Painted Books for Plaster Walls: Visual Words in the Fourteenth-Century Murals at the Tibetan Buddhist Temple of Shalu

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Art
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of some of the mural paintings on the walls of the Tibetan Buddhist temple of Shalu, arguing that these murals mediated and displayed books and book collections as both products and concepts. Elaborate mural paintings made after a major renovation of the temple in the early fourteenth century included long Tibetan inscriptions, displaying sometimes large passages of Tibetan sacred texts as part of their communicative pictorial program. By variously projecting books onto the walls, the temple’s abbot, Butön Rinchen Drup (Bu ston rin chen ‘grub, 1290-1364) placed new textual collections, inherently scholastic and elite projects, assertively into a more public domain. Rendering these books also as images was a way to assert and share the temple’s religious work. The painted images reference texts as sources of authenticity and also bring the ideas and organizations of book collections into visibility. During his time at Shalu, Butön oversaw the work of collecting, editing and organizing the early Tibetan canons, providing edited compilations of both the Kagyur (bka’ ‘gyur; words of the Buddha) and the first version of an edited Tengyur (bstan ‘gyur), among numerous other
textual translations and editions. His deep personal investment and dedication to book collecting projects created the interest and desire to use the walls of Shalu as large canvases to express the power and potential of books and their organizational structures. I argue that the abbot and other monks at Shalu must have worked closely with designers and artists who painted these wall spaces in new ways that aimed at using wall images to project and argue for the power and efficacy of books. These murals also then permitted a different relationship to books and to reading than was otherwise possible. At Shalu, murals became an important venue in the fourteenth century through which to negotiate and ultimately to extend the possibilities of the book.
Acknowledgments

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2. Tibetan Capitalization
   This dissertation capitalizes the first letter only for Tibetan text titles, person and place names, and not the Tibetan root letter.

3. Italicization of Foreign Terms
   Foreign words are always italicized, unless they are commonly used in the English language, such as dharma and lama.

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Introduction: Word, Picture, Wall

“Pictures are used in churches so that those who are ignorant of letters may at least read by seeing on the walls what they cannot read in books.”

Pope Gregory the Great (590-604)\(^1\)

Pope Gregory’s famous defense of religious mural paintings, written to an iconoclastic Bishop in the seventh century, is a deceptively straightforward assertion of the relationship between religious murals and books and between elite and non-elite audiences. It has been called a statement “among the most weighty ever penned by a churchman in the history of Western art.”\(^2\) Though we have no such succinct and direct statement from the Tibetan art world, perhaps because no such explanatory defense was ever needed,\(^3\) we may still wonder if a Tibetan religious leader might not have explained temple paintings in a similar way: seeing them as necessary, didactic teaching tools, and even more specifically, as useful access points to otherwise inaccessible texts. Further, for what audience were temples being painted and how did murals and temples attempt to meet the various needs of its users, users who included monks and laity at varying levels of literacy? To what extent were Tibetan Buddhist murals asked to perform this important act of teaching, enacting reading, and to what extent was this contingent on either their visibility or a resulting understanding from their audiences?

At the temple of Shalu (the Zhwa lu Gser khang or “Golden house”), expanded in a large construction project in the early fourteenth century, mural images directly

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\(^2\) Ibid., 64.

representing the powers and organizational structures of books were painted upon many of the temple’s interior walls. This was a fundamentally significant moment for the creation of Tibetan book collections and the patronage of temple images in medieval Tibet, and Shalu shows ways in which these two forms went together as integrated processes. It is the argument of this study that the very same forms of knowledge related to typological organizations, authenticity of textual sources and the editing of texts for correctness and clarity that were being put to use in the creation of new book collections in Tibet, were also being translated to visual form in temple murals, indicating a close working relationship between religious thinkers and the artists painting the walls. Indeed, Shalu’s murals show how books were purposely made manifest in murals not only through their contents, but also as organizational structures.

This project began with a conservative set of art historical concerns around what painted images do, how they relate to the literary arts, how they were produced, who made them, and for what purposes. Shalu’s murals contain an extensive amount of hitherto un-translated Tibetan inscriptions, and so the core questions of this study sought better to understand what is the nature of the relationship between these numerous mural inscriptions and the painted images they accompany. In the relatively young field of Tibetan art history, much of this work is needed before other advances can be made. This is a site-specific study that seeks better to understand the temples murals, and follows on an established precedent for art historical studies of particular historic temples. Yet the example of Shalu, the only surviving fourteenth-century Tibetan Buddhist temple with largely intact mural sets, has much to offer to a wider art historical conversation around image and text, and more specifically, around the unique and specific ways art engaged books and delivered their knowledge to audiences in the fourteenth century.

In my own three visits to the temple of Shalu, in 2006, 2007 and 2009, I first took little interest in reading the words on the walls, and I was initially enthralled by the elaborate painted images. In the narrative paintings of the circumambulatory passage

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what first interested me was an expansive and unexplained visual diversity, which I imagined discussing as a “cosmopolitan” picture of Mongol-derived power being inscribed through the varied costumes and architectures shown in the paintings. Certainly these are there, yet these topics figure little in this study. Through my research I became particularly interested in the ways books and their words became pictures in Shalu’s inscribed murals. It became clear that the fourteenth-century murals were developed in response to the contemporaneous formation of large Buddhist textual collections at Shalu. This study has also made possible more precise dating for some of Shalu’s paintings, with significant implications for the dating of many Tibetan tangka paintings. Further, studying Shalu could change how we understand the programmatic painting of temples, and the agency of different people involved in such projects.

This dissertation will explore how some of Shalu’s murals represented books and specifically newly formed book collections, and celebrated the capacity and utility of books to organize and arrange information for use. Indeed, murals represented a key way of expressing the content of books as structures of knowledge, permitting viewers to make visual, mental, and physical contact – the latter so important in the Tibetan tradition – with this content. Murals extend the range of books as ideational structures, visually building them into the architectonic forms of the temple. That the same people who were responsible for editing and organizing book collections worked with artists to convey the ideas of books in pictures on walls shows how important the conscious and meaningful creation of images were. Indeed, Shalu shows how painted walls were an important format for conveying the work of the temple to its community.

**Inscribing Words onto Walls at Shalu**

The Monastery and Temple of Shalu has been famous for its mural paintings ever since they were produced in the first half of the fourteenth century. Indeed Shalu’s walls were painted at a level of detail enabled by their direct connection to generous patronage, particularly from the imperial Mongol Yuan court. The structures of books and their internal organization are advertised and opened in the murals, thereby celebrating the
concomitant, book-specific work of adapting, editing and collecting large volumes of translated teachings. One of Tibet’s most important canonical compilers and editors, the great teacher Butön Rinchen drup (Bu ston rin chen ‘grub, 1290-1364), served as abbot at the temple for over thirty years, and the temple’s murals were undertaken during his tenure.

The temple of Shalu was the main Buddhist temple in a town of the same name (though using a slightly different Tibetan spelling; Zha lu), which, though a sleepy district town today, was an important local capital in the period of Mongol ascendancy in medieval Tibet. This small town, seventeen kilometers south-west of the prefecture-level city of Shigatse (Gzhis ka rtse) in the historic Tsang (Gtsang) province of Central Tibet, was then a booming territorial capital in Mongol-administered Tibet. As such, it received generous patronage from the Mongol-Yuan court in China, and attracted and hosted one of the period’s most important religious leaders and translators, Butön Rinchen drup. Indeed, the temple hosted some of the most important scholastic work of the period, for it was at Shalu that this important abbot, Butön, oversaw the important early compilation projects for the two main sections of the Tibetan canon, the words of the Buddha, or Kagyur (Bka’ ‘gyur), and the commentaries on those words, or Tengyur (Bstan ‘gyur). While earlier scholarship has assumed the temple renovations were completed before Butön arrived at the temple in 1320, evidence instead indicates that most of the temple’s interior paintings were completed with his input.

The Shalu murals demonstrated a “pictorial turn,” an overt celebration by their maker of the written word in and through Tibetan temple painting, which “opened up” large cycles of Buddhist literature authored and/or organized in Tibet to their viewers. It was not new for Tibetan art to represent pictorial cycles derived from religious texts; indeed to an extent Buddhist images were always prescribed by religious texts. What changed in the relationship of book to image at Shalu occurred at a symbolic level, revealing how books were then regarded: they were revered not only for their content, or as reflections of a direct connection to the Buddha as teacher in India, but also as knowledge products of Tibetan teachers and institutions who could organize and distil their knowledge into useful and organized corpuses. It is this collecting and
organizational impetus, driven by the pressures and possibilities of great numbers of texts, that the wall paintings reflect.

Much research into Tibetan temple art, still a young field of study within the study of art history, has been focused on identifications of iconographic programs and the dating of styles. These are valuable and necessary projects, though they inadvertently leave aside numerous other questions, for instance, how art was actually made, what social relationships were involved in artistic production, and how art was essentially positioned to serve social functions and needs. This research, inspired by the anthropological interpretation of both art and religion as “cultural systems” (to use the words of anthropologist Clifford Geertz), seeks to place Tibetan temple art into wider discussions about how art functioned within a more nuanced interpretation of why and how it was made. While Tibetan temple inscriptions have usually been used to date or identify the iconography of paintings, scholars have seldom engaged questions regarding why and how inscriptions came to be there at all. How did words and images function together in medieval Tibetan art? What did they do for one another? What was the nature of their apparent symbiosis?

In an important article, Ernst Steinkellner questions the function of Tibetan mural inscriptions from a religious perspective, suggesting a differentiation between different kinds of inscriptions and their rationales. After a brief survey of Tibetan inscribed murals, he offers a tentative typological distinction between two types of inscriptions: “wall texts” which served simply to manifest the dharma and stand in for missing books in temples and “texts authenticating certain programs” which authenticate specific ideas, proposing that they were only used when “new programs or changes of ideas and

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5 The major monograph studies of other Tibetan temples including Alchi, Tabo and Gyantse largely fall into this category, taking, most often, iconographic description of the temples as its focus. See note 4.


7 For temples with mural inscriptions dating from before the creation of Shalu which can provide useful comparisons are Tabo, Dunhuang, Alchi, and Samye.
practices had to be backed up by scriptural evidence.”8 Steinkellner’s two tentative suggestions, that mural inscriptions can variously stand for books or justify new ideas, are both importantly suggestive and informative for this study. Particularly his suggestion of the relationship between extensive inscription and the need to explain and justify novel content points us toward a social function of the temple and its art. Shalu’s murals are, as I will suggest, indeed arguing for the power and value of newly created collections. In a social history of art, art itself reveals social anxieties, desires and needs.

**Previous Scholarship on the Art of Shalu**

In the history of Tibetan art, Shalu has long been recognized as an important site and has been often featured in discussions of the development of Tibetan painting styles. Painting from Shalu first featured prominently in the work of foundational Italian historian of Tibetan art Giuseppe Tucci, namely in his 1949 work, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, a work that marks the beginning of Western research into the history of Tibetan art.9 In *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, Tucci rightly located Shalu as seminal to the study of Tibetan art because it was the sole monument surviving from the Sakya period of Yuan political domination in Tibet. Tucci highlighted how Shalu’s architecture, sculpture and painting demonstrated a confluence of Indian, Nepalese, Chinese and Central Asian art styles, styles that although they often “meet… they do not mingle.”10 Asserting the presence of both foreign and autonomous forms in the paintings at Shalu, Tucci was the first to articulate a narrative of Tibetan art history still dominant today. His arguments concerning the autonomy of foreign styles at Shalu contributed to his overarching thesis that prior to the 15th century true “Tibetan art” did not exist, but was instead composed

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10 vol. 1 ibid., 178.
entirely of borrowed foreign elements. Tucci’s thesis continues to inform research in Tibetan art history.\textsuperscript{11}

Tucci relied on Tibetan written sources, providing the first translations into English of many of these. The texts that he recovered from Shalu or read in situ included an important historical account of building phases at the temple and several edicts of the Mongol emperors that granted powers to the lay heads of Shalu.\textsuperscript{12} Tucci’s brief but formative treatment of Shalu in \textit{Tibetan Painted Scrolls} established this temple as a key monument in the study of Tibetan art history, one representative of a unique political period. Furthermore, his discussion established key themes—most notably, an interest in placing Shalu at the apex of foreign styles—that remain central in the discussion of Tibetan art, and particularly of the art at Shalu.\textsuperscript{13}

In 1991 Roberto Vitali subsequently published an important study of Shalu as a chapter of his \textit{Early Temples of Central Tibet}.\textsuperscript{14} In this chapter, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” Vitali established a careful timeline of the temple from the eleventh to the mid-fourteenth century, identifying the major building periods from

\textsuperscript{11} The position that a true “Tibetan style” only emerges after the fifteenth century, and so earlier art is variously described as “Indian,” “Nepalese” or occasionally “Chinese” is still repeated in work on Tibetan art. For instance, on the Heilbrunn Timeline of art history Kathryn Selig-Brown writes “By the fourteenth century, stylistic influences from Nepal and China became dominant and in the fifteenth century these fused into a truly Tibetan synthesis.” Kathryn H. Selig Brown, “Tibetan Buddhist Art Thematic Essay,” Text, \textit{Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History- The Metropolitan Museum of Art}, (2015 2000), http://www.metmuseum.org/TOAH/HD/tibu/hd_tibu.htm. This is also stated in “It is generally agreed that a truly Tibetan style of art emerged in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. The paintings of earlier periods were usually classified according to the proposed source of inspiration, thus one distinguished between Kashmiri-, Pāla-, and of course Nepalese-inspired art.” International Association for Tibetan Studies. Seminar (7th : 1995 : Graz, Austria), \textit{The Inner Asian International Style 12th-14th Centuries: Papers Presented at a Panel of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995}, ed. Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger, Beiträge Zur Kultur- Und Geistesgeschichte Asiens Nr. 25 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1998), 1.

\textsuperscript{12} Tucci provided a partial translation of the Genealogies of Shalu (\textit{Chos grwa chen pod pal zhwa lug ser khang gi bdag po jo bo Lee’I gdung rabs}) by bKra Shis don grub, a sixteenth century text about the historical biography of the Lee clan masters. vol. II, 656-662. This is the only full text from Shalu that he appears to have taken back to Italy with him, where it is now housed in the Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente. In his text he also presented translations of a number of important edicts that he found at Shalu, which granted honours and protections to Shalu from the Mongol Yuan court. Tucci, \textit{Tibetan Painted Scrolls}, vol. 2, 671.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 177–9 vol. 1.

textual sources and corroborating these with the then recently re-opened temple.\textsuperscript{15} Vitali advanced a thesis that the early fourteenth-century renovations at Shalu were not only produced with Mongol patronage, but moreover by artists who had themselves been trained at the Mongol-Yuan court in China. Vitali thus expanded upon Tucci’s assertions of distinct Nepalese and Chinese elements in the paintings to argue that these elements serve as evidence of a distinctive stylistic synthesis of a syncretic artisan sent to Shalu directly from the Yuan court; Vitali suggests that these artisans channeled both Nepalese and Chinese visual elements, and combined them together.

Vitali’s treatment of Shalu relies on a close reading of textual sources but does not carefully analyze the paintings. Vitali identifies the paintings of the first floor renovations as representing a predominantly Newar style mixed with Sino-Mongol elements. He also reads these seemingly disparate visual elements together as one unified style that he attributes to Yuan court artists. On account of the late thirteenth-century ascent of the Nepalese artist Anige, who became the head of craftsmen at the Yuan court in 1273, the assumption follows that the court-trained artists who came to Shalu also worked in this same “Newar-Yuan” style.\textsuperscript{16} While Vitali’s chapter is extremely valuable in highlighting the history of the temple and its political affiliations, his treatment of painting styles and the attribution of Shalu’s paintings to Yuan-trained court artists cannot be supported by the dates of the paintings or close study of the murals.

Shalu has been featured in many articles and book chapters on Tibetan art history, with some scholars continuing to accept Vitali’s hypothesis of an explicit connection between the paintings and a Nepalese influenced Yuan court-style of art, and others dismissing it.\textsuperscript{17} Even in a recent publication that addresses the art of Shalu, Michael

\textsuperscript{15} Shalu, like all Tibetan temples in central Tibet, was closed and repurposed during the volatile years of the cultural revolution. While it officially re-opened in the 1980s, Photographs from the early 1990s show that many of the temple’s shrines were still in disrepair at that time.

\textsuperscript{16} It has been tempting for some to follow Vitali’s proposal and allow the art of Shalu to stand in for the “missing link” of Yuan Buddhist Art. The knowledge, corroborated in both Chinese and Tibetan sources, that the famous Nepalese artist Anige (or Arniko), had become the head of craftsmen for the Yuan court in the late thirteenth century, has left frustratingly few physical traces. For example, while it is known that the white stupa which Anige constructed in Beijing must have had murals, these are lost. Anning Jing, “Anige, Himalayan Artist in Khubilai Khan’s Court,” \textit{Asian Art and Culture} 9 (1996): 36.

\textsuperscript{17} Hugo Kreiger follows this assertion of “artists who returned to Shalu with Drakpa Gyaltern had been trained in the Yuan court style which flourished under the direction of Aniko” in his chapter on Mural
Henss describes the paintings of the circumambulatory passage as “Jātakas in disguise” since he suggests that the paintings depict “mundane scenes from life at the Yuan court.” Additional articles have sought further to explain the synthesis of regional styles of painting at Shalu with respect to specific developments in architecture and painting, also attempting to create a progressive and developmental artistic chronology for central Tibetan art more broadly.

In studies of Shalu, data about architectural construction is used repeatedly to supply dates for the paintings. In a field largely lacking in paintings with datable inscriptions, this material from Shalu is then used to date other un-inscribed paintings, in some cases ultimately reading strict visual stylistic progressions within narrow timeframes. For instance Franco Ricca and Lionel Fournier see a stylistic progression in two sets of paintings from a “purer” Nepalese style in the paintings of the Three-door shrine (Gosum Lhakhang), which they date to 1290 based on Vitali’s architectural history, and a later style of the Segoma Kagyur Lhakhang, which they attribute to Yuan court influence and date to about 15 years later. Ricca and Fournier read into these two painted rooms “considerable stylistic changes,” from what they describe as a freer, purer earlier kind of painting to a later and more “rigid and scholastic interpretation.”

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Hugo Kreijger, “Mural Styles at Shalu,” in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style* (London: in association with Alan Marcuson, 1997), 175. David Jackson in particular dismisses this claim when he says: “The Tibetan sources never say or imply that all artists who worked at Shalu came from Yuan China. That would have been an impossibility for a project of this size, complexity and duration.”


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20 Kreijger, “Mural Styles at Shalu.”


addition to this work, there are several studies of Shalu’s fragmentary eleventh-century paintings or articles where specific iconographic anomalies are the focus.\textsuperscript{23}

Largely missing from scholarship on the art of Shalu is close consideration of the large number of inscriptions in the paintings and an analysis of why so many words accompanied mural images after the fourteenth century. An important epigraphic and translation study of the first ten inscription panels of the circumambulatory passage considers inscriptions, but not the paintings to which they relate.\textsuperscript{24} The wealth of surviving inscriptions in Shalu’s murals are long overdue for study in relationship to their painted images, and stand to shed considerable light on the relationships between text and image in this formative period. Further, the study of these inscriptions can refine our dating of the mural paintings, which may in turn have important implications for the dating of numerous portable tangka paintings in collections around the world.

The most recent, comprehensive art-historical survey of Shalu has replicated the problems of earlier studies, notably linking paintings to construction dates.\textsuperscript{25} Recent studies of Shalu have also failed to explore relations of text and image in Tibetan art, a line of inquiry that might illuminate why Tibetan temple art was produced as it was, who made it, and for what expressive purposes. Despite a general consensus on the art-historical significance of the site, previous studies have so far not made use of the wealth of inscriptive evidence from Shalu. The arts of Shalu thus still serve as a rich body of


\textsuperscript{25} Most recently, about fifty pages (chapter XIII) are dedicated to Shalu by Swiss art historian and Tibet specialist Michael Henss in a large two volume work on all the major temples of Tibet. Henss, \textit{The Cultural Monuments of Tibet}, vol. 2, 582-629.
material from which to contribute to wider knowledge about Tibetan art, history, and more specifically, how religious institutions mobilized art for expressive means.

The Scope of the Current Study and Sources

This study focuses on the role of murals and inscriptions at Shalu during the fourteenth century by investigating murals in two areas of the temple; it is not a comprehensive study of all fourteenth-century murals at Shalu. I first present a close study of the history of the temple as evidenced with mural paintings, to contextualize how the use of mural art changed over the centuries of Shalu’s construction. I then focus on two examples of image-text mural sets: the paintings of the “Skin door shrine” and those of the circumambulatory passage. In the conclusion I suggest the utility of expanding this study to include the paintings and inscriptions of maṇḍalas in four upper shrines.

The paintings and inscriptions of the ground-floor “Skin door shrine,” were added to a room that was built to house the new Kagyur (bka’ ‘gyur) collections of the Buddha’s teachings. These mural inscriptions, which I locate as excerpts taken from two different sutras that were included in the early canonical collections of the Kagyur, are translated and interpreted in relation to their accompanying mural images in chapter two of this study. These walls were painted and inscribed, I contend, in the 1330s.

The other focus of study are the jātaka narrative images and their extensive inscriptions painted in the great ground floor circumambulatory passage, known as the Korlam. The passage features one hundred stories of the Buddha’s previous lives as both images and long inscriptions, all redactions of the longer stories from a fourteenth-century textual compilation, the Life Stories of the Buddha (Sangs rgyas kyi skyes rabs) that was authored in 1314 by the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (Rang byung rdo rje, 1284-1339). In chapter three I analyze which book appears on the walls, and how the text is mediated into this format. In chapter four I analyze how the stories were adapted as visual images, presenting analyses of the visual adaptation of narratives to images and the varying choices made in this translation. These paintings, I show, were likely painted in
the 1340s. In the appendix, I offer twenty-four of these stories as translations into English from the Tibetan inscriptions.\(^{26}\)

A further body of image-inscription, which is discussed only briefly in the conclusion of this thesis and which warrants further study in the future, are those of the four upper floor maṇḍala shrines at Shalu. Each of these shrines, painted in the 1330s, contained inscriptions specifically describing choices made in the designs of their paintings. As these are each on the uppermost floor of the temple, directly beneath the special Chinese-style tiled roofs, these walls have unfortunately sustained significant damage over the centuries, their paintings among the most poorly preserved at Shalu. These texts, which were painted as long inscriptions to the sides of each door the these shrine rooms, were also preserved in the collected works of Butön as the text *Catalogue of the excellent maṇḍalas of the large shrines of the four directions of Shalu* (Zhwa lu'i gtsug lag khang gi gzial yas khang nub ma byang ma shar ma lho ma rnams na bzhugs pa'i dkyil 'khor sogs kyi dkar chag). This work is proof of the vital connections being made at this time between formations of organized and compared bodies of texts and their instantiations of this editorial comparison through mural arts.

Other paintings of the fourteenth century are not included in this study because of the need to set limits on the material. For example, the paintings of deities in the assembly hall also date from the fourteenth-century renovation period but are now barely visible and nearly impossible to photograph. Further, they do not appear to have ever been accompanied by large inscriptive texts. The important paintings of the second floor circumambulatory passage are also not a subject of this study though they date from the same period and contain significant inscriptions. These have recently received attention and study by Chinese art historian Yang Hongjiao, whose thesis specifically considers these paintings.\(^{27}\) It was not possible to study some other paintings, including those in the shrine room located in the south-west corner of the second floor which was

\(^{26}\) I selected a sample of twenty-four stories from throughout the passage to translate from across the Korlam from my photographs, based on trying to gather a sample from throughout the passage, as well as selecting these based on aspects of the painted images that I wanted to better understand.

\(^{27}\) Yang Hongjiao, “11 Zhi 14 Shiji Xiaoliu Banruofomudian Huisu Yanjiu (The Study of the 11th-14th Century Statues and Murals in the Prajñāpāramitā Chapel at Shalu)” (Capital Normal University, 2012).
never open during the times of my visits to the temple. One painting on the inner wall of the northeast circumambulatory passage that I would like to examine further is what Michael Henss has recently called a “text maṇḍala” of Avalokiteśvara, which may well illustrate many of the same themes of the mobilization of text through images.\(^{28}\)

For the wall paintings studied here, my research takes the wall paintings and their inscriptions as its primary sources. I provide the first translations into English of many of these inscriptions in the Appendix. Other surviving Tibetan texts on Shalu’s history are also important, particularly in the discussion of the temple’s history for chapter one. The earliest sources on Shalu’s history come from the work and life of the abbot Butön Rinchen drup and from *The Biography of Butön (Bu ston po che rnam thar)*, written by one of his closest students Dratsêpa (Sgra tshad rin chen rnal rgyal) in two parts dated 1365 and 1355; this text provides the earliest descriptions of the temple.\(^{29}\) Butön’s own significant writings, particularly those preserved in his famous *History of Buddhism in India and Tibet (Chos-byung)* and a particularly telling letter to the editors have also been foundational to this study.\(^{30}\) The temple’s history is also recounted in a text authored by the seventeenth-century scholar Tāranātha (1575-1634), *The well-explained account of the marvelous places of upper, lower and central Myang region (Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa’i ’jug ngogs)* which gives an account of the temple’s building phases and patronage.\(^{31}\) A later text developed with

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\(^{28}\) Henss, *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet*, vol. 2, 605.

\(^{29}\) This was translated into English by David Seyfort Ruegg, who also published a Tibetan folio version with his translation. David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che: With the Tibetan Text of the Bu Ston rNam Thar* (Roma: Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1966). It also survives in the collected works of Butön in Dratsepa Rinchen Namgyal (Sgra tshad pa Rin chen rnam rgyal), *Bu ston rin po che rnam thar (The Biography of Butön)*, vol. 67, Bu Ston Rin Po Che gSung ’Bum (Collected Works of Butön) (New Delhi: Sata Pitaka Series, 1971).


access to earlier texts, the *Succession of Shalu’s Abbots (Zhwa lu gdan rabs)* by the nineteenth-century Shalu scholar Losel Tenkyong (Blo gsal bstan skyong, b. 1804), who resided at Riphuk, the retreat centre near Shalu, is now preserved with his autobiography.\(^{32}\) A twentieth-century pilgrimage account, *An Account of a Pilgrimage to Central Tibet (Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do)*, transmits an important physical description of Shalu.\(^{33}\) Together these works richly detail the history of Shalu vital to understanding the historical context of its art.

### Outline of Chapters

In the first chapter, I provide an overview of the history of the temple and the role of murals within the larger architectural and religious program. The temple was built in several stages in the eleventh century, augmented in the thirteenth century, and renovated into a new plan in the fourteenth century. As the temple grew, unifying earlier spaces into a new scheme based on a *maṇḍala*-design, the temple was made suitable for the increasing population of resident monks, and to serve as a larger, more significant civic centre. Understanding the development of the temple is essential to forming arguments about the “public” purpose of the fourteenth-century murals, and the way they sought to communicate with their wider audience. This chapter also seeks to point out key differences between the earlier murals and the murals of the fourteenth century, highlighting how the earlier murals were painted in conjunction with sculptural systems.


This chapter frames the fourteenth-century expansion of the temple according to key themes, explaining acts of collecting, assembling and organizing as important at both state and local levels across multiple arenas. These acts of collecting were social (people and spaces) economic (taxes and materials) and literary (books and stories). Thus they were central to the broader framework of re-configuring the temple.

In chapter 2, I closely examine the paintings of the last ground floor shrine room to be completed, a room called the Segoma Kagyur Lhakhang (bse sgo ma bka’ ‘gyur lha khang), the “Shrine of the skin door,” which was built and decorated to house the Kagyur text collections. Through a close analysis of the murals and their accompanying inscriptions in that room, I analyze how text and image were both chosen to express the power and potential of paintings themselves. This room was painted and decorated to house new, large collections of books, and I argue that the paintings were specifically designed and inscribed to open these usually closed books to viewers. I locate in these inscriptions excerpts of two Yoga Tantra texts from the Kagyur compilations, texts that were specifically chosen for the walls to make powerful arguments for and about paintings. Specifically, these passages discuss “cloth paintings” (ras ris), their power in ritual, and their ability to teach and enable a viewer to experience a “direct vision” of enlightened beings and realms. I believe that the selection of these inscriptive texts was central to the design and plan for the mural images, indicating a design program inspired by the conceptual understanding of these texts. Indeed, the painted images in this room also borrow visually from cloth-painted models in ways that Shalu’s earlier murals did not. This represents a possible strategy for elevating Shalu’s costly new murals to the functional status of tangka paintings, that is, paintings on cloth used for devotional practice. Further, it shows that artists must have worked closely with literate designers or textual interpreters in the conception of the murals, which used visual devices to establish their relation to the specific content of the room’s closed books. Arguing for the authority, power and efficacy of the painted images through recourse to doctrinal texts inscribed on the walls, these paintings explained vision itself as a domain for meritorious and direct exchange with the divine realm. Merit as gift-exchange is depicted in the murals, and the paintings are hence made to be a key site of exchange.
In chapter 3, I consider the paintings of the ground floor circumambulatory passage, the Korlam Chenmo (skor lam chen mo) or “great circumambulatory” through the novel decision to add one particular book, a new story collection, to the passage walls. The pictorial and inscriptive addition of this particular book, The Life Stories of the Buddha (Sangs rgyas kyi skyes rabs), covered the outer walls of this passage with painted words and pictures from a new compilation of organized jātaka stories made by the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (Rang byung rdo rje, 1284-1339). In the circumambulatory, this new book was painted on the walls as both image and text. I discuss the way that the painted outer walls of the circumambulatory passage were designed as a virtual book to be traversed. I look at the significant textual redactions of stories to understand how, and possibly who, was involved in creating the wall texts. We uncover multiple authors mediating the meaning of the text. These included: the original authors of the text, Āryaśūra and Rangjung Dorje; the person who chose it for the walls (I argue, the abbot Butōn); and the editors and scribes who negotiated its particular redacted use on the wall by making key choices about which words to include in this radically altered context. This created a new kind of book, one accessed through vision and a performance of walking.

In chapter 4, I consider the painted narratives that accompany the wall paintings of the jātaka stories in this circumambulatory, identifying the artists who painted fabulous images above each individual story as other types of “authors” mediating meaning and presenting it visually. I argue that two distinct workshops of artists worked side by side on the Shalu circumambulatory passage paintings. In the adaptation of these stories as pictures, the artists worked with a new set of narrative subjects (the jātakas) in a radically unusual dimensional format and scale for Tibetan art, responding with creativity in the visual elaboration of stories. Given this apparent freedom, chapter 4 asks what the artists found most important about the jātakas in the visual translation of these stories to pictorial form. I offer evidence that longer stories were being read in the adaptation of images, that artists demonstrated a close allegiance to book text and so worked closely with literate interpreters of texts. I also suggest that artists tried to show sequences of action, focusing on actions and consequences, and so were at the forefront of Tibetan experimentations with ways to convey narrative in visual form.
In the conclusion I assess evidence from another set of inscribed murals at the temple, the maṇḍala paintings and their accompanying inscriptions added in the temple’s upper shrines after their renovation. Designed by the abbot Butön, these murals were also accompanied by long inscriptions he authored to explain the images. The maṇḍalas represent mediations of numerous texts into images, and the inscriptions exemplify the need to then explain images through additional texts, demonstrating just how closely related the conceptual work of organizing texts and representing these organizations through mural images were at this time. Indeed, it is apparent from Butön’s words here that he used murals as a medium in which to exercise his discernment and editorial choice, highlighting the role of the editing and organizing of a number of texts as necessary precursors to the production of mural paintings. In turn, murals embodied the epistemology of vast bodies of literature, and manifest the relation of reading to organizations of knowledge. Visitors to Shalu thus saw on its walls pictorial expressions of contemporaneous book culture, content normally accessible only through reading now expressed in a visual format.
Chapter 1: Walls in Context—Building and Painting
Shalu Across the Centuries

This chapter explores the mural paintings at the temple of Shalu and places them in their larger spatial contexts of the changing and growing building of Shalu. I will present a historical overview of the building and its mural decoration before the fourteenth century, and show how the fourteenth-century renovation reconfigured the spaces into a new, and ultimately very different, whole. Some historical context is necessary in order to understand the significance of this building project. In the eleventh century, Shalu was established as a small local temple consisting of two separate shrine buildings. In the fourteenth century it was developed into a significantly larger building to support new social and religious needs. Shalu’s early murals of the eleventh century interacted with the sculptural programs in ways that later murals would not. By contrast to the eleventh-century examples, the building created in the fourteenth century was not only built to support a larger monastic community, but also was decorated to suit large community gatherings. Most importantly for this study, the newly painted walls used both pictures and words to project the power of the extensive book-editing work undertaken at the temple in the fourteenth century.

While Shalu’s renovation situated it in global networks of power and exchange, reflecting broad-reaching cosmopolitan aspirations, its social life was largely linked to its locality, the town of Shalu. In the fourteenth century, the town was the most populous and important in its district and the administrative capital of the myriarchy, the centre for Mongol tax-collecting. In the late thirteenth-century Mongol census, about 23,000 people lived in the myriarchy (khri skor) of Shalu and were responsible for paying taxes to the Mongols, via the Ché (lce) clan lords.34 The Ché clan leaders in turn supported the

34 The census of 1268 established that there were 3,892 “families,” or more properly population units (hor dud) in the myriarchy of Shalu. The only myriarchy with more was that of rgya-ma, east of Lhasa, with 5,850 hor dud. The hor dud unit was, according to Petech, roughly equivalent to six people. Using these numbers, some have estimated that the population of the Shalu myriarchy would have been around 23,352 people. Indeed, it is likely that the actual number was higher, as many households probably contained more than six people. Luciano Petech, Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yuan-Sa-Skya Period of Tibetan History (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 54, 57; Luciano Petech, “The Mongol Census in Tibet,” in Tibetan Studies in Honour of Hugh Richardson: Proceedings of the International Seminar of Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 1979, ed. Michael Aris and Aung San Suu Kyi
temple financially and under its leadership remained responsible for its support and upkeep across the centuries. The monastic population grew during the fourteenth century to house perhaps as many as several thousand monks, a reflection of both the prestige of the temple and the important scholastic work undertaken there during the tenure of its most important abbot and religious teacher, Butön Rinchen Drup, who served as abbot from 1320-1354.35

The architecture of the temple worked together with sculptural and painted decoration, creating an organized whole that created functional and symbolic devotional spaces. While the remains of the eleventh-century buildings and their paintings at Shalu are partial and damaged, and sculptures from the eleventh and fourteenth centuries have been entirely lost, a review of the fragments as part of the historical context provides clues about how the spaces and their decorations may have functioned. These fragments signal larger ideological changes and put into context the motivations behind the renovations of the fourteenth century.

I argue that the temple’s changing shape through the centuries shows how the social spaces of the temple were being used differently, as the needs of the community evolved. Further, the temple grew and transformed in response to shifting expectations of what temples could provide. The mural paintings provide important evidence for what people were asked and expected to do inside the temple. Because of the murals’ evidentiary nature, this chapter will first consider the building’s earlier construction from

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35 Butön’s biography states that by the end of his tenure as abbot in 1354 there were one hundred and sixty “Kalyanamitrās” (“spiritual friends”—ie. fellow teachers/translators and peers of Butön) and thirty-eight hundred monks at Shalu: “At that time in the Shalu temple the Dharmasvarmin was in the midst of more than 160 kalyanamitrās of the Mantra and philosophical schools and of about 3800 monks.” This would have been a huge number, probably equivalent to or greater than the population of the town, and may well be an exaggerated number. Nevertheless, it is a number that indicates that there were a great number of editors and monks at the temple, and this was in significant contrast to the situation before Butön’s arrival when there were “no more than a few priests in the temple.” Translations adapted from David Seyfort Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che: With the Tibetan Text of the Bu Ston rNam Thar (Roma: Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1966), 141, 92.
the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, and examine how murals functioned within those structures. Though fragmentary in their remains, these earlier temple murals communicated complete iconographic systems in accordance with built-in sculptural groups, providing discrete spaces for small group worship and circumambulation. This discussion will provide the context for the fourteenth-century expansion of the temple, where interests in expanding the size and scale of the temple were married with new interests in collecting, protecting and displaying religious texts, objects and teachings.

Building the Temple in Stages

The atypical floor plan of Shalu (fig. 1.3) demonstrates that the temple was not built all at once but in successive building stages between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. This history of the temple is attested through several Tibetan texts, and has been well explained by Roberto Vitali following Giuseppe Tucci’s pioneering work.36 Shalu, as it stands today, with a floor-plan that resulted from building during the fourteenth-century, is, in comparison to other Tibetan temples, architecturally unusual compared in several key ways, that reflect its discrete building phases. Most notable of these architecturally unusual elements are the split central shrines and the enclosed circumambulatory. Instead of a single, central, inner shrine, the core sanctum off the assembly hall is divided into two small rooms.37 In addition, a large, enclosed circumambulatory passage (skor lam) or circumambulatory passage encircles all four

36 The most useful Tibetan texts that provide a sequence of the building periods at Shalu are the Zhwa lu rnam thar; the Myang chos 'byung and the Butön rnam thar; Blo gsal bstan skyong, Zhwa Lu Rnam Thar (Tashigang, Leh: Tashi Yangphel, 1971); Tāranātha, Myang Yul Stod Smad Bar Gsum Gyi Ngo Mtshar Gtam Gyi Legs Bshad Mkhas Pa’i 'jug Ngogs [The Well-Explained Account of the Marvelous Places of Upper, Lower and Central Myang Region] (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1983), http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W1CZ689; Dratsepa Rinchen Namgyal (Sgra tshad pa Rin chen rnam rgyal), Bu ston rin po che rnam thar (The Biography of Butön), vol. 67, Bu Ston Rin Po Che gSung ‘Bum (Collected Works of Butön) (New Delhi: Sata Pitaka Series, 1971). The significant English language studies of this history have been presented as: Giuseppe. Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1949); Roberto Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” in Early Temples of Central Tibet (London: Serindia, 1990), 89–122.

shrines on the first floor. The addition of this circumambulatory passage represented one solution to build a larger, unified space out of previous buildings in the fourteenth century. Many of the distinctive architectural features at Shalu directly reflect fourteenth-century efforts to make eleventh-century buildings fit into a new plan.

Establishing Shalu in the eleventh century was important in the reintroduction of Buddhism to central Tibet as part of the later diffusion of Buddhism (bstan pa phyi ldar). The temple that was first built was at a short distance from the small temple of Gyengong (Rgyan gong), which had been built in 997. When Shalu was established, the first building constructed was the double-celled north and south shrines, often referred to in the English literature as the “twin chapels,” built in 1027 (fig. 1.5-1.6). This building was followed by a two-level but separate building that housed the Prajñāpāramitā shrine (Yum chen mo Lha khang) on the upper level. This shrine was added, Vitali argues, slightly later, around 1045 (fig. 1.7-1.8). By the end of the eleventh century the temple thus consisted of two separate, freestanding buildings, both relatively small in interior space; and from the remains of the eleventh-century paintings that appeared in small wall interstices around the built-in clay sculptures, these buildings must have been filled with large devotional sculptures.

The expansion of this small temple into a much larger structure did not begin until two hundred and fifty years later, when another freestanding building was added to the north of the other two. This next construction period began in the late thirteenth century when the Kushang (sku zhang; the title of the Shalu lay leader) of the temple, Gönpo pel (Mgon po dpal; ruled as Kushang from 1290 to 1303) oversaw the construction of another freestanding temple, the Gosum lhakhang (Sgo gsum lha khang; temple of the three doors) (fig. 1.9-1.10). The addition of this shrine, with its entrance facing south, in

38 Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 89.

39 The sixteenth century history of the Myang region authored by Tāranātha (1575-1634), the Myang Chung, discusses the construction of both the north and south temples in the west and the upper and lower Yumchnmo temple in the east as attributable to the founder Ché tsün shé rap jung né, but does not discuss any time lapse between their construction. Tāranātha, Myang Chung, 154.

40 Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 93.
towards the space that would later become an assembly hall joining all these freestanding buildings, implies that plans were already afoot for a larger expansion to the temple.

This great expansion would not take place until the period ruled over by the next lay leader, the Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen (Grags pa rgyal mtshan), who ruled as Shalu Kushang from 1306 to 1333. The charismatic Drakpa Gyeltsen is credited with the two most important activities in the temple’s history: the grand renovation of the temple following the receipt of generous patronage directly from the Mongol Yuan Court, and the arrival of the most important abbot in the temple’s history, Butön Rinchen drup. The fourteenth-century renovation to the temple transformed it into the complex structure we see today (fig. 1.11, 1.3-1.4.).

In the fourteenth-century construction, three pre-existing structures were unified inside a larger built structure. This renovation created numerous new interior rooms, all of which would eventually be painted. Yet these paintings were not done immediately, and I contend that instead the work of decorating the temple continued steadily through the early decades of the fourteenth century. In particular, the encircling large circumambulatory passage was, I believe, the last space to be painted, with its paintings probably not begun before 1340. The main support for this theory is found, in fact, in negative evidence: the extensive biographic and autobiographic literature of and by the author (d. 1339) of this new jātaka collection text that was being painted on the walls at Shalu makes no mention of knowledge of Shalu, yet does mention at least one other temple where this textual compilation was painted. This evidence, expanded in chapter three, nonetheless still gives us good reason to believe that the inner circumambulatory path had not yet begun to be painted with these jātaka stories and inscribed with their words during the lifetime of the author. For, had the author of the collection had been aware of this a project of such scale based on his work, he would probably have been sufficiently flattered by the scale and patronage of the project to have mentioned it, or (likely) even visited it. Instead, it appears that the scholastic work of editing and


42 This will be discussed again in chapter 3, and has been brought to my attention by the recent Phd dissertation by Ruth Gamble. Ruth Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs” (Australian National University, 2013), 261.
organizing the jātaka literature into a functional system was admired by the eminent abbot Butön, an organizer and editor of texts himself who also sought to create knowledge systems out of disparate texts. It was Butön and his editorial teams who worked on adding this book to the passage walls after the passing of the Karmapa in 1339.

Eleventh-Century Foundations: Small Separate Shrine Spaces

Shalu was founded in the eleventh century by a noble lord of the local Ché (Lce) clan named Chétsün Shérap Jungné (Lce btsun shes rabs ‘byung gnas). Chétsün, a noble man by birth and a monk by training, was from the local noble clan that traced its history back to the Tibetan dynastic period. His Ché clan ancestor, Jñanasiddhi, had been part of the delegation sent by King Trisong Detsen (ruled 755-789) to invite the illustrious Padmasambhava to Tibet from India in the eighth century. Chétsün had sought religious training in both Amdo and India, finally returning to his home region of Tsang, in southern Tibet. There he erected the small temple of Shalu a short distance from the earlier site of Gyengong, the temple of his teacher.

Textual sources state that this temple was founded in the mid-eleventh century, and the most widely accepted foundation date is 1027. While texts support the fact that three shrines were constructed under the founder Chétsün Shérap Jungné, Vitali argues for separate construction dates, showing that it is likely that the conjoined shrines were built first and the separate shrine to Prajñāpāramitā (Yum chen mo lha khang) was built later, after Chétsün’s return from his pilgrimage to India. While the evidence is not

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43 Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 31.

44 The three possible founding dates for Shalu are 1001, 1027 and 1039/1040 (all the possible Years of the Hare for the early part of the eleventh century). 1027 is the most likely based on the life dates of the founder, Chétsün Shérap Jungné (Lce btsun shes rabs ‘byung gnas). Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 91–92.

45 Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 657.

46 Vitali suggests this based on his interpretation of a remark made in Dpa’ bo gtsug lag ‘phreng ba’s (1504-1564) text the Chos ‘byung mkhas pa’i dga’ ston (Pecin: mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1986) that Atisha had built the main part of Shalu before leaving for India and that the Yumchenmo Lhakhang was later
conclusive, this theory that the two buildings were erected at slightly different times, and after different religious experiences for the founder, is plausible for this small, new temple. Such a reading of the temple’s building history shows how the building changed, explicitly growing in size and complexity in response to and as a record of the experiences of its founder.

The eleventh-century temple comprised two buildings, constructed and standing separately. On the western side, the double shrines called the Southern and Northern Temples (*lha khang lho ma* and *lha khang byang ma*) stood conjoined by a shared central wall, reminiscent of double shrine forms from Indian *vihara* constructions. The eleventh century constructions at Shalu consciously echoed Indian Buddhist prototypes as multi-celled structures and divided cella. This design was consistent with other temples from the early second diffusion of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, with similar plans evident at Buddhist temples of the eleventh century like that at Mangyu. Denwood suggests that the twin shrines, in keeping with these other Tibetan prototypes, may have had simple porches and external circumambulatory corridors around them (fig. 1.6).

Exterior walls from the eleventh century, subsequently enclosed during the later renovation, show paintings of a field of repeating Buddhas set against red aureoles (fig. 1.12), a theme later extended across the interior walls of the circumambulatory passage. The existence of these paintings, closed off from access and rendered mostly invisible following their enclosure into small corner spaces after the fourteenth-century addition of the circumambulatory passage, confirms that these were once exterior walls made for circumambulation when the twin shrines were freestanding. The eleventh-century construction thus consisted of small but tall square-planned shrines. These rooms were too small to allow many people to enter or worship within them at once, but they invited exterior circumambulation.

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Facing the twin shrines, a second building of almost equal width and height was built, which from the outside resembled another tall square-planned tower. Yet the exterior similarity of this second building built around 1045 concealed an internal difference: the interior space was differently divided here, not into twin shrines like those in the west, but into lower and upper stories, each containing one central space and one outer corridor. The main shrine here was on the upper level, and was dedicated to the goddess Prajñāpāramitā (Yumchenmo). The dedication of a temple to this important female goddess, an apostasis of an important early Tantric text, was certainly not unique to Shalu, and was common to other eleventh-century sites in central Tibet.49

Below this Yumchenmo chapel was another shrine, unusually configured with six narrow bays. The bays today contain the remains of platforms and aureoles in clay of what once would have been clay sculptures on wood substructures attached to the walls (fig. 1.13).50 Though the statues are now destroyed, two statues were photographed during the visit of Giusseppe Tucci in 1939, and these photos survive in the Tucci photographic archive in Rome today. They show that these statues included one of the four guardian kings holding a stūpa (fig. 1.14), and another statue of a standing bodhisattva (fig. 1.14 and 1.15).51

Although Tucci thought that these sculptures were from the fourteenth century, the standing bodhisattva is inconsistent with the fourteenth-century iconographic plan.52

49 The subject of the Prajñāpāramitā chapel at Shalu has been central to two recent studies, one by Yang Hongjiao and the other by Petra Müller. Petra Müller argues for a distinctive Tibetan visual adaptation of the goddess Prajñāpāramitā in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Tibet based on three Tibetan temples each with central shrines dedicated to Prajñāpāramitā. Yang Hongjiao has also argued in her dissertation for distinctive iconographic developments around the Prajñāpāramitā cult represented by this temple at Shalu. Yang Hongjiao, “11 Zhi 14 Shiji Xialusi Banruofomudian Huisu Yanjiu (The Study of the 11th-14th Century Statues and Murals in the Prajñāpāramitā Chapel at Shalu)”; Petra Müller, “Representing Prajñāpāramitā in Tibet and the Indian Himalayas. The Iconographic Concept in the Temples of Nako, rKyang Bu and Zha Lu,” accessed June 28, 2013, http://www.asianart.com/articles/mueller/index.html#6.

50 These are the same modes of construction we see at other early Tibetan temples like Tabo, where such clay statues survive form the eleventh century, and Drathang in central Tibet where we are similarly left with only vacant aureoles. Klimburg-Salter, Tabo.

51 Tucci published his photograph of the standing Buddha sculpture, with the background cut away Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 178. The other image is unpublished but was encountered in the photographic archives of Giusseppe Tucci, housed in the Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale and administered by Oscar Nalesini.

52 Ibid.
Further, the painted aureoles in the shrine, and the fact that these sculptures were built into the walls on wood and clay substrates, make it far more likely that the sculptures were from the eleventh century. In the eleventh century the lower-level shrine likely functioned as an iconographic entry-point to the chapel above, representing the lower levels of Mount Meru protected by the guardian kings, and one sculptural group of Buddha flanked by bodhisattvas. A narrow staircase allowed visitors to ascend to the Prajñāpāramitā chapel above. The transformation of this space into a wrathful protector chapel (mgon khang) was a later interpretive need, which repurposed the space so as to function as a wrathful protector chapel dedicated to Vaiśravana.  

Thus the two separate buildings at Shalu in the eleventh century were small, containing between them four separate, small shrines. The small temple is in keeping with the claim in Butön’s biography that before his arrival, no more than a few monks lived there. The temple spaces enshrined religious devotional items: sculptures and stūpas made of local wood and clay, and some stone and metal sculptures either miraculously-arisen or brought from India. The fragmentary remains of mural paintings from these early constructions repeatedly show that in these shrines, murals were part of integrated iconographic systems with built-in sculptures throughout each room, and there would not have been much space inside these rooms for large collections of books. This will serve as an important contrast to the fourteenth-century temple rooms.

53 The ceiling height of this lower level room is quite low, leading Denwood to erroneously suggest that this in addition to the “lack of any obvious place for a main image” make it likely that the “original purpose of this chamber was not to act as a chapel but simply to raise the Yum Chenmo chapel so that its ceiling is level with those of the twin chapels.” Denwood, “Architectural Style at Shalu,” 222. Yet this conclusion would require accepting that the paintings and sculpture in the lower chapel mentioned above are later and did not date from the eleventh century. Instead, both paintings and sculpture are stylistically consistent with an eleventh century date.

54 “Realizing that there were no more than a few priests in the temple, he wished to have them as extensive as the ocean.” Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 92.

55 The story of Shalu’s three “stacked lords” (sems pa gsum brtsegs) three images of Avalokiteśvara that were housed together in the southern of the twin shrines (lhakhang lho ma) includes the wonderful narrative detail that one statue emerged from the act of a female-goat watering a rock with her milk. Norbu Tsering, “Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880-1925) Diary On Pilgrimage in Myang Area” (MA, University of Oslo, 2001), 80.
Eleventh-Century Paintings: Retinues for Sculpture

The earliest preserved eleventh-century mural paintings at Shalu represent a frieze of fifty-six standing bodhisattvas painted up high, close to the ceiling in the Northern Shrine room (fig. 1.16). These paintings are located high on the walls, and are quite difficult to see with the naked eye and even to photograph. They consist of a procession of male and female figures in Tibetan and Indian dress. Twenty-three of the figures, or less than half of them, have small inscriptions in black painted U chen (dbu chen) script, the script most common for printing and for formal manuscripts placed below them.

The configuration of these painted figures implies their processional movement. The figures are painted as though “walking” in a common direction, all towards the shrine’s center, mimicking on the interior of the shrine the primary devotional act of Buddhist circumambulation, as visitors below walked around both outside and inside of the square-planned temple space. In a small publication that was being sold at the temple of Shalu in 2006, it is proposed that these figures represent “ancestors of the Ché clan who had gone to India on pilgrimage or in search of teachings.” While this interpretation reflects a logic consistent with Chinese ancestor shrines, it makes little sense in an eleventh-century Tibetan context. Helmut and Heidi Neumann have alternatively argued that the figures in procession more likely represent a large maṇḍala retinue, on the basis of identifying two figures whose names are still legible in the inscription. This is a more persuasive interpretation of these figures.

These painted figures are among the earliest wall paintings to survive from Central Tibet. They represent a fascinating diversity of Tibetan and Indian costume shown together. While the majority of the figures are dressed in an Indian style, with lower dhoti robes, the traditional male lower garment of South Asia consisting of a rectangular cloth tied around the waist, these occur alongside figures wearing thick-lapelled, heavy Tibetan robes (fig. 1.16), similar to robes seen in murals from Drathang.

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(Gra thang, located in Lhoka prefecture). These figures show that at Shalu in early times, a diversity of dress styles was combined in art and used seemingly quite randomly, with Tibetan and Indian dress easily mingling in the same image. A precedent and taste for visual diversity and the display of difference existed even at this early date, though the visual range of this difference spanned Indian and the Tibetan styles, and did not yet extend to Chinese, Mongol or Persian styles of dress that would become so important in the fourteenth century paintings.

The inscriptions are too high and too small to be read easily by a visitor to the temple. We must conclude that these inscriptions were not made or meant to be read as they are barely visible to the eye when standing in the shrine. Instead, the inscription of figures in these paintings must have served another purpose for the images they attended, and their function must have been unrelated to their legibility. The inscribed names may have ensured a functional completeness of the appropriate iconography, proclaiming and advertising the images’ closeness to texts, and authorizing the images as complete and textually-based. Being partially labeled may have provided a kind of effective proof that a set of known and named deities had been represented. Further, their intentionality may have had a vivifying effect on the images, since letters and texts themselves held religious power.

Two other fragmentary sets of eleventh-century paintings survive in the Prajñāpāramitā shrine and the space below it. In both instances the paintings serve to complete the addition of retinue figures for now lost sculptural figures. Paintings of

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59 In particular one of the identifiable figures, labeled “Jam dpal” by inscription, or Manjusri, is wearing Tibetan dress. Neumann and Neumann, “Eleventh Century Wall Paintings of Zhwa Lu,” 235.

60 When I photographed the figures at the site in 2009 several resident Shalu monks gathered around my camera in excitement to see the inscriptions. It struck me that even for monks who live at the site, they had never been able to read them due to their inaccessibility on the walls.

61 Some writers have disagreed that these decorations within are authentic to the eleventh century. Philip Denwood stated that the small lower chamber was built at this period to simply elevate the Yumchenmo chapel above. Victor Chan dismissed the paintings here as “late, unimportant paintings in the Indian style.” However, I follow Ricca, Fournier, Vitali, and Pakhoutova in seeing these paintings as demonstrating the Indian characteristics and iconographies of the earliest eleventh century building and painting period at
directional protectors appear in banded registers in the western-most bay of the lower level (fig. 1.17). This lower-level shrine, which also contained statues of the four guardian kings and at least two standing bodhisattvas, was described in later literature as having been a passage or open circumambulatory (rgyun lam) before it was transformed into a protector chapel in the fourteenth century. In the bay of the southwest corner, the eleventh-century paintings of directional protectors are still preserved (fig. 1.17–1.18). The painted figures look as though space for the eventual inscription of names was left below them, as white rectangular cartouches appear beneath each enthroned figure, though no names were ever added into them. The large groups of retinue figures likely surrounded the grouping of a central deity, likely Vairocana Buddha, who rather than being painted would have been made sculpturally. The most logical placement for a large statue of Vairocana would be near the now-closed western doorway, where he would have been attended by the two standing Buddha figures.


62 This deduction is based on visiting the site with the Tucci photograph of the bodhisattva and matching the aureole behind the figure (cut out of the published drawing) to the aureole remains of the figure and pedestal on the north side of the west wall, flanking the exit doorway to the west. A second matching figure would surely have stood on the adjacent platform on the other side of the doorway.

63 The Butön Namthar records that Drakpa Gyeltsen dedicated a Gonkhang to Vaiśravana, of whom he was an incarnation, in the fourteenth century. The Genealogies specify that below the Yumchenmo shrine there was an open circumambulation that was later converted into a Gonkhang. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 91; Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 657, 659; Blo gsal bstan skyong (b. 1804), “Dpal Ldan Zhwa Lu Pa’i Bstan Pa La Bka’ Drin Che Ba’i Skyes Bu Dam Pa Rnam Kyi Rnam Thar Lo Rgyus Ngs Mshar Dad Pa’i ’Jug Ngogs,” in On the History of the Monastery of Zhwa-Lu: Being the Texts of the Zhwa Lu Gdan Rabs and the Autobiography by Zhwa-Lu-Ri-Sbug Sprul-Sku Blo-Gsal-Bstan-Skyong, vol. 9, Smartsis Shesrig Spendzod (Leh: S.W. Tashigangpa, 1971).

64 Kreijger calls these deity paintings “provincial” in style when compared with the paintings of Buddhas and their assemblies of monks and bodhisattvas in the entryway, writing that it is therefore “difficult to assign them to the mid-eleventh century” (172) and instead proposing that they were part of later renovations of the thirteenth of fourteenth centuries. This is unlikely, as they both do not fit with the proposed iconography of a Gonkhang in the fourteenth-century transformation of the space. Further, I would argue that they are overwhelmingly similar to eleventh century paintings of the same directional deities painted at Tabo. Hugo Kreijger, “Mural Styles at Shalu,” in Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style (London: in association with Alan Marcuson, 1997), 172; Klimburg-Salter, Tabo, 83.
In these paintings, monochromatic red aureoles and simple frontal figures are reminiscent of deity styles based on Pāla Indian manuscripts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These directional guardians have been identified as Dīkṣā and nāṣṭra forming a sphere of protection (rakṣācakra) of the dharmaṭuvāgīṣvara maṇḍala and the durgatipariṣodhana maṇḍala. The figures are painted in two horizontal registers, and strictly adhere to Indian models in both style and iconography. The figures are frontal with simple shading and dress. They are seated before simple red egg-shaped aureoles. The style of dress, the red aureoles, and the frontal figures arrayed in horizontal registers are all derivative of Pāla Indian manuscript paintings that served as early pictorial models in Tibetan art.

Other early paintings in this area depict life events of the Buddha, a subject that, early on, was seen as particularly well suited to an area for circumambulation (fig. 1.19). In the eastern entryway to this lower space, four scenes show the Buddha teaching. While these scenes were likely repainted in the fourteenth century, the iconography and stylistic basis of the paintings are consistent with an eleventh-century date. These representations of the four historical teachings of the Buddha were likely part of a sequence depicting the eight great life events, painted in the eleventh century. Art historian and curator Elena Pakhoutova suggests that this would have been a logical addition to the space below the

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Prajñāpāramitā chapel, as the eight great life events were scenes chosen for depiction inside the Prajñāpāramitā manuscripts of the eleventh century.⁶⁸

These scenes show large central Buddhas flanked by close-knit retinues of smaller bodhisattva figures and monks all facing inwards towards a central Buddha (fig. 1.20). While the colours here suggest that these paintings were over-painted in the fourteenth century,⁶⁹ the layout and design of the scenes show that the later paint had been added over the earlier iconography, basically maintaining it. The architectural throne around the Buddha figure is reminiscent of eleventh-century Indian manuscript paintings, and the design of densely clustered overlapping figures around the Buddha are very similar to the eleventh-century paintings at Drathang (Gra thang).⁷⁰ The delicacy of the features of these bodhisattva figures, seen in three quarter view with their elongated arched eyebrows and curling hair tendrils, is characteristic of early Tibetan painting derived from Pāla models. That these paintings were touched up during the fourteenth-century renovation phase demonstrates an interest in preserving the earlier painting styles, together with a need for the fourteenth-century renovations to provide improved decorations. Indeed, painting over earlier designs with better, brighter pigments was likely possible due to the fact that the later artists had more wealth and resources at their disposal.

Eleventh-century paintings here also contain several fascinating portraits of figures in archaic Tibetan dress accompanied by smaller men on horses (fig. 1.21). While there are no inscriptions to identify these figures, their placement in the middle bay, their seated postures in three quarter profile, and their position facing and attending a central sculptural group informs the reading of them as lay donor figures. The three large figures all wear turbans similar to those seen in depictions of the early Kings like Songtsen Gampo (srong btsan sgam po, 569/605?–649? CE) (fig. 1.22).⁷¹ These depictions may


⁶⁹ Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 93.

⁷⁰ Henss, “The Eleventh Century Murals of Drathang Gompa.”

have been explicitly tracing the clan heritage back to the Tibetan imperial period (seventh to ninth centuries CE), emphasizing the connections of the Ché clan lords with the Pugyal kings. These eleventh-century portraits of Ché lords, with their purposely archaistic turbans linking them to the period of the Tibetan empire, likely commemorate the lay donors of the newly established temple, elevating their status through their visual association to the Pugyal kings.

Ancestors of the Ché clan were among the inner noble circle during Tibet’s imperial period, and visually stating an ancestral link to the empire was an important claim for the new temple in the eleventh century. These figures are also painted with eyes extending beyond the profile of the face, as though the eyes are viewed from the front despite the turned faces, which is like those seen in the royal portraits at Alchi in the Leh district of Ladakh. Interestingly, it is only in this earliest period of paintings at Shalu that such depictions of the aristocratic leaders of the Ché clan appear. In the later mural decorations, only portraits of religious personages and lineages appear, suggesting a different tactic and source of authority for asserting the temple’s prestigious leadership.

The middle level Prajñāparamitā shrine (Yum chen mo lha khang) on the east side of the complex also contains early paintings that demonstrate an adherence to Indian painting models and use painted figures to supplement the larger sculptural program. Small painted figures of the five Tathāgata Buddhas appear over the doorway here (fig. 1.23), demonstrating that the Vajradhātu maṇḍala already occupied an important role in marking space, especially above entryways, in the eleventh century. Other small painted figures appear in the interstices of lost sculptural groupings (fig. 1.24). While the sculptures observable today in the shrine room were rebuilt in the 1990s, fragments of

Ricca and Fournier read these paintings as an indication that during the eleventh century “noble personages of southern Tibet also could be portrayed under the appearance of former great kings and drawn with those Central Asian traits that had become an essential part of the contemporary Tibetan culture.” Ricca and Fournier, “Notes Concerning the Mgon-Khaṅ of Žwa-Lu,” 355–356.

In particular, a member of the Ché clan, Jñanasiddhi, was a contemporary and advisor to the King Trisong Detsen. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 31.

eleventh-century murals remain between the spaces of the sculptures. Mural remains located on both sides of the eastern entrance and in the western corners showing three seated figures, aligned in a vertical row. The murals here combine Indian Pāla elements with Central Asian influences. Petra Müller, an art history student from the University of Vienna, discusses the male and female deities as part of a maṇḍala of retinue figures accompanying the built in sculptures of Prajñāpāramitā and the ten bodhisattvas, modern versions of which were re-built in the 1990s.

Thus the fragmentary remains of the earliest period of decorations at Shalu demonstrate the close interdependence of murals and built-in sculptural groups for the creation of interior temple spaces. The early mural paintings worked alongside sculptures as integrated wholes, wherein mural paintings often provided the extra groups of figures to complete larger iconographic sets whose major figures were made in three-dimensional sculpture. This aligns Shalu’s earliest buildings with other early Tibetan sites, where sculpture and mural also worked in similarly close association. This is particularly easily observed in spaces where early sculpture in clay was built into the walls. This relationship of sculpture to mural would change in the interior spaces produced in the later renovations.


76 More specifically Petra Muller suggests: “The development of type I begins with the possible representation in Zha lu but is clearly visible for the first time in the Lha khang gong ma of Nako. Luczanits (2004: 84) identified the configuration as related to the prajñāpāramitā maṇḍala. In rKyang bu the standing brass image seems to refer to the same type and date back to the possibly earliest stage of the Prajñāpāramitā depictions due to the comparison with the Gilgit image dated to the 7th century by an inscription (see previously, fig. 23, 25). Prajñāpāramitā appears in the centre of the universe as the mother of all beings and the personification of the most important text of that time, which makes the relation to early textual sources such as the Dhāranisamuccaya No. 33 and the Mañjusrimūlakalpa, as mentioned in the paper, most likely and a relation to the the type I mode of representation becomes evident.” Müller, “Representing Prajñāpāramitā in Tibet and the Indian Himalayas. The Iconographic Concept in the Temples of Nako, rKyang Bu and Zha Lu.”

77 At other eleventh century Tibetan temples (Alchi, Tabo, Drathang) murals also complete iconographic groups made in sculpture. Klimburg-Salter, Tabo; Roger Goepper, Alchi; Vitali, Early Temples of Central Tibet, 37–68.
Thirteenth-Century Addition: A Shrine for Holding Books

The next period of construction occurred under the lay leader (dpon) of Shalu, Gönpo pel (Mgon po dpal) between 1290 and 1303. This saw the addition of another large shrine room to the north of the other two constructions (fig. 1.9-1.10). This shrine room was built with a single, triple-doored entrance facing south towards the other two buildings. This renovation was small in scale by comparison to the large building phase that followed soon after it. Yet I believe that it introduces the genesis of the plan for the larger temple-expansion to come, and forces us to confront a set of questions about how closely we can link temple building to temple painting in both date and motivation. It is my contention that while this shrine room, called the Shrine of the Three Doors (Gosum Lhakhang, Sgo gsum lha khang) was built in the period between 1290 and 1303, the paintings in it, which have been assumed to date from the same period, are more likely later, and were conceived together with those of the fourteenth-century renovation in the 1330s.

The addition and plan of this third single shrine, whose only entry faced south, towards the space that would eventually become an assembly hall, imply that aspirations and plans for a larger expansion of the temple already existed in the late thirteenth century. The layout of this third freestanding structure makes little sense on its own. The building of the Three-door shrine is off the central axis, to the north of the other two constructions, with an entry that faced in towards the other two. This construction only makes sense in the context of the fuller and later executed plans for a larger expansion of the ground floor, with important shrines at each of the cardinal directions.

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78 The Myang Chung specifies that the Gosum Lhakhang was added by Kuzhang Gonpo Pal. The Shalu documents translated by Tucci show that he was the secular ruler in 1290. He was succeeded by his son who served as Kuzhang for just three years from 1303-1306, which serve as the “terminus ante quem” dates for his rule. Taranātha, Myang Chung, 160; Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 670–672; Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 100.

79 In another, more recent assessment of these murals, author David Jackson has also followed the received wisdom that these paintings also date from 1290-1303 in the same dates as the room’s construction. David Paul Jackson, The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2010), 106; Kreijger, “Mural Styles at Shalu,” 170; Franco Ricca and Lionel Fournier, “The Paintings in the Zhwa Lu sGo Gsum Lha Khang and bSe Sgo Ma Lha Khang: Stylistic Differences,” The Tibet Journal XXVI, no. no. 3 & 4 (Autumn & Winter 2001): 106.
Was there an intention or desire to expand the temple of Shalu by the late thirteenth century? Since the firm establishment of Yuan-Sakya rule in Tibet in the 1260s, Shalu had been elevated from a religious centre to one of the most populous and prosperous of the thirteen administrative districts, the myriarchies, and had particularly close ties to the “royal” family of the Khon at Sakya.\(^8\) Major temple building projects had begun at Sakya in 1268,\(^8\) involving the construction of the Lhakhang Chenmo, a grand temple also filled with elaborate wall paintings. Indeed, it is likely that as Shalu’s fortunes, tied to Sakya, rose in the late thirteenth century, so too did aspirations for the small temple to become larger and more richly decorated. With wealth and power on the rise, it is logical that there would already have been at least nascent aspirations for constructing a larger temple, though these aspirations would not find full expression until after the arrival of Yuan patronage in 1306.

The new shrine room space constructed and later decorated (after 1290) had a totally different plan and purpose for its interior space. This new shrine room was specially made and decorated as a room to house a large collection of books. This was established by leaving two of the four walls largely free from painted decoration, a schema that would also be followed in the later Skin-door shrine across the assembly hall. The wall paintings that were added to the space also function in fundamentally different ways than the eleventh-century paintings: they are not specifically integrated into sculptural ensembles, but stand alone as devotional images. Furthermore they are painted only above the height of the altars, showing that the devotional sculptures in these rooms had likely changed from built-in clay sculpture to metal sculptures that sat on altars, and keeping the paintings at a visible level above these.

The interest in large collections of books was now integral to the late thirteenth-century Tibetan temple, a central concern that would also inform the plans and designs of the fourteenth-century renovations. Tāranātha (1575-1634) recorded that the Three-door


shrine room housed three redactions of the Prajñāpāramitā in different lengths.⁸²
Whereas during the eleventh-century construction, the goddess of the text had been
represented sculpturally and in anthropomorphic form in the upper Yumchenmo shrine
dedicated to her, now physical books were central to shrines, considered important
even enough to be employed and used in the design of the shrine spaces. The inclusion of the
same text in different redactions and lengths indicates that the books kept and housed
were not only there to be read, but were instead being collected, compiled and kept as
sets, underscoring an interest in comparison and their editorial completeness, signaling a
preoccupation with the display of archival completeness that would also dominate the
design and plans of fourteenth-century shrines.

The thirteenth-century shrine still also contained and was dedicated to a sculptural
image, with the main statue placed inside being an image of Śākyamuni that had been
consecrated and dedicated to the patron’s father.⁸³ This sculpture was notably different
from earlier eleventh-century sculptures in its medium and its rationale. Where the earlier
built-in devotional icons of the eleventh-century shrines were sculptures made of wood
and plaster, this sculpture was singular, and was notably dedicated and consecrated as a
memorial object for the patron’s deceased father. Though the texts do not specify its
material, it is most likely that this Śākyamuni sculpture was a freestanding metal
sculptural object. Because metal was inherently expensive, and because the text does not
mention the size of the sculpture, we should assume this metal statue was not especially
large.⁸⁴ It is likely that then, as now, this metal sculpture was displayed on a raised altar
platform, and was probably accompanied by other images. The space for such a raised
altar platform has been considered in the painted decoration of the walls, whose elaborate
paintings start from about four feet up.

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⁸² “Gsung rab rgyas ‘brin bsdus rnams bzhengs so.” Tāranātha, Myang Chung, 160.

⁸³ The Butön Biography simply states that “in the northern temple the chief image was Mahamuni,” Ruegg 91. While the History of the Nyang region states that the statue was dedicated to his father, the dpon of Zhwa lu mgon po dpal, his father being A mes chen po Sangs rgyas ye shes. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 91; Tāranātha, Myang Chung, 160.

⁸⁴ It was most likely just under life size, as are the altar-sized statues from this room in Lionel Fournier’s photograph from the site in 1991.
On the east wall a contemporary bookshelf appears along the south end of the west wall. This shelf is not only modern in appearance, but it was also absent from Lionel Fournier’s photographs of the room taken before the temple had re-opened in 1991 (fig. 1.25), suggesting that this bookshelf is a recent re-construction. Nevertheless it is likely that, given the lack of mural paintings behind it, an earlier shelf had also existed there, as the paintings had been planned around the design of this room containing several large bookshelves. The majority of the south wall is covered by a bookshelf built over and around the wide tripartite doorway, though in contrast this shelf looks considerably well aged, and was visible in Fournier’s photo, showing it had survived the vagaries and violence of the temple’s recent history. This is possibly one of the original shelves for books, or at least in the space occupied by a similar earlier shelf.

A Room for Books: A New Conceptual Impetus for Mural Art

The room that was made to house books used wall paintings differently from earlier eleventh-century shrine room murals at Shalu. Whereas in these earlier shrines the murals had clearly connected to sculptural programs, the murals of the thirteenth-century room represent a complete iconographic group with central deities: the five Tathāgatha Buddhas of the Yoga Tantras, the temple founder and protectors. As such, they are freestanding and relate to themselves. They also adorn the wall so as to permit visibility of sculptures and objects on an altar placed beneath them, and adorn only the spaces of wall that were not covered by bookshelves. The wall paintings, notably absent along the entire south wall and southern sections of the east and west walls, were only added to spaces not covered by bookshelves. In this way the murals worked in concert with books on shelves as organizing visual schema in the room. The same plan and use of space was followed in the Skin-door shrine built later, where the side walls were also left intentionally bare for the placement of large shelves still present today.

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85 I thank Amy Heller for providing me access to Lionel Fournier’s 1991 photos of Shalu, and then to Lionel Fournier for corresponding with me about them and permitting me to use them.

86 This bookshelf appears in an unpublished photograph from 1991 taken by Lionel Fournier at Shalu, and appears to have survived the other destruction that the room endured during the Cultural Revolution years.
We should question if the murals painted in the three-door shrine were actually painted in the late thirteenth century as has been assumed, or if they might better be understood as contemporaneous with the fourteenth-century murals—a question I will return to shortly. The mural paintings of the Three-door shrine appear on three walls. The surviving paintings occupy the full length of the north wall with the five Tathāgatha Buddhas (fig. 1.26), and the north ends of both west (fig. 1.27) and east (fig. 1.28) walls. Today the west wall has the remains of repeated painted Tsa-tsa, small hand-pressed molded clay votive offerings made in large sets as part of meditation practices, applied directly to it, which were likely added significantly later than the room’s paintings. However, since these do not appear to have disturbed paint layers below them it is likely that there were similarly no paintings on this wall, and this space was once where another large bookshelf was placed (fig. 1.29).

The north wall paintings include five monumental Tathāgatha Buddhas placed centrally and frontally (fig. 1.26). These are painted on a large scale, and are flanked by two large wrathful painted figures, a Vajrahumkāra on the west end of the north wall (fig. 1.30) and a Trailokyavijāya on the east end of the north wall (fig. 1.31). Along the north end of the east wall another four-armed Mahākāla appears (fig. 1.28). Further, an important and inscribed painting of the eleventh-century religious founder Chétsūn Shérap Jungné (lce btsun shes rab ‘byung gnas) is painted along the north end of the west wall (fig. 1.27) with a smaller inscribed lineage of Ché clan leaders surrounding him, in spaces both above (fig. 1.32, 1.33) and below (fig. 1.34). The inclusion of the religious founder of the temple and the Ché leaders, identified through inscription, shows an interest in celebrating the religious history of the founder and of the temple.

The portrait of Chétsūn Shérap Jungné, whose name is written in clear Tibetan letters on the left side of his white disc platform (inscribed: lce btsun shes rab ‘byung gnas), is accompanied by fourteen inscribed smaller lineage figures above and below him. The portrait of the religious founder, significantly shown accompanied by his most important teachers and predecessors, makes an important statement about the religious authenticity and authority of the lineage and the temple of Shalu as a whole. This was a logical addition to the conceptual space of framing the enlarged temple as an important
religious site with direct links to the Buddha. His depiction demonstrates an increasingly close association of political and religious roles in Tibet by the late thirteenth century.

In contrast to the earlier aristocrat portraits (fig. 1.21-22), Chétsün’s portrait emphasizes his religious authority by depicting him as a monk, wearing robes and a pointed red pandit’s hat, that followed the headgear associated with the religious masters of Nalanda University, on a lotus throne like an enlightened being. The image aligns temporally with the emergence of religious portraiture in Tibet, a pictorial theme that exploded in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and which has been the topic of recent exhibitions and studies.\textsuperscript{87} While his portrait is idealized in its personal features, an effort is clearly made to explicitly identify him and his Ché predecessors through their names given in inscriptions, identifying these idealized portraits as specific historical individuals, and specifically connecting the temple to its founder of three hundred years earlier.

The portrait of Chétsün is painted following the iconic model of a teacher seated atop a Vajrāsana throne (seat of enlightenment). Below the throne, two deer flank the dharma wheel viewed from the side, creating an intentional parallelism between Chétsün Shérap Jungné and the historical Buddha whose first teaching in the Deer Park is referenced by this symbolism. The founder of Shalu is here the one who “turned the wheel of the dharma” for this temple and region of Tsang by establishing the temple in 1027, and is thus visually likened to Śākyamuni who originally set the wheel of law into motion. By the early fourteenth century, portraits of Tibetan religious teachers had become an important genre within Tibetan art, though most of these survive in the format of tangka paintings and relatively few as murals.\textsuperscript{88} Portraits on cloth exalted human teachers and visually likened them to Buddhas by incorporating them into iconographic models developed for painting Buddhas. Creating the large inscribed mural-form of the

\textsuperscript{87} David Paul Jackson, \textit{Mirror of the Buddha : Early Portraits from Tibet : From the Masterworks of Tibetan Painting Series} (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2011).

\textsuperscript{88} For comparative portraits of Tibetan teachers see the catalogue cited in the previous note, based on an exhibition of the same name that was on view at the Rubin museum, curated by David Jackson and Christian Luczanits, from October 11, 2011- March 5, 2012. Ibid.
by-then popular form of tangka lineage portrait on the wall at Shalu inscribed this tangka design into permanent fixed form.

Tangkas depicting teachers seated in lotus posture, featured in the centre of compositions, enthroned against elaborate thrones backed with characteristic architectonic and animal mounts, befitting Buddhas, were often accompanied by other lineage figures either above or below. In the exhibit and catalogue *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet*, David Jackson points to a rise in the prominence of such painted portraits of religious teachers, which were less common in Tibet before the twelfth century but very popular by the fourteenth century.\(^8^9\) This artistic explosion of the theme of the lama portrait, where the lama is depicted in iconographic terms like an enlightened Buddha, should be seen in the context of a growth in confidence and the assertion of Tibetan teachers and lineages as sources of religious authority at this time.

The evolution of portraits of Tibetan religious teachers as primary subjects in paintings was a logical outgrowth of the depiction of lineages in the very earliest surviving Tibetan paintings, where lineages of teachers beginning with a Buddha and ending with Tibetan teachers charted the authenticity of the teaching and initiation lineages. Devotion to teachers, as the holders and bearers of teachings for the present, was particularly central in Tantric Buddhism.\(^9^0\) The desire to re-frame and depict Tibetan lineages as genuine, important, and closely related to Indian Buddhist precedents, was a key feature to successfully aligning religious and political authority in Tibet. This also featured prominently in the exportation of Tibetan Buddhism via charismatic teachers to neighboring states, including Mongol China.

On the northern, main wall of the shrine room, we see the first version at Shalu of the painted maṇḍala of the Five Tathāgata Buddhas. This is the core representation of five central Buddhas of the *Vajradhātumaṇḍala*, the principal maṇḍala of the *Sarva Tathāgata Tattva Saṃgraha Tantra* text, which had a profound effect on Tantric and

\(^{8^9}\) Ibid., 67.

\(^{9^0}\) David Snellgrove points out as religious orders were “closely related with the great importance attached to devotion to one’s chosen teacher, whence there derives immediately the concept of a spiritual lineage.” David L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1987), 486.
particularly Tibetan Buddhism. This focuses on the maṇḍala group of five crowned Buddhas, a depiction very different than the simple teaching Buddha groups of the eleventh century paintings, and an expanded version of the Vairocana maṇḍala I suggested may have been the lost sculptural focus of the earlier shrine.\(^91\) These very different paintings demonstrate a shift in Tibetan Buddhist art at Shalu towards the iconographic elaborations of the five Buddha families in Tantric Buddha forms, yet another iteration of the expression of enlarged numbered sets as useful and important didactic explanations of complex Buddhist philosophical concepts.

This maṇḍala is centred on the supreme white crowned Buddha Vairocana surrounded by four Buddhas of equal size. Together, the five Buddhas represent the fully enlightened mind through a spatial metaphor of complementary power relations. The metaphor of the basic maṇḍala has been compared to an ordered empire with centres and peripheries, implying a power sharing relationship between centres and their outliers.\(^92\) The use of this clearly organized maṇḍala of figures may have had great appeal for a temple like Shalu and a clan like the Ché, whose own power had been confirmed and bolstered through relationship to a distant powerful centre, the Yuan, but who themselves administered one of the most important of the thirteen myriarchies of fourteenth century Tibet. They were proudly participant in their peripheral relationship to the political centre.

The paintings within the Three-door shrine (Gosum Lhakhang) have usually been assigned to the same temporal period as the construction of the shrine, which was made within the same construction period as the room itself during the time of the Kushang Gönpo pel (1290-1303). The attribution of the shrine and its paintings to the same period is first proposed by Vitali, and forms the basis of a special stylistic study article by Franco Ricca and Eberto Lo Bue.\(^93\) In that article Ricca and Fournier compare the paintings of the five Buddhas in the Three-door shrine with those of the “later” Skin-door paintings.

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\(^91\) See page 29.


\(^93\) Ricca and Fournier, “The Paintings in the Zhwa Lu sGo Gsum Lha Khang and bSe Sgo Ma Lha Khang: Stylistic Differences.”
shrine (Segoma Lhakhang), seeing between them a legible stylistic development, explicable through identifying the responsible artists of each shrine as of different ethnicities and the paintings as coming from slightly different periods. They maintain that the Three-door shrine was painted by Nepalese artists between 1290 and 1303, and that the Skin-door shrine was painted by Tibetan artists after 1306. Indeed, this has become so widely accepted in Tibetan art history that many scholars refer to these dates as “firmly datable” and use the comparison of the separately dated paintings of the Three-door shrine and the Skin door shrine to derive dates for tangka paintings.

I agree that the stylistic differences between the two shrines can be partially explained through differing origins of the workshop artists, and that the artists working in the Three-door shrine were likely Nepalese. Yet I contend that we have little evidence that the paintings should be separated in dates, and instead their similarities to later murals at Shalu are far more overwhelming. While we know the shrine itself was patronized and built, or at least begun, under the relatively brief rule of the donor, the Kushang Gönpo pel, we do not need to infer that the paintings necessarily date from that time too. I propose that it is more likely that the paintings were added after the major architectural renovation.

These mural paintings participate in the same overall conception of the function of a temple’s murals. In both the shrines flanking the assembly hall, the paintings were added where bookshelves were not placed. The main iconography (of the five Buddhas) is the same in both the Three-door and Skin-door shrines (Gosum and Segoma lhakhang),

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94 Ricca and Fournier form an argument around reading the temporal differences between the presumed late thirteenth century paintings of the Gosum Lhakhang, painted they think by Newar artists, and the slightly later paintings of the early fourteenth century in the Skin-door shrine (Segoma Lhakhang), painted by their Tibetan disciples. In particular they engage in a close stylistic analysis of the large scale Jina Buddha paintings in the two shrines to shed light on what they describe as an “artistic evolution reached at Zhwa lu between the thirteenth and fourteenth century,” wherein the later paintings “reflect the growing autonomy of Tibetan disciples who, while still working under the guidance of Newar masters, were in the process of maturing their specific interpretation of the iconographic rules and of the dominating stylistic conventions in painting.” Ibid., 109.

where the monumental five painted Buddhas directly mirror each other. The five Buddhas in both shrines are painted according to the models of five frontal tangka (thang ka) paintings, divided from each other by the same thin yellow lines. It is worth noting of course that the division of spaces by thin yellow bands is the pictorial convention for dividing space used throughout the large ground-floor circumambulatory passage.

I think there is a possibility, one at least worth entertaining, that both first floor shrines were painted around the same time and not sequentially as has been previously suggested. The paintings of the Three-door shrine and the Skin-door shrine, are of a conceptual and temporal whole, and the small stylistic differences between them may reflect the different artists groups rather than different dates. They both represent the same central iconography, and may well have been conceived, planned and executed together. In both shrines the paintings start from four feet up on the wall, leaving the lower wall spaces and those that would be covered with shelves unpainted. In both shrines the paintings map and divide visual spaces schematically, following on visual precedents established for tangka paintings.

It is certainly possible that while written sources date the Gosum shrine’s construction to the ultimately rather brief reign of Gönpo pel (1290-1303), this dating does not apply to its interior wall paintings. Instead we could consider that the shrine was completed as an architectural construction with its statues in place during this period, but only painted later. While this would be unusual practice, the altar and sculptures were movable and since only the wall behind the altar appears to ever have been painted in this shrine, moving the altar to paint the wall later would not have been impossible. The major construction of the temple that followed after the receipt of patronage in 1306 was, we should consider, at first primarily architectural, and the paintings may well have come several decades later, well after the architectural work was completed. The re-conceptualization of paintings thus occurred after the arrival of the abbot Butōn, who was the person most interested and proficient in re-conceptualizing the “blank canvas” of the temple’s wall spaces into a meaningful new expression. The mural paintings were thus begun after 1320, and with the shrine and maṇḍala paintings completed in the mid-1330s, the circumambulatory was not begun until 1340.
This re-conceptualization of the temple’s murals was a role for someone invested in the religious power and potential of images. This was a role for a major religious teacher, an abbot. In the period directly before the arrival of Butön, from 1315 to 1320 on, there was no abbot at Shalu. Instead, the lay leader Drakpa Gyeltsen, who received the money to renovate the temple, was actively seeking a teacher of prestige to come and fill the position. Reading between the lines of the history, Butön was initially resistant to the invitation to Shalu, making it likely that at least some of these years were spent as Drakpa Gyeltsen sought to invite the teacher, but was unable to secure a suitable abbot. Butön did finally accept and come in 1320, and likely the promise of support and patronage for major canonical editing works he would direct there was part of his motivation.

It may seem improbable that a shrine room could be left unpainted for this period of time—possibly as long as twenty to thirty years. Yet we know from the case of the four maṇḍala shrine rooms at Shalu, which were also built during the renovations of Drakpa Gyeltsen, that the interiors of these rooms were not painted until the 13s. They are painted with maṇḍala programs that Butön himself designed and explained in long inscriptions attendant to the paintings. It especially makes sense that when such large architectural spaces were being added, and then topped with extensive and complicated foreign roofing systems like the glazed tile roofs and their complex structures of corbelled wood bracket supports, that this all would need to be well completed before the interior walls were finished and painted.

The paintings in the Three-door shrine are similar to the paintings known to date after the renovations. The paintings resonate so closely with the Skin-door shrine paintings, both iconographically and in overall conception, that it is possible that they were contemporaneous. The discernible differences of stylistic details between the two painted rooms and sets of five Buddhas—those enumerated by Ricca and Fournier (showing differences in details of the throne backs, floral patterns, and body types of the Buddhas)—are in keeping with other variations between paintings at Shalu. These

96 That there was no abbot at Shalu from 1315 to 1320, instead the period was overseen by the “interim” leader Dge-bshes 'Jam dbyangs pa. Blo gsal bston skyong (b. 1804), “Zhwa Lu Gdan Rabs (Shalu Abbatial History),” 365–366.
differences do not need to be posited as a temporal continuum, but instead further support a thesis that sees different groups of artists with notable variance in their styles working together at Shalu. The posited earlier and purer “Nepalese” style in the Three-door shrine that Ricca and Fournier want to see as a temporal precursor to a later “hybrid” style influenced by Yuan patronage, could also be more simply read as evidence for at least two different groups of artists—one Nepalese and the other Tibetan-- working at Shalu at the same time.

This is particularly easily supported when we look carefully at the paintings of the circumambulatory passage, whose styles intermingle but seldom mix. Instead, as investigated further in chapter five, two groups of artist workshops, one Nepalese and another Tibetan, worked alongside one another in the massive project of painting the circumambulatory passage. A theory that sees different groups of artists working at Shalu at the same time is ultimately necessary to explain the stylistic variance between different narrative painting panels painted in the circumambulatory passage, paintings which also must date slightly later than formerly assumed. These same two groups of artists may also have worked at the same time to paint the shrines off the assembly hall that housed books, engaging in a purposeful echoing of an iconographic program directly mirroring one another with massive Buddhas.

The circumambulatory passage paintings, whose display of differences are the topic of chapter five, show clear distinctions between painted panels whose artists are working in a pure Nepalese style, characterized by a unity of Nepalese costumes, architecture and bodily treatments, and other paintings that operate in a Tibetan style that incorporate Chinese elements of architecture and costume. These represent at least two different groups of artists working at Shalu at the same time. That they likely worked at the same time can be seen by examining the division of panels of stylistic consistency painted in the passage. The same two groups of painters were likely responsible for painting the murals of the two shrines across the assembly hall from one another, with the group of Nepalese artists painting the Three-door shrine, and the other main group of

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97 See Diagram of figure 4.1 that shows my assessment of the two artist’s groups, and the attendant discussion about artist’s groups in chapter four, page 194.
Tibetan artists painting the Skin-door shrine, both groups working after the 1320s and even in the 1330s.

To conclude, while the Three-door shrine was built in or shortly after 1290, and likely represented a desire to expand the temple into a larger architectural entity, the paintings of the Three-door shrine were likely completed only later, and with the other murals, after 1320. In my opinion, they share overwhelming similarities with the paintings of the Skin-door shrine, and the circumambulatory passage, which I believe are all roughly contemporaneous, and date to the period after Butön’s arrival as abbot in 1320. All of these murals participate in the same set of interests and the same larger design ideas.

The stylistic differences that appear between them do not necessarily have to belie different production periods, but instead are consistent with other evidence at the temple that there were primarily two groups of artists workshops, one Nepalese and one Tibetan, working alongside one another in the massive project of covering Shalu’s interiors with lavish murals. The project of painting the temple’s interior spaces in lavish sets of murals came after the major architectural renovations, and as I will explain in the following section, mostly after 1320. As the abbot Butön oversaw the completion of the great renovation, he developed and used programs of mural paintings significantly differently than had been previously used at Shalu. Murals became a key part of the temple’s mode of communicating, and were specifically useful to express its core work of collecting, protecting and displaying Buddhism, and above all, collecting, protecting and displaying the all important objects of fourteenth-century Tibetan Buddhism: books.

The Major Renovations of the Fourteenth Century: Reading the History of Building

At that time the great Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen… was repairing the temple of which he was the master … From the southern border lands the Kushang sent for various woods, and from the Eastern Kingdom he summoned expert craftsmen. The Serkhang had a triple pile of pagoda-roofs with four large turquoise-painted
pagoda roofs on the four sides, topped by golden gañjiras … the other temples had double pagoda roofs. All were hung with nets of bells, large and small. Inside marvelous images of the Tathāgatas were painted in 101 colours.98

So goes the earliest Tibetan source on the fourteenth-century renovation, a description from Butön’s biography written in 1355. In this section, the recent period of construction at Shalu is introduced and firmly credited to the temple’s lay leader, Drakpa Gyeltsern (Grags pa gyal mtshan), the man who served as Kushang from 1306 and 1333. He is the one who, we are told, “repaired” the temple (nyams pa rnams gsos), a verb that downplays just how major the renovation was. The excerpt emphasizes a set of standard elements that are repeatedly stated about this renovation throughout Tibetan sources: that craftsmen came from far away, that there was a special roof, and that there were colourful paintings added. Yet I think it is important to note that this renovation was certainly ongoing when Butön arrived at the temple in 1320, and while the shell of the building had been created, the design of the mural paintings was yet to happen.

It is interesting that Butön’s biography nevertheless makes brief but specific mention of the wonderful religious images that the renovation placed inside the temple. While normally the Tibetan noun for deity images (sku gzugs) refers to either sculpture or painting, the special mention of colours here makes this a strong reference to painting. Although the mention of mural paintings is brief, the fact that they are noted at all reveals two important things. First, is that the paintings were seen as the logical progression and completion of the building renovation—this description ends the section on architectural renovation. Second, that they were special enough, visually, to warrant mention. They are described as “bright and shining” (bkra ba), “extremely colourful” (tshon sna brgya rtsa gcig gis, made by one-hundred and one types of colours) and “innumerable” (mi khyab pa), all reasons given here as the root of at least some special status. This Tibetan

98 This excerpt from the Butön Namthar comes from a section written in 1355 by the chief disciple of Butön (Sgra tha pa Rin chen rnam rgyal) while Butön was still alive. It is the earliest extant Tibetan written source containing details of the fourteenth-century renovation. This follows but adapts the English translation, made in 1966 by David Seyfort Ruegg. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 89–90. A closer translation of the Tibetan reads: “Inside there exist innumerable images of the tathāgatas that shine with one hundred and one colours” (nang na tshon sna brgya rtsa gcig gis bkra ba’i de bzhin gshegs pa ’I sku gzugs bsam gyis mi khab pa) Ibid., Tibetan folios 14b.1–2.
description became the standard for the renovation as described in other Tibetan sources, and must be reexamined to support my claim that the renovation was significantly ongoing when Butön arrived in 1320, and more specifically that the paintings inside the temple were not yet complete at the time of his arrival. Previous interpretations of these passages read into them the statement that the renovations, including paintings, had been completed before 1320. I think this reading has been, at least partly, an interpretive accident of making interpretations based on literary sequence. The textual description in Butön’s biography of the temple proceeds from the renovation to a description of the temple that spans three Tibetan folia. This precedes the story of Butön’s invitation and arrival in the biographic text, yet a sequence between these in not stated. Indeed, I believe it is not really there.

In the Tibetan text, the section quoted, the beginning of the description of the temple, is then followed by a list of the major sculptural images that were placed in the shrine rooms. In this section then, the author, Butön’s student Dratsepa Rinchen Namgyel (Sgra tshad pa rin chen rnam rgyal) writing in 1355, writes as the result of visible access to the contents of the temple. His description of the temple is of a place he knows well, though he himself likely lived at the nearby hermitage retreat of Riphuk. The description of the temple is here part of a biography, a celebration of the illustrious monastery at which Butön would serve as abbot. The description Dratsepa supplied is of the important contents of a temple and similar to a description of a temple for and from a pilgrimage guide, enumerating important relics and statues. We really should in fact understand it as a description of the temple in 1355, not a statement of what the temple specifically contained before Butön’s arrival, as it has been sometimes understood.

After this section on holy images and texts, the text explains the expansion of the monastic community. The biographer is contextualizing the Kuzhang’s project of expanding the temple as attendant to the growth of the temple’s social role. First of these,


100 In particular the 1919 pilgrimage guide description of Shalu written by Kahthog Situ enumerates the same order of images and texts in the shrines listed in a clockwise direction starting with the southern Skin-door shrine. Tsering, “Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880-1925) Diary On Pilgrimage in Myang Area,” 406.
the Kuzhang, we are told, “built and offered to each priest inmate belonging there a cell,” a testament to the direct support of the larger monastic community at Shalu that followed the renovation; and then we are told that the Kushang “established the four great offerings which take place in the first month of each season,” implying that the greater involvement of the larger Shalu community was sought by the Kuzhang. The renovation project is thus immediately subsumed and explained in a wider context of an expanded social role for the temple for the wider population, a fitting focus for a biography of an abbot, though direct credit for these “worldly” endeavours is given to the patron.

That the Kushang desired to bring together monks “as vast as the ocean” then leads ultimately to the topic of greatest interest for the biography: the invitation and arrival of Butön to the temple to serve as abbot in 1320. Following from the explanation of how the Kushang maintained his many subjects, this discussion follows:

Realising that there were no more than a few priests in the temple, he wished to have them as extensive as the ocean and to have a religious superior (chos dpon) who combines the qualities of learning, nobility and excellence (mkhas btsun bzang) and a hundred kalyāṇamitras who expound the Dharma. With this in view, he had earlier prayed for a divine predetermination as to who would be suitable; he presented an offering to the Ratna, he honoured the Community and he made an offering (gtor ma) to the Dharmapāla. Reflecting on whether the kalyāṇamitras from home or abroad were learned, noble and good, he repeated their names and, falling asleep, he considered in dream, and by virtue of the very pure altruistic disposition of the great donor, the god gave a Prophecy in dream about the coming of this Dharmasvāmin and lotsāba… Sending a request to the teachers, students and members of the Community residing in Khro phu and to the Dharmasvāmin himself, he set about inviting them.102

The Lord of the Law (Dharmasvāmin) referenced here is the soon-to-be abbot Butön, and this is the description of his invitation by the Kuzhang. Since a biography is necessarily a

101 Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 91.
102 Ibid., 93.
tale of his exemplarity, it is not surprising that the focus here is on the Kuzhang’s recognition of Butön’s special qualities and of the dream prophecy that authorized his invitation. This should be, once more, read not as an explicit statement of sequence—for this was not the purpose of the text—but instead as text that was written as a religious biography. Thus, within this context, the expansion of the temple was there, not as a historical event, but to laud the teacher further. The renovation was also consciously placed within its social purpose—expanding the monastic population that the abbot joined and oversaw.

By placing these topics into a continuum for the sake of a biography of a religious figure, the Tibetan text places the physical expansion of the temple in connection with the religious growth of the temple. Yet this purpose and the sequence of its parts cannot be taken as a statement of historical sequence. The text does not say though that all the paintings had been completed by Butön’s arrival. The description of the temple instead appears in the context of establishing what is of greatest import to the biographer: that the great teacher was invited under heavenly signs.

Dratsepa’s text certainly does not provide a temporal sequence. This is apparent as his text places the increased population of monks before the arrival of Butön, although this is highly unlikely. While the Kuzhang’s expansion would have been attendant on a desire to expand the monastic population, the arrival of Butön in 1320 certainly would have been necessary to support a wider population of monks thereafter. Beyond the Kushang patron, Butön himself attracted much other patronage. His biography often enumerates other patrons and donors who sought teachings from him. Thus converse to the sequence of Dratsepa’s biography, the rise in monastic population certainly came after 1320.

Among our early Tibetan textual sources, The Biography of Butön does not mention the specifics of Yuan patronage or the honorific titles the Kushang received from the court, which in turn are emphasized by the Genealogies of Shalu. This omission could

103 In particular his biography describes “innumerable pupils came from India, China, Nepal, Hor, Yu gur, Sog po, ‘Ga’ and from Dbus, Gtsang, Mnga ris, Upper and lower Mdo in Tibet” Ibid., 118. Further on both the kings of China and India are invoked as major patrons: “From China the Cakravatin-king Tho gon thu mur gan and from India the dharmaraja Punyamalla etc. sent presents and enquired about the health, well-being, rising and walking of the Lama” Ibid., 121.
be partly reflected by the purpose and focus of the biography of a religious leader like Butön, but they are also probably related to the political changes Tibet had endured by 1355 when the text was written. Butön’s biography, the first part of which was written in 1355, was penned when Mongol power in Tibet had already effectively ended. Thus specific and explicit connections to the now floundering Yuan dynasty, and the recently dispossessed house of Sakya, were notably downplayed.

Later Tibetan sources on the history of the temple celebrate the renovations in terms of their explicit connection to Yuan patronage. Both the sixteenth-century clan history (partially translated by Tucci as the Genealogies of Zalu) and the sixteenth-century History of Nyang (the Myang Chung by Tāranatha), specifically frame the renovation in relationship to the direct Yuan court patronage that Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen received. In those sources on the history of the temple, the illustrious court patronage that followed a personal meeting between the Kushang and the Yuan emperor—a meeting that had taken place as the Kushang had traveled to the Mongol capital of Dadu—is described as a specific. The Kushang had met with the emperor Temür Öljeytü Khan, also known as Emperor Chengzong of the Yuan who ruled from 1294-1307, the second Emperor of the Yuan dynasty and a grandson of Khubilai’s, a scene that Tucci provided in translation:

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105 Central Tibet was now under the control of the Pakmodru leadership under Jangchub Gyeltse (ta’i si tu byang chub rgyal mtshan, 1302-1364). We know just how fraught the political moment was as we have, preserved in his collected works, a letter that Butön wrote to Jangchub Gyaltse. The Pakmodru leadership, leaders from another of the thirteen myriarchies, had successfully challenged Sakya’s right to rule central Tibet. The Pakmodru had conquered Sakya between between 1349 and 1354, and although the Pakmodru government would only be formally recognized by the Yuan court in 1365, a mere three years before the demise of the Yuan in 1368, they largely controlled Central Tibet by 1354. Kurtis Schaeffer, “The Pakmodru Polity,” *THL Place Dictionary*, July 21, 2011, http://places.thlib.org/features/24111/descriptions/1226. Accessed July 15, 2013.

106 The Ché (Lce) clan history is a sixteenth-century text of ancestral succession entitled the *Chos grwa chen pod pal zha lug ser khang gi bdag po jo bo lce’l gdung rabs*. The most important historical sections were provided in partial translation by Tucci, as what he would call the “Genealogies of Za lu” in parts of *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, volume 2. 656–662; Amoghasiddhi, *Chos Grwa Chen Pod Pal Zhal Lug Ser Khang Gi Bdag Po Jo Bo lce’l Gdung Rabs*, vol. manuscript (Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre, New York, 16th century); Tāranātha, *Myang Chung*. 
The Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen went to China. The emperor Oljadu, having filled with wine a crystal cup decorated with peacocks, gave it to him, saying: “As you are the uncle of all the clans, you are also my uncle,” and he conferred titles upon him. The emperor of China gave him an edict and a diploma which made him Lord of the lay and religious communities of the Shalu myriarchy … after this he … invested him with power over the myriarchy of Shalu… This myriarch, who delighted in administering justice, and had received from the Emperor of China a judge’s office, did not boast of his office. Later he made the leather door on the Southern wing the temple, the intermediate circumambulation, the Gonkhang in the entrance temple to the East, the four great ways of access to the entrance temple on the present Northern side, added paintings within projecting arches, frames of turquoise enamel, and the tiles decorated with golden ornaments on the Serkhang… Inside he placed numberless images of the Tathāgathas, variously decorated with a hundred and one kinds of colours, and particularly in the shrine of the leather door the Buddhas of the three times.  

This excerpt from the Genealogies provides imaginative detail for this moment of meeting between the Kushang and the emperor, to frame the specific investments of land and title that ensued from this meeting. This is likely also the basis of the text that appears in the sixteenth-century Myang Chung, as many of the details provided are repeated there. Clear emphasis is given in these texts on the meeting, honours and titles that Drakpa Gyeltse directly received from the emperor. Assigning the historical meeting between Drakpa Gyeltse and the emperor to 1306 has been a necessity since the meeting between these two must have happened after Drakpa Gyeltse came to power as Kushang (in 1306) but before the emperor’s death in 1307. So 1306 must remain the date where the Shalu Kushang received these honours in person —titles and patronage from the Yuan emperor. It was at this meeting that the title

107 Translation adapted from Tucci. Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 659.

108 Tāranātha, Myang Chung, 161–162.
“Kushang” meaning “revered uncle” was recognized for the first time by the Yuan emperor directly, and further many other honours, titles, and exemptions were granted. With this Yuan court patronage the Kushang was able to greatly increase the reputation of Shalu. This happened in many ways, not only as the result of the physical building. The ambitions of this period were to increase the function of the temple into becoming a stronger centre—religiously and politically. Over the next few decades this would occur at Shalu, where the population of the resident monks would be greatly expanded, an eminent religious teacher, translator and editor would be invited to serve as abbot, and under him hugely important book editing and organizing projects would be undertaken. These were interrelated processes—growing the building, increasing the number of monastic inhabitants, and patronizing religious activities.

In the sixteenth-century Tibetan gazetteer, the History of Nyang (or The well-explained account of the marvelous places of upper, lower and central Myang region; Myang yul stod smad bar gsum gyi ngo mtshar gtam gyi legs bshad mkhas pa’i ‘jug ngogs) attributed to Tāranātha, this list of fourteenth-century changes is provided:

The paintings and sculptures, the southern Segoma, the eastern entry shrine made into a protector’s chapel, now the entry to the north, and the great circumambulatory way emerged. From the east, China/Mongolia skillful craftsmen were summoned. Chinese roofs, turquoise, with golden ganjiras were planted on the four [roofs]. On the four sides, turquoise parapets, ornamented with ganjiras and fully covered with other decorations, were placed.

109 It had earlier been used between the Sakya and Shalu lay lords. The title Kushang referring to uncle was a recognition by the emperor of a title formerly granted by Sakya to the Shalu lay leaders. Since the daughters of Shalu had famously married Sakya hierarchs, and mothered their lineal offspring, the father of this daughter was formally recognized as “uncle,” and the term was first used in 1265. Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 100.

110 the word for sculptures is glo ‘bur, more specifically means “projections” but here understood as sculptures, or three dimensional objects.

111 The Tibetan here, byang ngos kyi, “from the north.”

112 Bzo bo mkhas pa is read as “skillful craftsmen.”
On the Serkhang three layers of Chinese roofs were made, on the others, two layers.\textsuperscript{113}

In this textual description, the renovated temple is described in overall plan—with the specifics provided for which rooms were added and what they included. The invitation of foreign craftsmen from either China or more specifically from the Mongolian court (\textit{shar rgya hor}), is again re-iterated, and these directly precede the text’s detailed elaboration of the special Chinese roof (\textit{rgya phibs}). It is from these accounts, however flawed and partial they are, that the chronology and details of Shalu’s building phases have been based. They provide quite a lot of information, but must also always be interpreted as the sources they are—texts ultimately written not merely to reflect facts but also to make some larger argument. In combination with the remains of the fourteenth-century paintings, much more about the temple’s construction can be understood.

\textbf{Overview of the Fourteenth-Century Renovation}

The renovation unified and regularized the floor-plan of the temple, making it resemble a maṇḍala by placing major shrines at the cardinal directions around a roughly square enclosed assembly hall on the ground floor and an open terrace on the upper level (fig. 1.3, 1.11). On the ground floor, the assembly hall united the three previously freestanding buildings with a fourth new shrine on the south side, adding a large, enclosed central space. This assembly hall contains 36 large pillars, and would have required the importation of large wooden beams. This assembly hall, a space that would

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{113} The Tibetan of this important verse: \textit{zhwa lu'i gtsug lag khang ’di'i glo 'bur lho'i bse sgo ma dang / shar gyi gyi sgo khang la mgon khang byas / da lta byang ngos sgo rgyun lam chen mo ’di bton / lho dma’g sde dang bcas pa’i shing ’dren byas / shing tshan chen po drangs / shar rgya hor gyi yul nas bzo bo mkhas pa bos / rgya phibs g.yu cu can gser gyi gan ji ra gtsugs pa che ba bzhi / zur gyi gyi blo ’bur bzhi la g.yu chu’i ba gam dang / rgyan la gser gyi gan ji ras brgyan pa / gzhan rnams rgya phugs/ gser khang rgya phibs gsum brtsegs su yod pa/ gzhan rnams rgya phibs gnyis brtsegs pa med la. Tāranātha, Myang Chung, 162.}
facilitate communal gatherings for rituals and prayers, was necessary to support and house an enlarged resident monastic population at the temple.  

The odd layout of the three shrines was regularized by the addition of a fourth on the ground level. Directly across from the three-door shrine, the Three-door shrine, a shrine of nearly equal width was built. This shrine, was alternatively called the Skin-door shrine, named for the rhinoceros leather door (Bse sgo ma) that would front it, or called the Kanjur Lhakhang, for the words of the Buddha (Bka’ ‘gyur) housed therein. This space spatially mirrored the earlier chapel to the north, though the shrine itself was structurally slightly narrower, in keeping with a cleaner, more geometrically aligned overall plan. A large, enclosed circumambulatory path was built, entered from the new assembly hall, to encircle the shrines at the south, west and north of the assembly hall. The lower level shrine below the Prajñāparamitā shrine (Yumchenmo Lhakhang) came to possess a new iconographic purpose, being dedicated as a wrathful protector chapel dedicated to Vaiśravana, the guardian of whom the lay leader, Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen, was considered an emanation. Major additions were also made to the upper level of the temple. In particular, a second level of shrine rooms was added over the newly united halls of the first floor, and a third story added over the already double-level Yumchenmo Lhakhang.

The Chinese-style roofs (rgya phibs) that were added were much celebrated in the texts. This addition of distinctive, colourful and technologically challenging Chinese-

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114 Specifically the Butön biography of the fourteenth century specifies that the monks were given cells outside the main encircling wall, meaning that most of the monastic dwellings were outside the temple we see today. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 91.

115 Both names for this shrine are used in the Khathog Situ account. Tsering, “Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880-1925) Diary On Pilgrimage in Myang Area,” 75.

116 In Butön’s biography the Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen is described as “a faithful donor considered to be the manifestation (sprul pa) of Vaisravana.” Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 89.

117 Ruegg translates the passage as: “The Gser khang had a triple pile of pagoda-roofs (rgya phibs) with [on the four sides] four large turquoise painted pagoda roofs surmounted by golden ganjiras and with projecting turquoise painted parapet-railings having a chequered design and adorned with golden ganjiras; the other temples had double pagoda roofs.” Yet the Tibetan more properly is understood as “Four big turquoise Chinese roofs” (rgya phibs g.yu chu can) and does not specify that they were painted, nor that they were pagoda-like (these appear to be Ruegg’s interpretation of rgya and g.yu). The turquoise colour was a reference to the green-glazed tiles that were produced for them. Ibid., 90. folio 14b.
style roofs, which were covered in heavy, glazed, overlapping tiles and supported by intricate systems of complex wooden bracketing, was obviously a very conspicuous, difficult and hence notable change made to the temple in the renovation. Indeed, later pilgrimage guides would even call Shalu the one with “Chinese roofs like bright green gathered turquoise,” showing that these distinctive tiled roofs remained notable well into the 20th century. Indeed, when we think of what is at least today a sparse landscape in the region around Shalu, where only small shrub trees can be found right next to the river, it is all the more impressive just how starkly visible these roofs must have been. Even if there had been more trees in the area earlier, these would not likely have been very tall, and so Shalu was distinctively and declaratively marked and made visible—glimmering, colourful and resplendent, in an approach across the valley, by these new roofs.

When in the Fourteenth-Century Were the Murals Painted?

Thus far in the interpretation of the art history of Shalu, the building construction dates and the dates of interior paintings at Shalu have been interpreted as sharing the same moment—the assumption being that paintings were quickly produced in the shrines as they were built and so must also align exactly with construction dates. Yet I contend that we have good evidence that these dates should be disentangled. I believe that most of the fourteenth-century paintings were painted after the completion of the buildings, and mostly from the 1330s on. Planned under the Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsen (1306-1333), the paintings were mainly completed under the following Kushang (Kunga Dondrup, ruled from 1333 to 1355), and were not completed quickly all at once but rather in several stages. The paintings completed in the fourteenth century were most importantly closely linked to the interests and editorial work undertaken by Butön at Shalu, and were enabled by the presence of large groups of editors and scribes staying there in these years. The projects of compiling edited volumes, and creating murals, were intimately intertwined.

Historian Roberto Vitali dates the renovations between 1306 and 1315, and includes in this date range all the architectural changes and paintings. The 1306 date represents when Drakpa Gyeltsen must have received the Yuan patronage that enabled the renovation, and 1315 indicates the end of the abbacy of Drakpa zhönnu (Grags pa gzhon nu). The end date is in Vitali’s rationale needed as the paintings must have been completed under an abbot, and, Vitali reasons, could not have been completed under Butön who did not arrive until 1320. It seems that the reason Vitali feels that the paintings had been completed by the time of Butön’s arrival is that his biography makes brief reference to paintings in the description of Drakpa Gyeltsen’s renovation, stating “Inside there were marvelous images of the Tathāgatas painted in 101 colours.” Since this section appears in the text before the invitation of Butön, this may lead to Vitali’s interpretation taking this as the indirect proof that the paintings were completed before Butön’s arrival at Shalu.

However, this strict interpretation of the details as provided by the 1355 biography is questionable. The Biography of Butön is the closest datable historical text to the renovations, but it was still nonetheless written later: the first part in 1355 (at Sakya) and the latter part in 1366 (at Riphuk). The goal of the biographer Dratsepa is primarily to discuss the life and great deeds of his teacher Butön, and in this framework the descriptions of the temple are secondary, and certainly not intended as history lessons. In the description of Shalu’s renovations that he does provide, he does attribute the major renovations to their lay sponsor and lord, the Kushang Drakpa Gyeltsetn, who ruled Shalu until 1333. This is not a definitive statement that these renovations, and more specifically their paintings, were completed by 1320, or even by 1333. Instead, we can only safely

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119 This date is itself related to the fact that the emperor died in 1307. Vitali, 100. Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” 100.

120 Vitali’s understanding here seems to be that the renovation must have been completed during the lifetime of the abbot prior to Butön, and later dismisses references by Tucci and from Butön’s namthar that Butön had helped with the completion of the renovations. Ibid., 100, 118.

121 Tibetan folios 14a-14b. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 89–90.

122 Ibid., 41; Dratsepa Rinchen Namgyal (Sgra tshad pa rin chen rnam rgyal), Bu ston rin po che rnam thar (The Biography of Butön).
interpret from this that all the art in the temple that he has described was in fact
completed before the text was written, in 1355.

Two painted and inscribed Lamas are among the fourteenth-century murals at
Shalu, and for these to be posthumous portraits, which they most likely are, they must be
dated after 1320 and 1324 respectively. The first of these is in a small shrine space off the
circumambulatory, where a resplendent painting of Sadakśari Avalokiteśvara is the
central painted deity (fig. 1.35) accompanied by a red Hayagriva. Here, two inscribed
lineages end with the same teacher. Helmut and Heidi Neumann first published the
inscriptions of these names without attaching them to dates, and David Jackson has
since dated the final figure, inscribed Chos rje gzhon nu grub, to his death date in
1319. His biography relates that the teacher passed away, likely at Shalu monastery, in
1319. Since it was most usual to depict a teacher who has recently passed away as a
posthumous portrait, these murals had to be begun after his death in 1319.

In a second example that has not yet appeared in the literature on Shalu, a teacher
named by inscription appears at the end of the circumambulatory passage, on the inner
wall (at the end of the field of a Thousand Buddhas). Here, a painting of a monk seated
next to an offering table is inscribed with a clearly written name: Gelong Dorje Pal
Zangpo (dge slong rdo rje dpal bzang po). This name presents some problems, as
“Gelong” means simply monk and “Pal Zangpo” is an honorific title (meaning glorious,
virtuous one) featured in many names of this period. However, from the history of Shalu,

123 Helmut F. Neumann, “Shalu’s Hidden Treasure: The Paintings of the Shadakshari Chapel,”

124 Jackson, The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting, 108.

125 This is also likely the same teacher, “ Zhonnu Pelzang,” who provided Butön teachings in 1312 when
he received his full ordination at Tsongdu Gurmo. Namgyal Tsering, “Butön Rinchen Drup,” September
2012, http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/But%C3%B6n%20Rinchen%20Drub/2845. The biography
of Chos kyi rje gzhon nu grub reveals that this Shangspa Kagyu master spent significant time at the end of
his life at Shalu monastery. Speaking about his poor health in his old age, his translated biography reports
him as saying: “Right now my health is poor and my body feels heavy. I cannot grant you the teachings you
want… For now it’s best for me to stay at the Shalu monastery.” Later in his biography, just fourteen days
before his passing, he is again quoted as saying “At first, I was going to leave without a trace. But it seems
like that’s not going to happen. There will be good, devoted disciples. In particular, the practitioners of the
Shalu monastery were hospitable to me and wanted me to leave something behind so they would not feel
too sad when I passed away.” Nicole Riggs…Nicole Riggs, Like An Illusion: Lives of the Shangpa Kagyu
Masters (Eugene, Or: Dharma Cloud Pr, 2000), 204, 280.
and with knowledge that this teacher must have been important and further that the
temple of Shalu maintained a close association with Sakya at this time, this is probably
the head of Sakya from 1306-1324, Zangpo Pal. Since Zangpo Pal died in 1324, this
painting was likely made after his death. This inner wall of the circumambulatory passage
was thus likely painted after 1324 as this is most probably a posthumous portrait.

Indeed, several of the shrine room sets of paintings can be firmly dated to the
early 1330s, and more specifically to the short date range of 1333-1335. These include all
the paintings of the four upper maṇḍala shrines. The maṇḍala shrines are the four upper
rooms at the cardinal directions that were painted with floor to ceiling maṇḍalas covering
all four walls. Butön wrote descriptive and explanatory texts after these maṇḍalas were
painted, and these texts were then inscribed on the walls inside each room, flanking the
doorways, and are attributed to Kushang Kunga Dondrup, who became abbot in 1333.
Their completion by 1335 is necessary as it is by this date that the newly organized and
catalogued Tengyur is installed, with some fanfare, into the eastern uppermost maṇḍala
shrine, the Tengyur Lhakhang. The fair assumption operating here is that the maṇḍalas
that had been painted floor to ceiling in that shrine had to have been completed before the
texts were installed there.

The attributions and dates of another, smaller but significant circumambulatory
passage around the upper Prajñapāramitā (Yumchenmo) shrine, recently studied by Yang
Hongjiao, have been given the same dates as the maṇḍala shrine paintings, specifically
1333-1335. Yang Hongjiao gives several reasons for this dating, but the primary among
these is that several of the “iconographies” are included among the listed themes of


\[127\] It is evident from the language of the inscriptions that the paintings already exist as the text is
composed—for example—it uses past tense ie. “this is why we made it like this”

\[128\] Kurtis R. Schaeffer, Matthew Kapstein, and Gray Tuttle, eds., Sources of Tibetan Tradition,
Introduction to Asian Civilizations (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 408; Ruegg, The Life of
Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 30–35.

\[129\] Kawasaki Kazuhiro. “Sharu no maṇḍara hekiga ni tsuite 3 Puton no kongokai mandara rikai” Mikkyo
colleague Akiko Takesue for helping me to consult this article in Japanese.
paintings overseen by Gönpo pel. According to Yang, the mural depicting the Utrayana is on the east side of the south wall in the Assembly Hall of the ground floor. Furthermore, since this painting of Utrayana is signed by the artist named “mchims pa bsod nams ‘bum”, whose name also appears six times in the upper circumambulatory passage, the paintings of the lower assembly hall (Dukhang) and the upper corridor are roughly contemporary, and contemporary with the maṇḍala shrine paintings. This narrow dating would mean that all four maṇḍala shrines, and the Yumchmno chapel and Dukhang, were all planned and painted at the very same time that the Tengyur was being edited and its catalogue being produced at Shalu.

I believe that the 1335 terminus date for the installation of the Tengyur is reasonable. It does not automatically follow that all other paintings had been completed by this time. But I do think it implies that the paintings of that room were likely finished before any large book collection could be placed inside it. Thus, most broadly, these paintings were painted between 1320-1335.

However, I also believe that the last major set of paintings added at Shalu were added later than this, and these are the paintings of the jātaka that follow Rangjung Dorje’s _Garland of Lives_ in both painting and inscription. It is certain that these cannot have been painted by 1315, as early as Vitali proposed. The circumambulatory passage is inscribed with the stories of Rangjung Dorje’s Jātaka tales, a text that Ruth Gamble has now shown in her dissertation research to have been composed in 1314. This date of composition is clearly stated at the end of a Song (mgur), number 58 from Rangjung Dorje’s Collection of Songs (mgur ‘bum), the lines concludes with: “He sang this when he had finished composing the Hundred Jātaka Tales of the Buddha in Trashi sarma

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130 Ruegg, _The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che_, 115.


132 The all important passage of the Bu ston rnam thar on 115.Ruegg, _The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che_, 115.

Thus the text had only just been composed in 1314, and certainly could not have been copied, distributed, received at Shalu, redacted into edited compositions for the wall, and completely painted on the walls within the year, by 1315.

Yet I think there is good reason to date the jātaka painting project even later, placing these paintings in the 1340s. The main reason for this is that Rangjung Dorje himself made no reference to knowledge of the paintings, nor did he ever visit Shalu. I believe this may provide sufficient evidence to place the paintings after his death in 1339. Some could argue that this was because reference to Shalu’s project would not have been significant enough to mention. However, it was a large, expensive, time-consuming visual and pictorial translation, a close study of his text and its first transfer into art, which honoured him and his work directly. Moreover, it occurred in relatively close proximity to his Tibetan home temple of Tsurphu (mtshur phu). Had he known about it, it would have warranted a visit to the temple, or at least a mention. I think it is reasonable to assume, in the absence of any direct reference to his knowledge of the project, that these paintings were completed after his lifetime.

In the last decade of his life, Rangjung Dorje travelled back and forth between the Yuan capital and Tibet, spending more time, much to his chagrin, in the Imperial capital than at home. Rangjung Dorje was invited to Dadu in 1331, arrived in 1332, returned briefly to Tibet in 1335, but left again in 1336 to arrive back in the capital in 1337. He was entreatinig the emperor to grant his return to Tsurphu from that point on, but never made it, dying in the imperial summer capital of Shangdu (Xanadu, Šandu) in 1339. At the time of his death, he had made no mention in any of his known works of the Shalu painted version of his most famous and popular work. It thus appears to me most likely

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136 A negative deduction, based on discussions with Ruth Gamble, who has translated his songs, his biography, and looked at most of the literature on him.
that these paintings were begun in the mid-1330s and completed after his death.

Rangjung Dorje’s Jātaka stories did gain rapid popularity in Central Tibet and at the Yuan court. They were also painted in a temple at the Yuan capital in 1339, a project that the Karmapa Rangjung Dorje dictated into his autobiography just before his death. Interestingly, the stories were also painted there in the space of a circumambulatory passage. Ruth Gamble notes that “although the Emperor sponsored it, the temple was clearly Rangjung Dorje’s project,” and that he had expended “an unusually large amount of narrative ink” on describing the construction of the temple. While the reference to his Jātakas being painted in a backwards order is unexplained, this is nevertheless our only other reference to this same set of stories being painted in monumental form. Perhaps this project inspired the addition of the stories at Shalu. As we know, at least one of Rangjung Dorje’s students lived at Shalu and studied with Butön, Dorje Pal, so this is plausible. In the case of the temple in Dadu, the time elapsed between the original textual composition and their dissemination as murals was twenty-five years.

137 It is also interesting that it was only these jātaka tales that seem to have remained “a hit” into modern times in Tibet: having looked at the inventories of Central Tibetan printing houses, Ruth Gamble notes that his jātaka tales were the third Karmapa’s only text “in print,” in pre-modern times, and concludes from this that it must have been his only text to be included by the fifth Dalai Lama into his collections. Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs,” 35, n. 57.

138 Ibid., 261.

139 Ibid., 260.

140 This proposition is as yet far from conclusive. A future study of a Tibetan biography of a figure named Rdo rje dpal, (TBRC Person 1454), who was a disciple of both the Karmapa Rang ’byung rdo rje and Butön, a text that I have heard is at the center of some new research being conducted by a young scholar in China presently, may be revealing about the next stage of work at Shalu.

141 There are few known remnants of other paintings of Rangjung Dorje’s jātaka’s. One tangka painting in the Rubin collection depicts the scenes of these one hundred jātakas, which dates from the mid fourteenth century, and has been published in several recent catalogues including Jackson’s The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting. Nancy Lin has also discussed some textual evidence that the One-hundred jātakas may have once been painted as murals at Drepung in the seventeenth century, though the evidence is inconclusive. If they were ever painted there, they did not survive to modern times. Instead the far more popular textual basis for the illustration of sets of jātakas were the collection of 108 stories known as the Wish-fulfilling Vine, a collection of jātaka s and avadanas, that became the more popular textual basis in art, and is the topic of Nancy Lin’s dissertation study. Jackson, The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting, 117 figure 6.25; Nancy Lin, “Adapting the Buddha’s Biographies: A Cultural History of the Wish-
Indeed, it is most probable to me that the temple building had been only roughly finished by the time of Butön’s arrival in 1320, but that none of the paintings were in place. The process of painting the temple developed over the next two decades, with most of the paintings being added in the 1330s and 1340s. Just as planning and building the temple spaces, adding Chinese-style tiled roofs and wooden support structures, had been huge undertakings that required time, money and planning, the painting of the temple’s interior was a process that required planning, design, and a large and organized workforce. It certainly did not and could not have happened all at once, and it is more reasonable to look at an unfolding sequence of paintings. Based on the evidence, I propose the rough decade dates for the following sets of paintings: In the 1320s the first murals completed in the new building were the extension of the paintings along the inner wall of the circumambulatory passage, and ended with a teacher who died in 1324. In the same decade, the shrine paintings in the two new shrines to house books, the Skin-door shrine (Segoma Lhakhang) and Three-door shrine (Gosum Lhakhang), were also begun. These paintings would also have been a priority from a religious point of view. In the 1330s, the work of painting the temple continued with the paintings of the four upper maṇḍala Shrines, the circumambulatory passage outside the Yumchenmo lhakhang, and the assembly hall were the next to be painted. The last to be painted, only after 1339, with work continuing for at least a few years into the 1340s, were the paintings of the outer wall of the great ground floor circumambulatory passage, where the famous narrative jātaka paintings were added. Planning the paintings, and then painting the temple, thus unfolded over the decades; however, each of the spaces I will discuss used mural painting designed with a specific agenda and a novel functional demand: the impetus for the design of the new murals lay in their new interest in directly demonstrating the organizational book-work that was also ongoing at Shalu.

**Themes in Temple Expansion: Collecting, Assembling and Organizing**

The following section outlines three conceptual strategies behind the fourteenth-century temple renovation that played out across different economic and social spheres. I argue that these motivated the temple’s leaders and patrons and were reflected at the core of its architecture and art. The building and its art manifested intentions—in architectural choices, decorative painted schema, and the temple’s own ideological and religious project(s). The underlying strategies of collecting, assembling and organizing information, people and things, were acts of ordering, typologizing and organizing that were, after all, functions and expressions of power. These acts that occurred as social, religious, political and economic operations also informed conceptual and symbolic programs. The present section seeks to introduce the fourteenth-century renovations and connect these to broader conceptual strategies. In this view, we see the temple as both produced by and producing its own society.

Collecting Spaces and People

The fourteenth-century renovation created a temple worthy of a centre—Shalu as a local capital of its administrative region (myriarchy). Making a temple worthy of the centre, meant building a monument that was itself the epicentre of numerous collections. It was a centre of religious objects, teachings, books and people. It represented not only a conceptual collection and organization of formerly disparate spaces into a new whole, but it was also literally the storehouse for other kinds of collections (of people, things, books, stories). The built temple was the physical locus for collecting people into a newer and larger centre, but its religious power was reliant on its ability to collect sacred objects and books. These acts of bringing things, people and teachings together, assembling and organizing these both conceptually and literally, constituted the work of the fourteenth-century temple that was at once ideological, physical, religious and social.

As I proposed in chapter one, the shrines that had previously stood as separate buildings were integrated into a new whole in the fourteenth century. These were encircled by a high wall, closed on all but one side, entered from the east like a maṇḍala. The new plan for the first floor, where the shrines along the western side were still doubled as “twins” side by side, would see the creation of four equally large spaces
around a central square assembly hall. This maṇḍala plan was also exercised in the newly built upper story spaces, where four shrines of equal size were built with entrances off a central open roof courtyard, rooms in which Butön himself would oversee the design of floor-to-ceiling painted maṇḍalas.

The spaces of the temple were spaces for collecting and moving bodies—those of an increasing monastic population and a large tax-paying lay “public.” While Butön’s biography explains that Drakpa Gyeltsen had offered each monk a cell inside the “great enclosure” (lcags ri, which can also mean fence or border), it is probable that most monks lived outside the fortified wall of the temple. It was not only monks who could and would be accommodated by the new space. In addition to the enclosed assembly hall, it is likely at this time that the entry courtyard was enclosed, which would have created an important site for rituals for the resident and lay communities.

The collecting together of spaces—and the creation of shared public spaces for large community gathering—are both physical acts that the renovation enabled. The earlier separate shrines were organized into the new plan, and encircled by a wall. The exterior enclosure could have been the site of the temple’s new and regularized seasonal festivals. Kushang Drakpa Gyeltse introduced seasonal, annual offerings, and he is credited for having “established the four great offerings which take place in the first month of each season (ra ba bzhi la mchod pa chen po), the offering to the Triratna (dkon mchog gi mchod pa), and good endowments for the service of the Saṃgha.”

While these seasonal, annual gatherings may also have been occasions for collecting the produce that was due as tax to the centre, this was probably not their only purpose. These occasions also would have been social gatherings at the temple. The courtyard space could have acted then, as it still does now, for spectators to observe rituals or dance performances.

142 The rise in monastic population is introduced as extending from the same the impetus as Drakpa Gyeltse’s renovations of the temple, and in Butön’s biography leads to the discussion of the invitation of Butön. It states that the Kuzhang Drakpa Gyeltse “realizing that there were no more than a few priests in the temple, he wished to have them as extensive as the ocean and to have a religious superior (chos dpon) who combines the qualities of learning, nobility and excellence (mkhas btsun bzaṅ) and a hundred kalyāṇamitras who expound the dharma.” Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 92.

143 Ibid., 91.
Collecting Taxes and Materials

The wealth of the temple was not only linked to the large-scale patronage received from distant rulers, but also maintained by a local level of support. Indeed, the temple must have been inextricably linked to its political and economic realities, in which it was a significant mediator between spheres of exchange. In the political system of fourteenth century Tibet, the myriarchy of Shalu supported the temple through land grants (chos gzhi or chos sde) that supported their religious communities.144 As the administrative centre of the myriarchy, the temple was not only endowed with lands, but also had a supporting population that directly paid taxes through this centre. The second most populous of the thirteen myriarchies at the time of the Mongol census of 1268, the Shalu myriarchy contained nearly four thousand households, and thus over 23,000 people.145 Revenue available through taxes, collected through Shalu, would have been basic to sustaining the temple.

Indeed the famous “Zhalu documents,” a set of Yuan-Sakya period handwritten edicts sent from the Yuan officials and Emperors to the lords of Shalu, many of which were still preserved at Shalu in 1939 when Tucci visited,146 are often concerned with the granting of protections and more specifically tax exemptions. The purpose of this myriarchy organizational system and land granting was ultimately to pay taxes to the Yuan, which expected ten percent of agricultural revenue from all its regions.147 In the

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144 Ruegg discusses this system, following Tucci, in page 91 Ibid. n. 4; Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 691 n. 183.

145 See note 34 on page 18.

146 Tucci translated and published these documents and derived much of his knowledge about Shalu’s history from them. His translations are published in Tibetan Painted Scrolls. Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*. Interestingly, these documents, either in facsimile or original, now often are present in “Tibetan history” displays, I have seen them both in the Lhasa museum (2007) and the museum of Tibetan culture in Beijing (2010) where they often are presented as handy and early evidence of Tibet’s enduring, and politically subservient, position within China.

147 On the system of taxation, a levy of 10% of farming produce that Petech surmises was paid in nature, since the fiscal classification of a myriarchy was often expressed in bushels of barley, see Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols*, 49–50.
meantime, when the temple itself received special tax exemptions from the Mongols, it was probably being granted rights to keep those tax revenues for itself. In a document of 1305, translated as “The Shalu edict of the Mongol Prince Qayishan,” the monastery is granted exemption: “No taxes shall be levied on land and trade. Monastery land, rivers, forests, commoners and livestock shall not be infringed upon.”\textsuperscript{148} Showing how much the monastery functioned like its own small towns, it owned and controlled its own space, people and livestock. Again, another edict of, recorded and translated by Tucci, states “according to the order contained in the imperial diplomas, let no taxes be collected nor any foodstuff and forced labor… Let nothing be stolen by force.”\textsuperscript{149} Shalu repeatedly received these special exemptions from the state, which surely permitted its growth.

The temple building project must also have involved the construction of spaces around it for the actual storage and collection of produce. Drakpa Gyeltsen had overseen the building of four large storehouses outside the walls of Shalu, where this produce would have been collected.\textsuperscript{150} The temple was intimately connected as a central marker of the economic centre: it served as the place that brought people together to expedite local-level collections of resources for the wider empire.

The temple had long been a place of assembling religious objects that came from afar. In the early establishment of the temple, two important statues were brought from India through miraculous efforts—much being made both of the prophecies that had brought the founders attention to them and the miracles that allowed their travel.\textsuperscript{151} Yet in the fourteenth-century renovations, the focus shifted to collections not of finished objects, but of materials, techniques and craftsmen who were brought together to produce sacred

\textsuperscript{148} Schaeffer, Kapstein, and Tuttle, \textit{Sources of Tibetan Tradition}, 344.


\textsuperscript{150} Xie, \textit{Xizang Xialusi Jianzhu Ji Bihua Yishu (Architecture and Mural Paintings from Shalu Monastery in Tibet)}, 69.

\textsuperscript{151} In particular, there is one self-arisen image at Shalu and two invited from India. Tāranātha, \textit{Myang Chung}, 154–155, 157.
objects—the new temple—locally. In the fourteenth century it was the very materials and methods for building the temple that came from afar.

The building itself was literally a collection of excellent and foreign resources. The best material resources were collected from afar to build it—wood was brought from the south, and must have been a substantial transportation cost. In particular, to support the roof of the new assembly hall alone, thirty-six large wooden pillars, standing over twenty feet tall each, were required. As there are no such tall trees in the area of Shalu today, the transportation of wood was necessary, and is attested in the Tibetan texts about the construction. Additional wood would have been needed for supporting interior roof structures, and little of this wood could be local. Transporting a fairly large quantity of wood from more fertile valleys to the south would have been itself an expensive and difficult undertaking, but one that this renovation with its extensive patronage made possible.

Yet the most notable special attribute added to the temple during the renovation would have been the turquoise-coloured tiled roofs. While most tiles have been replaced in recent renovations, these have been basically maintained and are a distinctive feature of Shalu even today. These low-fire, glazed red earthenware tiles may not have been produced locally.\textsuperscript{152} Doing so would have been a huge undertaking that was unprecedented for that period in Tibet, and there are no records or knowledge of either a clay foundry or any kiln sites that would have been necessary for their local production.

\textsuperscript{152} More research is needed about Shalu’s tiles to answer whether they were produced locally at the site or imported from elsewhere. This is made difficult by the fact that the tiles on the roofs today are not original, and have probably been replaced several times. A possibility for research into this remains though, as there are numerous old tiles stored in rooms at Shalu. What is interesting about Shalu’s tiles is that they seem to pre-date other tiled roofs in central Tibet. My feeling has been that since it would have been hard to have enough fuel for even low-heat firing, and keeping a long-burning fire in a kiln at the altitude of Shalu would have been a challenge, they may well have been imported from regions of eastern Tibet. However my external reader Rob Linrothe challenges me on this, citing the expense of transportation and arguing that it would have been quite easy to import workers and a set of molds to produce the many roof tiles locally. He has further referred me to architectural historian Aurelia Campbell, who in recent correspondence with me also finds it more likely that they were produced locally, citing both the expense of transportation and the fact that in the sites she has studied (the Daoist architectural complexes on Wudang Shan in Hubei province; the Forbidden City in Beijing) the glazed tiles were always locally produced even when other building materials were imported. I still feel that the environmental restrictions of this area of Tibet may warrant a different situation here, though can only offer this here as an inconclusive suggestion. A source for further consideration of this topic is Clarence Eng. \textit{Colours and Contrast: Ceramic Traditions in Chinese Architecture} (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Rob Linrothe, personal communication, December 11\textsuperscript{th} 2015. Aurelia Campbell, personal communication, December 15\textsuperscript{th} 2015.
Most importantly, Tibetan craftsmen would have been lacking in the technological knowledge of how to produce the composite parts of these complex Chinese-style roofs, which involved at least five different types of mold-made tiles, and equally complex bracketing systems to support them. There is no other conclusion than that these roofs were imported from further east, from a Chinese area where tiles like this were already regularly produced.\(^\text{153}\) The cost and difficulty of both importing the tiles, and then of installing them atop Tibetan style tamped clay and stone structures, reconciling two wildly different material types and building styles, must have been a fascinating feat of both planning and engineering.

The brackets supporting the roofs which appear both inside and outside the chapels are in a Chinese style of the Yuan dynasty, with “larger numbers of bracket clusters, each one smaller in size” as compared to earlier Chinese models.\(^\text{154}\) Their visual impression of both complexity and organization must have fit in with the tastes of the time. Interestingly, the brackets featured inside chapels are actually only there for appearance and support no actual weight, but nevertheless they extended the visual value of these foreign roofs into the shrines.\(^\text{155}\)

Though the look of the roof brackets is altogether Chinese, as it was certainly intended to be, the roofs at Shalu do not in fact represent mechanical copying of Chinese architecture, but instead intelligent adaptation of Chinese features to Tibetan design.\(^\text{156}\) Innovation was necessary to support the massively heavy and unusual roofs by building masonry partition walls with extra braces behind them, which are disguised wooden columns. These were necessary since the flat roofed, stone-and-pounded earth Tibetan

\(^{153}\) The “Chinese” roof tiles may have been produced in areas like Amdo in eastern Tibet, in modern Qinghai province. The temple of Qutansi would later be built with a tile roof as well. Karl Philip Debreczeny, “Ethnicity and Esoteric Power: Negotiating the Sino-Tibetan Synthesis in Ming Buddhist Painting” (The University of Chicago, 2007).

\(^{154}\) Denwood, “Architectural Style at Shalu,” 228.

\(^{155}\) Observation made by Professor of Architecture Puay-Peng from Hong Kong University during the Tibet Site Seminar, June 2007.

\(^{156}\) Denwood, “Architectural Style at Shalu,” 229.
temple construction could not have borne the weight of these roofs alone, particularly in this earthquake prone area.

With the addition of these Chinese-style roofs a consciously and intentionally “foreign” style was conspicuously added to the temple. While earlier artistic and architectural models had looked to India, China was now an important architectural source for a temple affiliated with foreign court patronage. What did the addition of the Chinese roof mean and to whom was it important? This “Chinese style,” translated through the Mongol Yuan court, had been purposely chosen for the capital of Khanbaliq (or Dadu) that Khubilai established in the late thirteenth century. The formerly nomadic Mongols had few permanent architectural forms to draw upon in the construction of empire, so a continuation of earlier Imperial Chinese building styles was not only logical but necessary. In the Tibetan context though, we must wonder at the meaning associated with this vibrant and visible foreign assertion at the temple. Were Drakpa Gyeltsen and the Ché clan so proud of their connections to the Yuan court that this roof served as a blatant declaration and advertisement of this relationship?

In this area of central Tibet, frequent earthquakes, and the regular building materials of stone and clay, had habitually limited the height of buildings. In the landscape of Shalu, then, as now, the temple with its unusual and special turquoise tiled roofs would have literally towered over its surroundings. In a valley surrounded by hillocks, the temple of Shalu would was made into an even more impressive sight by these roofs seen from a distance upon entry to the valley. It is interesting that at this same period, the Lhasa Jokhang was also embellished by Chinese-style roofs, though these are made of gilt metal, which became a much more common style of “Chinese roof” for Tibetan temples in Tibet (and hammered gilt metal a potentially more accessible material for most temples).

157 According the Nancy Steinhardt: “The planning of the Imperial City, along with many other imperial projects of the 1260s, was supervised by Khubilai’s close minister Liu Bingzhong. That the Imperial City was Chinese in style was certainly Liu’s preference” Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Imperial Architecture Under Mongolian Patronage: Khubilai’s Imperial City of Daidu*, 1981, 222.

Yet the centrally important religious objects for the new temple, and for the fourteenth-century patron and abbot, were now large sets of books, and many such “complete sets” of books were being newly produced at Shalu. The ground floor shrine rooms of the late thirteenth and fourteenth century were built to enshrine large sets of books, with huge bookshelves assigned to the spaces where the walls remained unpainted. The desire not only to collect, but further to edit, arrange, correct and organize into orders these Buddhist texts drove the abbot and provided the inspiration for his temple’s new paintings.  

Collecting Books and Stories

Books of Buddhist scripture had always to some extent had an important place in Tibetan Buddhism and had been significantly collected in Tibetan temples. What appears new, at least for Shalu, in the period of the formation of the Tibetan canons, is that storing large sets of books in areas also meant for worship provided a new focus and reason for shrines. Moreover, this presence of books demanded a different use of space while resulting in different choices for mural images. The interest in texts at the time, at least from the highest levels of patronage and religious leadership, had also shifted. Increasingly, it was not only materially old texts that were of value, but instead newly organized and edited wholes, the results of careful (and contemporary) work. It was the

159 Butön’s biography in describing the temple renovated under Kuzhang Drakpa Gyeltsen before Butön’s arrival states: “there were many volumes of holy scripture (gsung rab) including the word collection (bka’ ’gyur) made of precious gold.” Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 91. Visiting in 1919, Kahthog Situ wrote of the Segoma Lhakhang: “In this chapel, there also remains the copy of Kagyur compiled by Chomral (Bcom ral, thirteenth century), Upa Losal (Dbus pa blo gsal, thirteenth century), Gyangrobum (Rgyang ro ’bum, thirteenth century) and others according to the advice of Jamga Pagshi (’Jam dgag Pakshi, thirteenth century). One of the three copies of the Kagyur Dzambu Chuserma (’Dzam bu chu gser ma), compiled by Kuzhang Dragpa Gyaltse (sKu zhang Grags pa rgyal mtsan,1365-1448) by adding the Mdo phran bcu gsum and other texts of the translator Tarlo (Thar pa Lotsawa) as well as Gsang ’dus gnyis med rnam rgyal interpreted by Butön, is kept here. (In the chapel there is also) a first copy of (the Kagyur) offered by Miwang Phola (Mi dbang pho lha, 1689-1747).” While the dates provided here by Norbu Tsering are incorrect, particularly as it comes to the Kushang, this pilgrimage account nonetheless shows that the texts collected were either relatively recently composed by Tibetan authors, or those that had been altered by residents of the temple. It seems most probable to me that this is thus the room where the texts that Butön had based his Kagyur edition on, along with his new edition of the Kagyur, were also placed in the fourteenth century. Tsering, “Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880-1925) Diary On Pilgrimage in Myang Area,” 75–76.
time of organizing the centuries of translated teachings into established doctrinal wholes, and Butön was not alone in this work. Indeed, he relied in particular on work that had been completed a few decades before at Narthang (Snar thang). Interestingly, a close association with Narthang was maintained through the work as well, with the appearance of a Narthang scribe at the end of the circumambulatory passage inscriptions.¹⁶⁰

The texts deposited in the new rooms at Shalu were likely commissioned, but new copies of important old texts, as in the three redactions of the Prajñāpāramitā, were placed in the three-door shrine. Those that were housed in the Skin-door shrine were also specially compiled or altered by the Kushang himself. Creating new collections and new copies from old texts was ongoing at Shalu. Book collecting would enable and lead to the major fourteenth-century work undertaken at Shalu itself by its eminent abbot Butön.

Butön during his time at Shalu would make one of the first editions of the Tibetan canon, divided into the sections of Kanjur, (bka' 'gyur), words of the Buddha and the Tengyur (bstan 'gyur), commentaries.¹⁶¹ He was working from the Old Narthang Kagyur scriptures, an assemblage of old manuscripts, not themselves a new copy.¹⁶²

Extensive workshop book production took place at Shalu during Butön’s thirty-six year tenure as abbot. A fascinating preserved letter from Butön, likely intended for a group of editors in residence at Shalu, gives some idea of these workshops. In this letter, which Tibetan religious historian Kurtis Schaeffer has called “Directions to the Editors and Publishers of the Buddhist Scriptures”,¹⁶³ the author expounds detailed instructions on processes of editing—particularly writing clearly, expanding contractions, and correcting spelling. Great pride was taken in the project, and we get the image of Butön as a person who is involved in numerous details of the work. He proposes that there should be disciplinary actions taken against scribes who are not writing clearly enough,

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¹⁶¹ Tsering, “Butön Rinchen Drup.”


and that tea rations should be cut down if people are late returning from break. His letter depicts him as a demanding project manager with real-life solutions to the realia of managing a large team project through demanding work.

The centuries during which new books flowed from India to Tibet had largely stopped by the fourteenth century, the work of initial translation had been largely completed, and a new and different kind of work was now required. Ruegg argues that these changes were the impetus and cause for Butön and his editorial and organizational work:

[... W]hereas the compilation of the Sutra texts into a canon had been for long feasible, the collection and edition of the commentaries for which Butön is renowned would scarcely have been conceivable had authoritative new works been continuing to flow into Tibet from India in the same quantity as before.164

Here David Ruegg points out that while many texts had already come from India to Tibet, Butön’s projects were largely possible because this “flow” of texts had largely stopped by the fourteenth century. The fact that the tide had mostly stemmed meant that the work of compiling, editing and organizing—Butön’s major religious work in the fourteenth century—was now both possible and necessary.

It was Butön who, according to religious historian of Tibet Ben Wood, established and highlighted the protection of books at the core of his model of monastic exemplarity, a topic further expanded in Wood’s doctoral dissertation. In writing about Butön’s introduction to his catalogue of the Tengyur, noting that “Butön recounts the very history in Tibet of Buddhism in terms of manuscripts—that is, the continuity of teachings are directly indebted to the safety of Buddhist texts.”165 In Wood’s reading, the very process of cataloguing and editing was itself an expression of protecting. The creation of an intellectual order of texts and teachings was the necessary act of protection for the

164 Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, 20–21.

ongoing lives of these texts. Butön’s desire to create an accurate, comprehensive, textual body of knowledge bespeaks a fundamental concern with historiography itself—at least, a concern with the issue of how to consolidate knowledge, and how to leave it for posterity.

Collecting, editing and organizing books were acts indicating the collection and re-organization of stories and teachings. The important teachers whose literary works were either created at Shalu (Butön) or foregrounded there (Rangjung Dorje) were fourteenth-century teachers, who not only collected volumes of these stories and teachings together but organized them into new and useful wholes. Collecting was thus the precursory ideological move of organization and editing, which had themselves become the great religious acts for religious leaders of the time. These acts evidence a new self-assurance for Tibetan religious leaders and institutions and are key to re-framing religious and political authority in the fourteenth century. Collecting and organizing sets of stories and ideas into groupings were essential to the design of Shalu’s fourteenth century murals, where the act of arranging and organizing were made visually central to the paintings.

Indeed, in the painted decorations of Shalu that followed from this renovation, it was new sets of images and stories that were repeatedly being celebrated and manifest into fixed mural paintings. In the ground floor shrine rooms, the rooms were designed to house books and the wall murals were designed to conceptually open them. In the circumambulatory passage, there was a newly authored collection of jātaka stories inscribed and illustrated, with the passage as a whole manifesting the overarching organization of the collection as a book. With paintings that looked like pages and pictures that explained and attended words, the walls were made, quite literally, of visual books.

**New Murals, New Expressions**

In examining art as a cultural system, anthropological studies of the visual have opened space to see built objects in wider social contexts, interpreting how art is involved
in social and cultural systems of meaning.\footnote{Clifford Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System,” \textit{MLN} 91, no. 6 (December 1, 1976): 1473–99, doi:10.2307/2907147.} Alfred Gell’s theories of the agency of objects themselves position art as not merely reflecting but indeed actively making culture. Gell’s concept of the agency of works proposes objects as mediums through which people “manifest and realize” intentions. Gell explains that this “objectification in artefact-form is how social agency manifests and realizes itself, via the proliferation of fragments of ‘primary’ intentional agents in their ‘secondary’ artefactual’ forms.”\footnote{Alfred Gell, \textit{Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 21.} In Gell’s reading then, objects, art and by extension buildings are not just expressions but manifestations of human intention—a built creation of human thoughts and goals.

This is a useful frame for thinking about the building of the temple of Shalu, a temple built across three centuries, each time manifesting different intentions. As the building was created, its spaces, their functions and the expectations made of them, changed as well. The surviving mural art inside these spaces give some evidence and hope of interpreting, however partially, the shifting intentions and goals of its makers and users. What we have observed in this chapter is that as the building plan changed, so too did interior mural paintings within the temple’s spaces act very differently from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries.

These shifting spaces permitted and demanded different kinds of social actions and symbolically highlighted different systems. In the eleventh century spaces, people entered into three-dimensional symbolic systems—spaces that were occupied by over-life size clay deities enthroned and resplendent. Painting the walls around these statues, in interstices in between or above, extended but participated in this same divine realm. Seated retinues or processional figures extended the same symbolically powerful system of a group of resident resplendent iconic beings, and were another form for representing these icons. These rooms allowed people to enter into three-dimensional imagined divine realms. Compared to later constructions these were actually very small spaces, and really only a few people could or would be able to enter them at once. When historic Tibetan texts recount the contents of these earlier-constructed rooms they speak of small stone and metal statuary, like the special and divinely emanated forms of Avalokiteśvara at the
temple, but they do not mention books in these spaces. While some of these early rooms may have contained some books, storing and conceptually opening these had not been a primary consideration in the spatial design or decorative programs of these spaces.

By contrast, in the spaces added throughout the fourteenth century, a different order of relationship between built spaces, sacred objects and mural paintings emerged. The two ground-floor shrine rooms added later did not contain the same sorts of immersive iconographic programs of built-in life size sculptures and related murals, but instead the dedicated statuary in these rooms were what were likely smaller sculptures in metal. These smaller statues likely sat, as today, on high table-like altars, but were not always the most important objects enshrined. These rooms seem primarily concerned and designed to house large sets of books. Each of the new ground floor shrine rooms contained huge volumes of books.

Whereas the earlier murals responded to sculpture in clay, the murals of these new shrines corresponded most closely with the book collections that the rooms housed. In the following chapter I will continue to show ways in which these new murals specifically acted with and even as books. The wall paintings opened up the closed books of the room, giving expression not just to their contents, but to the power of books as organized systems of knowledge. What was being celebrated were vast collections of teachings, and the focus was no longer on immersing viewers in realistically conceived three-dimensional realms occupied by divinities, but instead in immersing them into the cognitive work of the temple as organizational institution itself—the temple as the site of collection and organization of vast bodies of teachings and systems of knowledge. The Buddhist texts that had been collected for the preceding centuries from India, translated by many teachers, had now been newly organized by Tibetan lamas and editorial teams in the fourteenth century, and it was these that were being celebrated through murals. The product of the new, enlarged, monastic institution of the temple and monastery of Shalu celebrated through murals a new pinnacle of achievement: collected, organized, and hence powerful systems enclosed in the organized system of the collection. Inscribing these onto walls made these book collections manifest in visual, and immediately accessible form.
Chapter 2: Writing on the Wall: Inscribing the Power of Paintings

Among the most famous of Shalu’s paintings are the two large and impressive sets of the five tathāgata Buddhas painted in the two ground floor shrines that were added in the fourteenth century—the Three-door shrine (Gosum Lhakhang) and the Skin-door shrine (Segoma Lhakhang). These two rooms, facing each other across the assembly hall, contain finely detailed interior mural paintings on their walls. These monumental paintings of the five Buddhas that appear in each shrine room behind the altars are the images that circulate most widely (as published and unpublished photographs) of Shalu’s paintings today: images of them are sold as postcard-sized tourist prints at the site, and it is these paintings that are most frequently illustrated when Shalu is featured in literature on Tibetan painting. These paintings share many formal and iconographic characteristics with portable tangka paintings of the same period, and so have been useful in dating related paintings in museum collections.\footnote{Eva Allinger, “Thang Kas Dedicated to the Vajrādhatu manḍala. Questions of Stylistic Connections,” in \textit{Art in Tibet: Issues in Traditional Tibetan Art from the Seventh to the Twentieth Century} (PIATS 2003 Tibetan Studies- Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford, 2003) (Boston: Brill, 2011).}

Having proposed dating the mural paintings to the 1320s in the previous chapter, this chapter will examine how these murals, particularly those of the Skin-door shrine which bear inscriptions, interacted with and responded to the design and inclusion of the large book collections housed in the same room. In the Skin-door shrine, a particularly telling set of inscriptions can help us to better understanding the paintings.

The paintings of these two ground floor shrines mirror one another, and if interior walls were not blocking them, the five Buddhas of each shrine would directly face one another across the space of the assembly hall. Iconographic mirroring imaginatively spans these two shrines, and in both rooms these paintings function very differently from earlier mural paintings. I will show in particular that these murals borrow their visual arrangement and the overall wall design from devotional tangka paintings, the composition of these shrine walls thus serving as permanent installations of hanging tangka. By selecting passages for inscription that argue for the power and possibility
afforded by sight, and even more specifically, sight of paintings, the two important
textual inscriptions in the Skin door shrine that housed the Kagyur reveal much about the
purposes and reasons behind the paintings and the rooms that hold them. The inscribed
Tibetan textual passages chosen for the wall explain and argue in favor of paintings,
while painted images authorize and open the closed books contained within the room.

**The Five Buddhas: Painting the Yoga Tantra**

The two shrine rooms that were built in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth
centuries have nearly matching monumental five Buddhas with retinues of attendants of
the “diamond-realms” (Vajradhātu maṇḍala) painted behind each altar (fig. 1.25, fig.
2.2). These paintings depict the five Buddhas and their “families” (Skt. kula) of the
Yoga tantra texts, featured centrally in Indian Buddhism in such texts as *the Compendium
of Principles of All Tathāgatas* (Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha). Mirroring of these
two large sets of paintings, in two shrines across from one another, unified the discrete
shrine rooms of the temple. Repetition of the iconography of the five Buddhas served as
one means by which artists and designers united the shrine spaces, complementing but
not competing with the iconography of the earlier shrines.

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169 The five Tathāgata Buddhas, often called Jina (“Victor”) Buddhas in western literature, or sometimes
erroneously called Dhyāni (“Meditational”) Buddhas, represent the Buddhas of the five families (rigs-Inga,
Skt. pancakula). They reside as the central resident deities in the Yoga Tantra maṇḍalas. The five Buddhas
represent the geometric maṇḍala that they inhabit: the central direction surrounded by four cardinal
quadrants. Shown as frontal seated icons side by side, they are shown at Shalu from left to right as the
yellow Ratnasambhava, blue Aksobhya, white Vairocana, red Amitābha and green Amoghasiddhi. See
“Fundamentals of the Yoga Tantra” Mkhas-grub Dge-legs-dpal-bzaṅ-po, *Introduction to the Buddhist

170 Steven Weinberger, “The Significance of Yoga Tantra and the Compendium of Principles
(TattvaSaṅgraha Tantra) within Tantric Buddhism in India and Tibet” (2003).

171 In his article about tangka paintings of the Jina Buddhas, Christian Luczanits points out the difference
between those paintings of the Jinas who are surrounded by bodhisattvas that are differentiated and made
according to the iconographic rules of the Vajradhātumaṇḍala text, in contrast to those tangkas where any
one of the Jina Buddhas is surrounded by non-differentiated or distinctive retinues of Bodhisattva. Both sets
of Jina paintings at Shalu partake of his first type and thus show the correct Vajradhātumaṇḍala figures.
Christian Luczanits, “On the Iconography of Tibetan Scroll Paintings (Thang Ka) Dedicated to the Five
Tathāgatas,” in *Art in Tibet: Issues in Traditional Tibetan Art from the Seventh to the Twentieth Century*
(PIATS 2003 Tibetan Studies- Proceedings of the Tenth Seminar of the International Association for
The paintings of both these rooms were also planned to accompany different central devotional objects. Instead of the murals preserved in the eleventh-century northern shrines that accompanied towering clay statues, both of these rooms were made to house metal sculptures and substantial numbers of books. The paintings of five, huge, frontally conceived and iconic Buddhas were deemed a powerful iconography for these rooms in which they guarded and blessed large book collections.172

The Vajradhātu maṇḍala of the five Buddhas has at its centre Buddha Vairocana who represents the totality of the enlightened mind. The maṇḍala expands to picture Vairocana at the centre of another four Buddhas, and together this group of five is the prototypical maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantra class, a type of Buddhist literature that focused on yogic meditational practices and which was important in Tibetan Buddhism early on. This maṇḍala arose in two early and important Indian Tantric texts that had been central since Buddhism’s arrival in Tibet. The first of these, the Sarva Tathāgatha Tatva Saṃgraha, or the “Compendium of Principles,”173 was the root text for Yoga Tantra that first described this five-fold maṇḍala focused on Vairocana. Later, the maṇḍala was also described in the Sarva Durgati Parishodhana Tantra, or the “Purification of All Bad Transmigrations,”174 a Yoga Tantra text that particularly emphasized practices to benefit the deceased, in which this maṇḍala figures among its twelve primary maṇḍalas.175

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172 We do not know what books were housed in the Gosum Lhakhang, just that there were books there. When Khathog Situ visited the temple in 1919, he noted only that texts were stacked up in the room (chos brtseg), but that these were by this time confused or incomplete (thor po). Norbu Tsering, “Kathog Situ Chökyi Gyatso’s (1880-1925) Diary On Pilgrimage in Myang Area,” 75.

173 I am here following the translated names for these texts as used by Weinberger in Steven Weinberger, “The Yoga Tantras and the Social Context of Their Transmission to Tibet,” Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal 23 (2010): 133.

174 The Sarva-durgati-parishodhana-tantra, or “Tantra on Eliminating All Evil Rebirths” (Tibetan: De bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag par rdzogs pa ’i sangs rgyas ngan song thams cad yongs su sbyong ba gzi brjed kyi rgyal po ’i brtag pa phyogs geig pa) occurs in Kangyur vol. 116 and 117, no. 5. Lhasa Edition 457 Ja 353b5-412b5 and 458 Ja 412b5-493a7. In this text the Buddha is asked by the god Indra to describe how one may escape from negative rebirths., and the text describes twelve principal maṇḍalas.

The focus on the Yoga Tantras as a class of texts can be linked to the textual interests and work of the abbot Butön. Under Butön, Shalu became an important place for the study and practice of Yoga Tantra texts. Butön was “Tibet’s most celebrated proponent of Yoga Tantra,” and he was responsible for writing over forty Yoga Tantra texts. Moreover Shalu remained an important place for study of Yoga Tantra after his time: later in the fourteenth century the famous Tibetan religious reformer Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa, 1357-1419) came to study at Shalu because of its fame with regard to the Yoga Tantra, and he continued his training with scholars from Shalu both before and after this residency. The later Shalu scholar Losel Tengyong still wrote about Yoga Tantras in the nineteenth century. Shalu thus had a special connection with the Yoga Tantras, and were a focus for the temple’s teachers from Butön’s time onwards. Thus these mural paintings in the ground floor shrines completed during Butön’s tenure represented the core maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantras.

The Five Tathāgata Buddhas are central to the teachings and systems of the Yoga Tantras, this subset of Tantric texts that Butön particularly studied, taught and catalogued. An increased interest in the Yoga Tantras underlies other paintings completed under Butön: the four upper shrines were also painted with the Yoga Tantra maṇḍala sets. The five Buddhas, a group centred on Vairocana, are the basic maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantras. The basic maṇḍala of the five Tathāgata Buddhas was a useful and by this time popular shorthand as a visual explanation of a fully enlightened mind. These five Buddhas together represent stages, teachings and qualities of Buddhahood, and were an important symbolic outgrowth of Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy, a school of late Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism that focused on meditative and philosophical practices. The five Tathāgata Buddhas, a graphic representation both of necessary stages and necessary


178 Losel Tengyong wrote Yoga Tantra texts and included familiarity with the Yoga Tantras among the important characteristics of exemplary teachers. Benjamin Wood, “The Jeweled Fish Hook: Monastic Exemplarity in the Shalu Abbatial History” (Phd diss., University of Toronto, 2012.) 78.
wisdoms for enlightenment, offered viewers “an abbreviated reference to the qualities and realizations that constitute the totality of enlightenment.”179 By being painted in the first floor shrines as iconographic bookends, on a circuit of the ground floor, the Skin-door shrine would be the first shrine entered, and the Three-door shrine would be the last. These five Buddhas were thus added at both the beginning and end of the experience of going through the four shrines of the first floor. These Buddhas through which adepts visualize the totality of enlightenment explained as a system of fives, thus contained the total space of the new temple, old and new.

The five-Buddha maṇḍala of the Yoga tantras was a major iconographic focus at Shalu in the paintings that came after the fourteenth century renovation. Not only were the five Buddhas painted in monumental format in both the north and south shrines, but the basic five-part maṇḍala also underlay the conceptual plan of the renovated temple’s floor plan, where major shrines were added at the cardinal points. Furthermore, the repetition of pattern of five differently coloured Buddhas along the inner wall of the great first floor circumambulatory passage together composed the larger set of the one thousand buddhas of an aeon (fig. 2.5). Each of these enumerations of painted enlightened beings demonstrated the Tibetan Buddhist interest in explaining complex concepts through expanded organized numerical sets.

A visual elaboration of organized numerical sets, the five Buddhas are recognized by five colours, five different mudrās, and five different kula (family) symbols. These Buddhas correspond to the five directional points: the four cardinal directions and the centre. By the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, sets of tangka paintings of these five Buddhas were popular in Tibetan art.180 The five Buddhas as painted in both the Three-door shrine and the Skin-door shrine both reflect a composition that harkens to an arrangement of separate tangka paintings hung—not painted—on the walls. Their

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arrangement as five monumental, frontal images, each surrounded by a retinue of vertically arranged retinue figures, and separated by thin, yellow borders, treats each Buddha within his own space rather than in one integrated composition. As we will soon see, other paintings along the opposite North wall of this interior room also looked to tangka painting models. Both walls may have appropriated visual strategies from the more iconic, devotional tangka paintings so as to better position themselves as devotional objects. The choice to compose murals based on the appearance of tangka may have been an attempt to elevate murals to the same status as tangka.

Another Room for Books: The Segoma Kagyur Lhakhang

The Segoma Lhakhang ("one with a skin door"), the shrine also called the Kagyur Lhakhang, for the "translated words" of the Buddha housed there, was built and decorated to complete a maṇḍala-like floor plan of the ground floor, with major shrines in the four cardinal directions. It was also decorated and painted in accordance with its purpose: to hold new, organized, sets of hand-copied books.

The Tibetan canon is organized into two primary divisions: the Kagyur represents sutras that are "the words of the Buddha" (thus his direct teachings); the Tengyur represents the Indian commentaries or treatises on these teachings. This was a distinction that had already been made before Butön inherited it, and which he would carry on as he organized and edited his own versions of each of these at Shalu. While we know that Butön had completed his edition of the Tibetan Tengyur at Shalu in 1335, details are lacking about his work on the Kagyur. However, we know that in editing the Kagyur he used a version from Narthang, the same nearby temple that at least one of Shalu’s mural scribes came from.\(^{181}\) We do not know when Butön’s Kagyur was created and placed in the Segoma Kagyur Lhakhang room, but it was quite likely before his work on the Tengyur, which occurred in 1334-5 and ended with the installation of the Tengyur in the uppermost eastern shrine in 1335.\(^{182}\) The Kagyur has a much smaller number of texts,

\(^{181}\) See chapter 3 pages 162-166.

\(^{182}\) David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che*, 35.
today normally comprised of a mere 100 volumes (that include about 900 some individual works). In contrast, Butön’s Tengyur collection contained 3,392 works. Nevertheless the organization of the Kagyur, which likely had taken place before 1335, would have been an important and involved team project. In accordance with the function of the room, which was built to accommodate collections of texts on shelves, only two of the four walls were decorated with murals; the others, which supported large bookshelves, were left unpainted. The functional goal of the room was to house the assembled texts, while the paintings simultaneously introduced and “opened up” the books’ contents to viewers.

We know from a later pilgrim account to Shalu that the books placed inside the room included the early Kagyur compilations, as well as the newly organized and edited set created at Shalu patronized by the Kuzhang Drakpa Gyaltsen (logically this must be the one Butön edited). The different volumes of the Kagyur housed here represented the words of the Buddha translated into Tibetan, organized into one set and hand-copied together. The Segoma Lhakang, in a sense, was thus made as a shrine meant to be the architectural and artistic supplement to the textual work undertaken at this time, enshrining and celebrating an important part of the new “canon” of texts, the creation of which must have occupied much of the temple’s focus.

The exteriors of some books were at once displayed in the room, though their contents were largely hidden. They were most likely visibly present in the room then as now—arranged on tall shelves along the east and west sidewalls. The books today are displayed on shelves with only their wrapped ends showing at the ends of the shelves (fig. 2.1). They appear as numerous little building blocks occupying the wall space from

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183 When Kah thog Situ Chokyi Gyatso visited Shalu in 1919 he described in detail which texts were held in this room. We can safely assume that many of these were included in the shrine at, or soon after, the time of its construction. These included several important thirteenth-century texts and one compiled by the renovator, Kuzhang Drakpa Gyaltsen. See note 157 page 72.


185 The shelves seen there today may in fact be the very old ones—they share the same Chinese-style bracketing roof structure along their tops as the monastery’s famous roofs, and possibly survived the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution. This is attested in a 1991 photograph by Lionel Fournier that shows the shelves in place in a room full of partially destroyed sculptures.
mid-height to the ceiling. A few decorated books today are laid open to display frontispieces or carved covers on a lower shelf, visible at eye height. Books were certainly present as visible objects, but their words were not largely visible, in part because they were mainly closed.

The two painted walls of the shrine room along the south and north sides were decorated with sumptuous paintings that open the contents of these closed books. These two painted walls survive remarkably well to this day (fig. 2.3; 2.6). The visibility of the paintings on the north and south walls seems to have been kept in mind, since they were painted from about 4 feet up from the floor all the way up to the ceiling so that any altar or furniture placed in front of them would not obstruct their visibility. The south wall contains beautiful towering images of the five Tathāgata Buddhas, enthroned and frontal, each surrounded by smaller, vertically arranged retinue figures. The north wall was painted with yet more Buddhist deities in divided wall spaces, a maṇḍala above the doorway, and three painted inscriptions.

Of particular interest here are three long inscriptions included in the murals of this shrine room. These inscriptions, one mantra and two excerpts chosen from religious texts—likely those recently assembled and gathered—make implicit claims for vision as action and ultimately as exchange. They grant access to the tangible materiality of the divine realm contained in the teachings in the room.

The Paintings of the North Wall: Inscribing and Painting the Material Power of Vision

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186 In particular the north wall was specially preserved through the efforts of the Shalu preservation society in 1994 and 1995. Amy Heller, who was involved in the report, shared photographs with me of the wall before and after restoration. Shalu Association, *Shalu Association First Year Report 1994-1995* (Shalu Association, 1995), 8–12.

187 This is in marked contrast to the paintings in the upper maṇḍala shrines where the paintings are continuous and cover the space from the floor to the ceiling. Any furniture in those rooms, as now, obstructs their view. I actually think that there would have been, originally, a different configuration of furniture and book shelves in these rooms, perhaps with books in the centre, that would have meant that the paintings were not obstructed.
The painted north wall in the Segoma Kagyur Lhakhang shrine room has so far received little scholarly attention in literature on Shalu. This wall, when compared to the southern wall of the Skin-door shrine, yields further insight into the ways that texts and images were conceived together. Directly across from the five Buddhas, the painted north wall, the wall of the doorway, contains yet more meticulous and complex mural paintings (fig. 2.6-2.7). Here, three long painted inscription panels accompany the painted images of impressive Tantric deities: an inscribed mantra above the door, and two verse inscriptions below the paintings at either side. These are the only verse inscriptions painted in the shrine rooms of the ground floor (fig. 2.8-2.9).

The Inscribed Mantra: Sight and Sound Above the Entry

The largest written letters, and the most starkly visible inscription on the wall are those of a Sanskrit mantra visible directly above the entry doorway. This maṇḍala of Akṣobhya Buddha is painted in the centre of the north wall, directly above the doorway, and the associated inscribed mantra of Akṣobhya is positioned directly beneath it in black letters on a while rectangular background (fig. 2.13). It is a Sanskrit mantra written in large, clear Tibetan printing (U chen) letter script that reads:

![Mantra Image](image-url)

188 The other inscriptions in the shrines of the ground floor include only name identification panels, not verses. These are featured among some of the earlier paintings. For instance, such names are featured among the eleventh-century paintings: below the monkey headed and robed deity in the former Gonkhang there was a short inscription, but it is no longer legible. Also, among the eleventh-century bodhisattva paintings high up on the walls of the Lhakhang Jangma appear the names of the bodhisattvas inscribed below, so small from the ground that these were only legible from zoom lens photographs. The painting of the founder from the 1290 chapel in the Gosum Lhakhang is inscribed with his name, and another lineage from a fourteenth-century painting in the Chenrezig shrine off the Khorlam features an inscribed Shangspa Kagyu lineage. In all other shrine rooms of the ground floor then, the inscriptions inscribed are usually names or mantras.

189 The Akṣobhya mantra and the Akṣobhya maṇḍala appear elsewhere at Shalu, and are common markers for entrances. As Akṣobhya is the Buddha of the eastern direction, he represents the entry to the maṇḍala. This Mantra also figures largely in Qianlong’s tomb and was the subject of a paper by Francoise Wang-Toutain, who from the Chinese textual context called it the “Dharani that Totally Purifies all Obstructions from Karma” in an article on the emperor Qianlong’s tomb. Francoise Wang-Toutain, “The Purification of Sins in the Ornamental Program of Emperor Qianlong’s Tomb,” *Journal for Sino-Tibetan Buddhist Art Studies (Han-Zang Fojiao Meishu Yanjiu 漢藏佛教美術研究)* 2008 (2010): 86–87.
Na Mo Rat Na Tra Ya’ Ya  
Om Kam Ka’ Ni Kam Ka’ Ni Ro Tsa Ni Ro Tsa Ni Tro Ta Ni Tro Ta Ni  
Tra Sa Ni Tra Sa Ni Pra Ti Ha Na Pra Ti Ha Na Sarbba Karma Param Param Ni  
Me’ Sva’ Ha//

Since this Sanskrit mantra is transliterated and written phonetically in Tibetan printing (Uchen) script, it may have been intended to be readable. This is in contrast to the usual preference to depict mantra in decorative Lantsa script, a decorative script often used for writing Sanskrit, which today, few Tibetan monks can read, and we may infer that this was similarly true in the fourteenth century. The choice to write the mantra instead in visible, legible, letters may also indicate a purposeful accessibility. Since it was rendered in Tibetan letters, sounding it out would have been relatively easy to anyone who could read Tibetan.

The phrase represents above all efficacious sound over particular or specified meaning. Mantras were spoken and used, in the Tibetan context also drawn and painted as here, as a sacred phrase, a set of sounds that activate and manifest the deity, corresponding to the painted maṇḍala to the same deity above it. The written mantra, an allusion to sound and to practice, is here a visual motif, a graphic representation of relationships between sight, sound and practice.

The Akṣobhya maṇḍala combined with this mantra is a recurring marker over entrances at several of Shalu’s thresholds, particularly on the ground floor. The same combination of mantra and maṇḍala also appears over the entrance and exit to the great Khorlam passage of the ground floor (fig. 2.16), though in both these places the mantras have been inscribed in the Lantsa script, an artistic graphic script used in Tibet to render Sanskrit. This repetition of the Akṣobhya maṇḍala and mantra, image and text that each

190 In particular, reading this phrase with colleague University of Toronto Sanskritist Bryan Levman can lead to the following possible reading (based on deducing correct Sanskrit words from the phonetics of the Tibetan letters): “Homage to the three jewels (Namo Trayaaya). What are the three jewels (Kamkaani)? Bright and shining (Rotsani). Three things woven together (Trotaani). The Three Bodies. Neglecting/against killing (Pratihaana). All actions the other side exchange (Sarva Karma Param Nime Svaahaa). Hail!” Levman though points out that the phrases, particularly the repeating phrases of “Kamkani Kamkani Rotsani Rotsani Trotani Trotani Trasani Trasani” operate more like Dharanis, employing nonsensical or sound syllables that are not meant to contain meaning so much as to be used as mnemonic devices to help remember the teachings. Email correspondence with Bryan Levman, August 31st 2012.
serve as graphic shorthand for sight, sound and practice, emphasizes how passage through the temple was meant to actualize benefits to those who walked below these thresholds. The thresholds of entrances and exits were an effective location for the combination of maṇḍala and mantra—together forming a symbolic, efficacious shorthand uniting image and text.

The mantra painted was an efficacious phrase, part of what activated and made Akṣobhya present on the wall and in the shrine room. Mantras are cornerstones of Tantric Buddhism and Tantric practice, and their recitation is understood to prepare the mind for meditation or worship, calling deities activating deities. When written on objects, their efficacy depends on an agent other than the ritual practitioner: they operate as sound activated through something often physical. The mantras on Tibetan prayer flags and the mantras inside prayer wheels both operate in this way. These written mantras may not even be visible, as, for example, in the case of the wheel or a flag placed very high, but through their physical movement—the turning of the wheel or the blowing of the wind past the flag—the sound as a material presence made active in the world. The activation of the mantra that was painted in clear Tibetan letters above the doorway was facilitated through sight itself. This directly corresponds to the arguments framed in the longer textual passages chosen for the wall, which repeatedly liken sight to efficacious religious action.

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191 My external reader Rob Linrothe has rightly pointed out to me that what is also interesting is that there is a shift from focus on Akṣobhya’s mantra is included instead of Mahavairocana’s. He has noted to me that in the context of Ladakh, he sees the change from Mahavairocana to Akṣobhya in “kankam” chörten to be possibly related to memorial functions for laity. This is an interesting proposition and warrants further consideration. Robert Linrothe, personal correspondence, December 11th 2015.


The Avalokiteśvara Inscription: Cloth Paintings and the Power of Direct Sight

Upon entering the room, if a visitor followed the usual clockwise circumambulatory direction, the painting with an inscription that is directly to the right of the doorway would be the first to be encountered, and so should be read first. Below the wall paintings, in a horizontal white register, this inscription appears in three long lines of text in large, visible Tibetan letters (fig. 2.8):

We should understand that when one just sees this cloth painting (ras ris) one can see directly the immeasurable palace (gzhal med khang) at mount Po ta la with the noble lord Avalokiteśvara (‘Phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug). (And when one sees this painting) sentient beings can be freed from the eight great hell realms, and from the eight fears, and from the five inexpiable sins (mtshams med pa lnga). Anyone who abandons the holy dharma, and who abandons the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, even if that person sees this, they will be immediately (mod la) completely purified (rnam par dag par ‘gyur). Even one who has almost gone to Avīci hell (mnar med) can also become completely liberated, and the root of virtue of the great Brahmin (will be gained by seeing this). At the time of death (‘chi dus) Avalokiteśvara will appear directly and will comfort (those persons). After death, those people will be reborn in the land of bliss (bde ba can gyi ‘jig rten gyi khams). Freed from all obscurations, they will be able to remember five thousand lifetimes.\footnote{This passage can be located as a part of a text called the 'Phags pa don yod pa'i zhab pa'i cho ga zhi ba mo'i rgyal po (The Ritual of Noble Amoghapāśa Called the King of Peace) in the Dégé Kagyur, and so was probably also kept in the Tantra section of the Kagyur by Butön in his organization (possibly between 1323-48). This text passage can be located in: Chos kyi 'byung gnas. Bka' 'gyur (sde dge par phud). TBRC W22084. 103 vols. delhi: delhi karmapae chodhey gyalwae sungrab partun khang, 1976-1979. \url{http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W22084}; TBRC volume 92, page 200. Chökyi Jungney (Chos kyi 'byung gnas), Kagyur, Dege (bka’ ‘gyur; Sde Dge Par Phud), TBRC W22084 (Delhi: Delhi Karmapae Chodhey Gyalwae Sungrab Partunkhang, 1976), 200, \url{http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W22084 vol. 92}. See Appendix pages 7-8. The Tibetan reads: [Line 1:] ras ris 'di mthong ba tsam gyis 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi ri bo ta la na gshal med khang dang bcas pa mgon sum du mthong bar rig par bya'a/ sems can dmyal ba chen po brypad las mthar/ 'jigs pa (words lost) byan gchus [Line 2:] mtshams med pa lnga byed pa yongsu thar dam pa'i chos spong ba dang zhu r+ha dang bo r+ho spong ba thams cad kyis kyang 'di}
The subject and topic, the act of seeing this painting, thus begins the inscription.

The inscription also begins by referring to a “cloth painting” (ras ris) on this wall of painted plaster. This purposefully mistaken self-reference is a remnant from the source it quotes. The text this quotes from, the *The Ritual of Noble Amoghapāśa Called the King of Peace* ('Phags pa don yod pa'i zhabs pa'i cho ga zhi ba mo'i rgyal po), a Buddhist Tantra that appears in later editions of the Kagyur, the collected teachings of the Buddha. While we do not have Butön’s Kagyur to look at, the existence of this text in the Dege Kagyur, a seventeenth century collection that is considered to be based on the version collected by Butön, it is very likely that this text existed in Butön’s Kagyur as well.

This section of the text is an excerpt, and comes from a longer section that provides a sustained discussion and description of using a tangka painting of Avalokiteśvara in a ritual context. Leading up to this passage of text on the wall, the longer text before it describes the creation of a painting of Avalokiteśvara, providing first specific instructions about the type of cloth and the type of paint to be used, before the iconographic instructions are provided:

Three heads, four eyes, four arms, and staying in the lotus seat, the central face is smiling, the right face is wrathful, the crown is decorated with Amitayus, and the head is decorated with the moon and sun. The left face is also showing wisdom teeth [i.e., wrathful], and an Amitayus head is above.\[195\]

The description of a “cloth” painting (ras ris) must refer to iconic deity paintings, paṭa in Sanskrit, and tangka in Tibetan, depicting enlightened beings frontally, available for the exchange of vision. Artists and scribes working at Shalu would have known the difference between a cloth painting and a mural, yet chose to leave these erroneous words

\[195\] vol. 92 ibid.
intact in the inscription. This wall thus plays with the perception of its own materiality: a clay wall that calls itself cloth.

Indeed, I believe that there is an intentional modeling of these murals on tangka forms. A later tradition of tangkas inscribed with this specific passage appears below a similar image of Avalokiteśvara. Examples of these appear under the grouping of images appearing under this iconographic set of Amoghapāśa—Avalokiteśvara on the Himalayan Art Resources (HAR) website, making it likely that such cloth images circulated earlier as well. The existence of these much later tangka paintings inscribed with the same section of the Amoghapāśa Tantra, in conjunction with an image of Avalokiteśvara above it, makes it all the more likely that the Shalu mural visually references an actual devotionally inscribed tangka painting.¹⁹⁶

The inscription on the wall has been carefully redacted for length, omitting some words for length while preserving meaning. Meaning has been carefully retained while text length reduced, indicating that someone with experience and confidence working with textual editing was involved in the process of redaction. The choice to shorten the textual passage was likely made to keep the letters large and visible, and the large and impressive monumental painted images were still made to be the primary visual focus. Redaction kept the inscription to three lines rather than the twelve that we find in their entirety on the woodblock. In this context, where in fact many words are omitted from the longer textual excerpt as it appears in the inscription at Shalu, we should wonder why an editor leaves in the word “cloth” (ras) when this could have been just as easily excluded. Omitting this word alone could have changed the lines for the wall to the more logically consistent “when one sees this image.” If processes of omission were practiced throughout the rest of the inscription, why not simply omit an illogical material reference? In the context of other editing, where many words, phrases and sentences were excluded for the purposes of redaction, it seems this reference to cloth has been

The purposeful inclusion of the mistaken self-reference to a cloth painting is revealing of the iconic status to which these mural paintings link themselves. In the Tibetan context, the tangka painting can be consecrated whereas the mural is normally not. However, these particular mural paintings at Shalu make gestures towards changing this situation and make some claims to possessing an iconic value. One strategy for claiming increased devotional status for Shalu’s elaborate mural paintings is to connect them to texts, themselves an important support for devotees, and to link them explicitly to devotional tangka paintings. The wall painting as icon here derives efficacy from its relationship to consecrated tangka paintings that share its text, iconography, and form.

The recourse to murals that look like tangkas arrayed together across the wall informs the paintings of every wall in this room. The paintings of the five Buddhas behind the shrine are arrayed like a set of five separate tangkas, and each divided from one another by the thin yellow borders we see throughout Shalu’s fourteenth-century murals. These visual references to patterns and designs characteristic of cloth paintings occur throughout the wall paintings of the ground floor shrines in the North and South. The Five Buddhas painted in both the Three-door shrine and the Skin-door shrine show the deities arranged as separate images, not integrated into shared space. This format for depicting the five Buddhas is most similar to the format of five hanging tangka paintings, though their cloth borders are not represented.

The north wall distinguishes itself from all the other walls at Shalu in the manner in which it evokes the experience of looking at hanging tangkas. Six distinct spaces have been circumscribed on the wall, but they are not uniform in size. These spaces are laid out horizontally and stacked vertically along doorways, producing a sense of tangka paintings being arrayed before the viewer. The slightly disparate size of each space was

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197 The most important religious objects are those that are considered to be receptacles (rten) of the Buddha’s body, speech and mind. In enumerating the “most revered Buddhist objects of devotion that are considered to be receptacles of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha” Yael Bentor lists as the things that require consecration images (referring to sculptures) and tangkas, books and dharanis, stūpas and tsa-tsa’s. Mural paintings do not require consecration and were normally not held in the same religious purpose as tangka paintings. Yael Bentor, Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1996).
entirely plausible in the context of tangka paintings, since they may not have derived from the same set. This north wall is particular at Shalu differs from the other walls of these two shrines in its design of divided but differently sized spaces for deities. With six distinct spaces on the wall, placed both side by side and stacked by doorways, the overall wall composition is in fact made even more similar to the effect of viewing multiple hanging, separate tangka paintings, which may not share scalar proportions if they are not produced as a set. Indeed, the wall appears to have been conceived as a kind of permanent mural depiction of so many hanging “cloth” paintings, paintings of difference sizes.

In short, the wall contains words that open up books. These chosen words were carefully selected textual passages that talk specifically about cloth paintings and the powers that accrue directly to each and every viewer from simply seeing them. The wall images here then also channel cloth tangka paintings, modelling themselves on these cloth paintings in their layout of deities and their divisions of space. In bending these material references, the artists and designers of these murals make them into other forms and formats. These are murals that at once partake of the power of books and the power of devotional images, and in so doing, transcend and combine them into and onto the structure of the temple. The painted temple walls are at once book, deity, window to paradise, source of instant merit, and an eternal reason to visit the temple.

**Direct Sight: Immediate Contact with the Deity**

The impact of the inscription in explaining paintings extends far beyond the inter-materiality with which the passage begins. The passage excerpted from the longer text and placed on the wall specifically focuses on and highlights a key concept: “direct sight” (*mngon sum du mthong*)—a religious concept that posits a distinction between possible types of vision based on the relationship between viewer and object. “Direct sight” exists in contradistinction to its opposite, sight that is not direct (*mngon sum du mi mthong*). Direct sight implicitly emphasizes the viewing position, and the tangible reality of the thing viewed. It implies not only cognition as a mental act occurring in the mind of the viewer, but also conflates the act of vision with that cognition, that “beholding in
actuality” is equivalent to contact with the thing that is viewed. The concept of direct sight is a reflection of the experiential knowledge of the viewer as well as the tangibility of the thing viewed. Sight then, the passage promises, makes contact with these deities, now and in the present, direct and real.

The passage chosen for the wall thematizes the “direct sight” of deities that is permitted and enabled by seeing paintings. By differentiating the kind of seeing that takes place as “direct,” it promises that what the painting shows—the noble Avalokiteśvara in his palace—is not merely seen, but placed into present and future contact. By seeing Avalokiteśvara directly (mgon sum du) painting and reality are conflated. No intermediary or intercessor is needed—the painted signs, though signs, are also the real. The painting is elevated beyond mere representation, and framed as a way of accessing the deity directly.

The inscription promises that the painting creates and enables the conditions for direct sight—sight that is a direct form of contact with something real and present. Seeing these paintings is to be in the presence of the divine. Though images are in fact more akin to mnemonic devices, and “deities in the tantric system don’t exist as external entities” but rather are “demonstrations of Buddhahood,” visible deities are necessary contacts for mental metaphor—and this exchange of vision emphasizes the direct, tangible, material connections between deities and viewers.

The reference to direct sight also elevates the viewer in status and abilities, as it is direct sight that distinguishes enlightened beings. Buddhas always have the ability to see directly, and so by seeing directly, viewers are already closer to realizing their Buddha nature. A translation of Mipam’s famous work on the topic of the Buddha’s own consciousness uses examples of mgon sum du mthong (direct sight) to discuss how enlightened beings can always perceive things directly and without obstruction. To be

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able to see directly is then an indicator of enlightened abilities.\textsuperscript{200}

In this passage it is by “just” (tsam) seeing, a meaning that also contains “only” or “merely,” that the events occur. The term here is implying a comparison of disproportionate scale. It implies that the small, easy act of seeing is rewarded by the disproportionately wonderful act of contact with the deity. The addition of the Tibetan tsam for “just” here also minimizes the intentionality of the act of seeing, emphasizing the ways that seeing-as-activation may be involuntary or accidental. Seeing in this context is not something undertaken with effort or requiring understanding. This might also imply that the emphasis is added for the exceptional or surprising—by highlighting that “just” or “only” seeing is enough, this implies that the opposite might be expected. The line later implies that the reader “should” or “must” understand (bya’o) that “just” seeing is itself meritorious action. This kind of “just” seeing is thus open to all, and is also all that is required.

The Tibetan concept of “liberation through sight” (mthong grol) is operating here, implying that simply by seeing a religious image, immediate liberation for the viewer is possible. This was a concept particularly fitting to the physically, materially invested, practical and systematic Tantric systems, and pervades other Tantric Buddhist cultures as well.\textsuperscript{201} In the Tibetan context mthong grol is still the name used for particularly large and public displays of enormous cloth tangkas unrolled along the sides of hills during annual ceremonies, where masses of people at once gain merit by the opportunity of just seeing them. Liberation through seeing contains within it the core Mahayana Buddhist concepts of a wider public access to liberation.

Each of the senses—the gateways of human experience—are possible avenues for liberation. Sight is not alone in its potential for producing immediate liberation from delusion, though it has been privileged here. Other senses are also potential access points to immediate liberation: Liberation through seeing is part of a wider sensory systematization that in Tibetan Buddhism includes liberation by hearing (thos grol).


liberation by tasting (*myang grol*), and liberation by wearing (*btags grol*). These each betray a particularly embodied interpretation to accessing possible liberation.

The concept of “direct sight” is deployed twice in this excerpt—across two temporalities of present and future. The passage first tells that the painting opens “direct” access to Avalokiteśvara’s palace and heavenly residence in the present. By extension then, the temple space becomes heaven due to the presence of this image. Yet it also ends by promising the return of this direct and directly beneficial sight after the time of death. The inscription states that Avalokiteśvara, having been seen once in this image, will also appear directly at the time of death and take the viewer to paradise. Direct sight is thus a way that direct access or physical proximity to the deity and his paradise will be provided both now, and again in the future. Both space and time are being collapsed: being here is to inhabit both the present and the future: to be simultaneously in this world, and in paradise.

**Learning to See: Promises for the Time of Death**

The rewards of seeing “this painting,” inscribed below the painted wall of Avalokiteśvara to which it must refer, are even open to those who have committed the worst possible karmic acts. As the inscription continues it lists the extreme cases in which seeing this painting is beneficial:

[And when one sees this painting] sentient beings can be freed from the eight great hell realms, and from the eight fears, and from the five inexpiable sins (*mtshams med pa lnga*). Anyone who abandons the holy dharma, and who abandons the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas, even if that person sees this, they will be immediately (*mod la*) completely purified (*rnam par dag par ‘gyur*). Even one who has almost gone to Avici hell (*mnar med*) can also become completely liberated, and the root of virtue of the great Brahmin [will be gained by seeing this]...²⁰²

²⁰² “*sems can dmyal ba chen po brgyad las mthar/’jigs pa,....byang chubs/ mtshams med pa lnga byed pa yongasu thar dam pa/i chos spong ba dang zhu r+ha dang bo r+ho spong ba thaMs cad kyis kyang ‘di mthong ba/mod la rnaM par dag par ‘gyur mnar med pa la gzhol ba/i thar thug yongs su grol bar ‘gyur tshangs pa chen pA.o dge ba/i rtsa ba”*
This is an argument that the benefits of “this painting” are effectively universal. The painting can liberate those who have committed any of the five sins (*mtshams med pa lnga*), or those who have abandoned the dharma, or even those who are about to go to hell. By listing all those who will be saved by this vision, the words reassure that even those who commit the gravest of karmic misdeeds will not only escape from all eight of the worst realms of hell. Further benefit is immediate as the painting has the power to erase the ill effects of even the egregious transgressions, specifically the five inexpiable sins (*mtshams med pa lnga*). It promises that even those who abandon the dharma will be helped by this vision. Basically, the text promises that there is no limit to the power of the image—it has the capacity to save even the worst transgressors from their negative karmic burden and to speed them along to the paradise that will permit their unencumbered work towards enlightenment. Vision will be the act that enables and transports the viewer to paradise.

That this seeing is a preparation for death is also stated very explicitly. The last line frames this vision as a training for visionary death experiences:

> At the time of death (*‘chi dus*) Avalokiteśvara will appear directly and will comfort [those persons]. After death, those people will be reborn in the land of bliss (*bde ba can gyi ‘jig rten gyi kham*). Freed from all obscurations, they will be able to remember five thousand lifetimes.

Seeing this particular painted deity directly has then not only saved them in this lifetime, but also in many more to come. It saves people from the karma of their own worst acts, and further prepares them for the moment of death, when the bodhisattva of compassion

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203 The five inexpiable sins, or the five crimes with immediate retribution are: killing one’s mother, father or an arhat, causing a schism in the monastic community or maliciously drawing blood from a Tathāgata. These five sins are understood to result in instant bad karma. Ranjung Yeshe online dictionary. Entry: “Mtshams med pa lnga” accessed August 14, 2012.

204 *‘chi dus spyan ras gzigs mgon sum du ston zhing dbugs ‘byin par gyur to/ shi nas bde ba can gyi ‘jig rten gyi khamasu skye bar ‘agyuro// sgrib pa thams cad dang bral nas tshe rabs bryga stong phrag lngar rjesu ‘dzin par ‘gyur ro.*
appears directly to them. Having seen the deity correctly and directly by visiting the temple thus results in the correct seeing of the god at the time of death (‘chi dus), when the deity will re-appear. These acts are involuntary, all one needs to do is see and Avalokiteśvara will do the appearing.

The specific use of Avalokiteśvara in visionary preparations for death in Tibet may be likened to the popularity of the Buddha Amida (Amitābha) in China and Japan. In Japan, images called Amida raigozu (paintings of the welcoming descent of Amida from the Western Pure Land) were popular from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries and often used in death rituals, through which this Buddha often greets and gathers the deceased to his paradise. In Tibet, where Avalokiteśvara was by far the most popular image, this bodhisattva of compassion may have been used in similar ways in death preparations.

Seeing the deity, the inscription argues, causes the viewer to be reborn in the land of bliss, or paradise (bde ba can gyi ‘jig rten gyi khams). Thus seeing paintings in life has provided important practice for the salvational vision that will be conjured at the moment of death. The ability to see Avalokiteśvara at that moment directly, as he was seen before in this painting, will be the necessary precursor to rebirth in the land of bliss. This paradisical afterlife, a common goal for practitioners who would aim to be reborn in paradise where they can pursue enlightenment unencumbered by worldly sufferings, is the promise. In paradise people can dwell for thousands of lifetimes as a follower of Avalokiteśvara. All this has been made possible by “just seeing.”

In conclusion, this inscription has been selected to explain and expand the expediency of vision and specifically to extol the power of seeing paintings. This kind of


207 This self-conscious statement of the ease of sight and the promise it holds stands in sharp contrast to James Elkins claims also in a chapter entitled “Just Looking” where he attacks the idea that there is anything as simple or easy as “just looking” and likens seeing to hunting and being hunted, concluding that “looking has force: it tears, it is sharp, it is an acid.” James Elkins, The Object Stares Back: On the Nature of Seeing (San Diego: Harcourt, 1997), 44.
seeing is both a kind of action that can save one from one’s own worst karmic actions and lead one to rebirth in paradise. This “direct vision” is a both tool and goal, and framed as a spontaneous gift to the sighted who come to the temple. The painting, the inscription states explicitly, makes immediate and future salvation possible for all. This textual passage thus not only connects the image painted above it to a text, but has also been selected and featured on the wall as a passage about the power of the painted image. These words were chosen to argue for paintings, while the painting realizes the promised experience.

The Tathāgata Inscription: Naming the Text

To the left side of the doorway is another three-line inscription that takes viewing paintings as its explicit theme. This excerpt describes vision as an action that results in other actions from the divine realm. Words and images both emphasize the tangible, material, rewards that accrue from vision, implying an underlying economic model for the exchange that vision produces. This inscription (fig. 2.9) reads:

From the Phags… [text name damaged]. If anyone sees the characteristics of the Tathāgata’s painting, immediately seeing this, ninety-nine million Tathāgatas will give that person attainments (dngos grub; siddhi) and assemblies of dākas (rigs pa mchog) and dākinīs (pho nya ma) will also give attainments. While fasting on the eighth day of the waxing moon for one day, make offerings to Vajrapāni. Recite the mantra onto each white flower, and throw them to the Vajrapāṇī of The Eight Thousand (verse Prajñāpāramitā). Then look (bstabs) towards a stūpa (mchod brten) or a symbol (mtshan). If [one tries to] accomplish the knowledge mantra (rigs sngags), it will be easily achieved. In summary, it is said that one will be able to do all sorts of actions [upon seeing this]. This painting of Vajrapāṇī was painted

208 While the inscription is damaged at exactly this point and the name is no longer visible, I have been able to locate the source text, and so this wall inscription likely named the text through its redacted title as the Supreme Knowledge Tantra: (Phags pa rigs pa mchog). The full name of the text is the Phags pa rig pa mchog gyi rgyud (The Supreme Knowledge Tantra; the Viyottama Tantra).
This inscription is concerned first and foremost with citing its source, naming the text from which this passage was excerpted. Though the title is now lost as a result of damage to the wall, it can be corroborated by having located this passage in a text in the Kagyu. The full text, named *The Great Noble Supreme Knowledge Tantra* (*‘Phags pa rig pa mchog gi rgyud Chen po*) was a title that would have certainly been shortened for the wall space, and indeed since the inscriptions does begin with a visible ‘Phag, the inscription most certainly included a shortened form of this title.

The explicit demonstration of its textual source is reminiscent of the writing of Butön in his maṇḍala shrine inscriptions, where he also frequently provides source titles before long quotations that were provided to fit or make an argument. The inscription thus begins like a quoted book citation, stating the name of the source text that the wall passage came from. This itself demonstrates a key interest in asserting all that follows as directly reflecting the longer textual source. This introduction of the inscription with the placement of a text’s name demonstrates the importance of attributing the words to a specific text, though interestingly the title had been omitted in the redaction of the inscription on the other side. Beginning with a citation to a specific book, named by its title, located and authorized the words that follow it.

This visible and direct reference to a longer, named text, changes the quoted information that follows. By locating the information in a longer piece, it claims its status and authority by association with the book, and by extension, with the authority of the editor who understood and selected it.

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209 This passage can be located as a section of a text called *‘Phags pa rig pa mchog gyi rgyud (The Supreme Knowledge Tantra; the Viyottama Tantra)*, also part of the Tibetan Kanjur. It can be located in Chos kyi 'byung gnas. *bKa’ gyur* (sde dge). TBRC W4CZ5369. 103 vols. (sDe dge: sde dge par khang chen mo, 18th cent) vol 95 page 303; as well as in the comparative Pedurma Kanjur. *bKa’ gyur* (dpe bsdur ma). TBRC W1PD96682. 109 vols. (Pe cin: kRUN gO'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006-2009). [http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W1PD96682](http://tbrc.org/link?RID=W1PD96682) TBRC vol 95, page 353. See Appendix pages 9-11. The Tibetan inscriptions reads: “… las gang ga'i de bzhiin gshegs pa'i bris sku'i mtshan nyid 'di mthong na/ de mthong ma thag du de bzhiin gshegs pa bye ba phrag dgu bcu rtas dgos dgos grub rtsoł bar mdzod rig pa mchog pho nya ma'i tshogs dang bcas pas kyang dngos grub hyin par 'gyur ro/ ‘yar gyi ro tshes bryad la zhag cig bsnyung ba gnas pa byas te (Line 2:) 'phags pa lag na rdo rje la mchod pa byas nas/ me tog dkar po la lan re bzas brjod byas la/ bryad bstong gis 'phags pa lag na rdo rje la bsun la/ de nas mchod rten nam / mtshan la lngas ste (Line 3:) rigs sngags bsgrubs na bde blab du 'grub par 'gyur ro"/ mdor na las thams cad byed nus par 'gyur ro zhes gsungs so/ phyag na rdo rje'i bris sku 'di/ sangs rgyas on pos bris/ bkra shis par gyur dge'o/ …… da”
The Immediate Gifts of Seeing

The same passage explicitly talks about the material benefits of seeing a painting of the Buddha:

If anyone sees the characteristics of the Tathāgata’s painting, upon immediately seeing this, ninety-nine million Tathāgatas will give that person attainments (dngos grub; Skt. siddhi) and assemblies of ḍākas (rigs pa mchog) and ḍākinīs (pho nya ma) will also give attainments.\(^{210}\)

The text provides religious and material reasons for seeing paintings. Placed below a painting of a Buddha, the inscription refers explicitly to seeing specific paintings, not just images.

The nuance of the line is focused not just on what occurs when one sees a “painting of the Tathāgata,” but furthermore on what happens when one sees the “characteristics” of that painting (de bzhin gshegs pa’i bris sku’i mtshan nyid). This term mtshan nyid, translatable as characteristics, marks, signs or attributes\(^{211}\) brings attention not just to viewing a painting, but to viewing the painting as a symbolic form, as an assembly of marks or characteristics that together represent one who has attained enlightenment. This is a fascinating and self-conscious Buddhist reference to the viewing of symbolic content. It also directly refers to the didactic nature of symbols—that through these aids one is reminded of all the important aspects of Buddhahood that are being taught.

An inherent distinction is made between signifier and signified, so that the seen object, the painting, is understood to have the power to communicate through signs. The painting’s value and power lies specifically in its ability to render correct characteristics

\(^{210}\) Tibetan line reads: “gang ga’i de bzhin gshegs pa’i bris sku’i mtshan nyid ’di mthong na/ de mthong ma thag du de bzhin gshegs pa bye ba phrag dgu bcu rtsa dgus dngos grub rtsol bar mdzod aX rig pa mchog pho nya ma’i tshogs dang bcas pas kyang dngos grub byin par ’gyur ro.”

or signs. It naturally follows from this that all paintings of the Tathāgatha must necessarily possess shared characteristics to be correct. Hence the strict iconography of Buddhist images has its doctrinal justifications. The iconography of correct signs—things like relative sizes, facial features, elongated earlobes, robes—produce the efficacious image.

The immediacy of benefits that they are accruing in the immediate present is expressed by the end of line particle, the use of the Tibetan “na,” which can produce the meaning of either “If one sees” or “When one sees.” Both possible readings point to the immediacy of sight. With the addition of “this” (‘di), we are reminded that this is all occurring “when/if one sees this” (‘di mthong na). This very moment of reading or looking at this wall, here and now, is thus treated as the direct topic. This is not a generalization about seeing religious images, but a comment on seeing in the present instance. It is a perfect inscription to add to a painting.

The verb of choice, mthong, refers to the passive act of seeing, as opposed to the more active intentional act of looking (lta). The meaningful distinction between looking (lta) and seeing (mthong) operates much the same in Tibetan as in English—looking implies action, while seeing is the natural result of things happening in front of (working) eyes. The meandering or unintentional nature of sight was also highlighted in the Amoghapāśa inscription which qualified the reference to seeing by the addition of the word “just” (tsam), emphasizing the passivity of the viewer who receives the message “by just seeing this/it” (‘di mthong ba tsam).

Seeing as an involuntary act does not require knowledge or even literacy. It does not necessarily lead to understanding. Instead, seeing is available to any sighted person who comes to the temple. Such seeing is explained as open and provided in equal opportunities to all who are here. Since these paintings are immovable, the act of coming to the temple and specifically into this shrine space is the implied necessity. After that, by the point of reading or experiencing this room, anyone who sees it, regardless of their level of attainment, knowledge, or awareness, experiences the benefits promised.

The last part of this first line points explicitly to what happens when one sees the characteristics of the painted Buddha—that other Tathāgatas, gods and goddesses will give attainments (dngos grub). The dngos grub (Skt. siddhi), translatable as attainments,
realizations or spiritual powers, refer to a kind of awareness or cognition that can be given or granted. It is significant here that, upon seeing, it is not knowledge that is granted, but the more materially located “attainments,” which can include either levels of awareness or can also refer to things like wealth. The acts of seeing, viewing and beholding the characteristics of a Buddha painting are ultimately framed as processes of exchange: by seeing, merit of a spiritual or material sort is granted.

This merit is further granted not by the Tathāgata of the image, but by a secondary set of players. The inscription tells that other Tathāgatas, gods and goddesses are the (unseen) benefactors of this exchange. While seeing one painting sets this wheel in motion, an unseen multitude of ninety-nine million beings are the ones who are then directly responsible for granting gifts. No one asks the depicted Buddha for attainments, for it is not he that grants them. Instead, the act of making signs visible is what he does, and the other ninety-nine million intercede as a result of his being seen. Seeing has the potential to engage these other munificent beings, and activate the exchange of gifts. There is no delay: the inscription also promises that upon sight, the transaction happens immediately (ma thag du). Thus the inscription highlights the fact that the occurring gifts, benefits and attainments are being given right here, right now.

**Moving Words: Sound as Object**

The other main focal point of the passage describes a ritual of making offerings to Vajrapāṇi. The offering specifically involves throwing white flowers that have been imbued with mantric syllables onto a Vajrapāṇi. This Vajrapāṇi could be a sculptural or painted image, or could have been a maṇḍala or yantra of the deity made in ephemeral materials specifically for the ritual process. This ritual description may seem an odd addition to the wall space, and odd in the context of a description of looking at a painting of a Tathāgata. But the description is very similar to other examples from known Tantra

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212 It could be possible that this is an image in the form of a sculpture or painting, though it is also common in Tantric rituals for a maṇḍala of the deity made out of transient materials (grain, rice, sand) made just for the ritual to serve as the “deity.” David L. Snellgrove and Kṛṣṇācāryapāḍa, *The Hevajra Tantra; a Critical Study*, (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 53–54.
texts (*Rgyud*). This section of the passage describes the specific ritual thus:

Fasting on the 8th day of the waxing moon for one day, make offerings to Vajrapāṇi. Recite the mantra onto each white flower, and to the Vajrapāṇi of *The Eight Thousand* [verse Prajñāpāramitā] throw them. Then look (*bstabs*) towards a stupa (*mchod brten*) or a symbol (*mtshan*). If [one tries to] accomplish the knowledge mantra (*rigs sngags*), it will be easily accomplished.

This verse describes a specific ritual prescribed for a specific monthly calendrical date following a lunar cycle. Its inclusion here should remind us that all of these systems and specifics, texts and images, are part of larger systems of techniques and solutions that lead one in practical and applicable ways towards the goals of enlightenment.

The ritual specified here involves making offerings to Vajrapāṇi, and further clarifies that the Vajrapāṇi to be used is made in accord with the form of Vajrapāṇi featured in the eight-thousand verse version of the Prajñāpāramitā Sutra (*Brgyad stong*), a text with wide popularity and ritual use in Tibet. Why specify this? There are many forms of Vajrapāṇi, and this specifies a particular one for use in this ritual. This inscription, from one text, further singles out a form of deity specified in yet another text. This exactitude is a useful detail for one who wants to perform the ritual, and one that produces the semblance of order and specificity. Not only does the ritual require a specific form, but presumably to generate this correct and efficacious image one must turn to a specific book. As a technique and source of authority, the text, not surprisingly,

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214 yar gyi ro tshes brgyad la zhag cig bsnyung ba gnas pa byas te Line 2: 'phags pa lag na rdo rje la mchod pa byas nas/ me tog dkar po la lan re bzlas brjod byas la/ brgyad bstong gis 'phags pa lag na rdo rje la bsnun la/ de nas mchod rten nam / mtshan la lngas ste Line 3: rigs sngags bsgrubs na bde blab du 'grub par 'gyur ro.

215 Vajrapāṇi is mentioned but once in the *Brgyad Stong*, and all that it said about him is that he is a Yaksha. Iconographically, we would expect any “Yaksha” to be either a fearsome warrior or a corpulent, possibly dwarf-like figure. The Vajrapāṇi painted on the wall is neither of these, though this verse refers to the Vajrapāṇi to be used in the ritual not the painted image necessarily.
looks to other texts. The ritual described here would require thus not only a literate officiant, but more specifically literate intermediaries with access to texts.

The textual references play a role here not only in mediating rituals but in authorizing images used in rituals. The painted image, by extension, appears attached to this commentary and this specificity, justified and explained through text and by allusion to yet another text. We could read this to mean that this is not just any Vajrapāṇi, but one described in another text. The viewer is assured that the right texts have been followed. Accordingly, the painted image is sanctioned and efficacious.

Materiality and exchange are repeatedly made central to the ritual process. Even the spoken mantra is transferred to flowers that are then thrown onto a physical form of the deity. “Mantric” sound—the spoken, sounded sacred syllables are given material reality, and then conveyed to the deity. Sound is made physical, and then made an active agent in the transaction with the divine. It seems that all senses, especially the senses of vision and sound, are repeatedly reinforced and used as moments for the possibility of material and physical exchange.

The proximity of sight, sound and ritual action are highlighted in the specific ritual description. This ritual action first involves attaching mantras, sacred syllables or sacred phrases, onto white flowers through the act of recitation. These flowers then get tossed onto Vajrapāṇi. Here, we are reminded how categories of sound, object and image are malleable, and repeatedly being transmuted in Tantric Buddhism. The spoken word of the mantra is given physicality—attaching the recited words to flowers. These physical words are conveyed onwards, onto Vajrapāṇi: spoken words that can be placed and can be moved.

The end of the verse inscription promises that all these actions—from seeing the painting to reciting mantras and dedicating flowers to Vajrapāṇi—will lead towards the simple accomplishment of the knowledge or awareness mantra (rīgs sṅags). The Rīgs sṅags, or Knowledge Mantra, can either refer to mantra generally, or to one of the three specific types of mantra. Here the reference is more likely to the more general sense of the knowledge mantra as the end goal for all Tantric practitioners, as a description of a desired kind of power, an ability associated with a certain stage in practice.
Mantra is the combination of sounds that communicate the nature of a deity and can themselves be tools to lead to realization. Not only does this passage reference the knowledge that arises from mantra, but a mantra is also featured visibly here in the topmost inscription on this same wall, prominently above the doorway. Mantras serve as conditions for the visualization of a deity, and through repetition serve to realize the specific powers of that deity.\footnote{Sngags, Ranjung Yeshe dictionary online. Accessed August 15 2012.}

So what does the promise of accomplishing the Knowledge mantra imply? Mantras, sacred speech, are a core practice and religious action for Tibetan Buddhists, and their accomplishment bespeaks power and the realization and direct access to deities. Achieving the Knowledge mantra means achieving Tantric transformative power. The verse ends in a summary:

In summary, it is said that one will be able to do all sorts of actions [i.e. upon seeing this painting].\footnote{“mdor na las thams cad byed nus par 'gyur ro zhes gsungs so”}

This reference to a summary (\textit{mdor na}, “in short” or “in conclusion”) is a textual convention used to close a section of text, summarizing the meaning or intent of what has come before. Here, it concludes that it will be possible (\textit{nus}) to perform (\textit{byed}) all sorts of actions (\textit{las thams cad}) as a result of both seeing the painting and performing the ritual. The verse ends by promising that the combination of seeing and of Tantric ritual worship together achieve access to divinity: the deity actualized through mantra. The act of summarizing and the phrase “it is said” (\textit{zhes gzungs so}) serve to remind us that this promise derives from a book text—one of those closed books lining the very walls of this room—from which the passage, its images, and its promises, have all come.

\textbf{A Named Artist}

The closing lines of the inscription provide a source of another kind: the named artist of the painting, a rare enough act for fourteenth-century painting to warrant our close interest. This part of the inscription was not part of the textually cited source, but was added specially to the inscription, a rare but not unprecedented inclusion for Shalu’s fourteenth-century murals.
The attribution to the artist is itself presented in an unusual way, with the words of the Tibetan sentence “This painting of Vajrapāṇi was painted by Sangye Onpo” appearing in larger letters from the rest of the inscription before and after it (fig. 2.18). The words jump off the wall towards the eye, employing larger text to stand out from the rest of the three-line inscription. While some might see these as a potential later addition to the wall, the visibility of the underlying red plumb lines for the writing make it sure that this larger phrase is from the same period as the rest of the inscription.

Just as the inclusion of a painter’s name is rare for Tibetan inscriptions of the fourteenth century, so too is an inscriptive phrase that is given such visual emphasis through larger scale letters. A more common convention of highlighting a name was through the use of red coloured ink, called rubrication, which was the technique used to highlight the name of the textual author Karmapa Rangjung Dorje when his name appears in the final inscription on the outer wall of the circumambulatory passage.218 Situated right at eye level on an unobstructed wall, most (literate) viewers, even those even who did not read the whole inscription, would notice this starkly larger, more prominently displayed phrase jumping out at them.

The name of the artist called here Sangye Onpo (Sangs rgyas On po) is clearly placed at the end of the inscription (fig. 2.18). What can we know about this artist from his name? If it is a proper Tibetan name, then the appellation On could possibly be a misspelling of ‘on, indicating that he came from the Ön region, east of Samye.219 We cannot tell from the name much more about him though—for instance it does not reveal if he is a monk. Although his first name translates to mean “Buddha” this does not

218 For more on this see chapter 3.

219 I thank David Templeman for bringing my attention to this region. Alfonsa Ferrari, Luciano Petech, and Hugh Richardson. "Mk'yen brtse's Guide to the Holy Places of Central Tibet" (Serie Orientale Roma XVI, 1958) locates the district of ‘On about 30 km east of Samye. In the Blue Annals ‘On gets many references. David Templeman, email message to author, May 15, 2013.Go Lotsawa Shonu Pal (‘Gos Lotsâba Gzonnu dpal, 1392-1481), The Blue Annals, ed. George N. Roerich, Asiatic Society Monograph Series v. 7 (Calcutta, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949-53, 1949), 178, 573, 612, 655, 692; Turrell V Wylie, A Place Name Index to George N. Roerich’s Translation of The Blue Annals (Roma: Is. M.E.O., 1957). Templeman also suggested another, though I consider even less likely possibility, that ‘on can also mean “deaf” and so he may have been named “Deaf Sangye.” The problem here is that both the region and the adjective deaf should be spelled ‘on rather than On as here.
necessarily imply a religious role for him—Sangye was (and still is) a common personal name in Tibet. However, since the unusual spelling uses the capitalized, Yig-chen letter spelling of “O” (ཨ) instead of the more expected prefix letter “o” (འ), which are different letters in Tibetan and not normally interchanged, it is also possible that the name is a Tibetan rendering of a Sankrit name, perhaps something like “O na po.” In short, the name presents several possibilities, but tells us little conclusively about the person it references. Most likely, it points to a slightly unusually named Tibetan painter, one of enough prestige to warrant placing his name prominently on the wall, likely a master craftsman.

However, it is worth noting that the placement of this name at the end of the inscription likens the artist to an author or scribe. Though Sangye Onpo is clearly identified as an artist, specifically one who has painted (bris) this painted image (bris sku ’di), the sentence that tells us so has been placed at the end of the long inscription, making it notably different from other occurrences of artists’ names at Shalu. The only other artists’ signatures that appear in the murals of Shalu appear in a very different way—both in wording and its placement on the wall.

In the upper Khorlam surrounding the Prajñāpāramitā shrine, six short inscriptions bear the recurring name of one other artist. In this appearance, the artist’s name is placed atop the lotus throne platform of six Buddha figures. The words are inscribed directly onto the lotus thrones and not separated into page-like inscriptions. These short inscriptions attached to the Buddha thrones state simply: “Painted by Chimpa Sonam Bum.” (mchims pa bsod nams 'bum gyis bris). Placed right in the visual field of the painting, these inscriptions are not part of longer inscriptions below, but instead

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221 This occurs three times, and in three other instances the same name has been even more abbreviated and the inscription states only “Painted by Sonam Bum” (bsod nams 'bum gyis bris).
appear in the paintings themselves (fig. 2.19). This same painter’s name also appears once in the assembly hall.222

In contrast to these other artists’ signatures at Shalu, the inclusion of the artist’s name in the Skin-door shrine appears in a very different context. The artist’s name has been included at the end of this page-like, spatially separated, textual inscription, occurring below the painting. Further, the position of this attribution or signature at the end of the passage to which it is made attendant, places it in a position where we might normally expect to find the name of a scribe. At least two names of scribes appear in the Shalu Khorlam in exactly this position.223 Indeed, the placement and treatment of the artist’s attribution here likens the artist to a scribe—as though an artist’s responsibility for channeling the correct image is like the scribe’s responsibility for copying the correct text.

It was uncommon for artists to be credited and even more specifically cited by name in fourteenth-century Tibet. Yet, this is the second artist to be named overtly in painted inscriptions at Shalu. What necessitated these attributions to an artist for specific paintings? Does the very act of naming artists on mural works demonstrate the rising importance of artists? Does it also serve as a way to differentiate murals, or at least these specific murals, as efficacious icons?

I believe that the inclusion of the artist name could possibly be interpreted by all these possibilities. The project of Shalu’s mural paintings was particularly expensive, lengthy, and complex, and it possibly required some intellectual justification to its public. The particularly lavish and detailed nature of the Shalu paintings may also contribute to this desire to credit particular masters among the painters. In overtly claiming a religious function for seeing murals, the individual artist also becomes important as he becomes an


223 Two such scribal “signatures” appear in the inscriptions of the Khorlam Chenmo narratives, one below the inscription of jātaka story number thirty-four, and the other at the end of story one hundred and one, which is the life of Śākyamuni. At the end of story thirty-four the last line of the inscription reads “Rinchen Sakya himself wrote this” (Rin chen Sakya bdag gis bris he); and following the colophon, the final inscribed panel at the very end of the Khorlam, the last line reads “The scribe is called Snar thang pa slob ston btra shis” (yi ge pa ni snar thang pa blo ldan bka shis zhes grags so). So in these two examples from Shalu we see the placement of scribal attributions at the end of similarly rectangular inscriptions panels.
author of images that possess transformative power for the viewer. These passages were selected for their arguments about images, specifically paintings, as powerful objects that produce results. The artist, after all, is an important source for the image’s potency and efficacy. Sources through which teachings were transmitted were immensely important in Tibetan Buddhism, where reciting lineages of teaching transmission was a necessary part of learning any new teaching. The act of attribution and traceable lineages connected to Indian sources, and by extension to the Buddha, were the core of Butōn’s editing processes. The named artist is here functioning like a lineage source through which the image is passed on to the viewer.

The attribution to the artist contains another unusual aspect: that the artist is made responsible specifically for the image of Vajrapāṇi but not for all the others on the wall. The inscription specifically stipulates that he painted “this image of Vajrapāṇi” (“phyag na rdo rje'i bris sku ’di/ sangs rgyas on pos bris”), yet Vajrapāṇi is not the most prominent image on the wall here in either compositional arrangement or size (fig. 2.12). The main images of the wall consist of a large triad centred on a Buddha (probably Maitreya fig. 2.11), flanked by Vajrasattva on the left (fig. 2.20) and Śiva and Parvati on the right (fig. 2.21).224 The specific image of Vajrapāṇi appears not central but subsidiary to these, occupying a smaller space above and to the right, flanking the doorway (fig. 2.12, 2.7).

The image of Vajrapāṇi appears in an unusual way as a four-armed peaceful bodhisattva—unusual since we more often see Vajrapāṇi in Tibetan art in a fierce or wrathful form. This peaceful Vajrapāṇi is four-armed, dark blue in colour, sitting in the lotus position, holding a vajra in front of his chest (fig. 2.12). His two upper arms hold small golden staffs. So why would the inscription cite an artist as specifically responsible for this smaller, non-central image, when he might have as easily been made responsible for all the paintings? Was this iconography particularly special or unusual and thus required attribution? Was this painting done with any closer attention to detail? Was this one painting really the only one that was painted by a master artist alone?

224 I thank Christian Luczanits for advice about this iconography of these figures. Christian Luczanits, email message to author, January 23, 2013.
None of these seem plausible in the context of what we know of Tibetan mural production. Tibetan mural painters worked in workshop groups, and we should assume several artists of a workshop worked together on this, and all the walls.\textsuperscript{225} Labour tasks were often divided among artists of varying skills and experiences: master artists would draw outlines and faces, and other artist-craftsmen might fill in colours or complete other decorative details, elements like clouds and scarves.\textsuperscript{226} While this image of Vajrapāṇi is certainly beautifully drawn, it does not outstrip the other paintings of the wall in its draftsmanship. Indeed, the shape of Vajrapāṇi’s face and ornaments are overwhelmingly similar to those on the other iconic figures painted here, making it unlikely that just this one image was drawn by this master artist while others were not.

Instead this attribution connecting one specific image to the named master artist may have more to do with the relation to the textual source quotation, or the literate scribe, or the fact that possibly this enlarged phrase really was written by the artist, while the rest of the verse was not. One hint at this possibility comes from the obvious spelling error that has been made in the line, which was poorly corrected. The word for “image”, \textit{sku}, was first written in the fine large script without the superscribed Tibetan letter \textit{sa}, making it \textit{ku}. The spelling of \textit{sku} is not particularly difficult or unusual, and this spelling mistake on a word that seems so pedestrian may make it more likely that someone with very little Tibetan literate knowledge or spelling added these lines—perhaps even the artist himself.

Another explanation for the focus on Vajrapāṇi, and a line added by an artist without good reading or writing skills, would then be the relationship of this line to the text before it. Most simply, in the quoted passage, the line about the artist was an addition composed for the wall itself. The person who composed this line, a scribe or religious overseer of these paintings, may have been taking as their departure point the immediate

\textsuperscript{225} We can assume this was relatively similar to practices at sites like the Buddhist caves at Dunhuang, where “collaborative, time-demanding” work was done by “painting ateliers” as described by Sarah Elizabeth Fraser, \textit{Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia}, 618-960 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 6.

\textsuperscript{226} For instance, it is clear that when great Tibetan painters like the fifteenth century Sman bla don grub painted murals, he did so as a leader of a group of painters. David Paul Jackson, \textit{A History of Tibetan Painting}, vol. Nr. 15, Beiträge Zur Kultur- Und Geistesgeschichte Asiens (Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 114.
last image that was mentioned in the passage, namely the Vajrapāṇi of line two instead of the image of the Tathāgata mentioned in line one. Perhaps it was simply that more specificity was desirable, and key to attributing and explaining the power of image.  

Image: Exchanging Merit as Topic and Action

The exchange of worship for its resulting merit underlies the whole inscription and, indeed, all the images of the wall. There are two main claims made in the inscription before the artist is credited. The first is an overt statement about what happens when “anyone sees the characteristics of the Tathāgata’s painting.” This is itself interesting because the painted image is important specifically because it has correct characteristics, an overt statement about the importance of correct iconography and iconometry. The rest of the inscription though is concerned with describing actions that result from vision: “immediately seeing this, ninety-nine million Tathāgatas will give that person attainments and assemblies of gods and goddesses will also give attainments.” In short, sight brings gifts, and these gifts are delivered by innumerable other actors.

The last line is a simple and common dedicatory wish: “May all things be auspicious!” (bkra shis par gyur dge’o). This dedicatory wish is a reminder of an ultimately symbolic, protective and even additionally apotropaic function for the text here. The wall text is represented here physically so as to be sounded out, produced, and enacted in space, not merely read. By simply being here, whether it is read or not, it does its work. For the artist, the scribe, the viewers, the temple, the gods, the world, auspiciousness is a convenient catchall expression of well wishes for all. This dedicatory verse is on behalf of all, and made in a future tense: “May all things be auspicious!” This

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227 The last line of inscription also closes with a lone letter “da” placed after the name of the artist it has provided. I am not able to offer any reason for the inclusion of one clear lonely letter “da” at a distance from the rest of the verse at its close, this might be an emphatic closing expression, a possible reference to a section or chapter using the eleventh letter of the Tibetan alphabet, or just some much more random addition (testing the brush? A later addition?).

228 “de bzhin gshegs pa bya ba phrag dgu bcu rtsa dgus dngos grub rtsol bar mdzod rig pa mchog pho nya ma’i tshogs dang bcas pas kyang dngos grub byin par ’gyur ro”

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activates the wall in its apotropaic function—whether read, seen, or simply by being present, this line continually wishes for auspiciousness to arise.

In conclusion the inscription of the left side of the wall does several important things. It first of all directly refers to the act of seeing paintings and to seeing paintings on the subjects that are here depicted. It significantly talks about viewing religious paintings as a means for spiritual accomplishment, promising extraordinary benefits in both the present and the future to all who see them. It further refers to itself as a textual excerpt in several places and ways, even once providing the name of the text from which it came. It gives key and rare historical information, and even attributes one specific painting to a named artist.

**The Deity Paintings of Avalokiteśvara and Amoghapāśa as Exchange**

The images of Avalokiteśvara show the deity beautiful in form and countenance, and apparitional in both space and time. He is surrounded by a swirling aureole of rainbow light that connotes a movement forward and demonstrates the magical qualities of the divine space made up of refracted light. He makes direct eye contact with all viewers, looking out to his audience, being available to their sight and returning his divine gaze to the viewer. The inscribed passage about Avalokiteśvara recounts the many powerful effects of seeing this painting. It further explains that the painting has provided a direct sight of the deity, which in turn has the power to benefit everyone and expiate all negative karma. It importantly collapses not only space, but also time, as the act of seeing the painting of a seated Avalokiteśvara atop his Potala mountain-paradise is thus also the beginning of a cycle that will end with the viewers’ paradisical rebirth after their current life. A transformation, naturally effected by seeing, has already occurred, and its fruits, we are told, are being experienced here and now, and will continue well into the future.

In this context, the inscription has made an explicit argument about the value of religious paintings on the wall. Sight itself is a necessary religious action, an action that invariably produces merit for viewers. Seeing this painting affords immediate access to the deity in his palace. The selected text frames this sight as a preparation for the death to come, when Avalokiteśvara, who having been seen once so directly, will enable the devotee’s rebirth in paradise. The inscription promises viewers that by seeing this
painting, both present perfection and a future in paradise will be theirs. The painting has thus also made that specific future promise—the moments aft—tangible here and now. Standing in front of the deity now is the scene that awaits you.

This inscription names the necessary elements of the painting above it. The inscription speaks of Avalokiteśvara, and he is painted on the wall twice. The larger painting, the one that occupies most of the wall above the inscription and is most directly related to the inscription, depicts a maṇḍala arrangement of subsidiary deities below a complex form of three-faced and four-armed Avalokiteśvara seated atop the stylized mountain that represents his Potala paradise (fig. 2.22). The mountain is rendered in the stylized form of early Pāla Indian and Nepalese Licchavi prototypes—as stylized geometric vertical overlapping registers with some linear delineations within them. The palette here is softened by the unusual addition of pink to the regular red, blue, white and yellow.

The central deity is a form of Amoghapāśa Avalokiteśvara with four arms and three faces. The frontal face is peaceful while the side two faces are wrathful. He sits with his legs folded in lotus position. The reddened palms of his two lower arms make gestures of gift-giving while the upper arms hold a trident and white lotus respectively. He is beautiful, graceful, bending at the waist in a seated thrice-bent (Skt. tribhanga) posture. His golden ornaments and crown are refined and elegant, and his green scarves, which drape over and cover both shoulders, fall in elegant folds showing an inner golden lining.

Directly to the left of the central seated Avalokiteśvara deity stands another, secondary figure. This is a small red standing Amoghapāśa with four arms, a figure at first easy to miss against the colourful display of rainbow light emanating from the central deity (fig. 2.23). Here the artist has included the small red standing image of Amoghapāśa over the shoulder and to the right of the central image. This figure is placed in association with the maṇḍala of smaller subsidiary figures who appear in the mountain rocks below (fig. 2.22).

This maṇḍala of Amoghapāśa includes also four dikpāla in the sky (fig. 2.24), and four guardian kings at the bottom (fig. 2.25). While the central image of the three-faced Avalokiteśvara could be the deity in paradise described in the text, this image is also
embedded into a seventeen-figure Amoghapāśa maṇḍala. The large-scale format of the wall permits this more elaborate rendition of this maṇḍala mapped onto the tiers of a mountain atop which the deity sits.

Avalokiteśvara is also depicted a second time on the wall, in a simpler iconographic form. This smaller painted image of Avalokiteśvara appears in his own rectangular section on the upper left of this wall and shows a two-armed white Avalokiteśvara, with delicately painted face, simple crown and ornaments, holding the stems of two pink lotuses in his elegantly long fingers (fig. 2.26). Beside him a smaller white female Tara holds a flower in front of her. Compared to the Avalokiteśvara and Amoghapāśa, this figure is smaller, has fewer arms, faces, and less iconographic detail.

**Demonstrating Vision as Material Exchange around Enlightened Beings**

Avalokiteśvara receives active worship from the surrounding celestial beings. Above the large Avalokiteśvara, two small flying *apsarāḥ* descend from the sky to drape flower garlands onto the deity below (fig. 2.27). Observing him requires and necessitates constant gifting: the gifting of sight and the gifting of items such as flowers. Such exchanges also underlie a visit to a temple, where devotees proceeding past the numerous devotional images leave rice, ornaments, money, incense, and butter in the lamps placed before them. Physical and material exchange are important expressions of spiritual devotion, and the celestial beings who pay homage to Avalokiteśvara serve as pictorial models for temple visitors.

The images of the Tathāgata Triad and special image of Vajrapāṇi, similarly thematize vision as exchange. The inscription of that passage promised specifically that seeing paintings results in gifts of attainments, in this case gifts received from a multitude of unseen actors, the ninety-nine million Tathāgatas and assemblies of gods and goddesses described in the passage. Although they have been described as innumerable,

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229 For a modern example of the seventeen-deity Amoghapāśa maṇḍala, see: [http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/58150.html](http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/58150.html). For an example of a seventeen deity maṇḍala to Hevajra, where the inner circle includes eight gods surrounding the central deity, four goddesses in the second circle, and four wrathful gate guardians, see Raghu Vira et al., *Tibetan Mandalas: Vajrāvalī and Tantra-Samuccaya* (New Delhi; Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture ; Aditya Prakashan, 1995), 30–31.
the painting has given them numerical reality as six assembled gods and goddesses, shown as a stacked group of yellow, red and blue-skinned figures to the side of the Tathāgata, each expressing a different stage of devotion through exaggerated physical gesture. These smaller figures are shown variously bowing, kneeling and facing towards the central Tathāgata, at the left side of the painting in a vertical register (fig. 2.28–2.29). The accentuation of their gestures underlines the physicality of their devotional act. Similar to the celestial beings shown with Avalokiteśvara, these deities model the appropriate devotional behavior and serve as surrogates for the “real” painting’s actual viewers.

These small gods may at once be understood to be receiving the promised attainments, as and for the viewer, and also as the channel through which the viewer will receive their attainments, as one of the assembled gods and goddesses who will be delivering those. The concept of attainment as discussed earlier in this chapter, called dngos grub in Tibetan or siddhi in Sanskrit, refers to accomplishments or merits, and can include spiritual powers, faculties or capabilities. These are things, described here as material gifts of a sort, that transform the viewer, the recipient, into something or someone new. In this passage the “attainment” is spoken of also as something physical, something that can be granted and given. It is thus certainly not an abstract idea, and not a cognitive act, but a set of transferable skills that result from physical and material exchange. This attainment is something produced, exchanged, and which produces a change of state in its recipients.

The same themes of physical and material exchange are emphasized throughout the paintings. The issue of a productive exchange of gaze underlies all iconic religious paintings on the wall. The iconic depictions of the Tathāgata, the four armed Vajrapāṇi and both Avalokiteśvara images all stare out at the viewers, available to the reciprocal eye contact between viewer and deity required for the indic religious conception of the exchanged gaze with the sacred (Skt. darśan). The central figures are themselves also located as the subject of gazes and devotional gesture from smaller subsidiary figures, whose smaller scale is essential to connoting a difference in status and expressing a

hierarchy of exchange. Six small gods and goddesses play out various active gestures of worship facing towards the Tathāgata triad (fig. 2.28-2.29) and smaller directional deities face in towards Avalokiteśvara from both sides (fig. 2.24). The depicted relationships between large and small painted figures repeat again and again the importance of the exchanges of gaze, bodily gesture, and material gifts as embodied devotional relationships.

Devotion and observance of the central divinities are themselves depicted as processes of material exchange. In the paintings, the central deities receive and are adorned with material wealth. Elegant floating beings hover above, and from their vases enormous flower buds issue forth (fig. 2.30), beautiful impossibilities of transmuted form and scale. They echo the flying āpsarasā above Avalokiteśvara who swoop down holding garlands of flowers as big as their heads, ready to drape them over the deity (fig. 2.27). Glancing down to the Buddha they serve, they are locked in space and motion. Frozen in this moment of transactional worship, they inscribe in permanent form their observance of divinity, their transactional sight, as one that begets and incorporates gifting. The enlarged flowers at once express the magnitude of their gifts and devotion, and the size of these sprite-like spirits, themselves smaller than flower buds.

So just as the benefits of seeing paintings have been explained as direct and material, the paintings themselves thematize visual materiality—they complete and play with the promise of exchange and the economy of vision and worship. Beyond their textual referents, the paintings also act and influence, showing visual exchange between their figures, the deities, and the viewer. The paintings fulfill the promise of access and provide physical, material attainment in very literally interpreted terms. This room for housing books was thus not only inscribed, but also painted, in order to express to the visitor that the temple experience led to direct, material rewards. Visiting the temple and seeing its paintings was an experience akin to receiving gifts.

**Space and Materiality: The Viewer in the Painting and the Deity in the Room**

The paintings play with space and materiality, depicting and performing physical exchanges with the space and time of their viewers. To achieve this, the paintings employ
visual strategies to make the viewer participant in their imagery. The painted valance at the top of the wall here asserts the space of the deities as a coterminous extension of the room. The painted wall is topped with a tri-coloured textile valance. It hangs down from the ceiling of the room creating a playful trompe-l’oeil illusion (fig. 2.31). This valance expresses the idea that these apparitional deities are just beyond the material space of the very room in which we are standing.²³¹

Furthermore viewers are asked to doubt the hard, fixed materiality of the plaster and paint. The valance hangs down as would the ruffled silks decorating ceiling beams and hanging above and throughout the temple. The painted silk valance even responds to one of the painted deities, and is pulled up and tied over the image of Vajrapāṇi in much the same way a thin silk covering cloth can be gathered up over a tangka painting. It establishes that the deities are so real, so direct, that the materials of the space can and must respond to them.

The painters use other playful optical illusions to comment on reality and produce effects of illusionism. Two powerfully wrathful kneeling figures serve here as the painted door guardians. These figures of white and blue Acala (a meditational deity whose name means the “unmoveable one”) each maintain their appropriate iconographies by kneeling with their left knees to the ground and their right arms extending upwards holding swords threateningly aloft (fig. 2.14-2.15). But the artists here have made a creative choice to further involve the guardians in the physical architectonic space of the room. The guardian to the left of the doorway turns back towards the door, completing his downwards gaze towards the entryway, turning to rest his left hand upon the edge of the doorway (fig. 2.14). His hand rests there, against the doorway supporting it, reacting to it, indicating it. With his index finger pointed ominously upward in a gesture of warning (Skt. tarjanī mudrā), he playfully interacts with the architecturally defined space of the room, activating the very real space of wood, stone and plaster as part of his divine realm.

The transactions of gaze and gesture further weave figures into relationship to the standing viewer. With swords held aloft, the wrathful Acala figures gaze and gesture

²³¹ Painted valances are not unusual for Tibetan mural paintings, and were seen in earlier paintings at Tabo and Alchi. Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom: Early-Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 75 diagram 1.
downwards, towards the open doorway where we, the unwitting humans, have already entered beneath their stare. They see us, indeed they have watched us enter even before we can turn to see them.\textsuperscript{232} These large corpulent figures would easily break the thin framing devices that contain them should they choose to extend an active limb, their flame aureoles and clawed toes already licking irreverently past the dainty yellow borders that attempt to contain them. Their gestures and directed gaze put them into a real physical relationship not only with the space of the room, but also with the human viewer entering below. Invisibly positioned like all-seeing guards in a panopticon, the two Acala figures here together are the ultimate surveillance system, ever watching and weighing those who enter.\textsuperscript{233}

In combination with these inscriptions that specifically thematize seeing paintings as an important process of meritorious exchange, of gift-giving that directly benefits the viewer, this wall shows how artists expressed the power of vision and the power of paintings. Through a series of forceful visual expressions, the painting transforms deities—their own powerful embodiments of enlightened activity—into present, tangible, visible and material beings with whom exchange is possible. The painting also expresses relationships between figures who show devotion both in gesture and through explicit depictions of material exchange. As we stand and look back at the door, our point of entry, we realize that the life-size guardians have allowed our entry to the room and so entreat and protect our entry to the images and the realms beyond the wall. The walls, hung with cloth, dripping with flowers, jewels, flames, and thrones, depict for us what the promise of enlightenment, the intangible and immaterial, looks like in material terms. Vision requires the material just as the mental requires the visual.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{232} Like Lacan’s theory on the gaze, a pleasure which contains the anxiety that one is also visible, these over life-size guardians wield swords and have already viewed, weighed and measured us. They stare directly at us and confront the viewer. Lacan’s concept of the gaze is an anxiety about realizing one is visible, an awareness of objecthood that entails becoming aware that one is also an object. Lacan “The Split between the Eye and the Gaze,”(1964). In Jacques Lacan, \textit{The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis} (London; New York: Karnac, 2004), 73, http://site.ebrary.com/id/10477653.


\textsuperscript{234} There is much more to be said about ways that enlightenment is depicted in and through material excess. As William Blake famously wrote in \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}: “The road of excess leads
Conclusion: The Functions of Painting the Walls in a Room Made for Books

This chapter has argued that the inscriptions were selected to argue for paintings as a source of benefits, and they use their inscribed words to emphasize the immediate and powerful material exchange that seeing paintings produces in a viewer. This was work that was conceptual and scholastic—an individual or individual(s) had mined from the huge corpus of available religious texts two specific and succinct passages about the powers of seeing paintings, and designed with the artists a way that that material exchange through vision could be explained and enacted. This room, painted between 1320 and 1335, must have been designed by the abbot Butön, and perhaps the help of his editorial team, but what is assured is that one or more religious interpretors worked both to locate passages that authorize particular kinds of images (of Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāni, of painted cloths) and also closely with the painters to develop ways to show what this vision-as-exchange looked like. This is not to remove the agency of the artists, as they were also important “author’s of these images too—enough even to warrant recording one of their names here, citing the artist “Sakya Onpo” just as a religious text might cite an author at its end.

There are several important points here. Since the power of the images, and the images themselves, also relate to the books contained in the room, this is an argument about the power of the closed books in this room and the merit they promise. The materiality of this exchange of vision as an exchange of merit is recoded into the images, where vision and worship are depicted as processes of reciprocal exchange between big and small gods, and posited as direct exchange with viewing audience. This wall acts, influences, demands, persuades, and above all, it promises that seeing these paintings, here and now, can, will and has changed its viewer forever.

When this shrine was painted it was a room made to specially house the recently collected words of the Buddha, the Kagyur, which Butön had overseen. As such, it was a room consciously designed to hold books, and the paintings act to express the power of

their contents. The two walls that did not house the great bookshelves were painted with images that emerged and were authorized by texts, and which also borrowed visually from cloth painted models. The South wall was painted with the iconic five Buddhas, the foundational maṇḍala of the Yoga Tantras writ large. The North wall was painted to make explicit claims about the power of seeing paintings. Two carefully selected and edited textual passages were chosen for inclusion on the wall, and were arranged like horizontal pages of text along the bottoms of the images.

The wall makes an argument for the importance of paintings, promising gifts that can be obtained in the present and will be useful in the future. Equations between sight, contact and gift-giving are shown repeatedly. The paintings were authorized by texts, and the texts were also then celebrated in and through paintings.

Of course we should not assume that most viewers could, or did, actually read these inscriptions. It is likely that in the fourteenth century only a fraction of even the monastic community was fully literate. Yet the placement of the lines and their visibility, the explicitness of their promises, and the brevity of the redacted texts, mean that some literate viewers to the room certainly would have read them. In the context of this room—on the ground floor and the first of the shrine rooms that a visitor would enter—we can also imagine an attendant monk, a keeper of the lamps in the room, reading and interpreting the inscribed passage for someone else.

But reading was not required from the wall. For the experience of reading was also being substituted with the experience of looking. Books were materially and conceptually present as devotional items in the fourteenth-century shrine room. The closed texts held in this room were a huge set of books, physically present, yet their contents were largely inaccessible to most visitors and residents of the temple and

\[\text{235} \quad \text{We can safely assume that the literate population also meant those who had received monastic education and training. It is sometimes estimated that as much as 25\% of the male population of pre-modern Tibet were monks, and therefore at least partially literate. Donald S. Lopez, “The Monastery as a Medium of Tibetan Culture,” Cultural Survival Quarterly Spring, no. 12.1 (1988), http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/the-monastery-a-medium-tibetan-culture. For historically low rates of literacy in Tibet see Ajit S. Bhatta, Shufang Qiu, Poverty And Inequality Among Chinese Minorities (London: Routledge, 2006) 78. A. S Bhatta and Shufang Qiu, Poverty and Inequality among Chinese Minorities (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 78. Kapstein argues that Tibetan literacy from the tenth century onwards was increasingly tied to Buddhism, meaning also that Buddhist clerics made up by and large the entirety of the literate Tibetan population. Matthew Kapstein, The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 12.}\]
monastery. Though the room was made to store them, they were likely then, as now, simply placed there wrapped, bound, and closed. The painted images that worked with words and as words offered visual explanations of what divine access looked like.

This argument for paintings, made through recourse to the written word, appears here, at the entry point to the only ground level shrine room that was added as part of the large temple renovation of the early fourteenth century. Indeed the mural decorations of this whole renovation repeatedly show an extreme preoccupation with textually associated image-making, and an elliptical, dialectic process of illustrating words through images that then are again explained in words. The room for books at Shalu was made at a time when book projects, like the editing and organization of the Kagyur and Tengyur, were at the very centre of Shalu’s religious life under the supervision of Butön. Clearly, for Butön the production of wall paintings was an opportunity to express the power of the new textual sets on which he and his many editors and scribes were working.

Paintings were called upon to play a role in mediating and accessing the contents of texts, making their promises seem attainable. Paintings could be bolstered and supported by texts, and so too, texts could be enlivened by exciting images in murals. Self-advertising and self-promoting, the wall of the Kagyur Lhakhang used pictorial and textual means to argue for what paintings can do simply by being seen, thus also making a clear statement of the importance and necessity of temples. Together the paintings and inscriptions use metaphor, physical immediacy, and demonstrations of exchange to communicate the powerful importance of seeing as a religious act. In so doing, they stake a claim for the purpose of the temple where pilgrims are reminded to visit often and come bearing gifts.

The wall paintings argue for, and celebrate, both themselves and the temple that houses them. Why was such explicit rhetoric necessary? I believe that the evidence from Shalu demonstrates how painted images and temples were being called upon to mediate access to Tibet’s religious book culture—a largely elite cultural form—and the wider public sphere in which it relied for its existence. As the temple of Shalu was renovated and re-decorated in the early fourteenth century, lavish paintings alongside lengthy textual inscriptions expressed the contents of texts now, ironically, largely inaccessible. These texts had been rendered inaccessible in the space to both a mostly illiterate
population, and further even to the literate resident monks whose book collections were stored, closed, in this room. The literary and the visual combined could promise at least one idealistic approach to the dissolution and non-opposition of these elite/non-elite formations: with painted public religious images providing one possible site for this hierarchical breakdown.\textsuperscript{236} The power of the institution was being forged in relation to the conceptual organization of religious texts. This wall, whose paintings and words describe and make attainments available through immediate sight, made the merit of textual collections relatively experiential, attempting to substitute, at least for some viewers, seeing for reading.

\textsuperscript{236} Matthew Kapstein writes “… it would be an error to insist upon driving too deep a wedge here between adepts and scholars, or between elite and nonelite cultural formations. Tibetan religious culture… sought to affirm an ideal that mended the former divide, so that although there was real and sustained opposition, it was an opposition that in principle and in practice was regularly dissolved.” Kapstein, \textit{The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism}, 19.
Chapter Three: The Book on the Walls: Authors and Intentions

In the previous chapter we located in a shrine a mural that excerpted for inscription two specific textual passages about the power of seeing paintings and illustrated these same ideas about vision through its paintings. I argued that this space was designed to house books; and the paintings were made as intentional substitutes for the experience of reading. In this chapter, we find at Shalu an even more explicit example of an opened and illustrated book, which was painted into the long circumambulatory passage of the ground floor in the 1340s. Into the great circumambulatory passage (called the skor lam chen mo) people moved in walking circuits around the temple’s unseen sacred contents, and on its outer wall, this chapter will show that one particular book was painted as both word and image, and hence made traversable.

During the fourteenth-century renovations, the long and fully enclosed circumambulatory passage, called very literally in Tibetan a skor lam or “encircling path,” was built around the shrines of Shalu’s first floor. This tall passage was unusually long and narrow, with an interior space nearly six meters high and only two meters wide. The passage would not have been completely dark, since it was illuminated by irregularly placed windows cut into the wall, but the space was nonetheless quiet and dim and constructed so that visitors could walk around the temple’s unseen sacred relic halls contained within the corridor’s expansive footprint. The passage proceeded off the assembly hall, and encircled the four main shrines of the ground floor, providing a quiet, enclosed, interior space for circumambulation. Such a large, enclosed circumambulatory was an unusual architectural addition, and was likely an architectural strategy considered necessary to add both support and strength to the lower buildings. It was after all an earlier structure that after the renovation this whole upper level of new shrines had been added to, and all of these had their own heavy wood and tile roof structures as well. Architecturally the passage also served to unify the disparate spaces of the earlier temple into a new whole (see images in chapter 1). Further, it provided the wall space for the most literal visual interpretation of a book writ large at Shalu.
Tibetan visitors to the temple today often visit the circumambulatory passage first before proceeding to the four inner shrines on the ground floor. This passage is painted in exquisite detail, its outer wall being covered with narrative scenes of the Buddha’s former lives (Skt. jātaka) and its inner wall painted with a repeated Buddha pattern (fig. 3.1). The topic of jātaka, the Buddha’s previous lives before he was born as Siddhārtha Gautama, were a new narrative subject for Tibetan art when it was produced at Shalu. Specifically, the walls of the passage depict an important new book, a contemporary collection made by the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339), entitled The Life Stories of the Buddha (Sangs rgyas kyi skyes rabs). This text was a new collection of former life stories, texts that had previously been translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, but which were now being collected together into a new whole.

The book painted here, the Karmapa’s new collection, was a book he had recently authored in 1314.\(^{237}\) It was featured on the walls of the Shalu circumambulatory passage as both image and text.\(^{238}\) This choice of subject showed the karmic ascent of the bodhisattva, thus inscribing the physical walking path of the temple visitor with the karmic path that the Buddha himself had traversed across many lifetimes. The colophon passage added by the Tibetan author and compiler at the end of the passage explains the collection as a logical completion of a formerly incomplete set. The rhetoric of the complete set, and the Tibetan author’s ability to create an effectively complete set, was manifestly expressed here as both text and visual image.

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\(^{237}\) The text has been dated thanks to the research and translation efforts of Ruth Gamble, who translated a passage giving the date of composition for this text as 1314. This date of composition is stated at the end of Song number 58 from Rangjung Dorje’s mgur ’bum, a line that conclude with: “He sung this when he had finished composing the Hundred Jātaka Tales of the Buddha in bKra shis gsar ma, on the fifth day of the second month of the tiger year [1314].” Ruth Gamble, “The View from Nowhere,” 227, 368.

The importance of these paintings cannot be overstated. These are some of the most visually marvelous and detailed paintings at Shalu, and the largest among sets of narrative mural paintings in all of Tibetan art. The long, tall, narrow passage of over one-hundred-and-ten meters in length is painted in exquisite detail. Furthermore, this painting cycle was the first systematic representation of the Buddha’s former lives in Tibetan art. While earlier narrative subjects included depictions of the final life of the Buddha as Śākyamuni or the Pilgrimage of Suddhana from the Gaṇḍavyūha sutra, the jātakas themselves were, until their fourteenth-century depiction at Shalu, not a common subject for representation in Tibetan art. This seems surprising, given that the jātaka stories had figured so prominently in the early Buddhist art of South, Central and East Asia at all the famous sites like Bharhut, Sanchi, Ajanta, and Dunhuang. Yet in the art of late Indian Tantric Buddhism as it was transmitted to Tibet, the Jātakas did not figure prominently. Thus, the subject had little impact on or appearance in Tibetan art before the explosion of imagery at Shalu.

So we must also analyze the emergence of the images in the context of a new literary interest in the genre of former life stories itself. In this regard, the choice to represent these specific jātakas at Shalu may also be related to emergent ideas about the rebirth and lineal institutions that embraced it. Specifically, the author of this Tibetan collection of jātakas, the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, picked the subject for its

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239 Both these narrative subjects are painted at Tabo, see Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom: Early-Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 120–133.

240 This assertion is based on partially surviving art historical records of the standing Tibetan temple sites built prior to the fourteenth century and known pre-fourteenth-century tangka paintings. This of course could one day be disproven by a new discovery. Yet among the existing art historical evidence, we have no painted depictions of jātakas per se in Tibetan art before Shalu. The near exception is the inclusion of details like the story of the starving Tigress, the first jātaka story of Āryasūra’s set, which was featured on the twelfth-century dhoti of one of a standing colossal Maitreya figure in the temple at Mangyu in the Western Himalayas. Rob Linrothe has written about the five scenes painted onto the textile designs of the dhoti that together represent the jātaka of the tigress (Vyāghri jātaka). Yet it is clear that the textual association of these scenes is probably reliant on the Gaṇḍavyūha/Suvarnaprabha Sutra, where the story of the Tigress is also included among Maitreya’s reflections on his previous lives. Rob Linrothe, “Skirting the Bodhisattva: Fabricating Visionary Art,” Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centraasiatiques et Tibétaines, no. 42 (December 1, 2011): fig. 18–21, 24, 25, doi:10.4000/emscat.1803. Also, some jātaka scenes may appear in the carved wooden lintels at the Jokhang, though this warrants scrutiny, particularly as to which are represented. Alexander, André, and Matthew Akester, "The Lhasa Jokhang—as the world's oldest timber frame building in Tibet?" (Webjournal on Cultural Patrimony, 2006: 145-76.) 159.
particular appeal and usefulness at this moment. In the early fourteenth century, Tibetan
lineages, and particularly the Karmapas own lineage within the Kagyu were
institutionalizing reincarnation in a new and significant way that Tibet had never before
seen, and which would become hugely important in future centuries. Specifically,
Rangjung Dorje, the author of this collection, was the first lama to be recognized and to
claim he remembered his life as his earlier incarnation, as the Second Karmapa Karma
Pakshi (1203/04-1283).242

Reincarnation was always a fundamental underlying belief informing Buddhism,
yet this was the first time that reincarnation was used in the service of political continuity
and the explicit inheritance of property.243 In Rangjung Dorje’s case, the lineage, titles,
and their attendant wealth and land investitures were explicitly passed through what were
being claimed as reincarnated lineal lines. In fact, reincarnation was about to become an
important political reality for Tibetan lineages from this time on, and the Karmapa
Rangjung Dorje was actively involved in making claims himself. In her study of his life
and work, Australian Tibetologist Ruth Gamble shows how Rangjung Dorje used the
Jātakas as a model for a short work he composed which included descriptions of his own
earlier lives; and he also wrote life stories of earlier lineage holders and the first two
Karmapas. Gamble shows that the jātakas were an adaptable form for the Karmapas, and
more specifically were used as models for their own reincarnation and life stories.244

Epic and historical narratives had a special appeal throughout the wider Mongol
realms, and it is possible that the renewed interest in jātaka literature was one of Tibet’s
specific iterations of this wider interest. In Mongol-ruled Iran from the thirteenth century
on, artistic patronage became almost entirely focused on the production of illustrated

241 Rangjung Dorje himself was the first teacher to directly claim to be a direct reincarnation of his lineal
predecessor. Turrell V. Wylie, “Reincarnation: A Political Innovation in Tibetan Buddhism,” in
Proceedings of the Csoma de Kőrös Memorial Symposium Held at Mátrafüred, Hungary, 24-30 September,

242 Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story
and Songs,” 40–43.

243 Ibid., 111.

244 Ibid., 40–43.
historical epics like the *Shahnama*, or the Book of Kings. This overt confluence of an expanded political realm and a renewed interest in representing historical narratives in art is suggestive, and resonates with its sudden appearance of the jātaka theme here in the Tibetan context.

The choice to represent these specific one hundred jātaka stories and paint them in exhaustive detail on the walls at Shalu was made within a constellation of religious, political and social factors. First and foremost among these, the choice was made to represent a particular, recent, Tibetan-authored book. This contemporary collection of tales presented itself not as a straightforward translation of Indian sources, but as a reflection of the Tibetan lama Rangjung Dorje’s capacity to carefully edit and organize a previously disparate group of texts into a logical, useful, sequence—a project conceptually close to the activities undertaken at Shalu in these same years. Indeed, the visual presentation of the book on the walls highlighted the planning and organization of the stories, their conceptual organization into sets of ten, their regularized lengths (at least for inscription), and their progress towards the final story of Śākyamuni.

Other reasons to choose these jātakas at Shalu must also relate to their basic appeal and potential for artistic representation. In contrast to other available religious subjects, the jātakas were morally didactic, visually rich, and easily accessible to the larger audiences that the temple hoped to influence. These stories opened up unprecedented possibilities for painting rich landscapes and visual pleasures: the machinations of royal courts and worldly dramas played out in them. This was a showcase for some of the most talented artists, assembled from far and wide.

There was also a utility to placing these narratives—a form foregrounding sequence, causality, and themes of the everyday—in a space meant for lay circumambulation. In earlier Indian and Tibetan temples, sequential narratives like the life of Śākyamuni were often featured around circumambulatory spaces. The linear

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sequence of narrative was found to be conducive to these passage spaces, where people were expected to traverse them in a set (clockwise) direction. Furthermore, narratives could encircle and contain sacred spaces, and stories could hold together the spaces and shrines of a temple. Indeed, since the earliest Indian Buddhist art at stūpa sites like Sanchi and Bharhut, dating back to the first century BCE to the first century CE, narratives of the life of the Buddha and scenes of the jātakas had been the major iconographic subjects represented on the stūpa drums, railings and gate crossbeams, which were also spaces for circumambulation.\textsuperscript{247} Indeed, it seems that narrative was common in entries, external passages, and spaces that encircle.\textsuperscript{248}

Both the inner and outer walls of the tall narrow passage were painted. The inner wall of the circumambulatory passage was painted with a repeating pattern of the thousand Buddhas. These Buddhas were painted in five colours sitting against red pillows. Towards the end of the passage, the Buddhas have names inscribed in cartouches below them (fig. 3.1), although many of these inscriptional spaces remain blank.\textsuperscript{249} These Buddha paintings represent an organized set of devotional images equivalent to the organized set of stories. Here, this expansive set of deities is regularized and arranged in rows and registers, and these depictions of the thousand Buddhas of the aeon are placed on the right side of a person circumambulating the passage clockwise. During circumambulation, these repeating Buddhas were on the right side of a devotee, the side appropriate to devotional objects. Viewing and touching these images were certainly important avenues for receiving merit, which was the goal of the devout. In contrast to the paintings of the inner wall, the paintings and stories of the outer walls are in a non-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{248} Understanding the placement of narrative art in relation to other religious spaces and themes in Tibetan temples more broadly, and perhaps in historical survey, would be a fascinating subject for further investigation. This idea emerges from the kinds of studies like the important study of Renaissance Italian narrative art and how and where it was placed within monuments. Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, \textit{The Place of Narrative: Mural Decoration in Italian Churches, 431-1600} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).
\item \textsuperscript{249} The names of some of the thousand Buddhas are inscribed at the end of the hallway, in cartouches below them, but not at the beginning.
\end{itemize}
devotional position, and so are both expected and able to be more didactic than devotional in their content.

While both inner and outer walls of the passage were painted, they were not necessarily painted at the same time. Indeed, as I argue in chapter 1, there is good reason to believe that the inner wall of the circumambulatory passage was painted before the outer walls. The passage was built around earlier shrines, and it seems the theme of the thousand Buddhas was already painted on the exterior of the freestanding twin shrines. Paintings on walls that were once exterior along both the south and north of the twin shrines preserve this (fig. 1.12). Thus after the construction of the great circumambulatory passage some of the walls were already painted, particularly the exterior west wall of the conjoined shrines, and the rest of the new walls contiguous with these paintings would have required painting first. Yet the painted jātakas of the exterior wall facing these were, I feel, most likely not painted until after their author’s death in 1339, placing them in the 1340s. The absence of any contact between Rangjung Dorje and Shalu mentioned in the records of either, and the fact that in his own autobiographic works he does not mention the project at Shalu makes it to me seem very probably that these jātaka story paintings and inscriptions were added after Rangjung Dorje’s death in 1339.

The Chosen Book: Collecting Narratives from Ancient India in Contemporary Tibet

The book that was painted on the walls of Shalu’s circumambulatory passage was a hybrid book by two authors whose lifetimes were separated by over a thousand years, and who lived in India and Tibet. The book, Rangjung Dorje’s compilation Life stories of the Buddha (Sangs rgyas kyi skyes rabs), or The Tantra of Previous Life stories (Skyes pa’i rabs kyi rgyud), was a compilation that began with an Indian collection and then claimed to “complete” it.250 For this collection, the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje

250 The title of the book is given alternatively as Life Stories of the Buddha in his collected works and The Tantra of Previous Lives in the colophon inscription at Shalu.
expanded on the Sanskrit text, known as the Indian *Jātakamālā*, a collection of thirty-four former life stories by the fourth-century Indian poet Āryaśūra. Āryaśūra’s text was translated in its entirety into Tibetan and then “completed” by the fourteenth-century lama Rangjung Dorje with the addition of a further sixty-seven stories, creating a linked collection of one hundred stories leading up to the penultimate life, the one hundred and first story of the life of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

Āryaśūra, called Pa bo (*dpa ’bo*) in Tibetan (meaning “hero”), was a fourth-century Indian poet about whom we do not have much information.\(^{251}\) Later Tibetan literature says that he was once a prince who, like Śākyamuni, abandoned the palace and became a monk, although this cannot be verified.\(^{252}\) In Tibetan sources he is a figure around whom some confusion swirls: Tāranātha conflated Āryaśūra with Āśvaghoṣa in his 1608 *History of Buddhism in India*.\(^{253}\) While five works are attributed to him in the Tibetan *Tanjur*,\(^{254}\) most of these other attributions are dubious.\(^{255}\) Among his attributed works, his *Garland of Life Stories*, or *Jātakamālā*, was his most famous work.

The Sanskrit *Garland of Life Stories* was a work in which pre-existent folk tales were adapted into a text of high classical courtly-style Sanskrit. These were stories from the vast sea of known tales of the Buddha’s past lives,\(^{256}\) and these adhered closely to


\(^{255}\) In particular, Carol Meadows argues that doctrinal divergences between two texts attributed to him, the *Jātakamālā* and the *Pāramitāśamāsa*, imply different authorship. Carol Meadows and Āryaśūra, “Ārya-Śūra’s Compendium of the Perfections: Translation and Analysis of the Pāramitāśamāsa” (Columbia University, 1978).18f.

\(^{256}\) There are over 500 jātaka stories known in the Pali canon. K. R. Norman, *Pāli Literature: Including the Canonical Literature in Prakrit and Sanskrit of All the Hinayāna Schools of Buddhism*, vol. 7, History of
explaining the first three perfections of generosity (dāna), virtue (śīla) and forbearance (ksānti). Since these three perfections were more suited to householders than monastics, it has been suggested that the text may have been intended to serve as instruction for the laity.\(^{257}\) This literary gem was written in an elaborate campū poetic style, which combined mixed verse and prose.\(^{258}\) As a Sanskrit text it was refined poetry, characterized by a variety of poetic meters, a wealth of vocabulary, and numerous sophisticated literary devices.\(^{259}\)

The text was admired immediately in India and abroad, and famed for its beautiful style. Its popularity was likely due in part to its subject matter, including stories of dramatic intrigue and ultimate sacrifice leading to death. Its popularity was evident in its almost immediate translation into a topic ripe for artistic depiction. The Jātakamālā stories of Āryaśūra were made the subject for some fifth-century cave paintings at Ajanta,\(^{260}\) as well as an extended program of stone carvings from the eighth century at Borobodur in Indonesia.\(^{261}\) Yet despite its popularity and fame in South and Southeast Asia centuries earlier, it was, before its depiction at Shalu, not depicted in Tibetan art.

This is somewhat surprising, since this Indian literary work already had a presence in Tibet. The Jātakamālā was one of six core treatises for the Kadampa (Bka’ gdam pa) school, the lineage established by Dromtön (‘Brom ston, 1004-1064) the chief disciple of the eleventh-century Bengali master Atiśa. The set of thirty-four jātaka stories authored by Āryaśūra was translated into Tibetan in the eleventh century, and was one of

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\(^{258}\) Āryaśūra, *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*, xvi.


\(^{260}\) Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 34.

the six texts that were emphasized for study by that school. However, it had evidently not been popular enough to warrant the creation of art on its theme, which is surprising given the early popularity of jātaka tales in art from other parts of the Buddhist world. Yet in Tibet it seems that while the text was read, for about three centuries the jātaka were not a popular topic in art. Rangjung Dorje’s use of the text as the basis for his collection gave it a renewed life and a much-expanded popularity in Tibet. However, the Jātakamālā was not the only text about the Buddha’s former lives that was of interest in Tibet at the time. Ksemendra’s Wish-Fulfilling Vine had been translated from Sanskrit in the thirteenth century and included in Butön’s Tengyur in the 1330s; around 1360, a revised edition of it was sponsored by the lay leader Jangchup gyeltsen (Byang chub rgyal mtshan).

Rangjung Dorje was a hugely influential Lama from the Kagyü lineage (bka’ brgyud), or “Oral Lineage.” He was a prolific scholar and an important teacher both in Tibet and at a teacher of considerable influence at the Mongol court in the 1330s. He was held in high regard at the Mongol court, where he traveled several times to resolve disputes and serve as a religious leader. Tibetologist Turrell Wylie argued that he may have been being groomed to take over as the spiritual head for the Mongols, and that this was one reason he enjoyed particular patronage and support from them throughout his life. He was the first of his recognized lineage to don the black hat, which would come to be a characteristic attribute of his lineage and position.

Born in 1284, he was only a few years older than Butön, and was the first of the Karmapa lineage to be recognized as a direct reincarnation of his predecessor in his own lifetime. He authored many works, including works on “Great seal” (phyag chen, Skt.

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Mahāmudrā), and Tibetan “Cutting through the ego” (gcod), as well as the highest yoga tantras (Anutarayogatantra, bla na med pa’i rgyud).\(^{266}\) His work on Buddha-nature (Tathāgatagarbha) highlighted the conceptual belief, paraphrased by Kurtis Schaeffer, that “because all beings possess the enlightened heart of Buddhahood that they are, but for obscuring defilements, essentially Buddhas.”\(^{267}\) He was also the very first Tibetan author to organize his own set of jātakas.

In the next section I will look at first the inscriptions of the introduction and conclusion which were painted in the circumambulatory passage and which explain the book that is being included here. Both Āryaśūra’s introduction, which Rangjung Dorje preserved in his text, appears in-full at the beginning of the circumambulatory passage, and Rangjung Dorje’s own colophon text appears at the end. These were each transferred to the wall largely unchanged from the textual versions, except for a few minor divergences in spelling from the longer text, showing that the processes of redaction that were used in the visual translation of stories was not necessary or desired in the application of these textual “book-ends” to the walls. These inscribed texts painted as inscriptions at Shalu each warrant a close reading for what they tell us about the intention behind the text and it’s representation.

**Āryaśūra’s Introductory Inscription**

The textual introduction that appears in the murals is not redacted, but reproduces the Tibetan translation of Āryaśūra’s introductory homage in full as it appeared in Rangjung Dorje’s work.\(^{268}\) It does not, however, begin with a possible textual frontispiece that accompanied later printings of Rangjung Dorje’s collection, a page that

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\(^{267}\) Ibid., 1.

briefly explains in the collected works the respective contributions of each of its two authors, though this is an editorial addition that reflects and explains the text in the context of the collected works of the author.\textsuperscript{269} The circumambulatory passage inscription begins just as a Tibetan manuscript of this text would, by listing the title of the text that follows in both languages, Sanskrit and Tibetan (fig. 3.2): In the Indian language: \textit{Jātakamālā}. In the Tibetan language: \textit{The Continuum of Life Stories (kyé pé rap kyi gyū)}\textsuperscript{270} The homage and introduction were kept intact, probably not only to preserve their meritorious meanings but also because it was a simple matter to keep them since they were relatively short texts in comparison to the longer individual stories. The Tibetan phonetic rendering of the Sanskrit title is a direct copy of Āryaśūra’s title, \textit{Jātakamālā}, which in Sanskrit means specifically a garland (mālā) of birth stories or former lives (jātaka). The Tibetan title that follows offers a nearly direct translation of this title, using the term “continuum” for garland (rgyud), also the term used for the general classification of a text as a “Tantra.” This is a reminder that Tantric texts (rgyud) were described as continuums or strings, and distinguished from the words of the Buddha or sūtra (mdo). Though the Tibetan title could then also be read as the “Tantra of life stories,” it is far more likely that the rgyud here was intended only in the sense of a continuum.

This inclusion of two language titles is a conventional beginning of a Tibetan religious manuscript, which always begins with titles first in Sanskrit, then in Tibetan. This is visible in several early manuscripts that were displayed open in the Skin-door shrine in 2009 (fig. 3.3). The inscription follows the title section with another reference to the organization of a book that reads, “The first section” (bam po dang po), before proceeding to a poetic homage that follows. This homage is the Tibetan translation of the

\textsuperscript{269} In the later printed version of the text this frontispiece text reads: “The Garland of Life Stories of the all-knowing excellent teacher. Thirty-four by Sura, later Rangjung Dorje with a further sixty-seven completed the one hundred” (Ston pa thams cad mkhyen pa'i skyes rabs phreng/ bcu phrag gsum dang bzhin ni dpa' bo'i ste/ phyi nas rang byung rdo rjes bdun lhag pa'i/ drug cus brgya rtsa rdzogs par mdzad pa bzhugs/). Rang byung rdo rje, Gsung ‘bum 1, 108.

\textsuperscript{270} rgya gar skad du/ dza ta ka ma la/ bod skad du/ skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud
Sanskrit homage originally offered by Āryaśūra.\textsuperscript{271} From here until the end of story thirty-four, all texts are a direct Tibetan translation from this Sanskrit source. The dedicatory homage reads:

I bow to the Lord Buddha Mañjuśrī.\textsuperscript{272}
I respectfully offer flowers of poetry with cupped hands,
To the incomparable previous lives of the Buddha,
Which are the foundations of auspiciousness, fame, are indisputable,
extremely beautiful and completely hold supreme knowledge.

These exalted signs of becoming (ie. \textit{jātakas}),
Will show all the paths to Buddhahood.
Even the mind of the faithless will become faithful.
By this speech endowed with dharma (all) will become very happy.

In order to make my poetry suitable to listen to
By ones who are the best among worldly beings, and partially noble
I compose (\textit{brtsams}) with complementary text and logic,
Thinking of benefiting sentient beings.

I bow to the Sangha, the Dharma, and the incomparable Buddha
Who is famous for his omniscience, [who is] without error,
Who is unlike some other beings,
Those who only achieve qualities for others in order to benefit themselves.

\textsuperscript{271} For two good translations of the same verse from the Sanskrit see Āryaśūra, \textit{Once the Buddha Was a Monkey}, 3; Āryaśūra, \textit{Garland of the Buddha’s Past Lives}, 2–5.

\textsuperscript{272} The invocation of the specific Buddha of Wisdom, Mañjuśrī, instead of the more common invocation “In homage to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas” that appears in the Khoroche translation of Āryaśūra, was likely an authorial emendation made by Rangjung Dorje. His specific selection of the Buddha of wisdom is more fitting in his context of editing and authoring than to offer the text to all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Compare with Āryaśūra, \textit{Once the Buddha Was a Monkey}, 3.
We must have pure devotion to the Buddha
Because even in his former lives
He had the nature of extreme compassion,
Without the expectation of reward, towards all sentient beings.  

This homage to the Buddha explains in religious terms the author Āryaśūra’s interest in exploring the theme of the Buddha’s former lives. These stories are described as signs or indications of something else, likened to exalted signs of becoming (grags pa'i mtshan mar gyur pa bzang po), which are brought together to demonstrate and teach all the paths to Buddhahood (bde bar gshegs gyur lam rnams). This implies that these paths are various and multiple, and that the study of many different paths can be instructive for others. The lives are thus proposed as models of virtuous action, intended to inspire faith and devotion, to be admired, and perhaps even to be followed. Extolling the deeds of the bodhisattva has the power to convert, making even the minds “of the faithless” become faithful. The aim of inspiring and supporting widespread devotion through this modeling of ideal selfless behaviour is Āryaśūra’s stated goal.

The fact that the lives are also the “foundations” of the Buddha’s fame is symbolically important and useful here, as well. Āryaśūra presents the argument that the stories themselves are like foundations, situated structurally lowest in the meaning-hierarchy of Buddhism, making the often-used metaphorical association between Buddhist teachings and built structures. As foundations, the stories are structures upon which other systems and beliefs rest. They are thus accessible, supportive and useful. They are foundational because they are didactic and easily understood, and are important

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273 bcom ldan 'das ngag gi dbang phyug la phyag 'tshal lo; dpal ldan yon tan dam pas yongs bzang bkra shis pa/ /grags pa'i gzhir gyur ma rmad shin tu yid du 'ong/ /thub pa'i sku tse snga ma'i sphyod pa rnam byung rnam/ /bdag gi snyan ngag me tog snyim pas gus par mchod/ /grags pa'i mtshan mar gyur pa bzang po 'di rnam kyis/ /bde bar gshegs gyur lam rnam gang yin bstan par 'gyur/ /yid la dad pa med pa rnam kyang dad par 'gyur/ /chos dang ldan pa'i gtam gyis rab tu dga' bar 'gyur/ /jig rten mchog gi sphyod pa dam pa'i phyogs tsam gyis/ /bdag gi snyan dngags mnyan du rung bar bya ba'i phyir/ /lung dang gtsug lag rigs par mi 'gal lam dag gis/ /de ltar 'jig rten don 'gyur snyam nas 'di brtsams so/ /rang don brtson pas gzhan don brtson pa gang yin pa'i/ /yon tan sgyub pa bzang po'i rjes su mthun ma gyur/ /thams cad mkhyen ces brjod pa ma nor gsal bar grags/ /mnyam med de dang chos dang dge 'dun spyi bos 'dus/ bcom ldan 'das de sku tse snga ma la'ang sems can thams cad la rgyu med par rab tu byams pa'i ngo bo nyid yin pas/ sangs rgyas bcom ldan 'das la sems rab tu dang bar bya'o/
because they have the capacity to explain something as conceptually difficult as enlightenment in ways that more people can understand.

While the stories are meant to be didactic and accessible, it is also clear that the author wants them to be appreciated as beautiful literature, and by “ones who are the best among worldly beings, and partially noble” (ʼjig rten mchog gi spyod pa dam paʼi phyogs tsam). Ārāśūra explains that his words are composed so as to be beautiful, likening them to individual flowers, a fitting metaphor for the larger text being described as a garland, made to beautify and ornament, composed of many flowers strung together.274

His stories are “suitable to listen to” (mnyan du rung ba) because his own speech both follows tradition and is in keeping with logic—he has composed it with “complementary text and logic” (lung dang gtsug lag rigs par mi ’gal). Here lung refers to tradition and scriptural precepts, while rigs pa connotes rational reasoning. The words thus are both correctly following precedents and crafted by the author himself. Being composed by the author with the intention to help others, the act of writing is thus modeled on the Buddha’s own “extreme compassion without the expectation of reward.” In this way, the stories are meant to stir the emotions and have an aesthetic effect on listeners, who the author plans to move and influence both through the stories’ compelling narrative and their beauty.275 Ārāśūra thereby flatters his audience while also extolling the aesthetic qualities of his own work in his homage.

The introductory inscription reproduces in complete form the translated dedication of Ārāśūra as Rangjung Dorje also included it in his text. The inscribed panel, painted in gold ink on black, recalls the first page of a book in its colouring (fig. 3.2). The words it contains spell out clearly the author Ārāśūra’s intention in writing the text, and his intentions were related to providing accessible and persuasive stories that

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274 A comparison of scriptures to flowers was a common metaphor, and even one that Butōn is known to have used, describing himself like a “bee overjoyed with flowers” when he is able to place himself among “these boundless teachings.” Butōn Rinchen drup, Butōn’s History of Buddhism in India and Its Spread to Tibet: A Treasury of Priceless Scripture, trans. Lisa Stein and Ngawang Zangpo, First Edition (Boston & London: Snow Lion, 2013), 5. Interestingly there are also important examples from elsewhere, like the Persian poet Saādi’s famous collection of poems and short stories called the Gulistan (Rose Garden) composed in 1258 CE.

275 For a further discussion of Ārāśūra’s aim at having an emotional and aesthetic effect, see Justin Meiland in Ārāśūra, Garland of the Buddha’s Past Lives, xxv.
would move people to devotion through their clarity, as well as their emotional and aesthetic appeal. It is one of only two inscriptionsal panels in the circumambulatory passage unaccompanied by painted images.

The other inscription unaccompanied by image is the explanatory text that comes at the end of the passage, as it would also come at the end of the book—the colophon from our Tibetan author Rangjung Dorje that appears at the end of the passage. This passage echoes and expands the theme of the didactic power of these narratives, providing further reasons not just to write them in the first place, but explaining the rational to collect them together. In contrast to the Indian author, the Tibetan author clearly states that his complete set of stories provides a usable, organized system.

Rangjung Dorje’s Colophon Inscription

The colophon inscription is the final inscription on the outer wall, located at the end of the passageway. It is placed where the walls have lowered struts and is, like the introduction, also unaccompanied by any painting (fig. 3.4). This colophon was composed by the Tibetan author, the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, and in it, he offers his own dedication and explanation for his textual work. Rangjung Dorje’s colophon picks up on many of the themes established in Āryaśūra’s introductory dedication, particularly around the explanatory power of the jātakas, but he further expands on these to include his own rationale for creating the collection as a whole. He ultimately posits his project as the completion of a formerly incomplete set. This rhetoric of the complete set, and the Tibetan author’s ability to create an effectively completed set, is what the entire painted cycle sought to capture and convey.

Rangjung Dorje begins his colophon by explaining why and how the Jātaka stories are effective teaching aids:

The glorious Buddha’s deeds are vast like the sky. Without bias, they cover everywhere, like the sun. But it is because of individual sentient beings’ karmic connections that they appear as different things. [Like that, the Buddha’s deeds] show the great path of enlightenment, and become beneficial to sentient beings.
They have incomparable great qualities, and demonstrate both worldly activities and world-transcending activities.\textsuperscript{276}

Rangjung Dorje repeats the argument about the illustrative power of the Buddha’s deeds, tying it even more explicitly to the concept of a diverse audience. He specifies that it is because people have different “karmic connections” that there is a need for multiple stories wherein the Buddha appears differently and puts his beneficence into practice in diverse ways. Rangjung Dorje explains that the Jātakas are purposely numerous and different from one another to demonstrate diverse paths to enlightenment for diverse kinds of people. This goes beyond Āryaśūra’s divisions of assumed readers into only two categories: the “faithless” and the “faithful.” Conversely, Rangjung Dorje celebrates the diversity of stories as a necessary treatment for an unspecified but vast diversity of people who may hear and be helped by them.

This invocation of a wide and karmically diverse audience for the stories uses the metaphor of an overarching sunlit sky that has the power to illuminate the whole world. Thus, Rangjung Dorje presents the Buddha’s past lives as global and universally present. Further, they are likened to something natural, likening the author’s role more to revelation than to craft. This is also a change of tone from Āryaśūra, who “composed with complementary text and logic,” whereas Rangjung Dorje reveals the unmediated natural “sunlight” of the stories, changing the relationship posited between the author and his text.

The stories also have value for Rangjung Dorje, because they demonstrate to people and instruct them about actions necessary in this world and beyond it. The distinction between “worldly activities and world transcending activities” (\textit{jig rten 'jig rten 'das pa'i spyod pa}) on which the stories are strongly based (\textit{brtan pa}) expresses his belief, also

\textsuperscript{276} Incription Line 1:/dpal ldan thub pa'i mdzad pa mkha' lta'rgya che la/ /phyogs phyogs bsam pas nyi ma'i dkyil 'khor lta bur snang /de ni tha dad 'phrin las rkyen gyis so sor shar/ /lam mchog dpal ldan brtan cing sens can don gyur pa/ Line 2: /rmad byung mtha' yas yon tan mthu mnga' cig pu'i/ /'jig rten 'jig rten 'das pa'i spyod pa brtan pa dag//.
found in his work on Tathāgatagarbha, that there is a systematized relation between absolute and ordinary human reality. He is thus able to explain methodically “the continuum of existence from ordinary human existence to Buddhahood.” The jātakas demonstrate above all else that even with and through actions in the human world, the bodhisattva became the Buddha. Rangjung Dorje has thus temporally extended the benefits and relevance of the jātakas—they are relevant for this life and beyond it.

This is followed by the specific attribution of the first thirty-four stories to Āryaśūra “All these (stories) the being called Āryaśūra (dPa’ bo) decorated (rgyan pa) with poetry like beautiful flowers. Generosity, discipline, patience and diligence, in thirty-four Buddha life stories he explained these perfections.” Here the author directly credits Āryaśūra, but also implies that his work was incomplete. By referring to thirty-four stories that extol only the first four of a set of ten perfections, Rangjung Dorje is setting up his claim that his own work is a logical completion of the work that Āryaśūra began but did not finish. He borrows and repeats Āryaśūra’s own metaphor likening the stories to flowers, and attributes to the Indian author the power to “decorate” (rgyan pa) them with poetry—a reference to his aesthetic craftsmanship.

He goes on to justify and explain at some length his project of completing the incomplete work in terms of the set of ten perfections (Tibetan: pha rol tu phyin pa bcu, Sanskrit pāramitā). The ten perfections are virtuous qualities that explain the bodhisattva’s ascent to Buddhahood over many lifetimes. He states that the work had been begun but had not completed, further insisting that he alone was equipped for the task:

In India, although many scholars knew the five major sciences of knowledge (gnas

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278 Inscription Line 2: dpa’ bo zhes byas snyan ngag me tog phreng mdzes pas’/brgyan par byas zhes phyogs phyogs kun du gsal bar grags/ sbyin dang tshul khrims bzod dang Line 3: brtson ’grus don ldan pa/ /bcu phrag gsum dang bzhir ni gnas khang der bzhag pa.
na rigs pa), they tried to explain the ocean of poetry (of Buddha’s lives), but their individual wisdom was just like a river, so they could not compete (with Āryaśūra). Further they were cowardly, and gave up in the attempt (to bring all the stories together and explain them). Similarly in Tibet, ones who assume presumptuously that they are scholars, they also could not bring together (these stories). Although the incomparable Āryaśūra did not appear here (in Tibet), he is a poet who was prophesied by the Buddha. By myself, one who during this age of degeneration has strong devotion to the deeds of the bodhisattva and Buddha, and unshakeable devotion to the self-arisen Buddha, with faith strong like the vajra, my own wisdom of poetry comes from the great compassionate Mañjuśrī. I clearly explained sixty-six stories of Buddha’s incomparable deeds, explaining the path of enlightenment, and completing the body of meaning of the religious commentary (on the Buddha’s Jātakas). That is the reason why my hard work/diligence is meaningful, and it is suitable for scholars to rely on them.279

Rangjung Dorje first implicitly criticizes other scholars, both Indian and Tibetan, who have been unable to complete dPa’ bo’s work, despite their attempts. These others before him had wisdom merely like little rivers, and were therefore unable to conceive of the vast ocean of the Buddha’s deeds, as he and Āryaśūra have. Again, the ability to capture and convey an otherwise naturally occurring “ocean” of wisdom is one of the author’s key interventions.

He bases his claim that his project and individual authorship are valuable by means of two arguments: that his explanations are clear, and that they have completed a “body of meaning” (don gyi lus) for the religious commentarial text (bstan bcos). Here, in

279 Inscription Line 3: rgya gar yul du lnga rig blo ldan du mas kyang / snyan ngag rgya mtsho so so'i blo gros rgya mtsho chu klung gis/ /'gran bar ma nus zhun zhing dor ba bzhin du gyur/ gangs can khrod 'dir mkhas par rlim rnams Line 4:smos ci dgos/ /de ltar dpag dka’ rgyal ba'i lung bstan snyan sdags mkhan/ mishungs med dpa’ bo yang ’dir byung ba ma yin kyang / /dus mthat rgyal dang de sras spyod la dad byed pa’/rang byung rgyal ba mchog la rdo rje ltar bstan pa’i// mi phyed dad ldan bdag gi snyan ngag blo gros Line 5: ni’/ /thugs rje ldan kyang ’jam dbyangs rgyal sras ma pham pas/ / nye bar bsgrubs pas bcu phrag drug dang drug pa’i’/ /rmad byung mdzad pa gsal bar byas pa ’di yis ni/ /lam yangs dri med byang chub spyod thul gsal byed cing / /bstan bcos don gyi lus kyang yongs su rdzogs par ’gyur Line 6: de bas ’dir ni bdag gis ’bad pa don yod par/ ’gyur bar mkhas mchog rnams kyis bsten par bya ba’i rigs/ /
fact, what makes a commentary text valuable is its clear expression of a unified body in its meaning. This all leads up to the author actually introducing himself, stating that he has strong devotion and wisdom that has come directly from the Bodhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī. With his skill and devotion, he has been able to “to make completely whole” (yongs su rdzogs par ‘gyur) the collection by his addition of sixty-six stories.280

The completion of meaning is an oblique but direct reference to his claim that the one hundred stories illustrate the ten perfections with ten stories each. This is a claim he makes in his closing lines, and that he expands and explains in another short commentary on the Jātakas.281 This is Rangjung Dorje’s fundamental claim: that he has completed Āryaśūra’s text because he has placed the Buddha’s lives and deeds into a meaningful set related to the set of ten perfections (pha rol tu phyin pa bcu, Skt. pāramitā). The ten perfections are virtuous qualities that explain the bodhisattva’s ascent to Buddhahood over many lifetimes. These qualities were originally a set of six perfections, to which an additional four were added within Mahāyāna Buddhism. The original six perfections, listed in the Prajñapāramitā Sūtra and the Lotus sūtra (among others), include generosity, discipline, patience, diligence, contemplation and wisdom.282 To these six another four were added in the Mahāyāna Ten Stages Sūtra (Daśabhūmika Sūtra) by at least the sixth century; these are: skillful means, resolution, strength and knowledge.283 This expanded

280 His numbering is interesting here and differs from a later claim in this same inscribed colophon that he added 67 stories. The first reference, the addition of 66 for a total of 100, refers only to the numbering of the jātakas, the former lives, and the later number, the addition of 67 for a total of 101, also includes the final story of Śākyamuni which is not, strictly speaking, a former life story but the final life story. It does however, as included here, call itself story one hundred and one. See colophon inscription in the appendix.


282 1) Generosity (Dāna pāramitā; sbyin-pa); 2) Discipline (Śīla pāramitā; tshul-khrims); 3) Patience (Kṣānti pāramitā; bzhod-pa); 4) Diligence (Vīrya diligence; brtson-'grus); 5) Contemplation/Concentration (Dhāyāna pāramitā; bsam-gtan); 6) Wisdom/Insight (Prajñā pāramitā; shes-rab).

283 (7) skill-in-means/method (upāya-kauśalya), (8) resolution/prayer (praṇidhāna), (9) strength (bala), and (10) knowledge (jñāna).
list was also interpreted as a complement to the ten stages (*bhūmis*) that a bodhisattva traverses on the path towards becoming a Buddha.

These perfections represent virtues that are fully developed by a bodhisattva and that are practiced across multiple lifetimes. Their combination with the ten stages of a Bodhisattva as the set of ten to which Rangjung Dorje refers implies that through perfected actions the bodhisattva acquires more merit through action, and so eventually becomes the Buddha. This reinforces that real enlightened activity is possible for everyone in the world, regardless of station. The generosity of a king will necessarily look different than the generosity of a rabbit, but both can nevertheless put extreme bodhisattva-like generosity into action. The jātakas so organized thus illustrate how all beings can put into practice the perfect virtues necessary to ascend along the path, regardless of their starting point. Their enumerative inscription and illustration in a path itself was an ideal, harmonized expression of the concept of a progression through lives and stages of perfection.

Rangjung Dorje also advertises his merits to an intended audience of “other scholars,” who he promises can “rely” on his text. This reminds us that no matter how broadly accessible the subject itself was held to be, another very real audience for any scholar is, quite naturally, other scholars. This is also an invitation to others to use his commentary on their own, to “rely” upon it as they interrogate or explain their own commentaries. Rangjung Dorje sees himself as contributing to an active discourse of authors and scholars who, like himself, are explaining and coming to better understandings of the Buddhist teachings. We can imagine the appeal of a line like this to a reader like Abbot Butōn, whose commentaries on the maṇḍala paintings reveal his own desire to be a sound scholar who could be relied upon by others.

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285 Nalinaksha Dutt: writes “It is evident that the Hinayānists, either to popularize their religion or to interest the laity more in it, incorporated in their doctrines the conception of Bodhisattva and the practice of paramitās. This was effected by the production of new literature: the jātakas and avadānas.” Nalinaksha Dutt, *Buddhist Sects in India* (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1970), 251.
Towards the end of his colophon, Rangjung Dorje becomes quite explicit in his defensive criticism of his work. He asserts that he has attended to both the poetic style and the subject of the Buddha’s deeds, and even implies that anyone who would criticize his writing lacks the wisdom to properly appreciate these aspects:

Some people don’t care about meaning but they care about the way of writing poetry [i.e., style], whereas some intelligent ones focus on the Buddha’s deeds and want to follow only his activities. Some people don’t care about either of these [deeds or poetic style], and have no wisdom to understand those things, and so those people are not allowed to place blame on this text.\(^\text{286}\)

This pre-emptive response to his critics implies that any criticism of the work on the basis either of content or style reveals the poor understanding of the critic, not any failing in the original text. Here, he asserts that he has taken care to follow a logical meaning while also maintaining a beautiful, poetic style.

He follows this with another, even clearer iteration of his motives, along with an interesting caveat regarding his expected outcome:

These jātakas, which are not contradictory to either scriptures or logic, I did not make in order to improve my ego or to increase my fame or wealth. During the age of degeneration, it is impossible to spread them everywhere, so I don’t have this motivation. Instead, just like the Buddha’s activities were for the great benefit of sentient beings, I myself also try to do great benefit for sentient beings. That’s why the supreme actions of the bodhisattva, I have clearly explained.\(^\text{287}\)

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\(^{286}\) Line 6: ga’ zhig ‘jig rten don ldan min kyang ngag tshig bsdeb sbyor lhung len pa /gzhan dag rmad byung don gyi rjes ‘jug ‘di yang blo gros ldan la yod/ /gnyis ka’i tshul la rnam par rmongs Line 7: gyur rnam spyod mi ldan ‘jig rten dag /’jig rten snang byed ‘od zer gyis ni reg par myi nus stobs chung ba//

\(^{287}\) Line 8: /skyes rabs ‘di byas nga rgyal mthu yis myin/ /khe dang grags pa longs spyod ‘dod phyir myin/ /snyigs dus rgya cher ‘gyur snyam ‘di ma byas/ /rgyal ba’i spyod ‘di ‘jig rten rmad byung la /tshul ‘dis nam zhig ‘gro phan byed ‘gyur bar/ /bdag kyang ‘gyur zhes smon pa’i mthu yis ni/ Line 9: byang chub spyod mchog rab tu gsal bar bstan/ /
These are nearly contradictory lines, where Rangjung Dorje has told us that he seeks no fame and cannot possibly hope to “spread them everywhere,” yet in spite of this has done this work to “benefit sentient beings.” These statements reflect the somewhat ambiguous position of the author signing his work in a structure where self-recognition could be misunderstood as egoistical self-promotion. While of course the writing of a good text or commentary is arguably exactly what increases any particular Buddhist teacher’s fame, it is an important statement to place for the record that this is not his motivation, even if fame could be an accidental outcome.

The colophon closes with dedicatory verses, whose first words are highlighted in red, in contrast to the rest of the text in black. I have indicated with underlining here the phrases that appear in red:

By this pure virtuous action
May countless sentient beings enter the path of bodhisattva’s actions,
And achieve great wisdom,
And cut all ignorance
And so become Buddhas.

The text expresses the desire to share these stories so that others can become enlightened beings. This is followed by a concluding summary of the two authors, which also highlights the name of Rangjung Dorje in red:

Like that, The Continuum of the Jātakas, Lop tôn pa bo wrote thirty-four, and in order to thoroughly complete the ten perfections, and ten stages (bhūmis), the next sixty-seven, which are the actions of the bodhisattva from many sutras, were composed by Rang byung rdo rje, the person who follows the dharma of the profound Sūtras. The end. May auspiciousness spread everywhere in the world. The writer [scribe] is called Nar tang pa Lop tön Tra shi.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁸ Line 10: de ltar skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud/ slob dpon dpa'i sum cu rtsa bzhi pa la/ pha rol.da tu phyin.da. pa bcu dang / sa bcu mthar phyin pa'i sar sbyor ba'i don du phyi ma drug cu rtsa bdun
The end of the text corresponds to Rangjung Dorje’s longer written text, with the notable omission of a series of mantras that cover one more line of text in the longer textual version. In the Shalu inscription, instead of mantras, the last line is a scribal incursion, a signature from the scribe who artfully wrote the words of this verse.

Thus the colophon inscription has given us a very clear attribution and explanation for the text that appears on the walls. It tells us that this is the book, authored by the fourteenth-century Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, and that he took the first thirty-four stories from the famous Sanskrit poem, Āryaśūra’s Jātakamālā, and followed this with sixty-seven more stories from other sources. In the introductions and colophons as they are included on the walls, both of these authors, the ancient Indian poet and the fourteenth-century Tibetan scholar, have asserted their reasons for composing their texts. While Āryaśūra sought primarily to “decorate” and “beautify” the deeds of the Buddha to inspire faith and devotion, Rangjung Dorje emphasizes his ability to create through them a complete, usable set.

**The Rhetoric of the Completed Set**

As both the colophon and his commentary text explain, Rangjung Dorje saw his textual project as one of “completing” an unfinished collection of stories begun by Āryaśūra. His claim that the Jātakamālā text was incomplete was later repeated by Tāranātha, who also claimed that Āryaśūra had planned a collection of one hundred stories.289 While it is possible that Āryaśūra’s collection was moderately unfinished,290 there is little to support the contention that the collection he planned would have comprised one hundred stories, organized according to ten perfections. When Rangjung...
Dorje states in his colophon that he made complete (*yongs su rdzogs par ‘gyur*) the body of meaning of the Buddha’s Jātakas (*bstan bcos don kyi lus*), he claims validity for his work specifically because it represents a logical unification of meaning, a composite thing he describes as a body (*lus*). Meaning is produced through compilation and collection, and assembling the many parts into an organized whole.

Āryaśūra’s *Jātakamālā* was probably not intended to follow the structures Rangjung Dorje later adapted in his scheme. Peter Khoroch explains that whereas the first three “decads” (a group or set of ten) of Āryaśūra’s stories do correspond to the first three virtues (generosity, morality and forbearance), the scheme falls away for the last four of the thirty-four stories, making it unlikely that Āryaśūra had any intention of completing them as Rangjung Dorje suggests.291 Though Āryaśūra’s text does lack a closing colophon, making it possible that he intended to add more stories, it is unlikely that he ever planned to reach one hundred.

Instead, we must see the assertion that Rangjung Dorje was completing the work of the famed Indian scholar as a rhetorical claim from the Tibetan scholar himself, and one that probably bears little relation to the Sanskrit poet’s intentions. By making this claim for himself and his work, Rangjung Dorje placed himself and his work in a continuous line with the much earlier Indian poet-scholar. He depicts himself, as in his colophon, as a worthy member in front of the “ocean of wisdom,” and one of the few worthy enough in either India or Tibet to follow in that wise scholar’s footsteps. For an author himself invested in being recognized as a rebirth, the claim of a continuous line of wisdom and skill serves a clear purpose.

This claim must be read as a indication of Rangjung Dorje’s time and interests, rather than as a reflection of Āryaśūra’s unfinished work. Indeed, this claim for making a set complete through perfect sets of ten stories, each illustrating one of the ten perfections, further organizes the Buddha’s lives into a logical schema. Much like a ritual that is divisible into performed parts, the sequence of lives here is explained as a rational schema of ascending perfections, each consistent in scale. This organizational impetus, together with the creation of numerically organized sets, were at the core of the book-

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291 Āryaśūra, *Once the Buddha Was a Monkey*, xii.
editing work in which the fourteenth-century authors and editors were involved. Both Rangjung Dorje and Shalu’s abbot Butön Rinchen Drup utilized these organizing sets of texts in dialogue with one another.

Rangjung Dorje’s work was driven by the desire to organize and explain Buddhahood as a logical, progressive and ordered process. This project of creating a new set of one hundred previous birth stories, organized into sets of ten, must be seen as Rangjung Dorje’s own project, one that both benefited him and made sense in his time. The impetus and logic for this text’s creation can be divided into governing rationales for the text’s choice and treatment of its subject (rebirth), and its organizational form.

The commentary genre was intended to reach out to a larger populace, to show more easily accessible examples of perfected, bodhisattva-like action across all imaginable types of lives (animal and human) and stations (king, dancer, outcaste). An important aspect of Rangjung Dorje’s intervention was that he offered a collection that had been meticulously organized around the perfect numerical set—ten by ten—that reflects Tibetan pragmatism and interest in order. His collection gained popularity almost immediately and represented an important authorial act in the early fourteenth century. The text also likely benefitted its author directly during his lifetime, as Rangjung Dorje was the first Tibetan teacher to claim to be the direct reincarnation of his predecessor and to have complete memory of his past lives.

Rangjung Dorje’s collection of jātakas, a small but important and popular piece in his larger oeuvre of writing, represented an important writing act. With this text, he became the first Tibetan author to actively engage and take up this genre of literature, the jātakas, which represented an explicit, didactic explanation of progressive rebirth and the

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292 On the popularity of Rangjung Dorje’s jātaka collection, see Ruth Gamble’s observation that before the recent (2000) compilation of his collected works it was one of his works found most frequently in many Tibetan monastic library collections. Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs,” 35. On the Avadana Kalpata collection quickly superseding Rangjung Dorje’s as the more favoured and popular and most frequently depicted text of narratives and former lives, particularly in art, see Lin, “Adapting the Buddha’s Biographies: A Cultural History of the Wish-Fulfilling Vine in Tibet, Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries.” It is not sure how exactly Rangjung Dorje’s texts would have been distributed in his lifetime, though likely, as with the interest of Butön, this would have been through hand-copied manuscripts. While there is evidence that Tibetans knew of wood-block printing technology and used it as early as the twelfth century, it does not seem to have been yet widely practiced. Agnieszka Helman-Ważyń, The Archaeology of Tibetan Books (Boston: Brill, 2014), 121.
possibilities of perfecting oneself through the extended example of the Buddha himself. As we are about to explore further, the theme of reincarnation, and more specifically directed rebirth, had special political importance for this author. He was actively engaged in re-interpreting his religious role as connected to an explicit lineal descent based on reincarnation, and was the first to claim he was a direct descendent of his predecessor.

**Stories of Reincarnation by the First “Tulku” Rangjung Dorje**

The Tibetan institution of Tulku (*sprul sku*), religious heads of particular lineages like the famous Dalai Lamas, Khyentses and Karmapas, are now commonly associated with Tibetan Buddhism, but the institution in fact was just developing in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Indeed it was among the line of the Karmapas, of which our author was the recognized third in the line, that the institution was first established. While his immediate predecessor, the second Karmapa, was recognized to be a “directed rebirth” of the first, it was Rangjung Dorje who was the first Tibetan lama to claim that he was a direct reincarnation of his predecessor himself. Turrell V. Wylie argued that this form of reincarnation was ultimately a political strategy that developed as a direct response to the political turmoil of Mongol-administered Tibet. Arguing that the third Karmapa was being groomed as the next Tibetan religious head for the Mongols, who found in him a “new sectarian hierarch to replace the Sa-skya lamas as regents of Tibet,” Wylie argues that the seed for the institution was planted by the Mongol Emperors but took root in Tibet thanks to the special efforts of the prolific and charismatic Karmapa himself. Indeed the third Karmapa, did have dreams and hear rumblings that he would be requested at court because of rising concern over Sakya infighting. In this context, we can see the Karmapa’s decision to author a collection

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294 For the earlier discussion of this see page 132.

295 Ibid., 582.

296 Ibid., 586.

that brought the specific topic of the Buddha’s reincarnations into view, and to claim for himself a continuity of wisdom with a revered earlier poet, as strategic claims intended to bolster his own memories of past lives.\footnote{Ibid., 40–43.}

The doctrine of recognizing lamas as reincarnations would become so pervasive and fundamental to later Tibetan Buddhism that Wylie warns it is easy to forget “the innovative and unorthodox nature of the concept in the beginning.”\footnote{Wylie, “Reincarnation: A Political Innovation in Tibetan Buddhism,” 579.} In his argument, the adaptation arose in the lifetime of the third Karmapa in direct response to Mongol imperial needs. When Rangjung Dorje was invited to the Mongol court to participate in the 1333 enthronement of Toghon Temur as the Shunti Emperor, Wylie suggests this move effectively “signaled the end of Sa-skya religious supremacy at the Mongol Court.”\footnote{Ibid., 582.} While nuancing this reading of sheer political expediency, Ruth Gamble’s recent dissertation study of the Third Karmapa instead discusses the arising of the transference of identity as composed of “all the cultural, material, religious and knowledge traditions that had already been accumulated by the Karmapas.”\footnote{Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs,” 113.} Moreover, she highlights the institutional and Tibetan religious precedents that the Karmapa responded to as reasons for the distinctive reincarnation institution that he helped to establish, examining the role of his own writing (biographical liberation-stories or \textit{rnam thar}, and songs \textit{mgur/glu}) as integral to these cultural transformations.

Nonetheless, it is true that the decades from the 1320s to the 1350s represented a moment of declining fortunes and stability for Sakya. The house of Sakya had been in turmoil since the death of its head Dakchen (Bdag chen) in 1322, after which four of his sons had established separate lateral branches of the lineage, leaving Tibet in a disintegrating power vacuum from the perspective of the also-floundering Mongol court. The myriarch Jangchub Gyaltsen (Byang chub rgyal mtshan, 1302-1364) of the house Pagmodrupa (\textit{phag mo gru pa}) had been appointed as myriarch of his area in 1321, and
was already plotting to politically overturn Sakya. This would plunge parts of Tibet into years of civil war. Until Jangchub Gyaltsen’s tacit recognition by the Mongols as leader in 1354, he was a major potential adversary and military rival for them and for Sakya.

In contrast, the Karmapa had not been appointed as a myriarch and so “was overtly free of complicity in the conspiracy for political and patrimonial power then developing in the regency.”\(^{302}\) Basically, in this reading the third Karmapa had the right affiliations or more correctly, at least not the wrong ones to become the next religious-political leader in a Mongol administered Tibet. The fact that Mongol supremacy ended soon thereafter with the dissolution of centralized Mongol power at the Yuan court means that this remains hypothetical history. In this reading, reincarnation itself is, however, being politically aligned and used in Tibet in a new formation. Moreover, the Tibetan author of our text about the Buddha’s previous lives is particularly invested in a reinterpretation of “directed rebirth,” the ability of a bodhisattva to control and direct their rebirth, which Ruth Gamble explains “provided the conceptual model for the jātaka genre.”\(^{303}\)

**The Chosen Text: Adapting and Redacting the Text for Inscription**

Who chose Rangjung Dorje’s text for the walls and when? It is my belief that this project must have begun after his death in 1339, since he never mentions knowledge of the project. I thus assume the choice was made to honour his work posthumously, and posit that this must have been a choice made by the temple’s primary lover of both book collections and book organizations: the abbot Butön. Indeed, although Rangjung Dorje does not mention ever visiting Shalu, he did go into retreat in Khams with the lay leader of Shalu, the Kushang Drakpa Gyaltsen, in 1327, and possibly interested the lay-leader of Shalu in his work and himself at this time.\(^{304}\) Rangjung Dorje had also been meditating

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\(^{304}\) Ibid., 236; Luciano Petech, *Central Tibet and the Mongols: The Yüan-Sa-Skya Period of Tibetan History* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1990), 93.
and in retreat in the area of southern Tibet as late as 1329-1332, his last years of retreat in that area, but spent the last seven years of his life going back and forth to the Yuan court.\footnote{Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs,” 241.}

If the abbot Butön selected this text—and these two Tibetan lamas were very much contemporaries and towering religious figures at the same time—was there a direct relationship between them? There is no evidence these two prominent teachers ever met. Nonetheless, they were both prominent writers and translators, albeit associated with different schools and temples, who both received favour from the Mongols and survived, in their own ways, the political turmoil of the early fourteenth century. Yet Rangjung Dorje does not appear to have ever visited the temple of Shalu, or even to know about it or its paintings made after his book. This is, I believe, a sound hypothesis then to suggest that the paintings of his jātaka text produced at Shalu were made after his death in 1339. Indeed, the lack of direct connection between Butön and Rangjung Dorje is curious, given that these important religious figures were contemporaries. They do not mention each other directly in their work, although they were both towering figures of their time. Butön was slightly younger, and although Rangjung Dorje came and went between Central Tibet and the Yuan court for much of the 1330s, a trip that itself must have kept him very occupied and would have taken almost a year in any one direction,\footnote{We know from looking at Karmapa Rangjung Dorje’s biography, that towards the end of his life in the 1330s he traveled several times back and forth between the same region of Southern Tibet and the Yuan courts at Dadu and Shangdu, an overland trip of approximately 3,778 kilometers, which at the rate of cart and caravan travel must have been quite slow.} they do not seem to have had any direct contact. This might have been different if Butön had ever accepted any of the numerous invitations he had received to also go to the Yuan court, but Butön managed to use his health as an excuse to never have to go to China. The two great teachers did, however, have teachers and students in common.\footnote{In particular, Butön and Rangjung Dorje both received ordinations from the Tropu Kagyu (\textit{khro phu bka’ brgyud}) lineage, and shared in common at least one student, a man named Yakdé penchen (gYag sde pan chen) who studied with both of them. Go Lotsawa Shonu Pal (’Gos Lotsāba Gzonu dpal, 1392-1481), \textit{The Blue Annals}, ed. George N. Roerich, Asiatic Society Monograph Series v. 7 (Calcutta, Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1949-53, 1949), 532.}
Thus I suggest that these paintings were actually among the last to be completed at Shalu, painted in the 1340s, and were made based on the text by the recently deceased, famous Rangjung Dorje, a text selected for depiction by Butön. Adapting the book to visual form as it appears on the wall required a great deal of work, for this process of placing the book onto the walls did not represent an easy or direct translation. The inscriptions provide short versions of the longer jātaka stories, which have been edited to fit into the wall space. These mural texts are redactions, with all of their text derived from longer stories, and just a few notational words added to suit their function as inscriptions. There are far fewer additions than there are omissions from the longer text. The stories as they are inscribed are partial but for the most part very logical representations of the longer texts, and their creation would have necessitated a literate group of editors and scribes. This must have involved a long process of editing and reducing each story to the amount of text appearing on the wall must have involved a workforce of several monastic editors.

The process of reducing the text was yet another form of authorial manipulation, and the editors (and scribes) producing these site-specific redactions for the Shalu circumambulatory passage were making new and different texts in the process. They variously adhered to rules and standards: some inscriptions directly indicate their editorial interventions through the use of editorial phrases like “and so forth” (zhes pa nas), though in some other cases they left the textual ellipses unmarked. As in the case of narrative inscriptions at Tabo discussed by Steinkellner, the inscriptions at Shalu represent, for the most part, texts that have been copied onto the walls in a “painstakingly correct way.”308 Apart from these two minor forms of addition (redaction phrases and scribal signatures) made to the text of the inscriptions, the words on the wall are directly excerpted from the longer written stories.

What did the inscriptions include and how they were structured? As story editions, the inscriptions selected major passages from the longer stories, and sought to include major narrative actions from the stories. These inscriptions standardize a group of

stories that already displayed a great deal of internal variations, and produce all of these into shortened redactions. Both the textual authors—Āryaśūra and Rangjung Dorje—at once “composed” and “collected” the stories they included in their respective collections. While each of them made various attempts to standardize stories into their particular sets, there were nevertheless vast differences in lengths, and the kinds and types of actions these stories included. It is thus somewhat hard to conclude that story redactions always included the same story elements, as the stories themselves did not all start with the same elements.

**Beginnings: Introductory Phrases**

Studying the inscriptions as selective texts, it becomes possible to see which elements were often included and which were always included. The jātaka story inscriptions often begin, as do the longer jātaka stories, with a maxim expressing the general truth that the story will express. This short statement introduces the moral or message of the story in a short, concise manner, and articulates the lesson about the bodhisattva that a reader is meant to understand from the story. For instance, story fifty-nine begins with the maxim: “Great beings, even when they are born as animals, have great clear wisdom, and are able to bring others of their same species to the path of happiness and benefits,”\(^{309}\) or story fifty-six with “Noble beings easily complete benefits for themselves and others because they have great compassion.”\(^{310}\) These maxims were almost always included in inscriptions: only two of the twenty-three inscriptions I translated omitted such a maxim.\(^{311}\)

Several common introductory bridge phrases also regularly feature in the inscriptions, used to lead into the action of the story. These include the common phrase “Furthermore, once I heard these words” (*De yang 'di skad thos te*), a phrase that

\(^{309}\) Story 59, appendix page 86.

\(^{310}\) Story 56, appendix page 81.

\(^{311}\) The two exceptions I have found so far are the inscription of story 1, which begins mid-action and omits this line, and also thus omits much of the beginning of the story. We may wonder in this case if a process for redaction may have been started after this first inscription. Story 51 also omits this introductory moral phrase, whereas every other inscribed story I surveyed included it.
establishes that the story about to be recounted was one originally told directly by the Buddha to his disciple Ananda. This is not included in all inscriptions, just as it was not a necessary feature to begin all jātaka stories in Rangjung Dorje’s collection. However, when the textual jātaka began this way, this introductory phrase was almost always included in the inscription.

Another common introductory phrase included in the inscriptions is a further introductory line that introduces the subject of the story: “Furthermore, it is known that at the time when the Buddha was a bodhisattva, one time he became the King called Serdok chen.” This phrase was sometimes used in conjunction with the former (“once I heard these words”), or could be used instead of the former in stories. This phrase establishes and specifically introduces the particular story, establishing the identity of the Buddha as the bodhisattva of a prior time, in a phrase that further establishes that this identity and/or story is famous or widely known (zhes grags go). Once again, while not a necessary feature of all longer versions of jātaka stories, it was another feature that when included in a story was often selected for inclusion in the inscription.

Together, these features—an introductory maxim, and the two introductory phrases, were most commonly, though not entirely consistently, included in the painted inscriptions. In all but the first story inscription of those, at least some elements of these introductions were included in the inscriptions. Thus, it appears that real effort was

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312 The phrase “De yang ‘di skad thos te” was used about half the time in the stories I surveyed: It is absent from story inscriptions 1, 10, 15, 19, 32, 37, 39, 61, 90, 98, 99; it is present and used in story inscriptions 6, 8, 9, 51, 52, 56, 59, 60, 63, 65, 66, 77.

313 For instance, while it does not occur in inscriptions of stories 10, 15, 19 it also does not occur in the longer stories. In each of those cases the introductory phrases that introduce the story are instead “Furthermore it is known that once the bodhisattva became a knowledgeable great Brahmin, whose fame spread everywhere and who was faultless.” (de yang ‘di ltar byang chub sens dpa’ re shig cig bram ze’i rigs chen po yon tan gyi grags pa rgyas pa phyas su bya ba’i skyen med pa zhig tu skyes par gyur to zhes grag go) Story 19, appendix page 50.

314 “de yang beom ldan ‘das ‘di byang chub sens dpar gyur pa’i tshe/ re zhig rgyal po gser mdog can zhes bya bar gyur to zhes grags go”, story 37, appendix page 60.

315 The case of the first story inscription is unusual, as it skips so much of the beginning sections of the story. However, when read closely, this redaction can also be seen as a fairly intelligent attempt to feature all the important action of the story. The longer story begins with a sizable section introducing the bodhisattva and his many virtues. It goes on at some length about his “good fortune and superior qualities” and about his activities of teaching others. In Justin Meiland’s translation, there are two pages of such
made to introduce the inscribed story by introducing the jātaka, its moral and the identity of the bodhisattva according to a common set of conventions established in this type of literature. However, apart from framing conventions for each story that included these common introductory and concluding devices, there was much variation in the redaction in between.

The Story as Sequence and Action

Many of the edited stories carefully select action over sections of extensive description, including the major actions of the story, while editing out long descriptions of people or places, or selecting only an expressive phrase from a longer repetitive conversation between characters in the story. For example, in the first story, in which the bodhisattva offers his body to a starving tigress who is so hungry that she is about to eat her cubs, a long initial description of the virtuous bodhisattva teaching is cut out of the story, thus omitting several Tibetan folio pages from the inscription. Instead, the inscribed story has started late into the textual story, with the action of the bodhisattva sacrificing himself to save the tigress and her cubs.

Similarly, in stories with many narrative points of action, like the Vessantara jātaka (Thams cad sgrol, story 9), the frequent editorial breaks of the otherwise long story nonetheless success in including all the major moments of action in the inscription. Thus, the inscription somehow includes the many specific points of action from the story: the gift of the elephant to the devious Brahmin, the upset population and the resulting exile of the prince, the divestment of his goods and the prince’s departure with his family, the miraculous apparition of the animals to pull the cart, and ultimately, the request for the ultimate gift of his children as slaves and the resolution of their return to the kingdom of description before mention is even made of the tigress. Āryaśūra, Garland of the Buddha’s Past Lives, 9–11. In the redacted wall text, all of the beginning of this story, and the sizable description of the bodhisattva, are omitted, preferring instead to begin the story’s action as quickly as possible, with only a small description of the teachings, and getting fairly quickly to “At that mountain retreat, there was one starving female tiger with cubs” appendix story 1, page 13.

The notable exception here is story one which significantly starts mid-action and thus omits all of these introductory elements, discussed in note above.

Appendix story 1, page 16.
Shibi. In this long and complex story, while some minor story elements are omitted, most of the significant action has been retained in the inscribed version, and the causal links of the story are still decipherable through the elements included. The focus is on the inclusion of the numerous tangible examples of the bodhisattva’s great acts of generosity rather than on the exposition of descriptions or teachings that are present in the longer version but have not been retained in the inscription. This demonstrates that consideration and logic went into the process of redaction, wherein editors endeavored to preserve the unique sequences of actions and changes of state in a story.

**Ends: Conclusions, Numbers and Titles**

An effort was also made to standardize the conclusions of the stories’ inscriptions. A concluding moral, usually begun with a phrase like “that is why” or “and so in that way” (*de lta bas na*) often appeared near the end of the inscribed stories. This often led into a concluding moralizing statement, as in the example from story nineteen: “So that is why people who really enjoy staying in a quiet place consider the wealth of the desire realm a source of harm and disadvantage.”

Another example of a conclusion that offers a moral lesson comes from story thirty-two: “That is the reason why, someone who has renunciation, even if they have royal wealth, this is not an obstacle to their practice.”

These moralizing conclusions at the end of stories occur in nearly all of the painted inscriptions.

There is one telling element that all inscriptions include without exception. This is the final line, where a short title and story number are provided. Without exception among the stories I read, each story ends with the same summarizing line:

“This is story six, the story of the rabbit”

“This is story eight, the story of Jampé top”

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318 For instance the request by a Brahmin for his horse pulling the cart that necessitated that he pull it himself, which then led to the apparition of the miraculous red deer, are omitted.

319 Appendix story 19, page 53.

320 Appendix story 32, page 57.

321 A few exceptions to story inscriptions that omit a final moral are 39, 56(?) and 60.
“This is story nine, the story of Tamché dröl”
“This is story seventy-seven, the life of King Norchen”
“This is story ninety-eight, the story of the monk Utpala dong”
“This is story ninety-nine, the story of bodhisattva Pawé top (dpal ba’i stobs, ‘Power of Strength’)
“This is story one-hundred-and-one, the story of the bodhisattva Dön tamché druppa (Don thams cad grub pa)”

This indicates that the sheer enumeration of the stories was considered important to include among the inscriptions. By reminding us of their numbers, with summarizing titles that appear at the end of every story rather than the beginning, a presumed reader is assured that the set is ordered and complete. We are told that all the stories are in their proper place and order. These indications also function like an index, pointing constantly back to the presence of any single story as a part within the larger whole, referring to its place in the larger set, which is ultimately its source of validity. This reinforces the idea that the completeness of the book was a prime concern for its representation, and that underlying this was also an overarching interest in the ordered collection.

Textual Additions from the Scribes

There are two types of words added that appear in the inscriptions that would not have appeared in the text of a book. These two additions are indications of redaction and scribal attributions. These are the only two times that any words are added to the inscriptions, indicating that these textual interventions represent meaningful choices. The scribal attributions provide evidence of at least two active scribes, though there could have been more scribes whose names were not inscribed: The phrase “Rinchen Sakya myself wrote this, he he,” and in a later instance “The writer [scribe] is called Nar tang pa Lop tön Tra shi,” which follows the final inscription. These are the only complete

322 See appendix for the final lines of these inscriptions.
323 Appears in the inscription at the end of story 37 and 34: Rin chen Sha kya bdag gis bris he he.
324 End of colophon inscription: yi ge pa ni snar thang pa blo ldan bkra shis zhes grags so.
sentences, short as they may be, which were added to the inscriptions that do not also appear in Rangjung Dorje’s longer text. The only other additions to the text are shorter, but substantially more common, recurring as three-syllable phrase “and so forth,” the written equivalent of an ellipsis in the text added to indicate jumps over sections that result from editing. While this is not employed in a fully consistent manner—and there are some stories that do not use it at all—it is the most common addition to the inscriptions.

**Indicating Redaction: The Use of “And so forth”**

The Tibetan phrase which I have translated as “and so forth” (zhes pa nas) could also be understood as “thus was said,” or “from there” and occurs often multiple times in the redactions of a single story. It is the Tibetan linguistic equivalent of the ellipsis in modern English, a linguistic marker used when the story is leaving a section and jumping ahead. While its meaning is a reference to the incompleteness of the section it is leaving behind, indicating there are more words that continued but are now being omitted from the inscription, it also handily indicates the breaks created by an editor between the sections of text chosen for the wall. After “and so forth” a new section of the story inevitably follows. It is an editor’s addition revealing the very intentional process of story redaction taking place in the inscriptions.

The use of “and so forth”, when it is, is a visual and linguistic marker of the process of redaction and editing that has already taken place before each story could be transferred to the wall. This phrase would make a reader aware that the story as depicted on the wall is omitting a section. It makes explicit that the version of the story on the wall is not complete, and implicitly refers to the editor’s knowledge of the longer story, thus reinforcing the authority of the longer written version. It also makes explicit and visible editorial choices—that someone has chosen to include some sections, while others can and have been glossed over or left off the wall entirely. In the most basic sense, it acknowledges that the story as represented on the wall is a version of the story contained in the book, a synopsis of a longer version, but ultimately nothing more than a version.

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325 For a better understanding of how the phrase zhes pa nas is used within any single story I point the reader to the full translations of the story inscriptions in the appendix. I have translated the phrase as “and so forth.”
The stories on the wall thus do not purport to be complete, but instead acknowledge themselves as intentionally, purposefully incomplete. The use of the editorial phrase “and so forth” places the text in a relationship to its longer, unrepresented, text. This redaction has been made, the recurring phrase shows us, by someone and for a particular purpose. Demarcating the absence or unfinished nature of textual passages ensures that the editor or scribe has communicated that the story as represented on the walls is intentionally, not accidentally, incomplete. This demonstration of editorial action shows intent behind the incompleteness for authors who were otherwise so concerned with completeness.

The linguistic indication of redaction, “and so forth” is not, however, used consistently throughout the story inscription panels of the circumambulatory passage. Instead, its use varies between stories, and sometimes even varies within individual stories themselves. An almost equal number of the stories whose inscriptions I studied closely used it consistently as those who used it only partially. Some stories use it faithfully, ending every section that is not completely included from the longer text with the phrase “and so forth.” In these cases, the number of times it has been used ranges from only once in a story (though this would be only possible for a story that in its original form was also rather short) and it gets used up to as many as eight times within one story. In half of the story inscriptions I read, the redactions were marked consistently.

Yet in the other half of the inscriptions I read the phrase was only used sporadically. These stories sometimes used “and so forth” to indicate redactions, while within these same stories other redactions were left unmarked. It was, however, almost

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326 About half of the inscribed stories that I surveyed consistently used zhes pa nas to mark each textual redaction of the story. For example, see stories 1, 6, 10, 51, 52, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, and 77.

327 Story 59 which was even in its original form very short, only “skips” once. In this story zhes pa nas is only needed, and used, once.

328 Story number 6 redacts the text and marks it with zhes pa nas eight separate times. Story number 60 marks all its seven instances of redaction with zhes pa nas as well.

329 Story 8 uses zhes pa nas eight times and skips an additional three times without indication; story 9 uses zhes pa nas nine times and skips an additional four times without indication; story 19 uses zhes pa nas nine times and skips one other time without indication; story 32 uses zhes pa nas once and skips seven times.
always used at least once in a story, and there was only one story I read where “and so forth” was never indicated at all, despite the fact that omissions from the longer text were still made. So while the use of “and so forth” to mark incomplete sections of text in the circumambulatory passage stories was very common, it was certainly not used consistently. Instead, the variance of its use between stories and within stories was extreme and various. The fact that it was used consistently in half of the inscriptions I read indicates it was probably an ideal.

What can we make of this? It may have been an impossible ideal, and also demonstrates surely that many different editors worked on the redactions at once. We can imagine this is one reason for the notable inconsistency of the work: the mural paintings represent different people working at different times, who may have had different relationships to the rules and ideals of editing and redacting the stories. It is likely that the task of editing the stories was undertaken by several different people, surely, but how then to explain the variance even within individual stories as well? The high volume of stories that use the phrase “and so forth” only sometimes also suggests that while an editor/scribe might have been aware of it, he could also opt not to use it when making a redaction. The record of redaction was a possibility, probably even an ideal, for a perfectly redacted textual inscription, but an ideal that in practice was too cumbersome to follow faithfully over the whole course of the project.

While rules or guidelines must have been established for the use of the redaction indications, they may have been inconsistently followed as time pressures to complete the sizable task of painting the circumambulatory passage mounted. Or, conversely, it simply did not remain equally important for everyone at every time across the course of the work. We know from Butön’s impassioned letter to text editors at Shalu that there could be considerable concern over potential lapses in the work of editing volumes of text.

without indication; story 37 uses zhes pa nas once and skips numerous times without indication; story 39 uses zhes pa nas twice and skips eight times without indication; story 90 uses zhes pa nas nine times and skips one other time without indication; story 98 uses zhes pa nas twice and skips nine other times without indication.

330 Story 56 never employs zhes pa nas to indicate any of its numerous omissions.

331 Kurtis Schaeffer translates and titles this letter as “Butön Rinchen drup’s Letter to the Editors” and includes it in Kurtis R. Schaeffer, The Culture of the Book in Tibet (Columbia University Press, 2009),
In his letter, examined by Kurtis Schaeffer, Butön exhorts his editorial teams at Shalu to “work in accordance with the instructions I have given you” as they worked on the compilation of the Tenjur. His specific instructions included things like inserting missing words, expanding contractions, carefully proofreading, maintaining equal spacing and equally sized letters and clarifying sections through correct punctuation. His need to write such a letter at all suggests that there were at least some times when some of these instructions had not been followed.

Butön’s letter also reveals something about the division of labour in the scribal workshops, where directors oversaw teams of managers, proofreaders, and scribes, who worked alongside numerous other craftsmen often under considerable time pressures. This letter to the editors of the 1335 Kagyur reveals that Butön often had reason to express, and even specifically attempted to address, concerns about the quality and consistency of scribal and editorial work. As this letter was written just prior to the time that I believe these circumambulatory passage paintings were produced, it is indeed even likely that some of the same editors and scribes were involved in redacting and painting the jātaka inscriptions. The indication of textual omissions through the phrase “and so forth” was included more than half the time to indicate redactions, but was also often used but partially, which speaks to the environment evoked in Butön’s letter.

**Scribal Incursions: Three Scribal Signatures**

At three points in the circumambulatory passage inscriptions, a scribe has taken the

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149–150. This chapter was also published in an earlier form as an article. Kurtis R. Schaeffer, “A Letter to the Editors of the Buddhist Canon in Fourteenth-Century Tibet: The ʻYig Mkhan Rnams La Gdams Pa’ of Bu Ston Rin Chen Grub,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 2 (April 1, 2004): 265–81. The original Tibetan letter upon which the study is based is included in *Gsung ’bum: Rin chen grub* (Lhasa: Zhol par khang), 350-352 (101v-102v).


333 Ibid., 22–23.

334 Schaeffer also locates a fascinating list of workers involved in the 1362 production of a Tengyur at Shalu under the patronage of Tai Situ Jangchub Gyaltsen (1304-1364), which additionally included papermakers, engravers, goldsmiths, page numberers, collators, book-strap makers, and blacksmiths. Ibid., 27.
opportunity to add his name at the end of a story inscription. The same name occurs twice, on two panels in relatively close succession at the end of stories thirty-four and thirty-seven, and another scribal name occurs after the final inscription on the colophon panel at the end of the circumambulatory passage. These additions are significant reminders of the role played in the process of inscription by several educated, literate scribes, who, from their evident literacy and their names, we can in the very least deduce were likely monks. We must interpret these monk-scribes as yet other participants in the process of rendering the book on the walls.

What was the extent of a scribe’s duties? Were these monks the same ones also charged with creating redactions of stories as they appear in inscriptions? I cannot know the definitive answers to these questions at present, though I would think that this is not only possible, but likely. Since the process of creating the redactions of the stories often did follow a logical understanding of the stories, and since the task of redacting the text onto a single page might have been necessary before transferring the stories to the wall, it does seem probable that some of the scribes, themselves highly trained and literate monks, were also on the editorial teams under the leadership of the abbot in redacting the stories.

The fact that only two names of scribes appear among these inscriptions does not necessarily mean that only two scribes were active in the circumambulatory passage. Indeed, looking at these two scribal attributions, and what appear to me to be many more different possible “hands” at work in the handwriting and lettering of adjacent panels, it seems certain to me that additional scribes either did not have or take the opportunity to sign their names were in the circumambulatory passage. So what was unique about the two named scribes? Why did they sign their names, and how? What does this demonstrate about their role in the larger project and their stake in the textual project? It is possible that these two scribes were heads of the scribal workshops and supervised the work of others. This could explain not only the varying levels of skill and beauty of the handwriting, but also the variation in the choices around editing stories and marking those edits.

335 These are explained in the section on scribal incursions in chapter two.
To analyze these specific scribal name inscriptions: there are three in the circumambulatory passage in total. Approximately one third of the way into the circumambulatory passage, at the end of stories thirty-seven (fig. 3.5) and thirty-four (fig. 3.6), the same name appears. I list thirty-seven first because, while the story number is higher, spatially this inscription occurs earlier in the circumambulatory passage than thirty-four, and would have been encountered by a visitor to the corridor first (see the numbers of the stories in the diagram of fig. 3.7). Story number thirty-seven occurs as the first story of the lower register on the west wall. For the scribal inscription on story thirty-seven, the final lines read as follows (see fig 3.5): “This is the story of the king of golden colour, story thirty-seven. I myself, Rinchen Sakya, wrote this, he he!”

The inscription directly follows the end of the story with its habitual listing of the title and story number, and inscribes too the sound of “joyous laughter” at its end.

In story thirty-four, the third story from the right in the upper register, almost exactly the same signatory inscription is included after the story (see diagram in fig. 3.6). Thirty-four marks the final story composed by Āryaśūra, and so this was a significant place to add the scribal inscription yet again. It follows on after the title and story number and the very brief synopsis also included: “The story of the woodpecker, thirty-four. The continuum of life stories completely composed by Āryaśūra. May it be virtuous! I myself, Rinchen Sakya, wrote this, he!” Both the phrase, the wish “May it be virtuous!” (dge’o) and the scribal attribution, are additions that do not appear in the longer text. Here the laughter has been reduced to a single “he,” but this indication of joy has still been included.

In both these scribal additions, the same person, the self-proclaimed Rinchen Sakya (a personal name meaning “Precious Shakya”) claims that he has written this (bris so) by “myself” (bdag gis). While the Tibetan verb “bris” can mean both to write or to draw, meaning that the line could alternatively be read to mean “Rinchen Sakya myself drew

336 
rgyal po gser mdog gi skyes pa’i rabs te sum cu bdun pa’o/ Rin chen Sha kya bdag gis bris he he

337 
Bya shing rta mo skyes pa’i rabs ste sum bcu bzhi pa’o/Skyes pa’i rabs kyi rgyud slob dpon dpa’ bos shyar ba rdzogs sho/ dge’o/ Rin chen Sha kya bdag gis bris he!

338 
Compare to lines 2-3 in Āryaśūra and Rangjung Dorje, Thirty-Four Former Lives (skyes Rabs so Bzhi Pa), TBRC W30541. 1: 117–514: 505.
this,” I believe in contrast to the earlier inclusion of an artist’s name, this inscription refers instead to the inscriptional scribe named Rinchen Sakya and not an artist. While the verb “bris” to write or draw is the same as in the Skin-door shrine inscription discussed in Chapter two, where I argued a master artist was named in the inscription this way, the text before it clearly alluded to “this image of Vajrapāṇi” as the subject that was drawn (“bris,”), so reading this as a reference to the artist was the most logical translation. In contrast, in the circumambulatory passage inscription, the “this” (‘di) of the line refers to the story as written, not to the image.

Further support for this comes from the existence of a third, similarly placed inscription at the end of the colophon inscription (fig. 3.8). At the end of the passage, another scribe offers a brief dedication and another, different, personal name. Further, this time he explicitly refers to himself as a scribe, confirming the likelihood that the earlier Rinchen Sakya was also a scribe. The final lines of the colophon inscription read:

Like that, The Continuum of the Jātakas, Lop tön pa bo wrote thirty-four, and in order to thoroughly complete the ten perfections, and ten stages (bhūmis), the next sixty-seven, which are the actions of the bodhisattva from many sutras, were composed by Rangjung Dorje, the person who follows the dharma of the profound sūtras. The end. May auspiciousness spread everywhere in the world. The writer [scribe] is called Nar tang pa Lop tön Tra shi. 339

Everything up to the last line before the inscription that names the scribe was included in Rangjung Dorje’s longer text, including the wish for auspiciousness to spread in the world (bkra shis dpal ’bar ’dzam gling rgyan du shog). 340 The name of the scribe, though, is an addition made for the wall context only.

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339 Line 10: de ltar skyes pa’i rabs kyi rgyud/ slob dpon dpa’ bos mdzad pa’i sum cu rtsa bzhi pa la/ pha rol.da tu phyin.da. pa bcu dang / sa bcu mthar phyin pa’i sar sbyor ba’i don du phyi ma drug cu rtsa bdun pa/ mdo du ma las byung ba’i byang chub sens dpa’i spyod pa/ zab mo’i mdo sde rnam s Line 11: la chos kyi rjes su ’brang pa / rang byung rdo rjes mdzad pa rdzogs saho/ bkra shis dpal ’bar ’dzam gling brgyan du shog yi ge pa ni snar thang pa blo ldan bkra shis zhes grags so/

The scribal signature follows a different format than the earlier two. First, it is not written in the first person, omitting the use of “bdag gis” (by myself) that characterized the earlier two attributions. The name of the person is different, and in certain ways, even more revealing. For the name reveals that he is a “Snar thang pa,” meaning that he is a monk from the nearby centre of Narthang. Narthang was an important monastery in Tsang, not too far from Shalu. It had been founded in the twelfth century, and by the fourteenth century was an important locus for book production. This is significant because Narthang itself was an important locus of early textual production, and Shalu, in its renovation and decoration processes, had evidently brought monk(s) from Narthang, themselves likely highly trained book specialists, to participate in the inscriptions of the circumambulatory passage. It is also important to remember that the Narthang collections were the basis of Butön’s main editing work for the Kagyur and Tengyur, and so it is highly likely that there was real collaboration and monks and scribes being shared in these years between these two temples.

While the three scribal attributions to two named scribes in the circumambulatory passage introduce almost as many questions as answers, there is something to take from their very presence. We know that at least two different scribes worked on the inscriptions, though the look of the multitude of various handwritings across the many inscriptions of the passage leads me to believe that many more unnamed scribes were also involved. So the fact that at least two were granted, or took, the honour of placing their own names attendant to story inscriptions implies a workshop hierarchy of master and subsidiary scribes among them. Since these scribes were likely highly trained monks, at least one of whom had come from Narthang to participate in the project, this shows again that highly skilled workers and thinkers were being gathered together for the project. It is likely that these highly trained scribes were those also involved in the extensive work of reading and redacting the longer stories into shortened versions.

The Look of a Book: How the Book was Placed on the Walls

The jātaka stories and paintings exposed visitors to the full range of history, people and places enumerated in the Buddha’s former lives. These episodes were arranged, following the Karmapa’s logic, into a rubric of ten stories to represent each of
the ten perfections of a bodhisattva (see diagram in fig. 3.9). One hundred former lives as various kings, animals and merchants all lead up to the penultimate one hundred and first life, the life of Śākyamuni, which is painted at the end of the passage (fig. 3.10-3.11). These narrative paintings open up many possibilities for study, and in this section, I focus in particular on the manner in which the book was placed visually onto the walls of Shalu—the processes of selection, representation, and organization that informed the mural-book.

The painted walls were meant to express a specific book, which had two authors: the Indian poet Āryaśūra and the Tibetan lama Rangjung Dorje. However, as the processes of selection, adaptation, and representation suggest, there were other “authors” at work in Shalu. In particular, the editors and scribes, who are partially accessible by studying Shalu’s inscriptions, made choices and modifications as they translated the text onto the walls. Considering their role helps us to understand what all this illustrated and organized text was doing on the walls at Shalu, and the processes and choices involved in putting it there. The artists of the story illustrations, explored in Chapter Four, can also be considered another set of “authors,” for they participate in the larger project of expressing meaningful stories by translating textual narratives into visual forms.

A good deal of space was devoted to inscription in the semiotic scheme of the decorated circumambulatory passage, as part of this project aimed to represent a complete book on the walls. This was a book that was accessed through physical proximity and vision, allowing a non-word based, embodied, experience of “reading.” The painted images themselves, explored in the next chapter, similarly often enabled the visual depiction of the complete narrative arc of a story, making a story that was constructed to be seen instead of read.

While driven by the book collecting and organizing interests of the abbot Butōn, the inscriptions and paintings are evidence of a process of creative decision-making by a large group of people who were involved in the project of translating the book to a monumental and visual scale and format. In addition to Butōn, who would have chosen this particular book as the source for the passage’s paintings, the production of these paintings and inscriptions would have involved significant numbers of editors making new redactions of the stories, and even more artists and designers transforming these
often complex and strange stories into images. The act of “authoring” the book on the walls at Shalu can be attributed not merely to the book’s authors, but also to the editors, scribes and artists who gave these stories visual form.

The inscriptional passages inscribed in the mural are all made on spaces that mimic the size and shape of paper book pages: rectangles that are dimensionally about twice as wide as they are tall and aligned horizontally. Yet the decision to replicate the appearance of a book on the walls was not merely expedient. While the visual format of making the inscriptions look like book pages was certainly also practical and in keeping with what scribes knew how to do, this visual format also kept the visual formal properties of a book active on the wall. These conveyed the significance of books as cultural and intellectual objects through their replication in another format as mural art.

The visual conventions of books dictated all the choices about how and where to place the inscriptions. These conventions determined the shape and dimensions of inscription panels, the relative scale of the words to their pages, and the choices of colouring for both background and lettering. These visual components further bolstered the literary expression of the walls, where the content and organization of the wall paintings contained the contents of the book. The text stories follow on from each other as they do in the book, but were fashioned to be circumambulated past, not read.

The pages and stories dwarf and impress human viewers through their scale and placement on the wall. The paintings begin above human eye level, about six feet up from the floor, and proceed up to the height of the tall ceiling (fig. 3.12). A person must crane their neck to see the upper register paintings and inscriptions. It is only as one approaches the corners of the passage that one can see the upper registers at enough distance to fully appreciate their impressive scale and the consistency of inscriptional and pictorial detail. These paintings are not just a book, but a larger than life book, a book at once too large and detailed to fully appreciate as a whole. The scale of the painted book, its ability to dwarf viewers, is part of its visual power. This is similar to the closed books of the shrine room—while they are there they are stacked and closed, their contents implied but invisible, present but contained.

While the book of the passage is more “open,” many of its pages are still beyond reading access. What is visible though, what leaves its greatest impression, are the
consistent use of borders, the relentless pictorial detail of the images and words, which
make a visitor, cognizant that they cannot see them all but seeing enough that they
understand with what great care they have been produced, confident that the unseen
stories above are as detailed as those visible below. In the remote darkness of the
passage, the book physically immerses a visitor both with parts seen and parts unseen.

The direct visual references to a book, and the explicit inclusion of a textual
introduction and conclusion, make Shalu’s inscriptions significantly different from other
known sites of mural inscriptions in Tibetan art. Inscriptions in earlier murals at Alchi
and Tabo do not express themselves visually and directly as books. At Shalu the murals,
by making the inscriptions explicitly look like book pages of a single unified book,
facilitate a physical encounter with a whole book with each of its pages opened, allowing
the act of walking past pages to replace (or repeat or approximate or make unnecessary,
depending on the walker) the act of reading.

**Intervals and Rhythm: Dividing up the Wall**

By being placed on the walls, the arrangement of the words and images of the
stories impresses the viewer with its visual regularity. The complete book is a set of
unlike objects made, in some sense, alike. The different stories have been made
comparable, since each is reduced to the same amount of regular, divided, rectangular
spaces, some of words and others of image. This visual collection of isolated, individual
pages and their painted individual stories is spread across the wall, each “page” organized
by and contained within a border. The introduction and colophon text panels are included
at the beginning and end of the corridor, and these are the only two panels of text
unaccompanied by painted images. The stories are organized across an upper and lower
register, while each inscription and image is divided from the next by thin yellow bands.

The inscriptions look like an opened, fully visible Tibetan book. The most
obvious visual reference to books occurs through the shapes of the inscription spaces.
Each inscription is written in clearly printed Tibetan U-chen letters, and is contained
within a white horizontal rectangle. These rectangular frames follow the dimensional
shape and proportions of the pages of a traditional Tibetan book. The regular Tibetan
sacred book or *pecha* (*dpe cha*) is usually in a format of unbound horizontally formatted pages that are at least twice as wide as they are high, with the long edge along the horizontal axis instead of the vertical as with this page.³⁴¹ Looking at the wall, the framed inscriptions give the impression of so many book pages spread out across the surface. Above these “pages,” the stories are animated as pictures in rectangular spaces of equal width but double the height of the inscriptions to which they correspond.

The horizontal division of painted walls for Buddhist narratives also had earlier precedents. In the murals at Ajanta, wall spaces were habitually divided horizontally with separate stories narrated visually in upper and lower registers.³⁴² However, these much earlier Indian paintings at the caves of Ajanta proceed from floor to ceiling, and often used the wall’s vertical middle point, roughly around the height of the doorframe, to separate their two registers. In contrast, the height of the doorframe is instead where the Shalu murals start, and the division into upper and lower sections happens at Shalu even higher up the walls.

At Shalu, the double register (one upper and one lower) of stories is separated from an unpainted section below. The artists made this same organizational choice in all of the first floor paintings at Shalu painted in the fourteenth century, including the paintings of the shrine room considered in chapter 2, and the assembly hall. This choice to leave the lower five feet of the walls unpainted in each space was logical in the shrine rooms as it left space for the placement of furniture, altars and statues below the paintings. In contrast, the narrow circumambulatory passage could never have been meant to house furniture. Instead, the choice to leave the bottom of the wall unpainted, or rather, to keep it painted black, must be read as an effort to keep the paintings and texts higher than the encircling humans below, placing them into a position intentionally higher than the reverent viewers. This choice has definitely also contributed to the

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³⁴¹ Tibetan *pecha* (*dpe cha*) were and are horizontally aligned on unbound pages that are much wider than they are tall, a shape derived from the horizontal shape of Indian palm leaf manuscripts, but which by the fourteenth century would have been habitually produced on hand-made paper pages.

³⁴² Dehejia writes: “Except when using the narrative network which covered the wall from floor to ceiling, it appears to have been customary to divide the wall horizontally, roughly along the level of the cell doorway (approximately 6 feet from the ground), and narrate different legends in the two levels.” Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 208.
preservation of these paintings, as they are mostly placed well above the easy reach of human hands.

The mathematical division of the wall into separated spaces for inscriptions and paintings would have required extensive planning, and must have preceded the paintings and inscriptions. While the dimensions of individual panels for painting and inscription vary slightly from wall to wall, the overall effect is one of ordered visual regularity, where pages of the same size are repeated across the wall with individuated painted stories above each of them, regularized through their use of yellow borders. While the height and darkness of the hallway would have made reading or carefully examining the details of each painting or inscription impossible, the impression of organization and collection is conveyed through the meticulously planned and bordered spaces that contain within them a rich diversity of images.

The yellow border used as a framing device throughout the circumambulatory passage was a visual convention adapted from Tibetan tangka paintings. Vitali first discussed the division of tangka paintings into frames and rows as consistent with Newar art, although our examples are necessarily all much later. David Jackson has characterized this convention as a visual hallmark of Tibetan painting in the Nepalese style ("Beri" or Bal ris), which was particularly dominant in Tibet from the twelfth century onwards. This use of yellow bands was most often used to separate and order assemblies of figures, as in a twelfth-century painted manuscript cover where the central goddess Prajñapāramitā is attended by eighteen lineage figures, each divided from the

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343 This is an assumption made from my photographs but not on measurements: I was not able to measure each painting in 2009, and since a return trip to the site has not been possible. Yet we can see then from photographs and the floorplans that since the North and South walls must be approximately the same overall length, and the south wall has 24 jātakas while the North wall only had 22 when it was complete (including the 8 that have been entirely lost due to damage), it is clear that some alterations were made to painting sizes based on available space.


345 Jackson, *Nepalese Legacy*, lists “Thin yellow edges and dividing strips” among the features of the Beri style missing from Pāla style Tibetan paintings, 86.
next by a thin yellow band (fig. 3.13). These narrow borders regularized the spaces and gave a visual impression of order. 346

The use of yellow borders was also common in thirteenth-century paintings, and can be seen in several paintings used to separate lineage figures, 347 or in other paintings to divide rows of repeating Buddhas. 348 These yellow borders were most often used to separate and organize groups of subjects of equal size, showing components to be part of a meaningful set. The adaptation of these yellow bands to order the stories at Shalu was thus a logical way for painters familiar with Tibetan tangka painting conventions to separate individual stories from one another, and further enforce the impression of regularity and organization that the wall paintings sought to convey.

The overall plan of the wall spaces is also rigorously divided following the meaningful lines of Rangjung Dorje’s text. Within the text, the stories are grouped into sets of ten, and the paintings of the wall follow this arrangement (fig. 3.9). These sets of ten reflect Rangjung Dorje’s organization of the text, for he sought in his collection to provide ten examples for each of the ten perfections. He explains this plan in his colophon, and finishes each set of ten stories with a concluding phrase. For example, following the conclusion of the last line of story ten, stating “This was story ten, the life story of the merchant,” 349 comes this brief review: “Tiger, Shibi, Kosal person, two merchants, Rabbit, Agasti, Sha jin, Tamché dröl, and the Sacrificer. These are the first ten (stories).” 350 This is a very simple synopsis, with each story described only by one word or name. A similar single sentence summary appears at the end of each decad of stories.

This plan of ten stories representing each of the ten perfections is further communicated in the colophon text and a longer commentary text that Rangjung Dorje

346 Jackson, Nepalese Legacy, 71 and 101. Rhie and Thurman Wisdom and Compassion, no. 122.

347 Jackson, Nepalese Legacy, 72.

348 Jackson, Nepalese Legacy, 89, And Gilles Beguin 1990, no. F.

349 See Appendix page 43. Inscription reads: “tshong dpon gyi skyes pa'i rabs te bcu pa'o.”

350 See Appendix page 43. Inscription reads: “stag mo shi bi ko sal bdag tshong dpon gnyis dang ri bong dang / a ga siti dang sha byin dang / thams cad sgrol dang mchod dbyin byed/ bcu tshan dang po'o.”
wrote about his jātakas. The fact that the organization into sets of ten—something most clearly explained in a separate explanatory text by the same early fourteenth-century author—dominates the plan of the walls and makes the project of painting the circumambulatory stories markedly intertextual. The redaction and communication of the text has been meaningfully influenced by access to yet another text. This further bolsters the claim that someone quite invested in textual interpretation, and who was familiar with diverse texts, must have been involved in the planning of these paintings. The stories are arranged with the first five proceeding along the upper register and the next five following directly below these. Between each group of ten stories, a decorated vertical band painted with floral scrolling patterns emerging from vases, a common motif for abundance here mostly used for its decorative potential, divides each section of ten stories from the next, a continuous design that interrupts both upper and lower registers (fig. 3.14).

**Inscriptional “Pages”**

The representation of inscriptions in white, framed rectangles resembling book pages was an expedient and logical choice, but also one that expressed the visual presence of a book regardless of whether the words were read. Inscribed murals were produced by workshops of artists and scribes, who operated separately and at different times. Inscriptions for the wall could have been planned on horizontal paper pages, and these could then be easily transferred or copied by scribes onto their respective, equally proportioned mural spaces. The fact that, in some spaces at Tabo, the white rectangles for inscriptions remain blank indicates that inscriptions were often added later, or in some cases, were never added at all.352

This is not the earliest example of a Tibetan mural inscription attached to a narrative painting that visually recalls the look and format of the traditional Tibetan

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351 Rangjung Dorje’s short commentarial text about the jātakas is Rangjung Dorje, *The Short Summary of the Buddha’s Former Lives (Sangs Rgyas Kyi Skyes Rabs Kyi Bsdud Don Bzhugs So).*

352 Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo.* Figure 184 page 169.
pecha book page in its shape and colouring. The eleventh-century narrative paintings at the temple of Tabo include inscriptions that also occupy similarly white, rectangular spaces. However, in contrast, the page shapes at Tabo are irregularly sized, and do not share a plumb line at either the top or bottom. In this way they are arguably page-shaped, and cannot imply a book, a set of unified pages, in the same way that the Shalu paintings do. The choice at Shalu to make the inscriptions look like pages of a book was also an expressive design choice for the wall, and contributes towards the depiction of a collected book of stories. In contrast to the earlier Tabo murals whose inscriptions also looked page-like, at Shalu we see intense dimensional and spatial regularity maintained in all of the panels painted across the walls.

The painted inscriptions visually reference book pages through their use of colour. Most of the “pages” are the same white colour of paper, painted with ink-black text, just as we see in most printed and handwritten Tibetan books. The introductory inscription is unique among the wall inscriptions at Shalu for its colouring, which uses gold lettering on a black background (fig. 3.2). This is also in keeping with book conventions, as gold writing on dark blue or black pages was a common visual convention for the first page of traditional Tibetan books (fig. 3.3). A first page, or in some cases an interior manuscript cover, made with inherently precious materials like this gold writing, represented greater expense and greater devotional merit.

Writing a text in gold on black was then and still is a common devotional practice. While it is not always possible or affordable for whole texts to be produced this way, the first page including the title and homage was often made in gold ink on a black background; and if this was not done on paper it could be added as the first page painted on the inside of the manuscript cover. Several examples of such black and gold frontispieces, gold letters on black backgrounds, are visible today among the old texts on display at Shalu—evidence that this was a model of text that the temple itself possessed.

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353 See Klimburg-Salter, Tabo, diagrams 9, 10 and 11, 126, 127, and 133.

354 Deborah Klimburg-Salter also pointed out about that this inscription at Shalu appeared “Exactly as the frontispiece of a valuable book the panel is dark blue with the title written in gold in Sanskrit and Tibetan.” Klimburg-Salter, Tabo, 130. Kathryn H. Selig Brown, Protecting Wisdom: Tibetan Book Covers from the MacLean Collection (Chicago, Ill.: Munich: Prestel USA, 2012), 14.
and which may have served as the visual model for the rendering of text in the circumambulatory passage (fig. 3.3). Entire texts written in gold, which also would have been on black grounds to make the gold writing visible, were also written about as having been produced and housed in fourteenth-century Shalu. For instance, Butön’s biography specifically mentions a set of Kagyur written in gold that was housed in the Segoma shrine room after the fourteenth-century renovations.355

The “pages” painted on the walls at Shalu share upper and lower borders and are consistently sized and aligned across upper and lower registers. Within them, the relative size of their lettering can be quite various, largely dependent I believe on the specific textual redaction. Nevertheless, consistency and rhythm of repeating pages and blocks of text visually communicate an ordered and organized set, ordering the wall spaces into upper and lower registers of legible words.

The Doubled Page and the Reading Experience

The existence of two registers of pages—one upper and one lower—visually mimics the process of reading a Tibetan text. Arranging the pages along two rows can be compared to the visual experience of reading a traditional Tibetan book pecha. As the unbound pages of the Tibetan text are read, a reader flips the finished page over and places it above the page below, making visible the writing on the back and a page which now sits above the page that follows, much like the two registers of painted text on the walls at Shalu. Since the pages are unbound and two sided, maintaining two piles of pages is necessary so that the reader does not lose her place. The reader thus reads with two stacks of horizontal pages before him, one above the other. This way the pages are kept in order, and the reader is always looking down at two consecutive pages of text below. Thus, the planning of two registers of pages at Shalu mimics the visual experience of the process of reading a Tibetan text.

Although in the Shalu paintings this convention does not govern the ordering of the stories, which proceed in sets of five stories from left to right above with the

355 A passage in Butön’s biography about the renovation period (1306-1320) is translated by Ruegg: “There were many volumes of holy scripture (gsung rabs) including the Word collection (bka’ ‘gyur) made of precious gold.” David Seyfort Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che: With the Tibetan Text of the Bu Ston rNam Thar (Roma: Istituto italiano per il medio ed estremo oriente, 1966), 91.
following five below, standing before two pages of text still recalls the physical and visual experience of being before two pages of text at once. This look of two pages, one above the other, would have felt familiar to any Tibetan reader. Walking through the hallway was thus like reading the physical book. These paintings actualize the larger-than-life book and place the temple visitor, dwarfed, within it. What better expression of the power of books than to place the tiny human visitor inside and within one?

**The Letters in Red: Highlighting Dedication and Author**

Another visual convention borrowed from books was the use of red text, called rubrication, a convention that is also shared more broadly with medieval manuscripts of both Europe and India, where words were painted in red often to mark ends of sections or beginnings of another.\(^{356}\) We see a small amount of red text used at Shalu to highlight the name of the author and the final section. In the colophon inscription red lettering interrupts the regularly black writing to highlight two important parts of the text: one a phrase and one a name (Figure 3.15).

The first red letters indicate the beginning of the final dedicatory summary verse of the colophon.\(^{357}\) The phrase, “By this pure virtuous action,” appears towards the end of the inscription, near the beginning of the ninth line, the third line of text from the bottom of the inscription.\(^{358}\) The red letters here highlight the beginning of this final section that provides the closing dedication. This highlighting indicates to a reader the important content that follows. The words after the highlighted red provide the closing dedicatory verse:

**By this pure virtuous action**

**May countless sentient beings enter the path of bodhisattva’s actions.**

**And achieve great wisdom,**

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\(^{356}\) A forthcoming doctoral research study from Bidur Bhattarai at the University of Hamburg entitled “Dividing Texts: Conventions of Visual Text-organization in North Indian and Nepalese Manuscripts up to ca. CE 1350” will be of interest here. [http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/Projekte_e.html#B04](http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/Projekte_e.html#B04)

\(^{357}\) The colophon is also not redacted but fully included, and compares exactly to that in: Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 664-666.

\(^{358}\) The words “de las byung ba’i” appear in red in the inscription.
And cut all ignorance
And so become Buddhas
Like that, the Tantra of the Jātakas, Lop tôn pa bo composed 34, and in order to complete the ten perfections, and ten bhūmis, the next 67, which are the actions of the bodhisattva from many sutras were composed by Rangjung Dorje, the person who follows the profound Sutras.
The end.
May auspiciousness spread everywhere in the world.
The writer (scribe) is called Nar tang pa lop tön tra shi.359

The only other phrase rendered in red lettering is the four syllables of the author’s name Rang byung rdo rje. Here the red text highlights not the beginning of a significant section but rather the most important piece of information: the attribution to the fourteenth-century Tibetan author. Both these red highlights are used to distinguish meaningful words in the inscriptions. Since Tibetan written text does not usually show breaks between lines, words, or sections, this is one way that the text communicates and highlights important new information.

Throughout the circumambulatory passage text panels, the convention for rendering text on the walls as images replicated the conventions of book production. It is likely that book pages were the models for the inscriptions, and the redactions were produced onto pages then copied onto the walls. It is also likely that the same scribes who were involved in Shalu’s numerous book projects participated as the artist-scribes for the murals. Indeed, I will return shortly to the topic of three inscriptions that include the names of two separate scribes, one of whose names is inscribed twice, in the jātaka inscriptions of Shalu’s circumambulatory passage murals.

359 de las byung ba'i dge ba dri ma myed pa des//mtha' yas 'gro rnams byang chub spyod la rab 'jug cing /
/ngag tshig gzugs dang yan lag drug cu'i dbyangs thob nas//the ishom gcod hyed rgyal ba'i dbang por 'gyur bar shog Line 10: de ltar skyes pa'i rabs kyi rgyud/ slob dpon dpa' bos mdzad pa'i sum cu so bzhi pa la/ pha rol.d tu phyin pa bcu dang / sa bcu mthar phyin pa'i sar shyor ba'i don du phyi ma drug cu rtsa bdun pa mdo du ma las byung ba'i byang chub sens dpa'i spyod pa zab mo'i mdo sde rnams. Line 11: la chos kyi rjes su 'brangs pa / rang byung rdo rjes mdzad pa rdzogs so.h/ bkra shis dpal 'bar 'dzam gling brygyan du shog yi ge pa ni snar thang pa blo ldan bkra shis zhes grags so// See appendix page 144-146.
Naturally it was impossible to include the complete text of Rangjung Dorje’s book on the walls, even in this large passage. Instead, each story was significantly redacted for the walls. The modern printed version of the text has one thousand and sixty-three pages, each with six lines of text. At Shalu, this text was substantially redacted to fit into the spaces of one hundred and three “pages” for the wall, the space of one individual inscription, one “page” on the wall, allotted to each of one hundred jātaka stories, one “page” for the final life story, and one “page” each for the introduction and colophon inscriptions. Yet the redaction required for the stories was not needed for the introduction and the colophon inscriptions. Since they were already quite short, both the introduction and colophon could be included without redaction, as they would fit into the space permitted. These inscriptive texts tell us much about the text and why it was chosen, what it purported to do, and the relationships of its authors to the material presented and to each other.

**Conclusion: The Book on the wall and the Aggregate Author**

The stories that were painted as both inscriptions and images on the outer wall of Shalu’s great circumambulatory passage were not there simply to share these narratives; rather, they were made also to communicate and depict the complete contents of one particular, recently-authored, book. The book was a contemporary collection made by a recently-deceased Tibetan teacher, the third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, who in his formulation of the one hundred former lives of the Buddha had offered an organized collection: arranging the former life stories (jātaka) according to the Buddhist conceptual program of a progressive path towards self-perfection. These were not just great stories, but great stories that were also arranged in relationship to a system of understanding a great being and a great perfected mind, and so their arrangement here in the passage, visually depicted in their sets of ten, explains the ascent in stages towards the perfection of enlightenment across many lifetimes.

Although depicted as a book on the walls whose stories had been redacted with great care, this mural “book” was not necessarily made or meant as a book to be read. It was instead a book that could be, as it were, entered, walked into and through, exposed to the eyes and bodies of any visitor to Shalu. The text that was selected was a commentary
arranged and organized by the Tibetan author, whose role was made explicit in the circumambulatory passage, his name emphasized with red ink, appearing at eye level, at the end of the passage.

It would be a mistake, however, to view him as the text’s sole author in this particular context, where a unique version of a large book was produced on the walls of Shalu. Instead, the book on the walls was a collection of the minds and hands of many authors, an aggregate of those who chose what to include and exclude, how to include it, and who had to actively transform the often long stories into this significantly different context. This specific book was not the reflection of a single author, but was made by many people. There are the obvious “authors” of the text who wrote their intentions in both the introductory dedication and the colophon: the fourth-century Indian scholar-poet Āryaśūra, and the fourteenth-century lama Rangjung Dorje who formulated a complete and organized set and renewed this genre of literature.

We should see the process of this book’s creation on the walls at Shalu as a further extension of this “authoring” process where even more people mediated the meanings and uses of the book in a particular and new context: creating a new book. Yet there are other “authors” communicating through this book on the walls: the person or persons who selected this book and this massive scale format, pictorial and textual, for its representation, and for whom the idea of a traversable wall-book in a circumambulatory passage was worth the hours of planning, labour, and sheer expense. At Shalu in the 1340s this could have been none other than the abbot Butön who had spent the previous decades of his life involved in massive editorial book-work.

For this particular book on the walls of Shalu, even more unnamed authors were involved in the production: teams of editors chose what to include or exclude from the stories, and scribes conveyed the stories to the walls. Then the choices involved in illustrating the stories, represent yet another form of authorial choice that I will turn to in the final chapter. The artists, “authors” of the painted images—were responsible for interpreting stories to be communicated through a set of visual signifiers for their depiction on the walls, forming a new format for the interpretation of visual narrative in Tibetan art.
Chapter 4: Shaping The Book on the Walls: Artists and Visual Narration

In the last chapter I considered how one book, a specific collection of stories recounting the Buddha’s previous lives collected by Rangjung Dorje, was depicted as a series of inscriptions and images on the outer walls of the circumambulatory passage. That chapter focused on the display of the book both through its organization and its textual presence in the corridor where shortened versions of each individual story were included on the wall (fig 3.12). These stories had been carefully redacted to contain parts of each story’s sequence: beginnings, middles and ends, yet while this made them functionally “complete,” reading them would have been nearly impossible. I argued that the book was illustrated so as to make it visually present and complete.

This chapter focuses on the translation and transmission that went into producing the painted pictures that accompany each textual story. The artists who painted the images were mediators of another set of choices: choices about what and how to paint each individual story as image. Directly above each painted “page” of text on the wall each story was painted in elaborately imagined visual form. While the inscriptions and paintings above them are of equal lateral width, the painted story panels occupy twice the height as the inscriptions, dedicating at least fifty percent more wall space to their visual depiction than to their written forms. Thus substantially more wall space was given over to illustrating stories visually than to their written forms, allowing each story to be rendered in visual detail, often shown as a specific series of events developed in and across spaces in new ways for Tibetan artists.

This spatial priority given to image over text must have been a choice based on the design of the walls and also chosen to fit their function: the images rapidly “show” a viewer the entirety of each of the one hundred and one individual stories in the book. Above the redacted texts, and their significant ellipses, the painted images allow for whole stories to be included on the walls, experienced through quick viewing during circumambulation of the corridor. From the sheer scale of the paintings compared to the inscriptions, and from the exuberant detail afforded to their visual expression, the project of adapting stories as illustrations must have been itself a massive intellectual and artistic
challenge. This was a project that teams of text readers, designers and artists at Shalu clearly tackled with care, attention to detail, and creativity.

Yet apart from the tangible remains of these efforts, we have very little information about the massive intellectual, artistic and physical work that went into the production of this painted book on the walls: the first of its kind, subject or scale in Tibet. Other than the abbot Butön’s inscribed praise for Shalu’s mural artists as “divinely incarnated,” I have recovered nothing else in writing about the surely many people involved in the production of its mural images.

However, there is much internal evidence in the paintings themselves both about the numerous people involved and the various and experimental processes of adapting the stories to visual form at Shalu in the 1340s. This chapter will develop insights about what these paintings can tell us. These one hundred and one individually painted narratives taken together demonstrate that two groups of artists from different places worked side by side at Shalu, and each worked in different ways and with different visual models to adapt the stories to this rare format and size. Moreover, the artists consistently worked with textual interpreters to show details of stories, a process of interpretation that looked to the longer stories and not to the shorter versions made for inscriptive redactions, making it likely that the pictures were placed on the wall before the inscriptions. In this chapter I will provide close readings of how these stories were adapted to the visual format, what was retained and prioritized for illustration from the textual versions, locating a recurrent emphasis on sequence and action in the visual stories. Even if the images were not made to be read, significant acts of reading nonetheless informed and were a vital part of their production.

In Butön’s māṇḍala chapel texts at Shalu he says of the mural paintings: “these were drawn by skillful artists” (lha bzos ba mkhas pa). This appears in the inscription to the left (north) side of the door in the Eastern Tengyur Upper level shrine, and also, printed in Butön Rinchen drup, Catalogue of the Excellent Māṇḍalas of the Large Shrines of the Four Directions of Shalu (Zhwa Lu’i Gtsug Lag Khang Gi Gzhal Yas Kang Nub Ma Byang Ma Shar Ma Lho Ma Rnams Na Bzhugs Pa’i Dkyil ’Khor Sogs Kyi Dkar Chag), vol. 17, gSung ’Bum Rin Chen Grub Bris Ma (pe cin: krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008), 39, http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O1PD81200|O1PD812001PD81396SW1PD45496.
Different Workshops of Mural Artists:

The paintings of the circumambulatory passage were, I have proposed, painted in the twilight of Mongol empire and power in Tibet, in the 1340s. Stylistic analysis of the paintings leads me to conclude that they were painted by at least two different groups of artists working in different painting styles. One group was composed of itinerant artists who came from the Kathmandu valley, and painted distinctively “Nepalese” figures, costumes and architectures. The second group, who for Shalu have often been claimed to be artists from the Yuan court, I think were more likely a group of local Tibetan artists, who channelled inspiration from Chinese pictorial sources, incorporating more Chinese-derived costumes and foreign figures into their depictions, and more interested in experimenting with landscape developments. These depictions of Chinese dress have long led writers about Shalu to see these as court-appointed painters, who depicted “‘worldly’ scenes from the life of the Yuan court.” Yet I think there is no reason to believe that the painters were from the court. Instead, the paintings with demonstrably “Chinese” costumes are relatively few and isolated from others, making it possible that this was an “influence” felt among one or two particular artists, but not necessarily the group as a whole. Each group of artists appears to have been made responsible for their own paintings, organized to paint different sections of the wall.

When we look along these one hundred individually painted jātaka stories, we find coherence among groups of paintings that visually divide working groups of artists along large sections of the wall (Diagram fig. 4.1). Looking closely and comparatively at the paintings of the circumambulatory passage makes it impossible to support the argument of a single hybrid style directly attributable to the Yuan court and their interpretation of the Newar style as practiced there by Anige. While there are certainly visual influences from Indian, Nepalese, Tibetan, Chinese and Persian painting all in

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361 I argue for this later date for these paintings in chapter 1 page 34.


363 Roberto Vitali proposed that the Shalu Korlam was painted by a group of artists working in “the Newar style of the Yuan court.” This was an analysis arrived at by combining the visual diversity of the paintings with the textual evidence that craftsmen came from the Yuan court. Roberto Vitali, “Shalu Serkhang and the Newar Style of the Yuan Court,” in *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (London: Serindia, 1990), 89–122.
evidence, some of these are isolated from one another, providing the evidence for different workshops

It is my contention that there were two distinct groups of artists, one group Tibetan and the other Nepalese, working side by side in painting the circumambulatory passage. The diagram (fig. 4.1) outlines which artists, grouped on the basis of style, produced which paintings. There are thirteen story sections that are lost or too badly damaged to be assessed for style, and these are indicated in grey on the diagram. A larger number of surviving paintings, fifty-eight in total, are stylistically attributable to a Tibetan workshop, clearly a large and diversely skilled group that showed a diversity of representational types and included artists with varying skills in drawing and design; these are indicated in red on the diagram, and illustrated in several figures (for example paintings by this group include fig. 4.2, 4.3).

Within this group, seventeen paintings, indicated in yellow on the diagram, show the Tibetan workshop style with increased prevalence of Chinese-inflected costume styles represented. These were likely done by Tibetan artists familiar with and interested in both Chinese and Persian art, because both costumes and design choices were informed by knowledge of these forms. There are twenty-nine paintings in what I will argue is a predominantly Nepalese style, which should be attributed to a separate Nepalese workshop at Shalu. The co-mingling of styles in groups of paintings across the long passage makes it necessary to posit that these two groups worked on painting different stories in the passage at the same time.

The paintings by the Tibetan workshop demonstrate a hybrid style that most often combines Mongol style dress, Chinese decorative elements, and combinations of Chinese and Tibetan architecture, with a diversity of roughly rendered headgear whose closest visual equivalents are found in Persian miniature paintings. In these paintings, figures are shown in a variety of Indic and Tibetan dress styles, in the same way that we saw these combined in earlier paintings (fig. 1.16). Yet it is significant to note that there are no archaic-styled Tibetan costumes among these paintings, meaning the same robes with a differentiated colour for a wide-lapel. Instead, the robes depicted at Shalu are shorter, usually monochromatic in colour, simply crossed once, and tied at the waist with a simple sash (fig. 4.2, 4.3).
This most common dress style for male figures, the predominantly depicted gender, likely represents contemporary dress influenced by Mongol robes. These robes, though rendered in a very different style of painting, look similar to their counterparts depicted in contemporaneous Chinese paintings (fig. 4.4). They are distinctly different from depictions of earlier Tibetan costumes. In central Tibetan painting and sculpture earlier Tibetan costumes, like those of the Tibetan-dressed bodhisattvas represented among the frieze of figures in the Northern shrine room, showed a longer robe with a wide lapel-collar often of a contrasting colour, sashed with a long pendant belt (fig. 1.16). The wide lapel and contrasting colours are missing from the robes depicted in the fourteenth-century circumambulator y passage paintings. The later robes are shorter, suitable for everyday wear and styled for Mongol horsemanship and also are usually monochromatic.

Contemporary Tibetan and Indic dress co-exist in some images. The Indic-styled male dress consists of bare-topped males wearing dhoti, and is often depicted alongside the Tibetan style robes in paintings (fig. 4.2). Indic dress was specially reserved for recurring gods like Indra, or for depictions of “Brahmins,” both recurring figural types in the jātaka stories. For instance, in story eight, the yaksha demons disguise themselves as “Brahmins” (bram ‘ze), who are then shown as figures in Indic dress (fig 4.3). In still other panels from the same workshop, the simple contemporary robes are combined with a wide array of styles of headgear on subsidiary figures. Some of these are loose approximations of Chinese caps (fig. 4.4), or slightly more adapted Chinese black scholars caps (fig. 4.5).

Still other paintings from this group, seventeen in total, often feature a notably different style of dress. These are the paintings that show a marked increase in depictions of distinctively Chinese-style costumes. For example, the group of women in story ninety-eight wear more complex sets of robes with outer and under-robe layers (fig. 4.6). These are close to the costumes seen in Yuan-Jin stoneware (fig. 4.7), and thus also depicted a contemporary dress style that was familiar to the time, but from farther afield. They are not so different in fact from the costumes on female musicians featured in the famous Chinese handscroll, the Night Revels of Han Xizai (fig. 4.8). That these types of costumes occurred along and beside the typical short robes, as in story twenty (fig. 4.9),
makes it unlikely that the paintings with more Chinese costumes must represent another group of artists group. These often distinctive Chinese-inspired costumes could also appear combined with heavy white and black Tibetan style boots (fig. 4.10). Instead, the Tibetan workshop painters painted Tibetan, Indian or Chines costumes, and demonstrated influences of Chinese and Persian art. When they represented buildings, they often represented Chinese-style blue-glazed tiled roof buildings like the one just recently erected at Shalu, but again, these could occur alongside depictions of Tibetan style buildings, as in story forty-six (fig 4.11). Elements like these costumes, dragon designs painted onto walls and varying headgear are often imperfectly or awkwardly rendered, showing that the Shalu artists were probably copying these at a remove from the objects themselves.

In contrast, the separate workshop of Nepalese painters can be identified, who painted costumes and buildings very differently. This Nepalese workshop can be identified working on twenty-nine of the paintings, and can be isolated by very different styles of costume and buildings. In story sixty-one, the depicted palace contains covered balconies supported by diagonally positioned support struts and distinctively shaped windows with perforated screens (fig. 4.12)—elements still found in traditional architecture of the Kathmandu valley. While the men are all shown in this painting dressed in the Indic style of Nepal, the female figures of the painting wear translucent saris (fig. 4.13). The male figures are also shown in very different costumes, as well as showing a more gestural interest in bodies often shown bending and moving (fig. 4.14), whereas for many of the Tibetan workshop painters the figures are quite still. The paintings of the Nepalese workshop at Shalu, accounting for about one third of the surviving paintings, are consistently different in the way the figures are dressed, buildings are shown, and spaces are arranged.

From the stylistic variance in the paintings, it appears that two different workshops of artists painted the circumambulatory passage at the same time. The fact that the styles intermingle in blocks across the circumambulatory passage, always clustered in groups, show that they were painted at the same time. There was a long tradition of inviting Nepalese artists to Tibet, and we know that a workshop of Nepalese artists had been very involved in the mural paintings of Sakya just earlier than the painting of
Shalu. While I have distinguished the works of these two groups here mostly by using costume and architectural depictions, the differences between the ways these artists each worked with depicting landscapes is also fascinating. Indeed, we see far more experimentation with setting figures into broader landscapes in the paintings done by the Tibetan artists than by the Nepalese artists, who may include landscape elements but whose figures seldom interact in space with them. The experimentation with setting figures into broader landscapes, like costumes, likely shows some more interest in experimenting with a taste adapted from a greater familiarity with Chinese landscape painting.

**Reading and Illustration**

While there were two groups of artists working at Shalu, it is clear that both groups had strong working relationships with text readers during the development and adaptation of the stories into visual form. Indeed, it is my contention that while the reading of the stories as either text or image was probably not the intended goal of the art being produced, the textual stories were definitely being read during the adaptation of the visual depictions. At Shalu, the same stories are presented as painted images and as written words, and these versions share a profoundly close relationship. The illustrations consistently show an extremely close conceptual understanding of the written stories, yet one that also departs from the inscription in important ways. It is such a close relationship that it is necessary to posit that a reading of the written texts must have occurred alongside the adaptation of these stories as images.

The painted images show close, often extremely literal interpretations of details from the written stories, which the artists could not have developed without close reference to the written textual stories. Only one or two exceptional stories may have been widely known—like the Mahāsattva jātaka where the bodhisattva sacrifices himself to save a starving tigress—and these may possibly have been illustrated without a strict

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364 There is ample evidence for Nepalese artists working in Tibet regularly before and during the thirteenth centuries, and were in particular responsible for painting Sakya. Steven Kossak, “Sakya Patrons and Nepalese Artists in 13th Century Tibet,” in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style* (London: Laurence King Publications, 1997), 26–37.
reliance on reading.\textsuperscript{365} But many of Rangjung Dorje’s collected jātakas were probably quite obscure at this time in Tibet; and since there is no evidence for any artistic interest in the jātakas before this time in Tibetan art, we cannot assume any specific Tibetan visual precedents for these painted illustrations. The relatively recent composition of the textual collection (Rangjung Dorje composed the \textit{Skyes rabs} in 1314), combined with the extremely close detail of the narrative illustrations, make it clear that someone at Shalu read the stories as part of the process of creating the illustrated adaptations.

Literacy was largely limited in pre-modern Tibet to those with some degree of monastic training, and further given their location within a monastic institution, a highly trained monk must have helped in this task of textual reading, interpretation and adaptation. The artists, traditionally understood as likely craftsmen with limited literacy, would not likely have been reading texts themselves; so instead we must posit that they worked closely with someone who did.\textsuperscript{366} Thus we can posit that in developing the book on the walls at Shalu, a literate monk or reader, or more likely several, worked alongside artists, reading the stories, and helping to determine which scenes or actions warranted illustration. Such complex narrative illustrations were probably worked out in a smaller format first, perhaps on paper, although we have no direct evidence at Shalu for this.\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{365} The Mahāsattva jātaka, or story of the tigress, which at Shalu and in Rangjung Dorje’s collection appears as story number 1, is the only other jātaka story I have found depicted in early Tibetan art prior to the Shalu paintings. This story was probably famous and appears in several contexts at Alchi and Mangyu. Roger Goepper, \textit{Alchi: Ladakh’s Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary: The Sumtsek} (London: Serinda Publications, 1996). In particular, it also appears as a small scene on the painted dhoti of a standing figure at Mangyu. Rob Linrothe, “Skirting the Bodhisattva: Fabricating Visionary Art,” \textit{Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines}, no. 42 (December 1, 2011): fig. 18, 19, doi:10.4000/emscat.1803.

\textsuperscript{366} The assumption of pre-modern Asian artists, and more specifically painters, as vastly illiterate, largely stems from their status as craftsmen, and their association as a socially inferior class of artisans as compared to, say, calligraphers and scribes who by necessity were literate. For comparative literature on mural artists at the site of Dunhuang see Sarah Elizabeth Fraser, \textit{Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia}, 618-960 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 190, 258 n. 1. While there are certainly important cases in Tibetan art history where monks produce art themselves, these are more often as devotional tangka paintings, and these instances always warrant some mention. For a famous Tibetan monastic artist see the 10\textsuperscript{th} Karmapa of the seventeenth century in Karl Debreczeny, \textit{The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa} (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2012).

\textsuperscript{367} However, the unusually preserved cache of works from Dunhuang studied by Sarah Fraser show paper sketches as preparatory drawings for murals and a place where artists worked out compositions before transferring these to the wall. Fraser, \textit{Performing the Visual}. 
Indeed, close comparison of the one hundred separate painted stories shows that two distinct groups of artists worked side by side in painting the corridor. We should assume a workshop-like structure for these painters, with small groups of artists dividing tasks for particular paintings—different artists being responsible for details of figures versus architecture, and different artists commonly completing illustration outlines versus others in the workshop responsible for filling in colours and patterns. These groups of artists worked closely with a text reader, interpreting longer stories and not merely redacted inscriptions, creating distinct and detailed narrative sequences.

Artists working in small groups thus worked through the logic of each painted story, determining their design and execution, and finding innovative ways to communicate the distinctive series of actions and conceptual understandings of the stories. This was necessarily a process of choices about which parts of stories to tell and how to tell them in visual form. Their choices in this adaptation of story to image demonstrate how the jātaka literature was being understood and adapted to fulfill a specific function here—the function of paintings in a circumambulatory passage—but also the processes of reading.

Specific features in the paintings consistently closely match the minute details of the written stories. In story number six, the story of the rabbit, a group of animals, which are disciples of the rabbit bodhisattva, come to the aid of a lost and hungry Brahmin, later revealed to be Indra in disguise who was testing the resolve of the rabbit bodhisattva (fig. 4.15). In the painting, the artist illustrates very specific textual details, evidencing a close reading of the text in the adaptation of the image. The story inscription includes this description of the gifts brought to the Brahmin by the animals:

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368 Some evidence for artist workshops in Tibetan paintings is available in David Paul Jackson, *A History of Tibetan Painting*.

369 This should encourage us to re-interpret the creativity of the “illiterate pre-modern craftsman.” Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Anne Walthall “Technology, Skills and the Pre-Modern Economy in the East and the West.” in *Pre-Modern East Asia: A Cultural, Social, and Political History, Volume I: To 1800, 3rd edition* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2013), 55.

370 The very strange visual interpretation of an otter makes it likely that this is an animal this artist has probably never seen. While the shape of the head, snout and ears of the animal in the painting are quite close to the smooth-coated otter native to the Indian subcontinent, the shape of the body, the long dog-like
…the otter … immediately went and brought seven fish and said: “These seven fish were forgotten and left by the fisherman, or perhaps they have just become very old and died on the lake. Please eat them and stay here.” The jackal also brought food, prostrated himself and said: “Here is yoghurt in a small pot and lizard meat (skyin gor). Someone just threw these out and I found them, please take them for my benefit. O wise one, please stay here in this forest and I will happily serve you what I find.” Then the monkey brought a totally ripened mango fruit. It was totally smooth, and very beautiful in color with the top slightly yellow, and the base slightly red, and with his two hands together, he said: “Ripened mango of beautiful color, this great fruit I have, please eat this and stay here.”

The painted image shows a very close and literal interpretation of each gift. It is specified in the text that the otter brings seven fish, and the artist has endeavored, however awkwardly, to illustrate exactly seven fish (fig. 4.16). The otter is holding three brown and yellow fish in his mouth, and another four white fish with red fins are arranged on the ground in front of him. This awkward, stilted composition shows that the artist was closely following the textual details of the story, for otherwise there would no need to incorporate this awkward inclusion of exactly seven visibly arrayed fish.

371 de nas de ci yang mi zer bas / mgon du bos pa khas blangs pa sram gyis rig nas/ dga’ bas rtab rtab por gyur cing ngyogs par song ste/ nya mo bdun khyer te ’ongs nas de la smras pa/ n ya pa rnams kyis brjed nas bor ba’am/ dngangs te rga bas thang la ’gres pa dag /mi dga’ gnyid kyi log bzhin nya bdun po/ /bdag gis rnyed pa ’di dag zo la ’rug de nas lce shyang yang ci rnyed pa’i zas dag khyer te ’ongs nas de la phyag byas te/ gus par smras pa/ skyin gor gcig dang zho ni rdzi’u gang zhig /la la zhig gis bor ba rnyed pa ’di/ /bdag la phan pa’i phyir snoms la/ /yon tan gnas khyod nags tshal ’dir bzhugs shig /ces smras nas yid dga’ bzhin du de la byin no/ /de nas spre’us shing A mra’i ’bras bu rab tu smin pa ’jam po ldong ros kyi phyre mas kha dog bsgyur ba ’dra ba rtsi ser ba/ /rtsa ba dmar ba’i snye ma dag cig khyer te ’ongs nas thal mo sbyar te de la smras pa/ A mra smin cing yid du ’jong ba’i chu/ grib ma bsil ba dam pa rnams dang ’grogs/ /bdag la mchis kyis tshangs pa rigs pa’i mchog / ’di dag snoms la khyod ni ’dir bzhugs shig. Appendix story 6, page 19.
The gifts of the other animals are also shown as close literal interpretations of textual descriptions in all regards except for their use of colour. The jackal holds in his mouth the small red pot and a package of “meat” shaped like the hind leg of an animal (fig. 4.17), and the monkey holds his two hands together around the mango, a round object painted in two distinct colours. Only the colours of this mango defy the textual description, which says the mango is “beautiful in color with the top slightly yellow, and the base slightly red.” although the mango is illustrated as black and white, which may have altered over time (fig. 4.18). However, since there are other places in the paintings where colours of dress are also inconsistent, this more likely this betrays a division of labour for colouring in images. Where the text was closely consulted in the drawing and planning of the image, it was not followed so necessarily by those artists later filling in the colours of objects. Nevertheless, this example shows just how closely details of text were followed in the adaptation of particular stories to pictures.

When a Picture is Worth A Thousand (Missing) Words: Painting Longer Stories, Not Redactions

The stories adapted to visual form were based on the longer textual tales and not on the stories produced as redactions for inscription. In several cases this is easy to discern because the painted images include key events that were omitted from the redacted inscriptions. For instance, while the specific textual lines of story six of the rabbit, describing the gifts provided by the animals, were included in the wall’s inscriptions, other important moments of this story were omitted from the inscription but were still included in the painting.

In particular, I am thinking here of painting 8 where the dress of the king inexplicably changes colour between different representations of the king. There are several other stories too though where the colour of dress changes between two different depictions of the same figure. In story 32 the prince shown leaving at left wears a green lower robe with a red robe over, and these colours are reversed on the right side where he sits meditating. In story 9 of Vessantara the king’s robes are coloured differently each time he is shown, and in story 10 the King’s robes change colour as well between his depiction in the centre and at the left. To me there seem to be two overlapping possibilities for this. First, that consistency of colour really did not matter much, and second that colours were being added or filled in by someone less familiar with the story. These are both possible, though I am more inclined to think that consistency of colour really just did not matter much, as I am fairly certain that, for the Vessantara story and others, an artist would have known at least in a basic sense that these are depictions of the same figure, yet still maintaining the colour of the king’s dress didn’t matter much to logic. Perhaps it was more important to have a visually diverse image.
In story number six of the rabbit, the crux of the action takes place around the bodhisattva rabbit, who bemoans the fact that the food which a rabbit is able to collect, being merely simple, lowly grass, is not a suitable gift for a guest. He thus vows to make a more noble gift, vowing to offer his entire body as food to the Brahmin. In the inscription, this reason for the rabbit’s extreme gift is omitted, as is his pledge of this very significant vow. This section of the inscription contains three elipses with only very short passages included between them, and even though these elide some of the most important and dramatic moments of the story, we can also see in the editing a real effort to include major action. Proceeding directly from the description of the animals’ gifts provided above, the inscription follows:

After that Indra knew that rabbit’s motivation, and manifested the great fire. The rabbit looked around, and saw this huge fire. And so forth. Then the rabbit leapt into the burning fire, just like diving into great water, or just like people who strongly desire wealth would jump into a treasury. And so forth. In order to show that great body to others and benefit sentient beings, Indra put the image of the rabbit on the roof of the palace, and on the full moon he drew the body of the rabbit.

With each insertion of the phrase “and so forth” (zhes pa nas) the passage elides a significant part of the story’s dramatic action. In the first instance, the Zhes pa nas glosses over the rabbit’s initial offer of his body as food, and the Brahmin’s subsequent

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373 There are a substantial number of jātaka stories that revolve around similar gifts of the body. For an important study of this literature, see Reiko Ohnuma, Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

374 zhes pa nas/ de nas lha'i dbang po brgya byin gyis de'i bsam pa shes nas/ mdag ma'i phung po gser btsos ma'i kha dog 'dra ba/ cung zad 'bar ba/ me stag rnam par 'phro ba du ba med pa zhog mgon par sprul to/ de nas ri bong gis phyogs kun tu bglas pa dang me'i phung po de mthong ngo / zhes pa nas/ de nas de ni me 'bar de'i nang du/ nor 'dod ba dag gser ni mthong ba bzhin/ /rab tu dga' bas me yi nang du zhydro/ pad 'dab rgyas pa'i chu nang ngang pa bzhin/ zhes pa nas/ de nas brgya byin gyis de'i lus khyad par can bstan pa'i phyin/ /jig rten la phan par bsam nas/ khang bzang mchog rnam par rgyal ba dang lha'i mdun sa chos bzang gi khang pa rtsegs pa dang / zla ba'i dkyil 'khor la ri bong gi gzugs brnyan gyis brgyans te bzhag go. Appendix story 6, page 19.
refusal since he, as a Brahmin, cannot kill (oddly, eating meat is not apparently the problem here, just the act of killing).

This omitted passage read in the longer preserved text also includes the rabbit’s resolution to find another way to serve himself up as food to the Brahmin. The following *Zhes pa nas* omission includes a verse where the rabbit begs the Brahmin once more to consume him, crying for him to “make my wish successful, O great Brahmin, … for me it is very difficult to find honourable guests like you, so I want to make my life’s meaning dependent on you.”375 And the last section omitted from this inscription given above includes the important revelation of Indra’s own divine form, for he had merely disguised himself as the Brahmin to test the bodhisattva rabbit’s resolve. In the longer text, this section includes the line that “Indra saw this and was amazed and transformed into his own (true) body, he made flowers rain and sweet sounds to praise him.”376

Thus the text for the wall inscription elided several significant narrative moments, even though these were still used in the interpretation of the narrative image. In particular, the painting emphasizes the transformation of Indra from disguised-as-Brahmin to God-form by the inclusion of the two equally sized, adorsed figures, making the image read as though the Brahmin has turned around and so become the god-form Indra. The painting culminates at the right side of the composition with the golden-skinned, crowned god Indra, wearing an Indian style dress of a red dhoti and billowing scarves, raising the body of the white rabbit from wonderfully stylized red flames (fig 4.19). These significant parts of the story were omitted from the inscription, yet each was central to the design choices of the painting’s illustration, making it certain that the artist who designed the composition had heard the longer story, and not merely the redacted inscriptive version.

In another example, from story fifty-one of King Tsang Jin (*Tshangs byin*), the inscription omits several key moments of the story, yet these sequences are included in the painting (fig. 4.20). In this story, the king has been requested by a *yaksha* (once again, actually Indra in disguise), to donate his wife and son as food for the demon, in exchange

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375 *Āryaśūra*, *Skyes Rabs*, 161-162.

376 Ibid. 162-163.
for which the yaksha has promised that “whatever the Tathagata taught, I also know it. If you want it, I can teach it to you, but you must make offerings to me (first).” While the family’s discussion and willingness are included in the inscription, the actual description of the moment the king offers his wife and son is not included in the inscriptive text. In the text that has been omitted from the inscription, the king is described as he “took his son and wife by the hand and offered himself and the two of them to be eaten. He spoke: ‘By your great teaching I have received a meaningful life. Whatever you want, eat it!’”

The painting too shows this scene from the text omitted from the inscription. In the painting, the king is shown standing on the roof of a palace, and he holds two smaller figures by the wrists (fig. 4.21). This is the clear depiction of this moment of offering, where he specifically holds them “by the hand” as the dark-bodied yaksha descends from flight above them. Also omitted from the inscription but included in the painting is Indra’s revelation of his divine form following the king’s generous offer. The kneeling figure positioned below the flying demon is Indra in this revealed god-form, though here, instead of being dressed as an Indic prince as in painting six, he wears a heavy long-sleeved green robe and a Chinese-style structured yellow hat (fig. 4.22). Once again, it is clear that the composition has depicted a scene omitted from the inscription.

Indeed, over and over, the paintings centralize pivotal and specific scenes of action that the inscriptions omit, showing an advanced comprehension of the stories based on the longer textual versions and not the redactions. In story fifty-two (fig. 4.23), the Story of Chöyongsu tsölwar dö (Chos yongs su 'tshol bar 'dod, the Bodhisattva who wishes to completely follow the dharma), the Bodhisattva is once again tested by a man desirous of wealth who instructs him to hand over his clothing and jewels before jumping from a cliff—thus once again a demand is made in exchange for providing him with a spiritual teaching. Yet the actual scene of the bodhisattva jumping from the mountain-top as a form of self-sacrifice has been omitted from the inscription, despite its centrality to the illustration (fig. 4.24). The inscription reads:

… Immediately after hearing this, the bodhisattva gave his priceless clothes and

jewels to this person, who himself stayed on the rock shelter, and said these true words: And so forth. In this way that Bodhisattva didn’t injure anything because the gods held him.  

In this inscription it is clear that both the words spoken by the bodhisattva, and the actual moment of his leaping from the cliff, were omitted from the inscription. Yet in the painting, this specific scene is clearly the focus of the composition. In the painting he is shown twice: leaping from the cliff, and miraculously unharmed at the bottom of the cliff where the would-be-thief bows before him, still holding the gifted jewels and clothing (fig. 4.24). Again, the longer story and not the redaction must be the basis for the image.

In another story where a King commits suicide (this time successfully) in an effort to feed his starving kingdom, the depiction of King Norchen (nor can) from story seventy-seven is also a painting based on passages omitted from the inscription (fig. 4.25). In this story the bodhisattva jumps from a cliff and then his body miraculously expands to an enormous size, enabling his corpse to feed the entire kingdom for a few hundred years. Both the conditions of the painful drought throughout the kingdom and the actual moment of his jumping from the cliff are omitted from the inscription. Once again these inform and structure the painted story, which shows in the lower right corner the scene of the bodhisattva jumping as he falls arms and head first from the mountain (figure 4.26). Below the falling figure is the miraculously enlarged corpse in a later moment of the story, which is being cut up by regular-sized men who carry off the sections of flesh (4.27), distributing the meat throughout the many small palaces of the kingdom painted to the left (Fig 4.28).

The artists thus repeatedly showed awareness of what was deemed the most important action from the longer textual story versions in their paintings. They were not limited by what had been included in the redacted versions of the stories made for

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378 de thos ma thag tu byang chub sems dpas/ rang gi gos rin thang med pa dang/ nor bu rin po che mi de la byin nas bdag nyid g.yang sa chen po'i khar 'dug ste/ bden pa'i tshigs su bcad pa 'di dag kyang brjod par mgon no/ zhes pa nas/ de ltar byang chub sems dpa' de ma smras shing ma bsnad la bde bar lha rnams kyiis hzung ba'i dbang gis g.yang sa chen po de nas sa la babs par gyur to. Appendix page 74.

379 Appendix page 110, footnote 163.
inscription. Indeed, it is most probable that the text inscriptions were actually added later
than the paintings. The main support for this are the numerous occasions of spaces in
Tibetan murals that look as though they were meant to receive inscriptions, but that were
left bare. This is the case for the narrative paintings at Tabo, where white cartouches
below images were left bare, although they are the same size and shape as others that
were inscribed. There is even some evidence of the same kind of blank white
inscriptional cartouches left bare at Shalu, in the final story of Śākyamuni depicted in the
circumambulatory passage (fig. 4.29). Their placement and the fact that one has been
used for inscriptive words, used like a speech bubble including the Tibetan alphabet
beside the depiction of the prince Śākyamuni, shows there was probably an intent to add
shorter inscriptions into the image field itself, though these were never added. This
supports the likelihood that the words attached to the jātaka paintings were added after
the painted images.

This recurrent artistic reliance on the longer stories to develop the painted images
can thus be firmly established. Because of this, the images could be substantially more
“complete” than the edited inscriptions below them, and were necessarily most focused
on the central actions of a story. The visual images could represent missing words, those
that had been elided from the condensed book for the walls. The images also worked
sometimes to communicate long sequences of action, necessarily editing and condensing
these into just a few selected images. This skillful economy of pictorial means shows
both close understandings of the stories, once again making it likely that artists were
working closely with people who not only read but interpreted the texts, and were most
interested in selecting, where possible, scenes of action for pictorial display.

**Studying Pictorial Narrative in Asia**

The circumambulatory passage paintings illustrate specific narratives, and I argue
that these painted stories were made not after an oral tradition or after previous artistic

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380 Evidence of the later addition of inscriptions into wall paintings exists in that in several narrative
sections at Tabo, they were never added. Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo*, 124.
images, but instead were adapted from the written stories. No earlier precedents for any jātaka paintings existed in Tibetan art. While the individual jātaka stories themselves were not new, this particular collection of one hundred stories had been newly assembled and organized by Rangjung Dorje in 1314, following his explanatory logic of ten stories to illustrate each of the ten perfections, and leading up to the penultimate life of Śākyamuni Buddha, the “one hundred and first story.” While none of the stories were themselves necessarily new, placing them together was new. Here the entire collection was being illustrated for the first time. 381

The paintings are not visual reductions of stories, but instead are visual elaborations, often prioritizing action and sequence. One alternative form of depiction that would have been far easier and quicker to execute would have been to simply illustrate each incarnation (a king, a merchant etc.) in a larger form, or to regularly depict a story as a single scene to represent the whole story. When space is greatly reduced in depiction, as in the two extant known tangka painting of this same sequence of jātakas, the stories, which are allotted only three inch squares on the tangka, are rendered as either one representation of a bodhisattva-king or one emblematic scene of action (fig. 4.30, fig. 4.31). 382 Yet at Shalu, given far more space for the illustration of each story, the artists continuously exerted effort towards depicting stories as sequences, often including moments from the beginning, middle and end of narratives.

The painted picture spaces were, like their written counterparts, organized and ordered, with the pictorial space of each individual story regularized along the same two registers (see diagram fig. 4.1). Yet there was not one universally applied strategy for adapting stories to pictorial form, and each picture-story necessarily follows its own

381 The only other known large scale illustration of these particular one hundred jātaka stories in a temple setting comes through a textual reference made by Rangjung Dorje to a temple, now lost or unknown, painted with the same set of his one hundred stories in Beijing in 1339. Ruth Gamble, “The View from Nowhere: The Travels of the Third Karmapa, Rang Byung Rdo Rje in Story and Songs” (Australian National University, 2013), 261.

382 For example in the large tangka painting in the Rubin museum of art, fig. 4.30, the jātaka stories are represented in small square spaces accompanied by inscriptions of the story numbers below. Of the two tangka paintings I have found that depict this set, one is in the collection of the Rubin museum, and another is in a private collection (fig. 4.31). These are both online as Himalayan Art Resources items number 230 and 30907.
logic. Within each bordered story, choices were made at the level of each individual story about how to adapt it as a picture. This was a necessity as the stories themselves are quite various. Some stories delineate long sequences of events before arriving at a conclusion, whereas others are quite short. An example of a long story would be the tale of Vessantara (story 9) who first gives away the elephant, then loses his horse, then his cart, and lastly his children, before a final crisis leads to his restoration, whereas in another jātaka story like that of the Fish (story 15), one crisis, the drought, leads to one vow/prayer leading to the resolution, the rain. Since the stories were each quite different, appropriate adaptations to pictures were necessary.

Some useful tools for the study of Shalu’s pictorial narratives can come from other studies of pictorial narrative in Asia, particularly the work of Vidya Dehejia and Julia K. Murray. A major divergence, though, is that both Dehejia and Murray are arguing for locating some consistent “narrative strategies” with much wider bodies of work, art that spans periods and formats. While some of their approaches are useful here, the case of Shalu’s narratives, where one hundred and one stories were adapted as large paintings by a relatively small group of artists in the early fourteenth century at the same site, is in fact quite a different body of work than that which has previously been used in analyses of pictorial narrative in the Asian context. We rarely find such controlled diversity, one hundred different examples from the same period and place of stories adapted into visual narratives. In this way, the example of Shalu allows us to ask different and more specific questions of the stories and images: for instance, what was the nature of the relationship to the text, what was the process of adapatation like, and who was responsible? This is also pictorial narrative that can hopefully help us to answer: to what goals and aims was it produced, and what did that mean for the understanding of the various narrative functionality of images as opposed to texts?

Dehejia, asking how Buddhist stories were adapted in visual form in Indian art, lists seven “modes of visual narration” for all Buddhist narrative art.383 This seven-part typology names different formal compositions:384

1) Monoscopic narrative: Themes of action in a single episode.
2) Monoscopic narrative: Being in state in a single culminating episode.
3) Sequential narrative: multiple episodes with protagonist repeated, in progressive linear order, separated by frames.
4) Continuous narrative: multiple episodes with protagonist repeated in a single frame showing chronological sequence.
5) Synoptic narrative: multiple episodes with protagonist repeated in a single frame that disregards chronological sequence.
6) Conflated narrative: Like synoptic but with the protagonist only shown once.
7) Narrative networks: extreme disregard for chronological sequence and scenes placed arbitrarily.

This typology provides the framework for the comparison of a large and disparate body of material that includes first-century Indian stone relief carvings, fifth-century murals, and seventeenth-century Tibetan tangkas, uniting these through their depictions of “narrative.” Dehejia’s “modes” seek to explain how formal compositions relate to stories, distinguishing between images that tell stories through one scene or many, images that communicate temporal sequence or disregard it, and images that separate scenes with formal devices or do not.  

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384 Though her modes are first based on an analysis of early Indian stone relief carvings, she extends them to also be useful with the paintings at Ajanta and some later Tibetan art as well.

385 This is a typology that has been criticized as being too “art historical,” reflecting little of how a pre-modern Indian audience (or artist) understood either images or the narratives. Specifically Robert Brown concludes in his book review that “Dehejia’s approach treats the art as if it were on the walls of a museum or on the screen in a classroom. This is a valid way of looking at the material, but I do not think it is how the ancient worshippers at these Buddhist monuments saw it.” Robert L. Brown, “Book Review of Discourses in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India by Vidya Dehejia,” *Artibus Asiae* 61, no. 2 (2001): 358. This repeats his own earlier developed claim that people did not read narrative because it functioned for them as “icon.” Robert L. Brown, “Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient Indian and Southeast Asian Architecture,” in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1997), 64–109. An important response to Brown which debates his proposition that people could not see the Sāṅcī narratives in particular appears in Joanna Williams, “On Viewing Sāṅcī,” *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (January 1, 1997): 93–98.
Dehejia is positing a form of relationship between image and story that is purely pictorial, transcending format or use, and where the comparison to written narrative is not a key part of the interpretive apparatus. One difficulty in using the “seven modes” for a more specific body of material like the Shalu Jātakas is that in proposing terms for the comparison of formal compositions across vastly different media and scales, her typology conflates numerous variables. For example, defining a stone roundel decoration as “monoscenic,” and comparing this to a whole-wall mural painting described as a “narrative network,” omits the vastly different scales and purposes of the images, and comparing these as sheer “narrative choices” seem miss much of the inherent variation that material/media and scale/use must have demanded. The scale and material context of the display must have had as much effect on the choices here as how to represent the story alone.

Another useful interpretation that accounts for format and scale is provided in the analysis of Julia K. Murray who presents three overlapping aspects for the visual presentation of narrative. Her system, developed in relationship to Chinese narratives that communicate Confucian ideologies, divides and considers three different aspects of a work:

1) The conceptual approach to the narrative (does it allude to, symbolize, or represent through excerpted highlights the story in question?).
2) The compositional structures (where she adapts Dehejia’s typology differentiating monoscenic, conflated, synoptic, sequential, and large planar compositions)
3) The format (wall, tablet, screen, scroll, fan, album, book).

The strength of her analysis, though it cannot always lead to typological clarity, is the recognition that “each kind of format presents a particular set of posibilites and limitations” and hence further “influences the work’s reception by viewers, who infer meaning and significance from the circumstances in which they encounter the image.”

In Murray’s analysis, while each of these aspects overlap and contribute towards the

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adaptations of visual narratives, these cannot be elided in comparisons, as each has a
different (possible) role to play in the constraints and productions of meaning.

Illuminating here is Murray’s insight that three attributes (conceptual
interpretation, composition and format) each play a role in determining the others. After
considering her large corpus of images spanning two millennia of Chinese visual art, she
notes:

In theory, many combinations are possible, but in practice, most narrative
depictions belong to relatively few modes of presentation: monoscenic
compositions that symbolize or epitomize the story in the handscroll, hanging
scroll, and fan formats; sequential compositions that symbolize or epitomize the
story in the handscroll, album and book formats; sequential compositions that
present key events from the story or narrate it pictorially in the handscroll, album
and book formats; and planar compositions that excerpt the highlights of the story
in the mural format.387

Murray’s passage highlights the related variance of narrative needs and pictorial formats.
At Shalu there is significantly less variation to consider, yet Murray’s observations about
overlapping combinations is useful in considering to what possible templates did Shalu
artists have access to in the creation of their visual narratives. The Shalu narratives are
mostly, using Murray’s terms “sequential narratives that present key events.” Yet the
format itself does not often allow for a clear depiction of sequence, which I believe shows
that while reading informed production it was not an assumed expectation for the image’s
consumption. The Shalu illustrations then could be considered most closely related to
formats usually otherwise seen in Chinese art in handscroll, album and book formats. I
hope to do further research on this question, as this appear most similar to album/book
illustration, particularly that of Il-khanid Persia.388 The murals at Shalu thus allows us to
ask questions of the material more specific than those of Dehejia or Murray.

387 Ibid., 22.

388 The similarity to what I am broadly calling “Persian” paintings is a topic I have suggested but not fairly
addressed in this thesis but plan to explore further in the future. There are, I believe, significant visual
What Murray has as her first “aspect,” the conceptual approach to the story, acknowledges that the first step in rendering a visual narrative must be to decide what of the story to represent. Only two of Dehejia’s distinctions between her first two modes, the monoscenic, which can alternatively either show scenes of “action” or scenes “in state,” reveal artistic choice of which narrative moments to depict. Yet I want to begin by interrogating the Shalu jātaka paintings with respect to representational choices made in response to the narrative needs of a given jātaka tale.

So we can and should ask of Shalu’s jātaka paintings—what was selected for representation and how was it rendered in visual form? The artists worked with a conceptual toolbox of several core but limited visual possibilities, particularly mobilizing space, figure, and objects to communicate dramatic sequences of events. What were the parts that mattered within a story when creating it as a painting? The artists who painted the stories directly intervened in the ways that the visual stories conveyed meaning, creating a parallel, visual, text. In so doing they produced a new and unique version of the book—a book that could be entered and experienced, and which enacted reading as activity, not as conceptual understanding. Given all their choices, the artists, themselves a conspicuously heterogeneous group, become yet other kinds of authors—mediators of meaning for the pictorial text.

How did Shalu Artists Make Stories Visual?

There were significantly different considerations in transferring the stories into visual form. This choice was first one of what scene to depict from a given story, and then how and where to place it/them in the visual field. Written narratives, due to the linear nature of text, have an assumed beginning, middle and end, such that a written text necessitates or at least suggests reading in a linear direction. When the story is seen, a painted story has no intrinsic sequence of action in the way a linear line of text does; instead the whole story can be seen at once.

similarities between paintings of Shalu’s circumambulatory passage and, in particular, Ilkhanid book illustrations from around the same period. It makes sense that objects like Ilkhanid illustrated books might have been exchanged and traveled within the expanded Mongol realm which Tibet was part of, and so these could have made their way to Tibet to become one of the visual sources for this large and innovative artistic project. In addition to details of costume and headgear that are similar, figural groupings and arrangements and experiments with arranging figures around landscape elements may be similar to Shalu’s paintings.
What then happened at Shalu in the effort to translate stories, each one a series of events that develop over time, into a unified pictorial space? The exercise of these processes over so many stories at Shalu, in cases where we have seen a very close relationship between image and text, offers an important opportunity for understanding the different possibilities for making stories into visual forms. At Shalu, artists first made choices about which parts of a story to illustrate, how many scenes needed to be shown, and then how to place them in spatial relationship to each other. There was not a single format to follow; instead each story was adapted to visual form on its own terms.

The artists used a range of responses to the problems of animating stories in paint. I will further explore in detail a few specific examples of frequently made choices: the focus on a scene of dramatic climax; the interest in showing multiple scenes and sequential events; and the times when only one scene at first appears to be depicted but into which narrative elements have nevertheless, I argue, been placed. Most often some attempt was made at depicting linear sequence was made in the paintings, and most often scenes developed in a roughly left to right direction. The painters consistently took great care to depict each story on its own terms, but focused on, where possible, depicting actions.

The Choice to Depict Moments of Dramatic Climax

Many of the stories depict a dramatic climax, selecting one or several moments of dramatic action for depiction. This is in keeping with eighteenth-century German enlightenment philosopher and art critic G.E. Lessing’s analysis of painting as an art that “can use but a single moment of an action, and must therefore choose the most pregnant one, the most suggestive of what has gone before and what is to follow.” The stories of the Buddha’s former lives are often stories of generosity and self-sacrifice. When the story permits it then, these specific feats, pregnant moments of flinging bodies and strewn corpses mid-consumption, were often chosen for depiction. When the story is one of sacrifice, the painting invariably depicts this sacrifice. The sacrifice, or another dramatic

climax in the narrative, is often selected for prominent display. Compositionally, these can either appear at the centre of narrative illustrations, or can occasionally be placed in a corner of the composition to which the eye is drawn.

The first painting, story one in the circumambulatory passage, depicts the most famous story of the bodhisattva who gave his body to feed a starving tigress (fig. 4.32). In this tale the bodhisattva is successfully teaching others about the necessity of guiding “all worldly beings to the absolute path,” when he and his friends see a tragic sight: a starving mother Tiger who is about to eat her babies. Following this he bemoans, “This starving wild female animal has gone beyond the border of compassion, and even plans to eat her own children!” (fig. 4.33). As his students scatter to find her food, the bodhisattva does not hesitate to offer her his body as food. The painting tells this story across three scenes, but features most prominently the very recognizable moment of the tigress consuming the bodhisattva’s human body in the very centre of the composition (fig. 4.34). This dramatic moment of the story is represented by a naked, supine bodhisattva, who lies with closed eyes and one arm casually tossed above his head as the tigress chews on his other arm and blood flows (fig. 4.34). The pair are observed by a group of seven bejeweled bodhisattvas holding lotus flowers, who watch the scene with superhuman equanimity, representing the moment where the students observe this selfless gift with awe: “Then the students were amazed by that action” (fig. 4.35).

Each of two scences flanking a central scence shows one different moment from before this action. On the left side is the bodhisattva with four attendants enthroned as a prince at the beginning of the story where he is teaching (fig. 4.36). At the right is the scene that he witnesses and which moves him to make his sacrifice—the starving tigress bending down with mouth agape, so starving that she has lost all motherly instincts and is about to eat one of her own cubs (fig. 4.33). Each of these earlier flanking scenes introduces the characters—the teaching bodhisattva and the tigress—brought together in

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390 jig rten pa rnams ni nges pa’i lam dam pa la btsud. Appendix page 14.

391 gcan zan mo ’di logs nas su/ byams pa’i mtshams las ’das nas ni/ bdag gi bu yang za bar rtsom. Appendix page 14.

392 de nas de’i spyod pas ngo mtshar gyur pa’i slob ma. Appendix page 14.
the centre. Temporality is not clearly marked between the scenes, though they do proceed roughly from left, to far right, to centre—a reading order (left to right) that flanks a centrally placed climactic action. What was given visual prominence to express in this depiction of the story was the moment of climax—the dramatic gift of the bodhisattva’s own body.

Another painted story that we have already seen gives prominence, though not a central position, to a dramatic act of body gifting is that of story seventy-seven (fig. 4.25). In this story, the bodhisattva is the King Norchen (“Wealth”) whose kingdom is suffering from drought and whose people are starving. To allay this, the King throws his body off a cliff, praying beforehand that his body should miraculously become enormous: “May my body become like this mountain (in size) for the benefit of all sentient beings.”

This scene of self-sacrifice, and its resultant use of the giant body by the kingdom’s people, is illustrated in a scene at the lower right corner of the painting. Here we see the moment where the bodhisattva commits suicide, as the body of the bodhisattva falls from a mountain (fig. 4.26). Below the falling figure, the now magically enlarged corpse is shown, being harvested for flesh. The enormous body lies naked and recumbent, clearly dead as the corpse is being hacked at by five smaller figures with sharp tools, one who even cuts off the bodhisattva’s penis (fig. 4.27). The story concludes “by giving his body for 10,000 years, all sentient beings were guided to incomparable enlightenment.”

Most of the painted panel here is given over to the visual explanation of the large size of the kingdom thus sustained, yet the dramatic action is shown in the lower right corner. Part of the reason for this orientation though is also to permit the enumeration of a large kingdom filled with many palaces and people bringing bodhisattva-food to all of them. To the left of this body is a procession of figures coming and going from the large body (fig. 4.25). The upper line of figures approaching the body wield tools, and the lower line of figures leaving the body carry parcels on their backs and in side baskets. The rest of the painting, most of the space to the left and centre of the panel, is occupied

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393 di lit'a bdag lus yongs su g tong ba ni/ snying brtse phyir te lus kyi sha khrag rnams/ /ri 'di'i 'phang tsam dag tu g yur nas ni/ /lha bcas 'jig rten don du 'gyur bar shog. Appendix page 108.

394 de lta bu'i tshul gyis lo khri'i bar tu sbyin pa byas te sams can rnams bla na med pa'i byang chub la bkod do. Appendix page 108.
by many of these small figures carrying packages and leading pack animals amidst seven
small palace structures (4.28).

The six small palaces to the left are Nepalese style multi-level structures with
upper balconies, each occupied by a single prince (fig. 4.37). This is in contrast to the
largest palace, the one positioned closest to the bodhisattva’s body, which is occupied by
two females, representing the palace left empty after the king abandons it to become a
monk (fig. 4.38). The structure of the painting to the left though is a direct reference to
another part of the story: the division of his kingdom into six parts. In the story, six of his
one thousand sons refused to give up worldly rule and turn to a religious life like the rest.
In this earlier part of the story, “his whole kingdom was divided into six pieces and given
to his six sons” who later “disagreed with each other and fought, argued and debated.”
Indeed, part of the reason that the kingdom is in such a bad state is due to the internal
fighting of these brothers. Thus, the act of the bodhisattva jumping off the mountain, and
then sustaining and thereby saving the vast divided kingdom, is put into spatial
relationship to the context of the story: the whole divided kingdom that has been
suffering.

While dramatic action is located only in the busy painted scene of suicide and the
cutting up of the corpse in the lower right corner, this is visually explained through its
context to the rest of the kingdom. Indeed, all the other kings inside the small palaces,
and the lone queen (wife of the departed bodhisattva?) in the largest palace, gaze towards
the lower corner of action, as if time and space permitted them to watch the drama of the
lower corner as it unfolds. The artist here has thus balanced the needs of representing the
moment of action (the suicide) with the context of the crisis: the division of the space into
six separate kingdoms.

Another painted story that depicts the dramatic action of the bodhisattva’s self-
sacrifice in the name of the dharma is story fifty-two, the story of the Bodhisattva
Chöyongsu tsölwar dö (Chos yongs su ‘tshol bar ‘dod , “Who completely searched for
the dharma”). In this painting the action is divided across the rectangular composition

395 dzam bu’i gling thams cad cha drug du bgos te/ bu drug po de dag la byin nas ... ’dzam bu’i gling gi
rgyal po de dag kyang phan tshun mi mthun zhing ’thab pa dang / tshang ’bru ba dang / ’gyed pa dang /
rtsod par gyur to. Appendix page 108.
into two primary quadrants, left and right sections of the composition, which roughly delineate a linear sequence from the beginning of the story at the left to its dramatic conflict at the right. In this composition, the bodhisattva’s selfless gift is placed as the drama playing out in the right half of the painting (fig. 4.23). In this story the bodhisattva eschews palace life, and “in order to receive the dharma he traveled to many different places.”

Having traveled to a quiet retreat place, the bodhisattva meets “a person with a strong desire for wealth staying alone without any friends.” This person wants the jewels and fine clothing that the prince bodhisattva has, but fears that if he lets the giver live he will cause problems, so asks “Young man, give your clothes and jewels to me. After that, if you give up your body at this rock shelter, then I will teach you this story of the Buddha” (somewhat confounding logic, for potential death is no impediment to receiving teachings). The bodhisattva of course does not hesitate to jump, risking his life, but not without first taking the vow: “Dharma is priceless and wealth is meaningless, since I gave away my clothes and jewels, I have no regret at all. If this is true by the power of this merit, even if I jump from this rock shelter, it will not destroy my body.” Of course the jump does not kill him, since he is protected by his vow, and the greedy teacher, amazed, returns him his clothing and seeks teachings from him instead.

While in this story the self-sacrificing bodhisattva does not die, the far right scene shows the moment where he puts faith in his own vow, and without fear for the loss of his life or harm to his body leaps off the cliff (fig. 4.24). The artist has depicted both the dramatic act and its outcome. The bodhisattva is pictured twice, once leaping down with legs wide from the stylized multi-coloured rocks, and once standing just below receiving

396 A line of the story omitted from the inscription, but occurring in the Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 129-131. Appendix page 75.

397 re de’i bya skyibs cig gi drung na skyes bu longs spyod kyis sems kun tu g yengs par gyur pa ‘dod pa dang ldan pa’i skye bo zhig grogs med par ’dag pa mthong ngo. Appendix page 74.

398 gzhon nu khyod kyis bgos pa’i gos de dang / nor bu rin po che de nga la byin zhing de nas kyang khyod ri’i bya skyibs ’di nyid nas bdag gi lus bor bar byed na kho bos khyod la sangs rgyas dang ldan pa’i gtam yongs su bstan par bya’o. Appendix page 74.

399 A line omitted from the inscription but present in the longer text. Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 135. Appendix page 74.
his ornaments back from the man—the moment of the thief’s regret and conversion, when he “went to the place where the bodhisattva had landed and said: “Ema’o! It is amazing that you did that great activity in order to receive the holy dharma. I did a horrible thing. Please explain to me a little bit about why you would undergo such hardships in order to receive the dharma?” This scene depicts the final outcome of the story, when the bodhisattva successfully converted the thief and set him upon a better path.

The jump from the cliff is framed by scenes that represent, on the one hand the lead-up to this moment of action, and on the other, its outcome. At the left, a royal figure sits in a palace with four attendants, a depiction of the bodhisattva as the king who “traveled widely in search of the dharma,” explaining his one notably foreign attendant (fig. 4.23). To the right side, a small robed figure sits below a mountain clutching a red sack, probably the depiction of the would-be thief, the one staying alone and wishing for wealth, seen before his request of the bodhisattva. Once again, the painting has chosen to show the narrative dramatic climax flanked by scenes from earlier in the story, as well as including the narrative’s ultimate outcome, the bodhisattva’s miraculous survival and the thief’s conversion. Artists thus demonstrate an interest in the central action but also in some depiction of its sequence and outcome.

The number of scenes chosen to tell the visual story is important in determining the placement of the dramatic act. In story 39, the story of the Low-caste one (rigs ngan), the dramatic act is unusually placed on the upper right corner (fig. 4.39). In this story, the bodhisattva is born as a low-caste person who “kept all the people of the world away from bad activities.” Following the death of the country’s king, this noble but low caste man is selected as the next king by the people based on his justice and fairness, and his ability to positively influence all people. But the story takes a strange turn, when later, after becoming king and satisfying all the needy people of his land with food and gifts, he

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400  de ltar blo la nges par gyur nas myur bar myur bar ri'i bya skyibs de las babs ste byang chub sens dpa' ga la ba der song nas 'di skad ces smras so/ e ma'o/ khyod dam pa'i chos kyi phyir bya ba 'di lta bu byed pa ni ngo mtshar to/ /bdag gis ni gya tshom du byas shing ma rungs par gyur to/ /di lta bu'i ika' ba spyod pa'i don cung zad cig zhu'o. Appendix page 74.

401  'dzam bu'i gling gi mi phal mo che de lta bu'i brtson 'grus kyi shugs kyis ngan par spyod pa las bzlog par gyur to. Appendix page 74.
is approached by a man and asked to cut off and gift him his own skin.\footnote{In a section omitted from the inscription, the story explains that the man needs “the skin and eyes of a live person” in order to “win a war with the demi-gods.” \textit{Skyes rabs} 35. Appendix page 67 footnote 103.} The man asking needs it in order to fulfil the knowledge mantra (\textit{rigs sngags ‘chang}), and the story curtly ends with, “The king gave his skin to this person. That person took away the skin and completed the knowledge mantra.”\footnote{\textit{des kyang lpags pa khyer te rigs sngags bsgrubs so.} Appendix page 65.} The dramatic climax, the unique act and action selected for depiction of this story, is the act of the bodhisattva cutting and peeling off his own skin, indicated as red cuts on his mostly naked skin, and an expressive outstretched arm gesture towards the crowned figure who represents the man asking for his skin (fig. 4.40). The desire to tell four specific parts of this story then determines a circular placement of scenes, with the action of the skin-cutting placed in the upper right.

The rectangular space of the painting for this composition has been treated differently than others, divided roughly into four quadrants and four scenes. The divided quadrants, a relatively unusual format, may reflect the artist’s struggle to interpret a story in which there is little easy or cohesive relationship between its parts: the longer description of the ascent of the low caste man to becoming a king bears little direct relationship to the latter part of the tale, where he willingly relinquishes his skin. The artist has chosen to depict the tale as four separate scenes, and these move in a circular, counter clockwise movement from lower left, to lower right, to upper right to upper left (fig. 4.41). The dramatic act, the act of skin cutting and peeling, occupies the top right quadrant (fig. 4.40). Beside this, at the top left, the figure who made the request walks away from the scene with the human skin casually hoisted over his shoulder (fig. 4.41). The lower two scenes represent two ambiguous earlier moments in the early part of the story of the low caste person, enthroned at the left and being entreated and worshipped at the right, representing his ascent to kingship and the great favour he found among the people (fig. 4.42).\footnote{There are times when colour consistency of dress is used to denote the figures and others where it is not. The king here in story 39 remains clad in the same dark green robe with gold designs in all four depictions of him in the scene, although the figure who asks for the skin above, and then who proceeds to walk away with it, which are certainly meant to depict the same person, is clad once in a green dhoti and once in a red dhoti.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.40}
\caption{The dramatic climax, the unique act and action selected for depiction of this story, is the act of the bodhisattva cutting and peeling off his own skin, indicated as red cuts on his mostly naked skin, and an expressive outstretched arm gesture towards the crowned figure who represents the man asking for his skin (fig. 4.40).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.41}
\caption{The rectangular space of the painting for this composition has been treated differently than others, divided roughly into four quadrants and four scenes.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure4.42}
\caption{The lower two scenes represent two ambiguous earlier moments in the early part of the story of the low caste person, enthroned at the left and being entreated and worshipped at the right, representing his ascent to kingship and the great favour he found among the people (fig. 4.42).}
\end{figure}
In these four examples we see the dramatic action being carefully selected for pictorial inclusion, always as a sequence shown mid-action. It is often combined with scenes that depict both moments before and after this event. Dramatic action is important to depict, but does not follow strict rules as to its placement. It can be centrally placed, or placed in the lower right or occasionally, upper right in a four-part structure. The only compositional place where we seem to never find the dramatic action occurring is on the left side of the compositional rectangle—a space reserved for beginnings and ends but not actions. Instead, action can occur in the middle or the right, always an action framed as an outcome of a preceding moment, and the depiction of temporal progress then proceeds, usually in the direction of reading, from left to right. We see dramatic acts variously placed in central prominence, flanked by scenes that lead up to this action, or as one of several scenes that move back from right to left. It was a most common pictorial choice for artists to feature and illustrate action mid-event, representing the dramatic climax of the story as a scene still unfolding through action.

To recapitulate: all of the examples of paintings featuring dramatic climax given above also depict other scenes in relationship to that moment. In story one of the tigress, moments that flank the action both come before the drama: the munificent bodhisattva at left and the tigress about to eat her young at right, but the outcome is also represented, as the central scene is observed by the student-bodhisattvas. In story seventy-seven, though, we find an unusual temporal incursion that so far has not been explained. While most of the painting is given over to the denouement of the action, the feeding of the many kingdoms that lasted for thousands of years (fig. 4.25), it also contains a much later scene. In the top right a preaching monk is seated on a throne, being approached by six other males, two of whom kneel in devotion while the other four stand in approach holding begging bowls and staffs (fig. 4.43-44). This depiction represents the Buddha Śākyamuni telling the story to his six followers, who were also, we are told at the end of the story, his six sons in a past life, an identification only in the longer story that is not included in the inscription. This is thus a moment of the rare distinction of a scene

405 In final lines omitted from the inscription, but from the longer text, the closing of the story contains this scene and explanation: “When the Buddha said: ‘Noble sons, in order to arise the mind of bodhicitta in others, I gave away all the universe. At that time the six sons of the king were called the bodhisattvas Legs
from the story’s “discourse-time” rather than “story-time,” if we use terms proposed by structural theorists of narrative like Seymour Chatman. However this was also one of the few stories I found in the circumambulatory passage that included this scene in the text, and so this pictorial adaptation again reveals a close reliance on interpreting each individual story on its own terms in adapting it as an image.

Story fifty-two also features two sequences before the dramatic action that has been placed centrally: flanking the jumping placed centrally (fig. 4.24) with the enthroned king in a palace on the left (fig. 4.23) but also including the greedy man alone on the forest on the right (fig. 4.45), another scene from before the central action. Story thirty-nine selects both scenes from before and after the action, with two depictions of the low-caste-become-king below, and above the climactic moment of skin cutting, combined with the figure taking the skin away (fig. 4.39-42). The sequence of action at the top of the painting moves, in a rare exception, from right to left, with the king cutting his skin away on the right side of the panel and the skin being taken away on the left. The spatial continuity between them is explained through the figures gestures and the direction of their movements. These paintings all feature a sequence of actions with the dramatic action featured prominently, though not always centrally. Other stories demanded other kinds of artistic response, and necessitated even more scenes to be depicted.

**The Choice to Depict Multiple Story Events**

The stories discussed above not only depicted the narrative focus, but always also included depictions of other scenes as well; indeed, some stories were illustrated with

dga’, Rab tu lag brkyang, Sa sbyin, Brtson ‘grus skul, Sying po me tog rgyas, and Shes rab ‘od zer kun nas ‘khrugs ‘dzin. I have given away my body: I sent my eyes to sentient beings like so many grains of sand, I gave away my blood like so many rivers etc... Thus anyone who wants to follow the path of the great being must practice generosity.’ We praise the good qualities of the Tathagata.” Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 349-351. Appendix page 111.

many specific scenes. One story illustrated as a series of numerous events is the painting attached to story nine of the famously generous prince Tamchédröl (Thams cad sgrol; in Sanskrit known as Vessantara/Vishvantara) (fig. 4.46). The depiction of the tale corresponds effectively to the narrative: for this story is also told as a series of action-based exchange events, specifically a series of gifts made by the generous ruler. In the story, Tamchédröl gives away a sequence of things: first the kingdom’s famed royal elephant which he gifts to a Brahmin, causing the social upset that leads him to be banished, told by the king’s messenger that “Because you gave away the royal elephant, the people of Shibi are angry and their trust is depleted. Go forth abandoning your own property!” Yet even as the exiled king is wandering away with his wife and children outside the city gates, his generosity is not curbed. He is progressively asked for his horse, his cart, and finally, his children and his wife. The story tells that “the bodhisattva with his great mind had the habit of giving and not saying no, so he agreed to give away his two greatly loved children without hesitation.” In a redemptive twist for a rare happy ending, the children are taken back to his former kingdom, and when the people and the king hear about his extreme generosity, “their hearts softened” and they save the two children and they call for the prince and reinstate him.

The painting centres on an iconic and frontal portrait of an enthroned royal figure in a palace with two attendants, possibly the portrait of the king (the prince’s father) who banishes him and brings him back, though more likely, given its prominence in the composition, a central depiction of prince Tamchédröl himself, understood both as before his banishment, and after his reinstatement at the end of the story (fig. 4.46). Around this largest central figural group are arrayed specific scenes of his various generous actions (fig. 4.47-9). The artist has selected specifically three events of giving for detailed depiction, with each instance of his extreme generosity being illustrated.

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407 glang po'i rgyal po khyod kyis byin pa'i phyir/ /shi bi pa rnams 'khrugs nas brtan pa nyams/ de bas rang gi chos bor te. Appendix page 32.

408 byang chub sms dpa' sms dpa' chen po/ /shyin la dga' ba goms byas shing / slar zlog pa ni ma bslabs pas/ rab tu sdug pa'i bu gnyis kyang / tsham tshom med par byin zhes smras. Appendix page 33.

409 snying brlan par gyur. Appendix page 36.
The left side of the painting shows the earliest story events surrounding the royal elephant (fig. 4.47-8). At the upper left the prince is shown riding the elephant at the outset of the story, as onlookers behind him talk in a closed group (fig. 4.47). This may also be a conflated scene that shows the moment of people conspiring to request the elephant, or of his followers fearing his decision to give it away. Their physical relationship to the prince on his elephant, with their backs turned to him, expresses that their conversation is intended to be without his knowledge, and the strange figure gesturing up towards the corner palace may be an indication of the neighbouring kingdom’s plot. Below that scene the moment of giving the elephant away is depicted across two vignettes with the elephant and the Brahmin repeated, but the prince shown only once (fig. 4.48). In the more central of the two scenes, the Brahmin with white matted locks and a white and green robe asks for the elephant as the king holds out its reigns to him (fig. 4.48). Further left of this scene, the same Brahmin leads the elephant away. Sequences of specific actions are shown moving out from the centre in both directions.

The right side of the painting features other specific moments of his generous actions. These proceed from lower to upper spaces, and from left to right. Close to the centre, a Brahmin leads two horses away, riding the back of the larger brown one (fig. 4.49). To the right of that the Prince and his family are shown on a red cart and one wooden beam of the cart is being held by a cloaked Brahmin, depicting the moment the Prince is asked for his cart. This scene again conflates several events, showing a red deer behind that Brahmin (very hard to see in the available image, but two heads with white ears can be seen behind the white cloaked Brahmin holding the cart), this is a visual reference to the miraculous red deer specified in the story who pull the cart when the horses are taken. Above this scene is the penultimate drama of the story that brings its resolution: the depiction of a scene where the prince in the forest gives away his two children (fig. 4.50). The king holds the two smaller figures, his children, by their wrists, their hands have been tied, ready to give them away. While the condition of this painting and my photograph make it very hard to see, a Brahmin in a white coat is standing next to the child on the right also reaching for his wrist.
This story, then, is visually rendered as a specific sequence of events, and specifically the dramatic and selfless acts of the Prince’s generous giving have been repeatedly selected for depiction. It seems the artists had some trouble deciding how much to include, since in the logic of the story almost all of the giving is essential. The exile of the prince can only be explained by its cause (the gift of the elephant), and the ultimate act of giving away his family is dramatically positioned in the story as the culmination of earlier gifts (his horse, his cart). The artists have erred on the side of excess, including as much detail as possible. While the happy resolution of the tale is implied by the central scene of the prince enthroned, this is not specifically depicted, and the centrally enthroned prince is out of time and action, what Dehejia might have called a depiction “in state” instead of “in action.”

Surrounded by scenes of action, this central enthroned prince is connected like the great centre of the spokes on a wheel. The moments selected for illustration—the gifts of the elephant, horse, cart and children—devote equal space and visual emphasis to the story before and after the prince leaves the kingdom, progressing again from left to right. The division of space in the painting here may also be a topographical order or sequence, with the space to the left of the central palace seen as a space within the kingdom, whereas the right of the palace depicts the space of the wilderness beyond the palace walls. Indeed, in the lower right corner of the painting the space is indicated as “outside” and “wild” through the inclusion of graphic elements of wilderness space, with multicoloured rolling hills providing the background of these scenes in the damaged section on the right (fig.4.49).

When numerous scenes are depicted in landscape settings, their spatial arrangement can be linked to geographic rather than narrative logic. In story sixty-three, the bodhisattva is forced to marry out of compassion, to spare the life of a woman who has fallen madly in love with him (4.51-56). In this story, the bodhisattva, a youth (khye ’u) named Karma (sKar ma), is first a mendicant practicing as a pure and celibate ascetic. He is an ascetic both at the story’s beginning, and again at its end, a state broken

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410 Dehejia, Discourse in Early Buddhist Art, 12.

by the story’s central action that forces him to marry. This before-and-after state of the protagonist is given large depiction in the upper right of the image, where he is shown as a bearded ascetic with matted locks dwelling in a stylized mountain landscape (fig. 4.52). One day the bodhisattva goes into the city and a woman sees him and falls instantly in desperate love with him. When he rejects her advances, she swoons, fants, and swears that she will die. The dramatic scene that leads to their marriage is given in the following inscribed exchange:

…the woman ran near to the youth and prostrated at his feet. After that the bodhisattva sKar ma said: “Sister what do you want?” The woman said: “Youth, I want you” (“khye’u bdag khyod ‘tshal lo”). The youth said: “From me, I don’t want desire (‘dod pa”). The woman said: “If I am not able to be with you, then at this place, I will die (‘gum pa”).” Then, the youth Karma thought: “How sad! (kye ma’o) This miserable being is tightly bound by desire and craving. Myself I have lived 42,000 human years practicing celibacy, and have destroyed the behavior of desire (‘dod ni brtul zhugs ‘jig byed pa). This is not suitable for me.” Having thought that, he insistently pulled away and left. After that, the woman, falling on her face to the ground, was consumed by suffering, she sweat and she came close to death. After that, the bodhisattva having seen that situation, on his seventh step [away] great compassion arose in him. He thought: “How sad! Those strange beings who stay in Samsara are very ignorant. From this beginningless fire of desire, it completely burns the firewood of objects. Even still, they are not satisfied. How strange!” And so forth.⁴¹²
The scene described above is specifically depicted in the painting (fig. 4.53). At the bottom of the painting, in the centre, stands a beautiful Indic-styled bodhisattva wearing only a white lower dhoti with red trim. A woman is shown twice with him, but she is the same woman depicted in two different moments around the same conflated image of the bodhisattva: She falls at his feet (fig. 4.54) and further right, is depicted just moments earlier, standing and beholding him (fig. 4.53). This is the dramatic climax of the story, when she first sees him and then her dizzying attraction causing her to fall “on her face to the ground.”

The resolution of this action, that he ultimately decides, in a section of the story omitted from the inscription, to marry her, is shown as the pair walk off to the right, gazing towards each other with the bodhisattva tenderly putting his arm around her (fig. 4.53). Once again, the artist has selected this dense sequence of actions, that spiral in a small clockwise loop, to show this short but telling sequence of dramatic action. The figures only repeat as necessary, with two depictions of the woman around the same conflated image of the bodhisattva, for she is the one moved and moving, not he. Her action of literally falling into love with the man is also illustrated in its outcome: the pair walk off to the right, in the general direction of a large palace at the right side of the painting (fig. 4.55). In the palace the figures repeat again: the visual depiction of the twelve long years as a married householder he then spends with her out of compassion.

At the end of this story he is reborn, due to his compassion, as a practising spiritual celibate ascetic once more, making the depiction of the bearded man in meditation in the cave an iconic image that serves dual narrative temporalities, depicting both the bodhisattva before and after the marriage. To understand the whole story from the image then, requires movement around in a clockwise circle within the painting’s rectangular composition, starting in the upper left, cycling down to the lower right where the eye is caught in the smaller spiral of the woman and man’s dramatic action, moving back right along the lower rim of the image towards the other small painted palace, before returning to the bearded ascetic. The repetition of another small palace occupied by three figures including a central prince and a sari-clad woman at lower left (fig. 4.56) is a re-depiction of the married couple during those twelve years. The action of the story
is depicted as a sequence of events in the lower right side of the painting, but combined in space with the iconic ascetic bodhisattva, who represents both the beginning and the end of the story. Here the artist has shown through brilliant economy of means the full sequence of dramatic actions that make this story unique.

Another painted story that illustrates many specific and discrete events is story number ninety of the Prince Sönam Top (Bsod nams stobs; “power of merit”) (fig. 4.57). In this story the prince is born as one of five specially gifted brothers to a king and queen. It is a complex story with many different, seemingly unrelated sequences and spaces, and the artist has endeavoured to represent as many of these distinctive parts as possible. In the centre of the composition is a depiction of a woman inside a palace, lying on a bed decorated like a throne (fig. 4.58). Two smaller attendant figures hold a red canopy cloth above her, providing her privacy. This scene must be a depiction of the queen pregnant and about to birth the sons, a narrative sequence omitted from the inscription but included in the longer text:

When the queen was pregnant with these five sons there were many amazing signs (e.g., rains and flowers falling etc.), the palace was decorated and the oracle foretold of her amazing sons. The gods made her a throne and from there she gave teachings. The gods also made flowers rain down, and bowed to her and she taught more.  

Below this is a blue and white robed king with five standing prince-types facing him (fig. 4.59). This must be the last scene of the story, when the Prince who has by the end of the story become a king receives homage from his previously jealous and competitive brothers.  

Around these centrally placed scenes depicting moments at the story’s beginning and end are two discrete and specific dramatic sequences from the story, one arranged to

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413 Skyes rabs, 517-520.

414 It may seem to some at first that this could be a depiction of the five brothers around the king, but in the logic of the circumambulatory passage paintings, it is always the bodhisattva who is depicted as a large, central and enthroned figure, so in this story it would not make sense to have that person be his father.
the right and another to the left. To the left is the earlier scene, where the five brothers encounter hungry ghosts in a garden and Sönam Top miraculously feeds them:

One time, young Sönam Top went with his four brothers to the garden of amazing wealth. At that time many thousands of hungry ghosts with mouths small like the holes of needles, begged for food [...] the young one prayed [...] “By the power of my pure motivation, may various heavenly foods and drinks emerge here without delay to satisfy all the hungry ghosts.” By the power of that prayer, the hungry ghosts received the food and drink of the gods, which transformed their lives…

The painting shows four princes striding into the garden, indicated by the towering globular trees behind them (fig. 4.60). The prince who is closest and with his arm down is Sönam Top providing six skeletal hungry ghosts beneath him with food, their begging indicated through their bent gestures and supplicating hands (fig. 4.60).

Then to the right side is the depiction of distinctive and gory act of self-sacrifice where Sönam Top gives away his limbs one at a time (fig. 4.61). Later in the story, after an episode omitted from the illustration where a poor person’s house miraculously becomes wealthy, Sönam Top comes upon a criminal who has been punished by having his limbs cut off outside the city walls:

One time the king ordered that the limbs be cut off a person who had committed crimes against his laws, and that criminal be thrown out of the city. The young Sönam top went to that place. That person saw young Sönam Top, and woefully cried, “Oh young sir, please protect (bskyabs) me.” And so forth. After that, from the great compassion of Sönam Top the suffering of the man who had lost his limbs

415 de nas dus gzhан gzhig gi tshe bsod nams stobs phu bo bzhis dang lhan cig du 'byor pa mchog gi skyed mos tshal du dong ngo / de'i tshe yi dwags kha khab lta bu la sogs pa stong phrag du ma bdag gzhon nu bsod nams kyi stobs la zas sلوng par gyur te/ gzhon nus de dag mthong te snying rje chen po'i smon lam gyi stobs brjod pa/ bdag gi lhag pa'i bsams pa'i mthu yis ni/ 'dir ni thogs pa med par mngon gyur te/ yi dwags rnams ni yongs su tshim par shog /de ltar smon lam gyi mthus yi dwags rnams kyiis lha'i bza' ba dang btung ba dag thob cing yi dwags kyi skye ba nas las 'phos te dga' Idan gyi lha'i rigs su skyes par gyur to.

Appendix page 113.
became unbearable to him… Immediately after that prayer, that man’s limbs were fully restored.\textsuperscript{416}

In the section omitted from the inscription, Sönam Top is able to restore the criminal’s limbs by taking a sharp knife and cutting off his own limbs, miraculously sticking them onto the criminal.\textsuperscript{417}

In the image that illustrates this scene at the right of the composition, the criminal whose limbs have been hacked off is shown three times across three vignettes being gradually restored by Sönam Top (fig. 4.61). Sönam Top first cuts open his veins and feeds the criminal his blood.\textsuperscript{418} He then gives the criminal an arm, shown in the image attaching one to the criminal. In the last image of this scene, placed above the other two, our protagonist bodhisattva is now limbless on a throne while the criminal, having provided his legs as well, and the criminal whose limbs have been fully restored kneels beside him in a gesture of veneration (fig. 4.61). The restoration of the limbs is shown then as a sequence of three scenes, each time repeating the figural pair of both the bodhisattva and the criminal, to show the sequence of the exchange of limbs between them. The scenes proceed in a counter-clockwise mini-spiral, at the lower right of the image.

Above the scene showing the limbless Sönam Top, comes the miraculous resolution, where Indra praises the generous prince and magically restores his limbs (fig. 4.62). A new pair of figures, the fully restored Sönam Top and the god Indra, appear above the former scene. Sönam Top raises his two palms towards the god Indra who

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\textsuperscript{416} \textit{de nas yang dus gzhan zhig na/ rgyal po la nyes pa byas pa'i mi zhig gshed ma dag gi/ yan lag bcad de/ grong khyer gyi phyi rol du bzhag par gyur to/ gzhon nu bsod nams kyi stobs kyang sa phyogs der phyin pa na/ mi des gzhon nu bsod nams kyi stobs mthong nas/ nyams thag pa'i nga ros ngu zhing / jo bo gzhon nu bdag la yongs sa bskyab du gsal/ zhes smras so/ zhes pa nas de' nas gzhon nu bsod nams stobs/ /snying rje'i dbang du gyur pa des/ /de'i rkang lag gcad pa yis/ /sduig bsngal de yang thun mong gyur/ /gzhon gyi sduig bsngal bdag gi khur khyer zhing / /gzhon dag bde bas bdag nyid bder sans pa/ /snying rje'i rang bzhin skyes chen brtan pa nams/ /bdag gi bde bar ring du spangs pa yin/ /de skad smras ma thag tu skyes bu de'i/ yan lag dam pa rab tu gsal gyur cing. Appendix page 113.


\textsuperscript{418} Again as specified in the text omitted from the inscription: “He cut open his veins and gave his blood. The man’s health condition improved slightly.” Rang byung rdo rje, \textit{Skyes rabs}, 528. Appendix page 115 footnote 169.
appears in torso-only emerging from a swirl of colourful clouds. So the painting of this story places the beginning and ending sequences in the centre, and then selects two significant narrative sequences from the story to depict on either side. The artist has not included every part of the story, notably omitting a long sequence about a home that Sönam Top lived in that was made miraculously wealthy and abundant, but instead has made a selection of two important and specific action sequences and their resolution. When the scene to the right unfolds with repeating figures, they progress from bottom to top. Thus the overall narrative movement of this story moves compositionally from the upper centre, to the left, to the lower right to the upper right, to the lower centre.

In the last three painting considered, the stories are told through the use of numerous scenes shown in combination. Scenes are also composed differently, with some facing the viewer frontally and other figures seen in three quarter profile. It was common practice to place a figural group, often enthroned in a palace, in the centre of the scenes, whose figures would then be shown frontally as well, with scenes of action in three quarter view around them in seemingly pendant relationships. The central figures can either be understood as icons, the bodhisattva for worship, or within narrative as the beginning or end of a story. That many paintings followed this format may be less a choice dictated by narrative concerns, and more a choice driven by the fact that this was a familiar way for Tibetan artists to represent kingship/divinity. This is because in the Tibetan tradition, images of enthroned deities or kings whose images are most often central and geometrically regular.

When scenes are arrayed around a centre they are never divided by borders, but still can be easily distinguished as spatially self-contained. The easiest way that artists contain groups and scenes is by having figures in three quarter profile face in towards each other. In each of these painted story moments, the gifting of the elephant in story nine, the love-sick woman in story sixty-three, or the restoration of limbs in story ninety, the figures repeat, a device associated with continuous narrative.\(^{419}\) They also clearly

\(^{419}\) Dehejia’s definition of continuous narrative is that it depicts “successive events of an episode or successive episodes of a story within a single enframed unit, repeating the figure of the protagonist in the course of the narrative. Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 15.
face one another to establish relationship. While some figures are repeated they can be combined around a figure conflated into two moments: the woman seen twice relates to a single image of the bodhisattva, unmoved, in story sixty-three.

In all these cases we see examples of a combination of both “iconic,” meaning central, frontal and often enthroned depictions, alongside narrative depictions of scenes of action shown together. Is the “iconic” figure really “iconic”—i.e., meant as an icon for worship? I think the artistic conventions for depicting a bodhisattva in such a manner, crowned, enthroned, central and frontal, would be so ingrained that it is little surprise that this composition should figure prominently in painted panels. Read in terms of the narrative movement around them these can also be understood as the beginnings of the stories told as they radiate out from the centre—often first to left and second to the right.

This nearly universal left to right movement shows that narrative and reading logic dominated the creation of images. Yet within individual scenes or the developments of strings of continuous narrative sequences, specific sequences of action could be shown in almost any direction, and seems to be a choice based more on composition than narrative logic. One sequence moved from right to left (as the elephant is given away) or from bottom to top (as the limbs are restored). Much of this is probably determined by the need to fill available space. Working within regularly shaped rectangles, whose centre is most often well occupied, artists creatively use all the available space around to place sequences and series of actions. The way these are placed are inconsistent and constantly being re-negotiated through the passage, and must have a lot to do both with the acts of reading and interpretation of each story that were going on. Throughout these examples though, we see them recurrently selecting salient, action-based and dramatic events from each specific story to illustrate.

When a Single Scene Will do

In a few cases a story is shown with only one dramatic scene, what Dehejia might have called “monoscopic” illustration. Yet is it truly monoscopic? In story fifty-six,

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420 Dehejia’s uses “being in state” and contrast it to “being in action.” Ibid., 12.

421 Dehejia discusses Monoscopic narratives that “centres around a single event in a story, one that is generally neither the first nor the last and which introduces us to a theme of action.” Ibid., 10.
the story of the Ship Captain, the painting represents only one dramatic moment, placed centrally, that stands for the whole narrative sequence (fig. 4.63-67). However, that scene is surrounded by other pictorial elements that do not bear clear relationship to any action from the written narrative, but instead show that the artist was not satisfied to represent so much less figural action, so elaborated the space with visual elements from beyond the text. Further, this choice to represent economically the story through a single scene, seems based on the text, as it is a story with few moments of action to depict.

In this story the bodhisattva is the captain of a ship containing five hundred merchants. They are going to collect wealth from the many jewel-filled islands of the huge ocean. While at sea the ship captain is visited by gods in a dream, who tell him that among the men he has assembled, there is one bad person who plans to kill the others and steal all the wealth. They entreat him to find a way to save the merchants, and also to stop this man from accruing this type of terrible karma. The bodhisattva realizes what he must do: in order to spare the other merchants and the intended criminal the negative consequence of the mass murder, the bodhisattva must kill the aspiring criminal:

…Even though I myself may go to hell, if I am able to benefit others and make them happy, by this stable promise of my own compassion, although this action is very difficult, I must strive for it in order to benefit others.” Then with a sword like the petal of a blue Utpala lotus, he killed that bad one without his realizing it. After that the merchants came near him and asked him: “Why did you do this?” He answered with totally clear words: “The gods prophesied that this person was going to do inexhaustible bad actions, killing all of you and taking your wealth. Because of this he also would have spent immeasurable time in hell. That is why I committed this sin.” Having heard what he said, these merchants trusted him and felt great amazement, and loved their great ship captain.422

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422 de phyir bdag ni sdig can gyur//de skad ces smras pa thos nas tshong pa de rnams yid ches la ya mtshan che bar gyur cing / ded dpon chen po de la yid dga' bas/ 'di skad du brjod pa snyam sens so//e ma'o thabs mkhas e ma'o snying rje ldan/ /gang gis bdag cag srog kyang sbyin byid cing / /sdig can 'di yang dmyal ba'i gnas las bSgral/ /khyed ni bdag cag don rnams mdzad par nges/ /bdag nyid che bas bdag gi bde ma chags/ sens can ched du sdug bsngal khur chen khyer/ /khyod kyiis mgon bcas sdig pa can 'di yang / /da ni nges par thar pa'i lam du 'gro/ /bskal pa chen po legs so legs so/ /di ni snying rje chen po dang rjes su mthun no/ /bdag cag thams cad brtse bar mdzad do. Appendix page 80.
The painting depicts only one specific event from the story: the very moment of murder caught in mid-act. In the centre of the composition, the physically larger crowned bodhisattva wearing a red robe pierces with a spear another male figure, who falls back and off the side of their oddly-shaped square boat (4.64-65). While the narrative is reduced to this moment alone, letting this dramatic moment of climax literally take centre stage, the whole painting panel is filled with a beautiful extended tableau depiction of the enclosed ocean and the lands around it. The large square boat, a boat that more closely resembles a floating, gated building, is in the centre of a great body of water with land on all sides (fig. 4.64). The blue waves appearing as decoratively regular overlapping lobed shapes, white striations on the blue water, this fantastically imagined body of water contains birds, lotuses, at least two water-sprite humanoid figures, and more than a few animals who would certainly be happier on land (a white bull and a white ram bob among the waves). Among the other non-narrative depictions here that bear no close relationship to the narrative are the hunter in the foreground (fig. 4.66) and the Tibetan style palace in the upper right (fig. 4.67). Together, these animals and figures are not related to the story’s narrative, but serve to illustrate the numberless riches of the ocean, and the world more generally. Non-narrative details like a mother cow and her suckling young fill in the space, showing that artists choose to fill spaces with detail wherever possible (fig. 4.68).

What is described in the text as a huge, endless ocean is illustrated in the picture as quite the opposite, with the water hemmed in on all sides by rolling blue and green hills (fig. 4.63). In the top left and right corners on land are two distinctively Tibetan looking buildings, square tiers with black trim, one whose white walls wide red stripes are painted, reminiscent of the way that exterior walls of Sakya were painted (fig. 4.67). But apart from the violent scene of murder in the centre, where the man is both being speared and thrown from the boat at the same time, most of the visual details of this scene have no referents in the written story. Those details of buildings and animals, or the white-skinned archer in the foreground shooting his arrow at a white deer being chased by an orange dog (fig. 4.66), are imaginative, decorative detail, possibly the artist showing off or having fun. While the story has been carefully shown with its one most
distinctive and dramatic scene of action, the moment of murder placed in the centre, the rest of the painting is an imaginative visual description of a land of riches.

Is this a significantly different relationship to the text or just an example of an adaptation of a specific jātaka story where action is easily limited to one telling scene? The other parts of the textual story include an earlier trip to the ocean alone where the bodhisattva gathers different kinds of gems, and the prophetic dream of the gods who warn of the impending murder, as well as a long section about how the bodhisattva considers all the karmic results and settles on the decision of murder. The inner actions of the mind—thoughts, dreams, considerations, are not easily shown in these paintings, which far prefer to depict the overt, real and external actions that defined the bodhisattva’s virtue.

Another painting that is depicted only through a single scene is similarly developed from a story that has little external action available to show. Perhaps these are then not all merely “monoscenic” depictions but rather some at least are the results of stories with but one sequence of action to show. Story sixty-six is the story of the dancer, wherein the bodhisattva is born as a male dancer (fig. 4.69). Yet much of the story is then told about this bodhisattva dancer’s daughter, herself a dancer, and the songs she sings (4.70). This story, told in its inscription with much poetic verse, has little action to show or tell, and instead talks about the daughter’s beauty and skill in singing songs that teach her audience about impermanence and death:

Wherever lots of people gathered, she would go decorated in many ornaments. And in front of all people she would sing songs like this:

All beauty and youth, like water falling from the mountains, is quickly gone.
In one single moment, everything is lost.
Childish people, very intoxicated,
Become unconscious, and by their unsteady motion,

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423 To read story fifty-six with translated inscriptive omissions see appendix pages 80-82.

424 In other story paintings, like stories ten and sixty-six, we also see compositions that struggle because much of the “action” in the story is mental or silent action (thought, vow, dream or song) and not overt physical action.
they are without awareness [of this].”

The story repeats other examples of her wise lyrics, and the painting is a beautiful depiction of two dancers being watched: the female dancer is shown above (fig. 4.70), and the male dancer holds a fan below (fig. 4.71), balancing on the yellow border of the painting. Around them, on a totally flat red background covered in scroll motif, figures of people who watch their dance are arranged in four palaces placed at the four corners of the painting, with male and female audience members looking towards the dancer (4.72-3). All their gazes focus on the female dancer, who by being higher, larger, attended by more musicians and dancing on two tiers of green and blue lotus petals, is given more of the scene’s compositional focus than the male dancer depicted below her.

The story contains few other actions that would have been available for depiction. Illustrating this story through two gorgeous dancers being watched by groups of people is thus a logical response to a story that is otherwise limited in narrative action. Where the artists seem especially concerned with depicting characters and specific sequences of action in the other stories, stories that themselves provide many sequences of action, when anomalous stories with less action the artists have to respond differently. In both the story of the ship captain, where one central action (the murder) is in answer to an event that never occurs (a dream), and the story of the dancer, where dancing is the only action, the artists do not have much narrative action to depict. Some extended visual elaboration is needed. These paintings are not empty, but instead highly decorative and beautiful. In particular with the paintings of the dancer, one of the most beautiful of the circumambulatory passage, it results in one of the most perfectly symmetrical designs. Yet the elements of the stories that the artists are not interested in specifically depicting include dreams, prophecies, and songs. Instead these illustrated life narratives are mostly concerned with action and event.

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425 de lta r ma khan gyi bu mo ’gro ba’i dpal mo/ gang na skye bo’i tshogs mang po ’dus shing ’khod pa der/ bdag nyid rgyan tham cad kyis mngon par brgyal nas skye bo’i tshogs kyi mdun du ’dug ste ghu’adi skad ces blangs so/ lnga tsho ’di dag ri bo’i chu lta r ’gro/ skad cig thang cig yud tsam cig tu lhung / byis pa’i skye bo rab tu myos pa dag brgyal zhing g.yo ba’i shugs kyis mi shes so. Appendix page 104.
Conflated Scenes: Sequences in Disguise

Some paintings appear to depict only one scene, but on closer inspection still contain narrative sequence by conflating several events around a single figure—a narrative strategy also seen in earlier Buddhist narrative art.\textsuperscript{426} Examples like this are relatively few at Shalu, but they are present in some cases, particularly in some of the animal-protagonist jātakas, where narrative events are also less immediately recognizable. This may be because without an emphasis through scale, the animal protagonists are less easily distinguishable from their fellow creatures, they do not get crowns or halos. Narrative events are still, nonetheless, the chosen focus of illustration, and the artistic interest is still primarily concerned with depicting action.

The stories that appear as single scenes in fact contain narrative elements that are not at first obvious. In story fifty-nine of the Chusek (\textit{Chu sreg}, a type of water fowl or duck) the bodhisattva is the king of the birds, one of whose flock-members is eating the eggs and young of his brethren. The painting shows a large group of birds gathered around a river that runs diagonally through the whole scene (fig. 4.74). On first observation, I was sure that this mass of birds and landscape would contain no discernible narrative. Yet, upon reading the story, it became easy to locate specific events and actions in the painting.

In this story, among the flock of which the bodhisattva bird is the king, there is one old and malicious bird, who uses a specific trick upon his fellow bird-brethren:

One time another old Chusek, in a skillful way, ate all the eggs and babies of other Chuseks. When he had nothing else to do, he pulled up one of his feet, and pretended he was unwell. He pretended his body was unwell, and so gave up following the actions of a great being.\textsuperscript{427}

\textsuperscript{426} Dehejia, \textit{Discourse in Early Buddhist Art}, 25.

\textsuperscript{427} dus gzhan zhig gi tshe na chu gsig rgan po zhig gs chu gsig de rnams kyis sgo nga dang phru gu rnams thabs kyis zos nas/ de dal bus 'chag cing bya ba med pa'i gnas skabs na rkang pa ya gsig bskum nas mi bde ba bzhin du tshul 'chos par byed do. Appendix page 84.
In this description, the old bird lifts his leg and pretends to be lame or hurt so as not to fly off with the rest of the birds. He thus is able to stay behind, profiting from the absence of the bird-parents, to feast upon their eggs. The painting depicts this sequence: at the lower left side of the composition, a lighter coloured yellow bird is shown repeated three times (fig. 4.75). In the depiction close to the centre he lifts up one foot, in another depiction he leans down to peck at an egg, and in the third depiction close to the river he takes flight. This is the illustration of the sequence of actions where the old bird lifts a foot in deception, then eats the eggs after the other birds have flown. His taking flight however, is a depiction of the story’s outcome from later on in the story.

While the old, malicious bird has been repeated as a figure to illustrate the sequence of his actions, the largest bird in the scene is the depiction of the Bodhisattva bird, and is the conflated figural representation of the king of all the birds, the observer of these evil actions (fig. 4.76). In the story, the bodhisattva bird gives a speech to his fellow birds, yet knowingly he is speaking a message most directly to the old bird, which ultimately causes the latter to realize the error of his ways. He preaches:

“Eating one’s own species eggs and babies, and bones, and staying with one foot pulled up, is this your behavior? Others have said that one who walks slowly, speaks slowly, does actions with head hung low, these are characteristics of a dishonest and bad one.” Then the old Chusek thought, “Oh that leader knows what I did,” and he took refuge in him. The bodhisattva told him: “Khu khu, so long as Chusek are not suffering, then you can be happy. In the world, even when one has done very bad actions, if they then follow some great one, then they can purify all their bad actions.” In this skillful way he taught. Then that old Chusek left, and all the other Chusek became peaceful.428

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The action, not at first recognizable, is nevertheless being faithfully reproduced here. Here the bodhisattva, the largest bird of the scene, is standing facing back across the river towards the old bird, so that he is serving both in the action as the observer and the speech giver (fig. 4.76). Meanwhile the antagonist bird, the old one who is eating the young and is eventually exiled from the herd by the bodhisattva bird, is shown three times in an arc of action that culminates with his departure, a culminating sequence that ends up quite close to the centre of the compositional field (fig. 4.75). The bad bird here is also distinguished by his somewhat larger size, and a consistent colour is used for him. Thus amidst what appeared at first to be a painted field of indistinct birds by a river-side turns out to contain as much narrative action as the written story in fact does as well.

Another example of a story where the artist has selected to depict the major actor only once is story fifteen, the story of the great fish (fig. 4.77). Showing the protagonist fish only once, several depictions of narrative action are merged around the figure of the central large fish. In this story, the bodhisattva is the king of the fish, and so appears in the painting as a giant fish (fig. 4.78). He is a fish-king whose fellow fish are suffering due to a harsh drought, explained thus:

Gradually the spring came, and the sunlight had become slow like (people) who are tired and lazy, and the land became sharp, hot, scorched and burning. As the dry wind came every day they wished for cool, but the water shrank as though it was being drunk (by the wind and sun). And so forth. When all the water had evaporated, then the bodhisattva thought: “with so many fish here, even the (slow) birds can catch these fish, so other birds who surround the water can also.” Then he felt hopelessly unhappy. When the fish could all just barely move, strong compassion arose in him and he thought: “how sad, these fish have become very miserable.”429

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429 *de nas rin gyis dpypid kyi dus la bab pa dang / ngal zhing le lo'i dbang gis bul bar gyur pa 'dra ba'i nyi ma'i 'od zer no zhing tsha bas sa ghzi mgon par gdungs shing 'bar bar gyur ba'i rjes su 'brang ba'i rlung skom pa'i dbang gis bsil bar 'dod pas nyin re zhing 'thungs ba bzhin du mitho de tseg ka bzhin du gyur to/ zhes pa nas/ khros pa bzhin du chu ni skams par byas/ de nas byang chub sens dpas nya mang po rnams la kha rnams kyi kyang glags lta bar gyur na/ chu 'gram na rgyu ba'i bya rnams kyis lta smos kyang ci dgos te/ spa gong zhing mi dga' ba'i dbang du ni gyur/ cung zad 'gul nus pa tsam la lhas nas/ snying rje bzhin du bsams pa/ kye hud kye nya 'di rnams ni ma rung bar gyur gyis med do snyam nas. Appendix page 43.*
In the painting, birds and animals lean into the pond to feed off the smaller fish that are his to care for, depicting the dramatic crisis of the story, their suffering through shrinking water and being eaten by birds and other ferocious animals that include a fox and a tiger as well as a black crow (fig. 4.79).

After that this great being investigated what he could do to help, and realized that only through his true vow could he help. He sighed as his heart was saddened by compassion, and looking to the sky he said: “Even when I was very poor, I don’t remember killing any animal with intention. By that truth, may the kings of the gods bring down the rain and fill this lake.” After that, by the power of that great being’s accumulated merit, and the power of his true vow, the gods, nagas, and yakshas who cared for him caused all the clouds to fill with water even though it was not the right season (for rain). Then a thunderstorm and many black clouds came and shook together.430

We see depicted the moment of his prayer as the giant fish arches up towards the heavens, as supplicating a gesture as one may be able to depict with a fish-body (fig. 4.77-8). Above him the rain pours down from a cloud, a special miraculous rain that comes to refill the lake thus saving the fish, and indicated in the clouds by a makara (fig. 4.80). While the main figure, the giant fish, does not repeat, the painting nevertheless shows a sequence of actions that evolved in the story over time (drought, prayer and miraculous rain) all conflated and shown around the single large, praying fish.

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430 de la 'dir ji ltar byas na rung snyam du bdag nyid chen po des rnams par brtags na/ bden pa'i byin gyis brlabs 'ba' zhi gis phongs pa las phan thogs par mthong ngo / snying rjes kyang sems gdungs pas shugs nar zhes phyung ste/ gnam du blas nas smras pa/ rab tu phongs par gyur kyang bdag gis ni/ bsams bzhi srog chags bsad par mi dran te/ bden pa 'di yis lha yi rgyal po rnams/ char pa 'bebs shing mtsho ni gang bar shog de nas bdag nyid chen po de'i bsod nams bsags pa'i yon tan dang / bden pa'i byin gyis brlabs kyi mthu dang / de la dga' bar gyur pa'i lha dang lhu dang gnod shiyin rnams kyi mthos/ dus ma yin pa'i sprin chus gang ba'i gzu gcan rnams Sgra snyan pa zab mo ni sgrogs / glog 'gyu bas ni bgyan sprin ngs sngon porgya chen po rab tu 'phro ba ni khas glal ba bzhi/ sprin gyi rtse mo phan tshun du 'dus pa ni 'khyud pa 'dra bar sprin nag po rnams byung bar gyur to. Appendix page 43-44.
A story where a human protagonist is also shown only once is the painting of story sixty-five, the story of the Brahmin teacher (fig. 4.81). This painting only shows the bodhisattva once, while the figures around him represent various moments of the story. In this story the bodhisattva is born as a Brahmin teacher, who is shown in the painting as a large figure with long white hair who wears the Brahmin sacred thread over his bare chest and is depicted as the largest figure seated in the centre of the painting in meditation (fig. 4.81). In this story, the Brahmin teacher is disappointed and worried that his five-hundred students who have followed him to practice in the wilderness have not attained “the five super-knowledges.”\footnote{\textit{mgon par shes pa lnga}. Appendix page 88.} He realizes that this is because “those children were holding many types of vases, and collecting many fruits and making efforts to collect roots,”\footnote{\textit{Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs}, 248. Appendix page 101 footnote 149.} meaning that the students are too busy feeding themselves rather than working on their spiritual perfection. Thus he decides to go into a withdrawn, silent meditation at a distance from them, and tells them that none but two may approach and speak to him. In a section omitted from the inscription, the following actions take place during his retreat:

One day a wild animal came from far away and the teacher talked to the animal: “Animal come here, we are both the same, if you feel full, that is enough for you. You and I, we are satisfied. But some people are not like that. They are very greedy, and the whole day and night they strive to collect fruit and roots.” He said this to the animal and the children of the Brahmin overheard him. Then they thought “Oh no, our teacher has already finished his practice, now he is talking with animals, so let us all go and see him together.” Then all the children together went to see the teacher, but he was silent, so then they thought, “Our teacher is only speaking to animals, not people, so let’s leave.” And they rose and left. And then again one day someone who had animal-like restraint (i.e. meaning they only sought food as needed, and only ate until they are full) went to visit the Brahmin. The Brahmin said: “Come here, we are the same, we both behave like animals,
we don’t hold various vases. Some people don’t behave this way, and instead spend all their time collecting fruit and roots.” The children of the Brahmins overheard this conversation, and they said to each other: “Our teacher condemns greedy people, and praises non-greedy behavior. In reality the teacher was scrutinizing/observing us (nan tur), we now should throw out our many various types of vases and throw them in the water.” So they threw away their wealth and carried only simple things to go see the teacher, and prostrated to him.  

It is as a result of the students having the chance to overhear the Brahmin’s two conversations, the first with the deer, and the second with a person, that they are guided towards realizing they should relinquish their “many vases,” (which is the repeated metaphor for their concern for food). After this the teacher returns to teach, and at the end of the story, successfully “destroyed their attachments and guided them to the path of the five super knowledges, and once they achieved these five super knowledges, they eventually abandoned Samsara and went to nirvana.”

This is a different kind of story than many of the jātakas, a story about inner transformations that is largely lacking in external action. Most of the action of this story takes place as observation, conversation, or realization, and there is in fact little overt action to illustrate (no violent suicides, no large gifts). Without the repetition of any figures, the artists nevertheless know the story, once again certainly in the textual version prior to redaction, and has placed all the figures around the central Brahmin that represent the story. To the left of the central figure are five ascetic students (fig. 4.81). What distinguishes this group is that they hold various things and all face towards him. This is the artistic representation of the students at the beginning of the story, those who the bodhisattva realizes are “holding many types of vases and collecting many fruits and making efforts to collect roots etc.” These are the students who, due to their over-

433 Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 249-251.

434 Omitted from the inscription. Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 251-252.

435 This line is omitted from the inscription, but featured in the longer text. Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 248.
attachment to collecting, are not attaining the five super-knowledges despite studying in meditation for a long time in a remote place.

The retreat is also illustrated, as only two people were allowed to interact with him during this time are shown as two larger, kneeling figures in front of the central Brahmin.\textsuperscript{436} To the right is the deer, representing the wild animal of the story, whom the teacher praises. In the story, another section omitted from the inscription, the teacher tells this deer “Animal, come here, we are both the same. If you feel full, that is enough for you. You and I, we are satisfied.”\textsuperscript{437} This conversation, overheard by the students, is one of the two they overhear that cause them eventually to realize that they must relinquish greedy behaviour.

The outcome or resolution of the story is depicted at the right side of the painted space (fig. 4.81). Here four students meditate, facing straight ahead to the viewer of the mural unlike the figures at left who all turned towards the teacher. In contrast to the students of the left side, they hold nothing, and with their empty hands they make gestures of prayer or meditation. Their frontal position indicates their total immersion in the appropriate meditation practices that are to help them along the path to the five super-knowledges.

This painting, focused around one central figure who is not repeated, nevertheless represents at least four particular narrative moments surrounding him. The conflation around the central figure here though is probably also a logical response to this different kind of action, where the story itself contains little overt physical action or geographic change. A painting organizing scenes around a large, central figure is a logical response. Around the central figure though, the movement of the painting’s temporal actions progress basically from left to right, as in earlier examples.

In conclusion, conflation was not a very common strategy used in the circumambulatorily passage narrative paintings, but nonetheless it is in evidence several times. I think it is a strategy used for stories where the bodhisattva is not the one performing much action other than teaching or speaking, and the action is instead

\textsuperscript{436} In the story these two are specified as “the one Brahmin who could offer fruits and roots and the other called Dge sbyong bco lnga pa.” Appendix page 101.

\textsuperscript{437} This line is also omitted from the inscription, Rang byung rdo rje, Skyes rabs, 249. Appendix page 102.
performed around him by antagonists (on story sixty-five this is the students, in story fifty-nine the old Chusek). When the “actions” of the story are not overtly external, not changing a visible state of being, but more internal, like praying or preaching, the bodhisattva is a large and immobile being around whom the action happens. This is true of the depiction of the Brahmin who has instructive conversations, the fish who prays, and the bird-king who preaches. Conflation of the central figure does not preclude the artist from also including a sequence of action when there is one to show, as in the sequence of the old bird pretending to be lame, but instead may be a response to a type of story where the bodhisattva is not the focus of that physical/sequential action.

These paintings still demonstrate a real attempt at interpreting stories in visual form, one that pays service to the meaning of the longer texts, and highlights specific actions to explain the stories. This demonstrates again that reading informed the visual interpretation, and must have occurred as part of the process of adapting these illustrations. For this we can posit the literate monk or monk(s), possibly the same ones responsible for redacting the stories, as reading the full stories aloud to the artists so that they might develop their designs. Stories in each example of the illustrated jātakas, remained important as explanations of specific actions and sequences with beginnings, middles and ends.

**A Life on The Straight and Narrow: The Final Life of the Buddha in Linear Continuous Narrative**

Following the presentation of one hundred previous life stories, there comes a sequence of painting that is notably very different than the earlier jātaka paintings. And the end of the passage, as at the end of the text, is the culminating life story: the life of Śākyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of our time. This is, of course, consistent with the book written by Rangjung Dorje, where the presentation of the one hundred stories served as a logical prelude to the explanation of Śākyamuni and his biography. Rangjung Dorje’s text thus also ends with the story of Śākyamuni, and it was clear from the numbers that it was understood as a story of a slightly different order than the jātakas. It did not illustrate
one perfection, but was the story that represented, in the life of one person, the culmination. It was a life where depicting and showing sequence mattered, for it was the end of a causal sequence that ultimately ends with Śākyamuni’s cremation and the distribution of the ashes that explain the beginnings of Buddhist worship. Its ending is in some senses the temple’s beginning. It was also a story where a template of scenes as sequences had already circulated in Tibetan art, and so for which there were certainly more readily accessible visual templates.

The final story painted in the Shalu circumambulatory passage Chenmo is presented in a very different visual format than the Jātaka stories illustrated before it. The life story of Śākyamuni Buddha is depicted as a linear sequence of actions, and is divided into 18 events shown in progressive sequence. This is still the story of a life, but it is a story with a very different shape in both narrative text and resultant image. This is not a life story that revolves around one major event with one moral message. Instead, in the final life story of Śākyamuni Buddha, the events are all important, and the message is no further distilled. This story further had longer mileage in Tibetan art, and had already been used in mural decorations of temples before this time.438 Both due to the different nature of this narrative, and the fact that it had already been fairly well developed as a pictorial set of rehearsed and recognizable episodes, this final story is illustrated in thin linear sequence strips, more like a modern day comic strip.

Yet the difference of this story was marked primarily through its visual presentation as pictures and not through the inscription: the visual depiction of the text remained the same as it had been for the jātakas. This makes sense: it was still being presented as part of the book. The inscription for this “one hundred and first” story is written into a white rectangle like all the other inscriptions (fig. 4.82 the inscription for story 101), and while the lettering is somewhat smaller than throughout the circumambulatory passage, permitting more text to be included, it is still a much longer story being substantially

438 Even the earlier paintings at Shalu include the narratives of the Life of the Buddha in the paintings in the lower rgyun lam, see Elena A. Pakhoutova, “Reproducing the Sacred Places: The Eight Great Events of the Buddha’s Life and Their Commemorative Stūpas in the Medieval Art of Tibet (10th-13th Century)” (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2009), 135. At Tabo, Alchi and Mangyu etc. the murals also include the narrative rendering of the Life of Śākyamuni Buddha, though no jātaka scenes.
reduced to fit the same space of one of the wall’s inscriptive “pages.” As text then it is visually continuous with the other stories of the book on the walls.

The story, one that was longer than many jātakas since it contained so many discrete scenes, was significantly redacted to fit into the same size and format of space used for all the other inscriptions. Looking at this story, it is evident that care and attention were taken, as the story inscription, despite numerous necessary omissions, still preserves most of the important points of the story.\footnote{To understand this, read the inscription and translation of the omissions as pages 135-141 of the appendix.} Still, the image makes up for anything lacking in the inscription, and several of the scenes specifically illustrated are once again only available in the longer text.

Pictorially, the artistic representation of the life of Śākyamuni Buddha represents a huge departure from the paintings of jātaka stories before it. The presentation of the final life of Śākyamuni Buddha communicates sequence and linear development in ways that the earlier paintings did not. Śākyamuni’s life is represented as a set of eighteen specific narrative moments, in a continuous linear narrative, arranged from left to right and top to bottom along six narrower horizontal registers (fig. 4. 83-85). Between the scenes the figure of the protagonist (Buddha) is repeated, and there are no clear delineations used to divide the scenes from one another along the horizontal axis.

This use of space breaks away from the previous jātaka paintings in several ways. First, the dual register division that had dominated all the jātaka paintings until this point is now completely abandoned, and in its place the vertical space is divided into six shorter rows. Thus while story one hundred and one is given the same space for its inscriptional text as every other jātaka, the pictures to illustrate it fill up a space equivalent to two jātaka paintings and the upper story inscription that occur between them throughout the rest of the passage.

Yet the major pictorial deviation here is that space is used to develop stories in ways that clearly show linear sequence, which within the narrower rows, are arranged to follow both the temporal sequence of the Buddha’s life and the text that recounts it. Read from left to right, and from top to the bottom, scenes are each allotted about the same amount of space, and the scale of the figures within them is varied accordingly, somewhat
awkwardly, depending on how many figures or how much space is required for the representation. Thus, while the figures representing Maya’s dream at the top right are quite large, a scene easily expressed through just the inclusion of a supine Maya surrounded by three royal attendants, and the tell-tale white elephant she dreams of descending a rainbow towards her (fig. 4.87), the figures of the scene depicting the four sights are rendered much smaller (fig 4.91). The departure from the palace and the sight of sickness, death, a corpse and a holy man all must be fit into the same relatively small space, and so have by necessity been shrunken considerably.

In structure then, as compared to the jātakas, the painted life of Śākyamuni Buddha is expressed as directly sequential and linear. This is a narrative arc that, like the story itself, begins before the birth of the Buddha as he appears in heaven anointing Maitreya (fig. 4.86), and ends with the final distribution of his ashes following his death (fig. 4.102). It is the famous progress of the Buddha’s own life, and probably the only story here that had definitely had a prior development in other Tibetan art before the Shalu paintings.

At Shalu the scenes of the life that are depicted all have direct precedence in Rangjung Dorje’s textual version of the life story. While these were not all included in the inscription, the written story still seems to be a direct basis, in keeping with the rest of the paintings in this passage. The nineteen scenes depicted, and the lines of text that correspond most closely to them are presented here in a table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Crowning Maitreya (fig. 4.86)</th>
<th>2. Maya’s Dream (fig. 4.87)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Included in inscription: “He explained to the gods (ie. that he must descend to earth) and enthroned the bodhisattva Byams pa (Maitreya) as his successor.”</td>
<td>Omitted from inscription: “She has an amazing dream about a white elephant with six tusks, beautifully decorated, with a red head and a beautiful, smooth gait.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The Birth (fig. 4.88)</td>
<td>4. Showing the baby to the Brahmin (fig. 4.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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440 The appearance and crowning of Maitreya in paradise before birth appears in art before it is consistently depicted in text, see Luczanits article. Christian Luczanits, “Prior to Birth. The Tuṣita Episodes in Indian Buddhist Literature and Art,” in The Birth of the Buddha, ed. Cueppers, Christoph, Deeg, Max, and Durt, Hubert (Kathmandu, Nepal: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2010), 41–91.

441 Dga’ ldan gyi lha rnams kyi rjes su bstan cing byang chub sems dpa’ byams pa rgyal tshab du dbang bskur te. Appendix page 133.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6. The archery competition (fig. 4.90)</th>
<th>7. The four sights (fig. 4.91)</th>
<th>8. The departure from the palace (fig. 4.91)</th>
<th>9. Cutting off his hair (fig. 4.92)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Included in inscription: “There was an archery competition, and among the five-hundred Shakayas, the other best young ones could variously shoot their arrows for one mile, or two, four, six, or eight miles, but the Buddha could defeat all of them.”</td>
<td>Omitted from inscription: “At that time the gods showed him aging, sickness, death and he asked if there was any way to escape from that. Then the gods also made a fully ordained monk appear.”</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “Then after that, four sons of the gods like Myu gu can held the feet of the horse, and Indra (Brgya byin) opened the door, while the four kings with their followers protected him. … and he renounces the home.”</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “Then the bodhisattva cut off his own hair which was coloured like a blue lotus with a sword and threw it away.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Searching for teachings (fig. 4.93)</td>
<td>11. Ascetic meditation (fig 4.94)</td>
<td>12. The gift of milk from Sujata (fig. 4.95)</td>
<td>13. Preparing the grass seat (fig. 4.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omitted from inscription: “Then the bodhisattva went to see many various teachers and (listed by names on text page 636), and eventually the Buddha went to Raigir and went to see the sponsor King Bimbisara who gave him respect…”</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “When that incomparable one was doing meditation, young village cow-herders put dirt on him and threw dirt at him. Despite this the incomparable one sat there in continuous meditation throughout.”</td>
<td>Omitted from inscription: “At that time Sujata served him a gold cup full of milk, that was fine like a thousand cows milk, sweet like honey, and Buddha’s body became well.”</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “sitting on green grass that was smooth and soft like peacock feathers given by the grass seller Tashi”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The Battle of Mara (fig. 4.97)</td>
<td>15. The first teaching (fig. 4.98)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included in inscription: “At that time the army of demons were ordered by their sinful leader, and their minds became very busy. Then using all their weapons and using all their magical powers,”</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “After that, the Buddha first wanted to go to Sarnath, and ripen the first five disciples. He went to give them the vows of fully ordained monks and taught the dharma.”</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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442 de nas byang chub sems dpa’ don thams cad grub pas sens can gyi don du bzo’i gnas la mkhas pa. mdzad de/ thog mar yi ge’i slob dpon kun gyi bshes gnyen byis pa sum khri nyis stong dang bcas pa bla na med pa’i byang chub tu smin par mdzad pa’i phyir yi ge’i grwar ‘jug pa bstan te. Appendix page 133.

443 For Tibetan see appendix pages 133-141.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Practising Miracles (fig. 4.99)</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “At that time in order to tame non-Buddhists (mu stegs, or outsiders) the Buddha showed many great magical display(s) at Gnyan yod (Shravasti)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The final death (fig. 4.100)</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “After that the Tathagata laid down on this bed like a lion (i.e. means on his side). Immediately all the world shook six times.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The burning of the body (fig. 4.101)</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “the fire … burned the body of the Buddha until is was small like a mustard seed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. The distribution of the relics (fig. 4.102)</td>
<td>Included in inscription: “Then eight groups, including the King of Serkya, the Shakya lineage, King Ma skyes dgra, the people from Yangs pa, Byi nu ta, Cha la ka, the King of Ka shi ka, and the Brahmin of Khyan ’jug gling, they all debated about what to do with the relics of Buddha. At that time by the Brahmin Bre bo, they were divided equally and everyone made offerings to those relics.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While borders are used to separate the vertical registers, none are used to separate individual scenes from one another within a horizontal register. The distinction of scenes from one another within a register is instead accomplished through the use of architectural elements, figural groups that look and gesture towards one another, and landscape elements like rivers and trees. The thin white borders separating the vertical spaces are sometimes horizontally continuous, but in two of the six cases are divided and non-aligned with the stories below (the top and the fourth from the top are non-continuous, (fig. 4.84). In the cases where they are divided, these borders relate spatially to the scenes above them, providing the ground line upon which figures stand or which order the spaces.

There are two main reasons that the final life of the Buddha is represented so differently than the jātaka stories, related to both interpretive choices about the uses of the picture-text at Shalu itself, and to the fact that previously available artists’ models were known for the final life story. An established pictorial tradition had come from India to Tibet for representing the Buddha’s life, which formalized the depiction as a set of
eight great life events, including four scenes from the life and four miracles. These eight great events, while not all retained here, formulated a pre-existing visual basis for the Life of the Buddha as a set of sequential events. In Tibet these had also found popular representation across different media sculptural and painted) as a set of eight stupas, which had remained popular and which was even painted around the upper level Butön’s maṇḍala shrines at Shalu at this same time. Unlike the jātakas, stories of previous lives, the life of the Buddha had long been a relatively popular subject in Tibetan temple art as a sequence, and had been represented in other Tibetan temples before this, notably depicted in the Alchi Sumstek and at Tabo.

In particular, the painted cycle of the Buddha’s life at Tabo was developed as a continuous narrative, though more and different scenes were used at Tabo than for its representation at Shalu. The Tabo paintings of the subject look as though these paintings may have originally been intended to have accompanying inscriptions included, though these were not added. The white spaces, left empty, hint that the relationship to


445 Kathryn Selig Brown writes “In India, by the Pāla period (ca. 700–1200), the Buddha's life was codified into a series of "Eight Great Events." These eight events are, in order of their occurrence in the Buddha's life: his birth, his defeat over Mara and consequent enlightenment, his first sermon at Sarnath, the miracles he performed at Shravasti, his descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods (Buddha’s Descent from the Trayāstrimśa Heaven), his taming of a wild elephant, the monkey’s gift of honey, and his death.” Kathryn Selig Brown, “Life of the Buddha Thematic Essay,” Text, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accessed July 23, 2015, http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/buda/hd_buda.htm.

446 Luczanits, “The Sources for Bu Ston’s Introduction to the Acts of a Buddha,” 93; Pakhoutova, “Reproducing the Sacred Places: The Eight Great Events of the Buddha’s Life and Their Commemorative Stūpas in the Medieval Art of Tibet (10th-13th Century).”

447 At Alchi scenes from the Life of the Buddha are featured on the dhoti of the colossal standing Bodhisattva Maitreya, whereas at Tabo, the life of the Buddha is featured as a narrative mural in the assembly hall. Goepper, Alchi, 127, 270; Klimburg-Salter, Tabo, 124–133.

448 In particular the Tabo painting includes extra scenes of the life story that are not illustrated at Shalu. Things like Maya’s report of her dream and its interpretation, and her request to the king to depart to Lumbini, a royal procession to Lumbini, the first bath following the birth, the departure from Lumbini, scenes in his father’s palace, and the four miracles, are represented in the Tabo paintings but not at Shalu. Klimburg-Salter, Tabo, 126–127.
text may have been more ambiguous at Tabo than at Shalu. At Shalu, it is still likely
that the cartoon-strip like depiction of the final life was made in relationship to Rangjung
Dorje’s text, yet in contrast to the jātaka paintings the text was not an artist’s only visual
source. Many scenes, like the birth, the first teaching and the death, were popularly
represented across media. Indeed, many of these were probably scenes known and
practiced as visual images.

There is also a visual communication of important difference between the nature
and purpose of the final life story in contrast to the jātakas. By concluding the paintings
of the passageway with a very differentiated depiction of Śākyamuni’s final life, the
earlier progressive sequence of lives in relationship to it is made clearer. The final life
ends with the Buddha’s passing away and the distribution of his ashes, and it is a story
that provides a functionally different understanding. This is not a story that is meant to
communicate an example of virtue-in-action as the jātakas did—or, rather, not to do this
alone—but it instead communicates and sets up Buddhist institutional history. It provides
a direct sequence to depict and explain the purpose of the temple and the religious
institution, for the Buddha is the teacher that has provided all users the current path, both
literally and figuratively. It is in continuity with the Buddha, whose final life was a series
of traversable actions, clearly sequential and linear in depiction here, that the viewer
emerges from the long passage.

Conclusion: Choices and Strategies for Visual Narration at Shalu

At Shalu choices about how to represent the jātaka stories were ultimately
responsive to the terms of each particular story, and demonstrate just how closely and
carefully the text was being transferred into visual form. Throughout the passage the
artists found ways to demonstrate and highlight the patterns of the book collection, and
the image-text relationship explicitly throughout the passage. They were also working
with text and text readers for the creation of images: and we have ascertained that reading

449 Ibid., 124.
the longer texts must have been key to developing the paintings. Each story was a unique and responsive adaption of story to picture.⁴⁵⁰

At Shalu there are two ultimately different narrative levels of meaning operating simultaneously in the circumambulatory passage as a whole. First, the book itself, a collection of stories, is painted—Rangjung Dorje’s *Life Stories of the Buddha* (*Sangs rgyas kyi skyes rabs*) functions at once as a master narrative, but also engages stories at the level of individual narratives. The larger story being told throughout the whole book is the ascent of the bodhisattva across many lifetimes, ending with the linear-telling of his life as Śākyamuni and beyond it to the distribution of his relic ashes, themselves the basis for temples and worship as here. This is thus an explanatory inscription of history and cause leading to the need for the temple. The entire collected book of 101 stories, painted across the walls of the long passage, is thus an extended sequential narrative that prioritizes progressive sequence across lives.

Stories also operate each on their own and individually, tales illustrated in relation to understandings of specific and individuated causal sequence, though ones that must be pictorially subordinated to the larger whole. The “protagonist,” the ever-changing bodhisattva in his different lives, is repeated in each story, and these stories are arranged in linear sequences of ten stories, divided from one another by framing devices. To maintain the visual order of the set, since the framing devices have been used between stories, they are never used within them. The whole book on the walls then is its own kind of large sequential narrative made in relationship to the structures of meaning that Rangjung Dorje imposed on his Jātaka collection, the organization of ten stories into ten perfections.

Within each frame, choices are then made within constraints of space. At Shalu, each story is represented as a specific set of events and actions, and were most often adapted as continuous narratives, with artists seeking to illustrate beginnings, middles and ends of stories even as this sequence was rarely shown explicitly. None of the jātaka paintings use any internal framing devices or borders to distinguish scenes from one

⁴⁵⁰ Of course, part of the difference too is that in other contexts “modes” of visual narration have been analyzed where there were no or few inscriptions present as a way of suggesting the “reading” of the visual materials.
another, so that they variously display sequential actions within their large horizontal rectangular spaces as so many events arranged in space.

In contrast to the Jātakas, the painting of the final life of the Buddha is directly linear, showing that while artists were familiar with a technique for illustrating clear linear sequence, for most of the passage’s stories they chose not to do so. The story of the final life progresses from left to right and from top to bottom, and follows the Buddha’s life from before birth to after his death. Since no scene is out of order, the story can be “read” as it proceeds in horizontal bands from left to right, with image scenes starting from before Śākyamuni’s “birth” as he crowns Maitreya in Trayāsrīmāśa heaven, and ending with the distribution of his ashes after death.

Within individual jātakas as pictorial adaptations, compositional choices were related to story types:

1. Central actions flanked by scenes from either before or after (story one of the tigress functions in this way).
2. Linear sequences proceeding from left to right (story six of the rabbit functions in this way; also story forty-six and and fifty-one).
3. Radial designs that contain many scenes, often with enthroned kings in the centre (stories eight, nine, ninety— this was a choice most suited to depictions of stories of kings).
4. Conflated scenes where the protagonist is only shown once but scenes of action occur around them (story fifteen of the fish, story sixty-five of the Brahmin teacher—this was a common adaptation when the story’s action is mostly not undertaken by the protagonist).
5. Monoscenic scenes (story fifty-six the ship captain, story sixty-six of the dancer— common adaptations for stories with little overt action).
6. Corner compositions where actions and groups are clustered into corners (These can be structured alternatively by geography and landscape space like story ninety-eight; structured by narrative like seventy-seven).
Each painting was uniquely adapted to illustration—just as the stories themselves were diverse, and could contain very little or very great amounts of detail, so the paintings that resulted as adaptations of them could as well. The artists chose to represent actions that happened in real time, and the few examples that depicted fewer scenes (monoscenic or conflated) did so in relationship to stories where much of the narrative had occurred in prayer, verse, or dream.

In stories where only a few scenes were shown, these often progressed from left to right, or in a counterclockwise circular direction. In stories where many scenes were shown—often stories about kings—these were arranged around an “iconic” (frontal) representation of the king enthroned, often surrounded by scenes that progressed from left to right like spokes of a wheel in a radial design.

What is consistent among these strategies is a desire to interpret and represent the main dramatic actions of each story, and to represent stories primarily as sequences of overt physical or gestural action. Stories showed not only specific ways the bodhisattva acted, but how these actions resulted in changes in his person or upon the world he inhabited. The artists in adapting these stories to visual form demonstrate an advanced interpretation of the written textual stories, and must have worked with literate monks to place them on the walls.

Ironically, while the stories were read to make the images, neither the images nor redacted wall texts were, I think, themselves necessarily intended to be read. Indeed, access to the image, however brief and tangential to the otherwise central practice of circumambulation for which the passage was constructed, probably stood in and replaced actual reading for most viewers. By so literally adapting the images in relationship to reading, acts of reading were inscribed into the pictures, so that they no longer needed to be read. The images then could even replace actual reading, making the act that created them a transferable reading-act, and any further reading of the wall texts, rendered potentially redundant.

**Conclusion: Developing Stories in Space—Prototypes and Innovations for Visual Narration at Shalu**
The overall format of the Shalu story paintings is quite unlike anything else in earlier Tibetan paintings. The paintings are unified compositions often composed of multiple temporal scenes, variously configured, which are distinguished from one another through spaces left empty. They variously select and omit, include and foreground, elements from their story texts. What they chiefly select for inclusion are actions, most often shown mid-sequence.

Each jātaka is a moral tale about specific actions that the bodhisattva performed in his karmic ascent across lives before he was Śākyamuni. Within that logic, each story is a small didactic part of a whole—an individual example contributing towards the goal of explaining in concrete ways that the Buddha-as-bodhisattva traversed many lives and actions. An overarching goal, of the painted stories is their visual comparability: while the stories differ, they are ultimately comparably sized and framed. They are acts that taken together are the building blocks of the Buddha’s progress.

Visual comparability is established in a number of technical ways: Within the paintings, the human and animal figures are often about the same size relative to the frame. The stories in relationship to one another in the entire passage can be understood as an extended continuous narrative—one bodhisattva moving across many lives telling a unified story of his ascent towards complete perfection. This larger story is also a story about reincarnation itself, about karmic continuity across lives, and about the possibilities for enlightened behaviour regardless of status at birth. The stories are coincidentally narratives that often depict benevolent rule as extensive gifting—a convenient trope for a temple that itself was benefiting from patronage that resulted from what was certainly contested foreign rule by the Mongols.

On individual levels, the painted stories repeatedly focus on action, often showing sequences and where possible, illustrating movement. Of course not all stories lend themselves to depictions of movement—but those that do often foreground the action. When possible, painters include actions like jumping, walking, or violently cutting off body parts as central to their compositions. In cases where the story’s central actions are less overt, more internal, like stories of prayers or mental vows, innovative ways of making these stories “move” are introduced. Prayers become physical gestures (the fish fig. 4.77), songs are sung and danced (fig. 4.70). These painted actions give concrete
examples of virtuous actions and explain them. The cumulative effect is that the great being described through pictures is not being explained as great merely due to his (often) noble birth, but because of specific, concrete, self-sacrificing actions he personally undertakes across many previous lives. The illustrated stories teach about and connect universal morals (generosity, patience, discipline) and specific, relatable actions, transforming the universal into the particular.

The painted images ultimately act in many important ways that the written texts cannot. Forced to select, they instantly prioritize, visually describe and re-perform the most important actions of a story—distinguishing and making choices about the meaningful or useful sections and details of narratives and then representing these all at once through spatial relationships. Events are depicted in causal sequences, often progressing roughly from left to right across the rectangular horizontal spaces, and from top to bottom. Ways and modes of figuration were built into the images, even if reading was not necessarily their overtly intended goal. The Shalu paintings represent unique adaptations of each individual story to the available spatial constraints, a set of choices that relate as much to the vagaries between the stories as to the choices available to a diverse group of fourteenth-century artists and textual interpreters who were busily experimenting and adapting with both a new text and a new graphic format.

These mural illustrations are graphically unlike anything that would have occurred in a Tibetan book manuscript or tangka painting. Paintings in Tibetan books were almost always restricted to painted inner covers, following conventions of Indian palm leaf manuscripts which from the eleventh century on often contained only three illustrated pages, one at the beginning, one at the middle, and one at the end. As carried into the tradition of illustrating Tibetan books, these illustrations were most often small and monoscopic, occurring in small divided spaces, depicting deities and life events frontally. When a sequence of Buddha life-story events were shown, these often exemplified, as Dehejia has noted, a “persisting disregard for the temporal sequence of

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There is thus no precedent we can locate in Tibetan art for this large-scale visual elaboration of sequential narrative. The extensive visual elaboration of multiple events in a large space was only possible due to this large mural context. Graphically, as large rectangular stories that included multiple events set into landscapes of often rolling hills, their visual adaptation was, I believe, indebted first to the scale of the format and the visual need to unify each story within a frame, and only after that possibly related to several distant relatives. It will be interesting to question further if knowledge of landscapes from Chinese handscrolls, though visually distant from the bright colours and crisply delineated forms at Shalu, could have served as visual inspiration.

Circumambulating the Temple, Seeing the Painted Book: Where Walking Replaces Reading

The didactic nature of both the literature and the images were significantly combined within the specific architectural and conceptual space of the circumambulatory passage, a space intended and built primarily for the Buddhist practice of circumambulation, or encircling a sacred object. This passage encircled the whole ground floor of the temple, and thus made the objects of veneration during circumambulation the ground floor shrines and their contents (sculptures, paintings, books). In the passage itself, the inner wall painted with the thousand Buddhas was in the position of veneration during circumambulation (fig. 3.1). The wall on which the jātaka paintings were painted would have been on the left side of a practitioner circumabluating the khorlam. This they were not in a position of veneration, but were nonetheless on “view” and in bodily proximity during circumambulation. Visitors were confronted with the visual display of the bodhisattva’s great acts in his ascent towards becoming the Buddha as they walked through this passage. The visual book was as a sequence of pages, encircling the outer walls, always protecting and containing the temple within. The pages, displayed like the

Dehejia, Discourse in Early Buddhist Art, 256. Though later research, in particular by Jinah Kim, has shown in fact that other structuring principles ordered the relationship of deity paintings in books to one another, and in particular, the book was understood as a sort of three-dimensional space when closed. Jinah Kim, Receptacle of the Sacred: Illustrated Manuscripts and the Buddhist Book Cult in South Asia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 7.
giant building blocks of the towering and impressive temple, were the visual material of this outermost wall, and a visual support system for the temple. The choice of a subject at once didactic and mythico-historical, one both universal and personal, the stories of the Buddha that were also a model for all, were what was made into these pictorial building blocks.

While the viewer was not encouraged to stop and gape at the specifics of the display, there is little question that a walk through the passage would engender the impression of a dizzying array of great acts, but that this “disorder” of so much difference was also impressively organized in and as a book. Walking through the passage replaced and enacted reading the book, exposing the viewer through proximity and vision to the whole organized collection. As a viewer circumambulated, they themselves walked through the book, and through the reading acts that informed the pictures for individuals. The book was both a sequence of equally-sized pages, and a set of illustrations. For literate and illiterate viewers alike, the pictures served to express the book as a set of individual, differentiated, stories.

In the position of this collection on the temple’s outermost walls, the temple was held and made out of stories that contain and explain Buddhist history. Like the brick-like display of texts themselves in the inner shrines, a book-grid of stories and pages supported the newly enlarged and unified temple’s outer walls. Reading though inscribed into each illustration and enacted into large inscriptions below the images, was not expected from a viewer. Instead, anyone traversing the passage walked through the book.
Conclusion: Building the Temple of Books

At Shalu the newly expanded temple was built to house a larger monastic community that was responsible for active book editing and collecting. Into the newly built spaces, it was mural paintings that then afforded a particularly rich venue through which to extend the possibilities of the book. The religious book itself was not new in importance for the Tibetan monastic institution, but large, Tibetan-organized book collections were. These book collections were new phenomena, and the massive institutional support and patronage that we know they required and received needed to be matched also by local support. The murals at the temple would never move, would never be seen by most Mongol administrators, or foreign elites, and so while their patronage may have been instrumental in enabling them, these do not well-explain the radical expressions of these murals. Instead these murals were made to communicate with the people who would see them every day: resident monks themselves involved in ongoing organizational, editing projects, and lay people whose taxes went directly to support the temple and all its efforts. Hence book collections were not only new material forms, but new social forms, that the murals served to explain, open, and argue for.

The idea of books as an organized collection was re-iterated and communicated through the murals at Shalu. The idea of the collected book was one of relationships between orders of knowledge, and of parts operating within larger wholes. So the paintings designed by the editors, the abbot Butön and his team, expressed the value of these powerful new constructs and their role in creating them. Like the medieval Pope Gregory, we can imagine that Butön was invested in and purposeful about how to decorate the new temple for its many users: monks and laity alike. It is no surprise that he asked artists to develope his temple’s walls in creative collaboration with what he saw as his most important work: books, and even more specifically, books within canonical collections of edited and organized knowledge.

At Shalu this drive to extend books into visual formats resulted in murals that ordered deities in relation to one another in organized spaces like books on shelves, and a whole passage where a newly organized collection was laid open and made to be walked
through. In the murals, books were made physical and manifest, and the book collections became the armor and substance of the walls. This was nowhere more true than in one more significant example of Shalu’s murals, the sets of maṇḍala paintings that were added to the four upper shrines.

**Reading, Designing, Writing: The Maṇḍalas of the Upper Shrines**

Before the installation of his newly formed Tengyur into the upper eastern shrine room in 1335, Butön was also providing designs and instructions for detailed maṇḍala paintings to fill the walls from floor to ceiling across every inch of all four upper shrine rooms at the temple (fig. 5.1). Once again, this was a team effort, and the inscriptions credit both the “author” Butön, and another religious leader serving as the second-in-command, with realizing these maṇḍala murals. A line included in the eastern shrine inscription placed to the left of the door (fig. 5.2) states:

According to Butöns’s plan, these [maṇḍala] were drawn by skillful artists. These artists were attended by Geshe Sonam Gyaltsen. Then they were completely finished. That Butön’s own plans are explained as having been interpreted and managed through another monk, Geshe Sonam Gyaltsen (*Dge shes bsod nam rgyal mtshan*), reveals some of the team effort that was involved in the production of the temple, and also shows just how closely religious hierarchs were working with artists through the process of painting murals. This religious attendant worked directly with the artists, such a close working relationship between a fully ordained monk and the working artists was necessary for these paintings that required so much textual interpretation for the images.

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453 This line appears in the inscriptions to the left of the door: *dge slong rin chen grub kyi bsgrubs pa yin/* This line is also found in Butöns’s collected works. Butön Rinchen drup, *Catalogue of the Excellent Maṇḍalas of the Large Shrines of the Four Directions of Shalu (Zhwa Lu’i Gisug Lag Khang Gi Gzhal Yas Khang Nub Ma Byang Ma Shar Ma Lho Ma Rnams Na Bzhugs Pa’i Dkyil ‘Khor Sogs Kyi Dkar Chag)*, vol. 17, gSung ’Bum Rin Chen Grub Bris Ma (pe cin: krung go’i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang, 2008), 39, http://tbrc.org/link?RID=O1PD81200|O1PD812001PD81396$W1PD45496.
The production of these manḍala paintings, like the production of the many textual collections Butön and his team would produce, represented wide reading and careful editorial work: numerous texts had been consulted and compared in the formation of these paintings. Furthermore, these newly created images demanded the creation of new texts: and Butön authored long commentarial writings about these manḍala paintings that were then added onto the walls of the rooms as long inscriptions alongside these paintings. In these new commentarial writings Butön explains the paintings and the choices made in their production with specific recourse to his knowledge and consultation with texts.

These inscriptions reveal a complex relationship between the production of images and the creation of texts. Flanking the doors of the upper eastern Tengyur shrine, the long inscription passage begins with dedicatory exhortations, praise to the donors, and then quickly evolves into a thorough and detailed descriptive analysis of the painted manḍalas of the room:

They were designed like this: In the centre there is the manḍala of the Dharmadhatu Lord of speech (*Chos kyi dbyings gsung gi dbang phyugs gi dkyil 'khor*), this *manḍala* is explained in two texts: a section of the *Vajradhātu*, and also in the *Yoga Tantra* of the *Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti*. This manḍala has two systems: the system of Master Jampel drakpa (*Mañjuśrīkirti*) and that of Master Jikmé jungné bépa (Abhayākaragupta). Here we follow mainly the teacher ‘Jampel drakpa.455

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454 These inscriptions appear in each of the four upper floor shrine rooms, though today are very damaged in both the north and west shrines. The inscriptions of the eastern shrine and southern shrine are well preserved. In the eastern shrine they flank both sides of the door on the inside of the room, and in the southern shrine they appear only to the left of the door on the shrine’s interior. They also survive in print. Ibid., 17:7–56.

455 *bkod pa’di ltar lags / ’di ltar / dbus na rdo rje dbyings kyi kyi dum bu las’ phros shing / de dang cha cha mthun pa ‘jam dpal gyi mtshan yang dag par brjod pa rnal’ byor gyi rgyud du dgongs pa bkral ba chos kyi dbyings gsung gi dbang gi dbang phyugs gi dkyil ’khor te / ’di la slob dpon ’jam dpal ’jam dpal grags pa’i lugs dang dang / slob dpon ’jig med ’byung nas shas pa’i lugs gnyis las / ’dir slob dpon ’jam dpal ’jam dpal grags pa’i lugs gtso bor byas te / Ibid., 17:32.*
The inscription clearly states that texts have been read and followed in forming the maṇḍala paintings. Furthermore, nothing has been followed without comparative analysis, and these different Indian systems have been compared in the decision about what to paint. The specific choice of which system to follow is then carried into other choices. The inscription goes on to apply this systematic and comparative approach to individual visual elements:

Inside the root maṇḍala some people accept nine maṇḍalas, but this is wrong. Because this is not explained in either of their systems [of Abhayākaragupta and Manjusrīkirti] nor does any clear text mention this. Some people say the inner of all three maṇḍalas should have no pediments (rta babs), but this is wrong. Some texts say to make a square and put four doors and decorate it with four pediments, meaning that the maṇḍala square with pediments is clearly mentioned. Although the texts do not clearly state whether the round maṇḍala does or does not have pediments, according to the Phrel ba and the traditions of previous lamas, they both say that they should have pediments, so that is why here we have made pediments.456

His own specific decisions around the relative position of objects in relation to each other, the size or colour of deities, or here the choice to depict the pediments or gate archways on the central circular maṇḍala are made through recourse to texts and the knowledgeable abbot’s comparison of these: decisions about images are the same as decisions made between different texts. But what also is being communicated then through the images is Butön’s own conclusion of which should be followed, which text is correct. He has consulted all the systems, and produced illustrations, he tells us, based on those he deems most authentic.

456 The wall inscription reads: ‘di la ‘ag ’azhiga rtsa ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi nang nang du dkyil 'khor dgu bzhes pa ni / lug gnyis ka la med med cing cing / gzungs gsal kha can ma byung la / nang gi dkyil 'khor gsun la rta babs med par 'dod pa ni / gru bzhir bgyi zhing so bzhis ni rnam par brgyan / zhes dkyil 'khor gru bzhi rta babs can gsungs la / de'i yang phyi rol bri bya bar / phyi rol rdo rje rigs kyi rigs kyi gnas / zlum zhing kun kun tu bzang ba dang / zhes dkyil 'khor gru bzhi'i phyi rol du dkyil 'khor zlum bu gsungs pas chos kyi dkyil 'khor rta babs can yin la / dkyil 'khor zlum bu la la rta babs yod med kyi kyi gsal kha ma gsungs kyang / phreng ba dang bla ma gong ma rnams bzhed pa bzhin rta babs yod par byas so so. Ibid., 17:32–33.
Sometimes his choices around how to make the paintings acknowledge the complexity of balancing textual prescriptions with the very real demands of physical space, and Butön frankly discusses this in contexts where texts cannot be followed. These are not apologies, but explanations that demonstrate that the paintings on the wall are still correct even if they are constrained by other demands that make the full realization of textual requirements occasionally impossible. To the left side of the entry door to the eastern shrine chapel, the inscription begins:

On the North side there is a maṇḍala called All the Buddhas Secret Great maṇḍalas (ba'i chos kyi dbyings kyi rdo rje chen po snying po rgyan de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po). This is from the Ornament of Ancient Vajra Tantra, a text which is very similar to the Vajradhātu and the Great Glory. About this maṇḍala some different perspectives exist. In the text, some people say to draw the third maṇḍala by the force of vajra. According to this text it has nine doors, but this is not correct. Because from the Vairocana text, it lists three maṇḍalas, and this is the third maṇḍala. This maṇḍala does not have three doors. About this maṇḍala [of the Vajradhātu realms], normally you would make the plumb line, and outside of that there would be seven maṇḍalas, but if we followed this, then we can’t fit all the deities in, so we cannot follow it.  

Admitting that although a text prescribes something, spatial demands prevent its realization, reveals how Butön places himself, the author and designer, in the position of negotiation between the need to follow text but also create images. These texts and

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457 The wall inscription reads: byang ngos kyi mgon rdo rje dbyings dang dpal mchog gnyis ka'i cha mthun gyi rgyud rdo rje snying po rgyan gvyi rgyud las byang ba'i chos kyi dbyings kyi rdo rje chen po snying po rgyan de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gsang ba'i dkyil 'khor chen po bzhugs sors/’di la 'ga’ zhig rdo rje shugs kyi song nas ni/dkyil 'khor gsum pa bri bar bya/ zhes pa la brten nas sgo dgu sbrags tu ’dod pa ni/ mi rigs te/ rnam snang las ’khor los bsgyur ba brgyad kyi bskor ba dang po/ rigs bzhisi dkyil 'khor gnyis par byas pa'i gsum pa yin gvi/ sgo gsum pa ni ma yin te/ nang gi dkyil 'khor phyogs kyi char/ dkyil 'khor dag ni rnam bzhiri bya/ zhes rigs bzhisi dkyil 'khor nang ma'i nang du bshad pa'i phyir dang/ nang gi dkyil 'khor thig gda bya/ de yi phyi rol du bya ba/ dkyil 'khor yang ni rnam pa bdun/ zhes brgyud du gsal bar gsungs pa'i phyir ro/ ’di la thob thang bzhin byas na gzi chung bas lha ma shong bar bzo thig lung ma bstan du byas so. Ibid., 17:36–37.
paintings exist in a constant state of negotiation, where neither is in definitive control. The paintings are not merely showing authoritative systems of image making based on Indian tantric texts, but instead they are showing how a knowledgeable author/editor/designer must stand at the nexus of many texts and choose between them, and also must correctly realize the kinds of images they prescribe. The work of the scholar was key here: it was up to an intelligent and discerning mind to distill the available knowledge into useful and workable systems. Producing textual sets required this; so too did productions of mural images.

The inscriptions Butön authored to explain the maṇḍala paintings demonstrate just how closely text and image were used as interrelated communicative forms at Shalu in the early fourteenth century. The maṇḍalas were clearly illustrated from texts—and wherever possible followed texts in all their details. But such work was neither easy nor straightforward, and indeed, included ample choice: the learned religious authority had to decide based on numerous possible texts what were the most clear and correct instructions for making the complex painted maṇḍalas. In the critical times where the texts disagreed, the author made informed choices. These texts were not ultimately the only forms of authority; rather, real authority was exercised by the editor who stood as keeper of these texts. He was the one who read them, understood them, and had the power to choose between them. Real authority, as communicated and practiced in the formation of collections and the formation of murals, lay with the editor and the designer.

The paintings of the maṇḍalas represent most starkly Butön’s editorial work, and were specifically chosen as paintings in a room that would house one of the most important new text collections: the copy and catalogue of the newly edited Tengyur collection. This large collection was deposited at Shalu in 1335, with some fanfare, into the eastern shrine room painted with maṇḍalas and their explanatory commentarial texts. In the colophon to Butön’s Tengyur, he speaks directly about how his new collection had come to be:

To the scriptures in translation deposited in the great religious institution of Narthang, texts were added, and rare texts not available there and new translations were carefully sought for in the great and small religious institutions of Ü and
Tsang. About one thousand new texts were added and, when all the duplicates contained in the texts were removed, the most excellent commentarial scriptures were 3392 in number.\textsuperscript{458}

The edition of the Tengyur involved taking this earlier version, one now referred to as the “Old Narthang” edition, and adding about one thousand authoritative Indian-sourced texts to it. This monumentally difficult work had involved searching across Tibet for all known texts, bringing these together, then making a new and complete set.

The rhetoric of the complete set, and the role of the Tibetan lama and the religious institution in forming it, holding it, and then also making it usable and available, were the major themes repeatedly celebrated in the mural format in the new fourteenth-century temple of Shalu. While this is very explicit in the case of the maṇḍala shrines,\textsuperscript{459} this study has shown how other parts of the temple painted in the fourteenth century also expressed the power of books, and the power of the editor in collecting and conveying them.

In his dedication of another of his important commentarial collections, his famous History of Buddhism in India and Tibet, Butön likened his relationship to texts like that of a bee around scriptures likened to flowers:

\begin{quote}
Held dearly by my lama, as loving as a mother,
I approach the lotus garden of the Lion of Men’s scriptures,
Like a bee overjoyed with flowers:
\end{quote}


My intellect will flourish among these boundless teachings.\footnote{This translation comes from a recent English translation of Butöns’s \textit{A History of Buddhism} by Lisa Stein and Ngawang Zangpo. \textit{The Jewellery of Scripture} and \textit{The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet}. Butöns Rinchen drup, \textit{Butöns History of Buddhism in India and Its Spread to Tibet: A Treasury of Priceless Scripture}, trans. Lisa Stein and Ngawang Zangpo, First Edition (Boston & London: Snow Lion, 2013), 5. This hugely important and influential work of Butöns was originally translated in the 1930s by Dr. Eugene Obermiller and appeared as two volumes, Bu ston Rin chen grub, \textit{History of Buddhism (Chos-Hbyung)}, trans. Eugene Obermiller (Heidelberg: In Kommission bei O. Harrassowitz, 1932).}

His powerful yet humble metaphor here compares holy books to lotuses, a favourite Buddhist symbol for transcendence, being the flowers that grow out of muddy waters yet emerge with otherworldly purity. His extended metaphor also leaves unstated one of its most powerful images: this is the unspoken honey, the production of bees with flowers. Butöns conceived of himself and his relationship to texts as a productive one: one wherein the editor creates a new product, itself a beautiful (and probably not accidentally, a consumable) synthesis. Butöns saw this as his job, as the job of the scholar and editor: to create something new, the “honey” distilled from vast reading, that others could also benefit from and consume. This informs how he saw the production of his texts and his editorial work: that in which the rest of the population, those who would not be equipped to read all available texts and make decisions between them, could also benefit. This new nectar of textual synthesis, the distillation of knowledge and newly organized systems that held together Buddhist learning, were what both textual sets, and wall paintings, variously permitted.

At the heart of these efforts must have been Butöns’s recognition that the institution, and his work, had diverse audiences, and that the audiences of texts and images, while overlapping, were not exactly the same. Religious theorist on art, Margaret Miles, has called for a “juggling of texts and images in the method of historical hermeneutics, a balance based on a respect for and interest in not only historical language users but also historical image users.”\footnote{Margaret R. Miles, \textit{Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 38.} The fact that Butöns wanted to argue for books with and through wall paintings demonstrates a stark awareness and desire from the abbot (and the temple’s patrons and other hierarchs) to create those bridges: to provide access and explanation to the book collections to a wider group of “image users” in their local...
community. This inherently recognized the power of painted images to permit access, to open and display, and to collect and contain. For whom were these books opened? By making murals that enacted and manifest the processes of reading and editing, the visual could become a substitute or surrogate for reading, or by turns, also a justification and incentive.

**Painting, Power and Politics**

This is not only a story of how murals in medieval Tibet relied on and were produced through texts, but it is also a story of how texts and books themselves needed painted images to reinforce arguments for them. These paintings did not merely express the important contents of books, but rather showed how books worked and how book knowledge was organized. Aimed at a wider audience than the audience for books, the “canvas” of the temple wall also indirectly celebrated the power of books on a larger scale and for a wider audience. The mural paintings did not aim merely to communicate specific teachings or specific texts, but also implicitly communicated through visual impressions the very powerful organizations of book collections, and the ability of the institution, the temple, to perform and enact the collecting. As such, they celebrated the temple as a repository of knowledge, and the Tibetan teacher as editor and compiler. Books and book collections were being shown, advertised even, as constructive, powerful, devices that themselves contained, controlled, and ordered diversity, history and hence, gave access to authority and power. This was power to instruct in the present and also power over history, and both of these aspects were central to the refashioning and indeed the survival of Tibetan religious institutions in the face of Mongol colonialism and its demise.

Yet ironically for us as modern readers and thinkers, these same instructive images, just as many of the texts in situ, were probably not in fact made to be “read” by most people, if we can really presume any “readers” at all. Then, as now, books may have been present yet mostly closed in a temple room, and we might really wonder at Gregory’s suggestion that “reading” or even any real sense of understanding was an expected goal or outcome for looking at a temple wall. Indeed, “reading” may have
meant something else entirely, and the visual act of seeing paintings became a surrogate for absent acts of reading. While we know that many monastic book specialists lived and worked at Shalu in the early fourteenth century, most of the population who visited the temple would have been illiterate. While we can posit that at least sometimes a literate monk might have read an inscription aloud for an individual temple visitor, there are many of the wall paintings where the space or placement of them makes this seem, instead, quite unlikely. In the position of some paintings and their words, it seems more likely that reading was replaced by viewing through movement, and the viewing of unread words and only glanced-at images could stand in for that missing reading-act. The performative iteration of inscribing books onto walls permitted a different kind of performed “reading” of the text, one enabled through contact more than through mental cognition.462

Shalu has something to teach us about the ways in which medieval Tibetan temples variously used art, specifically mural paintings, for communication. In expressing the power that came from collecting and organizing projects as central to productions of art, and to productions of books, Shalu’s lamas, designers and artists found ways to express the new power base of Tibetan religious institutional power in the period of the Mongol empire. This consisted of religious authority that was rooted not merely in the collection of earlier, disparate, and foreign sources (books, teachings, art, people), but which most importantly resulted in the re-formulation of these elements into new wholes.

A driving tension in the study of Shalu here has been the extent to which foreign contact or foreign influence was formative at the temple. Though the new temple certainly consciously assembled itself from foreign parts (a Chinese roof, Nepalese painters) what studying Shalu further permits is the analysis of the exercise of powering its vital operations at the essential local level. And in the mediation with local audiences, architecture and mural art aimed to coerce and convince the people who used the temple. Few Mongol administrators or foreign rulers would ever see these murals. Instead, they

462 Of interest here too is British linguist J.L. Austin’s distinction between “constative” and “performative” iterations, which describe speech acts that alternately describe situations as opposed to those that incite actions. J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
were made to speak for and to the people who used the temple every day: all the people other than the editors for whom vast reading would never be possible which included some monks and all laity.

Building a large temple and decorating it ornately are inherently assertions of wealth and power, but should not be confined to these explanations either. Instead Shalu provides evidence for the ways a religious leader like Butön could, within the parameters afforded by tax exemptions for the temple and the political turmoil of much of the rest of the country, nevertheless employ vast patronage to make impressive creative advancements that reflected essentially local need. Working alongside Butön the artists who arranged the visual narratives at Shalu worked in a new pictorial format and were able to create and use pictorial spaces differently than they had previously. This was required by the subject and scale of the representations and led to the first experiments with extended landscapes that we see in Tibetan art. The new possibilities of this moment, its patronage, and the confluence of diverse groups of artists with a wider awareness of visual materials resulted in new ways of envisioning story, book and space.

In the murals painted at Shalu between the late 1320s and early 1340s, walls found new ways to express the power of edited book collections, and also, of the abbot and the institution that had brought them together. Completing the temple’s murals were but one final stage in the same intellectual and communal processes that saw teams of men supported at the temple to create edited book collections. The elaborate murals specifically manifested the same interest in organization and delineation as in these new book collections, using the visual symmetry of writing and the visual structures of books (pages, shelves, covers) to order the painted spaces of walls. The new walls then were made as books manifested and opened, and it was the idea of books that were intentionally built into the supporting structures of the new temple.

This reflects ultimately what the institution and its leader hoped most to celebrate: the power of scholasticism, which was based in organizing the assembled teachings. This was a key difference from murals of earlier centuries at the temple, which had fulfilled iconographic sets accompanying built-in sculptures but rarely divided wall space into grids and sections.
But just because Butön may have meant to also produce “books for the illiterate” in the temple’s murals in a way resonant with Pope Gregory’s famous statement, can we infer from this that he assumed these were meant to be read or even looked at? I believe not, for what Shalu’s murals seem to permit is the replacement of reading with other activities. In the passage that was meant for circumambulation no one is, I believe, expected to read the stories, even if some monks could or did. Instead the creation and manifestation of the complete image-book makes reading redundant for most viewers. Instead the readers who made the walls have read, this benefit can now be passed along through the paintings and their (often glanced) viewing. The editors, and the artists, together, have become active surrogate “readers” for everyone else, and their acts of reading are passed on as text-image. The benefits of reading could now accrue in other ways, for instance, by being walked past, seen, but not studied. This is fitting for the very material nature of Tibetan Buddhism, which often conflates or collapses mental and physical work. At Shalu the mental work was made physical through mural, and the walls presented opportunities to place bodies into and inside the collections of philosophical religious teachings represented by religious texts.
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