

Marketing of Paintings: A Case of Thangka Paintings

Archana Rani

Department of Drawing & Painting, R.G. (P.G.) College, Meerut (U.P.) India
Email Id: drarchana.art@gmail.com

Abstract

Thangka Paintings are a very much popular Tibetan paintings. A 'Thangka' is also known as 'Tanka' or 'Tangka'. In Tibet the word 'thang' means flat. Thangka Paintings are painted or embroidered with the Buddhist banner. The thangka painting's look is complicated and is a composite three-dimensional object. Thangka is a beautiful wall-hanging that is being further decorated with gold, silk and wood. Thangka paintings are visually very stimulating and usually used for various functions and which even depict the life of the Buddha. The most common shape in which a Thangka Paintings is done is in the upright rectangular form. These paintings as mentioned used to represent the life of Buddha and were used in temples, however, in the present scenario it is more appreciated as a form of pure art. Some artists even encouraged the incorporation of elements like train; plane etc to show the development of the traffic of India. The price of the Thangka depends on the skills of the artist and the perfection of the painting. As the Thangka was enjoying great popularity and received high demands, the prices of the paintings increased as a result of which fake or immature thangkas were introduced in the market known as commercial Thangkas. Although it wasn't popular in the market then and remained confined in the monasteries, but later with the increased demand and appreciation, cheap or fake Thangkas flushed in the market as commercial Thangkas. One has to have good knowledge about this artwork before purchasing so that the person is not cheated by the frauds in the market who know various tacts to give the painting and old and original appearance. Having good knowledge about the Thangkas is the only remedy to appreciate the original artwork and its popularity in the Indian market.

Keywords: Thangka Painting, Travelling monks, Abhidhorms teachings, Budhist scripture.

PAPER/ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED ON: 21/03/2017

ACCEPTED ON: 11/05/2017

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Archana Rani (2017),
"Marketing of Paintings: A
Case of Thangka Paintings",
Int. J. of Trade and Commerce-
IJTC, Vol. 6, No. 1, pp.
162-172

1. INTRODUCTION

A "Thangka," also known as "Tangka", "Thangkaa" or "Tanka" is a Tibetan silk painting with embroidery, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, scene, or mandala of some sort. A thangka, was hung in a monastery or over a family altar and occasionally carried by monks in ceremonial processions. It can be rolled up when not required for display, and is sometimes called a scroll-painting. Thangka painting was popular among travelling monks because the scroll paintings were easily rolled and transported from monastery to monastery. These thangka served as important teaching tools depicting the life of the Buddha, various influential lamas and other deities and bodhisattvas. One popular subject is the Wheel of Life, a visual representation of the Abhidharma teachings (Art of Enlightenment). The devotional images acted as centerpieces during rituals or ceremonies and were often used as mediums through which to offer prayers or make requests. The visually and mentally stimulating images were used as a focus meditation practice, to bring the practitioner closer to enlightenment. Painted thangkas are done on treated cotton canvas or silk with water soluble pigments, both mineral and organic, tempered with a herb and glue solution. The entire process demands great mastery over the drawing and a profound understanding of econometric principles. The artist must paint according to certain basic rules that dictate the number of hands, the color of the deity's face, and the posture of the deity, the holding of the symbols and the expression of the face. Final touches may be added using 24-carat gold. The composition of a thangka is highly geometric. Arms, legs, eyes, nostrils, ears, and various ritual implements are all laid out on a systematic grid of angles and intersecting lines. A skilled thangka artist generally includes a variety of standardized items ranging from alms bowls and animals, to the shape, size, and angle of a figure's eyes, nose, and lips, in the composition. Thangka often overflow with symbolism and allusion. Because the art is explicitly religious, all symbols and allusions must be in accordance with strict guidelines laid out in Buddhist scripture. The artist must be properly trained and have sufficient religious understanding, knowledge, and background to create an accurate and appropriate thangka.

According to historical records, around the seventh or eighth century A.D. Thangka drawings began to be made in Tibet. This approach stems from Indian storytelling, where the image from which the story was told is vertically suspended, to visually assist in the story-telling. The most common shape in which a Thangka Paintings is done is in the upright rectangular form.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The origin of the basic and the original Thangka painting is from the ancient Indian religious art. These paintings even today are heavenly drawn inspirations from Nepalese, Chinese and Kashmiri styles. Thangkas are very much flexible that can also be rolled and called a scroll-painting. A Thangka painting is an object which craves for devotion, spiritual practice, and is a harbinger of blessings. Thangkas exclusively comes in variety of styles, portraying the Buddha and other Hindu deities. It is believed that the hanging painting which brings blessings in the household and serves as a constant reminder of the Buddha's teachings of compassion, kindness and wisdom. Tibetan thangka painting is based upon the Indian religious art of pata and mandala, complex paintings whose designs were used in certain religious rites. As the Tibetans closely adhered to the religious teachings of the Indian Pandits, so did they follow the strict guidelines laid down by Indian and later, Nepalese and Chinese artist? Eventually, it was the

Nepalese and Chinese painters who had the most far-reaching influence on the development of the Tibetan thangka.

A thangka painting is not simply a decoration or a creation of beauty, but a religious object and a medium for expressing Buddhist ideals. These works of art function as models on which the practitioner can reflect and meditate. The Thangka until today is still mainly a form of virtuous duty by artist for the temple, some to decorate temples, some used to form lasting bonds with people to the living Buddha. But over time the development of Thangka has come out of the scope of religion and emerged as a pure and beautiful art form.

Turning to the future of Thangka collection trends, Xie Ji-sheng said that the value of this art form will continue to rise give the increasing attention do to the Tibetan culture. For many years, thangkas were not known to the Western world it influenced Indian market too. But with the modernization of Tibet and India, the paintings have been turning up with increased frequency in local and international art collection markets. At a sale in New York in 1994, a large embroidered thangka painted at the time of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) was sold for \$1 million. In 2002, the same thangka was sold again for around \$3.6 million, making it a record for any auctioned thangka. However, nowadays it is rare to find thangkas painted before the Ming Dynasty.

Apart from ancient classic works created in Tang (618-907) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, modern thangka paintings have also been favored by enthusiasts and collectors both home and abroad. Some works of contemporary artists have great value for collectors because of the painters' consummate skill and innovation of blending modern painting styles or approaches with traditional characteristics. With the development of a new generation of thangka artists, the content of thangka artworks has been enriched as well.

Since 2006, Thangka has been included in the first national list of intangible cultural heritage protection. With the Tibetology boom Thangka has also been gaining attention among collectors. Thangka have become a major focus of auction markets in India. The works of Thangka masters and many other contemporary works are also frequently sold in the tens of thousands of dollars; few have even reached tens of millions of yuan.

In recent years, the Thangka collection in Indian market continues to heat up, from 2000 to date; the price of Thangka has nearly jumped 10 times. Those from the Ming and Qing dynasties have set record high prices such as at the 1994 Christies auction in New York of one million U.S. dollars for a Thangka named Red Night Magic of the Yongle Imperial system. At the 2002 Christie auction in Hong Kong, a price of 30.8741 million Hong Kong dollars set a new record. On August 13, 2008, "The Thousand Thangka of Gesar to welcome the Olympics" exhibition opened in Beijing Cultural Palace of Nationalities. The National Political Consultative Conference Chairman Jia Qinglin, Panchen Lama and other leaders visited the exhibition. The exhibition had aroused widespread attention at home and abroad.

In August 2008, the first International Thangka Art and Cultural Heritage Expo was held in Qinghai where many Thangka art treasures at home and abroad had attracted a lot of collectors. At the fair held during a Thangka art auction, after fierce bidding, eight Thangka works were auctioned off totaling 690,000 yuan. It is apparent that collecting Thangka is increasing becoming favored by consumers of Indian and western market.

According to Professor Xie Ji-sheng, with the opening and maturity of the art market, more art forms have gained exposure through the auction markets allowing Thangka to be seriously appreciated as one of the earlier art forms. How a Thangka is valued is affected by its art style and genre, the complexity of the painting, material texture and quality. No less is the value also dependent upon the skill of the artist. A skilled artist takes about 6 to 8 months to complete a Thangka of one squared meter in size, based on a daily work schedule of 6 to 8 hours. To account for the length of careful production, such a Thangka will typically sell for 30,000 RMB or higher. Therefore, a high quality Thangka of significant size will be correspondingly valued higher. Originally a Buddhist art depicting a Buddhist deity or a famous scene suddenly became very hot on the art market. Things seem to have changed overnight. With thangka paintings well received on the art auction market, a collection craze has been sweeping both Indian and other countries.

Sep 21, 2015 auctions, A finely embroidered Buddhist thangka was sold for \$1.5 million at Sotheby's, New York on Wednesday. Estimated to sell for between \$80,000 and \$120,000, the artwork fetched 15 times the expected price.

The 18th century Qing dynasty thangka hung in an Arizona home for decades. The artwork was bought by the collector Wilton D. Cole and his wife in 1971 and passed down to their children, who were reportedly unaware of the artifact's value.

Antiques and the Arts Weekly reported that six potential buyers fought to secure the thangka in a protracted bidding war that lasted several minutes. Eventually, a private collector from Aisa landed the artwork with a winning bid of \$1,510,000.

Sep 21, 2015 auctions, A painting of Chakrasamvara and Vajravarahi, Nepal, 16th century. Sold for \$545,000 in the The Van der Wee collection of Himalayan Paintings auction on 15 March 2016 at Christie's New York.

An important and exceptionally fine painting of Vaishravana, Tibet, 18th century. This work was offered in the the Vander Wee Collection of Himalayan Paintings auction on 15 March 2016 at Christie's New York.

3. THEORETICAL ASPECTS

There are many reasons for commissioning a thangka, the most common being to create an object of worship which will lead to the accumulation of merit. For even looking at a thangka is in itself a good deed. By meditating on such objects, one can train the mind and gain an understanding of certain types of awareness that specific image portrays. Other reasons for commissioning a thangka painting may be to bring about good health, prosperity or long life. Sometimes they are commissioned to aid the recovery of a sick person, or to protect a person through vulnerable periods in his or her life, or to help in the rebirth of someone who has recently died. In all these cases, a lama is usually consulted to advice on which deity should be painted to give the greatest assistance to that person. So if somebody dies, the family of the deceased will consult a lama or an astrologer who will advise them which deity would be the most propitious in assisting a good rebirth.

A Thangka is more than just a painting. It is an object of devotion, an aid to spiritual practice, and a bringer of blessings. Thangka paintings come in a variety of styles, portraying the Buddha or other deities. The iconography of the thangka is informative. Hanging a Thangka painting is

considered auspicious and brings blessings to the household and serves as a constant reminder of the Buddha's teachings of compassion, kindness and wisdom.

Originally, Thangka painting became popular among travelling monks because the scroll paintings were easily rolled and transported from monastery to monastery. These Thangkas served as an important teaching tool depicting the life of Buddha, various influential lamas and other deities and bodhisattvas. One popular subject is the Wheel of Life, which is a visual representation of the Abhidharma teachings (Art of Enlightenment). To Buddhist people these Tibetan religious paintings offer a beautiful manifestation of the divine, being both visually and mentally stimulating.

For Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns alike, Thangka is regarded as an essential tool during religious practice. Worship Thangka could earn merit while observing Thangka would evoke associations of Buddhist teachings. Similarly, at home, the faithful would invite the painter to create a Thangka for worship. Some would also personally paint and dedicate it to the monastery temple as decoration. The most spectacular can be found in monasteries during festivals and religious assemblies when monks bring out their collection of Thangka for public display as a demonstration of the glory of the great Buddha. They would also give speeches along with singing and dancing, creating an occasion of magnificence of solemnity. Normally the Thangka used for indoor worship is generally not more than one meter in length. However those used for public display when opened in full can completely cover one side of a mountain.

As a kind of Tibetan scroll-banner painting and a unique art form, the thangka painting requires serenity and sacredness of the painters. Before painting a thangka, a painter needs to take a bath, burn incense and chant scriptures in order to paint in the state of tranquility. The whole process goes without any utilitarian purpose. Thangka paintings can have multiple functions. The images of deities can be used as teaching tools while preaching of Buddha. They can describe the various historical events in the life of the Lamas and narrate mythological stories. These paintings use devotional images which are the centerpiece in a ritual and prayers are offered to them. Most important Thangka Paintings depict the wheel of life, Buddha life story, Abhay Mudra, yantra mandala, medicine Buddha mandala, etc. Most important aspect of Thangka Paintings is that all these paintings are hand painted by dedicated artisans. Thangka painting is a Nepalese art form that came down from Nepal to Tibet to India. Thangka paintings are especially painted or embroidered Buddhist banners which are hung in a monastery or a family altar or even carried in ceremonial processions.

4. METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

Thangkas are painted on cotton or silk. The most common is loosely woven cotton produced in widths from 40 to 58 centimeters (16 - 23 inches). While some variations do exist, thangkas wider than 45 centimeters (17 or 18 inches) frequently have seams in the support. The paint consists of pigments in a water soluble medium. Both mineral and organic pigments are used, tempered with an herb and glue solution. In Western terminology, this is a distemper technique.

Line drawing is the basic means of traditional Tibetan painting and had once reached a high level of development. In most cases, Thangka uses gold threading to outline the figures and scenery through varying the line thickness, thereby drawing focus to every part of the picture. The artists are very good at using gold, and often use pink gold as the bottom layer, and then use gold to

outline patterns, so as to increase the layering effect of gold shine. They have very strict quality requirements for gold, using only the purest gold personally processed to powder. In order to increase the brightness of some outline in gold, they use what is called the "cat's eye stone" repeatedly rubbing onto the surface where gold is applied. As a result, the entire picture appears rich in cultural style and can be used as an elegant decoration.

In addition to composition and the artistic treatment of these characteristics, methods such as in-shading, hook lines, paint smudging is also strengths. Generally iridescent greens are used for rocks, trees, sky and the ground. People, buildings and large areas of the Buddha are created with warm tones of yellow and red. This color contrast of warm and cool color tones not only splendidly demonstrates well coordination within the picture but also a structured yet decorative coloring effect. Artists mainly use opaque mineral pigments for coloring, such as cinnabar, stone yellow and malachite green. These pigments are enhanced for anti-corrosion ensuring the longevity of the colors. Therefore, despite the passing of time, the colors remain as fresh as ever a further testament to the artist's consideration.

The Tibetan artists not only pay attention to the overall effect of the picture but also focus on the detailed portrayal of each image. For instance within each frame, the natural objects such as rocks and plants and the characters are blended using the same coloring scheme with different shades creating a layering effect.

The contents of the Thangka paintings range widely. They include religious activities and characters from Buddhism and story scenes while also depict the traditions and many sights of the high plateaus. To reflect such voluminous content in a scroll painting requires extraordinary skills and rich life experiences. In particular, the stories are portrayed according to history without conceptualization. The Thangka artists paid the utmost attention to detail for every single aspect in the painting from the architecture of popular customs down to the weaponry and armor. Such careful composition demonstrates the artist's creative skills in realistically depicting life. Tibetan Thangka is generally 60 cm in width and 90 cm in length. The center of the frame contains a big Buddha, which is surrounded by stories depicted in a clock-wise fashion around the Buddha, which serves as a focal point for each of the stories.

Traditionally, it is said that an artist should possess certain characteristics: modesty, devotion to religion, soundness of all senses, diligence and a kindly disposition. In addition, depending on the subject of the work, it is said that the artist may have to follow certain personal restrictions: abstinence from meat, alcohol, onion and garlic and strict personal cleanliness. Creating Thangka requires extreme patience and precision. The process is complicated, and painters have to abide to the classic principles of Tibetan Buddhism, which Thangka is based on, as well as painting techniques. The pigments are made from natural mineral materials to prevent the color from fading. The meditation may take many forms. One way is for the painter to meditate on a particular deity, which is not necessarily the one that will be featured in the painting. The image of the deity, Manjushri, the deity of wisdom, for example, may be used and is placed in front of the artist, who imagines the image melting into his body before he generates himself as Manjushri.

The next step is to invoke the image of the deity about to be painted. If it is one of the Taras, for example, the artist will visualize the goddess who then dissolves into the canvas, brushes and paints, thus, making them the essence of that deity.

The final step is the motivation for creating the thangka, when the artist thinks of all the suffering beings in all the different realms and remembers that he is painting the thangka for the benefit of them all. Innovations to Thangka are underway in various aspects. Lhaug Dakpo, a Thangka artist, gradually combined modern painting techniques and changed the composition of pictures, scenery and perspective in his work, after his Thangka did not sell well.

In one painting, a Buddha figures changes into a Indian girl surrounded by musical instruments. Penpa hopes to add planes, trains and tourists in his future painting, to reflect the development of traffic in India. For him, traditional Thangka paintings are distinctly Buddhist and tied with faith. Modernization will limit the development and spread of Thangka. He stresses the importance of keeping traditional painting techniques.

Thangka paintings often cater to tourists, with changes made in the background and designs, with only the Buddha figures kept. Ma Shengde said this might hinder Thangka. Innovation should be prudent and respectful. The core of Thangka is its religious aspects. It's not for mass consumption and should not cater to public demands," he said. "Our descendants should know what original Thangka looks like."

For Tibetans, traditionally, Thangka painting is only passed down to monks or males in the family, whereas a Thangka master walks by the tradition and teaches Thangka skills to his daughter for the better inheritance and development of the Thangka art.

'The painters of Tibet and India pursue their art in an orderly and systemic way. When creating thangka paintings they proceed through six clearly defined steps. The first is the preparation of the painting surface. Second comes the establishment of a design on that surface by means of a sketch or transfer. The third step involves the initial coats of paint, and that is followed by steps four and five: shading and outlining. The sixth and last step consists of several finishing touches.'

As a thangka painting is made to be rolled up in a scroll fashion, it is painted on cloth whose surface has two layers: the support and ground. The most common cloth, or support, used today is light-weight Indian cotton of fine but slightly open weave. An open weave allows the 'gesso' a kind of white paint to settle more evenly. This underlying material holds the subsequent layer of ground and paint. Once the artist has acquired the cloth, it is washed, dried and cut to fit the wooden frame upon which it is stretched. This must be done carefully to avoid any bulging which, if it occurs, will be permanent.

Once the fabric is secured onto the frame three steps are taken to prepare the cloth for painting. First is the sizing of the cloth, which involves the preparation of warm solution of hide glue which is applied to both sides of the cloth with a large brush or a wadded rag. Once the cloth is saturated, any excess is removed and the cord that connects the cloth to the stretcher is tightened. Then the canvas is aside to dry.

Secondly, the cotton support is coated with gesso. The gesso used is a solution of either chalk or white clay, whichever is the most available and is combined with size solution until it reaches the consistency of buttermilk. The mixture is then strained through a cloth to remove any lumps and is applied to both sides of the cloth in thin even coats with a wadding rag or gesso knife. When the first coat has dried the artist determines if another is necessary by holding the canvas up to the light. If light comes through, another application of gesso is applied.

Finally, the surface is polished until it is perfectly smooth and ready for use. The drawing of a thangka is done in several stages – first are the lines of orientation. The most important line is the central vertical axis, which forms the exact centre of the painting around which the composition will be laid out. The vertical axis usually marks the centre of the main figure – in relation to which all the other figures of the composition are to be positioned. The figures portrayed have to be in perfect relationship to the central axis, any mistakes affect the religious value of the painting. There are eight major lines of orientation to be drawn. The first of these are the two diagonals. These are drawn from one corner of the canvas to its diagonal opposite and enable the drawing of these two axes. Such lines are drawn with the use of a chalk line or a compass. The second lines to be drawn are the vertical axis and the horizontal line and finally the four outer lines that define the edges of the painting are added.

Once the eight major lines are established the artist can begin his sketching. The first step is to establish the area of the main figure on the vertical axis and its position in relation to the horizontal axis. In order to sketch the figure properly the artist must know the iconographic measurements of each deity as established by Buddhist tradition. The main iconographic classes, in order, are: buddhas, peaceful bodhisattvas, goddesses, tall wrathful figures, short wrathful figures, and humans. Other iconographical systems exist with more classes that are basically subdivisions of the above classes with the addition of some rare types. The next step is to apply paint to the canvas. This is a two step process which includes filling in the areas of different base colours and shading and outlining these areas. Mineral pigments, mixed with a binder of either size or glue, are used for the initial coats of colour, while dye and lakes are used for the shading and outlining.

After applying the initial coats of colour the next step is the shading. Shading, shadowing and gradation of tones are done to give a three dimensional quality to objects such as clouds. There are two main methods of shading: wet and dry. Wet shading is the blending of two wet colours, which is done during the application of the initial coats of colour. Dry shading is usually a secondary step and is the application of successive thin washes of colour over the dry preliminary coat. The main shading colours are organic dyes and lakes; mainly indigo (blue) and lac dye (red). Other dyes used are mainly yellow and orange. Typically, indigo is used to shade the initial blues and greens, lac dye is used for the areas of red, maroon, orange, yellow or flesh colour, while yellow is used to intensify and highlight the greens. Shading is done much as the initial coats of colours are applied – working from the farthest planes to the closest and working with as much of one colour at once as possible. Shading is an important feature of Thangka painting, taking up a large portion of the artist's time, and is done very carefully and precisely.

Outlining is one of the final steps in the process of Thangka painting. It is done to intensify distinct objects, setting them off from their surroundings. It is used to indicate any small or fine details. The colours mainly used in outlining are indigo and lac dye, each used to outlined shaded areas of the same colour. Other colours used are: white, for water and bone ornaments; gold, for nimbuses, seats, flowers, leaves, robes, multi-coloured lotuses and rocky crags. These are applied in stronger concentrations than in shading to contrast the base colour and the background more sharply.

The last major step in painting the thangka is drawing the faces of the main figures. This demands great attention. The application of the gold with a burnishing tool is the final step in thangka painting. There are two main types of burnishing, flat burnishing, in which large areas of gold are uniformly polished, and selective burnishing, polishing certain areas or drawing designs onto the gold with the point of the burnisher.

Most thangka paintings are mounted in a brocade frame. Although there is nothing to stipulate that it has to be brocade or even cloth, it is a tradition that has continued from the past. Silk brocade is the most popular form of mounting since it is seen as having greater religious merit than other less expensive types of cloth. The quality of brocade used, varies from patron to patron, but again it is generally thought that the higher the quality, the greater the religious value the painting will assume. Likewise, the greater the number of brocades used, the greater the enhancement of the painting. Often, for example, brocade square is sewn on to the mount below the picture to draw attention to the subject, whilst other paintings are framed with one or two thin strips of brocade, often red and yellow, before being placed on the main brocade, again for emphasis.

The proportions of the mounts tend to be the same, although sizes may vary according to the intended wall space on which the painting is to be hung. Normally, the amount of brocade used at the bottom equals half the size of the thangka, whilst the amount at the top is a quarter of the size of the thangka. Similarly, the mounting at the edge is equal to one eighth of the size of the thangka.

One final addition may be a curtain, which tends to be a piece of orange or yellow cotton material attached to the top of the brocade mount and which, when let down, covers the painting. Two thin red strips of material often hang down in front of this. The purpose of the curtain is mainly twofold, although not all thangkas have them. First, it is used as a form of protection, preventing the accumulation of dust and is raised only on special occasions and secondly, it is an extra adornment to enhance the value of the work further.

5. MARKET AND MARKETING OF THANGKA PAINTINGS

On the one hand, the collection craze shows that thangka paintings enjoy a great popularity. On the other hand, some illegal phenomena begin to show up on the market. Some fake printed thangka paintings appear on the market; some so-called "thangka paintings" are only made semi-manually. Some illegal merchants even use new smoked thangka paintings to pass for old ones for higher prices. When thangka paintings become commercial, changes have also taken place in the painters' attitude and purpose.

Some thangka painting workshops create thangka paintings on production lines with different painters having specific divisions of work in order to improve work efficiency and make higher profits. Many painters now use shabby and low-priced paints to replace the ever gem, coral and turquoise paints to cut costs, damaging thangka paintings' quality and image.

The market changes every day with the value of the thangka art remaining unchanged. So, what is vital to thangka is to keep an upright attitude and motive. Anyhow, the inheritance of the thangka art is more important than money.

Art lovers and collectors can divide thangkas basically into three different categories:

- Cheap thangkas made for the tourist market

- Thangkas older than 100 years.
- High quality thangkas created in the 20th century.

Thangkas older than 100 years were and not allowed to be exported out of India, which can be considered the most important country for Tibetan thangka painting. In terms of quality, old thangkas are not necessarily the better thangkas. In former times there were good and poor handicraftsmen just as today, or the quality standard was limited due to what the commissioner of a thangka was willing or could afford to pay. If you are familiar with the subject, you can easily verify this fact by visits to museums of East Asian Art.

I also want to mention that a large part of "old" thangkas and 'old' Tibetan bronzes offered in the Western art market, is in my personal and humble opinion of rather recent nature. Nepalese handicraft people are great masters in making things "old". (Maybe one should really speak of artists in such cases.

A thangka of the highest quality created in the 20th century can be a real masterwork, which required several months of work. But how can a non-expert discern a good from a poor.

But there are also a few good indications for inexperienced newbies:

- The level of elaborateness and details of the painting
- The harmony of the color combinations
- The use and quality of color gradations
- The price
- The use of real gold
- The quality of the cloth

Take some time for comparisons, and by and by we will get an eye for good quality. Take also a look at the depiction of the smaller gods and goddesses outside of the center of the thangka. For a top quality thangka we should accept a price of ca. \$ 1,000 and more. Cheap tourist thangkas are available in Nepal for as little as \$ 20. As the use of real gold is by nature expensive, it is used only for the best thangkas. But beware, cheap thangkas may also be painted with golden colors, but this is a golden color not from real gold. These color pigments do not have the brilliance and shining of the real gold colors. They are easily recognizable. As far as I remember, the dealers in Dharmshala used the terms "gold colors" and "golden colors" to fool the tourists without offending the experts. Provided a thangka still has its original cloth, it too can be an indicator for quality. Lush brocade cloths usually (but not always vice versa) decorate a thangka of better quality.

6. CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, today, thangka painting and with it, other aspects of Tibetan art are threatened by the influx of fake or badly finished paintings. In many tourist areas such as Delhi, Srinagar or Kathmandu, these pieces are offered to the unsuspecting buyer as authentic Thangkaas. Many have been prematurely 'aged' by holding them over butter lamps for long periods or by twisting them tightly thereby cracking the paint to give the effect of an old, much-used item. The symbols used in some of these paintings have been incorporated with little or no regard to the traditional guidelines laid down over the centuries. Often the grids have been badly or incorrectly drawn and the figures and features from many different mandalas combined into one picture. Furthermore, the silks and paints used are often of inferior quality, which often leads to cracking.

Most of the painting must be appealing, beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The image must appear to be well proportioned. There are certain characteristics to look for in determining if the image has been done properly. In a well executed thangka painting the feet and hands are youthful with long tapering fingers and toes, marked with the sign of the wheel (dharmachakra) and the endless knot. The limbs are graceful unblemished and the anklebones hidden. In the case of a thangka painting depicting a Buddha, his stomach is wide; the navel twisted clockwise, the waist well-defined and the upper body broad with rounded shoulders. The throat is tapered, the lips red and the nose long and pointed. The eye, the most important detail, should resemble lotus petals with the whites and pupils clearly defined. The eyebrows must be distinct and should feature a fine white hair (urna) between them, whilst the head should be large and rounded with broad forehead, distinct hairline and the ears long and lobed. Gema Lama States in his book. The Principals of Tibetan Art that, 'Generally, the form is meant to be large and erect, with dignified bearing and pleasing mien'. He goes on to point out that the masculine and feminine features 'should be clearly defined and the clothing graceful'.

To sum up, Traditionally, thangka paintings are not only valued for their aesthetic beauty, but primarily for their use as aids in meditational practices. Practitioners use thangkas to develop a clear visualization of a particular deity, strengthening their concentration, and forging a link between themselves and the deity. Historically, thangkas were also used as teaching tools to convey the lives of various masters. A teacher or lama would travel around giving talks on dharma, carrying with him large thangka scrolls to illustrate his stories.

REFERENCES

- [1]. **Asvaghosa (1978)**. Buddhacarita (Ed.), E.R. Johnston Pub.
- [2]. **Beal, Samuel (1969)**. Dhammapada, Indo-Asian Publishing House Delhi-7.
- [3]. **Beer Robert (2016)**. Buddhist Art Coloring Book: Figures, Shambhala Publications, Incorporated, 16 Feb.
- [4]. **Kashyap, J. (1956) ed.** Nalanda Devanagari Edition.
- [5]. **Kashyap, J. (1956)**. Cullavagga (Ed.), Nalanda Devanagari Edition, Nalanda.
- [6]. **Kashyap, J. (1961) Ed.** Kathavasthu, Nalanda Devanagari Edition, Nalanda.
- [7]. **Novick, Rebecca McClen (1999) Ed.** Fundamentals of Tibetan Buddhism, Crossing Press.
- [8]. **Oldenberg, H. (ed.)** Dipavamsa
- [9]. Personal visit of different Buddhist monasteries of Indian Himalayan Region of India.
- [10]. **Vaidya, P.L.** Dasabhumikasutra Institute of Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga.
- [11]. **Yeshe De Project (1987)**. Art of Enlightenment: A Perspective on the Sacred Art of Tibet, Dharma Publishing, Berkeley, CA.
- [12]. <http://www.dinkunstner.com>", for thangka paintings.
- [13]. Source: Xinhua/Global Times.