

DEPICTED IDENTITIES:
IMAGES AND IMAGE-MAKERS OF POST-1959 TIBET

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Volume One

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role of images and image-makers in the period after 1959, when political control of Tibet was assumed by the People's Republic of China and thousands of Tibetans followed the Dalai Lama into exile. It is based on the work of image-makers in exile communities in India and in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic.

The first section of the thesis establishes the importance of images in the exile community (with emphasis on the Tibetan capital-in-exile, Dharamsala) as religious objects and as definers of identity. Image-makers' responses to the conditions of exile and their engagement with new techniques of production and subject matter are discussed. Their works are analysed in the context of Tibetan debates about what constitutes appropriate imagery for exilic conditions. The thesis demonstrates that style is invented and negotiated in different ways, with significant differences emerging between image-makers in Dharamsala and those outside the capital-in-exile.

The second section of the study examines the parallel history of image production in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Here the impact of the colonial gaze is registered in a chapter on Chinese depictions of Tibet. The resulting entanglement of Chinese and Tibetan styles of image-making over the course of nearly five decades is outlined. Finally, the emergence of self-consciously Tibetan "modernist" images and image-makers is considered. A case study of one artist, who has worked in both the Tibetan Autonomous Region and the capital-in exile, draws the two sections into a problematised alignment.

The contribution of this thesis rests in the analysis of Tibetan images during a period of dramatic political and social upheaval, a subject which has been largely ignored by art historians and is only beginning to be considered by anthropologists. It aims to enter into a debate about style in Tibetan painting from the perspective of post-1959 Tibetan image-makers.

Depicted Identities:
Images and Image-makers of Post-1959 Tibet

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Preface

In 1984 I spent six months living and working in the Tibetan refugee community near the Indian town of Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh. One morning, as I went to hang out my washing, I noticed a group of young Tibetan men hard at work apparently scrubbing a cloth stretched onto a wooden frame on the flat roof of the neighbouring building. They soon explained that the cleaning activity they were involved in had rather more significance than my rudimentary washing techniques. They were preparing a "pure ground" for a painting and were not scrubbing but polishing the dried lime wash they had applied to a piece of cotton. These young men were students of the painter Jamyang Losal who I then discovered had executed the wall paintings for the concrete monastery in Mussoorie [Plate 1]. When I met "Amdo" Jamyang¹ he explained that the murals had been designed from memories of monastic buildings in his homeland and I was amazed at his powers of recall.

Over the course of the next few months I realised that his memories were by no means hazy imaginings (or imagings) of the past but evolved out of a structured cognisance following distinct rules. Politically and culturally uprooted, and therefore without recourse to actual physical models (or even photographs) of his Tibetan heritage, Jamyang was able to visualise a huge range of images and to replicate the designs for manifestations of the Buddha with extraordinary precision. For the artist, the system by which he recreated his past was akin to a "science" which he wished to pass on to his students. As a result, after eighteen years in exile Amdo Jamyang produced a book in which he published over a hundred drawings of deities with their correct iconometric and iconographic specifications. He described his motivation for the project in the preface.

During the course of my service, I realised the importance of preserving Tibet's unique painting for which I felt there was need of producing a scientific work. Many learn and practice painting without conforming to the rigours of the discipline such as accuracy of scales. Texts on painting based on sacred literature are a rare phenomenon even in Tibet. In view of the urgent requirement of a manual for the use of Tibetan and non-Tibetan art practitioners, I, despite my many shortcomings, but in response to repeated requests

¹The artist refers to himself in this way, emphasising his birth in the north eastern Tibetan region of Amdo.

of fellow painters, my own students and my desire, have laboured hard to bring this work with the sincere hope that Tibetan tradition of painting will not decline but will spread far and wide. In producing this scientific, concise and precision-based work I have shared with all the lovers of Tibetan art, the best and the ultimate knowledge I have of Tibetan painting.²

This thesis began (years later) partly in response to Jamyang's statement. I wanted to discover why this "science" of painting was so urgently required and why it was perceived by Tibetan artists and their audiences as so crucial to the process of reconstructing Tibetan culture in exile. Why were objects like paintings still so empowering? Why was the visual so vital for Tibetan refugees?

Amdo Jamyang's assertion of a "unique" entity called "Tibetan" painting suggested that the production of images was both an aesthetic matter (and not a purely religious exercise as many Western commentators persist in stating) and a defining feature of the representation of Tibetan-ness. He emphasised the specificity of Tibetan techniques and "tradition", in response to the admiring gaze of outsiders; the "lovers of Tibetan art" and those "non-Tibetan art practitioners" who desired to paint in the Tibetan manner. His statement confirmed the resilience of the Tibetan tradition whilst projecting an optimistic assessment of the refugee situation. The exilic status, of both himself and his culture, expands the remit of Tibetan Buddhist art to "spread it far and wide". This "local-global" context, set in motion by the migration of Tibetans from Tibet after the Dalai Lama's departure in 1959, provides both a critical theme and a chronological marker for this thesis. It also explains the inclusion of references to "outside" perceptions of and influences upon post-1959 image making.

The frontispiece illustration [Plate 2] to another refugee painter's manual³ also demonstrates how the exilic consciousness of the value and uniqueness of Tibetan art evolved from pride in the global awareness of Tibetan Buddhist culture but also a sense of loss and displacement. The Tibetan exile community includes a group of highly cultured and educated

²Losal 1982:8

³The Principles of Tibetan Art was published in Darjeeling 1983 by Gega Lama, who was born in Rinchen Ling in eastern Tibet in 1931.

people (such as artists, writers, performers, musicians and religious figures) who have been at the forefront of the promotion of an "invented tradition"⁴ of what it means to be Tibetan after 1959; an invention defined in terms of the imagined communities (Anderson) of Tibetan Buddhism and neo-nationalism. Gega Lama's drawing depicts the situation perfectly. The form of the historic Tibetan homeland is demarcated as it appears in publications, T-shirts, maps and books of the neo-nation in exile. The shape of the land "Tibet" has taken on an iconic status, instantly recognisable to Tibetans and their supporters world-wide, as confirmation that an independent Tibet covered a section of the globe (as large as Western Europe),⁵ and whose unity and boundedness continues to be imagined by them despite the results of Chinese colonialism. Goldstein (1994 following Richardson and Bell) analyses the categories of "ethnographic" and "political" Tibet which have been in use after 1959, in which the political heartland of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is contrasted with the larger category of ethnic Tibetans who are located in the nearby Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan and Xinjiang, and parts of neighbouring states such as India, Nepal and Bhutan. The exiles remember and depict this larger "Tibet" as that which was taken over by the Chinese beginning in 1950 and fully effected by 1959. This is the "nation" which they have been denied and to which they hope to return.

The central position of India on Gega Lama's mapping of the Tibetan local-to-global nexus is also pertinent, since it was in this country that exiles (like Gega Lama and others discussed in this thesis) were first able to reconstruct the "traditions" of pre-1959 Tibet. The so-called "capital-in-exile", at Dharamsala in Himachal Pradesh (India) which contains the exile government, monastic institutions and the home of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has been the primary location in which this project has been executed. The dream of redrawing Tibetan nationhood is depicted by Gega Lama in the hand of an artist gripping a (Tibetan-style) brush whose point touches on the hem of the seated Sakyamuni Buddha

⁴Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) terminology and theory is explored more fully in Chapters Three and Four.

⁵Gega Lama marks the geographic location of Tibet with mountains, another definer of the idea of Tibet which is shared by exiled Tibetans and the "global" group of Tibetophiles. Bishop (1989) establishes the history of the "mountain aesthetic" in Western travel writing about Tibet.

as he makes the earth(globe)-touching gesture. The connection between the Tibetan homeland and the global community into which the refugees have been displaced is mediated through the Buddha, and importantly (for this thesis) the painter.

Both the Dalai Lama and the government-in-exile have placed great emphasis on the need to produce the tangible and visible evidence of the perpetuation of Tibetan culture, when separated from its homeland. Image-makers (especially painters, but also sculptors and architects) have therefore played a crucial role in fashioning the image of the exile community. During the course of my research it became apparent that those who were born in Tibet prior to 1959 were accorded special status due to their access to "authentic" memories and techniques for making images. However, a specific notion of what Tibetans currently construe to be authentic has actually evolved through debates about the way image-makers should work. This thesis identifies some of the key moments (and images) when certain paths were not taken and when certain memories and histories were rejected.

In Gega Lama's mapping a sharp demarcation is made between Tibet and China. In exilic image-making, drawing the lines of difference has been an essential political task. It became clear to me that one of the key ways in which exilic representations have been generated is through a consciousness of what they are not; that is, they insist on depicting Tibet, and what it is to be Tibetan, in opposition to Chinese Maoist depictions which were produced alongside the annexation and ideological take-over of Tibet from 1950 onwards. Given this (quite legitimate) objection it is therefore rare to see any image in the capital-in-exile which displays even a trace of Chinese influence. However, I have documented cases in which "inappropriate" images were rejected and ejected from Dharamsala. I have also charted the history of image making in Chinese controlled Tibet in order to explain where the exiles' objections arise from and how Tibetans in the TAR, who cannot remove these images from their lives, have tried to put themselves in the picture. The making of Tibetan images after 1959 has been monitored by regimes in Dharamsala and Beijing and thus the styles in which image-makers work is a political matter.

A large part of my analysis of the expectations placed on image-makers evolved through discussions with contemporary practitioners of Tibetan painting and was consolidated by observation of their products made during fieldwork between 1991 and 1995. I worked in Tibetan communities in Ladakh, (1991, 1992, 1993 and 1995) Himachal Pradesh (1991, 1992, 1993 and 1995), Kalimpong, Darjeeling and Sikkim in West Bengal (1993 and 1994) India. I also visited artists in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal (1992 and 1993) but have generally not included the results of this research here. In 1993 I spent two months in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. The impact of the events of 1959 have affected artists in all these areas. As stated above, due to the "revolution" which this date suggests we can no longer define Tibetan culture within the boundaries of the pre-1959 geo-political zone and a new set of cultural parameters are required (as I discuss in Chapter One). The protagonists involved in the recent production of Tibetan art are dispersed throughout the world, but here we examine the work of artists living in two areas with close relationships to the "political" and "ethnographic" pre-1959 Tibet: the cis-Tibetan borderlands of India and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China.

When celebrating the demise of "homogenous national cultures" and giving credit to the role of minority groups, exiles, refugees and the disenfranchised, Bhabha's (1994) discussion of the arts of cultural displacement has resonance for this thesis. Due to Chinese colonialism Tibetans lack a nation state, and therefore in Bhabha's terms have no "homogenous national culture".⁶ However, in exile they aspire to neo-nationhood. But if national "cultures recognise themselves through their projections of otherness"(Bhabha 1994:12), how does the neo-nation define itself? As Goldstein (1975:22) records, at refugee commemorations of the March 10th Uprising all the linguistic elements of the day - speeches, placards, slogans and so on, are given in English, Hindi or a local language, not Tibetan "thus indicating in a direct and practical way the extent of Tibetan 'self' projection in relation to local/Indian 'other'"(Nowak 1984:34). Even more importantly, we must acknowledge that though some Tibetans inhabit the "transnational" and "border" positions which Bhabha (1994) suggests are the sites for new definitions of

⁶In Chapter One I show how Tibet was presented as just such a "homogenous culture" in projections made through the British and other national lenses.

The Location of Culture, others remain in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, where they are labelled as members of a national minority of the People's Republic of China. Thus all Tibetans are born "other", but some exiles achieve "otherness" as a tactic for survival in host nations, whilst TAR Tibetans continue to have "otherness" thrust upon them by the Chinese.

In this thesis I first examine how the contemporary Western conception of "Tibetan art" has been fixed and located through objects and accounts emanating from pre-1959 Tibet. This needed to be acknowledged as the recent block-buster exhibition "Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet" (which was seen by a quarter of a million Westerners) was devoid of any reference to images produced by Tibetans in the twentieth century. I argue in Chapter One that the "fixing" of the late nineteenth century continues to the present day in exhibitions and publications about Tibetan culture and that instead we need to take account of how Tibetans now view themselves. The following chapters are partly designed to fill the gap left by "Wisdom and Compassion". I therefore begin (in Chapter Two) with an image which unites all refugees; the portrait of the Dalai Lama and an image of the "father" of the nation many refugees now inhabit, Mahatma Gandhi. Since both of them have been mechanically reproduced, I suspect they would never be considered for an exhibition of "Tibetan art" in the West but they reflect far more about Tibetan self-perceptions than almost any other kind of image. The degree to which Tibetans themselves are involved in debates about appropriate imagery and style is discussed in Chapter Three in the specific context of the capital-in-exile. Chapter Four shows how one particular style has been selected as the house style of the neo-nation. The consistency of style established there is contrasted in Chapter Five, with the styles used by image-makers outside the "capital". Chapter Six establishes the history of Chinese depictions of Tibet since it became part of the PRC and in Chapter Seven the recent practice of image makers in the TAR is examined and historicised. Finally in Chapter Eight, I conclude by showing how two "Tibets" come into collision in the work of a Tibetan modernist.

Tibetan Image-making in Exile

As we have said, images and image-makers have been critical components in the reconstruction of Tibetan culture in exile. This study focuses on painting and acknowledges that objects like thangka (religious) paintings remain empowering within Tibetan Buddhist practice and as markers of important life-events. They continue to have a role when commissioned for the commemoration of the dead, to aid good rebirth, to tell tales of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, to gain merit and to assist in meditation and visualisation and so on⁷ as they did in pre-1959 Tibet. But I argue that images (and not just thangka paintings) provide recognisable proof of Tibetan identity, the tangible proof of difference and cultural distancing from the new local context. This is most markedly the case for public images like murals in the new monasteries or government sponsored buildings such as the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives⁸ [Plate 3] (where the detailed painting of architectural features dresses the concrete frame in Tibetan style) and the concrete neo-Jokhang in Dharamsala; built according to Indian modernist architectural principles (at the request of the current Dalai Lama), but with an interior filled with fixtures and fittings made by Tibetan artists in a Tibetan manner giving it religious and political significance⁹. But more portable images such as photographs, photo-collages and thangkas are also significant things which have a "social", political and economic life¹⁰ through which Tibetans define themselves in relation to the perceptions of others.

Much of exilic art production concentrates on the reinvention of "traditional" models. "Tradition" for Tibetans refers to that which went on before 1959 - a moment which is reified by the exiles as the point of a disastrous break with the past. A great deal of the government-in-exile's efforts have gone into trying to heal the rift between the present and the past of the place they vacated, with the result that a clear motivation for the invention of tradition can be identified. But in the following

⁷Jackson and Jackson 1984:9-11

⁸Discussed in Chapter Four.

⁹Discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁰Though Appadurai's (1986)The Social Life of Things does not provide any material directly comparable to the subject of this thesis, his introductory essay and Spooner's "Weavers and Dealers" on the "authenticity" of the Oriental carpet have been influential on my thinking about the mutability of meanings attached to objects as they circulate in both internal and external markets.

chapters I try to demonstrate how simple "tradition versus modernity", "consolidated past versus confused present" paradigms fail to do justice to Tibetan attempts to make sense of their post-1959 situation. That an appeal is constantly made to "tradition" is not in doubt, but the fact that a number of "traditions" are recognised by image makers and their audiences has generally been overlooked or played down by outside observers.¹¹ More to the point, I show how particular traditions have been consciously reinvented in exile, with some given the equivalent of state patronage in Dharamsala (see Chapter Four). Outside Dharamsala others evolve in response to different political and economic conditions and image-makers appear to have greater freedom to choose which traditions to put into use. (see Chapter Five).

However, the ubiquity of images produced by mechanical reproduction in the Tibetan communities I visited between 1991 and 1995, suggested that the use of a modern device like the camera was not frowned upon by Tibetans and that a number of outside influences had come to bear on the production of Tibetan paintings which were not related to "traditional" sources.¹² The anti-modern(ist) stance of the majority of "Western" commentators on Tibetan material culture has meant that these images have been largely ignored, particularly by art historians.¹³

Image Making in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China

What kinds of images are exiled Tibetans producing in response to the loss of the geographic Tibet and how do the products of imaginations disconnected from the homeland differ from those produced by artists who still inhabit part of that space, the TAR Tibetans? In Chapters Six and Seven I establish the history of image-making in the TAR going back to 1950 and discuss the impact of Chinese representations of "minority" Tibetans. The response of Tibetan painters to this political and

¹¹See McGuckin (1996) and Jackson and Jackson (1984)

¹²Ideas taken from Benjamin's (1992) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" are tested against the evidence of Tibetan photographic images in Chapter Two.

¹³Only Klieger (1989), an American anthropologist has discussed the uses of Dalai Lama photographs in his study of Tibetan identity, but this was in the context of the TAR.

epistemological colonisation of their territory is documented as far as is currently possible, given the lack of publications on the topic and the difficulty of conducting research in the TAR. It appears that the question of how to represent Tibetan history, religion and identity is also a crucial matter for some TAR Tibetans which led to the emergence of the first Tibetan Artists' Association and the use of a modernist formal vocabulary in painting.

It could be said that those who remained in Tibet in 1959 (and were thereafter referred to as of a minority nationality within the PRC), have experienced the most drastic challenge to their Tibetan identity. But the events of 1959 and the resulting diaspora mean the both TAR and exiled Tibetans are challenged by the new conditions which evolved after that date and hence I include both in this thesis. The idea of Tibet as a place which only existed prior to 1959 dominates the image making of both groups. In exile, the homeland is configured in buildings which are "copies" of important sites in Tibet (the Jokhang, the Norbulingka) and painted photorealist backdrops used at communal political and religious gatherings (they usually depict the Dalai Lama's former home, the Potala Palace). An idea of the abandoned land of Tibet is also seen to be embodied in the Dalai Lama and hence Chapter Two considers the importance of his portrayal. In the TAR, both Chinese and Tibetan artists have focused on the landscape of the Tibetan plateau but with very different ideological intentions in mind. Though the subject matter of pre-1959 Tibet might be shared by exiled and TAR Tibetans, we shall see that the forms of its depiction alter.

The Question of Style

This thesis was initially designed to explore the notion of style as understood by refugee painters. Although this may be a rather out of date issue in the study of art, there were two major reasons why it still seemed to be a legitimate one when examining Tibetan images and image-makers. Firstly, Tibetan artists had been presented in Western literature as anonymous monk-artisans who worked according to a series of strict religious and artistic proscriptions.¹⁴ This attitude is, of course, not

¹⁴There are numerous cases but one example will suffice. Rowland (1953:6) (in a standard work on South Asian art) claims that Tibetan art is "... stultified rather than vitalised by

uncommon, as Price puts it: "In the Western understanding of things, a work originating from outside the Great Traditions must have been produced by an unnamed figure who represents his community and whose craftsmanship respects the dictates of its age-old traditions." (Price 1989:56) Deviation from iconographic and iconometric canons was said to be denied to these "devoted" Tibetan workers and therefore the form of their images remained static.¹⁵ The question of style has therefore been under-researched due to an assumption that Tibetan art was only religious, in both motivation and execution. But the evidence of Tibetan paintings from the tenth century onwards contradicts this assumption. Some European and American scholars have identified differences in style in Tibetan objects held in Western museum collections (and occasionally *in situ* in Tibet and its Himalayan border cultures). But in general their judgements were based on objects without provenance or authorship and more importantly, without reference to Tibetan assessments of how images should look. Which brings me to my second reason for concentrating on style.

In Tibetan Paintings Pal (1988) followed the monk-artisan approach to its logical conclusion and ascribed stylistic variation (in Tibetan objects from American collections) to the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, as he assumed that they would only paint for the religious establishments in which they resided. Although he mentions the existence of Tibetan names for their painting styles (eg. Menri and Karma Gardri) he is generally dismissive of these titles (see Chapter Six) and unaware of Tibetan literature on the subject. Only two Western writers have seriously considered how Tibetans have written about style; Giuseppe Tucci (1949) and David Jackson (1995) have made significant contributions by translating Tibetan texts. Jackson (1995) and Lobue (1995) have briefly mentioned style as a subject discussed by contemporary Tibetan painters, but they have not carried out in-depth research in this area. This is an

tradition. In the art of Tibet, dedicated to the most esoteric phase of tantric Buddhism, the necessity for the most explicit accuracy in pictures, statues and other paraphernalia in a ritual dominated by magic was obvious. It was impossible for the artist to depart from specifications or to rely at all on experience or experiment. "

¹⁵An assumption which Boas promoted as early as 1927 in Primitive Art when he wrote: "The same motif occurs over and over again in the tale of primitive people, so that a large mass of material collected from the same tribe is liable to be very monotonous, and after a certain point has been reached only new variants of old themes are obtained" (Boas 1955:330)

ommission which I thought it important to counteract, as texts which purport to analyse art (especially those produced in the service of religion) are notoriously unreliable for answering the question "but what does it look like?". Those who produce images, on the other hand, have to deal with this issue on a daily basis. By talking about style and the production of images with image-makers I have been able to ascertain which styles they follow and why. I have also watched them at work and observed the contexts in which their images are used and as a result have gathered that style may well be of consequence.

This approach has meant that some commonly held assumptions (in Western literature) can be overturned. From the outset of my study it was clear that exiled artists did not have to be monks (Amdo Jamyang was not ordained, nor were many of the others I met) nor was all their work designed for monasteries (Amdo Jamyang designed painted furniture for secular domestic use [Plate 4] and thoughtfully included a diagram showing how to write your name in the form of scantily clad girls "for complimentary purposes" in his manual [Plate 5]. Equally importantly, many artists defined themselves in relation to the region of their birth (e.g. Amdo), to an artistic lineage and distinctive style from that place, and were also cognisant of other "historic" styles of Tibetan painting, some of which they wrote about in their own books.¹⁶

I was quickly able to counteract the anonymising tendency of Western writers with the assistance of a member of staff at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. Tashi Tsering provided a list of refugee painters who had been born in Tibet prior to 1959. I supplemented his list by interviewing artists of the younger generation as well and by working in areas well away from the capital-in-exile. It rapidly became apparent that a Vasarian biographic approach to the subject would be inappropriate.¹⁷ Though some of the artists I worked with had high status in their communities, a hagiography which converted them into genius individuals would obfuscate the fact that it was their products which had the greatest power, not the artists themselves. The status given to those born in Tibet, who were viewed as receptacles of "tradition", only

¹⁶Dagyab (1977), Lama (1983) and Thaye (1987) all mention a number of schools of Tibetan painting, though they disagree about some of the details of their history.

¹⁷However, this is the approach used by Jackson in his recent (1996) History of Tibetan Painting.

served to attach authenticity to their products on behalf of the group as statements of an exilic identity. In fact, some of the most popular and powerful images were not even made by painters but by "mechanical reproduction". The title of this study reflects these apprehensions in its reference to "images and image-makers" (rather than art produced by painters), as a separation between elite art and popular print, or religious icon and artisanal artefact, is inappropriate, especially for the study of contemporary images produced by exiles. Like Bhabha, I want to "confront the concept of culture outside *objets d'art* or beyond the canonisation of the 'idea' of aesthetics, to engage with culture as an uneven incomplete production of meaning and value, often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival" (Bhabha 1994:172). The image-makers I have worked with are not part of a Tibetan nation, hence a conception of "art" which is tied to the idea of nationhood must be avoided and since some are members of a borderless diaspora, I have said that they are "of" a period after 1959 not "in" Tibet. Equally, the material covered here suggests that a notion of ethnicity is also problematic as a definer of "Tibetan" images. They are not all produced by people who have ethnic or linguistic connections to Tibet (as is shown in Chapters Five, Seven and Eight). The 180 images included in this thesis need therefore to be understood in relation to the identities and imaginings they depict, rather than as static representations of a Tibet which no longer exists or as examples of "Tibetan art" as it has been understood by most art-historians. This thesis tries to expand these categories, as Tibetans themselves have done.

In order to answer the overriding questions of this thesis: Is "style" an important issue for contemporary Tibetan artists and can it be related to projections of identity? I have used a number of different approaches. Discussion with image-makers and members of their audience in India and the TAR has meant that the techniques and debates of anthropology have proved useful and though the study of Tibetan material culture after 1959 is still in its infancy, some of the most valuable contributions have been made by anthropologists such as Klieger, Calkowski, Nowak, Bentorn and Korom. Other ideas pursued here have been forged in the mould of cultural studies and influenced by the few Tibetologists who take this kind of approach seriously, such as Lopez, Korom and Venturino.

Though I have rejected the connoisseurship focus of the majority of art historical studies of Tibetan painting I have however persisted in the contextualised analysis of images, assisted by interviews with their makers and textual sources. This is due to the fact that amongst both artists in exile and those in the TAR, images are produced to depict memories and to project future aspirations, therefore we must look closely at the objects which contain these meanings. Appiah (1994) emphasises the role of memory and the use of language (the mother-tongue) when migrant groups produce "scripted identities" in the face of host nations. These are two important themes for Tibetans, but could not the linguistic focus be widened to include "depicted" identities in which images bind people together through a shared recognition of style and content? This study seeks to establish that Tibetan identity is as much depicted as it is scripted.

Language policy

For this thesis to be readable by those not specialised in Tibetan language I have kept the use of Tibetan terminology to a minimum. Where Tibetan or Sanskrit words occur they are italicised with a brief explanation in English. Tibetan has been rendered in a phonetic form rather than in Wylie transliteration. For personal names and places I have used the form in which they are generally presented for English readers in publications produced by Tibetans. Buddhist terminology is given in Sanskrit rather than Tibetan, (*vajra* instead of *dorje*, *stupa* instead of *chorten*) as this is generally the case in the publications of art historians and Buddhologists. Some Sanskrit terms which have entered common parlance, such as *mandala*, are not italicised. I have generally avoided the use of diacritics.

Chapter One: Locating Tibet and its Objects

A certain sterility is now apparent in Tibetan crafts, art-forms, literature, imagery and all the rest. But as the various things produced continue to be true to traditional form and always beautiful in themselves one hesitates to make adverse comment on this score. But the question arises: what now becomes of Tibetan civilisation? Does it continue to flourish always in the same stereotyped forms, contrary to all we observe elsewhere in the history of civilisations? It is almost a general rule that when any culture becomes cut off from outside influences and ceases to develop new forms it is already moribund.¹ (my emphasis)

The purpose of this chapter is to establish what kinds of new parameters are required when looking at Tibetan images produced after 1959 by analysing those which have gone before. We could easily be forgiven for thinking that Tibetans ceased to produce "art" of any sort in the course of the twentieth century if we base our judgement of the publications and exhibitions devised by art historians and collectors over the last one hundred years. Using examples from the history of collecting and documentation of Tibetan objects in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, I argue that the focus of art historical scholarship has been heavily attached to a fixed idea of the place "Tibet" and the objects which were removed from it. Once that place no longer existed (i.e. after 1959) art was assumed to have ended. Therefore the images of exiled artists and those in the TAR, have either been unknown, ignored or considered weak copies of the heritage of Tibet's past, and therefore unworthy of consideration. As I want to begin to redress these omissions in the course of this thesis, the second part of the chapter describes some of the ways in which Tibetans now locate and identify themselves as refugees in the absence of the place called Tibet.

Part I: "Outsider " Definitions of Tibet

It could be argued that Tibet no longer exists - or that if it does, it is only as a utopian vision in a virtual world. Tibet does not exist as a place or nation in the nomenclature of contemporary world politics; there is no geo-politically bounded space which we can designate as the territory of a Tibetan homeland. Though the majority of ethnic Tibetans currently reside in a part of the People's Republic of China (PRC) designated by the Chinese government,

¹Snellgrove and Richardson 1986:230

apparently without irony, as the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), it is the smaller community of exiles now dispossessed and dispersed throughout the world, who dominate the global view of Tibet as a concept. These refugees, led by the Dalai Lama and his "government-in-exile", are sitting tenants in the homes of others - some hold passports of host nations but most are still defined by the yellow Identity Certificate of the Indian government, an indication of their statelessness and lack of political powers of self-determination.² The original Tibet from which they departed in or after 1959 is now denied to them as a source of national self-definition but continues to function as a profound signifier of identity in other respects. This 100,000 strong diasporic community sees itself as the perpetuator of the heritage of this abandoned place.

In cultural terms the picture is slightly different - the heritage of a place called Tibet continues to exist as an apparently unproblematic and identifiable unit for non-Tibetans (to simply cite "The West" would be understating the case, for Tibeto-philes reside in all the four corners of the earth). Publications, films, exhibitions and organisations employ the linguistic marker "Tibet" with justifiable confidence in its powers of signification. It is even possible for viewers of "Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet" (an exhibition which began a world tour in San Francisco in 1992), who may be members of "The Tibet Support Group" or some similarly named organisation, to take "The Tibet Guide" as their instruction manual on a "Tibet Tour" in the "Tibet"-an Autonomous Region. It is perhaps only when, Chinese visa in hand, on the tourist pilgrimage to the Potala in Lhasa that they will inhale the scent of a home(land) that has become a mausoleum and the hyperrealism of this version of Tibet will begin to reverberate.³ However, the imaging or hyperreality of Tibet is a contested issue, with the exiles claiming a closer relationship with the facts of the past than the Chinese or even TAR Tibetans can hope to have. The collision of the differing representations of Tibet will emerge in this study.

The fact that Tibet did exist as an independent cultural unit is verifiable for those on the "Tibet tour". Some physical markers remain, despite the ravages of the Cultural Revolution. Having won the battle (in both

²The "Yellow Card" as the Tibetan exiles call it, is officially called an "Identity Certificate" by the Indian Government. However it is assigned to stateless refugees and people with criminal records, two groups for whom a distinct and positive identity is rather circumscribed.

³Klieger (1989) borrows Eco's terminology for his discussion of the TAR.

a political and military sense) the Chinese could afford to meet the entreaties of the Panchen Lama and others and retain some major buildings, such as the Kumbum at Gyantse, the Jokhang and Potala in Lhasa, the religious complex of Samye and so on within a "museumising" (Anderson) process, which generally plays down the religious and/or political contexts for which these structures were intended. During the 1970s and '80s some of the monasteries damaged in the Cultural Revolution have been reconstructed primarily for the benefit of tourists who were allowed into Tibet particularly after 1985. Both Chinese and Western tourists now take the "Tibet" tour and even some TAR Tibetans have been able to reclaim their religious spaces.⁴

But most of all the idea of Tibet exists in the Western imagination, through its objects, making the journey to the "sacred land" on the "roof of the world" redundant.⁵

Until 1960 or so Tibetan art was known outside Tibet from scattered museum collections and those of the very few westerners who had visited the country on official missions or as travellers and scholars.⁶

Although Tibet was never colonised by Europeans, this elite group of "travellers and scholars" shared many of the preoccupations of colonial explorers of other lands. Their observations and collections had the double force of confirming a personal history of adventure and access to first hand specialist knowledge with the ability to encode an imagining of place. These early travellers played down the significance of individual objects in order to construct a grander narrative of a cultural unit. This tactic has remained powerful and perhaps inescapable due to our "entanglement" with colonial history.

I want to acknowledge this entanglement here, with some examples from the history of British involvement with Tibet. The "objectified fantasies" which emerge from the eighteenth century onwards have produced the kind of fixed idea of Tibetan art and material culture which lies behind the statement of Snellgrove and Richardson at the head of this chapter. For them,

⁴See Makley (1994)

⁵As Thomas (1991:176) puts it, "We take the "concrete and palpable" presence of a thing to attest to the reality of that which we have made it signify; our fantasies find confirmation in the materiality of things that are composed more of objectified fantasy than physical stuff."

⁶Snellgrove and Richardson 1986:277

and many others, Tibetan culture has become sterile and possibly moribund due to its dependence upon unchanging traditionalism. Further, when a culture is uninflected by "outside influences" they can see no future for it. The material in this thesis proposes an interrogation of these two statements. Have post-1959 Tibetan image-makers assumed that their relationship with tradition is transparent and unproblematic? Secondly, have they ignored "outside influences" when trying to revivify Tibetan culture?

British Reactions to Tibetan Material Culture

Following a skirmish between British and Bhutanese forces in 1774, the Panchen Lama (the second highest ranking religious figure in Tibet) sent a letter to Warren Hastings (the Governor of West Bengal) in Calcutta inviting one of his representatives to visit Tibet. At this point in time no British foot had been placed on Tibetan soil.⁷ George Bogle was the man charged with the unique task. Hasting's curiosity had been excited by the box of gifts which accompanied the Panchen Lama's letter and which included:

gilded Russian leather stamped with the Czar's double headed eagle, and Chinese Silk, which suggested external commerce; small ingots of gold and silver, purses of gold dust, and bags of musk, which seemed evidence of internal wealth; and Tibetan wool cloth, which together with the well made chests in which the gifts had come, indicated a knowledge of the arts and industries.⁸

On the basis of these examples of material culture Hastings made judgements about the nature of the place from which they came and the people who lived there:

A simple, well disposed people, numerous and industrious, living under well-regulated government, having considerable intercourse with other nations, particularly with the Chinese and Northern tartars, and possessing at home the principle means of commerce, gold and silver in great abundance.⁹

Hastings obviously viewed Tibet as something of a Treasure House and recognised that the Tibetans were highly skilled traders with contacts stretching from the Black Sea to Beijing. Their ability to both acquire and

⁷ Cited in Bishop 1989:28

⁸ Cited in Bishop 1989:29

⁹ Cited in Bishop 1989:29

produce objects of beauty and value made a great impression and the possibility of entering into trade relations with these "industrious" people who were apparently also rather "well disposed" towards him, was tantalising. This vision of an unknown but jewel-filled Tibet continued to fuel British desires to know and engage with Tibet and Tibetans right through the nineteenth century; a passion which ultimately inspired the Younghusband Expedition of 1903-1904.¹⁰ But Hasting's reaction to the Panchen Lama's tantalising objects at least included an identification of broader cultural influences on Tibet (resulting from "external commerce"). By the late nineteenth century a more rigid view of Tibetan culture as a sealed unit held sway.

Although British involvement with Tibet was literally peripheral during the period of colonisation of India, one of the aims of the Raj was to map the extent of Tibet, to discover exactly what lay beyond the Himalayan foothills which the colonial administrators inhabited in the monsoon months.¹¹ Indians,¹² known to the British as "Pandits" (such as Sarat Chandra Das who wrote a Tibetan dictionary) were sent into Tibet disguised as Tibetans to count Imperial miles on prayer beads and orientate themselves with compasses concealed in prayer wheels. As a result "what in the end came to be its borders were colonially determined" (Anderson 1983:171). But the fascination with Tibet was not only a matter of fathoming its landscape and territory (one of the defining features in the construction of The Myth of Shangri-La),¹³ but also arose from a desire to acquire its objects. The void left by the failure to fully map and colonise Tibet was filled by a series of "anticipated" realities which were concrete embodiments of a projected myth of Tibet. These were the objects of Tibet's material culture, which had become familiar to the British via the Indian subcontinent, and a series of other objects produced by Europeans, that is to say, texts, dating back to Herodotus. The conclusions adduced by early collectors of Tibetan objects alter according to the state of knowledge about Tibet current for their time; knowledge which is

¹⁰The British also feared that "the Northern Tartars" i.e. the Russians, might gain political and economic ascendancy in Tibet if they did not intervene.

¹¹At one of the British summer retreats, Simla, a marker stone indicating the number of imperial miles to Lhasa was still visible in the nineteen fifties when my informant Balraj Khanna was a schoolboy there.

¹²Also sometimes "semi-Tibetans" who, according to Waddell (1971: xi) in his preface to the second edition of the Buddhism of Tibet, were trained in Darjeeling to "travel in Tibet as spies, mapping it out for our survey department"

¹³ Bishop 1989

established through texts. It has been possible to historicise varying European attitudes towards Tibetan Buddhism between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, highlighting visions varying from the demonic to the benign.¹⁴ But to date little account has been made of the ways in which Tibetan material culture has been "read" in different ways and used to demonstrate some of the assumptions held about Tibet, the place.

We need to acknowledge the degree to which objects function as triggers to a series of received ideas; contrary to the view, still retained in some quarters,¹⁵ that things somehow constitute an "objective" record of a society or culture. As Thomas states:

An attempt to map European interests in artifacts in the period (of colonialism) could thus take seriously the idea that a collection of curiosities could in some sense stand as an objectification of the culturally and historically specific form of intellectual and experiential desire which "curiosity" alluded to.¹⁶

One dominant Orientalist trope concerns the intriguing difference of Asian objects,¹⁷ an exoticism further excited in the minds of Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth century when they came from Tibet because of the perception of the inaccessible and esoteric nature of Tibetan religion and culture.

Over many years on the periphery of Tibet, in the employ of the British Raj, L. Austine Waddell had dreamt of Lhasa. Between 1885 and 1895 he worked in Sikkim and Darjeeling as "assistant sanitary commissioner",¹⁸ and studied Tibetan Buddhist culture as expressed in those areas. In order to fully comprehend Tibet (even though he was outside its borders in British-run India) he began to collect objects produced for service in the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. He outlined his collecting strategy at a Sikkimese

¹⁴As Lopez (1995) and contributors to Curators of the Buddha do.

¹⁵Thomas (1991:5) quotes from a guide to the field collecting of ethnographic specimens, produced in the USA in 1977 which states that objects "have advantages over written records of behaviours and beliefs in being concrete, objective, difficult to distort, and little subject to personal or ethnocentric bias"

¹⁶Thomas 1991:127

¹⁷A history of European reactions to Indian art has been produced by Mitter (1992). No equivalent text currently exists for Tibetan art, though Lopez includes a chapter on American interpretations in his forthcoming Prisoners of Shangri-La.

¹⁸Lopez in Lopez (editor) 1995:260

monastery in the preface to the first edition (1984) of The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism.

... Realising the rigid secrecy maintained by the lamas in regard of their seemingly chaotic rites and symbolism, I felt compelled to purchase a lamaist temple with all its fittings and prevailed on the officiating priests to explain to me in full detail the symbolism and rites as they proceeded. Perceiving how much I was interested, the lamas were so obliging as to interpret in my favour a prophetic account in their scriptures regarding a Buddhist incarnation in the West. They convinced themselves that I was a reflex of the Western Buddha Amitabha, and thus overcame their conscientious scruples and imparted information freely.¹⁹

With his Orientalist ambitions, Waddell could hardly have hoped for better luck. He acquired the entire contents of a monastic building, enough erudition to write a five hundred and seventy page book and was deified in the process. Though Waddell enjoyed impressing his British readers with his assimilation into Tibetan culture as a new Amitabha, he "adopted a posture of both control over and contempt for his informants and secured his authority by allowing the lamas to believe that he was ultimately one of them."²⁰ Whilst it is clear that Waddell sought to emphasise the superstitious and gullible nature of Tibetan monks and his readers are assumed to share his enjoyment at playing a "reflex" of the Buddha, it is highly unlikely that the Tibetans actually believed this English gentleman to have any connection with the Buddha or a bodhisattva, rather that they had little choice but to encode what was an equally confusing situation for them in a culture specific manner. Whilst the English surgeon, sanitation commissioner, collector and amateur anthropologist/art historian employed dissection and description as his cultural tools, the Tibetans organised their thoughts within a world-view dominated by religious pronouncements. As a representative of the colonial authorities when Waddell felt "compelled to purchase", it is also likely that the Tibetans felt compelled to oblige. This must rank as one of the first recorded moments when Tibetans enabled a European to go away with what he believed were thoroughly authenticated goods.

Waddell's reaction to the confusing prospect presented to him by the imagery and ritual of Tibetan Buddhism, was first to purchase and then to

¹⁹Waddell 1971:xxxvii:

²⁰Lopez in Lopez (editor) 1995:259

dissect and itemise his "finds". Thus page after page of The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism include diagrams and tables of ritual implements and the "insignia" of Tibetan Buddhism. Pages 340 and 341 demonstrate his working methods [Plate 6]. On the right hand page a box includes illustrations of twenty nine "Insignia and Weapons of the Gods, etc." each inscribed in Tibetan. On the left hand page a table provides translation of the Tibetan into English in one column, in the second column transliterated Tibetan and in column three, Sanskrit terms, where they apply. That Waddell based his model on similar studies of Indian objects is demonstrated by his inclusion of Sanskrit, the *lingua franca* of Indology and one which any scholar connected to either the British Museum's Oriental department, the India Office Library or the Indian Museum Calcutta (all institutions to which Waddell donated objects) would have been well versed in.²¹ Thus Waddell introduced Tibetan objects through a classificatory grid established for the documentation of Indian objects. Hindu material culture had been a major feature of "The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations" at Crystal Palace in London in 1851 and Paris Exposition of 1877-78,²² and had inspired a European taste for secular, decorative objects from India. But Hindu ritual implements and devotional images were also collected and displayed. Waddell selected only religious items for his representation of Tibet but his motivation was not dissimilar to those who collected Hinduism.

Such a collection created an illusion of control - in this case over the "mysteries of the Hindu pantheon" with its endless "curious and often grotesque" gods who belonged to a "polluted faith". Mastery over these multiarmed gods was brought about with Linnaean tenacity, if not obsessiveness. The collector collected them, grouped them, photographed them and even published them.²³

Waddell aimed for a similar air of control through the use of classificatory tables and taxonomies which attempted to organise objects in a scientific manner akin to that used for specimens of flora and fauna. The Gazetteer of Sikkim, (Risley 1894) in which he published diagrams of the positioning of ritual objects in a Sikkimese monastery was part of the colonial project in

²¹Waddell (1971:xi) tells us that "it had been one of my first self-imposed tasks on entering the Indian Medical Service to pass the Higher Standard literary examinations in not only the universal Indian vernacular Hindustani, but also in Bengali and in Sanskrit the dead language of Indian Buddhism and Brahmanism, corresponding to the Latin of Europe."

²²This exhibition led to publications like George Birdwood's The Industrial Arts of India 1880.

²³Breckenridge 1989:209

which the regions of India were documented and included sections on the plants and animals of the area, as well classifications of ethnic types and their practices. A tension between what Waddell saw as the curious and grotesque appearance of Tibetan culture and his desire to organise it and make it knowable is resolved by the aestheticising effect of the tables of illustrations, in which the diminished scale of the objects makes them both pleasingly miniature and manageable.²⁴ Waddell's study is firmly placed in the colonial framework of documenting the visible details of a culture even when his overall attitude towards that entity was fundamentally negative. He describes his magnum opus thus:

The special characteristics of the book are its detailed accounts of the external facts and curious symbolism of Buddhism, and its analyses of the internal movements leading to Lamaism and its sects and cults.²⁵ (My emphasis)

but he also states that:

... the bulk of the Lamaist cults comprise much deep-rooted devil worship and sorcery, which I describe with some fulness. For Lamaism is only thinly and imperfectly varnished over with Buddhist symbolism, beneath which the sinister growth of poly-demonist superstition darkly appears.²⁶

However, though these two statements may appear contradictory to later readers, for Waddell dispassionate description of data and interpretation of the "Lamaist cults" both have the status of fact.

For nearly ten years after the publication of The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism Waddell continued to hope that he would have further opportunity to find evidence of the "idolatry" of Tibet. That Waddell had been inspired by the idea of the "unknown" Lhasa is suggested by his use of this quotation from Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India: "In the heart of Asia lasts to this day the one mystery which the nineteenth century has still left to the twentieth to explore - the Tibetan oracle of Lhasa."²⁷ In 1903 he finally gained the opportunity to examine Lhasa and its Mysteries as surgeon to the

²⁴Thomas (1991:133-137) notes a similar tendency in the illustrations to Captain Cook's (1777) A Voyage to the South Pole.

²⁵Waddell 1971:xxxviii

²⁶Ibid., p..xi

²⁷Waddell 1905:1

Younghusband Expedition to Tibet. In his account of the campaign, he presents this view of Colonel Younghusband's final destination:

Wreathed in the romance of centuries, Lhasa, the secret citadel of the "undying" Grand Lama, has stood shrouded in impenetrable mystery on the Roof -of-the-World, alluring yet defying our most adventurous travellers to enter her closed gates. ... But now, in the fateful Tibetan Year of the Wood Dragon, the fairy Prince of Civilisation has roused her from her slumbers, her closed doors are broken down, her dark veil of mystery is lifted up and the long sealed shrine with its grotesque cults and its idolised Grand Lama, shorn of his sham nimbus, have yielded up their secrets and lie disenchanting before our Western eyes. Thus, alas! inevitably, do our cherished romances of the old pagan world crumble at the touch of our modern hands!²⁸

Designed for an adventure hungry British public and with the aim of legitimising the Younghusband Expedition, Waddell begins his book on "Lhasa and its Mysteries", in classic Orientalist mode. He encourages the (male) reader to join with him as an Asian city, defined as feminine and alluring yet chaste and fortified, is penetrated by the "fairy Prince" of European civilisation. But in Waddell's romance, where he plays Prince Charming to a Tibetan Sleeping Beauty, the Princess Lhasa, once touched and unveiled, reveals herself to be something of a whore. Lhasa's tradition of "pagan" cults and idolatry is exposed as a "sham" which cannot withstand the interrogation of a rational, modern, Christian European. In the explicitly "tradition" versus "modernity", ignorance versus Enlightenment, paradigms of many a colonialist before and since, Waddell is both enticed by dreams of the perpetuation of the "old world" in a remote corners of the globe and repelled by its difference. He manages to blame Lhasa for failing to live up to his dream and somehow it is her fault that "our Western eyes" are disappointed once the fortress has been assailed. This passage consists of an extended metaphor of the "virgin culture", which has yet to be conquered but once taken can never be the same again.

Waddell's account attests to the privilege of having been physically present on the Tibetan plateau. Despite the fact that the dream crumbled under his "Western eyes" he continued to use them during the expedition to collect specimens that presented Tibet as "a fixed reality which (was) entirely

²⁸Waddell 1905:1-2

knowable and visible" ²⁹. But on this occasion he was not obliged to purchase, as the dream also crumbled at the touch of Western bodies. The Younghusband Expedition was supported by a military force who engaged in battles with the Tibetans as they attempted to reach Lhasa. In a letter to his mother written after the capture of Gyantse Dzong in 1904³⁰ Lieutenant Colonel A. L. Hadow described how he and other soldiers looted the fort (*dzong*) "which was almost entirely in ruins" and how in one room they found "a lot of images and other things connected with their religious ritual".

Everything which appeared worth having was there, and after some things had been set aside for the British Museum, the remainder was divided amongst the officers. Three small images fell to my share, of no particular value beyond being curiosities...³¹

But Hadow was not satisfied with his "curiosities" and went back at seven the next morning with only one other officer to look for more. This secret mission proved fruitful because

...presently in a dark corner I discovered what appeared to be a cupboard with two doors... It was piled high with dust inside but the first thing I touched rattled, it being hung from the ceiling, and I recognised it as a Lama's apron made of human bones and beautifully carved - knowing this to be of some value I seized it out at once.³²

Hadow also found a large "image of some deity" covered in silk but it was evidently too big for him to take away so he settled on two smaller images, though he was "disappointed to find no precious stones set in any of them as is often their custom". He removed a stupa, which did have some turquoise and coral set in it and then:

I found a trumpet made out of a human thigh bone and there were several skulls with offerings in them in front of the images. I was much afraid that if the authorities heard of what I had got, some of the

²⁹Bhabha 1986:156 with reference to India.

³⁰As a senior member of the Norfolk Regiment and leader of a group of soldiers trained in the use of the Maxim machine gun, Hadow was asked to take part in the Younghusband Expedition. He and the eleven other Norfolks performed vital service at Gyantse where the Maxims proved to be extremely effective against the Tibetan flint fired guns. The Norfolk and Norwich Regimental Museum (Norwich) today presents this collision of technologies in deeply colonialist vein with an example of an "inferior" Tibetan gun (collected by Hadow) placed alongside a Maxim.

³¹ Letter written by Hadow at Gyantse encampment dated 18:04:04.

³² Ibid.

things would be appropriated for the British Museum, so I have packed up the best of them and they are leaving tomorrow. There is a Colonel in the Indian Medical Service who is "Antiquarian to the Force" and whenever he sees anything nice, he says for the British Museum, but we are very doubtful as to how much will eventually reach the said museum!³³

Though Hadow does not name him, the "Antiquarian to the Force" must have been their surgeon L.A. Waddell. With the assistance of the Norfolk Regiment and their Maxim machine guns, the Younghusband Expedition successfully established trade relations between Tibet and British India and Waddell did ensure that a large number of looted Tibetan objects were accessioned at both the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.³⁴ At these institutions they have performed honourable service to the static, religious based vision of Tibet which still predominates one hundred years later.

Given this history it is no surprise that one of the authors of A Cultural History of Tibet, Hugh Richardson, should emphasise what he saw as the lack of innovation and external influences visible in Tibetan art from the eighteenth century onwards. The fact that very similar objects were collected by "antiquarians" like Waddell and Hadow (who followed his example) and that they usually came from similar sources, such as monasteries, provides one explanation. But as British representative to Tibet between 1936 and 1950, Richardson's lament about Tibet's inability to change also refers to the British view that Tibet should modernise or die. The early part of the twentieth century saw European, particularly British "princes of civilisation" attempting to arouse Tibet from her slumbers and to bring her into the domain of Western modernity. Waddell includes a section in his preface to the second edition of The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism in which he describes "The Hostility of Lamas to Western Civilization and Western Education". However, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was less negative.

³³Ibid. Hadow's bone apron, stupa and thigh bone trumpet make it to the Norfolk Regimental museum and are still on display in 1997.

³⁴Snellgrove and Richardson (1986:277) state that "The collections in England began to be built up mainly as a result of the British expedition into Tibet in 1904 and the subsequent establishing of trade relations with British India. The British Museum, where still today a very small part of the total collection is on display, and the Victoria and Albert Museum, were the main recipients."

In order to assist the Tibetans towards acquiring some western civilization, this Dalai Lama was induced by our Indian Government to send them the sons of Tibetan lay land owners and merchants and nobles to receive western education on civilized lines.³⁵

These lucky boys were sent via India to Harrow, Rugby and Sandhurst in England.

But it all proved a miserable and total failure, through the inveterate hostility of the all powerful and superstitious and intriguing lamas of the great monasteries in fear of losing their firm hold on the ignorant populace.³⁶

According to Waddell, the Tibetans rejected those very influences from the outside world which could have redeemed them. Instead they persisted in their "superstitious" religion, in perpetuating their traditional but "sterile" art forms and doggedly pursued an isolationism which the British deemed inappropriate for the modern world.

The vision of Tibet as a "Lost World" whose religious practises meant that it was somehow outside of time, retained its potency into the mid-twentieth century and was shared by the Buddhologist and art historian Giuseppe Tucci. He wrote: "To enter Tibet was not only to find oneself in another world. After crossing the gap in space, one had the impression of having trailed many centuries back in time". (Tucci 1967:13) His Tibetan Painted Scrolls (1949) is usually referred to as the first art-historical study of Tibetan images (based on the collection of thangkas he acquired in Tibet in 1948³⁷) and has been the model to which many later art-historians have aspired. Its emphasis on iconographic analysis has bequeathed a powerful if rather rigid legacy (See Chapter 3). Tucci's attitude to Tibet, like Richardson's and Waddell's, reflects the way in which Western intellectuals projected their understanding of problems in the Occident through the lens of the Orient, as they searched for an understanding of the industrialisation and modernisation of Europe.

³⁵Waddell 1971:xxxiii

³⁶ Ibid., p.xxxiii

³⁷This journey is described by Tucci in To Lhasa and Beyond: Diary of the Expedition to Tibet in the Year 1948.

But Tucci's position was rather contradictory, for he both castigated those who sought to escape the realities of the European present by dreaming of foreign lands and yet still retained an idea that Tibet (and Asia in general) possessed a magic no longer present in the West. His experiences during the First World War, (in which he served in the Italian Army and reached the rank of lieutenant³⁸) meant that he viewed battle as "the antidote to the cold rationality and impersonality of the modern age" (Benavides 1995:171). But he also entered into the spirit of fascist ideology, the heroism of battle and the *communitas* of those who fought. Tucci supported facism and expected that it would put an end to the weak dreams of Asia that some of his compatriots were prone to. But he also wanted his example, as a hero who had visited Asia, to lead them to greater understanding of the "inner vision" of Asia. The presentation of that vision is taken from his understanding of Tibetan Buddhist principles, in which the outside world is viewed as an ephemeral distortion of reality. However, he felt that "that inner vision, centered upon itself, cannot be communicated through concepts but must be felt and relived" (Benavides 1995:163) One of the ways in which Tucci attempted to assist Occidentals to experience the "inner vision" of Asia was through works such as The Theory and Practice of the Mandala (1961) in which he documented the uses of mandalas with a gloss influenced by Jung. The sense that Tibetan paintings were to be consumed by Westerners as manuals for religious and psychological development thereby became enshrined as one of the tropes of Tibetophilia.³⁹

For those individuals who visited prior to 1959 (such as Tucci and Waddell), Tibet was no longer the inaccessible and unobtainable virgin culture of their imagination. They had seen her disrobed and removed some of her more alluring attire to be displayed back in the Occident. These objects dressed the cabinets of Western museums and fixed Tibet as a clearly identifiable cultural unit, in which tradition and religion were the dominant themes. But how has Tibet been represented since the disappearance of these defining characteristics?

³⁸An account of Tucci's life and politics is provided by Benavides(1995:161-196)

³⁹Pott, (1964: 210) writes "...much of the material which has reached western collections in fact exemplifies nothing more than a skilled specialist ability which can lay no claim to be described as true artistry..... As [the objects] clearly have reference to a mysterious side of life they can certainly be of such interest to initiates that, despite all aesthetic inadequacies, they become desirable objects, but certainly not works of art."

Snellgrove and Richardson report that in the 1950s, thangka paintings could be purchased in India and Nepal for very little but twenty years later, prices for similar items had increased a thousand fold.⁴⁰ They attribute the increased marketability of Tibetan paintings to a rise in knowledge about them and a revival of interest in the colonial collections in the West. However, they fail to mention that it was the very impact of the "outside world" which forced a change in the market for Tibetan goods. From 1959 onwards as refugees fled from the Chinese incursions into Tibetan territory and began to establish exile communities in India and Nepal, many were forced to sell their possessions from the homeland in order to survive. The paintings and religious objects which they managed to escape with were eagerly purchased by those whose interest had been triggered by the collecting and documentation of Tibet carried out by figures like Waddell. That is, a taste for Tibetan material culture had already been created but the events of 1959 attached further symbolic capital (as Bourdieu would have it) to exilic objects. The Chinese policy of the Cultural Revolutionary (1966-1976) period also fuelled the market as monasteries and other religious buildings were destroyed and their contents passed into the galleries and dealerships in Hong Kong and further afield. As Maoism sought to eradicate all tangible traces of Tibetan Buddhism its human embodiments (such as the Dalai Lama) were in exile and its objects were placed in the holding cells of Western museums and private collections. These objects have since provided the source material for the majority of studies on Tibetan art produced in European languages in the second half of the twentieth century.⁴¹ But, like the refugees, they carry an identity certificate marking them as "Tibetan" and are without powers of self-determination.

There are only a handful of texts by Tibetan authors which make reference to these objects⁴² "Tibet House" in New Delhi has staged a number of small exhibitions based on objects from refugee collections and curated by Tibetans.⁴³ But the majority of Tibetan art and craft pieces are roving ambassadors representing Tibet without the intervention of Tibetans and, as yet, there has been no concerted attempt by to reclaim them. The "capital-in-

⁴⁰Snellgrove and Richardson 1986:277

⁴¹See Jackson's (1997) survey of European accounts.

⁴²Trungpa's *Visual Dharma* is one which is included by Jackson (1996) in his chapter on "Previous Research". The collaboration between Essen and Thingo (1989) is also included but that between Olschak and Wangyal (1973) is not.

⁴³Catalogues of these shows were published in 1965, 1966 and 1979.

exile" in Dharamsala in India has a small museum (at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives) but appears to lack the infrastructure and more importantly the desire to reappropriate these diasporic objects. Unlike other groups of "marginal" or dispossessed people, such as the Aborigines of Australia and the indigenous groups of North America, the Tibetans have made no claims on the objects of their history to become markers of their present identity. As we shall see in the following chapters, this may be due to the way in which their identity as exiles is part of an ongoing process of production in which the images of Tibet must be made anew.

The meaning of Tibetan objects which have been disconnected from their original contexts and the people whose belief systems animate(d) them has been conjured by Western Tibetophiles (many of whom have never been to Tibet or even the T.A.R.) and their main role has thus been to act as memento mori, reminding the world of a culture and a place which in some sense has died.

In the 1990's a group of art historians, curators, collectors, Buddhologists and Tibetophiles (lead by Richard Gere) tried to resuscitate the myth of Tibet in the form of an exhibition entitled "Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet"⁴⁴ In it they attempted to recreate pre-1959 Tibet with a treasure trove of beautiful, dispossessed objects.⁴⁵ Gere (the founding director of "Tibet House", New York which sponsored the show) states in the exhibition catalogue that the exhibition and Year of Tibet festival were staged in order to "bring the world's attention to the richness and uniqueness of Tibet's tragically endangered culture" (in Rhie and Thurman 1991:8). No direct mention is made to the source of the threat to Tibet's culture; it is simply understood that those visiting the exhibition will share the organiser's horror at the Chinese take-over. The entire project (and catalogue) seeks to depoliticise the history of Tibet and replace it with a myth. The director of the Asian Art Museum appeals to the memory of pre-1959 Tibet in his introduction to the exhibit. "In a Westerner's mind there is, perhaps, no place more distant from here, from now, than Tibet. Its very elevation makes it aloof - above even geography. We think only of mountain lofts and snow, bundled-up people moving slowly on the slopes of Everest." (Rand Castile in Rhie and Thurman 1991:9) Castile's imaginings echo the romance of the out-

⁴⁴The show was designed for the San Francisco Asian Art Museum for display in 1991. It then toured to the Royal Academy in London in 1992 and the Bonn Kunst halle in 1996.

of-space and out-of-time Tibet of Waddell and Tucci in the spirit of what Lopez (1994) calls "New Age Orientalism". As we know the Old Age Orientalist vision of Tibet focused on religious practices, hence at San Francisco the exhibition was organised according to the principles of the mandala. Tucci's Theory and Practice of the Mandala was enacted by Western curators and a group of "live" Tibetan practitioners. Four monks from the Tibetan capital-in-exile Dharamsala made particle mandalas throughout the course of the show. This was the closest the curators came to acknowledging that Tibet had a living culture. Within the display of over one hundred and sixty works of art the curators did not (knowingly) include a single work painted by a Tibetan after 1920. Only at the Bonn Kunsthalle (1996) display was a living Tibetan artist allowed to enter the space and then in order to sell his wares as tourist curios on the periphery of the main display.

At least one of those involved with "Wisdom and Compassion" admitted that all the pieces in the exhibition came from Western collections. The President of the Royal Academy in London notes: "That no work of art or artefact in this exhibition has been sent from Tibet itself must surely tell its own story." (de Grey in Rhie and Thurman 1991:no page number) That story remains undiscussed and the simple fact that the Tibet referred to no longer exists, remains unacknowledged. Presumably the curators could not countenance the use of any object produced in the TAR. However much the creators of "Wisdom and Compassion" hoped to devise a show which would bring its audience closer to understanding the inner vision of the "Tibetan mind" (a dubious objective in itself), they failed to consider the political implications of their representation of Tibet through its objects. It seems that devoid of a physical location or a national identity, "Tibet" cannot determine the telling of its own story, nor can Tibetans. More pertinently for this thesis, the stance of many curators, dealers and collectors of art from Asia, and of Tibet in particular, is decidedly anti-modernist preferring to dream of the solace of a different and traditional Tibetan past rather than face the realities of the Tibetan present. "Wisdom and Compassion" was forged from the same longing for a pure sleeping beauty untainted by modernisation that Waddell desired. Even more disturbingly the unstated rationale behind such an exhibition is that the West has graciously preserved the treasures of Tibet from the ravages of expansionist China and materialist modernity. But to whose advantage?

Part II: "Insider" Definitions of Exilic Tibet

The presence of the Dharamsala monks at "Wisdom and Compassion" (and the absence of contemporary artists and/or their work) suggests that for Western Tibetophiles the practice of Tibetan Buddhism is the only cultural expression through which exiles can perpetuate the dream of their lost paradise. In this sense Western views reflect those of the Dharamsala government. Since 1959 the practice of Tibetan Buddhism has provided the religious sustenance and ideological underpinning for the diasporic community. Those Tibetans who followed the Dalai Lama into exile and escaped the threat of Chinese obliteration of their religious practice have emphasised it as a major part of refugee identity. As the Tibetan historian Dawa Norbu wrote in 1973

Tibet has no oil deposits like Kuwait to boast about or machines like the West. Her sole pride and contribution to the world is what she strove for and specialised in during the last 2000 years - Tibetan Buddhism.⁴⁶

Under the leadership of the Dalai Lama the exile government has reassembled the fragments of its lost past through a preservation-in practice ethic, and as we shall see the arts have also been promoted in this vein. The elision between Western and Tibetan projections of exilic Tibet may arise in part from the brute economic facts. The exiles are financially reliant upon financial support from Western aid organisations and support groups⁴⁷. Equally they have only been able to relocate themselves due to the political and economic backing of host countries. The government of India has been the most accommodating in allowing the creation of the "capital-in-exile" in Himachal Pradesh within their territory (even if they do not provide Indian passports).

As part of their strategy for self definition the exile community has adopted some of the trappings of nationhood with a "capital", a government, a constitution, a legal system and offices dealing with education, housing, foreign relations and "religious and cultural affairs". Shakya notes that for some exiles (particularly the members of the Tibetan Youth Congress) there

⁴⁶Norbu 1973:9

⁴⁷The organisers and financial backers of "Wisdom and Compassion" were also supporters of the Tibetan exile cause.

has been a "shift of focus from the faith to the flag" and that a move "from the purely religious-based identification to a more secular notion of Tibetanness is clear". (Shakya 1993:11) Taking his cue from Chogyam Trungpa's famous letter to "All tsampa eaters" (published in 1959 in The Tibetan Mirror), Shakya points to the ways in which Tibetan identity prior to 1959 was defined in cultural rather than political terms since the term "Tibetan" can "denote populations with a common history and tradition" who "share world views and myths about their origins". (Shakya 1993:11) As he remarks, there is in fact no directly comparable term in the Tibetan language. The nearest equivalent might be "Bodpa" but it has been used primarily to define difference rather than affinity. Nomads in the western region of Changthang used it to refer to the people of the Lhasa valley, while for the people of the eastern regions of Kham and Amdo it defined the inhabitants of the whole of Central Tibet. Amongst the refugees "Bodpa" is used to refer to the combination of three areas; Kham, Amdo and U-Tsang. Tibetans in Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim are omitted from this categorisation. Thus historically the word "Bodpa" has emphasised the plurality of Tibetan identities, but the exilic situation has led to a more unified vision of identity which Shakya suggests comes from an opposition to "the other".

Shakya refers to another label of Tibetan exilic identity which emphasises religion rather than region; "Nangpa" (or insider) referring to a believer in Tibetan Buddhism, subsumes regional sub-divisions. Kalachakra ceremonies and teachings given by the current Dalai Lama in Dharamsala are cited as ritual occasions when this "Nangpa" sense of identity predominates and when "Regional differences are smoothed out and a common identity is manifested" (Shakya 1993:11).

But "Nangpas" are not only to be found in Dharamsala. Since the 1960s some of the refugee communities have been located in or near long established Tibetanised communities in the Himalaya (such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, the Darjeeling and Kalimpong regions of West Bengal which are included in this thesis) and their members have participated in a fair degree of cross-fertilisation of ideas and influences with these relatively more stable and politically more self determined groups and vice versa. Ramble comments on the impact of exiled Tibetans in places like Sikkim and Nepal:

As for 1959, far from crippling Lamaism in the Himalaya, the Chinese annexation of Tibet may have fortified it. The passage of Tibetan refugees - some of them influential lamas apparently shocked by the paganism of the frontiers they passed in flight - gave Buddhism an additional boost, and the cults of autochthonous gods suffered as a consequence. Becoming good Buddhists is not necessarily a question of reversion to a glorious past state; it may be equally a matter of people becoming something they look as though they might have been but never actually were.⁴⁸(my emphases)

Ramble highlights the degree to which both groups have been involved with a process of reinventing themselves. In the following chapters I describe some of the ways in which images reflect the metamorphoses of "Nangpa" identity. Outsiders on the "Dharma" tour of the exile community recognise "Tibetan" style in a generic manner (and buy thangkas in increasingly large quantities). In Dharamsala the consolidation of Tibetan Buddhism as the cultural style of exiled Tibetans is reflected in a conservative presentation of one style of Tibetan Buddhist art. (Chapters Three and Four) But we can also establish that Tibetan image-makers are not simply concerned with the preservation or continuation of a homogenous past but have a sophisticated relationship to the hybridity of historic styles.

For Snellgrove and Richardson (1986:274), the ramifications of the Chinese take-over meant that "the religious art of Tibet, perhaps the main expression of Tibetan genius, has been cut off at its roots." How have Tibetan exile artists responded to this severance from their cultural roots whilst simultaneously entering new cultural conditions? Has the experience of exile actually provided some of the "outside" influences which could revivify Tibetan art as Snellgrove and Richardson argue is essential if a culture is not to become moribund?

⁴⁸Ramble 1993:23

Chapter Two: Reinventing Tibetan Images in Exile

In 1988 an unsuspecting Westerner was arrested in the capital of the TAR, Lhasa. The story of this 'innocent abroad' made international news but her crime was neither incitation to riot nor theft of official secrets, or even of straying into delimited territory. The offence: sporting a Phil Silvers T-shirt without due care and attention. Though questions might be raised over the sartorial merits of such a get-up, few would suspect that this item of clothing could be viewed as a provocative political statement, but the felon had failed to notice the striking resemblance between the image of Phil Silvers, an American comic of the 1950s and the Dalai Lama, incarnation of Avalokitesvara, bodhisattva of compassion, Nobel Peace Prize winner and exiled spiritual and political leader of the Tibetans. Nor did she realise that a ban on displaying his image was in force. The story demonstrates that, just as it is a crime to display the Tibetan flag in the TAR, it can be equally dangerous to exhibit the Dalai Lama's portrait, though travel guidebooks encourage foreigners to take a wad of photographs of His Holiness to present to Tibetans.¹ On their return many visitors report continuing adoration of the Dalai Lama icon, with recipients of postcards, snapshots and even newspaper cuttings breaking down in tears as they crush his image to their foreheads in the traditional gesture of respect. Despite Draconian attempts at cultural control in the TAR, the image of the Dalai Lama remains the figurehead for a cultural currency which has yet to be devalued. Within the refugee 'black market' this coinage moves across borders, continues to have purchase and is reinvented by contemporary artists.

Tibetan Images in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Though representations of Dalai Lamas are not a twentieth century innovation in the Tibetan cultural sphere, [see Plates 7 and 8] there can be no doubt that the image of the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has the distinction of being the most frequently reproduced and most widely available. There has been a democratisation of access to the image of the bodhisattva of compassion which is in part the result of the impact of an "age of mechanical reproduction" (Benjamin) but also of a shift in political and social conditions amongst Tibetans living in exile. This chapter focuses on why and how refugee status has led to the production of new types of

¹See Klieger (1989:317) on "drifter-tourist" guidebooks.

images for new contexts.

Where pre-1959 portraits of Dalai Lamas were mainly devised for the private use of an elite group of monks or their secular patrons, and the accessibility of mural versions was limited, the current Dalai Lama portrait can now be found in almost every refugee home, irrespective of class status. He appears as a single icon or amongst a customised selection of root gurus and other images [Plate 9]. The availability of photographic reproductions of the Dalai Lama has enabled individuals to construct "do-it-yourself" domestic icons and shrines, a particularly appealing option in the early exile period when artists and their products were in short supply and heavy demand.² Throughout the refugee community and the other Tibetan Buddhist communities of the Himalayas, the photographic Dalai Lama is also installed in thrones awaiting his actual physical presence. The construction of a shrine or chamber for the Dalai Lama was a practice of the Geluk order prior to 1959, and one which is now continued by all "Nangpas" (i.e. irrespective of affiliations to other orders of Tibetan Buddhism) in refugee communities in India. (The Shiwatsel chapel near the Tibetan camp at Choglamsar on the banks of the Indus in Ladakh for example serves both as guest house and memorial to the Dalai Lama.³) Religious festivals and ceremonies such as the March 10th Commemoration and New Year which bind the refugees, wherever they may be in the diaspora, are usually conducted when at least the two-dimensional Dalai Lama is present [Plate 10]. Thus in the second half of the twentieth century the Dalai Lama image has become a marker of Tibetanised spaces throughout the diaspora, though he and his representation are markedly absent from his former home, the Potala in Lhasa.

Significantly, the mural genre in which the latest Dalai Lama is added to a sequence of his predecessors (in the traditional genealogy format so favoured by the Geluk order) has not been entirely abandoned [Plate 11], but the photographically reproduced Dalai Lama embodiments have moved out of the relatively concealed environments of the monastery and home into the streets and across the globe. In India his depiction now protects the service

²Klieger (1989:318) notes that Dalai Lama photographs were "the object most in demand for the consecration of recently reconstructed private and monastic chapels and altars" in the period of relaxation of religious prohibitions in the TAR in the early 1980s.

³This building was constructed for the Dalai Lama's visit to Ladakh in 1976 when he gave a Kalachakra teaching. Tsering Wangdu, the Ladakhi painter, completed a large Kalachakra thangka for this site. See Chapter Five.

vehicles of the exile community as Tibetans insert their image into a local symbolic structure, [Plate 12] in which Hindu deities and gurus stand guard at the windscreens of autorickshaws and Tata trucks. The Dalai Lama image does not merely emulate the prophylactic function of the Hindu gods, nor even their role as signifiers of religious affiliation, but indicates a re-evaluation amongst Tibetans of their sense of political identification in exile. The fact that, as a result of a wrench of political fate, the Dalai Lama is abroad in the world, literally and pictorially, is acknowledged by Tibetans now as one of their major tools of communal definition. This is an example of Tibetans labelling themselves as such in the face of an "ethnic other" through appropriation of that group's cultural vocabulary, but much of the growth in Dalai Lama image production is actually the result of reinventions of a specifically Tibetan nature.

This process constitutes an inversion of Benjamin's theory of the loss of aura which, he claims, results from mechanical reproduction:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term 'aura' and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art. One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence.⁴

For Benjamin, plurality of copies destroys the connection with both tradition and ritual, for the image is no longer the unique object functioning in a specific context (or contexts) which can be mapped by the (art)historian. "In other words, the unique value of the 'authentic' work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value."⁵

In the Tibetan refugee context this theory poses an interesting challenge. The notion of mass production (though not necessarily mechanical) is a long standing feature of Tibetan religious practice from the stamped clay *tsa tsa* produced in their thousands to fill stupas or acquired by pilgrims as an indicator of merit gained, to the wood block representations of deities and mantras printed on prayer flags. Even at the more elite end of the

⁴Benjamin 1992:215

⁵Benjamin 1992:217.

image production market, thangka designs have frequently been copied from models which were deemed iconometrically and ritually effective and repeatedly requested by patrons. The process of copying a design onto cotton cloth with a pin-prick stencil (Tib: *gtsag par*) to ensure accuracy is still commonly used by artists throughout the Himalayas⁶ [Plate 13]. The neologism *par gyap*, a verb which means "to take a photograph" is etymologically close to *gtsag par*. *Par* refers to a mould for a form or letters, and came to mean that which was produced from a mould, hence "print". The verb *gyap* can mean a number of things from "build", "shoot" to "mark" or even "bite". Hence a photograph is construed within terms similar to those used to refer to traditional techniques of copying an image. In fact, if anything the "aura" of a thangka painting could be said to lie in exactly those features which are not unique to a particular work or artist, that is, in the codification and sanctification of iconometry. Without the correct proportions and iconographic elements on the obverse of a thangka and the appropriate mantras on the reverse, the image has no religious validity and cannot receive the blessing of consecration.⁷

Thus these images fall entirely within Benjamin's terms in the sense that they are traditional and designed for a ritual location but they fail the test of authenticity because they are not unique. Additionally, the incursion of photography in the refugee production of images would imply for Benjamin that "aura" had been entirely lost. However, I hope to show here that tradition, ritual and aura have been reinvented and further that paradoxically it is even possible to agree with Benjamin when he says:

But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice - politics.⁸

I can concur with this for two reasons. Firstly, because the question of the authenticity of an image has radically altered in the refugee situation, to the extent that authenticity is not to be sought in a singular object but in a wider group project which seeks to establish a Tibetan identity through a selective notion of the "authentic" Tibet. The "criterion of authenticity", of the unique

⁶As I observed in the Dharmapala Art Studio in Kathmandu in 1992. Sixty artists were producing thangkas under the guidance of the Tibeto-Nepalese painter Kalsang.

⁷Jackson 1984:25

⁸Benjamin 1992:218.

object having a ritual function in Benjaminian terms, has been replaced in exilic Tibetan artistic production by a concept of authentic style which recreates tradition. (This theme is discussed more fully in Chapter Three.) Secondly, in the case of the Dalai Lama image specifically, the political and religious are inextricably fused as I attempt to show below.

The Politicisation of the Dalai Lama Icon

The exceptional qualities of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, as man and symbol of unity have been noted by a many commentators.⁹ In Rule by Reincarnation Michael (1982) argues that "a common bond and danger" has removed some of the stressful sectarian differences amongst Tibetans, but above all

... there may be a new force to cement Tibetan unity in exile that is stronger than any such force prevailing in Tibet: modern nationalism. There has been an ethnic nationalism in Tibet ever since the aristocrats invoked it in the eighth century in their attacks against the Indian Buddhist missionaries the kings had imported. Today this nationalism amongst the exiles is linked to their hope of returning to their homeland under their own rule, and it transcends the particularist inclinations of the past. The settlements contain population groups from all regions of Tibet and the Lhasa language has become more of a lingua franca than ever. The nationalism is inextricably linked to Tibetan Buddhism and the Dalai Lama as its focus and chief symbol.¹⁰ (my emphasis)

The increased political significance of the Dalai Lama as an emblem of Tibetan neo-nationalism and his concomitant ability to unify Tibetans beyond regional and sectarian affiliations may explain why in the latter half of the twentieth century the production of images of the Dalai Lama has grown exponentially and why the Chinese continue to impose bans on his likeness in Tibet.¹¹ The archive cine footage of His Holiness's journey across the Himalayas into exile also unites both Tibetans and their sympathisers in its interpretation as a key image in which a significant individual embodies the

⁹Such as Nowak (1984), Klieger (1989), Schwartz 1994:124 states that "The dual nature of his role for Tibetans - as both political and religious leader - has been an important political resource for them. The Dalai Lama embodies the central formula of Tibetan politics: "religion and politics combined (chos srid gnyis Idan). "

¹⁰Michael 1982:169-170.

¹¹This occurred again in June 1996 and led to violence at the monasteries of Ganden, Sera and Drepung - important Geluk strongholds with a history of involvement in anti-Chinese actions. (See Tibet Information Network world wide web news releases for June 1996)

actions of a group. This journey has acquired mythic status as it reiterates the exilic view that had the Dalai Lama not departed, Tibet, in the traditional sense, would still exist.

Where earlier representations of Dalai Lamas could be said to represent a limited and exceptional genre of Tibetan pictorialisation since it focused on the portrayal of a recognisable living individual as opposed to religious figures depicted generically for meditational purposes, Tenzin Gyatso's image now incorporates many different levels of signification. It could be argued that for Tibetans his image has eclipsed the power of even that of the Buddha for it is he, the Dalai Lama who appears in so many *Tibetan* Buddhist contexts: domestic, religious and political.

For example, in his most apotropaic representation, signifying his role as protector of both the faith and the people, [Plate 14] the 1950s photographic image of the Dalai Lama appears in the position usually reserved for the Buddha in an amulet alongside two forms of weaponry, a Khampa knife and a belt of bullets. In pre-1959 Tibet, Buddha amulets had been worn in battle and were deemed to possess miraculous powers of defence for the wearer. Arrows and bullets were thought to be deflected by the Buddha icon, just as the Buddha himself was able to deflect the weapons of Mara's armies.¹² The use of the Dalai Lama image in the Khampa fighter's amulet is appropriate in both a religious and political sense, since the Khampa guerrillas set out to try to reclaim the Tibet His Holiness had been forced to abandon. As father of a nation held in suspended animation, the Dalai Lama thus has greater symbolic resonance than the Buddha.

Amulets have also been used by Tibetan Buddhists to rededicate and sanctify larger images, as was the case at the Ladakhi monastery of Thikse, where the sculptor Nawang Tsering was asked to incorporate a Tibetan amulet into his thirty foot figure of Maitreya [Plate 15]. The old Buddha amulet, acquired by the head monk of Thikse from Tibet, was embedded in the clay and now sits at the centre of Maitreya's necklace. The Maitreya had been built to counteract a malevolent force which was seen to have crept into the monastery, through the inauspicious presence of a broken older image of the Maitreya (which was duly destroyed when the new one was finished). As

¹² Klieger (1989:331-332) notes "Photos symbolise the protective nature of the Dalai Lama as bodhisattva Chenrezi, the God of Compassion: and as a fierce Protector of Buddhism (Tam-drin). In this sense, photos are worn as amulets.

embodiment of the refugee narrative of the absented Tibet, embedded in the exile community, the Dalai Lama image now rededicates, sanctifies and protects exilic Tibet against the corrupting force of China.

Embracing Photography

How is it that Tibetan exiles do not appear to suffer from the angst which so troubled Walter Benjamin in The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Production? Instead they seem to have embraced the potential of photographic reproduction. Though painting is still the preferred *modus operandi* for images of bodhisattvas such as Tara and so-called Adi Buddhas, such as Amitayus (see Chapter Four), the representation of living incarnations appears to fall into a different category. The photograph has proved itself a device which can be happily accommodated into Tibetan conceptions of "realism" and remembrance. Benjamin describes this process as the last gasp of "aura":

It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of the human face.¹³

One of the earliest examples of a Tibetan's initiation into this "cult of remembrance" is a photograph of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama [Plate 16] taken in Darjeeling in 1910 by Sir Charles Bell, British Representative in Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim and author of The People of Tibet (1928), The Religion of Tibet (1931) and Portrait of the Dalai Lama (1946). The Thirteenth Dalai Lama had taken refuge in Darjeeling after the Chinese sent four hundred troops to Lhasa, an act he and his government interpreted as the beginnings of a mission to kidnap him. (This was in fact the Thirteenth's second period in exile as a result of such a threat.) Renowned today by some Tibetans for his radicalism and openness to the adoption of a number of "Western" things, the Thirteenth first encountered some of them in British-run India, including serving as the subject of a portrait photograph. As a hill station and trading post, Darjeeling allowed access to some of the more sophisticated technologies of Empire - thus he became the first Dalai Lama to be immortalised by the camera. Bell is proud of his achievement and describes it

¹³Benjamin 1992:219

thus:

This was, I believe the first photograph of him seated in the Tibetan style. I gave him a large number of copies, and these proved useful to him; he used to give them to monasteries and to deserving people. These all used the photograph instead of an image, rendering to it the worship they gave to images of Buddhas and deities.¹⁴

And he goes onto describe the frequency with which he observed his handiwork as utilised by Tibetans and includes a photograph of his photograph in the biography of the Thirteenth as if to prove the point

In subsequent years I frequently saw my photograph of the Dalai Lama, but photographed down to a smaller size, standing among the images on the altar either in a private house or in a monastery, and worshipped along with them. In the private houses and shops of Darjeeling district and Sikkim, one saw them everywhere; there must have been thousands of them receiving the adoration of the faithful.¹⁵

The Thirteenth was also photographed by Bell in Tibet in 1930, as we see in Plate XLII in Portrait of the Dalai Lama [Plate 17], where he appears seated at an elaborate throne before a painted wall, probably in his home at the Norbulingka, at the age of fifty four. During the 1930s, with the eminent example of the Thirteenth in mind, the Lhasa elite were also losing their innocence of the camera, providing further evidence that Tibet was not utterly isolated from the cultural and scientific developments which transformed other parts of the world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (a commonplace amongst commentators on pre-1959 Tibet). The Thirteenth Dalai Lama's senior thangka painter was photographed at work in 1937 by C. Suydam Cutting, [Plate 18] and the Tsarong family were pictured in their home, [Plate 19] proudly seated at a Western-style table with a photograph hanging alongside Chinese scroll paintings by F Spencer Chapman in 1936.

By the 1950s, studio photography had become popular amongst the Lhasa aristocrats and one example explodes a Western preconception of Tibetans as ethereal, non-materialistic beings with little regard for the vanities of the physical world. In a 1957 portrait [Plate 20] Sakya Dagchen Jigdal Rinpoche clad in full monastic robes, sits astride his motorcycle in front

¹⁴Bell 1946:114

¹⁵ Bell 1946:114

of a painted studio backdrop of distinctly Chinese character. His pride at being recorded as purchaser of exotic foreign goods and consumer of pleasurable pastimes clearly emerges from the sepia, for the backdrop implies that he has just driven out to the lake-side pagoda for a picnic. The Thirteenth's pioneering approach to photography meant that portraits of important religious figures, with or without motorcycles, were circulating in wealthy circles before the upheavals of 1959 and hence found their way to India with the refugees.

The next Dalai Lama incarnation continued the Thirteenth's interest in the photographic image, but took it one step further and wielded a cine-camera himself. Heinrich Harrer, who had been commissioned by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to build a cinema hall in the grounds of the Norbulingka in 1950, reports on the first evening's viewing which included the Dalai Lama's own handiwork:

But I was anxious to see what subjects he had chosen for filming and persuaded him to put his roll on to the screen. He had not, of course, had a large choice of subjects. He had done a big sweeping landscape of the valley of Lhasa, which he turned much too fast. Then came a few under-lighted long-distance pictures of mounted noblemen and caravans passing through Sho. A close-up of his cook showed that he would have liked to take film portraits.¹⁶

Though Harrer is rather critical of the novice's technique, his comment about portraiture is poignant; at this point the Dalai Lama is still apparently a little camera shy, both before and behind the apparatus. As subject of the photographer's gaze he later had little choice in the matter and became the first Dalai Lama to be immortalised in moving celluloid. The film of his presence in Tibet now acts as documentary proof that he once was a resident of his own country.

By 1950 he is photographed seated in a large throne looking youthful and tense "at the time of the Chinese invasion in the autumn"(Avedon 1986:picture caption) of that year [Plate 21]. This image is one of those which has gained iconic status amongst refugees, perhaps because of the date but also because the link is made with the previous incarnation (who predicted the cataclysmic events which his next incarnation would face) as the Fourteenth

¹⁶Harrer 1953:250-251

is shown seated on the same auspicious fabric, embroidered with crossed dorjes and swastikas seen in images of the Thirteenth.

The Image of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Exile

Amongst some of the first images to be mass produced in exile were collages in which a photograph has been incorporated into an otherwise traditionally painted composition. This technique constitutes a surprising departure for Tibetan artists when we consider the emphasis which has usually been placed on mastery of iconometric systems for the design of figures, which includes strict regulations for the depiction of divine as well as not-so-divine figures. Deviation from these rules was a risky business both for producer and viewer. Any involvement with an ill-formed thangka risked personal misfortune and errors could "lead one to hell" as the painter Pema Namdol Thaye comments in his Concise Tibetan Art Book:

The image must be accurate. An erroneous image cannot be blessed and consecrated. Such images should be in remote and deserted places as they are more harm than benefit to Human society.¹⁷

When specifying exactly how human beings should be drawn Thaye states that "The general human measurement, according to the ancient artists is eight thos. similar to the divine forms" though he adds that "the religious heads and personal Root-Gurus who show the sentient beings the Vairayana ways should be represented according to the measurements of Lord Buddha".¹⁸ Despite these specifications Thaye's book includes an illustration of his personal "root" guru, the head of the Nyingmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism, Mindroling Trichen Rinpoche in photo-collage style [Plate 22]. But whilst one artist emphasises the elaborate system of codification for producing icons worthy of use in religious practice another displays a strong vein of interest in a different kind of representation, one which he defines as "realism".

According to folklore, once an artist painted a rat and kept it in a place where it would be visible to a cat and as expected, the cat, on first sight of the mouse, jumped onto it. So realistic was the representation of the animal on paper!¹⁹

¹⁷Thaye 1987:23

¹⁸Thaye 1987:183

¹⁹Losal 1982:7 Karmay (1980:146) cites a similar account: "In Klu-'bum *kham-s-tshan* there

Losal goes on to relate the tale of one of his predecessors:

Once an artist painted a beautiful flower, and a man, on seeing it, complimented on its beauty. He wanted to grow that flower and so asked for its seed. The painter said, "If you like this flower, then take it home." The man felt happy and began to pick up the flower only to realise that it was not real. He felt ashamed and felt it childish to take it home. It is amazing that even in those days something akin to modern art existed.²⁰

Perhaps it is this acknowledgement of the miraculous veracity of certain images of the past which could allow the products of the camera into the images of the present. Losal is also not the only Tibetan to equate modernity with realism (as we shall see later). A monk assisting at the Kalachakra Assembly Hall in Dharamsala (where a major painting cycle was in progress in 1992) showed me his notebook. In it he had covered many pages with free flowing line drawings of birds, cats, dogs and other creatures of the natural world. When asked what he was doing he replied "modern art".

In fact it appears that at least since the eighteenth century iconometric and more "realist" traditions had been synthesised in Tibetan art practice as discussed by Erberto Lobue:

(But) from both the Indian and Tibetan sources one gains a clear impression that the theory of proportions was originally based on the actual measurements of the human body. Although portraits of kings and religious masters had to conform to recognisable and idealised stereotypes, they followed the likeness and proportions of their subjects, whether they were done from memory or from life. That was certainly the case in the Nepal valley from the Licchavi period onwards and in Tibet, where, as we have seen, live indigenous models were used in the making of early Buddhist deities.²¹

is an oral tradition concerning a famous artist who was also an important teacher of metaphysics, known as Klu-'bum Lha-bris-pa. One day instead of holding classes as usual he held a competition with one of the students who was claiming to be a better artist than he. Both were to draw a mouse. The master asked the class to judge. Some thought that the student's mouse was a little more beautiful but they could not decide. The master then invited a cat in to judge. The cat did not even look at the disciple's mouse, but concentrating on the one drawn by Klu'bum Lha-bris-pa, it crouched and sprang...".

²⁰Losal 1982:8 It is also rather amazing to note the similarity between these anecdotes and the famous account of verisimilitude in Pliny in which Zeuxis produced such a realistic picture of some grapes that birds came to eat them.

²⁶Lobue 1990:47

However, it was a modern device that truly changed the nature of portrait painting amongst refugee Tibetans. The very first image of the Dalai Lama produced for mass circulation in exile was made by Sherap Palden Beru²² [Plate 23]. In it the Dalai Lama appears framed by Tibetan monastic architecture, with two dragon entwined pillars and multiple layered pagoda style roof. A subsidiary frame of flat blue colour is then used to house the man himself, who is surrounded by four deities, Amitayus at the top, White Tara to the left, Avalokitesvara to the right and Namgyalma, goddess of longevity at his chest, the group is pulled together by repeated cloud formations. This is a slightly ungainly composition it must be said, particularly when we look at the bent hand and arm of His Holiness, but in fact these clumsy details expose the artist's problem: how to paint a reincarnate bodhisattva who lives amongst you in the refugee community of Dharamsala. Previous Dalai Lamas were largely invisible to the Tibetan public and certainly not available to have their portrait made from life, thus they were generally represented in rather stilted and stylised manner with little regard for details of their actual physiognomy. The Fifth Dalai Lama, for example, is mainly identifiable by his rotund form and twisted moustache, but otherwise little else distinguishes him from others in Dalai Lama lineage sequences. The exiled Dalai Lama, on the other hand, is known to people in far greater intimacy, either through his public appearances (he still regularly holds audiences in Dharamsala, and tries to meet all new refugees) or through photographs. Sherap Palden was the first exiled artists to incorporate one of these into his picture, though he is still left with the problem of how to construct an integrated human form.

Another popular portrait of the Dalai Lama, to be found in refugee homes from Dharamsala to Ladakh, is more successful in this respect and portrays him in a beatific state, eyes closed as if in meditation but wearing the fifties style glasses which led to the Phil Silvers confusion [Plate 24]. Here the Dalai Lama's face and arms are taken from a photograph. All other features of this composition, the Dalai Lama's throne, robes and tables decorated with symbolic offerings are portrayed in the classic Tibetan manner with a high degree of emphasis on pattern and flattened surfaces contrasting with the three dimensionality of the photographic visage. Though apparently

²²Interview with the Dharamsala artist Lobsang Ngodup, 1992. Sherap Palden is now based at the monastery of Samyeling in Scotland.

contradictory on an aesthetic level, this combination makes sense in philosophic terms since the only 'real' element is the person, and specifically the mind, of the Dalai Lama. His special physical characteristics identify him as Avalokitesvara. The three thangkas hanging on the wall behind the throne and framing his head(mind) represent facets of the Dalai Lama's religious 'personality' and the Buddhist traditions with which he is affiliated. Kalachakra (the Wheel of Time) on the left, representing the Vajrayana, the four armed manifestation of Avalokitesvara, (Bodhisattva of Compassion) on the right, representing the Mahayana, and Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha) in the centre representing the Hinayana.

The images described above are two of the more sophisticated examples where the camera seems to have been allowed to take on the responsibility of correctness previously ascribed to iconometry. These artists appear to have decided that the truthfulness of the mechanically produced image can be readily incorporated amongst Tibetan aesthetic precepts. Some images in a similar vein are closer in fact to retouched photographs, without any major painterly contributions such as these two [Plate 25] based on a photograph that must have been taken around the same time as the portrait described above, that is in 1950, before the Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet and the arrival of the glasses. Others are straightforward untinted photographs though they have been Tibetanised by the inclusion of brocade surrounds, as is the case for thangkas. In fact, precursors for photo-collage portraiture existed before the move into exile. A number of Ladakhi monasteries possess images which employ similar techniques for the Ninth Panchen Lama [Plate 26] and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama [Plate 27]. The latter is fascinating for the face could well have been taken from Bell's 1930 portrait (mentioned earlier) and the throne from the 1910 image in the same volume published by Bell in London in 1946. The fact that customised versions of his photographs were circulating in the Himalayas from the forties onwards was noted by Bell.

A Tibetan painter in his retinue painted two or three of these photographs, and enclosed one of them in a frame made by a craftsman in the Dalai Lama's household from such materials as the exiles had with them. He painted them in the appropriate colours for his hat, his robes, his throne, the religious implements and richly brocaded canopy, known as "The curtain of heaven" and the silk pictures of Buddha which formed the suitable background of it all. At each of the four corners of the throne is a swastika, an emblem which has been used for

many hundreds of years in Tibet.²³

A similar image of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama of this sort hangs from a pillar in the old assembly hall of Likir monastery in Ladakh, above the clock, and has been customised with two postcards of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama outside the Potala in Lhasa surrounded by Tibetans displaying the Tibetan flag. Since it was the Thirteenth who predicted the calamitous events that would befall Tibet under his next incarnation, and he who designed the flag now used as an ensign of independence, the combination could not be more apt.

The photographing of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had in fact indicated to some Tibetans that the transmigration of his spirit was imminent:

In November, 1933, the Dalai Lama, summoned one of the Nepalese photographers in Lhasa to take his photograph. This alarmed the people of Lhasa, who took it as a sign that he intended to die soon.²⁴

By mid December the Thirteenth was dead. The people of Lhasa did not fear the camera, but had good reason to associate the taking of an image with death. This brings us back to Benjamin and his conception of the role photography in the "cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead". In Tibet, portraits of religious figures were generally made after their death. However, in his slightly mawkish account of the Last Rites amongst The People of Tibet, Bell discusses the embalming process utilised for the preservation of the bodies of high ranking monks and members of elite families:

For embalming purposes, salt, known as 'corpse salt', is rubbed in. 'This draws out', says my informant, 'the body juices. The body dries up and is built out again with clay, being fashioned and painted after the likeness of the deceased.'²⁵ (My emphasis)

This treatment is only deemed appropriate for those whose life was exemplary; their bodies stand mummified as testimony to this, though their spirit has transmigrated. Bell also notes that:

When So-nam Gya-tso, the Dalai Lama who introduced Tibetan

²³Bell 1946:114

²⁴Bell 1946:383

²⁵Bell 1928:296

Buddhism among the Mongols, died, 'In memory of his body his portrait was painted on cloth, in memory of his speech one copy of the Kan-gyur was printed in gold letters, and in memory of his mind a silver tomb thirteen cubits in length was built by the people'²⁶

Stein's (1972:227) discussion of the Tibetan way of dying includes the information that "In modern Tibet, the dead man is represented by a picture and receives offerings during the *bar-do* period." Thus there are precedents for life-like portrayal of the dead and the use of an image to represent the deceased to the living, within ritual contexts. Bell however had unwittingly (but with the Thirteenth's collusion), overturned this centuries old tradition by photographing the Dalai Lama when alive. This established a precedent for the mass produced images of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. A Tibetan artist based in Kathmandu confirmed that:

We do have a tradition in the villages and working with the monasteries that if someone dies we may make their image. This tradition is already there. As is the case for the image of the Dalai Lama, as long as it is not for meditation.²⁷

His emphasis on the non-meditational use of a portrait reiterates the degree of flexibility available to exiled artists when making an image of the Dalai Lama whose role, as we have suggested has become as much political as religious.

Though painted embalmed bodies could be said to encompass the most realistic memorial of the dead, the photograph now appears to come a close second for Tibetans. The collage thangkas of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Ninth Panchen Lama at Likir are highly valued as memorials to previous incarnations and to pre-1959 Tibet. In the case of Fourteenth Dalai Lama representations, the subject still lives but the camera's ability to fix moments in time and the evolving appearance and roles of the subject is now capitalised upon.²⁸ But it is perhaps the capacity of film to make that which is

²⁶Bell 1928:294 - the quotation is taken from The Biography of the Reverend Omniscient So-nam Gya-tso, like a Chariot in the Ocean. Lobue (1990:192) notes that a fourteenth century prince of Gyantse had a silver image of Tara made in Indian style and with "proportions having as their unit of measure his dead wife's thumb"

²⁷Kalsang: Interview in Kathmandu 1993

²⁸The Buddha image is also discussed in terms of his appearance at different ages, as the child prince Siddhartha, as the ascetic yogi of middle years and as the enlightened Bodhisattva approaching death and Nirvana.

absent appear to be present which appeals most to Tibetan artists and their audience. The "cult of remembrance" of an absent loved one (the Dalai Lama) and a beloved place absented, (Tibet) is a major feature of refugee culture.

Times Past, Times Present: New Contexts for the Dalai Lama

Klieger identifies a number of roles for the Dalai Lama image in systems of exchange in the TAR during periods when Chinese policy was more relaxed. Some of his observations are equally pertinent to the refugee situation. He delineates a number of categories in which the photograph of His Holiness functions:

1. Dalai Lama photos possess "merit", which can be realized by the giver by the act of giving. Merit may additionally accrue to the recipient by subsequently treating the object respectfully and displaying it in a prominent place.
2. Photos symbolize nang-pa cultural solidarity.
3. Photos symbolize aspirations of the return of the Dalai Lama and the rightful independence of Tibet.
4. Photos symbolize the whole system of theocratic monarchy, not just the present Dalai Lama XIV.
5. Photos symbolize the protective nature of the Dalai Lama as bodhisattva Chenrezi, the God of Compassion: and as a fierce Protector of Buddhism (Tam-drin). In this sense, photos are worn as amulets.²⁹

The emphasis in the TAR however, is on portability since the fixing and display of these images is still a dangerous matter.³⁰ In the exile community the Dalai Lama image functions in a different vein as fixing and locating device that identifies Tibetans as different to outsiders (Indians and foreigners) and as insiders i.e. "Nangpas" to other Tibetan Buddhists. This attempt to locate culture through a political/religious icon is a vital part of Tibetanising spaces (and bodies) at a simple, cheap and democratic level, which parallels the more public architectural statements of Tibetan-ness constructed by the monastic institutions and the government-in-exile (see Chapter Three).

The Impact of History

²⁹Klieger 1989:331-332

³⁰Monks at Ganden in 1993 only revealed badges of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan flag worn under their outer robes when safely out of view of Chinese minders.

The fact that the Dalai Lama icon now presides over everything from the diners in a Dharamsala restaurant to the actions of Tibetan exile government officials results from many factors, but in the context of ideological battles fought in the visual field it is worth remembering that during the 1960s and '70s in Chinese-controlled Tibet, the image of Chairman Mao had been forcibly inserted into the homes and lives of Tibetans. The memory of these events is still alive amongst exiles in Dharamsala. Dhondup's (1978) account of the implementation of Cultural Revolutionary policy in a Tibetan commune is just one of many which report on the introduction of the "Four News" to replace the Four olds: old thoughts, old culture, old habits and old customs. "The four olds are the things Tibetan and four news are whatever the Chinese say"(Dhondup 1978:64). Between 1966-1969 the "old culture" was swiftly replaced with the new. "They came from house to house and forced every one to buy Mao's portraits and painted his sayings all over the walls"(Dhondup 1978:65). This activity was not restricted to private homes but extended to religious buildings³¹ as well as the streets and countryside. Norbu reports:

Before the sacred mantra "Om Mani Padme Hum" were curved (sic) on rocks; the Red Guards now inscribed quotations from Mao's red book. In short, Mao replaced the Buddha in every respect during the Cultural Revolution.³²

Chinese policy of this period also concentrated on the radical appropriation of ritual events which had previously been sanctified by the presence of the images of Buddhist deities (not Dalai Lamas) in Tibet, as we see in this propaganda image [Plate 28] where a photographic portrait of Mao is carried at the front of a harvest ceremony by cheery Tibetan labourers. The reaping of harvest had traditionally been marked by Tibetan Buddhists through the actions not of the workers but monks, who processed through fields to the homes of farmers where textual recitation and offerings in the (Buddhist) image chambers of their homes were performed to placate the spirits of the earth and creatures destroyed in the scalping of the land. Tibetan holidays then included:

one day for Ongkor festival, during which time the monks used to pray

³¹On a wall in Drepung Monastery (in 1993) the faded image of Mao was pointed out to me by an elderly Tibetan monk who had spent twenty years in jail for supporting Tibetan independence.

³²Norbu 1987:263

in the homes and fields for an auspicious new season. It is now called Lo-leg Dutchen (prosperous year festival) and we are made to carry Mao's portrait, sing Chinese songs and dance Chinese dances in expectation of a prosperous year.³³

No Tibetan exile would equate his use of the Dalai Lama icon with anything perpetrated by the Chinese, but the fact remains that it was the Chinese regime which first effectively manipulated the use of the political portrait in areas of Tibetan life that had previously been the domain of the 'anonymous' religious icon. The fact that the Cultural Revolutionary regime consciously employed the Mao image within a system designed to equate the Chairman with the incorruptible power of a deity and installed him in cultural space previously occupied, both for Tibetans and some Han Chinese by apotheosised Buddhist figures, demonstrates its recognition of the essential role of images in the process of controlling a vast populace. Additionally, Mao images, both photographic and painted, could be deployed in many places that Buddhist images could not, such as work places and public, secular sites. Through mechanical reproduction the Mao image became, in China, a more pervasive and identical type of image than anything preceding it and the same uniformity and ubiquity was attempted in Tibet.

Amongst the exiled Tibetans the Dalai Lama image now has a similar unifying function but this is achieved not through coercion but by the mnemonic, almost meditational force which is a fundamental feature of the refugee political culture. More to the point, the photographic Dalai Lama image has displaced that of Mao both in the TAR and the exile community. This constitutes a conscious attempt by Tibetans to regain a visible space which their knowledge of a bleak recent history tells them was colonised. Whilst the control of images in the TAR remains a potent issue, the attempt to exhibit the image of the Tibetan hero, the Dalai Lama, is a statement of defiance. It is the Dalai Lama image which has greatest potency in this situation, not the Buddha, for he parallels the power of Mao as semi-divine man whose life has become a political symbol.

However, it would be wrong to end this discussion leaving the impression that exile culture has been constructed entirely in opposition to the negative implications of history. Earlier we considered the sense of ritual

³³Dhondup 1978:30

and tradition as Benjaminian definers of authenticity. The guardians of Tibetan refugee culture have emphasised a number of reinvented traditions and rituals whilst establishing a neo-nation of "authentic" Tibetaness in defiance of the bowdlerised version presented by the People's Republic of China.

The embodiment of the exile story in a single individual is one device through which refugee Tibetans are utilising something along the lines of Appiah's notion of "scripted identity". He discusses the flexible relationship between individual and group identities.

Collective identities, in short, provide what we might call scripts: narratives that people can use in shaping their life plans and in telling their life stories. The story - my story - should cohere in the way appropriate by the standards made available in my culture to a person of my identity. In telling that story, how I fit into the wider story of various collectivities, is for most of us, important.³⁴

Amongst diasporic, colonised and marginalised peoples there is perhaps an even higher premium placed on the construction of life-scripts than in other communities by virtue of the fact that the experience of 'otherness' is a constantly reiterated experience when confronting a host culture and the memory of the past. For these groups one individual frequently embodies the communal story whilst simultaneously entering into the dialogic production of the "script", as is famously the case of Nelson Mandela in South Africa or as discussed below, Mahatma Gandhi. In the Tibetan refugee situation however the role of the image of this figure (in this case the Dalai Lama) is perhaps even more powerful than an emphasis on biographical narrative would suggest. This is due to the fact that, unlike Mandela or Gandhi, the Dalai Lama does not have to perform any specific acts to acquire heroic stature. Tibetan and Buddhist notions of kingship require him simply to be recognised as the reincarnate leader and to exist. Hence the static Dalai Lama icon, whether it be photographic or painted, is the appropriate vehicle for his depiction. However, that image does incorporate a "script" of the exile experience and since not every Tibetan refugee has direct access to the official "script" of the Dharamsala government, it is "depicted" identification (incorporating a narrative) which dominates the Tibetan diaspora.

³⁴Appiah1994 :159

However, it is not simply the representation of the Dalai Lama that carries the burden of depicting identity, but many types of images which are culturally perceived as Tibetan, (as discussed in following chapters). Just as Appiah (1994) has emphasised the role of language in the creation of group identities in multicultural situations,³⁵ so the continued use of "Tibetan" visual idioms is designed to secure a group cultural identity and thus even the image of an outsider (Mahatma Gandhi), can function as a "Tibetan" image carrying a pertinent narrative if presented in a visual form which is legible to Tibetans.

Mixed Metaphors: The Image of Mahatma Gandhi

Exiled image-makers have reinvented the Dalai Lama image using a modern technology of the host culture of India. They have also responded to new subject matter. A specific case in point is the adoption of Mahatma Gandhi into the Tibetan pantheon in the early period in exile. In 1970 his biography was translated into Tibetan by Lobsang Phuntsok Lhalungpa (an important figure in the Dharamsala education system) and entitled Jewel of Humanity Life of Mahatma Gandhi and Light of Truth His Teachings: Rendered in Tibetan Prose and Verse. The text was published in "Western" format with illustrations by the Tibetan artist known only as "Master Topgay" of the Tibetan Craft Community, Palampur, Himachal Pradesh. The frontispiece of the Gandhi biography states that it was published to commemorate the birth centenary of Gandhiji, on 2nd October, 1969. Nowak (1984:34) notes that in that year, the commemoration of the March 10th Uprising³⁵ by refugees from all over India, involved a public acknowledgement of the Mahatma.

In 1969, for example, demonstrators in Delhi marched from a Tibetan Buddhist temple to Rajghat, a pilgrimage site near the sacred Jamuna river where Gandhi was cremated, where they publicly "reaffirmed their faith in the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi."³⁶

The enthusiasm for Gandhi amongst the first wave of Tibetan refugees who were struggling to establish themselves in India, relates partly to the religious aspects of his teachings and his egalitarian and ecumenical spirit, but also to

³⁵The March Tenth Uprising refers to events immediately following the Dalai Lama's departure when Tibetans who feared for his life were involved in violent demonstrations at the Norbulingka.

³⁶Nowak 1984:34 quoting from the Tibetan Review, 1969:4

his political role and anti-imperial stance, a position that resonated positively in the minds of newly colonised Tibetans. Nowak's (1984:34) comment on the event: "Clearly the affirmation of national 'Self' is done with great concern for ethnic 'other'" is correct but too neutral. The Tibetans were not merely attempting to appease the Indian government with a public demonstration of respect for the father of the nation; many valued his passive resistance as a political tactic which they could empathetically incorporate into pre-existing Tibetan Buddhist value systems. Since leaving Tibet, the Dalai Lama had advocated pacifism in the face of Chinese aggression, but in the sixties and seventies Khampa guerrilla fighters, sponsored by the C.I.A., had led campaigns into Tibet. Meanwhile, the Tibetan Youth Congress were agitating for a more violent response to the impact of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet (1966-1976). Nowak reports that a number of young, militant Tibetans urged the use of violence in the defence of a just cause and explicitly rejected Gandhian *ahimsa*.³⁷

The 1969 commemoration of the March 10th Uprising with a visit to Gandhi's cremation site can thus be read as a ritual action designed to acknowledge the history of violent struggle in Tibet but also to provide a framework that would contain anger and prevent further bloodshed. The Dalai Lama's representatives sought to emphasise a pacifist approach and quell the dissent of the Tibetan Youth Congress. The Dalai Lama sought to follow the Mahatma's example and practise *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (holding on truth) though did not go so far as a non-violent civil disobedience campaign. The parallel between the Mahatma Gandhi, Christ and the Buddha had already been drawn by Lord Mountbatten, but I suggest that the Dalai Lama hoped to add himself to the list. As we saw above, the image of the living Dalai Lama appeared to have more potency for exiles than that of the Buddha. So the iconisation of Gandhi and the representation of the story of a man recently deceased has relevance.

The degree to which a non-Tibetan, Gandhi, could be absorbed into Tibetan exile culture can be gauged from the Tibetan language edition of his life. Its cover illustrates the major events from the Mahatma's life story and presents him not merely as a political hero but as a saint with a pertinent biography, as the Dalai Lama knew only too well. Major events in Gandhi's

³⁷Nowak 1984:133

life³⁸ are presented by Topgay [Plates 29 and 30] within the format of a jataka painting, that is to say with central iconic representation surrounded by a landscape filled with smaller scale scenes from a biography. This format had been used in Tibet to illustrate the life of the Buddha and both Indian and Tibetan Buddhist saints, such as Padmasambhava and Milarepa [Plate 31]. The compositional structure in this Gandhi jataka is not only reminiscent of a genre of Tibetan painting, but is cross-fertilised by influences from mass produced images of Hindu devotional subjects produced in India in the 1950s and '60s which refugees in India were aware of. The interweaving of two visual schemes in the Gandhi illustrations demonstrates a kind of post-colonial (and post-exilic) hybridity in which pre-existing structures are negotiated and given novel realignments. Below I attempt to demonstrate that the format of Topgay's work can be analysed in ways analogous to Pinney's (1992:41-43) discussion of an Indian oleograph, but that a conscious Tibetanisation is also evident which echoes the political resonance for Tibetans of Gandhi the man as described above.

Like the jataka thangkas, the front and back covers of The Life of Gandhi replicate the movement from birth to death, with his most youthful representation appearing in the top left of the front cover and his death at the bottom right of the back, illustrated by a scene where his corpse lies draped with the Indian flag. Although Gandhi is not represented emerging from his mother's womb (or from her side, as was the case for the Buddha), he is depicted as a child in Porbandar, Gujarat in 1869. The first three scenes at the top of the page all focus on women in Gandhi's life, his mother Putlibai, who biographers insist first instilled a sense of the importance of abstinence and purity in Gandhi, and Kasturba, the woman he married as a teenager in 1883, who supported his campaigns and eventually died imprisoned in the Aga Khan Palace near Poona following a "Quit India" demonstration. The two women become fused into one in the central image where the young Gandhi is shown prepared to face the trials of his life but still embraced by a sari clad figure, highly reminiscent of the *Bharat Mata* feminine iconisation of the nation begun by Rabindranath Tagore. This image is placed in a significant location for Tibetan viewers, as it rises above the head of the central image of the lotus-seated Gandhi in the position usually reserved for root gurus or a bodhisattva such as Avalokitesvara. Here the living man, Gandhi is acknowledged to have emanated from a woman but his saintly status is

³⁸Verified in Rothermund (1991) and Brown (1989)

implied by the lotus beneath his throne, a device used in Tibetan imagery to indicate a person of exceptional qualities and of exceptional birth. In fact a Tibetan historian suggested that Gandhi was seen by some Tibetans as an incarnation of Padmasambhava, the lotus born, who is credited as the founder of Buddhism in Tibet.³⁹ Like Gandhi, Padmasambhava was also not a Tibetan, but he exerted extraordinary powers and subdued powerful figures to establish the new order of Buddhism in Tibet.

On the second level of this cover, moving downwards as the chronology of events unfolds, we see Gandhi in three of his guises. Dress was a fundamental issue for Gandhi, both personally and politically in strategies for disrupting British Raj marketing of English textiles and European sartorial modes. Tarlo takes the point even further:

Gandhi, recognising that dress was a concrete symbol to which everybody could relate, portrayed his disillusionment with the British through his gradual shedding of Western garments. This was not merely a rejection of Western values, but also a reassertion of Indian values as morally superior, as well as being socially, politically and economically more appropriate to India.⁴⁰

On the left he appears in European style suit indicating his journey to England as a young man where he studied law and the attire he wore as a barrister in Johannesburg, South Africa. This image is contrasted with the *kurta* (coat)-clad and staff clutching Gandhi on the right, implying his shift towards a more Indianised dress. In the centre is the religious representation of Gandhi in *lotus-asana*, (seated position) hands in a *mudra* (religious hand gesture) of peaceful contemplation, bareheaded and dressed in the simple white *dhoti* (loin-cloth) and shawl so familiar from photographs of his later years. The thin wire glasses also hint that this is the mature Gandhi of post-*Satyagraha* and *ahimsa* campaigns that we should view within the aesthetic of *darshan*, (the ritualised viewing of religious images) for this is a man whose use of religious precepts for political ends should inspire veneration. We should also note that the central figure is presented as outside of the chronological sequence, as it is in Buddha jatakas.

On the lowest register two formative events in Gandhi's life in South

³⁹Tashi Tsering - personal communication Dharamsala 1995.

⁴⁰Tarlo 1992:426

Africa are arranged. On the left he appears in the Durban court room, (though we would hardly guess the location as the architectural features are highly Tibetanised) where in 1893 he was asked to remove his turban if he wanted to present his case. Gandhi wrote to the newspapers complaining of his mistreatment and subsequently acquired the racist epithet "Coolie Barrister". On the right an even more blatant demonstration of the colour bar in operation is displayed as Gandhi is ejected from the first class carriage of a Durban to Pretoria train by railway officials and passengers at Maritzburg. These experiences are cited in Gandhi biographies as lessons through which he learnt the iniquities of colonialism. By 1913 Gandhi's activities defending the rights of Indians in South Africa had led to his third period in jail and by 1914 he left the country for good. Thus the front cover of the publication moves geographically between India, England and South Africa, chronologically charting his evolution from childhood to adulthood and growing political awareness, but it also marks a number of other transitions which are placed in a dialectical relationship with one another. [Plates 32 and 33] There are three major strands of transformation indicated as he moves from child (home) to man of the world (down the page) and from the protective embrace of others, specifically women, to man of many parts and guises; his constructed identity through dress, indicated from left to right in the central section, is sealed by a central iconic representation. The theme of movement from innocence to (painful) experience follows a downward diagonal trajectory. These patterns are replicated on the reverse cover.

Just as the image of supporting feminine figure(s) could be read as the root image from which the young Gandhi emerged, the reverse cover of the Gandhi biography is topped by a scene that embodies crucial values in his later life, where he appears as stoic prisoner. Here a deliberate parallelism between back and front covers is drawn, since we are told that it was from his mother (also the "Mother of the Nation", and a representation of "Indian" values) that Gandhi had learnt to observe a simple and virtuous life. These lessons were brought even more sharply into focus as he spent many periods of his life in jail. In the central iconic image, Gandhi the self-sufficient guru of the ashrams is shown at his spinning wheel indicating a further reification of simplicity and purity. The implications of these values in terms of politics are demonstrated in the surrounding biographical scenes. The events covered follow his career back in India (1914) up until the assassination in 1948 a period of thirty-four years, in which Gandhi was involved in so many

campaigns that the artist has had to select certain types of events to function as emblems of his major achievements. Broadly speaking the sequence begins (top left) with the representation of the Mahatma as leader of the Indian people as he marches followed by flag-carrying supporters. Here he appears as leader of the "Quit India" movement (by 1920 he had been elected leader of the All India Home Rule League) in which non-cooperation was the dominant tactic employed, though when this led to violence at Chauri Chaura in 1922 Gandhi halted the campaign and personalised it by fasting for five days. This was to be a leitmotif of his mature career. In fact the dialectic of this image is constructed in an opposition between private and public with Gandhi as figurehead of mass movements on the left hand side, and Gandhi the more reclusive guru on the right. As we have observed, these two principles are not mutually exclusive but operated ideologically and practically for Gandhi in constructive tension. At top right Gandhi the founder of number of ashrams, (the Satyagraha Ashram was the first, established at Ahmedabad 1915) is shown in teaching mode, rather as the Buddha appears in jataka thangkas, surrounded by a number of disciples. The left hand image of the second level is the only one to indicate the battles which ensued during the "Quit India" movement though Gandhi himself, appropriately enough for he abhorred violence, is absent. He appears opposite, alone and in contemplative mode. Finally we see two scenes of nationhood as a crowd assembles outside the Delhi Lok Sabha buildings, the Indian flag raised above their ramparts indicating the achievement of Independence in 1947. On the right Gandhi as father of the nation is consulted by the new country's leaders before a backdrop of the flag. His corpse, wrapped in the flag and strewn with flowers, closes the story.

As stated above, the trajectories of time and experience are indicated on the reverse cover as on the obverse. On the left side a popular movement of the people ultimately leads to the construction of the new Indian nation, that is the cause, agitation against the British colonialists, channelled by Gandhi leads to the effect of Independence. On the right Gandhi's wisdom and teachings lead to his valorisation as father of the nation (if not leader) - but also, to his death at the hands of an extremist. The political narrative is underpinned by the diagonal imperative of the image structure that leads from (top left to bottom right) leader of the masses to assassination; innocence to experience. This contrapuntal theme demonstrates the moral core of the image and the implications to be drawn from the biography - that a virtuous

life lived for a cause may lead to privations and the ultimate sacrifice. In his discussion of a Sravana Kumar oleograph [Plate 34] Pinney reveals the way in which "mythic correspondences" run counter to "linear sequence" to construct an argument, though he goes on to add:

"Argument" is perhaps too overdetermined in this context, for what is intended is something akin to what Umberto Eco terms "syntagmatic concatenation imbued with argumentative *capacity*" (1982:38 emphasis mine). Such "visual rhetorical arguments" are produced by the "succession/opposition between frames" (ibid.), and their effect is to constrain the possible readings that might flow from the viewing of any of these images in isolation. Concatenation here allows *inferences* to be produced, certain readings to be sustained.⁴¹

Pinney's discussion of a Hindu image is concerned with the delineation of "a visual diagram of the karmic relationship between cause and effect" (1992:43), implying a move beyond temporality both for the image's protagonists and its viewers. The "inferences" described in the structure of the Gandhi image, whilst not directly pointing to karmic cycles, do contain a powerful argument concerning the implications of the actions of one individual employing knowledge informed by religious precept. Causality is personalised, though not without ethical and philosophical ramifications. The iconisation of Gandhi at the centre of these images illuminates a figure whose actions give him heroic stature beyond that of ordinary mortals and who thus is outside temporality. Like Tenzin Gyatso, Fourteenth Dalai Lama, his story speaks for a larger group as he embodies the embryonic nation of India.

The structural "argument" behind these Gandhi works is something utterly novel in Tibetan produced art and demonstrates, I believe, the impact of Hindu oleographs. Although pre-twentieth century jataka thangkas [Plate 35] incorporate sub-scenes which follow a sequential narrative and are interconnected by a zig-zag or clockwise compositional movement, there is little sense that each scene is chronologically connected nor of causality in the Buddha's actions. Landscape is utilised to confer the impression of one space in which these events take place but it is a kind of empty time-space continuum. The choice of tales from the Buddha's life appear to be randomly made from whichever text was available to the artist (in the case of the plate 34 above this was Aryashura's Jatakamala) and there is no conscious

⁴¹Pinney 1992:42

paralleling or dichotomies drawn by the location of events within the "frame". Unlike the Gandhi book covers there is little sense that a logic of events is to be determined in the jatakas nor that experience is as clearly transformative in the manner which Gandhi's life story demonstrates.

Perhaps this shift in visual representation reflects a change in the function of biography for refugees and Topgay's innovation is an inevitable consequence of a different medium of story-telling for Tibetans - the Western style book. In pre-1959 Tibet the jataka thangka was mainly placed in the service of the itinerant story teller (*manipa*) who recited the accompanying text whilst pointing to relevant images on his thangka [Plate 36]. In this oral/aural system the resultant meaning is formed through a dynamic relationship between word and image, mani-pa and audience. Topgay on the other hand is reconstructing a chronological account of a life as it appears within the pages of the book, to be read privately but also publicly in a classroom. Both systems are informed by a didactic intent but the new image format indicates a change in the experience of learning amongst refugees which no longer focuses so heavily on repetition and recitation of religious texts, but focuses instead on drawing lessons from the narratives of recent history. ⁴²

Tibetanising Elements

Topgay's Gandhi images reflect an epistemological shift in Tibetan culture under the influence of the host society. However, they are still heavily "Tibetanised" images to be read by Tibetan viewers and the artist has added to and then constrained the "possible readings" for that audience. This is achieved in a number of ways. Firstly the treatment of space is a deliberate fusion of the implications of Indian oleographs and some elements of pre-twentieth century Tibetan landscape styles. As in the Sravana Kumar example, Topgay's images are highly symmetrical with sharply subdivided, cartoon-strip style scenes but the overall space is unified by the use of landscape devices familiar from Tibetan paintings from the sixteenth century onwards in which tufted triangular forms stand for hills or mountains. When buildings or compounds need to be marked out diagonal lines cut into

⁴²Nowak (1984) confirms this. However, when working in the Tibetan Homes Foundation school in Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh (1984), I observed both the new "Western"/Indian style of education for refugee children, as well as mani-pas and monks continuing to ply their trades.

the space, not as Denwood suggests because 'The artist has perhaps tried too hard to incorporate perspective into each little scene, no doubt under western influence'⁴³ but because this is a "traditional" Tibetan system for treating space, especially popular in one of the few genres where landscape and architecture need to be amalgamated, the jataka image. In the seventeenth century Buddha jataka [see Plate 35] each time the Buddha appears in an interior setting the walls of the temple/monastic compound suffer from the same drastic foreshortening as Topgay's. Neither achieve the supposed rationality of Western one-point perspective, but why should they? Both artists and audience are well aware that unity of space, time and action are hardly possible or desirable for this kind of subject. Generally Topgay simply uses the outline of his buildings to contain a scene and then moves onto the next. If there *is* any creeping "Westernisation" in Topgay's work, it has been filtered through the prism of Indian images produced after Raja Ravi Verma's explorations of European realist oil painting and the impact of photography.

We have already noted the Tibetanisation of the architecture of the South African courtroom which includes a golden "pagoda" type roof as found on many Tibetan religious buildings (such as the Potala and Jokhang in Lhasa) as well as other familiar Tibetan architectural details. Interestingly the rest of the buildings are rather generic and apparently brick built. This appears to propose an inversion of Denwood's discussion of "local colour" in a biographical painting by a Tibetan artist working in Dolpo, Nepal in the 1970s.

...if the story takes place in Tibet the buildings though simplified will be recognisably Tibetan; if in India, they will be recognisably 'foreign' (which usually means copied at some remove from a Chinese or occasionally Nepalese model).⁴⁴

In Topgay's work the architecture surrounding the events of Gandhi's life in India is rendered in a generally neutral modernist box manner, with the exception of the Lutyens architecture of New Delhi on the reverse, but an official building in "foreign" parts is represented by Tibetan architecture. What does this say about the Tibetan exile mentality? That things Tibetan have become the global whilst things Indian are the local? Tibetan architecture appears to be sufficiently exotic to refugees to function visually as

⁴³Denwood 1979:176-177

⁴⁴Denwood 1979:176

a sign for the strangeness of South Africa, just as Denwood argues Chinese or Nepalese types used to serve as indicators of Indianness.

However, perhaps the most significant facet of these works is the manner in which Gandhi becomes a Tibetan icon or saint. In the central image of the front cover he is seated and enthroned in a style and position reminiscent of the Buddha. The throne and tree canopy is a design popular in Tibetan painting from at least the fourteenth century [Plate 37] and the same type of throne is used in twentieth century Tibetan paintings of high ranking Rinpoches (reincarnate teachers). Mahatma Gandhi would of course not be the first person born outside the Tibetan plateau to become part of a Tibetan canon of images; one thinks immediately of Padmasambhava and Atisha, for example. However M.K. Gandhi is the first non-Tibetan in the twentieth century to gain this accolade.

Interestingly on Topgay's reverse cover the focal figure of Gandhi clothed in his familiar 'ascetic' attire and glasses (that is familiar as a result of photography, even to those who never saw him in the flesh) is in fact less reminiscent of the Buddha than it is of one of the most popular Tibetan saints, Milarepa, who is also traditionally thinly clad in white, (the "cotton-clad" Milarepa) indicating his distanciation from materialistic, communal life but the depiction of whose deeds remind the audience of his sometimes wickedly effective "magical" powers. [Plate 38] His life story, recounted in the Hundred Songs of Milarepa are extremely well known to Tibetans and, like Gandhi's, provide tuition and inspiration. In painting and sculpture Milarepa is also differentiated from other figures through his more relaxed, asymmetrical posture (often with hand to ear indicating his love of poetry and song) just as Gandhi is shown in half-profile by Topgay, seated at his spinning wheel.

Topgay's book covers are an extraordinary example of what Nowak (1984) calls refugee creative sense making. An outsider becomes an insider (Nangpa) as a result of his biography which is read as an inspirational example to be assimilated into Tibetan refugee life. Tibetans based in India have benefited from such an example in political terms but here a Tibetan artist has also benefited from the assimilation of Indian visual structures. The addition of lessons drawn from Indian/Hindu visual codes has led to a more rhetorical treatment of space than had been seen before in Tibetan

biographical painting, where space and time were conceived in a meandering, non-structured way. The subplot of Topgay's work as we have seen implies that innocence may lead to painful experience but that the journey is worth travelling if the destination is achieved. Parallels are undoubtedly to be drawn with the Dalai Lama, who learnt much from the Mahatma's example. The question remains whether his journey (and dream of nationhood) will prove as fruitful.

Conclusion

At the close of Red Star over Tibet, the eminent Tibetan historian Dawa Norbu compared the evolution of Tibetan Buddhism with the modernisation of Japan:

Both processes involved, through entirely different fields, enormous degrees of *rationalisation* of means to given ends. They involve necessarily some thinking and its translation into concrete products: monasteries or machines, meditation techniques or medicine, philosophical treatise or technology, *thangka* paintings or photography, merit-saving activity (*dgewa*) or economic investment etc.⁴⁵

In this chapter we have seen that the "rationalisation" which is required for the conditions of exile does not necessarily lead to Norbu's strict binary oppositions. It is not simply a matter of "treatise or technology" or of "thangka painting or photography" but of plurality of media and modes of expression. Just as it is not either the Dalai Lama or Mahatma Gandhi, but both, should they prove useful. This is because (as we observed in the discussion of the iconised Dalai Lama), it is no longer a matter of either religion or politics, as some outsiders would have us believe was the dialectic of pre-1959 Tibet, but of a fusion of the two.

⁴⁵Norbu, 1981:291

Chapter Three: Dharamsala Debates about Style

John Huntington began his 1968 thesis with a complaint, "One problem facing the Tibetan art historian is the lack of a stylistic study" (1968:xxv), and continued with a detailed attempt to redress this omission in an examination of an early "regional" school of Tibetan painting, from Guge in Western Tibet. Huntington's work is extremely valuable due to the lack of similar studies,¹ and as a counterpoint to the zeal for iconography amongst Euro-American scholars who work on Tibetan material. Huntington notes:

Iconography is one area of investigation that is thought to be of primary importance in the West and has led to the startlingly complicated studies that have been done regarding Tibetan art. Some of these, such as Guiseppe Tucci's *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, (Rome, 1949) are monuments to the academic discipline.²

Huntington's contribution to the study of Tibetan art was to move one stage on and to take an image with the same iconographic features as a template against which stylistic variations could be deduced. The criteria for his study were exceptional (at the time) as he hoped to acknowledge two means of contextualisation: "First, frescoes, or wall paintings in situ or from documented removals, and second, a well documented corpus of paintings illustrated in situ among the users, or better yet, the painters." (1968:13) In the former category Huntington was successful and his sense of the importance of original locations leads to a convincing definition of a regional school. However, though he identifies the potential significance of the makers of Tibetan images for stylistic research, his reluctance to work in the Himalayas and reliance on photographs taken by others, leads to this admission: "Needless to say, this latter category is almost unused as only four illustrations of painters at work show the style of the painting clearly enough to be of any value." (1968:13) Thus Tibetan artists remained the unknown quantity of so much Orientalist and colonialist art history.

David and Janice Jackson on the other hand, researching among the exile Tibetan community in the early 1980s, realised that a crucially important source of information was available to them - a group of artists who had

¹The conference I organised in 1994 with Jane Singer and Philip Denwood called "Towards a Definition of Style: The Arts of Tibet" (and publication of the same name), was an attempt to tackle the problem of style on more than a piecemeal basis.

²Huntington 1968:xxiii

become refugees after 1959 who were living in the relatively accessible countries of India and Nepal. Their motivation also arose from the experience of being beguiled by objects.

Anyone examining even a small number of these fine old scroll paintings (thang ka) cannot help being impressed by the exquisite materials and consummate skill that went into their creation. Just what these materials were and how they were applied were questions that attracted our interest years ago, when as college students we first came into contact with Tibetan art. But when we tried to learn more we could not get very far because the subject had not then been studied in much detail by Westerners. Therefore we decided to get closer to the source and to learn what we could from the living painters of Tibet.³ (My emphasis)

The Jacksons interviewed and observed the work of nineteen such painters for their study Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials but unfortunately, as their title implies, they focused entirely on the manner of production of images and references to other matters, such as style, generally appear only in brief footnotes.⁴ This, no doubt reflects a desire to present exile art as the seamless continuation of a "traditional" culture, for as they say:

When we began this study eleven years ago we thought that we were recording and preserving a dying tradition. Now however, it seems clear that thangka painting on the whole is in no danger of becoming extinct. Although traditional art is today moribund in Tibet proper, it is flourishing in the Tibetan settlements of South Asia on a scale that nobody could have predicted two decades ago. Some of the younger painters are even showing promise one day reaching the high levels attained by the early masters.⁵

The Jacksons suggest that future researchers should look in detail at the different stylistic traditions "preserved" in the exile community but few have attempted the task.⁶ However, to date no one has specifically examined the uses of style in exile and academics have failed to ask contemporary Tibetan

³Jackson and Jackson 1984:1

⁴Though not explicit in the main text, the Jacksons admit in a footnote that their account concerns "just one major tradition", the Menri and that "detailed studies of such traditions as the Karma Gardri (Karma sgar bris), the New Menri (smanris gsar ma) of Kham and the regional styles of Amdo and Shigatse would make welcome additions to current knowledge of Tibetan painting"(1984:3). The privileging of the Menri style amongst Tibetans in Dharamsala is discussed by me in Chapter Four.

⁵Jackson and Jackson 1984:3

⁶The Italian art historian Erberto Lobue has made a similar request and his publications go some way towards meeting the challenge. See Lobue 1978, 1981, 1983 and 1995.

artists how style is defined or how they perceive the work which they execute. Due to the common assumption in Western literature that Tibetan art is predominantly religious and "traditional", the question of Tibetan accounts of style has been under-researched and underplayed. Even Huntington essentialises the nature of Tibetan culture stating that:

... the Tibetan is principally concerned with those properties of the painting that serve him in the process of meditation. Fundamentally, the thang-ka is a mirror of the inner self of the observer. It is in an attitude of introspective contemplation searching for self and transcendental knowledge that the devout Tibetan examines the painting. His examination is not concerned with style, but only with content.⁷

To which one might reasonably reply - but why then are there any differences in Tibetan painting? If an image is simply required to be efficacious in a religious sense, why are not all Tibetan paintings the same? Is it really true that Tibetans have not been concerned with style?

David Jackson's recent publication A History of Tibetan Painting goes some way to redressing the balance in providing historical sources for Tibetan artists and their styles but he mentions only a handful of twentieth century painters in a chapter on "Later Styles" and comments that he will "leave it to others to portray in more detail the still flourishing branches of the ancient tree of Tibetan painting" (1995:361). In a foot note (1995:368) it becomes clear that Jackson expects future studies to provide evidence of artistic "pedigrees" through reference to "conservative" traditions dating back at least to the eighteenth century.

This thesis in some ways responds to Jackson's demands, by considering the work of recent painters, though I cannot concur with the assumption that all painting produced by contemporary Tibetan artists is inevitably part of a traditional lineage. The following chapters do provide some evidence of such a tendency but the matter has been complicated by the experience of exile. What in Western art historical terms would be deemed a relatively simple issue, the question of style, has been a matter of contention amongst Tibetan artists and their audience. In order to avoid some of the pitfalls of earlier literature, in this study the producers of thangkhas have been given as much prominence as their

⁷Huntington 1968:xxi

products and have been questioned about their works *in situ*.. The capital-in-exile in Dharamsala provides an illustration of the degree to which Tibetans themselves are discussing the uses of tradition and the appropriateness of historical styles for new conditions.

The Debate of "The Three Kings"

In Tibetan refugee culture, style is most definitely of consequence, but not for connoisseurship reasons. I suggest that this is due to two major factors. Firstly, it is because artists are conscious of the history of styles in the Tibet they have been forced to abandon and are therefore making decisions about how to put that heritage into action either in a conservative and preservative manner or in radical and reinvented forms. (This contrast is established in the following chapters.) Secondly, style has resonance as part of a politics of self-representation. Just as there may be no such thing as an "innocent eye", there is no innocent brush. The images created by refugee painters inscribe a recent political history through their adoption or rejection of certain styles. One particular style has been read as ideologically loaded (and associated with China) whilst another is construed as the appropriate form for the projection of exile Tibetan cultural identity.

This issue was powerfully illustrated by a debate which ensued in Dharamsala in the late 1970s, over an image of the Three Early Kings of Tibetan Buddhism. The debate was first presented to me in 1991 by the artist Migmar Tsering, who was working in Ladakh, well away from the more controlled atmosphere of Dharamsala, where I had not heard it mentioned.⁸ Tsering had been trained in Dharamsala by Gonpo at the Tibetan Children's Village art school but left in 1980 to teach painting in the refugee school in Choglamsar, Ladakh. During the course of a discussion about style, he presented two photographs showing: a photo-realist portrayal of three figures and a more conventional or "traditional" (in Tibetan terms) version of the same subject[Plate 39]. The subject was the three Buddhist "kings" of Tibet, Songsten Gampo, Trisong Detsen and Tri Ralpachen, constituting the so-called Yarlung dynasty.⁹ As far as I can establish, there are not a huge number of precedents for this subject from pre-1959 Tibet, though at least one

⁸Interview with Migmar Tsering, Choglamsar, 1991.

⁹Their regnal periods are 627-649 A.D., 755-799 A.D. and 815-838 A.D., respectively

probably eighteenth century example appears in Lauf (1979)¹⁰[Plate 40]. Illustrations of each of the kings do appear separately in iconographic manuals such as the Bhadrakalpika-Sutra and the Astasahasrika Pantheon,¹¹ [Plate 41] but the fusion of the three in one image is rare. When it does occur it may owe something to the Gelukpa preference for the format of three powerful bodhisattvas: Vajrapani, Avalokitesvara and Manjushri.¹² This comparison is further emphasised with reference to Lauf's example, for in it Tri Ralpachen is shown with *avajra* and Trisong Detsen with a text, attributes of Vajrapani and Manjushri respectively.¹³ Since the versions we are discussing were commissioned by a Gelukpa patron, this parallel may be significant.

Migmar Tsering informed me that Rigzin Peljor had been commissioned to paint a new "Three Kings" following complaints about the earlier photorealistic image. Peljor (b.1933-d.1991) had been a Junior State artist in Tibet prior to his departure for Dharamsala and was therefore one of the most important artists of the "precious" generation then living in exile.¹⁴ He was also an artist with a lineage and a traditional style which was considered appropriate for high profile public commissions. (see Chapter Four) It is the Peljor version of the "Three Kings" which now hangs in the main assembly hall (*Tsuglhakhang*) of the Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala.

The Namgyal Monastery and Assembly Hall

¹⁰Lauf's (1979:94) "Three Kings" are "Gemälde aus dem Kloster sTag-tshang dpal-phug, ca. 18. Jahrhundert."

¹¹Lokesh Chandra's *Buddhist Iconography* includes copies of the plates for both these texts. Number 1033 of the Bhadrakalpika shows Songsten. In the Astasahasrika, number 1568 is Trisong and number 1570 Tri Ralpachen. They appear one after the other later in the same text (numbers 1888, 1890 and 1891), but never combined in a single image. However, this kind of manual may well have been a source for artists in the past and was available to artists in Dharamsala, where I observed Chandra's edition in use during the course of my research.

¹²Rhie and Thurman 1991:68: "In the Geluk order in particular,.... Vajrapani is often grouped with Avalokitesvara and Manjushri. The three celestial Bodhisattvas are thought of as archangelic protectors, representing the power (Vajrapani), compassion (Avalokitesvara) and wisdom (Manjushri) of all the Buddhas of past, present and future".

¹³They appear with these symbols in the iconographic manuals (as above), though Songsten Gampo is usually shown making the earth touching gesture, whereas in the Lauf example he holds a bowl and gem.

¹⁴Tsering's introduction (1987:no page numbers) states that "Not only was he a *dbu-chun*, the Junior State Artists in Lhasa before 1959, he actually shouldered all the responsibility of a *dbu-chen* in place of his late father, the famous *dbu-chen*, Las-mtshan-pa Bsod-nams rin-chen, who was the most senior artist in Lhasa of his day. Rig-'dzin dpal-'byor traced his artistic lineage back to his ancestor La-mo kun-dga' who was employed at the court of the regent Sans-rgyas rgya-mtsho (1635-1705)".

Namgyal Dratsang is the reconstruction in exile of a Gelukpa monastic community founded in the sixteenth century by the Third Dalai Lama and originally housed in the Potala in Lhasa. In Tibet, the Potala Palace contained the offices and assembly halls used for the execution of religious and state power, as well as providing a residence for the Dalai Lama for at least half the year. In exile, there has been some attempt to separate the government from the religious institutions, with the Dalai Lama's home, the Namgyal monastery and its main assembly hall adjacent to one another in Macleod Ganj, whilst government buildings were sited at some distance away in Gangchen Kyishong. However, both the government and monastic buildings are used to encourage solidarity amongst the exiles and the Namgyal monastery is no exception. According to Von Furer-Haimendorf the new monastery was, from its inception, "characterised by its catholicity, which allows prayers and rites of all Tibetan sects to take place within its walls". (1990:61) The Dalai Lama himself promoted the notion of an ecumenical space and suggested that it should be built "in a modern idiom". (Avedon 1984:95) The resulting building, a two storey, concrete construction with no distinctively Tibetan features externally, is of the post-Corbusier Indian modernist style [Plate 42]. Piloti support covered walkways around the assembly chamber allowing devotees to circumambulate. The Dalai Lama's belief that this "modern idiom" would emphasise the accessibility of the space appears to have been successful for the building is utilised by all members of the exile community, irrespective of sectarian and regional affiliations, particularly on days when the Dalai Lama appears as leader of the nation, uniting all refugees.¹⁵ It is also one of the primary refugee sites visited by an external audience of devotees and tourists from all over India and the wider world.

Inside the Tsuglhakhang are three large scale sculpted images, which again are relatively accessible to all Tibetans, that is to say, they do not represent bodhisattvas and other religious figures favoured by the Gelukpas alone. The Buddha, Padmasambhava and Avalokitesvara are situated at the back of the assembly chamber, behind the throne used by the Dalai Lama when he addresses the congregants. Though the images were sculpted in

¹⁵In 1995, for example, the Dalai Lama's return to Dharamsala was marked by dancing under the Tibetan flag in front of the Tsuglhakhang. Dancers representing different regions of the homeland performed in turn.

exile, the Avalokitesvara has special status as cultural repository, for it incorporates the head of the Lhasa Jokhang Avalokitesvara which was removed during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet.¹⁶

Alongside these three-dimensional figures, is the painted "Three Kings". It hangs above the entrance to the area which is circumambulated by Tibetans (and non-Tibetan visitors) when viewing the sculpted images and is thus behind them after entry. It occupies the position historically reserved for wrathful, protective deities. (The liminal spaces of entry points to assembly chambers were traditionally marked in Tibet by guardian kings of the four quarters on the exterior and wrathful, usually sect-specific protectors in the interior.¹⁷) Due to the Dalai Lama's desire to avoid sectarianism a single Gelukpa wrathful deity has not been selected for the space. Instead, three major historical figures are presented as protectors of the faith. Although a triumvirate of deities is (as I have suggested above) a Gelukpa format, the Three Kings is an example of a "invented" traditional combination which is more suitable for the exiles as a group. The three kings were the rulers of what they now consider to have been the first Tibetan Buddhist nation, with its capital in the Yarlung Valley. Their significance for the neo-nation in exile is demonstrated by a Dharamsala-produced postcard of the rejected "realist" image of the three kings. The kings are described as "These three great Emperors" who are "specially revered and loved by the Tibetans for the tremendous contribution they made to spread the teachings of the Buddha as well as to unify and strengthen the country".¹⁸ Thus the subject and placing of the three kings in the reconstructed Tsuglhakhang can be construed as a statement of neo-nationhood. Given the prominence of its position, the "Three Kings" image iterates the significance of the debate about how the image should be painted, that is to say, in which style.

Rigzin Peljor and the Three Kings

¹⁶"Pious Tibetans managed to smuggle it via Nepal to Dharamsala where it was incorporated into a newly sculptured image and ultimately erected in the Central Cathedral. The new image, which was consecrated in 1970, is made of silver and has eleven faces and a thousand hands and eyes". Von Furer-Haimendorf 1990:61

¹⁷See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. de 1956

¹⁸Postcards provided the only tangible proof of the existence of the realist image in Dharamsala in 1992, where they were on sale in the bazaar.

Why was the Peljor version deemed more appropriate for an official commission in the Dalai Lama's own monastery? Peljor's model for his work could easily have been of the kind illustrated by Lauf, and/or the iconographic manuals we mentioned earlier. His figures are highly regularised with little in the way of distinguishing marks. Dress, drapery, crowns and thrones are all almost identical with the only hint of variation appearing in the scale of the figures. As the first Buddhist king of Tibet, Songtsen Gampo appears the larger and greater of the three (as is the case in the Lauf thangka). Thus the image is broadly traditional and no attempts at perspective, recession or modelling are made. More importantly, Peljor's "Three Kings" is executed in the Menri style, which as I suggest below, (Chapter 4) has become the "house style" of the Dharamsala regime. Noticeably Menri elements in this composition are the relatively densely packed nature of the piece with figures filling most of the space (as compared to the Karma Gardri style in which large areas of open space are usually left around the central figures) and the colour range which is relatively strong with plenty of turquoise blue in the background. (Karma Gardri backgrounds are usually paler with large amounts of green.)

The appropriateness of this image and its style is confirmed by the status of the artist. Rigzin Peljor joined the exiles in the early 1980s and soon became an important figure in the Dharamsala community, teaching thangka painting at the Centre for Tibetan Arts and Crafts. His "precious" status is demonstrated by a lineage which dates back to the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama when his ancestor, Lamo Kunga, had been one of those summoned to work on the Potala Palace in 1645 and at the Great Fifth's "Marvellous Thangka Painting School". Peljor continued this family tradition in Lhasa by working on projects for "various departments and organisations of the Government of Independent Tibet, and in reward for his work at the Norbu Lingka Palace, he earned the rank of Junior State Artist (U-Chung)".¹⁹ During the late 1950s Peljor was imprisoned for a time but was later released and allowed to work on renovations of the Potala, Norbulingka and Jokhang during the relaxation policy which followed the Cultural Revolution. But as a result of his journey to Dharamsala, ("to receive the blessings of the Dalai Lama") he stayed on in India and "painted numerous much needed Thangkas" (Thonden 1991:n.p.) for the Dalai Lama. Peljor became a crucial figure in the cultural reconstruction project inspired and implemented by

¹⁹Thonden1991 from the introduction to the artist's manual (no page numbers).

Tenzin Gyatso for which these thangkas were so essential. In 1987 his role as a teacher to the younger generation led to the publication of a manual providing details of Menri style painting entitled Illustrations and Explanations of Buddhist Iconography and Iconometry according to the Sman-rnying School of Central Tibet.²⁰ Just before his death he had been working on another publication, A Mirror of Buddhist Iconography,²¹ which the Centre for Tibetan Arts and Crafts rapidly published posthumously to ensure that his knowledge was available to the next generation of artists in Dharamsala. As well as the Tsuglhakhang "Three Kings", a number of Peljor's paintings retain high status in the exile art world, since they are housed in the Dalai Lama's private residence.

Jampa Tseten and the Three Kings

But what became of the work and career of an artist who actually reached Dharamsala well before Rigzin Peljor and is said to have been "a personal friend" of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama both in Lhasa and in exile?²² Tsering (1987) records that Jampa Tseten was the only State thangka painter who managed to leave Tibet immediately after the 1959. He was also the first to work with the Dalai Lama on the construction of new religious buildings in Dharamsala and is the artist behind the earlier, rejected version of the "Three Kings".

Jampa's "Three Kings" [Plate 43] is superficially similar to that of Peljor in that it is highly symmetrical and gives the figure of Songtsen Gampo due prominence, though with a realist device (a higher throne) rather than different proportions. Jampa's three figures are not radically unlike it terms of physiognomy or posture, but they are more consciously differentiated by dress than Peljor's kings. They each wear the wrapped turban style crown which appears in all other representations, though Songtsen Gampo's is topped with a protruding head of the Buddha, as is the case in classical iconography of bodhisattvas like Maitreya. But in all other respects Jampa's image is radically different. His treatment of space is not fully perspectival but is constructed in terms of layers of depth, creating a sense of recession

²⁰"Zi-khro rab-'byams rgyal-ba'i gzugs-sku las cha-tsad glu-dbyangs sgro-pa" Second edition published Dharamsala 1987

²¹"bur-sku'i phyag-tsad rgyal-ba-'i sku-brynyan legs-par blta-ba'i me-long" - published Dharamsala 1991

²²This information was passed to me by Tashi Tsering- interview, Dharamsala, 1992.

from the offering table in the foreground to snow-covered Himalayan peaks in the background. Each of the levels is overlaid in a manner which is readable as a convincing place or space. The thrones on which the three kings are seated are modelled with shadow, suggesting a light source from the left of the frame. Though the implications of this are not comprehensively explored, the faces, bodies and drapery of the three figures are also cast in this light. Offering vessels on the table in the foreground are also moulded with chiaroscuro and attain a convincing three-dimensionality. The only elements which do not conform to a Western notion of depicted space are the two hovering images of Padmasambhava and Tsongkhapa, which appear above and to the right and left (respectively) of the main figures. Though the methods by which this composition are achieved are not "traditionally" Tibetan, the details undoubtedly are - no object, skull bowl, throne, robe or jewel falls outside the familiar range of accoutrements for religious or royal characters. Lest we were in any doubt as to the empathetic response which the artist requires of his viewers, four flags with the snow lion, emblem of Tibetan power and nationalism, provide a backdrop. (The snow lion was one of the elements included in the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's design for the Tibetan flag.) There can be little doubt that Jampa's "three great Emperors ... revered and loved by the Tibetans" is a nationalist piece.

However, Tashi Tsering claimed that Jampa's version of the "Three kings of the rebirth of Tibetan culture" was considered too Sinicised by the exile audience.²³ The Peljor version was commissioned because Jampa's work had been deemed too "realistic", and therefore un-Tibetan - more pertinently, the realism employed was associated with Socialist Realism and therefore with the Peoples Republic of China. The assumption that all things "realist" in the visual arts derive from China, and are designed to obliterate styles and techniques which could be perceived as religious and/or Tibetan, is understandable considering the history of enforced Sino-Soviet Realism during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet. However, prior to the 1950s, realism was not only imported to Tibet from China, (as we saw in Chapter Two, the camera had already made an appearance there) nor need its use be interpreted as an indication of a transparent and unproblematised relationship between style and Maoist ideology.

²³Tsering interview, Dharamsala, 1992.

In Lhasa, Jampa Tseten had trained alongside Rigzin Peljor with the latter's father, Sonam Rinchen, who held the title of most Senior State Artist, and so he must undoubtedly have been well versed in traditional painting styles. However, in the early nineteen fifties, before the Dalai Lama's departure to India, Jampa Tseten had completed highly realistic wall paintings, including figures from the Lhasa government of the 1940s and a portrait of Hugh Richardson, on the walls of the reception chamber of the fourteenth Dalai Lama's Palace, the Traktrak Migyur in the Norbulingka [Plate 44]. Lobue discusses the strange phenomenon of the realist painting thus:

Here the painter departed from traditional iconography and used as his model not the image of the Dalai Lama as portrayed in the 20th century Prajnaparamita mentioned above, (xylographed in Shol sometime between 1935 and 1959) but an actual photograph of him as a young man. This may be an isolated example, due to the originality of the artist (one wonders of this may not be a work by the famous dGe-'dun-'chos'phel), but it is conceivable that photographs of Tibetan lamas and dignitaries taken and printed by Western travellers in Tibet were occasionally used for reference by artists commissioned to paint portraits of important lamas.²⁴

Lobue's assumption that artists must have acquired photographs from Western sources has already been denied by the evidence I presented in Chapter Two, where photographic equipment has been shown to have been in use amongst Tibetans, both in India and Tibet, well before 1959. Lobue's further suggestion that the artist responsible for the Traktrak Migyur painting must have been Gedun Chompel is reasonable given that Chompel is the only non-traditional twentieth century Tibetan artist about whom anything has been published²⁵ and his radicalism in a number of fields is well known amongst scholars of Tibetan culture. (At the end of this chapter I discuss a painting which I identify for the first time as the work of Chompel. It is also avant-garde in Tibetan terms but in a very different way to the realist style of Tseten.) But it was, in fact, Chompel's student, Jampa Tseten, who painted the first realist portrait of a Dalai Lama at the Traktrak Migyur. The artist was living in Dharamsala in 1983 when Stoddard interviewed him for her study of Chompel. Her brief biography of the painter runs as follows:

²⁴Lobue 1990:187

²⁵See Stoddard(Karmay) references below.

Peintre portraitiste, élève de G.C. Auteur de la fresque célèbre du Norbulingka ... et récemment d'un très grand thangka des trois rois de la dynastie de Yarlung.²⁶

This Yarlung dynasty painting is undoubtedly the one rejected for display in the Namgyal assembly hall.

Tseten's photo-realist portraits of eminent religious figures were apparently popular amongst the Lhasa elite and fifty years later continue to have wide currency in reproduction in the T.A.R. and other parts of the Himalayas apart from Dharamsala.²⁷ His portrait of the Tenth Panchen Lama [Plate 45] demonstrates just how convincing and effective his command of the realist mode was, with the modelled and animated visage of the Panchen distinctly recognisable and the chiaroscuro treatment of drapery folds on his arms and legs not utterly dissimilar to post-Renaissance images from Europe. Even when used to depict an important religious subject, some Tibetans had no problem with Jampa Tseten's style.

So why was his style rejected in Dharamsala? The Dharamsala response can be explained, in part, by the fact of Tseten's visit to China. Norbu reports that:

Beginning with the Dalai Lama's previous court painter Amdo Champa, quite a number of young Tibetans with artistic talents were trained in the fifties, sixties and seventies in art schools in Beijing and other parts of China.²⁸

He goes on to claim that "essentially these artists were to be used as propagandists". Norbu's comments are derived from the recent politics of the exile situation in which any involvement with China is viewed as suspect and, as we have suggested, deviation from "traditional" styles can imply a kind of cultural treachery. But "Amdo" Jampa's personal history is more complex than Norbu asserts. Prior to 1959, the fact that an artist had studied in Beijing was not taken by the Dalai Lama to indicate a treacherous artistic bent. The Traktrak Migyur commission indicates that approval for a new style

²⁶Stoddard 1985:377

²⁷Copies of his portrait of the Tenth Panchen Lama are sold everywhere from the bazaar in Leh, Ladakh (1995) to the Barkhor in Lhasa (1993) and the same work has been published in Tibetan Contemporary Art (Lhasa, 1991). See Chapter Seven.

²⁸Norbu 1993:3

of painting came from the top. The realist sections of the Dalai Lama's reception chamber appear just behind his throne (on the left and right hand walls) and are hardly concealed from view. Since this is the room utilised for important public meetings - not a private chamber of the house, can we not affirm that the Fourteenth Dalai Lama embraced Tibetan photo-realism, as he had attempted to embrace the cincamera himself? Although Jampa Tseten may have learnt how to paint in a realist style in Beijing and may have been exposed to its "Socialist" form there, I would suggest that it was photography and the impact of his Tibetan teacher, Chompel, which were of greatest influence. The rejection of his "Three Kings" is therefore rather unjust for Jampa Tseten did not become a Socialist Realist painter in China nor was he the first to experiment with new styles. The Dharamsala verdict on his work tells us more about the politics of painting there than anything else. Rigzin Peljor's image was given preference because he painted in a style that was given official approval (see Chapter Four).

Gedun Chompel

The fact that some exceptional (and privileged) Tibetans had access to ideas from Europe and other parts of Asia, as well as from China, is illustrated by the case of Gedun Chompel (b.1905-d.1951), the poet, scholar, revolutionary and painter who (as we saw in Chapter One)

spent twelve years in India, which put him in contact not only with Western scholars and the scientific approach but also the realities and ideals of twentieth century political turmoil. ²⁹

Chompel provides a useful reminder that contra Snellgrove and Richardson (see Chapter One) "outside influences" did come to bear on image production, even in pre-1959 Tibet. Rahul Sankrityayan met Chompel in Tibet in 1934 and wrote: "Peu de gens le savaient, tandis que sa renommée de peintre était grande. Ayant étudié et maîtrisé le peinture traditionnelle, il apprit vite le style nouveau." (Stoddard 1985:168) Unfortunately the Indian scholar does not specify what this new style was. Though few of his works survive, the pages from Chompel's 1938 sketchbook (i.e. after he had visited India) are covered with free flowing line drawings which are a radical departure from any type of illustration produced prior to this date in Tibet [Plates 46 and 47].

²⁹Karmay 1980:145

Karmay published these drawings alongside her analysis of Chompel's artistic evolution through reference to the sites which he is known to have visited and the individuals he met when he left Tibet. "In India he was open to a wide variety of artistic influences from the Buddhas of Mathura and the cave painting of Ajanta to the luminous mystical Himalayan watercolours painted by Nicholas Roerich, and even to Russian icons." (Karmay 1980:148) and she concludes that his work "seems inspired both by traditional Tibetan painting and a keen observation of the human figure." (1980:148) However, the sketchbook drawings do not reflect any "traditional" Tibetan styles and though Chompel may well have studied the human form, the resulting images are hardly naturalist studies from a life-class. I believe they are indebted to the abstraction from reality of European and Indian modernism. Karmay records the fact that Chompel met Rabindranath Tagore, and that he invited him to teach Tibetan, at Santiniketan (an offer Chompel refused) but she fails to mention the Santiniketan artists and their modernist experiments.

Two major forces drove the development of the art produced at this highly important Indian institution, one coming from the West in the form of European modernisms, such as Cubism and Expressionism - the other from further East in the guise of Japanese aesthetics. Okakura Kakuzo, a Japanese art theorist visited India under the guidance of Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) in 1902 and two other Japanese artists had made an impact on Calcutta art circles in 1903 (Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunso). In the same year Okakura published a pamphlet in Calcutta entitled The Ideals of the East with Special Reference to the Art of Japan which was taken up by the Calcutta elite as further evidence of a pan-Asian aesthetic.³⁰ Euro-modernism's emphasis on self-expression coupled with ideas borrowed from Japanese paintings and calligraphy which highlighted the importance of deep concentration on the subject within the mind of the artist, rather than on empirical observation of the natural world, led many artists in Santiniketan and Calcutta further and further away from realism. Nandalal Bose (who headed the art school in Santiniketan) "doubted the virtues of "similitude" and quantification (*pramanani*) that his master had taught him, and so developed alternative modes of composition and perspectivism" (Bilimoria 1986:39) Rabindranath Tagore himself, though renowned as a man of letters, turned to visual art in his later years, partly inspired by his visits to Japan (in 1916, 1924 and 1929). However, "No doubt, his

³⁰Bilimoria 1986:33

figurative style, linear movements, expressive colours, even his sparse use of primitive or folk motifs, reflected art experiments in Europe; but it was an intense individual, neither Westerner, nor Indian, who executed the paintings." (Bilimoria 1986:41)

Karmay similarly eulogises the exceptional qualities of Chompel, the genius individualist, when citing an anecdote related by Fany Mukherjee, a photographer who travelled with Chompel, Rahula Sankrityayana and the artist Kanwal Krishna to southern Tibet in 1938:

I was educated in the western tradition in which art is one activity that can be picked up at a moment's notice and put down again, but dGe-'dun Chos-'phel said the most important thing is concentration. The mind must be totally absorbed in the subject. One day he said that he would show me what he meant. He went to the market and bought a bottle of arak, he started to drink. He drank and drank and kept asking whether his face had gone red yet. By the last drop he was quite inebriated. He stripped off stark naked and sat down and started to draw; he drew a perfect figure of a man starting off at one fingertip and going all round in one continuous line until he ended back up at the fingertip again.³¹

Chompel was in fact demonstrating (and parodying) two conventions: firstly Tibetan specifications about drawing when naked,³² described here by Lobue:

The author of the *Hevajra-Tantra*, for example, lays down rather impractical and purely ideal conditions for painting the image of Hevajra: in a lonely spot at midnight on the fourteenth day of the dark fortnight, in a ferocious state of mind from the drinking of wine, with one's body naked and together with one's female partner.³³

And secondly, the Japanese calligraphic system of focused drawing in one line which influenced Indian modernist artists. But there was a serious point behind Chompel's performance. He was demonstrating his mastery of modernism, the implications of which he had experimented with in India.

In 1992 I visited the Gelukpa monastery of Tharpa Choeling, on the outskirts of Darjeeling, West Bengal. Since 1835, when Darjeeling had been ceded to the British by the Raja of Sikkim, it had become an increasingly

³¹Karmay 1980:148

³²I suspect he may also have known of Leonardo da Vinci's penchant for nudity at work.

³³Lobue 1990:190

important hill station responding to the "necessity that exists in India of providing places where the health of the Europeans may be recruited by a more temperate climate" (Hooker 1849:113). In addition to the health benefits of the Himalayas, at 370 miles to the north of Calcutta, Darjeeling provided some political and economic advantages for the British Raj. It was a buffer zone between Nepal and Bhutan and gave easy access to certain goods which had otherwise to be procured from further afield. Hooker records that in 1849 there was a "very considerable" trade in "Musk, salt, gold-dust, borax, soda, woollen cloths, and especially in ponies"(Hooker 1849:202-204). Many of these substances were either acquired in Tibet and/or were transported by Tibetans. Hooker (1849) continues "We daily passed parties of ten or a dozen Thibetans on their way to Mywa Guola, laden with salt; several families of these wild, black uncouth looking people generally travel together". Hunter's Statistical Account of Bengal (1876) also notes the presence in Darjeeling of both Tibetans and Bhutanese or as he calls them "the Dharma people" . By 1873-4 Edgar's Annual Administration Report for the area included a discussion of the possibilities of trade with Tibet and the best route over the Himalayas. These interests ultimately fed the motivation behind the Younghusband Expedition in 1903-1904. However, despite the troubles between the British and the Tibetans during that campaign, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama still took refuge in Darjeeling in 1910. The combination of the long term presence of Tibetan traders in Darjeeling and an apparently benevolent British community meant that he stayed on for more than a year. Darjeeling has remained a base for Tibetans throughout the twentieth century, with 4,500 Tibetan refugees recorded there in 1976.³⁴

No statistics are available for the first half of this century, but the Tibetan Buddhist community must have been of a reasonable size, since the Tharpa Choeling monastery was established in the 1920s to serve them [Plate 48]. Subba (1990) notes that post-1959 refugees built new monasteries in Darjeeling and Sikkim but that some settled where older monasteries already existed.³⁵ In the case of Tharpa Choeling, the main assembly hall was completed by 1940,³⁶ well before the arrival of the main influx of refugees

³⁴Source: Dharamsala Information and Publicity Office 1976:206-7.

³⁵As in Subba: (1990:115) "The refugees have a monastery wherever they have settled. Some of these monasteries were built years before their arrival but quite a few of them are built by the refugees too".

³⁶This date is painted on the entrance wall of the monastery.

from post-1959 Tibet, and it is this dating which made me look closely at one of the murals in its entrance hall.

To the right of the entrance, in the vestibule where visitors remove their shoes before entering the monastery and in a place traditionally reserved for didactic images, is an image of the Wheel of Existence. This illustration of the relationship between an individual's life cycle and the karmic realms into which he or she may pass, caught my attention firstly because of the unusually free figure style employed and secondly due to its content. In general the work conformed to the basic format of the Wheel: (1) hub: containing the three sources of suffering, ignorance, lust and hatred represented by pig, cock and snake. (2) the spokes: subdividing the six sensual realms of the universe. (3) the rim: of the twelve stages of man. (4) The Figure of Shinge - holding the wheel and indicating the inevitability and power of death and impermanence. (5) The figure of the Buddha at one remove from the wheel but indicating a route away from the ceaseless cycle of suffering in various rebirths. The Tharpa Choeling wheel retains these elements but the treatment of some of the individual scenes is unusual.

The outer rim of the karmic wheel, as described by the current Dalai Lama, demonstrates the twelve stages of consciousness or links of "dependent arising".

The consciousness which conceives things produced in dependence upon causes and conditions to ultimately, truly exist, was said by the teacher Buddha to be ignorance; from it, the twelve branches of dependent arising occur.³⁷

This philosophic concept is illustrated on the rim of the wheel with scenes from human life in which ignorance is shown as a potentially obfuscating factor in an individual's psychological development.³⁸ The ignorance of attaching oneself too closely to others including spouses and children is shown in section ten of the rim and is variously described as "Fuller Life" (in Waddell 1971) or "Procreation" (in Losal 1982). In the majority of examples

³⁷Dalai Lama 1987:28

³⁸Nagarjuna, the second century (A.D.) Indian monk, is also credited with the invention of the pictorial version of the theory, though as Waddell (1971:108) reports: "Buddha himself may, as the Lamas relate, have originated the picture of "The Wheel of Life", by drawing it in diagrammatic fashion with grains of rice, from a stalk which he had plucked whilst teaching his disciples in a rice field".

that I have examined this subject is dealt with rather coyly by Tibetan artists, with a couple lying stiffly in bed together, [Plate 49] or even, as in Waddell's illustration, by a pregnant woman with no indication of how she came to be that way. The Tharpa Choeling artist is less reticent on the subject and shows a scene of near debauchery [Plate 50] as a couple thrash around, tongues entwined on a bed with a bottle by their sides. This is by far the most explicit and animated drawing of a naked(non-divine) couple I have seen in a Tibetan monastic context and its style could be compared to that of the drawings of couples in Gedun Chompel's sketch book [Plate 51]. If we also take into account Chompel's translation of the Kama Sutra³⁹ and his general open-mindedness about sex, the case for an attribution to him may be even more plausible. Stoddard, commenting on the Kama Sutra translation, suggests:

Sa conception de la femme et franchement égalitaire. A la fin de ce chapitre il admet avoir connu au Tibet seulement les femmes du Kham et du Tsang: "Les Khammo sont douces et passionnées, et les Tsang-mo sont bien en technique et actives dessus." Il laisse un espace blanc dans son manuscrit, où il invite ses compatriotes connaisseurs ("viellards au corps jauni qui ont l'expérience du royaume") à ajouter leurs propres commentaires sur la femme au Tibet.⁴⁰

Chompel had made Darjeeling his temporary home in 1935 as an announcement in the Tibetan magazine *Melong* stated:

Le *pandit* indien du nom Rahul, qui se rendit au Tibet l'année dernière, est parti au Japon. Le *geshé* d'Amdo qui est venu avec lui de Drepung, homme très érudit et excellent artiste, est allé à Darjeeling, et il réside à Dotsug.⁴¹

He stayed in Darjeeling until April 1937 and studied English and Sanskrit whilst living in the "Bhutia Busty" or Himalayan Buddhist Centre. Stoddard's inclusion of the testimony of a Tibetan woman (Ama Lhamtsho), who knew Chompel in Darjeeling, suggests that he was painting for private patrons during these years. "Une fois, peu de temps après son arrivée en Inde, il peignit pour nous un *thangka* de Namthöse (Vaisravana) en style traditionnel, y travaillant pendant deux ou trois semaines". (Stoddard 1986:173) I suggest here, that he also worked on at least one public commission in a distinctly untraditional style.

³⁹I suspect he had seen illustrated versions of it in India.

⁴⁰Stoddard 1985:202-203

⁴¹Stoddard 1985:172

Further evidence that the Tharpa Choeling Wheel could be Chompel's work is shown in the segment traditionally used to depict the proud, battling titans or demi-gods. The artist has painted them in ancient Tibetan warriors' dress armed with bows and arrows [Plate 52]. The composition is crammed with bloodied and dismembered figures in a variety of contorted poses, not a unique subject in Tibetan painting but carried out with more than usual vigour. The sketchbook includes line drawings of shooting figures which may have been preparatory sketches for the Wheel [Plate 53]. But the really dramatic departure from the norm is the incursion of the modern world into this longstanding model. Early Spitfire-like aircraft, howitzers and the uniforms of twentieth century warfare appear in a montage employing the imagery of newspaper photography and cartoons. As we have noted before, Darjeeling was the place where the Great Thirteenth had first come into close contact with the camera. Chompel could also hardly have failed to notice the imagery this equipment produced. It seems to me that just a few years before the Second World War, and only two decades after the first, Gedun Chompel (or whoever was the artist behind this wheel) attempted to demonstrate the relevance of Buddhist philosophy in the modern world. Traditionally the demi-gods were doomed to be reborn to fight eternal battles in this section of the karmic cycle because they had envied the power of the gods in a previous life. In the Tibetan scheme of things Hitler and Mussolini would be justly consigned to this kind of purgatory.

When he returned to Tibet for good in 1945, Chompel supported himself by painting portraits and decorating the homes of the nobility. He produced highly life-like images:

In his friend's cell in Klu-'bum *kham-stan* he painted a portrait of a young and brilliant monk called 'Byams-pa and a Chinese emperor that looked so real it seemed to be talking. Other friends of his report on the realism of his style and the unusual use of colour.⁴²

His sense that the modern world could provide appropriate subject matter for a modern Tibetan artist is demonstrated by the report of his wall painting of the history of Tibet "from the time of the kings up to the twentieth century with lorries and modern buildings"(Karmay 1980:148). This radical gesture was an important precedent taken up by artists in exile, where in a mural in the dining

⁴²Karmay 1980:146

room of the reconstruction of the Norbulingka, Tata trucks are shown bringing building materials to the site [Plate 54]. Chompel truly was unusual, but the uniqueness of his art must be placed within the context of Indian art during the turbulent period heading towards Independence.

Conclusion: Purity or hybridity?

Despite these radical precedents, Jampa's photorealism and Chompel's modernism have been rejected as styles for painting in Dharamsala. This is not simply due to the privileging of the past which Dharamsala demands, but because style cannot be construed as politically neutral. Realism is synonymous with Sino-Soviet Realism. If the image is to be displayed in a prominent position within institutions of the neo-nation with explicit connections to religion, "realism" of any kind is thus to be avoided in preference for the more consciously Tibetan "thangka" style. The delineation of a distinctive, authentic Tibetan style in the visual arts (as in so much else) is considered essential for self determination. But Clifford has fired a warning shot:

Such claims to purity are in any event always subverted by the need to stage authenticity in opposition to external dominating alternatives. ... If authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political cultural invention. ⁴³

During the 1980s and '90s a deep seated conservatism appears to have dominated cultural production in Dharamsala.⁴⁴ The desire for a "pure"⁴⁵ and authentic Tibetan culture-in-exile (in which identification with the "pure" figure of the Dalai Lama assists) has resulted (in part) from outside pressures. The impact of the host culture and Dharma tourism were cited by the editor of the Dharamsala journal Rangzen, as the root causes of the "diluted" and "bastardised" cultural forms which he observed in the capital-in-exile.⁴⁶ He complained that sacred images were inappropriately sold for "hard cash" on the "Dharma market" and that Tibetan monks spent far too much time teaching foreigners on the international circuit of the "guru racket". Excessive use of loan words from English and Hindi in refugee speech was also criticised. However,

⁴³Clifford 1988:12

⁴⁴Nowak (1984) calls it a desire for "puritanism".

⁴⁵See Clifford's (1988) essay "The Pure Products Go Crazy".

⁴⁶Cited insee Nowak 1984:135

when the Rangzen editor poses the question "Is this our culture?" with reference to the "bastardised" culture of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the PRC, he raises another issue. The exiles have little hope of preventing what they see as the corruption of "their" culture in the TAR, hence the desire to control it, unchanged and unmodernised, in Dharamsala.

Chapter Four: Fixing Style in Dharamsala

Under the inspiring leadership of their traditional ruler and spiritual head, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tibetans of all classes who had succeeded in escaping from the Chinese grip set about reconstructing the culture which had unfolded over centuries in Tibet, and aroused the admiration of all those aware of its aesthetic and spiritual uniqueness.¹

In the preceding chapters we have identified some new types of image production and some radical departures from historic styles of Tibetan painting. However, we also noted that, in at least one important case, Dharamsala viewers demanded that a work executed in a style which was perceived as alien and politically inappropriate should be removed. Styles which correspond more closely to exilic recollections of paintings of the past or which are embodied within a lineage of "master" painters exported into India are given preference, particularly if designed for prominent public commissions. This demand for "traditional" works is examined more closely in this chapter.

After nearly forty years in exile, Tibetans increasingly define themselves in relation to social models of a far more secular (Shakya 1993) nature than was the case in pre-1959 Tibet and yet, despite their adoption of neo-nationalism with a flag, a democratic government, a constitution and so on, the predominant markers of Tibetan-ness in cultural terms are still seen to reside in the "traditional" and the religious. A major unifying principle amongst Tibetans in exile is the notion of the absented country (or nation) but it is the loss of the religious "way of life" which is most feared and therefore highly placed on the agenda for cultural reconstruction in exile. Tibetans in Dharamsala thus concur with Von Furer Haimendorf when seeking to emphasise the "spiritual" in their public culture. (The extent to which Tibetan self-presentation is now mediated through a Shangri-laist or Western vision is an important issue which deserves further research.) The debate over the image of "The Three Kings" also suggests that exiles hope to galvanise the "uniqueness" of the Tibetan aesthetic, filtering out any rogue elements. As observed in Chapter Two, the fact that the neo-nation is led by a figure whose role is

¹Von Furer-Haimendorf 1990:1-2

both political and religious may explain why this exile "aesthetic" is predominantly religious in character.

The vast majority of paintings produced by exiled artists depict religious subjects and should therefore more accurately be described as *rten* (literally supports), rather than *thangka*, the word commonly used in Western literature (and some literature produced by Tibetans in English). *Rten* are thought of as physical representations of the speech, body and mind of the Buddha and are ritually consecrated in a ceremony (*rab gnas*) in which aspects of the spirit of the Buddha become present in form. These forms can be constructed of cotton cloth (most paintings are produced on this material) and other fabrics, paper, clay, stone and metal and can range in scale from small printed paper images to architectonic constructions like stupas and monasteries. Most of the images discussed in this study are more specifically referred to as *sku rten* or "body supports", an expression which implies a figurative depiction of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, but which can in the Tibetan context also refer to more aniconic representations like stupas and mandalas. Prior to 1959, objects (including paintings) were made which did not fall into the *rten* category or were of a secular nature but these are now rarely mentioned or made. Significantly, the word "thangka" has absorbed the meaning of *rten*, implying that all Tibetan painting is religious.² I continue to use it here because refugee painters do so and because this affiliation with the religious is part of a project for depicting Tibetan identity through a traditional aesthetic. "Thangka" painting is thus the generic style of exiled Tibetan artists.

Due the facts of the new geographic, political and cultural conditions of exilic Tibet it could be argued that all its post-1959 cultural forms are, of necessity, invented traditions. As Hobsbawm states:

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overt or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.

²As in Kapsner and Wynniatt-Hussey's essay on "Thangka Painting" for the journal of the Department of Religious and Cultural Affairs in Dharamsala: (1992:298) "Thangka paintings are religious works of art intended to aid the devotion and prayers of Buddhist practitioners and herein lies their true value."

(my emphasis)³

This is undoubtedly true of certain aspects of the Tibetan refugee situation, where a "suitable boy" (the Dalai Lama) and a suitable Buddhistic version of Tibetan history is clearly privileged.⁴ The selection of "suitable" moments and figures of Tibetan history and the rejection of others is an essential survival tactic for refugees economically supported by foreign governments and individuals. For example, the military history of pre-1959 Tibet is underplayed whilst the Dalai Lama's Gandhian non-violence rhetoric is emphasised. Western commentators, like von-Furer Haimendorf, offer support for this laudable but, in actuality, invented tradition, though others identify the degree to which ideas about Tibet's past have been consciously managed by the Dharamsala regime.⁵ As we suggested in Chapter Two a blanket assertion that "tradition" continues in the visual arts in exile is also frequently posited and little attempt has been made to differentiate between various traditions or to identify which have been selected (Jackson 1984, Von Furer-Haimendorf 1990, Snellgrove and Richardson 1986 etc.). In this chapter I hope to demonstrate how one type of painting has been selected to act as the "house style" of the Dharamsala regime.

Romancing the Home

The continuation of Tibetan cultural practices in exile has largely been the responsibility of those born in Tibet and who physically experienced the process of exile as a journey in which they partook. As is noted by Nowak (1984), and more explicitly by von Furer Haimendorf in The Renaissance of Tibetan Civilisation(1990), the exile community includes a large number of intellectual and creative figures some of whom had firmly established reputations in pre-1959 Tibet (as is the case for several artists discussed later). This older generation is unsurprisingly more inclined towards conservatism and it is their view of Tibetan culture which has been predominant in the last three decades in the "capital-in-exile", Dharamsala. As we shall see, the artists within this group are viewed by other Tibetan

³ Hobsbawm 1983:1

⁴ This is particularly true in the capital-in-exile - though 'custom', as Hobsbawm defines it, is the dominant mode in other Tibetan Buddhist areas which have suffered less dramatic political upheavals such as Ladakh, Sikkim, Darjeeling and Kalimpong.

⁵ This is a sensitive issue but Lopez (1994), Shakya (1993) and Calkowski (1991) have raised it.

exiles as an endangered, and therefore extremely precious, species. Their special knowledge, determined by years of physical presence in Tibet, means that they are perceived as cultural repositories with an embodied authenticity which the younger generation cannot hope to emulate. One eminent figure in Dharamsala even goes as far as to state that young artists who have not experienced Tibet physically are therefore incapable of producing accurate paintings (see Tsering below). This "romancing" of the homeland leads to cultural productions where Tibet is reimaged in large scale backdrops, (particularly of the Potala Palace), which locate refugee ceremonies in a pre-fabricated past. Thangka painting is also part of the process by which the new location, be it in India, Nepal or the USA, is demarcated and Tibetanised with imagery and styles which resonate of home.

The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (L.T.W.A.) [see Plate 3] is one of the few non-monastic buildings in Dharamsala to be constructed with elements of "traditional" Tibetan architecture and it is used as a backdrop for operatic and theatrical performances and other refugee ceremonies.⁶ Designed by Indian modernist architect, Romi Khosla, and Tibetan politician, Jigme Taring, it has a Tibetan style facade with painted columns and beams. These architectural features, and the fact that the building houses (as its name suggests) a large number of religious texts and objects smuggled from Tibet by the refugees, appear to give it religious significance, for many exiles circumambulate it on a daily basis. This constitutes another example of the fusion of religion and heritage. The Library was sponsored by the Dalai Lama, to ensure that its contents contributed to the project of "tradition-in-use". The texts are consulted by Tibetans and non-Tibetans alike in order to pursue the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. Publications on cultural matters are also available and there is a large art section. The Library has its own imprint, publishing the works of exile authors on both religious and cultural topics. As part of the process of perpetuating tradition, the Library also had a satellite organisation, "The Library School of Thangka Painting".⁷

⁶Calkowski's (1991) "A day at the Tibetan Opera" is one of the few accounts which acknowledges the political significance of performance in the exile community.

⁷Unfortunately, the Library Art School is no longer accepting any new students and is due to close as the painting teacher Since Sangay Yeshe is getting too old to teach. The Norbulingka Art School is now taking on those who want to learn to paint thangkas. See below.

The director of the L.T.W.A. Gyatso Tsering,⁸ and librarian and historian, Tashi Tsering,⁹ provided some explanations for the creation of a "traditional" art school in Dharamsala. Both were concerned that tourism and the commodification of thangka painting was leading to a dilution of the quality and power of images produced by exiled artists. Their points are reiterated in Chöyang, the magazine of the department of religious and Cultural Affairs:

The inferior paintings available at present are of little or no artistic value as most are of crude workmanship and resemble a mosaic of Buddhist symbols, deities, entourage and environments rather than a properly constructed painting. These paintings certainly have no value because of the lack of religious intent by the artist and as His Holiness the Dalai Lama has frequently pointed out it benefits neither Tibetans nor Tibetan art and culture for this trade to continue.¹⁰
(my emphasis)

Tashi Tsering cited a number of other reasons for the decline:

Amongst the artists here in Dharamsala there are some who spent most of their lives in Tibet, but who have forgotten much of what they knew, or who no longer observe the conventions for fine details in thangkas. There are also young artists who have come from Tibet recently and are painting in a post-Invasion style with modern paints and rough and ready shapes. They never knew the fine work of the pre-1959 era. Both of these groups have been influenced to some degree by art styles from China which reflect Soviet Socialist realism. This can be most clearly seen in portraiture.¹¹

Tsering acknowledges that the crucial resource of artists' memories has, in many cases, been destroyed by the trauma of exile. His views also reflect the attitude which we discussed in Chapter Three, where the blame for the debasement of Tibetan art is squarely placed at the door of the Chinese (and Communism, be it Chinese or Soviet). The combination of the importation of Chinese styles, based on Soviet Socialist realism, and the mass destruction of ancient images from the monasteries and temples of

⁸Interviewed in Dharamsala, 1992.

⁹Interviewed in Dharamsala, 1992 and 1995.

¹⁰Kapsner and Winniatt-Husey 1991:298

¹¹Tsering interviewed at L.T.W.A.,1992.

Tibet "created an atmosphere in which Tibetan artists and their audience alike, suffered a crisis of identity"(Tsering, 1992). Reestablishing artistic lineages has been part of the attempt to counteract this crisis in Dharamsala and training the younger generation is seen as vital. However, Tashi Tsering, (in concord with Gyatso Tsering), was particularly scathing about the painterly attempts of the younger generation born in exile. Their lack of knowledge of the authentic details of Tibetan life he argued, meant that they could never paint accurately. If asked to draw a Tibetan kitchen, "They would probably include a Chinese thermos flask instead of a traditional butter-tea churn" (Tsering 1992).¹² In order to counteract this problem the older generation of artists should have been encouraged to record their memories of such things, but already many of the artists steeped in such culture-specific knowledge had died. Tashi Tsering regretted that the Library had no texts in which technical terms and illustrations of significant objects were recorded. Those artists who retained this kind of knowledge were expected to enlist for the reconstruction process. Those still alive in 1992 had been documented by Tashi Tsering, with details of where they were last known to be living, in the hope of commissioning two paintings from them for an archive from which the younger generation could learn. We might note that many were based far away from Dharamsala and the dispersal of these artists, all around the world, suggests that they have been able to support themselves well away from the capital-in-exile through commissions from exile Tibetans, reconstructed monasteries and non-Tibetans with an interest in Tibetan Buddhism.¹³

In the meantime it has been left to two Dharamsala painters, supported by institutions of the government-in-exile, to provide the authentic details for the young. Sangay Yeshe, at the Library Art School and Tenpa Choepel at the Norbulingka¹⁴ (the cultural centre named after

¹²However, Chinese manufactured thermos flasks are a fact of life for many Tibetans, in both the TAR and the Tibetan communities of the Himalayas.

¹³Bentorn's (1993) analysis of the trade in Tibetan paintings in Kathmandu notes both the scale of the market for these images and the differing expectations of "internal" and "external" audiences.

¹⁴The original Norbulingka, or "Jewel Park", two miles west of Lhasa, was founded in the eighteenth century by the Eighth Dalai Lama and was the summer residence to which much of the essential business of state was transferred when the Dalai Lamas left the "winter palace" of the Potala. The Norbulingka was also the site of a number of significant events in twentieth century Tibetan history. In 1932, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama wrote his prophetic statement about the future of Tibet in the grounds of the Norbulingka. In 1959

the Dalai Lama's summer palace in Lhasa, just outside Dharamsala, which was sponsored by Western money and inaugurated by Madame Mitterand of France) have been prominent in this project. Both are Menri painters and Gelukpa monks and are thus appropriate embodiments and communicators of the government-in-exile's view of Tibetan culture. They and their students are "exhibited" as part of the cultural tour made by visitors to Dharamsala and like a craftsman at the Indian Crafts Museum, New Delhi, these monk-artists therefore become more than mere painters:

The nature of the materials and techniques, the design and its execution, the socio-religious context and the purpose of creation are all engrained in his consciousness. To see a craftsman at work is therefore seeing the universe take place in front of one's eyes.¹⁵

Although not "displayed" in the specific context of a museum, the artists of Dharamsala are certainly seen by both Tibetans and outsiders as figures who are able to make the Tibetan "universe take place in front of one's eyes." The desire of foreigners to experience a world which is anti-modern and anti-industrial through artists/artisans and their products underpins much of Orientalist expectations of India. In the case of exilic Tibet the 'esoteric' nature of Tibetan religion adds to the stereotype. Where India is viewed within the paradigm of craft and the rural idyll, a representation mirrored in the activities of the Indian government's "Cottage Industry" policies, and mediated through the essentialising vision of "tradition" of Ruskin, Morris and Coomaraswamy,¹⁶ Tibetan exile art production must in some sense be tied to the authentic marker of religion. Tenpa Choepel confirmed this, stating that the importance of thangka painting for the refugees lay in the fact that it "represented their history and their religion".¹⁷ Thangka painting, in his view, could have a didactic function in communicating the lessons of Buddhist philosophy, but it also ensured that Tibetans could demonstrate a cultural distance and distinctiveness

rumours that the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was about to be kidnapped, spread so rapidly around Lhasa that by the 10th March, around thirty thousand people had gathered outside the main gates of the Norbulingka. After his departure, the Norbulingka was converted by the Chinese into a prison with thousands of Tibetan inmates. By 1972, it had been revamped as "The People's Park" and became the site of the annual Communist Youth picnic.

¹⁵Greenough (1995: 228) quoting from the Indian Crafts Museum (Delhi) brochure.

¹⁶Spencer 1995:234-257

¹⁷Interview with Tenpa Choepel, Norbulingka, 1992.

from China. Choepel's statements reflect the fact that he was born in Tibet in 1959, and experienced the impact of Chinese policies at first hand. Although he was able to begin his artistic training under a Menri style painter in Lhasa in the early 1970s, Choepel departed for India in 1984, "depressed at the limitations placed on cultural and religious practice" and therefore chose to become part of the exilic reification of the religious artist.¹⁸

The Dharamsala Losel project is another case in which monks have been commandeered to serve in the production of "authentic" commodities [Plate 55]. The project, in which dolls dressed in "traditional" Tibetan clothing are made for export, began during the period when Kelsang Yeshi was minister in charge of the Council for Religious and Cultural Affairs (the publishers of *Chöyang*).¹⁹ Kim Yeshi (Kelsang's Canadian wife) describes its inception thus:

Losel dolls were born out of the imagination and talents of a group of Tibetan monks living in exile in India. They represent an alternative use of traditional skills in creating dolls which preserve an aspect of Tibetan life that has been lost forever, while passing down age old skills to a new generation of artists.²⁰

Exactly which aspect of Tibetan life is being recreated here is not discussed, but the process of making dolls is a newly invented phenomenon. Though the idea for this is initially ascribed to the "imagination" of monks, the remainder of the account makes it clear that it was Kim Yeshi who organised the materials and workers on the project. More crucially it was she who selected the subjects for their labours, though by consultation with "natives and former government officials and consulting our growing photo archive" (Yeshi 1991:343). The "costumes" selected for dolls either represent regional styles of aristocratic dress (such as "a Lhasa lady" and "an Amdo lady") or illustrate members of the religious hierarchy (such as "a monk disciplinarian" and "a monk official"). These Tibetan "types" reflect the social groups (the "natives") interviewed for the project, who were Dharamsala government officials and monks, many of whom

¹⁸Further details of Choepel's biography are included in Yeshi, 1991a.

¹⁹The dolls have been purchased by individuals and organisations such as The Tibet Society of the UK, The Foundation Alexandra David Neel, the Musee d'Ethnographie, Geneva and even the Dean of Westminster Abbey.

²⁰Yeshi 1991b:338

come from the aristocratic families of pre-1959 Tibet. No doubt the consumers of the dolls (see note 20) are equally "delighted by the authenticity of the figures, reminders of a way of life that is now gone forever." (Yeshe 1991:345) Yeshe does eventually admit that it is not the techniques which are "traditional" or authentically Tibetan but that she has adapted techniques used in pre-1959 Tibet:²¹

I knew Tibetan tailors made beautiful clothes for statues of deities and fashioned appliqué wall hangings out of brocade, that they embroidered beautifully, and sculpted figures out of coloured butter for the New Year celebrations.²²

The appropriation of skills originally designed for religious purposes does not seem to trouble Yeshe, presumably because most of her workers are monks and the project was intended to fund monasteries in exile. Thus, despite the fact that "Tibetan tailors" were rarely monks, the authenticity of these dolls lies in the "knowledge engrained" in the "consciousness" of monks and in the miniaturised and attractive invocation of pre-1959 Tibetan high class types. Intriguingly, an early prototype doll, dressed by one of the Tibetans on the project (Lhabab) and which represented a "policeman, wearing a black chuba and a stick" is said by Yeshe to have "looked so unpleasant that no one liked him enough to buy him and he remains the only one of his kind" (Yeshe 1991:341). Dare it be suggested that no-one (especially non-Tibetans) wanted to remember that pre-1959 Tibet did have its less than attractive side with punishment meted out by monks and laymen alike. The Losel project commodifies a selective vision of pre-1959 Tibet in a memorialisation of class and power. The fact that this vision of a "way of life" that has been "lost forever" dovetails with a major theme of contemporary Western Shangri-laism and is a useful marketing tool, Yeshe fails to acknowledge.

Menri as the "House Style" in Dharamsala

In Dharamsala, the majority of painters recreate a notion of "traditional" Tibetan painting from compositional models dating back no earlier than the seventeenth century, a particularly "suitable" point in time as this is

²¹Yeshe complains about the problems of constructing figures in "local" Indian clay, which tended to crack. Pema Ludrup, one of the monk workers devised a new composite of clay, sawdust and glue to solve the problem.

²²Yeshe 1991b:338

the period when the Gelukpas, the order led by the Dalai Lama, gained ascendancy in Tibet. Over the following two centuries they established a cultural and political hegemony which some commentators suggest led to "stagnation" in the visual arts.²³ However, though most thangkas in Dharamsala appear very like their eighteenth and nineteenth century precursors to those who admire the "unique" Tibetan aesthetic, one particular historic style has been selected and promoted. The consensus is towards the Menri, a style named after the fifteenth century artist Menla Dhondrup, none of whose works survive. It is therefore extremely difficult for Tibetans, and non-Tibetans alike, to define what the Menri style actually looked like and thus its legitimacy as the appropriate style is constructed through other means, by reference to age, images which are believed to represent the later evolution of Dhondrup's style and texts.

Tibetan Texts and Style

From at least the eighteenth century onwards, patrons in Tibet could ensure that artists depicted religious subjects as they wished by sponsoring sets of printed illustrations.

After sponsoring a new xylographic edition of the bKa'-gyur (1732) and the bsTan-gyur (1742), the last 'king' of Tibet, Pho-lha-nas bSod-nams-stobs-rgyas (1689-1747) and his sons encouraged two Tibetans from Xixia to finance the carving of a set of seven xylographs to illustrate the cycle of the 18 *sthaviras*.... The same patrons sponsored a set of fifteen xylographs illustrating the biography of Tsongkhapa to be copied from a set of *thang-kas* painted by 'Jam-dbyangs-bzhad-pa.... These sets of woodcuts were the iconographic source for generations of artists to come and encouraged the persistence of the 18th century style well into the 20th century.²⁴

Lobue corroborates the suggestion that many of the designs used by twentieth century Tibetan artists were bequeathed to them by their eighteenth century predecessors via xylographic and woodcut prints. The use of illustrated religious texts was a well established practice amongst artists in pre-1959 Tibet which has been continued by "traditionalist" artists like Rigzin Peljor, who appears to have used a similar set of prints for his "Three Kings" painting in Dharamsala (see Chapter Three). Texts of

²³See Snellgrove and Richardson (1986) quoted in Chapter One.

²⁴Lobue 1990:185

Indian authorship, such as the *silpasastras*, *puranas* and *tantras* were also influential in the production of art on the Tibetan plateau, though Lobue doubts "whether all artists were sufficiently educated to read" them. (Lobue 1990:181). It is more likely that religious patrons, who could read these texts, acquired ideas for the images they wished to commission from them, as we saw was still the case for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Dharamsala. These religious texts are relatively well known to foreign scholars, but texts written by Tibetans and which deal with practical and stylistic matters are not.

Giuseppe Tucci was the first to identify this omission and in 1959 he published an article concerning an anonymous text which he translated as "A Tibetan Classification of Buddhist Images According to their Style".²⁵ The text is invaluable because it, "Gives us a glimpse of certain aspects of Tibetan literature which have been overlooked, our attention having been chiefly centred on religious books or religious experiences"(Tucci 1959:179). Tucci emphasised the rarity of a text which, in describing the specific qualities of materials for use in both religious and secular objects, was probably intended as a manual for artists and/or patrons. Secondly, he states that:

The section on statues is very interesting because it is the first attempt to my knowledge made in Tibet to classify different styles of images based upon the peculiarities of the treatment as well as the varieties of materials of which they are made. The images are divided into various geographical groups according to the place they are cast, and an attempt is made to trace the eventual link between the five schools of India (Central, East, West, South, North) and those which claim to be derived from them.²⁶

Tucci's rendering of this text made it clear, for the first time in Western literature, that Tibetan artists and patrons pursued a number of aesthetic concerns and that religious efficacy was by no means the only criterion involved. Unfortunately the implications of this article have been ignored by later commentators (as we suggested in Chapter One). Tucci was also aware that another type of Tibetan text, the artist's manual, existed. These would further emphasise the proactive role of artists in deciding how

²⁵ The Tibetan title is *a jig rten kyi bstan bcos dpyad don gsal bai sgron me*. Tucci 1959:179-187

²⁶Tucci 1959:179

images should look, but he had difficulty in finding copies of them. These books constitute a type of Tibetan literature which was still overlooked by non-Tibetan authors, until the recent contributions of Jackson (1996) and Denwood (1996). Lobue, for example, complains that "There do not seem to be texts which may be regarded specifically as artists' manuals for quick and easy reference, such as Cenino Cenini's Il libro dell'arte" (Lobue 1990:190). In fact the earliest example of just such a book is entitled The wish-granting gem: a treatise on the proportions of images of the sugatas²⁷ and it is the work of the fifteenth century artist Menla Dhondrup.²⁸ Dhondrup was obviously one of those few artists who could both read and write (or had access to someone who could write for him) and thus we have his own account of the motivation behind The Wish Granting Gem:

As for the Treatise on the proportions of images, which explains how the intentions of the tantric sources may be easily carried out, these present writings were earnestly undertaken at the request of my pupils coming from dBu and gTsang. I, the artist sMan bla don grub who have absorbed all the artistic systems of India, China, Tibet, Nepal and so forth, ... formed the intention to write it at a place in Nyang stod in gTsang.²⁹

Dhondrup's project was inspired by the demands of his students who, as he notes, came from different regions of Tibet. He boasts of the internationalism of his influences and, like later authors of manuals, acknowledges the eclecticism which lies at the core of Tibetan art practice. Dhondrup's manual was apparently in fairly wide circulation for several centuries and it inspired debate particularly on questions of iconometric specifications. (It is mentioned in the seventeenth century by the Fifth Dalai Lama, in the eighteenth century by the Mongolian mGon po skyabs and by the Tibetan encyclopaedist Klong rdol Bla ma and in the present century by Mipham.) Though other Tibetan authors have made reference to art,³⁰ Dhondrup is ^{the} only pre-1959 artist whose account has been retained and, it appears, is in use amongst contemporary artists.

²⁷The Tibetan title is *bDe bar gshes pa'i sku gzugs kyi tshad kyi rab tu byad pa'i yid bzhin gyi nor bu*.

²⁸Menla Dhondrup was born in 1409 and was at his most active between 1458 and 1469.

²⁹Denwood's translation of Menla Dhondrup's text. (1996:29)

³⁰Padma Karpo and Taranatha wrote translations and interpretations of earlier texts dealing with iconometry, the latter inspiring the Fourth Panchen lama, (1781-1854), to devote two sections of his Collected Works to iconographical description. Other Tibetan commentators on artistic matters are Kong-sprul (1811-1899) (See Chandra's 1970 edition of

The Ladakhi thangka painter and teacher Tsering Wangdu attached legitimacy to his entire oeuvre by stressing that it was based on the manual of Menla Dhondrup.³¹ I found this somewhat surprising, since according to Western scholars, the text had been lost. Neither Tucci or Jackson had managed to find a complete copy³² Tsering Wangdu and his colleagues at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies had found one in their Library and published it in Hindi and Tibetan for use in the art class.³³ Wangdu provided the illustrations, demonstrating how the iconometry was to be utilised in some very fine line drawings (see Chapter Five). With this book Wangdu was able to recreate the traditional model of oral and text based teaching in his classroom in Ladakh. When I attended his classes there in 1991, 1992 and 1995, copies of another artist's manual were also in use. This was The New Sun Self Learning Book of the Art of Tibetan Painting by the refugee painter Jamyang Losal, who was one of the first exiles to teach thangka painting in Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh. Losal's book was published there in 1982 and circulated widely in Tibetan Buddhist communities of the Himalayas. I suspect that this example inspired Wangdu to publish the older text.

When translating the text on style, Tucci noted the similarities between it and the *Li ma brtag pai rab byad smra ba 'dod pai ka rgyan* of Padma Karpo, and suggested that the author's main strokes of originality consisted of muddling or omitting the sections as he transcribed Padma Karpo's work. There were, however, a few additions to the text and Tucci concludes that "Nothing prevents the surmise that the author drew not only from books but also from the oral tradition handed down from father to son in some of the most important artisan centers of Tibet" (Tucci 1959:180). It is this father-to-son lineage system which Dharamsala artists sought to recreate, both orally and through the use of texts.

Konsprul's Encyclopaedia of Indo-Tibetan Culture) who includes legendary accounts of the production of the first images of the Buddha as well as mentioning artists known to him by name, such as the sixteenth century painter Namkha Tashi.

³¹Tsering Wangdu interviewed at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Choglamsar, Ladakh, 1992. The work of this artist is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.

³²Jackson (1984:67) says that he saw a "version" of Dhondrup's text that had been published in Gangtok in 1983 but that Tucci had only found a fragment.

³³Copies of this book, (which was published in 1986 with annotations and editorial work by Penpa Dorjee Shashtri and Professor Ram Shankar Tripathi) were stored in a hut at the back of the Institute and were only available on request. My copy of it was used by Philip Denwood for his 1996 article.

The "Precious" Artists

Tsering Dhundup³⁴, son of Jampa Tseten (mentioned in Chapters Three and Four) described how, in 1961, his father and a number of others, had managed to smuggle a collection of drawings out of Tibet (via Nepal) fearing that their work would be destroyed if it remained there. They recognised that these images could be used to perpetuate artistic knowledge in exile in India. Dhundup had inherited these sketches from his father and kept them with an old palm leaf format book, from which both his father, and later Rigzin Peljor, had begun to teach him the techniques of thangka painting. According to Dhundup, this book provided the basis for Peljor's (1987) Illustrations and Explanations of Buddhist Iconography and Iconometry according to the Sman-rnyin School of Central Tibet and it is therefore likely to be based on a version of Menla Dhondrup's original text. However, I was prevented from examining the book in detail as its cover was inscribed, in English, "The Secrets of Tibetan Painting" and Tsering had no intention of revealing them to the ^{un}initiated.³⁵ In designating the text a "secret" one, Tsering Dhundup and his teachers recreated the tradition of *terma* or secret texts which were hidden at times of persecution of Buddhism in Tibet (such as during the ninth century) and when rediscovered stimulated a renaissance in Buddhist practice (in the fourteenth century). Unfortunately Tsering's induction into the "secrets" of the text was curtailed at about a quarter of the way through when first his father, and then Peljor died, leaving him tutor-less. Thus for him the book had become a memorial to the *rinpoche* ³⁶or "precious" artists of the older generation and also sadly, something of a reproach, as in 1992 he had virtually given up painting altogether.

The first edition of Peljor's text, was edited by Sangay Yeshi, one of the "precious" exponents of the oral tradition in exile. The fact that Peljor's title assigns the Menri style to central Tibet also reflects the Dharamsala, Lhasa-Menri preference. Menla Dhondrup was actually from Lho brag, in Mentang, southern Tibet and his style is referred to by non-

³⁴Tsering Dhundup interviewed in Dharamsala, 1992.

³⁵See Snellgrove and Richardson 1986:96

³⁶"Rinpoché is an honorific term given to revered teachers or incarnate lamas; it means 'precious one.'" (Avedon 1984:4)

Dharamsala artists as the style of the south (Lho).³⁷ Dhondrup's manual, has been taken by artists as proof of the existence of a style, the Menri, which was created by a named individual and which is now described by its promulgators as the "first school of Tibetan Buddhist art".³⁸ (However, since many Tibetan paintings predate the fifteenth century, this claim is a little imprecise.) Menla Dhondrup is certainly the earliest artist for whom dates and some biographical details can be established³⁹ but whether his was the first "school" is open to question. The claim is made by Sangay Yeshi, (a Gelukpa monk and friend of the Dalai Lama), who was selected to run the first exile art school in Dharamsala in 1977. He follows the Menri style, though his models are actually taken from versions of the Menri as Tibetans understood it to have been practiced in Lhasa, central Tibet in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and teaches it to the younger generation of artists born in exile. His views are legitimised through patronage from his Holiness the Dalai Lama who sanctions this selective vision of Tibetan "traditional style".

Sanjay Yeshi and the Library Art School

Sanjay Yeshi (b. 1929) entered a monastery at the age of seven and first studied thangka painting, at the age of fourteen, from a monk who was "the best painter of Kham".⁴⁰ He studied under the same teacher at Drepung Monastery until he was 28, when the teacher died. Yeshi decided to become a *geshe* (professor of divinity) but in the early 1950s realised that the twenty years of continuous study required might not be possible in Tibet. In 1959, when Chinese influence in Tibet became overwhelming, he followed the Dalai Lama to India where he initially continued his studies in painting and Buddhism in Dalhousie. In 1974 the Dalai Lama asked him to come to Dharamsala to work in his private office and then (in 1977) to teach students who had been sponsored to become thangka painters. Since then, Yeshi has trained thirty six students and completed

³⁷"Some refer to his as the "southern style" (Lho.bris), since Mentang was a district of Lhodrak in southern Tibet; they assign the name on the basis of which major region of Tibet was the source of the tradition." (Gega Lama 1983:46) Further differences in the interpretation of Tibetan "art history" emerge from the exiled artists manuals.

³⁸Interview with the artist Sangay Yeshi in Dharamsala, 1992.

³⁹See Jackson (1996) and Denwood (1996).

⁴⁰Interview with Sangay Yeshi, Dharamsala, 1992.

many thangkas, some of which hang in the Dalai Lama's private apartments.

Though he describes himself as a Menri painter, and confirms that the Dalai Lama asked him to promote this, "the oldest style" of Tibetan painting, closer examination of Yeshe's works and statements reveals that Menri is a rather loose term.

My painting was influenced by Menla Dhondrup but with changes. There were many variations on the original text and certain aspects were made clearer. I follow the new form. Sangay Dorje was one of the main ministers during the Fifth Dalai Lama's time. He clarified Menla Dhondrup's style and ideas.⁴¹

Unfortunately no references to Sangay Dorje appear in the literature on Tibetan painting. The most reliable and extensive source, Jackson's A History of Tibetan Painting does not include this name, but proposes that the New Menri of the Fifth Dalai Lama's reign (seventeenth century) was created by Choying Gyatso (Chos-dbyings-rgya-mtsho). This artist worked on commissions in both the Potala Palace and the monastery of the Panchen Lama, Tashilunpo,⁴² in a style which was extremely elaborate. Sangay Yeshe's style, on the other hand is simpler and more direct though he argues that:

The art of Menla Dhondrup looks very simple but if you try to draw it yourself you find its very difficult because it is very accurate and complicated. The other style looks great and hard to do, but actually the finishing on it is not as difficult as Menri.⁴³

Jackson confirms that "recent Lhasa artists", including Sangay Yeshe, "consider themselves to be the modern direct successors of the Old sMan-ri"(1996:246) and continues:

Indeed, it was probably not the rich, almost baroque style of Chos-dbyings-rgya-mtsho and the subsequent Tashilunpo court painters that developed later into what some have called the "international style". Rather, it was the lighter, simpler but at the same time more conservative style that gained wide-spread patronage and approval among the clergy of the great Lhasa monasteries and which thus

⁴¹Interview with Sangay Yeshe, Dharamsala, 1992.

⁴²See Jackson (1996: 219) and the rest of his chapter on the New Menri.

⁴³Interview with Sangay Yeshe, 1992.

became the official style propagated elsewhere. The latter was also an easier style, and thus better suited for widespread adoption than either of the high court styles of Lhasa or Tashilunpo.⁴⁴

Though Yeshe may disagree that the "Old Menri" is an easier style to execute, it is a "conservative" style as Jackson suggests, and therefore more effective for widespread use in the exile community as we shall see below. It is impossible to demonstrate how Yeshe's use of the "old Menri" relates to the founder's style as he himself admits that "It is now very rare to see a picture by Menla Dhundrup himself, but you may find some by his descendants"(Yeshe 1992). It is possible however, to show that he and Tenpa Choepel share the same stylistic approach. [Plate 56] is Tenpa Choepel's version of Avalokitesvara and [Plate 57] is the longlife deity Namgyalma, by one of Sangay Yeshe's students at the Library Art School. Both are relatively simple and highly symmetrical compositions with the central deity surrounded by four minor figures. The central figures are lightly decorated, exposing flat, unpatterned areas of colour. The background landscapes are drawn with layers of triangular shapes in a blue-green colour scheme. These are all common features of the Dharamsala version of Menri. This style was employed on a grand scale for a new building at the Dalai Lama's monastery, the Kalachakra Assembly Hall.

The Kalachakra Assembly Hall (*Dukhor Lhakhang*)

The painting of the Kalachakra Assembly Hall was begun at the instigation of the Dalai Lama in the late 1980s. His Holiness has given many teachings based on the Kalachakra text both amongst the refugees in India (particularly at Bodhgaya, where he draws enormous crowds) and in the West. The scheme for the paintings was based on the Dalai Lama's 'vision' after he had made several close readings of the text. It is more usual for a high ranking religious figure to simply confirm an artist's design before he begins a project of this nature, especially if it is a high profile public commission in a religious building. In this case the project takes on even greater significance than usual, because the patron and interpreter are one in the same.

⁴⁴Jackson 1996:243

It is also rare for a patron, even a Dalai Lama, to have such a free hand with the design of an entire architectural and mural painting project. In pre-1959 Tibet, Dalai Lamas had to contend with the painted statements of their predecessors and perhaps to erase one set of images in order to set up a new scheme. The Kalachakra Assembly Hall was an entirely new building giving the present Dalai Lama a clean, concrete slate on which to work.

The Murals: First Phase

The first phase of the painting at the Namgyal Lhakhang was presided over by the elderly Lhasa painter Chamba Kelsang [Plate 58]. At the Dalai Lama's request he left Tibet in early 1990 and stayed amongst the refugees for two years. He informed me that he and his twelve assistants had all memorised the Kalachakra text and that he had been in close communication with the Dalai Lama in order to perfect the design. The project was closely monitored by Namgyal monks. Should any of the artists have forgotten the religious implications of their endeavours, there were two or three of them on hand in the Assembly Hall at all times. These monks also performed *therab gnas* (blessing) ceremony for completed images [Plate 59]. Chamba's extremely detailed drawings were pinned to a large piece of hardboard in the middle of the room to enable each artist to consult the plan, when in doubt. Although Chamba had been working on reconstructive painting in the Potala, Ganden and Sera monasteries in the TAR, and therefore had a good memory bank of images direct from Tibet, it seems that the Kalachakra murals were devised from a novel amalgamation of earlier designs.

The back wall of the Kalachakra Lhakhang is dominated by a richly painted image of the Buddha enthroned [Plate 60]. This section of the mural was very much the work of Chamba Kelsang himself and not of his apprentices. He executed the animal and figural supports on the throne, the golden vessels and ornamentation of its structure and the understated but majestic image of the Buddha himself. This 'Gaya' Buddha (the form of the Buddha associated with Bodh Gaya, where the Buddha achieved enlightenment) was, according to the artist, based on a "central Tibetan style". It had been scrupulously analysed by the Dalai Lama, who

demanded that even the colour range should meet with his approval.⁴⁵ The central Tibetan style refers here to the form of the Menri promoted in Lhasa since the time of the "Great" Fifth Dalai Lama, which as Jackson remarked was still practised by Lhasa artists of Chamba Kelsang's generation prior to 1959.

Given the Dalai Lama's close involvement with this project we can make some observations which suggest that, although he no longer promotes the photo-realist style of Jampa Tseten (Chapter Three), he does allow some innovation. Some parts of the mural scheme are thoroughly predictable, such as the presence of Kalachakra with his consort and wrathful forms around the Buddha-throne. Other aspects are more unique, such as the eight simplified mandalas similar to those made from the particles of a demolished Kalachakra "sand" mandala.⁴⁶ These essential mandalas are made just before the elements of the full scale particle mandala are finally immersed and disposed of in water. The Dalai Lama has therefore abbreviated some of the complexity of the traditional mandala format for this composition. (However, the older style Kalachakra mandala was also painted on other walls in the second phase of painting, see below.) But perhaps the most unusual components of the Kalachakra scheme are the twelve lotus bases with animals representing the twelve houses of Tibetan astrology. The Kalachakra Tantra is perhaps the most important Tibetan text for the transmission of ideas about time and astrological calculations (the evolution of the *kalpas* are recorded therein, alongside some predictions of future events.)⁴⁷ so their inclusion is appropriate. However, I have not seen any other mural or thangka painting with this kind of imagery, and would suggest that the originality of the design probably comes directly from the Dalai Lama, with Chamba Kelsang merely carrying out his requests. The artist returned to Tibet in 1992 to work on the reconstruction of monasteries there but he considered

⁴⁵Interview with Chamba Kelsang in the Kalachakra Assembly Hall, 1991.

⁴⁶I observed such a mandala being made by Namgyal monks at the monastery of Spituk in Ladakh in 1992, where a small 'star' mandala is made immediately before the used, and therefore sanctified, particles are returned to the elements at a pure water source.

⁴⁷The special issue of *Chöyang* (1991) includes a chapter on Tibetan astrology with illustrations of the twelve houses in rather different forms than they appear in the Assembly Hall.

that the merit he had accrued working for the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala was great.⁴⁸

The Murals: Second Phase

Following the departure of Chamba Kelsang, the Assembly Hall painting was taken over by Kalsang. He and his brother Sonam Wangchuk,⁴⁹ are highly regarded in the exile community and are both sculptors and painters. They have worked together on projects for monastic and private patrons and have received some of the most sought after commissions for the monasteries in exile, such as the new Sakyapa monastery in Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh. The brothers left their home in Kham, Tibet in 1960, a year after the Dalai Lama's departure, and spent twenty three years in Bhutan before coming to India. Though initially trained by their father in Tibet, the consciously "traditionalist" environment of Bhutan appears to have provided them with skills well beyond that of many other exiled artists.⁵⁰

In 1992, a new regime had been instituted at the Assembly Hall. The Namygyal monks were enforcing a strict policy in which they barred casual observers, both Tibetan and non-Tibetan, from entering the building and photography was restricted. The fact that Chamba Kalsang's images had been consecrated, whilst others were still being completed, meant that the building was considered vulnerable to inappropriate viewing or copying. (By the time the project was finished in 1995, and was in use as a religious space, photography was totally banned.⁵¹) There had also been an important addition to the space. A very large thangka of the Kalachakra mandala [Plate 61] had been hung

⁴⁸Chamba Kelsang (1992) remarked that remuneration for artists in pre-'59 Tibet was not good. In his early career all artists, irrespective of age, were given 80 kgs of wheat or barley per month, whereas the Chinese paid in cash but this amounted to less than the equivalent value in grain.

⁴⁹In 1992 Sonam Wangchuk was in charge of work on large scale sculpture at Thupten Choeling monastery in Darjeeling, West Bengal.

⁵⁰Very little has been published on recent art practice in Bhutan, but Bean (1995) offers some comments on the relationship between the conservative and traditionalist image of the nation currently promoted in Thimpu. Aris and Hutt (1994) include essays on architecture and other recent cultural developments in Bhutan.

⁵¹In 1992 Kalsang gave me permission to photograph him and the twelve assistant painters at work but I was specifically asked not to photograph the finished back wall both because it was the work of another artist and because it had been consecrated.

across the pillared hall facing the main Buddha image. Kalsang told me that it was the work of Jampa Tseten.⁵² The image was positioned to seal the space between the completed paintings and the new mandalas that Kalsang was designing on the right and left walls. It also blocked the view of the consecrated Buddha, which was otherwise exposed to casual glances from the outside, as the hall has large windows on three sides. Most importantly, the use of this image, which had previously been in the Dalai Lama's private collection confirms the point of this chapter, that His Holiness and the Namgyal monastery were intent on confirming the position of the Menri style. As we noted in Chapter Three, Jampa Tseten had been trained in conventional thangka painting in Lhasa, and when he arrived in Dharamsala, produced many paintings of this sort for the Dalai Lama. By the 1990s it was his Menri work which was promoted whilst the photo-realist works were suppressed.

However, though the presence of Jampa Tseten's work confirmed Kalsang's relationship to the approved house style, his own Kalachakra mandalas were not directly copied from it. To produce his designs he surrounded himself with photographs of other artists' work and admitted that his model for Heruka, for example, was taken from a print of a thangka "by a painter from down south called Nawang" (1992). Chandra's Buddhist Iconography and a number of Western publications with colour plates of Tibetan painting were also sources. To ensure the correct positioning of deities on the wall, Kalsang consulted the Kalachakra tantras and conferred with Namgyal monks. When asked to define his style Kalsang described himself and his assistants as "Mensar" painters, that is, followers of the New Menri or the Central Tibetan style also used by Sangay Yeshe, Tenpa Choepel and Chamba Kelsang. The use of the Mensar ensured that the two sections of the Assembly Hall were executed without any glaring inconsistency and the transition between Chamba's and Kalsang's sections is seamless. However, Kalsang asserted that he could also work in a number of other styles, but that the patron, the Dalai Lama specified the Mensar.

⁵²Interview with Kalsang in the Assembly Hall, Dharamsala, 1992.

Conclusion

Ever since the "Three Kings" debacle in Dharamsala, the Mensar has become the official manner of imaging Tibetanness in Dharamsala. Four major exilic institutions are involved in confirming its status; the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, the Library Art School, the Norbulingka cultural centre and the Namgyal Monastery. The Mensar is presented to outsiders as the current version of the Menri established by Menla Dhondrup, but, as we observed, the Menri cannot be illustrated. Instead it is asserted as a memory which can be reconstructed by artists trained in what is actually a later style, the Mensar of Lhasa.

Dharamsala thangka painters, such as those mentioned here, share a fear of the loss of tradition with custodians of texts and history at the Library (Gyatso Tsering and Tashi Tsering) and guardians of the Tibetan religion at the Namgyal Monastery (preeminently the Dalai Lama) and therefore willingly participate in the attempt to stabilise and fix the style in which they work. However, in the 1960s Sangay Yeshi had a formative experience which led him to come to some conclusions about appropriate style. Yeshi (1992) described how he met an American in Delhi who had suggested that he could support himself as an artist by experimenting with new, non-religious subjects, such as yaks and nomads. So Yeshi started to "collect styles" and tried to learn ways of depicting the natural world, but the American was displeased with the results. He told Yeshi to stop as "there were plenty of Western artists who could draw a tree as it looks in reality"(Yeshi 1992). Yeshi therefore abandoned his attempts at realism and the American capitulated. "The American said I should concentrate on producing images in the style I know best. This was a very good lesson"(Yeshi 1992). As we know, the monk artist later concentrated on thangka painting in the Mensar, a distinctly non-realist style, but he did allow himself one foray into commercialism producing a series of postcards, [Plates 62 and 63] which are drawn in a sort of secular Tibetan realism. The postcards, of subjects such as kings and queens of Tibet, folk heroes and other historical figures, were sold in the bazaar in Dharamsala.⁵³ Yeshi extracted scenes from images usually found in

⁵³ They were still available there in 1992.

domestic wall paintings or the peripheral areas of thangkas for his "Five Offering Goddesses", "Long Life Image", "High Incarnations of Tibetan Lamas Travelling to Kham" and "Tibetan Music". As they are not painted in a thangka style, and are unconsecrated, they can legitimately be sold to foreigners as souvenirs of the "authentic" and lost Tibet. The fact that they are by no means photo-realist or Socialist Realist, also makes them accessible to exiled Tibetans who do not want to be accused of treachery.

Chapter Five: Style beyond Dharamsala (Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal)

Outside Dharamsala the combination of oral and textual transmission of style is also potent, but not all refugee artists adhere to the Menri as the house style of the diaspora. We can establish the degree to which artists are able to select the styles in which they work by examining those who are located well away from the capital-in-exile. The publication of exiled artists' manuals (in which non-Menri styles are acknowledged),¹ and the presence of teachers of other styles of painting allows for increasing variation from the Dharamsala norm.

Tibetan Painters in Ladakh

Ladakh is situated at over 12,000 feet at the Western end of the Indian Himalayas and was once ruled by kings who followed Tibetan Buddhism. It is now part of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir and, since the opening of motorable roads and an airstrip into the region (in 1975), has become increasingly absorbed into the modern, industrialised nation of India. Tourism plays a major role in its economy² a fact which has had repercussions for artists, due to the revenue acquired by monasteries from charging visitors to enter their establishments. This income has been directed by the Ladakhi Monastery Association (and the individual heads of the monasteries) into rebuilding and repainting projects which have been implemented on a scale unlike anything experienced in Ladakh since the eighteenth century. Artists with knowledge of traditional techniques and religious imagery have been in great demand in this "renaissance". Buddhist paintings in Tibetan styles have become valuable commodities, not, in this case to be sold and removed by tourists, but as part of the process in which the features of Ladakh are defined for the tourist gaze in murals for monasteries. Portable thangka paintings on the other hand are mainly produced for an internal market of Tibetan and Ladakhi Buddhists, for whom the perpetuation of traditional styles is a definer of identity.

¹Exiled artists who have published manuals are Dazyab (1977), Losal (1982), Lama (1983), Thaye (1987) and Peljor (1987 and 1991).

²For the impact of tourism in Ladakh see Norberg Hodge (1992). Risvi (1983) provides a socio-political history of the region. Snellgrove and Skorupski (1980) is still the best survey of the monasteries of Ladakh.

Amongst the artists I interviewed in Ladakh between 1989 and 1995, some were Tibetan refugees working for the government-in-exile at the refugee camp at Choglamsar, whilst others were Ladakhis who followed many of the same basic precepts of Buddhist religious and cultural practice as the Tibetans. Some of them had also been trained for a time in Tibet. These artists responded differently to questions about the style they pursued in their own work and to broader questions about the history of style in Tibetan painting and contemporary production of images.

The Dharamsala Menri in Ladakh

As an artist and employee of the government-in-exile, Migmar Tsering's first job on arrival in the refugee community at Choglamsar (near Leh, Ladakh) was to paint thangkas for the "homes" of the SOS Children's Village.³ He had been trained in Dharamsala by Gonpo, art teacher at the Tibetan Children's Village there and in 1979, became an art teacher himself at the Choglamsar community school. The school has pioneered the development of culture specific textbooks for their students, replacing Indian references and images with Tibetan ones. Tsering follows this policy through in his art classes where younger children draw yaks and snow leopards, while the older students work on projects with titles like "Tibet is my home" and "The Future of Tibet". In his own work Tsering has been open to innovation. He had produced a thangka for a foreign patron who specified that it should depict the SOS Children's Village surrounded by the mountains of Ladakh and White Tara at the centre. In the top right hand corner, a menacing Chinese dragon was to symbolise the continuing threat of the Peoples' Republic of China. Migmar Tsering admitted to some discomfort about such a composition, but he also emphasised that Tibetan art needed to transform itself to suit the new conditions.⁴ For him, the debate over the representation of the "Three Kings" illustrated the difficulties faced by artists working under the close supervision of the Dharamsala regime.

³The addition of at least one religious image (usually of the Buddha) to each "home" was a conscious policy of Tibetan administrators in the early 1980s, as I also observed in the Tibetan Homes Foundation in Mussoorie, Uttar Pradesh, in 1984.

⁴Migmar Tsering interviewed in Choglamsar, 1992.

Tsering's fellow student under Gonpo in Dharamsala, Dorje Josama, also teaches thangka painting in Ladakh at the Tibetan Handicraft Centre just outside Leh. He continues to paint in the Menri style he learnt in Dharamsala, and has executed commissions for the government and for the Choglamsar community. (He designed a huge Kalachakra stupa to commemorate the Dalai Lama's fifty-seventh birthday which towers over the Choglamsar camp.) His students spend two years training in Menri style thangka techniques and are tested each year on their knowledge of the iconometry and iconography of major deities. By the end of their training they were expected to master the measurements⁵ for all the classes of beings and the relevant extracts from the *pechas* (religious texts) which pertained to them. (No copies of such texts were visible in the studio at the Handicraft Centre, though Jamyang Losal's manual was.) All of this amply conforms to the Dharamsala model for appropriate imagery for exile but in 1995, Dorje Josama's students were only making a few Menri thangkas and were concentrating on producing images based on tourist postcard subjects, such as monks playing religious instruments. These were to be sold in the Handicraft Centre shop. The innovation that Migmar Tsering hoped for was thus emerging from the economic necessity of living as a small refugee group, well away from Dharamsala, (where such commercialisation would have been frowned upon) rather than from aesthetic imperatives.

Tsering Wangdu and the New Menri

The situation for Ladakhi Buddhist artists is less compromised. Tsering Wangdu⁶ was born in Nyemo, Ladakh in 1948, and has become one of the most prolific and respected thangka painters in Ladakh. In the course of his career he has taught painting at the Jammu and Kashmir Handicrafts Centre in Leh and latterly at the Central Institute of Buddhist Studies, Choglamsar, on the edge of the Tibetan refugee camp, where he teaches both Tibetans and Ladakhis. He and/or his students have worked on mural paintings in almost every monastery in Ladakh.

⁵For information on iconometry in Tibetan painting see Jackson and Jackson (1984), Gerasimova (1978), Peterson (1980) and the artist's manuals listed above.

⁶Tsering Wangdu interviewed at the Central Institute for Buddhist Studies, Choglamsar in 1992 and 1995.

Born into a family of farmers, Tsering Wangdu started to study painting at the age of eleven under the tutelage of a Tibetan artist who had come to Ladakh at the invitation of Bakula Rinpoche, the *kusho* (head monk) of the Gelukpa monastery of Spituk (just outside Leh.) The artist was Dawa Pasang, a painter who was well known for his work at the Panchen Lama's monastery, Tashilunpo in Shigatse, south western Tibet. Over the course of three years he trained Tsering Wangdu in this later, "richer and almost baroque" (Lobue 1995:4) version of the Menri style. Pasang also completed a series of thangkas for Spituk monastery but then departed for the newly established refugee communities in Karnataka, southern India in 1961.

The fact that he had received tuition from an eminent Tibetan painter (from Tibet itself) inspired the respect of Wangdu's fellow Ladakhi Buddhists, because in 1963 he received his first public commission, at the age of fifteen, to decorate the lantern of the main monastery in Leh (completed in 1957). For this commission Wangdu was asked to illustrate the "Twelve Deeds" of the Buddha. He painted them on cotton cloth which could then be attached to the wall "according to a technique known in south-western Tibet from at least the fourteenth century" (Lobue 1995:3). This technique, presumably taught by Dawa Pasang (who was from the south-west) was to prove invaluable for commissions in other monasteries, particularly where the compositions were due to be placed above eye level. Wangdu used the same technique at Sankar monastery later in his career, where the daily routine of monks is depicted on the upper floor of the main assembly chamber[Plate 64].⁷ Lobue's reference to the historic usage of such a technique is significant, since it is the use of wooden frames (sometimes affixed over older wall paintings) which has recently led some foreigners to assume that Ladakhi painters are breaking with tradition. It is true that much of the painting in Ladakhi monasteries has been produced by painting directly onto the wall (a technique which Wangdu also masters), but closer observation of the work of contemporary painters leaves us in little doubt that some mural commissions were approached with the example of thangka painting in mind (i.e. on cotton cloth fixed to a light wooden frame).

⁷Some of these Sankar paintings are published, without reference to the artist, in Genoud and Inoue (1978).

"Tse-ring-wang-du counts himself as a representative of the Man-ri school of painting, to which his Tibetan master belonged by tradition" (Lobue 1995:4). However Lobue also noted that Dawa Pasang was a follower of the later, New Menri style. So is Tsering Wangdu actually a new Menri artist? Marilyn Rhie asserts that:

According to Tibetan texts, the New Menri style is characterised as "stylised realism", stressing rich and thick colours, attention to detail, patterns of elegant brocade garments, individually painted petals and leaves, and a grace and flow in the style.⁸

This is a rather unhelpful definition as it could equally apply to any style of Tibetan painting, since they all concentrate on detail, elegant garments and stylising the real. The one point which conforms with Wangdu's work is the stress on "grace and flow" but when asked about his style, Wangdu replied that he was "just a Menri painter"(Wangdu 1992). He cited his illustrations for the Menla Dhondrup text (published by the Institute in which he works see Chapter Four) as evidence of this. The line drawings for a seated Buddha in the book would certainly conform with the more "baroque" characterisation of the later Menri style, since his drapery folds are extremely fluid and elaborate [Plate 65]. The same configuration occurs in Wangdu's seated Buddha at the back of the new Assembly Hall at Spituk monastery [Plate 66]. When describing the two main styles of Tibetan painting as Menri and Karma Gardri, Wangdu acknowledged that the New Menri "also existed" but plays it down as simply a later school. Instead he presents himself as an innovator working within a tradition which is supported by Menla Dhondrup's manual. Wangdu claims to have moved beyond his teacher's conventional "new Menri" by looking back to the original Menri, stating that his "own distinctive style" could be seen in "many of the monasteries around Ladakh". For Wangdu, the Menri is a stable model into which an individual's style can be easily accommodated, since historically it was the foundation of "many sub-styles devised by Menla Dhondrup's followers". The production of the new edition of Menla Dhondrup's text fixes those guidelines and gives artists the freedom to improvise around them.

Some of the best examples of Wangdu's work can be seen at the Gelukpa monastery of Likir (40 miles from Leh) where he worked in two

⁸Rhie (in Rhie and Thurman 1991:46) citing Chandra's edition of Kongtrul's Encyclopaedia.

different chambers (the Tashi Yanggon and the new assembly hall) during the 1960s.⁹ Illustrations of important deities such as Palden Lhamo [Plate 67] and Yamantaka [Plate 68] in the Tashi Yanggon certainly demonstrate the flowing style we noticed in Wangdu's drawings. His heavy emphasis on highly convoluted line is distinctive, (especially in the flayed skin flung like a saddle around Palden Lhamo's mount) but the degree to which his Menri actually differs from earlier New Menri painters is difficult to establish. An eighteenth century Yamantaka thangka [Plate 69], for example, is almost identical to Wangdu's version of that subject. Commenting on this thangka, Leonov suggests that:

this Yamantaka is a developed example of the New Menri style, which came to dominate the painting of the Lhasa area during the time of the Great Fifth, in the second half of the 17th century. Effective techniques like the glowing whites for the undersides of the lotus petals, the rows of toenails, the skulls and the intensely glaring eyes of Yamantaka, are characteristics of this style as well.¹⁰

These elements are all present in Wangdu's work - only the elaborate rippling of the inside of the flayed skin appears to be his personal contribution. It is easier to demonstrate Wangdu's accomplishment by comparison to the work of another Ladakhi painter (identity unknown) who painted the monastic life murals in the entrance veranda of the Tashi Yanggon. [not illustrated] In the scene of the sangha meditating in the courtyard of their monastery, the delineation of figures, architecture and lettering are decidedly shakey. Wangdu's versions of this subject, at Sankar and Spituk [Plate 70] are infinitely more coherent. Lesser figures in the painting scheme at Likir (such as Tsongkhapa), may well have been drawn by Wangdu with assistants filling in the colour, but it is difficult to say as this is a very conventional Menri representation of a frequently depicted figure with no "baroque" flourishes. Paintings of other important Gelukpa figures, such as Dalai Lamas, (on the right hand wall in the New Assembly Hall at Spituk) are also more conventionally rendered but this only reiterates the sense that Wangdu reserves his more flamboyant gestures for the largest and most visible images. As we shall see below, there is a competitive slant to this issue when a group of artists are participating in a project simultaneously.

⁹ Lobue (1995) mentions both of these chambers and suspects that the Tashi Yang-gon commission was completed at a later date, owing to its "very mature style".

¹⁰ Leonov in Rhie and Thurman 1991: 286

Although Wangdu presents himself as reinventing the original Menri, he is equally adamant that "tradition" must be maintained and objects to the inclusion of "inappropriate modern" details - such as jeeps and aeroplanes in the background of thangkas. Rather contradicting the freedom he allows for himself he states that "An artist must keep within the strict rules of composition for the Menri style" and he tellingly adds that he dislikes "modern art, where the artist tries to copy from nature and make it real or lifelike, as in a photograph". Though aware of modernist Indian painting and appreciative of some "freehand drawing", Wangdu asserts his preference for thangka painting because "he believes in the preservation of traditional Ladakhi culture and religion", an attitude comparable to that of Dharamsala artists. However, though Wangdu had completed some initiations in religious teachings he added that a "great artist" did not need to consult a religious text in order to design well known deities such as Avalokitesvara. Wangdu's sense of himself as a great artist is justified by the number and prominence of his commissions, working as he has for the Ladakhi royal family at the Kurphuk assembly hall at Stok, for the commemoration of the Kalachakra initiation performed by the Dalai Lama in 1976, (for which he produced a large Kalachakra thangka), for Bakula Rinpoche on the new assembly hall at Spituk and is further born out by the acquisition of ten awards from the All India Handicrafts Board (Lobue 1995:8). Wangdu claims that his "unique" style is suitable for all settings, as he "knows how to paint for all the different religious sects e.g. Kargyupa, Gelukpa, Nyingmapa etc.". This is an important point, for it has been assumed by some Western authors that in pre-1959 Tibet thangka painters were trained in and followed the style of one of the religious orders.¹¹ Though most of Wangdu's paintings are housed in Gelukpa monasteries in Ladakh, he has also worked at the only Nyingmapa monastery in the region, at Trakthak near Sakti, thirty miles from Leh. The example of Tsering Wangdu suggests that artist, patron and audience do not view through sectarian eyes, but with an aspiration for quality and "traditional" style, which is construed as Ladakhi but which has its stylistic roots firmly embedded in the history of Tibetan art. The brief presence of the Tibetan painter Dawa Pasang at the powerful Gelukpa monastery of Spituk seems to have reignited the practice of the New Menri style in the region, even if Tsering Wangdu

¹¹ As is the case in Pal's 1988 Tibetan Paintings.

insists that he has actually gone back to the first principles of Menla Dhondrup.

Who painted Kalachakra at Spituk?

Between 1963 and 1971 Tsering Wangdu worked in close collaboration with two other well regarded Ladakhi artists, the painter Nawang Chompel (b. 1938) and the sculptor Nawang Tsering (who made the Thikse Monastery image of Maitreya, earning him an entry in the Indian "Who's Who") on the painting cycle for the new Assembly Hall at Spituk monastery. Tsering Wangdu was solely responsible for the Four Guardian kings in the entrance veranda [Plate 71] but there is some dispute as to who actually devised the Kalachakra image inside the hall (on the right hand wall)[Plate 72]. In 1992, Nawang Chompel¹² claimed that it was his work, but Lobue (1995:5) states that Wangdu "drew an outstanding figure of Kalachakra" there. It is extremely difficult to establish who can rightly claim the authorship of this painting, since the representation of Kalachakra is highly codified, both in iconography and colour scheme. In this respect, the example in dispute hardly deviates from the norm. It does, however, stand out from amongst the other images on the right hand wall, as a finely executed work. Is it possible to solve the argument about the authorship of the Kalachakra by stylistic analysis?

To establish differences in the styles used by the two artists concerned, the type of methodology used by Huntington and others, can temporarily be used, though below I substantiate the observations with the comments of Nawang Chompel himself. For the moment some comparisons can be made by paralleling their treatment of the same subject, the Guardian Kings of the Four Quarters, which Wangdu designed for Spituk and Chompel designed for Lamayuru, some fifty miles from Leh.

One major variation is immediately apparent, which is the use of colour. Nawang Chompel's Guardian Kings in the entrance porch to the Lamayuru assembly hall [Plate 73] are surrounded by a deep and penetrating blue with strong contrasting colours placed in front of the blue ground [Plate 74]. For the Kings Chompel exploits the colouristic potential

¹²Nawang Chompel interviewed in Leh, Ladakh, 1992.

of complex patterns and pigment variations in fabric designs to the full, as his predecessors at Alchi monastic complex (about thirty miles from Lamayuru) did for figures of bodhisattvas.¹³ Chompel's jostling patterns on his Kings' robes [Plate 75] are almost as baroque as Tsering Wangdu's use of line, and help to enliven the surface of the image. However, there is no equivalent use of textiles in Wangdu's Spituk paintings and his colour range is less complex, with orange, green and white predominant. Here the overall effect of the treatment of the Four Kings' robes is to flatten the figures and make them rather stiff and ungainly [Plate 76]. The background is conventionally Menri in style with green tufted hillocks and a light blue sky (as we saw in the work of Dharamsala Menri painters).

This comparison at least illustrates the point that, even within a relatively small region, styles do vary from one artist to another. However, it does not proffer conclusive evidence to conclude the debate over who painted the Kalachakra image at Spituk. Drapery elements at the base of the figure fall within the characterisation of Wangdu as the master of flowing line (as in the Palden Lhamo and Yamantaka murals), but there are also strong colour contrasts in the Kalachakra painting, particularly in the surrounding mandorla, which would concur with the description of Chompel as a fine judge of colour combinations. Although Lobue records that Wangdu painted the Kalachakra, he also suggests that the two artists both worked on the right hand wall of the assembly hall, so perhaps the image should be read as a monument to effective collaboration. This conclusion poses further questions however. Even if it is possible to identify the style of an individual artist and/or the school in which they were trained, it appears he may submerge that distinctiveness for the purposes of a collaborative project. This raises problems for the study of contemporary art, but it also rather undermines some conclusions made about Tibetan art of the past, where if style has been acknowledged at all, it is seen to be a fixed category from which an artist does not deviate. The biography and comments of Nawang Chompel provide some evidence to suggest that thangka painters outside Dharamsala have a more fluid approach to style than has previously been acknowledged.

¹³In the Alchi SumTsek, fabric designs (some with Sassanian and other Central Asian motifs) are represented in paint on the ceiling panels, whilst the dhotis of Avalokitesvara, Manjushri and Maitreya move beyond the purely decorative to incorporate scenes from religious practices such as pilgrimage, yoga and meditation. See Goepper and Poncar (1996).

Nawang Chompel

Nawang Chompel lived in the monastery of Lamayuru (Ladakh) from the age of six and was taught to make butter sculpture, small figures in clay and mandalas by an elderly monk painter there. When he died, Chompel was sent (aged sixteen) to the Kargyupa monastery of Yangris Skar at Drigung in Tibet to study under the most famous painter of the area, known as Norgay. Chompel worked with him for eleven years and carried out mural, thangka and painted furniture projects for a number of patrons. On his return to Ladakh (due to the Chinese invasion in 1960?) he found himself in great demand, particularly for painting dvarapalakas (guardian figures) and carried out mural cycles at the monasteries in Phyang, Spituk, Lamayuru and Chu Chut in the Changthang.¹⁴

Unlike the majority of Dharamsala painters, Chompel was able to describe six major styles of painting from Tibet (though he says there were many other lesser ones). They were: Gyari - Chinese Style; Khamri - from Kham region; Driri - from Drigung region (Drigung also refers to a sub-order of the Kargyupas); Uri - from Lhasa; Tsangri - from Tsang (particularly strong at the monastery of Tashilunpo); Tsuru - from the Karmapa sect. The fact that five of them are defined by geographic region, and one as the style of the Karmapas, suggests that style is established with reference to a lineage of painters from a specific place and only occasionally, by association with a religious group. However, Chompel's explanation of what distinguishes these styles is more a poetic evocation of their qualities of light. Gyari, the Chinese style should be "like a rainbow in the sky, all colours equally positive". Uri the style of Lhasa and Central Tibet is defined as the "sunrise style" with the amount of light as it is at dawn" whilst the Tsangri is the "sunset style - not too bright". The Driri, the style of Drigung which Chompel learnt from Norgay, is the "sunshine style" with brilliant colours radiating "the full light of day". The Driri style also demands the use of an all pervasive blue in the background of any composition, literally reflecting the "symbolic religious significance of a clear sky", according to Chompel. This deep blue was a noticeable feature of Chompel's Lamayuru Guardian Kings mural and he confirms that strong colour contrasts are an aesthetic preference ("good

¹⁴At Lamayuru was both master painter and leader of the monastic masked dance ceremonies for many years.

colour combination must be there"). The Buddha, in particular, should appear "as bright as a rainbow" with colours clearly but brightly demarcated. It is perhaps surprising that the artist defines style as a reflection of conditions in the natural world, though the end result may appear to an outsider as highly unnaturalistic. Although Chompel's language was rather metaphorical, he was one of the few Tibetan trained painters who was able to suggest how differences of style are perceived in Tibetan terms.

Why did Chompel omit the Menri from his list? It seems that his account is based on later styles for he acknowledges that the "followers of Menla Dhondrup" deviated from his model, and like Wangdu, Chompel cites this as justification for later variations. Chompel's list indicates that there is no single "New Menri" style but rather that numerous strands emerged from old Menri origins. As a result Chompel asserts that there "will definitely be slight differences amongst contemporary artists" though they may be so fine that "the variations are similar to differences in handwriting".

Such statements by contemporary artists imply that Western definitions of Tibetan style are rather unstable. Rhie's (1991) definition of the New Menri, for example, is problematic. Using one late seventeenth century image [Plate 77] (which had been acquired by Tucci in Sakya, (Tsang) she states that

..the Kunga Tashi painting displays the new style's emphasis on rich orange and green coloration, its usage of architecture and landscape elements to create dimensions in the setting, and the vigorous push and pull of space between deities and setting.¹⁵

As noted above, the green/orange colour combination was used by Wangdu for the Guardian Kings at Spituk - but it was not dominant in other works, such as the Yamantaka at Likir or the monastic life paintings at Sankar. The colour range employed by Tibetan artists therefore seems to me to depend as much on the subject matter and the intended site for the painting, as on stylistic considerations. Secondly, Rhie's comments on the novel use of architecture and landscape in the Kunga Tashi image are pertinent only when compared with the radically different treatment of

¹⁵Rhie and Thurman 1991:62

space in, say, a fifteenth century thangka depicting Shakyamuni Buddha and scenes from his life [Plate 78] where no attempt is made to show depth and a flattening strip format is used for the narrative scenes. The Kunga Tashi image may have been one of the first to use diagonals to establish recession into the picture plane, but this is not necessarily a solely New Menri feature. Later in the same paragraph Rhie continues to discuss another facet of what she considers to be the innovatory manner of the New Menri by pointing to the framing for the portrait of Kunga Tashi.

Rather than the traditional Indo-Nepalese style niche-shrine formulation, a fully developed style of foliage and flowers is utilised for the backing of the main subject. The floral backing, probably inspired by Chinese paintings, was seen in its earlier stages in the Drigung lama in No. 87.¹⁶

Whilst the catalogue entry for this thangka [Plate 79] gives the provenance as "Central Regions, Tibet; probably U" and is further described as "associated with the Drigungpas, possibly from the U region" revealing "some prominent regional differences" (Rhie and Thurman 1991:250) no mention is made of the Drigung style. Rhie is presumably unaware that Tibetan artists such as Nawang Chompel (Wangdu also mentioned Driri), know that Drigung monastery had given its name to a style of painting, though at what exact point in time this school emerged is not clear.¹⁷ More to the point, Chompel was trained in this style. The sixteenth century painting discussed by Rhie actually shares some of the qualities he described as Driri (i.e. Drigung style), such as the strong blue background and generally intense colour contrasts radiating "the full light of day". The foliate and fruited throne of the Drigung lama is cited by Rhie as the possible source for the deviation from the "traditional Indo-Nepalese" norm in the Kunga Tashi painting. But Rhie assumes that Chinese inspiration must be responsible for this radical change, not that another school of Tibetan painting might be the source. The Kunga Tashi painting presented by Rhie as pre-eminently New Menri, would fall under Nawang Chompel's stylistic categories as Tsangri style (the "sunset style - not too bright") which would be far more accurate, given its provenance as "Central Regions; probably Tsang".

¹⁶Rhie and Thurman 1991:208

¹⁷The main Drigungpa (Drigungpas being a sub-order of the Kargyupas) monastery in U, north-east of Lhasa was founded in 1179 with the Chetsang Rinpoches (one of whom may be illustrated in Rhie's image) heading the order from the fourteenth century.

This brings our argument full circle. Although I cannot agree with Rhie's definition of the New Menri, there is broadly speaking a similarity (at least in colour range) between the Kunga Tashi thangka and Tsering Wangdu's Spitik Guardian Kings. (The Drigung Lama on the other hand has a good deal in common with Chompel's Guardians at Lamayuru.) Nawang Chompel's list indicated that the Tsangri style was most practised at Tashilunpo, which is where Tsering Wangdu's teacher, Dawa Passang was trained. All of which leads me to suggest that what Western commentators refer to as the New Menri style is a misnomer (and a term which Chompel conspicuously does not use and Wangdu mentions reluctantly). It obscures what are in fact a number of different styles which may well have taken their inspiration from the old Menri, but which evolved with regional differences. In the cases of these two Ladakhi artists the places in Tibet where their teachers were trained (Drigung and Tashilunpo), broadly explain why their styles are different. Therefore in Tibetan terms, Tsering Wangdu is a Tsangri painter and Nawang Choepel a Driri painter, both of which are versions of the New Menri.

Manali, Himachal Pradesh and the Karma Gardri

In another part of the western Himalayas, the impact of one artist who left Tibet prior to the main exodus of the early 1960s, (for economic rather than political reasons), has created a school of painting based on another major Tibetan art style, the Karma Gardri. The artist, known only as Dorje¹⁸ was born in 1930 in Kesa Pembo, a village to the north of Lhasa, and studied painting for eight years under the Lhasa painter, Peljor Gebo. We should note here that, though Dorje and his teacher were from Lhasa, their style, the Karma Gardri, is described by both Tibetan and non-Tibetan authors as arising in Eastern Tibet. Patently, by the early twentieth century, an artist in Lhasa could take his pick from a range of Tibetan art styles which had previously, been associated with a particular region. Therefore it is perhaps not so surprising that, later in the century, "Eastern" Tibetan style paintings could be bought by Americans in the western Himalayas from a painter born in Lhasa.

¹⁸Dorje interviewed at the Spiti School of Painting, Manali, Himachal Pradesh 1992

Dorje left Tibet in 1948, having decided that the system of artistic patronage was oppressive.¹⁹ His search for better economic and cultural conditions in India appears to have paid off, as he now owns a large house on the outskirts of Manali (a holiday resort in Himachal Pradesh) in which his painting school was established in 1976.²⁰ The school is part-funded by the Himachal government who also gave it the title "The Spiti School of Painting". Spiti refers to a valley beyond Manali, which is predominantly Tibetan Buddhist. The Himachal government, have been keen to encourage the development of tourism in the Manali area and are apparently happy to emphasise the Tibetan impact in their state. The "Spiti" style is thus a creation of a tourist driven economy in which art, which is in fact Tibetan in style (and specifically Karma Gardri) can be readily marketed. Dorje's school is affiliated to the Himalayan Buddhist Association, an organisation which serves Spiti, Lahaul, Kinnaur and other parts of Himachal Pradesh as well as Ladakh, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Arunachal Pradesh and though he has little contact with Dharamsala, Dorje is described by leading cultural figures there, as one of the best artists working outside Tibet.²¹

Dorje defines himself as a Karma Gardri artist, citing a lineage going back to the founder of the style, Namkha Tashi. Over the course of more than twenty years, he has trained several dozen students in Karma Gardri style painting, two of whom, Sonam Tenzin²² and Tsultrim Tenzin,²³ appear to have been particularly successful as thangka painters in their own right. The three of them completed the wall paintings in Ganden Tsechokling, the Gelukpa monastery set up by the refugee community in Manali and a series of jataka thangkas for a Japanese Museum.

¹⁹Dorje confirmed that artists were remunerated with bags of tsampa (ground barley) in pre-1959 Tibet.

²⁰The town has had a small Tibetan refugee community based there since the sixties, when they found work on road building projects in Himachal.

²¹Tashi Tsering interviewed in Dharamsala, 1992.

²²Sonam Tenzin (interviewed at the Shambala Hotel, Manali, 1991) was born in 1947 to Tibetan parents living in the Kullu Valley and studied Naropa teachings and meditation for twenty years before turning to thangka painting, which he then pursued under Dorje's tuition.

²³ Tsultrim Tenzin (born 1953)(interviewed at the Chidary Nyingmapa Monastery, Vashisht, Manali, 1991) began studying painting under Dorje at the age of fifteen and has since sold much of his work to western and Japanese collectors. Although trained in the Karma Gardri tradition, Tsultrim claims to have developed certain stylistic traits of his own.

What is the Karma Gardri?

Although all three artists present themselves as Karma Gardri painters, none of them was able (or willing) to define what exactly was meant by it. It will therefore perhaps prove useful to examine their works in the light of some definitions of Karma Gardri which have been proffered by others. There is undoubtedly a marked difference between the works of those artists who continue to practice a variant of the Menri and the Manali artists.

Rhie provides this definition:

The Eastern Tibetan schools, the most famous of which is the Karma Gadri, ... are intimately related to painting movements in China. ... It is also apparent that elements from painting in north India affect the Eastern Tibetan schools in particular at this time.²⁴

The refugee Karma Gardri painter, Gega Lama concurs, though he adds a Tibetan component:

this style was to incorporate elements from three countries: the forms to be in accordance with the Indian standards, the colouring and textures by the Chinese method, and the composition to be in the Tibetan manner.²⁵

The majority of artists I have spoken with, emphasise that of all the styles of Tibetan painting, Karma Gardri is the one which incorporates the most powerful influence from Chinese painting. Some claim that the overall colour scheme relates to Chinese scroll painting, whilst others refer to the figure style of Chinese lohan (arhat) painting. (Beguin notes that an eighteenth century portrait [Plate 80] of the Arhat Rahula, described as Eastern Tibetan or Sino-Tibetan, features a "successful synthesis between two well-known methods of illustrating Arhats in Chinese art"²⁶ and Rhie agrees that this image should be designated as Karma Gardri style.) A heavy emphasis on realism in the treatment of the human figure and asymmetrical compositions (an unusual thing in Tibetan painting) are also referred to as Chinese imports. On the other hand the unnaturalistic

²⁴Rhie and Thurman 1991:63

²⁵Lama 1983:47

²⁶Beguin in Rhie and Thurman 1991:119

portrayal of plants and rock formations in the Karma Gardri have also been derived from Chinese sources. (Rhie (1991:96) notes that Ming dynasty (1368-1644) painting is probably the direct source for "layered blue rocks, the stylised wave patterns of the water, and the tightly clustered trees executed with bright blue-green colours") All of these features can be observed in the work of the Manali Karma Gardri artists, though not necessarily in every painting. As we have noted before, there are shifts in the use of the style depending on the subject matter, the intended location of the image and whether it is a thangka or a wall painting. The Manali artists have produced both types of painting, (and we shall see below), and though the debt to Chinese style is visible, the paintings ultimately refer to the Tibetan compositional elements that Gega Lama speaks of.

Pal confidently assigned a sixteenth century series of Buddha jataka images to the Karma Gardri style [Plates 81 and 82], noting that:

what is striking about this style is the deliberate rejection of *horror vacui* and the emphasis on open space. Each episode is presented here in clearly defined space, even though each is a mini-composition and is to be viewed in its own spatial context.²⁷

But Pal is confused when facing another sequence of images of the Kagyupa lineage [Plates 83 and 84]:

The problem, however, is that a beautiful series of thangkas depicting the Kagyupa lineage (Pls.91-92), which will be discussed in the next chapter, is also said to be painted in the Karma Gardri style. Even a cursory comparison will reveal how different the two modes of expression are.²⁸

Consideration of the works of the Manali artists and other historic examples, can help to solve Pal's dilemma and prove that both sets of paintings are in the Karma Gardri style. The Karma Gardri style for jataka paintings has not radically altered since the sixteenth century, as we can see in an eighteenth century series described by Rhie as Karma Gardri.

²⁷Pal (1988:131) and adds that "The natural forms, both of the mountains and trees, however, are conceptually rendered, the former revealing the artist's fantastic power of imagination, and the latter his flair for decorativeness." (1988:132) These statements are in blatant contradiction to the definition offered by Kapsner and Winniatt Husey (1991: 292) who state that in Karma Gardri "natural forms are given more emphasis. They are depicted in a more realistic fashion, not exaggerated or dreamlike as in other styles of Tibetan painting."

²⁸Pal 1988:131

[Plate 85] The Buddha jatakas painted by the Manali artists certainly share the celebration of open space and the non-naturalistic presentation of flora. [Plate 86] On the other hand, the Kargyupa lineage thangkas (which confused Pal) are more closely aligned with the arhat paintings of Rahula and Angaja selected by Rhie as archetypal examples of the "Eastern Tibetan or Karma Gardri" school, but these do not fit the same definition of the style Pal identified in the jatakas. In these works space is more densely packed with figures and landscape details, in parts a highly convincing realism is dominant (in human figures and some landscape details) and yet in others an almost surrealistic treatment is pervasive (in rocks and clouds). Unlike the green of the jatakas, a single colour is not dominant. Instead, in the Kagyupa lineage thangkas and the arhat paintings, the primary figures are depicted in a strong red-blue colour contrast, whilst the background is in a lighter green-blue palette often so thinly applied as to leave the texture of warp and weft in the cotton cloth showing through. Sonam Tenzin's Vajrasattva thangka demonstrates the same contrast between strong foreground colours and a faint background [Plate 87]. Light and thin background colours however are a distinguishing feature of many works by the Karma Gardri artists in Manali as we shall see with discussion of their jataka thangkas.

The Jataka Thangkas

Dorje, Sonam and Tsultrim started work on a series of twenty-four jataka thangkas when they were commissioned by a Japanese museum in 1983. The paintings were close to completion in 1992 [see Plate 86]. Each thangka is extremely large, at six by four feet (including brocade surrounds). Sonam Tenzin reported that they had been unsure about how to proceed, since none of them had previously undertaken such an elaborate exercise in thangka painting before. He also complained that they lacked older thangkas on the same theme in Manali and so they consulted Western illustrated books and the "beautiful series of Buddha's life thangkas" at Stok Palace in Ladakh.²⁹ As a result, the paintings are formatted in the same way as those reproduced by Rhie and Pal, though the central Buddha image in each thangka has rather distinctive facial characteristics, with eyes placed closer together than usual, and a small pursed mouth. The

²⁹The Stok Palace Museum claimed that its jataka paintings were fifteenth century, but when I saw them in 1993 they appeared to be in an eighteenth century style.

background colour of extremely pale creamy green, provides a sense of clarity and airiness, as in earlier Karma Gardri paintings where the fabric texture is left to show through. The use of large areas of relatively flat colour broken up by ripples of either water or hillocks is a feature which the Manali thangkas share with both the sixteenth and eighteenth century jatakas described above. (Rhie adds that "the stylised wave patterns of the water" are a notable Karma Gardri device.) Pal had emphasised the use of "open space" into which a mini composition is inserted and can be "viewed in its own spatial context". This technique is also utilised here with many episodes appearing to be self contained, whilst the pale ground provides a sense of unity of time and space. Comparison with the Victoria and Albert's rather claustrophobic jataka series demonstrates the marked differences between Menri and Karma Gardri treatments [Plate 88].

The fact that these thangkas are executed in the house style of the Spiti school is confirmed with reference to thangkas produced in his painting class in 1992, where a very light ground is a common feature of thangkas produced there. For an Akshobhya mandala [Plate 89] the space surrounding the mandala is defined in an extremely pale wash which slides between hints of green at the base and blue at the top. The central image, however, is in much stronger colours, as are the Buddhas at the centre of the jatakas. (The same kind of contrast is observed in a Spiti school painting of Avalokitesvara [Plates 90].) These images suggest that Pal need not be confused. The legacy of the Karma Gardri, as it appears in Manali, suggests that landscape is treated in a restrained colour range whilst dominant figures are depicted in a strikingly positive hues. Pal's dilemma arises from an comparison between totally different genres - the landscape and narrative jataka and the portrait or deity image. Amongst the Manali artists these two genres are fused as is visible in another collaborative project completed by the three painters.

The Ganden Tsechokling Murals

At Ganden Tsechokling, a Gelukpa monastery established in Manali by the refugees who settled there after 1959 [Plate 91], Dorje and his students were responsible for the mural paintings in the main assembly hall and entrance veranda. Dorje executed both the plan and detailed drawing of most of the images from the Guardian Kings of the four quarters and

Wheel of Existence (in the veranda) to the life stories of the Buddha, images of Tibetan saints and teachers and the central Buddha image at the back of the chamber. As in the jataka series, relatively pale colour is used as a setting for "mini-compositions", as here in two events from the Buddha's life [Plate 92], where he renounces the trappings of his princely status and cuts his hair and later, sits beneath the Bodhi tree in meditation. The interplay between realism and conceptualism mentioned above as a marker of the Karma Gardri style is illustrated here in a subsidiary scene of highly naturalistic monkeys at play on a bizarrely formulated outcrop of rock. In the section of the Wheel of Existence where the *yidam* (hungry spirits) live in torment [Plate 93], Dorje uses pale, flat colour again to emphasise the extremity of their condition in a desert-like hell, whilst another fantastic rocky podium supports their only hope of redemption, a guardian king surrounded by the books and jewels of the Dharma. These fabulous rock formations, which are said to have been inspired by a Chinese dream-landscape tradition, mark Dorje's work as clearly Karma Gardri.

On the walls of the assembly chamber, important figures are picked out from amongst the throng with more of these artificial looking rocks or are given greater emphasis by the presence of extraordinary plants. The asymmetrical posture of a Gelukpa adept [Plate 94], (another Karma Gardri device borrowed from Chinese painting), is emphasised by the presence of a kind of orange tree emerging behind him on one side. Landscape elements are used to literally elevate a figure into view, as is the case of Padmasambhava [Plate 95] whose status as an incarnate bodhisattva with connections to the physical world is metaphorically iterated by his tree-throne. All of these figures are depicted in colours which contrast strongly with the base colour of the wall, as we observed was the case in thangka of Manali Karma Gardri.

The other area in which Dorje demonstrates his debt to the Karma Gardri tradition, and in which he excels, is the creation of human figures. Almost every character appearing in minor scenes in the life of the Buddha, even if only a few inches high, is provided with an animated expression, as we see in the devotees mourning the death of the Buddha or the princely figures who attend his teachings bearing gifts [Plate 96]. Dorje's figures are also more proactive and mobile than in other Tibetan

paintings. A monk with a *damaru* (drum) in the centre of the Wheel of Existence (in the white, upwardly mobile section of the hub) literally dances his way to enlightenment [Plate 97]. Much of Dorje's skill in this area relates to his reading of another Chinese component of the Karma Gardri style, the arhat painting system. An arhat from the main assembly hall, with furrowed brow and thin facial hair, is decidedly Chinese in inspiration [Plate 98]. All these factors demonstrate that the Manali artists are some of the best living exponents of one of the major historic schools of Tibetan painting and that Karma Gardri continues to provide the stylistic tools to engage with all the subjects and locations which thangka painting had traditionally been required to fulfil.

Finally, though Rhie is unsure about attributing the Los Angeles County Museum's "outstanding" seventeenth century Sarasvati [Plate 99] to the Karma Gardri style,³⁰ with its "spacious, atmospheric, and idealised" landscape, comparison with Tsultrim Tenzin's "Buddha under the Bodhi Tree" [Plate 100] may indicate that she need not be so hesitant. Tsultrim described the composition as one of control and clarity, to represent the calm of the Buddha's meditations, in the Karma Gardri style. However this thangka was commissioned by a westerner who specified that it should only depict "the essentials of the subject and nothing else" and he may also have seen a reproduction of the Los Angeles image.

The Manali artists have good grounds on which to be confident that their version of Tibetan painting is much admired, both in Japan and the West and at home, particularly by the Himachal government. Though the true name of the style they promote is denied, the Spiti School version of the Karma Gardri is a distinctive and highly marketable product. In this case, an artist who left Tibet as an economic migrant, has successfully sold his heritage to the benefit of himself and the Himachal government and Dorje's financial independence has allowed him to pursue a style which is utterly different from the Dharamsala Menri.

Kalimpong, West Bengal and the Karma Gardri-Menri Hybrid

³⁰Rhie and Thurman (1991: 135) "probably produced in Eastern Tibet and may be related to the Karma Gadri schools of that region."

Pema Namdol Thaye (b.1966) was born in Bhutan to a Tibetan/Bhutanese family, and educated at an English medium public school in Kalimpong, West Bengal.³¹ Kalimpong is situated on an ancient trade route with Tibet, as a result of which, a small but long standing Tibetan community is based there.³² Thaye has completed wall painting projects for a number of Tibetan refugee monasteries in India, hundreds of thangka commissions and has travelled to Europe to make three-dimensional mandalas.³³ He is widely known for his Concise Tibetan Art Book, an artists' manual published in 1987, when he was living and working at the Nyingmapa monastery of Zangdrak Palri, near Kalimpong. His uncle, an artist born in Kham (Tibet), but who went into exile in India, taught Pema to paint following a style he created from a fusion of what Pema describes as "Menris and Khamris influences".

Of all the artists I have interviewed, Pema Namdol Thaye was the most effective at describing the details of the two major styles of Tibetan painting, perhaps partly because his training in a mixed style meant that he was highly conscious of the advantages and disadvantages in each. In our discussion he confidently contrasted the two and was able to cite literary sources as well as visual ones.³⁴ According to him, the Menri style can be broadly identified "by the complexity of the composition, the emphasis on blue and green colours and the large amount of gold used."³⁵ Thaye also comments on the presence of large floral displays behind the central figures of Menri compositions and a general delight in filling the composition with "very natural" landscape features such as clouds, trees, rocks, water and animals. He is even more specific when discussing the characteristics of Menri Buddhas, whose clothing should be soft and

³¹Pema Namdol Thaye interviewed at Zangdrak Palri Nyingmapa monastery near Kalimpong, West Bengal, in 1992.

³²Awasty (1978:92) records: "Tibetan traders would have brought wool, yak-tails, hides, pashmina wool, borax, salt, musk and medicinal herbs. On their return from Kalimpong, they would have carried back cotton goods, woollen goods, matches, soap, needles, tobacco, dried fruits, sugar, hardwares and precious stones. ... hence from the earliest times small settlements of Tibetans and Bhutias would have sprung up along the trade route as staging houses, storage points and transit trading centres".

³³Thaye's mandalas for the Zurich Völkerkunde Museum are published in Brauen 1992. In 1994 he also produced a three dimensional mandala for students at the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture, London.

³⁴In 1994 (at my invitation) he spoke at the London conference "Towards a Definition of Style: The Arts of Tibet" and provided the most accurate account of the individual style of a practising Tibetan artist to date. (The text is published in Singer and Denwood, 1997.)

³⁵Gold is generally not added to Karma Gardri paintings, according to Thaye, because the metal was not found in great quantities in Eastern Tibet.

loosely flowing, posture relaxed and not "too stiff or symmetrical" and whose eyes should be drawn straight, not slanted (which appears to be more the case in some Karma Gardri paintings as we noted in the Manali jatakas). Many of these specifications, Thaye claims, emerge directly from the writings of Menla Dhondrup and "the measurements used by artists today can be traced to Menla's measurements", a suggestion which is probably more true since the publication and circulation of Wangdu's Ladakhi and Peljor's Dharamsala editions of the text. Thaye states that even brush techniques vary according to style, an issue not raised by any other artist. "The lines are drawn from a fine point and graduated to a thick base giving a three dimensional appearance. The main goal of the Menri style is to achieve a very flowing, soft, natural appearance".

Though Thaye acknowledges that the founding figure of the Menri style took inspiration from the art of India, China, Nepal and "the style prevalent in Tibet at the time", the impact of India and Nepal is seen to be dominant in matters of figure composition and measurement, whilst Chinese painting only provides decorative details such as throne and table forms and aspects of architecture, which were probably present in Tibetan architecture of the period, such as roof structures, certain types of buildings (castles and houses) and walls.

By contrast, the Chinese impact on the Karma Gardri style is, Thaye argues more all pervasive. Thaye states that though Namkha Tashi, (the sixteenth century founder of the school) took his figure proportions from those of Menla Dhondrup and Indian metalwork, the landscape elements were based on Chinese sources. His description concurs with those of Gega Lama, Rhie and our observations of the Manali artists, as he notes that "The Early Gadri shows a very strong influence of Chinese style. Here the background is usually made an earthy yellow and ... the artists use very light paint for the sky without any shading". Thaye's definition also includes sub-schools of the Karma Gardri, which he calls the early, mid and late. Most of the specifications given above apply to all three, but with one particularly important shift between the early and mid styles, which is pertinent to our earlier discussion. According to Thaye, the early Gardri is resolutely light in colour range. The mid Gardri, however, is differentiated by the contrast between light landscape colouring (Chinese) and darker figures, based on Tibetan models probably of the Menri school. According

to this classification the Los Angeles Sarasvati should be placed in the early Karma Gardri (as would Tsultrim Tenzin's "Buddha under the Bodhi Tree"), whilst the Kargyupa lineage thangka and the majority of the Manali school paintings would be mid-Gardri. By the time the later Gardri emerges (no date specified) the compositions become more floral, decorative and complex "all features borrowed from the Menri", so that ultimately it becomes difficult to differentiate between Karma Gardri and later types of Menri painting at all.

Thaye's own work illustrates this point rather well, for though he says that his landscapes were based on the Karma Gardri treatment of space and his colouring was broadly Menri, it is actually quite difficult to identify the Karma Gardri and Menri elements in his own painting. He finds fault with both styles and his products are therefore a strange hybrid. In a description of "The origins and developments of my own style" Thaye suggests that there are areas in which each style needs adjustment:

For example, in Menri, the colours used are sometimes too dark and dull and also some parts are applied too thick. Therefore the use of lighter shades as highlights, as well as less congestion in the sky and landscapes would give a more balanced effect to the painting.³⁶

That is, he resolves a Menri problem with a Gardri solution. Yet, "As for the Gardri, I think the style would benefit from an increased use of gold work, the figures drawn slightly larger, and the use of more plants. This would give more life and depth to the style." The Gardri is improved by becoming more like the Menri. The end result could be said to be a rather confused compromise and may reflect Thaye's desire to please an ever growing number of patrons. Thaye seeks to empathise with his consumers and says that both lay and monastic viewers have differing needs when commissioning a thangka:

Those who prefer Menri do so because it has more depth and beauty and is pleasing to look at. But for some who are not very skilful in visualisation, the complexity and detail of this style can sometimes be confusing. Most see the Gardri as being simple, and for those who like simplicity or who have difficulty in visualisation, the uncomplicated effect of the Gardri is appreciated.³⁷

³⁶From the draft version of his 1994 conference paper.

³⁷Thaye 1994 draft paper

Here aesthetic and religious criteria are elided, with a sense of hierarchy based on the notion that an inferior visualiser will choose a simpler style. If we consult Thaye's own recent work, we are left with the distinct impression that complexity is his preference, and that he would look askance at a thangka such as Tsultrim Tenzin's "Buddha under the Bodhi Tree" for bowing to the desire of a patron for essential simplicity.³⁸

Thaye learnt about style from his uncle, but cites two further influences on his personal style. The first comes from tenth Karmapa, Choying Dorje (1604-1674) who mastered many styles of painting, including the Menri and Kashmiri styles. Choying Dorje's eclecticism is said (by Thaye, citing Khetsun Sangpo) to have inspired a new title for a style, the "Jui'u'i Tsangdu" or woven bird's nest, implying that his style was an amalgam of samples from many sources. Examples of Choying Dorje's work, including a carved rhinoceros horn (which Pema claims to have seen), are currently held at Rumtek monastery in Sikkim. Thaye's other mentor was the nineteenth century painter from Chamdo, Purbu Tsering who, since he lived in eastern Tibet, studied in the Karma Gardri style. Thaye was inspired by Purbu Tsering's "unique style" which avoided the pitfalls of the over elaborate Menri and the too sparse Gardri.

Can the two styles actually be seen in the work of Pema Namdol Thaye? His Vajrasattva thangka [Plate 101] has a fairly pale background with few details, but is definitely coloured in the blue-green of the Menri style rather than the creamy neutrality of, say, the Manali Karma Gardri artists. Large pink blooms, associated with the Menri, punctuate the blue-green theme and a large amount of gold has been used on the lotus base and mandorlas surrounding the deity. A large scale thangka of Padmasambhava, commissioned by the Zangdrak Palri monastery [Plate 102], has virtually no Karma Gardri references, except perhaps the two dragons which appear to bite into Padmasambhava's mandorla.³⁹ It seems

³⁸Thaye (1994 draft paper) also objects to the realism of Dorje's arhat paintings: "I have seen a few paintings of Arhats looking very old and haggard and some even have no teeth. Since the arhats are said to have lived a very long life, the artists get the idea that they should be depicted as very old. The Arhats are said to have attained immortality, so that even if they have aged it would be with grace." This he cites as an example of an "inappropriate aspect of the style with minimal significance in the tradition" and which should be abandoned.

³⁹Thaye says they "are the main design motifs on the thrones of the Gardri style" but I have not identified this in practice amongst contemporary Karma Gardri artists.

to me that in his desire to demonstrate mastery of every possible stylistic and technical variant in Tibetan painting, Thaye has rather lost his way. Though designed to be displayed on the outside of the monastery [Plate 103] and therefore viewed from some distance, the Padmasambhava thangka is crammed with detail - flowers, drapery and goldwork are elaborate almost to the point of visual confusion, with the subsidiary figures disappearing in the melee. All of this suggests that what he is actually producing is a highly elaborate version of the New Menri with very little Gardri. This is rather surprising, for if we examine another large commission on which Thaye worked, though the subject demanded that the images be densely packed, the style allows for clarity and readability. I suspect that whilst still working with his uncle Thaye was less concerned to find the middle way between all the styles and so the murals he painted alongside his uncle are far more effective.

Zangdrak Palri Murals

Thaye and his uncle were amongst a group of artists who worked together on the three storey assembly hall at Zangdrak Palri. Of the three storeys, Thaye's uncle was responsible for the central floor and Thaye and another artist (unnamed) took over for the upper and lower levels. On the upper floor the wall paintings relate the stories of the Buddha's life and are almost entirely of Pema's design, though he admits it is possible to see where his work begins and that of another artist (who completed about a third of the painting) ends, mainly by close inspection of the line drawing and the portrayal of physiognomy [Plates 104 and 105]. As a designer of murals, Pema has a flair for dramatic composition. His illustration of Lord Buddha setting off to visit his mother in Tushita [Plate 106], makes a spectacular impact, as the diagonal staircase in vibrant colour and pattern, crosses the wall. The figure style is expressive and not overly ornamented. Patches of relatively plain colour create space around the protagonists as in this example [Plate 107], where a lightly patterned plain of gold does not detract from the agonised figure of a man disembowelled by a tiger. Some figures show an affinity with the Ajanta murals [See Plate 104], and others demonstrate even more clearly that this is the work of an artist born in India. Mourners at the Buddha's death include characters reflecting the religious and ethnic mix of contemporary Indian life. A be-turbaned and bearded Sikh [Plate 108], and a Hindu saddhu in mendicant's robes present

lotus blossoms alongside Buddhist monks at the body of the Buddha. The fact that Zangdrak Palri lies on the edge of an army cantonment, where Sikh and Hindu soldiers are stationed, may partially explain their presence. Thaye sees them as a reiteration of the ecumenical spirit of Tibetan Buddhism and the Buddha's biography is further explained for visitors by painted inscriptions in Hindi.⁴⁰ When this mural cycle was completed Thaye concentrated on working alone and seeking commissions from other monasteries of the refugee community and from foreigners. He has apparently never returned to the ecumenical and generous vision of the Zangdrak Palri murals in which his own experience as a Tibetan in the host culture of India was acknowledged, but has preferred instead to exploit his difference as an artist of Tibetan heritage, purveying a hybrid style which he believes will appeal to those with a taste for elaboration and a high level of visualisation skills.

Conclusion

It seems that the further a contemporary thangka painter is from the capital of Tibetan culture in exile, the more he may deviate from the version of the Menri style endorsed there. All the artists discussed here are proud of owning a distinctive style and of developing it within their own rules and those of their audience. Their success in perpetuating versions of the New Menri and the Karma Gardri shows that, though displaced, Tibetan culture has not been entirely "cut off from its roots" (Snellgrove and Richardson). As we have seen, cross-fertilisation between Tibet and India has continued through artists who travelled across frontiers (Nawang Chompel, out of India to Tibet and Dawa Pasang, out of Tibet into India) and through the regeneration which artists like Dorje inspired by permanently shifting his location. Nor is the culture moribund, for artists like Tsering Wangdu and Pema Namdol Thaye believe that they are reinventing Tibetan styles. Working well away from the Dharamsala

⁴⁰The Zangdrak Palri connection with Sikhism was also demonstrated by a photograph of Guru Nanak in the main assembly hall. It had been presented to the monastery by Sikh visitors. In the nearby ex-Tibetan kingdom of Sikkim, Awasty (1978:73) notes that "There is a curious belief prevalent that Guru Gobind Singh visited Sikkim. He is held in reverence as a reincarnation of Guru Rinpoche. This is a curious and confused belief and no lama seems able to explain it with conviction. Historically it appears unlikely that Gobind Singh visited this area. Perhaps Guru Nanak may have come to be venerated, but how this inclusion of a Guru of the Sikhs has entered Buddhism, I was not able to find out in spite of persistent enquiries".

vision of "authentic" Tibetan painting, gives them the confidence to occasionally break the rules.

Chapter Six: Chinese Depictions of Tibet

In the following pages I discuss the aesthetic and ideological underpinnings for depictions of Tibet after 1950 which were designed mainly for consumption by the majority Han Chinese audience (who make up over 90% of the population of the PRC) but were also seen by TAR Tibetans. Though few works survive from the first forays of Chinese artists who visited Tibet in the 1950s, this is a significant moment to document, since it marks the first time in history when Tibetan people, their landscape and customs were represented by a fair number of non-Tibetan artists.¹ (The photo-documentation of Tibet and Tibetans had begun rather earlier, at the hands of mainly European travellers and explorers. Henri d'Orleans was probably the first to publish his photographs in 1892 in De Paris au Tonkin à travers le Thibet inconnu, followed in the early 1900s, by Seven Hedin and J. Claude White. The first Tibetan photographer was Sonam Wangfel Laden-La, who accompanied the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to Darjeeling in 1910, and began taking pictures in 1912. ²)

One of the first projects instituted by the Communist regime in China in the 1950s was to classify the population into fifty six *minzu* or "nationalities". These groups were then placed in a scale of greater or lesser degrees of "civilisation". Emulating the "avowedly scientific scale of material stages of the social process (derived from Morgan and Engels, refined by Lenin and Stalin)" (Harrell 1995:9) the "nationalities" could then be led towards the higher plane of civility embodied in the Han, who by dint of being both modern and Maoist were at the top of the scale. The peripheral Tibetan "nationality" has been encouraged to become like those of the centre (i.e, Han Chinese) and the government of the PRC has tried to bring them up to the standards of modernity "enjoyed" by others in the country. This project is an ongoing one to which the services of Han Chinese artists (to research, document and depict) have been either directly or indirectly commandeered.

¹There are a few exceptions to this rule, such as the seventh century image reproduced in Karmay (1975:17) of the visit of a Tibetan minister to the Chinese court. High ranking religious figures, such as the Dalai Lama, also appear in some Chinese painting, particularly during the Qing dynasty (18th century) when relations between the Emperor Qianlong and the Seventh Dalai Lama were fairly good.

²Lhalungpa 1983:150

Though the primary motivation of individual Chinese artists may not have been consciously political, their works reflect the epistemological colonisation of Tibet and were instrumental in depicting Tibetans as underlings in need of redemption for the audiences of Beijing and other cities. That is as Said would have it, in order to civilise the nation/academy must first define and objectify its subjects. In this case, the objectification and exoticisation of Tibet and Tibetans is part of the means by which China as a nation defines itself, and thus has "more to do with majority discourse, than it does with the minorities themselves". (Gladney 1994:94) The narrative of the actions of Chinese artists as they depicted wild and untamed (uncivilised) Tibet traverses the period when Tibetans were increasingly denied freedom of expression, both as a nation and a cultural unit, so that by the period of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) when the most explicitly propagandistic "art" was produced by Chinese artists, Tibetans themselves claim to have been prevented from producing any work which followed their own aesthetic. At the same time, some of the most significant representations of their cultural heritage, monasteries, stupas and other religious buildings, were being disembowelled and demolished, their contents removed and stored in Beijing, Hong Kong and the West; an action justified by the Communist modernising (and anti-religious) process described above. The removal of Tibetan objects to be replaced by those of China (be they Maoist images or concrete secular buildings of the state), was designed to implement an "organised forgetting" which Connerton (1989) tells us plays such a fundamental role in the formation of colonial power. Echoing the experience of countries colonised by Europeans, the exoticism and "otherness" of Tibet was documented and depicted for consumption by the masses in the cities of China, whilst political self-determination was simultaneously denied the Tibetans. In this way the meaning and memories of Tibet were relocated to function in the production of an image of multi-nationality Communist China.

In this chapter we also see the beginnings of a response to the Chinese portrayal of Tibet amongst a small number of Tibetan artists. Though the demise of traditional and religious Tibetan art practice during the Cultural Revolutionary period, and thereafter, has been somewhat overstated (mainly in publications emanating from Dharamsala) it is no doubt true to say that much of it ceased, at least for a time, and that many

of its primary exponents left Tibet in the 1960s for exile (as we have seen in preceding chapters). However, some of the generation trained prior to 1959, did remain in Tibet and they or their students have been heavily involved with the reconstruction and repainting of monastic institutions particularly since the mid-1980s.³ (So that the Dalai Lama could still call upon the services of an excellent painter based in Lhasa for the first stage of the Kalachakra Assembly Hall murals in Dharamsala, as we noted in Chapter Four.) These "traditionalist" projects have been documented and advertised in Chinese publications such as Nationalities' Publishing House (1993) The Hidden Tradition: Life inside the Great Tibetan Monastery Tashilunpo.

However, the work of a new generation, for whom Chinese-style art schools have been the most obvious place for a person of artistic leaning to be trained, have rarely been analysed.⁴ Just as these younger artists learnt from childhood to speak Chinese, so they were educated in an artistic vocabulary totally new to Tibet. Many would argue that Chinese is the oppressors' language and that, equally, the imposition of alien art forms is yet another facet of the technologies used to gain cultural ascendancy and hegemony on the part of the Chinese. However, the response of Tibetan artists to this situation should not be prejudged. As we shall see, many did not respond to the experience of cultural colonisation in a passive manner. The works described in the following chapter may shock connoisseurs of "Tibetan art", for they display radical departures from tradition, and I do not seek to provide a justification for this horror. But political and historical facts must be taken into account in order to show that this is not simply a case of the importation of an "inappropriate" style or of a feeble attempt to recreate an "alien" aesthetic, as was the response in some quarters to, say, Indian modernism.⁵ Rather than assuming that recent art produced by Tibetans in the TAR can only reiterate a (Euro-American) sense of loss at the destruction of Tibet, we should attempt to read the images for signs of a markedly different sense of self-perception and projection amongst their producers. In some cases this sense developed into a combative interrogation of their situation.

³Repainting projects have been carried out at the Lhasa Jokhang, Samye, Nechung, Tsurpu and especially Tashilunpo monasteries.

⁴Kvaerne (1994) and Harris (1993, 1997) are the only Western authors to acknowledge non-traditional painting in print.

⁵For discussion of this problem see Clarke's (1986) "Open and Closed Discourses of Modernity".

Although we need to be conscious of the fact that Western imagings of Tibet have been dominated in this century by an emphasis on religion,⁶ and that exhibitions and collections of Tibetan art have followed this bias, it is no doubt true to say that the majority of images produced in Tibet prior to 1959 were designed for religious purposes and depict religious subjects. What we might call more secular forms of art, such as portraiture did exist however, though it was reserved for high ranking members of the religious community, royalty and aristocrats. Self portraits on the other hand were unheard of. The life styles of ordinary people were rarely documented except in some wall⁷ and furniture painting.⁸ Landscape, except in the form of topographic views of monasteries⁹ and backgrounds for thangkas, did not appear as a separate subject for Tibetan painters. Yet when Chinese artists first started to depict Tibet, the two categories just described, the portrayal of "ordinary" individuals and the land which they inhabited, were predominant.

"Spring Comes to Tibet" and Early Socialist Realism

Amongst the exhibits in the Second National Art Exhibition held in Beijing in 1955 was a work by Dong Xiwen (1914-1973) entitled "Spring Comes to Tibet" [Plate 109]. It was one of a thousand works on display, many of which constituted the first wave of Socialist Realist art in China and the results of Mao's entreaty (at Yenan in 1942) to artists,¹⁰ that they should travel and document the lives of their fellow workers. Completed in 1954, the painting depicts a group of women in Tibetan dress at work in the fields surrounded by blossoming apricot trees and a vista of a wide Tibetan valley. A road curves out of the middle distance with a convoy of vehicles wending its way towards them. Though this work is undoubtedly "realist", and probably "Socialist" or rather "Maoist" in ideology, it is worth mentioning that not all "Socialist Realist" works in China were Soviet in style (though this is where the term originates from).

⁶ As discussed in Chapter One.

⁷ As is visible in Ladakhi monasteries such as Spituk, Likir, Sankar and the new Norbulingka, described in Chapter Five.

⁸ A currently entirely unresearched area, in which artists enjoyed greater freedom to illustrate what they liked.

⁹ Such as the view of the temples and monasteries of Lhasa in Rhie and Thurman 1991 Plate 155.

¹⁰ Mao's "Talks at the Yenan Forum" (published in Mao 1960) established his view of cultural policy in the People's Republic.

In the early 1950s the cultural agenda in China was set by leading political figures such as Zhou Yang the vice-minister for cultural affairs. His dedication to the Soviet Union was clear when he stated that the Chinese:

must learn from other countries and especially the Soviet Union. Socialist realistic literature and art... are the most beneficial spiritual food for the Chinese people and the broad ranks of the intelligentsia and youth.¹¹

Yang's thinking was particularly influenced by the Russian theorist Malenkov, who had emphasised the heroic nature of the ordinary worker as a role model for Socialists worldwide. However, the form for their depiction is not defined in the political rhetoric. Revolutionary artists in China learnt their trade by following the example of artists such as Ilya Repin (1844 - 1930) and the other members of the Russian artists group known as the Wanderers. Socialist Realist printmakers Vladimir Favorsky (1886-1964), Alexei Kravchenko (1889-1940) and Pavel Pavlinov (b 1881) were promoted in the 1920s and '30s by the writer and critic Lu Xun, who approved of the epic Soviet depiction of contemporary life. The influence of these artists was sometimes quite direct, as Laing (1988) suggests was the case when Kravchenko's "Sluice on the Dnieper River Dam" was used as a prototype for "Searching in the Ruins" by Huang Yan (made between 1937 and 1945). They share a concern for the realistic illustration of the modern urban landscape. Works like this were inextricably entwined with theories about the labour force. In 1958, fifty eight artists were employed to record the construction of the Ming Tombs Reservoir (for which 100,000 workers were deployed) and their paintings were later exhibited in Beijing, and at the reservoir site, to boost morale.

However, "Spring Comes to Tibet" is stylistically closer to the earlier Western European realist painting of the Grand Manner which had also influenced Chinese art teachers. (Socialist Realism, of course, also derived many of its conceptual and figurative notions from Joshua Reynolds's definition of history painting where the positioning of human figures in the landscape is seen to reflect moral codes.) Though Millet was perhaps the most popular of the European artists to be legitimised in the Sino-Soviet Realist canon, the highly naturalistic style of this image is more

¹¹Yang 1951:7

reminiscent of the French nineteenth century landscape painter Corot, whose gentle evocations of the French countryside punctuated by the occasional cluster of people toiling on the land ultimately became popular among the French urban bourgeoisie. The use of this softer form of Socialist Realism reflects the romantic exoticism that Chinese artists generally assigned to "minority" groups,¹² as they sought to place them at the lower, but more picturesque, end of the civilisational scale. But, for Maoist viewers, certain elements of this composition would undoubtedly also be read as scenes from a political narrative in which the "liberated serfs" move towards modernity. The fecundity of the land, and in particular the blossoming trees, function as emblems of the successful harvest to come - a harvest made possible by Communist farming methods. The inclusion of the road is no mere illustrative detail or compositional device, but a metaphor for the incursion of the Chinese revolution into Tibet. Roads of this calibre, capable of sustaining the weight of a convoy, were a decisive factor in the annexation of Tibet. In October 1950 the People's Liberation Army had gained control of Eastern Tibet and had captured Chamdo, thus it seems likely that "Spring Comes to Tibet" was executed from studies made in the readily accessible eastern areas of Kham or Amdo. By the year this picture was displayed (1955) the first motorable highway to Lhasa had been completed.¹³

When displayed in Beijing, Dong Xiwen's painting presented an image of a relaxed, even languid life in Maoist controlled Tibet for the Chinese audience. It appeared that the prospect of spring planting providing successful fruits from Tibetan labour was assured, but four years after it was shown (at the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in 1958), the Tibetans entered a period of famine. The fertility of the Tibetan land, celebrated in this image, was overstretched and crops failed or were requisitioned for the People's Liberation Army and the masses in other parts of China. Thus the realism of "Spring Comes to Tibet" masked the truth of the Tibetan situation. Chinese artists were commandeered to assist in the effort to increase agricultural production all over China in the

¹²This continues to be the case in more recent Chinese depictions such as those from Chinese Nationalities a publication discussed by Gladney (1994:97), where he states that: "The minorities are almost always portrayed in natural, romantic settings, surrounded by flora and fauna."

¹³"A motorable road connecting Yaan in Szechuan with Lhasa by way of Chamdo was completed in late 1954" (Karan 1976:47)

1950s and they replaced the traditional theme of the cycle of the seasons with more prosaic images of the sequence of the farming year.

Feeding the People's Republic was not an easy task and mobilising the workforce implied an ideological shift of approach to landscape on the part of artists. Where nature had provided the neutral backdrop for the depiction of human life in earlier painting or had simply been enjoyed for its aesthetic appeal - as in traditional Chinese genres such as "Bird and Flower" painting, under the new regime, nature was to be shown as a force to be reckoned with and preferably defeated. By the early 1960s much more blatantly Socialist Realist works than "Spring Comes to Tibet" were common. Chao Mei's (1964) woodblock print "Spring Returns" [Plate 110] is just one example in which a traditional natural motif, of cranes flying East (symbolising longevity) are superimposed on a modernised agricultural background in which two tractors carve up fields in preparation for spring planting. The drivers are anonymous workers, mere details in the composition but unified with the machinery which makes the Maoist dream possible. Interestingly, these figures need not be ethnically defined, since they are part of a commune of the Motherland where man and machine join forces in the service of ideology, whereas in Dong Xiwen's spring image, the women, defined as "ethnic minority" by their Tibetan dress and simple tools, are clearly not yet fully part of the modernised state.

However, the relatively "primitive" state of the Tibetans appealed to many of the Chinese artists who painted them from the mid-fifties onwards. Some early depictions were decidedly saccharine Socialist, such as Zang Changgu's (1954) "Two Lambs" [Plate 111] which Laing (1988) identifies as a portrait of a Tibetan woman. This type of image was part of the wider project to record the ethnic types of the People's Republic in an effort to itemise and display their characteristics (in a manner similar to that used by the British Raj to documenting caste and ethnic types of the Indian subcontinent for consumption by the colonisers.) It also exemplifies the early stages of the eroticisation which accompanied the exoticisation of the minority "other". Women are more frequently the subject of "minority" paintings than men, ("Spring Comes to Tibet" is also devoid of males, either Chinese or Tibetan) and their depiction in local dress (in this case the Tibetan *chuba*) is a favourite theme which

emphasises their "innocence" of the civilised dress of mainstream Maoist society (at this time the Mao suit worn by both men and women). The fact that Tibetan women may be viewed as both supine and sensual is hinted at by the portrayal of the woman in "Two Lambs" in which a contrast is drawn between her thick coat and hat and the exposed, bare feet, which she rubs together.¹⁴

Other images from the same period as "Spring Comes to Tibet" such as Shi Lu's (1954) "Outside the Great Wall" [Plate 112], make the concept of the need to absorb ethnic minorities into the Motherland even more explicit. Here the bucolic characters revelling on a hillside in fur-lined coats (possibly *chubas*) appear to be Tibetan nomads depicted in European Realist mode. The title reflects the ideology of the People's Republic, for it refers to an inversion of the historic symbolism of the Great Wall as a monument to segregation, protecting the Han Chinese from marauding hordes. In Shi Lu's work those barbarian outsiders (like Tibetans) are to be brought in from the cold through the advances of Maoism, here represented by a railway building project. The picture is an essay in pride at both past and present achievements. The Great Wall acts as an expression of long-standing Chinese endeavour in engineering, with the railway as its modern day equivalent and another example of the triumph of culture over nature. "primitive" goatherds are assimilated into mainstream culture through modern transportation systems. The democratising force of such technology is depicted as an event to be celebrated by the average man in the street or field. Be he Tibetan or Chinese he has, scored across the landscape, visible proof of the power of the People's Republic.

Images like "Spring Comes to Tibet" and "Outside the Great Wall" project a view of Tibetans as passive occupants of a fecund land which had been readily commandeered by China. The use of a soft focus Socialist Realism, rather than the harsher Soviet style, reiterates the desire of Chinese artists to portray their colonised neighbours as gentle actors in a pastorate which had not been disturbed by the trucks and trains of

¹⁴I have yet to come across a Chinese depiction of a semi-clad or naked Tibetan woman but as Gladney (1994:103) notes, by the nineteen seventies "The image of Dai (Thai) and other minority women bathing in a river has become a *leit-motiv* for ethnic sensuality and often appears in stylised images throughout China, particularly on large murals in restaurants and public spaces."

modernity. Tibet appears to have happily slumbered through the events of the late 1940s and early '50s, when in fact she was invaded and despoiled.

"The Wrath of the Serfs" and 1970s Socialist Realism.

A little later the landscape of Tibet was used more blatantly, by artists and their patrons, as an arena for political drama. Twenty years after "Spring Comes to Tibet" and the beginning of the annexation, Tibet still needed to be presented as a part of the People's Republic, and the Tibetans, though still a minority people, were acknowledged to be protagonists in their fate. In the early nineteen seventies a team of Chinese (mainly from the College of Fine Arts of the Central May Seventh Academy of Arts in Beijing) and Tibetan artists travelled over five thousand kilometers within Tibet "for the purpose of study and investigation".

The artists listened to the angry condemnation of past sufferings by a hundred liberated serfs, asked for suggestions from former poor and lower-middle class peasants and herdsmen and improved their works on this basis.¹⁵

These "works" consisted of over a hundred life size clay figures and photorealistic painted backdrops for an exhibition called "The Wrath of the Serfs" held in Beijing in 1976 (the year of Mao's death and the end of the "Cultural Revolution"). The supposed sufferings of the Tibetans in pre-Cultural revolutionary Tibet were enacted in the highly theatrical realism of a *tableau vivant*, designed to elicit empathy from the Beijing audience [Plate 113]. The exhibition publication states that the artists involved hoped to emulate the impact of Revolutionary Opera; Mao's famous "Talks at the Yenan Forum on Art and Literature" are cited as a source for their combination of "revolutionary realism and revolutionary Romanticism". The sequence of events, set before backdrops of the Potala Palace, a generic monastery (described as a "lomasery"), the house of an government official and a "feudal manor", leads to a triumphal demonstration of the Tibetan people freeing themselves from feudal shackles to become joyful and fearless members of the People's Republic. The response of the Beijing audience is hard to establish, but it seems that "The Wrath of the Serfs", (or something very similar to it,) was also shown in Lhasa at around the same time. In a recent interview the artist

¹⁵From the introduction to The Wrath of the Serfs catalogue (Anon 1976:5)

Gonkar Gyatso¹⁶ describes his first job as an attendant and guide in the Lhasa "Museum of the Revolution" with its:

displays of life size clay statues depicting the evils of the old, 'pre-liberation' society. There were dramatic portrayals of landlords exhorting landless peasants, beggars living in caves, and monks abusing the whole of society.¹⁷

He was clearly swayed by the "revolutionary realism" of the show and states that he:

had to explain that when a new monastery was built, a child was put into a box and buried alive in the foundations. I completely fell for this and though I had no idea what religion was, I thought it must be a terrible thing. ¹⁸

Whether designed to be viewed by Tibetans or Chinese, the exhibition focused on the purported iniquities of two powerful male dominated institutions - the monastic establishment and feudal landownership. The greatest condemnation is reserved for monks who are accused of hacking limbs or stripping flesh from the bodies of live "serfs". Cannibalism is also said to be one of their habits, with the photographic "evidence" of thigh bone trumpets ("removed from the bodies of live serfs") and what is said to be "the mummified body of a female child" used as a sacrifice in a religious ceremony, helpfully provided in the catalogue [Plate 114]. Though representatives of these groups dominate "The Wrath of the Serfs", there is also a noticeable emphasis for the viewer on the tribulations of children (put into boxes to be cannibalised [Plate 115]) and women, who stoically stand by as their husbands struggle or their children starve. However, in later parts of the cycle, female figures appear as victors instead of victims depicted with hardly a trace of Tibetan physiognomy [Plate 116] for they have become the anonymous (de-ethnicised) heroines of Socialist Realism. The process by which the serfs have been liberated means that Tibet, the "beautiful place, rich in natural resources" (sculpted with all the accurate details acquired in the artists' fact-finding mission)

¹⁶See Chapter Eight for discussion of his work.

¹⁷Yeshe 1996:76

¹⁸(Yeshe 1996:76)At the end of his year long tenure at the museum, Gyatso then set off with an art teacher to visit other parts of Tibet to "give ideological advice to the peasants" (Yeshe 1996:77). His experiences in Chamdo (Kham) led him to radically reappraise his views of Chinese controlled Tibet.

can be shown to be populated by "industrious and brave people" not so dissimilar from the other residents of the People's Republic. Though for later audiences "The Wrath of the Serfs" may smack of the ethnographic display of a "dead" culture, the original intention was to evoke an actuality which would appear very much alive to its viewers.

The format of "The Wrath of the Serfs" was not unique and had been tried and tested in a number of other ideological battles. Under the influence of Soviet Socialist Realist sculpture, life-size clay images had been produced in mainland China since the mid-sixties (in fact accurate human-scale figures have been produced in China from the Tang tombs onwards). In 1965 "The Rent Collection Courtyard" was set up by a group of artists in the abandoned mansion of an ex-landlord. In this case, the life stories of the Chinese masses who had experienced bonded labour before the Cultural Revolution were narrated. Pivotal events were portrayed in the style of high melodrama so beloved of propagandists aiming to enrage an audience. Sullivan (1989) suggests that the heritage of Buddhist wall paintings of the sixteen hells was a horrifying precursor with which the audience were familiar. The "Rent Collection Courtyard" [Plate 117] served as a reminder of the iniquities of the feudal system in which it was claimed that peasant farmers were forced to sell their daughters to the landlord and to mortgage their crops for sixty years in advance. By comparing themselves with their clay compatriots, the members of Maoist Communes were to have their faith in the Revolution bolstered, and the mimesis of Socialist realism was the perfect tool for such a project. Other topics for such treatment were Pre-Liberation conditions in sweat shops and a series which recreated "The Air Force Man's Family History". Designed to be anti-elitist in their style and location, this was not art for the gallery or private home, but a public statement for the masses. All these compositions, including "The Wrath of the Serfs", were intended to evoke agreement with the actions of the government and the People's Liberation Army. The fact that Tibet was the subject of such a cycle, indicates that propaganda of this nature was still needed in the mid 1970s to convince both Tibetans and Chinese of the conclusiveness (and correctness) of the Chinese takeover.

Romanticism and 1980s Realism

By the early 1980s, the explicitly ideological drive behind art production (of the Cultural Revolutionary period) had begun to wane but a number of Chinese artists continued to visit Tibet. By this time their journeys were no longer prompted by the need for "study and investigation" to provide the details of the Tibetan environment to furnish propaganda, but by the romance of the Tibetan landscape and its people. The enormous river valleys and plains of Tibet inspired changes in palette and style amongst urban Chinese artists and the inhabitants of the Tibetan plateau proved equally alluring, and perhaps now also more approachable, subjects. By 1985 the Beijing publication Nationality Pictorial included a picture entitled "Happiness Ballot" in which a Tibetan "is portrayed as happily voting, as if Tibetans really did control their own destinies" (Gladney 1994:96-7).

Artists who had trained in Chinese art schools in the late 1970s had been exposed (through publications, exhibitions and lectures) to new art from North America and another manifestation of realism, this time of what I would like to call the "pastoralist" variety. The work of the American painter Andrew Wyeth, renowned for his landscapes in which a single, usually female, figure roams, was particularly popular in China and the specificity and intimacy with which he defines every blade of grass or bud of bush was admired. His control of the brush, creating a mess of fine lines may have appealed to Chinese artists with a residual penchant for traditional calligraphy. Wyeth's use of light is deceptively simple, his subjects appearing as if illuminated by a cool even daylight, but this apparent clarity can become eerie, even oppressive, creating an atmosphere of strict control. Sullivan hypothesises that it was this "cool realism" supposedly "free of ideology" which appealed to Chinese artists and led them to emulation.¹⁹ However, his statement must be queried, for though this is not Socialist Realism, pastoralist realism still involves a selectivity exercise on the part of the artist which may be deemed ideological. By describing a number of Chinese paintings purely in terms of their proximity to Western styles, Sullivan ignores the implications of their content, which when it consists of Tibetans must be political.

¹⁹"...Wyeth's realism appears to be totally free of ideology, being visual and psychological." Sullivan (1989:191)

Sullivan (in very Enlightenment empiricism mode) appears to believe that a Western mimetic style is somehow automatically democratic and rational, irrespective of who uses it.

Equally we must not disregard the implications of the Western landscape tradition in which the "pathetic fallacy" implies an umbilical connection between the natural world and human emotions. A case where two commentators, one American, one Chinese, establish what they believe to be the thoughts and emotions of a female subject, illustrates the mutability of readings of realism. In Yuan Min's (b.1963) "Earthline"[Plate 118] a young Tibetan woman is examined through the purportedly non-ideological lens of realism. The painting, clearly influenced by Wyeth, with a dramatic landscape setting framing a near life-size face in the front plane of the picture, was extremely popular when exhibited in the Sichuan Artists Exhibition at the National Art Gallery, in Beijing in 1984. Joan Cohen, an American who helped to bring exhibitions of Western art to China and then published a book on The New Chinese Painting (1987) describes the image as depicting a "nubile young Tibetan herdsman" who is "windblown and glamorous, standing on the high plateau, which appears convex in the clear distance, she is as beautiful as a movie-magazine star"(Cohen 1987:108). Cohen exoticises the looks of the girl by comparison to the landscape, emphasising her vulnerability in terms of a paradigm of inhospitable, "roof-of-the-world" Tibet. The comments of Cai Zhenhui, associate dean of the Sichuan art academy, on the other hand, are for Cohen, too blatantly political.

The poor herd girl is happy because the day has gone well. Her dreamy expression suggests her vision of a new China; she is thinking about China's development and prosperity and how herders like herself will have a better life.²⁰

Since, as we have established, there is a history in which Tibetans and their landscape have been envisaged ideologically by Maoist viewers, Cai Zhenhui's comment is an unsurprising variant on the "Wrath of the Serfs" theme. He reads the image of a Tibetan as an image of a liberated serf. On the other hand Cohen, an urban American writer and art dealer, enjoys the wilderness aesthetic, in which a harsh environment can only enhance a girl's looks. The "cool realism" of this image is an empty vessel

²⁰Cohen 1987:108

into which commentators, both Western and Chinese, pour their respective idealisations of Tibetans.

But can we reconstruct the intention of the artist Yuan Min or the reactions of his audience? Harrell (1995:11) notes that one of the most popular genres of non-revolutionary paintings exhibited in Chengdu in the late 1970s had been "portraits of pretty Tibetan women" and that their appeal may have derived from the sense that minority women were more available and less constrained by the sexual morals which Han women observed. The title of Yuan Min's image, "Earthline" gives us some indication that he is mesmerised by the sense that the Tibetan landscape engulfs its occupants (in the composition, the horizon certainly almost engulfs the figure) and he pushes the woman close to the viewer, as if encouraging a Pygmalion-like desire to touch and animate her. Like Wyeth, Yuan Min encourages the viewer to be both repelled and drawn to the female on the canvas. He does not however appear to agree with the stereotype of the Tibetan woman as "naturally" and glamorously fused with the landscape, as her expression suggests a sense of isolation and alienation. Nor does her depiction imply a "happy" and "dreamy" view of Chinese controlled Tibet. Interestingly it was a Western female commentator who eroticised the woman of "Earthline" as an object of desire - perhaps for the male Chinese artist, desire and loss are confused by the facts of history. This young woman is hardly celebrating her independence on the windswept plane amongst her goats, rather she displays the diffidence of a colonised subject caught in the glare of the ethnographers camera. As Gladney concludes, the beauty and nobility of the minority "savages" became an "important theme" for Chinese artists in the mid-eighties due to the fact that these people were "unsullied by Chinese political machinations and the degradations of modern society". (Gladney 1994:109)²¹ In this sense the arena of Tibet and the representation of the bodies of its women become the sites for a critique of the totalising state.

This idea is expressed more directly in the work of another artist who also emphasises the romance of colonised and unmodernised Tibet. Ai Hsuan (b. 1947), a product of the post-Revolution realist school in

²¹In "Representing Nationality in China" Gladney does not provide any pre-1980's examples (and only a single Tibetan one) so he may or may not have been aware of the evolution of this theme in earlier decades in images like those discussed here.

Sichuan, produced a canvas entitled "A Not too Distant Memory" in 1983 [Plate 119]. Freely acknowledging Wyeth again, the subject (though not identified as such by Sullivan) is a Tibetan girl standing alone in snowy wastes. Both the title and composition, with a hint of a concealed mountain (perhaps Kailash) in the distance, hint at the sense of loss which Chinese artists projected onto their minority neighbours and again focuses on a female. Sun Jingbo (b. 1949) on the other hand completed an oil study of a youth baldly entitled "Tibetan" in 1983, [Plate 120] again showing the young man almost eclipsed by the land. Jingbo had spent much of his career as an artist living in Kunming amongst a variety of minority peoples and had travelled widely in Tibet, taking photographs to help him prepare his Wyeth inspired paintings. Cohen (1987) claims that he painted minority peoples because "they are colourfully costumed and officially approved of" that is, exoticisation and objectification was an officially sanctioned aesthetic, but as we have suggested here, some Han Chinese artists may have had cause to envy what they saw as the less rigid and state-controlled life of the Tibetans.

Chen Danqing

Chen Danqing actually became famous in China for his sympathetic depictions of Tibetans. Born in Shanghai in 1953 to a family who were purged during the Cultural Revolution for holding "rightist" sentiments, Danqing's desire to pursue an artistic career was aggravated by political obstacles. Since his father had been labelled a reactionary, he was refused access to art training. The family home was attacked by Red Guards in 1966 but Danqing's father still encouraged his son's interest in the arts. Eventually Danqing became a painter of coffins for three years, during which time he met an art student Huang Suning, who later became his wife. The two of them decided to weather the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, first in Nanjing and then in Tibet, where Suning had a place on a work unit. By 1978, the "rightist" label was removed from Danqing's family and he was able to join a post-graduate course at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, which he completed and where he was later employed as a teacher until his departure for America in 1982.

Before he left, Danqing had achieved some renown in China for a series of images produced in Tibet and for his mastery of an emotive

handling of a realism reminiscent of European painters such as Rembrandt, Millet and Courbet. Danqing's earthy palette was used to good effect to record the lives of Tibetans as they went to market, worked in the fields and even visited a temple. Eschewing the brightly coloured depictions of minority types, his paintings emphasised that Tibetans were a group of people with some agency and capable of action. His "Five Tibetan Cowboys" (1980) [Plate 121] is more than just a "respectfully recorded" (Cohen 1987:103) document of men who "hang out" in town. This group of Khampa men, illustrated in a grimy realism which deflates any romanticism, are protagonists who are even allowed to display some hostility to the viewer. Identifiable to Tibetans and outsiders alike as a distinctive group, with red braids in their hair and lavishly decorated knives at their hips, groups of Khampa men are a familiar sight on the streets of Lhasa (where many of Danqing's sketches were made) which they visit for trade and pilgrimage. In Danqing's composition the arrangement of figures, with a man with his back to the viewer on the left cropped in half, emulates the lessons of Degas and photography and the attention to the details of knives reminds us of the Khampa reputation for strength and fighting prowess. It is difficult to establish Danqing's intentions here. Are the "Five Tibetan Cowboys" and "Tibetan Mothers and Children" (1980) [Plate 122] bathed in an air of pathos, of a dispossessed people, or is their depiction designed to arouse a more robust and realistic view of Tibetan life in the post-Revolutionary period?

A more explicitly political image from the Danqing workshop may help in our analysis. "The Workers Weep though the Harvest is Good: 1976.9.9" [Plate 123] is a highly significant painting, in part due to its subject matter, but also because it represents an unusual alliance between a Chinese and a Tibetan artist, Nawang Choedrak.²² The title of the painting may at first appear cryptic. Why should the workers lament a successful harvest? The answer lies in the figures which designate the date of Chairman Mao's death at midnight on the ninth day of the ninth month of 1976. The entire country is said to have virtually shut down at the news of his demise and this painting records the moment when a group of Tibetan labourers out in the fields receive the news on their radio. This piece of modern apparatus, the truck and combine harvester

²²Since a number of Tibetan artists went to Beijing to study painting, I suspect that Nawang Choedrak had been a student of Danqing's at the Central Academy of Fine Arts there.

beyond, are critical components of the painting's symbolism. They are the expressions of Mao's policies in action; the tools by which the harvest is made possible. Even the colour range emphasises this point, for the image is saturated by the golden glow of the ripened crop and the deep Maoist red of the combine at its heart. The portraits of Tibetan workers, in varying degrees of distress, are defined with the same expressive monumentality of "Five Tibetan Cowboys" and "Tibetan Mothers and Children" but Danqing fuses styles from different realist schools. The arrangement of the figures harks back to Reynolds' requirements for history painting, whilst Millet's treatment of suffering peasants is copied for figures like the weeping old woman on the right. The worker striking a heroic, statuesque posture with his radio, is more in the Soviet Socialist Realist vein. This image provides an update on "Spring Comes to Tibet" (painted twenty years earlier) showing the Tibetans literally reaping the rewards of the new political system and devastated by the loss of its architect.

However, a few telling details may justify a less straightforward reading, possibly suggesting that Danqing wants to express the distinctiveness of the Tibetan reaction to this moment of national calamity, if not out and out independence from it. The figures on the right are distinctly drawn in Danqing's style (Compare the male holding a hat in the "Workers Weep" and the central figure in "Five Tibetan Cowboys".) with the same stolid posture and immobile expression. Cropping is used to even greater effect in "The Worker's Weep", as the figure on far right is cut off (like the Khampa in "Five Cowboys"), but his exaggeratedly large hand is clenched in an inverted power salute alongside his knife, which points out of the picture plane. One of the women to the right, propping herself on a hoe, wears a striped apron over a *chuba* (not a Mao suit) and a red badge. The definition of the badge is indistinct but it appears to show a man's head, a flash of a yellow garment and a pair of black glasses; not the attire of the dead Chinese leader, but of the Dalai Lama. Wearing an image of the Dalai Lama was a punishable offence in the 1970s, so is this a clue to the political affiliations of Danqing and his Tibetan co-artist? These small details indicate that, at the very least, Danqing did his subjects the honour of acknowledging them to be Tibetan and not merely the anonymous players in a Socialist Realist drama as they were in "The Wrath of the Serfs" nor the passive beauties of the pastoralist realist paintings. At most, we might interpret them, (clenched fist, sheathed knife, Dalai Lama

badge), as signs of the impotence of Tibetans as political and cultural subjects. Since Danqing spent several years living amongst Tibetans as a result of the purge of his family by Maoists, would it be too much to suggest that he had some sympathy for the persecuted Tibetans? "The Workers Weep" was undoubtedly commissioned as an ideological exercise to demonstrate that minority communities like the Tibetans grieved for Mao as much as other members of the Republic.²³ Whether Danqing shares this view, or even that this was the case, is a matter of speculation.

Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism

Under the tutelage of Chinese painters, the 1970s also saw the emergence of Tibetans portraying their own minority people. Some, like Nawang Choedrak, learnt to master a type of realism which referenced the legacy of the European "Old Masters" more than Socialist Realism, even though it was also enlisted for Maoist purposes. As a solo artist, Choedrak's style is indistinguishable from Danqing's. Only his choice of subject matter, suggests a different relationship to the depiction of his fellow Tibetans. In "The Wedding" [Plate 124] Choedrak displays an intimate knowledge of Tibetan objects from the paraphernalia of a Tibetan marriage ceremony, but does not portray the newly-weds. Instead his rendering of two eastern Tibetan hats placed on a white ground, (reminiscent of the *kathak*s that denote blessing on the bride and groom when presented at a Tibetan wedding or possibly a crumpled bed) poignantly symbolise the narrative of the first conjugal night. However, the absence of the protagonists suggest that Choedrak continued to balk at the idea of portraiture of his compatriots preferring to remain the painterly equivalent of a costumier, providing the forensically accurate outer effects of Tibetanness for Danqing's drama.

However, those Tibetans who trained in Socialist Realism had fewer reservations. During the Cultural Revolutionary period (1969-1979), both Chinese and Tibetan artists were encouraged to work in this manner (as discussed in Chapters Two and Three). Prior to this, Tibetan visual arts (unlike drama or literature) had not been used to perform a political function or to relate or comment upon political events. The edict forcing

²³Which may explain why it is one of only two pieces by Danqing included in the Lhasa publication Tibetan Contemporary Art - discussed in Chapter Seven.

Tibetan painters to create Socialist Realist compositions with officially approved subjects, such as Mao portraits or scenes of the humiliation of the Dalai Lama, is therefore presented in Dharamasala as a double insult, since it broke the rules of tradition and introduced alien styles and subject matter. However, some Tibetan artists born during Chinese control of the TAR do not consider the use of Socialist Realism, the depiction of Tibetans or the politicisation of imagery to be problematic.

The Kanze School

The Kanze school of "new Tibetan art" was another collaborative project between a Chinese and a Tibetan artist. A Kanze school painting [Plate 125] produced in 1980 shows the meeting of a Tibetan monk, Getag Tulku (1903-1950) and the Chinese General Chu Teh at Beri Monastery in Kanze in 1936.²⁴ The monk had provided hospitality and assistance for the general and his troops as they took part in the Long March and he offered further support to the Chinese during the take over of Eastern Tibet.²⁵ The image is the work of the Tibetan artist Rigzin Namgyal, a founder member of the "Association of Young Tibetan and Chinese Artists" of Kanze ²⁶and the Chinese, Mis Ting Khae²⁷. It was shown along with two other paintings, "King Gesar of Ling" and "Tashi Delek", in Beijing in 1981 at an exhibition of the art of "national minorities".

How did a "minority" artist like Rigzin Namgyal find himself working with a Chinese artist in a Socialist Realist style on a painting of a Tibetan at his monastery? As a young Tibetan living in the east of the country, Rinzin Namgyal had grown up in a period when Chinese values were dominant and had undoubtedly trained in a Chinese-run art school. When setting up the Kanze school, Namgyal and his Chinese friend had the support of the Sichuan branch of the Artists' Association of China,²⁸ whose associate dean was Cai Zhenhui, who as we saw above, encouraged the depiction of Tibetans as they enjoyed the assimilationist "vision of a

²⁴Published and discussed by Kvaerne (1994).

²⁵Getag Tulku died in Lhasa in 1950 when he was on a mission to facilitate the peaceful "liberation" of the rest of Tibet.

²⁶Otherwise known as the "Kanze School of New Tibetan Painting" (*dKar-mdzes Bod-kyi ri-mo gsar-pa*)

²⁷Kvaerne's transliteration of the pinyin.

²⁸Kvaerne 1994:168

new China". Using a publication on the New Kanze school²⁹, Kvaerne discusses the painting of the general and the monk in some detail and establishes "mythic" resonances in it - as a parable of political power and of the "paternalistic attitudes of the Chinese towards the 'national minorities', the recipients of guidance which is benevolent but firm" (Kvaerne 1994:173) but he does not dwell on its stylistic vocabulary . Surprisingly, though paintings from this school have more Sino-Socialist Realist elements than those of Choedrak and Danqing, there are also more references to thangka painting.

The central figures in "The General and the Monk" are drawn in a Socialist Realist style which is close to photorealism³⁰ but a number of motifs in this painting have also been borrowed from Tibetan religious painting, presumably because they still function for the Tibetan viewer as iconic markers of significance, even sanctity. A comparison with a fifteenth century Sakyapa lineage thangka may make the point clearer. This painting [Plate 128] records the alliance between two high lamas of the Sakya order. It does not recreate a particular moment in time but functions as focal point for reverence; as an icon of two individuals (not named) who dominated a lineage in the fifteenth century. The focus of the fifteenth century artist is not to produce accurate life-like portraits of individuals but to emphasise their membership of a group, the *sangha* (community of Buddhists) and thus the Sakyapa monks are reproduced almost as mirror images of themselves. They sit in exactly the same posture both making the *mudra* (gesture) of teaching, with the same robes and on the same scale - since they hold equal rank. Though framed within a double sectioned niche, they share a throne. In the 1980 painting, the throne, comparable scale of the two figures and halo-niche are retained as unifying motifs and the General and Monk face each other whilst Chu Teh makes a modernised *mudra*. In that one gesture, as he appears to

²⁹The New Tibetan Painting of Kanze was published in Chengdu in 1987.

³⁰The two figures and the view of the monastery are modelled in a manner which belies a photographic source; they are defined in heavy blocks of light and shade. In 1993 one of the most popular images on sale in the Barkhor in Lhasa also featured the meeting of great minds. [Plate 126] In this case, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, are seated on either side of Mao Tse Tung with Lu Chau Chi (President of China on the right) and Chu Teh (Commander of the PLA on the left) flanking the central group. The iconic power of such an image, representing the apparent unity between Tibetan and Chinese leaders, meant that pilgrims to Lhasa in the nineteen nineties were still buying a memento of an event which happened nearly forty years earlier. Thangka photo collages of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas were also available. [Plate 127]

explain something to the attentive, even supplicant monk on his left, the power balance in their relationship is clear. Another more traditional element of the painting is the depiction of a portico with the pillars and multilayered cross beams of monastic verandas recreated with such accurate detail that it might be derived from a thangka painters copy book. The artists have emphasised that this is a meeting held in a specifically Tibetan space, a point reiterated with the inclusion of the two vases of chrysanthemums (on left and right below the throne) and the *chotsek* (table) with tea cups indicating that the soldier is an honoured guest. We only have to consult the lower portion of the painting to realise that the monastery has not only welcomed the general but several hundred of his troops as well. Thus the image memorialises the accommodation of the Maoist troops into the Tibetan sphere, and a Tibetan artist's assimilation of his cultural traditions into the new regime of Socialist Realism. The extent of the shift can be established by comparison with a Chinese artist's treatment of a similar subject. In "Chairman Mao Sends his Emissaries" by Chiu Han Shu Li [Plate 129] the still point at the centre of this whirlpool of a composition is the cheerful embrace of a Khampa and a Chinese soldier, for the "emissaries" arriving in Lhasa are the People's Liberation Army.³¹ This is clearly a piece of revisionist history, in cheery Socialist Realist style, presenting a decisive moment in Tibet's "Liberation" as if it were celebrated by all, when Lhasa was actually a zone of dissent and rebellion, with the monks of Sera and Drepung very much leading the way.

Conclusion

As we observed in the discussion of "The Workers Weep though the Harvest is Good" there are problems inherent in the interpretation of painting produced under strictly controlled political conditions. Style in itself cannot be used as a determinant of the ideology of the artist except in the most extreme cases, such as "The Wrath of the Serfs" or in the mass produced images of Chairman Mao where form and content are indelibly fused. Kvaerne and others have been quick to condemn the use of Socialist Realism by Tibetans but the collaborative projects of post-1959 Chinese and Tibetan artists indicate that for a time Tibetan painters had little choice but to become set-dressers or costumiers for their Chinese

³¹Included in *Tibetan Contemporary Art* (1991). The publication is discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.

accomplices. But Nawang Choedrak and Rigzin Namgyal were undoubtedly pioneers in framing modern Tibet for a Maoist-Tibetan audience in new styles. Kvaerne concludes his discussion of the Kanze works by suggesting that even though the school displayed some novelty, it had "surely already explored to the full its limited possibilities of expression"(Kvearne 1994:184). In the next chapter the works of recent TAR Tibetans are analysed to suggest ways in which other, more distinctly Tibetan forms of expression emerged despite the colonisation of their political and artistic space.

Chapter Seven: Depicting the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China

As one of the few studies of painting in post-1959 Tibet, it could be assumed from Kvaerne's (1994) article that all images in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) have been produced in the style of Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism and with ideological purposes in mind. Many Western commentators and exile Tibetans lament the loss of "traditional" Tibetan painting and assume it to have been replaced by variants of Socialist Realism (see preceding chapters). But this is not the case. It is therefore crucial to document other movements in art in the TAR. At present, source material for such a project is limited, making it dangerous to draw extensive conclusions from a single publication, as Kvaerne has done with the The New Tibetan Painting of Kanze. I propose to examine another rare book,¹ which at least offers a more comprehensive survey of art produced in the TAR in recent years, the implications of which are discussed in this chapter. The contents of Tibetan Contemporary Art suggest that though Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism may, for some, be the least palatable because it is the most ideologically explicit of the new painting styles in the TAR, it is just one amongst a number from which artists can choose to make their representations.

The questions which need to be raised when this material is taken into account are these. Is all art produced since the Chinese take-over of Tibet inevitably ideological and do artists, be they Chinese or Tibetan, automatically concur with the ideology of the State when they employ its styles? Is it not possible that these artists, like twentieth century painters all over the world, are engaged in the formulation of a modern or modernist discourse which includes the capacity for a critique of the political and cultural environment in which they find themselves? Kvaerne rather assumes that artists have no choice but to echo the values of Maoism, which may well have been the case during the Cultural Revolution and its immediate aftermath but, as in other parts of China, the 1980s and '90s have presented some opportunities for self-expression for Tibetan artists. We must not assume that all painters are blind followers of political dicta. However, it would be equally misleading to

¹Kvaerne may well have been unaware of Tibetan Contemporary Art as the only place I have seen it was in the Potala Palace in Lhasa in 1993.

ignore the burden facing Tibetans who wish to become artists in the TAR or to deny the appropriation of their cultural space by Chinese artists, as outlined in the preceding chapter. A Tibetan artist beginning his or her career in the TAR must pursue their training in an art school based on Chinese models and with teachers whose knowledge is based on traditional and modern Chinese art. Apart from the notable exceptions of Jampa Tseten and Gedun Chompel, Chinese artists were the first to depict Tibet and Tibetans in a modern idiom and many aspiring Tibetan artists have found the temptation to follow their lead irresistible.

We must ask how Tibetan artists have responded, if at all, to the legacy of outsiders' representations, whilst acknowledging that the power of a colonisers' image-making techniques is difficult to overturn. During the later phases of British colonial rule in India, artists like Raja Ravi Verma, Abanindranath Tagore, Jamini Roy, Nandalal Bose and Amrita Sher-Gill, utilised the imported styles of European realism and modernism to make images for a modern urban elite, but we would be foolish to ascribe their works to mere weak imitation of the colonisers' designs. Their images began the process of creating a new artistic *modus operandi* for an independent nation.² Tibetans have not yet achieved independence from their colonisers (and some, perhaps, do not desire it). Whilst they continue to live under the colonial yoke and gaze, are there any signs of a new type of image making which, as in the Indian case, posits an independent and consciously Tibetan point of view? If so, what does it look like? Does style dictate the perceived "Tibetanness" of an image? That is, can only "thangka" styles be considered authentically Tibetan, or is it possible that a different artistic vocabulary, derived from non-Tibetan sources, can define Tibetan aspirations? In this, and the following chapter, I attempt to answer these questions.

Since virtually no information on twentieth century painting in Tibet is available in the West I travelled to the TAR to begin the research. Since it is extremely difficult to study there, with prohibitions against photography and limitations on the amount of time that can be spent in the country, my comments are admittedly circumscribed. However, the book that I purchased next to the Dalai Lama's private quarters in the Potala Palace, as Chinese visitors donned Tibetan dress for their souvenir

²See Mitter (1992) and Guha Thakurta (1992) for the full account of this period.

photograph, was a valuable resource. As will become apparent in Chapter Eight, a vital part of the story which is not evident in either Tibetan Contemporary Art or the galleries of Lhasa, was relayed to me by an artist living in exile in Dharamsala.³

The Commodification of the Image of Tibet

In 1993 the focal point for the sale of contemporary Tibetan painting was in the area of Shöl, just beneath the Potala Palace in Lhasa. Prior to 1959 Shöl had been the site for a number of government buildings and granaries (Richardson 1993) and an area in which craftspeople and printers (Stoddard 1975) had their premises. Major public events, such as the King's New Year ceremonies and the religious ceremony of Sertreng,⁴ which defines a golden rosary around the Potala, took place there. But since the Chinese take-over and as a part of the "modernisation of the minorities" offensive, the area has been gutted. Buildings have been torn down and replaced with shopping arcades and new public institutions such as the "Museum of the People" (where Gongkar Gyatso was employed as a guide).⁵ Gladney (1994:97) notes that this phenomenon is by no means unique to the TAR; all "Minority areas have boutiques, open markets, tourist stores, and even "cultural stations" where minority goods are collected, displayed sold and modeled." Han Chinese need no longer rely on exhibitions in Beijing or Chengdu, for their glimpse of the exotic Tibetans. They can make a trip to the TAR itself. Non-Chinese visitors can also enter Tibet, but their ease of passage can be disrupted by political clamp downs.⁶ With the most popular sight for visitors to Lhasa, the Potala Palace as a backdrop, tourist facilities have been developed in Shöl since the mid-eighties, rededicating the space to the spirit of commerce, rather than religion or Tibetan political power.⁷ The display and sale of art (particularly easel painting) has been officially encouraged within gallery

³With the able assistance of the writer, Jamyang Norbu (of the Amnye Machen Institute) and the historian Tsering Shakya.

⁴Richardson (1993:74) discusses this ceremony amongst those which take place in Lhasa over the course of a year.

⁵André Alexander (Berlin), Heather Stoddard (Paris) and the Tibet Information Network (London) have been attempting to document the extent of the destruction of Lhasa.

⁶As Western tourists found during the period of demonstrations in Lhasa between 1987-1992. Documented in Schwartz (1991 and 1994).

⁷Klieger (1988 with Liker, 1988, 1989 and 1992) has published a number of accounts on the impact of tourism in the T.A.R..

spaces and studios as part of the commodification of minority culture. As this area is the zone in which the recent style of representing Tibet (i.e. through commerce) is most vivid it is therefore not so surprising that even the tea shops of Shöl became temporary exhibition spaces for the work of artists who tried to overturn some of the implications of Chinese image-making. (See Chapter Eight)

As visitors to the Potala make their way up the stairs, the signboard for "The Potala Palace Art Gallery" (established in 1993) screams for attention, claiming (in English) that it is "The Biggest Tibetan Art Museum". This statement has rather depressing implications, for it was the Potala that could most accurately claim to have been the greatest repository of Tibetan art up until the Chinese take-over. Many of its treasures have been removed and in 1993 it was only possible to enter a fraction of the rooms in which the Dalai Lama's collection of religious art had been housed.⁸ However, the Potala Palace Art Gallery is the largest space showing contemporary painting in Lhasa⁹ and many of the images are by Tibetan artists. On the other hand "The Chinese Artists' Association (Tibet Branch) Gallery" contains a small display of Chinese works, which conform to some of the themes found in the images in Chapter Six.¹⁰

The Chinese Artists Association: Tibet Branch

Any worker in the People's Republic - be he (or she) artist or agricultural labourer, is required to join a work unit. The notion of an independent artist living by the sale of his own wares is thus inconceivable in China. Irrespective of their ethnic background, artists who wish to work and exhibit in the TAR are required to join a work unit or group such as the Chinese Artists Association. The positive advantages of this system are to be seen in the facilities which are available for artists to show and sell their

⁸The chamber containing a huge golden Kalachakra mandala was closed, I was told, due to the fact that the monk who was its guardian was in prison.

⁹Another gallery at the Norbulingka, (also a tourist site) contained some contemporary work but of very poor, mock-thangka variety. Photography was prohibited there and so I have no visual documentation of its contents.

¹⁰The power of consumerism was confirmed at the Chinese Artists' Association Gallery by a sign (in English) announcing that "The Best Tibetan T-Shirts are Sold Here". Most visitors only reach the sales desk, rather than the gallery, in order to purchase this prized apparel.

work once they have left art school.¹¹ Nevertheless, the question of state control of culture remains germane when training and exhibiting is strictly controlled. Visiting the Lhasa galleries it is difficult not to be left with the impression that an approved range of subjects and styles is *de rigueur*. This is particularly true at the gallery of the Chinese Artists Association.

In a small ill-lit room in the Chinese Artists Association Gallery around thirty contemporary paintings were displayed at the time of my visit in 1993. About half of these were of the Andrew Wyeth "Pastoralist Realism" school (described in Chapter Six), with thick oils defining empty valleys and snow capped mountains in the distance. Following on from the legacy of the Chinese artists described earlier, the other favoured subject in these paintings appeared to be the inhabitants of the land. Few of the portraits were drawn from life, however, as evidenced in an example [Plate 130] where the treatment is almost expressionistic but the formal arrangement of the figures is reminiscent of photography. The production in the 1980s and '90s of images of men and women in traditional dress and of aristocratic background, when such people were no longer visible or even present in Lhasa, reiterates the point. These paintings are most likely to have been based on pre-1959 studio portraits, that is, from the period before the implementation of Mao suits and less ostentatious traditional dress. Nostalgic images such as these, produced by both Tibetan and Chinese artists, are part of the same tourist culture in which visitors to the Potala and Norbulingka, don the dress of an Amdo Tibetan or a Lhasa noblewoman.¹² Whilst the group portraits retain the monochrome colour scheme of their photographic sources, others, such as this portrait of a girl standing at a stairwell [not illustrated], allow some polychromy to enliven the image. Romanticism and nostalgia are still the theme however, and the girl's cowering expression echoes the colonialist objectification of Gauguin's portraits of South Seas Island girls. The Chinese Artists' Association paintings are all couched in the terms of the Euro-American realism imported to Tibet from the nineteen fifties onwards. Soviet-style Socialist Realism is completely absent, suggesting

¹¹In Lhasa, the university is the main training ground for the new generation of painters, print makers and sculptors.

¹²This option is primarily taken up by Chinese tourists, but I also came across Tibetans, returning from exile for a brief visit to their relations, being photographed in what has also become "costume" rather than "dress" for them.

that a romantic photorealism is considered more palatable for tourist tastes and for commodifying a vision of the old Tibet which is patently no longer visible in actuality.

On the other hand, whilst it also serves the tourist market, the Potala Palace Art Gallery exhibits some of the most radical work by Tibetan artists produced to date. However, in order to place these paintings in context we first need to examine Tibetan Contemporary Art, which covers a period from around 1959 to the late 1980s.

Tibetan Contemporary Art

What is Tibetan about the publication Tibetan Contemporary Art? As we have seen in preceding chapters, the designation "Tibetan" can encompass a number of historically constituted variations on the theme which are assembled together often for the sake of political or economic, rather than aesthetic reasons. In Dharamsala contemporary paintings by Tibetans are actually not just Tibetan, but Menri and Gelukpa versions of Tibetan art. The desire for the label "Tibetan" appears to increase in direct proportion to the audience perception of the "otherness" embodied in artists' works. Thus for the readers of Chöyang or the viewers of "Wisdom and Compassion", Tibetan designations of schools within Tibetan painting are deemed less useful than the overarching notion of a Tibetan Buddhist art (the thangka). For the Himachal government on the other hand, the Tibetan (and specifically Karma Gardri) sources for the "Spiti School" are played down but the uniqueness of a region of the Indian Himalayas is highlighted. In the bazaars of Kathmandu the apprehension of the saleability of anything labelled Tibetan, despite the fact that it may be produced by Tamangs or Newars, is driven by the ever burgeoning tourist market.¹³ In Lhasa, the label "Made in Tibet" also has potency since art, tourism and the politics of colonisation are inextricably fused together.

According to the Lhasa (1991) publication Tibetan Contemporary Art (TCA) the fact of an artist's presence in the TAR, not Tibetan ethnicity, qualifies him (and her) for inclusion. The 169 illustrations are accompanied by essays and captions in Tibetan and Chinese, and an introduction by the Deputy Party Chairman in Lhasa, (the highest ranking

¹³See Bentorn (1993) on the Kathmandu trade.

Tibetan official in the People's Republic in 1991), confirming the official status of the publication. Each painting is labelled with the artist's name (if known) and an indication of their ethnic background (for Tibetans and Han Chinese) or their status as part of a religious "minority" (Tibetan Muslims) alongside it¹⁴. These designations reflect recent government policies in which the minorities of the Motherland are to be acknowledged as cultural producers. This book reflects the confidence of the Chinese government in their control of what was Tibet and presents the acceptable face of what they construe as "Tibetan" culture.

Tibetan Contemporary Art: "Traditional"

Nearly a hundred different artists are featured in the publication and the range of styles is highly diverse, but the underlying organisational principles appear to be chronological¹⁵ and evolutionary, moving from "simple", indigenous beginnings towards a complex hybrid end. In the opening pages the editors have included eleven "thangka" paintings by Tibetans of religious subjects that were popular prior to 1959, that is, White Tara, Padmasambhava, Mahakala, Tsongkhapa and so on. These paintings conform to eighteenth century models, in the Menri or Central Tibetan style and are decent examples of the work of the few elderly thangka painters who remain in Lhasa.¹⁶ A couple of mandalas in this section, on the other hand, are extremely badly drawn and show little knowledge of the correct components of a mandala. Presumably these are the work of ill-trained students in post-1959 Tibet. (They are also published upside down, suggesting an equivalent lack of knowledge on the part of the publishers.) These traditional paintings make up a tiny proportion of the total number of images in the book and merely register an acknowledgement of a style of the past in a rather tokenistic manner. Placed at the beginning of the text, they are outnumbered and later eclipsed, by works in more modern or modernist styles.

¹⁴The titles of the images are given at the back of the text. I have translated them from the Tibetan but discovered, with the help of Wang Tao (from the School of Oriental and African Studies), that the Chinese version of the same title often did not tally. If the spelling of artist's names appear odd, this is due to the Chinese editor's bizarre Sincisation of Tibetan names.

¹⁵Unfortunately none of the works are dated. I have been able to establish a loose chronology by reference to other information

¹⁶As discussed in Chapter Four.

Tibetan Contemporary Art: Photo-realist

The first modern Tibetan image in TCA is the photorealist portrait of the Tenth Panchen Lama by Amdo Jampa Tseten which we mentioned in Chapter Three. [See Plate 43] The date of the painting is not included but it can be compared with the equally naturalistic Traktrak Migyur murals at the Norbulingka which were completed some time after 1956 (Kvaerne 1994). [See Plate 44] We noted that this portrait of the Tenth Panchen was widely available in Tibetan Buddhist communities in the Indian Himalayas, but it was also prominently displayed in monasteries in the TAR in 1993, (in Ganden and Shalu) perhaps owing to the imminent mummification of the Panchen's body at Tashilunpo.¹⁷ The Panchen Lama's portrait, unlike that of the Dalai Lama, has become an officially approved icon in the TAR due to the close (if difficult) relations he maintained with the Chinese throughout his career.

Jampa Tseten's photorealist style, in which he was able to paint figures that are convincingly modelled within a readable physical space, was appreciated by the Dalai Lama when he was still in Tibet. In TCA the same skills are utilised for a scene of the Buddha teaching in the deer park and a monastic interior. The style and subject matter of the former, as an illustration of a historic event rather than as a religious icon, can meet with Chinese approval [Plates 131]. But even more resounding appreciation must have greeted the latter; a rather stagey scene in which a Tibetan monk studies under the guidance of a benignly smiling Chinese tutor. The fact that "Amdo" Jampa adopted the realist style well before the Cultural Revolution, should remind us that not all realist art is inevitably Socialist or Maoist in ideology. For the editors of TCA his work is eminently approvable because he makes no attempt to transmute elements of traditional Tibetan style into his scheme. His realism is descriptive; the robes and furniture in the Panchen Lama's portrait are Tibetan and are therefore painted as such. But the same attention to detail is given to the setting of the Buddha's enlightenment though it is firmly placed in an Indian context, with palm fronds in the foreground, a monkey in a tree and devotees of decidedly Indian characteristics. Tibetan-style conventions have been utterly abandoned. Amdo Jampa's paintings

¹⁷Copies of Jampa's portrait of the Panchen were also on sale on the Barkhor, Lhasa, in 1993.

are fittingly placed at the beginning of a book which mainly concentrates thereafter on varying types of realism.

Tibetan Contemporary Art: Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism

As we saw in Chapter Six, some Tibetan artists attempted to fuse Tibetan and Chinese styles when working in conjunction with Chinese artists. In TCA two Tibetan painters, Yeshe Sherab and Lobsang Sherab record the meeting of the Mongolian, Godan Khan and Sakya Pandita in the same Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism [Plate 132]. As in "The Meeting of the General and the Monk", the central scene is constructed in realist style and a huge, ornate mandorla functions as a proscenium arch around a perspectival space. The artists are however, unable (or unwilling) to extend the realism to the full extent of the canvas. Instead thangka devices such as the mandorla and the rippling cloud formations emitted from incense burners conceal the seams between the three dimensional central space and the flattened surrounding world.

According to Kvaerne it is the choice of subject matter not the Sino-Tibetan style in itself which is most problematic. When discussing one of the three Kanze school paintings exhibited at the National Minorities exhibition in Beijing (1981) called "King Gesar of Ling"¹⁸ he complains that:

This world of Tibetan kings and heroes is, however, a gaudy one dimensional, fairy-tale distortion of history, from which the great saints and ecclesiastical figures who have dominated Tibetan civilisation and played a decisive role in Tibet's history are conspicuously absent.¹⁹

Though Gesar was a heroic Tibetan king, his story is essentially a secular one and therefore its recitation and depiction has not been discouraged in the TAR. Religious narratives, such as biographies of Padmasambhava or Milarepa which entertained and educated the masses in Tibet before the arrival of the Chinese, on the other hand, are no longer encouraged and appear to be absent from the young TAR artists' repertoire, as they

¹⁸The tale of the hero Gesar was an epic which originated in the court of the small north eastern Tibetan kingdom of Gling in the fourteenth century. A favourite of itinerant Tibetan bards over the centuries, it accrued religious subplots in the retelling .

¹⁹Kvaerne 1994:173

illustrate the heroic feats of Buddhist adepts. The TCA painting does depict a Tibetan religious leader, but in a scene where he surrenders Tibet to Mongol rule. The image falls within a genre of Tibetan painting in which historic affiliations between Tibetans and powerful figures from neighbouring countries are illustrated for posterity. Pre-1959 paintings of this sort, such as portraits of Srongsten Gampo and his Chinese wife Wencheng or high lamas meeting Chinese Emperors have been used in Chinese propaganda publications and captioned to suggest Chinese dominance of Tibet, denying its claims to independence. Kvaerne accuses the artists like those discussed here of cynically exploiting some traditional Tibetan "structural and semantic elements" only "in order to render new messages acceptable", but the process of borrowing from the past does not automatically imply dedication to the new ideology (as we shall see later) though it may be true that a training in Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realism means that style ultimately dictates content.

However, a composition by the Tibetan, Jampa Sang [Plate 133], (described in Chinese as "Prosperity" but more intriguingly phrased in Tibetan as "The Increase of the Three: Grace, Glory and Wealth") demonstrates a more successful combination of Socialist Realism and Tibetan artistic devices. It takes the basic model of the mandala - a central point encased by squares and circles and markers of the four cardinal points, but where the centre of a religious image should be filled by a deity, a young Tibetan woman milks a yak. The surrounding circle consists of female figures churning butter tea and at the four gateways Tibetan artisans ply their trades as weaver, painter, potter and metalworker. The mandala is no longer a palace for a deity but a formal device in which the secular aspects of Tibetan culture are revered.²⁰ In "Shepherdess with Lamb" [Plate 135] by Khun Hun Mei (defined in the text as a Tibetan woman painter, though with a Sinicised name) five sheep encircle a woman as she cradles a lamb in her arms, as if to feed it from her own breast. Eight white birds hover around them and are framed by a ring, echoing the modernised mandala format of Jampa Sang in a highly decorative, even decadent, Tibetan Socialist Realism.

²⁰Since the works contained in TCA are undated, it is impossible to establish whether Jampa Sang had first seen a similar painting by Chinese artist Hong Chang Krung called "Weaving" [Plate 134] or vice versa. In this case, both the Tibetan and Chinese versions of the title are erroneous, as the work actually shows the final phase of carpet production with women trimming and shaping the wool with large scissors.

Tibetan Contemporary Art: Chinese Artists of the Post-Cultural Revolutionary Period

However, collaborative works (such as those of Danqing and Choedrak and Serab and Sherab) are rarities in this volume. The majority of images are produced by individuals whose ethnicity is marked in the text. Given the fact that TCA was sold at a tourist location; a place where outsiders (Chinese tourists and foreigners from all around the world) were its most likely purchasers, we must assume that the publication was designed to reflect the Chinese view of the current state of art in Tibet. For the government of the People's Republic and the editors of TCA, the presence of Chinese artists, living in and depicting colonised Tibet, is a demonstrable fact. The inclusion of Tibetan painters alongside the Chinese is presumably designed to suggest that they concur with the governmental line and that they have been happily subsumed within the new ideology and aesthetic which we documented in Chapter Six. We need to ask if there are any differences between the works of the two groups which might imply dissent.

In general the paintings by Chinese artists date from the period after the Cultural Revolution (i.e. after 1976) when explicitly propagandistic images like the "Wrath of the Serfs" were abandoned. (The fact that "The Wrath" is not included in this publication reiterates the degree of selectivity on the part of the TCA editors, who wish to deny the more blatant visual attempts to coerce Tibetans into belief in the Revolution.) Only a couple of illustrations in TCA reflect the powerful role of woodblock prints in disseminating Maoist visions of the workers as Gu Yuan's "Rehabilitation of the Anshan Steel Works" (1949) [Plate 136] had famously done. The image of a Tibetan woman vet, listening to a yak's heart with a stethoscope [Plate 137] is an obvious (if rather ridiculous) attempt to demonstrate the advances which Communism and modernisation have brought to Tibet, suggesting that Tibetan serfs need no longer be wrathful, as animal husbandry is no longer the prerogative of men without science and technology. Other images display the history of colonisation and the implementation of the Cultural Revolution in a manner which suggests that the project was both paternalistic and benign. "When the People Marched..." [Plate 138], by the Chinese woman painter,

Hong Shu Ning²¹ celebrates the adoption into a Tibetan nomadic community of a female soldier, (on the far right of the canvas teaching a Tibetan woman to write P.L.A. in the earth) as if there were no debate. The Tibetans are presented as happily accepting the "Long" Marcher as they rest after a hard day with the yak herd which encircles them. This is the most gentle style of Socialist Realism - devoid of the harsh, triumphalist edges of Soviet painting and closer to popular Chinese calendar art and far removed in both style and content from the "Wrath of the Serfs". In another Chinese painting, "Eating Tsampa" [Plate 139], Tibetans are also presented as accommodating friends who offer hospitality to the troops, whilst the Chinese make positive efforts to involve themselves within the traditional life style of the "minority people". Here the European Realism of the type favoured by Chen Danqing is used to depict six PLA soldiers gathered around a camp fire sampling the staple food of the subjugated people; *tsampa* (roasted barley flour). Images like these reiterate the view of Tibetans illustrated in Chapter Six, where they appear as "noble savages" for whom nature, the land, and their animals are the defining features of the Tibetan way of life, but they also demonstrate that a Maoist re-education project has borne fruit.

However, in the 1980s some Chinese artists began to move away from the depiction of Tibetan people and landscapes and developed a new type of imagery based on objects from Tibetan Buddhist contexts, though these were still given titles like "Extreme Land"[Plate 140], which emphasise the Chinese perception of the harshness and peculiarity of the Tibetan plateau. "The Excellent Doctrine of Tibet" [Plate 141] consists of the multiarmed figure of Avalokitesvara, the head of an ibex, a fragment of cloth and a bowl on a blank ground, dissected and removed from any human or landscape context. Elements of Tibetan culture are displayed as in the decontextualised manner of the cabinet of curiosities. Similarly Li Te Po exoticises Tibetan material culture in a painting entitled "Sacred Objects" [Plate 142]. Allowing his imagination to roam freely, he appears to suggest that horse or yak jaw bones could be deemed sacred by Tibetans, a conception which I have yet to come across. The paraphernalia of Tibetan Buddhist practice, collected and aestheticised by Chinese artists appears to

²¹This may be a work by Huang Suning, the wife of Chen Danqing, who as we noted in Chapter Six, gained a place on a work unit in Tibet. Unfortunately I was unable to establish whether this is definitely the case, given the strange spelling of her name in Tibetan in TCA.

attach value to Tibetan culture, but like Waddell's documentation of Tibetan objects, it conceals a less positive attitude to the practice which is supposed to animate them. Since "The Excellent Doctrine", which refers (in Tibetan) to the Buddha's true teaching, has hardly been promoted in the TAR, the title and content of this painting are either a mockery or mock-up of pre 1959 Tibet.

The Chinese painter and teacher Han Huu Li is represented in TCA by two works in which he too appropriates Tibetan imagery. In "Blessing" [Plate 143] the profile form of the Buddha with his hands in a gesture of blessing and a cloud-like halo of soft grey wash is covered in scenes which are direct quotations from the painting on the figure of Avalokitesvara at Alchi in Ladakh (12-13th centuries). "Late Night; Little Chamber" [Plate 144] also references temples like the *Sum Tsek* (three storey) building at Alchi as it depicts a small Tibetan temple containing a large-scale Buddha image surrounded by monks.²² A tree and horse outside are also stylistically similar to wall paintings in Ladakh and the combination of aerial and planar perspectives for the drawing of the temple reflects a distinctively Tibetan, rather than Chinese, approach to form. Like his artistic compatriots who had been inspired by Buddhist wall painting at Dunhuang and in other parts of China, Han Huu Li has studied (most probably through photographic reproduction) the architecture and painting of the Tibetan region and used facets of its style with evocative simplicity.²³ As a Chinese artist, not a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, he depicts Buddhism as a cultural phenomenon which has produced some fine objects worthy of emulation, but just as Picasso assimilated the aesthetic of African sculpture but ignored its intended contexts, so Chinese artists like Huu Li have adopted what remains of Tibetan material culture for their own ends.

²² The *Sum Tsek* contains three Boddhisattva images whose heads reach the upper floor, as Huu Li shows in his painting.

²³ Yus Yu Shin, represented by four works in TCA (plates 44 - 47), also combines Chinese watercolour techniques with Buddhist imagery, such as a monumental Bamiyan style Buddha and a Tibetan stupa.

Tibetan Contemporary Art: Tibetan Artists of the Post-Cultural Revolutionary Period

There are no eulogies to the triumphs of the People's Liberation Army and no memorials to the Long March painted by Tibetans in TCA, though this does not mean that such things do not exist. Chapter Six included examples of Tibetan artists who had adopted Socialist Realist principles. Here the majority of Tibetan painters seem happy to emulate the watered down realisms of their post-Cultural Revolution Chinese colleagues. By the mid-nineteen eighties, the Chinese government relaxed their policy on religious practice in Tibet providing new subject matter for Tibetan and Chinese artists. Jampa Sang's "The Road" [Plate 145] and Te Yos Phee's "Monk" [Plate 146], for example, both use the back view of a red robed monk and the distinctive black yak wool curtains of monastic buildings as motifs. The Chinese artist's work exploits the abstract potential of the curtains to dramatic effect with the four white *cakra* (wheels) of the curtains dominating the composition and dwarfing the monk. Jampa Sang's "The Road" is sadly a rather more prosaic work, in which the inclusion of two dogs following the monk add to its air of nostalgia, bordering on kitsch.

However, this type of romanticised depiction of Tibetan Buddhism appears to have been eminently saleable in Lhasa. Even the Muslim artist Abu rejects the representation of his own religion and chooses to show an elderly Tibetan woman with her hands pressed together in "Meditation". [Plate 147] She stands beneath a string of Buddhist prayer flags and a view of a snowy landscape with a mountain like Kailash beyond. Footprints in the snow record a circumambulation route to the mountain. Abu's only other work in TCA "The Market" [Plate 148], is based on a view of the Barkhor, the ancient trading area around the Jokhang and home since the seventeenth century to Muslim Tibetans who settled there to pursue their businesses, but the artist only hints at a Muslim presence with the figure of a woman whose head is covered by a floral headscarf. No other image in TCA tells of the Tibetan Muslim experience (and nor did any other I came across in Lhasa) which leads me to suggest that though Tibetan Buddhist subject matter has gained some acceptance in the forms described above, other minority groups in the TAR remain unrepresented and undepicted. This may well be the result of two factors. The history of

Chinese portrayals of Tibetan life has provided a precursor for Tibetan and non-Tibetan artists which legitimises the choice of such a subject. (The Potala and the surrounding area of Shöl provided the inspiration for a dark and expressionistic work by two Chinese painters, Yu Shu Tung and E phing for example [Plate 149].) Secondly, the promotion and commodification of a carefully tailored image of Tibet for consumption by tourists creates a financial imperative which artists cannot ignore. I have not been able to establish whether a Muslim artist like Abu is subject to religious proscriptions which prevent him from illustrating Islam in Tibet, but I do know that Tibetan Muslims were as persecuted as their Buddhist neighbours during the Cultural Revolution.²⁴

By far the largest category of paintings produced by Tibetan artists in TCA however are those of secular subjects in the realist styles which Chinese artists had imported to Tibet. Kalsang Chungpa's "Water Collector" [Plate 150], Tashi Tsering's "Sun in Winter" [not illustrated] and Tsang Chos's "Separation" [Plate 151] are reminiscent of works by French painters Millet and Courbet, as transmitted to the Tibetan context by Chen Danqing. These Tibetan artists attempt to capitalise on the empathic response which realist mimesis supposedly ensures, though whether it is Tibetans or outsiders who are more likely to connect with the psyche of a Tibetan woman as she rests from her labours, or the father as he takes leave of his family, is unclear. In defining the realities of subsistence on the Tibetan plateau these artists do not indulge in a Socialist Realist heroising of their fellow workers. Some recapitulate the Pastoralist Realism of Chinese painters of the early nineteen eighties as in Sherab Gyaltzen's "Grass Steppelands" [Plate 152], where landscape is utterly dominant; human figures provide the incidental detail in a treatment which is heavily reliant on Wyeth. At least the portrayal of Tibetans is executed by Tibetans, but these images hardly proffer a Tibetan aesthetic.

The works described above rarely stray from the realist paradigms established since the 1950s and are therefore ideal for a new middle class market of mainly Chinese business people and cadres or foreign consumers who desire to collect impressions of the region with which

²⁴One elderly woman who lived on the Barkhor in Lhasa told me (in 1993) how she removed copies of the Koran from the flames of the Revolutionary fires which consumed hundreds of Muslim as well as Buddhist texts.

they have a passing acquaintance. They may be produced in what for Tibetans are modern or alien styles, but they are hardly modernist. Below I identify three artists whose work possibly does suggest a critique of the Chinese system in which they were educated and an attempt to create images which point to an independent Tibetan identity.

"Son of a Serf"

Tashi Tsering adopted European Realism for his painting "The Sun in Winter", but he is also responsible for a more important painting, a self-portrait, an unknown genre in pre-59 Tibet and the only one included in TCA. As we have seen, the Euro-realism of Chen Danqing was avidly taken up by Tibetan artists to represent their compatriots but few of them turned the mirror of realism directly onto themselves. Painted in thick oils and a monochrome colour scheme Tashi Tsering's "Son of a Serf (or Slave)" [Plate 153] is problematic both from the point of view of the translation of its title and the image itself. Couched in the conventions of artists' portraits from Europe, particularly those by Rembrandt,²⁵ Tashi Tsering portrays himself as a troubled man but also quite specifically as a Tibetan (he wears a *chuba*) and an artist (he holds the tools of his trade, brushes). The image constitutes a radical statement of his ability to represent himself, even if he does it in the manner of others. Geeta Kapur has argued (in a recent lecture at the Royal College of Art, April 1997) that realism dominated the work of early Indian modernists because of its power to display identity and the categories from which identity is established such as nationhood, ethnicity, class, religion and gender. Tashi Tsering's self-portrait acknowledges this mimetic power but without further information it is difficult to define the relationship between his identity as a male Tibetan artist and the ideology of the space in which he is located. The artist's expression in the painting and its title "Son of a Serf" could suggest a pessimistic reading if we view him simply as the offspring of a feudal system. More probably we should accept the facts of Maoist policies in Tibet and see this as the "liberated" son of a serf who now has the freedom to become a painter. But Tashi Tseing does not employ the triumphalist Socialist Realism of "The Wrath of the Serfs" and his demeanour is more pensive than heroic. The solemn view which he takes of himself, and to which the viewer is drawn, is hardly

²⁵ Such as the late Rembrandt self portrait in Kenwood House, London.

celebratory. Does the inscription suggest that Tashi Tsering views himself as liberated from the traditions of pre-59 Tibet which would deny him the opportunity to depict himself or to work in oils? Or should the fact that he wears a *chuba*, an item of Tibetan dress not encouraged by the Chinese regime portray an act of defiance, proposing an ironic reading of the title? Tashi Tsering may be considered by Chinese colonisers as merely the "son of a serf", a member of a group of people which Chinese artists had depicted as a generic ethnic minority (and is therefore labelled as such in the list of illustrations in TCA) but as both the subject and author of this image, Tsering challenges this stereotype. This selfportrait also proposes some questioning of Sullivan's "cool realism" argument (Chapter Six) as Tsering's realist style and subject matter cannot be construed as ideologically neutral.

Nawang Raspa

Tsering's painting hints at one of the criteria for modernism which we proposed at the beginning of this chapter; political critique. Nawang Raspa's work, although deemed suitable for this publication and therefore gaining official sanction, has more explicitly subverted the political intentions of the editors. His work is predominantly realist in style but a subcurrent of radicalism churns beneath the surface. Unlike any other artist in TCA, he has submitted one work which is "*ming med*", (without a name) ie. untitled. This piece is extremely important and we will return to it below.

"White Moon; Red Banner" [Plate 154] is a harrowing portrait of a woman seated amongst the rocks in a landscape which is truly forbidding. The naturalistic elements of the composition tell part of the story, with the viewer forced to focus their attention on the furrowed brow and pensive posture of the woman, whilst bare trees in the hinterland emphasise aridity and desolation. But the real tale is told in terms of Tibetan symbolism. The recent history of Tibet is literally etched into the environment, with the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum* carved in stone behind the central figure and the red banner of the title falling like a blood stain over the rocks and the woman's sheep skin *chuba*. Although required to avoid direct political statement, there can be little doubt that Nawang Raspa has used the colour red within the symbolic context of

Communism. The "Red Banner" is the Red Flag which falls like a pall over the countryside of Tibet, whilst the mantra and the white moon are elements saved from the ancient cultural vocabulary of Tibet. For Tibetan Buddhists, the full moon is associated with auspicious events. In pre-1959 Tibet ceremonies marking the Buddha's birth and parinirvana were held at full moon with entire communities performing circumambulations of sacred sites by nightfall.²⁶ The distress of the solitary figure in Raspa's work may be connected with the partially obliterated lunar view, as a pale red cloud traverses the white disc.

A similar theme is expressed in "The Sound of Autumn Thunder", [Plate 155] though landscape alone takes on the burden of representation. The mantra on the rock reappears, illuminated this time not by the full moon, but by a crack of white lightening. Red pigment runs down the rock, like an abandoned flag or a rivulet of blood, but this is counterpointed by two opaque tissues of ghostly white. Where Chinese viewers may take this as another portrayal of the "Extreme Land", Tibetan Buddhists can read the floating fabric in the trees as the forms of Tibetan *kathak* (scarves of blessing). In this apocalyptic environment Raspa offers them as signs of hope to those who may read his symbolism.

The piece in which Raspa comes closest to overt political allegory is the unnamed plate 73 in TCA, in which a crowd of Tibetans, some clutching prayer wheels and mani beads, crouch beneath a disc which is both sun, moon, globe and clock [Plate 156]. (The sun-moon symbolism is reiterated by a smaller disc on top which has the same configuration as such emblems on the top of stupas.) This is the first and only reference to a Western style time-piece in a painting by a Tibetan (that I know of) but its very uniqueness suggests a precursor in the famous painting by the Spanish Surrealist, Salvador Dali. In fact Raspa may be deliberately quoting from Dali's "The Persistence of Memory" (1931, now in the Museum of Modern Art, New York) in which a drooping, molten clock evokes the impact of the passing of time in the individual subconscious. In "*ming med*" the globe-clock functions as symbol of the collective consciousness of history amongst the Tibetan people, since it is surrounded by scenes from life in pre-1959 Tibet. A stupa with prayer flags,

²⁶ A practice continued in the exile community and which I observed in Dharamsala and Mussoorie.

rocks engraved with mantras and Buddha images, yaks ploughing fields and a monastery are sketched into the area above the heads of the figures. This illogical, non-naturalistic space defines the dimensions of a shared memory. Scenes emerge from the sunset orange backdrop, like cameos of a former life visited in a dream as the group of huddled figures, eyes raised or gazing gloomily forwards, appear to wait for the clock to move on. Unfortunately it is in the nature of painting for time to stand still, and Raspa's clock is stuck at half past three. The prayer wheel held by a Khampa in the centre of the group is also in suspended animation. The meaning of this symbolism is hard to decipher, but Tibetan Buddhism and its practices are undoubtedly the focus of this work. The Tibetans portrayed seem to expect both the clock and the prayer wheel to become animated at some point. Will that moment enable the memory of pre-59 Tibetan practices to metamorphose from hallucination into lived reality, with the faith of Tibetan Buddhists reactivating stupas and monasteries? Or is Nawang Raspa's view more cynically proposing that in the eyes of the world (the globe) time does stand still for Tibet and change is impossible. This image with "no name" comes closest I believe to a statement of Tibetan frustration at the loss of their heritage, which means that both for them and the outside world, an independent Tibet survives only in the imagination and memory.

Gongkar Gyatso

Nawang Raspa is one of the few Tibetans engaged in a modernist critique of conditions in the TAR through a style which is a distinctive amalgam of Expressionist and Surrealist influences. However, both he and Tashi Tsering cannot escape the desire to represent themselves, and/or others like them, figuratively. Gongkar Gyatso, on the other hand, takes refuge in unpeopled spaces and a kind of abstraction. Two pieces published under his name in TCA are not dramatically impressive works on first viewing [Plates 157 and 158]. Their meaning is also compromised by confusion in the list of illustrations, with plate 128 labelled as either "The Village" or "The Secret" and 129 as "Extreme Land". "The Village" is the more likely title for plate 128 but it actually shows a monastic compound, bereft of man or beast, whose empty atmosphere is emphasised through the use of heavy shadow. I would suggest that the erroneous title implies that at least some of the captions for the paintings in TCA were not provided by the

artists themselves but by Chinese editors. No Tibetan could mistake the specifically religious architectural details of "The Village".

The restricted palette and cool contours of this painting prepare us for the near abstraction of "Extreme Land" but again the title is misleading. The fact that the same wording was used for Chinese artist Ye Ching Heng's painting, which noticeably does not show any land at all but focuses on ethnographic display, should come as no surprise given our earlier discussion. In 1992 Gongkar Gyatso described his work as a recreation of a specific place, the Lhamo Latso lake to the south of Lhasa.²⁷ The lake has a particular significance for Tibetan Buddhists as it is named after Palden Lhamo the protector goddess of the Dalai Lama. A *la* is a spirit or soul and *tso* a lake and so Lhamo Latso is the lake where the spirit of the protector resides. The lake is also the place where the regent of Tibet goes to seek a vision of the birthplace of the next Dalai Lama, and thus is by no means a simple landscape detail. The title "Extreme Land" thus reiterates the Chinese preoccupation with Tibet as an exotic and remote place (without meaning) and obliterates the meaningful resonances which would be aroused in a Tibetan viewer, had the correct title been given.²⁸ In the late 1980s, Gongkar Gyatso was amongst a group of Tibetan artists who began to use landscape as a way of reengaging with their Tibetan identity (as we shall see in Chapter Eight). Gyatso rejects Euro-American realism as a style, perhaps because he views the Tibetan landscape as a fact of life with which he can take artistic liberties; not a rare domain which needs to be accurately and realistically portrayed in order to be understood by outsiders.

Significantly, further works by Gyatso with a new approach to style and more confrontational meanings, are not featured in this book, which may indicate that provocative pieces by other artists are also missing. Tibetan Contemporary Art presents a selection of works commandeered to promote a vision of a multi-ethnic, Maoist-but-still-exotic Tibet, those which dissent from this view have been omitted but can be seen in other locations.

²⁷Gongkar Gyatso interview in Dharamsala, August 1992.

²⁸In fact the Tibetan title is just visible at the bottom of the canvas as the artist wrote it.

Moving Towards Modernism

So, of nearly one hundred artists, half of whom are Tibetan, only a handful of works by Tibetan artists suggest any breaking of the mould. Whether the rest of the artists can be deemed to agree with the ideology of the People's Republic (as we asked at the beginning of this chapter) remains difficult to validate, except in cases where the style concurs with the politics of the subject matter (eg. vets with yaks, mandalas of craft and commerce, celebrations of Tibet's lost sovereignty), or where Chinese artists, though using a less explicit Socialist (Euro) Realist style, perpetuate the image of Tibetans as charming but successfully subjugated (eg. welcoming the PLA, sharing their food). A similar more neutral Realism is also used for the appropriation of Tibetan visual culture, and though this kind of depiction of the "Extreme Land" appears to be more generous in intent, its producers cannot escape the colonialist aesthetic. However, works in TCA and the Chinese Artists Association Galleries are hardly self selected and so, as we noted at the beginning, these examples provide only limited evidence of what artists might produce given different political conditions.

We have identified some stirrings of dissent, in the works of Nawang Raspa, Tashi Tsering and Gongkar Gyatso (and possibly in at least one image by Chen Danqing, which was published in TCA. See Chapter Six) but this reading may well not be shared by the editors of TCA, who would be unlikely to publish works which delineate a complaint about the current state of Tibet. This, I suggest, is not due to a mistake or over-interpretation on my part, but because radical Tibetan painters have deliberately created styles which prevent the authorities from identifying their true meaning. This is a crucial component of the new modernist Tibetan painting - its critique is muted and subtle. The most recent images take the position adopted by Gongkar Gyatso, rejecting Sino-and Socialist Realism in preference for a pared down abstraction from the real. As a founder member of the first Tibetan artists' association, the influential but short-lived "Sweet Tea House Painters", Gyatso led the development of a style and approach which was consciously Tibetan and thus anti-Chinese. Thus the images discussed below answer some of our opening queries. What does the art of "independent" and identity conscious Tibetans look like? We can examine a new artistic vocabulary which, at least for time in

the TAR, was construed as Tibetan, though it emerges from a modernist reappraisal of historic thangka images. (But, as we shall see in Chapter Eight, when Gongkar Gyatso went into exile in Dharamsala, he found that his "Tibetanness" and that of his work was disputed.)

The beginnings of Tibetan modernism initially stemmed from an engagement with the formal properties of European modernism, as it had been conveyed to Tibet through Chinese run art schools, such as the Lhasa University Fine Art Department. Artists like Gongkar Gyatso also visited Beijing where exhibitions of twentieth century European and American painting had been held since the 1960s.²⁹ Two works by Jigme Thinley (published in TCA) present evidence of the possibilities for experimentation with style. "Preparing Barley" [not illustrated] and "Nurture"[Plate 159] deal with the same subject matter, a woman and child, but "Preparing Barley" is a realist study of a family in a domestic interior of the Millet/Peasant Pastoral genre, whilst "Nurture" is a Post-Cubist play on shape and colour with only a smattering of references to the actual world. For "Nurture" the artist takes his cue from the linear patterns of Tibetan women's aprons and creates a composition which appears to be entirely composed to flat planes, until we notice the head and breasts of a sleeping woman and the eyes of a female child peeping from a modernised *chuba*. The body of the mother is lightly modelled and the head drawn to show both profile and full face, a technique first developed by Picasso in the second decade of this century. These two works transpose the popular Western theme of mother and child to the Tibetan context and demonstrate Thinley's knowledge of its treatment in the history of European art. It is impossible to ascertain whether Thinley pursued the implications of modernism in other paintings, but others certainly did.

Potala Palace Gallery: New Tibetan Modernist Painting

At the Potala Palace Gallery³⁰ (located in a converted seventeenth century building at the base of the Potala) the paintings on sale in 1993 were primarily the work of Tibetan artists trained in the Lhasa University art

²⁹For an illustrated history of this period see Cohen 1987

³⁰ The financial side of the gallery is controlled by a group of young Chinese managers, though when I visited in 1993 they claimed that some Tibetan artists were also involved. Unfortunately they could not provide the names of the artists whose work I examine here.

school.³¹ As stated above, many of them were not realist or figurative but, like Gyatso's "Lhamo Latso", closer to abstraction. In fact the style is generally abstracted from two sources: the iconography of earlier Buddhist images and imagery of the land of Tibet. The recycling of elements of traditional Tibetan iconography within a new idiom of painting suggests that artists no longer feel a compulsion to represent Tibet through realism and that like artists in the nineteen sixties in India, they take on the "detached stance of a mystical and hybrid style" (Kapur 1997 lecture) which is emphatically modernist.

Sino-Tibetan Socialist Realist paintings did preserve some elements from thangka painting, such as the mandorla or the mandala within realist schemes (in "The Meeting of the General and the Monk" and "The Meeting of Godan Khan and Sakya Pandita" and the "modernised" mandalas), but in more recent painting, motifs from Buddhist paintings of the past are dominant. In one Potala Palace Painting [not illustrated] a light-emitting Buddha is drawn entirely according to a traditional format, though without any subsidiary figures or landscape setting, as was the case in the Manali Buddha jatakas or in Dharamsala Menri thangkas. In another [not illustrated] the depiction of a couple in sexual union is based on *Yab-Yum* (father-mother) tantric union imagery, but without the iconography of ritual accoutrements they have been divested of any specifically Tibetan Buddhist symbolism. The treatment of stylised hand gestures and multiple arms, suggests greater affinity with Synthetic Cubism than with thangka painting. During his training at the Minority Art School in Beijing (1980-1984) Gongkar Gyatso³² had discovered the work of Braque and Picasso and had experimented with the dissection of form and multi-point perspective and so it appears likely that the Potala Palace artists of the late eighties also had access to these modernist practices.

³¹There were also some thangka style paintings which conform to the tourist aesthetic employed in Kathmandu, where a dark palette of browns and greens which is said to appeal to Western taste, predominates. I suspect that these pieces were imported from Nepal. In 1992 and 1993 I interviewed a number of Tibetan artists employed in the flourishing thangka trade in Kathmandu and Pokhara, Nepal, but have not included their work in this thesis. Bentorn (1993) provides a detailed anthropological analysis of the Kathmandu market.

³²See Chapter Eight

In [Plate 160] direct quotation from a Tibetan style of drawing the face, feet and hands and the bold colouring of some thangka styles (like the Drigung style of Nawang Choepel in Ladakh) are crucial components of the artist's repertoire. The features of a wrathful deity form the focal point of the composition which is then encircled by hands and a yellow mandorla-like ring. These in turn are cradled in the interlinked hands of a seated Buddha in lotus *asana*, as though the wrathful and pacific aspects of a deity had been dismembered and reunified. The fusion of these elements in a single plane is the result of a modernist approach to space and though some figuration is present, realism is avoided. [Plate 161] is another case in point with the "traditional" formulation of the eyes of the Buddha dominating the canvas.³³ The addition of four sets of eyes facing the cardinal points, illustrating the omniscience of the Buddha, is one of the few anthropomorphising elements of stupa symbolism. In the Potala Palace painting, nine stupas are placed within one of the 'eyes', an unusual configuration, (which I cannot explain) since eight is generally the preferred number referring to the eight stupas built over the relics of the Buddha's body. A blank peach coloured disc appears between the eyes above the stupas like the *urna* of the Buddha's superior wisdom. Two sets of brown eyes follow the outline of the Buddha eyes but their lower edges trail off into rivulets of colour like streams of tears. Only the blue eyes placed within the protective frame of another eye are tearless. The work is obviously about vision - the vision of the beholder of the Buddha (ie. his brown-eyed followers) and the spiritual vision of the Buddha himself (ie. the blue eyed boy under the Banyan tree) and fundamentally the vision which he transmits of the universe which is inconceivable to the human eye (expressed in the peach-coloured *urna*). Though stylistically novel, even modernist, this image recreates the ideas of the meditational mandala and the stupa, where the practitioner is drawn by interior and exterior vision to consider the Buddha-principle and then the cosmos beyond.

In these images, thangka motifs and mantras are utilised in the manner of quotation or intertextuality [Plate 162]. The Tibetan Buddhist viewer's familiarity with these details is assumed and it is this factor, not

³³We need to qualify the use of the word "traditional" here, since the shape of the eyes is based on the style imported to Tibet by Nepalese artists. The Kumbum at Gyantse, a stupa which survived the Cultural Revolution intact, has four sets of such Nepalese style eyes.

simply the influence of European art movements which allows us to assign them to a category of Tibetan modernism. The fusion of images of the past with the formal implications of an "alien" aesthetic, creates a hybridity which is decidedly modernist. Some might argue that the omission of the full range of thangka iconography and more emphatically "Tibetan" modes of representation implies an avoidance of direct statements about Tibetan Buddhism or a Tibetan cultural identity but such representations are politically dangerous and given their Chinese style training, an impossible option for these artists.

The Quick and the Dead

The fact that at least half a dozen of the paintings in the Potala Gallery deal with scenes of the dead or of sky burial sites may reflect the desparation experienced by Tibetan artists in the TAR, but their depiction is not a novel subject in itself. Prior to 1959 images such as the Shikhro mandala,³⁴ which includes a ring of cemeteries, and the Wheel of Existence (*khor-lo*) are forms in which consideration of death as one of the processes by which the Buddhist may achieve liberation from the samsaric realm are portrayed. In one Potala Palace painting [Plate 163] scenes of dismemberment and vultures picking at corpses are drawn in the uncompromising manner of the hells of earlier Wheels of Existence, where brutal tortures were painted with loving attention to detail. In this painting images of death are superimposed on the upright black form of a man, whilst the inverted silhouette of the Buddha is outlined in white below. The scrambled brown and rust coloured surface around these figures is marked with pieces of Tibetan text and framed with black as if to define a rocky niche or cave. The texture of this work, reminiscent of a rubbing made on stone and the monumentality of the central figure, all point to a relationship in the artist's imagination with the rock cut Buddhas of the Tibetan landscape.³⁵ Another telling detail is the small white stupa placed in the middle of the black figure's head. The stupa, in its original function as resting place for the remains of the body of the Buddha, reiterates the metaphysical speculations of this piece but placed near the head, it also has associations with traditional depictions of the Maitreya, Buddha of the future.

³⁴Illustrated in Brauen (1992).

³⁵Illustrated in Chayet (1994).

But the most dramatic example of the new Tibetan and Buddhist aesthetic on display in the Potala Palace Gallery in 1993 was an updated version of the Wheel of Existence [Plate 164].³⁶ Such images were so profuse in pre-59 Tibet that after several visits Lama Anagarika Govinda³⁷ could write "In practically every Tibetan temple a vivid pictorial representation of the six realms of the samsaric world can be found." These images were designed to aid the devotee as (s)he contemplates existence and death and are supplemented by texts on the same subject. Since there is a didactic intention behind the image, the viewer is often assisted by inscriptions. In the Potala Palace Gallery painting however, inscription and the elaborate symbolism of the twelve stages of the evolving consciousness, the six realms of existence and the three causes of delusion (ignorance, lust and greed) are all rejected in preference for a starker vision, though some formal ingredients of the old model are retained. The wheel is still held in the clawed hands of *Shinge*, the wrathful form of Avalokitesvara who is judge and lord of death. His three eyed visage, peering like a *kirti-mukha* (mask-image) over the wheel as his teeth grip into it, is not dissimilar to older images. However, here the similarity ends, as the wheel is defined by a thin ring of skulls encircling the naked body of a woman. The centrality and symmetricality of her position in the painting and the *mudra*-like hand gesture which she makes, suggests that this is some kind of goddess. But the presence of vultures hovering about her body indicate a "sky burial" site, where once dismembered, her body would be fed to the birds. The two interpretations, corpse or goddess, are not mutually exclusive, when we consider that Tantric adepts were encouraged to practice meditation at charnel sites. This woman may be the new naked goddess of death and her image retains the philosophic function in which the viewer is asked to contemplate the end of existence as had been the case in the thangka or mural form.

Although the complex enunciation of doctrine has been removed in this image, some references to the Tibetan Buddhist view of death are expressed. A connection between the wrathful Avalokitesvara and his

³⁶Examples of the Wheel of Existence are also discussed in Chapters Three and Five.

³⁷ Govinda was a German who converted to Tibetan Buddhism and began his travels in Tibet in Tsaparang (Western Tibet) in 1947.

benign, compassionate form (reincarnated in the Dalai Lama), is made through the "seed" syllables (*Om, Ah, Hum*) of his mantra placed along the bottom; the only redemptive element of an otherwise stark composition. It is also highly significant as a firmly Buddhist statement in the less than encouraging atmosphere for such things in the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Tibetan "Abstraction"

Rather than concerning themselves with a kind of empiricism and close observation of the concrete (as the Chinese realist schools had done), these artists are developing a more conceptual style, which makes reference to the visible world but in an "abstracted" manner. This approach has precursors from the history of Tibetan Buddhist image making which emerge from the fundamental problem of how to depict the Buddha.³⁸ Tibetan accounts³⁹ of the creation of the first Buddha images frequently focus on the difficulties faced by artists when attempting to portray the Buddha from life. His body is said to have emitted a blinding light which made the task near impossible. Instead myths emphasise the miraculous emanation of the Buddha image onto cloth or stone, thus denying human involvement. A similar denial of human agency accompanies reports of the creation of culturally significant objects in Tibet - from the construction of Samye monastery and the Jokhang in Lhasa to the appearance of Buddha and Bodhisattva icons in the "living" rock. These tales reiterate the special properties of the Buddha as a subject who is more readily perceived by the mind than the eye. However, a highly elaborate code for imaging the Buddha had been developed in pre-1959 Tibet (and is continued in the exile community as we have seen). When attempting to imagine the Buddha in the 1990s in the TAR, Tibetan artists have returned to some of the simpler Buddhist motifs (such as eyes, wheels and

³⁸The debate about the emergence of iconic rather than aniconic Buddhist imagery has been explored by many Western art historians, but their desire to establish a strict separation between figurative and non-figurative imagery in the early Indian Buddhist monuments (such as Sanchi, Amaravati etc.) is not shared by the artists discussed here and therefore I have not emphasised this types of analysis.

³⁹Such as Thaye (1987), Lama (1983). In "Tibetan Thangka Painting- A Short History" Sangay (1984), provides an extremely brief "history" (three pages) which begins with the story of the Indian King Bimbisara (of Maghada) sending his artists to paint the Buddha. "However, as soon as they started to draw, their eyes were blinded by his dazzling light. Fortunately, Buddha was near a pond which reflected his image. Thus the artists were succesfully able to copy from that image." (1984:31)

other so-called "aniconic" devices of Indian and Nepalese Buddhist imagery) freeing themselves from the strictness of earlier iconometric and iconographic specifications.

This change could be assigned to the loss of training in the technical skills required to produce such images - a training which traditionally took years of patient labour. Or it could be more positively interpreted as a move towards a new vocabulary which is more flexible than the old and more importantly, the abstracted style may have provided an escape for Tibetan artists from the requirements of the Chinese ideology and aesthetic. These images are by no means *thangka* paintings, but they do present non-explicit references to Tibetan Buddhism and possibly to an independent Tibetan vision. As Michael argued, (see Chapter One) with reference to the refugee community, Tibetans have demonstrated a high degree of "adaptive capacity" in their reinvention of traditional political structures to suit the facts of exile but "some of the unessential aspects of the Tibetan order - the surface trimmings of inherited tradition - fell off and the essence remained". I have argued however, that if references to the "essence" of the past have been used by Tibetan artists, it is in order to defy the reductionism of Chinese representations of Tibet; to counteract the exoticisation which continues to be part of the nation state's modernisation and unification programme. This drive is designed to lead to "The homogenisation of the majority at the expense of the exoticised minority" (Gladney 1994:95) Some Tibetan painters have tried to prevent this and, rather as monks reinvented the religious practice of *khorra* (the circumambulation of sacred sites) during the 1987 "uprising", they have politicised religious imagery.⁴⁰

⁴⁰Schwartz (1994:27-28) "Khorra retains its ritual significance as a means of accumulating merit; however, merit making is transposed into the arena of political action and the everyday private practice of religion is transformed into public protest."

Chapter Eight: Gongkar Gyatso and "Tibets" in Collision

In this closing chapter I examine the career of a Tibetan artist born in Lhasa shortly after the Dalai Lama's departure from Tibet but who later joined the exiles in Dharamsala. The conflicts which Gongkar Gyatso experienced both in the TAR and the refugee community allow us to recapitulate some of the themes of this dissertation. Gyatso's search for a Tibetan identity for both his work and his persona has given him first hand knowledge of the tensions between experimentation with modernist styles (TAR) and the demand for a return to traditionalism (Dharamsala)

Gongkar Gyatso: The Creation of a Tibetan Modernist

Born in Lhasa in 1962 to Tibetan parents who were employed by the Chinese government (his mother as a clerk in a government office and his father as a soldier), Gongkar describes his family as "a product of occupied Tibet" (Yeshe 1996:73) The works he has created as an artist are also products of this occupied space and reflect the dilemma facing Tibetan artists of how to recomander the envisioning of Tibet. But how is it that Gyatso can be both the only Tibetan (so far) to paint a mural for the Tibet Reception Hall in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing ("The Yarlung River"- completed 1985) and a founder member of the "Sweet Tea House" group of painters, (*Cha ngarbo rimo tsokpa*) the first independent Tibetan artists' association with an agenda which was hardly supportive of the Chinese regime? He has recently provided an account of his life (Yeshe 1996) which gives useful biographical information explaining the ideological imperatives of life in the TAR, but little analysis of the manner in which his painting altered in parallel with his politics. Through conversations with the artist and access to unpublished paintings I have attempted to tie these strands together.

Gyatso's childhood was dominated by Maoist ideology and imagery. "Everything in our home was Chinese and the entire family strictly adhered to party guidelines" (Yeshe 1996:74) As a result of his parents' employment, the three children were educated in special schools for government workers where an equally controlled vision of Tibet as imagined by Chinese rulers was promoted, so that during his teens, Gyatso revered Mao Tse Tung and

other heroes of the Cultural Revolution, such as the military leader Lei Fang, whilst the Dalai Lama was viewed negatively. His commitment to the Maoist view of Tibet meant that by the age of seventeen he gained a post as a tour guide in the "Museum of the Revolution". Built on the site of the demolished Nangtsheshar (a court house and prison) in Shöl, the museum contained a display of "the evils of the old, 'preliberation' society" which according to Gyatso's description must have been "The Wrath of the Serfs".¹ At this stage in his life Gyatso shared the Communist view that religion was a wasteful, oppressive system and entered into his work explaining the iniquities of "feudal" Tibet with alacrity. Mao had died the year before his job began (in 1976) and Gyatso willingly joined the campaign to remind Tibetans of just how bad their lives might have been without Maoist intervention.²

But, since middle school, Gyatso had also been developing an interest in art. During his time at the museum (which was close to the university), he met a number of Chinese and Tibetan art teachers and in 1978 decided to accompany one of them on a project to "give ideological advice" to Tibetan "peasants" in Chamdo in Kham. However, instead of confirming his faith in Maoist doctrine, Gyatso was shocked by his exposure to the system which demanded that Tibetan farmers donate half their yield to the government, whilst the rest could be claimed by government employees. The experience of seeing fellow Tibetans living in poverty led him to begin to question the assumptions he had grown up with.

In 1979 Gyatso accepted the opportunity to study drawing at the Minority School in Beijing and between 1980 and 1984 he studied Chinese painting among other students from "forty to fifty" different minorities. He tellingly remarks that of these "minorities" he and his fellow Tibetans (there were two others), were the only ones who, though fluent in Chinese, also retained some knowledge of their Mother-tongue and its script. Contrary to the intentions of the art school, which taught two styles of Chinese painting and provided "strict guidelines as to what art should be like"(Yeshe 1996:78),

¹"There were dramatic portrayals of landlords exploiting landless peasants, beggars in caves, and monks abusing the whole of society." (Yeshe 1996:76) "The Wrath of the Serfs" has been discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

²Chen Danqing and Nawang Choedrak's "The Workers Weep though the Harvest is Good" was commissioned with similar intentions in mind.

Gyatso became aware of both the distinctiveness of his own "minority" heritage and the art of places further afield. He visited museums and libraries and explored the ferment of Beijing's art, fashion, literary and music worlds, where Western modernist art and literature was *en vogue* amongst the Chinese avant-garde. By 1984 he was studying texts on Nietzsche and Sartre, Millet and Van Gogh and decided that "all these Western ideas flowing into China were the fruits of free societies with free markets, freedom of expression and concepts of democracy". (Yeshe 1996:79) As well as Van Gogh-style drawings, [Plate 165] his paintings of this period display an evolving fascination with the work of Braque and Picasso (especially in their Synthetic Cubist period), while others are reminiscent of the Surrealist movement, [Plate 166] and particularly Salvador Dali. In one study, even the choice of palette, browns, blacks and creams, echoes the choice of Braque and Picasso, [Plate 167] though where they developed Cubism as a means of disassembling visible reality, Gyatso's pieces move straight to abstraction without the intermediate phase of the dissection of form. A similar composition, [Plate 168] but with patches of more vivid pigment, (red, blue and purple) occurring like disused shards of stained glass, owes its interplay of shape and color to the experiments of Wasilly Kandinsky, who in Concerning the Spiritual in Art famously compared his non-figurative painting to the abstract appeal of music. The only specifically "Tibetan" feature in these early studies by Gyatso is the inclusion of the artist's signature in *dbu-can* script. What occurs here merely as an appropriate detail, becomes a far more significant statement in Gyatso's later works where he plays with extracts of Tibetan texts in compositions such as "A Prayer" (1993) [Plate 169].

But despite the liberating atmosphere of the arts community in Beijing in the early eighties, Gyatso still returned to Tibet in 1984 to continue his artistic training at the University art school in Lhasa. His arrival coincided with a period of liberalisation, as the authorities had lifted some restrictions on religious practice amongst Tibetan Buddhists. He was able to observe the reopened Jokhang functioning as a pilgrimage site once again and his grandmother reciting mantras and using a rosary. A cassette with speeches by the Dalai Lama telling of Tibet's history and status as an independent nation was in circulation and it galvanised Gyatso's resolve to create "something

Tibetan". Since he was "not familiar with Tibetan techniques" (Yeshe 1996:80) and the Lhasa University art school taught only Western style oil painting and traditional Chinese art at that time, Gyatso's illustrations of the landscape and architecture around him were initially forged through these stylistic models. Pieces like "Sky and Wall" (1985), "The Religious Section" (1985) [Plate 170] and the "The Village (Monastery)" (published in TCA) date from this period.³) But 1985 was also the year in which he returned to Beijing to complete "The Yarlung River" mural for the Tibet Reception Hall in the Great Hall of the People [not illustrated]. Although the image represented a Tibetan subject (and the Yarlung valley was the area from which the early Kings ruled Tibet) it was still an official commission for a Chinese patron and audience.⁴ The contradictions of his status as the son of party workers and artist to the state coupled with a growing consciousness of his Tibetan heritage, led to great tension and Gyatso reports that he painted an image expressing the frustration he experienced in

all my attempts to get at my Tibetan identity and cultural roots. The result was a feeling of depression and emptiness, which I tried to depict in a self portrait. I drew myself with half a face, reflecting the boredom and feeling of vacuousness I had felt during these idle days of senseless arguments.⁵

In debates with his fellow students, Gyatso admits that he continued to defend some aspects of the Chinese system, but he gradually discovered that his personal crisis was shared by a number of other young Tibetan artists and a solidarity emerged which inspired the search for a new "medium of expression" and non-official locations in which in which they could exhibit.

This group of young artists regularly met in the tea houses of the Shöl district to discuss the direction which contemporary Tibetan art should follow. In 1985 the University proposed that its students should exhibit at the World Youth Day festival in Lhasa but Gyatso claims that "they wanted to exhibit art whose social connotations conformed to the regime's veiws" (Yeshe

³See Chapter Seven.

⁴Gyatso fails to mention the mural in the biographical account published by the exile government in Dharamsala, (Yeshe 1996) indicating that it is perhaps a work which he now seeks to deny or that his interpreter (Yeshe) preferred to omit it.

⁵Yeshe 1996:81

1996:82). Thus, influenced by the model of the nineteenth century Parisian Salon des Refusées, they decided to show their work in the alternative, unofficial spaces of the "sweet tea" houses in order to encourage other young Tibetans to enter into the debate, thus acquiring their name "The Sweet Tea House Artists' Association". The primary motivation for these artists was the growing sense of a need to reinstate their Tibetaness and a rejection of the styles and institutions of their Chinese masters. Echoing the actions of urban Chinese artists of the 1950s, (whether consciously or not, is uncertain) they made excursions to remote areas of the country, particularly Changthang in Western Tibet, in order to "seek affirmation of their traditional spirit from the sky, the mountains and the rivers of Tibet" (Norbu 1993:5). The "Sweet Tea House" identity and sensibility became heavily tied to nature and the physical environment of Tibet. They attempted to reclaim the landscape of Tibet and to populate it not with ethno-kitsch reflections of themselves, but with Tibetan signifiers. Gyatso's "Lhamo Latso Lake" is a prime example of this new approach. (In his other landscape studies the mountains of Tibet are broken down into large chunks of colour or pointilliste flecks [Plate 171].) These works are predominantly anti-realist and do not attempt to record a specific geography, but to reattach Tibetan meaning to place. Lhamo Latso had been declared a place of pilgrimage in the sixteenth century by the second Dalai Lama Gendun Gyatso, as it was inhabited by the spirit of Palden Lhamo, State Protector of Tibet. A number of eminent religious figures in the twentieth century are said to have experienced visions in its waters and Reting Rinpoche consulted the lake for signs of the birth place of the current (Fourteenth) Dalai Lama. Given the significance of the Dalai Lama, as the prime physical embodiment of the old Tibet, (as we saw in Chapter Two) any location with a connection to the narrative of his life has great potency for Tibetans both inside and outside the TAR, particularly those who seek independence. So, although Gyatso's painting is a modernist, abstract evocation of a place with few referents to the real world, its meaning emerges from historical, religious and political associations. As Gyatso says: "By taking inspiration from the shapes, elements and events in our own environment, I and a group of art students in my college were striving to create a form of specifically Tibetan modern art." (Yeshe 1996:80) In works by Gyatso and his "Sweet Tea" colleagues it appears that European modernist techniques for the treatment of place and form released them from the tyranny of the Chinese

realisms, which had so often been put to use in blatant and not so blatant forms of propaganda. This point is reiterated in Gyatso's "Appropriate Way of Tradition" (1987) [not illustrated] where a series of overlaid planes of colour suggest an association with abstraction, but these multi-coloured bands are based on pre-1959 monastic murals where *trompe l'oeil* recreations of folded fabric were painted at the top of interior walls. Coupled with an increasing commitment to the Dalai Lama, Gyatso's modernism thus constantly refers back to fragments of Tibetan cultural expressions, but not in the descriptive, mimetic manner of Chinese images of the "Extreme Land".

The "Sweet Tea House" period was extremely productive for Gyatso who, following his experiments with landscape and architecture, went on to explore collage techniques and printing onto fabric. His rediscovery of Tibetan Buddhism led to the production of a series of fiery red seated Buddha images [Plate 172] in which the basic colours are stained into cotton cloth and then drenched with further layers of black ink. The resulting image can be rolled and transported in the same way as traditional thangkas but the delineation of the Buddha image is not taken from Tibetan models but from early Indian Buddhist sculpture. The content of these images employs quotations from the art of the past, both from India and Tibet, but their style and composition depart from tradition in a dramatic expressionistic manner. His "Buddha and the White Lotus" [Plate 173] is divided into three sections with the central portion filled by a black void onto which an elegantly sketched white lotus is floated. Expectations of frontality and symmetry are confounded as the lotus appears at ninety degrees to the upright and the Buddha is depicted in silhouette on the right. The roots of the lotus drift into the left hand segment where a cloudy mass of red and black pigment glows like a furnace of old but long burning coals. In Gyatso's work the lotus appears as the only element of the composition which is truly in focus. It appears in the foreground plane while the Buddha is obfuscated even obliterated by the troubling black band in the centre. All other elements are nebulous, the Buddha is more a ghost at the feast than a true presence. In this piece Gyatso's philosophy reflects something of that strand of Tibetan thought which focuses on the perception of truth through concentration on the objects of the natural world; an animistic respect for exceptional flora and fauna. This iconography of the natural world, experienced something of a

renaissance amongst the "Sweet Tea" artists as they used it to express a Tibetanness which could not be readily interpreted (particularly by the authorities) and appeared to be ideologically neutral. However, I read "Buddha and White Lotus" as a statement of the literally faceless, that is almost imageless, power of the Buddha as concept unpersonified in Tibet. This is an essay on absence and mortality; the absence of the prime physical embodiment of the Buddha, the Dalai Lama and the finiteness of all things unless they can rejuvenate or reincarnate themselves as the lotus does each summer.

At the University Art School Gyatso had been a student of Han Hu Li, (discussed in Chapter Seven) and though influenced at first by his teacher's hybrid style, which incorporated Chinese techniques for spreading ink on fabric and European realism, a comparison of Hu Li's "Blessing" [see Plate 141] and Gyatso's "Buddha and White Lotus" and his "Red Buddha" shows just how much further the Tibetan had gone in paring down the depiction of the Buddha and omitting any direct copying of the art of the past.⁶ The lessons Gyatso drew from his experiments with European modernist styles enabled him to depart from the history of both Tibetan and Chinese art.

However, the efflorescence of "Sweet Tea" Tibetan modernism was not to last. In 1987:

after a very successful exhibition covered by Lhasa radio and television and attended by TAR dignitaries, the artists were being badgered by the authorities to accept support, and to allow party approved Chinese painters into the group.⁷

The "Sweet Tea" artists rejected this proposal and disbanded their association. After the group's dissolution, drawings of prostrating pilgrims at the Jokhang and men resting in the Barkhor [Plate 174] produced by Gyatso in the late 1980s, (and reminiscent of Chen Danqing's portraits painted a decade earlier) suggest that he entered a period of retrenchment and escape back into nostalgic realism.

⁶Han Hu Li worked from photographs of Alchi for his piece, but once in exile Gyatso actually visited the monastery in Ladakh. He made two visits to the area in his first three years in India.

⁷Norbu 1993:5

Struggling with "Shangri-La": A Tibetan Artist in Exile

Between 1987 and 1990 Gyatso witnessed riots and protests against Chinese rule in Lhasa and the brutal suppression of the monks and nuns who led the campaigns. He decided to attempt to leave the TAR and in 1991 managed to get a passport and the means to escape. Since 1992 he has been living in the the "capital-in-exile" Dharamsala. Initially the move into exile was a source of inspiration to him. He left Lhasa and the hollow mausoleum of the Potala Palace behind and went in search of its rightful incumbent on the pilgrimage to Dharamsala. He found the Dalai Lama, a library and a group of people who made him feel "at home", but after a few years in exile, began to realise that no one knew where he was coming from.⁸

As an artist he has experienced the impact of the Dharamsala guardians of Tibetan cultural and political identity quite literally in a graphic sense, as his products enter a world of antagonistic codes of interpretation. Both fresh-faced foreigners on the Dharma tour and his fellow exiled Tibetans constantly exclaim: "What, no thangka painting?" for as we have seen, Gyatso's work presents a radical departure from pre-1959 painterly norms. Images like his "Red Buddha" and "Buddha with White Lotus" are read by Dharamsala Tibetans as sacrilegious, due to their lack of iconometric measurement and the splitting of the Buddha body. As Thaye warned (in Chapter Two) an "erroneous" image can lead both its producer and viewer to hell. Our discussion of the rejection of Jampa Tseten's non-thangka style "Three Kings" (Chapter Three), and the fixing process by which the Menri has been reified as the appropriate style for the Dharamsala vision of exilic Tibet, (Chapter Four) further contextualises Gyatso's difficulties, as his work is neither "thangka" nor Menri. His situation also begins to answer questions raised at the beginning of Chapter Seven and a more general theme of this thesis, that is, how have Tibetan artists depicted their identity and their history?

In the hostile condition of the TAR the fusion of a modernist formal vocabulary with a Tibetan Buddhist sensibility appeared effective as a

⁸Gongkar Gyatso interviewed in Dharamsala in 1992 and 1995.

survival tactic for the "Sweet Tea" artists. But in exile Gyatso sells little work and more significantly experiences a sense of marginalization and rejection. Gyatso and his friends produced what they believed to be the distinctive Tibetan imagery we asked about in Chapter Seven. We wondered what those images would look like and if style dictates the perceived "Tibetaness" of an image. The response to Gyatso's modernist work in Dharamsala confirms the power of the "traditionalist" line and that only "thangka" styles are considered authentically Tibetan by those who control the exilic vision of Tibet.

So how does an artist like Gyatso, acculturated in the TAR and educated in art schools in Lhasa and Beijing continue to function in exile? And how is his non-thangka work to be read, especially when, as Clifford remarks, perhaps "It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones" (Clifford 1988:15). Though Clifford directs this statement towards Occidental interpreters, it could equally be applied to the Dharamsala audience for Gyatso's work, though the reasons for the rejection of newness and difference may not be the same. As he states: "Tibetans are not interested in modern art" (Gyatso, Dharamsala, 1995) since the abandonment of the religious thangka style appears to them as a dereliction of duty. In response to the constant querying of the 'authenticity' of his non-thangka paintings he has taken up classes with the Library Art School teacher Sangay Yeshe and now produces dozens of iconometric studies of the seated Buddha, like every other thangka painting student. It is quite clear that as a draftsman he hardly needs training - studying with Sangay Yeshe is much more a process of accommodation into a cultural system to which he had no access in Tibet. But Gyatso's appreciation of that heritage is inevitably filtered through a different aesthetic.

In recent works the iconometry of the Buddha's head [Plate 175] is not only a technical or sanctifying device but a signifier of style left for the viewer to examine in the finished works. Gyatso's emphasis on these linear structures is informed both by a modernist preference for form over content, but perhaps more significantly, also by his ambivalent position as both insider and outsider to this cultural vocabulary. While iconometric grids are perceived by traditionalist artists as the building blocks of their trade, to be learnt and assimilated over years of training and then subsumed in the final

product, for Gyatso these structures must remain visible, perhaps precisely because they have come to represent the codified memories of Tibet, recreated in exile by painters who no longer live in the cultural landscape for which they were originally designed. When Panofsky (1955) analysed early European and ancient Egyptian painting, he claimed that iconometric codes revealed far more about the fundamentals of image production than narrative content. For Panofsky and Gyatso, in many ways both "outsiders" observing culture from a distance, line and measurement are of greater value in understanding fundamental aesthetic and philosophic principles than the details of deities and demons. As Gyatso says: "I am more interested in iconometry, than in thangka painting itself". (Gyatso, Dharamsala, 1995) But it is exactly this logic which makes his style virtually incomprehensible to traditionalist Tibetan refugees. Gyatso finds himself in the ironic position that outside of his country of birth he feels more "at home" in political and spiritual terms, but his involvement in the recent history of image-making in the Tibetan Autonomous Region means that for now he is still culturally displaced.⁹

It appears that modernism, even when produced by artists of Tibetan parentage is unacceptable in Dharamsala. It cannot be "Tibetan" art, for it is viewed as yet another alien art style inspired by China and indicating a treacherous bent on the part of its producers. On the other hand, those who are not born into Tibetan ethnicity, such as the British artist, Rober Beer, the Japanese, Kenji Babsaki and the Canadian Andy Weber can be accommodated as producers of Tibetan art in Dharamsala.¹⁰ This is explained by Tenpa Choepel (the neo-Norbulingka artist) when he describes how thangka style may alter from one artist to another:

If you are a native speaker of English you always notice the way that other people speak the language when it is not theirs by birth. They have an accent or a particular way of using elements of the language which is distinctive. So it is with the styles of Tibetan art. The image

⁹ Just as travel within Tibet had provided inspiration for the "Sweet Tea" artists, so Gyatso has moved around in India in search of an artistic home. He seems to have found it in Alchi, Ladakh where the 11th - 13th century artists who completed the murals are thought to have been Kashmiris and thus their style is quite exceptional in the Himalayan Buddhist context and distinctly unlike the post-seventeenth century Menri styles which dominate Dharamsala.

¹⁰ See Beer (1991) for names of other non-Tibetan thangka painters.

reflects the background of the artist in a particular way, even though the story he is telling is the same.¹¹

So long as that story remains a Tibetan Buddhist one, the Dharamsala audience can accept even those who are not "native" speakers of Tibetan language or "native" producers of thangka paintings. Foreign artists who learn the 'language', that is, the style of Tibetan art have been accepted into the Tibetan art world and its market (though most of their work is purchased by other foreigners). This assimilation results from their adoption of two of the determinants of Tibetan exilic identity. Firstly they have followed and practised Tibetan Buddhism, following a well trodden path for *ingis* (foreigners) established since the Tibetan communities emerged in India and Nepal in the 1960s. They have taken part in the oral transmission of Tibetan Buddhism, sitting at the feet of *rinpoches* (precious teachers), and have passed through various stages of initiation.¹² Secondly, they have involved themselves in a similar guru-disciple relationship with a painter and have emulated his example by copying and studying for many years.¹³ These two types of experience are of course interconnected. In keeping with the openness the Dalai Lama has engendered towards foreign adherents to his faith, (including the acceptance of Caucasian incarnations of *rinpoches*), so long as foreign practitioners of Tibetan style painting have also absorbed something of Tibetan style religion they can be accommodated. This practice is somewhat at odds with other minority or "Fourth World" groups around the world¹⁴ where it is unusual for a person who is ethnically "other" to be allowed to produce images which are seen to determine a marginalised group's identity. It is hard to imagine, for example, a white Australian producing "Aborigine" art with the approval of Aboriginal leaders.¹⁵ In some post-colonial situations "Western" aficionados of other cultures have

¹¹Tenpa Choepel interviewed at the Norbulingka, 1991.

¹²See Lopez "Foreigner at the Lama's Feet" in Lopez (editor) 1995

¹³Beer studied with Oleshey in Solu Kumbu, Nepal and the Eight Khamtrul Rinpoche in Tashijong, Himachal Pradesh. Babasaki was taught by Jampa Tseten in Dharamsala.

¹⁴Graburn's (1976) definition of the Fourth World includes indigenous peoples assimilated into colonialist or nationalist cultural formations, the dispossessed, refugees etc..

¹⁵As was confirmed by the uproar in Australia which greeted the discovery that the works of an acclaimed male Aboriginal painter, Eddie Burrup, were actually produced by a white 82 year old woman called Elizabeth Durack. Reported in "The Guardian" newspaper March 8th, 1997 (London).

convinced themselves of their understanding of say, a West African aesthetic, as was the case in Nigeria with the German Ulli Beier, but this kind of purportedly benevolent appropriation is no longer stomachable in most parts of the world. Robert Beer, one of the non-Tibetan thangka painters is confident that he has understood the lessons taught by his Tibetan teachers but allows himself an extra freedom to interpret them.

That this sacred art form finds new expression through the perception of Western artists is a consequence both of the times in which we live and the eternal spirit of the human imagination. Perhaps more than anyone I myself am most responsible for innovations in colour, perspective, atmospheric landscape elements and the use of the airbrush in painting.¹⁶

Perhaps the limited self-determination of Tibetan refugees prevents them from rejecting such post-colonial empathy on the part of these foreign artists. The benevolent spirit of Tibetan Buddhism is cited as reason enough for their acceptance, though an artist like Gyatso or a woman who wants to become an artist, be she Tibetan or non-Tibetan, does not benefit from this generosity as easily.¹⁷

Conclusions

The ethnicity of an artist is by no means the determinant of what constitutes contemporary "Tibetan" painting. This is the case in both Dharamsala and the TAR. So what makes recent "Tibetan" art authentically Tibetan? As we noted earlier, Clifford's comments are helpful:

Such claims to purity are in any event always subverted by the need to stage authenticity in opposition to external dominating alternatives. Thus the "Third World" plays against the "First World" and vice versa. At a local level, Trobriand islanders invent their culture within and against the contexts of recent colonial history and the new nation of

¹⁶Beer 1991:13

¹⁷McGuckin(1996) found that male Tibetan artists generally believed that a woman could not paint thangkas due to the sanctity which their images were designed to encase. However, I met three female painters in Dharamsala, one of whom was a nun, but the others were lay people.

Papua New Guinea. If authenticity is relational, there can be no essence except as a political cultural invention.¹⁸

As Tibetan authenticity is currently "staged" in relation to a number of "external dominating" realities it is perhaps no surprise that in the life of an artist like Gyatso the "cultural inventions" of the TAR and exilic Tibet come into collision. In the TAR he was part of an invention of Tibetan identity which was forged "within and against" the colonialism of Maoist China. In Dharamsala this invention was at odds with an authenticity determined by "Nangpa" confirmations of the "old" pre-1959 Tibet, aided and abetted by outsider (Western) desires for the fixing and placing of that Tibet in exile. Tibetan refugee culture is frequently defined (by Tibetans) in relation to the perceived requirements of their immediate Asian neighbours (demonstrated in the use of English and Hindi language placards at rallies) in India and Nepal, or those of more distant others, as when Namgyal Monastery monks travel the world making particle mandalas in museums in the West. In these conditions the delineation of a distinctive, "authentic" Tibetan style in the visual arts (as in so much else) is essential for self determination, but this, as we have seen, was also the case in the TAR.

In fact, both TAR and exilic Tibetans have constructed their cultural authenticity in response to the same brute fact of history; the Chinese take-over of the "aboriginal" Tibet and all its "fixtures and fittings" (to borrow Waddell's phrase). This fact denies them the "mapping" of the space which Connerton (1989 citing Comte), tells us produces the context for collective memory and a social framework which supports the illusion of unchanging stability. In such a stable environment the presence of familiar objects in daily life helps to trigger the human capacity to rediscover the past in the present. In the images of the artists of both groups discussed here, reference to the past (i.e. with quotation from paintings and objects of the past) involves a major leap of imagination and is always a reconstruction, since the objects which held their history are no longer part of daily experience. (Hence the importance of photography and film as a way of recreating past objects, places and lives.) These memories of that past are to some extent shared but what varies markedly is the way in which the past is used.

¹⁸Clifford 1988:12

Dharamsala privileges the "purity" of the oral lineage tradition by emphasising the role of the "precious" artists whose memory is based on actual experience of pre-1959 Tibet. (The younger generation, on the other hand as Tashi Tsering so adamantly put it, have no access to this authentic memory. Their minds have been filled by "organised forgetting" so that Thermos flasks replace butter-churns in their imaginings of Tibet. But history and politics are responsible for denying them the experience of objects which contain the past and reactivate it on a regular basis.) The thangka painting, in a variant of the Menri style, (and dedicated to the memory of Menla Dhondrup embedded in a text) is the preferred vehicle for staging the authenticity of Nangpa solidarity, as it signifies Tibetan Buddhism as the key definer of Tibetan culture. Modernist TAR artists, like the "Sweet Tea" painters and Nawang Raspa, on the other hand are equally conscious of the history of the vacated space which they have inhabited. (The territory which is no longer truly "Tibet" due to the absence of the Dalai Lama.) This is true despite the attempts of the Chinese to implement the "organised forgetting" that Connerton speaks of,¹⁹ in which Maoist imagery (in varying degrees of explicitness) was injected into the lives of Tibetans to squeeze out any memory of images made by their predecessors. Although Connerton also warns that "A historically tutored memory is opposed to an unreflective traditional memory." (Connerton 1989:16) and in some ways it could be argued that the TAR Tibetans have been exposed to conditions which demand that they teach themselves a history to counteract Chinese "organised forgetting", Dharamsala Tibetans have also not naively pursued an "unreflective" traditionalism. As this thesis has demonstrated, though the exilic invention of the visual arts is framed within a notion of tradition, there are conscious inflections which suggest a tutored approach even to the history of art.

We could therefore perhaps conclude that since 1959 there has been no such thing as "Tibetan" art, only art produced by Tibetans and sometimes even non-Tibetans, in which the idea of "Tibet" is staged. As has been noted on a number of occasions in this thesis, the label "Tibet" has powerful

¹⁹Connerton (1989:14): "When a large power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses the method of organised forgetting."

resonances, as a marketing tool and a sign of a memory (which is globally shared) of the pre-1959 place. This art clearly fulfills Connerton's definition of re-presentation, as it causes that which has disappeared to reappear (Connerton 1989:69) but the reappearance of Tibet in post-1959 images is filtered through a series of lenses which mean that for some, even Tibetans, the subject ("Tibet") is unrecognisable. Jampa Tseten, Gedun Chompel and Gongkar Gyatso's versions of how Tibet could be re-presented were all incomprehensible for Dharamsala viewers but that was due to the power of "external dominating" influences i.e. China, India and the West. The artists themselves did not labour under a negative reaction to their impact, but attempted to harness the alien and novel artistic devices they came across for positive ends. I deliberately chose to document the post-1959 period of Tibetan image making because it seemed to me that a colonised and diasporic people, the Tibetans, could not be presented as a homogenous group with a single mode of self-representation since their identity as political and cultural agents was in a state of flux. Taking note of Said's important admonition that:

The notion that there are geographical spaces with indigenous, radically "different" inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture, or racial essence proper to that geographical space is....a highly debatable idea.²⁰

The dominance of the idea of the geography of Tibet as a definer of what was Tibetan in Orientalist writing and collecting in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, (which we discussed in Chapter One) would pose no surprises for Said, due to the authors' entanglement with colonialism. But I argued in Chapter One that such essentialising remains common in Western literature, including and perhaps especially, in art historical writing. One of the ways in which this can be counteracted is by beginning from Said's premise and acknowledging that a fixed geographic, racial, cultural and religious Tibet does not exist and did not even prior to 1959, (despite Dharamsala protestations to the contrary). Further, I contest that the lack of any studies similar to this one results from the continuing Western predilection for what has been understood as the essential characteristic of Tibetan culture, religion, and for objects produced and used by the religious elite, a stereotype which was established well over a hundred years ago.

²⁰Said 1995:322-325

Therefore the non-thangka paintings, photographs, collages, book covers, market stall prints and so on, that are actually in use amongst Tibetans have been ignored because they fail to fulfill Orientalist expectations of Tibet.

There is one other issue which demands attention. This is the question of what Hallisey (1995) calls "intercultural mimesis". In an analysis of the history of Western writing about Buddhism, Hallisey asks us to acknowledge the links between knowledge and power which Said had so effectively analysed but also to look for relationships between "the West" and "the Orient" that are not characterized by negation or inversion. One way of proceeding is of course to accommodate the voices and accounts of people of "the East" (and I have made some attempt to do that here) but also to demonstrate the interconnectedness of "East" and "West". I interpret this notion to refer, not to a kind of universalism in which what differentiates the actions and ideas of different people can actually be put down to a series of interconnected and mutually influencing themes, but to the extent to which we are all producers and receivers of various staged authenticities. Thus when Hallisey asks us to be transparent and to admit "where it seems that aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner" (Hallisey 1995:33), I will not demur. My relationship with the subject matter of this thesis is inevitably the result of "intercultural mimesis" and I have bowed to the appropriate form of academic literary realism (and photography) in order to record my impressions. But two nuances must be added to the admission that I cannot escape colonial history (particularly of Britain) nor some of the memories of "Tibet" and Tibetans which have impinged on my consciousness. (Beginning at age eleven, when I saw Powell and Pressburger's film "Black Narcissus", an Orientalist exploitation of Indian and Tibetan representations if ever there was one). Firstly, if "intercultural mimesis" affects Western writers, then does it not also affect Tibetans? This thesis has tried to define a number of moments at which Tibetans themselves responded to the interconnectedness of cultures (Tibetan, Indian, Chinese, European, American, Soviet Russian etc.) and where artists responded to the negative manner in which their culture had been represented by others. Tibetans must be credited with this power, which they utilise in difficult conditions both inside and outside the TAR. Secondly, from my first experiences in the Tibetan refugee community

in Mussoorie in 1984, I met artists, teachers, administrators, children and other Tibetans who, although they often had some relationship with the concepts of Tibetan Buddhism, were not monks or *rinpoches* or in any sense promoters of the religion. However, when they wanted to identify themselves as Tibetan, religious images provided a powerful sense of that identity. This projection of Tibetanness through photographic and painted objects suggested to me, as a non-Dharma type, that the institutionalised, religious representation of Tibetan culture communicated across the planet, needed some unpacking

Postscript

The problems inherent in negotiating a secular nationalist agenda on the political front and a religious cultural project on the other hand are currently being approached by a small number of individuals and institutions in the capital-in-exile. It is therefore no surprise that the newly formed Amnye Machen Institute (A.M.I.)²¹, a radical organisation which, amongst other things focuses on secular aspects of Tibetan arts, curated the only exhibition of Gongkar Gyatso's work in exile.²² Among its aims is the acknowledgement of the non-religious aspects of culture in pre-1959 Tibet:

A.M.I. is established along liberal and humanist lines. Its focus is on lay and folk subjects, with emphasis on contemporary and neglected aspects of Tibetan culture and history. The Institute is not just concerned with preservation; it studies the past in order to help Tibetans understand the present and prepare for the future.²³

The A.M.I. recognises that not all painting by Tibetans has been produced in the service of religion, counteracting one of the dominant "Shangri-laist" assumptions that a "Tibetan" painting must be a thangka. It also sponsors and publishes new forms of Tibetan literature both from the TAR and the exile community and thus tries to move into the space of the virtual Tibet, where cultural production is not fixed within the rigid categories of nation states,

²¹ A.M.I. formally launched on June 28th 1992 in Dharamsala, India. For analysis of their translation project see Venturino (1995).

²² The exhibition "Works of Gongkar Gyatso of Lhasa" was held in Dharamsala, June 1993, with a pamphlet of the same name written by Norbu (1993).

²³ Norbu 1994:38

geographic boundaries or religious and political ideologies. The A.M.I. is thus already trying to negotiate a vision of the future "Tibet" and is facing up to a problem which the Dharamsala government has yet to fully grapple with. For if, as they hope, the exiles and TAR Tibetans one day recombine in an independent Tibetan nation, the story of Gongkar Gyatso's experience of the collision of cultural representations and identities could be repeated on the grand scale.

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DEPICTED IDENTITIES:
IMAGES AND IMAGE-MAKERS OF POST-1959 TIBET

Clare Harris

School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

PhD Thesis

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Volume Two

Depicted Identities:
Images and Image-makers of Post-1959 Tibet

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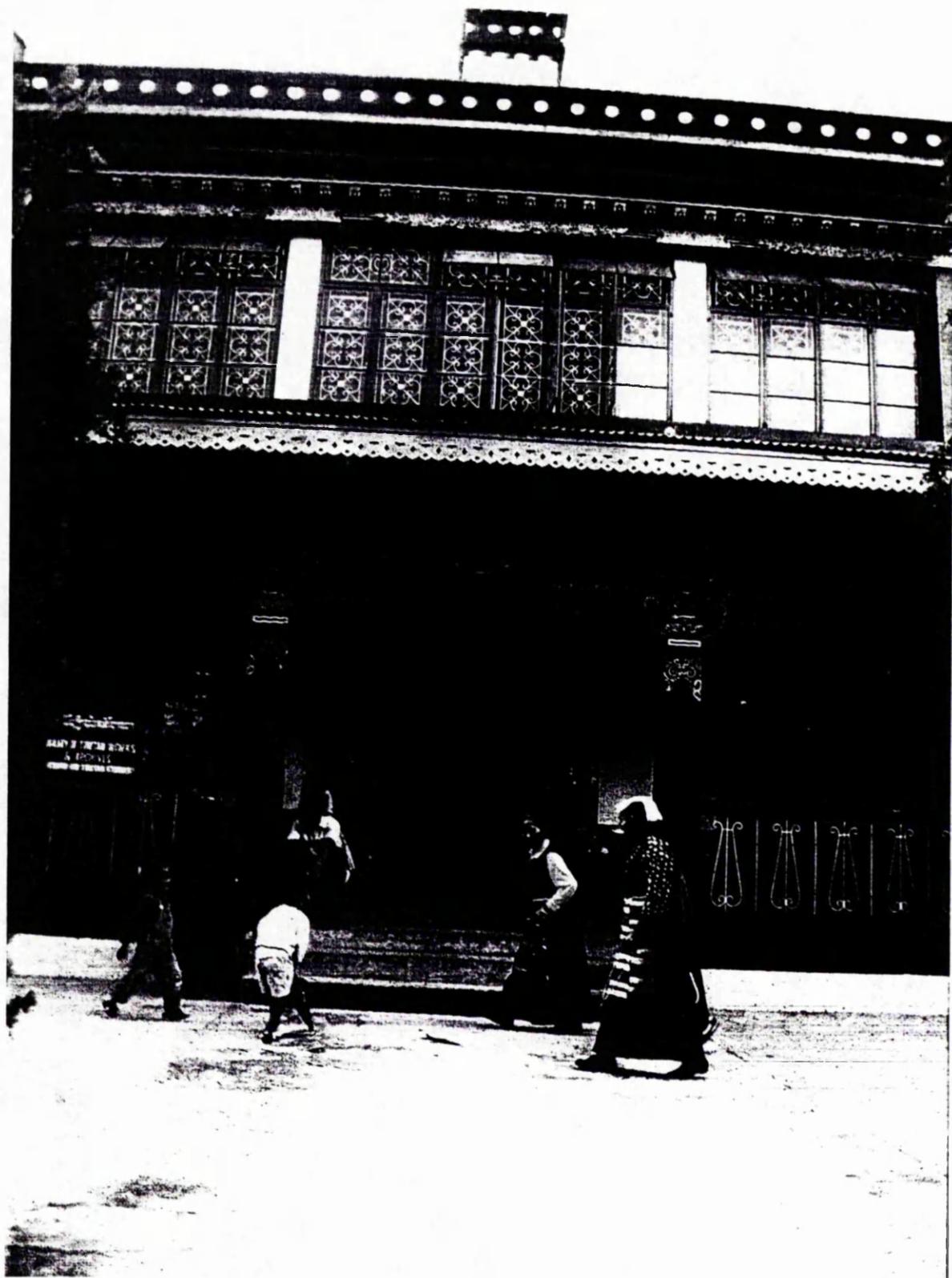
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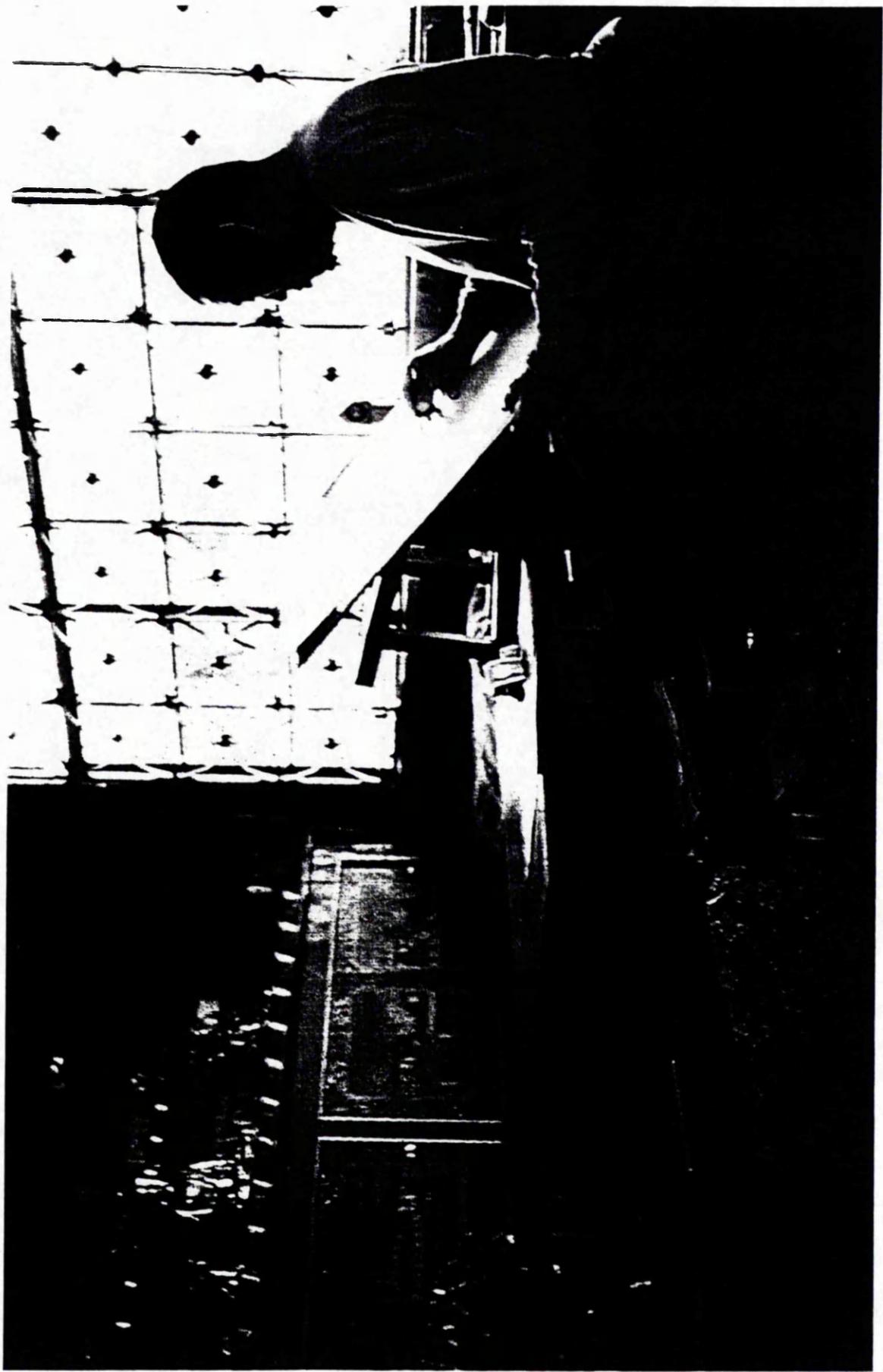
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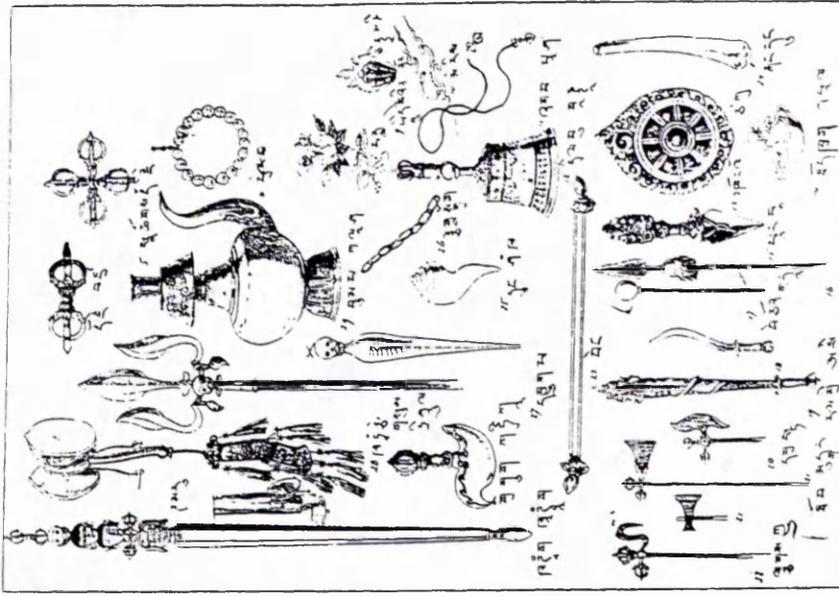
(Occasionally the surmounting Jinās are represented by their mystic emblems of a wheel, *vajra*, jewel, lotus, or *viṣṇu-vajra*, as will be described presently. Thus Ratnasambhava is usually represented by a jewel on the head of his spiritual reflex Jambhala, the god of wealth. And it is to be noted that when, as often happens, the image is surrounded by figures of the five Jinās in an arc outside the halo, then its own special surmounting parent occupies the central position in that arc, whilst the others are placed two on each side at a lower level.

English Name.	Tibetan	Sanskrit.
1. a pike	K'atvai	<i>khakvāṅga</i>
2. a trident	K'a-'tvan-rtse-gsum	<i>triśūla</i>
3. hand-drum	Pa-ma-ru	<i>ḍṭṭamara</i>
4. chisel-knife	Gri-gug	<i>karīkā</i>
5. thunderbolt	rDo-tje	<i>vajra</i>
6. cross-thunderbolt	sNa-togs rdo-tje	<i>viṣṇu-vajra</i>
7. rosary	Pren-ba	<i>mālā</i>
8. Lotus-flower (white or red)	Pael-ma	<i>padma</i>
9. blue lotus ¹	Ue-pal	<i>utpala</i>
10. Agoka-flower ¹	Mya-nan-med pali-shin	<i>agoka</i>
11. "Naga's tree" (cactus or coral) ¹	Lai-shin	<i>nāgā-taru</i>
12. alarm-staff	'K'ar-gail	<i>hakkā, or khakkhara</i>
13. begging-bowl	'Loin-bzed	<i>patra</i>
14. wish-granting gem	(Yid bz'in) Norbu	<i>(cintā-) manī</i>
15. flames	Me-ris	<i>pāṣa</i>
16. snare ²	zags-pa	<i>ghanta</i>
17. wheel	dri-lu	<i>caakra</i>
18. skull-cup	'K'or-lo	<i>kapāla</i>
19. thunderbolt-dagger	F'od k'rag	<i>phurba (?)</i>
20. spear	'nur-bu	<i>gada</i>
21. club	gDun	<i>adī</i>
22. dirk or dagger	Be-con	<i>paragu (?)</i>
23. sword	'Chu-gri	<i>mudgara</i>
24. axe	Ral-gri	
25. hammer	dGra-sta	<i>sanakha</i>
26. iron-goad	T'o-ba m'o-ba	<i>kalasa</i>
27. unce	IC'ags-kyu	<i>chavri</i>
28. thigh-bone trumpet	Ben	<i>dhavaḥ</i>
29. conch-shell trumpet	rKan-dun	
30. iron-chain	Dun	
31. skeleton-staff	IChags-sgrog	
32. See No. 1 (a)	dByug-pa	
33. water-pot	Bun-pa	
34. anointing vase	sPyi-glug	
35. fly-whisk	rNé-yub	
36. banner	r'Gyal-mts'an	

¹ See figures on previous page.

² To rescue the lost or to bind the opponents. A symbol of Śiva, Varuna, and Lakshmi.

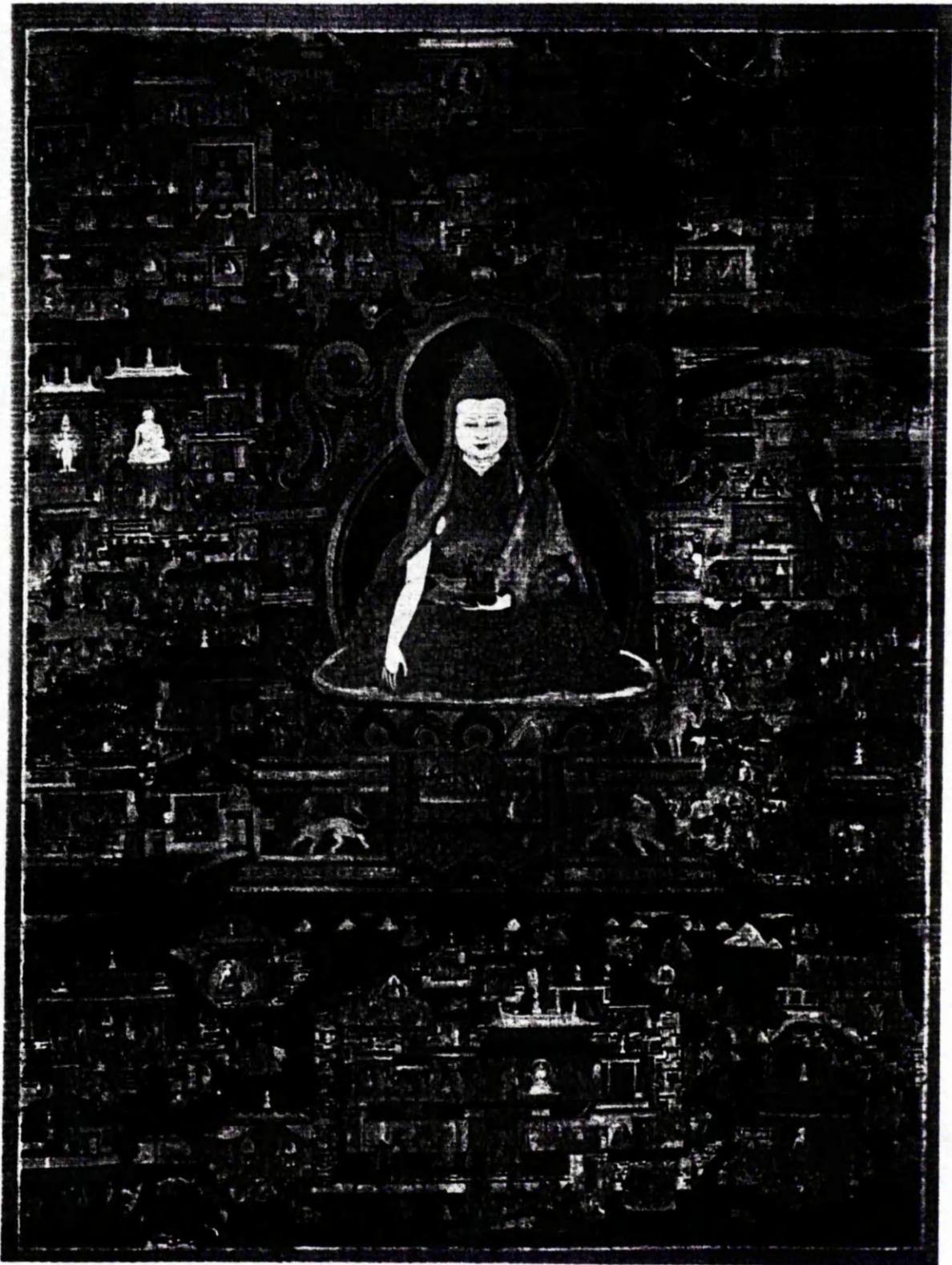
The objects or insignia which the several figures hold in their hands refer to their functions. Thus, Mañjuśrī, the god of wisdom, wields the sword of the truth in dissipating the darkness of ignorance, and in his left he carries the book of Wisdom

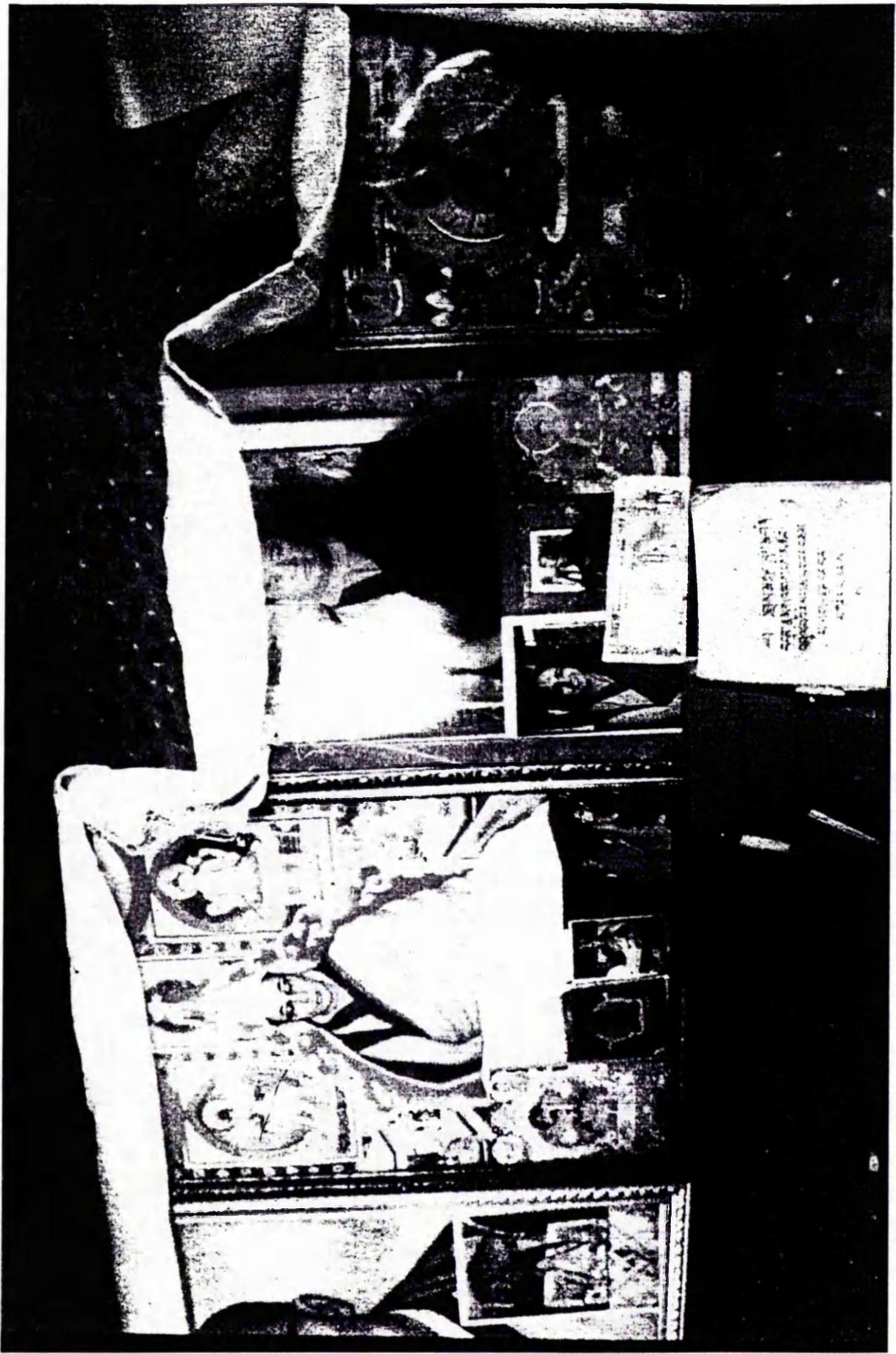


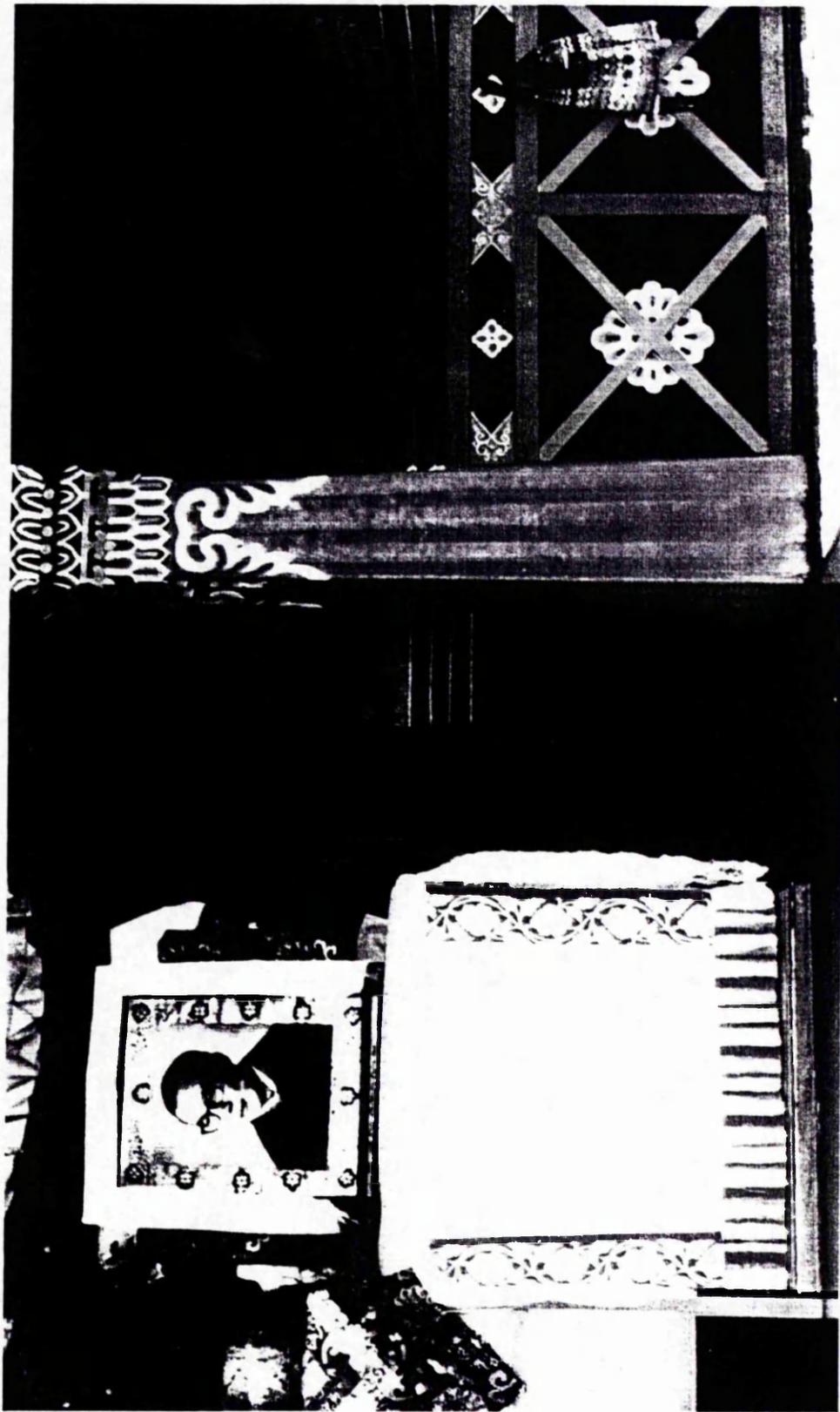
INSIGNIA AND WEAPONS OF THE GODS, ETC.

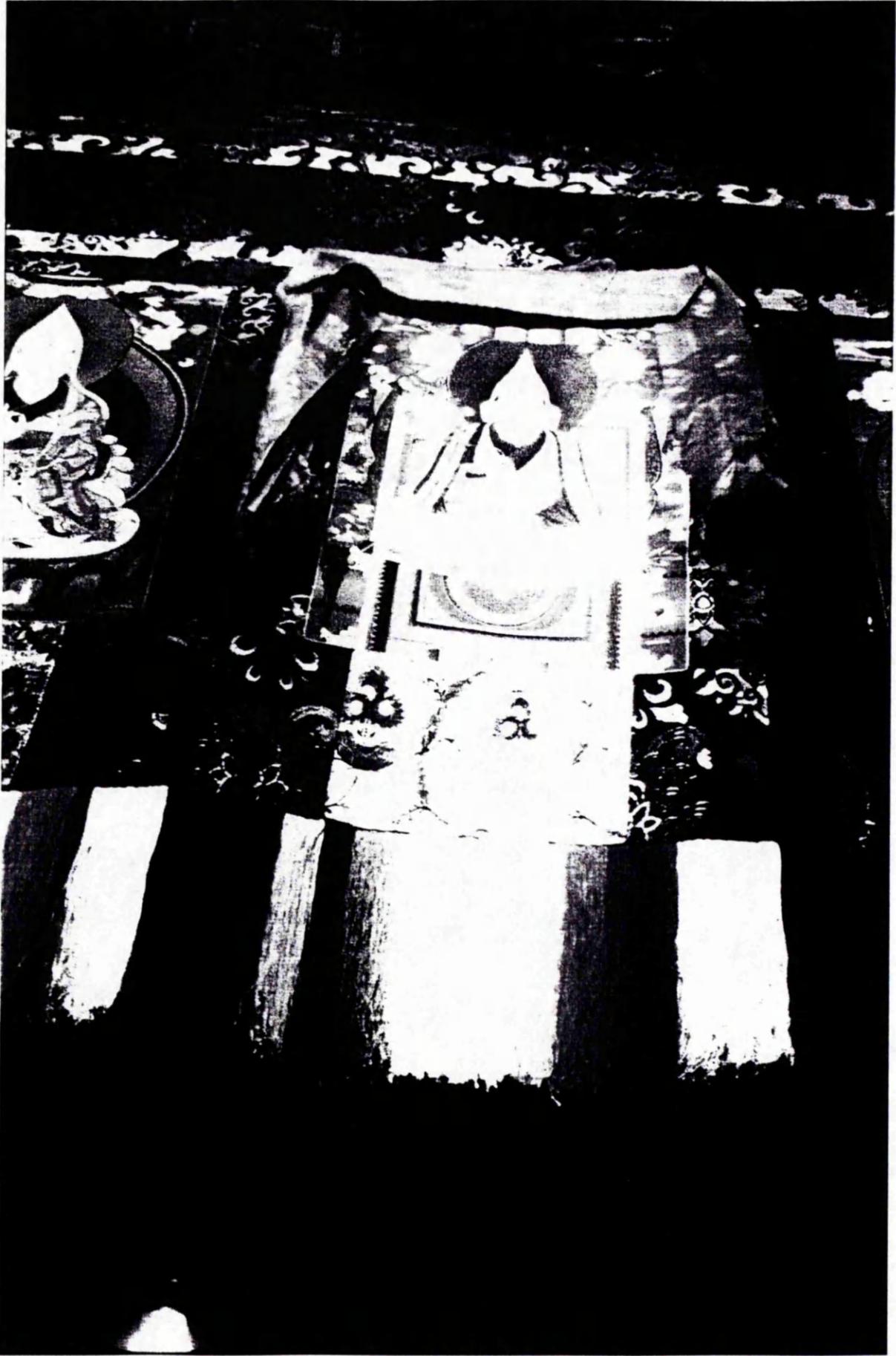
upon a Lotus-flower, thus symbolizing its supernatural origin; and he rides upon a roaring lion to typify the powerfully penetrating voice of the Law.

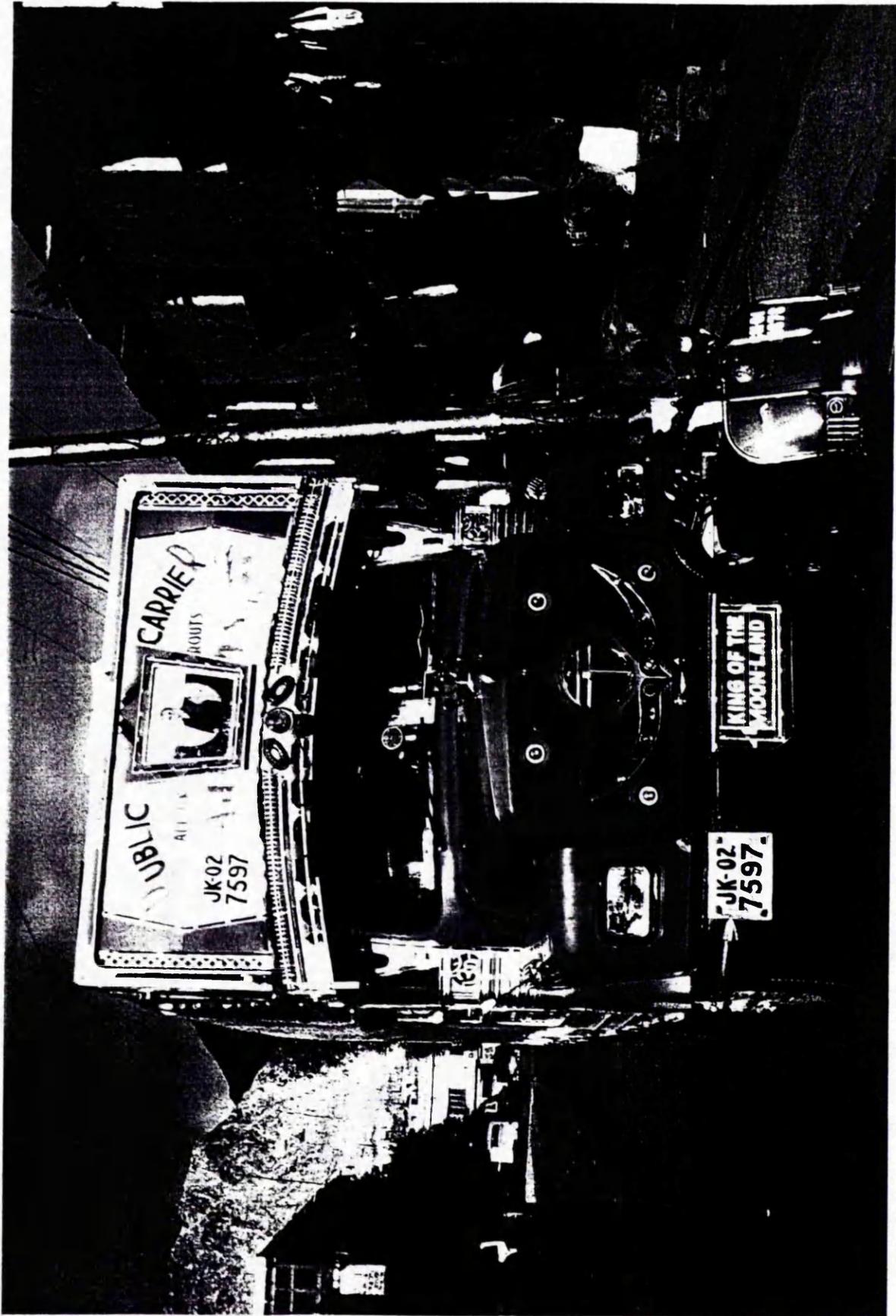


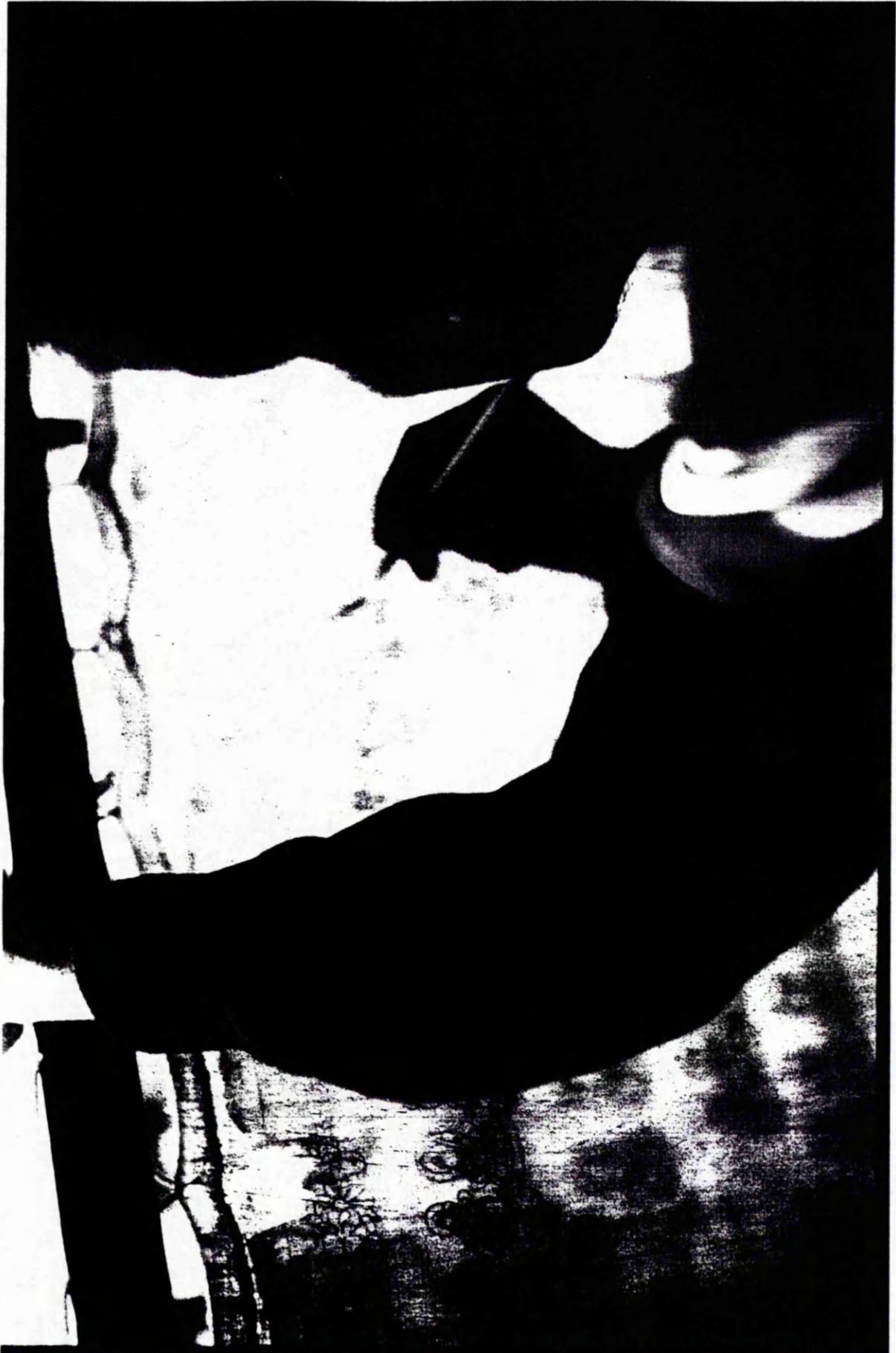




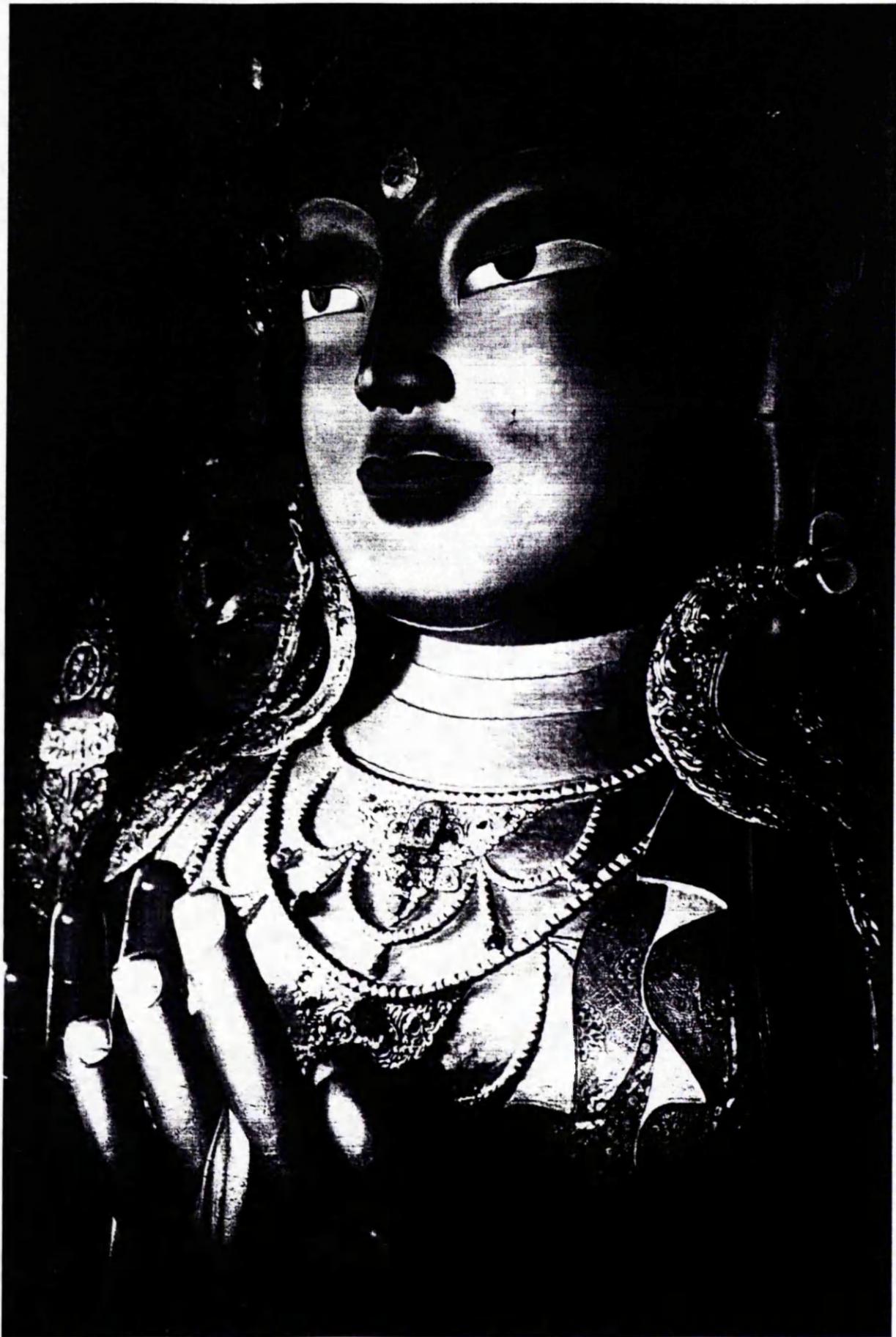








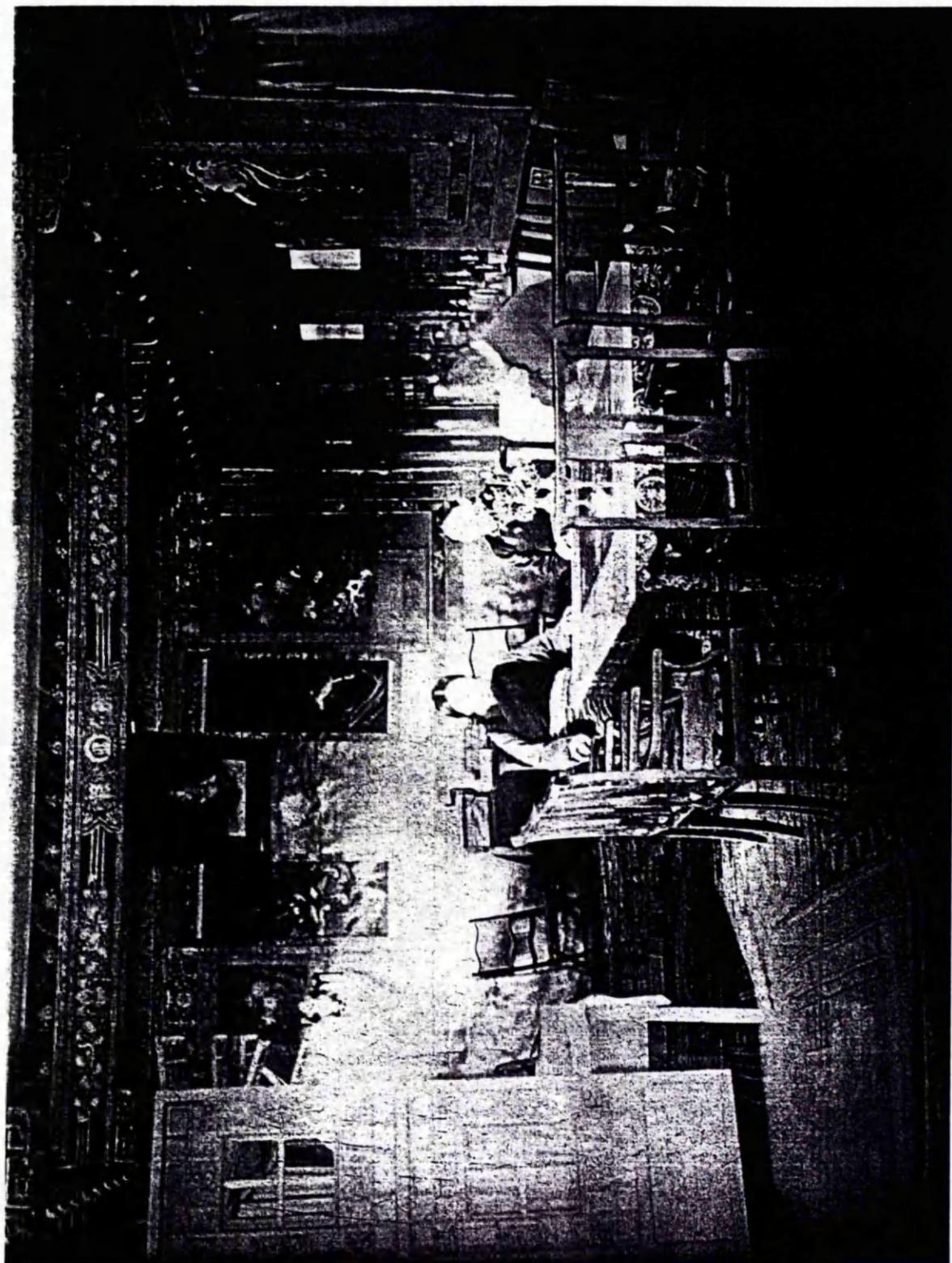


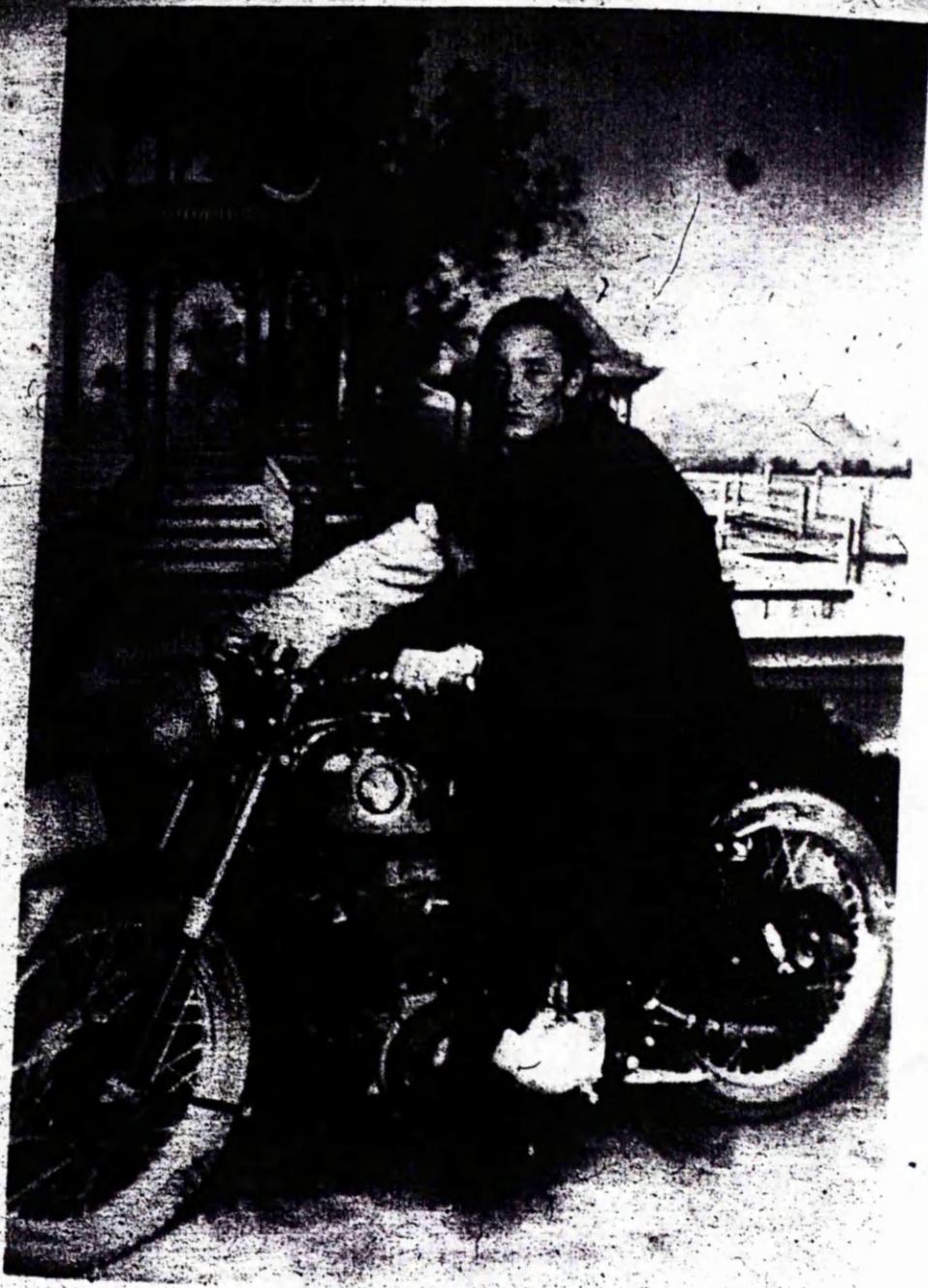




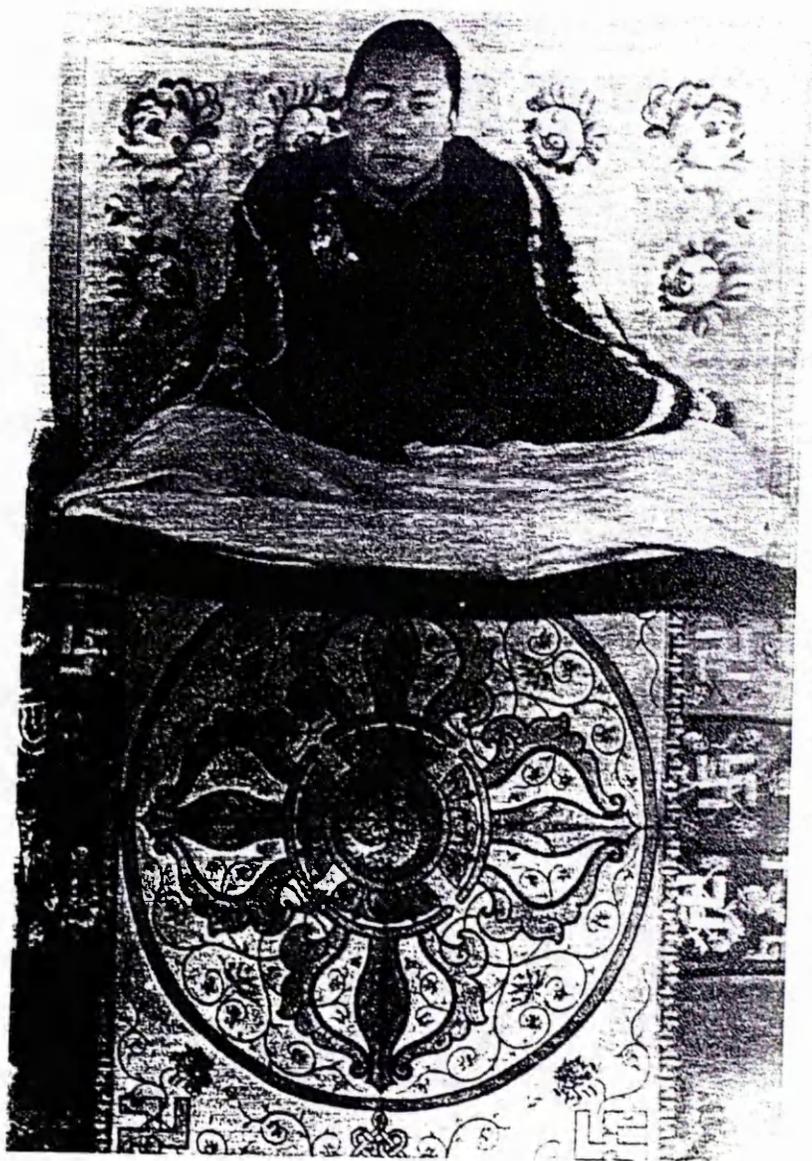






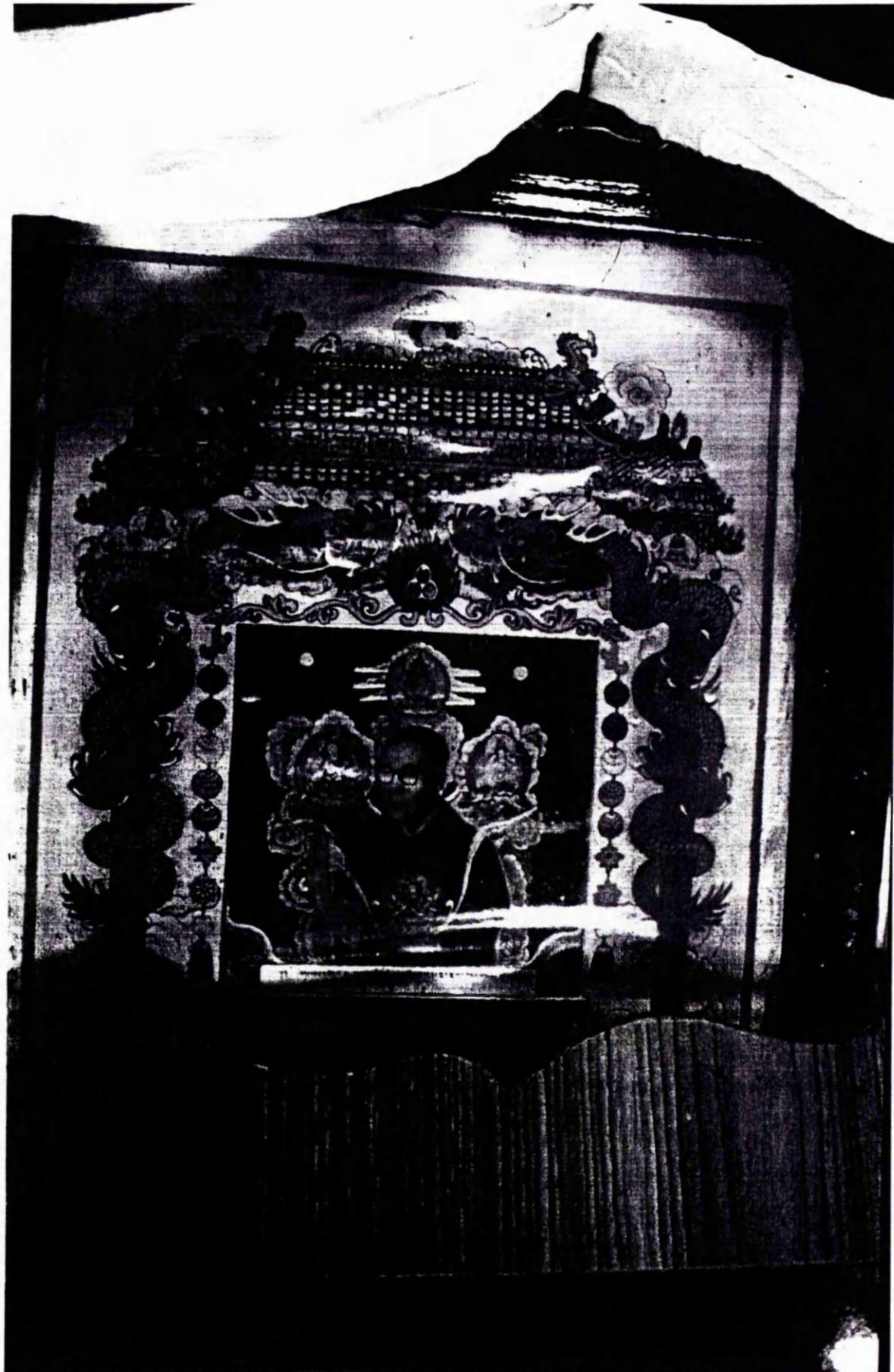


Sakya Dagchen Jigdal Rinpoche, husband of Jamyang Sakya, on his motorcycle in Ebase, 1957.

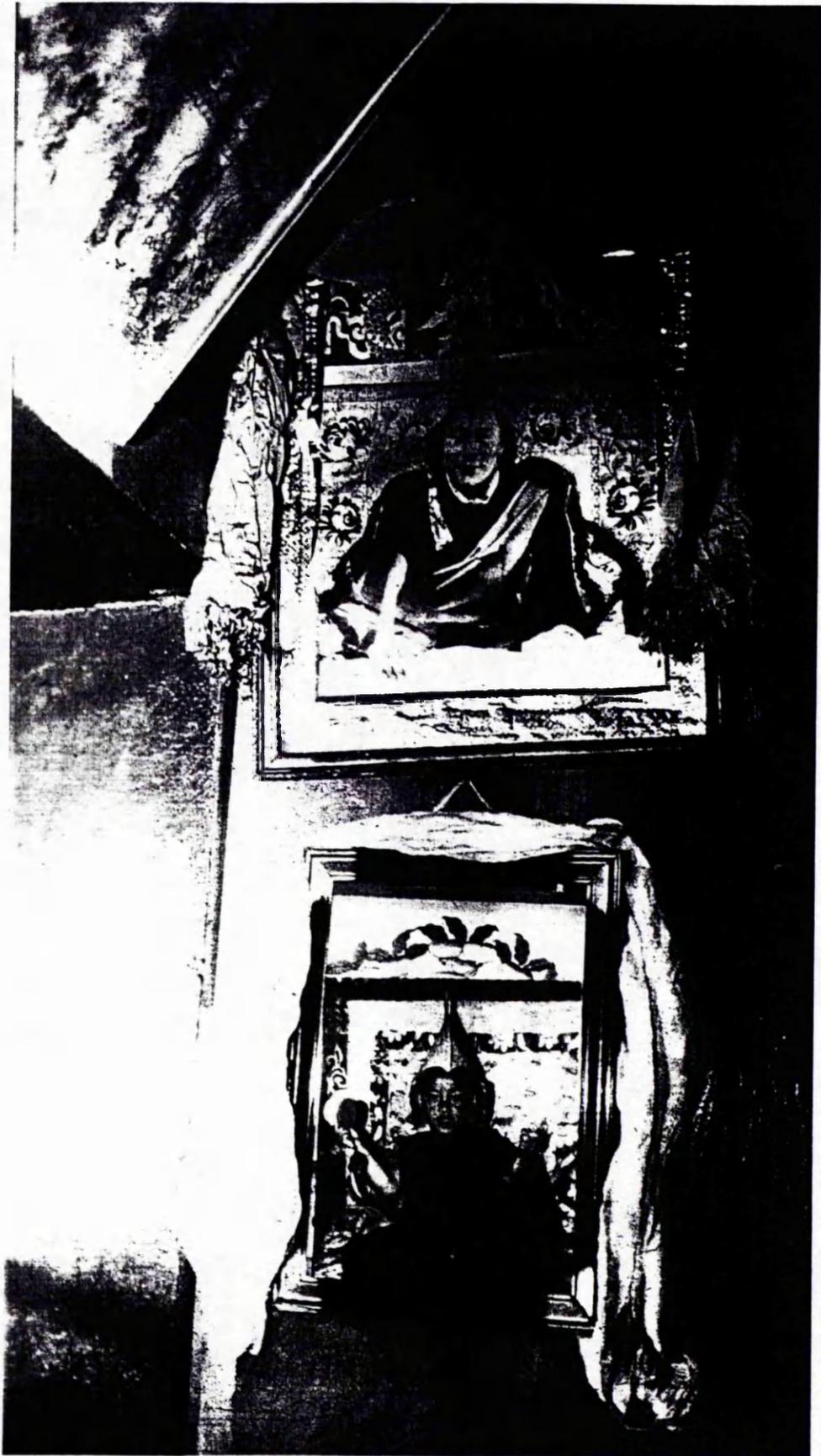




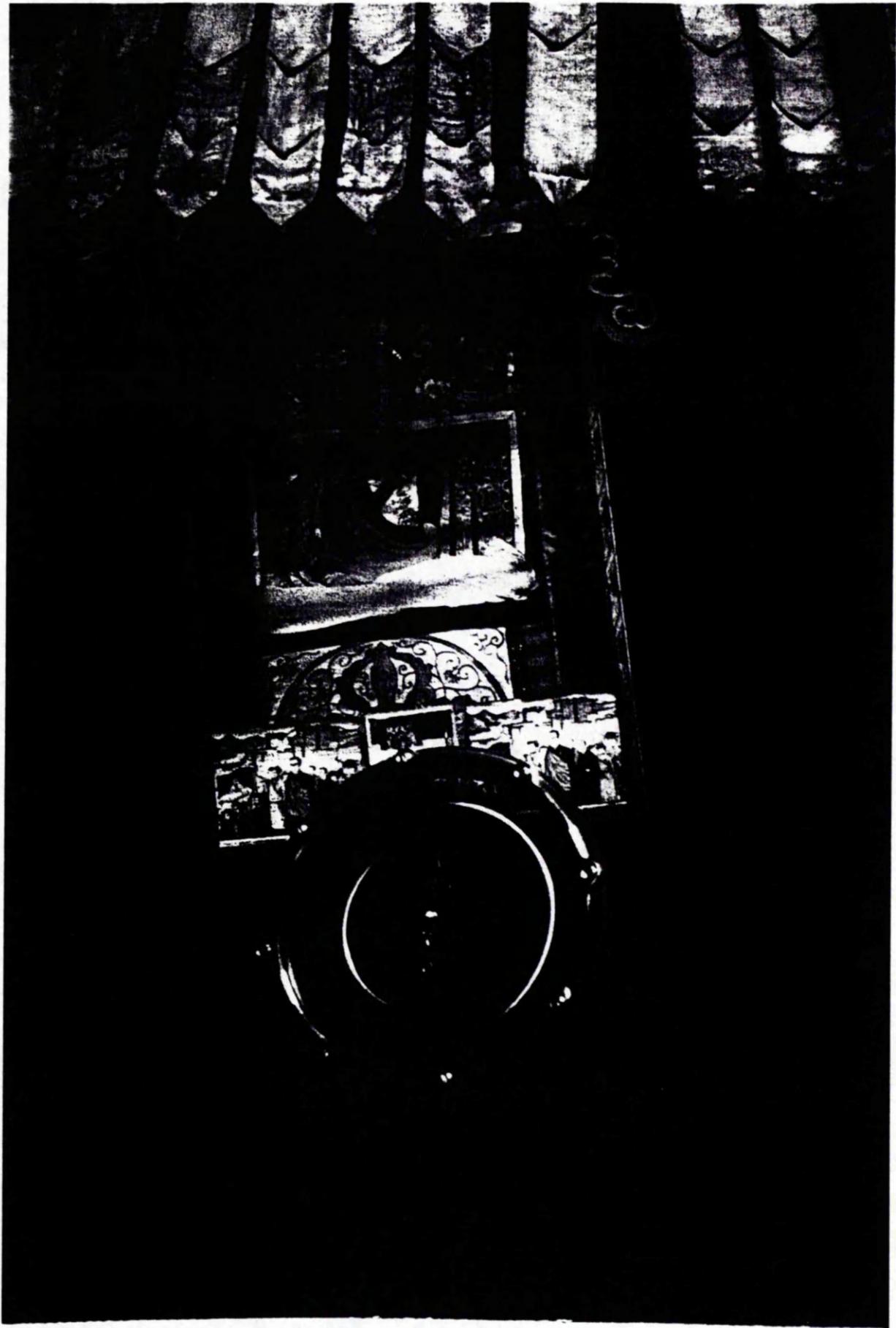
༄༅། །རྩ་ཡབ་སྐྱིད་ནས་གྲུ་ལུ་ཡབ་ཡུམ་གྱིས། །དགོངས་པའི་ཤོད་གཞན་དུ་གསུམ་རྒྱུད་ཆོས་པ་ལས།
 བསམ་ཆེན་བསྟན་པའི་རྒྱལ་མཚན་ཀུན་རྒྱུ་བྱེད། །འཇིགས་པུལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་རྟོ་རྟེན་གྲུས་ལུག་འཚོལ། །

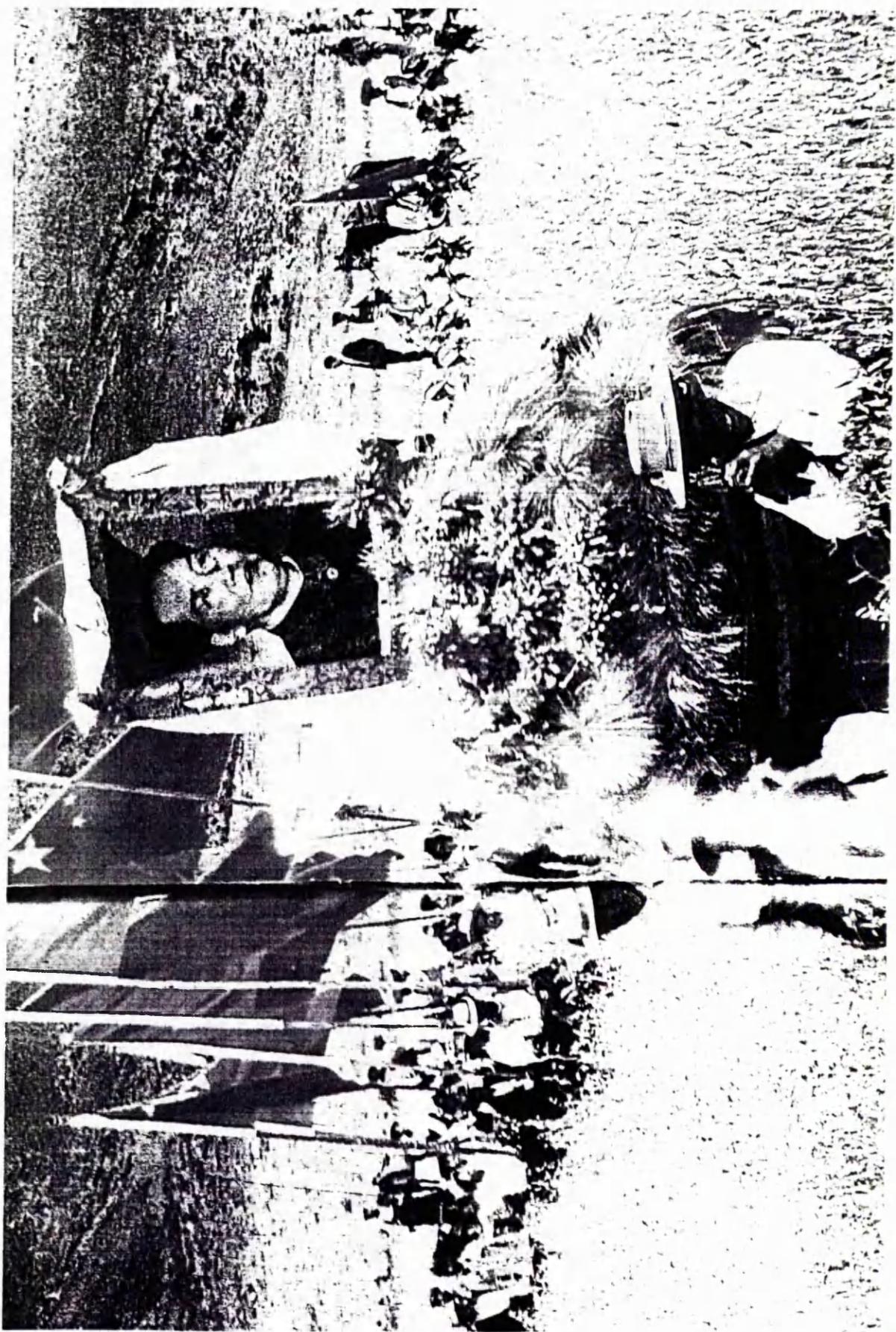






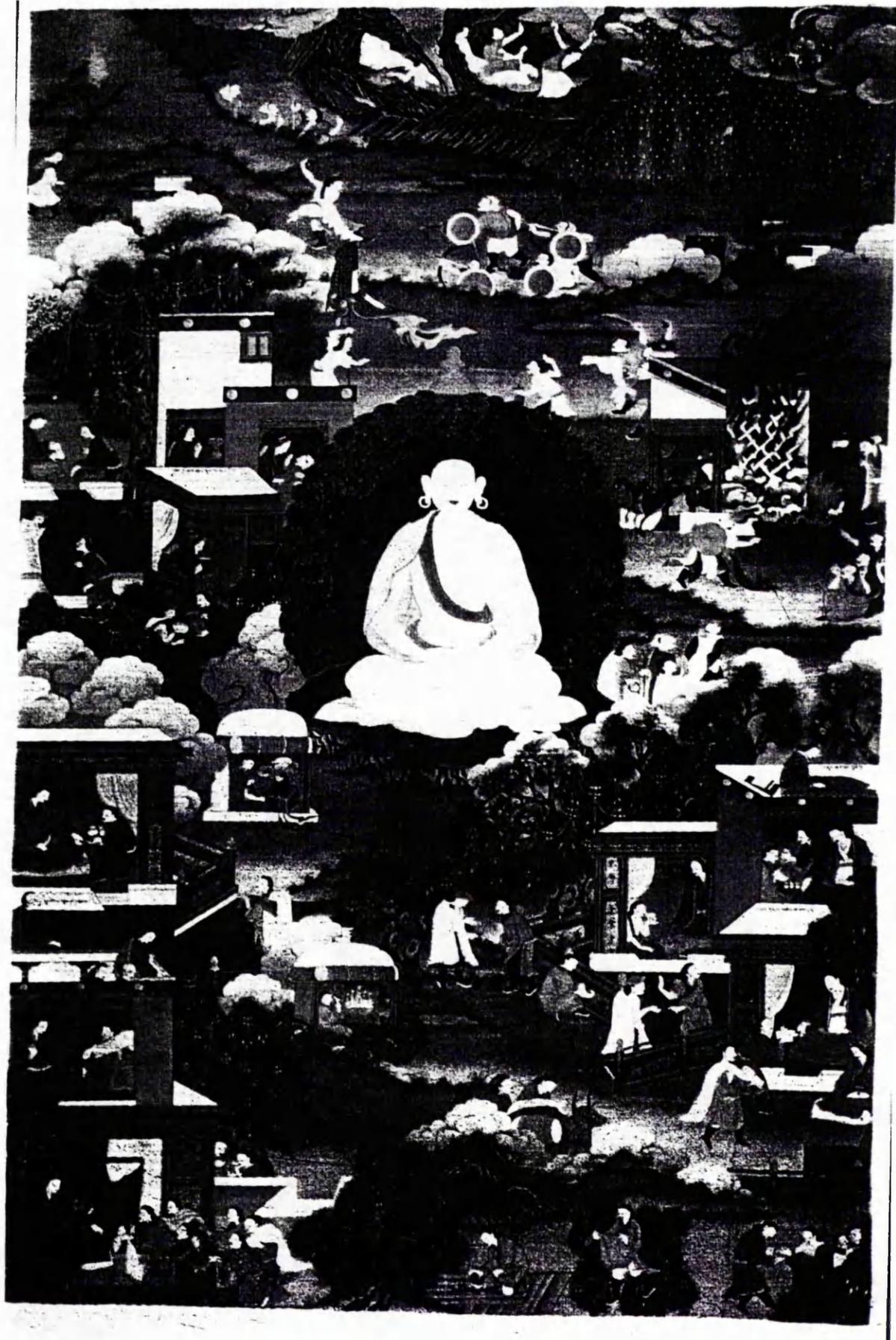








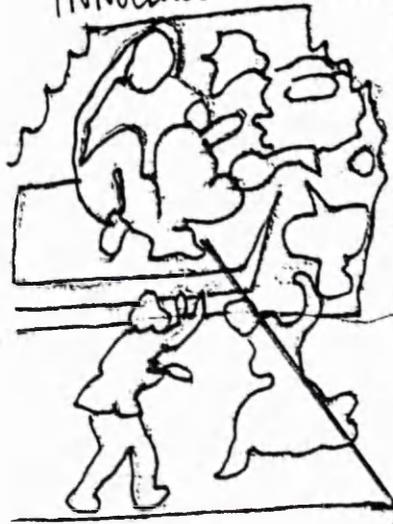




INNOCENCE HOME

MOTHER INDIA

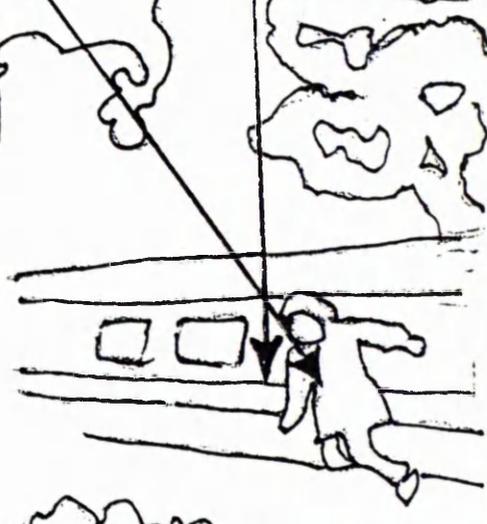
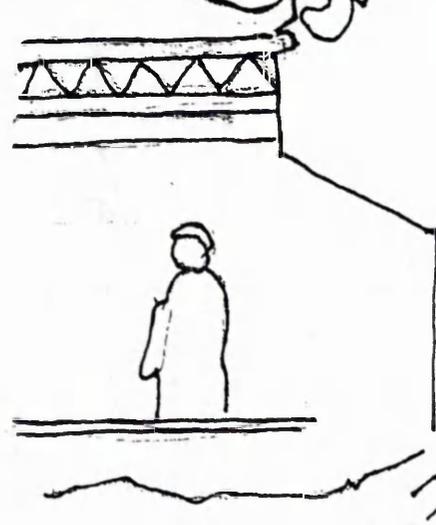
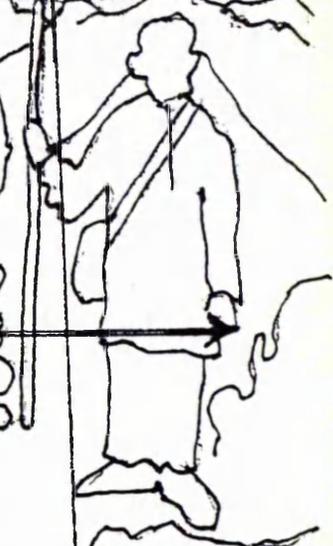
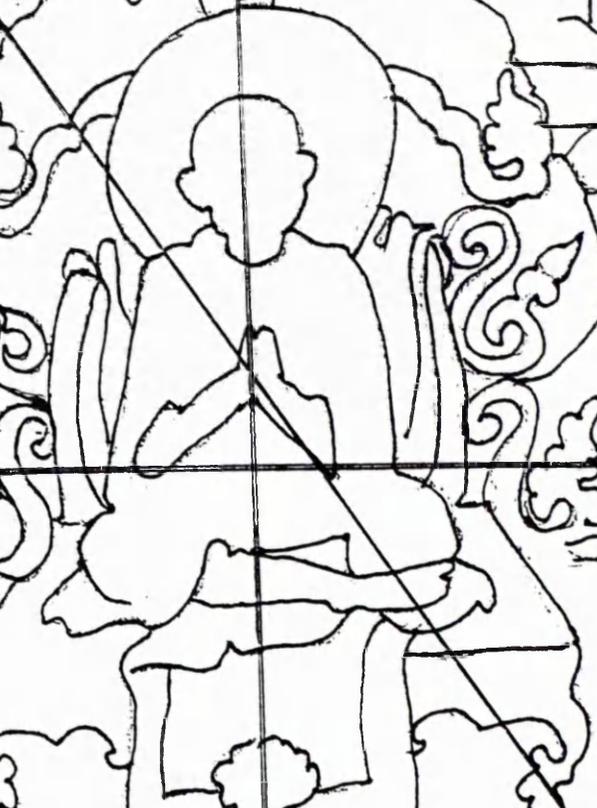
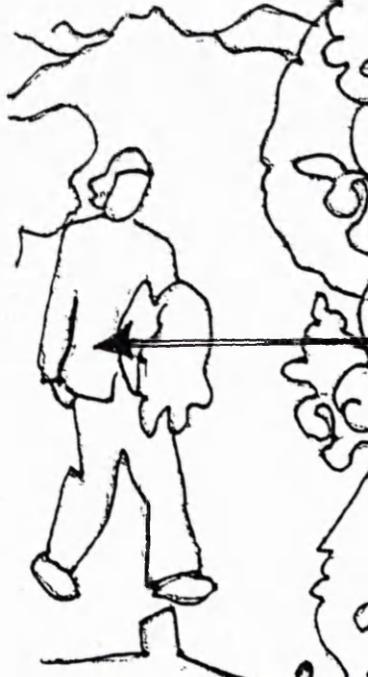
MAN & MANY PARTS



CHILDHOOD

MARRIAGE

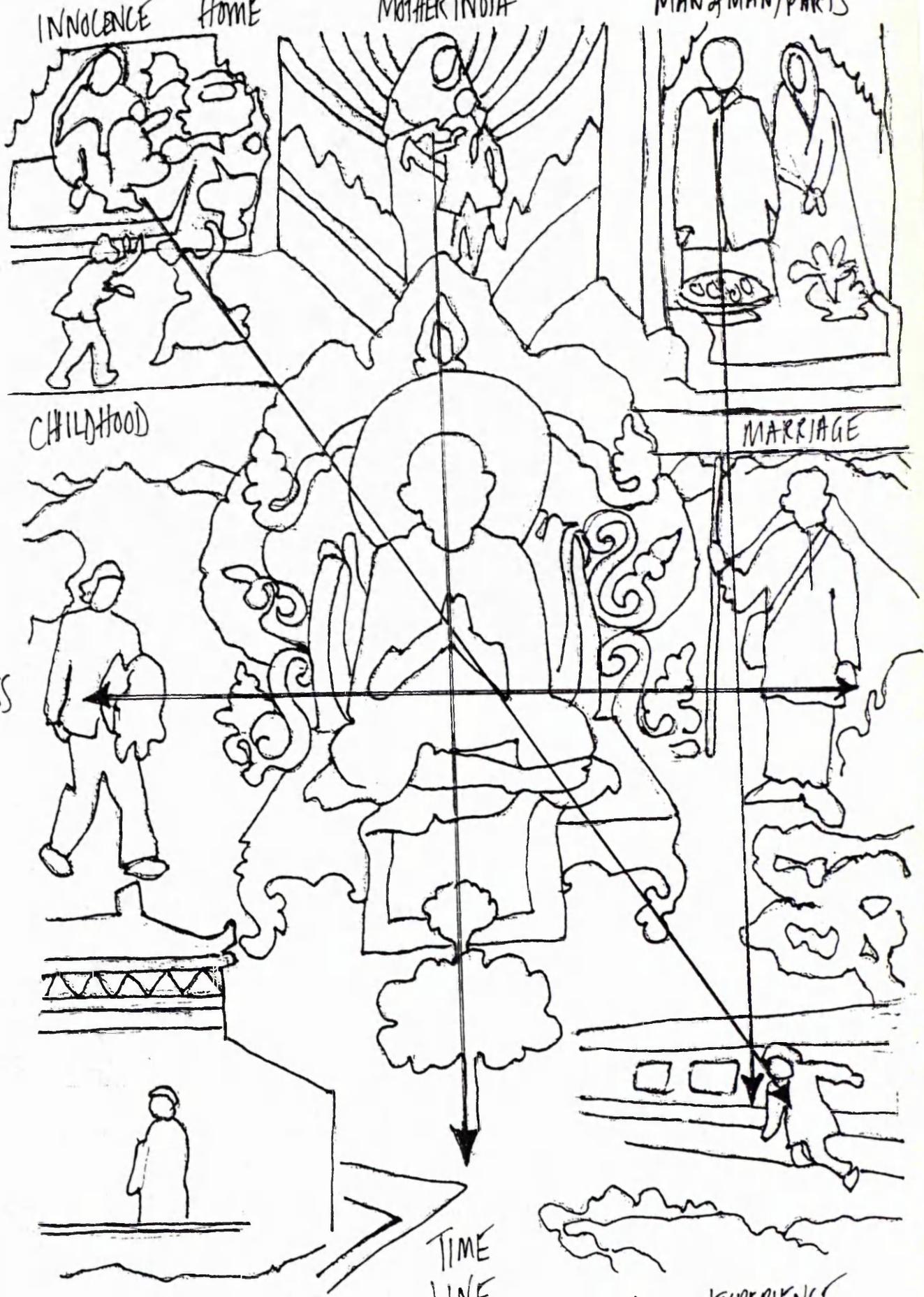
DRESS



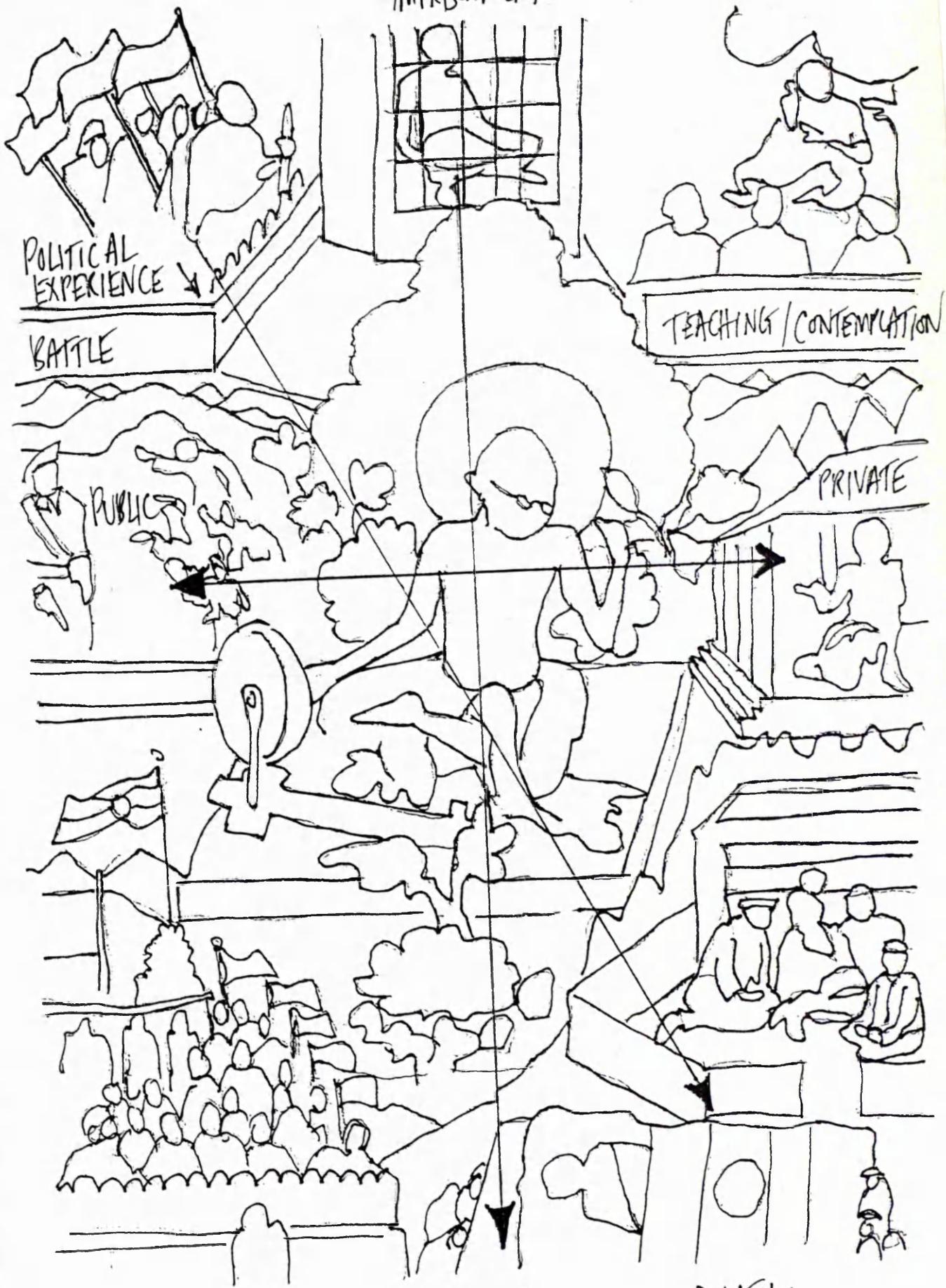
TIME LINE

WORLD

EXPERIENCE



IMPRISONMENT



POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

BATTLE

PUBLIC

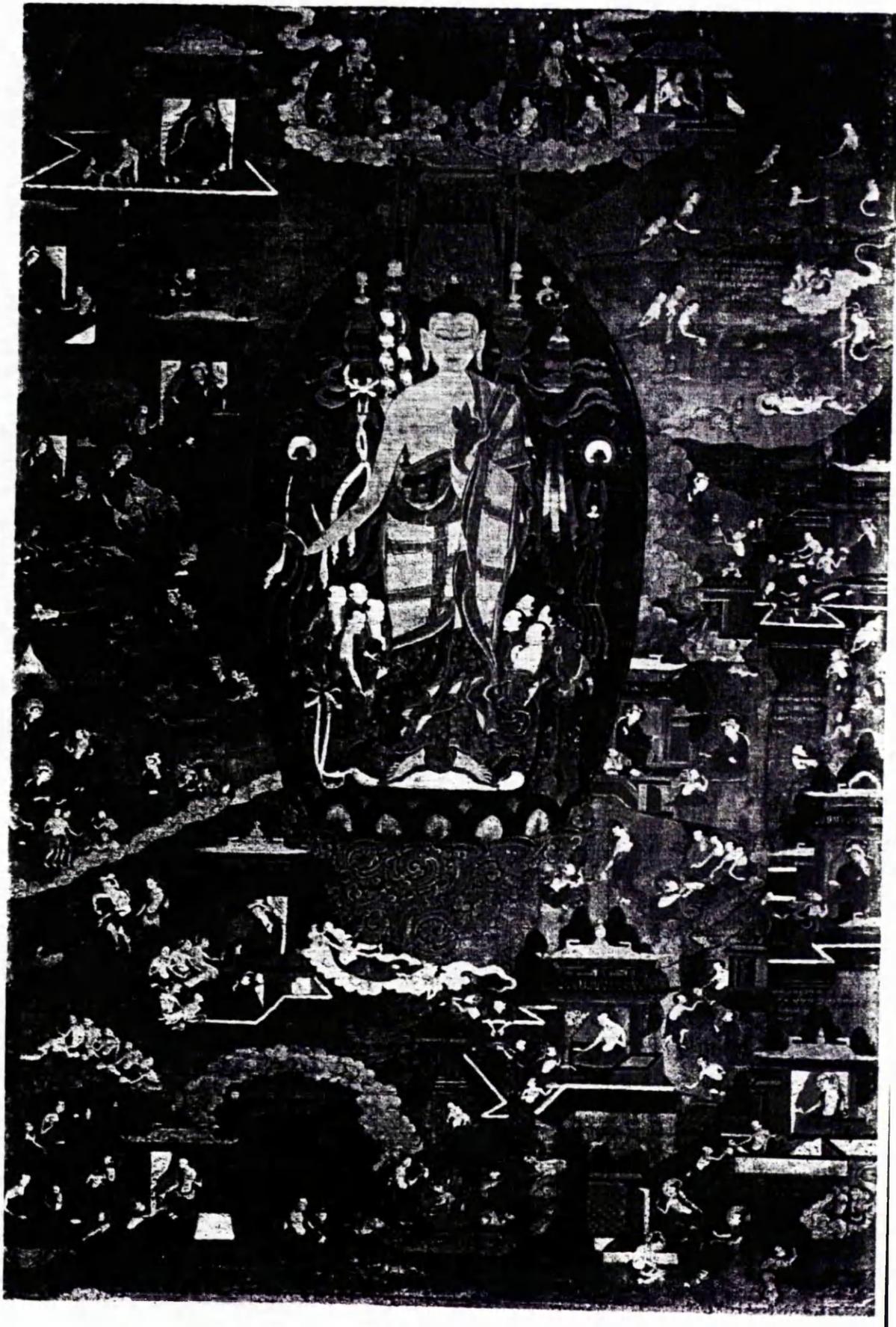
TEACHING / CONTEMPLATION

PRIVATE

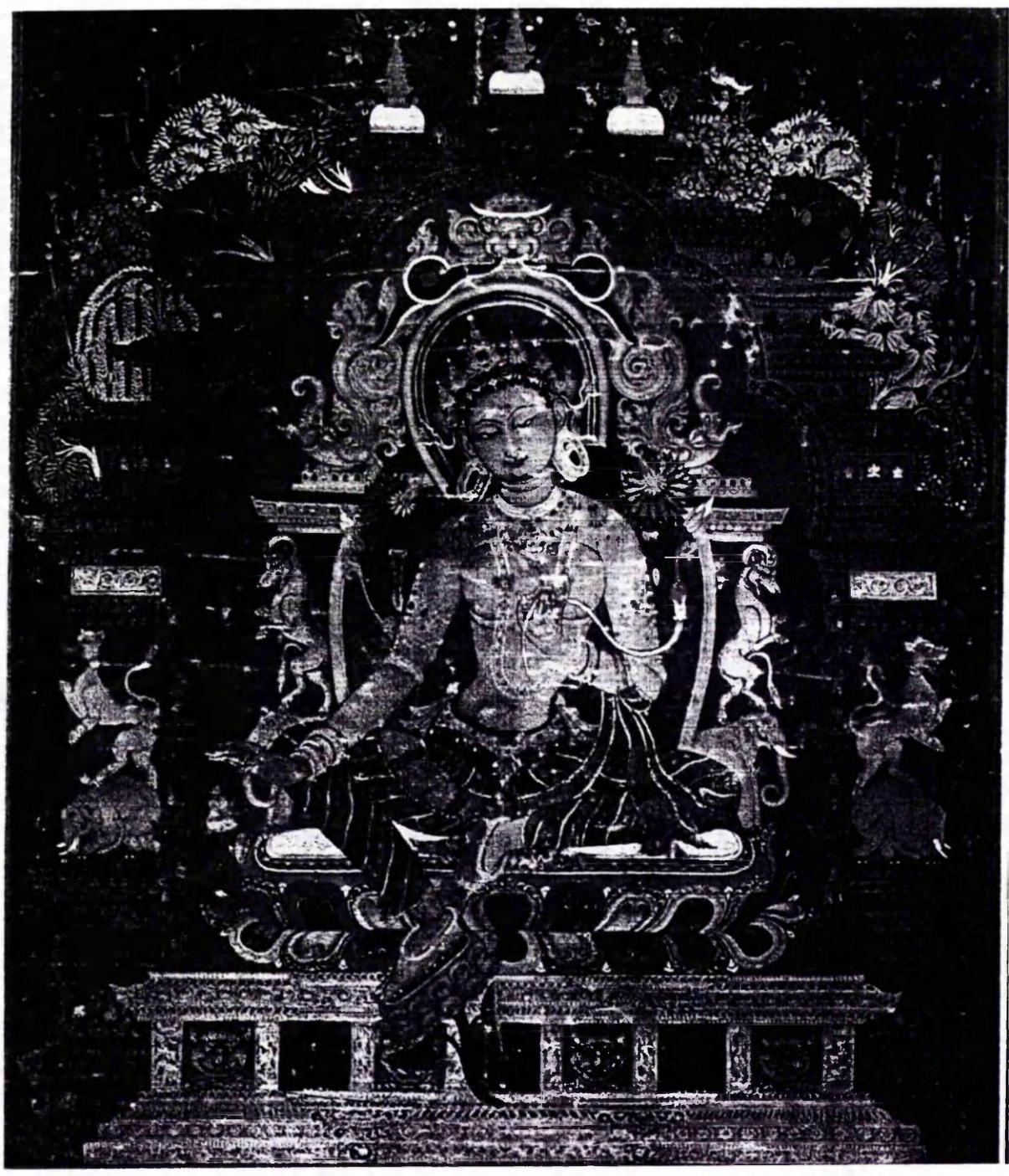
TIME LINE

DEATH















1888 T. Sron-btsan-sgam-po

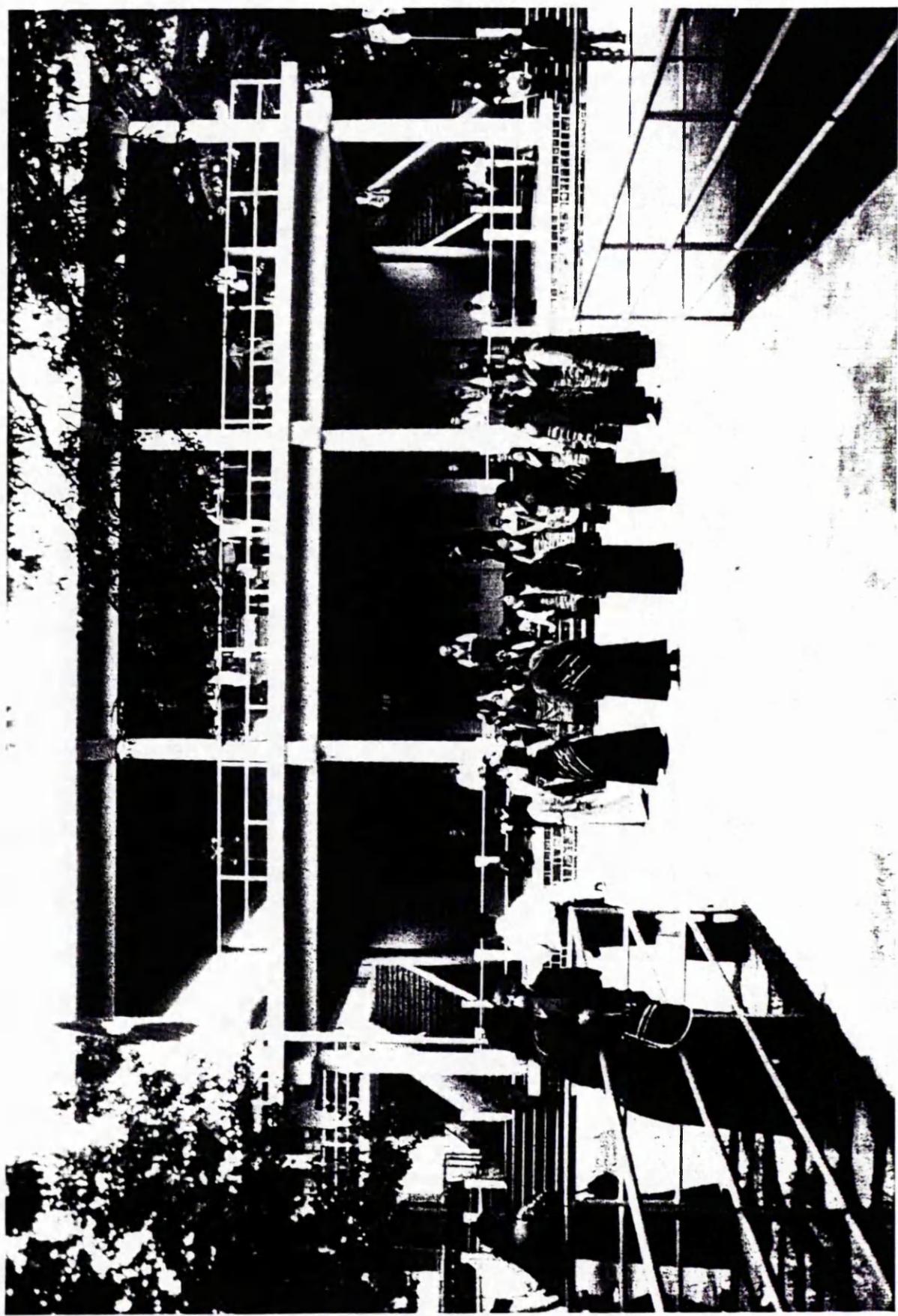


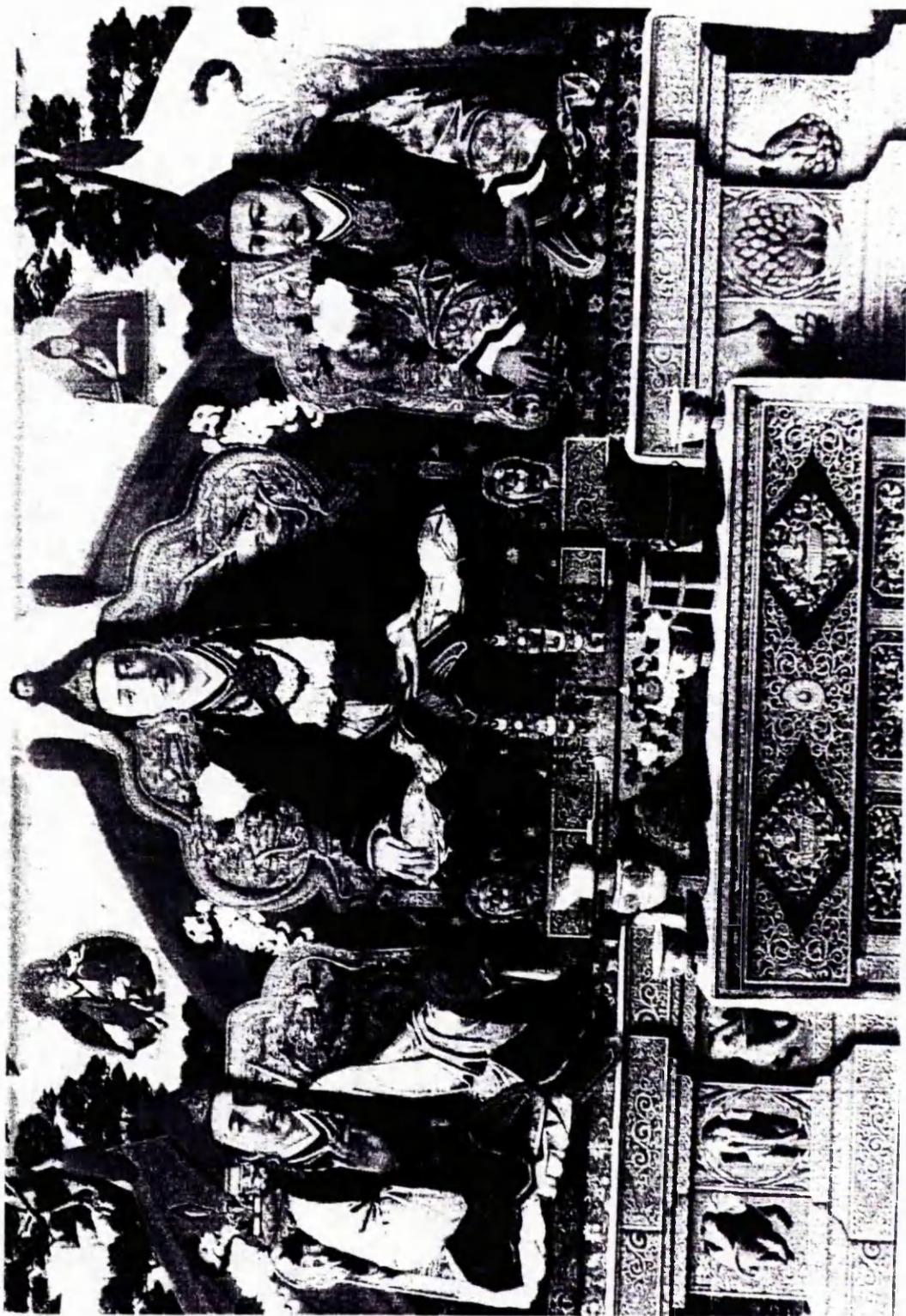
1891 T. Khri-ral

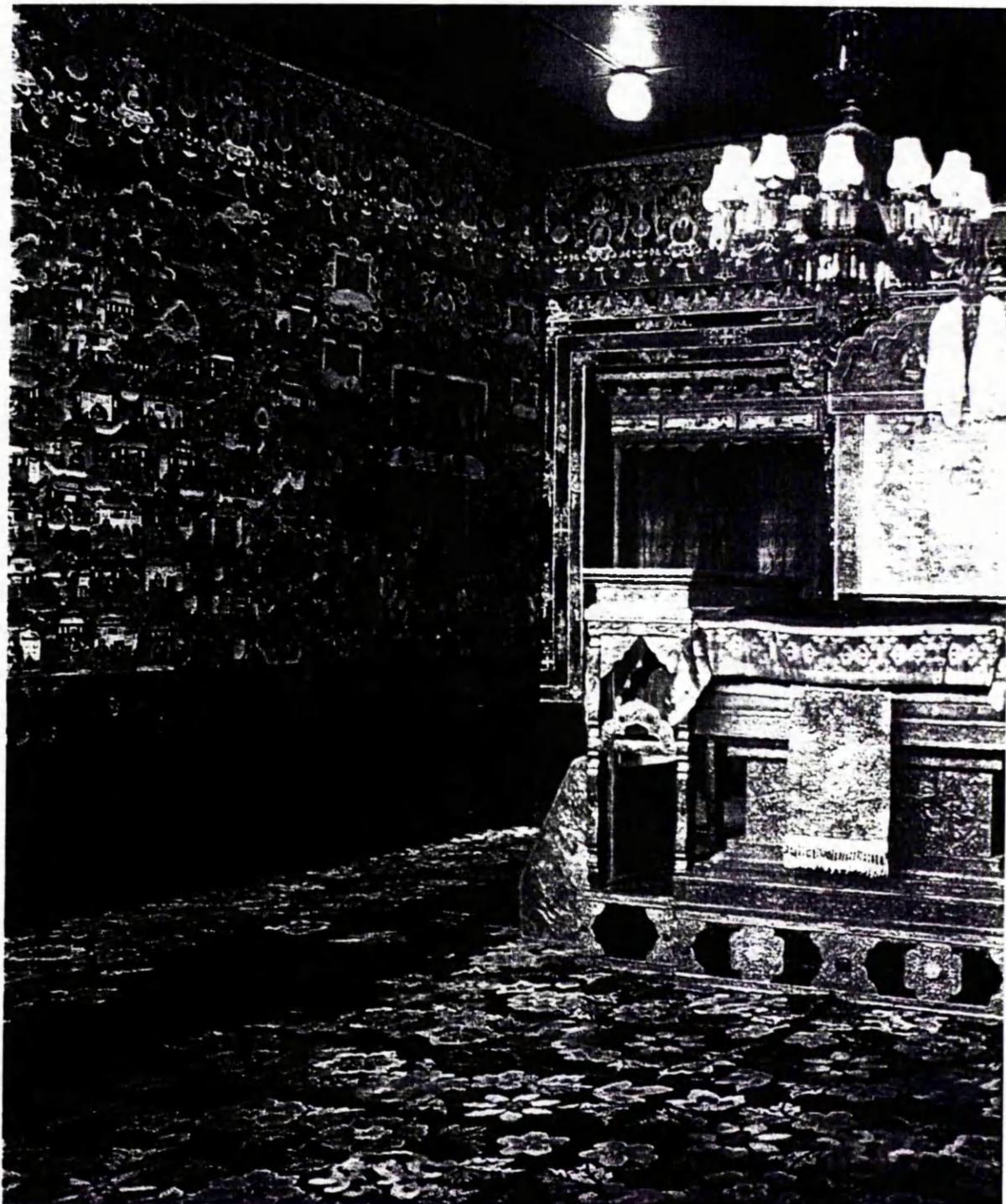


ཨ། བསྟན་གཉིས་ཡོངས་སུ་རྒྱས་མཛད་བྱིས་པ་ཇེ།

1890 T. Khri-sron-lde-btsan



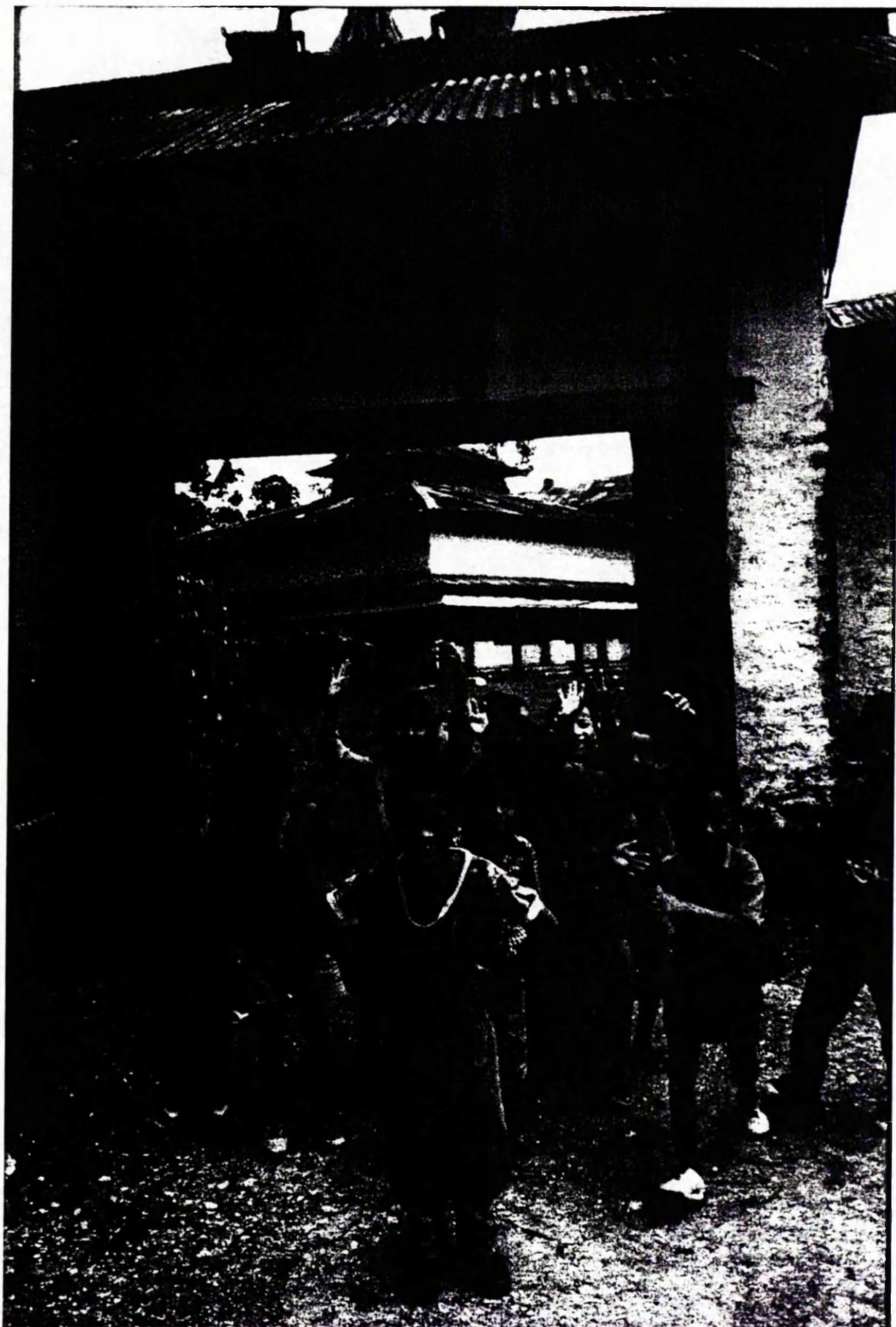


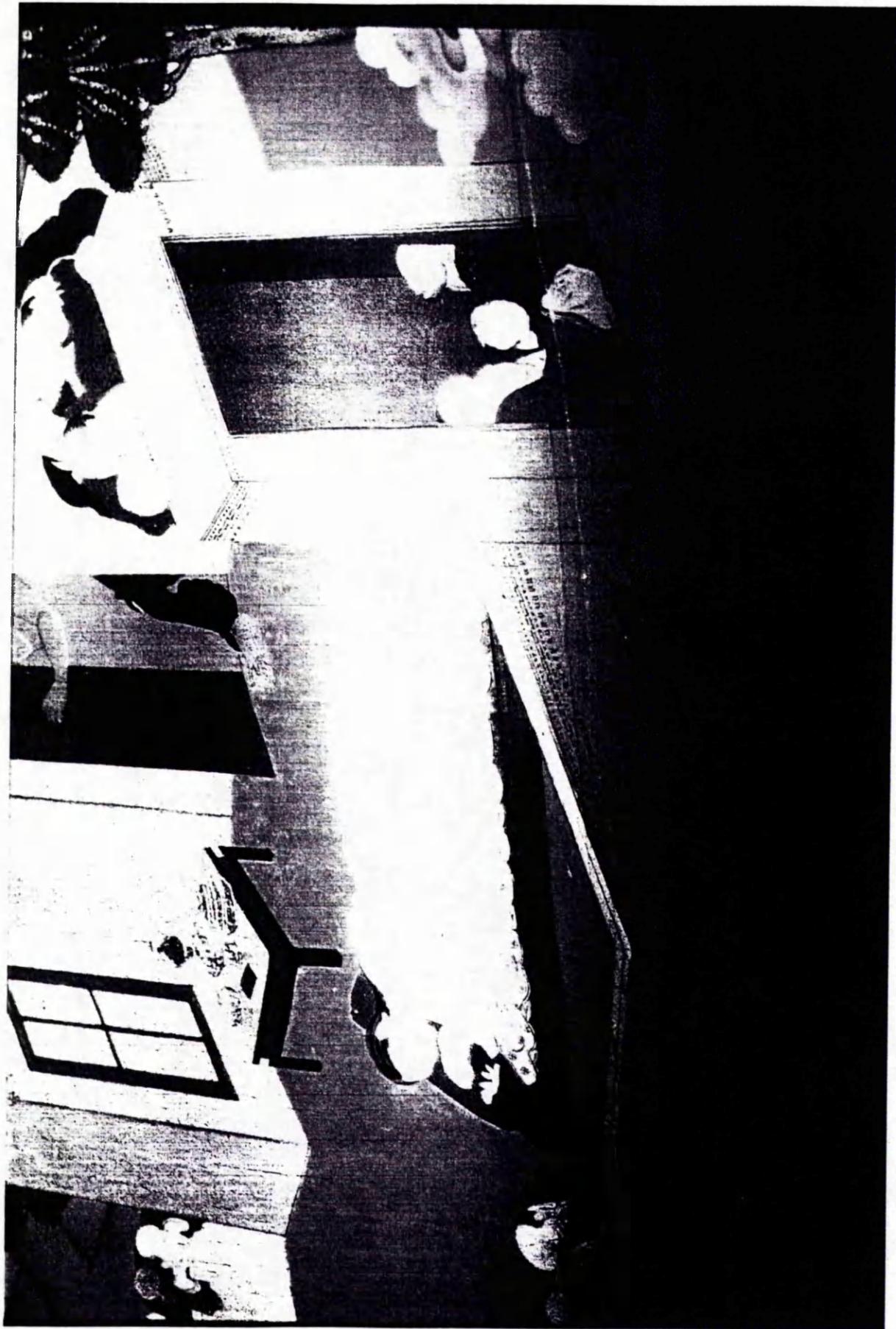




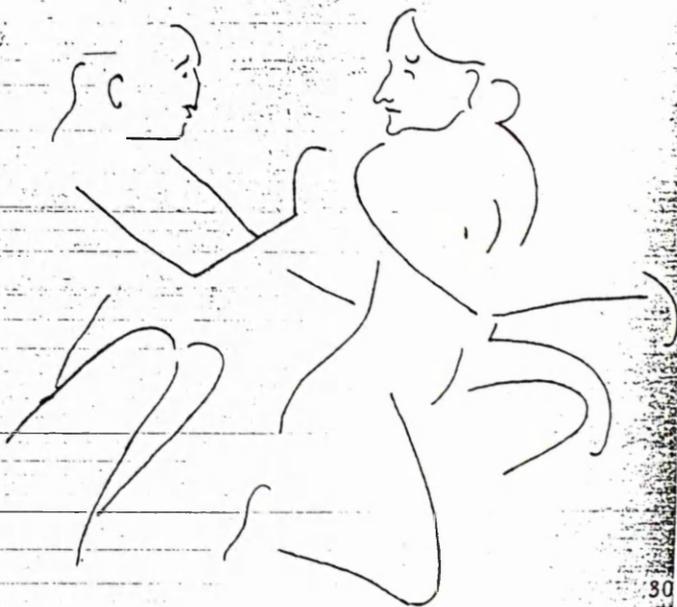




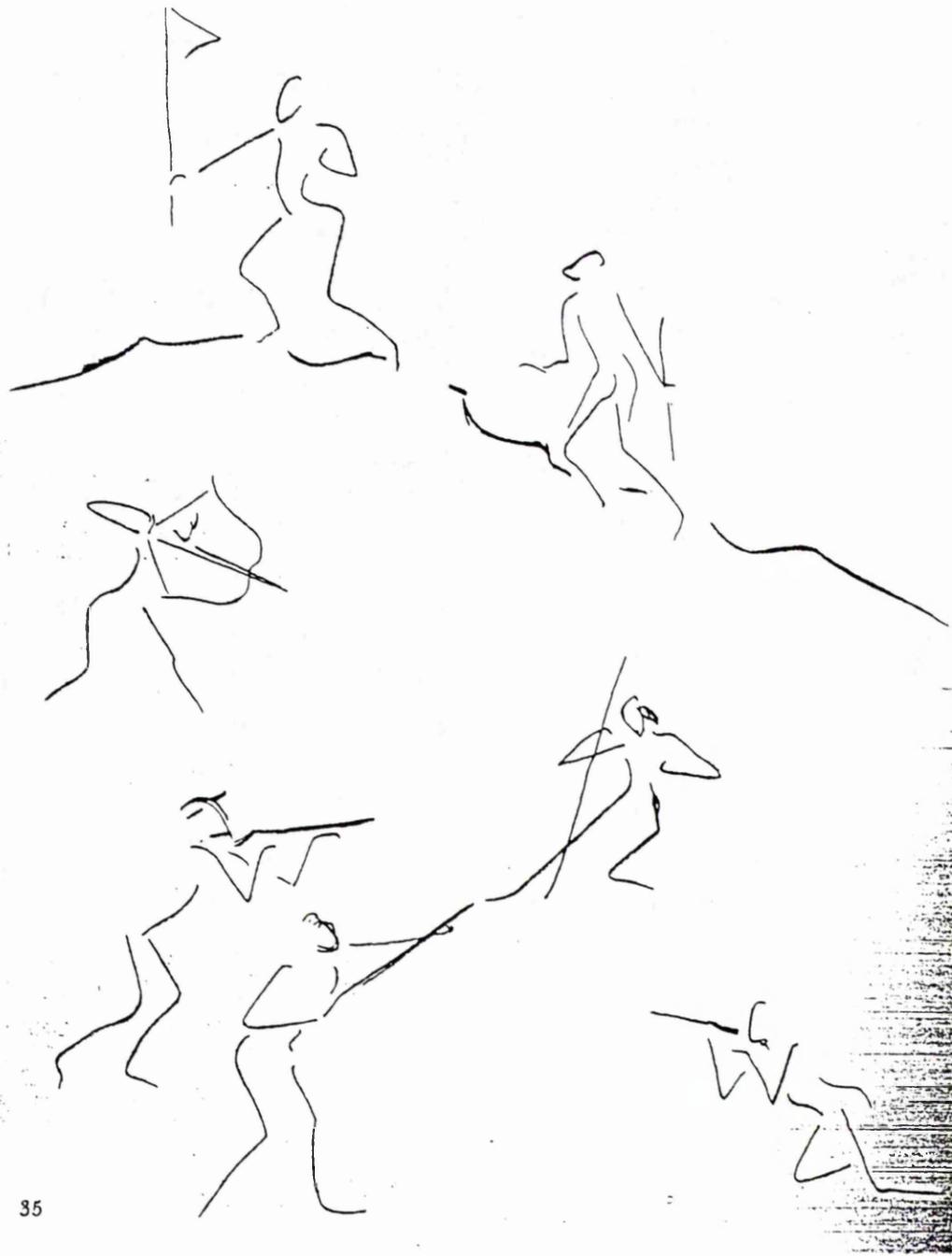


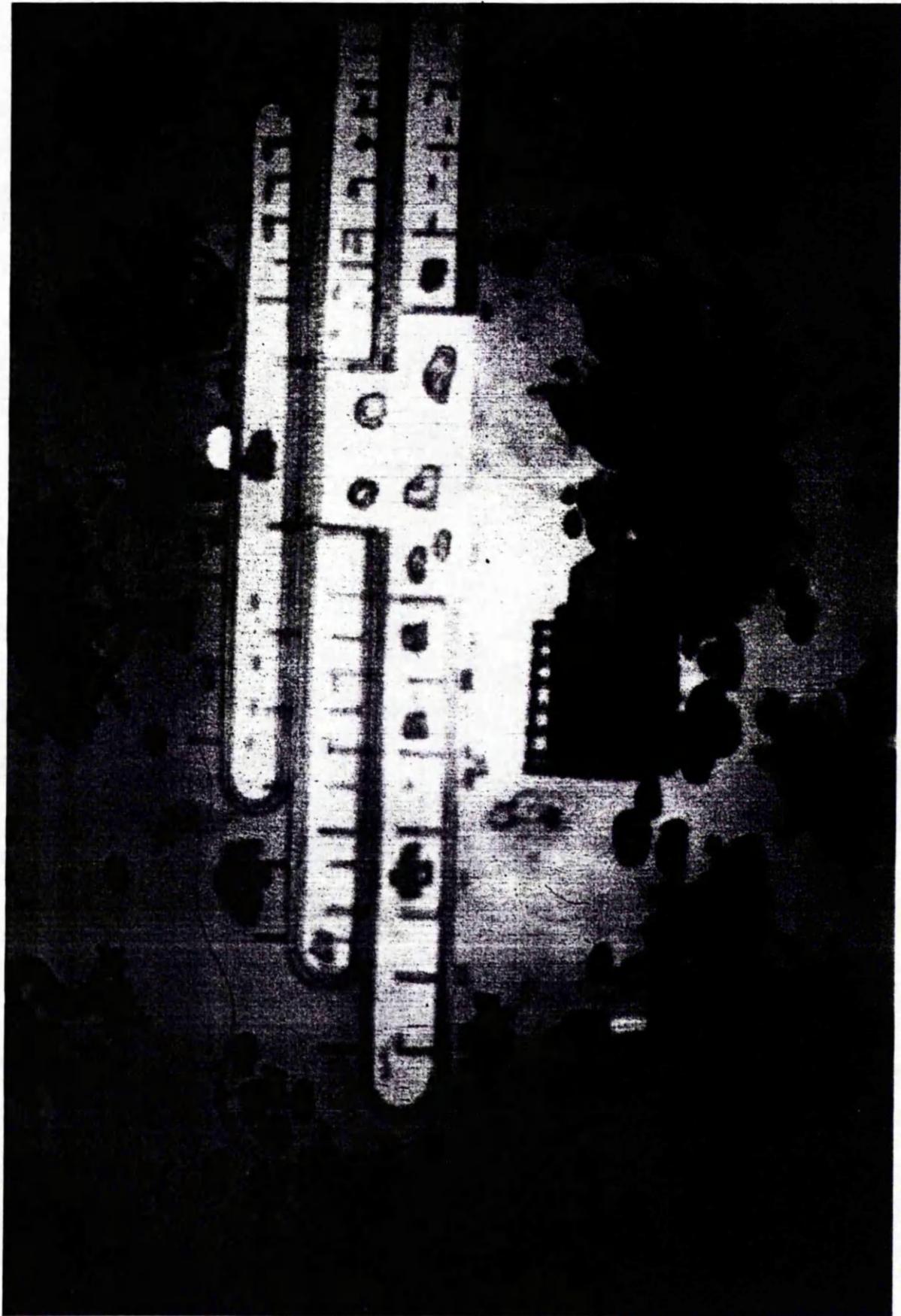


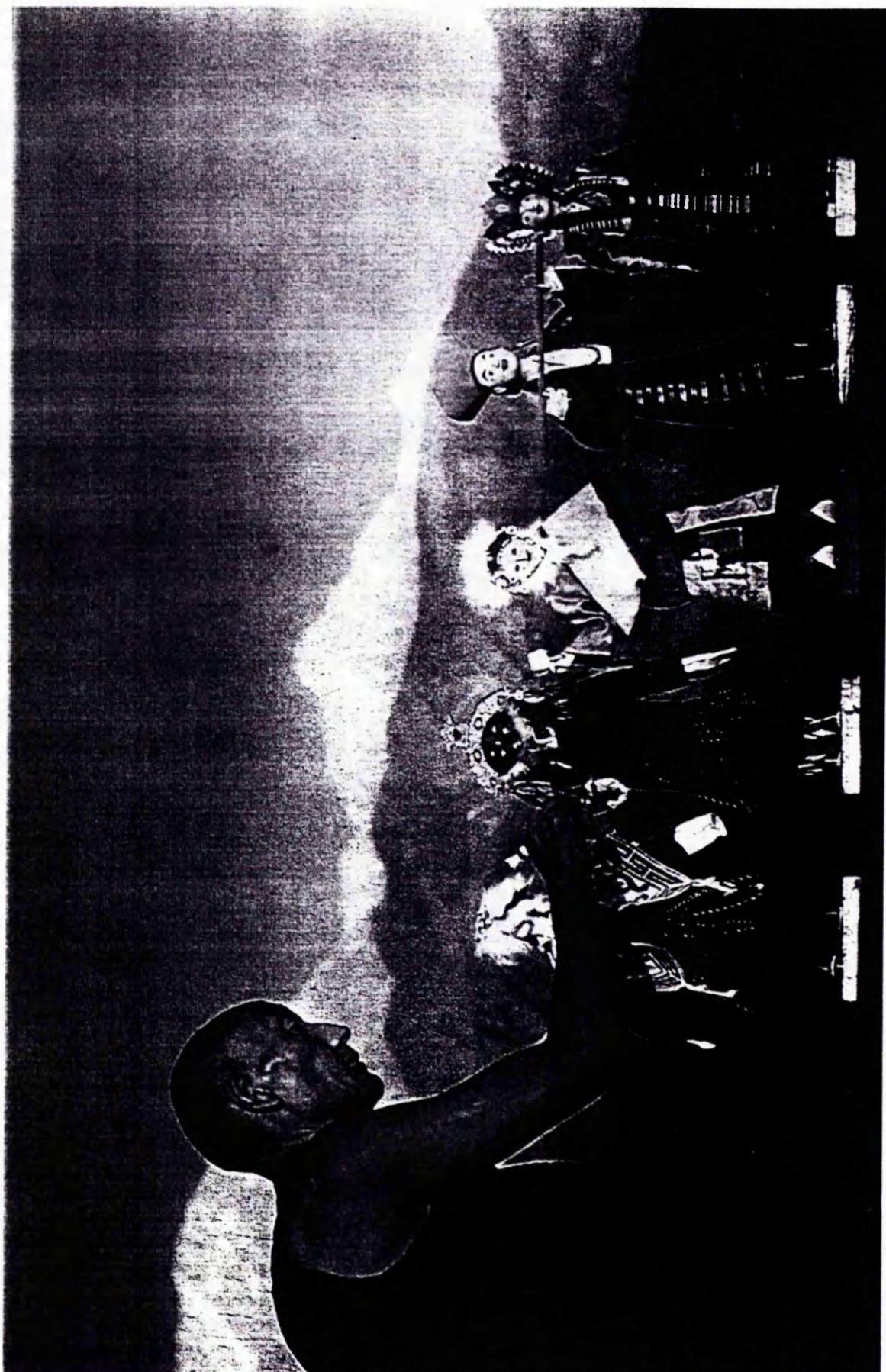






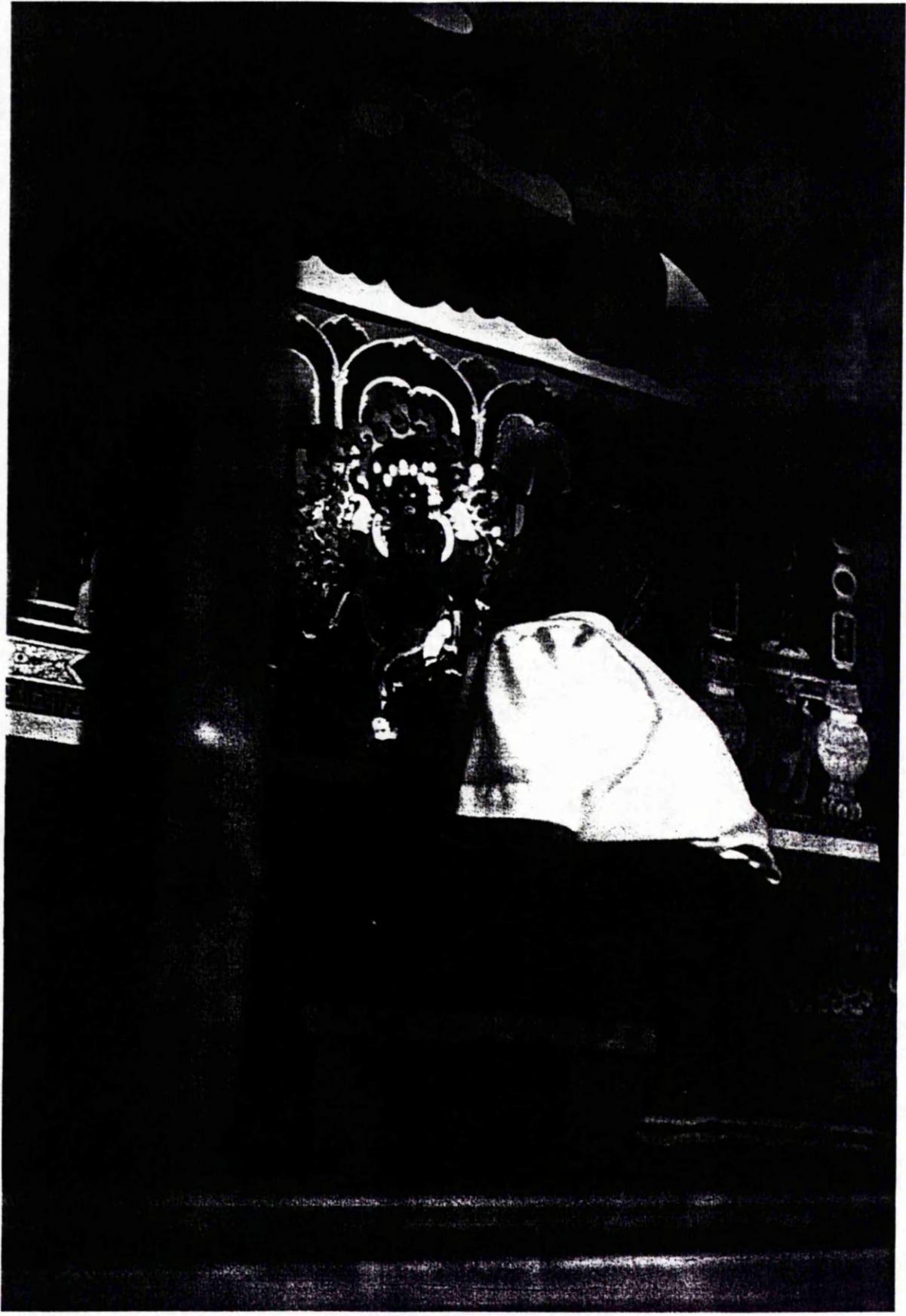




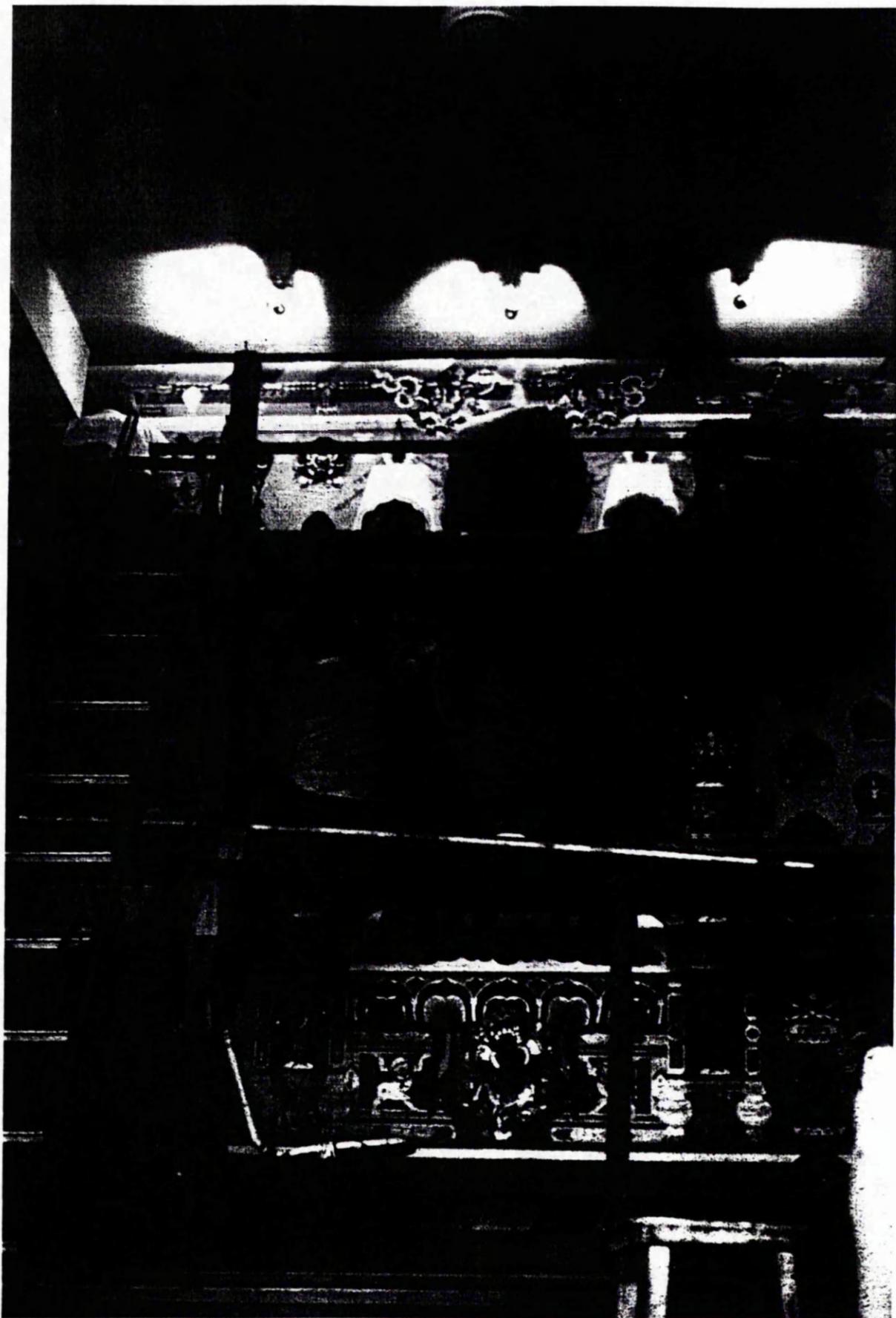


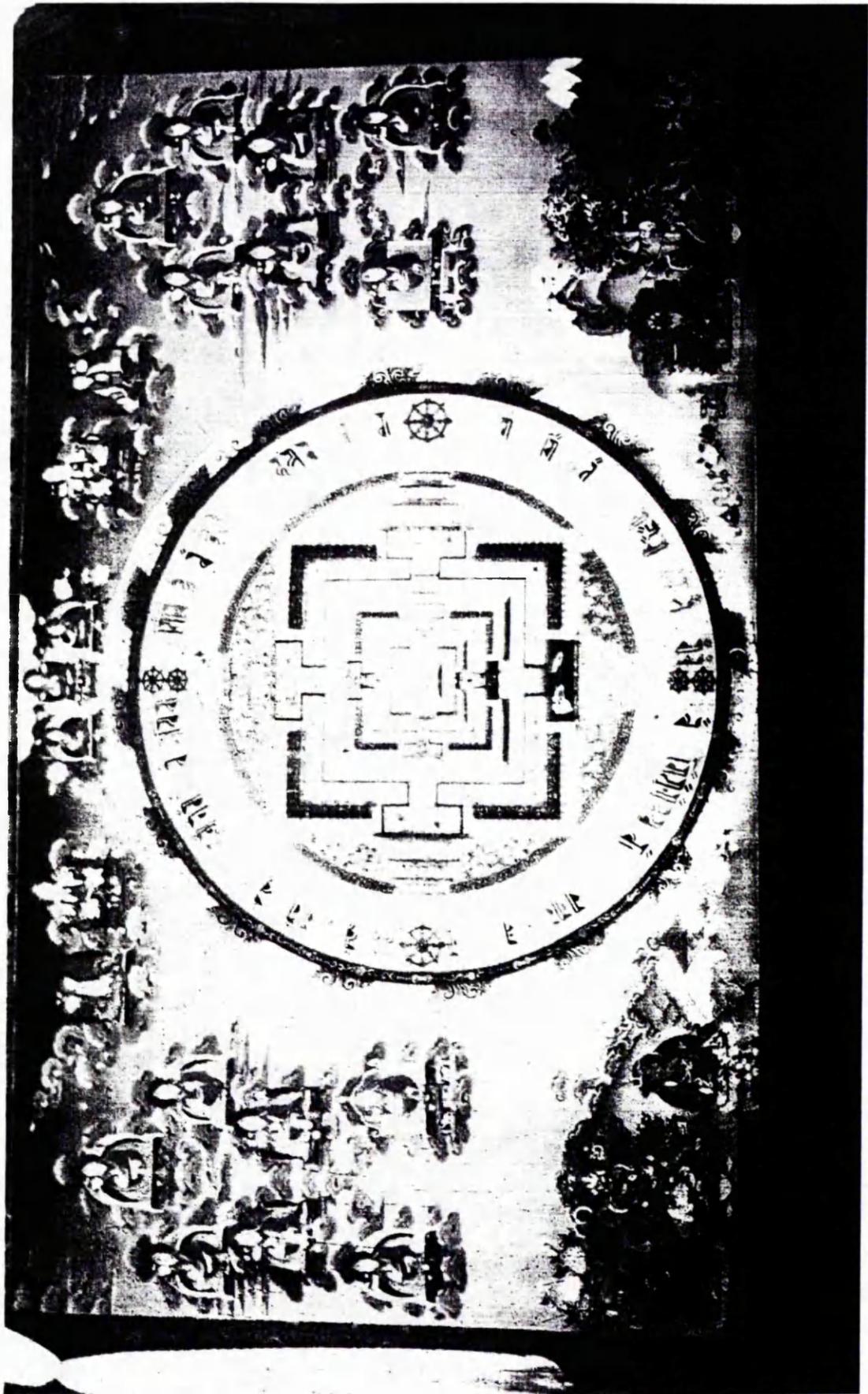


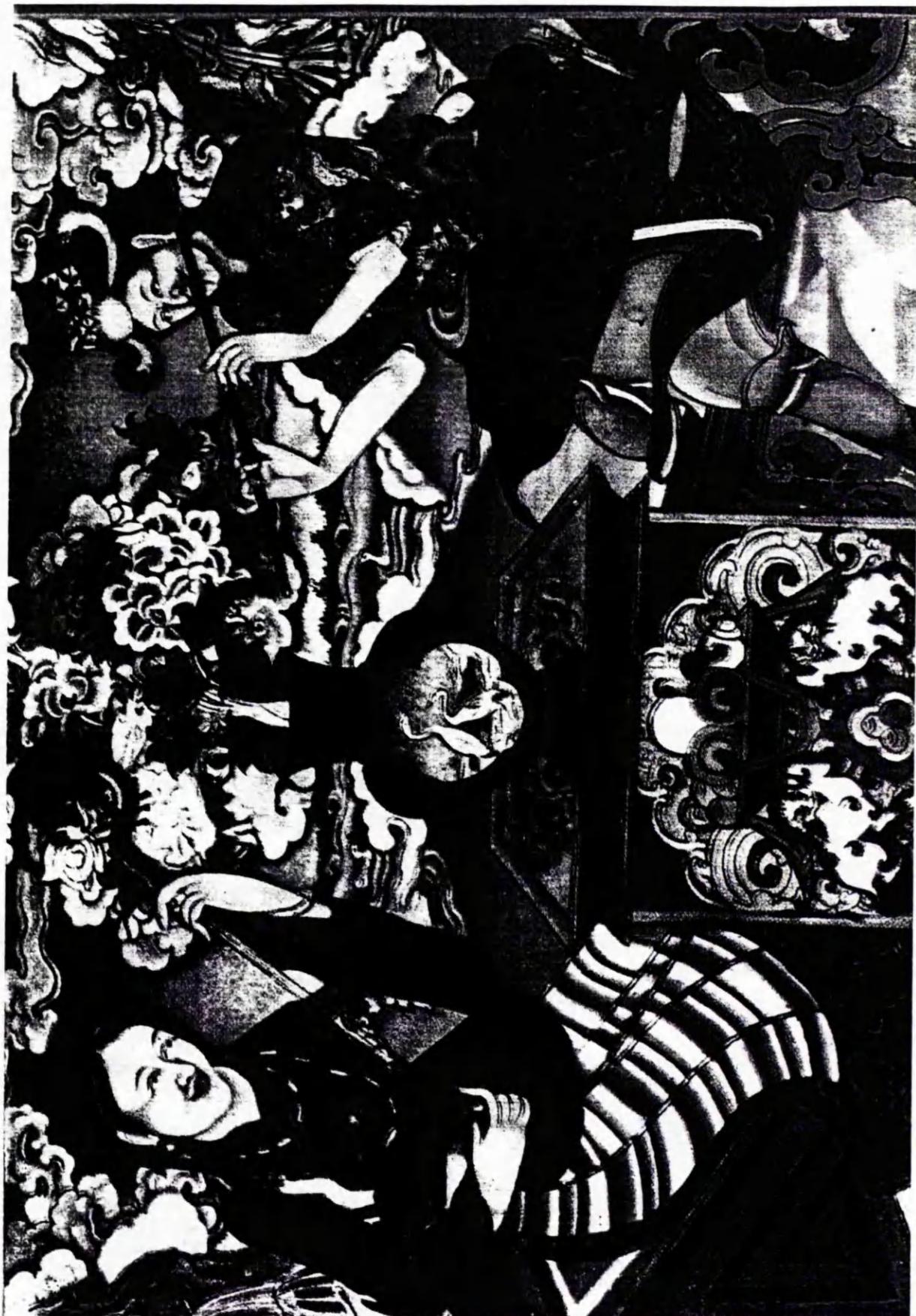




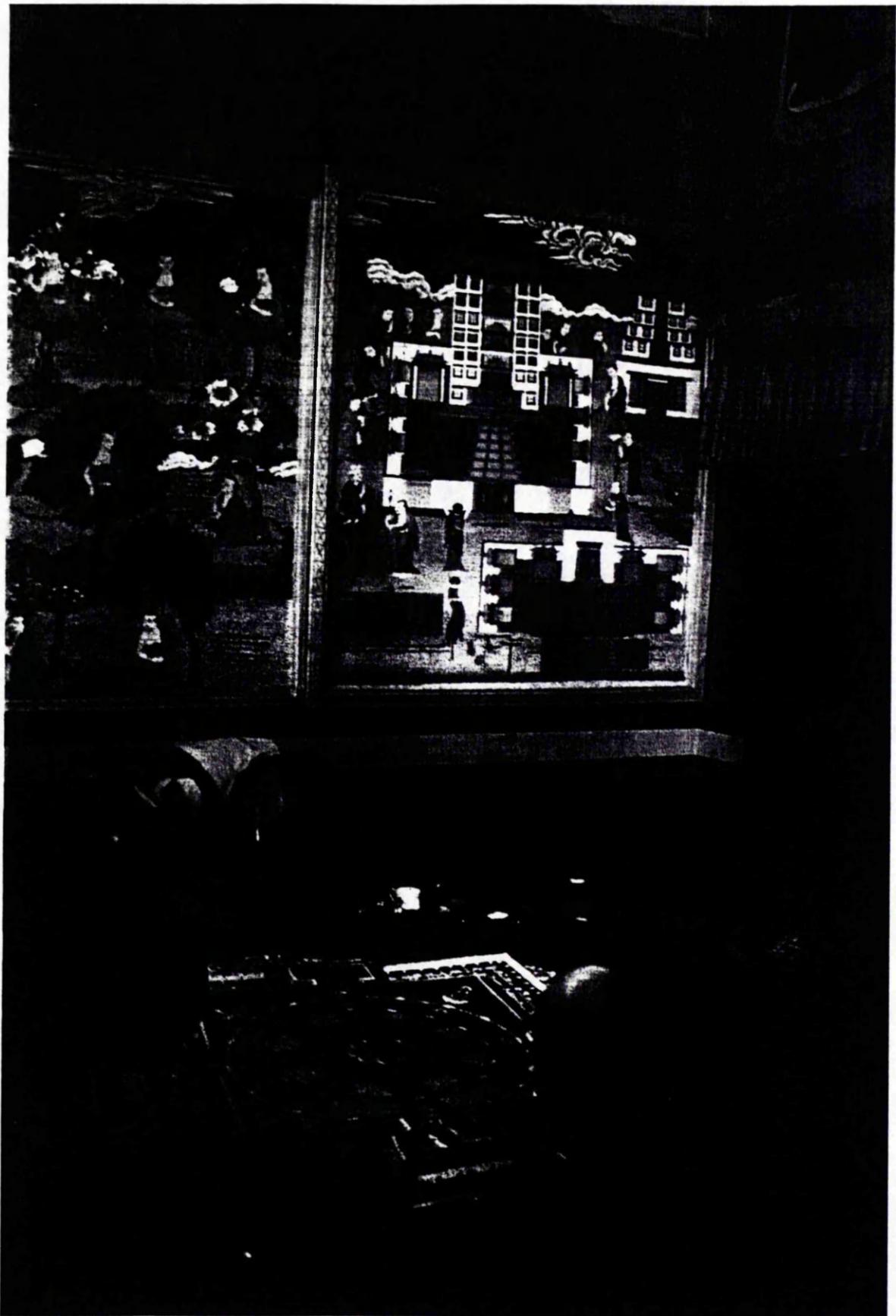




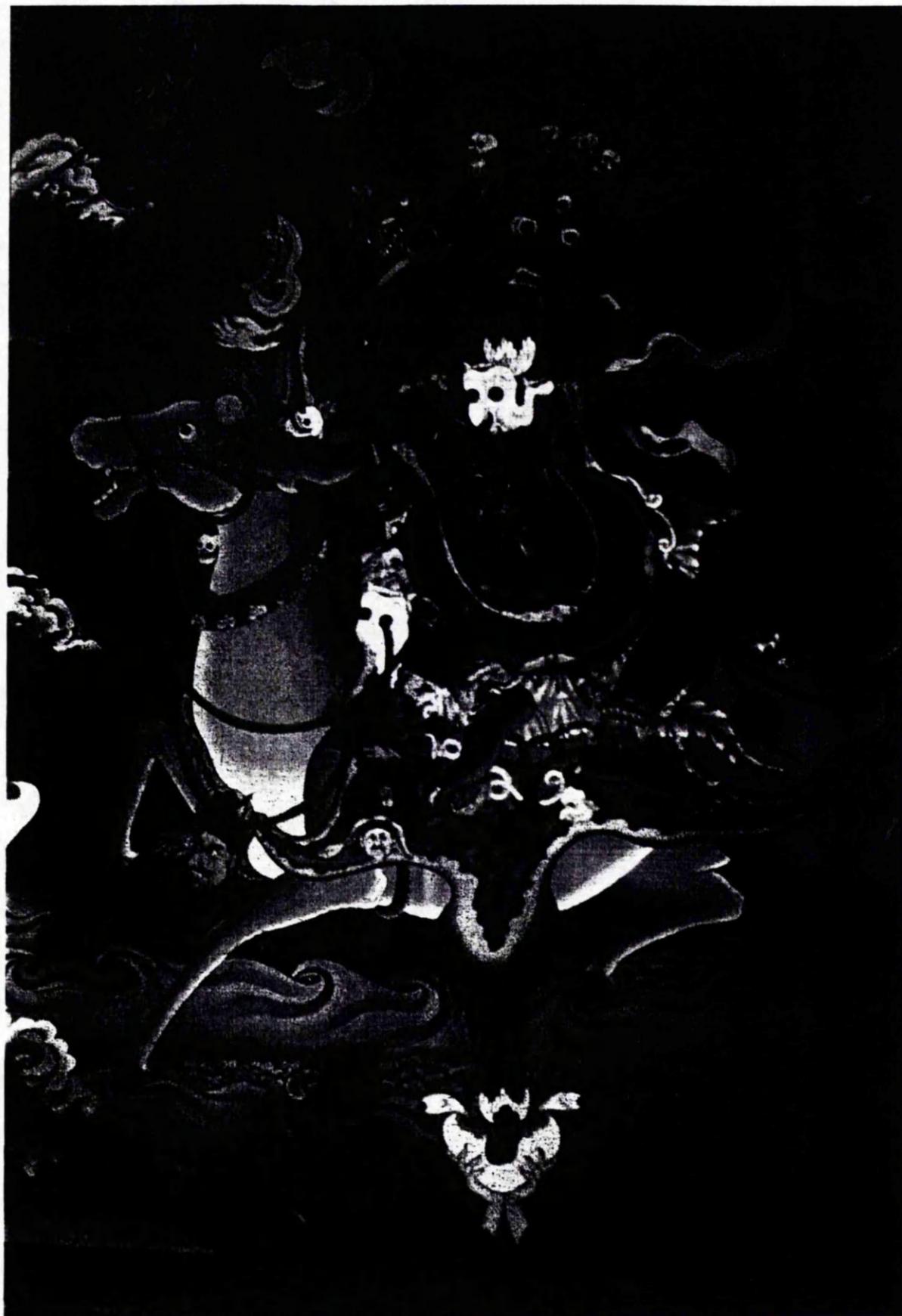








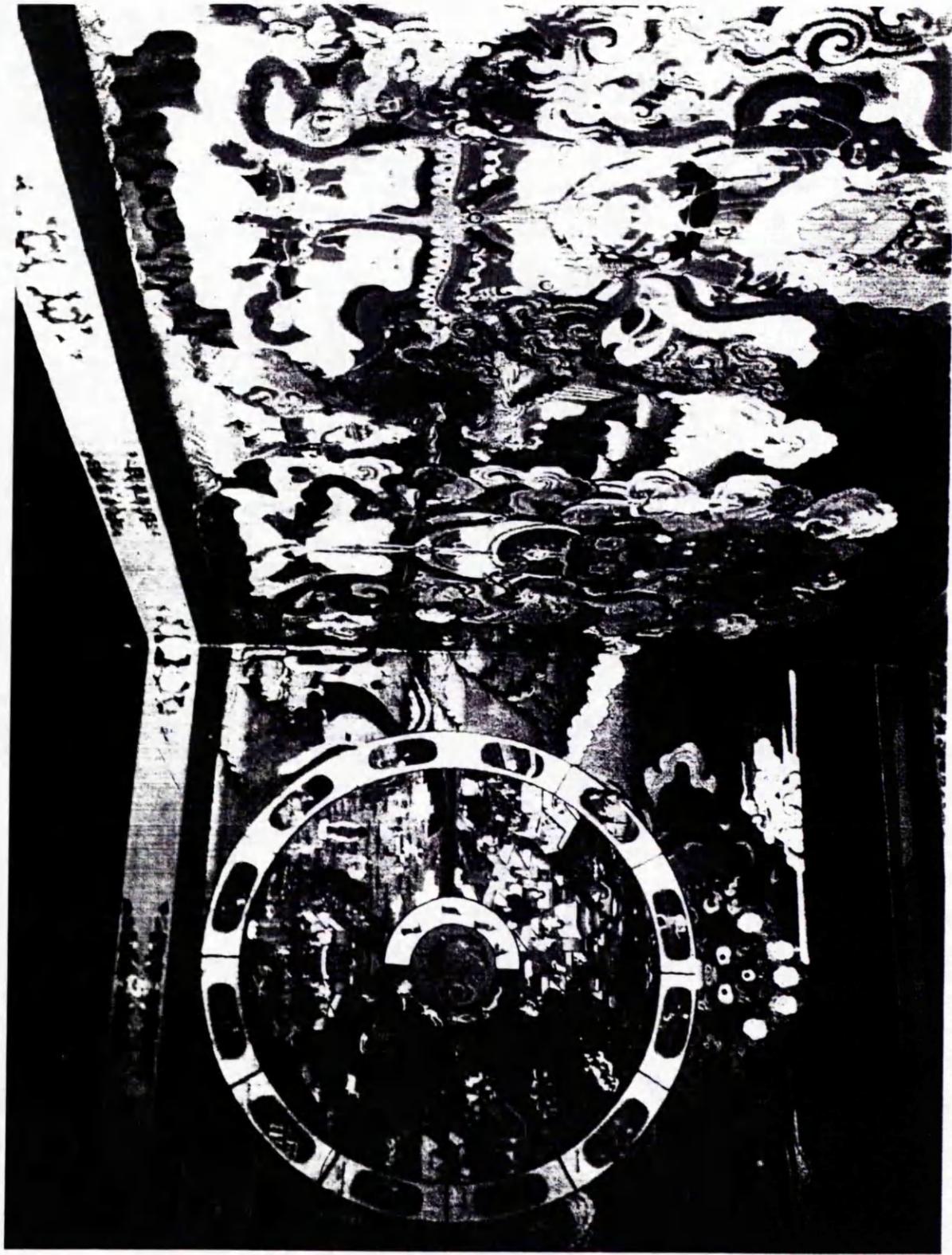






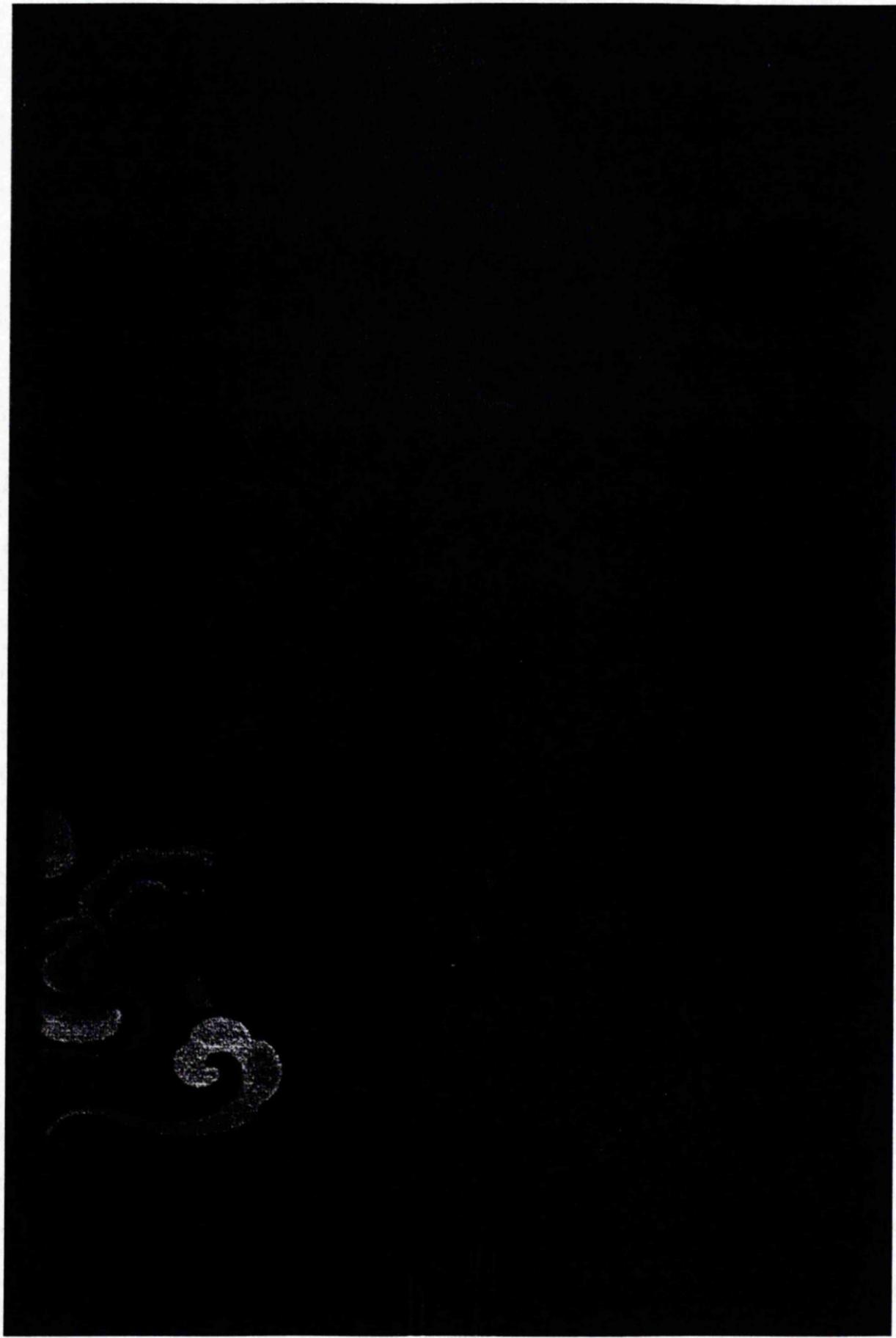






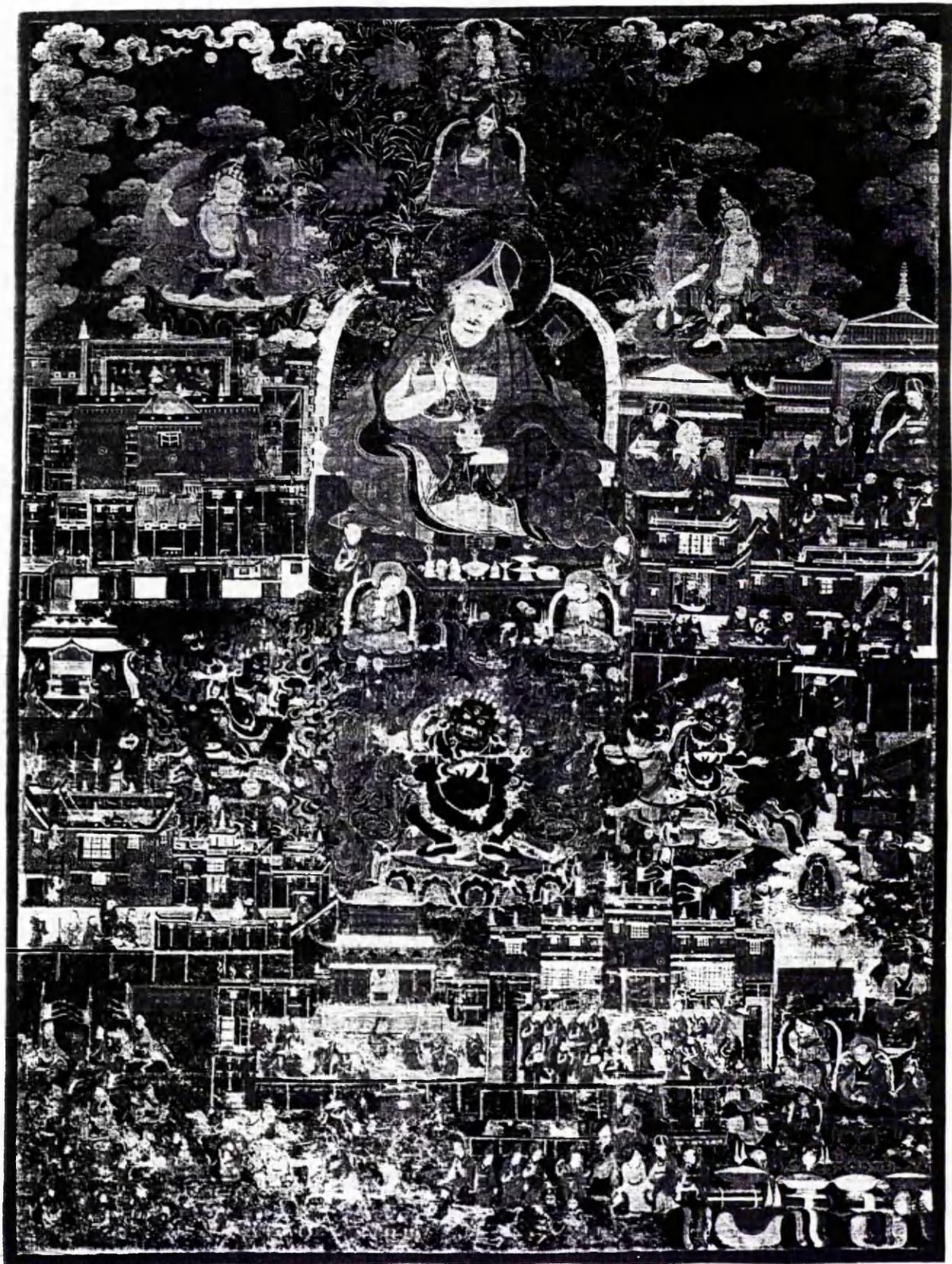




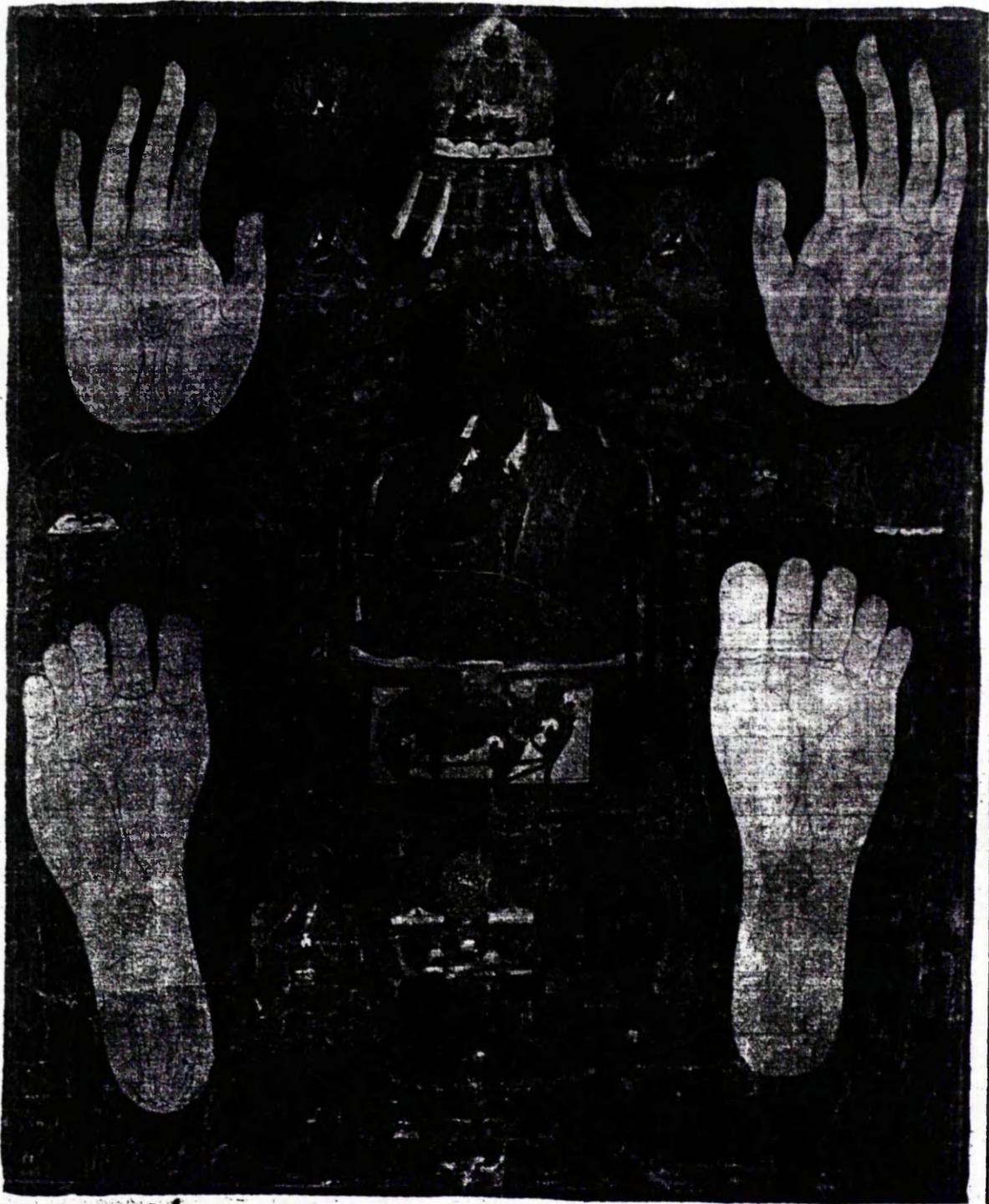






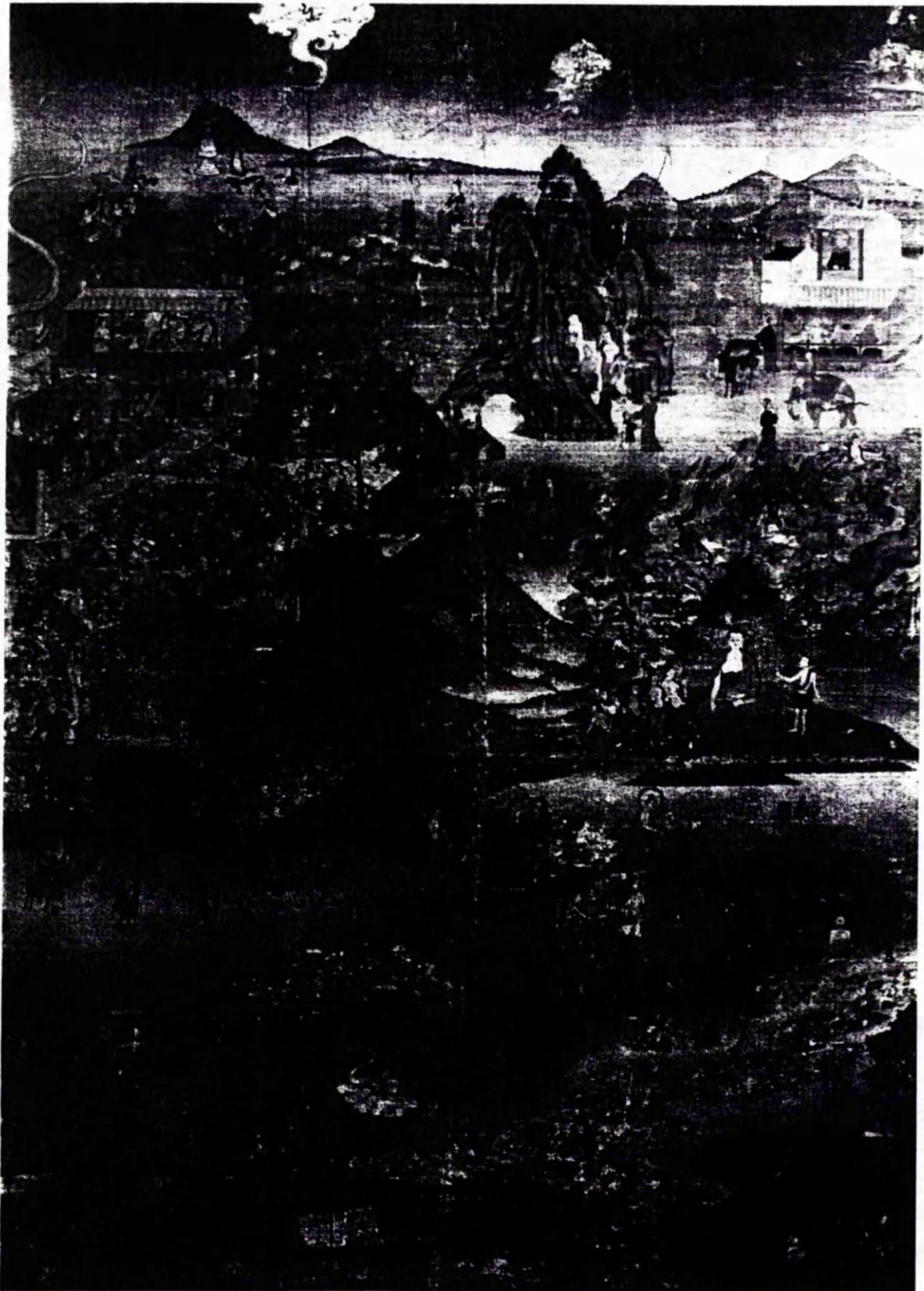






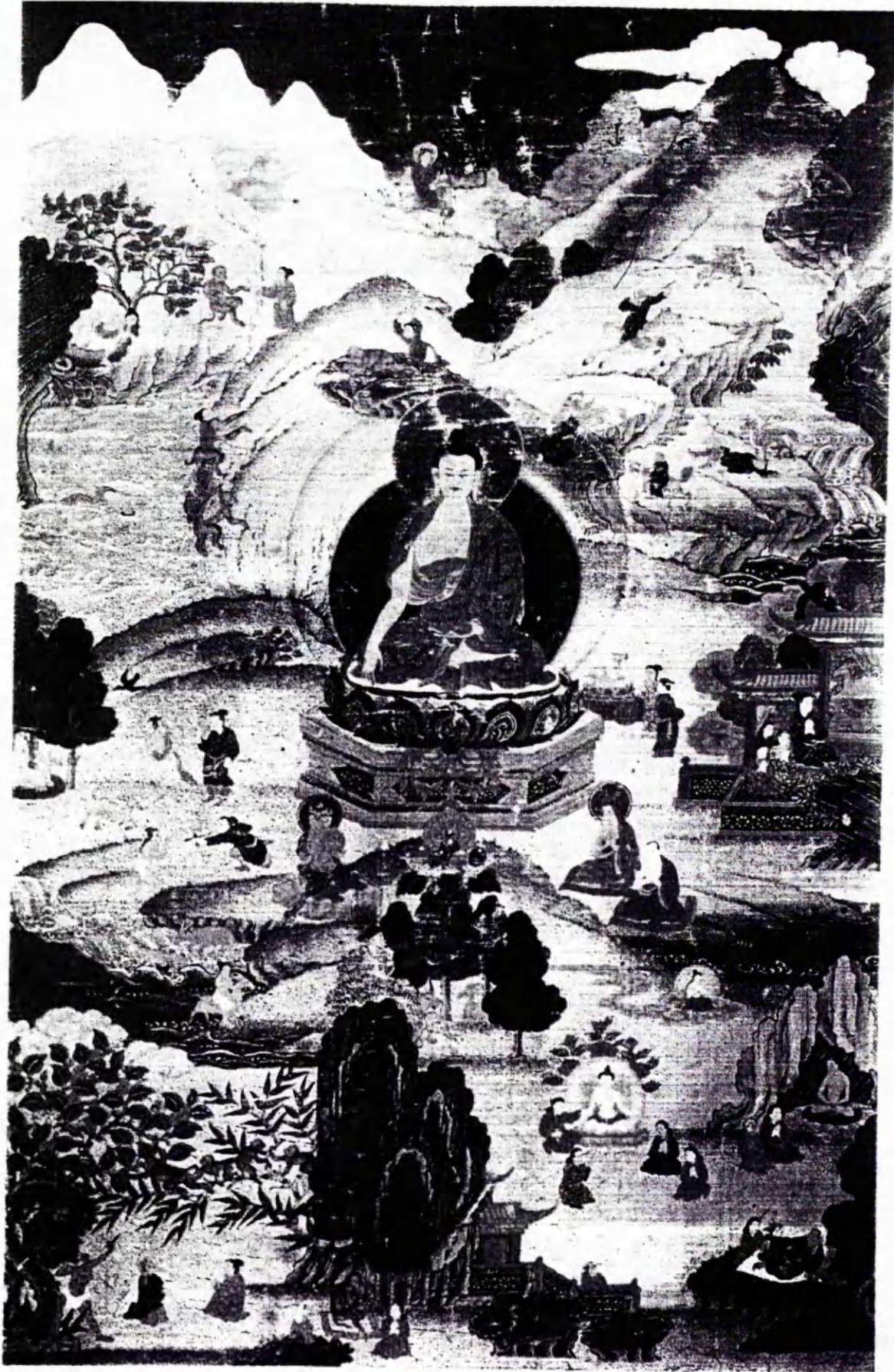




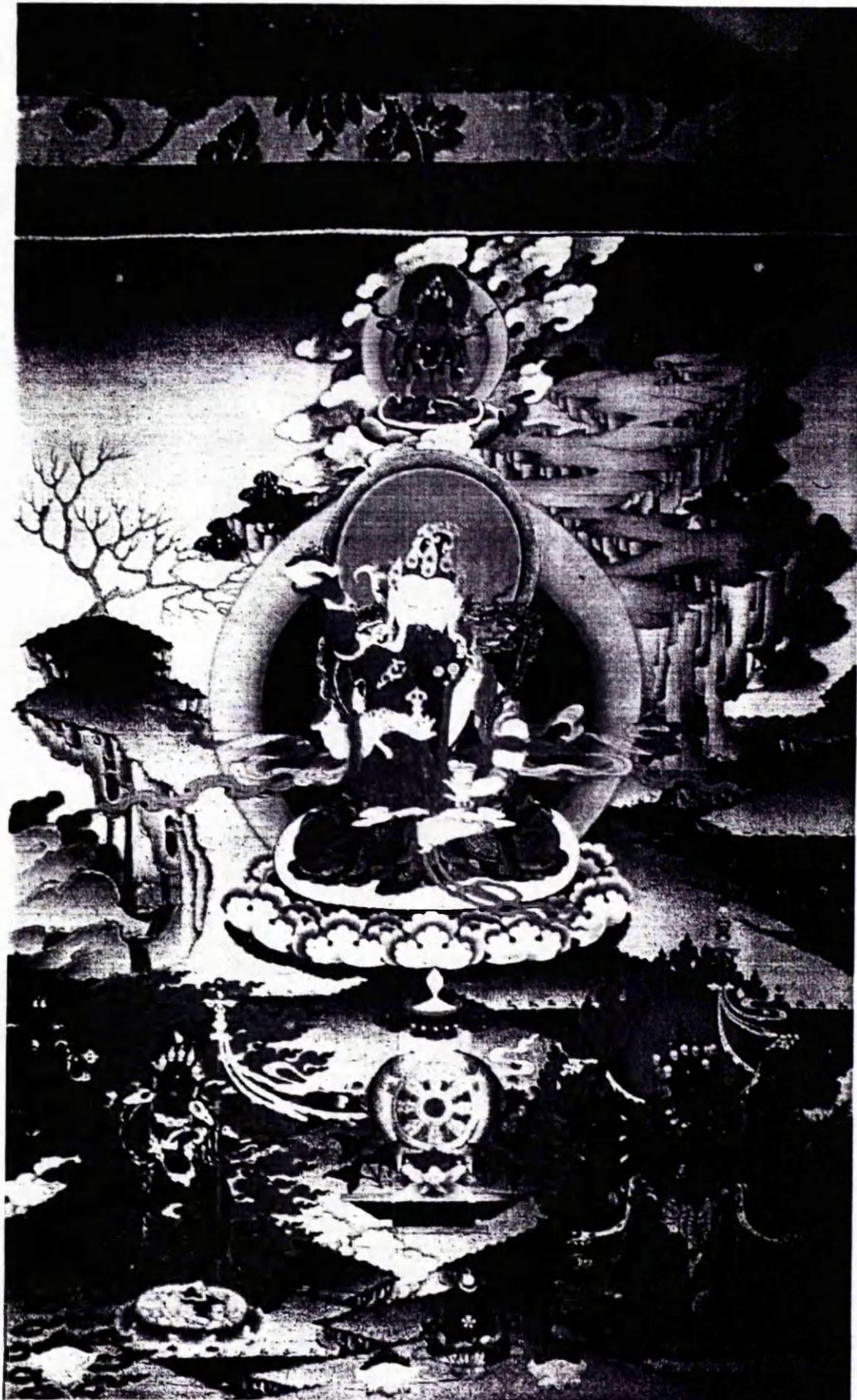


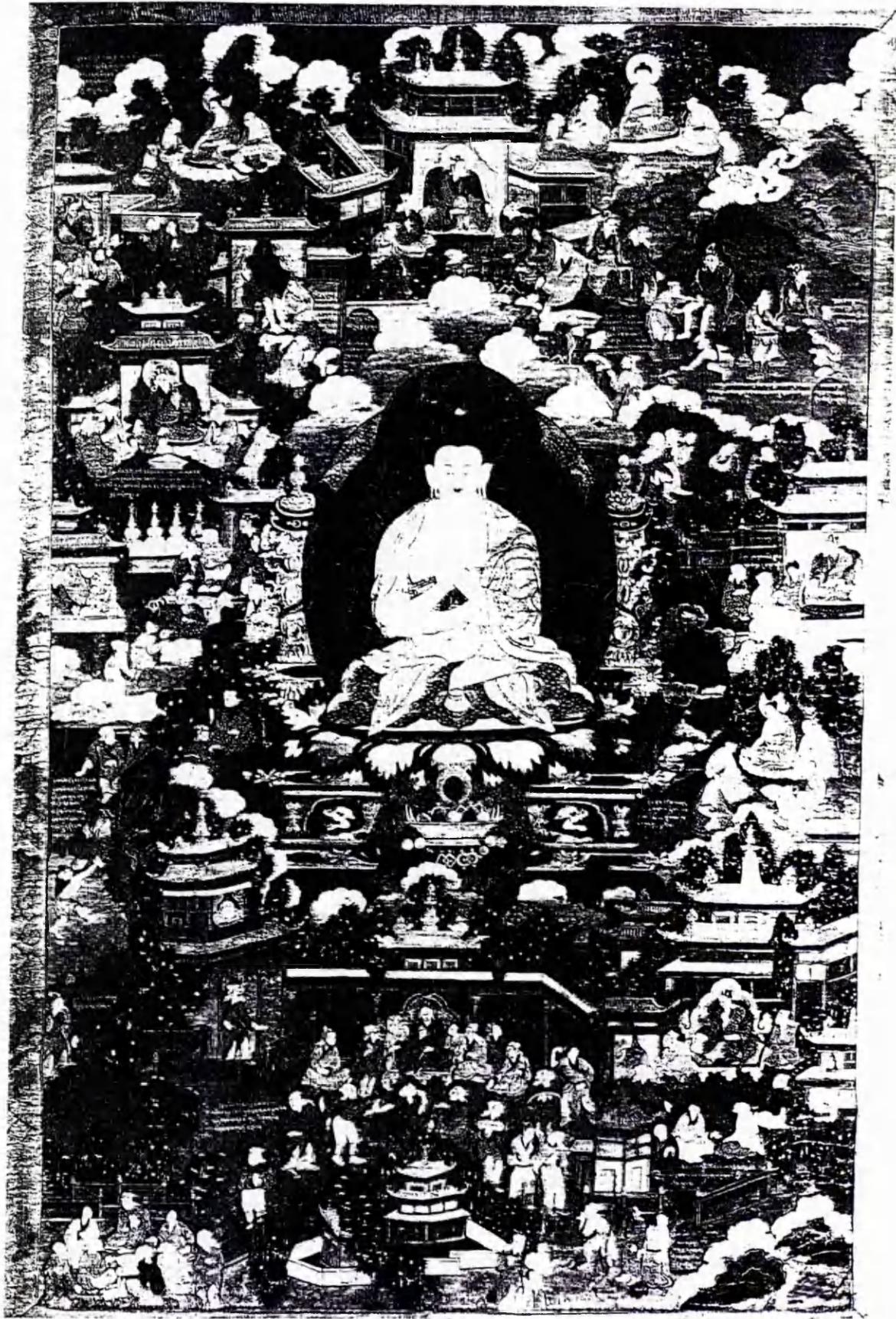


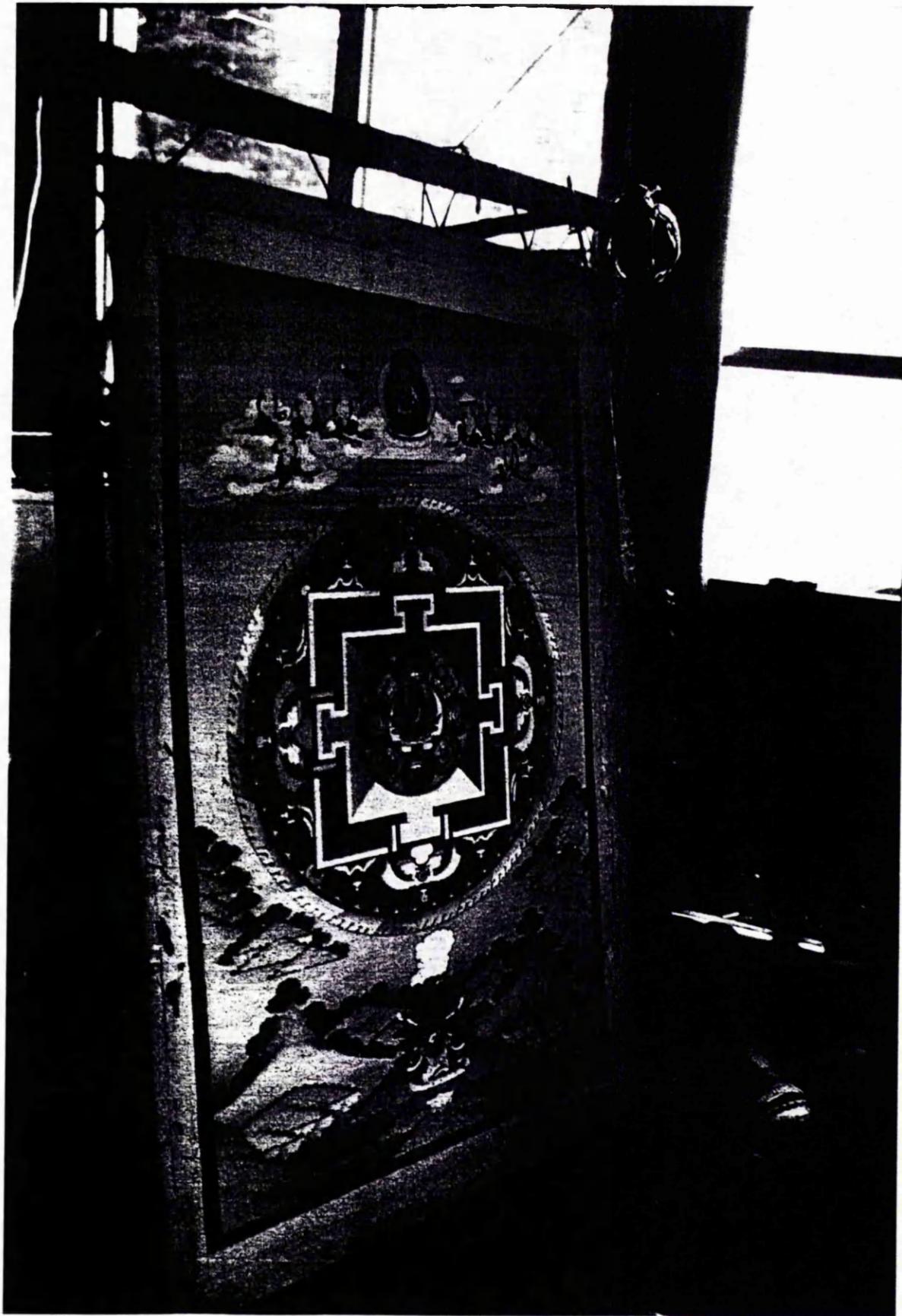




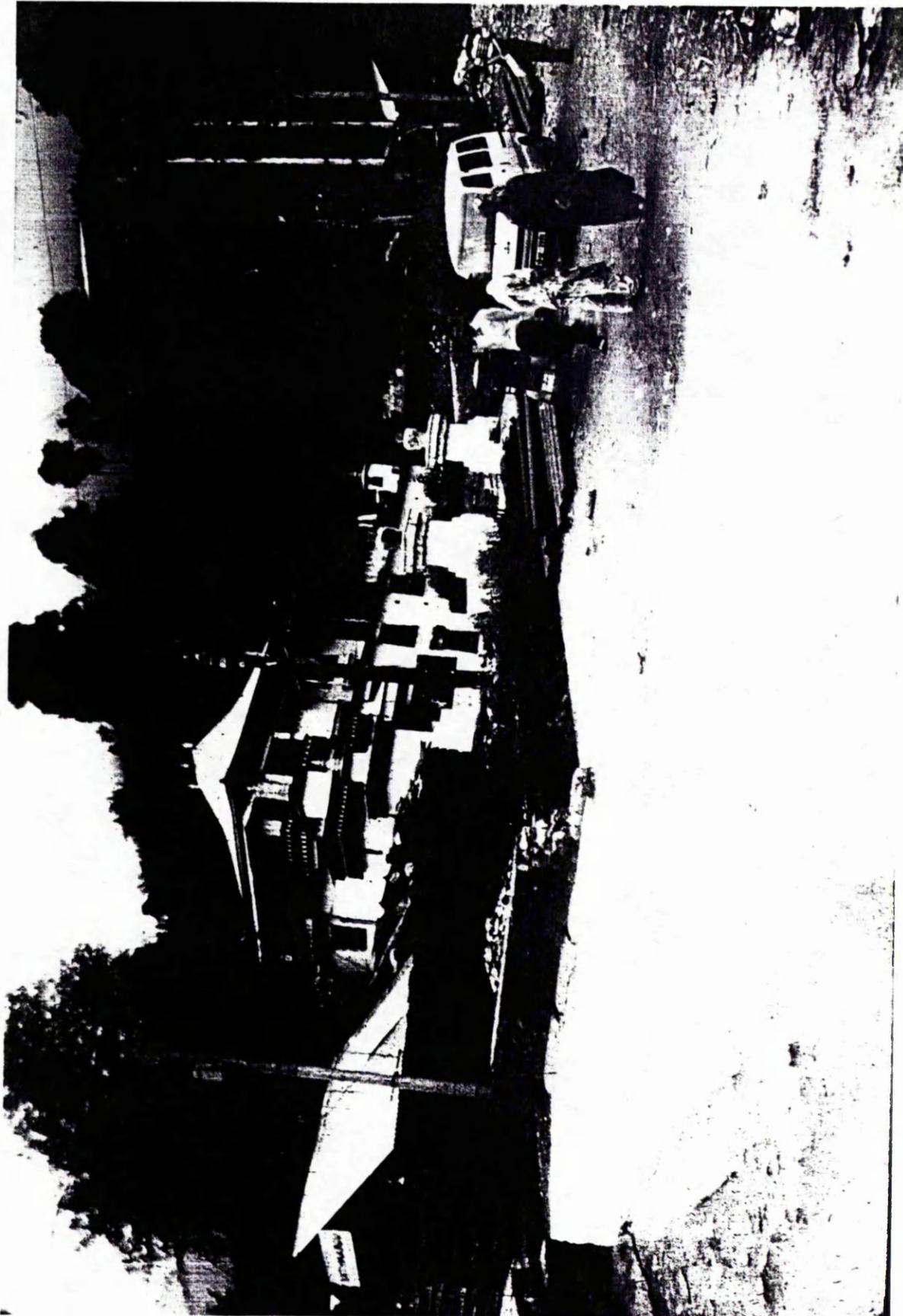




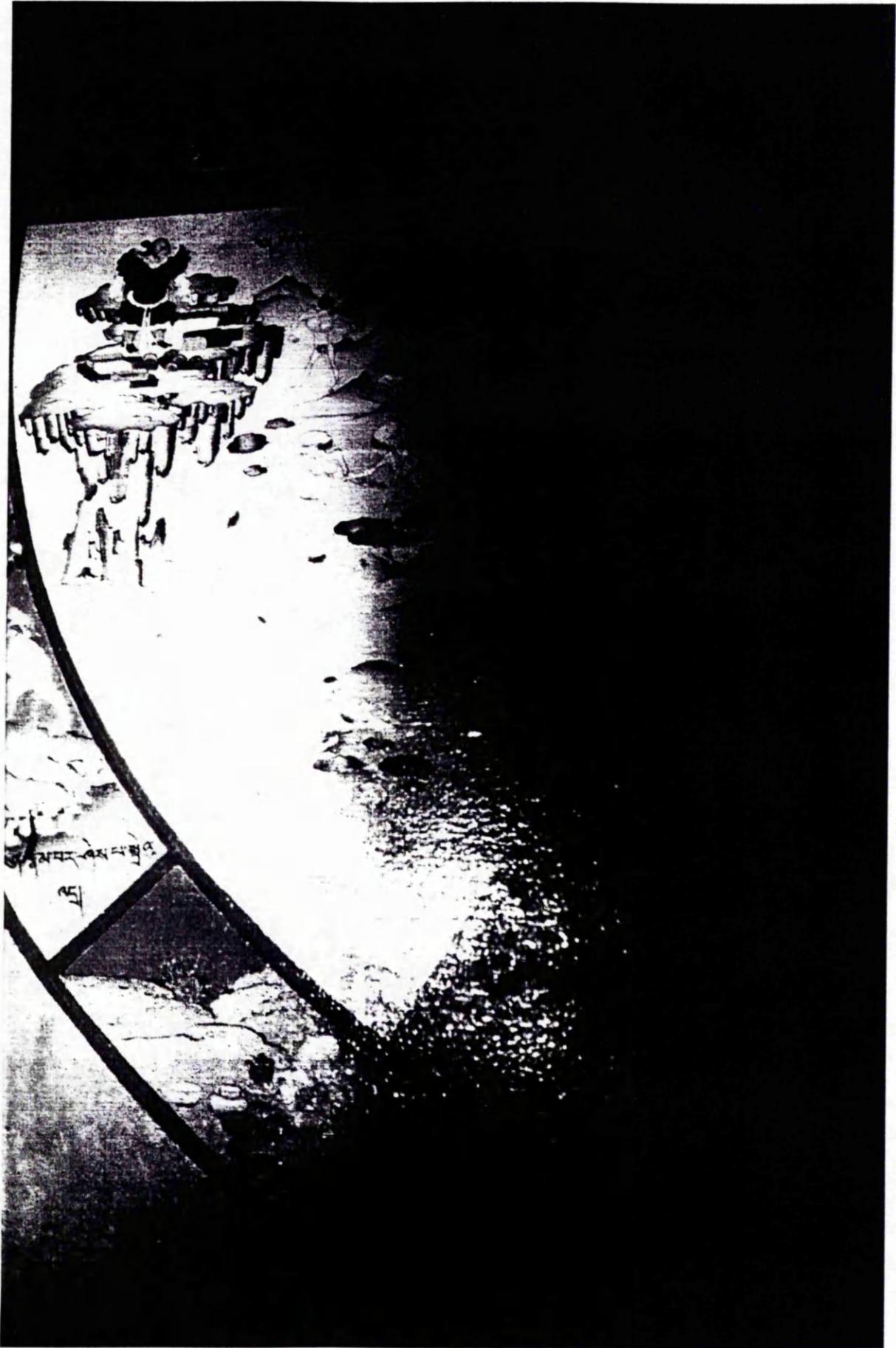






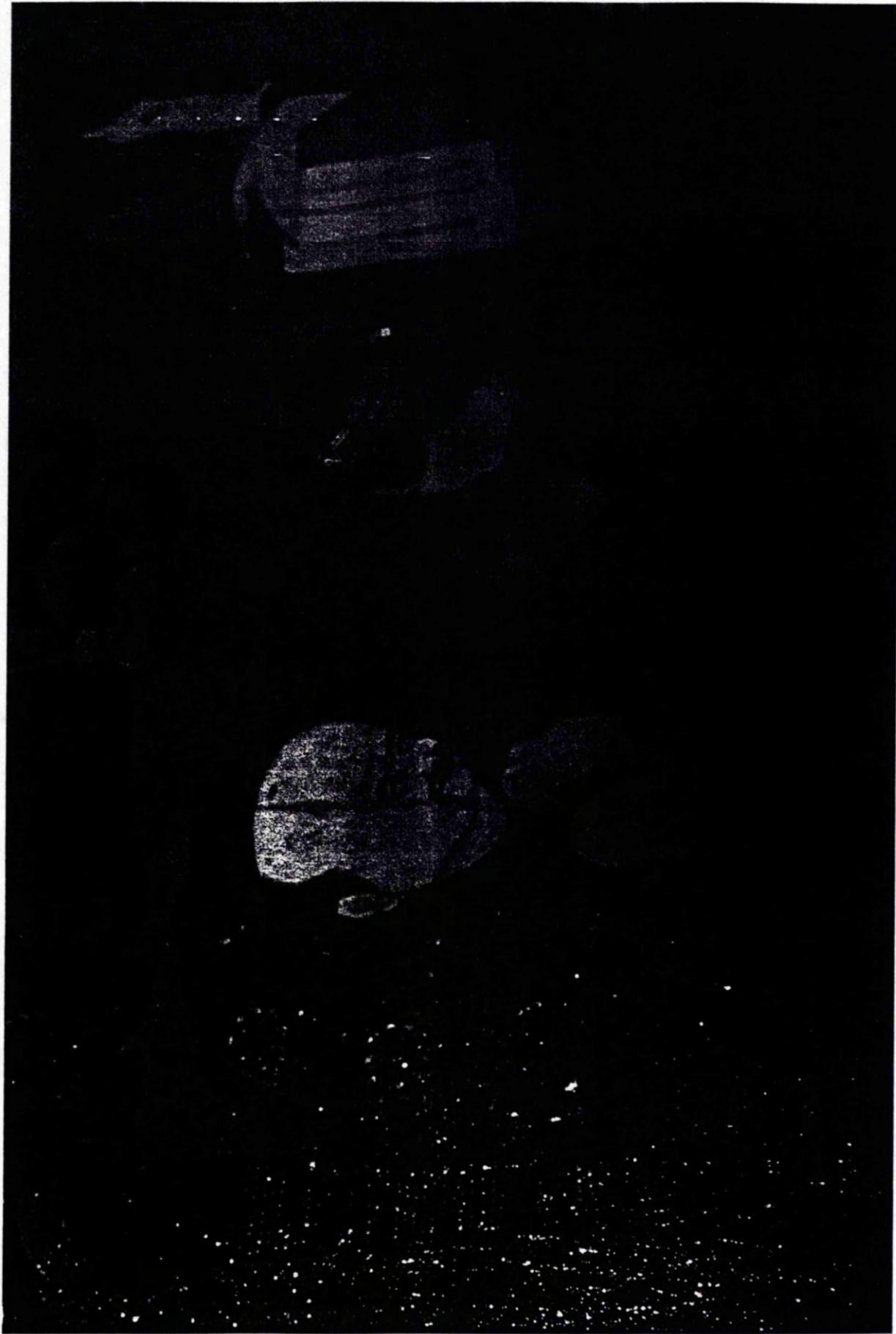




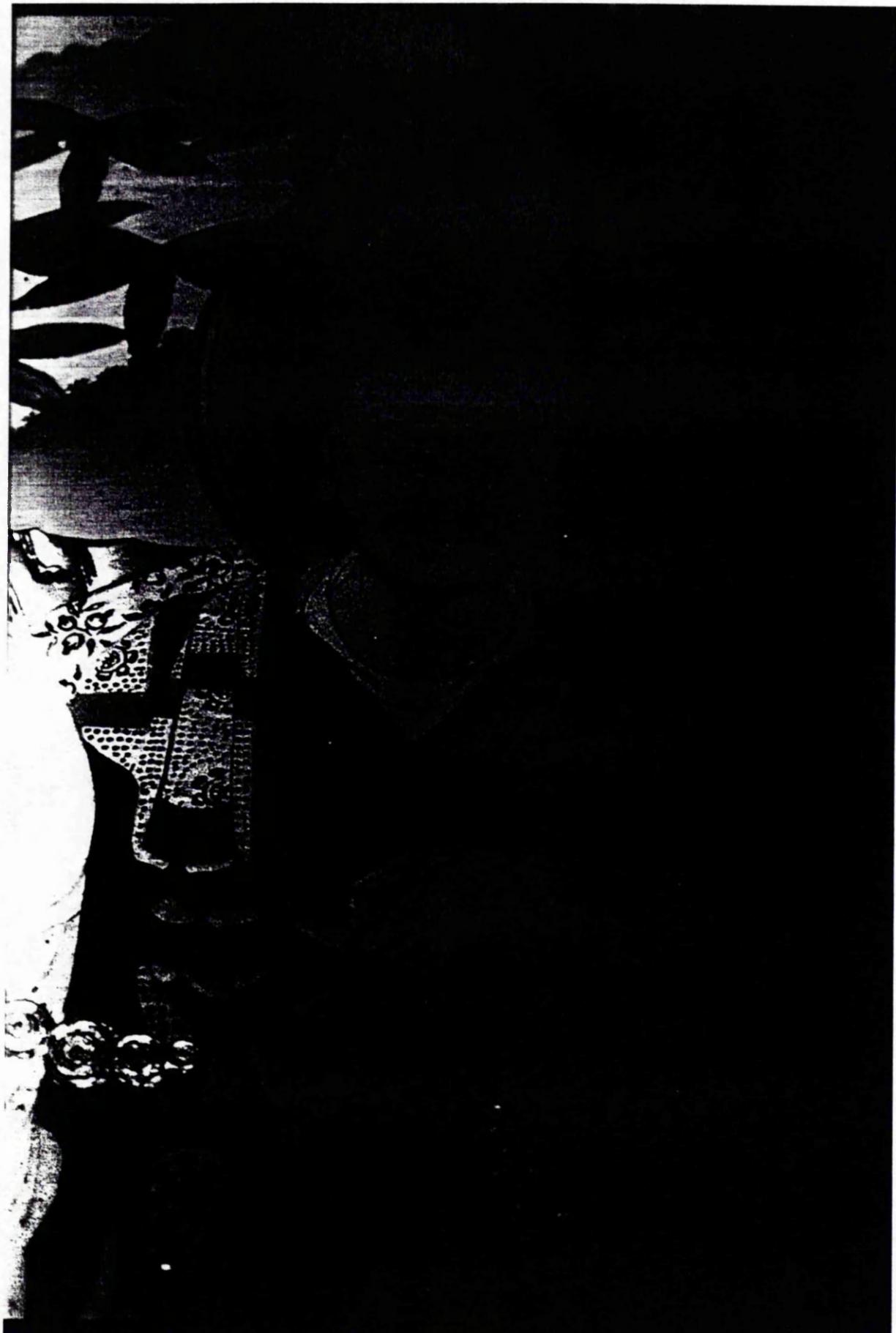




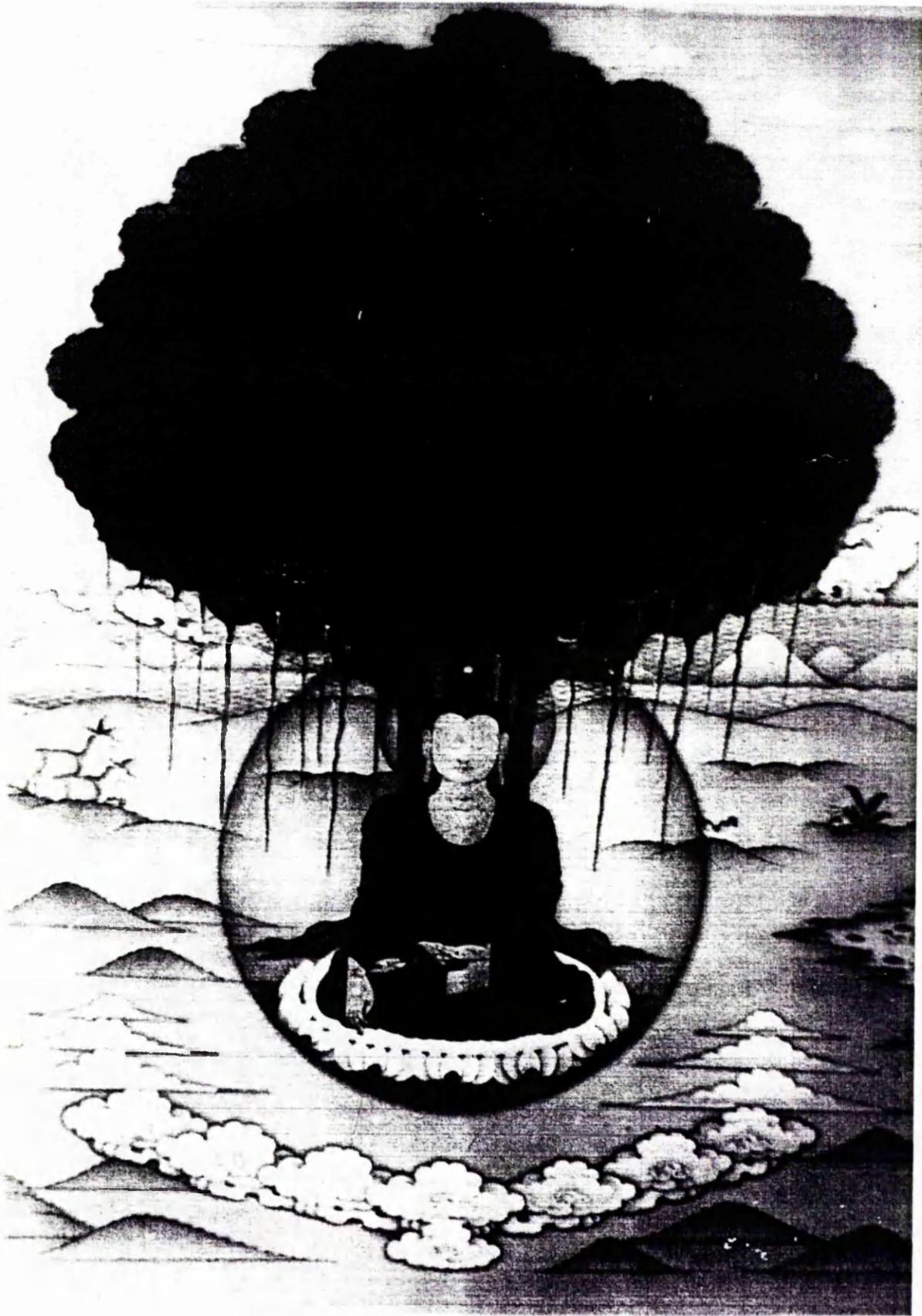


















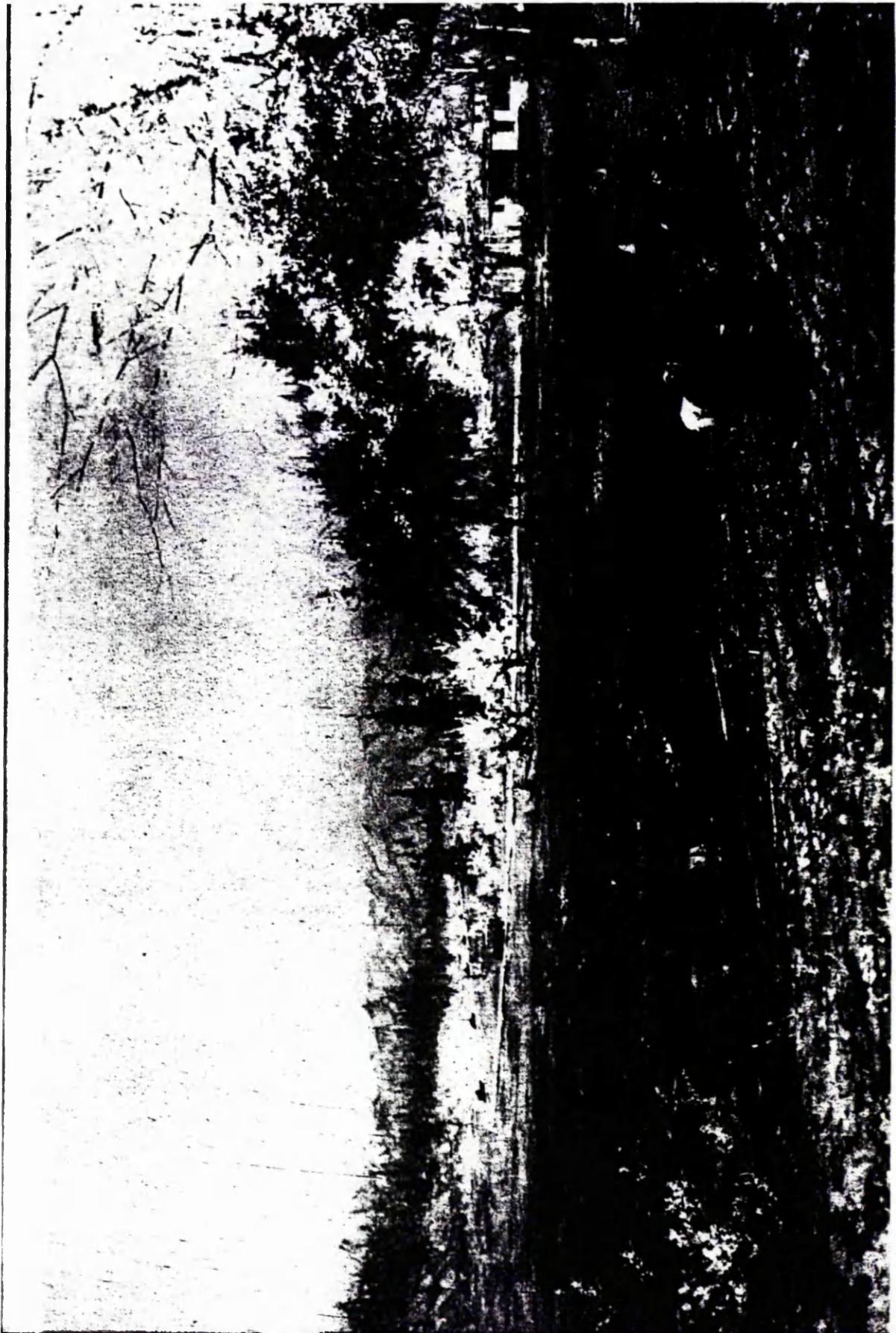














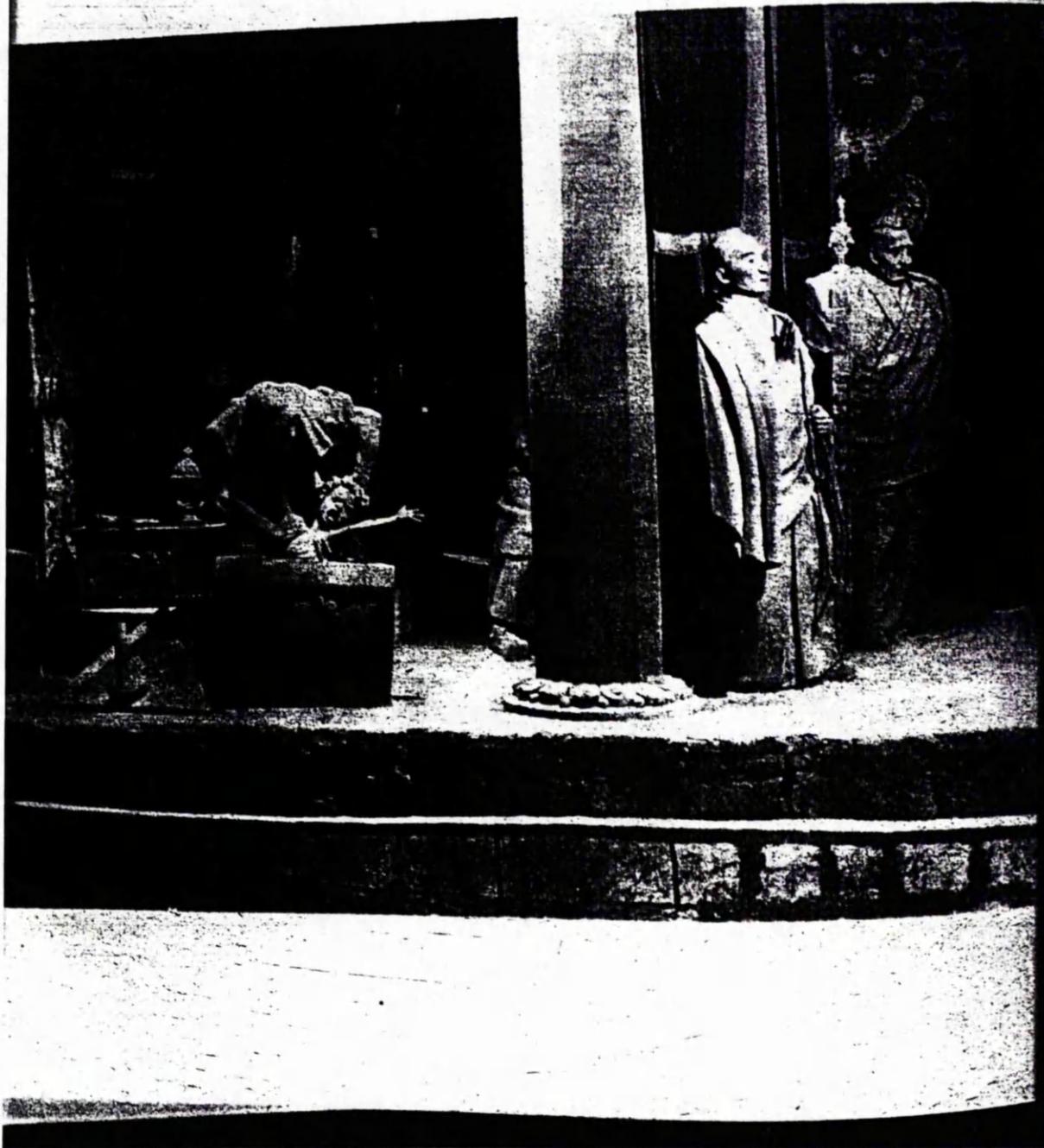


兩個羊羔
一五三
牛
秋
苗
田
雨
城
區
一
女
題



The Man-Eating Religious Authority

IN a dim inner hall a cassocked lama shoves a little boy into a box to be buried alive. In the name of building a temple, the boy is to be placed under a cornerstone of the hall as sacrificial offering. The mother hears her child's screams, rushes up and cries out. She is followed by an old carpenter and other serfs.



ship of China, Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party, the people of the Tibetan and other nationalities took a social leap of several centuries in little more than a decade and began speeding along the bright socialist road.

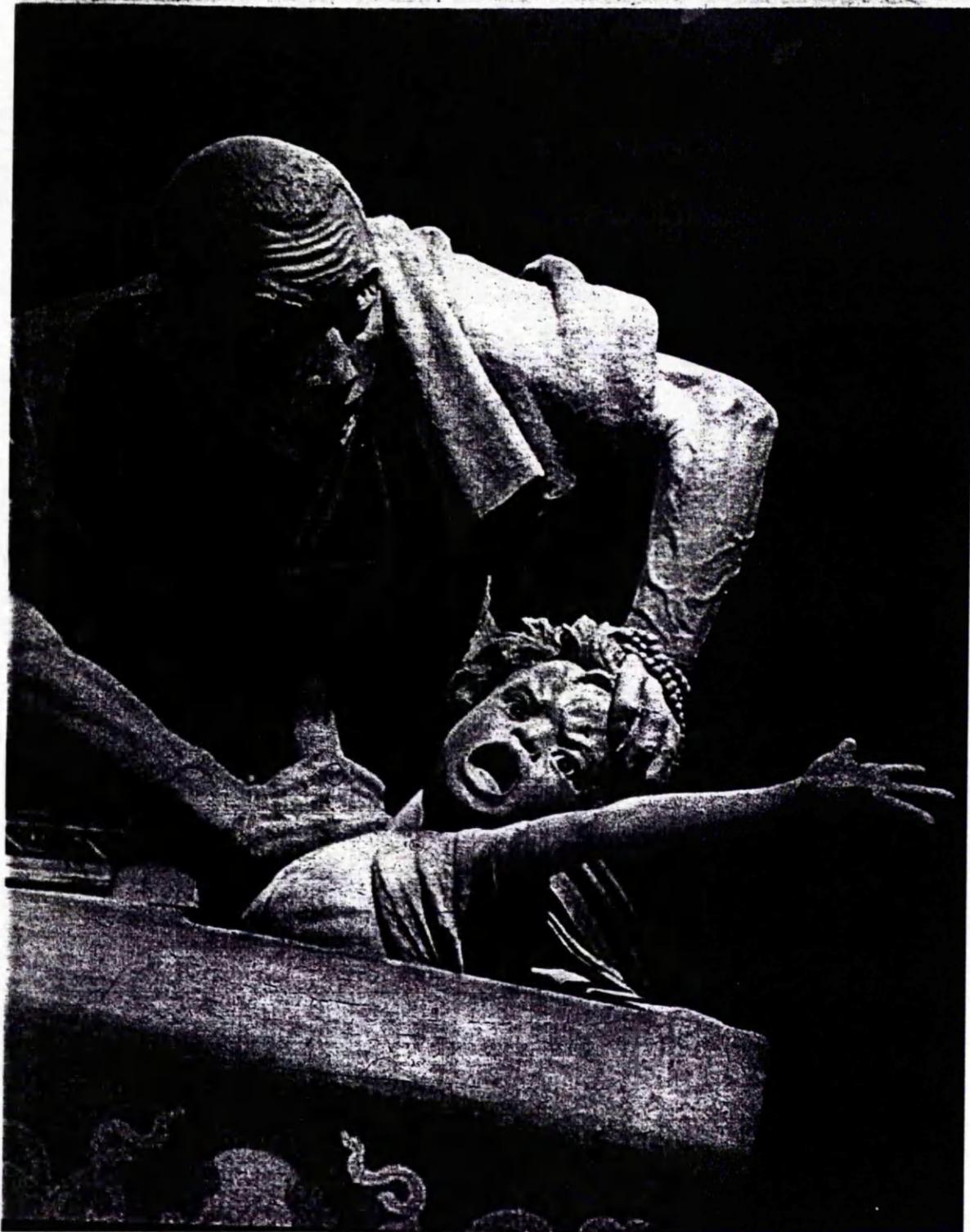
Two human skins stripped from live serfs. Such practices were indulged in at will by the self-owners.



Serfs' hands and forearms which were chopped off by the lamas during religious ceremonies in a lamasery of old Tibet. The prayer drums were also made of serf victims' skulls and skins.



The boy is forced into the box.



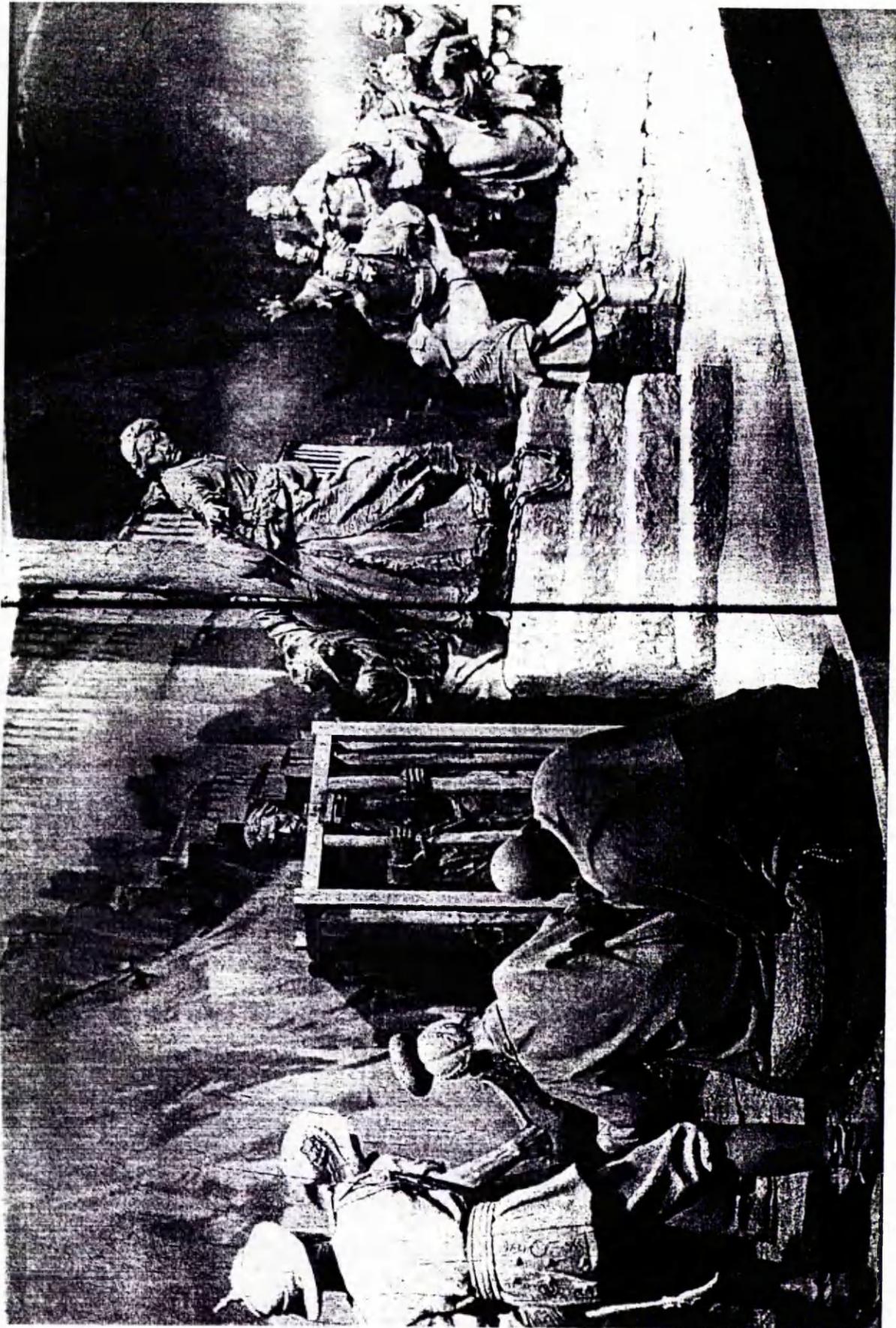
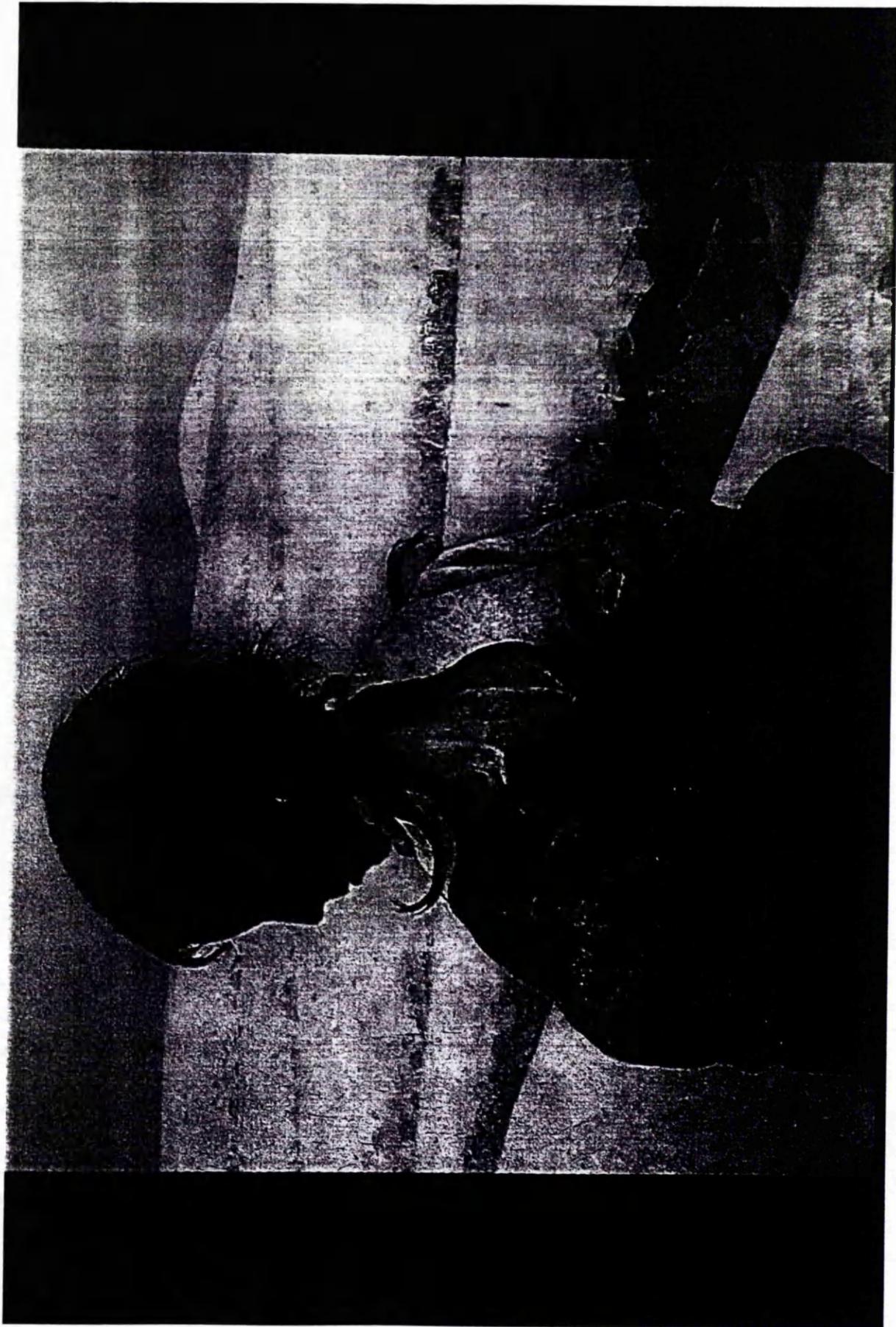




FIG. 60. *The Rent Collection Courtyard*, clay sculpture, 1965, portion.



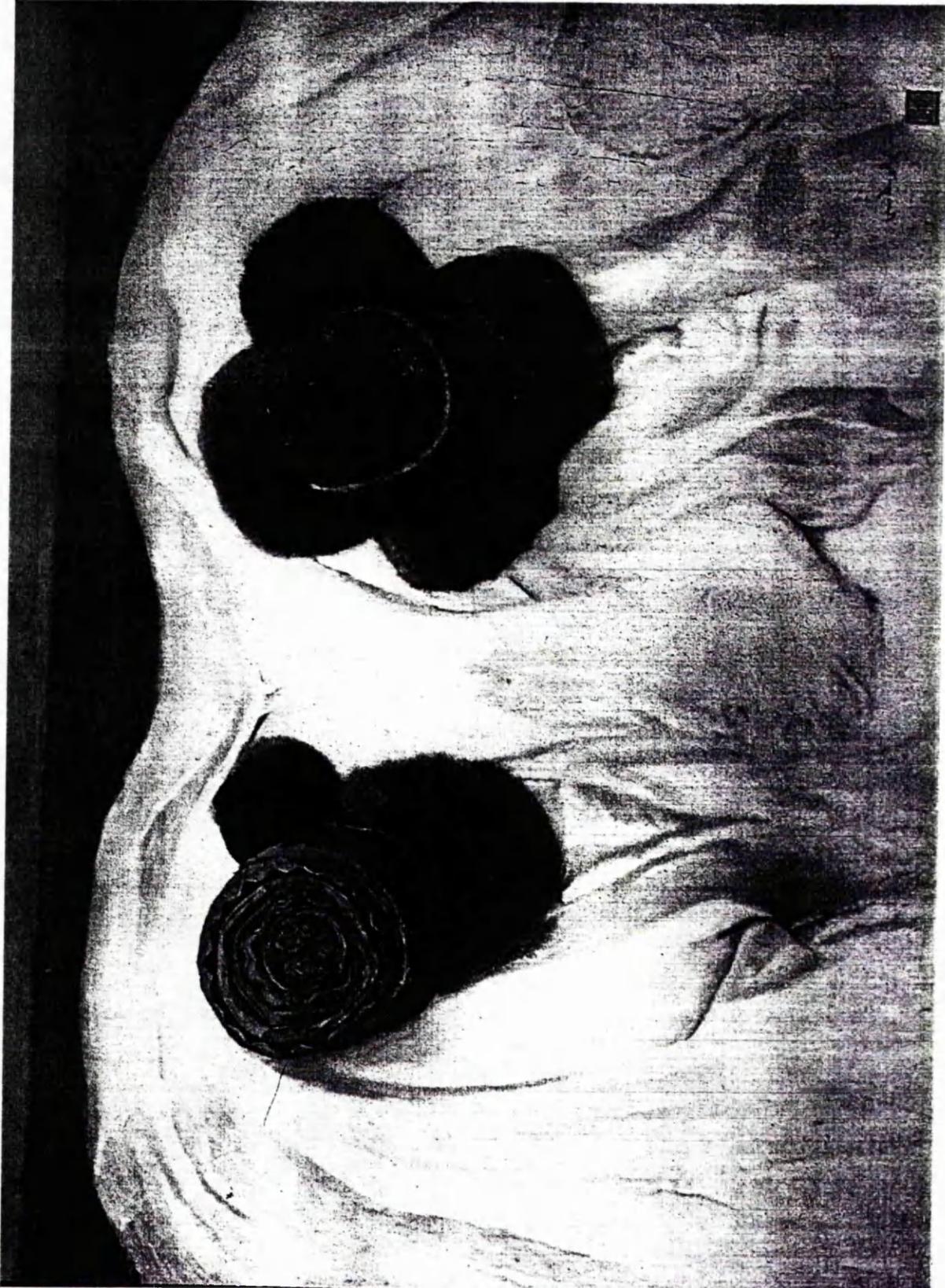




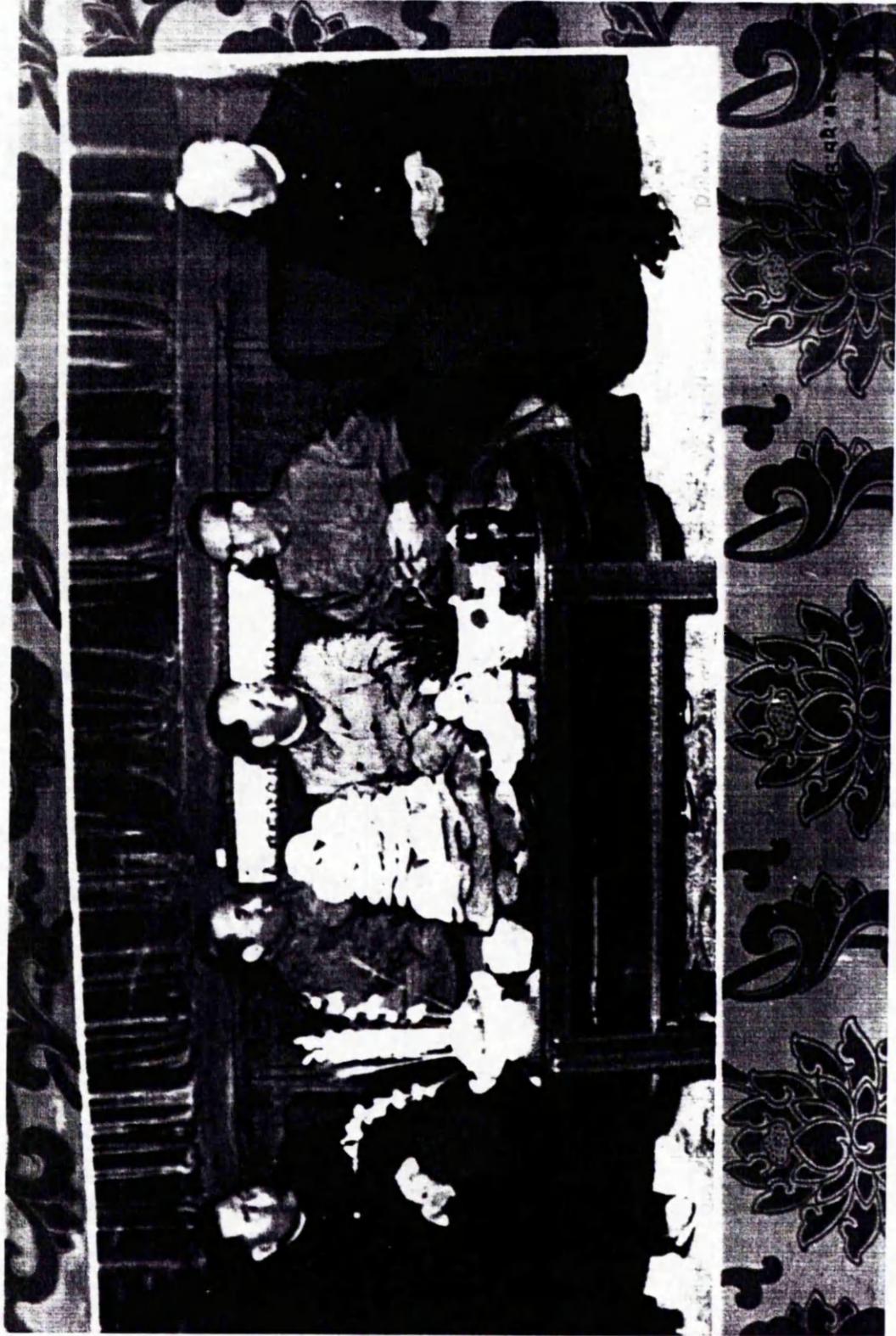


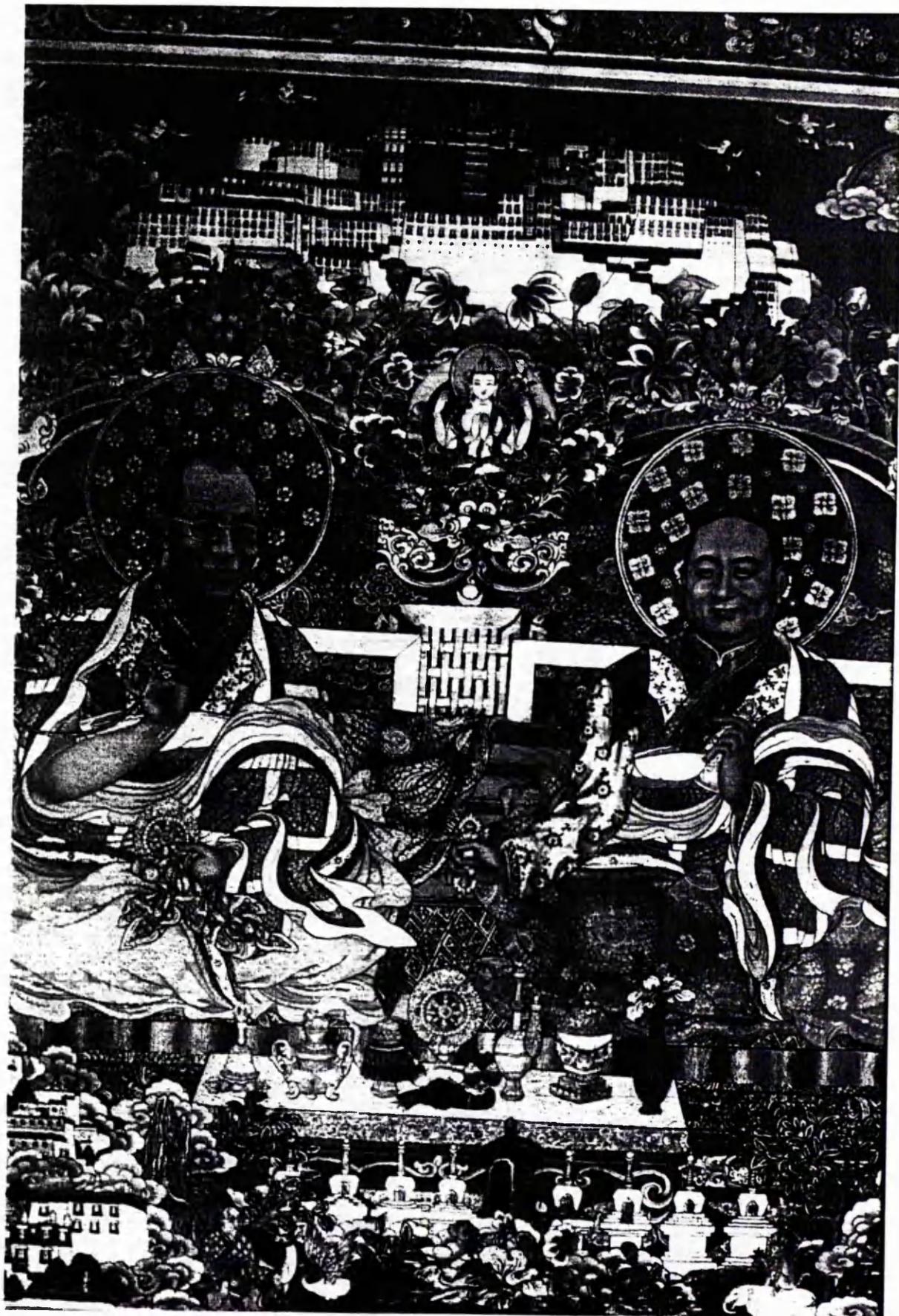


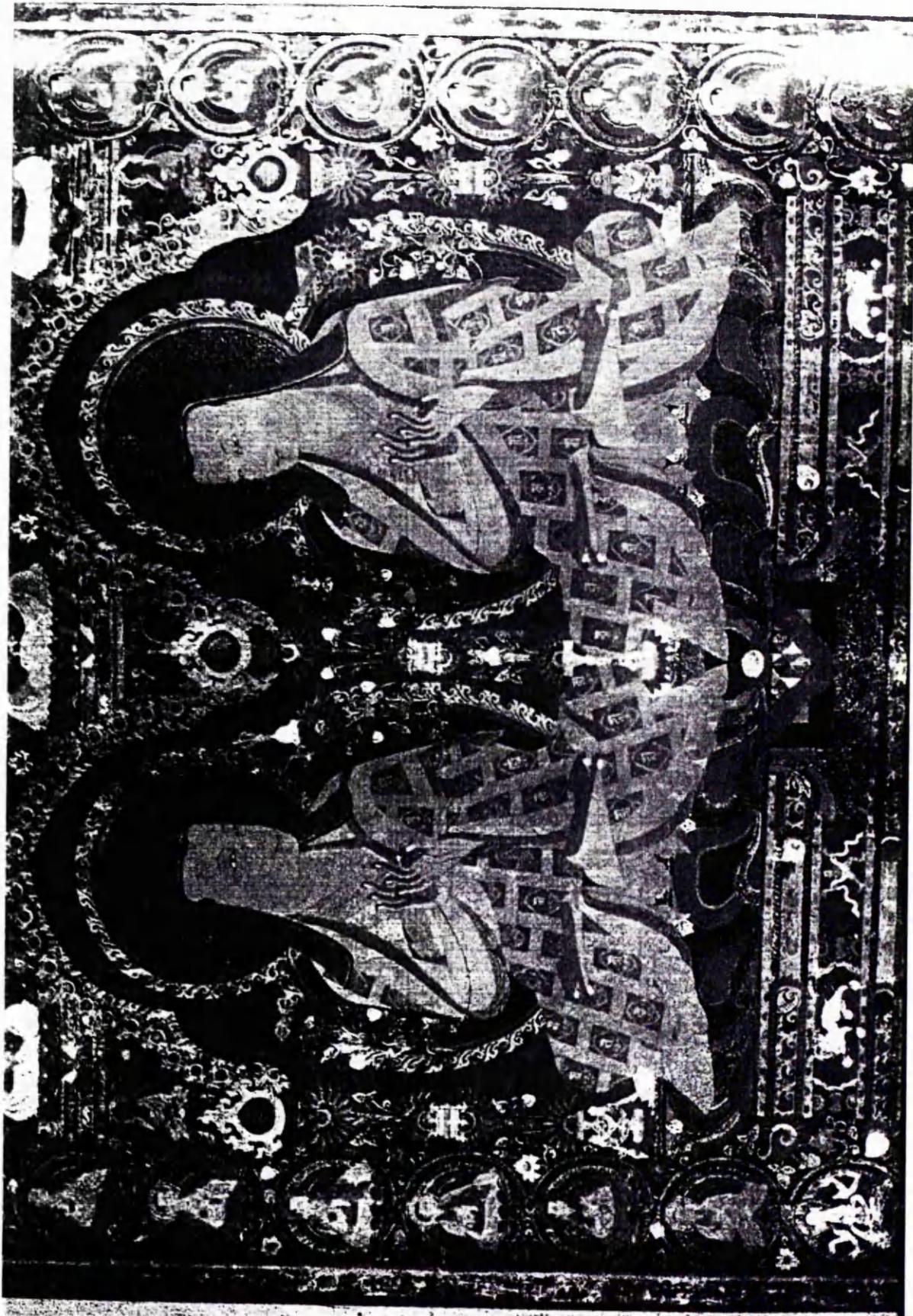


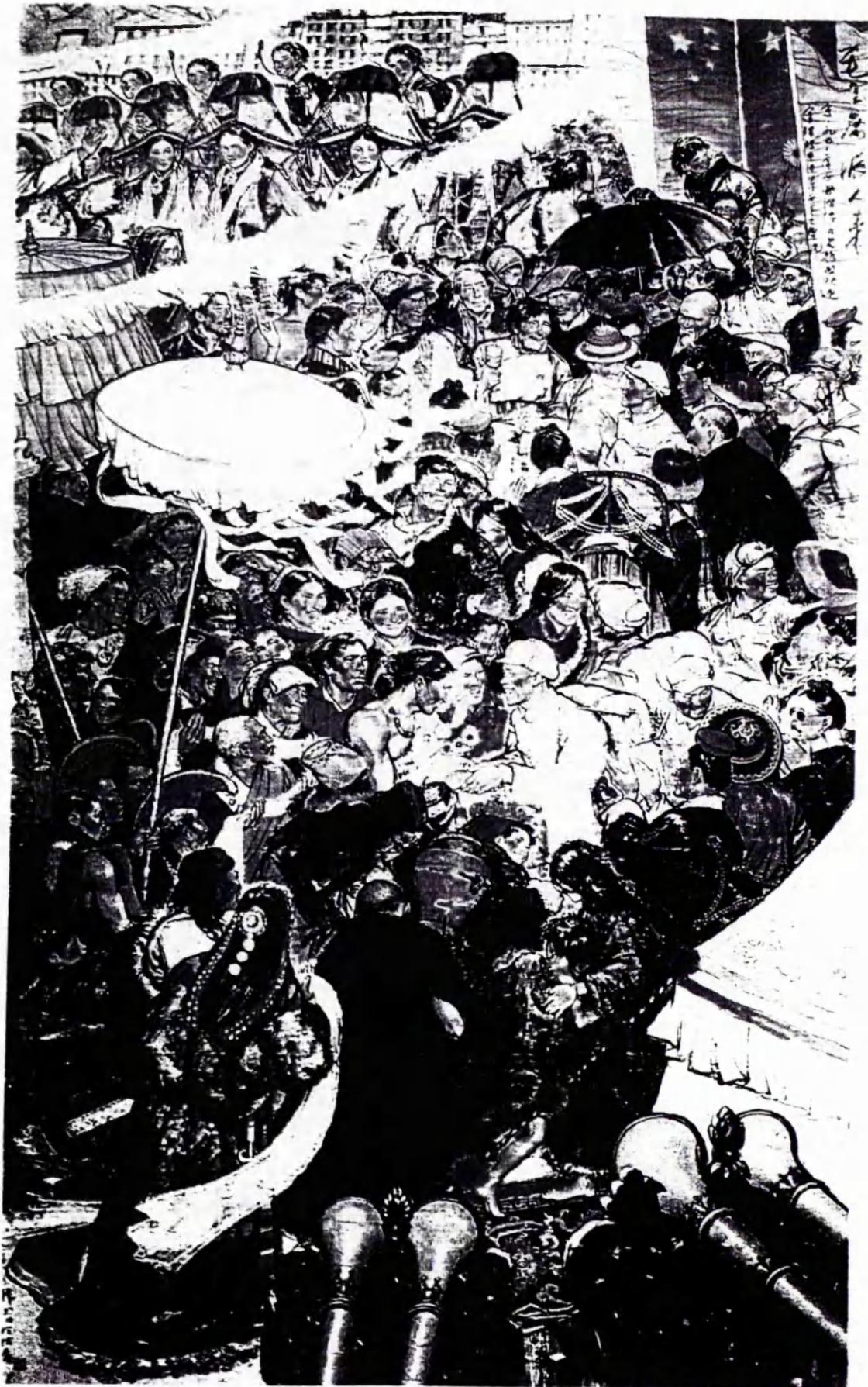




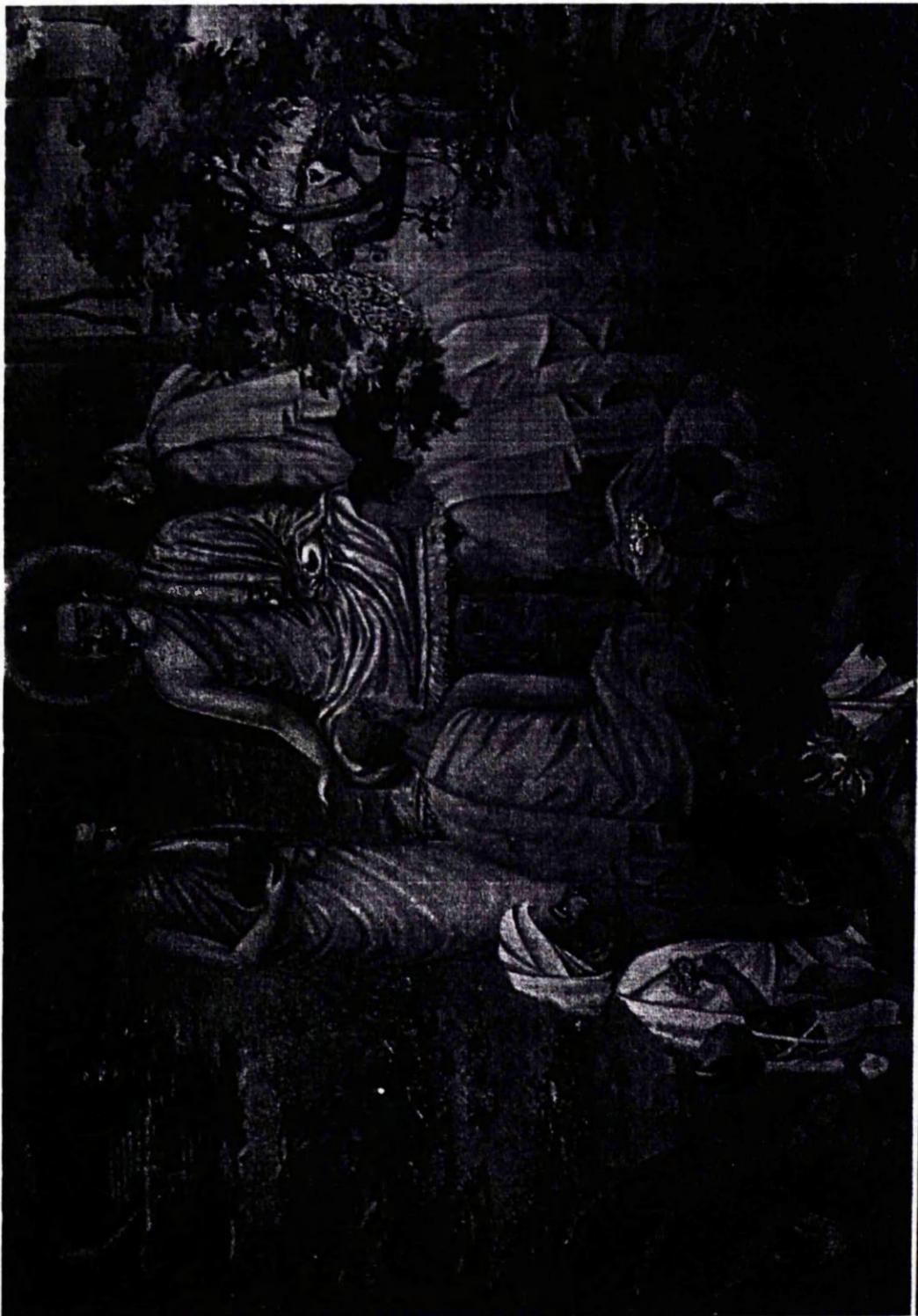


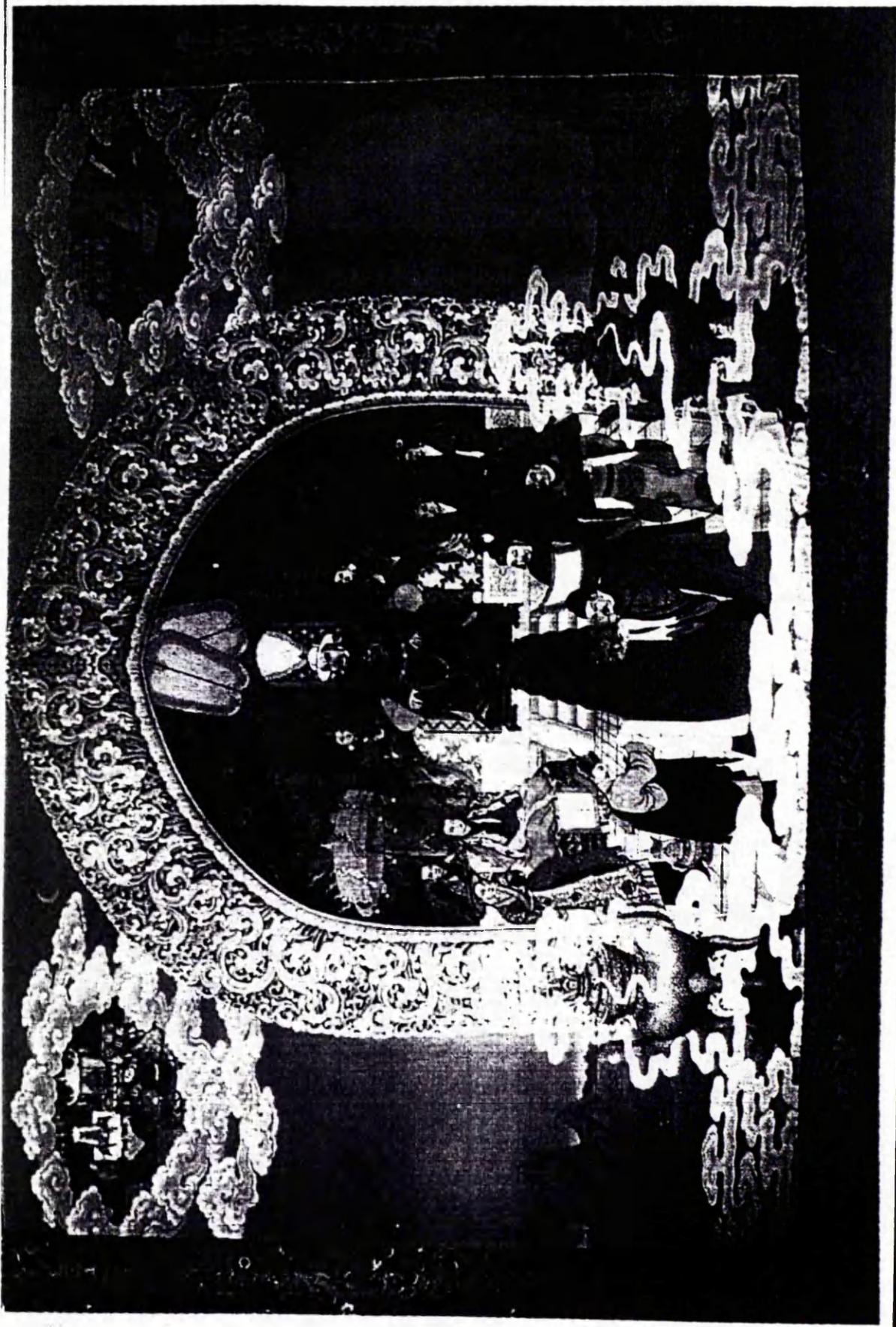


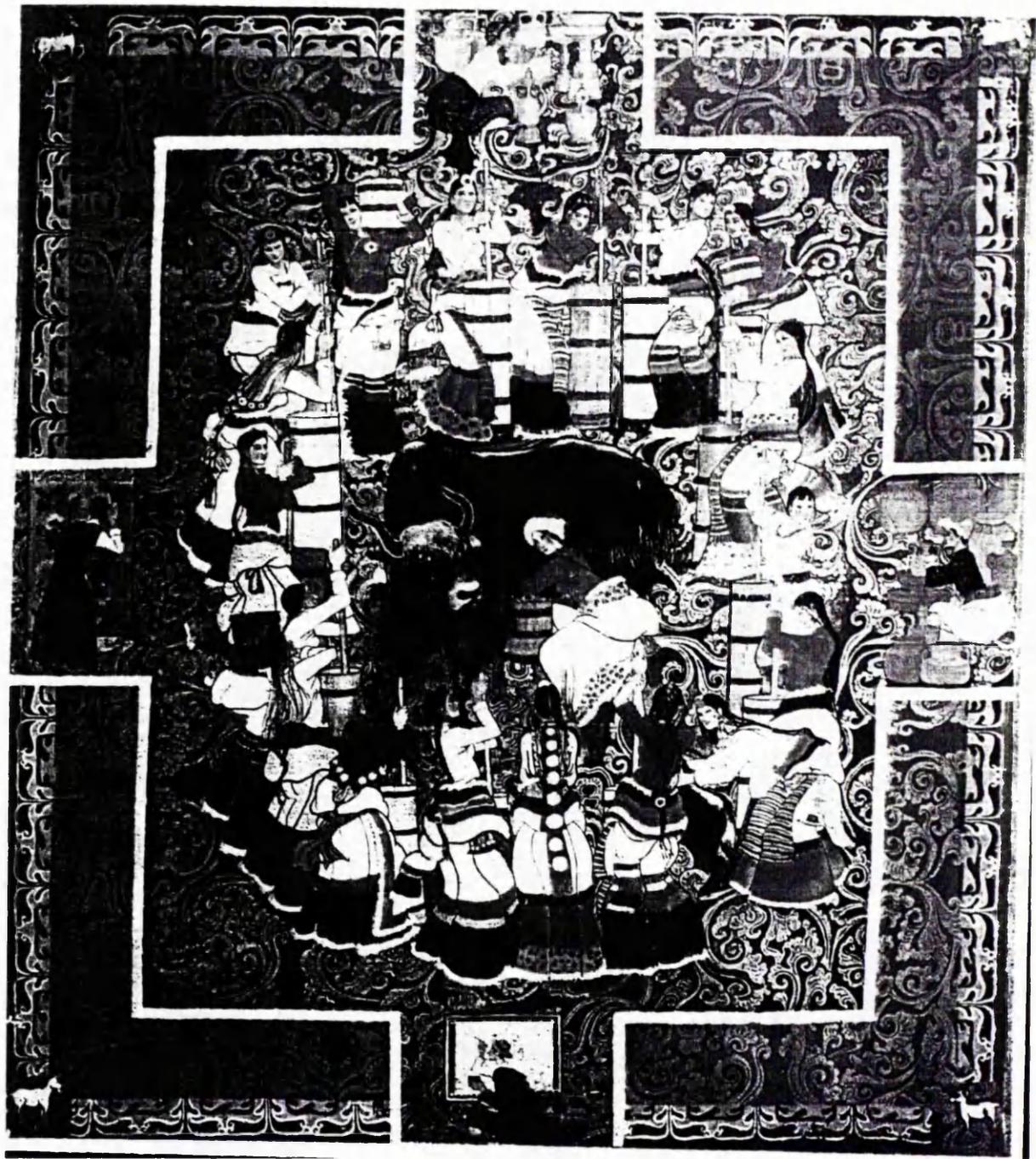














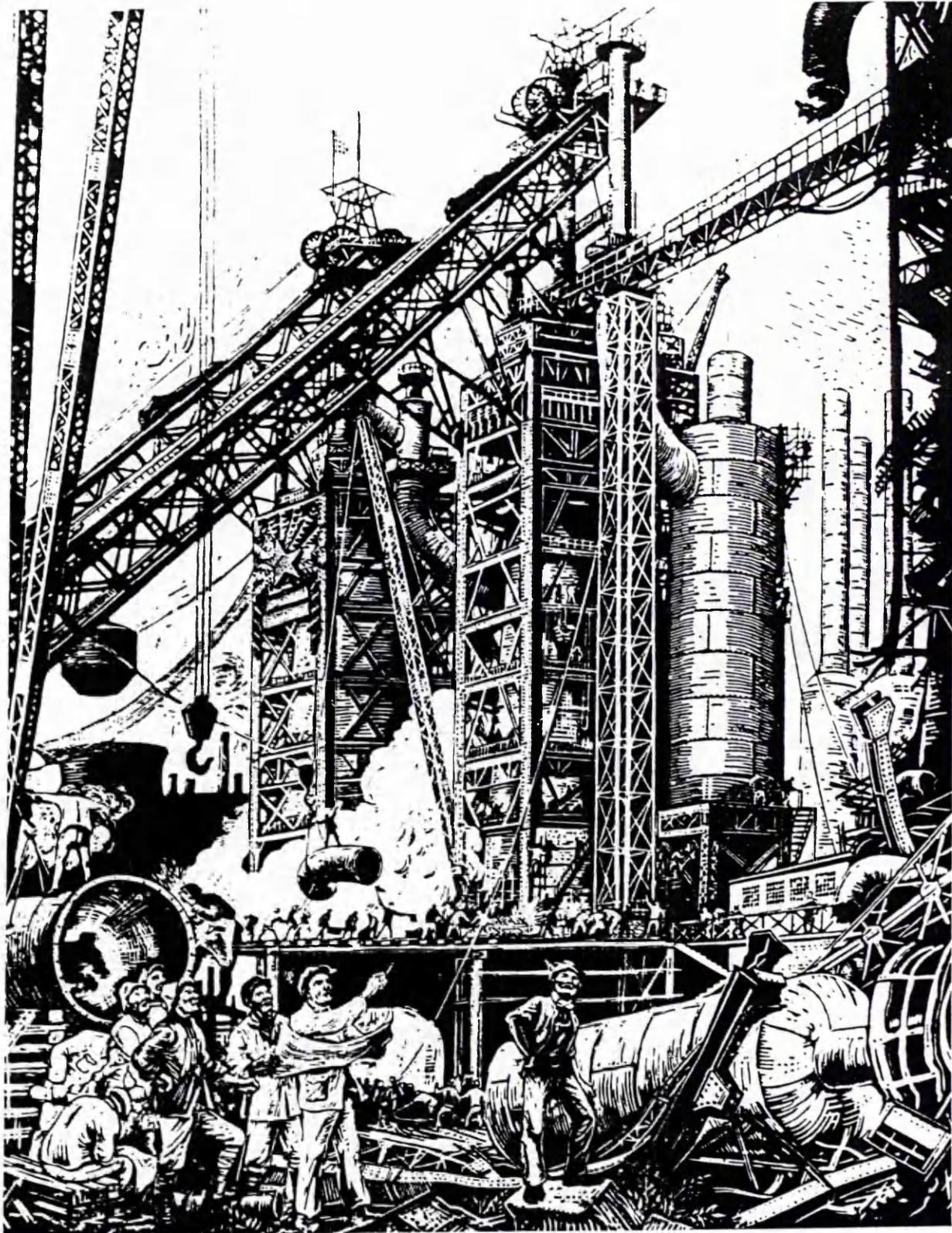
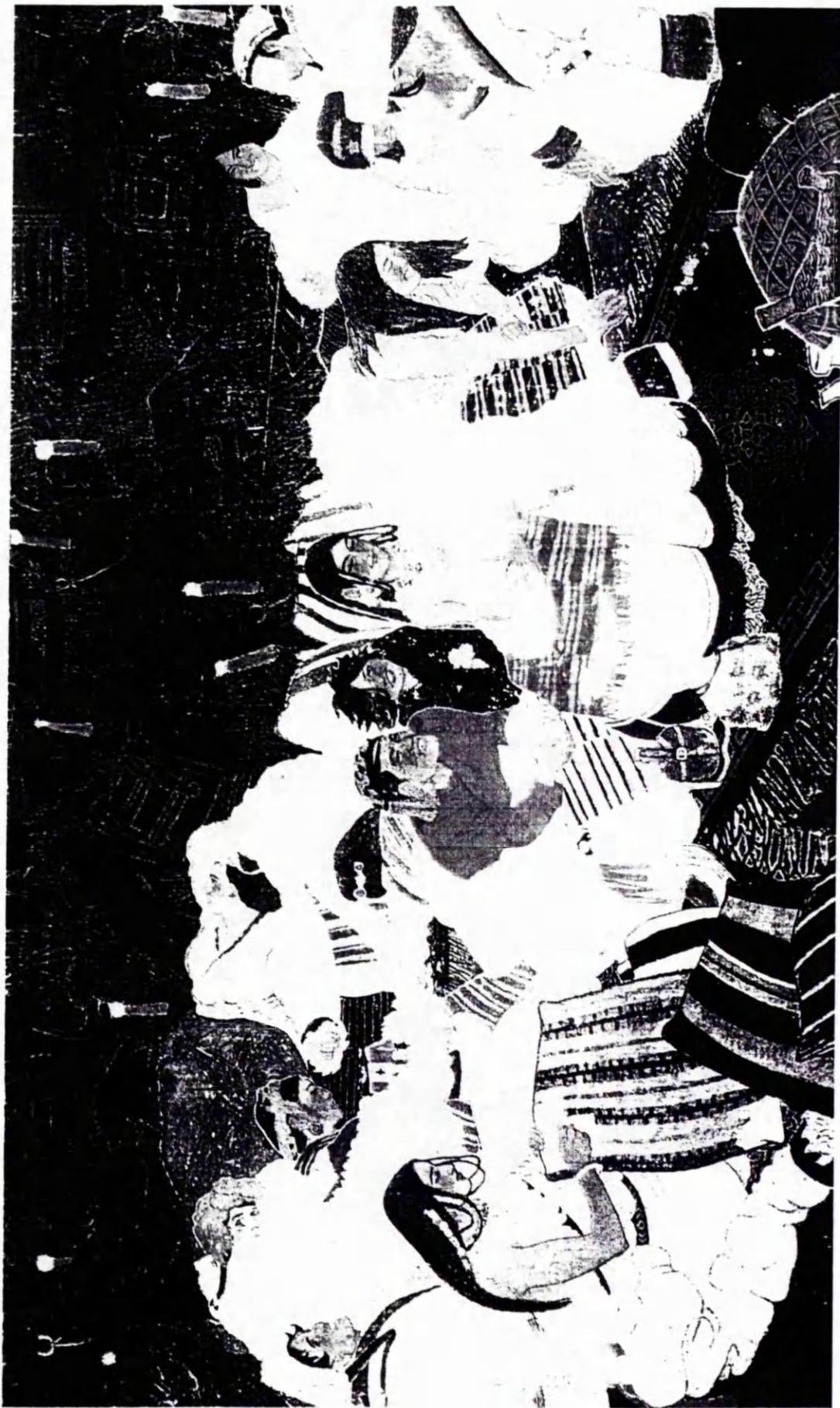
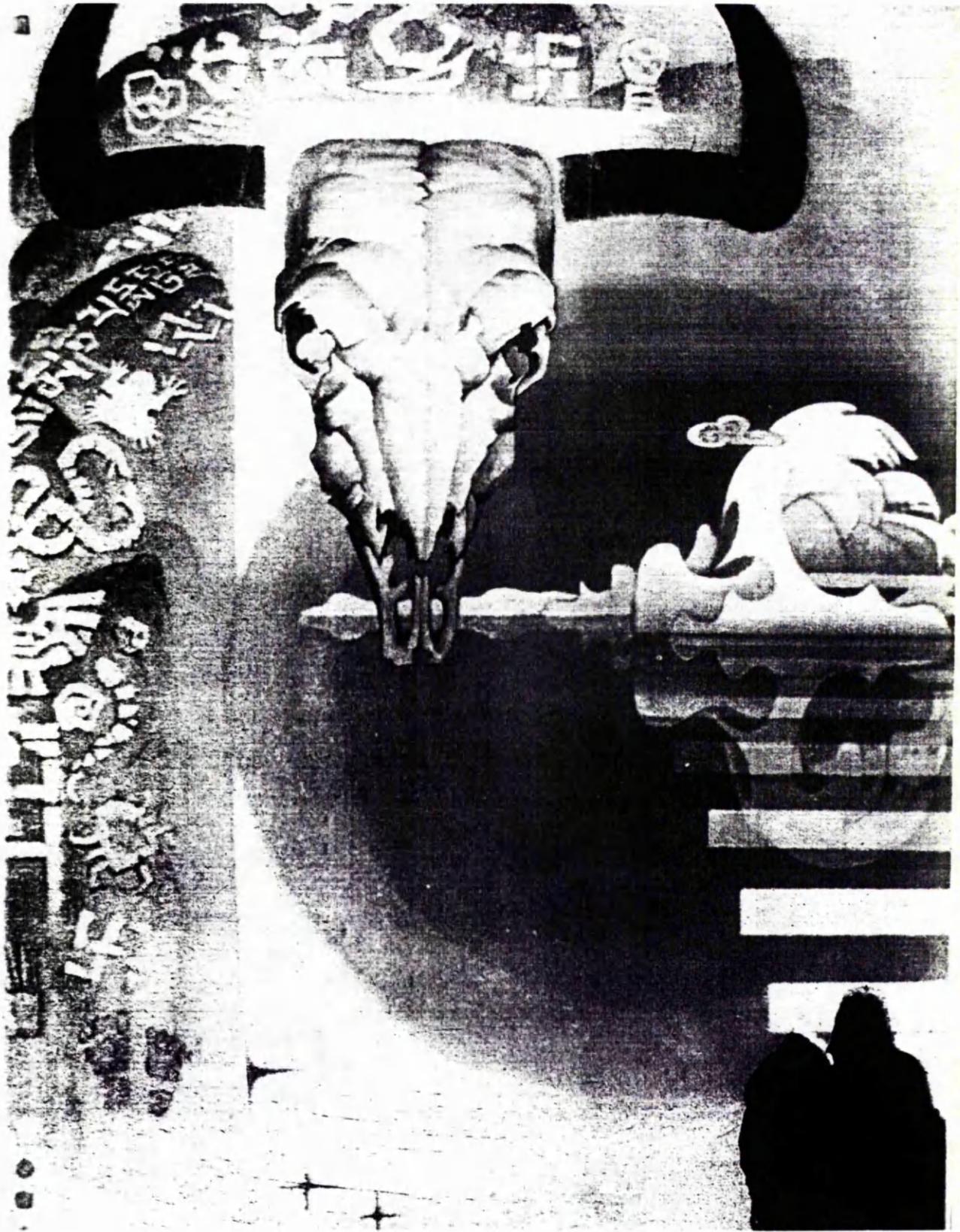


FIG. 23. Gu Yuan, *Rehabilitation of the Anshan Steel Works*, woodblock print, 1949.

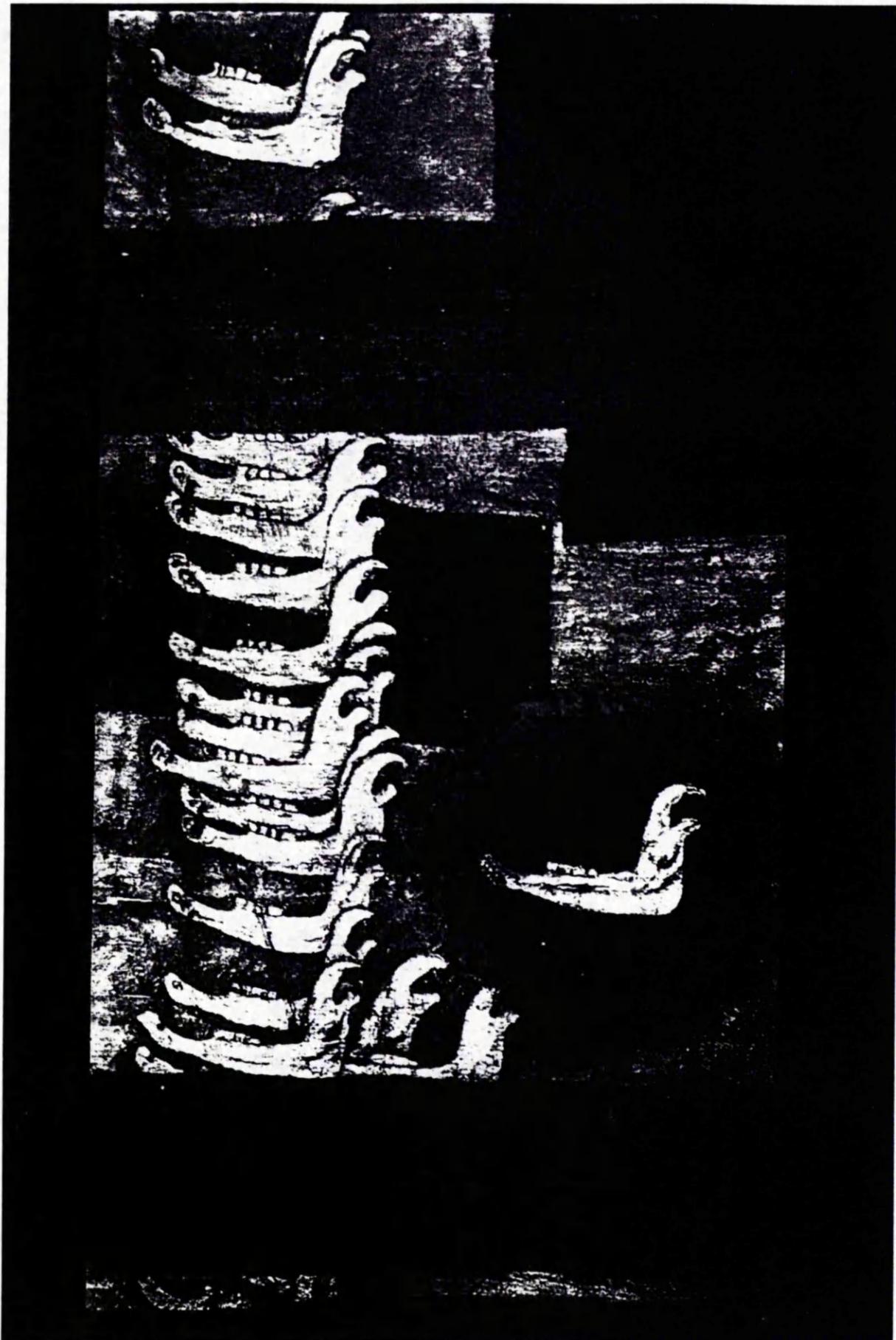




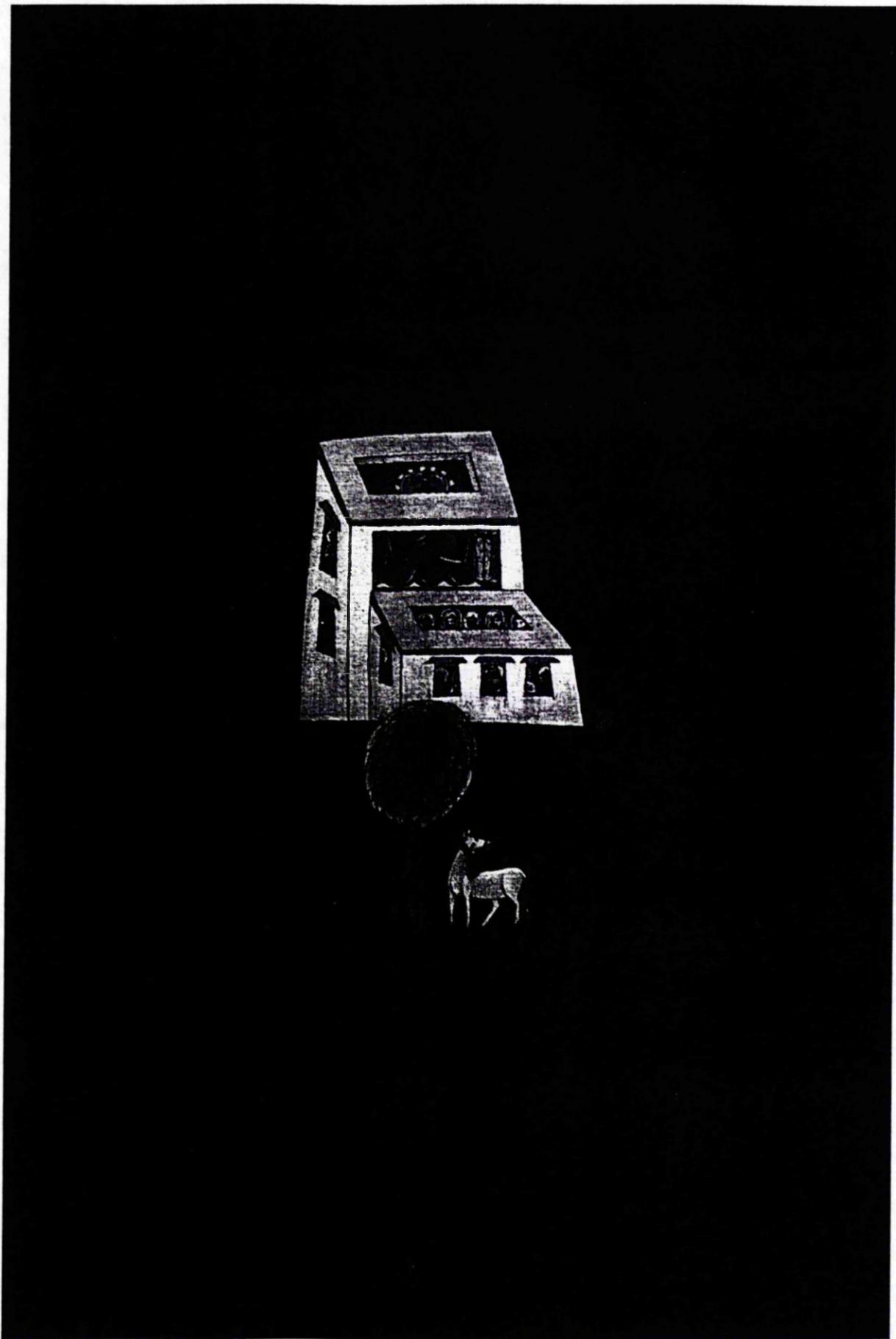




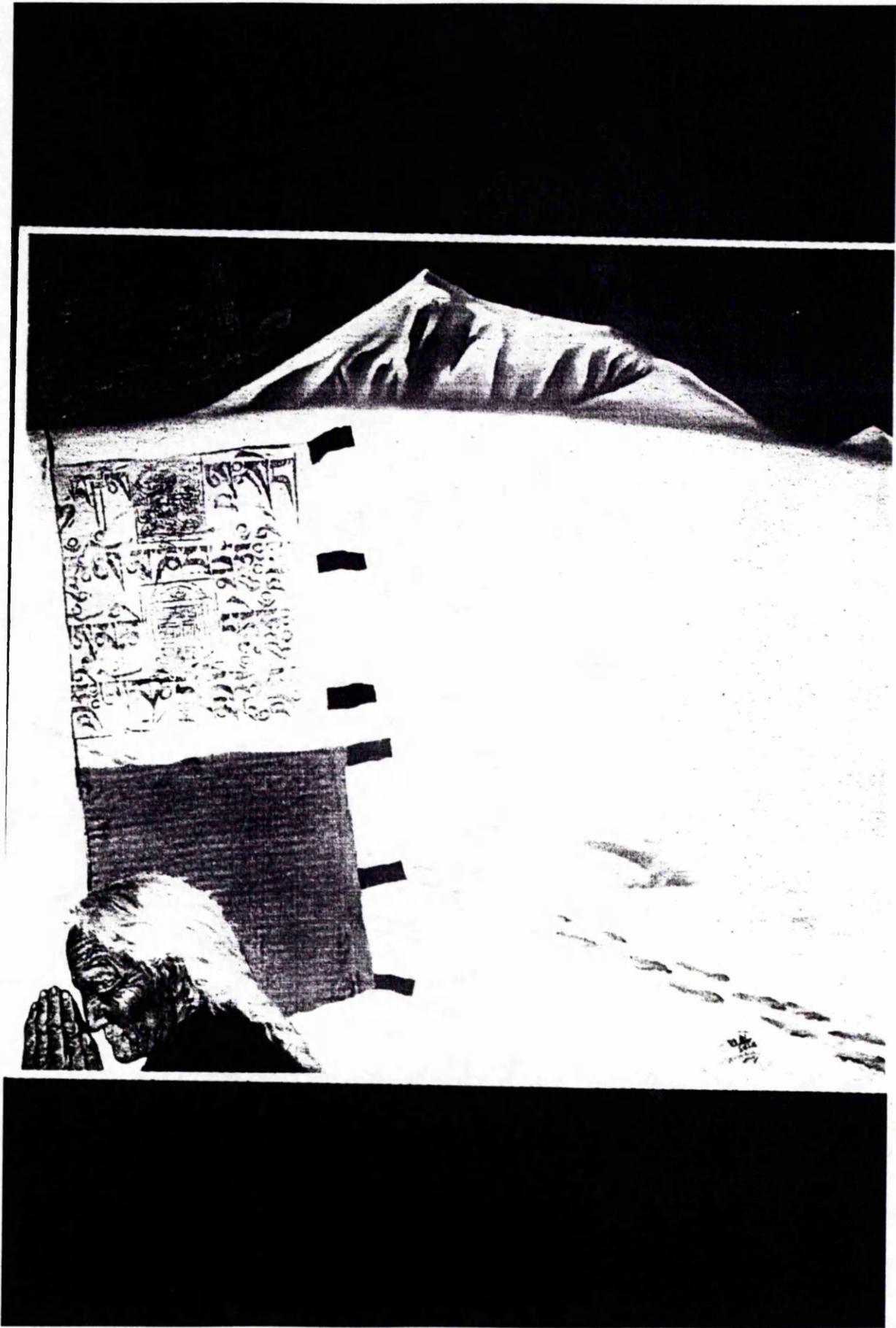


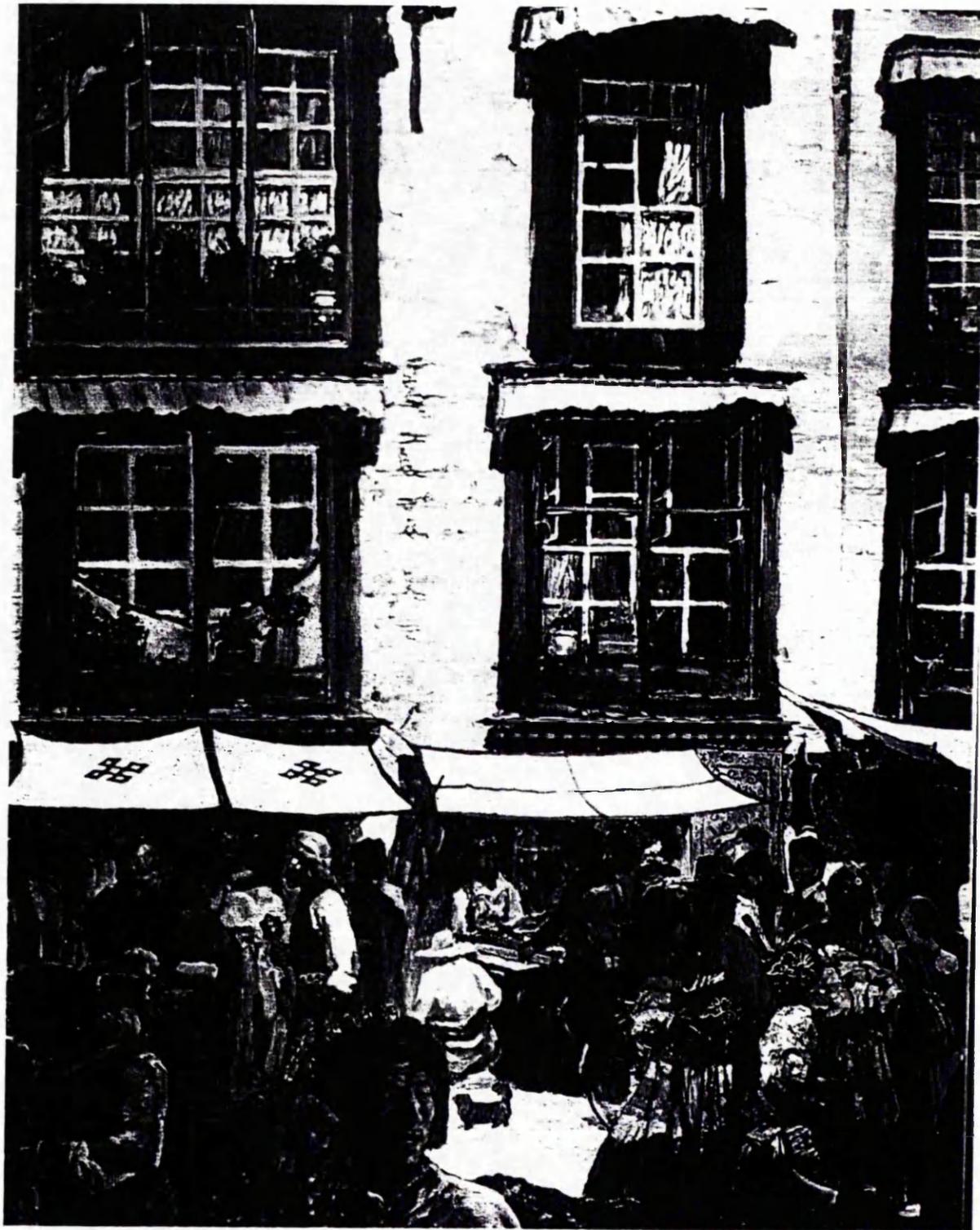


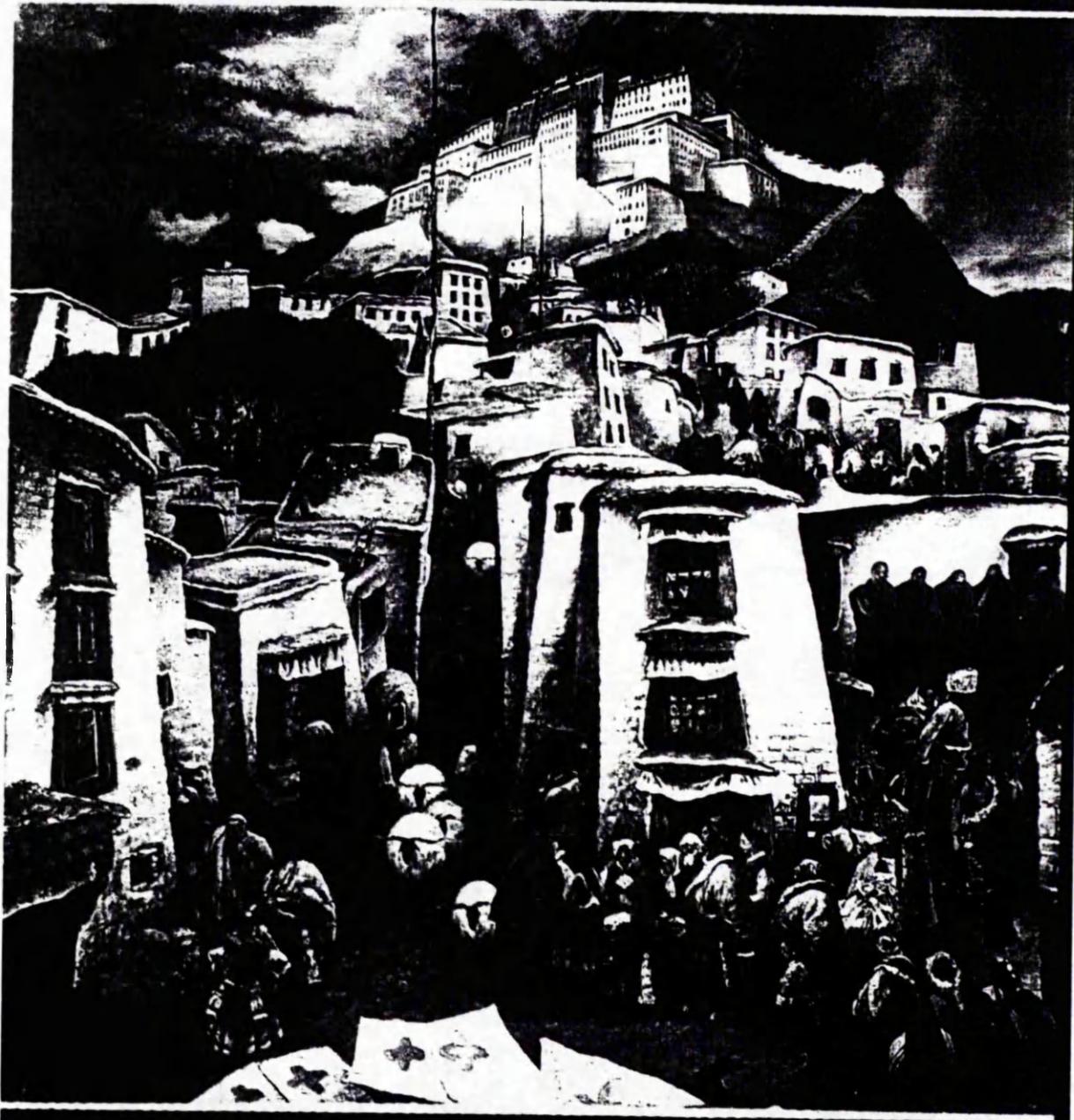














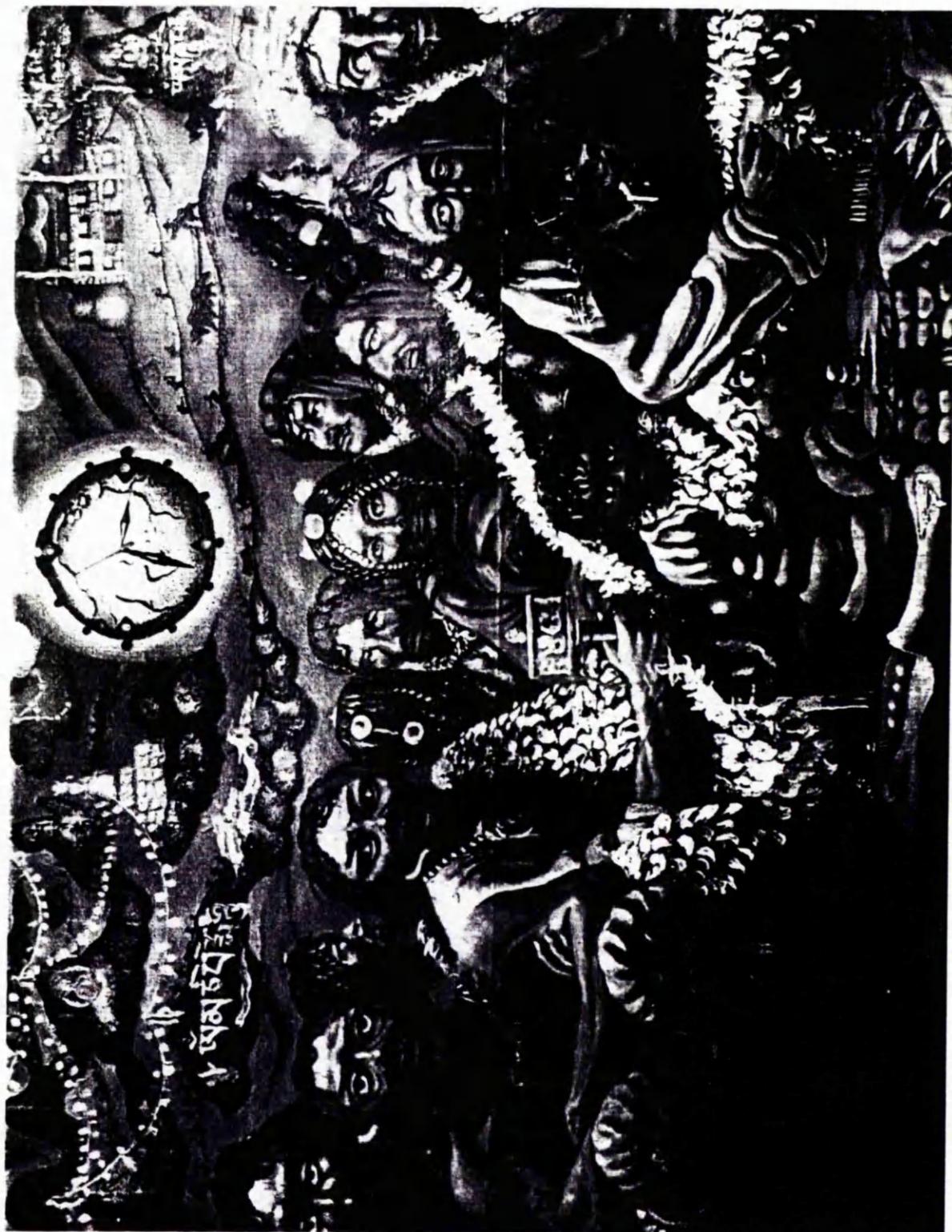


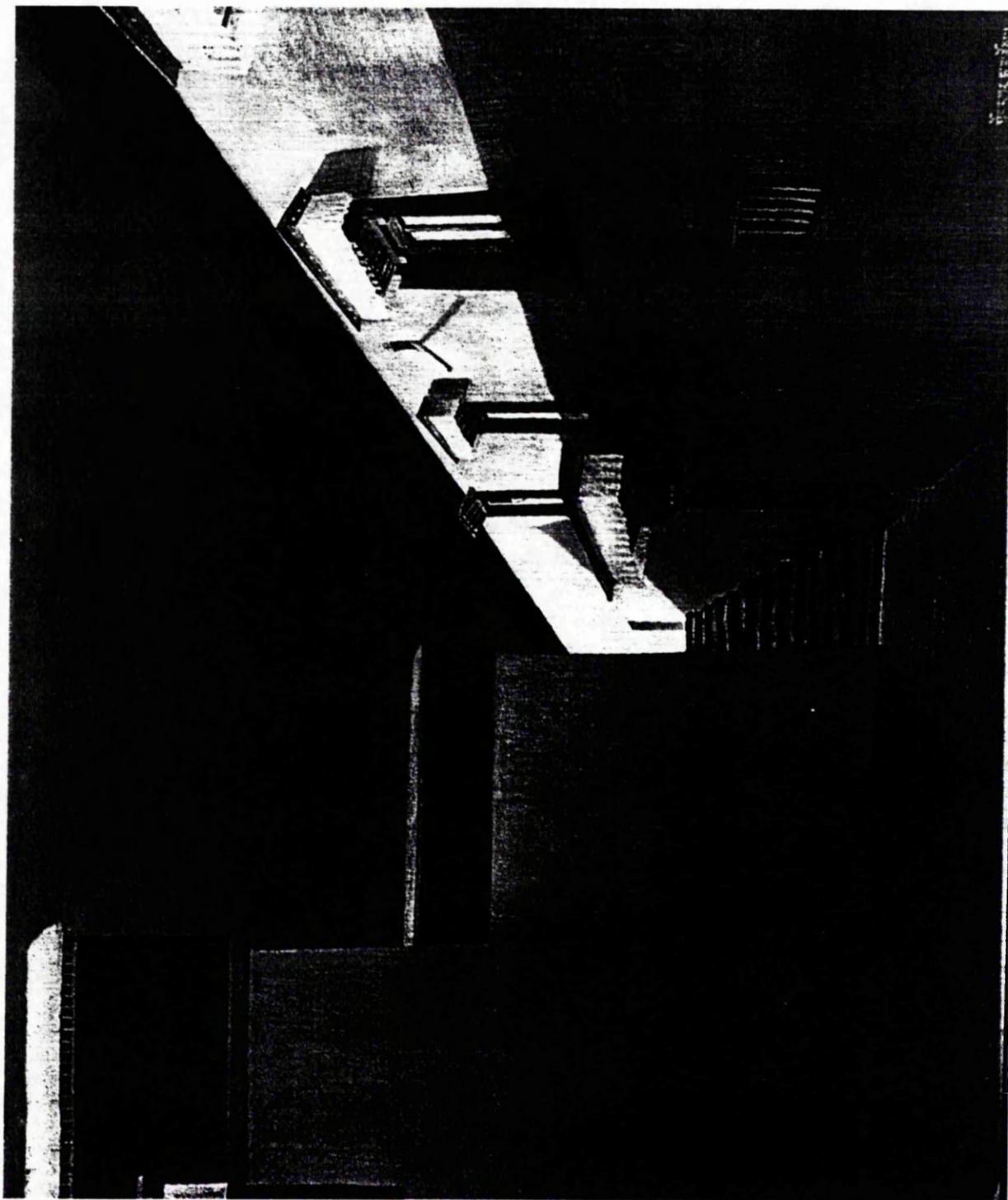


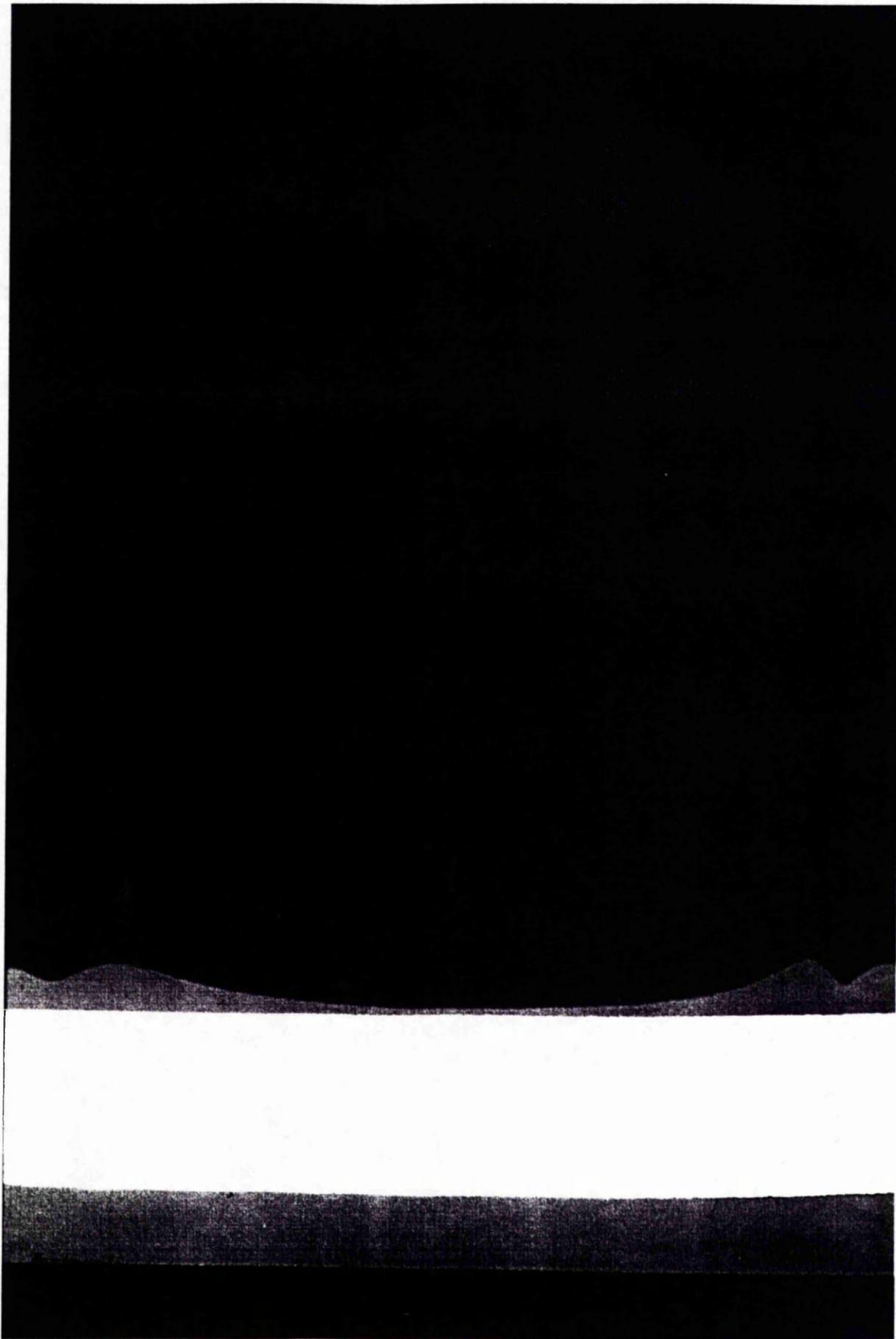


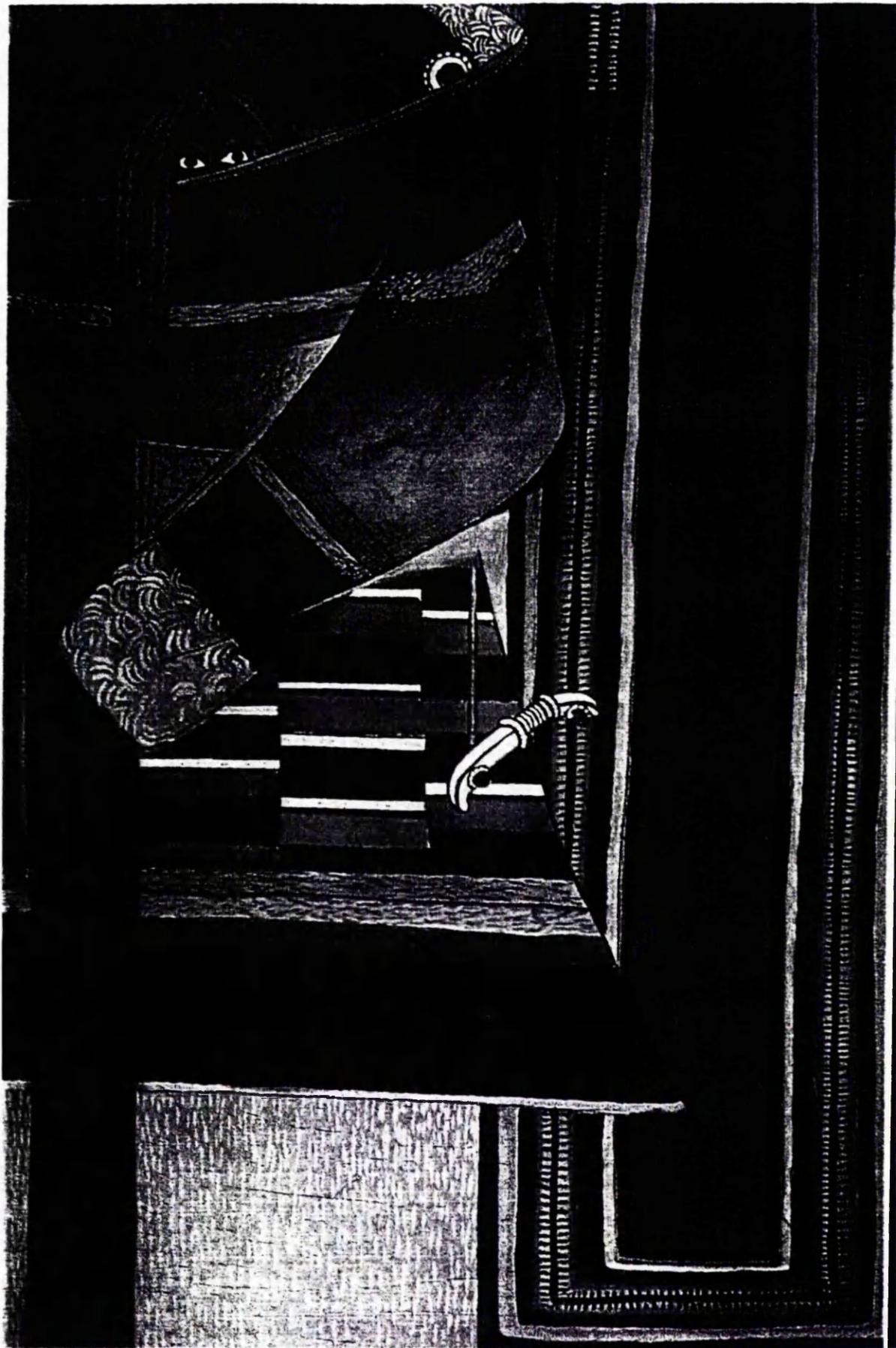




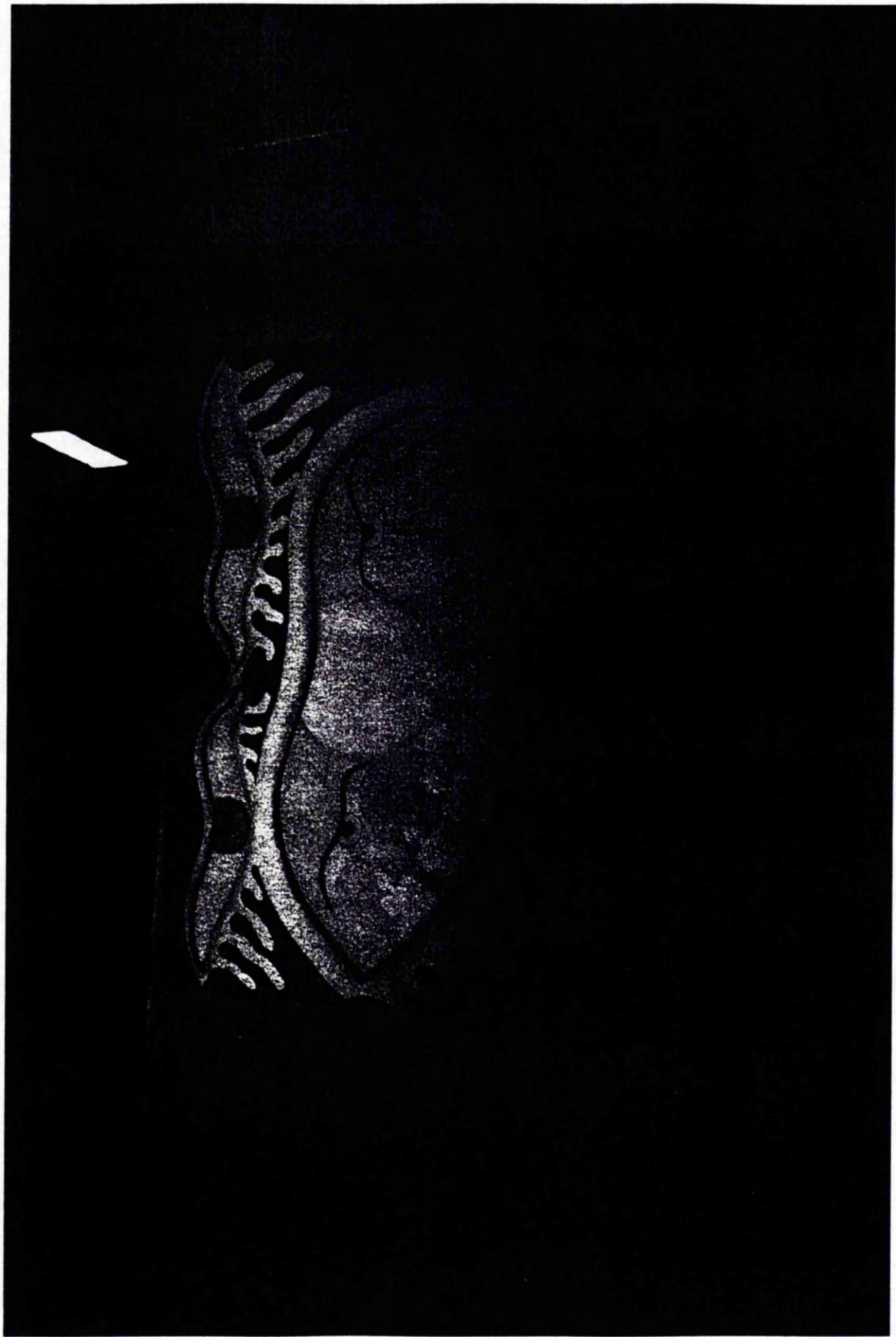


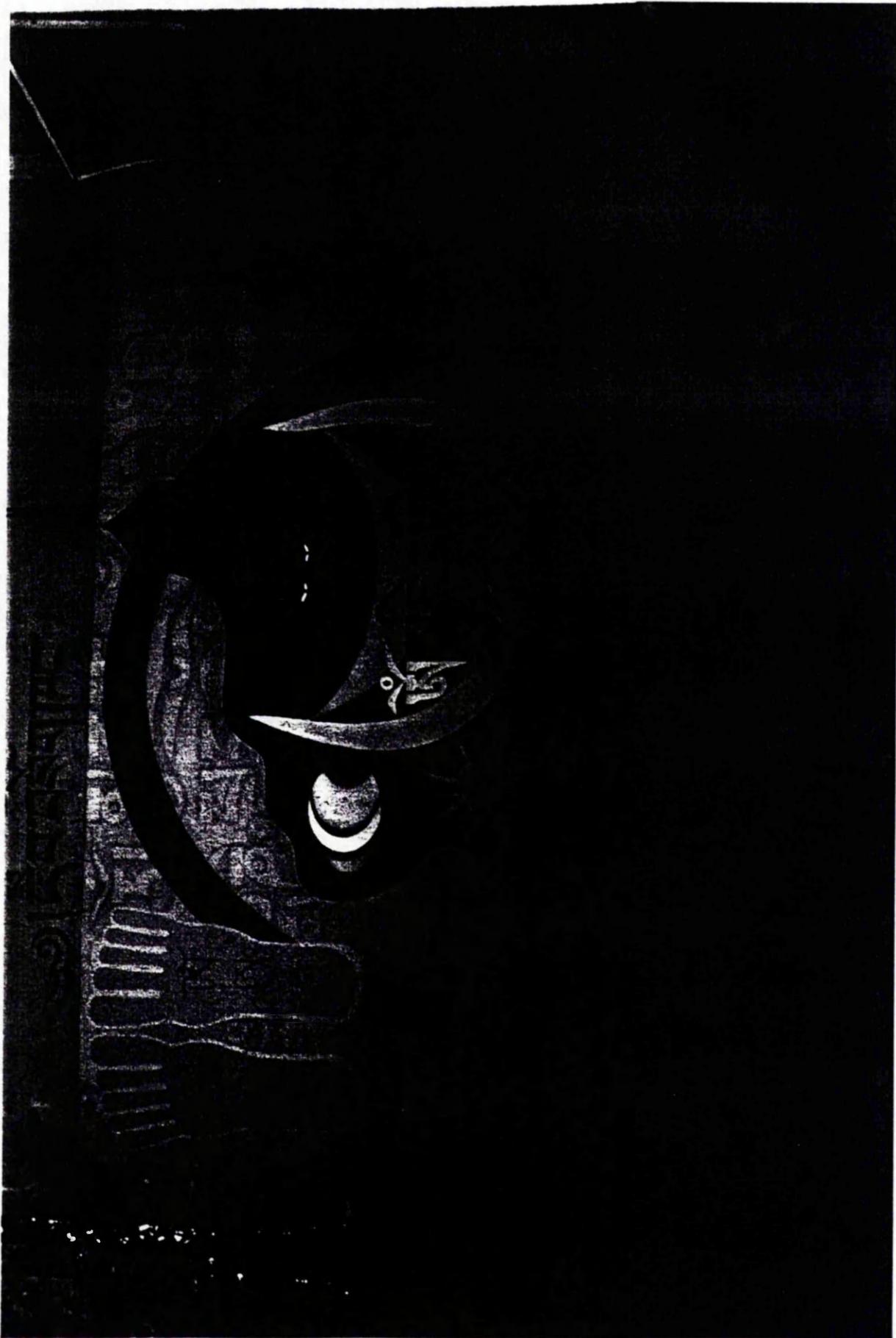


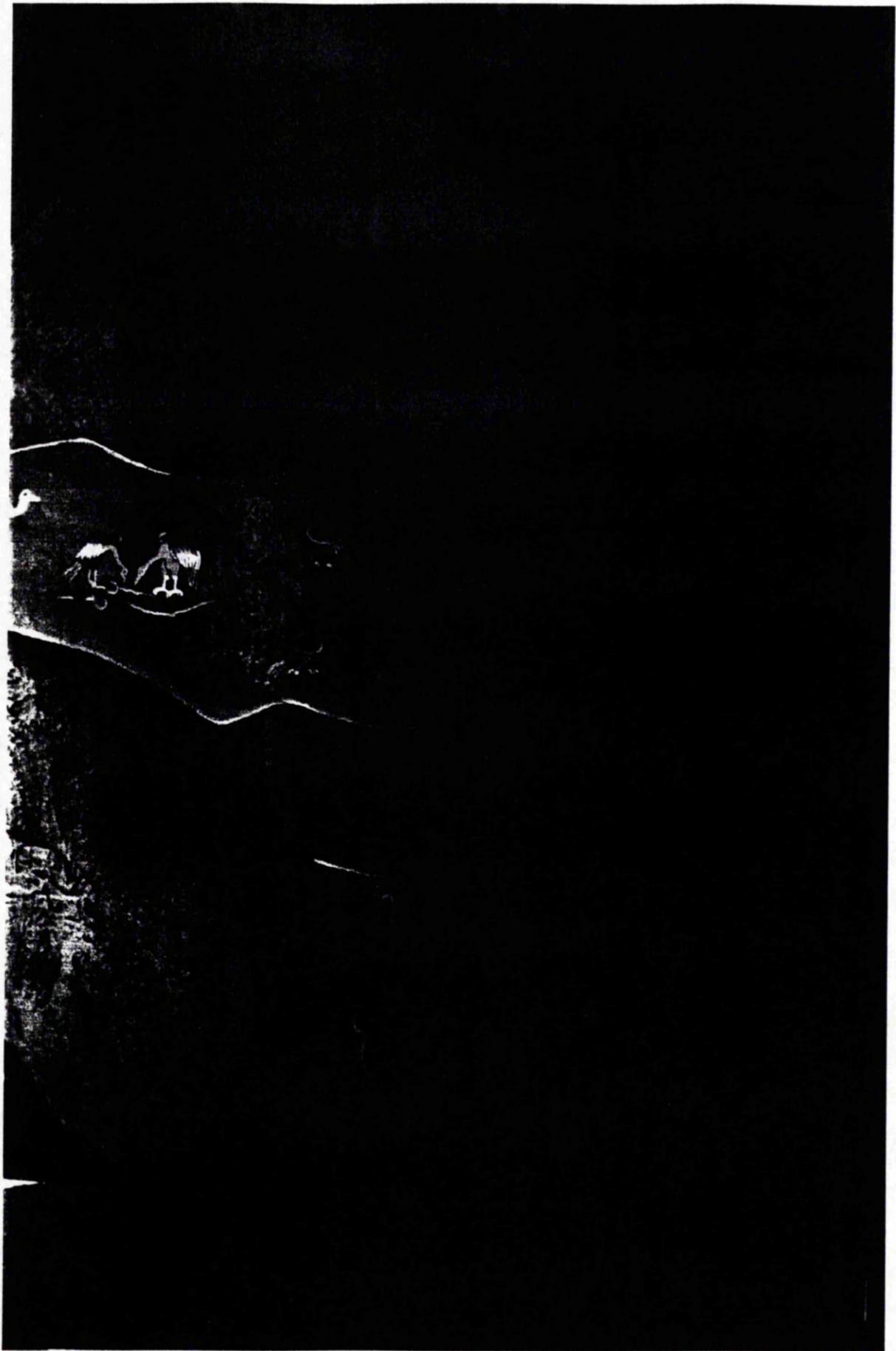




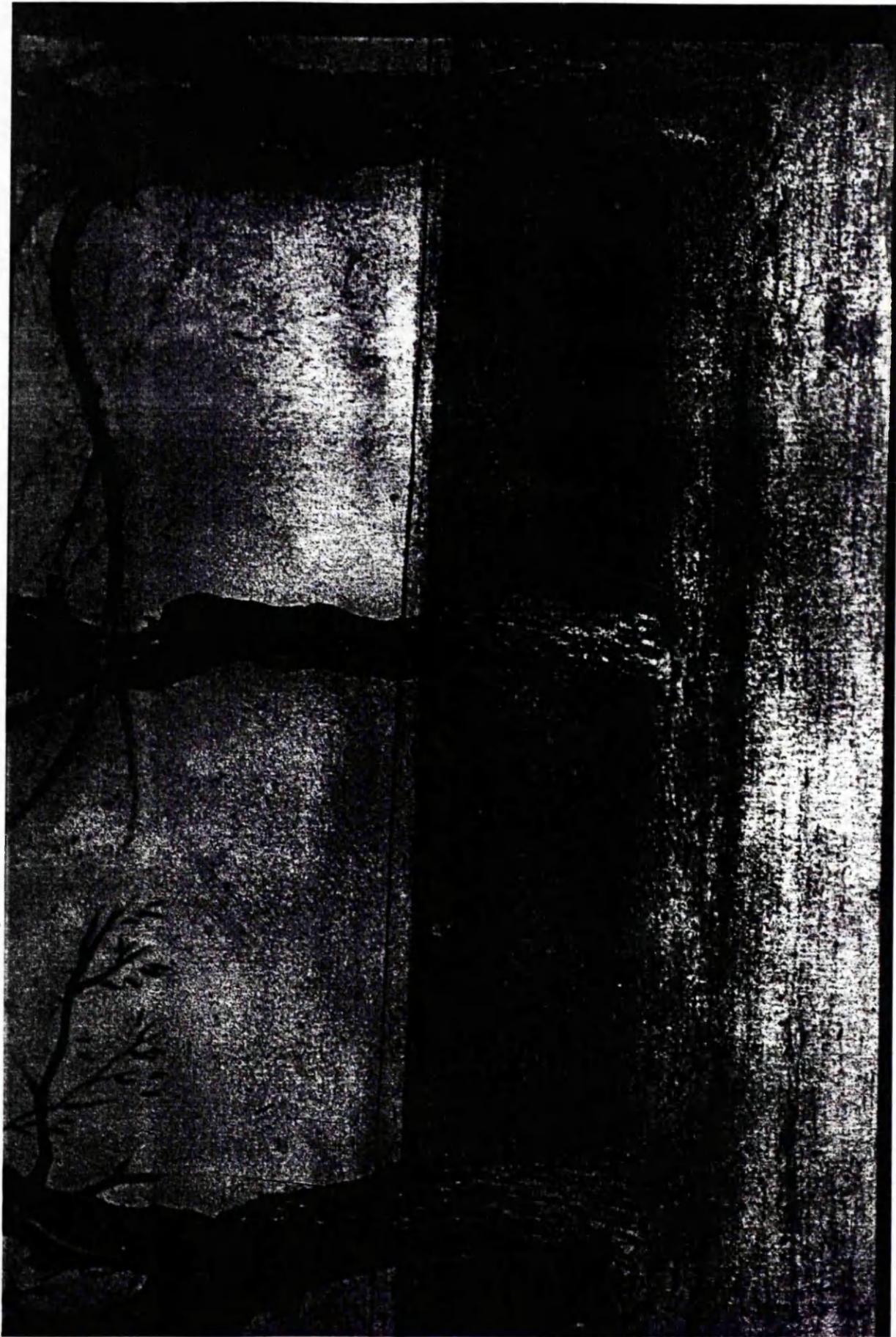


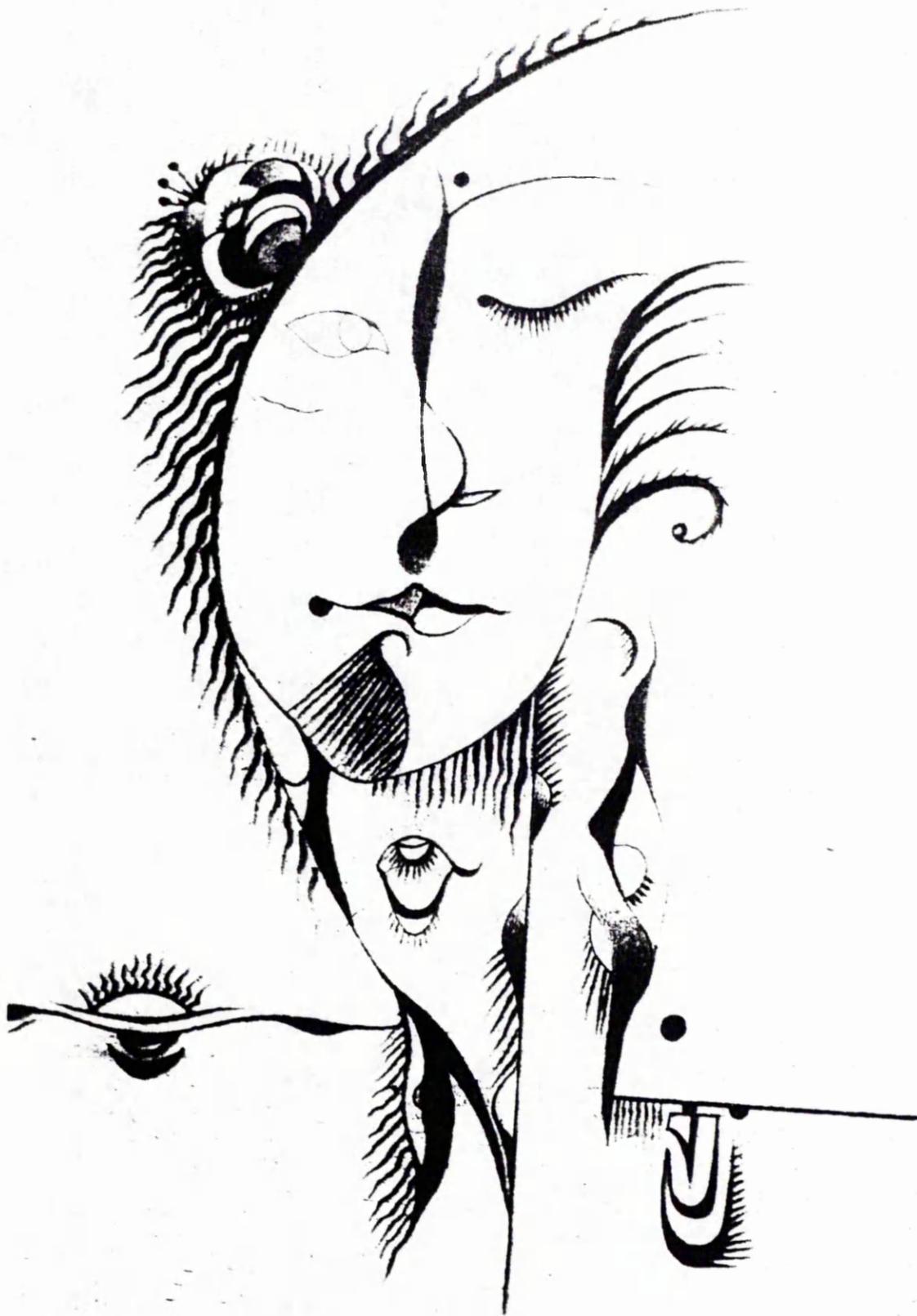


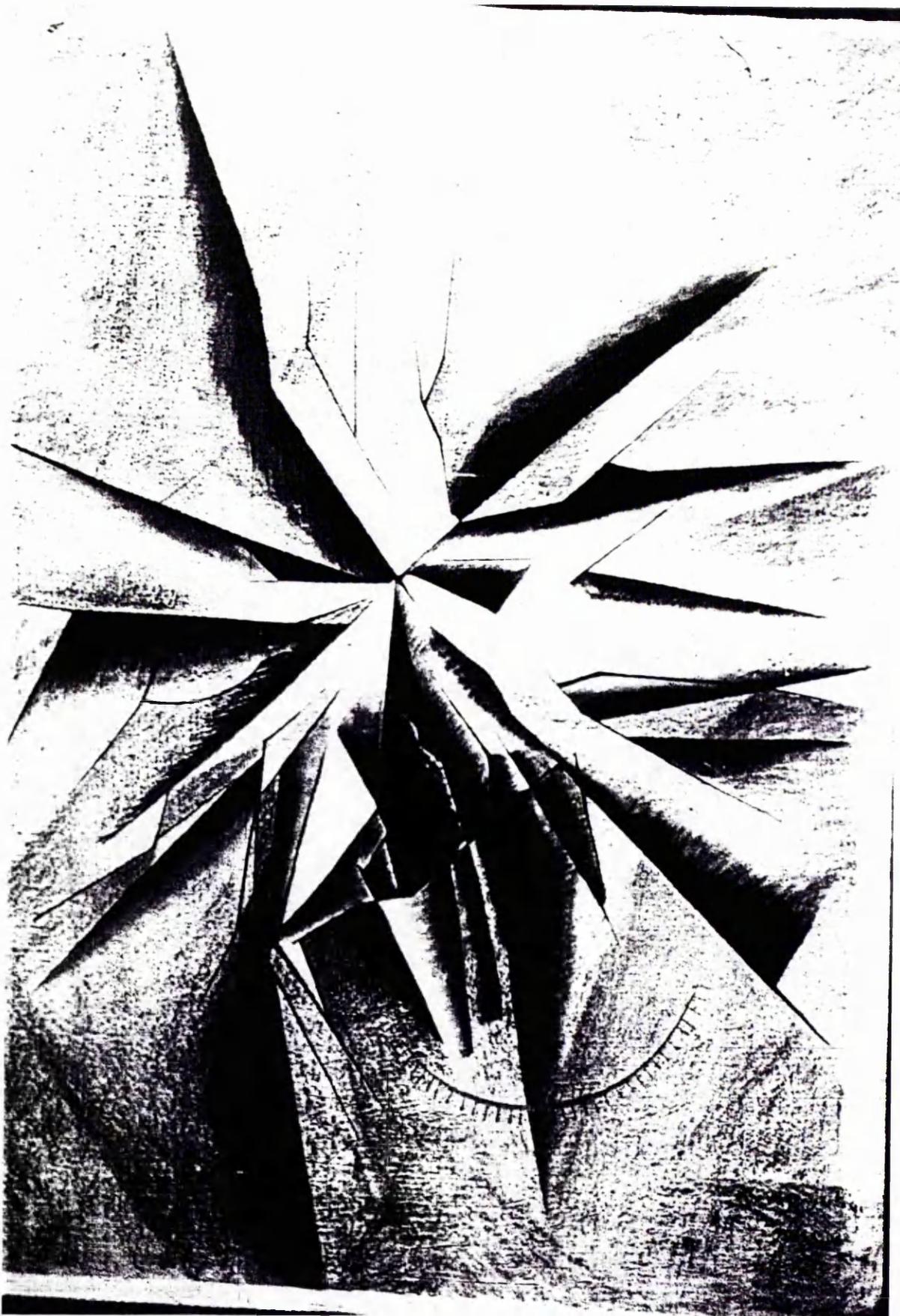


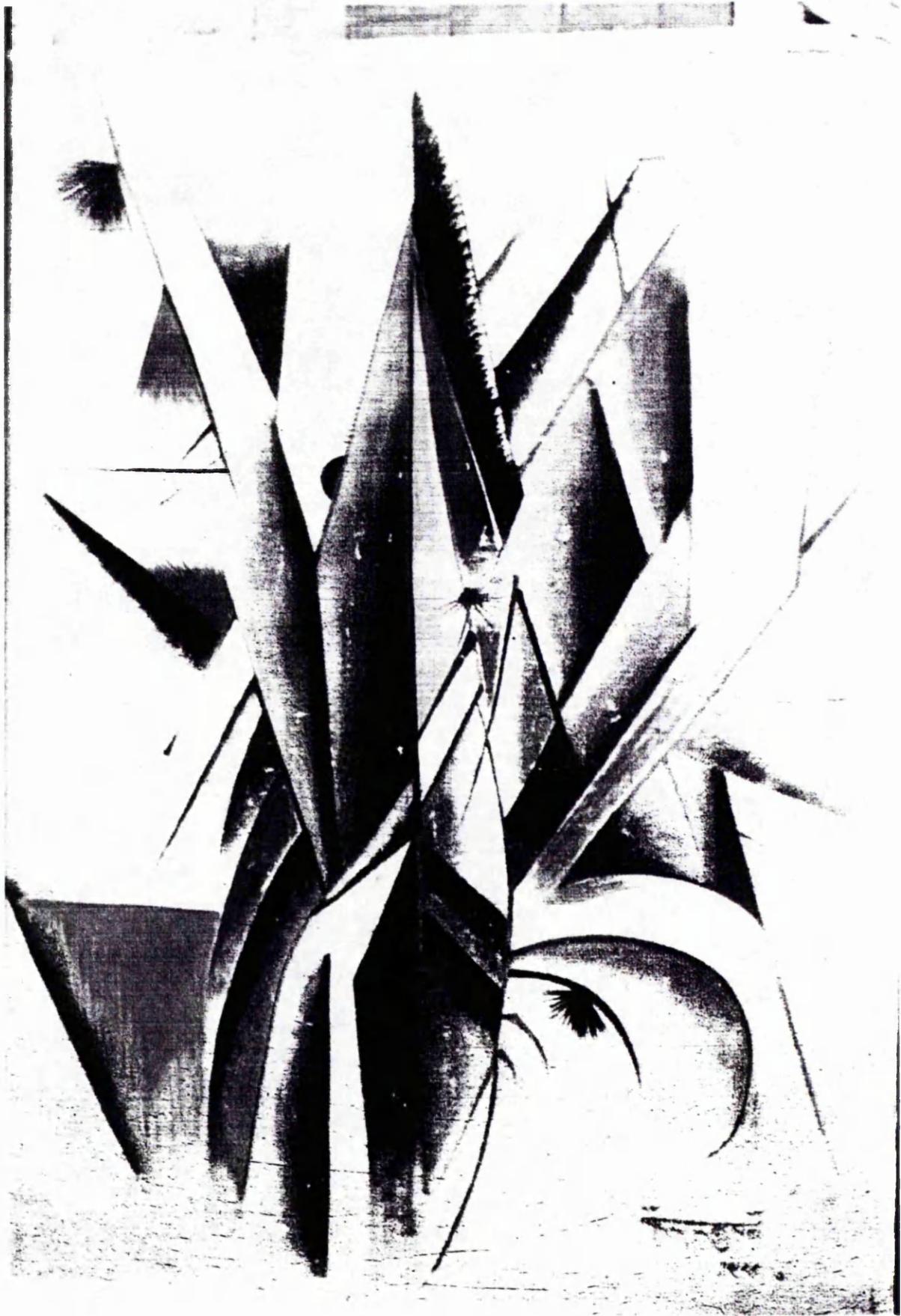


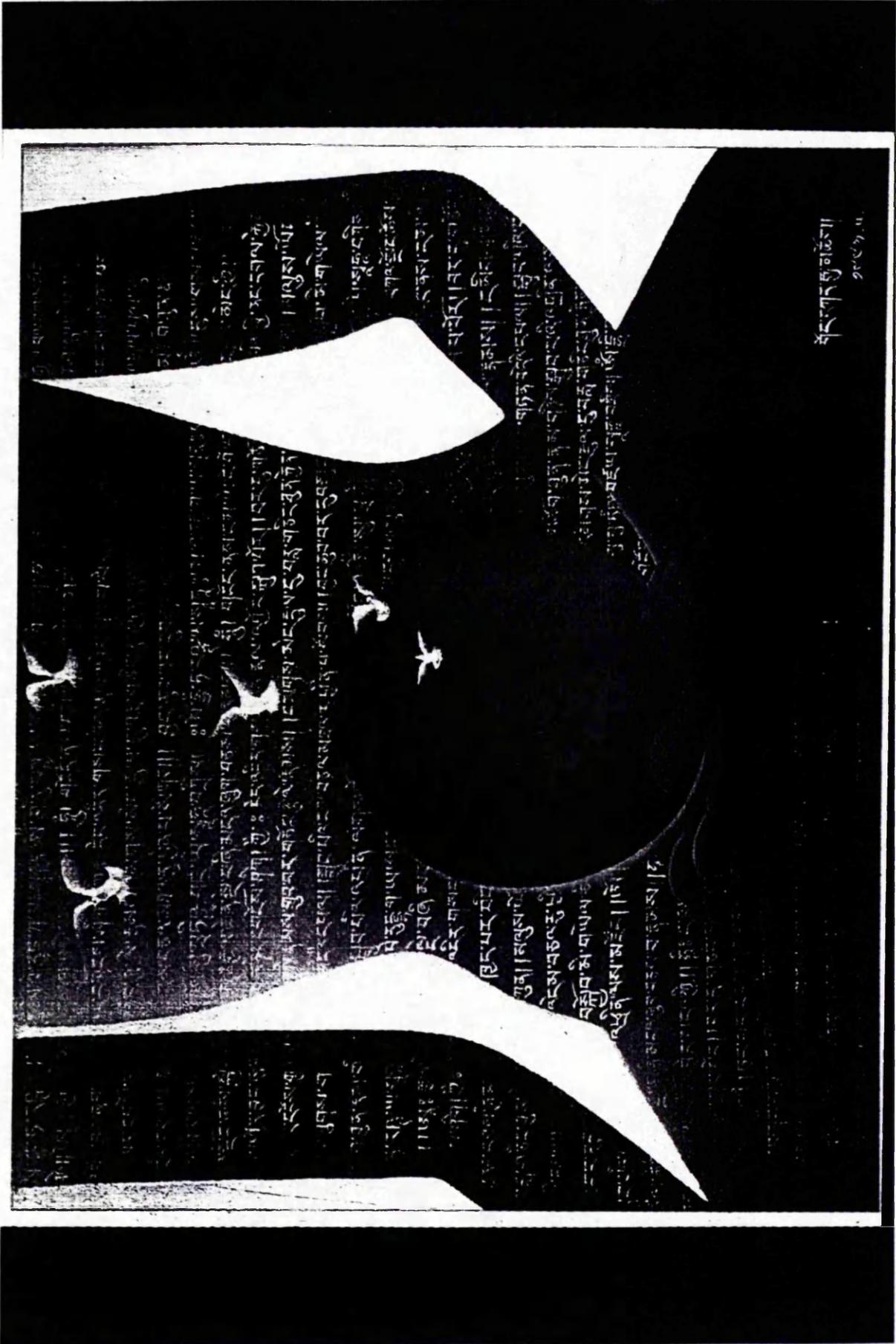




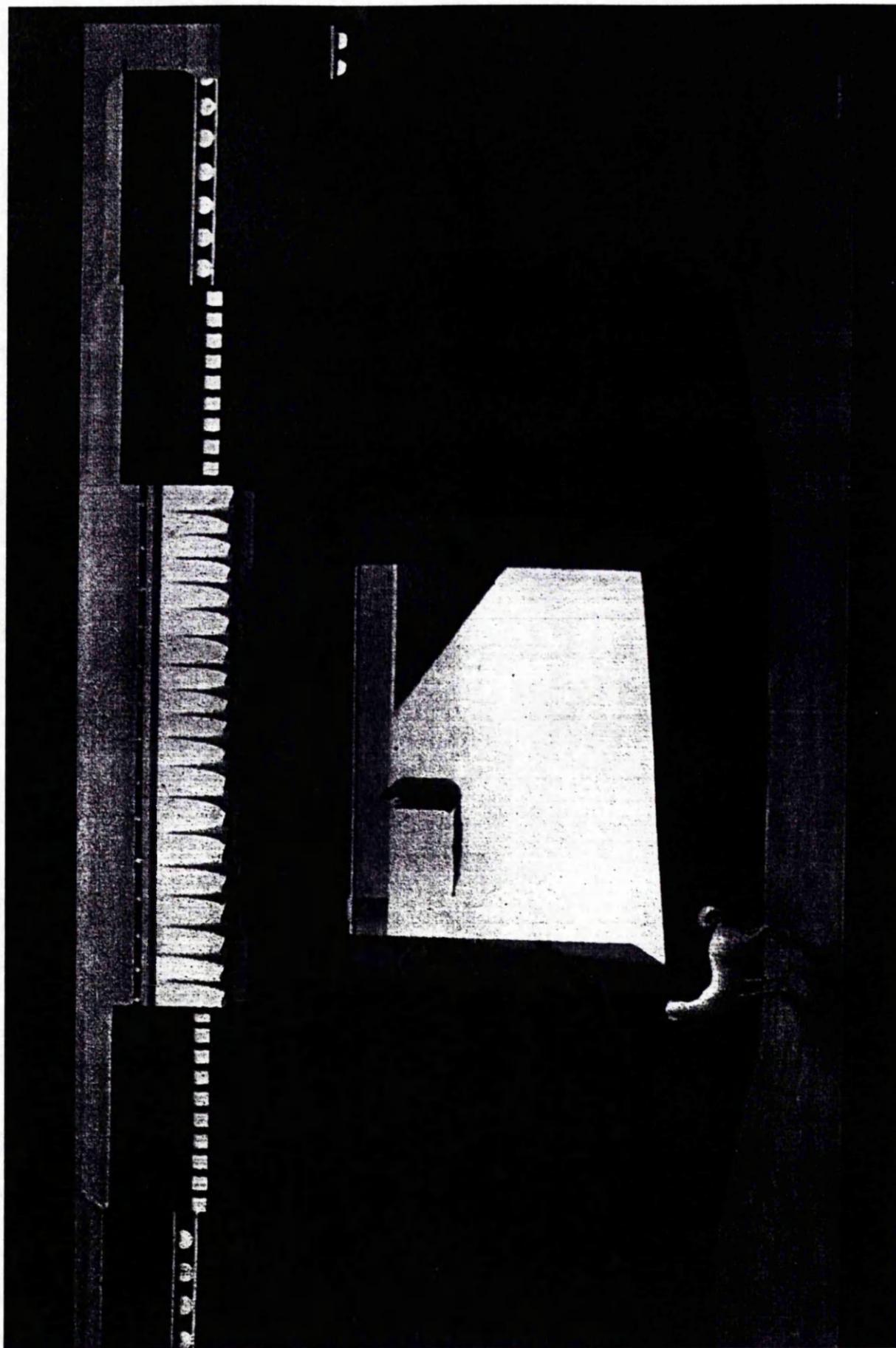


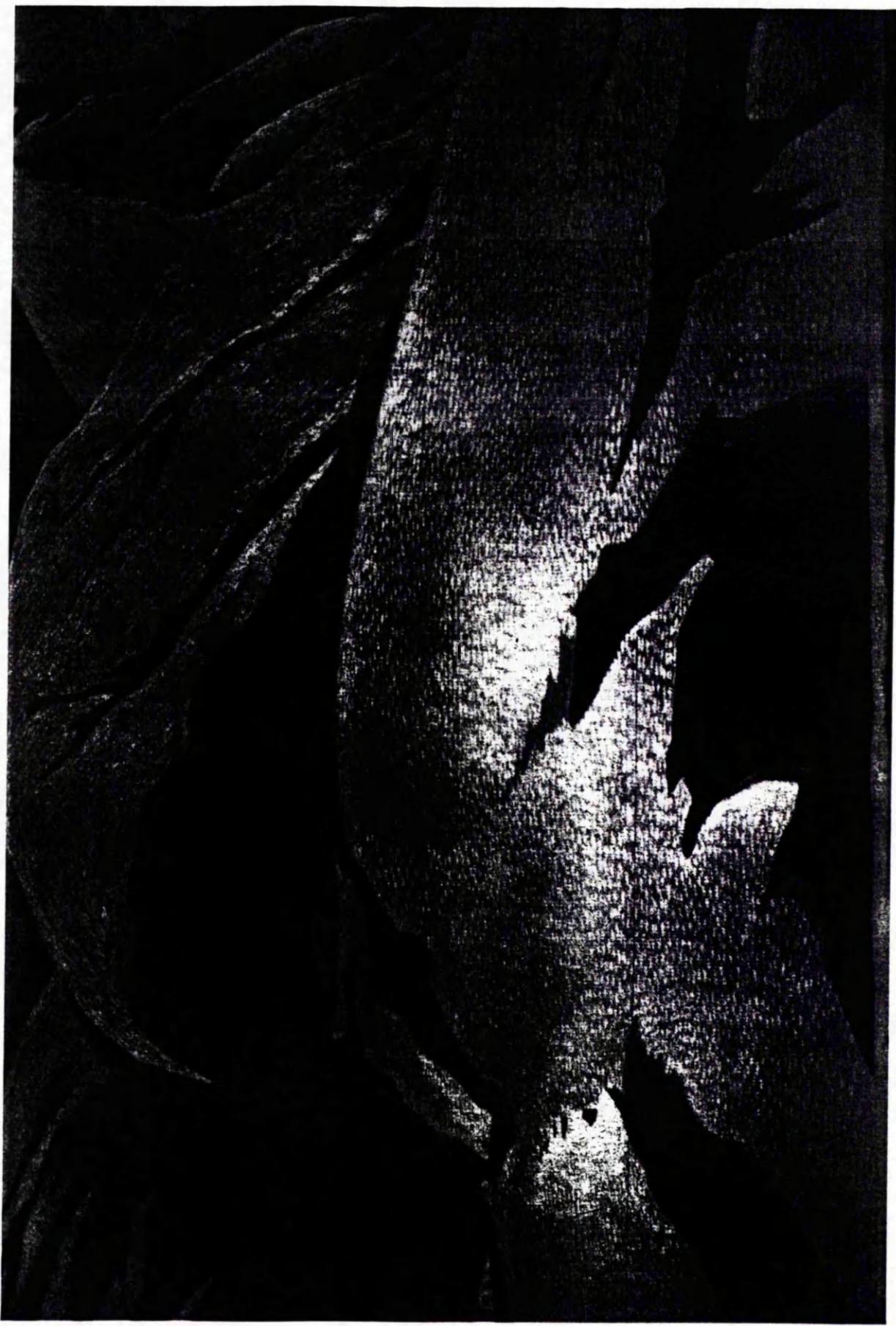


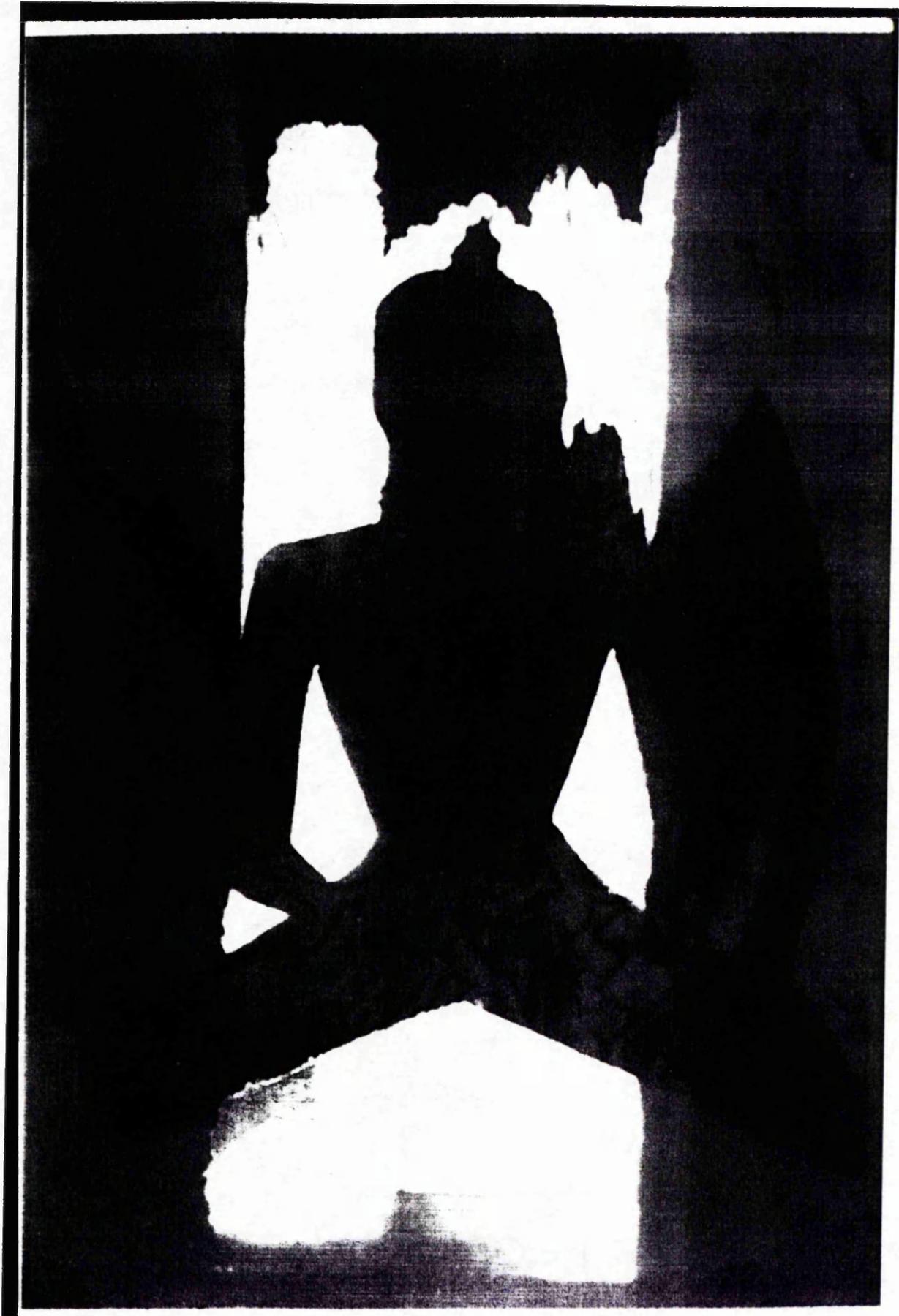


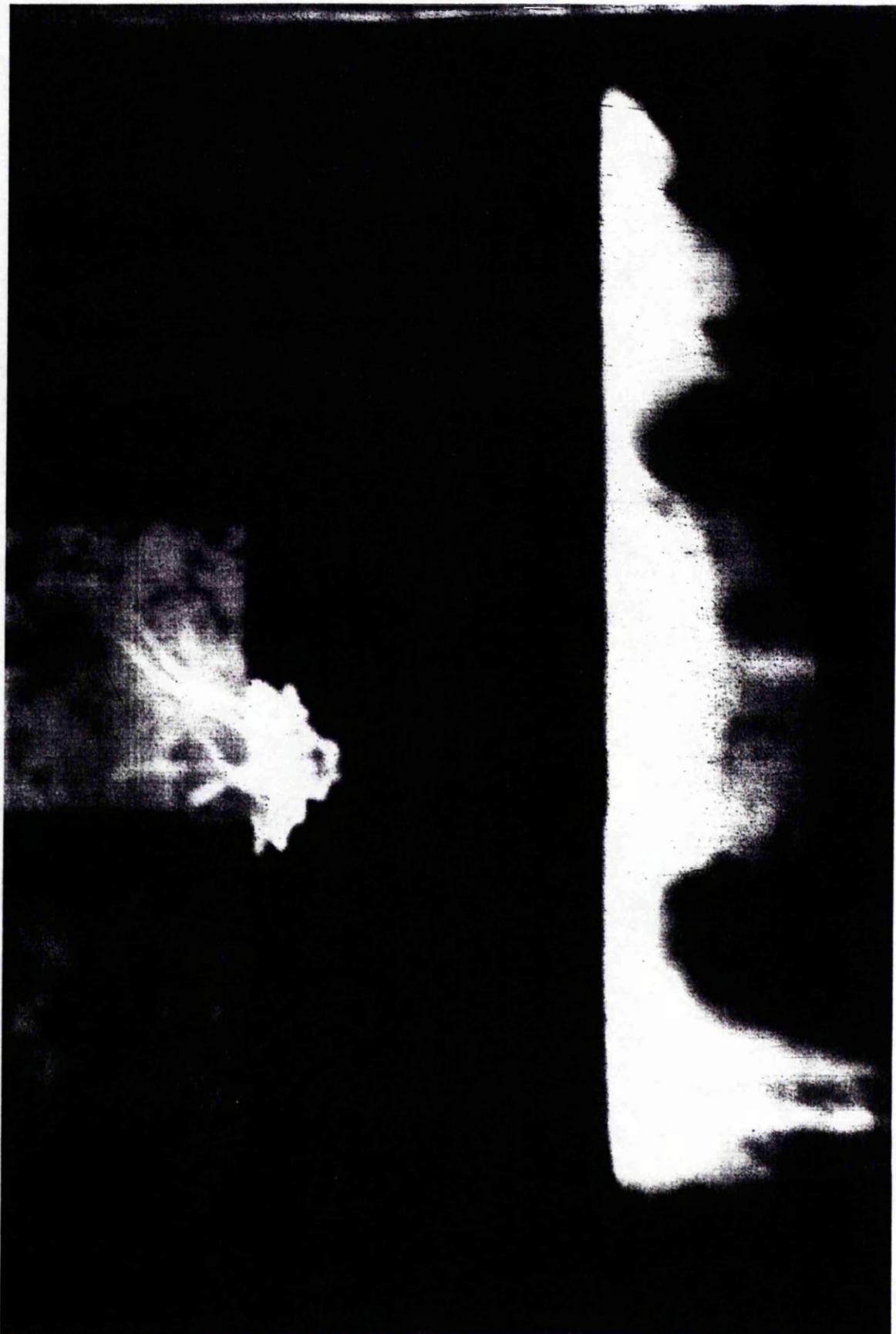


श्रीगणेशाय नमः ॥
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A. W. M. +
18.12.1989

