



## TIBETAN TSHA-TSHA

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Artistic value is often seen in items of very elaborate pieces of work. Skills of many generations are often felt in them and enigmatic tireless effort led by some unshakeable ideas now opening to the spectator. On the other hand, it is rather amazing, that also some pieces of not very elaborated art provoke imagination of their collectors. In such cases it is often because of the cultural or religious ideas connected with them. This might be applied also to the strange small clay tablets with rough images of stūpas and Buddhist deities called tsha-tsha in Tibet. There are much more elaborated works of art in Tibet and these clay tablets might appear mere as a curious business of village people at first glance, but it is surely not the case. The usage of tsha-tshas is spread across the all levels of society in Tibet. The following introduction will try to show that these rather uniform rough clay tablets express very well some religious efforts of Tibetans and without their religious meanings they lose also their very essential values. These clay images are not a Tibetan invention, but in case of Tibet it reached a very fertile ground. We do not know if Forman shared such conviction, but his collection at least documents his interest in the seemingly simple, but at the same time enigmatic and religiously very rich kind of art.

### The background of tsha-tsha

The widespread usage of tsha-tshas predominantly in Tibet but also in neighbouring countries is indeed in contrast with only a few sources available in western languages dealing with them. It is not easy to say what tsha-tsha is in a single definition.<sup>1</sup> Approaching the

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<sup>1</sup> Austine Waddell in 1894 wrote: "Miniature funeral images or caitias, moulded of clay or dough, with or without the addition of relics, called sa-tsch'a... Small consecrated medallions of clay are also given by the Dalai and Tashi Grand Lamas to donors of largess..." (A. Waddell: *Buddhism and Lamaism of Tibet*, Kathmandu 1995, p. 330). Marion H. Duncan, who travelled in Kham between 1921 and 1936, wrote: "Tsatsa are objects made of clay with a few blest grains of barley stuck into the bottom, or perhaps clay mixed with either the ashes or the bone relics of one deceased. Tsatsa are commonly in the form of a bell but solid, others are moulded in the shape of a Buddha and still others are formed like idols and dorjes..." (M. H. Duncan: *Customs and Superstitions of Tibetans*, Delhi 1998, p. 210). John Vincent Bellezza, who led four expeditions in 80<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> in central Tibet says that "Tsa-tsa are cone-shaped or flat objects, bearing designs are moulded from clay



subject merely from the viewpoint of its appearance, these are mostly clay tablets with popular images of Tibetan cult, i.e. stūpas, deities and Buddhist masters varying in size approximately from 2 to 20 cm. Most of them are dried by sun, only few of them are baked. Yet their meaning in the religious context might be shown only through their usage by Tibetans.

Before we deal with the Tibetan tsha-tshas in detail, we should note that similar images are not restricted only to the areas where Tibetans live. Besides territories neighbouring with Tibet, like Nepal, Sikkim and Mongolia, its presence was known in China, Afghanistan, areas of Silk Road and till even nowadays they are frequent in Burma and Thailand. Concerning Burma, according to a experience of L. Sklenka, who travelled there few years ago, these are always baked and their presence in central Burma is very scarce.

In Thailand, they are known mostly in the form of protective amulets these days (phra kreung) and are subjects of prolific activity of various native collectors. There is a large and busy amulet market where one can find thousands of them in downtown Bangkok near the Royal Palace. People in Thailand buy, exchange and collect them in a way which resembles collecting post stamps. In the amulet market you can find both very cheap ones (5 baht) and very expensive ones (climbing up to 10–50 thousand bahts). They are made from clay mixed with dried flowers, rice and other ingredients or small stones and mostly depict Buddha Śākyamuṇi with “earth touching gesture” (bhūmisparśamudrā). You can find them uncovered, stored in small boxes or placed inside a small glass stowage. Nowadays, they are worn round the neck as a necklace. Their cult spread by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. The predecessors of today’s amulets were so called phra-pim, votive tablets stored in stūpas, caves and temples. These were probably connected with pilgrimage and their religious “souvenir” aspect might be apparent in their protective necklace form common nowadays. Such older context of pilgrimage and stūpas is closer to their Tibetan form of these days.<sup>2</sup>

Approaching the Tibetan cultural space, it should be first noted that the orthography used for tsha-tshas in Tibetan is not uniform. Apart from tsha-tsha (*tsha tsha*), they are known in written form also as sā-tstsha (*sā tstsha*) and others (*tshwa tshwa etc.*). They bear no meaning in Tibetan with the exception of the syllable sa in some of its written forms, which designates soil. G. Tucci argued that their Tibetan name with its variety of written form is probably a corrupted loan word from Indian Prakrit *sachāya*, derived from Sanskrit *satchāya* meaning “perfect image” (Tib. *gzugs brnyan*). This hypothesis might be supported by the Thai expression *phra pim* with similar meaning.<sup>3</sup> And indeed in Sanskrit-Tibetan Dictionary compiled from various indigenous Sanskrit-Tibetan word listings appears a Sanskrit expression, which is identical with one of the written forms in Tibetan.<sup>4</sup>

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with an admixture of sanctified substances; they are placed as offerings at holy places. The are often found in caves and fissures in large groups. They come in different colours and vary in the age and intricacy of their design” (V. Bellezza: *Divine Dyads – Ancient Civilisation in Tibet*, Dharamsala 1997, p. 221, note 19). Juan Li writes in his article from approximately similar time: “Tsa-tsa are clay impressions made with a metal mould containing the hollowed, reversed image of a deity or sacred symbol. The stamped images are dried in the sun and in some cases fired into hardness” (J. Li: *Images of Earth and Water; The Tsa-Tsa Votive Tablets of Tibet*, Asian Art /The internet journal: <http://www.asianart.com/li/tsatsa.html>, 11 November 1995/).

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the experience of Luboš Sklenka, for some details we are indebted to M. Hubina. For detailed information see M. L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati: *Votive tablets in Thailand: Origin, Styles and Uses*. Kuala Lumpur and New York 1997.

<sup>3</sup> G. Tucci: *Stupa: art, architectonics and symbolism*, New Delhi 1988, pp. 54–55.

<sup>4</sup> Dmu dge bsam gtan et al.: *Sam bod skad gnyis shan sbyar gser gyi phreng mdzes* (Sanskrit-Tibetan Dictionary called Beautiful Golden Rosary), Xining 1989, p. 842.



It is a Sanskrit expression *sāccha* translated as “excellent image” (*Tib. dam pa'i gzugs brn-yan*). Its Sanskrit written form corresponds perfectly to its transcription into Tibetan as *sā tstsha*. Although Tucci himself refers to the bilingual Tibetan-Sanskrit title of a text dealing with tsha-tshas, where for the Tibetan tsha-tsha stands enigmatic Indian parallel *sarvaka* and Laufer connects it with Indian *sañcaka* meaning “mould”,<sup>5</sup> the connection with the Sanskrit expression for “perfect image” is far the most probable. The written form of tsha-tsha and other forms seem to derive from *sā tstsha* transcribing Indian *sāccha* meaning “excellent image”. Tsha-tsha is probably a corrupted form much more convenient for pronunciation in Tibetan.

As far as their ancient origins are concerned, we find ourselves in the area of hypotheses. Outer similarity with several images found in Mohenjo Daro deserves some note. In this locality, a form for stamping images of religious figures was excavated together with large number of seals dating back approximately to 2500 BC. And these seals perhaps eventually found their expression in today's tsha-tshas and might be also ancestors of ancient seals from Near East.<sup>6</sup> However, these are just hypotheses with too many empty spaces.

Tsha-tshas seem to be a purely Buddhist kind of art and no Hindu parallels are attested. They probably appeared in the context of worship of stūpas, which were frequented by pilgrims and might have served as a “religious souvenir” for them. Close relationship to the cult of stūpas is according to Tucci confirmed by the fact that the oldest tsha-tshas represent mostly images of stūpas.

The oldest surviving examples date back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century in Dunhuang, Khara-khoto, Eastern India, but also in Afghanistan (Juan Li).<sup>7</sup> At the same time Buddhism found its firm place in Tibet during the rule of the king Thisong Deutsen (755–797). It is also the time of flourishing development of tantric Buddhism in Northern India. The place of tsha-tshas in Tibet is firmly based within the tantric rites. It is attested by the title from one of the earliest catalogues of Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan, which is dated to the early 9<sup>th</sup> century and known as Phangthangma (*'phang thang ma*). The text “Five diverse ways of ritual of imprinting tsha-tsha *lce ti* (?)” is included into the tantra section of the catalogue.<sup>8</sup> It also appears to us that images considerably resembling tsha-tshas appear as unnamed effigies used in several tantric rites. As striking example of that kind we might present a paragraph from the 8<sup>th</sup> century text of Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-tantra, very frequently used for funeral purposes in ancient Tibet. Forming image of stūpas (*caitya* in the text) or deities might help the deceased to attain better rebirth (translation of T. Skorupski):

He should gather together the ashes in accordance with the rite reciting the mantra of this vajra-gathering. He makes into lump the ashes and particles of bones together with scented water and the five products of cow, blessing it one hundred thousand times with the purification mantra. Mixing it with camphor scent and clay, he should make either an image or a *caitya*.

<sup>5</sup> Tucci: *Stupa: art, architectonics and symbolism*, p. 57, B. Laufer: *Loan Words in Tibetan*, T'oung Pao 17, 1916, pp. 404–556, no. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Li: *Images of Earth and Water*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The full title in Tibetan is *Tsha tsha lce ti gdab pa'i cho ga mi mthun lnga* and it includes enigmatic word *lce ti*, where *lce* is “tangle”, but in archaic language means also lit. “heavenly iron” and the given manuscript of the catalogue, copied approximately in 13<sup>th</sup> century says, that several editions of this list included in its tantric section another rites connected with production of tsha-tsha, see Rta rdo, ed., *Dkar chag 'phang thang ma*; *Sgra sbjor bam po gnyis pa* (The Phangthangma list, The Translation of sounds in two volumes), Beijing 2003, p. 64.



Having consecrated it once, twice, thrice, four or five times, or as many as one hundred and eight times by applying mantras and mudrās, he should perform the recitations two hundred thousand times. Then the caitya blazes with light or the image smiles or scent and incense are smelt or light shines or different groups of gods and others reveal themselves or magical events take place. (...) If still it does not come about then he should proceed with method of recitation and meditation. He writes the name (of the deceased) and makes a series of caityas or he makes an effigy. He performs the consecration and offers the homa sacrifice. One is certainly born in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

Such examples from tantric texts raise questions about the connection of tantras and tsha-tshas which are not to be answered easily. Did the cult of tsha-tshas evolve through certain tantric rites? The earliest appearance of them in 8<sup>th</sup> century might point to this. Or was it the other way round and tsha-tshas found their place as effigies in tantric rites from more common usage of them? We have to leave the question open, but as tantra seems to be incorporated into Buddhist practice not always sharply separated from other mahāyāna texts, it might be the case of tsha-tshas as well. However, it is seen even from the Phangthangma catalogue that in Tibet, from the earliest times tsha-tshas were bound to tantric rites. And also the frequent usage of ashes and bones of the deceased points clearly to the tantric practices at the burial grounds.

### Kinds of tsha-tsha and their appearance<sup>10</sup>

We divide tsha-tsha into three general groups here according to their usage and ways of producing them. However, it should be confessed here that the division does not follow any clear-cut indigenous classification, which we simply have not come across. It is thus an attempt to identify three common purposes of tsha-tshas:

- i. Funeral tsha-tsha.
- ii. Offering tsha-tsha.
- iii. Protective tsha-tsha.

Roles of tsha-tshas in these groups are often interwoven. For example, by empowerment of famous master, the offering tsha-tsha becomes protective, funeral tsha-tshas are often offered to nāgas and placed into river etc. As we will see later, ritual texts deal with tsha-tshas in terms of purification, which is the central topic of tantric procedures in general, be it purification of the deceased in case of funeral tsha-tsha, or purification of the person who has produced tsha-tshas. Yet we are aware that for many lay people the purification might not be the main association with tsha-tshas and that other roles as protection, religious "souvenir" from pilgrimage to holy places and others are much more primary for them. Ideas of tantric practices and meanings for the public outside the tantric practices are often intermingled.

i. Funeral tsha-tshas are made from ashes of lay people after their cremation. Their bones are ground to powder and mixed with soil; sometimes hair, nails or teeth are added. These tsha-tshas are kept only in certain specific places, e.g. in caves or in so-called funeral stūpas (i.e. chörten, *mchod rten*). Another type of funeral type are tsha-tshas made from

<sup>9</sup> T. Skorupski, ed. and transl.: *The Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra; Elimination of All Evil Destinies*, Delhi 1983, pp. 85–86.

<sup>10</sup> Following lines are besides scarce notes in literature results of field research conducted by L. Sklenka in 1995–2001 in Central Tibet (U-Tsang) and North-East Tibet (Amdo) and in 2002–2003 years in Ladakh.



clay with ash from burned sheets of Tibetan religious texts used during funeral ceremonies. Sometimes the grains are also added and green shoots appear from these tsha-tshas with the time passing. Nobody touches funeral tsha-tsha and they are left to decompose. Funeral tsha-tshas of high-ranked masters are produced in a similar way, but can also be given to disciples of a deceased teacher and represent then the link between the teacher and his disciple.

ii. Offering tsha-tshas are made from clay and other usual ingredients as grains, scant water and ground precious stones without adding the remnants of deceased bodies. Tibetans can obtain them in monasteries and at their holy places. They might be produced both by monks and laymen. People often buy them for a few coins; monks also sometimes present them for free. These are the most frequent ones and might be used on various occasions, for example as a means of curing illnesses. A very unusual kind of tsha-tshas might be related to this group too. These are "water tsha-tshas", which are produced by continuous pressing the form used for imprinting tsha-tshas (called "seal", *rgya*) to the river surface. Invisible tsha-tshas are thus produced and carried off by the stream.

iii. Protective tsha-tshas are, like the offering ones, made without adding remains of the deceased bodies. Their protective role is given mostly by the empowerment of a highly respected master. They are put into gau (*ga'u*), small boxes enshrining ritual objects, might be kept either hung on the body or placed at the altar. In the case of illness, a very small piece of it is eaten.

The places where tsha-tshas (mostly offering and funeral ones) are placed comprise rocks at the pilgrimage sites, caves, stūpas etc. Hundreds or even thousands of tsha-tshas are often inserted into the main body of stūpas during their construction. Tsha-tshas are also placed inside temples and at home altars. People sometimes bring home tsha-tshas as a kind of remembrance of a holy place they visited during pilgrimage and it represents a spiritual bond with the visited place then; especially in the case when the tsha-tsha is somehow interesting. They usually place their new offering tsha-tsha at the pilgrimage site instead of tsha-tsha which had already been put there by someone else. A protective tsha-tsha is often placed into a gau.

The shapes, sizes and colours of tsha-tshas are quite unified all over Tibet. Their most usual shapes are tablet-like rectangular or square, statue-like shape with round base forming the lotus throne or combination of these. A Buddhist image is in the centre and sometimes an inscription is also present. Very frequent kind of tsha-tsha is of conic shape representing a small stūpa.

The usual size of a tsha-tsha varies from 3 to 7 cm in the diameter of the statue-like ones and this is also the usual size of the rectangular and square tablet-like tsha-tshas. Less frequent are smaller ones (1.5–3 cm) or bigger ones (10–20 cm). The tablets are usually from 0.5 to 1 cm thick and conical stūpas usually reach the height between 3 and 7 cm.

The most common colour of tsha-tshas is the natural colour of clay, i. e. white, light brown, dark brown, reddish or grey. Less frequent colours of tsha-tshas are dark grey or black. Tsha-tshas, both dried in the sun and baked ones, are less frequently gilded or coloured. Coloured tsha-tshas could be sometimes identified with a certain monastery, place or the tsha-tsha producer (for example violet colouring is distinctive for a particular tsha-tsha maker of the Depung monastery in the vicinity of Lhasa).

Inscriptions are most frequent on the tablet-like tsha-tshas with the image of a stūpa. The conic ones representing stūpas (photo 4) and statue-like ones bear inscriptions very rarely.



Images of tsha-tshas correspond to general popularity of particular deities and masters. One of the most frequent image displayed on tsha-tshas is so-called “Three Families of Protectors”,<sup>11</sup> i.e. Avalokiteśvara in the top centre who represents the Buddhist aspect of compassion,<sup>12</sup> Mañjuśrī in the bottom left corner representing the aspect of wisdom<sup>13</sup> and Vajrapāṇi in the bottom right corner representing aspect of power.<sup>14</sup>

Another very popular triad represented on tsha-tshas are so called “Triple Gods of Life-span” (photo 5).<sup>15</sup> These consist from Amitāyus in the top centre of the tsha-tsha,<sup>16</sup> Vijāya in the bottom left corner<sup>17</sup> and White Tārā in the bottom right corner.<sup>18</sup>

Another popular group of images are those of Buddha Śākyamuni (photo 8) depicted in five positions with distinctive hand-gestures (*mudrā*), the most popular being the “gesture of touching the earth” (*bhūmisparśamudrā*). Bodhisattvas, Buddhas, personal deities and protectors of Doctrine are other popular figures. To name some of them, Avolokiteśvara (photo 9) is very popular (both the four-armed form and the one-thousand armed), Green Tārā, White Tārā, Amitābha,<sup>19</sup> Vajrasattva (photo 2),<sup>20</sup> Vajrayoginī,<sup>21</sup> Vaiśravaṇa<sup>22</sup> etc.

Another group of images are religious heroes of Tibet, thus one often finds tsha-tshas with Padmasambhava, legendary Tibetan kings Songtsen Gampo and Thisong Deutsen, master Tsongkhapa (photo 10) and many others.

According to Tucci, the earliest tsha-tshas from the 9<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> century depicted mainly stūpas and were often accompanied by inscriptions, sometimes with the formula of Buddhist credo.<sup>23</sup> First tsha-tshas were probably connected with pilgrimage to stūpas and it seems to be probable that stūpas depicted on tsha-tshas were not images of abstract stūpas, but those of very concrete places, where pilgrims used to travel. With the time passing, images of deities become more frequent, at first together with stūpas beside them (photo 2), leaving inscriptions and images of stūpas behind gradually. The stūpa is nowadays represented by tsha-tshas of a conical shape, often with 108 smaller stūpas, and it almost disappeared from tablet-like tsha-tshas. Tucci’s hypothesis based on palaeographic analysis of inscriptions is plausible. In 2002 and 2003 we found many tablet-like tsha-tshas depicting stūpas solely in the decaying ancient stūpas near old king’s palace at Shey in Ladakh. Such early Tibetan tsha-tshas symbolically represented Buddha’s body as a stūpa.

## Ritual of producing tsha-tshas

As has been already stated, tsha-tshas have their firm place within the domain of the tantric rituals in Tibet. During the ritual more general tantric procedures are employed and these are only modified to fit the given purpose in case of tsha-tsha. Rituals vary in their elaboration. As has been already noted, one of the main preoccupation of the ritual texts is with purification. Let us have a look at one description of a very abbreviated ritual,

<sup>11</sup> Tib. Rigsum Gombo (*rigs gsum mgon po*).

<sup>12</sup> Tib. Canrezig (*spyen ras gzigs*), “All seeing”.

<sup>13</sup> Tib. Jamyang (*‘jam dbyangs*), “Gentle voice”.

<sup>14</sup> Tib. Chagna Dorje (*phyag na rdo rje*), “Vajra in hand”.

<sup>15</sup> Tib. Tshelha Namsum (*tshe lha rnam gsum*).

<sup>16</sup> Tib. Tshpagme (*tshe dpag med*), “Immesurable Life-span”.

<sup>17</sup> Tib. Namgyālma (*rnam rgyal ma*), “All-winning”.

<sup>18</sup> Tib. Dolma Karpo (*sgrol ma dkar po*), “White liberating one”.

<sup>19</sup> Tib. Öpagme (*‘od dpag med*), “Immesurable light”.

<sup>20</sup> Tib. Dorje Sempa (*rdo rje sems dpa’*), “Vajra being”.

<sup>21</sup> Tib. Dorje Naljorma (*rdo rje rnal ‘byor ma*).

<sup>22</sup> Tib. Namthöse (*rnam thos sras*), “Son of Well-hearing one”.

<sup>23</sup> G. Tucci: *Stupa: art, architectonics and symbolism*, pp. 60–61.





Photo 1: Tsha-tsha of Chinese provenience, Buddha with his two disciples, 7<sup>th</sup> century, height 11.3 cm, width 9 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 481.



Photo 2: Ancient tsha-tsha probably from Western Tibet or North-Western India depicting Vajrasattva with stūpa on his left side and brahmī script on his right side, 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century, height 4.5 cm, width 3.6 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 501.

which deals with the purification of the deceased. It sees the ritual of tsha-tsha producing as a particular means of purification of a deceased person:<sup>24</sup>

If someone wishes to perform a very abridged ritual of bones on the behalf of the deceased:

“Think that there is a disk of moon upon the pieces of bones marked by a white syllable *Ā* in its centre. An ambrosia falls down from it and cleanse into purity all misdeed-defilement of intentions. DURGATE and OM VAJRA PRAMARDHANAYA SVĀ HĀ.” These mantras repeat as many times as possible and [pieces of bones] are washed in scented water. Such water is then poured into a water-fall of a large river. If there is no water-fall, it is also possible to keep it with bones and mix it with the soil, from which the tsha-tshas will be stamped. Dry the hair and pieces of bones then and grind them up to powder, mix it with good soil and perform ritual of stamping tsha-tsha. Stamp god’s tsha-tsha [in the shape of statue] or flat images.

If you are unable [to perform such ritual, ask] master to enter meditation on emptiness. Then purify [by means of emptiness] all the bones and grind them into powder on the stone.

<sup>24</sup> Sā tsta ‘debs pa’i chog las rim bzhugs so, fol. 12b–13b (translation of D. Berounský) : yang tshe ‘das kyi don du rus chog byed tshul shin tu bsdus pa la mos na/ rus bu’i steng tu zla ba’i dkyil ‘khor gyi dbusu ā dkar pos mtshan pa/ de las bdud rtsi’i rgyun babs pas dmigs yul gyi sdig sgrib thams cad spyangs shing dag par bsam la/ durga te dang/ om bazra pra mardha na ya swā hā/ zhes ci mang bzlas zhing dri bzang gi chu la krus/ de ltar bskrus pa’i chu babs chu chen por dor/ ‘bab chu ma byung na rus pa dang sbyar nas sā tsta ‘debs cho ga lha sā tsta’am sku thang gdab par bya zhing/ de ltar ma nus slob dpon stong nyid ting nge ‘dzin rdo/ de rjes rus pa rnam sbyang ba/ zhib mo’i rdo la btag nas ni/ shin tu rgya che’i chu bo la/ mchod par byas te bskur bar bya/ yang na sa ‘dzin chen po ni/ mthon po’i rtse la ‘dzegs nasu (gnas su)/ shin tu shugs drag mthon pa yi/ rlung la di ni bskur bar bya/ zhes gsungs pa ltar chu bo chen po la bskur pa’am/ ri mthon po’i rtse nas rlung la bskur bar bya’o/ zhes rang bzhin gyi skra dang so dang sen mo dang tshes ‘das kyi rus pa sogs la sbyang ba bya te/.





Photo 3: A Tsha-tsha depicting Indian siddha Saraha standing at the beginning of several tantric lineages in Tibet, Tibet, 19<sup>th</sup> century, height 5.4 cm, width 4.4 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 280.



Photo 4: Conical tsha-tsha representing stūpa with 1008 Buddhas, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet, height 6.7 cm, base: 8.5 x 8.3 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 290.



Photo 5: Tsha-tsha depicting so-called "Triple Gods of Life-span", 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet, height 6 cm, width 4.6 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 378.



Photo 6: Tsha-tsha with White Mahākāla (*Mgon dkar*), 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mongolia or Eastern Tibet, height 10.6 cm, width 9 cm, acquisition number NpM A23





Photo 7: The form and tsha-tsha with Yama, The Lord of Death, and his consort Camundi, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mongolia or Tibet, height 11.8, width 8 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 491.



Photo 8: Buddha with "earth touching gesture" (bhūmisparśamudrā) and his two disciples Maudgalyāyana and Śāriputra, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet, height 7.3 cm, width 6.8 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 483.



Photo 9: Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, 19<sup>th</sup> century, Tibet, height 7.9 cm, width 6.2 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 490.





Photo 10a: Painted rectangular tsha-tsha inserted in a metal box. Main figure up the center is master Tsongkhapa (*Tsong kha pa*, 1357–1419) with his two main disciples (“sons”) to the right and left: Khädubje (*Mkhas grub dge legs dpal bzang po*, 1385–1438) and Gyeltshab Darma Rinchen (*Rgyal tshab dar ma rin chen*, 1364–1432). Below them between two stūpas Karma-Yama (*Las kyi gshin rje*), the Lord of Death judging the deeds is depicted. 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mongolia or Tibet, height 7.2cm, width 6.4 cm, acquisition number NpM A23 247.



Photo 10b: Back side of the previous tsha-tsha with stūpa and mantras (NpM A23 247). First mantra is OM VAJRA VIDYĀ SVĀ HĀ (OM “vajra-wisdom” SVĀ HĀ). Then follows so-called “mantra purifying defilement of deeds” (*las sgrib sbyang ba'i sngags*): NA MAḤ SARVA TATHĀGATA HRIDĀYA. ANUGATE. OM KURUMGINI SVĀ HĀ The last mantra is “mantra of the Tsongkhapa’s name”, with his personal name Lozang Dagpa (*blo bzang grags pa*) translated into sanskrit as Sumatikīrti: OM ĀḤ GURU VAJRADHARA SUMATIKĪRTI SIDDHI HŪM HŪM.



"To a very large river,  
make an offering and send it,  
also to the great holder of soil,  
at the high place of peak where one climbs,  
send it in the direction,  
of very strong wind."

According to what was said, it should be sent by a large river and by wind at the high peak of a mountain. And in this way hair, teeth, nails, bones and other parts of the deceased are naturally purified.

Another brief text deals with the tantric ritual accompanying the production of tsha-tshas in the shape of stūpas without any connection with deceased person. The symbolism of stūpa comes forth in this text, but the procedure described might be applied with certain modifications also to the funeral tsha-tshas. It contains all the phases of producing tsha-tshas and a number of mantras, which are hardly translatable. However it is clear that the moulds are gradually granted the "seed of vajra-sphere" (vajradhātugarbha), then the "seed of dharma-sphere" (dharmadhātugarbha), the form for pressing represents wisdom and the mould itself method, it is stroken by the "vajra-hammer" (vajramungara) and eventually Buddhas are requested to place themselves into the tsha-tshas (consecration). Passages within quotation marks are to be pronounced, the rest is the commentary.<sup>25</sup>

In Dpung bzang<sup>26</sup> it is stated: "For the purification of misdeeds always stamp the stūpa of Sugata,<sup>27</sup> the essence of good results of previous deeds." As it is said, if those who use to lay large

<sup>25</sup> Mkhyen rtse dbang po: *Sā tsta gda pa* (Stamping tsha-tshas). In: Nor brang o rgyan, ed., *Rnying ma pa'i zhal 'don phyogs bsgrigs* (Collection of chanting texts of Nyingma tradition), Lhasa 1997, pp. 400–402 (translation of D. Berounský): dpung bzang gis zhus pa las/ bde gshegs mchod rten rten 'brel snying po can/ sdig pa sbyong phyir rtang tu gdab par bya/ zhes gsung pa'i phyir ro// gang dag dkyil 'khor chen po bkod pa'i rjes su 'brangs nas sa tsta gda pa la sogs pa'i cho ga gzhung rnam dag rnam las byung ba ltar bya bar 'dod na de ni 'di yin te/ gtsang zhing dri zhim po'i sa dang chu las byung ba'i 'jim pa la mgon par phyogs te// om ā bighānta kri ta hūm phaṭ kyis bsang/ swabhā was sbyang/ stong par gyur/ stong pa'i ngang las pam las padma a las zla ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi steng du bhrūm las byung ba'i 'jim pa rnam/ om ratna ā hūm/ rin po che'i phung po chen por gyur/ rang gi thug ka'i hūm las 'od 'phros pas de bzhin gshegs pa rnam par snang mdzad/ 'od kyi rgyal po'i thugs kar phog/ thugs rgyud bskul/ smin mtshams kyi mdzod spu nas 'od zer 'phros/ 'jim pa la phog pas 'jim pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i ye shes lnga'i rang bzhin du gyur/ lag pa gnyis kyi mthe'u chung gis mthe bong mnan nas sor mo gzhan gsum brkyangs pas 'jin pa la reg la/ om na mo bha ga wa te bai ro ca na prabhā rā dzā ya ta thā ga tā ya/ arha te samyaksam buddhā ya// ta dya thā/ om sūkṣem sūkṣem/ sa me sa ma ye/ shānte dānte/ a sa mā ro be/ a na lambhe/ ta rambhe/ ya sho wa ti/ mahā te dzo/ ni rā kū le ni ra wa ne/ sarba buddha a dhi śthi te swā hā/ zhes nyi shu rtsa gcig brjod pas 'jim pa de'i rdul phra rab ji snyed pa de snyed kji mchod rten byas par gyur ro// gzhan yang phan yon mang ngo// 'jim pa de bzhin gshegs pa'i thugs gnyis su med pa'i ye shes kyi rang bzhin du gyur/ na massa manta buddhā nam/ om badzra mu ye śe swā hā zhes 'jim pa bcad de gsungs dang/ rin po che dang/ 'bru dang/ sman dang/ dri dang/ byin rlabs kyi rdzas rnam snying por gzhug cing/ om badzra uddha wā ya swā hā/ 'bi 'bi bya ba'i sngags so/ om a pra ti śtha ta badzrā ya swā hā zhes pas bzhag ste/ byang chub kyi sems kyis yongs su bsgos par bsams la/ om a ra dze bi ra dze swā hā zhes 'bru mar gyis byugs nas/ om badzra dhātu garbhe swā hā zhes 'bi 'bi blangs la/ thabs dang shes rab dbyer med du gyur par mos te/ om dharmā dhā tu garbhe swā hā zhes rgyar btsud nas/ tho bas brdung zhing om badra mungga ra ā koṭṭa ya hūm phaṭ swā hā/ chos rnam thams cad rgyu las byung/ de rgyu de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs/ rgyu la 'gog pa gang yin pa/ dge sbyong chen pos 'di skad gsungs/ zhes brjod de 'dis kyang rab gnas su gyur ro/ rgyu dang 'bras bu'i tshogs thams cad yongs su rdzogs par bsams la/ om dharmā ra te swā hā zhes rgya nas phyungs te chos kyi sku'i bdag nyid du mos pas/ om su pra tiśtha badzra ya swā hā zhes bzhugs su gsol/ om sarba ta thā ga ta ma ni sha ta dipte dzwa la dzwa la dharmā dhā tu garbhe swā hā zhes rab tu gnas pa/ om a kā shādhā tu garbhi swā hā zhes pas bzod par gsol te thams cad la de bzhin du bya'o// mchod rten gdab pa'i cho ga'o//.

<sup>26</sup> Dpung bzang kyis zhus pa'i rgyud le'u bcu gcig pa, Derge Kangyur 805.

<sup>27</sup> General name for eight kinds of stūpas.

<sup>28</sup> It means those, who follow the tantric path.



maṇḍala<sup>28</sup> wish to perform the ritual of stamping tsha-tshas and others in accordance with pure fundamental scriptures, the following is for them.

Turn towards the real mud which came from water and clean soil of pleasant odour: “OM Ā VIGHĀNTAKRITA HŪM PHAT” This is purification. “SVABHĀVA [ŚUDDHA SARVA DHARMĀ SVABHĀVA ŚUDDHO HAM].” This is cleansing [into emptiness]. “It changes into emptiness. From the sphere of emptiness [appears the syllable] PAM, [from it appears] a lotus [with the syllable] Ā, from it [appears] a disc of moon and upon it is the syllable BHRŪM. From it comes the mud. OM RATNA Ā HŪM. It changes into the heap of precious stones. From the syllable HŪM in my own heart light emanates. The light reaches the heart of Vairocana. He is called to the continuum of mind. From the hair between the eye-brows beams of light emanate. They reach the mud and the mud changes into the nature of five wisdoms of Buddhas.” Press the thumbs of both hands with little fingers and touch the mud with the rest of three stretched fingers: “OM NAMO BHAGAVATE VAIROCANA PRABHĀRĀJĀYA TATHĀGATĀYA ARHATE SAMYAKSAMBUDDHĀYA TADYATHĀ OM SŪKŚME SŪKŚME SAMESAMAYE SHĀNTE DĀNTE ASAMĀROVE ANALAMBHE TARAMBHE YASHOVATI MAHĀTEJO NIRĀKŪLENIRAVANE SARVA BUDDHA ADHIŚTHĀNA ADHIŚTHITE SVĀ HĀ.” Pronounce it twenty one times and by this all the small particles of the mud which could be only found change into the stūpas. But there are also many other benefits. “The mud changes into the nature of wisdom inseparable from the mind of Tathāgata. NAMASSAMANTABUDDHĀNĀM OM VAJRĀYUṢE SVĀ HĀ.” This is the dhāraṇī of cutting the mud. Insert to their hearts materials of blessing: precious stones, grains, medicines, perfumes. “OM VAJRA UDDHAVĀYA SVĀ HĀ.” This is the mantra of forming the round shape. “OM APRATIŚTHATA VAJRAYA SVĀ HĀ.” This is the mantra of twirling them to the top. Then think that all are fully smeared by the mind of awaking (bodhicitta): “OM ARAJE VIRAJE SVĀ HĀ.” Pronouncing this, smear them with clarified butter with grains. “OM VAJRA DHĀTU GARBHE SVĀ HĀ.” Saying this, take the round mould and imagine firmly that they change into the inseparable method and wisdom: “OM DHARMA DHĀTU GARBHE SVĀ HĀ.” Saying this, insert them to the form a when you strike them with a hammer [pronounce]: “OM VAJRA MUNGARA AKOṬṬAYA HŪM PHAT SVĀ HĀ. All phenomena appear from their source. That source was preached by Tathāgata. This great ascetic preached how to stop the source.” By pronouncing it they also change into place of excellence (i.e. consecration). Think that all the sources and their fruits came fully to perfection: “OM DHARMĀRATE SVĀ HĀ.” With this, [tsha-tsha] comes out from the form of the seal. Concentrate yourself firmly on the body of dharma itself: “OM SUPRATIŚTHA VAJRAYA SVĀ HĀ.” This is welcoming. “OM SARVA TATHĀGATA MANISHATADĪPTE JVALA JVALA DHARMĀDHĀTUGARBHE SVĀ HĀ.” This is consecration (i.e. placing seeds of body of dharma into them). “OM AKĀSHĀDHĀTU GARBHI SVĀ HĀ.” This is a request for forbearance and this is to be done in a similar way for each of them. This was the ritual for stamping stūpas.

Such is the brief ritual text of stamping tsha-tshas. While the passages dealing with actual forming tsha-tshas are in other texts rather similar and contain only different mantras, the main difference in elaboration comes with the conclusion of the text and concerns the process of consecration (pratiśthā, *rab gnas*). Here only very simple consecration is provided. It consists of placing the “seed of dharma-sphere” representing the Buddha into the tsha-tshas and of the request for forbearance. In other ritual texts this part is the most elaborated one and the consecration ritual is rather complicated. Such powerful consecration strengthens the protective power of tsha-tshas. After a number of ritual procedures, the main part of consecration comes with the merging of so-called “wisdom being” (*yeshe pa*) with “pledge being” (*dam tshig pa*). These are very hard to be simply explained,

<sup>29</sup> For more details see Y. Bentor: *Consecration of Images and Stūpas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism*, Leiden 1996.



but “pledge being” is usually the form of Buddha-deity represented by an object to be consecrated, “wisdom being” is another aspect of the same and it is often said to be identical with “body of dharma”. The main core of the ritual is inviting “wisdom being” into the tsha-tsha to dwell there as long “as saṃsāra lasts”. Then the other rituals of “opening eyes” of the tsha-tsha often follow.<sup>29</sup>

Tsha-tshas are then, typically for the Tibetan cultural space, filled to the brim with many meanings. For part of lay people these might be strongly marked by the experience of pilgrimage, connection with the natural world and deceased close persons, while tantric specialist fill tsha-tshas with complicated meanings of undivided sphere of dharma, unity of method and wisdom and many others. Such seemingly priceless pieces of clay, which are not difficult to produce had won popularity all across the Tibetan society. Perfectly shaped statues from precious materials and other pieces of art are valued as well, but in another way. Tsha-tshas are much closer to the natural environment. They hide in themselves a little different kind of values.

### Forman's collection of tsha-tshas

Some more than 300 pieces of tsha-tshas are to be found within the Forman's collection. They were kindly given to the Náprstek Museum by L. Formanová in 1993 and none of them was published. Far most of them are of Tibetan or Mongolian provenience. Tibetan or Mongolian tsha-tshas are often hardly datable. If they bear some inscription, it is usually only a mantra and they do not specify the donor or the time of production, as it is the case with Chinese clay images. Far the largest group of them seems to be from 19<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. But there are also some exceptions. It is also the case of very interesting tsha-tsha of Vajrasattva and stūpa (photo 2). The style of depiction is similar to the style to be found in oldest monasteries of Ladakh. The place of their origin might be then in Western Tibet, Nepal or North-Western India and the approximate time of production is 11<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> century.

Most of the Tibetan tsha-tshas are offering and protective ones. The funeral ones are usually of dark colours (ashes of the deceased) and these are missing inside the Forman's collection. The collection comprises great variety of shapes, sizes of tsha-tshas and deities depicted. The limited selection of the tsha-tshas on plates tries to follow such variety.

Forman's collection comprises also a small group of images of Chinese provenience.<sup>30</sup> They bear inscriptions revealing that they date to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. First of them (NpM A23 480, height 14.8 cm, width 12.8 cm) depicts Buddha on the lotus throne, whose portrait is given by sharp contours. An inscription on its back side says: “In the fourth year of Yong-ding period (i.e. 557–559) of the Great Chen, Mrs. Wu together with all members of He family respectfully (ordered to) make and donated (?) the image to the First cave (Da Chen Yong-ding si nian Wu shi bing tong He jia jūan shu ren deng jing zao /broken part/ xiang yi kang gong yang).

Another item of the group of images from China depicts Mañjuśrī (NpM A23 477, height 11.6 cm) and its back side bears the following inscription: “Produced in Zhang-guan period of Great Tang (i.e. 627–649). With the same inscription is another clay image of Bodhisattva (NpM A23 478, height 10.4 cm) and also another Bodhisattva image from Tang Dynasty forms this group of Chinese images (NpM A479). On its backside a wrathful Bodhisattva is depicted and thousand Buddha's motif appears below the lotus throne. The

<sup>30</sup> An information on this part of collection from China was kindly supplied by Zlata Černá.



last of the Chinese images is that of Buddha with his two disciples (photo 1, NpM A23 481, height 11.3 cm, width 9 cm) The back side bears the following inscription: At the time of Tang Dynasty an a wonderful image of deity was made in clay by an outstanding work-room (Da Tang shan yie ni yan de zhen ru miao se shen).

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