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Portraits as Relic:  
A Set of Nineteenth-Century Tibetan Lineage Paintings of the Dalai Lamas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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## Abstract

### PORTRAITS AS RELIC: A SET OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY PORTRAITS OF THE DALAI LAMAS

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This thesis presents a close iconographic and contextual study of a set of seven Tibetan *thangka* paintings depicting portraits of the First through the Ninth Dalai Lamas, currently in a private collection and dated to the nineteenth-century. Through this case study, I propose to situate the genre of Dalai Lama portraits within the larger context of Tibetan Buddhist practice by considering their role and function in merit-making activities. I propose that as visual reminders of the Dalai Lamas, these portraits can be considered a type of “relic” that is foundational to devotional practices in Buddhism. Specifically, this thesis will investigate portraits of Dalai Lamas within the framework of Buddhist relic traditions. As a secondary focus, the thesis will examine the artistic conventions through which the figures are rendered present, problematizing the notion of “portrait-likeness.”

## Introduction

In July 2011, a portrait of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was enthroned at the Lithang Gonchen monastery in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (T.A.R), China, during a ten-day Buddhist prayer festival of Jang Gonchoe Chenmo. More than five thousand people attended the ceremony, in order to view the life-sized photographic portrait of the Dalai Lama and make offerings of traditional Tibetan scarves. Atruk Tseten, a member of the Tibetan government-in-exile's parliament, remarked: "Many people told me that for the first time in their lives they felt as if they really could see His Holiness the Dalai Lama in person and seek his blessings."<sup>1</sup> Since the Chinese take-over of Tibet in 1959, images of the Dalai Lama have been strictly banned in T.A.R, because of the power ascribed to them by Tibetan Buddhists as vivified representations imbued with the presence of the sacred figure.

This contemporary event highlights several concepts significant to images in the Tibetan Buddhist context. First, images of Dalai Lamas are objects of power and the focus of veneration. The practitioners receive blessings through the act of sacred viewing (Skt. *darsan*) and making offerings to the image. Second, the portraits of the Dalai Lamas, whether they are paintings, sculptures, or photographs, are conceived of as the embodied presence of the subject, rather than an inanimate representation of the figure. Finally, the portrait selected for the enthronement was a photographic image of the Dalai Lama, and thus can be considered a "portrait-likeness." This thesis will address these same concepts in relationship to another type of Dalai Lama portraits,

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<sup>1</sup> Sherab Woeser, "Thousands Enthroned the Dalai Lama's Portrait in Tibet," *Phayul.com*, July 28, 2011. accessed March 25, 2012, <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=29809&t=1>.

specifically lineage sets. Although the images discussed in this thesis are not rendered with this degree of photographic realism, they can still be considered portraits because there is a deliberate attempt to visually reference the individual identity of a historical figure. It is this relationship between the representation and its human subject which distinguishes these portraits from generic, idealized images of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Tibetan Buddhist artistic conventions of religious portraiture will be a focus of this study.

### Objectives

The tradition of the reincarnate Dalai Lamas (“Great Ocean of Bliss”), instituted in the sixteenth-century, is one of the most important practices in Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama, currently in his fourteenth incarnation, is considered to be a human manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion, and is the spiritual and temporal authority of Tibet. Portraits of the Dalai Lamas comprise a significant genre of Tibetan Buddhist art, because of their ability to render the sacred figure present through a visual representation of his physical form. The commissioning and viewing of these portraits are considered meritorious acts, which facilitate a practitioner’s path to enlightenment. Often, the Dalai Lama portraits were commissioned as sets of paintings depicting the lamas’ spiritual lineage, rather than as isolated representations of a single figure. The tradition of Dalai Lama lineage sets began in the seventeenth century, during the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Since then, Dalai Lama lineage sets have become increasingly commonplace, yet few exist today in their entirety.

This thesis will present a close iconographic and contextual study of a set of seven nineteenth-century Tibetan *thangka* paintings depicting portraits of the First through the Ninth

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<sup>2</sup> “Fundamental to portraits as a distinct genre in the vast repertoire of artistic representation in the necessity of expressing this intended relationship between the portrait image and the human original.” Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7.

Dalai Lamas, (Fig. I.1-I.7). This thesis will examine the artistic conventions through which the figures are rendered present, problematizing the notion of “portrait-likeness.” In this set of seven paintings, the Dalai Lama figures are represented with varying degrees of idealization and realism. Several of the Dalai Lamas are portrayed as idealized portrait-types identifiable by their specific iconography and inscription labels, rather than by a naturalistic rendering of individualized physical characteristics, as is often the case in Tibetan portraiture. In contrast, other figures are depicted with a great degree of realism, which more closely resembles Western approaches to portraiture that emphasize a close likeness between the representation and its subject. The diverse modes of representation evident in the Dalai Lama figures in the seven-painting set exemplify the range of artist conventions through which a subject may be rendered present in Tibetan religious portraiture. As a secondary focus, the thesis will situate the genre of Dalai Lama portraits within the larger context of Tibetan Buddhist practice by considering their role and function in merit-making activities. I propose that as visual reminders of the Dalai Lamas, these portraits become a category of relic that is foundational to devotional practices in Buddhism.

This set is important for three reasons. First, it is one of a few complete extant sets. Few complete Dalai Lama lineage sets have survived intact. Secondly, this set is stylistically, iconographically, and compositionally distinct from the corpus of extant Dalai Lama lineage paintings. Thus, it provides an opportunity to examine the range of visual conventions by which the figures are represented and examine the underlying theoretical notions of portrait-likeness, in order to produce a more nuanced understanding of Dalai Lama portraits in lineage sets. A third key feature of this set is the presence of handprints and official seals on the back of each painting, indicating that they were ritually consecrated (fig. I.8-I.14). In Tibetan texts,

consecrated images are described as equivalent to the living presence of the sacred figure, and thus, can bestow merit and facilitate the spiritual accomplishments of devotees. Therefore, in the context of Tibetan Buddhism, these portraits are not simply representations of the Dalai Lamas. They are their embodied presence. In addition, it is extremely rare to find official seals on the back of paintings, and thus is evidence that the Ninth Dalai Lama authorized the set. Furthermore, the placement of handprints on the backs of *thangkas* is uncommon in Tibetan painting and suggests a close relationship between the patron and the person performing the consecration, which in this case was the Ninth Dalai Lama. The handprints are a type of relic that is highly venerated in Buddhist practice. In Buddhism, there are three categories of relics: *śarira dhātu* or bodily relics, *paribhogika dhātu*, or contact relics, and *uddeśika dhātu*, or exemplar relics, which are defined as a reference to, or reminder of, the sacred individual. The handprints are an example of contact relics, whereas the portraits themselves may be considered exemplar relics, because they visually reference the sacred figure. A Buddhist practitioner accrues merit through the act of sacred viewing (Skt. *darśan*) and touching these relics, since these objects are conceived of as the manifest presence of a sacred figure. In Buddhism, it is believed that the accumulation of merit can lead to a better rebirth in the next life, thus facilitating a practitioner's attainment of enlightenment.

To date, only one essay has been published on the set, since it only became known in the West in 2005. The essay, entitled "The Ninth Dalai Lama's Set of Seven Lineage *Thangkas*" by Per K. Sørensen, is part of a larger study on the Dalai Lamas, in an exhibition catalogue *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, edited by Martin Brauen, which accompanied the exhibition *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas: Tibetan Reincarnations of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, held at the Ethnographic Museum at the University of Zürich in 2005. Sørensen focuses his study on the

identification of the figures and their historical significance. This study expands on Sørensen's preliminary research, which Sørensen himself designates preliminary. The present focus on the significance of the handprints to the function of portraits as objects of veneration will yield a more comprehensive understanding of portrait sets of the Dalai Lama lineage.

### **Methodology**

The primary methodology of this study is an object-based approach. I conducted a close visual analysis of the painting set, based on archival materials, as well as field research in Nepal. To provide a comparative visual repertoire of Tibetan portraiture, I collected images of 103 Dalai Lama portraits identifiable as part of a lineage set, from published sources, archival material, the *Himalayan Art Resources* visual database, and Christie's and Sotheby's auction catalogues. In addition, I gathered images of over 25 individual Dalai Lama sculptures, paintings, and *appliqué* portraits for the comparative analysis. Since only a few portrait sets exist in their entirety and many of the dispersed sets are located in museums and private collections internationally, I assembled a visual database using Microsoft Excel of these 128 examples of Dalai Lama portraits from published and archival photographs. I classified the collected materials according to date, individual portrait-types, number of surviving works in the set, evidence of consecration, and the presence or absence of handprints.

From my close visual analysis of this comparative material, I was able to glean the range of visual conventions Tibetan artists used in Dalai Lama portraits. This allowed me to contextualize the set of seven *thangka* paintings within the larger framework of Dalai Lama lineage sets, in order to determine the standard conventions and unique aspects of the nineteenth-century set. This formal art historical approach was supplemented by the contextual analyses of

ritual practices, gleaned through Buddhist textual sources and philosophical ideas. Lastly, I conducted field research in Nepal and interviewed the original owner of the *thangkas*, in order to gain a better understanding of the provenance and circumstances of the set's commission.

### **Portraiture in Tibetan Painting**

Just as the tradition of reincarnate lamas is unique to Tibetan Buddhism, portraits of teachers are a predominantly Tibetan form of Buddhist art. There is a tendency among scholars to focus on early religious portraiture prior to the fifteenth-century and the inception of the institution of the Dalai Lamas, and these studies emphasize the notion of likeness. This discourse on the role of likeness in images of Buddhist teachers is, to a degree, embedded within the framework of modern Western conceptions of portraiture, which privilege a high degree of resemblance between the subject and the representation of that subject. The term “likeness” in scholarship on Tibetan Buddhist painting is generally defined as individualized realism, which is antithetical to idealization. Through this study, I hope to show that this notion of “portrait-likeness” must include a more nuanced definition in which likeness can also embody the idea of an ideal within the context of Buddhist art.

In this thesis, the term “idealized” refers specifically to the treatment of the subject's facial features. Idealized images of the Dalai Lamas adhere to iconometric guidelines, similar to that of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas* that dictate the shape and proportions of the facial features, thus reinforcing their enlightened status. In addition, the figure's identity as an enlightened being and as a historical figure may be conveyed through iconographic attributes, as demonstrated in Chapter One. Thus, I contend that a portrait does not have to be a likeness to the actual individual for it to be recognizable as a portrait.



There is a long history of portraiture in Tibet. The majority of portraits prior to the tenth-century depicted royal subjects, such as the seventh-century sculptures of King Songtsen Gampo and his two wives, Bhrikuti and Wencheng in the Potala Palace in Lhasa (fig. I.15). The treatment of the facial features in these sculptures combine both idealized and individualized aspects. The eyes and eyebrows are stylized. Songtsen Gampo's ears are elongated, which is an iconographic convention commonly found in Buddha images to symbolize the figure's renunciation of the material world. However, the modeling of the faces, as well as the shape of their noses and mouth, indicates a deliberate attempt to represent the figure as individuals. Thus, even in early portraits, historical subjects were depicted with both idealized and individualized features.

As Buddhism became increasingly well-established in Tibet after the seventh-century, highly venerated teachers acquired more prominent positions in society. Buddhist teachers and their spiritual lineages gradually replaced *tsempo*s, divine Tibetan kings believed to have supernatural powers, as the figures of authority. However, this tradition of a single Tibetan ruler embodying both the spiritual and political authority was reinstated when the Fifth Dalai Lama assumed control of Tibet in the seventeenth century. Concurrently, Buddhist teachers gradually replaced royalty as the predominant subjects of portraits in sculpture and painting. The commissioning of these portraits, which depict specific historical figures, became a widespread practice by the fourteenth-century. Subsequently, representations of teachers comprise a significant genre of Tibetan Buddhist art, to which the Dalai Lama lineage sets belong.

## Portraits of Buddhist Teachers

The tension between an emphasis on likeness in the literature and the idealization of the figure's form in representations is the basis of typical approaches to Tibetan portraiture.

Portraiture as a genre in Tibetan Buddhist art has only recently received significant scholarly attention, most recently from Jane Casey Singer, David Jackson, and Heather Stoddard. Their research has focused primarily on the concept of likeness and whether portraits were based on the actual physical appearance of the subject or if they are idealized types.

The earliest scholar writing about Tibetan portraiture in the 1940s was Giuseppe Tucci, whose work sets the foundation for subsequent scholars. In *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949), Tucci states that:

The typical features of each single master have early been established by artistic schools and handed down most faithfully: hence, while the schematic drawing and the hieratic fixity of these figures are such that they cannot be spoken of as portraits, undoubtedly the most representative figures of Tibet's religious history have become unalterable types, and if others suggestions, like votive inscriptions, were lacking, it would not be difficult to recognize them. Tsongk'apa, the fifth Dalai Lama, the Panc'en dPal ldan ye šes, in all the tankas belonging to the most different schools, have so well-defined an individuality, that it is impossible not to recognize them: these types nearly always go back to portraits (*sku abag*) made in the times of the personages themselves, which have later become models for successive artists...<sup>3</sup>

Two aspects of Tucci's approach to portraiture are significant here. First, representational images of teachers are only considered portraits if they are realistic and not "schematic" or "hieratic."

This definition emphasizes a dichotomy between true portraits and idealized representations.

Second, he contends that representations of significant teachers, such as the Fifth Dalai Lama, are more likely based on images made during that person's life. The underlying assumption of this argument is that images made during the subject's life are more individualized, and thus realistic.

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<sup>3</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949; repr., Bangkok: SDI Publications, 1999), 1:307.

This dichotomy between idealization and likeness is further taken up in recent scholarship. The most significant contributions to the discourse have been the work of Jane Casey Singer, David Jackson and Heather Stoddard. In contrast to Tucci, who only uses portrait in reference to realistic images, Singer broadly applies the term to representational images of historical figures, regardless of whether the image is conventionalized.<sup>4</sup> However, her approach is still informed by Tucci's dual categorization, in which a realistic treatment of the figure is the distinguishing factor between likeness and idealization. She contends that "accurate physiognomic likeness was not crucial to Tibetan portraiture,"<sup>5</sup> despite acknowledging that some images may depict certain aspects of the subject's physical appearance. She considers Tibetan portraits to be idealized representations, even if they depict certain physical attributes, because of the manner in which they are represented. Thus, it is not what *characteristics* of the subject are represented, but rather, the *style* in which they are rendered that determines whether an image is a likeness or an idealized type. According to Singer, these two categories are mutually exclusive.

For example, she examines a painting of two Tibetan teachers, dated to the thirteenth-century, in the collection of the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. I.16). Although the figures' bodies are similar in size and shape, there are significant differences in their facial features. The figure on the left is depicted with a darker skin color (fig. I.17). His jaw and chin are more rounded than the figure on the right and he is shown with distinctive facial hair. The nose of the figure on the right is straight, whereas the nose of the figure on the left has a distinctive curve. The figure on the left is depicted with slightly wider eyes and arched eyebrows (fig. I.18). The

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Casey Singer, "Early Portrait Painting in Tibet," in *Function and Meaning in Buddhist Art: proceedings of a seminar held at Leiden University, 21-24 October 1991*, eds. K.R. van Kooij and H. van der Veere (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 81-99.

<sup>5</sup> Singer, "Early Portrait Painting," 83.

differences are subtle, yet they indicate a clear attempt to represent the subjects as individuals, rather than types. Singer notes variations in the facial features, but contends that these representations become generic physiognomic types to indicate historical portraiture, and such individualized features are not necessarily indicative of the subjects' actual physical appearance.

Singer expands on Tucci's discussion of conventionalized portraiture by examining possible motivations for what she identifies as a tendency towards idealization. Singer states that "it seems the most crucial factor in religious portraiture was to present the subject as an accomplished Buddhist."<sup>6</sup> She suggests that, given the privileged status of teachers in Tibetan Buddhism, subjects were idealized in order to visually equate them with the Buddha, who himself was a historical figure. Thus, the spiritual accomplishments of the Tibetan teachers were conveyed through artistic conventions. Tibetan artists accomplished this by appropriating established iconographic conventions from Indian images of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, such as elongated earlobes, which symbolize the figure's renunciation of material possessions.

Recent scholarship by Heather Stoddard and David Jackson moves away from this dichotomous categorization of likeness and idealization by nuancing the possible categories of portraiture. Heather Stoddard presents the most comprehensive survey of Tibetan portraiture to date.<sup>7</sup> She examines the historical development of portraiture, highlighting various genres, some of which she considers likenesses and some idealized types. Stoddard identifies four categories of portraiture, noting that they are not mutually exclusive and that images may include aspects of more than one. For the purposes of this thesis, these categories provide the most useful

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<sup>6</sup> Singer, "Early Portrait Painting," 85

<sup>7</sup> Heather Stoddard, "Fourteen Centuries of Tibetan Portraiture," in *Portraits of the Masters: Bronze Sculptures of the Tibetan Buddhist Lineages*, ed. Donald Dinwiddie, 16-61 (Chicago: Serindia, 2003).

framework for analyzing Dalai Lama portraits in the nineteenth-century set. The four categories are:

1. The idealized ‘divine’ portrait which represents the figure with a “human face and godlike life-size body,” created during the life or shortly after the death of a historic person.<sup>8</sup>

2. The *ngadrama* image, which is a realistic depiction of a teacher, executed during his or her lifetime (fig. I.19).

3. The iconic ‘portrait’ based on a fixed set of characteristics associated with a specific master. This category may include: images based on a ‘live’ portrait, but which have become codified over time; ‘portraits’ created long after the life of a teacher, and possibly based on literary accounts of the person; the “highly individualized ‘likeness’, used to represent mythical or semi-mythical figures (fig. I.20).

4. The ‘modern style’ portrait which uses photo images for the face and a stylized treatment of the body and robes<sup>9</sup> (fig. I.21).

David Jackson further refines Stoddard’s fourfold categorization of portrait in *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (2007), citing five ways Tibetan artists may have approached portraiture based on time. These include: realistic representations made *during* the subject’s life; idealized depictions of the subject made *shortly after* their death; portraits created *long after* the subject’s death and based on oral or literary descriptions; images created *long after* the subject’s death, which are not based on specific models or descriptions and conform to standard artist conventions of lama portraits; and images created *long after* the

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<sup>8</sup> Stoddard, “Fourteen Centuries,” 59-60. Stoddard does not provide a specific example of this category of portraiture and it is unclear what type of image she is referring to in this case. I have included examples of the next three categories.

<sup>9</sup> Stoddard, “Fourteen Centuries,” 59-60.

subject's death which appropriate earlier artistic models, produced according to the previous four approaches. Jackson, like Stoddard, acknowledges that these categories are not mutually exclusive. His classification based on the temporal relationship between the creation of an image and the life of its subject is relevant to the commissioning of the seven-painting set and the discussion of relics.

Jackson devotes a chapter in his most recent publication, *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet* (2011), to human iconographic types in Tibetan painting. He examines iconographic elements which visually convey information about the figure's identity, highlighting those which indicate gender, level of monastic ordination, ethnic origins, level of scholarly attainment, ascetic practices and royalty. Typically the only aspect of a portrait that deviates from the standard typologies is a figure's facial features and hair. Although Jackson only discusses portraits dating prior to the fifteenth-century in this publication, many of the visual conventions he cites here are also applicable to later portraits, as in my discussion of the seven-painting set.

Stoddard and Jackson present a more nuanced understanding of portraiture, suggesting a wider range of possible categories, which include idealized types with no connection to the actual figure, idealized types visually connected to the figure through specific iconographic attributes, or more "real" portrait-like images based on the person's physical characteristics. However, the classifications are ultimately still founded on the same spectrum advanced by Singer and Tucci, which is dictated by proximity to the "original" source and the degree of likeness to the individual.

## Portraits of Dalai Lamas

Many of the same issues regarding the role of likeness are equally relevant to portraits of Dalai Lamas specifically. Portraits of Dalai Lamas in lineage sets are consistently identified as idealized images, despite the fact that they were often made during or shortly after the person's life.<sup>10</sup> While representations of many of the previous incarnations in the Dalai Lama lineage do adhere to the categories proposed by Stoddard and Jackson, portraits of the Dalai Lamas themselves do not. Stoddard acknowledges that "Taken together with the exercise of political power, art becomes symbol and loses all individuality. This is particularly true with series of portraits of the Dalai Lamas. When brought together and put side by side, there are seeming subtle differences in form and aspect, but they are fundamentally paintings of idealized, enlightened masters."<sup>11</sup>

In his essay "The Iconography of the Dalai Lamas," Michael Henss states that the "depersonalization of the monk's image was both intentional and objective: the point was not so much to reflect the individual physical appearance of a given title-holder, but rather to raise his image to a symbol of the Dalai Lamas as an institution. This forms the intellectual backdrop to most representations of the Dalai Lamas - not of individuals but as part of a series encompassing preceding and future incarnations."<sup>12</sup> According to Henss, although many iconographic types have become increasingly codified since the seventeenth-century, there is "no canon of

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<sup>10</sup> Stoddard, "Fourteen Centuries," 41.

<sup>11</sup> Stoddard, "Fourteen Centuries," 41.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Henss, "The Iconography of the Dalai Lamas," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 263.

obligatory motifs in the representations of the Dalai Lamas.”<sup>13</sup> He contends that prior to the seventeenth-century, the attributes and *mudras* were often interchangeable, making an identification of the figure difficult without the presence of an inscription. This argument is relevant to many Dalai Lama painting sets and is examined in greater detail in Chapter Two. However, the issue of individualization versus conventionalized/codified portraits is problematized by the set of seven-paintings (figs. I.1-I.7). In this set, I propose that there is a great degree of variation in the figures’ posture, style of hat, hair and facial features, indicating a deliberate attempt to represent the figures as individuals, rather than idealized types.

In his essay on the seven painting lineage set that is the focus of this thesis, Sørensen does not address issues of likeness in great detail, instead focusing his study on the identification of the figures and their historical significance. He notes that “some figures have idiosyncratic facial features while others follow standard, stylized iconographic conventions,”<sup>14</sup> but does not elaborate further or offer possible explanations. He addresses issues of style and composition throughout his visual analysis, suggesting possible artistic precedents. This thesis will build upon this discussion by specifically highlighting the relationship between the visual conventions and the presence of handprints in the seven-painting set and the Fifth Dalai Lama. Sørensen briefly discusses portraits of Dalai Lamas as a significant genre of painting, interpreting them as a visual assertion of the legitimacy and spiritual authority of the lineage. He concludes that the motive for making these paintings was to glorify, document, and establish the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama

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<sup>13</sup> Henss, “Iconography,” 262.

<sup>14</sup> Per Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set of Seven Lineage *Thangkas*,” in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, Martin Brauen, ed. (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 249.



lineage. This thesis will present an alternative interpretation, contending that the primary purpose of the set is to render the figures present as an aspect of merit-making activities.

### **Contribution to Scholarship**

Recent scholarship has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of Tibetan portraiture generally, and portraits of Dalai Lamas specifically, particularly with regard to artistic models and visual conventions. The multiple categorizations proposed by Stoddard and Jackson may accurately delineate and describe the multiple possible relationships between an image and the original it represents. However, by focusing on the issue of likeness with respect to the individual person, these scholars have chosen to emphasize art historical concerns, without an examination of function. While I build on the ideas presented by previous scholars by proposing a more nuanced definition of “likeness,” the primary contribution of this study is to highlight the *function* of portraits of Dalai Lamas within the context of Tibetan Buddhism. I contend that the purpose of a portrait in Tibetan Buddhism is to make the individual present, thus imbuing the object with the vivified essence. The ability of an image to successfully refer to the original is important, which is what western approaches to portraiture emphasize, but it is not the primary goal. Successful references to the portrait subject serve the greater purpose of manifesting the teacher's presence. Tibetan portrait artists have a variety of tools they can use to achieve the latter goal, of which likeness is but one of many.

In my discussion of function, I highlight the significance of relics in the Buddhist context to Tibetan portraits of the Dalai Lamas. The portrait subject may be rendered present through the addition of relics and the ritual process of consecration, as each of the *thangkas* in the seven-painting set has a set of handprints, an inscription, and seals on the back. The handprints are a

category of relics in Tibetan Buddhism. I build on Kathryn Selig Brown's discussion of the "print *thangkas*," that is, paintings with hand prints and foot prints.<sup>15</sup> Brown notes that paintings with handprints on the back are the least common type of "print *thangkas*" and are typically associated with the Buddhist sect of the Gelugpa, to which the Dalai Lama belongs, and that these handprints were placed at the back as part of the ritual consecration. This thesis will further situate the function of handprints in Tibetan *thangka* painting by examining them specifically within the context of broader relic traditions of Buddhism.<sup>16</sup>

Chapter One begins with a comprehensive examination of the seven-painting set. I discuss the provenance and circumstances of the set's commission, providing a detailed visual analysis of the paintings, highlighting issues of style, composition, and the iconography of the Dalai Lama portraits. Here, the core argument is the comparative visual analysis of the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama to provide a nuanced discussion of the role of likeness. Chapter Two discusses extant Dalai Lama lineage sets, using the seven-painting set as a point of comparison. This discussion provides a better understanding of this artistic genre, with respect to the visual conventions and the role of likeness in portrait sets of the Dalai Lamas. I discuss artistic precedents that may account for the variations in style and composition. Chapter Three examines the set within the context of Buddhist relic traditions, focusing specifically on handprints. I compare the seven-painting set to other Dalai Lama portraits that bear hand and footprints and discuss the significance of this tradition within the context of Tibetan Buddhism. In Chapter

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<sup>15</sup> Kathryn Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints in Tibetan Painting," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2000, ProQuest (AAT 9990979).

<sup>16</sup> In addition, I build upon the work of scholars who focus on Buddhist philosophy and relic traditions, such as John Strong, David Germano, Kevin Trainor and Yael Bentor. These sources on Buddhist relic traditions and consecration practices will provide a theoretical framework for investigating the function of Dalai Lama portraits.

Four, I focus specifically on the category of images as relics. I examine the ritual practices and merit-making activities that center on images. I conclude by demonstrating that portraits of Dalai Lamas are a type of relic, yielding a more comprehensive understanding of this artistic genre. Thus, this thesis provides a better understanding of two significant related aspects of Tibetan art: portraits of Dalai Lamas and portraits as relics.

## **Chapter 1: The Set of Seven Portrait Paintings of the Dalai Lamas**

### **Part I - Historical Background of the Dalai Lamas and Spiritual Lineages in Tibet**

The tradition of reincarnate teachers is unique to Tibetan Buddhism. Reincarnate teachers (*tulkus*) are highly accomplished spiritual masters capable of determining the time, place and manner of their rebirth. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth-centuries, succession through rebirth (Tib. *yang srid*, Skt. *punarbhava*) supplanted earlier traditions in which positions of political and religious authority were passed down through familial lineages. While this tradition is not the oldest of the spiritual lineages in Tibet, it is the most well-known since the Dalai Lama was instituted as the political and spiritual authority in Tibet in the seventeenth-century.

The Dalai Lamas are a lineage of Buddhist masters believed to be emanations of Avalokiteśvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion. Although the Dalai Lama is both a religious and political figure, like all high-ranking spiritual figures, he is venerated as a fully enlightened teacher, and through his compassion, chooses to be reborn for the sake of all sentient beings. Teachers have a particularly significant role in Tibetan Buddhism, because they are the primary means for transmitting the Dharma. In Tibetan Buddhism, teachings are transmitted directly from a teacher to a disciple. The path to enlightenment is considered extremely difficult and potentially dangerous. A practitioner can only advance on the path to spiritual awakening under the guidance and careful instruction of his or her teacher. Once a practitioner has achieved a high

level of spiritual attainment, he or she begins teaching and may acquire disciples, thus continuing the spiritual lineage.

The emphasis on the teacher-disciple relationship led to the development of four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, each of which traces its teachings and ritual practices back to a different master. The Dalai Lama is the head of the Gelug school, which has its roots in the Kadam tradition. The Kadam school was founded by the Tibetan teacher, Domtön Gyalwe Jungne (1004-1064). Domtön was a disciple of Atīśa (Skt. Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna) (ca. 972-1054), the highly revered Indian Buddhist master who played a significant role in the revival of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh-century. Many of Atīśa's teachings centered on practices associated with Avalokiteśvara.<sup>17</sup> Domtön established the first monastery of the Kadam tradition, which was based on Atīśa's teachings, at Reting in 1057.<sup>18</sup> According to Tibetan histories, it was prophesized that Atīśa would encounter a disciple who was in fact an emanation of Avalokiteśvara and who would spread the Buddhist teachings. Domtön is considered an emanation of Avalokiteśvara. For this reason, he is an important figure in the Dalai Lama lineage, as will be seen in the painting set that is the subject of this thesis.

The Kadam School later developed into the Gelug School through the efforts of Tsongkhapa (1357-1419). In 1409, he founded Ganden Monastery near Lhasa, and began to take on his own disciples. He referred to his order as "New Kadam," which later came to be known as the Gelug ("Order of Virtue"). It was Tsongkhapa's disciple, Gedün Druba (1391-1474) who

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<sup>17</sup> Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, "The Dalai Lamas and the Origins of Reincarnate Lamas," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, Martin Brauen, ed. (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 15; Per K. Sørensen, "The Sacred Junipers of Reting: The Arboreal Origins Behind the Dalai Lama Lineage," *Orientalia* 39, no. 6 (September 2008): 76.

<sup>18</sup> For an examination of the significance of Reting to the Dalai Lama lineage, see Sørensen, "The Sacred Junipers," 74-79.

was posthumously identified as the First Dalai Lama. The title “Dalai Lama,” translated as “Ocean of Wisdom,”<sup>19</sup> first came into use in 1578, when the Mongol ruler Altan Khan (1507-1582) bestowed the title on Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588). Since Gyatso was considered the third incarnation of Gedün Druba, he and his second incarnation Gendün Gyatso (1475-1542) were retroactively given the title of “Dalai Lama.”

Prior to the mid-seventeenth-century, the Dalai Lama was primarily a religious figure. Over the course of the sixteenth-century, the Gelug School gained increasing patronage and religious authority, causing tensions among the other traditions. During the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the Mongolian leader Gushri Khan led military conquests, which resulted in the unification of much of Tibet. In 1642, Khan gave the newly conquered territory to his spiritual teacher, the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lopsang Gyatso Jikme Gocha Thupten Langtsöde (1617-1682). Thus, the Dalai Lama assumed the role of both political and religious authority in Tibet. As he was now the appointed ruler of a theocracy, it was thought necessary to establish the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama lineage’s spiritual and historical roots. In order to do so, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his retinue identified and codified the succession of his previous incarnations. They consulted textual sources considered authentic and authoritative, in an effort to select previous incarnations which would link the Dalai Lama lineage to personages associated with the origins of Buddhism in India and its transmission to Tibet.

The Fifth Dalai Lama’s awareness of the importance of lineage carried over into artistic traditions. Although there was a long tradition of depicting spiritual lineages, the Fifth Dalai Lama was the first to commission paintings of the Dalai Lama lineage. He commissioned murals

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<sup>19</sup> van der Kuijp, “The Dalai Lamas,” 15. The term “Dalai Lama” derives from the title *ta lai’I bla ma vajradhara*. The Mongol word *dalai* refers to something vast or universal and is typically defined as “ocean.” Although it corresponds to the Tibetan word *gyatsho*, which is the equivalent of the Sanskrit word *sāgara*, meaning “ocean,” a large body of water likely would have been outside the experience of an average Mongol.

depicting his previous incarnations at the Potala Palace and several sets of *thangkas* depicting his spiritual lineage, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. The Fifth Dalai Lama also studied iconometry and wrote a treatise describing how paintings depicting his previous lives should be executed.<sup>20</sup>

Due to the Fifth Dalai Lama's political and spiritual accomplishments and patronage of the arts, he is often referred to as "The Great Fifth." Subsequent incarnations have engaged in politics to varying degrees, but the Dalai Lama has continued to serve as the political and spiritual ruler of Tibet.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the artistic traditions established by the Fifth Dalai Lama have continued to be appropriated as artistic models for subsequent works. Historically, the Fifth Dalai Lama is one of the most significant incarnations in his lineage. He is particularly relevant to this thesis, as his portrait is the central, and therefore most important, in the seven-painting set.

## **Part II: Seven Painting Lineage Set of the Dalai Lamas**

The nineteenth-century set comprises seven *thangka* paintings depicting the First through the Ninth Dalai Lamas, as well as additional historical figures related to the incarnation lineage (figs. 1.1-1.7).<sup>22</sup> The additional figures include the twelve successive Tibetan incarnations

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<sup>20</sup> David P. Jackson, *A History of Tibetan Painting: the great Tibetan painters and their traditions* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 203-206.

<sup>21</sup> In March 2011, the 14th Dalai Lama officially stepped down as the political leader of the Tibetan government-in-exile, but has retained his role as the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.

<sup>22</sup> For the identification of the figures, see Per K. Sørensen, "Ninth Dalai Lama's Set of Seven Lineage *Thangkas*," in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 242-257; Himalayan Art Resources, "Dalai Lama Incarnation Lineage Painting Set," <http://www.himalayanart.org/pages/dalaiset7/index.html> (accessed October 2, 2011). Based on the lineage established by the Fifth Dalai Lama, the current Dalai Lama is the sixty-third incarnation. For a list of all sixty-three incarnations, see Per Sørensen, "The Dalai Lama Institution: Its Origin and Genealogical Succession," *Orientalia* 36, no. 6 (September 2005): 58.

preceding the First Dalai Lama<sup>23</sup> and four previous Indian rebirths.<sup>24</sup> Each of the figures is identified by an inscription. Following the Tibetan *thankga* tradition, the images are painted on sized cotton cloth, with vegetable and mineral pigments and gold, and framed in silk brocade. Each painting measures 23.62 by 50 inches, which is significantly larger than most extant paintings of lineage sets. At the back of each painting are a set of handprints in red ink, three seals, and a consecratory inscription bearing the Sanskrit Buddhist *mantra Om Ah Hūm*, the sacred syllables which generate the body, speech, and mind of a Buddha.

### **Provenance and Commission**

The set was originally owned by Pasang Tsering a Tibetan man living in Kathmandu, Nepal, until 2004. He inherited the set from his grandmother approximately thirty years ago. Tsering brought the paintings with him to Nepal, when he moved there from Tibet in the 1970s.<sup>25</sup> This original provenance has not been mentioned in previous scholarship on this set. However, art historians Dina Bangdel and John Huntington met with Tsering and were given permission to photograph the paintings in 2003. At that time, the painting set still belonged to him and was placed as a backdrop to his main shrine image of Avalokiteśvara, which he still currently owns. In 2004, the set was acquired by well-known art collectors Veena and Peter Schnell, in Zürich. In

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<sup>23</sup> The only exception is Chogyal Gewapel, the forty-second previous incarnation, who is not included in the seven painting set.

<sup>24</sup> Gyalwu Jikten Wangchuk (“Prince Lokeśvara”) is represented in the seven-painting set, but is not included in the lineage established by the Fifth Dalai Lama, as documented in Sørensen, “The Dalai Lama Institution,” 58.

<sup>25</sup> Pasang Tsering, interview by author, Kathmandu, Nepal, July 9, 2011. In my interview with Tsering, I was unable to determine whether a member of his family commissioned the paintings or if they received them as a gift.



2005-2006, the paintings were part of the exhibition *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas – Tibetan Reincarnations of Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara* at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich. Reproductions of the paintings were published in the accompanying catalogue titled *Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, edited by Martin Brauen. This remains the only publication devoted to the painting set to this day. In September 2009, the set was sold at Christie’s auction house to a private collector for \$566,500.<sup>26</sup> For purposes of brevity, I will refer to this set as SPS, or Seven Painting Set.

The specific circumstances of the set’s commission are still uncertain. Stylistically, the paintings can be dated to the early nineteenth-century.<sup>27</sup> A more precise date can be gleaned from the number of incarnations included in the SPS, which Sørenson does not acknowledge in his essay. Chronologically, the Ninth Dalai Lama (1805-1815) is the most recent incarnation in the lineage depicted in the painting set. These sets were typically produced during the life of, or shortly after the death of the last figure in the Dalai Lama lineage. Thus, this set would have been produced between 1810 and 1822, the period between when the Ninth and Tenth Dalai Lamas were officially recognized.

In my interview with Pasang Tsering, he stated that the *thangkas* were commissioned by high officials who were relatives of the Ninth Dalai Lama.<sup>28</sup> Specifically, he mentioned that the SPS was made during the life of the Ninth Dalai Lama, who placed his handprints and official

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<sup>26</sup> Christie’s Auction House, “Sale 2195, Lot 811,” September 2009, <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/paintings/a-highly-important-set-of-seven-thangkas-5229889-details.aspx?from=salesummary&intObjectID=5229889&sid=8deb0792-4b14-4844-844b-f4d54dc8e04a> (accessed November 2, 2011)

<sup>27</sup> Sørenson, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 255.

<sup>28</sup> Pasang Tsering, interview by author, Kathmandu, Nepal, July 9, 2011.

seal on the back.<sup>29</sup> Per Sørensen also contends that the set was perhaps made for close relatives of the Ninth Dalai Lama and, hence, was not an official commission, because the paintings are not mentioned in his “otherwise detailed biography.”<sup>30</sup> However, he suggests that the set was likely made shortly after the Ninth Dalai Lama’s death in 1815, rather than during his life, as stated by Tsering.<sup>31</sup> There is no written documentation to substantiate or refute either claim. However, a comparison of the inscription on the back of the paintings with those on the front demonstrates that the lettering was executed by an unskilled hand (fig. 1.8). The large, thin writing is atypical of consecratory inscriptions, as most are written in small, evenly sized script, as seen in the gold inscriptions on the front of the paintings (fig. 1.9), but also in other *thangkas* with the dedicatory inscription *Om Āh Hūm* (figs. 1.10-1.11). It is plausible that the calligraphy was executed by the Ninth Dalai Lama, who was only eleven when he died, thus supporting Tsering’s claim that the paintings were made during his life. Furthermore, the large size, high quality of execution, and generous use of gold indicate that the patrons were wealthy and could have been part of the Tibetan nobility related to the Ninth Dalai Lama. The circumstances of the commission are significant because scholars of Tibetan portraiture have suggested that images made during or shortly after the subject’s life have a higher degree of likeness. However, through a detailed visual analysis of the Dalai Lama portraits in the SPS, this chapter will show that this is not always the case.

I propose that temporal proximity between the portrait and its subject does not guarantee a greater emphasis on likeness in the former. That is, the degree to which a portrait is idealized

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<sup>29</sup> Tsering, interview.

<sup>30</sup> Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 255-256.

<sup>31</sup> Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 255-256.

does not specifically correspond to the date when it was made, as evidenced by a comparison of six portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama dating to periods during, shortly after and long after his life. However, through visual comparisons, it becomes evident that even in idealized portraits the subject's individual identity is still conveyed through specific iconographic attributes. A comparison between a rare written description of the Ninth Dalai Lama and two portraits of him further supports this conclusion.

### **Visual Analysis of the Seven-Painting Set**

I will begin with a discussion of the SPS's style, arrangement, and composition. The painting style is particularly relevant to the subject of Tibetan portraiture, because it has a significant bearing on the composition and degree of realism. Furthermore, these aspects of the SPS may give an indication of the *thangkas*' commission and provenance. This will be followed by an in-depth visual analysis of each painting, highlighting the composition and visual conventions of the Dalai Lama portraits. The portraits will be compared to other examples, in order to provide a nuanced understanding of the visual conventions whereby a figure is represented as idealized or a likeness.

### **Style**

These paintings are executed in the famous Karma Gadri style ("Encampment Style of the Karmapa"), which was initiated in the sixteenth-century by the artist Namkha Tashi, who worked in the court of the Ninth Karmapa (1555-1603).<sup>32</sup> Tashi painted his figures based on Indian models, but incorporated stylistic elements from Chinese paintings of the Yuan and Ming

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<sup>32</sup> David Jackson, *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, in association with the University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2007), IX.

courts. A key characteristic of the Karma Gadri style, which was revived in the eighteenth-century by the scholar and painter Situ Panchen, is a marked use of Chinese stylistic elements. This is especially pertinent to the subject of Tibetan portraiture, because there was a much greater concern with realism in Chinese painting than in the Tibetan Buddhist visual tradition. Chinese portraits of teachers, a major artistic genre which began in the Tang Period (618-907), often depict subjects with a high degree of realism. A successful portrait accurately represented the subject's physical appearance, as well as mind or 'spirit.'<sup>33</sup> Chen Shidao (1053-1101), a famous poet in the Northern Song Dynasty, wrote that "A loss of formal likeness and spiritual harmony alike would produce a painting like a shadow silhouette, which would not be a portrait."<sup>34</sup>

This concern with realism and the individuality of the figures is clearly evident in paintings of *arhats* ("Elders"), the sixteen disciples of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni. There are no visual or textual records of what the *arhats* may have looked like and their portraits may not bear any relationship to the actual physical characteristics of the subjects. Yet, Tibetan portraits of the *arhats* are consistently rendered as individualized and realistic following Chinese portrait conventions, as seen in a sixteenth-century painting of the *arhat* Abhedha in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art (fig. 1.12). In this example, the figure is shown with wrinkled skin, a lumpy-shaped head, drooping eyebrows, and visible ribs. In Chinese portraiture, historical figures are generally represented as individualized types in order to distinguish the subject as a specific person who actually lived, rather than an idealized image of a deity.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>33</sup> Singer, "Early Portrait Painting," 82.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Bush and Hsio-yen Shih, eds., *Early Chinese Texts on Painting*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 227, quoted in Singer, "Early Portrait Painting," 83.

individualization of *arhat* portraits was a means to emphasize the subject's human nature, rather than their status as an enlightened being.<sup>36</sup> The concern with representing historical figures as individualized types through the Chinese artistic conventions is evident in series of drawings of *arhats* in a sketchbook, dated 1435, belonging to Jivarama, a Nepalese artist who worked for Tibetan patrons (fig. 1.13). This indicates that Chinese conventions of portraying *arhats* as individual physiognomic types were well-established in Himalayan art by the fifteenth-century.

A similar treatment of figures is found in the SPS, with its distinctive Karma Gadri style. Tibetan artists working in the Karma Gadri style appropriated the Chinese convention of portraiture which emphasized individualized features, highlighting a figure's physiognomy, even when invented by the artist. Thus, in paintings such as this set, the individualized treatment of the figures' facial features is largely informed by the style and is not necessarily representative of the figure's actual appearance.

Another aspect of Chinese painting characteristic of the Karma Gadri style is asymmetrical composition. Prior to the fifteenth-century, the standard composition for figural paintings followed Indic conventions of symmetry and hieratic scale, which includes a large, central figure with a row of small teacher figures in an upper register and protector deities and patrons in a lower register (fig. 1.14). In contrast, Chinese portraits, such as the painting of the *arhat*, often placed the figure off-center and set against a natural landscape. In both the *arhat* painting and the SPS, the portion of the background which represents the sky is unpainted, leaving the cotton ground visible. Thus, the distinctive composition of the SPS is likely related to stylistic conventions of *arhat* paintings. Although the paintings include many Chinese elements

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<sup>35</sup> Dietrich Seckel, "The Rise of Portraiture in Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 53, no. 1/2 (1993): 9.

<sup>36</sup> Rob Linrothe, *Paradise and Plumage: Chinese Connections in Tibetan Arhat Painting*, New York: Rubin Museum of Art; Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2004), 15-16.

typical of the Karma Gadri style, the treatment and proportions of the figures' bodies is based on Indian models. For example, both eyes of figures shown in three-quarter view are depicted frontally. As a result, the inner eye extends past the outline of the face, which is a distinctly Indian convention.

Several scholars have discussed the identity of the artist in relationship to the paintings' style. Certain styles were more predominant in some regions of Tibet than others. Thus, style could give an indication of where the artist lived and worked, which in turn would shed light on the circumstances of the set's commission. Per Sørensen and David Jackson suggest that the SPS paintings were made by an artist from Denma, Kham, working in Lhasa, based on the style and the fact that the Ninth Dalai Lama's family was from that region.<sup>37</sup> Jeff Watt suggests that the artist was from Chamdo, in Kham.<sup>38</sup> However, according to the original owner Pasang Tsering, the artist was known to have come from Lhokha, located south of Lhasa,<sup>39</sup> but there is no textual evidence to support this claim and little is known about the painting styles typical of this region during the nineteenth-century.<sup>40</sup> Given the cultural milieu in Lhasa and the fact that many artists could work in different styles, it is difficult to determine where the artist was from based on style alone. However, the Karma Gadri style was more prevalent in eastern Tibet, which supports Sørensen, Jackson, and Watt's hypotheses that the artist was from Kham.

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<sup>37</sup> As stated in discussions between Per Sørensen and David Jackson. Per Sørensen, personal communication with the author, March 6, 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Jeff Watt, "Painting Set: Dalai Lama Incarnations," *Himalayan Art Resources*, <http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=2074> (accessed February 8, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> Tsering, interview.

<sup>40</sup> This is an aspect of Tibetan painting that necessitates further research.

### Arrangement of the Paintings

The arrangement of the paintings is significant because it highlights the rationale for the specific placement of the figures and their relationship to each other. In the SPS, the nine incarnations of the Dalai Lamas are not represented in a linear, chronological order moving from left to right, and from the First to the Ninth. Rather, the paintings are grouped visually, moving from the center outward. Specifically, the central painting is the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama. (fig. 1.15) The other six paintings flank the central image, conceptually forming pairs. The central pair of paintings immediately to the left and right of the central Fifth Dalai Lama portrait represent the historical lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, with the seventh-century Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo on the left (fig. 1.16) and the eleventh-century Tibetan teacher Domtön on the right (fig. 1.17). These three paintings are conceived of as a triad, since all three figures are considered to be human manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion. Moving outward, the paintings to the left and right depict the First and Second Dalai Lamas respectively. The outermost *thangkas* include portraits of the Third and Fourth Dalai Lamas. The Sixth through Ninth Dalai Lamas are represented as small figures in the upper register of the central painting.

In their original context, the paintings were placed in this sequence in Pasang Tsering's home, as documented in photographs taken by Bangdel and Huntington in 2003. The SPS was hung behind a sculpture of Avalokiteśvara, which his family still owns. In my interview with Pasang Tsering, he mentioned that the statue was consecrated at the same time as the paintings, emphasizing that he considers it to be conceptually part of the set.<sup>41</sup> The SPS was published with the same arrangement in Sørensen's essay, but he did not mention the pairing of the figures and

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<sup>41</sup> Tsering, interview.

in his visual analysis he examined the paintings in order moving from left to right. This approach obscures the relationship between the figures, as well as the overall iconographic program of the paintings as a whole. Nor did Sørensen mention the Avalokiteśvara sculpture, which was the physically and conceptually the main figure in Pasang Tsering's shrine, with the lineage paintings as a backdrop. In the following section, I will examine the portraits in an order that follows the placement of the figures, beginning with the central painting and moving outward according to the chronological progression of the incarnations.

### Composition

The centerpiece painting (Tib. *gyalwang ngawa*) is the most important and is identified in an inscription and on the basis of its composition. In this painting, as is the standard convention in Dalai Lama lineage sets, a large central figure is shown frontally.<sup>42</sup> The paintings which bracket the centerpiece depict multiple figures, one slightly larger than the rest, in an asymmetrical composition. The largest figure is placed off-center, with the others located diagonally above and below. This type of asymmetrical composition was primarily used by Central Tibetan painters from Lhasa when executing works for which established models such as famous block-prints existed.<sup>43</sup> This asymmetrical composition with multiple figures of comparable size is unusual in Dalai Lama lineage sets.

The composition reinforces the emphasis on the central *thangka* because the figures are positioned so that they face towards the central portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Furthermore, the

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<sup>42</sup> In lineage sets whose individual paintings all depict a single, large, central figure represented frontally, the central painting is often more elaborate than the others.

<sup>43</sup> David Jackson and Janice Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1984), 40.



figures are set against a background of landscape elements, such as trees, foliage, mountains, and streams, whose placement underscores the importance of the central image. The three paintings located to the left of center depict trees in the upper left corner whose branches and foliage extend diagonally towards the right corner. The natural elements in the three paintings to the right of center are in mirror image, as they are placed in the upper right corner and extend inwards toward the left. This visual convention leads the viewers' eye into the central painting.

The composition of each *thangka* is examined individually, beginning in the center and moving outward, according to the chronological arrangement of the figures. I then focus specifically on the portrait of the central figure (Tib. *tsowo*) in each painting, discussing the iconography and treatment of the facial features. Particular consideration is given to the level of individualization or likeness in each portrait. I analyze comparative material in order to identify the visual conventions of Dalai Lama portraits.

### **Part III: Portraits of the Dalai Lamas in the SPS**

#### 1. Painting – Center : Fifth Dalai Lama

The *tsowo*, or central figure, of the fourth painting is the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lopsang Gyatso Jikme Gocha Thupten Langtsöde (1617-1682) (fig. 1.15). He is shown frontally, seated crossed-legged on an elaborate throne with a blue throne-back. He is surrounded by flowers in the shape of a mandorla, containing the eight auspicious symbols (Skt. *aṣṭamaṅgala*) and an image of the Goddess Tārā at the center. He has a red nimbus behind his head, which is an iconographic convention symbolizing his status as an enlightened being. The Fifth Dalai Lama is shown wearing the yellow *paṇḍita* (teacher's) hat characteristic of teachers in the Gelug tradition. His right hand makes the *vitarkamudrā*, a gesture of exposition symbolizing

transmission of the Buddha's teachings, and holds a lotus, representing enlightenment. He rests his left hand on his lap, bearing the long-life vase, which is used in rituals to increase the teacher's longevity.<sup>44</sup> A table placed in front of the figure bears ritual objects.

The Fifth Dalai Lama's face is relatively idealized, because the shape of his face, nose and mouth resemble those of Buddha images dictated by specific iconometric guidelines. These features are clearly visible in a grid demonstrating the proper proportions for a Buddha's face (fig. 1.18). The figure's face is so rounded that it almost forms a circle and it lacks modeling. His chin is delineated by a single curved line. His lips are full in the center and become thin lines at the corners. His nose is rounded. It is this portrait type, in which the figure's facial features closely resemble the standard conventions for Buddha images, which led Singer to conclude that the primary consideration in Tibetan portraiture was a portrayal of the subject's spiritual accomplishments by visually equating them with an enlightened being. While I agree that the idealization is meant to indicate the subject's status as an enlightened being, there is still an effort to depict the Fifth Dalai Lama figure as an individual. I propose that rendering the subject present was the primary concern of Tibetan portraiture.

My research suggests that there are three conventions typically found in portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama, which convey his individual identity. First, he has a moustache which angles down towards his mouth. This is the attribute mostly commonly associated with the Fifth Dalai Lama and is present in almost all of his portraits. In the SPS, he also has a *mouche*, or patch of hair below his lower lip, which is less common. Second, he has almond-shaped eyes, rather than the more stylized "bow eyes," in which the upper lid forms a horizontal S-shape, often seen in

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999), 221.

images of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*.<sup>45</sup> In this portrait, his eyes are slightly reddened and his eyebrows are thin and curve upwards at the outer corners. Finally, small patches of hair are visible beneath his hat at the middle of his forehead and temples, indicating a receding hairline. Although the receding hairline is found in other portraits of Dalai Lamas as a visual convention for expressing age, it is included in this list because it is so common in representations of the Fifth.

According to previous scholars, this type of idealized portrait would have been based on a likeness made during the subject's life.<sup>46</sup> A visual comparison of several portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama highlights the nuances of these issues of likeness and idealization that are so pervasive in the discourse on Tibetan portraiture. In the following examples, which provide a sampling of portraits dated to during, shortly after, and long after the subject's life, the Fifth Dalai Lama figures are all shown seated on a throne with their legs in lotus position (Skt. *vajrāsana*) and wearing monastic robes, as in the centerpiece of the SPS. Their hand gestures and iconographic attributes differ, but the variations in degree of likeness are indicated by the treatment of the figures' face and hair. The most common attributes which identify the subject as the Fifth Dalai Lama are a mustache, a broad face, wide almond-shaped eyes, a receding hairline, and a ritual dagger (Tib. *phurba*) tucked into his belt. However, not every portrait includes all of these elements. This suggests that while there were well-known conventions for depicting the

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<sup>45</sup> David P. Jackson and Janice Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1984), 139.

<sup>46</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949; repr., Bangkok: SDI Publications, 1999), 1:307; Heather Stoddard, "Fourteen Centuries of Tibetan Portraiture," in *Portraits of the Masters: Bronze Sculptures of the Tibetan Buddhist Lineages*, ed. Donald Dinwiddie (Chicago: Serindia, 2003), 59-60; David P. Jackson, *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, in association with the University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2007), 17.

Fifth Dalai Lama, but there were no specific guidelines dictating the requisite attributes of the figure.

### **Comparative Portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama**

The Fifth Dalai Lama's autobiography mentions several portraits of himself, which he identified as being "from life" (Tib. *ngadrama*). It is unknown whether the stucco sculpture in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts is one of the images mentioned in his autobiography (fig. 1.19). However, an inscription at the base of the image (fig. 1.20) identifies it as being made "from life." This small image, measuring only thirteen centimeters in height, dates to 1669-1670 when the Fifth Dalai Lama was still alive. In this portrait, he does not wear a hat and his head is completely bald. His ears protrude outward and the earlobes are elongated, a convention derived from early Indian images of the Buddha symbolizing the figure's renunciation of the material world. He is depicted with a broad face and heavy jowls. His eyes are almond-shaped and appear larger than in the SPS. His thick eyebrows are slightly furrowed and his forehead is creased. His lips are plump angled downward at the corners. There is no evidence of facial hair, which is surprising considering a mustache is the most common characteristic of Fifth Dalai Lama portraits. He has a *phurba* tucked into his belt. In contrast to the idealized portrait from the SPS, the overall facial expression appears relatively naturalistic. It is this type of image, made during the subject's life and identified as being a portrait-likeness, which Tucci, Stoddard, and Jackson suggest served as artistic precedents for later, conventionalized images. However, the shape of the eyes is the only aspect of the Boston sculpture also found in the SPS portrait.

Another portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama from a partial lineage set in the collection of the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques – Guimet in Paris (fig. 1.21) is dated to the late seventeenth-

century and is believed to have been made during the subject's life.<sup>47</sup> It is difficult to see the details of the figure's face due to the painting's condition, but this portrait is clearly more idealized than the Boston sculpture. The figure's face is rounded and similar in shape to the SPS portrait. There is no indication of the heavy jowls seen in the Boston sculpture. The figure's nose and mouth are no longer visible, except for a hint of red pigment where the lips would have been. The figure has narrow "bow eyes," typical of Buddha images. He wears the standard yellow *paṇḍita* hat, so his ears are not visible. The figure has a ritual dagger (*phurba*) in his belt, which is the only aspect of this painting specifically associated with the Fifth Dalai Lama. Despite the painting's condition, it is evident that this portrait was not rendered with the same concern for naturalism as the Boston sculpture, which challenges the assumptions of previous scholars that portraits made during the subject's life are more realistic representations of the figure's individual physical appearance. In this example, were it not for an inscription and the *phurba*, it would be difficult to identify the subject as the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Whereas the sculpture in the Boston Museum can be considered realistic and the Guimet *thangka* idealized, a metal sculpture of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art does not neatly adhere to either category (fig 1.22). Stylistically, the sculpture is dated to the seventeenth-century. Since the Fifth Dalai Lama died in 1682, the portrait would have been made during or shortly after his life. The figure's facial features suggest a deliberate attempt to represent the subject as an individual, rather than an idealized type. The figure appears younger than in the SPS, Boston, and Guimet portraits. His face is softly modeled and his nose is a distinctive shape. The top lip is smaller than the bottom and his mouth curves upwards in a

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<sup>47</sup> Kathryn Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints in Tibetan Painting," PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2000, ProQuest (AAT 9990979), 163.

subtle smile. However, the overall effect is much more stylized than the Boston sculpture and the relationship between the specific characteristics of the two portraits is subtle at best.

The Rubin sculpture does not have the broad face and heavy jowls of the Boston sculpture. It also differs from the ideal rounded shape of the SPS and Guimet figures. The face is narrower and the figure's cheeks and chin are well-defined. The figure does not wear a hat and is represented with short dark hair and a receding hair line, which is characteristic of most portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Similar to the Boston and SPS portraits, the eyes are almond-shaped, but in this image they are larger and accentuated by an outline of red and black pigment, extending outwards at the corner. Whereas the Boston sculpture's eyebrows are thick and softly modeled, the Rubin sculpture's are represented by a thick line of black pigment. The figure's nose is more angular than the Boston sculpture's and a slightly different shape. The Boston sculpture has thick lips of approximately equal size, whereas Rubin sculpture's lower lip is larger than the upper and he is shown smiling. The figure's ears are similar to the Boston sculpture, as they protrude outward from his head and have elongated earlobes. As in the SPS portrait, the figure has does not have a *phurba* in his belt. While the facial features of this sculpture do share some characteristics with the Boston sculpture, such as almond-shaped eyes and the shape of the ears, they are rendered in a much more stylized manner. Furthermore, the Rubin sculpture has none of the roundness seen in the idealized portraits in the SPS and Guimet. Many of the facial features are stylistically related to Indian portraiture, such as the treatment of the eyes. This is further evidence that style affects the depiction of a figure's facial features and thus the degree of individualization.

The Rubin sculpture has an inscription that identifies the subject as the Fifth Dalai Lama, but gives no indication that it was made from life. There is little information about the specific

circumstances of the commission of this work, so it is unknown whether it was made during the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama, where the artist was from, or who the patron was. However, in this example, it seems that the rendering of the facial features was dictated by style, rather than a concern with likeness. This is an example of an individualized portrait that is neither an idealized image nor a portrait-likeness. Although the figure has a distinctive appearance, the subject would not be recognizable as the Fifth Dalai Lama without the inscription.

A mural in the East Shishi Phuntsok Hall of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet, depicts the series of Dalai Lama incarnations, including a portrait of the “Great Fifth” (fig. 1.23), which dates to between 1690 and 1694, shortly after the death of the Fifth Dalai Lama and approximately twenty years after the Boston sculpture. This portrait has all of the standard conventions associated with the Fifth Dalai Lama. He has a mustache which curls downward and a *mouche*, as in the SPS portrait. Although the rounded shape of the face resembles the SPS and Guimet portraits, the modeling of his skin indicates large, fleshy cheeks similar to the Boston sculpture. His receding hairline is evidenced by small patches of hair at his temples and the middle of his forehead, visible beneath the standard *paṇḍita* hat. He has almond-shaped eyes, although they are smaller than those in Boston or Rubin sculptures and closer in size to the SPS figure. He has a *phurba* in his belt. This portrait does not have the same degree of realism as the Boston sculpture, but is identifiable as the Fifth Dalai Lama due to the use of standard conventions associated with the subject.

A *thangka* depicting the Fifth Dalai Lama, also located in the Potala Palace in Lhasa, is dated to the late seventeenth or early eighteenth-centuries, and thus was created only slightly later than the mural (fig. 1.24). This portrait has many of the same characteristics as the Potala mural, but appears more idealized. He has a thin mustache which is angled down toward the

corners of his mouth, but no *mouche*. Small patches of hair are visible beneath his yellow *paṇḍita* hat, at his temples and the middle of his forehead. He has a *phurba* tucked into his belt. His face is rounded, similar in shape to the Potala mural, SPS, and the Guimet paintings, contributing to the figure's idealized appearance. Furthermore, he has the same "bow eyes" as the Guimet portrait, rather than the characteristic almond-shape. Despite the greater degree of idealization, the figure is identifiable as the Fifth Dalai Lama through the inclusion of the mustache, receding hairline and *phurba*.

The manner in which the Fifth Dalai Lama's facial features are rendered in the Potala *thangka* are similar to an eighteenth-century portrait, located in the collection of the Rubin Museum (fig. 1.25). This portrait includes many of the identifying characteristics. He has a very thin, faint mustache and *mouche*. He wears the standard yellow *paṇḍita* hat, with the small patches of hair are visible at his temples, indicating a receding hairline. He has a *phurba* in his belt. The facial features are more idealized than the Boston, Rubin, and Potala mural portraits. His face is rounded, as in the SPS and Guimet portraits. His eyebrows are very thin. He has extremely thin "bow eyes." Similar to the SPS and Guimet portraits, his lips are plump in the center and grow very thin at the corners. Although the figure still retains several of the recurring features, such as the mustache, hat, round face, broad nose, and hair visible at the temples, the rendering is significantly more idealized and conventionalized than some of the earlier portraits.

As this comparison demonstrates, portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama may have varying degrees of individualization, specifically indicated by the facial hair, modeling of the face, almond-shaped eyes, and variations in the shape of the nose. The early portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama, made in the seventeenth-century during or shortly after his life, differed from one another in the treatment of the facial features and the degree of realism. These figures were



primarily identifiable by inscriptions, rather than specific features of the individual. The later portraits became increasingly conventionalized, combining ideal features, such as a rounded face, with characteristic attributes, such as the mustache and almond-shaped eyes, as in the SPS portrait. Thus, I conclude that there are various means through which a portrait subject is rendered present, including realism, iconographic attributes, and/or inscriptions. Furthermore, based on the visual evidence, I contend that the level of realism is not dictated by the date of the portrait, as both idealized images and portrait-likenesses were made during the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama. While some artists may not have actually seen the Fifth Dalai Lama, which could account for some variation in his portraits, the Guimet *thangka* bears his handprints and may even have been commissioned by him. Thus, the artist or patron who had access to the Fifth Dalai Lama could have emphasized his individual physical characteristics. This implies that a portrait-likeness was not privileged over an ideal image, as long as the subject was identifiable as the specific individual.

## 2. Painting L1 – Left of Center : King Songtsen Gampo

This painting depicts three figures.<sup>48</sup> The largest is placed slightly left of center and identified by an inscription below the figure as Songtsen Gampo (d. 649), (reigned 618-641), the first Dharmarāja (“Dharma King”) of Tibet (fig. 1.16). He is considered to be a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, indicated by the small figure of the Buddha Amitabha on his head-dress. This identification with Avalokiteśvara is likely the lineage association with the central painting of the Fifth Dalai, who is also the human reincarnation of the *bodhisattva* of compassion. According to

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<sup>48</sup> The figure in the bottom left corner is the first mythic king of the Tibetan dynasty, Nyatri Tsenpo (“Neck-Throned One”), identified in an inscription below the figure. The figure in the top right corner is the Indian prince Gyalwu Jikten Wangchuk (“Prince Lokeśvara”), as identified by an inscription below the throne. Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 251. Nyatri Tsenpo is identified as the thirty-seventh incarnation in the Dalai Lama lineage, but Gyalwu Jikten Wangchuk is not included in the list of previous incarnations established by the Fifth Dalai Lama, as documented in Sørensen, “The Dalai Lama Institution,” 58.

Tibetan history, the establishment of Buddhism in Tibet occurred in two phases. Gampo is credited with initiating the first phase, commonly referred to as “The First Propagation,” because he became a great patron of Buddhism after being converted to the religion by his Nepali wife Bhrikuti and his Chinese wife Wencheng. He is credited with building the great Jokhang temple in Lhasa, which is the focus of Buddhist practice in Tibet.

In this portrait, Gampo is depicted frontally, dressed in royal attire, including heavy jewelry and a crown bearing an image of the Buddha Amitābha, visually reinforcing his status as a hypostasis of Avalokiteśvara. A thin strip of curly, black hair is visible underneath the crown. His right hand makes the *vitarkamudrā* and holds a lotus. His left hand makes the *varadamudrā*, the gesture of “boon granting,” and holds a lotus topped with a *cakra*. His right leg is tucked beneath him. He wears a red and gold shoe on his left foot, which rests on a small blue pedestal. Behind his head is a red nimbus, which is an iconographic convention symbolizing his enlightened status.

The figure has similar idealized facial features to the portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the SPS, Guimet, and Potala *thangkas*. As seen in those examples, the shape of his face, nose and mouth follow the conventions for Buddha images. His face is almost circular in shape and lacks modeling. His nose is rounded, represented by a single curvilinear line. His lips are full in the center and very thin at the corners. In addition, he has the “bow eyes” commonly associated with Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. The only individualized aspects of this portrait are the figure’s eyebrows and facial hair. His brow is furrowed, curving upwards at the inner corners. He has a long, thin mustache and goatee. With the exception of the facial hair, this portrait bears little resemblance to the seventh-century sculpture in the Potala Palace (fig. I.15). Thus, in this nineteenth-century portrait, the facial hair is used as an individualizing convention in conjunction

with the idealized features to produce a representation of the seventh-century king as a portrait-type.

### 3. Painting R1 – Right of Center : Tibetan Buddhist Teacher Domtön

This painting also includes three figures set against a naturalistic landscape. The large figure at the center of the painting is the Tibetan teacher, Domtön Gyalwe Jungne (1004-1064) (fig. 1.17).<sup>49</sup> The figure is identified by an inscription, located in the lower left corner of his throne. Domtön, like Songtsen Gampo, represents the historical establishment of Buddhism in Tibet. Domtön was the principal Tibetan disciple of the revered Indian teacher Atīśa, (ca. 972-1054) (Skt. *Dīpamaraśrījñāna*), the renowned Buddhist scholar from Bengal. Atīśa and Domtön are credited with initiating the revival of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh-century referred to as the “Second Propagation.”

Furthermore, Domtön’s inclusion as the central figure in this painting is due to his significant role in the establishment and authentication of the Dalai Lama lineage. When the Fifth Dalai Lama sought to codify his lineage and previous incarnations, one of the most important sources he consulted was the *Rebirth Stories* in the *Precious Kadampa Book*, which discuss the previous lives of Domtön. This anthology emphasizes Domtön as the manifestation of Avalokiteśvara who, through his previous rebirths, embodies “the entire legacy of Buddhism as it was transmitted...from India to Tibet...”<sup>50</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama incorporated Domtön’s lineage into his own, thereby establishing its legitimacy and reinforcing his identification as a

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<sup>49</sup> The figure in the top left corner is Lha Thothori Nyenshel, the mythic twenty-seventh king of the Tibetan dynasty. The figure in the bottom right corner is identified in an inscription as the Indian Dharmarāja Lhe Gyalpo (Skt. *Devarāja*). Both figures are previous incarnations in the Dalai Lama lineage. Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 252. Lhe Gyalpo is depicted with darker skin, which is a visual convention used to convey his Indian identity.

<sup>50</sup> Sørensen, “Sacred Junipers,” *Orientalia* 39, no. 6 (September 2008): 76.

manifestation of Avalokiteśvara.<sup>51</sup> For this reason, Domtön often figures prominently in Dalai Lama lineage sets, such as this one.

In this portrait, Domtön is depicted frontally, seated on an animal skin atop an ornate throne surrounded by flowers. He is dressed in sumptuous, silk brocade robes, which symbolize his place in the Buddhist paradise of Akanīṣṭa. He also wears large gold earrings. Behind his head is a red nimbus. His right hand makes the *varadamudrā* and his left hand is in *vitarkamudrā* and holds a lotus flower. A low table topped with ritual objects is placed in front of him.

Domtön's representation is relatively idealized. The shape of his face, mouth, and nose closely resemble Buddha images, which are dictated by iconometric guidelines. His face is very round. His nose is represented by a single, curvilinear line. His lips are plump in the center and thin at the corners. The treatment of these features is very similar to the portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama and King Songtsen Gampo. His eyes are almond-shaped, similar to the Fifth Dalai Lama figure. He has a moustache which curves downward and a *mouche*. He has long, black, curly hair, which is an identifying characteristic of his portraits. The hair, clothing and jewelry are the only aspect of Domtön's portrait which differentiates him from the Fifth Dalai Lama. Thus, in this portrait, his hair is the primary means of representing Domtön as an individual.

The iconography of the three paintings highlights the central grouping. The identification of Songtsen Gampo, Domtön, and the Dalai Lamas with Avalokiteśvara is a significant association, because of the important role of the *bodhisattva* of compassion in Tibet. According to Tibetan Buddhist origin myths, the Tibetan people are considered to be descendants of the *bodhisattvas* Avalokiteśvara and Tara.<sup>52</sup> It is believed that Avalokiteśvara looked down on Tibet

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the origins of the belief that the Dalai Lama is a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, see Yumiko Ishihama, "On the Dissemination of the Belief in the Dalai Lama as a Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara," *Acta Asiatica* 64 (1993): 38-56.

from his heavenly realm and saw that the living beings were living in a state of chaos and unrest. He emanated a thousand manifestations of himself as various animals, in order to spread teachings of peace and thus transforming the land. In his form as a monkey, he mated with a snowlady, who was an emanation of Tārā, thus spawning the original six tribes of Tibetans.<sup>53</sup> As this narrative demonstrates, even in Tibet's early, mythic beginnings, Avalokiteśvara plays a protective and corrective role in the region's state of affairs.

These early associations of Tibetan ancestry and Avalokiteśvara's role as both progenitor and protector provide a foundation for the establishment of the institution of the Dalai Lamas as the spiritual and temporal authority. This identification of the Dalai Lama as an embodiment of Avalokiteśvara is underscored by the fact that Pasang Tsering, the original owner of the SPS, displayed the paintings in the shrine room of his home, behind a sculpture of the *bodhisattva*. In addition to the identification of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Songtsen Gampo, and Domtön as manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, the figures represent the legacy of Buddhism in Tibet. Songtsen Gampo is credited with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet in the seventh-century. Domtön, as the founder of the Kadam school, was an significant figure in the revival of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh-century. In the sixteenth-century, the "Great Fifth" played an important role in consolidating spiritual and political power in Tibet, codified the Dalai Lama lineage, and became a prolific patron of Buddhism. The arrangement of the portraits, with the Dalai Lama in the center, flanked by Songtsen Gampo and Domtön, reinforces the Fifth's role as one of the major proponents of Tibetan Buddhism.

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<sup>52</sup>Glenn H. Mullin, *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas: A Sacred Legacy of Reincarnation*, ed. Valerie Shepard (Santa Fe: Clear Light Books, 2001), 1.

<sup>53</sup> Mullin, *The Fourteen Dalai Lamas*, 1.

#### 4. Painting L2: First Dalai Lama

This painting depicts three figures, the largest of which is Gendün Drup (1391-1474), who was posthumously identified as the First Dalai Lama (fig. 1.26).<sup>54</sup> He is shown seated on a large throne draped in red cloth with a gold pattern. His yellow hat is a variation on the standard *paṇḍita*-type associated with teachers of the Gelug tradition. It has a flat top and the brim extends out past his forehead. Behind his head is a blue nimbus. His right hand holds a lotus flower and makes the *vitarkamudrā*. He holds an Indian-type *poti* book in the traditional oblong format in his left hand. He is seated in the *lalitāsana*, which is the “posture of royal ease,” with his right leg bent in front of him, and his left leg resting on a low pedestal decorated with a gold lotus petal motif. His feet, both of which are visible, are bare. He wears monastic robes of silk brocade, and his outer shawl is painted almost entirely in gold. The luxuriousness of his garments indicates that he is conceptually located within the heavenly realm of Akanīṣṭa.

There is a much greater degree of realism and individualization in this portrait. The distinctive features of the figure’s face give the appearance of old age. The line of his jaw makes a subtle S-curve, possibly indicating sagging jowls. Another curved line extends downward from his right nostril, representing wrinkled skin. His mustache and goatee are a lighter shade of black than the areas of hair visible at his temples and forehead, which gives the impression of graying hair. His is depicted with a receding hairline. The shape of his nose is long and pointed. The shape of his eyes is more stylized than his other features, as the upper lid forms an S-shape. His eyes are rimmed in red and his gaze is directed downwards.

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<sup>54</sup> The figure in the bottom center is Tisong Detsen, the second Dharmarāja of Tibet, identified by an inscription on the base of his throne. The figure in the upper right corner is Gyalwu Depatenpo (“Firm Belief”), an Indian prince identified by an inscription below. Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 251. Gyalwu Depatenpo is not depicted with dark skin, which is a common convention in representations of Indian subjects. Tisong Detsen does have slightly darker skin, which is unusual in representations of Tibetans.

In comparison to the portrait in the SPS, the First Dalai Lama is similarly represented as an older man in a portrait from an eighteenth-century lineage set in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing (fig. 1.27). In this painting, skin on the figure's face and neck is softly modeled to give the appearance of wrinkles. The shape of the nose, mouth and jaw are very similar to the figure in the SPS. The Beijing figure also has the stylized "bow eyes," which is the most idealized aspect of this portrait. The First Dalai Lama in the Beijing set does not have facial hair and wears the standard *paṇḍita*-style hat. Although the two portraits, which were created approximately fifty years apart, differ in style and iconography, the similarities between their facial features are striking. The degree of realism would suggest that the images are likenesses, however it is not necessarily indicative of the First Dalai Lama's actual physical appearance. There are no known portraits of the First Dalai Lama dated to during or shortly after his life, when there is the possibility of artists making images from life. However, he lived for eighty-four years, which is considerably longer than the majority of other Dalai Lamas. It is possible that the distinctive characteristics seen in both the SPS and Beijing portraits are visual conventions which signify the subject's long life, rather than individual physical characteristics.

A mural in the Potala Palace in Lhasa includes a significantly more idealized portrait of the First Dalai Lama (fig. 1.28). This painting, commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama, was created between 1645 and 1648, more than one hundred years earlier than the Beijing painting. The figure is shown frontally, with a rounded, unlined face. His nose is broad and rendered with a curvilinear line, in contrast with the long, pointed noses of the Beijing and SPS portraits, but the stylized shape of the eyes is similar. The figure wears the standard *paṇḍita* hat and, as in the other portraits, small patches of hair are visible at the temples and forehead. This painting provides visual evidence that both individualized and idealized portraits were created of the First

Dalai Lama. Furthermore, the idealized Potala portrait was made approximately a century before the more individualized SPS or Beijing versions. Thus, they do not follow the same pattern suggested by previous scholars of portraiture and evident in the comparison of Fifth Dalai Lama portraits, in which early portraits of the subject are more individualized, but then become increasingly conventionalized. The greater degree of realism in the SPS and Beijing portraits may be the result of style, rather than a concern for portrait-likeness.

Due to the lack of early portraits of the First Dalai Lama, which could be “made from life,” as in the Boston sculpture of the Fifth Dalai Lama, it is not clear if the similarities in the facial features of the SPS and Beijing portraits are the result of a shared model, based on visual conventions which indicate age, or represent the subject’s distinctive physical characteristics. Many of the earliest known portraits of the First Dalai Lama date to long after his life and represent the figure as an idealized type, signifying an enlightened teacher. All of the paintings representing the First Dalai Lama as an old man date to the eighteenth-century or later. Thus, this apparent realism further supports my argument that realism does not necessarily indicate portrait-likeness, in terms of resemblance to the individual physical characteristics of the First Dalai Lama. Yet, since the subject died at the age of eighty-four, the representation of the figure does indicate an effort to reference a specific characteristic of the First Dalai Lama, his long life. Again, this reinforces my assertion that realism is one means of representing the portrait-subject, even if the image is not made from life.

##### 5. Painting R2 – Second Dalai Lama

This painting includes four figures, the largest of which is located in the upper right corner and identified in an inscription as the Second Dalai Lama Gendün Gyatso (1475-1542)



(fig. 1.29).<sup>55</sup> Like his previous incarnation, Gyatso was posthumously identified as the Second Dalai Lama. He is depicted frontally, seated on a throne with a blue curvilinear throne back. He wears the characteristic yellow *paṇḍita* hat. His right arm is outstretched and he holds a *vajra* in his hand. His left hand holds a bell. His right foot extends forward, and part of his bare foot is visible. A small table bearing ritual objects is placed on his right side.

The facial features of the Second Dalai Lama are significantly more idealized than those of the First Dalai Lama. The shape of the face and nose resemble the portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama, Songtsen Gampo, and Domtön. Furthermore, the figure has the same stylized “bow eyes” as Songtsen Gampo and the First Dalai Lama, although his are slightly reddened. The more individualized aspects of his portrait are the mouth, facial hair and eyebrows. His mouth is open and grimacing, so his upper and lower teeth are visible. His eye brows are furrowed. The open mouth, bared teeth, furrowed brow, reddened eyes, and outstretched right arm are all standard iconographic conventions, which symbolize his status as a semi-wrathful figure similar to the images of Guru Padmasambhava in Tibetan Buddhist art. He has a long thin mustache which hangs down at either side of his mouth and faintly visible beard. Despite this individualization, the proportions and treatment of the face are more closely related to standard representations of Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Furthermore, the facial features which differentiate this figure from other Dalai Lama portraits in the SPS are not unique to representations of this subject. Rather, they are conventions which indicate the figure’s semi-wrathful mood.

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<sup>55</sup> The figure in the top left corner is the Indian prince Kōnchog Bang (“Ratnadāsa”). The figure in the bottom right corner is the Kashmiri yogin Khache Gōnpapa (Skt. *Jayānanda*) [b. 1055]. The figure in the bottom left corner is Ngawak Ralpacen, the third Dharma king of Tibet. All three figures are identified by an inscription and are previous incarnations in the Dalai Lama lineage. Sørensen, “The Ninth Dalai Lama’s Set,” 251. Kōnchog Bang and Khache Gōnpapa are represented with the standard convention of depicting Indian incarnations with darker skin.

This depiction differs from a portrait of the Second Dalai Lama in the mural at the Potala Palace (fig. 1.30), commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1645. The figure is shown in three-quarter view and is wearing the same variation on the *paṇḍita* hat as the First Dalai Lama in the SPS. The figure's jaw is rounded and the chin protrudes slightly. His mouth is small and closed, with plumper lips than in the SPS portrait. His nose is long, straight, and does not stick out very far from his face. His eyes are wide and almond-shaped. He has thin eyebrows and a receding hairline. Due to the greater degree of realism, this representation more closely resembles a portrait-likeness, as used in western terminology. This portrait of the Second Dalai Lama is much more individualized than the painting of the First Dalai Lama from the same lineage set in the Potala Palace. Conversely, in the SPS, the portrait of the Second Dalai Lama is more idealized than the First. This suggests that portrait sets of the Dalai Lama lineage related to the Fifth Dalai Lama could include both idealized images and likenesses. This does not appear to be the case with lineage sets associated with the Seventh Dalai Lama, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Two. Thus, it indicates that idealized images, such as the SPS portrait of the Second Dalai Lama, and more realistic images, such as the SPS portrait of the First Dalai Lama, were considered equally successful at rendering the subject present.

### 6. Painting L3: Third Dalai Lama

This painting depicts four main figures. The largest figure, located in the upper left of the image, is identified in an inscription as the Third Dalai Lama, Sönam Gyatso (1543-1588) (fig. 1.31).<sup>56</sup> He is seated in *vajrāsana*, with both hands in a variation of the two-handed teaching

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<sup>56</sup> The figure in the top right corner is the Indian prince Gyalpo Gewapel (Skt. *Kuśalaśrī*). The figure in the bottom right corner is the revered teacher of the Sakya tradition, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo. The figure in the bottom left corner is Nyangrel Nyima Wözer, the Tibetan esoteric master and treasure-finder. All three figures are identified by inscriptions and are previous incarnations of the Dalai Lama lineage. Sørensen, "The Ninth Dalai Lama's Set," 250.

gesture (Skt. *dharmacakramudrā*). The figure holds a lotus in his right hand. He is dressed in robes of Chinese silk brocade. He is seated on a large throne with a yellow cloth draped over the back, which may represent his hat. A red nimbus with a gold outline is located behind his head. Ritual implements are placed on a table in front of the figure.

The figure's face is much more realistic than that in the SPS portrait of the Second Dalai Lama. He has a square jaw and clearly defined chin. He has a thin mustache and goatee. His brow is furrowed and his eyes reddened. Similar to the Second Dalai Lama figure, his lips are thin and his mouth is open, revealing his upper and lower teeth. Although the figure has a furrowed brow, reddened eyes, and an open mouth, the expression does not appear as wrathful in this portrait. The figure has a short, pointed nose. His has almond-shaped eyes, but they are considerably wider and thinner than those of the Fifth Dalai Lama. He has distinctive eyebrows, which are angled upwards at the outer corner. His earlobes are elongated, symbolizing his renunciation of the material world. He does not wear a hat, so his black hair and receding hairline are visible. The treatment of the figure's facial features is similar to those of the First Dalai Lama, in terms of realism and individualization. Yet, as in the First Dalai Lama portrait, the figure's distinctive characteristics may not be indicative of the subject's actual physical appearance.

The portrait of the Third Dalai Lama in the mural at the Potala Palace (fig. 1.32) is also individualized, but the rendering of the facial features is quite different than the SPS figure. In this painting, also dating between 1645 and 1648, his chin is much wider and more pronounced. His mouth is small and closed, with thicker lips than in the SPS. His nose is a distinctive shape, with a curving ridge and pointed tip. The line of his nose extends between his eyebrows, bulging outward to form a bump between his eyes. A deep crease accentuates his left cheek. Unlike the

SPS figure, the Potala figure has the stylized “bow eyes.” He wears the variation on the *paṇḍita*-hat, like the Second Dalai Lama in the Potala mural and the First Dalai Lama in the SPS. In both paintings there is a deliberate attempt to represent the figures as individuals, but there is no clear relationship between the artistic conventions used to accomplish this. This further supports my supposition that a greater degree of realism and individualization is not necessarily representative of the subject’s actual physical appearance. However, it does indicate a convention in representing the portrait of an enlightened teacher.

### 7. Painting R3 – Fourth Dalai Lama

This painting includes four figures, the largest of which is identified in an inscription as the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yönten Gyatso (1589-1615) (fig. 1.33). He is shown seated on a throne, dressed in red and yellow monastic robes of silk brocade. He wears a yellow hat in the alternative style to the traditional pointed *paṇḍita* cap, which has a flat top and pointed brim that extends over the forehead, also seen in the portraits of the First Dalai Lama in the SPS and the Second and Third Dalai Lamas in the Potala Mural. The figure’s short black hair and receding hairline are partially visible underneath the hat. His left ear is also shown, which has an elongated lobe. Behind his head is a blue halo outlined in gold, indicating his status as an enlightened being. His right arm is extended outward and the figure holds a *vajra* and lotus in that hand. He holds a bell in his left hand, which is placed in front of his chest. Ritual implements are placed on a low table on his right side and on a lotus base in front of him.

The treatment of the Fourth Dalai Lama’s facial features is similar to that of the First and Third, in terms of individualization and realism. His face is in three-quarter view. His jaw is rounded and his chin is bulbous. He has a thin mustache which extends horizontally away from his face, curling upwards at the ends. His nose is rounded at the tip and there is a bulge between

his eyes, which are downcast and reddened at the corners. His mouth is depicted similarly to the portraits of the Second and Third Dalai Lamas, in that the figure has thin lips, an open mouth and visible teeth. The figure also shares other characteristics with the Second Dalai Lama portrait, such as furrowed brows, reddened eyes, the outstretched arm holding a *vajra* and the other hand holding a bell. These iconographic attributes similarly convey the figure's semi-wrathful appearance. Yet, despite the use of these conventions, the Fourth Dalai Lama's facial features are individualized, lacking the rounded, idealized forms seen in the semi-wrathful portrait of the Second Dalai Lama.

The individualization of the figure's face does not appear to correspond with his biography. The Fourth Dalai Lama was a Mongolian prince. Two small figures (fig. 1.34), representing Mongol nobles, are shown to the left of the Fourth Dalai Lama. These figures are clearly marked as "foreigners" by their darker skin tone, clothing style, and distinctive hat. The use of darker colors and distinctive attire are standard conventions used to convey the subject's non-Tibetan identity, as seen in the representations of Indian incarnations in the SPS. However, the Dalai Lama figure does not possess any characteristics that distinguish him as being Mongolian. This further attests to my argument that individualized, realistic portraits may not necessarily correspond to the subject's actual physical appearance. However, it does indicate a concern with representing the subject as a historical figure, rather than a generic, idealized enlightened being.

This individualized portrait contrasts sharply with an idealized portrait of the Fourth Dalai Lama in a mural in the Potala Palace (fig. 1.35). The portrait is very similar to the portrait of the First Dalai Lama, also from the Potala mural. The figure's face is rounded, although slightly narrower than that of the First Dalai Lama. However, the treatment of the eyes, nose and

mouth are almost identical. Thus, although the portraits of the First through Fifth Dalai Lamas in the SPS and the murals at the Potala include both ideal and individualized representations, there is no correlation between which figures are depicted in which manner. This would suggest that there were no set guidelines dictating which subjects should be represented as idealized images and which should be likenesses. This suggests that in Dalai Lama lineage sets, both portrait types were considered equally successful.

#### The Sixth Through Ninth Dalai Lamas: Central Painting

The Sixth through the Ninth Dalai Lamas are represented as four small figures seated on clouds along the uppermost register of central painting of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Moving from left to right, they are identified as: the Sixth Dalai Lama Tsangyang Ggyatso (1683-1706), the Seventh Dalai Lama Kalzang Gyatso (1708-1757), the Ninth Dalai Lama Lungtok Gyatso (1805-1815), the Eighth Dalai Lama Jampel Gyatso (1758-1804). Given the small scale of these images, the representations are significantly less detailed than the depictions of the other Dalai Lamas. However, the figures still appear to be relatively individualized.

The Sixth Dalai Lama is shown seated, with his body in a three-quarter view and his face in profile (fig. 1.36). He wears red and yellow monastic robes and a variation on the yellow *paṇḍita* hat, rendering his elongated ears and a section of his black hair visible. His right hand holds a gold *cakra* and his left hand is in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and holds a gold flower, likely intended to represent a lotus. Behind the figure is a large circle of green, with multicolored edges. His jawline is very rounded. His nose is long and slightly curved. His gaze is cast downwards in the direction of the Fifth Dalai Lama figure.

The Seventh Dalai Lama (fig. 1.37) is also shown in a three-quarter view, with his face in profile and wearing red and yellow robes. He wears the standard pointed yellow *paṇḍita* hat. His

hands are crossed at the wrists. There appears to be an object in each hand, likely a *vajra* and bell. He also holds a gold flower, similar to that of the Sixth Dalai Lama. His body is encircled in a circular band of orange, green, and gold, with a blue center. His jawline is square and his lips are thick and rounded. His nose is very straight. He also looks downward at the Fifth Dalai Lama, but his eyebrows are more arched than the Sixth Dalai Lama's.

The placement of the Ninth Dalai Lama does not follow chronological order and Sørensen suggests that this was a mistake on the part of the artist, which is plausible.<sup>57</sup> In this portrait (fig. 1.38) he wears the typical yellow *paṇḍita* hat and red and yellow monastic robes, but his outer garment is lined in green. Both hands hold an oblong book and the same type of gold flower as the previous figures. A large gold *cakra* is placed on the figure's right. The Ninth Dalai Lama is also enclosed in a circular band of orange, green and gold, with a blue center. The figure's body is depicted frontally, but his face is shown in profile, facing towards the central figure of the Fifth Dalai Lama. His jaw is less angular than the Seventh Dalai Lama's and less rounded than the Sixth Dalai Lama's. His lips are thick and his nose is small and pointed at the tip. His eyes are set back from his nose and his eyebrows are almost completely straight lines. This portrait will be discussed in greater detail presently, because of the SPS was commissioned during or shortly after the life of the Ninth Dalai.

The Eighth Dalai Lama (fig. 1.39) is depicted in a three-quarter view, whereas the other small-scale portraits represented the figures' faces in profile. His robes are red and yellow, and the outer garment is lined with green. His hands are in a variation of the *dharmacakramudrā*, and his right hand holds the same type of gold flower as the aforementioned figures. He is similarly enclosed in a circular band of orange, green and gold, but with a green center. He does not wear

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<sup>57</sup> Sørensen, "The Ninth Dalai Lama's Set of Seven Lineage *Thangkas*," 252.

a hat and has short black hair. His face is very round and there is some shading on the chin, indicating a beard. His mouth is shown in a circular manner, giving the impression that it is open. His nose is small and curves inward between his eyes. He also looks down at the Fifth Dalai Lama and his eyebrows are almost completely straight lines.

### **Comparative Portraits of the Ninth Dalai Lama**

Because the SPS is assumed to have been made during or shortly after the life of the Ninth Dalai Lama, it is significant that he is not the main figure of the central painting. Furthermore, his portrait is small and idealized. Stoddard and Jackson both cite realistic images made during the subject's life as a category of Tibetan portraiture. These scholars do not include idealized portraits made during the subject's life in their categorization. This indicates an underlying assumption, similarly expressed by Tucci, that portraits made during the subject's life are likely to be realistic representations of the figure's physical appearance. However, as demonstrated by the Guimet portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama, this is not always the case. A comparison of Ninth Dalai Lama portraits and a rare written description of the subject provide further evidence refuting the argument that a portrait's temporal proximity to the living subject results in greater "likeness." The significant disjuncture between the biography and the representations of the Ninth Dalai is the fact that he died at the age of eleven.

Thomas Manning, a British explorer and one of the first Europeans to visit Tibet, met the Ninth Dalai Lama when he was only seven years old. He described his meeting with the Dalai Lama in his notes, stating that:

The Lama's beautiful and interesting face and manner engrossed almost all my attention. He was at that time about seven years old: had the simple and unaffected manners of a well-educated princely child. His face was, I thought, poetically and affectingly beautiful. He was of a gay and cheerful disposition; his beautiful mouth perpetually unbending into



a graceful smile, which illuminated his whole countenance. Sometimes, particularly when he had looked at me, his smile almost approached to a gentle laugh.<sup>58</sup>

While this description is only one account, informed by Manning's own culture and personal perception and should by no means be considered an accurate, authentic representation of the Ninth Dalai Lama, his written description provides as useful point of comparison for considering the role of likeness in Dalai Lama portraits. While Manning does not give an indication of the Ninth Dalai Lama's specific characteristics, the description depicts him as youthful, smiling and beautiful. In a detail of the central painting in the Ninth Dalai Lama's painting set, the figure is not represented as a child and does not appear younger than the other small-scale figures. The size of the portrait likely accounts for some lack of realism, yet even other more detailed images dating to during or shortly after the life of the Ninth Dalai Lama do not represent the figure as a young child.

For example, a small scale representation of the Ninth Dalai Lama is included in a portrait of the Sixth Dalai Lama from a lineage set in the collection of the Hahn Cultural Foundation at the Hwajeong Museum in Seoul, South Korea. Similarly to the SPS, the portrait does not represent the Ninth Dalai Lama as a youth (Fig 1.40). The Ninth Dalai Lama is the chronologically last incarnation of the lineage depicted in this set. Therefore, as with the SPS, they can be dated to between 1810 and 1822, the period between the identification of the Ninth and Tenth Dalai Lamas. The figure is shown in three-quarter view. He wears the standard *paṇḍita* hat and patches of hair are visible at the middle of the forehead and temples, indicating a receding hairline. The figure's face is rounded and angled downwards. There is nothing specific in the treatment of his facial features that indicates the subject's young age. Thus, despite being

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<sup>58</sup> Markham, Clements R., ed., *Narratives of the Mission of George Bogle to Tibet and of the Journey of Thomas Manning to Lhasa* (1876, repr., New Delhi: Manjuśrī Publishing House, 1971), 265.

made during or shortly after the Ninth Dalai Lama's life, his portrait is clearly idealized, as he is never shown as a young boy.

### **Conclusion**

The portraits of the Dalai Lamas examined in this chapter, both in the painting set and comparative images represent a broad spectrum of idealized images and portrait-likenesses. The visual evidence demonstrates that there is not a strong correlation between degree of realism and temporal proximity of portrait and subject, as suggested by Jackson's categorization. Simply because an image is made during or shortly after the life of the subject does not guarantee a greater degree of individualization to indicate a close likeness of the individual. In many examples, such as the Guimet portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the portraits of the Ninth Dalai Lama, images made during the life of the subject are idealized. In the case of the Fifth Dalai Lama, both idealized and realistic images were made during a figure's life. Furthermore, highly individualized and realistic portraits were made long after the subject's life, as exemplified by the First, Third and Fourth Dalai Lamas in the SPS. Yet, there does not seem to be any consistent convention that dictates when an image should be idealized and when it should be a likeness. Thus, I posit that in portraits of Dalai Lamas, a likeness was not privileged over an ideal.

The SPS and the Potala mural depicting the First through Fifth Dalai Lamas further support this argument. Both sets of portraits include idealized and realistic representations, despite the fact that the paintings in each set were executed at the same time, in the same style, by the same artist(s), and for the same patron. In addition, the subjects that are depicted as ideal and as individualized differ in the respective sets. Again, this indicates that there was no specific

convention dictating which Dalai Lamas are represented as ideal and which as a likeness. Furthermore, it suggests that both modes of representation were valued equally.

However, in both idealized and individualized portraits, there is still an attempt to represent the figure in such a way that they are identifiable as the individual subject. In the more idealized images, the figure's identity is conveyed through specific iconographic conventions, such as facial hair, and an inscription. In the more realistic portraits, the distinctive facial features are not necessarily representative of the physical characteristics of the subject. However, they highlight the figure's identity as a historical human subject, similarly to the portraits of *arhats*. Regardless of whether or not the greater degree of likeness is based on the figure's actual appearance, there is deliberate attempt to render the figures as individuals, which does necessarily indicate the idea of portraiture as conceived of in a western context. The idealized images reference the subject's identity as an embodiment of Avalokiteśvara. Thus, I contend that a successful portrait could fulfill its purpose of rendering the subject present through a variety of artistic conventions, including realism and specific iconographic attributes.

## Chapter 2 – Dalai Lama Portrait Sets as Painting Genre

A comparison between the SPS and other Dalai Lama lineage sets highlights the distinctive features of the former and provides a better understanding of these sets as a genre of Tibetan portraiture. The tradition of painting Tibetan Buddhist spiritual lineages dates to the twelfth-century.<sup>59</sup> The first Dalai Lama lineage sets were commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth-century. The Dalai Lama lineage was painted in a series of murals in the Potala Palace in Lhasa, as seen in the examples in Chapter One. The Fifth Dalai Lama also commissioned sets of *thangka* paintings representing his lineage and previous incarnations. Since the inception of this artistic tradition in the seventeenth-century, Dalai Lama lineage sets became increasingly commonplace and can be found in murals, *thangkas*, and woodblock prints throughout Tibet. My research has shown that Dalai Lama lineage sets mostly commonly consist of thirteen paintings. There are also sets consisting of five or three paintings. The SPS is the only instance of a set of seven paintings that I have identified.

Few Dalai Lama lineage *thangka* sets have survived intact. In addition to the SPS, I have identified four extant complete sets of *thangkas*, located in collections in Stockholm, Beijing, Chicago, and Seoul.<sup>60</sup> Further, there are eight sets which have survived partially intact,

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<sup>59</sup> Singer, “Early Painting in Tibet,” 153.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Henss, “The Iconography of the Dalai Lamas,” in *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History*, ed. Martin Brauen (Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich. Chicago: Serindia, 2005), 266-267. Henss notes that the thirteen-painting sets in Stockholm and Beijing are complete. In a footnote, he mentions the three paintings from Seoul, but does not identify them as a complete set. He does not discuss the five-painting set in Chicago.

consisting of two or more extant paintings, in museums and private collections internationally.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, there are thirteen individual paintings which I have identified as remnants of no longer extant Dalai Lama lineage sets because they are nearly identical to paintings in the extant sets in subject, iconography, composition and style.<sup>62</sup> Only a small portion of these have been reproduced in scholarly publications, and often only as individual paintings rather than as sets. This is due in part to the fact that Dalai Lama lineage sets, as a genre of Tibetan portraiture, have received scant scholarly attention.

The exhibition catalogue *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History* includes a number of paintings, sculptures, and photographs of the Dalai Lamas, but the SPS is the only lineage set reproduced in full and in the correct arrangement. Other examples of Dalai Lama lineage paintings were included, but they were not explicitly identified as belonging to a set.

Furthermore, they were not grouped together in the publication, so it is not immediately apparent that they belong to lineage sets. The visual database *Himalayan Art Resources (HAR)* has a

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<sup>61</sup> The partial sets are: five paintings in the Tamashige Tibet Collection in Tokyo (*Gems*, figs. 22.1 - 22.5); five paintings in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zürich (*Dalai Lamas*, figs. 26, 30, 35, 36, 66); six paintings in a private collection (Christie's sale 2529, lot 95, November 2001); five paintings in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 37, September 2001); five paintings in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (HAR 94411, 94401, 94395, 94391, 94410); four paintings in collection of the Musée national des Arts asiatiques – Guimet in Paris (*Eternal Presence*, figs. 14, 16, 17, 19); two paintings in the collection of the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (*Eternal Presence*, figs. 15, 18); and two paintings in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 85, September 1997).

<sup>62</sup> The thirteen paintings are: The First Dalai Lama in the Jucker Collection; The Second Dalai Lama in the John and Berthe Ford Collection (HAR 73742); The Second Dalai Lama in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 71, September 1997); The Third Dalai Lama in the Rubin Museum (HAR 327); The Third Dalai Lama in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No.:1988.76.1); The Third Dalai Lama from the Schleiper Collection, Brussels (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 1); The Third Dalai Lama from the collection of Karl-Dieter Fuchsberger, Kempten (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 290); The Fourth Dalai Lama from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, Paris (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 291); The Fourth Dalai Lama in the collection of Arnold Lieberman (HAR 61145); The Fifth Dalai Lama in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (HAR 69459); The Fifth Dalai Lama in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (HAR 94315); Phagpa, a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas, from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, Paris (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 2); Domtön, a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 8). A painting of the Seventh Dalai Lama surrounded by previous incarnations in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art (HAR 380) can be identified as part of a set because it includes portraits of the First, Third and Fifth Dalai Lama. Jeff Watt, *Himalayan Art Resources*, <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm/380.html>.

number of high resolution digital images of Dalai Lamas, which has proved useful to this study. The *HAR* identifies several groups of paintings as lineage sets and specifies the order in which they were arranged. However, many of the Dalai Lama portraits in their digital collection are not identified as a lineage set or do not link to their “Dalai Lama” webpage. Therefore, there is no systematic way to search for Dalai Lama portraits. In addition, many partial lineage sets are in private collections, and I was only able to obtain images from Christie’s and Sotheby’s auction catalogues. It is quite possible that there are more examples of Dalai Lama lineage sets in private collections that have never been published. Given the displacement of Dalai Lama lineage paintings, it is difficult to reconstruct the corpus of sets as a basis for drawing broad conclusions or identifying common trends in portraits of Dalai Lama lineages. For the purposes of this study, I assembled a visual database of the 103 images of Dalai Lama lineage portraits I collected from published texts, *Himalayan Art Resources*, museum websites, and auction catalogues. This comparative material allowed me to examine the standard conventions of Dalai Lama lineage sets, which serves as a framework for highlighting the unique characteristics of the SPS.

In my visual analysis of the comparative material, I have identified four compositional types among the extant Dalai Lama lineage sets.<sup>63</sup> Identifying common compositional conventions provides a greater understanding of the artistic genre of Dalai Lama lineage sets and thus contextualizes both the common place and distinctive aspects of the SPS. In all four types, the center *thangka* follows the standard, hieratic Indic composition, in which a single, large Dalai Lama figure is depicted frontally and small-scale teachers, Buddhist deities, and protectors are

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<sup>63</sup> Related to these sets are single paintings in which a large Dalai Lama figure is depicted in the center of the composition, surrounded by previous incarnations. The composition may be related to refuge field paintings. This painting type will not be considered in detail, as it is not a set and thus is outside the scope of this thesis. Examples of this type include: *The Eighth Dalai Lama*, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Ethnographic Museum of Zürich, Inv. No.: 18593.

represented in the upper and/or lower registers, as in the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the SPS. Therefore, the four compositional types only pertain to the paintings which flank the central *thangka*.

They are:

1. A single large figure of the Dalai Lama in three-quarter view
2. Three central figures of the Dalai Lamas in three-quarter view
3. A single central figure of the Dalai Lama shown frontally
4. Multiple figures of the Dalai Lamas from different perspectives

### **Compositional Types**

#### Composition #1 : Single Dalai Lama Figure in Three-Quarter View

The first compositional type is the most common among extant sets. These paintings depict a single large Dalai Lama incarnation in three-quarter view placed slightly off-center. The paintings typically include additional small figures. In most cases, at least one deity and a teacher are located in the upper register and at least one protector deity or guardian figure is placed at the bottom. Occasionally, buildings or events from the life of the painting's main figure are depicted in the background. These paintings are arranged so that the figures all face inward toward the middle *thangka*, thus reinforcing the emphasis on the Dalai Lama portrait at the center.

Examples of this compositional type include: complete sets of thirteen paintings in the collection of the Folkens Museum Etnografiska in Stockholm (figs. 2.1 – 2.13) and the Palace Museum in Beijing (figs. 2.14 – 2.26); a complete set of three paintings in the collection of the Hahn Cultural Foundation at the Hwajeong Museum in Seoul (figs. 2.27 – 2.29); a partial set of five paintings in the Tamashige Tibet Collection in Tokyo (figs. 2.30 – 2.34); a partial set of five paintings in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zürich (figs. 2.35 – 2.39); a partial set

of six paintings in a private collection (figs. 2.40 – 2.45); a partial set of five paintings in a private collection (figs. 2.47 – 2.51); and partial set of two paintings in a private collection (figs. 2.52 – 2.53). In addition, eleven of the thirteen individual paintings have this composition.<sup>64</sup> The predominance of the first compositional type suggests a common artistic model, which will be examined in the following section.

#### Composition #2 : Multiple Dalai Lama Figures in Three-Quarter View

The second compositional type is closely related to the first, in that all of the Dalai Lama incarnations are depicted in three-quarter view, facing the central painting. In these paintings, three incarnations in the Dalai Lama lineage are represented in a pyramidal shape at the center, with one slightly larger figure placed atop two adjacent figures. Three smaller figures are located in the upper register, with the central figure vertically aligned with those below. Additional teachers and protector deities are represented in the lower register. The second compositional type is very rare. The only example I have identified is a complete set of five paintings in the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago (figs. 2.53 - 2.57).

#### Composition #3: Single Central Dalai Lama Figure Shown Frontally

In the third compositional type, the paintings follow the same Indic convention as the central *thangka*, in which a large central figure in the Dalai Lama lineage is depicted frontally, with small-scale teachers and deities represented in the upper register and guardian figures at the bottom. The central *thangka* in this type of set is often more elaborate than the others, which aids in identifying the arrangement of the paintings when there are no inscriptions. Examples of this type include: a partial set of five paintings in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (figs. 2.58 - 2.62), a partial set of four paintings in collection of the Musée National des

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<sup>64</sup> The two paintings which do not have this composition are the Fourth Dalai Lama in the collection of Arnold Lieberman and the Seventh Dalai Lama in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art.



Arts Asiatiques – Guimet in Paris (2.63 – 2.66); a partial set of two paintings in the collection of the Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire in Brussels (figs 2.67 – 2.68); a painting of the Fourth Dalai Lama in the collection of Arnold Lieberman (fig. 2.69); and a painting of the Seventh Dalai Lama in the collection of the Rubin Museum of Art (fig. 2.70).

#### Composition #4 : Multiple Dalai Lama Figures From Different Perspectives

In the fourth type, each painting depicts multiple figures, one slightly larger than the others, arranged in an asymmetrical composition. Some figures are represented frontally and others in a three-quarter view. The portraits of the First through Fifth Dalai Lamas in the murals of the Potala Palace depict some figures frontally and others in three-quarter view. However, the SPS is the only set of *thangka* paintings representing the Dalai Lama lineage with this compositional type that I have identified. This composition, characterized by multiple figures shown from various perspectives, is common among painting sets depicting *arhats* (fig. 2.71). Perhaps, the artist or patron followed an artistic model other than established compositional types for Dalai Lama lineage sets. It is also likely that the distinctive composition in the SPS is related to the style in which they were made. Tibetan artists working in the Karma Gadri style appropriated stylistic elements and compositional arrangements from Chinese paintings, such as portraits of *arhats*. Since many of the Dalai Lama portraits in the SPS are realistically rendered with a concern with physiognomy commonly found in representations of *arhats*, perhaps the artist also appropriated a composition associated with those images.

The corpus of extant Dalai Lama lineage sets differ in composition, but the first type is most common. The second type is rare, but presents a variation on the first by including three central figures instead of one. Furthermore, all of the Dalai Lama lineage sets with the first and second compositional types have portraits of the Seventh Dalai Lama as their central painting.

They are also related iconographically and stylistically. This contrasts sharply with the SPS, which has a distinctive composition and the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama at the center.

There are also distinctive conventions for the number of paintings in a lineage set. The most common is thirteen, although there are also examples of five and three. The Stockholm and Beijing sets have thirteen paintings, the Chicago set has five, and the Seoul set has three. The SPS is the only complete set consisting of seven paintings. Complete sets provide the most useful information about standard conventions in Dalai Lama lineage paintings, such as the number of paintings, composition, number of incarnations, and treatment of the figures. For example, the figures in the SPS vary in terms of perspective and degree of realism. Thus, an examination of only a few paintings likely would not give an accurate impression of the set as a whole. For this reason, I examine the four complete sets, highlighting the incarnations represented, composition, and the Dalai Lama portraits.<sup>65</sup> I specifically address Henss' argument that the "objective is not the individual resemblance to the physical person but rather...the visual representation of the institution of the Dalai Lama."<sup>66</sup> This discussion of the visual conventions of other lineage sets will provide a framework identifying the unique elements of the SPS.

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<sup>65</sup> I will not examine the partial lineage sets in detail in this chapter, because the majority of them are nearly identical to the complete thirteen-painting sets, and thus would not contribute anything new to this discussion. The partial sets from Guimet and Brussels will be discussed in Chapter Three, within the context of Dalai Lama lineage paintings bearing handprints.

<sup>66</sup> Henss, "Iconography," 262.

### **Thirteen-Painting Set: Stockholm, ca. Eighteenth-Century**

The set of thirteen paintings in the collection of the Folkens Museum Etnografiska in Stockholm was one of the first Dalai Lama lineage sets to be published.<sup>67</sup> The set, which was acquired by Swedish researcher Sven Hedin in 1930, was the subject of volume one of Toni Schmid's 1961 *Saviours of Mankind: Dalai Lamas and Former Incarnations of Avalokiteśvara*. According to Schmid, the paintings are thought to come from the Chinese imperial summer palace in Chengde, which was built in the eighteenth-century. The portrait of the Seventh Dalai Lama is the centerpiece of the set.<sup>68</sup> The twelve paintings which bracket the central *thangka* depict the First through Sixth Dalai Lamas, as well as Avalokiteśvara and five previous incarnations. The previous incarnations are: Songtsen Gampo, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, Tisong Detsen, and Domtön. All four of these figures are related to the history of Buddhist propagation in Tibet and are also represented in the SPS. The identity of the fifth previous incarnation has been debated. Schmid identified the central figure of the sixth painting as the Sakya master Phagpa Lodrö Gyaltzen (1235-1280), based on the figure's iconography.<sup>69</sup> However, Michael

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<sup>67</sup> Toni Schmid, *Saviours of Mankind: Dalai Lamas and Former Incarnations of Avalokitesvara*, vol. 1 (Stockholm: Sven Hedin Foundation, Statens Etnografiska Museum, 1961).

<sup>68</sup> Schmid, *Saviours*, 1:11,13. Toni Schmid contends that the set originally consisted of eleven paintings, with the image of Avalokiteśvara at the center. He believes that it was made during the life of the Fifth Dalai Lama and that the images of the Sixth and Seventh Dalai Lamas were later additions, because they are of an inferior quality. It is difficult to evaluate his assessment of the two *thangkas* based on visual analysis of the available photographic reproductions. Kimiaki Tanaka, "Portraits of the Dalai Lamas: The Thirteen-*Thangka* Type and Its Variations," *Orientalism* 36 no. 6 (September 2005): 72. Tanaka argues that the Avalokiteśvara painting would not have been the centerpiece, as the figure is not represented frontally. He posits that the set originally included thirteen paintings, with the image of the Seventh Dalai Lama as the centerpiece, and thus was made during or shortly after his life. Tanaka's argument is convincing and even if Schmid is correct that the two paintings were later additions, they likely replaced works depicting the same subjects.

<sup>69</sup> Schmid, *Saviours of Mankind*, 1: 10-11.

Henss has suggested that the figure depicts the Sixth abbot of Narthang monastery Sanggye Gömpa (1179-1250).<sup>70</sup> Neither Phagpa nor Sanggye Gömpa is included in the SPS.

The SPS and Stockholm sets have very little in common, except for the composition of the central *thangka* and the arrangement of the paintings into pairs, which flank the centerpiece. The Stockholm set has the portrait of the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center, whereas the SPS has the Fifth Dalai Lama figure. However, in both instances the Dalai Lama figure is represented frontally, following the standard compositional convention for the central *thangka* in lineage sets. The two sets also differ in number. The Stockholm set includes thirteen-paintings and the SPS consists of seven. Both sets have a similar arrangement, in which the paintings are placed in pairs, bracketing the central image, with the figures facing the Dalai Lama portrait at the center. Despite having fewer paintings, the SPS depicts twice as many members of the Dalai Lama lineage, because of the multiple figures in each composition. With the exception of the central *thangka*, the Stockholm paintings are the first compositional type, characterized by a large representation of a Dalai Lama incarnation, in three-quarter view, placed slightly off-center. There are small-scale images of deities and teachers in the upper register. Each painting includes at least one small image of a protector deity or guardian figure in the lower register. This composition differs from the SPS, which depicts multiple figures in an asymmetrical composition and does not include any deities or guardians. As in the SPS, the background of each painting depicts a natural environment, with landscape elements such as trees, flowers and

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<sup>70</sup> Henss, "Iconography," 266-267.

mountains. However, nine of the thirteen Stockholm paintings also include a representation of a temple or monastery founded by, or closely associated with, the central figure.<sup>71</sup>

The Stockholm *thangkas* include several standard conventions typical of Dalai Lama portraits, which are also found in the SPS. The figures are all seated on elaborate thrones and wear monastic robes made of silk brocade. Behind the figures' heads are nimbuses, symbolizing their status as enlightened beings. However, there are four elements which render the figures in the SPS more overtly individualized than those in the Stockholm set. The first is the treatment of the legs. In the Stockholm set, the figures are all seated in the same posture, with the legs hidden under the robes, but presumably in lotus position. This is common among Dalai Lama portraits. However, in the SPS, the figures sit in a variety of postures. The second is the representation of the figures' hats. In the Stockholm set, all of the Dalai Lamas wear the standard, pointed yellow *paṇḍita* hat and none of their ears are visible. Conversely, in the SPS four figures wear the pointed *paṇḍita* hat, three wear a variation of it, and two have bare heads. The third convention is the depiction of the figures' mouths. In the Stockholm set, the Dalai Lama figures' mouths are all closed, whereas in the SPS three are shown with open mouths and visible teeth. The fourth convention is the angle from which the figures are depicted. In the Stockholm set, the figure's faces are all in three-quarter view. In contrast, the figures in the SPS are represented from different perspectives, with four in three-quarter view, two frontally, and three in profile. The variations in these four aspects of Dalai Lama portraits in the SPS contribute to their individualization. The similarity in the leg positions, hats, mouths, and perspective visually unifies the Dalai Lama figures in the Stockholm set. It is because of this lack of differentiation

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<sup>71</sup> The portraits with buildings in the background are: Songtsen Gampo, Dömtön, Sachen Künga Nyinpo, Phagpa/ Sanggye Gömpa, First Dalai Lama, Second Dalai Lama, Third Dalai Lama, Fourth Dalai Lama and the Fifth Dalai Lama.

that Henss describes Dalai Lama lineage sets as “a symbol of the Dalai Lamas as an institution...” rather than representations of “the individual appearance of a given title-holder”.<sup>72</sup>

The Stockholm paintings do seem to support Henss’ observation that Dalai Lama lineage sets emphasize the figures as a series of incarnations, rather than distinctive historical individuals. However, I contend that these categories are not mutually exclusive, as there is still an effort to represent the figures as distinct individuals. The figures display different mudras and attributes, which help to differentiate them. The figures’ individual identity is also reinforced by the depictions of buildings in the background, which are specifically associated with the subject. Furthermore, the figures’ facial features differ from one another, albeit subtly.

A visual comparison between the portraits of the Fifth and Sixth Dalai Lamas highlights the individual characteristics of each (figs. 2.12 – 2.13). Both figures wear the yellow *paṇḍita* hat, but on the Fifth Dalai Lama the base is flush with his forehead and on the Sixth Dalai Lama, it bulges outward. The figures both have patches of hair visible in the middle of their foreheads and at their temples, but they are more prominent in the image of the Sixth Dalai Lama. The Fifth Dalai Lama is shown with a mustache, which is characteristic of his portraits, whereas the Sixth Dalai Lama has no facial hair. The Fifth Dalai Lama’s face is rounded, whereas the Sixth Dalai Lama’s chin is slightly pointed and his cheek more clearly defined. The Fifth Dalai Lama’s nose is shorter and comes to a point at the tip and the Sixth Dalai Lama’s is long and curves slightly inward. Their mouths are a similar size, but have slightly different shapes. The Fifth Dalai Lama’s eyes are almond-shaped and his brows are almost completely straight, horizontal lines. The Sixth Dalai Lama’s eyes are wider, thinner and more elongated. His

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<sup>72</sup> Henss, “Iconography,” 263.

eyebrows are thin and arched. Although the differences between the Dalai Lama portraits are nuanced, there is still an effort to depict the figures as individuals.

This does not refute Henss' claim that the primary concern was highlighting the figures as successive incarnations in a single lineage, since with the exception of the Fifth Dalai Lama, who is distinguished by his characteristic mustache, the differences in the figures' facial features is not enough to discern their identity. Yet, it is noteworthy that the portraits do not represent the Dalai Lamas as an undifferentiated series of generic types. The *mudrās*, buildings in the background, and varied facial features indicate an effort to represent the subjects as individuals. This suggests that conveying the subject's individual identity was deemed an important aspect of Dalai Lama portraiture.

### **Thirteen-Painting Set: Beijing, ca. Eighteenth-Century**

This differentiation between the Dalai Lama figures is even more pronounced in the set of thirteen paintings in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing, which are dated circa 1760.<sup>73</sup> The paintings measure 29.9 by 19.88 centimeters, which is significantly smaller than the SPS. The central painting depicts the Seventh Dalai Lama. In addition to the First through Seventh Dalai Lamas and Avalokiteśvara, the previous incarnations represented in this set include: King Yeshe 'Od (947-1024), Songtsen Gampo, Domtön, Sachen Künga Nyingpo, and Sanggyes Gumpa. Yeshe 'Od was a king in the western Himalayas who played an instrumental role in the revival of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh-century. This is the only known set to

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<sup>73</sup> Henss, "Iconography," 264. According to its catalogue entry, the Second Janggya *Khutughtu* Rölpe Dorje (1717-1786), a representative of Tibetan Buddhism in China and the first art advisor to the Qianlong emperor, gave the set to China's imperial collection of Buddhist art in 1761.

include Yeshe 'Od, who is not a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas. It is possible that the set depicts Yeshe 'Od based on directions given by the patron.<sup>74</sup>

Despite this unique aspect of the Beijing set, it is extremely similar to the Stockholm set, and thus significantly different from the SPS, in both iconography and composition. The Dalai Lama figures have the same hand gestures as attributes as those in the Stockholm Set. Since the Beijing set is also the first composition type, the paintings depict a single, large figure in three-quarter view, placed slightly off-center. They are arranged so that the figures all face in toward the central *thangka*. This set also includes smaller representations of deities and teachers in the upper register and guardian figures in at the bottom. The figures are set against a natural landscape and nine of the thirteen paintings also include buildings associated with the central figure.

Similarly to the Stockholm *thangkas*, the Dalai Lama figures in the Beijing set all have the same leg position, hat style, mouth, and face in three-quarter view. However, in the Beijing portraits, the individualization of the subjects' facial features, which appeared subtle in the Stockholm set, has been exaggerated, further emphasizing the distinctive characteristics of each figure. This is particularly evident in a comparison of the Fifth Dalai Lama portraits in each set (figs. 2.12, 2.25). In both images, the figure has his characteristic mustache, but in the Beijing *thangka* he also has a *mouche*. In the Stockholm portrait, the figure's face is rounded, his nose is pointed at the tip, his eyes are almond-shaped and his brows are almost completely straight, horizontal lines. These aspects of his face are accentuated in the Beijing set. His face is wider and more rounded and his chin is delineated with a thin line. The curves of his face are emphasized by subtle shading of his skin. The bridge of his nose is rounded and comes to a sharp

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<sup>74</sup> Henss, "Iconography," 284.



point at the tip. He has a bump between his eyes, which are larger and slightly elongated at the corners. His eyebrows are rounded. The idiosyncratic features of the figures' faces are more pronounced, which emphasizes the subjects as individuals. Although this individualization is not conveyed through realism, as in the SPS, but rather through a stylized treatment of the features, in the Beijing set there is clear effort to represent the figures as more than just a series of successive incarnations, as suggested by Henss.

Despite the greater degree of individualization in the Stockholm and Beijing sets, the similarities between the two are significant. They are both comprised of thirteen paintings with the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center. Both sets are the first composition type. The paintings contain many of the same elements. Furthermore, they are stylistically, compositionally, and iconographically similar to the other paintings with the first composition type. A comparison of the portraits of the Sixth Dalai Lama from the sets in Beijing, Stockholm and a partial set of five paintings in the Tamashige Tibet Collection in Tokyo demonstrates their great degree of similarity, even in the minute details (figs. 2.13, 2.26, 2.34).<sup>75</sup>

All three paintings from Stockholm, Beijing, and Tokyo depict the Sixth Dalai Lama slightly right of center, in a three-quarter view facing to the left. The iconography of the main figure is the same in each painting. He holds a gold *cakra* in his left hand and makes the *vitarkamudrā* with his right. The figure wears the standard yellow hat and a small patch of hair is visible at his temple. Behind the figure's head is a red nimbus outlined in gold. The shape of throne back is nearly identical in each painting. Next to the main figure is a low table bearing

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<sup>75</sup> I am only discussing the portrait of the Sixth Dalai Lama from the Tamashige Tibet Collection, as it is a partial set. I am including the portrait of the Sixth Dalai Lama in this comparison, in order to demonstrate the great degree of similarity between the painting sets with the first compositional type. As a result, I conclude that this partial set, as well as the other incomplete sets with the same compositional type, would also have originally consisted of thirteen paintings, with the portrait of the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center.

ritual implements, which are the same in each painting. The additional figures are the same in each painting, although a small Mahakala figure has been added to the Tokyo painting.

In addition to the paintings' main elements, there is a close similarity in even the minute details. For example, in each of the paintings, the tips of two leaves overlap the throne-back and one leaf and a flower bud overlap nimbus in the same place. Similarly, the tip of the protector deity's staff at the lower right corner overlaps the edge of the figure's robes in the same place in each painting. In each painting, there are two birds in the water on the left side of the painting. One of the birds cranes its neck to the left and the other has its wings outstretched. There is also great degree of similarity amongst the other paintings from the three sets. Although there are some differences between the paintings, especially in terms of color choices, the incredibly detailed similarities between these sets suggest a common prototype or shared artistic model.

As this comparison demonstrates, the similarities between the paintings in the Stockholm, Beijing, and Tokyo sets are remarkable. Only five paintings have survived from the set in the Tamashige Tibet Collection. However, based on their resemblance to the paintings in the complete Stockholm and Beijing sets, as evidenced by the example of the Sixth Dalai Lama portrait, I conclude that the Tokyo set originally consisted of thirteen-paintings, with the Seventh Dalai Lama as the center *thangka*. My analysis of the four other partial sets<sup>76</sup> and eleven individual paintings<sup>77</sup> with the first compositional type has shown the same degree of

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<sup>76</sup> The partial sets are: five paintings in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Zürich (*Dalai Lamas*, figs. 26, 30, 35, 36, 66); six paintings in a private collection (Christie's sale 2529, lot 95, November 2001); five paintings in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 37, September 2001); and two paintings in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 85, September 1997).

<sup>77</sup> The eleven paintings are: The First Dalai Lama in the Jucker Collection; The Second Dalai Lama in the John and Berthe Ford Collection (HAR 73742); The Second Dalai Lama in a private collection (Sotheby's lot 71, September 1997); The Third Dalai Lama in the Rubin Museum (HAR 327); The Third Dalai Lama in the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery (Inv. No.:1988.76.1); The Third Dalai Lama from the Schleiper Collection, Brussels (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 1); The Third Dalai Lama from the collection of Karl-Dieter Fuchsberger, Kempten

resemblance to the Stockholm and Beijing sets. Therefore, I posit that these paintings also originally belonged to a thirteen-painting set that had a portrait of the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center. Based on this assumption, the disproportionate number of thirteen-painting sets with the first compositional type and the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait at the center, which are iconographically and stylistically similar, clearly indicates a shared artistic prototype.

### **Woodblock Sets as Prototype : Representational Variation**

Michael Henss and Kimiaka Tanaka have both taken up the issue of a common prototype for the thirteen-painting type of Dalai Lama lineage sets. Henss has argued that the lineage paintings were based on a set of woodblock prints. In the eighteenth-century, there was a woodblock workshop at Narthang monastery near Shigatse. A set of twelve woodblocks depicting the Panchen Lama lineage were produced there prior to 1737, which served as models for a set of incarnations of the Panchen Lamas.<sup>78</sup> The woodblocks were produced during the life of the Seventh Dalai Lama. The Panchen Lama prints are compositionally and stylistically similar to many of the aforementioned Dalai Lama paintings. Thus, Henss suggests that a similar set of woodblocks was created for lineage paintings of the Seventh Dalai Lama, who was in power at that time, which served as the artistic model for the thirteen-painting sets.<sup>79</sup>

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(*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 290); The Fourth Dalai Lama from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, Paris (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 291); The Fifth Dalai Lama in the collection of the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (HAR 69459); The Fifth Dalai Lama in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (HAR 94315); Phagpa, a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas, from the collection of Mr. and Mrs. Solomon, Paris (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 2); Dومتön, a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zürich (*Dalai Lamas*, fig. 8).

<sup>78</sup> Tanaka, "Portraits," 72. Tanaka suggests that the patron was Polhaney (1689-1747) or his family members because he was an ardent supporter of the Second Panchen Lama, who was depicted in the central *thangka*, and because he was the patron of the Narthang print version of the *Avadanakalpalata*.

<sup>79</sup> Henss, "Iconography," 264, 267.

In his essay “Portraits of the Dalai Lamas: The Thirteen-*Thangka* Type and Its Variations,” Tanaka takes a slightly different stance. Although he notes that “Unlike the famous group of Panchen Lama *thangkas*, which are based on the sNar-thang (Narhang) wood-cuts, there is no uniform set of *thangkas* depicting the Dalai Lamas. Instead there appear to be several identifiable groups rendered in different styles.”<sup>80</sup> However, he argues that the thirteen-painting sets were based on a common, albeit unidentified, “original” prototype produced between 1735 and 1750, during the life of the Seventh Dalai Lama, and directly related to the Panchen Lama set.<sup>81</sup> The use of woodblock prints on cotton as a foundation for *thangka* paintings would account for the vast number of the thirteen-painting sets. Tanaka is correct in his observation that several of the sets vary in style and background elements, but this could be a result of certain artists taking more liberties in the over-painting than others. Furthermore, it is possible that many of the thirteen-painting sets were based on the set of woodblock prints, making them easier to produce, cheaper to commission, and, thus, more common. Other artists could have based their paintings on these sets, without actually using the prints themselves, which would explain the iconographic and compositional similarities, as well as the differences in style and certain background elements. An x-ray of the paintings would provide the most conclusive evidence regarding these hypotheses, but it is clear that these paintings all appropriated a common artistic model. Thus, it can be assumed that similar extant paintings sets which have not survived intact also had thirteen paintings originally, with an image of the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center.

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<sup>80</sup> Tanaka, “Portraits,” 71.

<sup>81</sup> Tanaka, “Portraits,” 76.

### **Thirteen Painted Woodblock Prints: Tibet House, Delhi, ca. Nineteenth-Century**

There is a complete set of thirteen nineteenth-century prints depicting the Dalai Lama lineage made from woodblocks in the collection of the Tibet House Museum in New Delhi (figs. 2.72-2.84). The images, which are printed on gold silk with mineral pigments and dated to the nineteenth-century, are nearly identical to the other sets with the first compositional type, such as the Stockholm, Beijing, and Tokyo sets. In contrast to the SPS, which has the Fifth Dalai Lama at the center, this set has the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait at the center. The Seventh Dalai Lama woodblock portrait follows the standard convention for the central image in Dalai Lama lineage *thangka* sets, in which a large, central figure is depicted frontally, according to the hieratic Indic composition.

This set of painted prints clearly supports Henss' argument that a set of woodblocks depicting the Dalai Lama lineage was made. Following Tanaka's convincing argument, the fact that the Seventh Dalai Lama's portrait is the central image of the set indicates that it was either made during the subject's life or based on an artistic model that was. The prints are dated to the nineteenth-century, whereas the *thangka* painting sets all date to the eighteenth-century. It remains unknown whether the set of prints was made in the nineteenth-century with woodblocks carved in the eighteenth-century, which likely served as the basis for the lineage paintings, or conversely, if a set of woodblocks was made in the nineteenth-century used earlier *thangka* paintings as an artistic model. Given the closer similarities between the images and the relatively large number of this type of *thangka*, I consider the former to be the more likely explanation. The use of woodblock prints, which would have been painted over, would account for the disproportionately large number of Dalai Lama lineage sets that so closely resemble one another.

The commonality of the thirteen-painting set with the first composition type and the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait at the center underscores the distinctiveness of the SPS.

### **Five-Painting Set: Chicago, ca. Eighteenth-Century**

A complete set of five eighteenth-century paintings in the collection of the Field Museum in Chicago represents a variation on the thirteen painting sets. Given the extant examples, this is the only complete set comprised of five paintings and the only example of the second compositional type, to date. The set is stylistically and iconographically related to the thirteen painting sets and the central *thangka* depicts the Seventh Dalai Lama. In addition to representations of the First through Seventh Dalai Lama and Avalokiteśvara, the other figures depicted include: Songsten Gampo, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, Könchok Bang, Domtön, and Phagpa. The first four figures are previous incarnations of the Dalai Lamas and are also represented in the SPS. Phagpa is not included in the spiritual lineage of the Dalai Lamas, but he was a revered teacher in the Sakya tradition, who converted Kublai Khan to Buddhism.<sup>82</sup> It was Kublai Khan's descendant, Altan Khan, who bestowed the title of "Dalai Lama" on Sönam Gyatso, the third incarnation, which could account for Phagpa's inclusion in the set.

Similarly to the SPS, Beijing, and Stockholm sets, the paintings are arranged in pairs bracketing the central *thangka*. The Chicago set also follows the standard convention, in which the central painting has a hieratic Indic composition, with a large Dalai Lama figure in the center and small-scale figures along the top and bottom. The other four paintings depict three figures from the Dalai Lama lineage in three-quarter view, facing the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait. Three smaller teachers are located in the upper register, with the central figure vertically aligned

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<sup>82</sup> Schmid, *Saviours*, 1:10-11.

with group of three below. Additional teachers and protector deities are represented in the lower register. This convention of representing the incarnations of the Dalai Lama lineage in three-quarter view is also seen in the thirteen-painting set types, whereas in the SPS the figures are shown from a variety of perspectives.

The portraits of the Dalai Lamas in the Chicago set are also similar to the thirteen-painting types. The figures are represented with the same *mudrās* and attributes as the Stockholm and Beijing sets. There is the same consistency among the leg positions, hat style, mouths, and three-quarter view in the portraits. There are subtle distinctions between the figure's facial features, similarly to the Stockholm set. Thus, a concern with individualization is also evident in variations on the thirteen painting sets. The implications of the differences in number of paintings and composition are better understood after considering the last complete set.

The Chicago painting set includes the same number of figures from the Dalai Lama lineage as the thirteen-painting sets. It is likely that the patron decided to limit the number of paintings in the set, by representing multiple incarnations in each *thangka*. The motivations may have been financial, since it would be cheaper to produce fewer paintings, or perhaps the set was to be placed in a more confined space. Regardless of the reason, the reduced number of paintings does not lessen the significance of the portraits and their ability to render the figures present.

### **Three-Painting Set: Seoul, ca. Nineteenth-Century**

There is complete set of three paintings is in the collection of the Hahn Cultural Foundation at the Hwajeong Museum in Seoul, South Korea. This early nineteenth-century set is distinctive for two reasons. First, it only consists of three paintings, the fewest of any complete

set. Secondly, the set contains portraits of the First through the Ninth Dalai Lamas, with the Seventh Dalai Lama as the central figure. This is similar to the SPS, wherein the central painting does not depict the most recent incarnation. Since the Ninth Dalai Lama is the chronologically last member of the lineage represented, like the SPS, the Seoul *thangkas* likely date to between 1810 and 1822.

It is iconographically and stylistically similar to the first and second compositional types. The figures are all shown in three-quarter view, facing the Seventh Dalai Lama. As in the thirteen-painting and five-painting sets, the Dalai Lama figures are all depicted with the same leg position, hat style, closed mouths, and perspective. There is a nuanced differentiation between the figures' facial features, as in the Stockholm and Chicago sets. Tanaka argues that this set is an abridged version of the thirteen-painting type, which follows the established visual conventions of representing the Seventh Dalai Lama as the central figure.<sup>83</sup> It is possible that the five-painting set from the Field Museum is also a redacted version of the thirteen-painting type. Tanaka contends that the compositional arrangement became codified, which is the reason that the Seventh is at the center rather than the Ninth, and chronologically last Dalai Lama. Based on this assumption that adherence to iconographic or compositional precedents was privileged over highlighting the most recent Dalai Lama, it is likely the Fifth Dalai Lama, rather than the Ninth, was made the central figure in the SPS because the artist was following an artistic model which similarly placed the Fifth Dalai Lama in the center.

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<sup>83</sup> Tanaka, "Portraits," 73-74.



## Conclusion

This examination of the comparative material underscores the unique characteristics of the SPS. The other complete sets of the Dalai Lama lineage consist of thirteen, five or three paintings. The SPS is the only complete set comprised of seven paintings. Despite the differences in number in the Stockholm, Beijing, Chicago, and Seoul sets, they are compositionally and iconographically similar. In these Dalai Lama portraits, there is conformity among the figures' leg position, hat style, closed mouths, and three-quarter view. While these similarities visually unify the figures, highlighting them as incarnations in a single lineage, there is still a deliberate effort to represent them as individuals, rather than generic types. This indicates that in Dalai Lama sets, significance was ascribed to the figures' individual identity as a historical figure, in addition to their role as an incarnation in a lineage. The emphasis on individualization is more pronounced in the SPS, due to the great degree of variation in the figures' body positions, style of hat, facial expressions, and perspective. Furthermore, the figures in the SPS are rendered in a more realistic manner. The diversity in the representations of the Dalai Lamas is another aspect of the SPS which differentiates it from the majority of other lineage sets. Yet, the consistent individualization of Dalai Lama portraits, albeit to different degrees, supports my claim that the function of Tibetan portraiture is to render the subject present.

In addition to being the only set of seven paintings, the SPS is one of only a few sets that highlight the Fifth Dalai Lama as the central image. Historically, the Fifth Dalai Lama was one of the most important figure in his lineage, because he was the first to assume both political and religious power, he was a prolific patron of Buddhism and its related art forms, and he established himself and his past and future incarnations as embodiments of Avalokiteśvara.

The most significant aspect of the SPS is the presence of handprints at the back of each painting. None of the paintings from sets which feature the Seventh Dalai Lama at the center have handprints on either the front or back. The four paintings from Guimet (figs. 2.64 – fig. 2.67), the two paintings from Brussels (figs. 2.68 – 2.69), and the portrait of the Fourth Dalai Lama in the collection of Arnold Lieberman (fig. 2.70) all have hand and footprints on the front of the image.

These paintings, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, are extremely similar in style, iconography, and composition. The Fifth Dalai Lama is identified in an inscription as the central *thangka* of the Guimet set. Given the close resemblance between these print *thangkas*, it is highly likely that a no longer extant Fifth Dalai Lama portrait was the central painting of the Brussels and Lieberman sets. This suggests a relationship between *thangkas* bearing handprints and sets with the Fifth Dalai Lama at the center. This connection between print *thangkas* and the Fifth Dalai Lama, as well as the significance of handprints to the function of portraiture, are explored in Chapter Three.

### Chapter 3 – Handprint as Relic

Relics have been a significant part of Buddhist practice since the death of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, and the ancient Indian Buddhist tradition continues in ritual practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Relics are considered the embodied presence of the Buddha, and, as such, are objects of great power. As the constituent elements embodying the essence of the Buddha, relics are believed to carry out the enlightened activities of the figure and thus are capable of bestowing merit, facilitating spiritual attainments, and performing miracles. Although early relic traditions were primarily concerned with the Buddha, the same concepts apply equally to relics of other highly accomplished teachers. In order to better understand the function of the SPS, I examine the foundations of Buddhist relic practices.

#### Origins of Buddhist Relic Traditions

Buddhist relic traditions originated in India, with the historical Buddha Śākyamuni.<sup>84</sup> The *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* is an early text which recounts the events immediately preceding and following the Buddha's death (Skt. *parinirvāṇa*), including a description of his funerary rites, as well as the collection and distribution of his relics.<sup>85</sup> After the Buddha's death, his body was cremated and his bodily remains collected as relics by the Malla kings of Kuśinagarī. According

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<sup>84</sup> Here, I am referring to relic veneration as an established practice among Buddhist communities. For a discussion of the relics of Śākyamuni's predecessors and previous lives, see John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 25-69.

<sup>85</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of this textual description, see Strong, *Relics*, 98-123.

to the text, when the rulers of neighboring kingdoms learned of the Buddha's death, they all wanted to possess his relics, threatening to use force if necessary. It is debated whether or not fighting actually occurred,<sup>86</sup> but these hostilities, often referred to as the "War of the Relics," culminated in the division of the Buddha's relics into eight shares. Each king returned to his own country and enshrined the relics in a *stūpa*, or reliquary mound. This event demonstrates three important points. First, from the moment of the Buddha's death, relics were highly coveted objects. This underscores the power ascribed to them from a very early date. Second, the relics were collected and ultimately enshrined by royal figures. This suggests a relationship between the possession of relics and political authority. Finally, the division of the relics, and their distribution to different kingdoms, provides a greater number of people access to them. They were placed in *stūpas*, which are public spaces, rather than in the kings' private shrines. Thus, the veneration of relics was likely not restricted to the elite, but was available to various populations.

These notions of power, political authority, and access are reinforced by the actions of the legendary King Aśoka. In the third-century B.C.E., Aśoka ruled the Maurya kingdom in India. According to legend, after converting to Buddhism he collected and redistributed the Buddha's relics into 84,000 *stūpas*. These actions, in which he exerts control over the relics, are a demonstration of his power and authority as king. Similar to the initial distribution of the objects in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, Aśoka's possession of the relics is associated with his political authority. Furthermore, his dispersal of the relics implies a concern with access, providing greater numbers of people the opportunity to venerate them. This underscores the power ascribed to relics as objects of power that may be used for both political and religious

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<sup>86</sup> Sculptural relief on the architraves of the southern and western *toranas* of the great stupa at Sāñcī depict armies fighting in battle, but according to Strong, in the textual sources physical combat never takes place. Strong, *Relics*, 119.

purposes. The concern with access is particularly pertinent to the subject of images as relics, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, because bodily and contact relics are limited in number, whereas images can be continuously produced.

### **Categories of Buddhist Relics**

In these early accounts, the relics refer to the Buddha's bodily remains. However, in Buddhism, there are three categories of relics (Skt. *dhātu*).<sup>87</sup> The first is *śarira dhātu*, or bodily relics. These are physical elements of a sacred person's body. They can be collected while the individual is still alive, such as a tooth, hair, or fingernail, or after the body has been cremated, such as bone fragments, ashes, and crystallizations. The bodily relics of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni were enshrined in *stūpas*, or reliquary mounds. The *stūpas* became the foci of Buddhist veneration and pilgrimage traditions. *Stūpas* are found in Buddhist communities internationally, as important sites of pilgrimage and veneration. Although their physical form varies according to the cultural and artistic context in which they are made, all *stūpas* are conceived of as Mount Meru, the center of the Buddhist cosmology. The significant role of *stūpas* in Buddhist practice is due to the relics contained within them, rather than their outward appearance. In the Tibetan context, the *śarira dhātu* are typically placed in reliquaries, which are conceived of as *stūpas*, regardless of the size or material they are made from.

The secondary relics, called *paribhogika dhātu*, are defined as anything that has come into physical contact with an enlightened being. This includes both objects of use and places

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<sup>87</sup> Susan L. Huntington, "Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism," *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1990), 405. Huntington is the first art historian to discuss the categories of relics within an art historical context. See also, Susan L. Huntington, "Relics, Pilgrimage, and Personal Transformation in Buddhism," in *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Virginia C. Ragun and Dina Bangdel (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2010), 41-49. Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, *Leaves From the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and its International Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 85.

where the sacred figure visited, such as the site at Bodhgaya where the historical Buddha Śākyamuni attained enlightenment. There are eight sites in India, known in Sanskrit as *Aṣṭamahāprātihārya* (“Eight Great Places”), specifically associated with major events in the Buddha’s life. As such, they are among the most important *paribhogika dhātu* and have become significant centers of pilgrimage. The sacred sites associated with the Buddha were represented in first-century relief sculpture at the *stūpas* at Sāñcī and Bharhut. These images depict figures venerating the sacred sites, which attest to the existence of Buddhist relic traditions centered around *paribhogika dhātu* in India as early as the first-century.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, by the Pala period (c. 850-1200), sculptural representations of these eight sites became widespread practice in India, because the viewing of these images allowed practitioners to visit the sacred places through a conceptual pilgrimage.<sup>89</sup> This artistic tradition centered on the “Eight Great Places” has continued in Tibet, as seen in an eighteenth-century painting from the Rubin Museum of Art (fig. 3.1).

The third category, *uddeśika dhātu*, literally “exemplar relics,” is commonly referred to as “reminder relics” because they are defined as a reference to, or reminder of, the sacred individual. This includes representations of enlightened figures and teachers, such as the Dalai Lamas. Thus, the portraits of the Dalai Lamas in the SPS, as visual reminders of the sacred subjects, can be considered *uddeśika dhātu*. The implications of this and its relationship to the function of portraiture are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

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<sup>88</sup> Huntington, “Early Buddhist Art” 401-408; Huntington, “Relics,” 49.

<sup>89</sup> John C. Huntington, “Pilgrimage as Image: The Cult of the Aṣṭamahāprātihārya,” part 1, *Oriental Art* 18, no. 4 (April 1987): 55-63; John C. Huntington, “Pilgrimage as Image: The Cult of the Aṣṭamahāprātihārya,” part 2, *Oriental Art* 18, no. 8 (August 1987): 56-68; Dina Bangdel, “Tracing the Footsteps of the Buddha: Pilgrimage to the Eight Great Places (Aṣṭamahāsthana),” in *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Virginia C. Raguin and Dina Bangdel (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2010), 55-61.

Given the significance of the second category of “associated” relics, the handprints on the reverse of each *thangka* in the SPS can be considered *paribhogika dhātu*, because they were made by the physical contact between the teacher’s hands and the paintings. The identification of hand and footprints as *paribhogika dhātu* in Tibet originates with Indian Buddhist traditions. *Buddhapāda*, literally “footprints of the Buddha,” as *paribhogika dhātu*, became an important object of veneration in India as early as the first-century (fig. 3.2).<sup>90</sup> There are numerous examples of sculpted footprints at major Buddhist sites, such as Bodh Gayā. Although the prints are manufactured and not actually imprints left by the Buddha, conceptually they are still *paribhogika dhātu*. Furthermore, a number of first-century sculptural reliefs at important Buddhist pilgrimage sites that depict figures in gestures of devotion (Skt. *añjalimudrā*) represent the veneration of the *buddhapāda*. According to Tibetan Buddhist sources, the tradition of placing hand and footprints on *thangkas* originated in India, where the veneration of prints as *paribhogika dhātu* was widespread practice.<sup>91</sup> In the SPS, the handprints were placed at the back of the paintings during the ritual process of consecration.

### Consecration of Images

Although Buddhist images are considered the third category of relics in their own right, bodily or contact relics are often used to augment their power through the ritual practice of consecration. Consecration is a ritual process by which means a deity or enlightened being is invited to reside within an image or object. Through this process, the image is transformed from an inanimate object to the embodied presence of an enlightened being. This presence is thought

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<sup>90</sup> Kathryn Selig Brown, “Handprints and Footprints in Tibetan Painting,” PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2000, ProQuest (AAT 9990979), 55.

<sup>91</sup> Selig Brown, “Handprints and Footprints,” 33.

to have a transformative “sacred power” (Tib. *chinlab*), which benefits any sentient being who comes into contact with it.<sup>92</sup> The consecrated images “serve to localize the sacred presence of the enlightened being, making it available for interaction with human beings, who worship it, receive religious inspiration from it, and accumulate merit from these activities.”<sup>93</sup>

Tibetan consecration rituals originated from Indian practices.<sup>94</sup> There are a variety of different Tibetan Buddhist consecration rituals. The ritual may take only fifteen minutes or last as long as several hours. They can be performed by a single ritual master or by an assembly of monks. They may be performed for a single item or a large collection of objects.<sup>95</sup> Often, bodily relics or sacred texts, which are also regarded as a form of the Buddha, are inserted into the image. In these instances, the image is not symbolically subjugated to the relic. Instead, as Juhyung Rhi explains, “Combined together, a relic and an image would have taken on a more efficacious means to communicate with the worshipper: an image could be enlivened by a relic, and a relic could take on a more concrete communicable form through an image.”<sup>96</sup> Regardless of the form the consecration ritual takes, the basic purpose remains the same: to transform an object into the nature of the chosen deity. While proper execution of the ritual is vital to its success, the religious realization and experience of the person performing it is also important for

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<sup>92</sup> Toni Huber, “Pilgrimage in Tibet,” in *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam*, eds. Virginia C. Raguin and Dina Bangdel (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2010), 96.

<sup>93</sup> John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), xvi.

<sup>94</sup> Yael Bentor, “On the Indian Origins of the Tibetan Practice of Depositing Relics and Dhânîs in Stupas and Images,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 2 (April-June 1995): 248-261.

<sup>95</sup> Bentor, “Horseback Consecration Ritual,” 23.

<sup>96</sup> Juhyung Rhi, “Images, Relics, and Jewels: The Assimilation of Images in the Buddhist Relic Cult of Gandhāra: Or Vice Versa,” *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 65, no. 2 (2005): 203.



its efficacy. The more highly esteemed the lama who conducts the ritual, the more powerful the consecrated image, as an *uddeśika dhatu*.

### **Handprints as Consecration: Seven Painting Set**

The consecration of sculptures typically entails inserting bodily relics, smaller images, or excerpts of Buddhist texts into the work. When consecrating Tibetan paintings, such as the SPS, the consecratory materials are placed on the back. Typically the sacred mantra *Om Āh Hūm* is inscribed on the back of the *thangka*, as in the SPS. In addition, many Tibetan paintings contain handprints on the back, which were placed there during the consecration ceremony. It is unclear when the practice of applying handprints during the consecration practice began, but the earliest extant *thangkas* with handprints on their backs date to the seventeenth-century and, like prints on the front of Tibetan *thangkas*, are primarily found on paintings connected to the Gelug and Kagyu sects.

In her study of hand and footprints in Tibetan painting, Kathryn Selig Brown notes that throughout the course of her research she has “seen unpublished examples of handprints on the backs of *thangkas* in every major collection, both public and private...”<sup>97</sup> However, she remarked that that they “only appear on a small minority of the *thangkas* I have examined,”<sup>98</sup> suggesting that application of handprints during consecration rituals is relatively uncommon. Whereas teachers are typically the main subjects of paintings with prints on the front, *thangkas* with handprints on the back tend to vary in terms of subject of the painting, number of prints and substances used to make the impression. This great variation indicates that there may not be

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<sup>97</sup> Selig Brown, “Handprints and Footprints,” 70-71.

<sup>98</sup> Selig Brown, “Handprints and Footprints,” 72.

specific guidelines delineating the use of prints in consecration or the type of *thangka* that should receive prints. Another scholar, Yael Bentor, who has studied Tibetan consecration manuals and ceremonies extensively, does not mention the use of handprints in her explanation of manual texts.<sup>99</sup> Giuseppe Tucci also studied Tibetan consecration of images and does not mention handprints as part of the ritual process. This suggests that there were no codified, didactic guidelines dictating the circumstances in which handprints should be applied during a consecration ceremony. Therefore, this implies that handprints were not a requisite component of consecration practices.

Selig Brown has suggested a correlation between the presence of handprints and the circumstances of the commission, which is relevant to the SPS. According to Selig Brown, the application of prints may have been dependent upon the specific situation of the commission and the nature of the relationship between the patron and the person performing the consecration.<sup>100</sup> For example, a *karchag*, or catalogue from Reting monastery that lists the *thangkas* formerly housed at the monastery mentions a painting that was consecrated by eleventh-century Indian teacher Atīśa and bears his footprints, created for his disciple and translator Nagtso.<sup>101</sup> In this case, the close relationship between the patron, Nagtso, and his teacher Atīśa, who performed the consecration, would account for the application of prints, which are *paribhogika* relics. If this is the case, it makes sense that there would be handprints on the back of *thangkas* in the SPS depicting the Dalai Lama lineage made for close relatives of the Ninth Dalai Lama. In the SPS

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<sup>99</sup> Bentor, "Horseback Consecration Ritual," 234-254.; Bentor, "On the Indian Origins," 248-261; Yael Bentor, "Sutra-style Consecration in Tibet and its Importance for Understanding the Development of the Indo-Tibetan Consecration Ritual," in *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Fifth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Narita, 1989*, eds. Ihara Shoren and Yamaguchi Zuiho, 1-12 (Narita: Naritasan Shinshoji, 1992).

<sup>100</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 72.

<sup>101</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 55-56.

paintings, an analysis of the handwriting, as well as the handprints, indicates a close relationship between the patron and, in this case, the Ninth Dalai Lama.

Based on the large, almost childlike handwriting in the consecratory inscription at the backs of the paintings in the SPS, I would suggest that they were perhaps written by a young, untrained hand (fig. 3.3). Given the generous use of gold, the large size and the excellent quality of the paintings, it is surprising that the consecration inscription would have been executed by such an unskilled hand, especially when compared to comparative examples (figs. 3.4-3.5). A probable explanation is that the Ninth Dalai Lama, who was only eleven when he died, wrote the inscription as part of the paintings' consecration. Both Sørensen and Tsering contend that the patrons of the SPS were relatives of the Ninth Dalai Lama. Therefore, based on the assumption that the Ninth Dalai Lama participated in the consecration ceremony, it seems appropriate that the patron, as a family member, would request handprints. Thus, the painting was not only consecrated, but the presence of the handprints can be considered a relic.

There are known instances of high spiritual teachers applying prints to *thangkas* during the process of consecration. For example, in 1770 Situ Panchen “performed the consecration for three *thangkas* of Tamdrin Gönpo (rTa mgrin mgon po) and imprinted them with thumb prints.”<sup>102</sup> Then, “In 1772 he put his own handprints on the back of a *thangka* painted by the Karmapa.”<sup>103</sup> This provides evidence that high spiritual masters consecrated paintings themselves and left prints as part of that process, as well as placed handprints on the back of works painted by others, making it specifically a *paribhogika* relic.

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<sup>102</sup> Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, 16.

<sup>103</sup> Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, 16.

According to Pasang Tsering, the original owner of the SPS, the handprints and seals were placed at the back of the paintings by the Ninth Dalai Lama. While it seems highly likely that he wrote the inscription, the prints appear larger than would be expected from a child's hands. The size of the prints does not preclude the possibility that they belong to the Ninth Dalai Lama, but they may have been applied to the paintings by an adult during the consecration. The ritual must be executed properly in order to successfully vivify the image and so experience is valued in the person performing the ceremony. Given the Ninth Dalai Lama's young age, it is possible that his own teacher may have assisted him in the consecration, leaving his prints in the process. Historically, the Dalai Lamas' teachers have been highly revered spiritual masters. Regardless of whether the prints belong to the Ninth Dalai Lama or his own teacher, these paintings are considered *paribhogika* relics associated with an important Buddhist figure such as the Ninth Dalai lama, and, as such, they augment the efficacy of the image as an object of veneration.

### **Fifth Dalai Lama and *Thangkas* with Handprints and Footprints**

There is a significant connection between the Dalai Lama lineage and *thangkas* with prints. According to Selig Brown, almost all "print *thangkas*" were made for Gelug or Kagyu traditions.<sup>104</sup> Specifically, all of the extant print *thangkas* from the Gelug tradition, which date from the sixteenth to early eighteenth-centuries, are related to the Dalai Lamas. Brown provides several possible explanations for the predominance of print *thangkas* associated with the Dalai Lamas. First, Phagmo Drukpa (1110-1170), a revered Kagyu teacher and the founder of Densatil Monastery, credits Atīśa with the introduction of tradition of handprints and footprints to Tibet

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<sup>104</sup> This term is used by Selig Brown to refer to *thangka* paintings displaying hand and/or footprints. Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 3-4.

from India.<sup>105</sup> Hand and footprints, as *paribhogika dhātu*, were an important foci for veneration in India. For example, the historical Buddha Śākyamuni's footprints (Skt. *buddhapāda*) became an object of worship, as early as the first-century. The conception of the hand and footprints as a category of relic which embodies the presence of the sacred figure was introduced into Tibet with the propagation of Buddhism. It is generally believed that a handprint in a rock cave near Pharping, Nepal belongs to Padmasambhava, the revered Indian teacher who helped establish the first monastery in Tibet in the eighth-century under the patronage of Tisong Detsen (fig. 3.6). Buddhist practitioners venerate this handprint as a sacred relic. Padmasambhava's ability to leave his imprint in rock attests to his spiritual prowess. Furthermore, it is evidence that important Indian teachers in Tibet participated in the creation of prints as *paribhogika dhātu*.

The painting bearing Atīśa's footprints, listed in the catalogue of Reting Monastery, is evidence of his creation of print *thangkas* in Tibet.<sup>106</sup> As previously noted, Domtön was a disciple of Atīśa and the founder of the Kadam tradition, which was later transformed into the Gelug school. In addition, he is a previous incarnation of the Dalai Lamas. Therefore, Domtön represents a link between Atīśa and the Dalai Lama lineage. Thus, the practice of making print *thangkas* has early associations with predecessors of the Dalai Lama lineage, but also to the foundational practices of Indian Buddhism.

The Fifth Dalai Lama, who established the tradition of Dalai Lama lineage paintings in the seventeenth-century, also has specific associations with print *thangkas*. In his autobiography, as well as in the biography of his regent Desi Sanggye Gyatso, he describes a consecration ceremony during which the Fifth Dalai Lama requested prints from his own teacher. According

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<sup>105</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 34-35.

<sup>106</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 56.

to these sources, The Dalai Lama's teacher Terdak Lingpa was in the process of consecrating some statues and *thangkas* and the Dalai Lama felt compelled to ask him for his hand and footprints.<sup>107</sup> Both texts remark that the Dalai Lama had not asked for his teacher's prints earlier because of his own laziness. While the Fifth Dalai Lama was certainly not known for being lazy, the use of this word implies that print *thangkas* were relatively commonplace, since it was only his lack of effort which prevented him from acquiring one sooner.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, the fact that the Fifth Dalai Lama both made print *thangkas* and requested them from his own teacher clearly demonstrates the significance he attributed to them.

### **Dalai Lama Lineage Sets With Handprints**

The Fifth Dalai Lama himself is known to have created several handprint *thangkas*. According to his autobiography and the biography of his regent, it was not uncommon for the Dalai Lama to create print *thangkas* and that these were made by his own hands, rather than copied or traced from another source. The print *thangkas* are therefore *paribhogika* relics, since the Fifth Dalai Lama made them by pressing his hands against the support. This attests to the fact that the creation of print *thangkas* by high lamas in the Gelug tradition was established by the seventeenth-century.

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<sup>107</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 201-202. According the Fifth Dalai Lama, he asked for the in response to the experience of viewing the consecration ceremony. The biography of Desi Sanggye Gyatso states that the Dalai Lama asked for his teacher's prints because he had just seen images with his own hand and footprints. Despite this discrepancy, both accounts underscore that there was a precedent in place for making prints of teachers.

<sup>108</sup> Selig Brown, "Handprints and Footprints," 203.

There are four paintings in Musée National des Arts Asiatiques - Guimet, in Paris which comprise a partial Dalai Lama lineage set, dated to the seventeenth-century (figs. 3.7-3.10) Each painting contains a single large central figure flanked by a set of hand and footprints. The central figures of the surviving paintings include: Nyatri Tsenpo, the first mythic king of the Tibetan dynasty, Tisong Detsen, the second Dharma king of Tibet, Domtön, and the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Fifth Dalai Lama would have been the central painting in the set. Although the prints have been embellished with gold and stylized with *cakras* painted in mineral pigment, the subtle idiosyncratic features in shape and size indicate that they are actual handprints.

There are two very similar seventeenth-century paintings in the Musée Royaume d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels (fig. 3.11-3.12). They are nearly identical to the Guimet paintings stylistically and compositionally. The central figures are the First Dharma King Songtsen Gampo and the First Dalai Lama, and flanked by hand and footprints, similarly embellished with gold and *cakras*. Furthermore, another single painting depicting the Fourth Dalai Lama with hand and footprints in the collection of Arnold Lieberman is nearly identical to the Guimet and Brussels *thangkas* (fig. 3.13). The close similarities indicate that the Brussels and Lieberman paintings sets would also have had the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama at the center. Furthermore, given the paintings' seventeenth-century date and the fact that the Fifth Dalai Lama was the first to commission Dalai Lama lineage sets, it is quite probable that he was the patron of the Guimet, Brussels, and Lieberman paintings. The placement of the Fifth Dalai Lama portrait at the center and the presence of hand and footprints, which he was known to have made, further support this hypothesis. Thus, it is highly likely that the prints were made by the Fifth Dalai Lama and that these paintings are an example of the print *thangkas* mentioned in his autobiography.

The prints placed on the front of the Guimet, Brussels, and Lieberman *thangkas* are perfected through the application of gold and mineral pigments. They are clearly meant to be visible, and thus are themselves objects of veneration. The handprints were placed on the back of the *thangkas* in the SPS during the process of consecration. However, their underlying significance and function is the same. The prints, as *paribhogika dhātu*, are a means for rendering the sacred figure present. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the Guimet, Brussels, Lieberman and SPS paintings all bear handprints and all have, or likely would have had, the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama as the centerpiece of the set. None of the other extant Dalai Lama lineage sets examined in Chapter Two had prints on either the front or back of the paintings. These sets all had the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait as the central painting. Based on the corpus of extant Dalai Lama lineage paintings, sets that have the Fifth Dalai Lama portrait at the center tend to have handprints, whereas sets with the Seventh Dalai Lama portrait at the center do not. This suggests a direct correlation between print *thangkas* and sets centered on portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Given that the Fifth Dalai Lama was known to be a proponent of print *thangkas* and commissioned lineage sets centered on his own portrait, it is plausible that the SPS followed these artistic and ritual precedents initiated by the “Great Fifth.”

### **Conclusion**

The handprints at the back of the paintings in the SPS are *paribhogika dhātu*, and they represent a continuation of Buddhist relic traditions that began in India with the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. The relics, regardless of whether they are bodily remains inside a *stūpa* or the handprints at the back of the SPS, embody the presence of the sacred figure, such that “the presence of the relic was thought to be the same thing as the presence of the actual Buddha, that



the two were religiously the same, and that the same behavior was required in regard to both.”<sup>109</sup> Since relics, such as the handprints in the SPS, are conceived of as the same presence as the actual historical figure, they are objects of power and an important focus of ritual veneration.

In regards to the paintings in the SPS, the presence of the sacred figure is localized within the portrait through the ritual process of consecration. However, the SPS could have been consecrated without placing handprints at the back, because it is not a requisite component in the process of consecrating images, as highlighted in the work of Bentor and Tucci. There are other examples of *thangkas* with handprints at the back, but they comprise such a small percentage of the extant corpus of Tibetan paintings that this appears to be the exception rather than the rule. However, based on the extant examples of Dalai Lama lineage paintings, handprints are more common in sets specifically associated with the Fifth Dalai Lama. Although the application of prints is not essential to the consecration of images, they are *paribhogika* relics produced by the physical contact between the teacher’s hands and the painting’s support. As relics, the handprints enhance the portrait’s ability to render the subject present and thus augment the efficacy of the image to bestow blessings upon the practitioner, facilitating their spiritual advancement.

Just as the Fifth Dalai Lama established the artistic tradition of Dalai Lama lineage sets, he was also a key figure in perpetuating the Indic relic tradition of hand and footprints, which was brought to Tibet with the advent of Buddhism. He wrote a treatise on consecration rituals, which highlights the importance of relics.<sup>110</sup> The Fifth Dalai Lama asked his own teacher for hand and footprints during the consecration of several images. He produced a number of print *thangkas* using his own hands, which may include the Guimet and Brussels paintings. Similar to

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<sup>109</sup> Gregory Schopen, *Bones, Stones and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 134.

<sup>110</sup> Yael Bentor, “On the Indian Origins,” 248-261.

the SPS, these Dalai Lama lineage sets centered on the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Thus, it is possible that the SPS, which follows the artistic convention initiated by the Fifth Dalai Lama, whereby his portrait is the centerpiece of a set, also emulated his ritual practice of placing handprints on *thangkas*. This would account for the relatively rare presence of handprints on the reverse of the SPS.

Furthermore, the Ninth Dalai Lama's biography states that he felt a particularly strong connection to the Fifth. He even he claimed to have visions and recollections of his previous life as the Fifth Dalai Lama.<sup>111</sup> Given the strong connection the Ninth felt to the Fifth Dalai Lama and his participation in the consecration of the SPS, as evidenced by the handwriting, it is highly probable that he availed himself of the same practice of making print *thangkas* revived by the Fifth Dalai Lama, either by requesting prints from his teacher or placing them there himself. The handprints, despite being placed on the back of the paintings where they are not visible, are powerful relics which vivify the images with the sacred presence of the Dalai Lama. Although the presence of the handprints makes the SPS a *paribhogika dhātu*, the paintings, as visual reminders of the Dalai Lamas, can be considered *uddesika dhātu* in their own right.

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<sup>111</sup> Sørensen, "The Ninth Dalai Lama's Set," 244.

## Chapter 4 – Portraits as Relic

In each of the three categories of relics there is a relationship between the material object and the body of the sacred figure. This relationship is most potent in *sāriṛa dhātu*, as the relics are the physical elements of the figure's body. *Paribhogika dhātu*, such as the handprints on the back of the paintings in the SPS, are produced through the sacred figure's physical contact with an object or place. *Uddeśika dhātu* render the sacred figure present through a representation of their bodily form. The portraits in the SPS are visual reminders of the Dalai Lamas, and as such can be considered *uddeśika* relics. As a "reminder relic," the success of an image to visually manifest the figure's presence is contingent upon an identifiable relationship between the portrait and its subject. The Dalai Lama portraits examined in Chapters One and Two represent a broad spectrum of ideal images and portrait-likenesses. In these examples, the historical subject is referenced through various conventions, including individual realism, specific iconographic attributes, and inscriptions. The artistic conventions and theoretical foundations of Dalai Lama portraits as *uddeśika* relics are deeply embedded in those of Buddha images.

In his essay on the assimilation of Gandhāran images into Indian Buddhist relic traditions, Juhyung Rhi cites two reasons a Buddha image could assume the status of relics. "First, one may claim that an image follows or resembles the true appearance of the Buddha as authenticated by legendary traditions...Second, one may install a relic somewhere in the image."<sup>112</sup> The second justification describes consecration, whereas the first refers to modes of

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<sup>112</sup> Rhi, "Images, Relics, and Jewels," 171.

representation which establish a recognizable relationship between the portrait and its subject. Rhi's use of the term "true appearance" implies that the visual reference to the living subject relies on likeness. In regards to Dalai Lama portraits, the visual evidence clearly indicates that the subject's individual identity could be successfully conveyed in idealized depictions with specific iconographic attributes. This disjuncture between likenesses and idealized images originates with representations of the Buddha.

### **Image as Relic in Indian Buddhism**

In his essay "Origins of the Buddha Image," John Huntington discusses three textual accounts of an "original" Buddha image, believed to have been the prototype for subsequent representations.<sup>113</sup> In the first, the Buddha ascends to a heavenly realm to give teachings to his mother. In his absence, the king Udayana of Kauśāmbī desired an image of the Buddha. He sent an artist to the heavenly realm to create an image in the presence of the Buddha which was regarded as a true likeness.<sup>114</sup> The second narrative begins in the same way as the first, with the Buddha ascending to a heavenly realm to give teachings to his mother. However, in this version King Prasenajit at Śrāvastī causes an image of the Buddha to be made. According to this story, upon the Buddha's return, the image rose to leave its place in the shrine and the "Buddha cried

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<sup>113</sup> John C. Huntington, "Origins of the Buddha Image: Early Image Traditions and the Concept of Buddha Śanapunyā," in *Studies in Buddhist Art of South Asia*, ed. A.K. Narain (New Delhi: Kanak Publications, 1985), 31-36.

<sup>114</sup>Huntington, "Origins of the Buddha Image," 31-36. Huntington states that there are multiple versions of this story. He specifically cites Hsuan Tsang's *Records of the Western World* and a late fourth-century translation from the *Ekottarāgama* by Dharmānanda. Donald K. Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha: The Ritual of Image Consecration in Thailand* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 21. Swearer also discusses the Dharmānanda translation. He cites a section of the text in which the 100,000 Buddhas who accompany Śākyamuni in his descent from the heavenly realm state, "After the Buddha's Nirvāna, anyone who makes and installs an image, and worships the same with banners, flowers, and incense, will in the time to come assuredly attain the pure mystic ecstasy of contemplating the Buddha." This clearly demonstrates that veneration of a Buddha image was akin to the sacred figure himself.

out, ‘Return to your seat: after my disappearance you shall be the model for the four classes of those in search of spiritual truth.’”<sup>115</sup> A third narrative, found in Tibetan commentarial literature, states that the Buddha was absent at a noon-day meal offered to the monks by a householder named Sraddhā and so another householder named Anāthapindada created statues of the Buddha.<sup>116</sup>

In each of these accounts, the images are either made in the presence of the Buddha or by artists who have seen his actual physical appearance and thus are considered true likenesses. Furthermore, the image (Skt. *mūrti*) is requested because the Buddha is physically absent. The image, as the embodied presence of the Buddha, functions as a surrogate. Finally, in these narratives the portrait-likeness or literally “reflection/likeness” in Sanskrit (*pratimā*) made during the subject’s life serves as a model for subsequent images. This same notion of an original likeness being the source for later conventional images has been suggested for portraits of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The portrait-likeness, as an artistic prototype, conceptually links the historical figure to later representations. This emphasis on tracing idealized portraits back to an original source associated with the living subject is similar to a teacher tracing their teachings back to an original Buddhist master as a means of authenticating the spiritual lineage.

This notion of authenticity and a temporal proximity to an original source is reinforced in a related narrative. In this account, an old woman has three sons who convert to Buddhism, one of whom creates an image of the Buddha shortly after his passing.<sup>117</sup> The mother is the last person alive who has seen the Buddha and so she views the image to determine whether or not it

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<sup>115</sup> Huntington, “Origins of the Buddha Image” 33.

<sup>116</sup> Huntington, “Origins of the Buddha Image” 35.

<sup>117</sup> Huntington, “Origins of the Buddha Image” 37-41. Huntington cites two versions of the same narrative. Although the accounts differ in certain details, the central events are the same.

is an actual likeness. She pronounces it to be a likeness in all but a few details. In this narrative, as in the previous three, there is a concern with producing a likeness. Again, the image is made in the Buddha's absence. However, in this account, the image cannot be made in the Buddha's presence and the artist does not know what he looked like. Thus, the old woman who has seen the Buddha acts as the authority on whether or not it is in fact a likeness. As such, she represents the link between the historical figure and sacred images made after his death.

In each of the four narratives, there is a deliberate effort to produce Buddha images that are likenesses. However, likeness, defined as realistic depictions of the figure's individual physical characteristics, is noticeably absent in the corpus of extant Buddha images. The origins of Buddha images have been the subject of great scholarly debate, but even the earliest known representations of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni depict the figure as an idealized type with specific iconographic attributes (figs. 4.1-4.3). This iconography has remained virtually unchanged, regardless of differences in style, date, and provenance. Although the Buddha was a historical figure, his representations are not individualized like Tibetan portraits of other Buddhist teachers. The figure's idealized outward appearance corresponds to his identity as an enlightened being.

It is unknown what Śākyamuni actually looked like, but according to textual sources, a Buddha's appearance is defined by thirty-two characteristics, typically referred to as "signs" (Skt. *lakṣaṇa*) and eighty minor marks. Examples of these perfections include smooth, soft skin, blue eyes, and the *urṇa* curl located between his eyebrows. These perfect characteristics of the Buddha's outward appearance are a visual expression of his attainment of spiritual perfection. As religious scholar Paul Griffiths explains, "the activity of the major and minor marks is shown to be the engendering of devotion in others, since merely by seeing [Buddha] they are convinced of

the blessed one's greatness."<sup>118</sup> Therefore, his idealized outward appearance is indicative of his inner Buddha-nature, which is the essence with which practitioners interact. In regards to Buddha images, the portrait-likeness refers to the accurate depictions of the figure's enlightened qualities as conveyed by the idealized form.

The Buddha's iconography also references his biography. For example, his elongated ears are a visual reference to the heavy earrings he wore growing up as a prince in India. The absence of earrings or jewelry in the image alludes to the fact that he renounced all his worldly possessions in his quest for enlightenment. Thus, the image does not represent a static moment in time, but encapsulates the entire trajectory of the figure's spiritual accomplishments. This is significant because the life of the Buddha and his path to enlightenment is considered the paradigm to be emulated. Therefore, the image not only conveys the Buddha's enlightened status, but also the viewer's potential to attain the same.

The four narratives indicate two important concepts regarding the appearance and purpose of early representational images. First, there was an overt concern with creating images that were likenesses. In order to ensure a close resemblance between the image and its subject, the object was produced in the presence of the Buddha or by an artist who had seen him. When that was not possible, as in the narrative when the Buddha had already died, the image was pronounced a likeness by the authority of someone who had seen him. However, in this context, the definition of likeness is not restricted to individual realism. Rather, it can refer to the visual representation of his enlightened status, conveyed through iconographic conventions. This broader notion of likeness is applicable to Dalai Lama portraits, which variously reference the individual subject through realism, iconographic attributes, and inscriptions.

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<sup>118</sup> Paul J. Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: the classical doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 99.

Secondly, the images were produced in the Buddha's absence. The purpose of the image was to render the sacred figure present through a representation of his bodily form. The images were not simply commemorative. Rather, they functioned as surrogates for the Buddha, and as such were the focus of veneration. It is precisely because of image's ability to render the subject present that they were created.

### **Image as Relic in Tibetan Buddhism**

These same Buddhist conceptions of likeness and images functioning as the surrogate for the Buddha are evident in the mythic origins of the Jowo Śākyamuni sculpture at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibet (fig. 4.4). The Jowo Śākyamuni is the most sacred of all religious icons in Tibet. The mythic origin of the sculptures helps to shed some light on the rationale for creating representational images and their intended purpose. Furthermore, it sets a precedent for the processes by which the images are endowed with sacred power. According to legend, Manjughosa, a form of Manjusri, the *bodhisattva* of wisdom, repeatedly requested that Śākyamuni allow for the creation of his representational images, so that in his absence all sentient beings might acquire merit by way of their veneration.<sup>119</sup> At last, the Buddha assented. A divine artist, Viśvakarman, created three representational images of Śākyamuni, at ages twenty-five, twelve, and eight. These were then ritually consecrated by the Buddha himself. As a result, they were said to hold a great blessing, indistinguishable from that of the actual Buddha.<sup>120</sup> The image of Śākyamuni at age twelve is believed to be the same sculpture brought to Tibet by

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<sup>119</sup> Gyurme Dorje, *Jokhang: Tibet's Most Sacred Buddhist Temple* (London : Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 2010), 127.

<sup>120</sup> Dorje, *Jokhang*, 127.



Wencheng, Gampo's Chinese wife. The image of Śākyamuni at age eight is believed to be the sculpture brought to Tibet by Bhrikuti, his Nepali wife.

This myth demonstrates several important points. First, the images were created as a means for practitioners to accrue merit and obtain blessings. Interactions with these images were seen as akin to interacting with the Buddha himself. Thus, the images function as an extension of, or surrogate for, the Buddha. Second, these images represent the historical Buddha's physical form. The myths do not mention the extent to which these images adhered to the physical likeness of the Buddha, only that he was depicted at different ages. It is clear from a visual analysis of the Jowo Śākyamuni, that the sculpture, which is repeatedly referred to as a "portrait-likeness" in scholarship on the subject, is represented as an idealized type.

The third important point demonstrated by the narrative is that the images were consecrated by the Buddha himself. This implies that the ritual process of consecration was already established during Śākyamuni's life. Furthermore, as a result of this ritual, the images were transformed into objects of power, equal to that of the Buddha. Through this process the sacred presence of the enlightened being is localized in the object, making it available for interaction with devotees.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the image can carry out the enlightened activity of the Buddha, conferring blessings, offering protection, and performing miracles.

In each of the five narratives discussing Buddha images, likeness visually and conceptually connects the representation to the physical presence of the sacred figure. In these examples, likeness does not necessarily imply a realistic depiction of the subject's unique physical characteristics. Rather, it may also refer to an ideal representation of the Buddha, which references his identity as an enlightened figure, replete with signs of his spiritual perfection. This broader understanding of likeness is equally applicable to Dalai Lama portraits. The idealized

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<sup>121</sup> Bentor, "Horseback Consecration," 234.

types emphasize the figure's status as a fully enlightened figure identified as a manifestation of the *bodhisattva* of compassion. The more realistic portraits highlight the subject as a historical person who lived at a specific point in time. I contend that both the ideal images and realistic representations can be considered a likeness because each Dalai Lama simultaneously embodies a spiritually perfected, enlightened *bodhisattva* and a historical human being. I posit that the mode of representation has little bearing on its ability to render the subject present, which is the primary purpose of Tibetan portraiture.

### **Portraiture as Relic: Sacred Viewing (*darśan*) and Merit (*puṇya*)**

Although *uddeśika dhātu* are commonly referred to as “reminder relics,” they are not simply inanimate representations which evoke a memory. They are considered the manifest presence of the sacred figure. In Tibetan Buddhism, it is believed that the Buddha exists in three forms (Skt. *rūpa*) or bodies (Skt. *kāya*). These are the *Dharmakāya*, or truth body, the *sambhogakāya*, or bliss body and the *nirmāṇakāya*, or emanation body. It is the latter which is most pertinent to this discussion, as it refers to the physical form of the Buddha, as manifest in this realm. The emanation body is further divided into three categories: “supreme emanation bodies”, such as the historical Sakyamuni Buddha, “born emanation bodies”, such as reincarnate lamas, like the Dalai Lama, and “made emanation bodies”, such as images, *stūpas*, and other objects ritually created and consecrated. The consecration vivifies the image, transforming it into the manifest presence of the sacred figure. As such, images, like the first two categories of the emanation body, are believed to carry out the enlightened activities of the Buddhas.<sup>122</sup> It is precisely for this reason, that images, as *uddeśika* relics, play such an important role in Buddhist merit-making activities.

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<sup>122</sup> Bentor, “Horseback Consecration,” 234.

A Buddhist practitioner may acquire merit by commissioning a religious object, such as a *thangka*. In addition, practitioner accrues merit through the act of sacred viewing (Skt. *darśan*). Viewing the *uddeśika* relic is considered akin to viewing the actual sacred figure. The image is not simply the passive recipient of the viewer's gaze. Rather, as a vivified representation of the subject's bodily form, it is an active agent that interacts with the practitioner through the mutual exchange of glances. It is this interaction between viewer and sacred figure, by which the former accrues merit. This reciprocal viewing is considered transformative for the practitioner, a concept underscored by the definition of the indigenous Tibetan word for painting, *tondol*, which means "liberation through sight."<sup>123</sup> In Buddhism, it is believed that the accumulation of merit can lead to a better rebirth in the next life, thus facilitating a practitioner's attainment of enlightenment.

As Jackson explains:

The creation of a *thangka* was not only a meritorious act in itself, but it also made possible further religious activities in relation to the sacred image. An icon of the Buddha acted as a focus and support for the practicing Buddhist's faith (*dad rten*) and it was also a reminder (*dran rten*) of the Buddhist's commitment to travel the path set by the Buddha. Occasionally a simple Buddha image was used as the object of focus (*dmigs rten*) during concentration meditation (*zhi gnas*), but more commonly it functioned as a worthy object for worship and offerings, one which provided the Buddhist with the right circumstances for adding to the accumulation of merit required for spiritual advancement.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, *uddeśika dhātu*, such as the SPS, provide an opportunity for the faithful to be in the presence of a great teacher, who serves as a didactic model of spiritual perfection—to accrue merit and receive blessings, and ultimately, to facilitate spiritual achievements.

In addition to being objects of veneration, portraits serve as a support in visualization practices. Meditation is a fundamental component of Buddhist practice that transforms the mind of the viewer and facilitates spiritual realizations. Images often serve as a tool in meditation, whereby the practitioner visualizes themselves as the sacred figure. This important function as a

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<sup>123</sup> Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*, 1:287.

<sup>124</sup> Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, 10-11.

visual aid is underscored by the definition of *rten*, the generic term for images in Tibetan which literally means “support.”<sup>125</sup> Portraits of teachers are particularly significant in this regard, because of the emphasis on the master-disciple relationship in Tibetan Buddhist practice. The teacher is not only responsible for initiating the disciple into these meditational practices, but often is the focus of them. The esoteric practices of *guru-yoga* involve the practitioner visualizing their teacher, and often their entire spiritual lineage. Through this process of visualization, the wisdom of the teacher is transmitted to the disciple. Portraits of teachers are often used to facilitate this practice. These images often take the form of a “Refuge Tree,” in which all the teachers and deities of a spiritual lineage are represented in a single composition, with the founder at the center, to help the practitioner meditate on the entirety of their tradition (fig. 4.5).<sup>126</sup> While the Dalai Lama lineage sets may not have been used by high level initiates involved in this advanced esoteric practice, they still would have been understood as the embodied presence of the persons depicted which bestow blessings on the devotee.

### **Portraits as Commemoration**

In her essay “Early Portrait Painting in Tibet,” Singer briefly discusses the possible functions of portraits of teachers. She suggests that the images made after the death of an important person may have served a commemorative purpose. The Blue Annals does mention the commissioning of portraits to honor a teacher or highly venerated spiritual master.<sup>127</sup> The

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<sup>125</sup> Jane Casey Singer, “Early Painting in Tibet,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 1991, ProQuest (AAT 9211748), 34n42.

<sup>126</sup> Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, 27.

<sup>127</sup> Gö Lotsawa Zhönnupal, *The Blue Annals*, trans. and ed. George Roerich (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 141.

portraits would be placed in monasteries and shrines associated with the sacred subject. The images can be considered commemorative, in that they invoke in the viewer the memory of the figure depicted. However, they are not simply a static depiction of a past figure. Rather, as the vivified presence of the figure, the *uddeśika dhātu* also facilitates further interactions with the subject, providing opportunities to accrue merit and receive blessings.

### Conclusion

Images, as *uddeśika dhātu* or reminder relics, give visual form to the physical body (Skt. *nirmanakāya*) of an enlightened figure, thus the image serves as a reflection or reminder of the teacher. The Dalai Lama portraits in the SPS are identifiable as representations of the individual historical figures through the artistic conventions of realism, iconographic attributes, and inscriptions. The portrait's visual form is a reminder of the subject's spiritual accomplishments and teachings, as the human embodiment of the *bodhisattva* of compassion. As such, it serves as a paradigm for the viewer to emulate, so that they may cultivate compassion within their own heart-mind, as an important aspect of attaining enlightenment. Furthermore, the portraits are not simply visual references to a physically absent subject. Because the images are consecrated, they are considered akin to the physical presence of the sacred figure. Thus, practitioners may accrue merit by venerating the portraits in the same manner as they would the Dalai Lamas, through *darśan* and ritual offerings. Like the function of the early Buddha images, the portraits allow the practitioner to obtain the spiritual benefits of interacting with their teacher, which facilitates their path to enlightenment.

*Uddeśika dhātu*, as the embodied presence of the sacred figure, are like other categories of relics, capable of bestowing blessing, aiding in visualizations, and transforming the mind of

the practitioner. However, because *sārira dhātu* are bodily remains and *paribhogika dhātu* are created through physical contact with the historical figure, they are finite in number. Their relationship to the teacher's body means that the relics can only be created during the figure's life or from their physical remains. Therefore, the availability of the relics and subsequently a practitioner's access to them is limited. However, *uddeśika dhātu*, as the "made emanation" body of an enlightened figure, can be continuously reproduced, so that more practitioners may interact with the sacred presence, as a means for generating merit. Due to the scarcity of *sārira* and *paribhogika dhātu*, such as the handprints in the SPS, these relics are more highly valued. However, the extensive corpus of *uddeśika dhātu* as a genre of Tibetan art and as ritual objects, attests to their significance within the context of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sørensen has suggested that the Dalai Lama lineage paintings served a political purpose, because they visually reinforce the authority of the spiritual lineage. He contends that depicting the lineage visually establishes the relationship between the figures, underscoring the continuous transmission of the teachings. There is certainly a valid interpretation. The Fifth Dalai Lama, who initiated the tradition of painting Dalai Lama lineages, was certainly politically savvy. He commissioned wall paintings depicting the lineage and his previous incarnations in the Potala, which was both a governmental building and religious space. In addition, the three central paintings in the SPS represent Songtsen Gampo, Domtön, and the Fifth Dalai Lama; a composition which visually equates that latter's accomplishments with the former's'. However, the SPS was commissioned by a private patron for personal space. Until 2004, the SPS hung in Pasang Tsering's personal shrine room, along with other ritual and devotional objects. Given that the set was not created for a public space where the authority of the Dalai Lama lineage would have been a political concern, I contend that the portraits, as *uddeśika* relics, were created for the

purpose of accruing merit, both through the commissioning and the viewing of the paintings.

Although there may be underlying political connotations in the composition and arrangement of Dalai Lama lineage sets, the *thangkas* cannot be divorced from their religious context, in which they are the embodied presence of the sacred figure, and as such, objects of veneration.

## Conclusion

The Dalai Lamas are considered the human embodiments of the *bodhisattva* of compassion and, until the Chinese occupation in 1959, the spiritual and temporal rulers of Tibet. Thus, they are among the most highly venerated teachers in Tibetan Buddhism. They are, like the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, a paradigm for Buddhist practitioners to emulate, as a means for facilitating their path to enlightenment. Although the artistic tradition of Dalai Lama lineage sets, as a genre of Tibetan portraiture, only began in the mid-seventeenth-century, it quickly became a common practice that continues even today.

Through this study, I contend that the popularity of the Dalai Lama lineage sets, which were produced in the form of *thangkas*, murals, and woodblock prints, is due to their ability to render the sacred figures present. The Dalai Lama lineage sets, as a visual manifestation of the sacred figures' bodily form, are *uddeśika dhātu*. As such, they provide Buddhist practitioners the opportunity to view the sacred figure, making offerings, contemplate their teachings, and, thus, accrue merit in order to facilitate their own path to enlightenment. The portraits render the figures present through artistic conventions, the ritual consecration, and in the case of the SPS, through the presence of handprints as *parbhogika dhātu*.

The discourse on Dalai Lama lineage sets has primarily focused on the notion of likeness, or the relationship between the portrait and its subject. Previous scholars of Tibetan portraiture have tended to treat idealization and realism as mutually exclusive categories, privileging individual realism as the primary means for a portrait to reference its historical subject. Scholars



have typically identified Dalai Lama lineage paintings specifically as idealized and undifferentiated representations, with little emphasis on the individual and therefore not true portraits. However, my research has shown that within the genre of Dalai Lama portraits in lineage sets, there are varying degrees of idealization and individualization. I posit that both the ideal and individualized aspects of these images specifically reference the subject's individual identity, and thus can be considered portraits. The Dalai Lamas are the human manifestations of the *bodhisattva* of compassion. Thus, they are simultaneously perfected enlightened beings and historical human figures. I contend that portraits of the Dalai Lamas in lineage sets, such as the SPS, deliberately convey these dual aspects of the subject's identity, but that some place greater emphasis on the ideal and others on the individual.

Certain representations of the Dalai Lamas, such as the portrait of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the SPS, emphasize the subject's enlightened qualities by depicting the figure with idealized facial features, typical of Buddha and *bodhisattva* images. However, even in these ideal portraits, the subject's individual identity as a historical figure is still referenced through visual conventions, such as iconographic attributes, facial hair, the placement of specific buildings associated with the subject in the background, and inscriptions. In representations such as the portrait of the First Dalai Lama in the SPS, the subject's identity as a historical figure is emphasized through a greater degree of realism and a concern with individual physiognomy. Yet, in these portraits the figure is still represented as an enlightened being through the use of iconographic conventions, such as the nimbus behind their heads or elongated ears. Thus, I contend that both idealized and realistic representations of the Dalai Lamas can be considered portraits, because both include visual references to the individual identity of the historical subject, as enlightened being and historical figure.

Although there are common conventions used by Tibetan artists to convey the individual identity of the subject, both as idealized and individualized, my analysis of the corpus of extant Dalai Lama lineage paintings indicates that there were no specific guidelines dictating which figures were to be represented as ideal or portrayed as individuals. Furthermore, there does not seem to be any correlation between when a portrait is made and how realistic it is, as suggested by previous scholars of Tibetan portraiture. It is clear that in certain examples, such as the SPS, the degree of realism was directly related to the style of painting. The individualization in the figures of the First, Third and Fourth Dalai Lamas seems to follow the Chinese artistic conventions of portraiture characteristic of the Karma Gadri style, which highlights the subject's identity as a human being through an emphasis on physiognomy and realism. However, both the SPS and the Potala murals depict both idealized and individualized Dalai Lama figures within a single set. This indicates that idealized and realistic portraits of the Dalai Lamas were considered equally efficacious at rendering the figure present.

In the SPS, the figures are also rendered present through the ritual process of consecration, as evidenced by the inscription, seals, and handprints at the back of each painting. It is through the consecration that the presence of the sacred figure is localized within the portrait, making it available for interaction with the practitioner. Thus, viewing the vivified portraits of Dalai Lamas is considered akin to viewing the sacred figure himself, as demonstrated by the testimonies of the Buddhist practitioners who attended the enthronement of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's photographic portrait. In the SPS, the presence of the sacred figure is even more powerful, due to the handprints, which make the paintings the second category of Buddhist relics, *paribhogika dhātu* or by association. The sacrality of the painting is augmented by the

presence of the handprints. Thus, to view the painting means to “see” the presence of the Buddha.

While there likely were underlying political motivations for the Fifth Dalai Lama’s commissioning of painting sets depicting his spiritual lineage and previous incarnations, I posit that this genre of Tibetan portraiture became so widespread because the images provide practitioners with the opportunity to be in the presence of the sacred, to view them, venerate them, make offerings and accrue merit, which ultimately facilitates their own path to enlightenment. This is evidenced by the fact that in my interview with Pasang Tsering, he stated that he would like to commission a Dalai Lama lineage set that included all fourteen incarnations. Thus, this artistic tradition of the Lineage sets, which began in the seventeenth-century with the Fifth Dalai Lama, continues today.

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