



**RISK ASSESSMENT:
THEFT**



PRESERVATION OF BUDDHIST TREASURES RESOURCE is the free online resource for monasteries and communities, with practical information on digital documentation, risk assessment and disaster recovery, safer storage, and preservation of thangka and other treasures. The resource comes from over 50 years of preservation work in monasteries.



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RISK ASSESSMENT: THEFT

Introduction

Theft in Monasteries

Responding to a Theft, and Recovery of Stolen Treasure: Importance of Documentation

Mandala of Protection

Awareness of Visitors and Placement of Treasures

Importance of Caretakers

Security in Museums

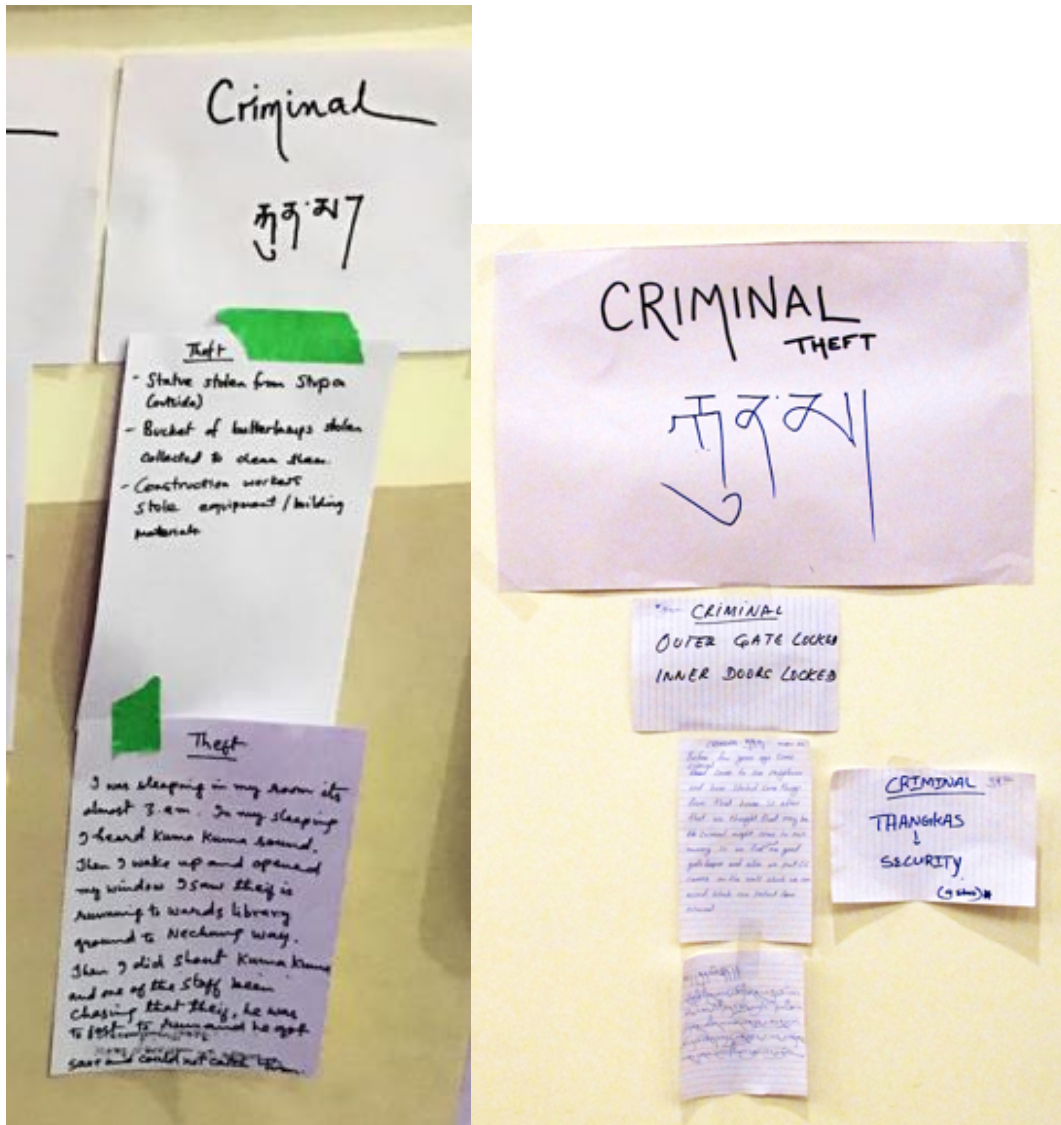
Stolen and “Fake” Treasures and Empowerment

Summary

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Risk Assessment: Theft

Introduction



Monk and nun participants in Preservation of Monastery Treasures workshop talk about their own experiences with Theft and Criminals in their home monasteries and communities

“I was sleeping in my room it was almost 3 AM. In my sleeping I heard Kuma Kuma sound. Then I woke up and opened my window I saw thief was running...Then I did shout “Kuma Kuma” and one of the staff was chasing that thief, but he ran too fast and he got away.”

- “Bucket of butter lamps stolen from where they were collected for cleaning”
- “Statue stolen from stupa outside of monastery”
- “Construction workers stole equipment and building materials”
- “Outer gate locked; inner doors locked (keeps criminals away)”
- “Before a few years ago some criminal came to our neighbors and stole some things. So, after that we thought the maybe the criminal might come to our nunnery. So, we found a good gatekeeper and also, we put cc cameras on the wall so we can record, which can protect from criminal”

Preservation of Sacred Art in a Monastery is a balance between the need for security of its treasures and the desire to use the treasures. How do theft and sacred treasures go together?

How could theft happen in the protected world of a monastery? There could be somebody who is local and thinks they need a little money for their family, or they have a drug or alcohol problem. Did you know that monastery thefts can be involved with major international crime? The same people who engage in drug trade and arms trade are organizing international art theft. The situation is very dangerous.

Monasteries did not suffer from international art theft for years until art collectors and gallery owners saw the treasures and realized that the art in monasteries, communities, and in Buddhist art museums was quite valuable. It has been, continues to be, and may be in the future worth a huge amount of money on the international art market. The art market fluctuates according to fashion and styles.

Similar challenges have been faced and even overcome by other religions and in other geographic areas, for example the safeguarding of Christian sacred art in some remote Catholic churches of Central America. These successes illustrate the need for comprehensive documentation of collections and for the implementation of security measures in Buddhist monasteries and nunneries to deter theft and to aid in recovery after theft and damage from natural or man-made disasters. There are similar concerns the world over. The next image is of a newspaper article about a church in Canada that “balances the need for the security of its artifacts with the desire to share the objects with parishioners”.



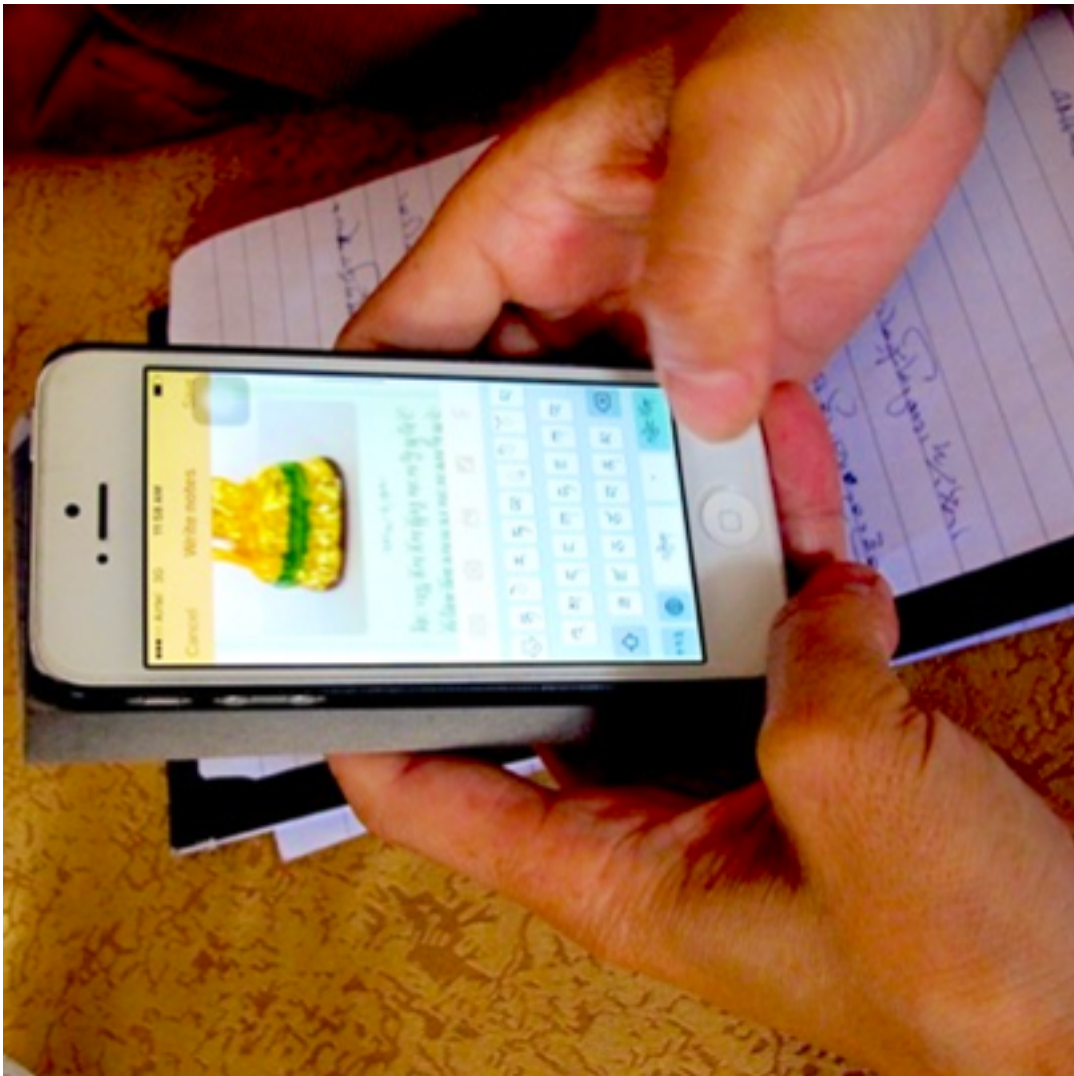
Monasteries and churches around the world are trying to balance the need for the security of their treasures with the daily use of the treasures and with allowing the community and pilgrims to see them

Theft from churches and monasteries is rising. According to one researcher, “Since the 1980s, authorities estimate thieves have plundered tens of thousands of Nepalese antiquities. About 80 percent of the countries religious artefacts have been stolen and sold into the \$8 billion-a-year illegal black market in art.” (Al Jazeera 19 July 2018 Nepal: The Great Plunder)

For monasteries and communities, criminals continue to be a real threat. Most thefts are not reported to the police because somebody doesn’t want to tell the police about their neighbor, or because sometimes communities and monasteries don’t trust the local police. Whatever the reason—whether there’s a disconnect between the community and the police or whether they don’t want to tell on a friend — many thefts are not reported. The police are often well-connected and can help recover stolen property, but sometimes they are kept out of the loop for various reasons. More and more police are being trained in the importance of art theft and how serious a crime it is. One monastery, however, mentioned that when their statues were stolen, and recovered, the local police had not been trained in ways to handle precious treasures, and thus the valuable statues were further damaged in the police office.

One monastery administrator recounted a time that local thieves stole valuable statues and thangka from their monastery. The monastery administrator went to the local police and gave the names of the thieves. The thieves told the police that, in fact, the monks had stolen the treasures themselves. The monastery then tried to recover their stolen treasures from the international art market; however, there was no

documentation to prove that the monastery owned these treasures. This is why documentation is so important, and in our www.treasurecaretaker.com preservation workshops, smartphone documentation methods are shared.



Monk documents a statue on his smartphone. He can use any language and any format, as long as certain crucial information is included in his documentation, including measurements and digital images.

At an INTERPOL conference held in Bhutan, there were discussions on the statistics from INTERPOL about the larger amount of treasures that are actually stolen compared to the small number of thefts that are actually reported. The difference is quite alarming.

Caretakers can be seriously injured during a theft of monastery treasures. This story recounts a theft in which the caretaker was injured and has never completely recovered. This is his story:

“The Shey Gumba was robbed by six robbers whose faces were covered and they had a gun. It was almost at 5 P.M. when the caretaker was brutally beaten, and the thieves took money at gunpoint and locked him inside a room. Then they broke through the back of the temple and took 13 antique Buddha statues and dzi beads, coral and many other antiques from the treasure storage area. Furthermore, more than 15 monasteries in the area have been robbed since 2011. There is little police and army presence in the area. It is still unknown who is the leader of the criminals.”





Wall of traditional old gompa shows where criminals broke into the storage room and stole many valuable treasures for their own profit

Arunachal: Divorce, tale of revenge and greed behind theft of 900-yr-old statue

A Tibetan couple's bid to sell a 900-year-old idol of a highly revered Tibetan saint which they stole from Tawang, ended with their arrest in Delhi.

Updated Jun 15, 2017 10:38 IST

Shiv Sanyal
Hindustan Times, New Delhi



The Delhi Police arrested a couple who allegedly stole a 900-year-old statue of a Tibetan saint from Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh and planned to sell it. (Shahil Kamach/HT PHOTO)

The Delhi Police on Sunday tracked down a 900-year-old idol of Tibetan saint Pema Lingpa to the capital's Majnu Ka Tilla area and arrested a couple suspected of stealing the statue

Thefts of monastery treasures can be done locally for personal or monetary reasons. Remote stupas and lhakangs are especially the most susceptible because there often are many valuables from centuries ago with little protection.





Remote Lhakhangs and stupas are vulnerable

Responding to a Theft, and Recovery of Stolen Treasure: Importance of Documentation

Police are getting better training and police services have the capacity to become connected internationally. After a theft, if local police know that this museum, monastery, or community has documentation—again, the importance of documentation repeats here—then they can send the pictures of the documented work of art that is stolen to international police services. When the stolen treasures go on sale—as they often do, typically through major art dealers or through auction houses in large international cities - then the monastery or museum can prove ownership through the documentation and the stolen treasure can be returned. For example, the ICOM Red Lists illustrate the types of cultural heritage treasures, including religious and ceremonial objects, whose export is restricted. <https://icom.museum/en/resources/red-lists/>,

Experts around the world use The Lost Art Registry, documents treasures that have been stolen or lost. www.artloss.com

RED LIST OF CHINESE CULTURAL OBJECTS AT RISK

Objective



This *Red List* has been designed as a tool to assist museums, dealers in art and antiquities, collectors, and customs and law enforcement officials in the identification of objects that may have been looted and illicitly exported from China. To facilitate identification, the *Red List* illustrates a number of categories of objects that are at risk of being illicitly traded on the international antiquities market.

Objects of the types illustrated hereafter are protected by Chinese legislation that specifically prohibits their unauthorised export and sale. Therefore, ICOM appeals to museums, auction houses, dealers in art and antiquities, and collectors not to purchase such objects without first having checked thoroughly their origin and provenance documentation.

Because of the great diversity of Chinese objects, styles and periods, the *Red List of Chinese Cultural Objects at Risk* is not exhaustive, and any antiquity originating from China should be subjected to detailed scrutiny and precautionary measures.

Stone statue of Buddha, Tang Dynasty, 98 x 28 cm.
© China Relic Information Consultation Centre

ICOM Red List and others list cultural heritage treasures that are “at risk of being illicitly traded on the international antiquities market.”



A Roman marble head of Marcus Aurelius, stolen on the 22nd December 1996, along with nine Roman portraits, from a museum in Skikda, Algeria. The Art Loss Register was alerted of the theft and all nine heads were registered on the company's database of lost and stolen art and antiques.

During one of the ALR's routine catalogue searches of a specialist antiquities sale in New York, June 2004, a Roman marble portrait bust of the emperor Marcus Aurelius was matched with the marble portrait stolen from Algeria. The ALR confirmed that this was indeed a match and worked with Interpol, who originally circulated the details of the theft and pulled the piece from the sale.

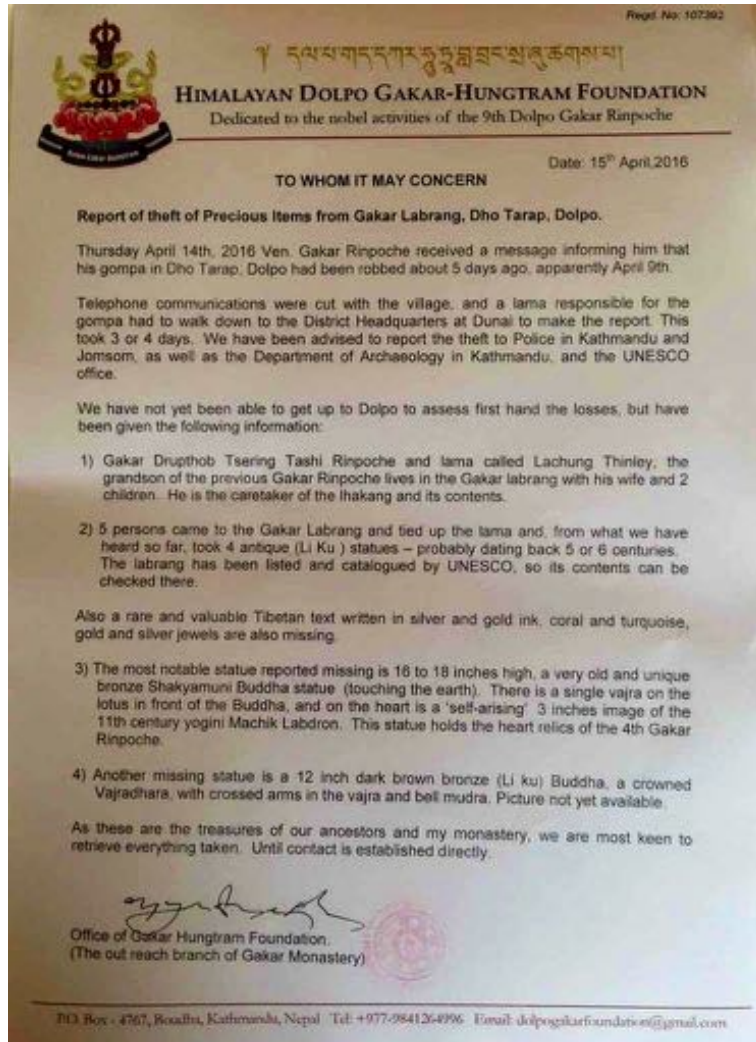
The ALR then worked with the United States law enforcement/customs to repatriate the marble head to the Algerian Cultural Ministry.

Art Loss Register is used by experts around the world to check out the history of objects before purchase, and to register their own objects that have been stolen or lost

How would the traditional monastery administrative structure affect implementation of a proactive policy of documentation, increased awareness, use of surveillance and other measures, now and in the future? The abbot of the monastery is key in the implementation of blending of traditional caretaking of sacred art in monasteries with up-to-date protective measures to prevent theft, illicit trading, and disaster.

Documentation and connectivity are crucial for our goal, even in the traditional world of monasteries.

But without documentation the legal system may not be able to help you. It all comes back to documenting. Documentation doesn't have to be shared with anyone outside of your monastery, museum or community until you need to share it. And when you need to share it, especially, is after a theft.



Official notice of theft from monastery, where the treasures had been documented

Theft causes damage to people and to treasures. Often the thieves are not going to steal the statue, they're going to try to steal the blessings inside of the statue, for example, dzi beads.



Statue damaged when thieves tried to steal valuable blessing substances inside



Statues and stupas can be damaged when thieves look for gems and dzi beads inserted as blessings



This is an example of the bottom of a Buddha statue where the thieves opened it up and removed blessing substances in search of gold and other valuables

Official valuation: (exchange rate of 1US\$ = Rupees. 55.55)



Six eyed

Rupees 600,000.00 for 6 eyes ~ US\$ 10,800.00



Seven eyed

Rupees 700,000.00 for 7 eyes ~ US\$ 12,600.00



Eight eyed

Rupees 800,000.00 for 8 eyes ~ US\$ 14,400.00



Twelve eyed

Rupees 1,200,000.00 for 12 eyes ~ US\$ 21,600.00



Fifteen eyed

Rupees 1,500,000.00 for 15 eyes ~ US\$ 27,000.00

Dzi beads can bring high prices on international market, but beware of fakes

These are evaluations from years ago. This is why the thieves come and steal the dzi beads: look at the price they may bring. They are worth even more now. That's why a statue may have been desecrated. The thieves went in to get those beads. How would the thieves know the beads were there inside the statue? Because dzi beads traditionally are placed there, but thieves do not know for sure. Why are dzi beads so valuable? Because they are rare. The natural ones are rare. There are also many that are made of ceramic and not created naturally.

During a preservation workshop, monks wanted to discuss documentation and blessing substances. When you document a statue, you would not open it up to document the blessing substances. Some museums do open up statues to see what is inside, but it is considered a dubious practice. Some museums and scholars did open statues to take pictures of the dzi beads, the texts or the powders inside. If a museum or researcher does that and then put the blessing substances back inside of the statute, do you think that is respectful? Is it more or less disrespectful than the thief who opens up a statue to steal?



Inside Bhutan

July 10 at 2:34 AM · 🌐



Sign of desperations are up!

Recently, a group of youth have vandalised several temples, monasteries and stupas in Bhutan. They have even crashed some life size statues to dust to get ancient relics. 😱😱

👮 [Photo: Royal Bhutan Police]





Statues damaged during ransacking of temple

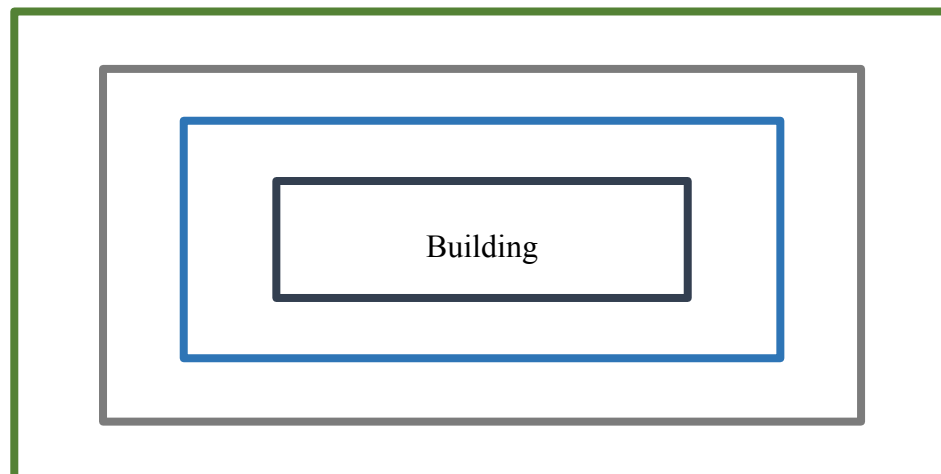
Thieves don't necessarily know what is inside, they just assume that what is inside will bring them a lot of money. The thieves may destroy a statue in case they can find something valuable to sell. Local thieves could be paid to steal, then what they steal is bought to couriers, then perhaps several hands later the stolen treasures reach international art collectors or art galleries.

Mandala of Protection

Theft prevention is often described in four stages: Protect, Detect, Respond, and Recover. Using the analogy of the Buddhist mandala is a good view for applying this to monasteries, where the situation differs from that in museums.



Protecting your treasures can happen within a traditional mandala, from the outside, moving inwards: Location – Building – Shrine or storage shelf – Treasure



Mandala of protection

How do you protect your treasures from theft? You can create a circle of protection similar to a mandala. You have the outside fierceness and circle of protection and then eventually you get to the middle, to the treasure of the deity. Planning for protection and security for your treasures is done in this exact same way.

- The outside of the mandala is the site. Many monasteries, museums, and some communities are enclosed by a gate and a high fence on the perimeter. Is the gate locked?
- Inside of the fence is the building. Can someone come in through a window? Is the door locked?
- Inside the building, there is the shrine or the case housing the work of art. The treasure may be sitting openly on a shrine, or it may be inside a chest or behind glass.
- The specific treasure is in the middle of the mandala of protection.

It's not as if a criminal can just come in and easily steal. They have to go through the whole mandala to get there. If your mandala is not designed to protect your treasures, then that is something you should consider creating. A thief cannot just steal things by going right to the heart of the mandala unless you let the thief do that. Think of security as a mandala of protection for your treasure in the middle.



Some meditation halls are simple in design, with few treasures available for theft



Meditation halls are sacred space very much in use in this living tradition. Some are full of treasures at all times and even more so during yearly celebrations.

Some monasteries have lhakangs that are very elaborate with a lot of treasure adornments that could be stolen. Others are very simple, possibly on purpose. When questioned about theft in his monastery, a khenpo who leads several large monasteries explained that he tried to use new and less valuable thangkas and statues in the more public areas to discourage theft.

The nunnery pictured below had a mandala of protection. There was a high wall on the outside with broken glass on top, and a gate that was closed every night, and dogs who barked loudly and snarled. Inside the wall and gate, they had the building of their Lhakang locked every night. Their shrine had many of the lineage treasures protected behind glass.

However, they had a terrible theft. The thief climbed over the wall—we don't know what he did to the dogs—but he sneaked in through this window and then he went to the front shrine to the statues that were not behind the glass.



Well-protected nunnery was robbed when a thief came in through the windows and stole gold, pearls, and other jewelry

These statues all had expensive jewelry, pearls, and coral, that people had offered, as they traditionally do in shrines. The thief did not steal the statues; he stole all the jewelry. And that was worth a lot of money. He basically stole what he could sell quickly and easily.

There was the mandala of protection. There was the gate, the fence, the dogs, the building, however the thief was able to accomplish entering the mandala and stealing valuable jewelry. He didn't steal the statues, he stole all the offerings made by the devotees: their families' gold, their coral. Preparing your mandala to protect against criminals requires real attention.



Valuable jewels set into statues can be stolen and sold



Dzi beads and other valuable gems on statues have recently been “picked out” of shrine statues and resold

Dzi beads are used for blessing inside of statues, and outside of statues and stupas. In one monastery where dzi beads were decorating the stupa, they also adorned little stupas behind glass in other rooms. A monk reported that thieves tried to steal them. Again, natural dzi beads are worth a lot of money. It would be terrible to desecrate a stupa to steal one, but this is done as often as the thieves can.



This lineage reliquary made of silver with gold details and adorned with dzi and other precious stones is protected from easy theft behind glass. The lightbulbs may create heat inside the closed-case microclimate, and the cabinet may be opened by treasure caretakers routinely to inspect for insects and rodents.

Here is another example of theft from a monastery. An old and venerable monastery in India had many visitors who came to see the teacher and to do kora around the stupa.

Valuable lineage statues were outside surrounding the stupa. The head teacher is extremely kind and trusting. Their most valuable statues were outside because he felt that most people came and just did kora outside, so he wanted them to be blessed by the most valuable statues. Many of the tourist visitors did not go inside the Lhakhang, they stayed outside. What happened was some criminals realized this and stole their most valuable statues without any problem whatsoever. When you have numerous tourists visiting a monastery to do kora, some of them are going in the opposite direction and it can look busy.



Small stupa on kora route held valuable monastery treasure. A thief reached in and stole the statue. Now, the replacement statue is behind bars to prevent theft.

The criminals just reached in and stole their most valuable statues. These statues were worth a fortune in money, but more important, they are rich in valuable in history and blessings. However, the monastery could not prove that they owned them because there was no documentation.

This is what the statues on the kora route look like now. There are bars there. When the tourists and pilgrims are going on their kora now in this monastery, they see the statues behind bars.

Elephant tusks and rhino horns are extremely valuable on certain art markets. Imagine how difficult it would be to steal these large and heavy treasures from your Lhakhang without someone noticing. There would have to be a complete lack of security. Yet they are stolen from monasteries as often as it is possible to steal them.



These are quite valuable, and are a target for thieves who visit monasteries

Opportunity for Theft: Remote Location

In small village shrine halls and family monasteries, a lay person could traditionally be trusted to manage the sacred art within the building, both access to the building, and safety, including care, storage, and handling of the treasures.

For example, one monk told the story of a lay caretaker who took some treasures from a small village monastery and sold them through a friend in the city. There was no documentation, either written or photographic, and legal ownership was difficult to prove. If you have proper documentation of your treasures, you can more likely recover what is stolen. International organizations can help you as long as you have documentation to describe your treasure and prove legal ownership and possession.

You don't have to share your entire documentation files with the government, nor do you have to share it with the monastery across the road. Your documentation files can be confidential within your monastery or community. You don't have to put it up on the World Wide Web.





Remote chortens and lhakangs are vulnerable to theft. In small village shrine halls and family monasteries, a lay person could traditionally be trusted to manage the sacred art within the building, both access to the building, and safety, including care, storage, and handling of the treasures. A lay caretaker took some treasures from a small village monastery and sold them through a friend in the city

Thieves are very interested in remote, traditional monasteries. This is true especially when they appear to be deserted and during the one to two weeks per year when the crowds come to visit for tourism and pilgrimage. In both situations, theft can be hard to prevent. Especially if you don't have a monk, nun, or community member whose specific job is to be aware of what people are doing. CCTV closed-circuit video surveillance is used now in some monasteries.

Some monasteries have CCTV closed-circuit TV coverage of their shrine halls. Unless someone is watching the video in real time, a thief could steal a treasure, and the video might show who did it and how it was stolen, and possibly be useful for police in finding the thief. But the treasure may be far away on a different continent by then. Hopefully those stolen treasures were documented so that the monastery can prove ownership. Some monasteries have fake cameras that visitors can see; the cameras are not even working, but the visitors believe they are being watched.



Monk knows that his Rinpoche is watching the CCTV

This monk explained that the Rinpoche of this monastery himself watches what the visitors are doing, and also what the monks are doing! But many of the CCTVs are just running and aren't even watched. Some monasteries even put up a sign saying, "You're being watched by CCTV," even when there aren't any cameras. This can be a good idea.

There are certain monasteries where many tourists visit, whether from the same country or internationally. A pilgrim may damage something through reverence, for instance, touching a statue to receive a blessing during kora, or placing money into the hand of a statue and breaking the hand by mistake. Large crowds of tourists may do kora the wrong way and inadvertently damage treasures through lack of knowledge, respect, or understanding. It is important to have a monk, nun, or community member watching.



Both caretakers and visitors traditionally get close to the shrines, to offer light, incense, and money as well as sometimes touching the shrine and contents with heads and hands. Proximity is not prevented.

For example, one monastery has a monk population of 400, kept relatively small to ensure high-quality study and practice. However, the main stupa, shrine halls, and grounds of the monastery are host to community members for Guru Drapcho, Yamantaka, Dispelling the Obstacles of the Year during the year. For a transmission blessing with a high teacher, there were over a thousand people in the room every day for five months.

A different large group of visitors are both tourists from the host country and foreigners, come to enjoy the monastery grounds and gardens. A monk was quoted as saying: "Tourists in the thousands visit, mostly on Valentine's Day, thousands of them come to romance in the gardens, and wander through the stupas and shrine halls showing no respectful etiquette at all, they touch the shrines, textiles and thangkas, and try to take souvenirs."



Local and international tourists visit monasteries and nunneries

A monk told us a story about the fear of foreigners stealing from lhakangs in his country. There was once a very wealthy collector of Buddhist art who wanted to see the thangkas in a region with many monasteries. His guide hired a luxury vehicle, started at one side and drove all through the region and back. When he was asked “What did you think of all the beautiful thangkas of that region?” he said, “We went through all of the region from one side to the other, we didn’t see hardly any thangkas at all.” He was so famous for being wealthy and collecting thangkas that people heard about his upcoming visit. People in lhakangs and private families hid their thangkas, and as soon as he left, they put their thangkas back on display in their homes and monasteries. People were afraid that he would send a thief to steal them. The monk telling the story mentioned that you have someone like that who is a risk, whom people believe will cause theft, but then you have traditional practices that are risks to treasures, practices of reverence that can also cause damage, such as fire and breakage.

Awareness of Visitors and Placement of Treasures

First of all, be aware of visitors. It is really best to have someone assigned to be in the shrine hall and other places where visitors wander to prevent theft and other kinds of possible damage such as serious vandalism, disrespectful actions such as littering, and thoughtless destruction through picking souvenirs from wall paintings.

So many visitors of all descriptions, pilgrims, community members, tourists, and thieves can easily enter parts of monasteries and no one is watching them. Sometimes it appears that entire shrine halls are empty of caretakers and visitors wander unsupervised and unwatched. Even the most devoted visitors can damage treasures by respectfully touching and even breaking off a piece of a statue, for example, to bring home.

And then there are several days during the year when it seems as if thousands and thousands of visitors of all varieties visit monasteries. There are far too many to watch to see if one of those visitors is a thief.





Monastery security is more difficult during days of the year when Lhakang filled with pilgrims and/or tourists





Stupas or chotens can contains valuable treasures and are located in areas that are not easy to monitor

Beautiful golden statues with rich blessing treasures inside can be attractive to thieves. You can see from a thief's point of view all that gold is very attractive. And the three-dimensional mandalas like this are filled with jewels. At the main stupa at this monastery, there are many beautiful statues located at different levels that are not safe from theft. At certain times during the year thousands of people go through this stupa every day. Also, you could have some treasures more available for view, and treasures

that are worth the most to the monastery lineage set back, higher, or behind glass so they're not within easy reach. This is how you plan ahead to prevent theft, with measures that include documentation, basic preservation measures, which includes creating a situation where monastics/community members are present when visitors come through the Shrine Hall, to reduce theft.

Looking at these images could cause you to think twice about security in your own monasteries and communities. And hopefully in each monastery there will be an administrative decision to have one monk or nun or community member become the Preservation Manager whose responsibilities includes theft prevention.

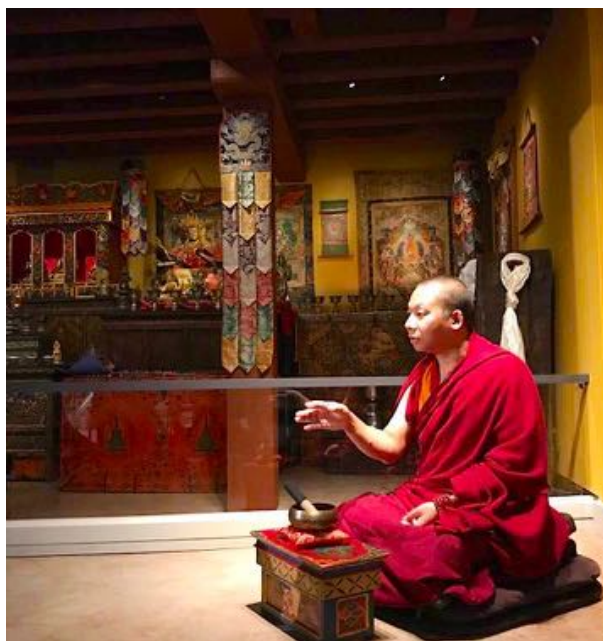
Security in Museums

Museums have a similar problem, but usually there is someone appointed, for instance, a security manager or gallery guards, to make sure people don't damage or steal the museum's valuable artworks.

Sometimes when pilgrims visit museums with Buddhist art, they believe that it's a Lhakhang and they offer food and other offerings. This decision affects security. Usually in museums, visitors are rarely allowed to touch anything, even to get close to exhibits.



With museums featuring sacred art, there is an observed crossover between monastery traditions and museum administration



Although this appears to be a Lhakhang, it is actually in a museum. However, visitors are not allowed to get close — there is a barrier.

In one situation in a museum, the museum thought that because it was Buddhist art no one would harm it. But there were places in the corners where anybody could cause harm. To rectify that problem, the museum CCTV in exposed corner. But it's important to remember that just because something is called a museum, that does not mean that it is safe or respectful for the sacred art in its collection.



Thangkas in this museum were not protected from visitors as museum staff could not see them around the corners

Security in Storage

Both preservation and security are important to consider for monastic storage areas. There are a variety of storage options you can adapt for use in your monastery and community. Please refer to the chapter in on **Storage in Preservation of Buddhist Treasures Resource**.



This monastic storage area has been redone recently, but before that it had a lock on the door, and the windows had bars. No person could get in, but animals, birds, and insects could enter and cause damage.

There are many options for storage of treasures. Choice of storage techniques, furniture, and location of your monastery storage room depends on tradition, budget, security, climate, and risk factors in your location situation.

For example, this is a museum in Switzerland that has visible storage. You can see if there are rats or insects. It can be kept very tidy. But, of course, this country is not located in an earthquake zone.



Visible storage allows easy viewing for caretakers, and also allows for monitoring for insects and rodents.

This storage would be a *disaster* for tremors and earthquakes, with the glass shelves and everything falling off. However, this kind of storage is useful and can be adapted for earthquake zone areas by using plastic. Treasures can be supported by collars and padding so that they will not fall over and crash into each other. With more visible storage, you don't have to go looking through the trunk to find something, which often causes even more damage. Locks can be installed in plexi. You can drill holes for air circulation if you wish, covered by mesh to prevent insect/rodent access.

Traditional storage in monasteries is often either in a separate storage room or within the Lhakhang itself.



Storage in Lhakhang cabinets

In some monasteries, thangkas and texts are kept in the main Shrine Hall and not a storage area. Then security can easily be considered from a mandala point of view: with the treasures in the middle of the mandala, surrounded by layers of its storage box or cases, then the storage room, and the larger monastery surrounded by the monastery grounds, surrounded by a fence, with a gate and a lock.

Thus, the security of your treasures can rest in organization, documentation, and perhaps more visible storage. The security of the storage room starts with a lock. Often, you see locks that anyone could get in the market so they're easy to open. One monk described his monastery storage room that has a very cheap lock, garbage and paper and oil, everything that could be flammable. He said it was neglected as a safe room for the treasures it contained.

Security in storage rooms can also be affected by cultural beliefs. The caretaker described the tradition to place a big hunk of meat up at the top of the storage area for protection. Many traditions prove to be scientifically sound; however in this storage room, the meat rotted, attracted rats. Also, the storage room was easily accessible to thieves.



Traditions can affect security

Importance of Caretakers

The caretaker of thangkas, statues, ritual objects, and dance costumes is a position that varies in stature and tenure from monastery to monastery. In one nunnery or monastery a caretaker may have that position for three months, in another, for a lifetime. During festivals and major Buddhist holidays, many monks or nuns may be

working with a monastery's treasures. Caretakers have a crucial role in prevention of theft and vandalism.



Monastery treasure caretaker position is very important for safety of treasures, but the position of caretaker may change from time to time and information may be lost

When you have the most sacred monastery treasures, consider how they protected, not just exactly where it is in the room but everything around it. CCTV is useful, strong locks are good, but the best protection is a monk, nun, or community members who are aware at all times. This is traditionally a caretaker position job. However, you can train a caretaker and maybe three months later the caretaker may be assigned another job in the monastery, and little or no sharing of documentation inventory (if it exists), or transmission of the history of treasures may occur. And if there is no digital documentation Inventory to refer to, then damage or loss to theft can be even more of a problem.

That is why it is important to have an administrative position of Preservation Manager. In some monasteries and nunneries, you have a monk or nun who is in charge of the monastery shop. The Shop Manager keeps an inventory of, for example, how many packets of noodles there are in stock. The Shop Manager knows how many noodles are to be purchased every week and when to stock up on more noodles. Is it more important to have an inventory of packets of noodles than to have an inventory of the lineage treasures? Sometimes the shopkeeper monks and nuns are the best at doing inventory because they're so used to doing it with the packages of noodles.

For the safety and security of the monastery and community treasures, digital documentation inventory is crucial. If the monastery shop is robbed, and noodles are stolen, the Shop Manager will know how many packets remain, both in the shop and in storage.

However, if a treasure in the storage room or shrine hall is stolen, or damaged during political upheaval, how quickly can it be accounted for? Is it listed on a digital inventory? What if the computer/tablet with the digital inventory is stolen? Is the digital inventory data stored externally? Is the data migrated as the devices and the systems are updated? This is crucial for safety and security of monastery and community treasures.

For example, an inventory of thangkas in a monastery was created in the early 1990s before smartphones and before many people had tablets and computers. The significant thangkas in the monastery, as decided upon by the Rinpoche, were documented with written report and photography, in this case, Kodachrome slides shot with a Nikon studio camera. The handwritten documentation reports, written on paper, were by request left with the monastery. In following years, the paper documentation disappeared. How? There was a changeover in monastery administration, the stack of papers could have been filed away, or the paper documentation could have become moldy during monsoon season, been eaten by insects and rats, or simply tossed out.

All documentation, whether written or digital, has to be backed up offsite, and if digital, migrated as technology changes. In this case, there were some statues and thangkas that went missing, ownership could not be proven, since the written documentation had been lost, and the monastery chose not to use the images. Again, documentation is of utmost importance for the safety and security of monastery treasure collections.

Stolen and “Fake” Treasures and Empowerment

Stolen treasures and fakes have been around for centuries in the art market. Even famous museums around the world have purchased stolen art, fakes, and forgeries and displayed them as legitimate. In past centuries, there were fewer negative consequences from stealing art and/or creating fakes and selling them, it seemed almost harmless to steal cultural heritage treasures, or create fake ones. However, now international organized crime is involved, and it can be quite dangerous.



Tibetan language video: Acharya Choying Gyurme shows you a venerable old painting from a thangka and warns you to be careful not to purchase fake thangka paintings. He explains the purpose of traditional thangka paintings and how they are worthy of respect. www.treasurecaretaker.com and www.thangkapreservation.com
You Tube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmN7Uvoli8U>

Discussion of Empowered Treasures

Through the 50 years of development for this resource, the question of "is it still empowered" has arisen continuously in monasteries from diverse regions and countries of the world, and from all lineages:

- What happens to your sacred monastery treasure when it is stolen, is it still an empowered with the essence of a deity?
- What about fakes that are painted just for the art market and have never been blessed?
- For example, when a thangka is stolen, and ends up in a museum, or on display in the bathroom of a private collector, does it still have its blessings?

Answers from monks and nuns in their own words:

- "Despite where it is kept and how many years it is missing, the statue will still have its blessings. However, our faith in it lessens because it is no longer in the monastery and therefore cannot be seen."
- "In Nepal, a precious statue was stolen from a monastery. It was in a very remote area not accessible by vehicle, so the thieves had to carry it. Because of all the blessings in the statue, it weighed 10-20 kilograms and they could not carry it over all of the valleys. In the middle of their journey, they cut the throat of a live chicken and sprinkled the blood over the statue. In my opinion, this action was a wrong against the statue and therefore took away the blessings."
- "Thangkas carry the blessing until the four elements of fire, wind, water, or earth dissolve. The methods for removing blessings from thangkas or statues that are no longer to be used is to burn or bury them".
- "The seed of liberation is planted in the viewer just by virtue of looking at a blessed treasure."
- "The blessing is always there."

Summary

In summary, in the words of monastic caretakers, here are some main points:

- Digital documentation to prove ownership can deter theft. Digital documentation, when created properly by smartphone and then emailed to monastery administrator, can be sufficient for legal proof for ownership.
- Documented proof helps in recovery of stolen articles.
- Maintain high confidentiality with inventory list.

Documentation is not difficult to do and is taught by www.treasurecaretaker.com in a low-cost and simple method that can be done within a monastery confidentially. Please read our chapter about low-cost and confidential documentation within your own monastery and community.

What can you do, in your Risk Assessment and Emergency Plan, to prevent criminals from having success in stealing and damaging your treasures? Please read our chapters about preventing theft, and recovery after theft.

Monastery administration could include one person to be in charge of it, to have knowledge about it, to create and oversee a team, to protect and preserve these treasures and original texts for future generations. The job can include responsibility for risk assessment, disaster planning, digital documentation, storage, pest awareness, and earthquake and flood preparations for your treasures and original texts. Treasures will be safer when monasteries, schools, and communities appoint a person for this.

If you can attend and engage in preservation training such as offered by www.treasurecaretaker.com and then go back to your monastery and community, you can become a leader in this working with your monastery administration, and leading the way towards security and theft prevention.

Security is a vital part of any monastery's risk management program to adequately protect its treasures. Whether the theft was premeditated, or a crime of opportunity, most thefts could have been prevented, and the same is true for vandalism and willful destruction of your monastery treasures. The more thefts happen, the more thieves feel they can get away with it, so prevention is critical! With Theft and Vandalism, as with other risks, prevention is the best cure.

Thank you to funders for ***Preservation of Buddhist Treasures Resource***, including The Pema Chodron Foundation, Khyentse Foundation, Shambhala Trust, Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation, Anne Thomas Donaghy, Henry Ming Shen, and many more.



Thangka Paintings, traditional old, and "fake" old

132 views • May 2, 2019

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VmN7Uvoli8U>

Nepal: The Great Plunder

Investigating how antiquities stolen from the Himalayas end up in museums and private collections around the world.

19 Jul 2018 11:36 GMT [Arts & Culture](#), [Nepal](#), [Crime](#), [Art](#), [Religion](#)

On the global art market, Himalayan statues of religious deities fetch millions of dollars. But to the Nepalese, they are living gods who have been stolen from their communities.

In this exclusive Al Jazeera investigation, *101 East* senior presenter and reporter Steve Chao takes viewers on a breathtaking journey across the Himalayas, to reveal how the art world's hunger for ancient artefacts is destroying a centuries-old culture.

As he seeks to expose the international black market in religious treasures, Chao travels across [Nepal](#) from its capital Kathmandu to remote and ancient Buddhist temples in Mustang.

Since the 1980s, authorities estimate thieves have plundered tens of thousands of Nepalese antiquities. About 80 percent of the country's religious artefacts have been stolen and sold into the \$8bn-a-year illegal black market in art.

But as *101 East* discovers, the Nepalese are now taking a stand and demanding a stop to the plunder of their greatest treasures.

Local guide Tashi Bista says the thefts are hurting communities and their ability to worship.

"When thieves look at our centuries-old statues and deities, they see millions of dollars of profit. To us, they are living, breathing gods," he says. "The thieves are destroying an ancient way of life for us."

Posing as a prospective buyer, Steve Chao goes undercover to meet black market art dealers and learn how they bribe officials to falsify papers so that they can export antiques from Nepal.

After showing his undercover filming to Nepalese police, Chao helps authorities conduct a sting on some of the country's most prominent antique dealers, leading to their arrests.

Set against a stunning natural backdrop, this is the story of how treasures from an ancient time are being stolen and sold to the highest bidder, leaving a culture in peril.

Source: Al Jazeera

https://www.academia.edu/9984258/Need_for_Implementing_Security_Training_in_Traditional_Buddhist_Monasteries_and_Nunneries

Conference on Protection of Cultural Property in Asia – Interpol

Thimphu, Bhutan 2013

Title: Need for Implementing Security Training in Traditional Buddhist Monasteries and Nunneries

Shafiq, Koestler, DePriest and Beaubien

1. Introduction

The loss of art and antiquities through destruction, theft, looting, and illegal export and sale has long been associated with dramatic and catastrophic changes in societies such as war, civil unrest, and natural or man-made disasters. However, even relatively peaceful and progressive changes such as the opening of countries for increased travel and tourism or the development of free markets and economies also may stimulate the illegal trade in cultural and religious heritage items.

For traditional Buddhist monasteries and nunneries where valuable religious objects and relics are readily available to the religious community for daily contemplation and worship, there is a special challenge in protecting objects from damage and theft without restricting access.

2. Training in Cultural Heritage Protection

Looting of archaeological and historical cultural heritage sites and international trafficking of stolen artifacts and antiquities is countered by enforcement of effective national laws and cooperation with international law enforcement bodies. For a number of years the Smithsonian Institution has partnered with the U.S. Department of State, Cultural Heritage Center, and the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, in the training of investigators for protection of international cultural heritage. These officials, working with U.S. Customs agents, investigate cultural heritage items illegally coming into the United States, recovering and repatriating items to their country of origin and arresting and charging those guilty of intentional trafficking of these items. The training program, organized by co-author Harriet Beaubien, focuses on reviewing the national and international conventions and laws that can be applied to protect cultural heritage, understanding how to work with cultural heritage professionals and institutions to identify and document artifacts, and using resources such as ICCOM country "red lists" of endangered materials and art loss registries.



Phajoding Monastery, Thimphu



A Bonhams auction, Hong Kong (Picture Courtesy-

Bhutan's stolen heritage up for sale in Hong Kong

| Tenzing Lamsang * 06/15/2019 # [Headline Stories](#) \$ 16,128 Views

In 1982 a major religious and cultural crime occurred in Bhutan when 40 valuable Thangkas were stolen from the 13th century Phajoding monastery in Thimphu, Bhutan.

Bhutan, since that time, has been making efforts to recover these items.

In 2017 the Bhutan Art Restitution and Reclamation Committee (BAARC), formed in 2017 to recover artifacts, found that two of the Thangkas were being put up for auction in the Bonham Auction house in Hong Kong by October 2017.

The BAARC, which immediately recognized the unmistakable 19th century silk embroidered Thangka of Ushnishvijaya and the 18th or 19th century large Thangka of Avalokiteshwara Shadakshari, informed the government and requested the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to intervene.

Bonham had estimated that the auction value of the Thangka of Ushnishvijaya is USD 51,129 to US\$ 76,693 and the Thangka of Avalokiteshwara Shadakshari was worth between USD 153,389 to 191,700.

The MFA on 15th September requested Edward Wilkinson, the Executive Director of Bonhams, in Hong Kong not to sell, move or transfer these items.

This letter from the government resulted in Bonhams withdrawing the items from auction and keep

Resources

<http://www.anonymousswisscollector.com>

artcrimeresearch.org

ICOM RED LIST

<https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/RedListofChineseCulturalObjectsatRisk-English.pdf>

The Chronicle Herald AT HOME Sunday, Dec. 23, 2018 B3

Sacred treasures

Church balances the need for the security of its artifacts with the desire to share the objects with parishiners

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of Christmas stories that explore sacred objects from the collection of churches.

AL. SAINTS Cathedral in Halifax, both of wood and stone, opened its doors.

The Cathedral is known for its beautifully carved wooden furnishings, especially the 19th-century altar behind the high altar, the altar rail, the pews on the choir level and the stained glass windows.

Members have shared in the altar during services for events and occasions that are filled with sacred meaning, such as baptism, marriage, funerals and vigils.

This sacred part of the cathedral, which is beautiful and dignified, has a story to tell.

It was a beautiful scene as the altar was being moved to a new location. Sacred objects are kept in the church's storeroom, but they are not always seen. They are taken out for special occasions, such as baptisms, marriages and funerals.

There was a month of work for many other people, a group of members of the cathedral's guild were in to get the altar ready.

The altar is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene.

The altar is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene.

The altar is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene.

The altar is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene. It is a beautiful scene.



The altar at All Saints Cathedral in Nova Scotia in Halifax.



The gold-plated chalice used for Communion at All Saints Cathedral.



Resting on the Communion offering table.



The altar rail at All Saints Cathedral in Nova Scotia in Halifax.



The altar at All Saints Cathedral in Nova Scotia in Halifax.



དགོན་པའི་གནའ་པོའི་གཏེས་སྤུང་གྱི་དབང་འཛིན་ལཱ།

Digital inventory འགྲུལ་ཚུལ་ལོག་ནས་དཔོན་པོར་འགོད་པ།

Risk assessment and disaster mitigation ཉེན་ཁ་ཕྱོད་འགོག་དང་ཚ་དྲུག་གཤོང་ལེན།

Recording digital interviews with elders མི་རྒན་རབས་དང་འགྲུལ་ཚུལ་ལོག་ནས་བཅའ་འདྲི་སྒྲུབ་བྱེད་པ།

Scientific research ཚན་རིག་ཉམས་ལེན།

Current project ད་ལྟོ་བྱེད་པའི་ལས་འཛུགས།

Free online preservation resource for communities and monasteries

དགོན་པ་དང་སྤྱི་ཚོགས་ཀྱི་ཚེད་དུ་གནའ་པོའི་གཏེས་སྤུང་འཕམས་ལམ་གྱི་ལྷན་པོར་ལྷན་ལེན་དུ་གྱུར་པ།



PRESERVATION OF BUDDHIST TREASURES RESOURCE is the free online resource for monasteries and communities, with practical information on digital documentation, risk assessment and disaster recovery, safer storage, and preservation of thangkas and other treasures. The resource comes from over 50 years of preservation work in monasteries.



Treasurecaretaker.com 0019022221467 treasurecaretaker@icloud.com



Basic Elements of Emergency Plan for Monasteries and Communities

1. People First
2. Who Do You Call?
 - Who is in charge?
 - Emergency phone numbers
 - Full monastery residence list, to text, WeChat, WhatsApp , etc.
3. Who Should Salvage Collections?
 - Monastery Treasures Salvage Team (trained previously)
4. Where to Bring Damaged Treasures
 - Another monastery?
 - Your monastery dining room, classrooms, etc.
5. What Do You Salvage First?
 - Decide your priorities, preferably before an emergency
 - Mark the location of these priority treasures on floor plans
6. Where Are the Emergency Supplies?
 - Stockpile supplies before an emergency occurs
 - Mark the location of supplies on floor plans
 - Contact local vendors for additional supplies
7. Who Provides Security During an Emergency?
 - Monastics, community members, or government?
8. What Information Technology Will You Need to Replace?
 - Survey your hardware and software currently in use
 - Store monastery files in "cloud" or duplicated offsite
9. Do You Have Insurance?
10. Who Has the Plan?
 - Make a list of who has copies of your Emergency Plan
 - Update Emergency Plan and Team