



Avalokiteshvara, Sumtsek at Alchi Chokhsor.

Courtesy Jaroslav Poncar

*is Pleased to Invite You
to an Illuminating Discussion
with Visiting Scholar*

Dr. Jaroslav Poncar

Professor Emeritus of
Technical University, Cologne

A Journey from Czechoslovakia to the Buddhist Himalayas

*40 Years of Exploring
Himalayan Monasteries:
A Photographic Documentation
of Murals and Wall Paintings
in Alchi, Tabo, and West Tibet*

Dr. Jaroslav Poncar looks back upon nearly four decades of photographically documenting Buddhist monuments in the Himalayan region—notably Alchi in Ladakh, Tabo in Spiti, Tholing in West Tibet, and his more recent work in Mustang, Nepal.

In this talk Dr. Poncar will reflect on his rich oeuvre, discuss the challenges of photographing particular sites and the technical solutions adopted, and ways in which digital photography has impacted his work.

Jaroslav Poncar was born in Prague in 1945, has lived in Cologne since 1973 where he was professor at the department of imaging sciences of Technical University Cologne. His photographic projects took him to Africa, Arabia and mainly to South and Central Asia, especially to the West Himalayas, Tibet, India, Burma and Cambodia. Between 1996 and 2005 he was co-director of German Apsara Conservation Project at Angkor Wat. His responsibility was mainly photographic documentation of Angkor Wat. After his retirement in July 2010 he was in Afghanistan on one-year assignment by GIZ-CIM (German International Cooperation) to photographically document the cultural heritage of the country. Since 2015 he participates in the project of Christian Luczanits (SOAS, London) to document manuscripts and objects in the monasteries in Mustang (Nepal).

Monday, October 30

7:00 PM

Palo Alto Art Center
1313 Newell Road
Palo Alto, CA

Free Public Program

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The **Alchi monastery** complex in Ladakh in the Indian Himalayas, represents among the best-preserved examples of Buddhist art from a thousand years ago. For decades scholars have been trying to understand puzzling questions: Who created the artworks? Why do they differ from orthodox Tibetan Buddhist conventions?

In 1990, Roger Goepper, then director of East Asian Art Museum in Cologne, photographer Jaroslav Poncar and art conservators from Cologne, Germany launched the *Save Alchi Project*, cataloging damage to its paintings and temple buildings. But the project ended two years after restoration work began in 1992. Monks of the nearby Likir monastery are the caretakers of Alchi, and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) oversees its preservation as a historic site.

Tabo monastery, also founded about 900-1,000 years ago on behalf of the king of western Himalayan Kingdom of Guge, is noted for being the oldest continuously operating Buddhist enclave in India and the Himalayas. There are many priceless collections of Buddhist thankas (scroll paintings), manuscripts, well-preserved statues, frescos and extensive murals.

After the earthquake of 1975, the monastery was rebuilt, with a new Assembly Hall. The monastery is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) as a national historic treasure of India. Poncar and Goepper initiated study and documentation of early West Himalayan art at Tabo in 1983.



The Green Tara, Sumtsek at Alchi Chokhsor. Courtesy Jaroslav Poncar

Tholing monastery, founded by an outstanding King of Guge Kingdom at the beginning of the 10th century, was one of the first to be built in western Tibet when Tholing was the capital of Guge. It still maintains an important place in Tibet after 900 years due to its significance in the second transmission of Buddhism in Tibet.

The Buddhist monastery in Tholing marked the evolution of ascetic Buddhism in Tibet, influenced by the Indian Buddhist scholars. The Indian master Atisa, invited to Guge in 1042, spent three years in this monastery imparting immense knowledge of Buddhism, and reviving its spread in Tibet through the adoption of very austere methods. His disciple established the Kagyu sect which became the basis of the Yellow Hat or the dominant Gelug sect in Tibet. In its time, the monastery in West Tibet was the most influential in the region.

The monastery became better known internationally, after Lama Govinda, a German Buddhist monk, accompanied by his Indian wife, Li Gotami, visited this site in 1948 and presented images of the monastery's artwork and paintings to the outside world. During the years of the Cultural Revolution, the monastery temples were mostly destroyed. However, it still retains many well-preserved murals executed in the West Tibetan style.

In 1993 Jaroslav Poncar was invited by Deborah Klimburg-Salter from the University of Vienna to join her expedition to Tholing and to perform documentation of wall paintings there. She also invited him to perform the complete documentation of Tabo in 2001, which Poncar had earlier initiated with Goepper in 1983.



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