

Domtsün Dampa

The Domtsün Dampa (ལྷོ་བཙུན་དམ་པ་) or Ngangtsho Raldi (ངང་མཚོ་རལ་གྱི་) is a common artistic creation found in the monasteries in Bhutan and the Himalayas. It is called Domtsün Dampa after the first phrase of the composition on which the art is based and Ngangtso Raldi or Swan-Lake Sword after the main elements of the art. It is written on temple walls, mostly near the entrances. The Nyingma tradition, which is associated with the content of this artwork, has in recent times also used it as the school's emblem.

The art work is composed mainly of a large lotus plant growing out of clear blue lake. In the middle of the lotus flower is a flaming sword standing vertically. To the right of the sword is a two-headed swan and to the left a two-headed parrot. The blooming lotus or *padma* flower is said to represent Padmasambhava, the main master to whom the credit of introduction of Buddhism to the Himalayas is given. It also symbolizes purity, just like the lotus is without stain although it grows in mud and dirty water. The sword which has a beautifully carved handle and which rises upward with flames burning around its sharp edge is generally used as the symbol of the wisdom of Mañjuśrī in Bhutanese and Himalayan Buddhist art. However, in this particular emblem, it represents Trisong Detsen, the 37th Yarlung Emperor of Tibet, who invited Padmasambhava to Tibet and patronized the establishment of the Buddhist system in Tibet. As Trisong Detsen was the main disciple of Padmasambhava, in order to indicate how the former spiritually emerged out the latter's blessings, the sword is shown as rising out of the lotus.

The swan with two heads to the right of the sword represents Śāntarakṣita, the Bengali abbot who introduced Buddhist monasticism in Tibet, and his chief disciple, Kamalaśīla.

As they possess the same spiritual heights and thoughts, they are shown with one body but as they taught separately at different times, the swan has two heads. The parrot with two heads represents the famous translators Kawa Peltsek and Chogro Luigyaltzen. As these translators worked with two languages, the parrot is depicted with two heads. In some versions of Dömtson Dampa, a religious scripture is also included on the lotus below the sword.

This art composition was originally said to have been created in Samyé monastery by the Sakyapa scholar Kunga Gyaltzen, popularly known as Sakya Paṇḍita, as way of token of homage and praise to the great masters who were behind the main programmes of the first diffusion of Buddhist teachings in Tibet in the 8th century. He is said to have also composed the following verses alongside the art work:

མོས་བཙུག་དམ་པ་དཔལ་ལྷན་ཞིབ་འཛོམས། ། བརྟལ་ཞུགས་བྱའི་པ་བླ་འབྲུང་གནས་དཔལ། །
སློབ་གསལ་དབང་པོ་བཞུགས་པའི་ལྷན་ལོགས། ། རྟེན་མའི་དུས་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་བ་གཉིས་པ་ཡིན།།

Sāntarakṣīta, the noble one with discipline and diligence,
Excellent Padmasambhava, who is an accomplished saint,
The lord of scholars, Kamalaśīla and others
Are the second Buddha of the degenerate times.

བདེ་བར་གཤེགས་པའི་འོང་ལྷགས་སྐྱ་ན་མེད། ། ལྷ་ཆེན་སྐུར་བྱེད་མཚན་བུའི་གནས་འདུག་པའི། །

སྐད་གཉིས་སྐྱ་བོ་སློབ་གསལ་ལྷན་པ། ། དེ་དག་བདག་ཅག་རྣམས་ཀྱི་མིག་ཏུ་བྱུང།།

The brilliant translators, who spoke two languages,
Held the titles of master editor, translator and assistant
And translated the incomparable teachings of the Buddha,
Are like the eyes for us.

མི་ཡི་དབང་པོ་ཚོས་བཞིན་ས་སྤོང་བ། ། རྣམ་དཔྱད་སློབ་ཅན་དེས་པས་འགྲོ་བ་འདུལ། །

དཔལ་མཛངས་སློབ་པའི་ཚོགས་ཀྱིས་ཡོངས་བསྐོར་ཏེ། ། རྟོ་དགུ་འདི་དག་བྱ་བཞིན་ལྷགས་པར་བསྐྱབས། །

The lord, who ruled the land in accordance with dharma,
Who was intelligent, skilful, noble in taming beings,
Surrounded by valiant and wise ministers,
Held his people dear like his child.

བདག་ཀྱང་མཚན་རྒྱུངས་ལས་ཀྱིས་འཕེན་པ་ཡིས། ། རྟེན་མའི་དུས་སུ་གངས་མའི་ཁོང་འདིར་སྐྱེས།།

འོན་ཀྱང་ཚོར་བས་མཚན་མའི་བསོད་ནམས་མཐུས། ། ཤེས་བྱ་ཕལ་ཆེར་འབད་པ་རྒྱུ་དུས་ཤེས། །

Through the force of my karma accumulated previously
I have been born in Tibet in these degenerate times.
However, through the power of merits from previous lifetimes,
I learnt most sciences with little effort.

ཚོང་དུས་འདི་ན་མཁས་པར་ཁས་འཛེ་ཞིང་། ། ལན་བརྒྱར་འཚད་དང་ཉན་ལ་མངོན་བཙུན་པ། །

དེ་དག་གིས་ཀྱང་ཤེས་བྱའི་གནས་རྣམས་ལ། ། རྣམ་པར་དཔྱད་ན་ཕྱོགས་འདི་མིག་ཅན་ཡིན། །

In this age of dispute, even those who claim to be learned
And engage in exposition and listening a hundred times,
If one examines, in all areas of knowledge,
They only possess a partial vision.

འབགས་པ་འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་ཕྱག་མཚན་གྱི་རིས་མོ་འདི་གཞུག་ལག་ཁང་ལ་ཕན་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཞིག་ཡོད་པས། ། དཔལ་ལྷན་ས་པཎ་བྲིས་པ་ཡིན། ། ལྷ་ཟད་འོ་མོ་མཛེས་ཀྱང་། མཚན་མོར་བྲིས་པ་དང་། །
པེར་ལ་སོགས་མ་འཛོམས་པས་ལན། འོན་ཀྱང་བྱ་ཤིས་པའི་རྟེན་འབྲེལ་ཞིག་ཡོད།

As the art of the sword, which is the hand implement of noble Mañjuśrī, has the auspicious power to benefit the temple, this was created by the excellent Sakya Paṇḍita. Although the art is not very beautiful as it was created at night without the necessary tools such as brushes, it has the auspicious omen.

According to above account found in the writings of Sakya Paṇḍita, the original version of this art composition was created on the right side of the middle circle in Samyé temple complex. Ever since, many copies and versions were created in other places as it is believed to bring auspiciousness and it denotes the three great figures of Khenlop Chösum (མཁའན་སྒོལ་ཚེས་གསུམ་) and other great masters of the Earlier Diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet. In Bhutan, this art is commonly found on temple walls and many Nyingma lamas also use a version or derivative of it as their logo.

Karma Phuntsho is a social thinker and worker, the President of the Loden Foundation and the author of many books and articles including *The History of Bhutan*.