

Interview with Gam Pol, Thangka painter, Degé

May 25, 2015

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Uncle is the “very famous thangka painter” Qumi Dorje. Gam Phal studied with his uncle. His uncle studied with the Lama of Dor Zhg Monestary.

(Yema in notes, but I believe DB misspelling of Nyingma Sect

LH: I wonder if this is Yama? Yama or Yamāntaka is associated with death and is one of the eight powerful protective deities who are benevolent but portrayed as fierce and gruesome. The point of the imagery is to scare the evil spirits. Yama (Lord of Death) is one of the vehicle through which Tibetan Buddhists come to understand death and is also associated with impermanence. I don't know if it is specific to a particular sect but I know that it is prevalent in Mahayana Buddhism. We need to look into this.

Gam Phal began his studies at 12 years of age. He is now 44.

He told us there are five styles of thangka painting. He is of the Garma Garze School. This school has three styles – new, common, old. Gam Phal paints in the new style. This style was founded by _____.

LH: These are the only reference I can find.

<http://zt.tibet.cn/english/zt/people/..%5Cpeople/200402004511163439.htm>

http://en.tibet.cn/lifestyle/people/200801/t20080116_330416.htm

The Babang (Chinese) Monastery is also known as the Palpung monastery. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palpung_Monastery

LH: The only references I can find come from the China Tibet Information Centre and we don't know the political issues. It is all quite confusing. We probably need to know more before “going public”

The new style is characterized by realistic scenery that mimics natural plants. The scenery resembles the scenery that appears in Indian painting. However, the Buddha and other deities are Tibetan style. Colors are Chinese style. The landscapes are imagined.

Garma Garze School was founded in 16th century (DB: Date not accurate to online resources above, accurate to *Tibetan Arts* by Wenbin Xiong, new style in 18th).

Thangkas begin with a pencil sketch.

No creativity in the paintings. Copy of founder of style. However, placement of elements in the paintings is not fixed.

The proportions of figures are fixed as written in historic guidebooks.

Inheritance more important than creativity.

Gam Phal showed us proportion guidelines in his collection, some as old as 400 years.

Different schools of paintings have different proportions.

What Gam Phal hopes people will take away from his paintings is a clear understanding of style and inheritance.

Gam Phal hopes to build a school. He currently has 85 students. He chooses students based on interest and references from relatives. Instruction is free. He hopes that students will continue the Gama Gazi style and will also be able to make a living from their painting. There was a young nun working in the studio when we interviewed Gam Phal. There are photos of her and her work.

Students spend 4-5 years drawing. 10 years at minimum for instruction.

Gam Phal uses mineral pigments that he makes.

Gam Phal's paintings first go to monasteries, then to lamas, and last to wealthy collectors. On the market his paintings sell for 180,000 RMB, although you can buy directly from the artist for 50,000 RMB. A businessman friend represents him on the market.

Gam Phal makes his living from painting. Depending on size and complexity, a painting may take from 6 months to 3 years.