The Heritage of the Reincarnated Lama of the Gobi

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Who was Danzaravjaa?

In Mongolia’s Gobi desert, at the beginning of the 19th century, a remarkable boy was born. This boy was Danzaravjaa, the Fifth Noyon Hutagt of the Gobi. He became a man of extraordinary ability — a talented poet, a Buddhist teacher, a meditator and philosopher, the creator of a nomadic theater, a dramatist and lyricist, a composer of songs, a craftsman of religious objects, a natural scientist, and a traveler.

His father was an obstetrician when the boy was delivered, and he noted in his short biography that there came a stream of bright light in the sky at the time of birth. His mother died at an early age and, as he wandered from place to place with his father, his great abilities became clear.

At the age of five, whilst they were at an encampment attending a ritual for good fortune, a heavy rain suddenly started to fall. Drops fell from the roof of the gher, the nomadic dwelling, with its thin summer covering, yet none fell on the father and son, who were sitting at the door directly below the edge of the roof, such that the locals made fun of them.

In response, the young boy sang in a bright voice:

...When the clouds roll in and the rain falls,  
what difference is there between the door and the rear of the ger?  
When you’ve done your work and it’s time to die,  
what difference is there between old and young?

...Though there be many stars in the sky,  
one or two carry the essence of light.  
Though there be many creatures on the earth,  
one or two have special wisdom.

The people were amazed by the boy’s response, and from that time on, he began to reveal extraordinary talents.

At the age of six, he received monk’s vows, and at the age of nine he was recognized as a huvilgaan, or reincarnated lama.
Between the ages of eleven and fifteen, he studied Buddhist philosophy and tantric practice at the monastery of Badgarchoilin in what today is Inner Mongolia.

Many of the high-ranking teachers of the time — such as Janjaa Hutagt, Ajaa Gegeen, and Düinhor Pandit — introduced the exceptional young man to spiritual practice through the rare and profound teachings of certain secret texts.

These senior teachers had read these texts and practiced at advanced levels for many years, yet they were amazed how, after just five years, Danzanravjaa was able to return to his birthplace at the age of sixteen, having fully realized the wisdom of tantra. There he began work on establishing a monastery at Hamarin Hiid. It became the center of religious culture in the Gobi region subsequently.

In addition to the establishment of many religious schools, Danzanravjaa also established schools for the general public. There was also a children’s school where the young were taught language, natural science, the fine arts, and both song and dance. And there was a library housing about a million texts, as well as a theater and a museum with extremely rare artifacts.

In this way, the uneducated people of the Gobi were educated in general knowledge, art, and culture, rather than being guided merely by superstition. It was also, at that point in history, a way to oppose the ideology of the Manchu rulers, who wanted to keep their Mongolian subjects in darkness.

The Founding of Nomadic Theatre and Roles of Dadishura

Although Danzanravjaa established many temples and monasteries in the Gobi, he himself did not spend much time within the boundaries of these temples. He journeyed across Mongolia, spreading his operatic works such as The Legend of the Moon Cuckoo, and composing music for his poetry and spiritual songs. He also brought rain to fall on parched ground, and both literal and spiritual medicine to the exhausted.

Meanwhile he explored mountains and rivers, rocky areas and grasses, and he ceaselessly compiled volumes of his writings. He traveled in a caravan of a few dozen camels, accompanied by a similar number of his students, a nomadic movement which looked to the future of education. He was forbidden from entering certain areas when some reactionary individuals described him as “a disreputable monk who brings with him young women and girls.”

He wrote in his autobiography that he was prevented from entering Ih Hüree (the capital city of Mongolia, presently Ulaanbaatar) in 1840 when he reached the banks of the Tuul river (the river in the south of Ikh Khuree).
Danzanravjaa’s school taught children with a particular aptitude for the arts. Along with preparing actors and other kinds of theatrical artists, he also had some of them train in religious schools. The female artists were led by one such student, whose name was Dadishura. These artists not only acted, sang, and made the costumes for the plays and the masks for the religious cham dances, but they also developed Danzanravjaa’s activity by, among other things, reciting prayers and teaching reading and writing.

Among these female artists, Dadishura was the most famous. She was the secret companion, or spiritual consort, of Danzanravjaa and, since she was artistically talented in many ways, such as in acting and in musical composition, she was continually with him. People who misunderstood her position in relation to Danzanravjaa misrepresented her on many occasions as his wife or secret lover.

Danzanravjaa dedicated many songs to Dadishura, evidence of how he honored her as his closest student and creative associate, and of his very human love for her. Dadishura had an intimate connection with Danzanravjaa’s life and works and is the woman about whom Danzanravjaa composed his song “Perfect Qualities.” After Danzanravjaa’s death in 1856, she dedicated her life to protecting and promoting his work.

Among the approximately 400 poems, songs, and spiritual songs composed by Danzanravjaa available to us today, “Perfect Qualities” is one that Mongolians particularly love to hear, claiming that it grants a blessing.

Perfect Qualities

Your perfect qualities
are like a clear mirror.
Oh, I see your beautiful
face, your body’s wonder
has truly captured my mind.

As the cuckoo’s song
thrills the sluggish mind,
Oh, as you sit and recite
your sweet and gentle words
so also my gentle nature.

As soon as we met, your body
struck me like a flowing river.
Oh, as red sandalwood and its scent
are created together intrinsically,
so you stimulate my mind.
Just like the honey taste
spreads from amid the lotus flower,
Oh, so meditation
more and more multiplies joy
and pleasure insatiable.

In this human life,
our desires are fulfilled.
Let us be happy together, floating
on the ocean of ecstasy,
an experience of desired divinity.

**Guru Rinpoche Statue Made from 10,000 Knives to Bring Peace to the Nation**

During the mid-19th century, there was a band of thieves called Hui Hui, who began to create discord along the Mongolian border. At that time, beis Delegdorj of Ih Huree repeatedly sent messengers to Danzanravjaa declaring, “Because of the military movements north and south, an escape route should be found immediately.”

On many occasions, in the presence of representatives from Tüsheet Han and Tsetsen Han, Danzanravjaa recited prayers to reverse any harm done to the military, and he enacted rituals to place obstacles before the enemy. In this way, Danzanravjaa allowed himself no respite in his meditations and rituals so that the army could overcome these obstacles.

At this time, too, he was considering the construction of a statue of Guru Rinpoche, while here and there in the Gobi there was a killer on the loose, stabbing a person to death. Danzanravjaa finally summoned the killer and collected his knife. Then he ordered the collection of knives from every family, such that there were ten thousand knives, and he had these knives melted down, pacifying the power of the blades by invoking protector deities, and so he created a statue of Guru Rinpoche which became known as “The Statue of Ten Thousand Blades.”

The people of the Gobi say that this is a statue, the blade of whose wise heart pacifies the knife of wrong thinking. So Danzanravjaa’s power started by pacifying the mind of a single person and reached as far as the destiny of a nation and the activity of armies. Thereby he attracted to himself, among all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the power of Padmasambhava.
Padmasambhava expanded the vajrayāna, with its direct scriptural and practice connection to the Buddha and mastered the power of a secret mantra. He is famous today as the root teacher of the Red Hat sect of vajrayāna Buddhism. He is considered to have been reborn to King Indrabodhi’s family in Taksil, one of the cradles of Eastern culture, in the north of India on the 10th new moon of the Wood Monkey year of 732.

Danzanravjaa was one of the more recent practitioners to regard Padmasambhava as his supreme teacher, and so he passed on his tantric teachings. Padmasambhava, who perfectly mastered the power of the secret tantra yoga and left his blessing for future generations, and Danzanravjaa lived more than a thousand years later. Yet, they were believed to be connected by the transformative power of wisdom realized at an elevated level.

In 1937, during the period of Stalinist repression in Mongolia, O. Tüdev, who was responsible for safeguarding Danzanravjaa’s heritage, secretly stored the statue of Guru Rinpoche in a cave. During the 1970s, he took it from the cave and brought it to his home. After he had cleaned it of rust and soot, thieves stole it. The thieves, who removed it from a chest, actually took only the statue, leaving behind the base upon which it had stood. Tüdev was very upset by this, but because of the statue’s power, he said that because he still had the base, the statue would return to its base.

After his death in 1990, his successor Altangerel devoted himself to reviving Danzanravjaa’s temple and monastery complex at Hamarin Hiid. He was also searching for the lost statue. One day he was watching television when he noticed the statue in a news report about a cache of precious objects in the holdings of the Mongol Bank.
He met with the bank’s director and asked about the statue. He was told that a person had taken out a loan and had left the statue with the Mongol Bank as collateral. The director told Altangerel, “Bring the statue’s base. If you’re right, then buy the statue back for the price of the loan.”

So, the statue and its base were reunited. But there was something missing—the Buddha’s crown. Unfortunately, Tüdev had lost the crown somewhere as he was quickly carrying a chest containing the statue by night, protecting it from armed soldiers.

One joyful day, a smith must have made a crown for the statue, painted it, and brought it when he came to pray at the temple. It happened that one of the workmen helping to renovate the temple came to Altangerel and said:

“I got a scorpion sting on my hand.” The lineage of Danzanravjaa’s caretakers are excellent medical healers, and Altangerel had the man recite prayers and take medicine. He noticed that the young man was holding in his other hand something bright and shiny, something like a hat, made of gold-plated copper. It fit Guru Rinpoche’s head precisely.

“Where did you get this?” Altangerel asked.

“I was tired and went to sleep where I was, and the scorpion’s sting woke me up. When I looked, it was running away. As I was going after it, I passed something gleaming like gold, and there was this crown.”

This is how Guru Rinpoche’s body, base, and crown were, in three fortunate turns of fate, reunited. What’s also interesting is that the scorpion is a special symbol associated with Danzanravjaa’s esoteric power.
Shambhala and Magical Stones

Shambhala is a place where people live. At the same time, it is the power and absolute wisdom which turns the sun and moon and stars, and so the world, too. The name “Shambhala” (Šambhala, Ūambal) means “holder of peace.” It is said to be located in what is now the northern part of Asia, yet people are still searching for its physical location.

One of these people was Fift Noyon Hutagt Danzanravjaa, who did not in fact look far to find it. This is what happened.

From the age of 19, Danzanravjaa established many temples and monasteries and places of spiritual significance. He created Buddha statues, traveled to many places, compiled books, and developed dance and theater. It is hard to imagine all that he packed into his relatively short life.

But all of this can be understood in connection with the fact that he many times received tantric teachings. These for him constituted a shortcut to developing his ability, his essential wisdom, and his spiritual activity, and they enabled him to sharpen his senses by engaging in deep meditation.

Danzanravjaa had received empowerment and teachings from his teachers, and he had absorbed the essence of their wisdom, and he had a particularly clear understanding of the secrets of the natural world, especially in his own region. For instance, we learn from his biography how he was able to come ever closer to Shambhala.

He believed that he had discovered Shambhala after entering deeply into the Kalachakra teachings. He sat in one-pointed meditation in the form of the Buddha Khorlo Demchig. This is evidenced by the fact that he established Shambhala to the north of Hamarin Hiid. He also established three monasteries in the Galbin Gobi, of which Demchig Monastery is the most important.

During his search for Shambhala, he selected a place in the Galbin Hills, and it came into his mind to construct Shambhala’s Galava (bshalpa, yalba) Palace there. He was interested in the fact that the name of the Galbin Gobi and the Galbin Hills was so similar to that of the Galava Palace in Shambhala. With his great understanding, he chose places with particularly unusual natural structures and with considerable energy and spiritual power, and in such places he built monasteries.

Today, the presence of rare natural elements such as gold, copper, and uranium further mark these places as significant sites.
Large deposits of uranium have now been found beneath Danzanravjaa’s birthplace of Dulaanhar Hill, while at Oyuu Tolgoi, about 10 km. from Demchig Monastery in the region around the Galbin Mountains, even greater deposits of copper and gold have been found.

Information regarding the various magical stones connected with Danzanravjaa’s life has attracted considerable interest. In a manuscript of Danzanravjaa’s works kept in the Mongolian National Library, we read, “In the spring of the snake year, 1833, a piece of rock was broken with a wooden switch through the apparent power of my own Handchoijid, and inside we were amazed to find an unidentifiable precious stone.”

In his paper “Physical Artifacts Relating to the Study of Danzanravjaa,” L.Hürelbaatar described how he had spoken in Züünbayan, Dornogovi, to an old man named Samdangiin Zorigtbaatar about the preservation of ritual implements which Ravjaa took when he traveled. He mentioned that “there was a stone which fit nicely in the hand, but whose name was unknown, a gleaming reddish brown jewel.”

In a paper presented at a conference to mark two hundred years since Danzanravjaa’s birth, Danzanravjaa’s curator Altangerel mentioned the physical artifacts which had been newly discovered, and which were connected with Danzanravjaa’s life and work. He said, “There were regular cuboid stones near to one another, which might have been formed from igneous rock. According to the oral tradition of those who preserved them, they were the precious stones of Handchoijid, on whom Danzanravjaa was meditating, and this confirms that magical activity was performed in front of those who were in attendance.”
In 2012, Altangerel told me, “In Ulaanbaatar in 2007, I met an Australian named Bruce Leon and his wife Sharon. They had contacted me on the Internet, saying that they had an important religious artifact to show me.

So, that July of 2007, they brought me a green jade-like stone which they described as a secret religious object from Shambhala. They said that there was clearly writing on this stone. It indicated where it had to go. And now the stone had come to the land of Shambhala.

Many people contributed money to pay for our travel to bring this stone to Mongolia, they said. They gave the stone together with $500. And there were old people who had been at Hamarin Hiid, who remembered a secret religious object such as this from the 1970s.” (What I saw was a dark green stone which could fit in a woman’s open palm, wrapped in an old offering scarf.)

In the summer of 2018, Altangerel showed B. Enkh-Amgalan, a member of Mongolia’s Parliament, and me something with a particularly unusual shape, like a rock bearing a design traced out in thread, and he said that this had been described in a written account as “a raindrop from Shambhala.” Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to get an image of this stone. That was the last time I saw Altangerel.

I recall that there were three stones connected to Shambhala in Altangerel’s care. These stones are most probably linked to the discussions about Shambhala stones mentioned in the accounts of Shambhala written by Nicholas Roerich. In one of these books, he somewhat obscurely describes how, “about forty years ago, this secret stone was placed in the safekeeping of a man in the Mongolian Gobi.” Elsewhere he says this had happened when he had been “in my 60s”, so it would seem that Roerich took these two sources from two different people.

One of the accounts regarding such amazing magic stones which, perhaps, come from the sky, and which are told about in legends all around the world, is told in connection with Shambhala.

According to Nicholas Roerich, Shambhala is the origin of these stones, and the stones which have come to this earth are linked, through a magnetic signal, with this original source. Magical dark stones of this kind are mentioned in Ferdynand Ossendowski’s book *Beasts, Men, and Gods* as having been left behind in the last Bogd Haan’s palace. So, both Roerich and Ossendowski indicate a strong likelihood that these stones of extraordinary power were directly related to the two stones kept by Danzanravjaa.

Events sixty years before in Roerich’s writings are closer in time to Danzanravjaa than are events from forty years before, Danzanravjaa having died in 1856.
It cannot be denied, then, that these objects have a connection to the lineage of Danzanravjaa’s curators. Roerich had heard in St. Petersburg in 1910 stories about Shambhala from the Buddhist abbot Agvaandorj. So, this history has a direct connection with Danzanravjaa. Moreover, there are stories and eye-witness accounts of magical stones which offer evidence of Danzanravjaa’s direct connections with Shambhala.

On the full moon day of the middle month of spring 1853, a large crowd gathered among the low-lying hills of Övör Hamar to meditate on the Kalachakra mandala, and to offer prayers that they would meet again in Shambhala. Today, travelers and tourists flock to this place in order to see the paths which lead to Shambhala, the meditation caves, and the so-called Golden Skull which is the place described as the “fontanelle,” the entrance to Shambhala. They believe that this place, with its strange natural formations and strong magnetic fields, can somehow stimulate the hidden workings of the human brain.

There are about 108 caves at Hamarin Hiid. The low-lying hills there are constantly shifting, their colors changing, and it has frequently been noted that those who go there sometimes have a unique feeling about time, as though they are experiencing an unusual dream. According to some accounts, Danzanravjaa located entrance points, which have some kind of umbilical link to Shambhala, and there frequently meditated on the Kalachakra.

Today there are stone circles to mark these places. The local people say that when Danzanravjaa entered into deep meditation, his body became stiff and unmoving, and his students would erect a small tent for him and guard him for two or three days. Suddenly, a white light would be shining, and he would emerge from his meditation. In this way, Danzanravjaa discovered in the Gobi a short cut to the high contemplative wisdom of Shambhala and established a point of contact with that invisible location.
The idea of envisioning such a world of peace and calm has been a constant among philosophers such as Danzanravjaa. He saw that the physical world is a complex interdependent system, but also a unified structure, which he clearly expressed in one of his poems when he wrote, “This fine world is I myself.”

Danzanravjaa’s experience of Shambhala was of a pure region which, by supporting the faithful understanding and practice of people of the natural world as an entwining of the sun, moon, stars, planets, and sky, was suited to the outer, inner, and secret practice of the Kalachakra.

In this way, we can remain with the faithful understanding that we can find the physical Shambhala, and travel there, and so manifest it.

**Danzanravjaa’s Lineage of Curators**

In the autumn of 1856, Danzanravjaa mysteriously passed away on his way to Beijing at the behest of the Manchu Qing state. But after he died, there was not much interest in his life. Since then, however, there have been caretakers/curators (tahilch) who have preserved for the future the heritage which constituted the experiences and material objects from Danzanravjaa’s life. These are the names of the caretakers/curators:

1. Balchinchoijoo, 1824-1865
2. Gan-Ochir, 1837-1889
3. Naryaa, 1861-1900
4. Ongoi, 1890-1931
5. Gombo, 1902-1937
6. Tüdev, 1912-1990
7. Altangerel, 1960-2019
8. Altan-Ochir, 1990-to date

He initially summoned his close student Balchinchoijoo, and made an agreement with him, giving him vows on a piece of white cotton cloth.

> When Chinggis ascended into Heaven,  
> his bondsman Borchi became his curator.  
> When I, melodious Noyon Hutagt Danzanravjaa, ascend to Heaven,  
> Balchinchoijoo will become my curator.

“Go to your homeland and return your monastic vows and take a wife to the countryside. From Shambhala, I will send a sign to your child, and he will become my curator after you. And so, it will continue.”
And saying this, Danzanravjaa died. Those who were to take on the duties of curator, and safeguard the heritage of Danzanravjaa, were subsequently born with a blue, moon-shaped birthmark about the size of a hand, on their back. I saw Altangerel’s birthmark with my own eyes.

The existing curator prepares the next curator from the time that the boy who has the mark on his back is five years old. He is shown the Buddhist teachings. He develops an inner strength. He takes a vow to study Danzanravjaa's heritage, to repair and revive it, to protect it from danger, and to keep hidden what should be kept hidden, and he hardens himself to face whatever difficulties might arise. He takes a vow also to continue in this preparatory work for twenty years and then, as soon as he reaches 25, to take over and become the next curator. At regular intervals, and at particular times, he connects and communicates with the spirit of Danzanravjaa.

In 1937, during the time of the sixth curator, Tüdev, there were the Stalinist purges, during which time monasteries and temples were destroyed. Tüdev took Danzanravjaa’s embalmed and gilded mummy, together with his material heritage and safely hid them among caves and rocks until 1990. I would note here that, although I never met Tüdev personally, he has come to me several times in dreams.

My dear friend Altangerel, who was almost like a brother to me, brought the objects which had been buried in the ground to Hamarin Hiid; he revived the blessed land of Shambhala, and placed in the monastery some of the precious items which had been buried. He established a museum, and until his death in 2019, he dedicated himself to spreading the memory of Danzanravjaa.

His son A. Altan-Ochir is now continuing the work of the curator. Danzanravjaa continues to bless the precious magic which exists between the curator in the physical world and the signs of wisdom coming from the peaceful land of Shambhala.

Conclusion

Over an extended period of time, ancient wisdom becomes preserved as a particular manifestation of understanding, and its results form an unbroken line of human understanding into the future. Today, because this wisdom has already been studied in terms of systems and quantum physics, there is no need to find it unusual.
The interpenetration of Buddhist understanding and contemporary scientific understanding offers something truly exceptional to human intellectual culture.

At this point, I would like to say that my 2012 novel *The Holy One* (*Gegeenten*) dealt with the life of the Fifth Noyon Hutagt of the Gobi, Danzanravjaa.

Danzanravjaa said, “I will return in a time when the world knows about me.” I pray that this brilliant poet and educator will be revealed in his works and return to us according to his clear and precise meaning.

*May there be perfect happiness,*

*ten thousand experiences,*

*fine wealth, and *

*good fortune.*