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Circumambulating the Jowo in Mongolia: Why Erdeni Juu Must Be Understood as “Jowo Rinpoche”

Isabelle Charleux (GSRL – CNRS)

Recent excavations at Qaraqorum by the Mongolian-German Karakorum Expedition (1999-2009), followed by the publication of archeological reports,¹ and by the proceedings² of an international conference³ on Qaraqorum and Erdeni juu (Cyr. Mo. Erdene zuu),⁴ have increased our knowledge of the most famous monastery of (Northern) Mongolia, which was inscribed at the World Heritage in 2004. Recent publications on Erdeni juu include a manuscript known in short as “History of Erdeni Juu” (*Erdeni juu-yin teüke*) dated 1803,⁵ a monograph using archive sources,⁶ the archives of the Kotwicz expedition,⁷ and a book of old photographs coming from different collections.⁸ The confrontation of archeological discoveries and written sources brought new information on the early history of Erdeni juu:

1) The foundation date of 1586 given in ancient chronicles⁹ is confirmed by a Mongolian and Chinese inscription written on a beam of the Central Temple¹⁰ that attests of the foundation by Abadai Khan (1554-1588): construction started on the 15th day of the 5th lunar

¹ See Gutschow and Brandt, 2005; Barkmann 2010.

² Matsukawa and Ochir (ed.) 2011.

³ The international conference on “Erdene-Zuu: Past, Present and Future,” held in 2011 at Harhorin, was organized by the “Erdene Zuu Project” led by Matsukawa Takashi 松川節, 1994-2011, aiming at recording historical materials, with a focus on medieval inscriptions.

⁴ I used Antoine Mostaert’s system to transcribe the Uyghur-Mongolian script, but I replaced “č” and “j” with plain “c” and “j.” Place names of the Republic of Mongolia are transcribed from Cyrillic Mongolian.

⁵ This manuscript includes a history of Mongol Buddhism and of the conversion of Abadai Khan, a list of inscriptions of the *stūpas* above the wall, and a biography of the Seventh abbot Lubsangdagbadarjai. Cendina (1999) gives a critical edition, a Russian translation and a facsimile of the Mongolian text. Different versions of the manuscript are known, which probably have a common source. It is the main source used by Pozdnev (1971 [1896]) and by Hatanbaatar and Naigal (2005).

⁶ Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005.

⁷ Tulisow et al. 2012. Władysław Kotwicz (1872-1944) led an expedition to Qaraqorum/Erdeni juu and Qara balyasun in 1912, focusing on archaeology, but also documented monastic life, architecture, and *cam* dances.

⁸ Baasansuren 2011.

⁹ *Asarayci neretü-yin teüke* (1677) gives 1585 (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 28); *Erdeni juu-yin teüke*, 1586 (Cendina 1999: fol. 12r-12v).

¹⁰ Matsukawa 2011: 30-31; Bao 2013: 179-182.

month, 1586 and ended the following year. The hypothesis that Abadai Khan did not erect but only restored a pre-existing temple dating back from the 13th century is therefore dismissed.

2) The Mongolian-German expedition brought evidence that the structure the Soviet archeologist Kiseliev had identified as the ruins of Ögedei Khan's (r. 1251-1259) palace inside Qaraqorum's wall (outside of Erdeni juu) in 1948-1949¹¹ was in fact a Buddhist temple/monastery built from 1235 to 1256-1257, and restored in 1342 and 1346. According to fragments of the restoration stele,¹² this monastery was known as Xingyuange 興元閣/Coytu yeke süme, and its main building was a 300 *chi* 尺 high five-storied structure. These dimensions correspond to archeological finds.

3) It is highly probable that Erdeni juu stands right above Ögedei Khan's palace, known as Wan'an 萬安/Tümen amgalan, built from 1235 to 1326. Below the actual monastic wall were found traces of a 13th century mud brick wall.¹³ Many bricks and stones as well as lion figures, incense burners etc. were taken from the old palace to build Erdeni juu. Because 19th century chronicles mention the construction of Erdeni juu in the "Taqai City,"¹⁴ this is called the "Taqai fortress theory." After the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Mongol elite went back to Mongolia and Biligtü Khan (1338-1378), son of the last Great Khan Toyon Temür (r. 1333-1368) settled in Qaraqorum. The Ming troops razed Qaraqorum to the ground in 1388, but Mongols still lived there under Dayan Khan (ca. 1464-1543). Although no archeological evidence of permanent constructions between 1388 and 1585 has been found, the site remained important and may have been occasionally occupied by felt tents.¹⁵

In spite of these recent discoveries, our architectural understanding of Erdeni juu is still in its infancy. The monastery has a long history of construction, rebuilding and restoration, but partially escaped destruction several times¹⁶ and keeps the best preserved interiors of all Mongolia, yet no plan has been drawn to restore the location of the many buildings destroyed in 1937-1938 (12 main temples and 5 smaller ones were preserved).¹⁷

My paper here focuses on the architectural peculiarities of the Three Temples (Гурбан жуу) and more particularly the Central Jowo/Temple (Гуол жуу) built by Abadai Khan in 1586 and its main icon. I will discuss historian of architecture Bao Muping's recent article on the architectural models of Erdeni juu,¹⁸ and propose new hypotheses about the location inside the wall, the inner corridor of circumambulation, the main icons and the alignment of the Three Temples. Like most authors who studied the monastery, Bao translates "Erdeni juu" as "Precious Temple"¹⁹—*erdeni* means "treasure, jewel, gem, precious," and *juu* (< Tib. Jo bo/Jowo, "Lord") means "temple, monastery." Here I argue that Erdeni juu should be translated as "Jowo Rinpoche"²⁰ by reference to the twelve-year old Jowo Śākyamuni (Rinpoche), the most worshiped statue of Lhasa, housed in the Jokhang (Tib. Jo kang) Temple of Lhasa (**fig. 1**), because it housed a statue of twelve-year old Śākyamuni.

¹¹ Kiseliev et al. 1965: 123-321.

¹² "Chijian Xingyuange bei" 勅建興元閣碑 dated 1347, granted by imperial order, in Chinese and Mongolian; text studied by Matsukawa (see the bibliography in Matsukawa 2011).

¹³ Hüttel and Erdenebat 2009: 9-14, 50-56.

¹⁴ *Erdeni-yin erike* 1859: 329-330, repeated in the "History of Erdeni juu" (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 27).

¹⁵ Gutschow and Brandt 2005: 352. Full excavation has not been carried out at Erdeni juu.

¹⁶ The Zunghars pillaged the monastery in 1731-1732 but without too many damages.

¹⁷ For a chronology of construction and renovation of the many temples and *stūpas* located inside and outside the wall, monastic departments and colleges, see Pozdneev 1971 [1896]: 281-299; Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005.

¹⁸ Bao 2013 (a first version of her article was published in English: Bao 2011).

¹⁹ Bao 2013: 173, n. 5.

²⁰ Rinpoche (Tib. rin po che, lit. "precious") is a term of respect used for reincarnations, accomplished masters and some statues of the Buddha.



Fig. 1. Statue of Jowo Sākyamuni, Jokhang Temple, Lhasa, Tibet. © Andre Alexander

The Architecture of the Three Temples

The Central Temple compared to the Glazed [Tile] Hall of Mayidari juu

The Central Temple is a Chinese style two-storied pavilion (*louge* 樓閣) with a gable and hip (*xieshan* 歇山) roof (**fig. 2**). The examination of the bracket system (*dougong* 斗拱), as clearly demonstrated by Bao, confirms the date of late 16th century²¹: the bracket sets are only found under the eaves and are not connected to tie beams of the building, they have lost their structural function in Chinese architecture after the 15th century.²²

On either side of the Central Temple (respectively southwest and northeast²³) were built the Right Temple/Jowo (Barayun juu) by Abadai's second son Erikei/Erekei Mergen Khan (d. before 1603), his wife and their son Гombodorji (1596-1655), and the Left Temple/Jowo (Jegün juu) by Гombodorji and his wife Qandjamso (**fig. 3**).²⁴ They were completed around 1630 and were restored in the course of the 18th century.²⁵ Both are double-eaved one-storied halls (*dian* 殿) with a *chongyan* 重檐 *xieshan* roof, and have an inner corridor of circumambulation (**fig. 3**).

²¹ Bao 2013: 178; see also Gutschow and Brandt 2005: 355-256. According to the "History of Erdeni juu," the roofs of the Three Temples were restored in 1796-1798 (Cendina 1999: fol. 26r-27v).

²² Guo 2005: 132.

²³ In Mongolian, "right" and "left" are usually translated as "west" and "east" (looking towards south).

²⁴ They were built in the early 17th century (sources in Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 35). Other sources state that Abadai built the Three Jowo Temples (1859 Biography of Zanabazar, transl. Bawden 1961: 36-37; "History of Erdeni juu" cited by Pozdnev 1971 [1896]: 282 and Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 27).

²⁵ Gutschow and Brandt 2005: 352; Pozdnev 1971 [1896]: 283-289; Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 35-40.

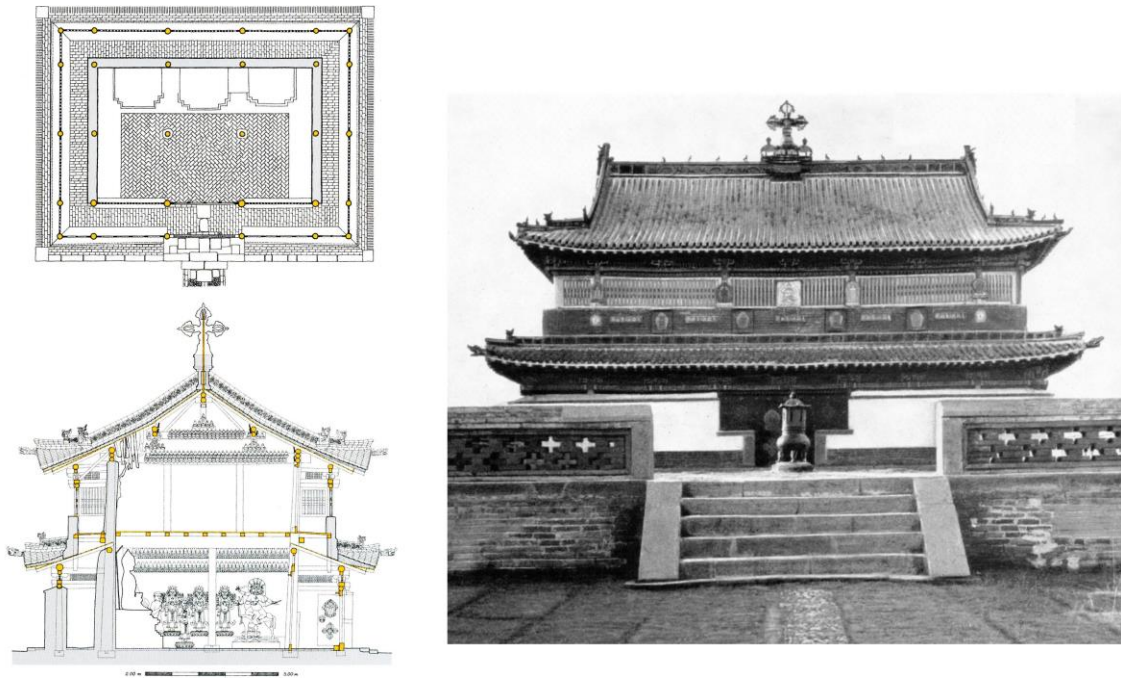


Fig. 2. Photograph (Maidar 1972: fig. 75), floor plan and elevation (Gutschow and Brandt, 2003) of the Central Temple, Erdeni juu.



Fig. 3. The Three Temples of Erdeni juu. © I. Charleux

In her article about Erdeni juu and its models, Bao found that the closest resembling architecture of the Central Temple is the Glazed [Tile] Hall²⁶ of Mayidari juu (Ch. Meidaizhao 美岱召) west of Hohhot (Kökeqota) in Inner Mongolia, built before 1606: both are *lounge*, have similar dimensions (14.85x11.35 meters and 15.84x10.88 meters respectively), similar lengths of bays, bracket sets, and glazed tiles.²⁷

As I showed elsewhere,²⁸ Erdeni juu and Mayidari juu—two approximately square, fortified monasteries built in the late 16th century—show striking comparable features. Not only the Glazed [Tile] Hall and the Central Temple are similar types of buildings,²⁹ but also both are preceded by two *stūpas*/tombs: two funerary *stūpas* stand in front of the Glazed [Tile] Hall,³⁰ and the square-shaped tombs³¹ of Abadai Khan and his son Гombodorji in front of the Central Temple (probably dated 18th century). Mayidari juu was fortified because it was initially built as the first palace of Altan Khan (1507/8-1582) before being progressively converted into a monastery; the palace was probably located in the center and a first temple was built in 1572 in the north-west corner of the square fortress.³² Erdeni juu also probably served as a palace for Abadai Khan. As shown by recent archeological finds, its walls were elevated upon the 13th century walls of the “Taqai” fortress, collapsed several times and were rebuilt in the course of the 17th and 18th centuries.³³ The presence of Abadai’s palatial yurt in the center of Erdeni juu could explain why the Three Temples were built in a corner. Both palaces-cum-temples became monasteries after the death of their founder.

The Dalai Lama is said to have resided for some time in Mayidari juu (where a temple bears his name): Abadai Khan may have visited Mayidari juu when he came to Hohhot to worship the Dalai Lama, and later built his temple with Altan Khan’s monastery and palace in mind. The inscription written on a beam of the Central Temple of Erdeni juu mentions the name of a Chinese carpenter in chief, Chang Jinzhong 常進忠. It also mentions a *laba tidiao* 喇叭提吊 (= *tidiao lama* 提調喇嘛?, title of the overseer of craftsmen in the Yuan dynasty) [sent by] *shunyiwang* 順義王 (title of Altan Khan and his successors). According to Bao Muping, it would indicate that Yuan dynasty titles of craftsmen were still in use at Altan Khan’s court.³⁴ Although historical sources do not evoke any connection between Erdeni juu and Mayidari juu, the Central Temple of Erdeni juu was probably built by the same Chinese

²⁶ Liulidian 琉璃殿, also called Sanfoge 三佛閣 (Three Buddha Pavilion).

²⁷ Bao 2013: 190-191.

²⁸ Charleux 2006: 186-189; Charleux 2014.

²⁹ In addition, both monasteries became Buddhist ancestors’ temples of Chinggisid princes and princesses: they enshrined their relics (ashes and personal objects), extremely precious and symbolical icons, and mural paintings commemorating their founding ancestor (Charleux 2014).

³⁰ Bao (2013: 187-188) does not mention the *stūpas* in front of the Glazed [Tile] Hall but compared Erdeni juu’s tombs with the *stūpas* of Altan Khan and the Dalai Lama in Yeke juu mentioned in Altan Khan’s biography (which were not located in front of the Main Assembly Hall but west and north of it), and with Yuan dynasty monasteries of Dadu, where Halls of Imperial Portraiture were erected east and west of the Main Temple. I find the comparison between Erdeni juu and Mayidari juu more pertinent.

³¹ These are usually called funerary *stūpas* (*bungqang-tu suburγa*); however their square shape clearly distinguishes them from *stūpas* (in Buddhism, laypersons cannot be buried inside *stūpas*. Altan Khan and his third wife Jönggen qatun are exceptions: Charleux 2014).

³² Charleux 2014.

³³ Pozdneev asserts that there was no fortified wall before 1796 or 1803 (1971 [1896]: 289, 298). For Hatanbaatar and Naigal (2005: 36-37) the wall was built before the 18th century (Zanabazar ordered to restore it in 1705) but *stūpas* started to be erected in 1730 on the top of the wall; the *stūpa* wall was completed in 1803.

³⁴ Bao 2013: 179-182.

carpenters who erected temples and palaces for Altan Khan.³⁵ As for the Glazed [Tile] Hall of Mayidari juu, it was built before 1606 but we do not know if it is anterior to the Central Temple.

The circumambulation corridor of the Three Temples

The Three Temples have an inner corridor for circumambulation (**fig. 4**). This type of corridor surrounding a central chapel is an archaic feature that characterized temples of Tibet and Central Asia during the first millennium; no contemporary Tibetan or Mongol example is known. As I have shown in a previous book,³⁶ such inner corridors of circumambulation surrounding a central chapel (Tib. *skor khang*, Mo. *goro-yin jam*) were very common in Tibet³⁷ as well as in Central Asia³⁸ during the first millennium. Their origin can be traced to Indian prototypes and cave temples. Examples of the Mongol imperial period include the (probably Sakyapa) temples of the Y2 and Y3 courtyards at Khara Khoto (between ca. 1250-1380), as well as monasteries sponsored by Yuan Mongols in China³⁹ and Tibet.⁴⁰ Inner corridors have become rare in Central Tibet after the 13th century,⁴¹ but they were still built in 15th century non-Gelugpa temples of the Gansu and Amdo area,⁴² some of them being sponsored by Mongols.⁴³ The inner corridors of the Three Temples of Erdeni juu (0.90 to 1.03 meters large) are comparable in size to corridors surrounding these Central Tibetan and Amdo temples,⁴⁴ but they surround a barlong shrine, while Tibetan corridors surround a square shrine.

The practice of inner circumambulation seems to have progressively been abandoned in the 16th century, especially in Gelugpa monasteries, perhaps because of the increase in the number of Buddhist monks which led to the construction of open, outer corridors that yielded more space to circumambulate. Yet the construction of inner corridors was not completely abandoned. Late examples are the rear temple at Fanzongsi 梵宗寺 (1743-1755) in Eastern Inner Mongolia, and the Qishoudian (Longevity Temple 長壽殿, also called Huasi 花寺, 1717) of the great Kumbum Monastery in Amdo.⁴⁵ These archaisms evidence the importance of circumambulation for Mongols, and may be linked to womb-caves and narrow corridors that are common in pilgrimage sites of Mongolia.

³⁵ Other Mongolian sources write that Abadai Khan summoned Chinese artisans from Hohhot to build Erdeni juu (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 33).

³⁶ Charleux 2006: 237-239, 253; also Bao 2013: 194-195.

³⁷ Examples include the dBu rtse of bSam yas (8th century), the *gtsug lag khangs* of Tho ling and Tha bo, the Ke ru lha khang (Kwa chu temple, sNe'u gdong, 8th century), the Jokhang (7th/12th century) and Ra mo che (14th century) of Lhasa, Grwa thang (1081), etc.

³⁸ Temple A with a “*stūpa*-pillar” at Gaochang, temple XXVI of Qarashahr (Xinjiang, China), temple of Ak-Besim in Kyrgyzstan (7-8th century).

³⁹ Shuishenmiao 水神廟 (Hongdongxian, Shanxi), 1324.

⁴⁰ bsTan 'gyur lha khang of Zhwa-lu Monastery, 1333.

⁴¹ Exceptions include the gTsub lag khang of dPal 'khor chos sde (rGyal rtse, 15th century) and a temple at Grwa nang (1438).

⁴² Qutandian 瞿壇殿 of Qutansi 瞿壇寺 at Ledu (Qinghai, 1392), Wansuidian 萬歲殿 of Miaoyinsi 妙因寺 at Liancheng (Gansu, 1427).

⁴³ Mongols controlled a portion of southwestern Gansu for over five hundred years by means of a hereditary title/position called *tusi* 土司 bestowed by Ming emperors; they were based in Liancheng and founded temples (Campbell 2011: 65-77).

⁴⁴ Less than 1 meter wide in the Wansuidian, 1.10 meters wide in the Qutandian (Campbell 2011: 163-178; fig. 65).

⁴⁵ Charleux 2006: 237-239, 253.



Fig. 4. Circumambulation corridor of the Central Temple of Erdeni juu. © I. Charleux

The barlong halls with an inner corridor for circumambulation at Erdeni juu would then come from this long Tibetan and Central Asian tradition, and we still need to find the missing link between the 15th century Amdo temples and Erdeni juu. Bao proposes that it was not introduced from Tibet but is a legacy of Sakyapa temples of the Mongol empire.⁴⁶ We know that Erdeni juu was first viewed as a Sakyapa monastery, and became Gelugpa in the late 18th century under the rule of the Seventh abbot *nomci corji* Lubsangdagbadarjai (1734-1803).⁴⁷ The affiliation to a school was not vital for 16th century Mongol Buddhism, and the Third Dalai Lama was sympathetic to the Sakyapas.⁴⁸

Knowledge about inner corridors for circumambulation may also come from temples of Hohhot. The Main Assembly Hall of Yeke juu (“Great Monastery/Jowo,” Ch. Dazhao(si) 大召(寺), 1579-1580) and other temples modelled after it have no such corridor, but two small doors at the north-east and north-west open on the colonnade surrounding the Back Shrine, allowing the devotees to circumambulate the main icon from the outside (fig. 5). But according to archeologist Su Bai, another early Hohhot temple may have been surrounded by a circumambulation corridor: the Old Temple (1585-1586?) of Siregetü juu (Ch. Xilituzhao 席力圖召) (fig. 6),⁴⁹ also known as Erdeni juu. Abadai Khan may have visited it in Hohhot.

In the light of written sources here presented in a chronological order, I will propose another hypothesis to explain the presence of a corridor for circumambulation at Erdeni juu.

⁴⁶ Bao 2011: 144.

⁴⁷ Erdeni juu was first consecrated by a Sakyapa lama, Lodoi Ninbo, sent by the Dalai Lama (Bareja-Starzyńska 2012: 137; Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 115-118). In 1776 Erdeni juu sent a mission to Sakya [Sa skya] monastery in Central Tibet (Pozdneev 1971 [1896]: 287).

⁴⁸ Nowadays a yurt-temple at Erdeni juu houses the only Sakyapa community of Mongolia. The study of the contemporary Mayidari juu in Inner Mongolia also reveals the complexity of the presence of old and Gelugpa schools of Tibetan Buddhism in the same monastery (Charleux 2014: 49-52).

⁴⁹ Su 1994: 51. The temple still exists but its inner walls have been rebuilt, now forming three rooms.

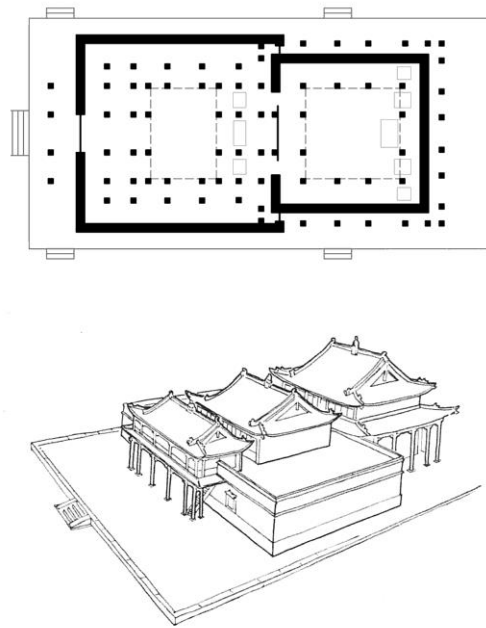


Fig. 5. Floor plan and elevation of the Main Assembly Hall of Yeke juu, Hohhot. © I. Charleux

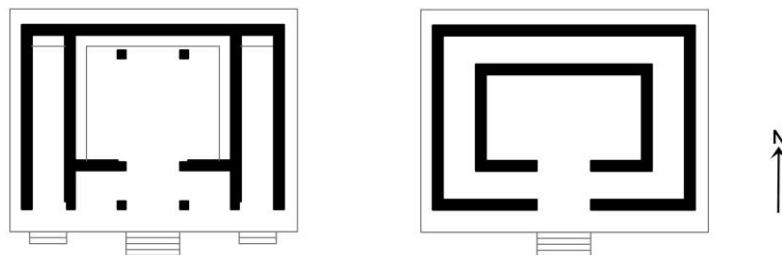


Fig. 6. Old Temple (Erdeni juu) of the Siregetü juu, 1585-1586, present floor plan and proposed reconstruction according to Su (1994: 56). © I. Charleux

The Foundation of the Three Temples in Written Sources

We have no contemporary sources describing the foundation of Erdeni juu. As noted by Agata Bareja-Starzyńska, the whole narration about Abadai Khan founding Erdeni juu is confusing.⁵⁰ The biography of Altan Khan written around 1607 mentions Abadai's visit to the Third Dalai Lama bSod nams rgya mtsho in Hohhot (probably in 1586) but does not mention his religious foundation.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Email, 28 January 2013.

⁵¹ *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur orusiba*, transcription and English translation in Elverskog 2003. The biography does not give a date but locates the event after Sengge Dügüreng's death and Namudai Secen's enthronement in 1586 (Elverskog 2003: 189-190). Other sources date Abadai's visit of 1586-1587 (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 22-29).

A relic of Śākyamuni bestowed by the Dalai Lama to Abadai Khan

1) The oldest source mentioning Erdeni juu is a biography of Zanabazar written in Tibetan by Jaya Paṇḍita, completed in 1702:

[..] Later he [Abadai Khan] went to invite the all-knowing bSod nams rgya mtsho and [discussed] the opportunity of [his] visit in Mongolia. [...] He (i.e. Abadai) was given a certain painted image (Tib. *sku thang*) of Phag-mo-grub Vajra-rāja (Tib. rDo rje rgyal po, 1110-1170) [called] Me thub ma (meaning: “indestructible in fire”) and was bestowed with the title Vajra-rāja (rDo rje rgyal po).⁵² He erected one temple called Erdeni juu (Tib. Er te ni jo bo) with the particularly sublime object of worship (Tib. *sku*).⁵³

“The particularly sublime object of worship” could refer to the painted image, or to another image (a statue, a painting), or to a relic.⁵⁴

2) The oldest source that records the Dalai Lama’s gifts to Abadai Khan, Saṅg Secen’s *Erdeni-yin tobci* (1662), does not mention the foundation of the temple,⁵⁵ but in addition to the image (*körög*) of Vajrapāṇi and other images, it says that the Dalai Lama bestowed the Khan a relic (*šaril*, < Skt. *śarīra*) of Śākyamuni.⁵⁶

3) The “History of Erdeni juu” (1803) writes that Abadai Khan placed in the Central Temple

objects of worship, among them the most venerated relics of the Buddha, similar to an extraordinary jewel called *cintāmaṇi*, bestowed by the Dalai Lama [...].⁵⁷

4) Galdan’s *Erdeni-yin erike* (1859) describes the construction of Erdeni juu in the old fortress of Taqai:

⁵² On Phag mo grub Vajra-rāja, Vajrapāṇi, and the title of rDo rje rgyal po: Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 110-111. The statue of Vajrapāṇi was later moved to nearby Barayun küriye (Cyr. Mo. Baruun hüree or Shanh hiid).

⁵³ Bilingual, Tibeto-Mongolian version entitled *bLo bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po’i ’khrungs rabs bco lnga’i rnam thar*, in Lokesh Chandra 1982: 418-419 (it is also included in Jaya Pandita’s “Clear Mirror,” Vol. IV (*nga*). I thank A. Bareja-Starzyńska for having translated this passage for me (email, 28 January 2013).

⁵⁴ According to a tradition, the statue offered by the Dalai Lama to Abadai was the Gür Gombo (Gur gyi mgon po, Skt. Pañjara Mahākāla, special protector of the Sakyapa order), another most worshiped icon of Erdeni juu. It is mentioned among the many objects of worship placed by Abadai Khan in the Central Temple (“History of Erdeni juu,” quoted by Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 112). The Dalai Lama would have wanted Abadai to remember the adhesion of the Mongols to the Sakyapa tradition. However, Pozdneev (1971 [1896]: 284) asserts that Gür Gombo was chosen as protector of Erdeni juu about 70 years after its foundation.

The “History of Erdeni juu” also mentions an image of the Dalai Lama by his own (Abadai’s) hands made in 1585 and placed on the upper floor of a small building in the old palace of Taqai (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 27, 30). This building would be the Köke süme (Blue Temple), which has been rebuilt in 1970.

⁵⁵ Other histories of Mongol Buddhism such as Sum pa mkhan po Isibaljur’s *dPag bsam ljon bzang* (1748), or ’Jigs-med Rig-pa’i rdo-rje’s *Hor chos-’byung* (1819) do not mention the foundation of Erdeni juu.

⁵⁶ According to the *Erdeni-yin tobci*, the Dalai Lama asked him to choose a Buddha (image), and he chose an image of Vajrapāṇi. The Dalai Lama then explained that it is an ancient image of Qamba Vajra qayan; when all other Buddha images that filled a hall were completely burnt in a fire, this one did not burn: it is an especially powerful image. The Dalai Lama also bestowed Abadai a relic of Śākyamuni of the size of a thumb, a statue of Cakrasaṃvara, and images of *arhats* coming from India. He identified Abadai as a reincarnation of Vajrapāṇi with the title of Great Vajra Khaan of the Doctrine. The encounter is dated 1587 (Haenisch 1955: 524, VII, 25r, p. 505). This passage is repeated in the “History of Erdeni juu” (Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 110).

⁵⁷ *Erdeni juu-yin teüke* (*Erdeni juu ba Öndörgegegen-ü namtar*), cited in Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 112; also Cendina 1999: fol. 12r-12v, transl. Bareja-Starzyńska 2012: 135.

In the Blue Female Chicken year (1585) and in the Fire Male Dog year (1586), inside the old city called Taqai, located at the back of Šangqutu Mountain called Širya Ajirya, where formerly lived Ögedei Khan, and which was later repaired by Toγon Temür who resided there, a terrace was dammed, and an object of worship called “erdeni juu” was consecrated/completed (*erdeni juu kemekü sitiügen bütügejü*). Inside there is the relic of Śākyamuni offered by the Dalai Lama and also a ruby is tacked on the forehead (of the icon).⁵⁸

Most authors understood *erdeni juu kemekü sitiügen bütügejü* as “a monastery called Erdeni juu was built,”⁵⁹ without taking into account the end of the sentence. I think here we can understand *erdeni juu* as designating a statue of Jowo Rinpoche which contains the relic. Jowo statues typically enshrine Śākyamuni’s relics,⁶⁰ and the ruby is an obvious reference to the shining jewel that usually adorns the *uṣṇīṣa* of the Jowos of Lhasa and their replicas. Was this monastery called Erdeni juu/Jowo Rinpoche because it enshrined a copy of Lhasa’s twelve-year old Jowo Śākyamuni?

Did Abadai Khan copy a temple or a statue?

5) According to Isibaldan’s *Erdeni-yin erike*, Abadai Khan built the “Shrine temples of Jowo Rinpoche” (*Erdeni juu-yin sitiügen süme-yi bütügebei*).⁶¹

6) Another biography of Zanabazar,⁶² written in 1859, mentions the image of Phag mo grub ba Vajra-rāja and the relic of Śākyamuni, and further says that in the fourteenth year of Wanli (1586) Abadai Khan erected the “three supports of worship” (*γurban sitiügen*) of Erdeni juu, and in the central one “he installed the relic [*pildun*]⁶³ of Shakyamuni Buddha bestowed by the Dalai Lama.” Charles Bawden, who translated the text, understood the following sentence as: “There was no model to be found for comparison in the country of the Mongols when this Erdeni Juu was being constructed, and so he completed it on the plan taken from the temple at Köke Qota [Hohhot]”⁶⁴ (*köke qota-yin juu-aca mayay abcu*). All the authors who studied the above-mentioned sources concluded that the architectural style of Abadai Khan’s Central Temple was modelled on that of the temples of Hohhot.⁶⁵ As seen above, the Central Temple is very different from the above-described Main Assembly Hall of Yeke juu (**fig. 5**). Did Abadai Kan copy the small temple of Erdeni juu/Siregetü juu with its circumambulation corridor, or the Glazed [Tile] Hall of Mayidari juu (built sometime before 1606)?

Because *juu* designates both (and first) the icon and (second) the temple, the sentence *köke qota-yin juu-aca mayay abcu*, lit. “taking the appearance (or form, pattern, sketch) from the Jowo of Hohhot” can also mean that Abadai copied a Jowo statue of Hohhot rather than a temple—hence the name of the monastery, “Jowo Rinpoche.” In addition, the *γurban sitiügen*, lit. “three supports of worship” (translated as “shrines” by Bawden) certainly designates three Buddha statues (the central one enshrining the relic)⁶⁶ rather than their shrine.

⁵⁸ *Erdeni-yin erike* 1859: 330 (my translation).

⁵⁹ Matsukawa 2011: 32 and other authors.

⁶⁰ Charleux 2015: 94-94.

⁶¹ *Erdeni-yin erike*, 1835, ed. Heissig 1961: 19v.

⁶² All the other Tibetan biographies of Zanabazar are based on the one written by Jaya Paṇḍita (Bareja-Starzyńska, email, 28 January 2013).

⁶³ *Pilduns* (< Tib. *’phel gdung*) are relics that multiply by themselves.

⁶⁴ Transl. Bawden 1961: 36-37.

⁶⁵ Bareja-Starzyńska 2012: 135; Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 32-34; Bao 2013.

⁶⁶ But the two lateral temples were more probably built by Abadai Khan’s son and grandson.

7) 19th-century Mongol historian Dharmatāla (who wrote in Tibetan and used Jaya Paṇḍita's biography of Zanabazar) similarly wrote that after his meeting with the Dalai Lama in Hohhot, Abadai Khan

built the temple of Erteni Jowo, after the pattern of the Jowo [here the translator added into brackets: Temple] in Kōke-qota. He installed in it the bodily relics of the Buddha which he had received from the (Third) Dalai Lama, placing them inside the statue of Jowo Rinpoche.⁶⁷

Jowo Śākyamuni temples in 16th century Mongolia

Actually there were several statues called Jowo in Hohhot, and Abadai Khan's foundation was not the only monastery known as Erdeni juu in Mongolia.

— The earliest temple that enshrined a statue of Jowo Śākyamuni is Yeke juu. According to the biography of Altan Khan, in 1578, the Third Dalai Lama met Altan Khan on the bank of Kukunor Lake and advised him to make a statue of Jowo Śākyamuni in gold, silver and precious stones. Altan Khan then gathered 40,000 taels of silver and commissioned the statue to a Newar sculptor. In the meanwhile (1579-1580), he had Yeke juu built to enshrine the new icon.⁶⁸ The biography stresses the central position of this icon in his politico-religious ideology.⁶⁹ The Lhasa statue (“Juu Šigemuni,” “Juu Rinboci”) is mentioned 15 times in the biography, and the Hohhot statue, 14 times. The young Fourth Dalai Lama (1589-1616), born in Altan Khan's family announced that he would pronounce his vows in front of the “Jowo Śākyamuni of the Western Eternal Land” (i.e. Tibet), but the Khan and his queen asked him to stay and “become a monk in front of *this* Jowo Śākyamuni”⁷⁰ (the Hohhot Jowo). Yet his decision was taken, and the Dalai Lama left Mongolia for Tibet in 1602. The Tūmeds could replicate the icon but could not keep their Dalai Lama.

Yeke juu was then known as Juu Šigemuni[-yin] sūme (“Temple/Monastery of Jowo Śākyamuni”), Juu sūme,⁷¹ and later as Silver Jowo. The silver statue still stands in its Main Assembly Hall (**fig. 7**); it is not an exact copy but it is obviously modelled on the Jokhang's Jowo.⁷² (**fig. 1**) Not only the statue but the shrine's interior with the dragons was copied. The Main Assembly Hall is composed of a porch, an Assembly Hall and a Back Shrine, covered by a succession of three Chinese roofs (**fig. 5**). Compared to the other Mongol assembly halls with a back shrine that follow the same style,⁷³ the Back Shrine that contains the Silver Jowo is much larger in proportions, highlighting the importance of the Jowo's cult over monks' assemblies. Yet, nothing in this architecture explicitly refers to the Jokhang of Lhasa, except perhaps for the square plan of the Back Shrine, which is surrounded by a colonnade for outer circumambulation.⁷⁴

- Between 1602 and 1607, Ombo qong tayiji (d. 1624), a grandson of Altan Khan, commissioned a statue modeled after the Jowo Akṣobhya statue of Ramoche (Tib. Ra mo che) Temple, the second most worshiped icon of Lhasa, and placed it in the Baya juu (“Small Monastery,” Ch. Xiaozhao 小召) of Hohhot.⁷⁵ Yeke juu and Baya juu, with their replicas of

⁶⁷ Dharmatāla, transl. Klafkowski 1987: 337.

⁶⁸ Charleux 2015: 99; Charleux 2006: 46-48, 59. According to the biography, the statue was made of “various types of jewels, gold and silver” (Elverskog 2003: 173-174); but it was later known as the “Silver Jowo.”

⁶⁹ Elverskog 2003: 174-175, 187, 202.

⁷⁰ Altan Khan's biography: Elverskog, 2003: 206.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 186-187, 193.

⁷² See Charleux 2015: 138.

⁷³ On this architectural style of the Tūmed region: Su 1994: 57; Charleux 2006: 246-247, 253-254.

⁷⁴ See Charleux 2006: 46, fig. 8.

⁷⁵ Altan Khan's biography: Elverskog 2003: 211-212.

the two Jowos of Lhasa, are therefore Mongol counterparts of the Jokhang and Ramoche, also popularly known as “Great” and “Small” Monasteries: the newly converted Tümed Mongols felt the need of establishing their new palatial city (Hohhot was founded in 1572) as a Buddhist site which was equivalent to Lhasa.

— Budasiri, one of Altan Khan’s sons, also made a Joo Akṣobhya statue, and probably placed it in Yeke juu near the Silver Jowo.⁷⁶

— In 1585-1586, Altan Khan’s heir Sengge dügüreng founded a temple named Erdeni juu, east of Yeke juu (it was later known as Siregetü juu), but no specific icon is mentioned.⁷⁷ This temple (now called “Old Temple”) may have tried to reproduce the corridor around the Jokhang because it enshrined a Jowo (**fig. 6**). Around 2010, a new statue of Jowo was installed in the Siregetü juu (**fig. 8**).

Two other temples of that period were erected to enshrine a Jowo:

— The twelve-year old silver Jowo Śākyamuni of Vang-un ḡool-un juu (1607-1613) of Ordos commissioned by Bošoḡtu jinong (1565-1624), probably on the model of Altan Khan’s Silver Jowo, and

— The Jowo Śākyamuni statue made by Ligdan Khan (1592, r. 1604-1634) for the White Temple of his capital Cayan qota.⁷⁸



Fig. 7. “Silver Jowo,” 1579, H. 3 meters (with the throne and mandorla). Main Assembly Hall of Yeke juu, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. © I. Charleux

Fig. 8. New, monumental statue of Jowo Rinpoche, Siregetü juu, Hohhot, 2010. © I. Charleux

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 211-212, and note 78.

⁷⁷ References in Charleux 2006: 52.

⁷⁸ Charleux 2015 :101.

In Altan Khan's biography, *juu* designates the statue of Śākyamuni and its Mongol copy, but not the temple.⁷⁹ It later designates in Mongolian other statues of Śākyamuni considered as a "true portrait" of the Buddha, such as the Sandalwood Jowo (Zandan Juu) of Beijing and its replicas. Later, by metonymy, *juu* came to mean "a temple, a monastery enshrining a precious statue," particularly in Inner Mongolia, as well as holy cities such as Hohhot (called Gegen qayan-u juu qota, "Juu-city of the Gegen qan," i.e. Altan Khan), and Lhasa (known as "Western Juu").

To sum up, several temples of the Buddhist renaissance were called Erdeni juu, which does not mean "Precious Temple" or "Jewel Temple" but translates Tibetan "Jowo Rinpoche," because they enshrined a Jowo-type of statue, viewed as a "true portrait" of the Buddha. Considering the competition between the descendants of Altan Khan to be in possession of their own Jowo icon, it is highly possible that Abadai Khan commissioned a statue on the model of the Jowo of Yeke juu he saw in Hohhot, or perhaps of another Jowo, that of Erdeni juu/Siregetü juu, to enshrine the relic given by the Dalai Lama.

The Statue of the Central Temple of Erdeni juu

Let us now have a closer look at the Jowo statue in the Central Temple of Erdeni juu (**fig. 9**). Two early 20th century scholars wrote about the Jowo statue of the Central Temple. Buryat scholar Jamtsarano (Jamsrangiin Ceveen, 1880-1942) wrote in 1912 that the Central Temple housed a giant statue of Śākyamuni at age twelve which is the "replica" of the Jowo of Lhasa; it was flanked by statues of the Buddhas of the Past (Dīpankara) and Future (Maitreya) Eras.⁸⁰

Buddhist scholar Zava Damdin (1867-1937) wrote that "in the old oral tradition, this Er te ni jo bo was constructed modeled on Jo bo of Hohhot." But when he visited Hohhot, he noticed that the Jowo of Erdeni juu did not resemble at all its supposed model, and concluded that "this is only referring to the outward appearance of the monastery, certainly not to the Buddha statue inside (Yeke juu)."⁸¹ In the title of his "Praise to Erdeni juu," he calls the icon Rin chen jo bo, "the representation of the Buddha Śākyamuni in Mongolia."⁸² He also wrote that on the Dalai Lama's order, Abadai completely reconstructed the monastery and its religious objects, including the old Śākyamuni statue called Erdeni (Rinpoche), the

Bodhgaya of Mongol, the Second Lhasa, where in former time, Chin kyis su tho kwan thu mer (Chinggis Khan?) took possession for a while. [...] he established a tradition of true Dharma, such as making effort to worship and circumambulate [...].⁸³

The Jowo of Erdeni juu we observe today is the same statue seen on early 20th century photographs (**fig. 9**), and no account mentions the destruction of the statue. We can only agree with Zava Damdin: the Jowo of Erdeni juu has few similarities with the Jowos of Hohhot and Lhasa; it is in clay and gilded, and makes the *dhyānamudrā* instead of the gesture of touching the earth (*bhūmisparśamudrā*). (It is difficult to examine these statues that are periodically re-gilded and adorned with new clothes and ritual scarves).

⁷⁹ Temples are called *sūme*, *keyid* or *sūme keyid* in the biography.

⁸⁰ Jamtsarano was then participating in the 1912 Kotwicz expedition; since he was a Buryat, he was allowed to enter the temples and wrote a precise description of their interiors (2012: 334).

⁸¹ Passage of the "Golden Annals" (*gSer gyi deb ther*, in *gSum 'bum*), vol. 2, ca, 7b translated by Miyake 2011: 168; also Matsukawa 2011: 32 and n. 12. Zava Damdin visited Erdeni juu in 1914, 1931 and 1934. Jamtsarano and Zava Damdin knew each other.

⁸² Transl. Miyake, 2011: 171, 173. This short text in the first volume of his Collected works (vol. 1) was probably written after 1906 (*ibid.*: 172).

⁸³ Zava Damdin, "Collective Works," 10th vol., 14b, text written in 1900, transl. Miyake 2011: 171.



Fig. 9. Modern (© I. Charleux) and ancient photograph (Baasansuren 2011: 18) of the twelve-year old Jowo Śākyamuni inside the Central Temple, Erdeni juu.

We can only make hypotheses. The statue that now stands in the Central Temple may have been made sometimes between the 17th and the 19th century to replace an earlier Jowo statue that replicated the Jowo of Yeke juu made on Abadai's order to enshrine the relic of Śākyamuni. Or, it can be a copy of another Jowo statue of Hohhot which has not survived. A third hypothesis is that the Jowo of Erdeni juu would be the copy of an old Uighur icon.

Another hypothesis on the origin of the Jowo icon of Erdeni juu

According to an old tradition, the Jowo Rinpoche statue of Erdeni juu comes from the medieval temple of Qaraqorum,⁸⁴ or would be the copy of an old Uighur icon that was acknowledged as being a Jowo, i.e. a “true portrait” of the Buddha. Zava Damdin quoting a Uighur history writes that Erdeni juu would first have been established in the 8th century in the Uighur Khaganate (744-840) and was known as Jo bo'i lha khang, then was re-founded by Ögedei Khan in the 13th century.⁸⁵ The Dalai Lama would have ordered Abadai Khan to reconstruct the Jo bo'i lha khang along with its religious objects in the old castle of “Hwa'u chin tha tha”(?) in his native land. In Zava Damdin's “Praise to Erdeni juu,” the “races of Hor Sog” (here, the Uighurs) “built the imperial city, [...] (and) the statue of Jo bo [...]” Later, “King Ögedei [...] reconstructed the Jo khang temple and its religious objects,” and Abadai Khan “following the instruction of Dalai Lama, reconstructed the religious objects.”⁸⁶ Japanese archeologist Matsukawa evokes the possibility that Erdeni juu was built on an ancient Uighur city or monastery, related to the nearby capital of Qara balyasun.⁸⁷ Abadai would have rebuilt an old monastery and made a copy of its main icon, dated of the Uighur period, to enshrine the relic bestowed by the Dalai Lama.

The story of the copy of an 8th-century Jowo icon at Erdeni juu claims for the existence of a Jowo that would not be connected to the Jowo Śākyamuni of Lhasa and thus supports a local origin of Mongol Buddhism. To sum up, written tradition records that (the Jowo of) Erdeni juu was made by Abadai Khan on the model of a Jowo of Hohhot; and another tradition says it took as a model an old Jowo from a Uighur temple that stood on the spot. No pre-19th century sources clearly mention a Jowo statue in Erdeni juu, but none of our sources is contemporary to the foundation of the monastery.

The circumambulation of the Jowo

In 1912, Jamtsarano witnessed pilgrims making the circumambulation of the surrounding wall of the monastery (*gorooloh*, < *goroo*, < Tib. *skor* (lam), to round, circumambulate), of the three Jowo Temples, and then entering to pray the Jowo of the Central Temple (**fig. 10, fig.**

⁸⁴ Lumir 1961, 88-89.

⁸⁵ “Golden Annals,” vol. 2, ca, 6a (transl. Miyake, 2011: 167), quoting the Uighur history *Yus-gwor gyi yig tsang*. Sogdian scholars from Khotan preached Buddhism to the Uighurs of Qara balyasun; the Bayan balgas monastery and perhaps a monastery on the site of Erdeni juu were built under their guidance. This hypothesis is supported by contemporary scholars such as Sh. Bira and lamas such as Sh. Soninbayar from Gandan.

⁸⁶ Transl. Miyake 2011: 172. About Bayan balgas (=Bai bailiq) monastery, locals say: “Our Jowo is of the same age as the Jowo of Erdeni juu. Since the latter was built by the king and ours by Queen Bii Biliq, it was recently called Jowo of Bii bilig (Bai bailiq). Long ago, the Jobo of Bayan balgasun was built when Sogdian teachers were there.” (Matsukawa Takashi, paper given at the 13th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS), Ulaanbaatar, 2013)

⁸⁷ Shiraishi (2011) found evidences of the presence of a village of the Uighur period beneath Erdeni juu.

11).⁸⁸ The inner corridor of circumambulation then served as storage for the temple, but it was certainly previously used to turn around the Jowo too (**fig. 4**).

If the icon of the Central Temple refers to the Jowo of the Jokhang, the source of the inner corridor may be the circumambulatory corridor surrounding the Jokhang: the Mongol pilgrims reproduced around Erdeni juu the three concentric circumambulations around the icon of Lhasa (inside and outside the Jokhang, and around the whole city). We do not have to find the model for the circumambulation corridor of the Three Temples in Sakyapa temples of the Mongol empire or in nearby Amdo, but in the Jokhang of Lhasa.

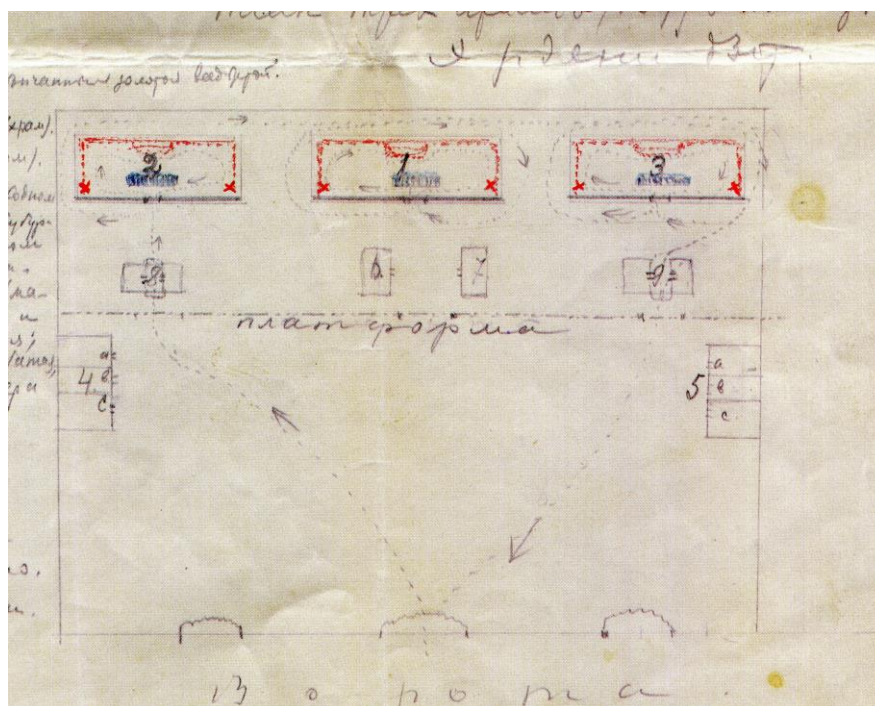


Fig. 10. Jamtsarano's drawing showing in dotted lines the circumambulation paths of pilgrims. From the personal files of Władysław Kotwicz (Archiwum Nauki AN PAN i PAU, K III-19, new numeration: j.168, k. 134)

The three Jowos side by side

The identity of the original icons of the Left and Right Temples is not known.⁸⁹ Jamtsarano wrote that new statues were made around 1882; they represented Amitābha in the Right Temple and Śākyamuni in the Left Temple.⁹⁰ These statues have been preserved, but are now identified in modern literature on Erdeni juu as representing Śākyamuni at three stages of his life: 35-year old Śākyamuni in the Left Temple, and 80 years-old Śākyamuni in the Right Temple surround young Śākyamuni in the Central Temple.⁹¹ Actually it is possible that

⁸⁸ Jamtsarano's notes (2012: 334). Present-day pilgrims do the same (Lham 2011: 53). They do not practice the inner circumambulation anymore; in 2014 the corridor was closed by a barrier.

⁸⁹ Pozdneev (1971 [1896]: 282) lists among the different objects of worship placed by Abadai in his new monastery the "Three Buddhas of the Three (Different) Periods (of the Life)." In my opinion the expression "Buddha of the Three Periods" (*γurban caγ-un burqan*) can only designate the canonical Buddhas of the Three Eras/Times (*γurban caγ-un burqan*), i.e. Śākyamuni, Dīpankara and Maitreya.

⁹⁰ Jamtsarano 2012: 335.

⁹¹ Or: *Burqan baγsi-yin baγa, ider, nasutai üye-yin barimal*: sculptures of Master Śākyamununi as a young, mature and old age. See photographs of these statues in the early 1900s: Baasansuren 2011: 17-19.

Abadai's son and grandson built statues of mature and old Śākyamuni to balance the 12-year old Jowo statue on both sides, although no source mention them.



Fig. 11. Pilgrims doing prostrations at the entrance of one of the Three Temples, anonymous photograph, early 20th century (Baasansuren 2011: 21).

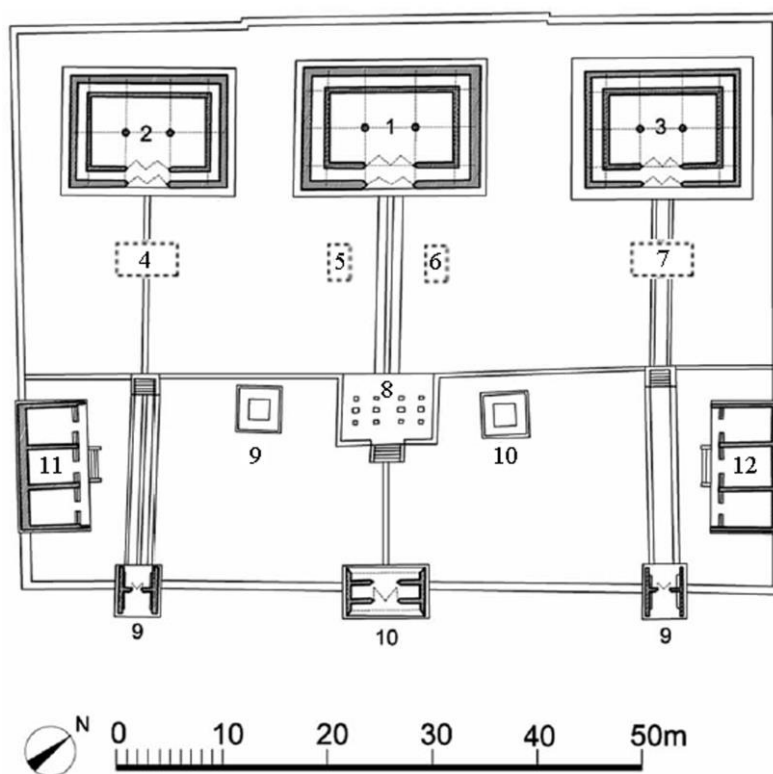


Fig. 12. Plan of the Three Temples complex, Erdeni juu (Brandt and Gutschow 2003)

1. Central Temple; 2. Right Temple; 3. Left Temple; 4. Temple to the Mahārājas; 5. Shrine to Avalokiteśvara; 6. Shrine to Maitreya; 7. Temple to the Mahārājas; 8. Ceremonial archway; 9. Tomb of Abadai Khan; 10. Tomb of Fombodorji; 11. Amītāyus Temple; 12. Camba[γarbu]/Tshangs pa dkar po Temple; 13. Entrance Gate

The Three Temples stand on a line, on a 1.40 meters high terrace. Additional structures were later added: two small temples housing two of the Four Mahārājas each⁹² in front of the Right and Left Temples (destroyed); two tiny chapels to the left and right of the Central Temple's entrance (dedicated to Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya, destroyed), and a Chinese-style ceremonial archway (destroyed) (**fig. 12**). On the lower terrace are the tombs of Abadai and Gombodorji flanking the archway, and two lateral temples now dedicated to Camba[γarbu]/Tshangs pa dkar po (East) and Amitāyus (West)⁹³ The complex was surrounded by a wall pierced by an Entrance Hall and two small gates.

Three Temples standing on a line side by side is not seen elsewhere in Tibet⁹⁴ and China.⁹⁵ Three buildings on a line are found in the 14th century palace of Köndüi, north of the Mongol empire.⁹⁶ For Bao, this is a characteristic of Mongol imperial architecture, because it is also found in temples of Dadu/Qanbaliq.⁹⁷ She hypothesizes that this arrangement originates in Korea: the 6th century Hwangnyongsa 皇龍寺 Temple in Gyeongju would be representative of this “Three Buddha Hall Style.” The missing link would be the Xingyuange of Qaraqorum: in 1238, Mongol troops destroyed the Hwangnyongsa and its remarkable 80 meters-high pagoda built in 1096, and may have captured Korean artisans. Eighteen years later, they would have erected a five-storied, 90 meters (“300 *chi*” according to the stele)-high building in the Xingyuange of Qaraqorum on the same model.⁹⁸ Although no temple ruins have been found in the Xingyuange other than a pavilion (called *ge* 閣 in the stone inscription) that she identifies as being a pagoda, Bao then imagines that the Xinyuange also had three Buddha halls on a line side by side, modelled of the Hwangnyongsa. These hypothetical three halls would have in turn served as a model for Erdeni juu.

There is actually no evidence that allows us to make a link between late 16th century Erdeni juu and 14th century Xingyuange, the ruins of which stand at 700 meters from the Three Temples. Too long time and distance separate Erdeni juu from the 13th-century Korean temples. In addition, this Three Buddha Style is not common at all in Korea.⁹⁹

We can propose another hypothesis: in their encampments, Mongols use to put the yurt of the family head or the chief in the center; yurts of the elder brother or main marshal are on its left/west (right when looking at the south)—the honorific side—; and yurts of younger brothers or second marshal, on its right/east (left when looking at the south). The two lateral temples built by Abadai Khan's son and grandson follow this model, on each side of the patriarch's Central Temple.

⁹² The Mahārājas (or Lokapālas) are the four kings who guard the four directions of space.

⁹³ Jamtsarano (2012: 335-338) is our most reliable source about these temples in the early 20th century. The tombs were built in the 18th century. See also Pozdnev 1971 [1896]: 283-289; Hatanbaatar and Naigal 2005: 35-40.

⁹⁴ Tibetan assembly halls are often built side by side, but without any ordained symmetrical layout comparable to the layout of the Three Temples.

⁹⁵ In Mongolia, a comparable arrangement is found in the Gūden sūme of Jaya-yin küriye (Tsetserleg, Arhangai Province), built in 1696 which is composed of a barlong hall divided into three rooms (called “the Three Temples”) each being covered by a roof.

⁹⁶ Kiseliev et al. 1965: 324-371. Köndüi is located in Zabaykal, Southern Siberia, just north of the Mongolian border.

⁹⁷ Hushengsi 護聖寺, 1329, as well as, to a lesser extent, Wan'ansi 萬安寺, 1272 and Puqingsi 普慶寺, 1300-1320 (Bao 2013: 194).

⁹⁸ Bao 2013: 193-195.

⁹⁹ It is also found in the 7th century Mirūk Temple in Iksan. I thank Ariane Perrin for this information.

Conclusion

Bao sees in the foundation of Erdeni juu, located in the Orqon valley that was a central place for several steppe empires, a continuity of the imperial traditions, in architecture (inner corridor, three temples on a line), administration (title of *tidiao*), and cults (Sakyapa Buddhism): “the tradition of imperial architecture at Qaraqorum remained influential in the 16th century.”¹⁰⁰

In my opinion, nothing allows us to say that Abadai Khan built Erdeni juu with precise medieval models in mind. He may have rebuilt the old palace’s walls and erected his temples having in mind the palatial architecture of Altan Khan’s Mayidari juu, the twelve-year old Jowo of Yeke juu, and the inner corridor of Erdeni juu/Siregetü juu modelled on that of the Jokhang, for the circumambulation of the Jowo. Altan Khan was the first to be converted to Buddhism and to have palaces and temples built by Chinese artisans; he was a model for Abadai Khan, Boşuytu jinong and Ligdan Khan. Abadai Khan copied Altan Khan’s Jowo, temples, city planning, and went as far as to hire Chinese carpenters from Hohhot.

Although older chronicles do not explicitly mention a Jowo icon at Erdeni juu, the most logical receptacle for the precious relic of Śākyamuni bestowed by the Dalai Lama to Abadai Khan (mentioned for the first time in the 17th century *Erdeni-yin tobci*) is a Jowo-type of statue, hence the name “Jowo Rinpoche” given to the new foundation. Abadai Khan probably took Altan Khan’s Yeke juu’s Jowo as a model (the story of the 8th century Uighur icon fits with early 20th century claims of ancientness and indigenoussness of Mongol Buddhism); why it is so different in iconography and style remains unclear.

Its making certainly corresponds to a strong demand to bring some of the charisma of the “original” Lhasa icon to Mongolia. The practice of circumambulation was central to the worship of these statues: not only one, but three concentric circumambulations around the statue itself (corridor of circumambulation or colonnade), around the temple and around the whole monastery.¹⁰¹ Because the icon depicted twelve-year old Śākyamuni, Abadai Khan or his descendants may have installed two other statues of old and mature Śākyamuni to the right and left. The Jowo of Erdeni juu was probably the main focus of worship for pilgrims and local worshipers. Up to the early 20th century, Qalqa pilgrims continued to worship and make circumambulations around the Jowo of Erdeni juu. In the Qing period there was a confusion with another statue called Jowo in Erdeni juu—the Sandalwood Jowo, also said to have been given to Abadai by the Dalai Lama.¹⁰² 20th-century Mongols may have forgotten the origin of the main Jowo of Erdeni juu, and transferred their veneration to the (much smaller) Sandalwood Jowo.

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¹⁰⁰ Bao 2013: 172.

¹⁰¹ Similarly, the practice of three concentric circumambulations—inside the temple, around the temple and the *stūpa* and outside the monastery—of another Jowo worshiped by the Mongols, the Sandalwood Buddha of Beijing, was prescribed in Rol pa’i rdo rje’s guidebook to this famous icon (Charleux 2015: 126, 133-134).

¹⁰² Charleux 2015: 86-87, 89, 135, 139.

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