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The Danzanravjaa museum in the Mongolian Gobi: An ancient exhibition temple revived as a modern museum?

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Abstract

Mongols claim that Mongolia's first museum was founded in the 19th century by the great eccentric lama, poet, and dramaturge Danzanravjaa (1804-1856), from his personal collection, in order to educate his people. The museum was located in Hamar Monastery in the Gobi Desert, and after Danzanravjaa's death, it was turned into his funerary temple. The monastery was destroyed during the religious persecutions of 1937-1938 but some of the artefacts were hidden in caves in the nearby mountains. In 1991, Altangerel, the descendant of the museum's lama-curator, rebuilt the museum in the city of Sainshand. The museum houses many Buddhist artefacts, Danzanravjaa's artworks and writings, diplomatic gifts, as well as a wax statue of Danzanravjaa and a stupa enshrining his corporeal remains. There is also a room that is usually locked to protect the most precious and holiest objects, and which is open to special devout visitors only. The museum is visited by both tourists and Buddhist devotees who worship the relics of Danzanravjaa.

This paper examines the general organisation and scenography of the museum, the hybrid (partly religious) character of the place, the link with the rebuilt monastery, and the attitude of visitors, with the broader aim of questioning the presence of a living religion inside the museum.

Keywords: Mongolia, museum, Buddhism, relics, tangible and intangible heritage

Résumé

Les Mongols prétendent que le premier musée de Mongolie a été fondé au 19^e siècle par le grand lama excentrique, poète et dramaturge Danzanravjaa (1804-1856), à partir de sa collection personnelle, pour éduquer son peuple. Il était situé dans son monastère de Hamar dans le désert de Gobi. Après sa mort, le musée a été transformé en son temple funéraire. Le monastère a été détruit lors des persécutions religieuses de 1937-1938, mais une partie des objets a été cachée dans les grottes des montagnes voisines. En 1991, Altangerel, le descendant du premier lama-conservateur du musée, reconstruisit le musée dans la ville de Sainshand. Le musée abrite de nombreux artefacts bouddhiques, des œuvres d'art et des écrits de Danzanravjaa, des cadeaux diplomatiques, une statue en cire de Danzanravjaa et un stupa renfermant ses cendres de crémation. Une salle généralement fermée à clé renfermant les objets les plus précieux et les plus sacrés est ouverte seulement à quelques visiteurs dévots. Le musée est visité à la fois par les touristes et les fidèles bouddhistes qui vénèrent les reliques de Danzanravjaa.

Cet article examine l'organisation générale et la scénographie du musée, le caractère hybride (en partie religieux) du lieu, le lien avec le monastère reconstruit et l'attitude des visiteurs, afin d'interroger la présence d'une religion vivante au sein du musée.

Mots-clés : Mongolie, musée, bouddhisme, reliques, patrimoine matériel et immatériel

Introduction

After the fall of Mongolia's socialist regime in December 1990, when Mongolia became a democratic country and proclaimed freedom of religion, Zunduin Altangerel (1959-2019), a schoolteacher, started to unearth crates full of Buddhist objects from caves and gullies of the Gobi desert. These crates, containing Buddhist icons, ritual costumes, diplomatic gifts and personal possessions of the great eccentric lama, poet, and dramaturge Luvsan Danzanravjaa (1804-1856), had been buried just before the destruction of the monastery to which they belonged in the period of severe anti-religious repression from 1937-1938. In 1991, Altangerel founded a museum to house this unique collection in the city of Sainshand, provincial capital of Dornogov' Province.¹ This small, privately owned museum receives little money from the government; yet the collection is of national importance for the history of Mongolia, whose religious heritage has been largely destroyed.²

The majority of Mongolia's museums were established between the 1940s and the 1970s, based on Soviet models as tools for building a modern nation-state, educating the masses, and promoting the new secular values of the socialist state.³ Among them were a few museums of Buddhist material culture founded either to exhibit artistic masterpieces, such as the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts (Ulaanbaatar), or to denounce religion as a superstition, as in the Soviet anti-religious museums.⁴ In a recent article, Ts. Baatarnaran and Maria-Katharina Lang (2016) highlighted the strong secular orientation of Mongolian museums, and also evoked tensions and conflicts over the conservation and reconstruction of Buddhist heritage between curators who received secular training, and monks of the re-founded monasteries. Baatarnaran and Lang argue that the 'bond' ('sensual-religious interaction') between believers and objects of worship has been severed: 'displaced' objects are exhibited with the intention of being seen⁵ and (in theory) do not receive prayers and offerings.⁶

In contrast to national museums established in the socialist period, where there may indeed be more tensions between the secular and the religious, the Danzanravjaa Museum, focus of the present text, was founded to house a Buddhist collection that actually reappeared thanks to religious freedom.

1 The museum is officially known as *Goviin dogshin Noyon hutagt Danzanravjaagiin muzei* (Museum of Danzanravjaa, the Fierce Noyon *hutagt* of the Gobi). Sainshand is located about 740 kilometres south of the capital, Ulaanbaatar.

2 Seven objects from the Danzanravjaa Museum are officially registered as 'national cultural objects of unique value' of the Mongol nation by the Cultural Heritage Centre and have been placed under special protection (Kantzenbach 2009: 86–87).

3 As of 2021, Mongolia has 12 state museums, 24 regional museums, 10 permanent private museums (including the Danzanravjaa Museum), 11 museums attached to government agencies and 16 'mini-museums' (Watterson 2014; Lkhagvasuren 2016; Macadré 2020).

4 For example, the Chojjin lam temple-museum in Ulaanbaatar. For more information on anti-religious museums, see Paine 2009.

5 *Üzmer*, 'display, exhibit' comes from the verb *üzeh*, to see. For more about the way in which museums culturally construct ways of seeing, or 'the museum effect', see Alpers 1991.

6 Walter Benjamin (1973: 218) contrasted the 'cult value' of objects located in temples and churches with the 'exhibition value' of objects recontextualised into a museum, where they are desacralised, become untouchable, and lose their power and efficacy. Recent changes within Western Museum exhibits have proven that this binary opposition is no longer tenable.

In this article I would like to question the hybridity of the museum's nature, between the secular and the religious. How was a museum of religious artefacts conceived in 1991, after 70 years of socialist atheism? How did its founder choose to exhibit the relics of a saint? Does the museum highlight the religious values of 'living Buddhist artefacts', or does it exhibit different types of objects according to aesthetic, ethnographic or other non-religious criteria? Do visitors worship specific objects, or are such practices discouraged?⁷ And, finally, is the bond between believers and objects of worship really severed in the Danzanravjaa Museum?

Compounding these questions is the fact that not everyone regards the Danzanravjaa Museum as a completely new museum: its founder and director Altangerel claims that the museum is the rebuilding of the 19th-century 'Display Temple' founded by Danzanravjaa in Hamar Monastery (*Hamaryn hiid*) in 1842. Altangerel himself is the descendant of the first curator of the Display Temple. Both the government and the general public now officially recognise that the Display Temple is the first Mongol museum. But isn't this claim perhaps just a late-20th-century projection to demonstrate that Mongolia was already modern in the Qing period (1644-1911), before the introduction of socialist 'progress' and European Enlightenment? Not only, as we will see, did this original 'temple' building obviously have a hybrid nature, but the figure of Danzanravjaa, both a monk and a scholar, and his monastery where monks lived together with laypeople, indicate that the strict distinction between the religious and the secular did not apply in pre-socialist Mongolia where Buddhism was deeply embedded in society.

One important additional aspect to bear in mind here is the relation between the museum and Hamar Monastery. At the same time as he was founding the museum, Altangerel undertook the rebuilding of Hamar Monastery on its former location, in the desert, 38 kilometres from Sainshand in Hatanbulag District. I will question the relation between the museum and the monastery: despite its location in the city, is the museum still considered as belonging to Hamar Monastery, and is it part of the pilgrimage circuit?

The first part of this paper introduces the complex figure of Danzanravjaa and the recent promotion of his image and his monastic complex in the Gobi. The second part examines the hybrid nature of the ancient Display Temple. In the third part, I will describe the general organisation, museographical practices, and scenography of the objects in the modern museum and the differentiated behaviours of visitors in order to highlight the hybrid nature of the place.

7 I visited Hamar Monastery and the Danzanravjaa Museum in 2018 and I interviewed museum employees and visitors, a tourist guide, pilgrims at the Shambhala Energy Centre, monks of Hamar Monastery, and residents of Sainshand, although I could not meet Altangerel, who passed away in 2019. I also conducted interviews in Ulaanbaatar between 2009 to 2018 with pilgrims who went to Hamar and Sainshand. I planned to go there again in 2020, however unfortunately that was not possible. This is a preliminary paper; much further work is needed, through interviews with the museum staff and visitors. When I was preparing the final draft of this paper, I discovered Birgit Kantzenbach's master's thesis. At the occasion of an Arts Council of Mongolia project for the conservation of the collection of the Danzanravjaa Museum, Kantzenbach conducted field research in the first museum building in 2005-2006 and interviewed about thirty people, including Altangerel's daughter Enhtsetseg. She asked visitors about the significance of Danzanravjaa's cultural heritage, their relations to specific objects, and their opinion about their value and specific properties (Kantzenbach 2009: 75-85).

Lastly, I will consider whether the modern museum can be seen as a revival of the ancient Display Temple. Through this, I hope to contribute to the debate on the existence of pre-museums in Asia and on the presence of religion in modern, theoretically secular museums.

Danzanravjaa, hero of the Gobi, and his legacy

A celebrity in modern Mongolia, the Fifth Noyon *butagt* (or *butugtu*, a reincarnated lama of the highest rank) Danzanravjaa was both a great religious figure and a literate scholar. He founded the first modern theatre of Mongolia, with a play entitled ‘The life story of the Moon Cuckoo’,⁸ and is considered to be the country’s most prolific poet of the 19th century. His poems conveying social criticism, denouncing the hypocrisy and immorality of society, and criticising the Qing, the nobility, and the clergy, are still remembered today (Danzanravjaa 2013) (Figure 1a). A polymath, he established a secondary school for lay boys and girls, and was well versed in medicine, music, painting, and horse breeding (Damdinsüren 1962; Hürelbaatar 1996).

Danzanravjaa was not just a prominent Buddhist cleric and scholar but is also renowned for his eccentricities. Nicknamed the ‘Fierce drunkard of the Gobi’, he used to travel with a sizeable retinue including young women, disciples, actors and dancers, and enjoyed taunting Buddhist scholars and high-ranking lamas. His adventurous life and magical powers are remembered in the well-known local legends and songs that circulate until now in the Gobi and in Alashan (Western Inner Mongolia). They tell about the supernormal powers (*siddhi*) Danzanravjaa had gained through the practice of inner tantra: how he slayed local demons, was able to fly, speak with the dead, and heal people from a distance.

Danzanravjaa’s Mongolian biographers explain that his feats and eccentricities recall those of Tibetan divinely inspired ‘holy fools’ (Tib. *nyönpa*) through the fact that he was a ‘red lama’;⁹ being enlightened, he was ‘beyond’ the rules and literally applied the tantras and the example of the *mahasiddhas* (tantric adepts of ancient India) of Vajrayana Buddhism. For Hamid Sardar, who studied Danzanravjaa’s biography (Heissig 1972: 185–240), like his master the Fourth Changkya *butagt*,¹⁰ Danzanravjaa was a ‘red *Gélukpa*’ lama who adopted a non-sectarian (Wallace 2017), ecumenical attitude, and practiced *Nyingmapa* and *Kagyüpa* teachings

8 Cl. Mo. *Saran kökege-yin namtar*. Written around 1830 and based on an 18th-century Tibetan work, it was a kind of musical drama with elements of *tsam* danced ritual, ancient Buddhist tales, Chinese opera, the Tibetan *ache lhamo* morality theatre, and Mongol long songs. The play included dialogue and music, dance, and comedic performances by talented musicians, singers, and dancers, as well as special effects. See Damdinsüren 1962. Danzanravjaa wrote other plays such as ‘Milarépa’ and the ‘Story of Shakyamuni Buddha’.

9 Mongols use the phrase ‘Red (Hats)’ to describe the schools of Tibetan Buddhism other than the *Gélukpa*, who are called the ‘Yellow (Hats)’. The *Gélukpas*, the largely predominant Buddhist order in Mongolia, put emphasis on monastic discipline, celibacy, and academic learning.

10 Changkya Yéshé Tenpé Gyeltsen (1787-1846) was known in the Gobi as the ‘Red Changkya’ (Sardar 2007).

together with those of *Gélukpa* (Sardar 2007).¹¹

After the 1920s, Danzanravjaa's complex personality and his rich literary heritage could not be ignored by the Mongol communists, who first demonised him as a 'mad drunkard' (*galzuu sogtuu*). But in the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, the communists used his popularity for propaganda purposes, portraying him as a 'revolutionary' red lama who had criticised both the hypocrisy and vices of the nobility and the clergy as well as Qing 'domination' and Chinese exploitation, and who had expressed his empathy with common people. Besides, his theatre could easily be detached from its religious context. In the 1960s, Ts. Damdinsüren from the Academy of Sciences retrieved and published the manuscripts of the 'Moon Cuckoo', and published Danzanravjaa's biography (1962), poems (edited with his disciple D. Tsagaan, 1968), and songs and legends collected among the population.

Since the 1990s, Danzanravjaa has been celebrated as a national and local hero, a 'great enlightened master and an outstanding poet',¹² a Buddhist thinker who had a deep influence on Mongolian thought and culture, and a modern reformer. Because he was in favour of social and gender equality and promoted education of the laity and especially of women, he was also seen as a 'Renaissance man', and his literary talent has led him to be compared to Pushkin and Dante (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 10). He embodies a cultural heritage that proves the existence of an 'authentic' Mongolian culture in which:

It is possible to live in harmony with the natural world, to cure any disease just with plants and pulverised stones, to know and control human destiny, to communicate with beasts and with mountains, even to move physical objects with his brain; [...] a mystical culture capable of going beyond the limits of Western scientific understanding (Thrift 2004: 116).

Mongolian scholars recognise Danzanravjaa as a follower of the 'Red school' and a tantric expert in *chöd*,¹³ but barely or never mention his adventurous life and his love affairs, his unconstrained consumption of alcohol, and his wrathful (*dogshin*) side, although these aspects are well known amongst the Mongolian public. According

11 See the series of paintings in the museum (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 61–72). Danzanravjaa also had links with 17th- and 18th-century clerics of Kathog, a major *Nyingmapa* monastery of eastern Tibet. A painting depicts Danzanravjaa in a *Nyingmapa* environment with clerics of Kathog (See **Figure 19a** and **Appendix 2**). Kathog had branch monasteries and religious links with monasteries of Kham and Amdo, but not with Mongolian monasteries. The link with Kathog and the presence of red teachings in the Gobi is still a mystery. For Sardar (2007), Danzanravjaa's link with Kathog was probably indirect, perhaps in connection with the Fourth Changkya *butagt* and a Khoshot prince of Kukur. With a few exceptions, Mongol monasteries after the 18th century all followed the 'yellow', *Gélukpa* tradition. However, further research is required to determine the 'red' influences and connections in teachings, monastic life, rituals, and religious literature in so-called 'yellow' *Gélukpa* monasteries.

12 *Ih soyon gegeerüülegch Noyon butagt*. *Gegen* or *gegeen*, 'brightness, light, splendour, brilliance', is a title for incarnate lamas of a rank inferior to *butagt*; it is usually translated as 'Serene Holiness, His Serenity'. Paradoxically, the communists who launched a mass literacy campaign and founded the state schooling system borrowed this term to form the words *gegeerel*, 'education, enlightenment', and *gegeerüüle*, 'to educate, enlighten'. Danzanravjaa's qualification as *gegeerüülegch* can be translated as 'enlightened' with both the Buddhist and humanist meanings.

13 Tsagaan & Altangerel, ca. 1991: 3. *Chöd*, 'cutting through the ego', is a practice especially favoured by the *Nyingmapa* School. It consists of visualising the offering of one's body as a tantric feast to sentient beings. Danzanravjaa's version of *chöd* is the most popular one in Mongolia and is still practiced near Hamar ("Origination of Uvur Bayasgalant Monastery" Sardar 2007: 291).

to Hürelbaatar (2006), a specialist in Danzanravjaa, this image is exaggerated: before all, Danzanravjaa was a Buddhist monk and even if there are many references to contemporary politics, love and lay concerns in his poems and play, these were only methods to preach Buddhism.¹⁴ As for local inhabitants, they worship him as the powerful deity of the Gobi and claim: “We are all his children” (Kohn 2010: 118). Altangerel, scholars, local authorities, and Gobi inhabitants therefore have a different image of this complex personality, either as a literate scholar, great thinker and artist, or enlightened saint.

The promotional project

Altangerel was entirely dedicated to the cause of the revival of Danzanravjaa’s heritage after 1990. He worked together with scholars to set up a promotional project that would exalt the man and his work: in addition to the museum and the rebuilt monastery, a research centre (Ravjaasudlalyn sudalgaany töv), two private foundations (Ravjaa San, Danzanravjaa San), and an association (Tavan Dohio, dedicated to the preservation and diffusion of Danzanravjaa’s spiritual and material legacy),¹⁵ were founded, all engaged in the production of books, photographic albums, a film,¹⁶ newspapers, magazines and articles, CDs, documentaries, YouTube videos, blogs, as well as in the organisation of conferences and religious festivals¹⁷ (Thrift 2004: 114–116). Famous writer and friend of Altangerel Mend-Ooyo published a novel on Danzanravjaa’s life, *The Holy One* (2017 [2016]) and scholars published academic studies of his life and work (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 84).¹⁸ Commemorative monuments were erected in his honour (see **Figure 1b**);¹⁹ a local theatre group staged excerpts of the ‘Moon Cuckoo’ in Sainshand. The commemorations of Danzanravjaa’s bicentenary in 2003, attended by scholars and politicians, were the occasion for a sports, religious, and musical festival, an exhibition of new discoveries related to Danzanravjaa, and the worship of the Saint on 24 May at the Central Palace of Culture. In 2006, Unesco commemorated Danzanravjaa’s 150th anniversary internationally, while the government of Mongolia also celebrated the occasion with conferences and publications. This promotional work also received significant media coverage.²⁰

14 His poems should be understood as Buddhist instructional poems (*surgaal*), and the famous ‘love’ song called ‘Perfect qualities’ (*Ülemjiin chinar*), about his tantric consort, muse, and lover Dadishura, as a devotional song about the offerings to the five senses of Buddha. His so-called madness was the sign of his spiritual accomplishment (Erdenebulgan 2018).

15 *Tavan Dohio* supported the museum and the reconstruction of the monastery.

16 *Dogshin butagтын сахиус* (‘The protector deity of the Fierce reincarnation’), 1998.

17 The 190th anniversary of his birth was celebrated in August 1993 with an international conference, an exhibition, a *naadam* (festival), and the erection of a monument in his honour (Lhagvasüren 1993). Since then, his anniversary has been celebrated periodically together with scientific conferences, such as the 210th anniversary in 2013, and the 215th in 2018.

18 Due to the impossibility of visiting Mongolia’s libraries in 2020 and 2021, I had no access to a number of publications on Danzanravjaa.

19 A stele marking his birthplace in modern Zuunbayan District (1988); a bust of him in Sainshand (2003); a statue of him near the museum (around 2008), and a stele commemorating the composition of the song ‘Perfect qualities’ at the Shambhala Energy Centre.

20 These manifestations follow the same model, at the provincial level, as the great 2006 celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of the Chinggisid state.



Figure 1. Two images of Danzanravjaa (Danzanravjaa's Museum)

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

1a. Painting, 20th century where Danzanravjaa is depicted as a young scholar with a pen in his hand, holding a pothi-format book leaf and a wooden board. Around him are a scale model of his theatre and a horse-fiddle (*morin huur*), a hat, a gun, brushes, and an ink-slab, piles of books, and Mongol furniture. **1b. Modern sculpture** in front of Danzanravjaa Museum. He is depicted in a lotus posture as if levitating and he wears a large tantric hat topped by a skull and a *vajra*. He makes a blessing gesture with his right hand; a scorpion, symbol of wisdom (and one of his personal symbols), stands on his right shoulder.

The creation of the pilgrimage to Hamar Monastery and Shambala

Altangerel (see **Figure 2**) strove to collect funds to rebuild the monastery and the museum, and to finance the education of young monks in India. Starting in 1990, Hamar Monastery²¹ was rebuilt under his direction: first, a 'red' (*Kagyüpa*) temple and a 'yellow' (*Gélukpa*) temple; later on, a nuns' temple (built in 2011 for *chöd* practice), a 32-metre-high stupa-shrine²² (2011) as well as other structures.²³

21 The original monastery (official name: *Övör bayasgalant hamaryn hiid*), founded from 1818 to 1823, was one of the biggest in Mongolia. It had 13 temples, four colleges, a 'red' temple, 15 treasuries (*jas*), a school, a theatre stage, and two stupas, with a total of 80 buildings. Over 500 monks resided in Hamar (Tsedendamba 2009: 375–376; 'Hamaryn hiid'; Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2012).

22 *Ih soyombutu tsagaan suvraga*, popularly known as *Övgön suvraga*.

23 Hamar Monastery was inaugurated in December 1990. Only ten lamas lived there in the 1990s. It was partially rebuilt thanks to Ts. Sharavdorj who used his political connections and own funds. A Member of Parliament from Dornogov' Province and Mongolia's Minister of Defence until 2007, Sharavdorj had



Figure 2. Altangerel in front of the painting of Tüdev

© Michael Eisenriegler 2009

The painting was later placed in a showcase of the first floor
(See Figure 8)

In 2006, Altangerel organised the construction of the ‘Shambhala Energy Centre’, said to be a symbolic entry into Shambhala, the legendary kingdom of the North (see Figures 3 & 4). The centre consists of 108 stupas (representing the snow-capped mountains surrounding Shambhala) organised in the shape of a mandala, with gates decorated with the images of the 25 kings of Shambhala. According to Altangerel, the present construction is an exact replica of Danzanravjaa’s original plan (although the central temple was not built yet).²⁴

converted to the *Nyingmapa* School (Wallace 2008: 50). Hundreds of people from across Mongolia and from abroad contributed an estimated \$ 250,000 to the reconstruction (according to monk Konchog Norbu [2004], director of Kunzang Palyul Chöling’s Mongolian Buddhism Revival Project in Mongolia, an American *Nyingmapa* foundation that financed monks of Hamar Monastery).

²⁴ Altangerel wrote that in 1853 Danzanravjaa planned to build a temple and a stupa complex symbolising Shambhala. According to Altangerel, he chose precisely that place because it was the exact location of a portal to Shambhala, and it radiated spiritual energy. It is said that Danzanravjaa drew the plans according to the proportions of a small metal box enshrining a painted Kalachakra mandala (preserved in the museum). Later, his disciples supposedly built the complex according to his drawings, with 108 wooden stupas, an *ovoo* and gates, and a central temple symbolising the palace of the kingdom’s central capital. The complex was entirely destroyed in 1938 (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 90–91). However, although, according to his biography, Danzanravjaa had a special interest in Shambhala and received a



Figure 3. Shambhala Energy Centre - © Sue Byrne 2006



Figure 4. Shambhala Energy Centre - © Sue Byrne 2006

From left to right: Konchog Lama, Sansarbat Lama, and Altangerel, at the stupa-filling ceremony.

These new constructions are integrated in a well-defined pilgrimage circuit that starts at the monastery and includes the Shambhala Energy Centre, located some two kilometres from the monastery; two breast-like cairns (*Tonton ovoo*, or *Meem*

prophecy that he would reincarnate as a commander of the Shambhala armies, there is no mention of any construction of a Shambhala complex by him or his disciples in the sources (see Sardar 2007: 282; Kollmar-Paulenz 2017: 1308–1309). His biography only states that in 1853, he “opened the path to Shambhala” (Sardar 2007: 288).

ovoo) on a hill north of the monastery; ‘108’ caves (actually, 13 are visible) of Yolhoi at two kilometres northeast of the monastery, including meditation caves and a womb-cave (Charleux 2015: 350–367); a sacred spring; and Han Bayanzürh (Rich Heart) Mountain. Han Bayanzürh is one of the ten official state-worshiped mountains of Mongolia – located 23 kilometres southwest of Hamar, this is the last step of the pilgrimage, and only men are allowed to climb to the top.

The pilgrims²⁵ are prescribed a series of rituals that include common pilgrimage practices such as circumambulating, prostrating, chanting prayers, and burning juniper, as well as specific rituals at each station of the circuit such as smearing the breast-like *ovoos* with milk, chanting Danzanravjaa’s poem ‘Perfect qualities’, lying on the ground to absorb the energy of the place, and burning a confessional list of one’s misdeeds in this lifetime at the Shambhala Energy Centre, crawling into the womb-cave, and making three wishes on Bayanzürh, called ‘Holy Mountain that grants all wishes like a *chintamani*’ (Konchog Norbu 2004; Kollmar-Paulenz 2017). The expected benefits are both Buddhist – to obtain blessings (*adistid*), wash away one’s sins, increase merit (*buyan*) to gain a better reincarnation in the next life, and more specifically be reborn in Shambhala among Danzanravjaa’s entourage and benefit from the extraordinary energy of the place to achieve final liberation – and pragmatic – increasing one’s vital energy (*hiimor*, *energi*), obtaining prosperity, fertility and good fortune (*hishig*), and having personal wishes fulfilled.²⁶ These rituals mix Buddhist and ‘popular’ practices as well as more recently introduced New Age-inspired practices to ‘recharge’ one’s energy.

The Shambhala Energy Centre has become the main pilgrimage of Mongolia; it attracts a constant flow of pilgrims – over 50,000 people every year²⁷ – who come there to heal and re-charge their bodies through the magnetic energy that emanates from the Earth. Buddhist organisations periodically organise big collective rituals there with chanting of Danzanravjaa’s songs, recitations, dancing, and fireworks. The main festival is organised in September.

The reconstruction of Danzanravjaa’s heritage includes religious and commemorative buildings, publications, films, anniversaries, conferences, and other events. It is therefore worth asking, what is the place and role of the museum in the promotional project of the Hero of the Gobi?

25 It is not the aim here to differentiate between theoretical categories such as pilgrim and tourist. For recent scholarship on tourist-pilgrims in Asia: see Reader 2014; Bruntz & Schedneck 2020, and more specifically on the Shambhala Energy Centre: see Kollmar-Paulenz 2017.

26 This circuit and rituals associated with specific ‘stations’ are typical of Mongol pilgrimages to powerful places such as sacred mountains, caves and rocks, and monasteries (Charleux 2015).

27 Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 5. The great majority are Mongols. There are also Western Buddhists and adepts of New Age movements such as ‘shambhalists’, following the Agni Yoga movement created by Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947), a famous Russian painter and theosophist who searched for Shambhala in Inner Asia (Kollmar-Paulenz 2017).

The ancient Display Temple

The Display Temple

Before describing the modern museum, I will first introduce the ancient museum-temple and the history of the collection. It should be emphasized that our knowledge of Danzanravjaa's collection entirely relies on Altangerel's memory²⁸ and the living memory and lore about Danzanravjaa in the Gobi region.²⁹

Danzanravjaa founded a Display Temple (*Üzmeriin süm, Üzveriin süm*) in 1842 in the western part of Hamar Monastery. The temple's official name was *Givaadin Ravjaa ling* (Monastery glorifying perfect virtue)³⁰ (Tsedendamba 2009: 376), however people used to call it *Dingam*, or *Nandin* ('Valuable').³¹ Another appellation of the temple was 'White Temple' because inside the building walls were in marble, with sculptures of female deities in white stone holding a lamp in a bowl: the temple was illuminated in a white glow when the lamps were lighted (Tsagaan & Altangerel, ca. 1991: 58; Tsendüren 1998).

The Display Temple exhibited Danzanravjaa's own artworks and writings, personal items, gifts offered by high lamas, offerings from the local community, and extraordinary objects he collected from different places during his travels, with a total of (approximately) 10,000 objects. The description of the display evokes a curio cabinet. In 1961, an elderly man named Luvsondash who remembered the place before its destruction recounted that the temple contained "a human-like skin that was covered in hair" (identified as a Mongol yeti [*almas*], Kohn 2010: 159, quoting Hürelbaatar 1998: 49), and that the most precious item was a '13th century' standard topped with horsehair that "once, allegedly, flew over 13th century Mongol armies" (Kohn 2010: 160).³² Michael Kohn, drawing on an interview with Altangerel and oral accounts, adds:

The museum also held a small statue of the Indian poet Nagarjuna, which was supposedly cast in England. The exhibits were placed in a particular order so that natural items, minerals, and plants, were shown first as the visitor entered the museum. A large statue of a woman in the nude was towards the front, symbolising

28 The many accounts by Hatanbaatar, Mend-Ooyo, Konchog Norbu, Vesna Wallace, Peter Morrow, Michael Kohn and others all come from the same oral stories told and retold many times by Altangerel, sometimes with variations. Altangerel decided which information to transmit, and to whom, and kept many secrets to himself. Interpretations and stories of objects may also vary (See for instance Kantzenbach 2009: 95).

29 Beside Danzanravjaa's short biography and writings, we do not possess historical texts that attest, for instance, to a Shambhala structure near Hamar, nor texts which describe the Display Temple.

30 Altangerel & Hatanbaatar (2013: 10–12) proposed restoring the Tibetan etymology as 'Geba-ten rabgya ling'. The Tibetan expression *rabgyalrapgyé* ('fully blown, very extensive, fully developed') frequently appears in names of monasteries; *ling* here means 'monastery'. 'Geba-ten' could be *gewaten* ('firmly established virtue'), *gawaten* ('firmly established joy' Tushita), or *gewa tenpa rapgyé* ('full development of doctrine/teaching of virtue'). I thank Kunsang Namgyal-Lama for having proposed these hypotheses.

31 Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 10–12. *Nandin* (< Skt. *nandin*, Tib. *nannten*) means 'precious, valuable, sacred, noble, rejoicing', *nandin sbüteen*, 'sacred/rejoicing object of worship'.

32 The standards were sacred objects of power that were believed to contain the *süld* (vital energy, charisma, spiritual power) of Chinggisid ancestors. The standard of Hamar monastery is one of the Nine White standards of Chinggis Khan; it was preserved in the Gobi in the Qing period and was handed over to museologists before 1990. It is now exhibited in the Museum of Dornogov' Province.

the natural state of human beings. A storage room attached to the museum housed the bulk of its belongings in large leather-bound boxes. Because Ravjaa was concerned that goods from his monastery could be stolen or confiscated by Manchu authorities, these boxes were carefully stored so that they could be easily moved onto the backs of camels and evacuated. In one instance, this well-executed pre-arranged plan apparently foiled a real robbery attempt by brigands (Kohn 2010: 160).

Danzanravjaa organised exhibitions to publicise his collection, which he himself or his two *gonirs* (Tib. *gönnyer*, clerk, caretaker) showed to visitors (Tsagaan & Altangerel, ca. 1991: 58; Tsendüren 1998). Kohn goes on to explain:

One [of the *gonirs*] was a lama responsible for educating visitors on philosophy and religious topics. The other, a layperson, explained exhibits related to science and nature. The *gomiir* [*gonir*] were charged with preserving the objects and used several techniques to do so. Cloth was protected from moths by a liquid made from crushed sagebrush and wormwood. Artwork was protected from fading with the application of cow bile mixed with water. Wood exhibits were boiled in oil and water, and then stored in wood boxes filled with cow and horse dung (Kohn 2010: 160).

As the museum grew, so did its importance as an educational centre. Admission was free and assistants were on hand to read the textbooks to illiterate nomads. In exchange, visitors left a blue silk scarf (*khadak*). Ravjaa also hosted cultural competitions at the museum. Artists and poets competed with one another for the sake of honour. Winners were called ‘Duvchin’ and given a special place to sit inside the White Temple. They also received an engraved wood seal known as a *paiz*, which granted them the right to teach at other monasteries in Mongolia (Kohn 2010: 161).

The Display Temple therefore functioned as a “real cultural centre. It even had training courses for people who wanted to learn to read and write” (researcher Ts. Tsendüren, quoted in Kohn 2010: 161). It was part of a larger project to educate laypeople, together with the ‘Children’s College’³³ and the library. It “employed eight lamas, five translators and thirteen assistants to read the texts, most of which were in Tibetan script,” and both elite and commoner visitors could come and “spend time with the assistants asking them questions and reading the available materials” (Kohn 2010: 161).

The relic temple and the function of guardian of Danzanravjaa’s heritage

After Danzanravjaa’s death in 1856, his body was mummified³⁴ and placed in the Display Temple, the name of which was changed to Relic Temple (*Sharilyn süm*) in 1858 (Tsagaan & Altangerel, ca. 1991: 58). The mummy was surrounded by more

33 The Children’s Datsan (*Hüühdiin datsan*), established in the 1830s, was a kind of secondary school that offered basic training in language, history, maths, and artistic education to the children of the region who often became singers, dancers, or painters in the monastery or in the theatre company.

34 In Mongolia, mummification was a treatment reserved for a few highly regarded teachers. Bodies, in the lotus posture, were desiccated with salt, and covered with paint or gold; sometimes clay was modelled around it, making the mummy akin to portrait statues. Very few mummies survived the destruction of Mongol Buddhist heritage. The remains of the Fourth and the Sixth Noyon *butagt* were kept in another funerary temple, in the eastern part of the monastery (Tsendendamba 2009: 376).

than 1,500 crates that contained the initial collection of the Display Temple, to which were added other artefacts such as theatre and *tsam* ritual costumes, and objects from the school (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 10–12). The transformation of the Display Temple into a Relic Temple would have been a strategy to preserve the collection because the Qing had planned to erase Danzanravjaa's legacy by destroying the temple, but according to law they could not desecrate a tomb.³⁵ Danzanravjaa's trusted disciple Sh. Balchinchoijoo (1804–1865, Buddhist name: Ishlodon) swore an oath to protect the collections and the mummy; he was the first *tahilch* – a lama in charge of sacrificial offerings. He performed the annual *puja* (worship ritual) called Gonzog on the anniversary of Danzanravjaa's death, the sixth day of the first winter month (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 75).³⁶ The text of Balchinchoijoo's vow, mounted as a *thangka* which is exhibited in the museum³⁷ (see Figure 5), affirmed three promises. The first one held that the items from Hamar Monastery were not personal property but belonged to all Mongols; the second held that the items must never leave Mongolia; and the third, that the *tahilch* was ultimately responsible for the protection and preservation of the objects if they were endangered (Morrow 2002). Since he had the sworn responsibility for caring for the collections, in this particular case the term *tahilch* can also be understood as protector, curator, or estate administrator.³⁸ At Balchinchoijoo's death, this position was hereditarily transmitted to his descendants: Gan-Ochir (1837–1889), Nar'ya (1861–1900), Ongoi (1890–1931), Gombo (1902–1937), Tüdev (1912–1990), and finally, Altangerel.³⁹ Except for Altangerel, all were monks.⁴⁰

The Relic Temple was no longer a display temple but had become a shrine for the cult of Danzanravjaa's mummy: only the *tahilch* was permitted to enter and perform rituals, while devotees could only worship it from outside, except for one day each year when its doors were open to the public for a special viewing (Kohn 2010: 191–192).⁴¹

35 “They declared the temple to be Danzan Ravjaa's tomb, reminded the authorities of their own laws, and thus cleverly rendered the contents inviolate” (Konchog Norbu 2006; Morrow 2002; “Curators of Noyon Khutagt Heritage”: 10).

36 According to Hürelbaatar (2006: 282–290), the institution of a *tahilch*, a figure who was responsible for the temple and the objects, existed before Danzanravjaa's death.

37 *Tahilch хүмүүний тангарагийн бичиг*. It starts with: “Since Holy Lord Chinggis Khan became Heaven/Sky [passed away] and bid farewell; His hero Bo'orchu became the guardian (*tahilch*). Since Melodious Noyon *hutagt* became Heaven/Sky and bid farewell, I Balchinchoijoo, became the guardian.” In Cyrillic Mongolian: *Ezen bogd Chinggis haanaa / Tenger bolon zalarhuid / Hölög Boorchu n' tahilch suujuhui / Egshiglent Noyon hutagtaa / Tenger bolon zalarahuid / Balchinchoijoo bi tahilch suuyu...* (Tsaagan & Altangerel, ca. 1991: 58). According to the *Secret History of the Mongols*, Bo'orchu took care of Chinggis Khan's most valued possessions after his death (Kohn 2010: 191).

38 In Danzanravjaa's studies published in English, *tahilch* is translated as ‘curator’ (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013).

39 The *tahilch* was recognised among the sons of the former *tahilch* because he had a special birthmark on his back in the shape of a moon crescent (Sodbaatar 2012: 58). I thank V. Wallace for having sent me this article.

40 According to V. Wallace (personal communication), Tüdev was a ‘steppe lama’ and he probably only took the novice precepts. Altangerel did not take any Buddhist precepts, even after 1990.

41 In his well-researched novel, Mend-Oyoo (2017 [2012]: 89) describes the temple as having three parts: the original, secret temple with the holiest objects called Nandin, the Exhibition temple (a section made into an exhibition for the general public), and the Offering Temple, an extension added after Danzanravjaa's



Figure 5. Mongolian text of the vow of Balchinchoijoo, on silk, mounted as a *thangka* (Danzanravjaa Museum: second floor) - © Isabelle Charleux 2018

Balchinchoijoo was the first gardian of Danzanravjaa's heritage (*tahilch hümünii tangaragiin bichig*)

Most of the collection was kept in the crates, ready to be evacuated and hidden in the desert in case of attack, as happened in 1911 when the Chinese Guomindang forces threatened monasteries in the Gobi.

In 1938, shortly before the monastery was entirely destroyed,⁴² Tüdev, the descendant of Balchinchoijoo and sixth hereditary *tahilch*, had predicted the soldiers would come. Every night for 64 nights, he secretly carried out one of the 1,500 crates of the Relic Temple and buried them in various locations in the vicinity of Hamar.

death to house his mummified body. The three temples were all joined together by a secret storehouse that contained some 1,500 boxes.

42 About 300 monks were arrested; of these, 112 were killed and others were imprisoned for at least ten or fifteen years and forcibly laicised.

The content of the 64 crates represented about 10 percent of the whole collection (Morrow 2002; Konchog Norbu 2006; Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 10–12, 92). Out of fear of its desecration, Tüdev cremated Danzanravjaa's mummified body, and buried the ashes with other valuables under a mountain cairn (later, in 1990, he enshrined them in a stupa). The army destroyed the remaining artefacts, except for the metal objects that were sent to the USSR to be melted.

Tüdev raised his grandson Altangerel in secret according to the extremely strict 'old-style' physical and mental training of a *tahilch*. For instance, when Altangerel was nine years old, Tüdev locked him for three nights in a cave to meditate and forced him to spend a night alone in a cemetery (Sodbaatar 2012: 58). He had him memorise the locations of the crates as well as each detail of the items they contained. Over the years, on specific days of the lunar calendar, by night, Tüdev and Altangerel opened boxes to study their contents, and Tüdev taught his grandson different methods of preservation; for instance, metal items were covered with horse fat to prevent corrosion, while a sack of dung ashes was placed in the bottom of the crates to absorb moisture.⁴³ Altangerel took the *tahilch* oath in 1984 (he was then working as a driver in Sainshand, which facilitated their night trips to the mountains), but the secret was kept until 1990. Unfortunately, Tüdev passed away on December 9, 1990, shortly after the end of the socialist era that same year, but before the secret was revealed.

The modern museum

After the fall of the socialist regime, Altangerel started to unearth some of the boxes⁴⁴ according to oracles he received:⁴⁵ when he meditated on specific days and recited the *sadhana* (visualisation text) of the 'local deity'⁴⁶ that was secretly

43 The preservation methods were passed on from father to son in the context of the *tahilch* tradition (Morrow 2002; Konchog Norbu 2006; Kantzenbach 2009: 67; Sodbaatar 2012: 58). The Australian restorer Sarah McHugh analysed the traditional methods and ingredients that Tüdev used to preserve the objects, such as tobacco, bile, camel urine, camel amniotic fluid, animal spinal fluid, and plant extracts (McHugh 2004).

44 A few were discovered by accident in 1969, but the authorities decided to destroy them. Damdinsüren discovered boxes that contained artefacts and missing volumes of the 'Moon Cuckoo.' Altangerel's mother sent eight crates to the museum authorities of Ulaanbaatar, but they were never seen again (Morrow 2002). Because of problems of conservation and theft in the museum, Altangerel did not want to exhume all the boxes at the same time: he first unearthed 23 boxes, then eight or more between 2001 and 2004. In 2009, he and Austrian amateur archaeologist Michael Eisenriegler unearthed two more crates in an event that was simulcast on the Internet and on TV (Konchog Norbu 2009; 'Gobi Treasure Hunt' 2009). About 20 crates remained buried.

45 Similarly, many Buddhist texts, images and ritual objects that were buried in the ground before the socialist purges of the 1930s later resurfaced in Mongolia and Russia after 1990. Bernstein (2011) studies how such objects 'chose' when to reveal themselves and how they were accorded revelatory status in Buryatia; and Gazizova (2021) describes a collection of Buddhist objects discovered in a *kurgan* (tumulus) in Kalmykia. Both of them draw a parallel with *termas* (secret teachings, relics and images). However, neither Altangerel nor the Buddhist institution has recognised these rediscoveries as *termas*. The *terma* rediscovery process is highly codified, and *tertöns* (treasure revealers) are usually recognised as charismatic reincarnations of a disciple of Padmasambhava or of an earlier *tertön*. On the idea that Danzanravjaa was viewed as a *tertön* (tantric master who reveals *termas*) because he wrote esoteric revelatory texts and was connected to lineages of *Nyingmapa tertöns*: see Sardar 2007: 274, 291; Humphrey 2005.

46 Sodbaatar (2012: 58) writes that Tüdev and Altangerel used to read a *dharani* before digging. Altangerel told Buddhist Vesna Wallace and other visitors that he received secret instructions from the deity,

transmitted from one *tahilch* to the next, he then received instructions from the deity, such as where to dig to find crates and which object to take out.⁴⁷ It was also under this deity's order that he reconstructed Hamar Monastery and the Shambhala Energy Centre.

Altangerel was given a small building in Sainshand by local officials. The Danzanravjaa Museum was inaugurated on 10 July 1991, and at the time was then very small. In 2008, it moved to a new, larger building located on the main street of Sainshand. A statue of Danzanravjaa (Figure 1b) was erected in the square in front of the museum. Nearby, on the other side of the street is the Museum of Dornogov' Province.⁴⁸ In considering the evolution of the new museum, it is therefore interesting to ask: how did Altangerel, who was not trained as a museum curator, but had secretly received the education of a *tahilch* from his grandfather, conceive the museum?⁴⁹

The initial building evoked a Buddhist temple, with a temple-style door and portico, a Chinese roof and a pediment topped by the Dharma wheel and the two deer – a symbol which is usually reserved for Buddhist assembly halls and should not be placed above secular buildings (Figure 6a). Sarah McHugh (2004), who realised a survey of the conservation problems and storage conditions of the objects in this first building, observed that:

The floor and small props within all of the cases are covered with blue silk *khadag* (ritual scarves) [...] A wooden box used to hold objects when they were buried, is displayed on an open plinth and is observed to be frequently touched by staff and visitors (McHugh 2004: 1–2).

The 2008 museum is a modern two-storeyed building with no Buddhist decoration, except for the archway, crowned by the Dharma wheel and the two deer (Figure 6b). The museography is simple: artefacts are presented in showcases along the wall or in the middle of the rooms; a few panels explain Danzanravjaa's life and works; drawings and two scale-models help the visitor explore Danzanravjaa's life and construction activity. Labels are simple and do not detail the size or material of the objects; English translation is occasionally added. Near the ticket counter, a machine sells coins depicting the recently built Övgön stupa of Hamar.⁵⁰

but in his publications, he wrote that he just remembered the place where the boxes were buried. Wallace argues that he could not have remembered the location of all the crates because he was too young when Tüdev showed him. His son Altan-Ochir is said to have the ability to become an ever more powerful oracle (V. Wallace, personal communication).

47 This oracular deity is certainly Yolhoi (or Yalhoi) *sahius*, the master-spirit of the land tamed by Danzanravjaa at the 108 caves, and who became a protector deity of the place (*gazryn ezen sahius*) (Sardar 2007: 269). For depictions of Yolhoi, see Appendix 2.

48 This museum has a collection of archaeological and historical artefacts from Prehistory up to socialist times, along with a presentation of local natural history which is typical of provincial museums of the socialist period; it exhibits very few religious items.

49 For a portrait of Altangerel, see Sodbaatar 2012. After his military service, he trained as a history teacher in Ulaanbaatar. Later he went to study in the Zanabazar University (V. Wallace, personal communication).

50 In 2018, the admission fee was MNT 2,000 (Tugrik, Mongolian currency) .

About 400 items (the contents of 38 crates) are exhibited.⁵¹ On the first floor is a modern painting that depicts Danzanravjaa as a young scholar in his studio; in front of it is a donation box (Figure 1a).⁵² Along the walls are a series of paintings of the 27 pre-incarnations of the Noyon *butagt* lineage (Figure 7), and a painting of the First Noyon *butagt* Agvaangongchig (1622-1704) (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 74–78, 100–101). Several crates covered with leather are piled against the wall, and a metal basin is filled with small banknotes. Small showcases display items used by Danzanravjaa’s ‘father’⁵³ Dulduit, his three personal symbols (a swan, a seal with a scorpion design, and a small golden Tara); Danzanravjaa’s works⁵⁴ on medical sciences, tools, and substances; and tools and textbooks used in the Children’s College.

The main museum space is on the second floor. The first room has a large showcase that displays objects dedicated to *tahilch* Tüdev (Figure 8). Nearby are *thangkas*, and a simplified scale model of the Shambhala Energy Centre (Figure 9). The visitor then enters the main gallery which has four large showcases. On the right-hand side of the door, a showcase displays a rug and various artefacts from the monastery’s Treasure House (Figure 10). On the left-hand side, the largest showcase presents about 50 artefacts having belonged to Danzanravjaa and his following reincarnations, including objects from his childhood and ritual items used during his enthronement ceremony (in 1811, when he was nine years old) (Figures 11 & 12).⁵⁵ Legends and historical facts are attached to some of them. For instance, a jade cup and a rosary of “108 beads fashioned from the skulls of 108 skilled lamas [...] inlaid with silver, gold and lapis lazuli” is said to have belonged to the Fourth Noyon *butagt* Jamyan Oidovjamts (1765-1802). Young Danzanravjaa identified these objects as belonging to ‘him’, proving that he was the Fourth Noyon’s reincarnation (Kohn 2010: 48). From a Buddhist point of view, these personal objects are ‘contact relics’: by worshipping them, one is blessed by the saint’s power. Usually in a Buddhist context, contact relics such as monastic robes, bowls and other personal objects are not exhibited but enshrined inside stupas.⁵⁶

51 The key objects are reproduced in two catalogues: Tsagaan & Altangerel, s.d. (1990s); Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013. The museum’s official website offers an online virtual tour of the second floor.

52 Because the documentation on Mongolian museums is scarce, I describe the most important artefacts in Appendix 2.

53 Kiripolska (1999), following Ts. Damdinsüren’s hypothesis, argues that Dulduit was his mother (d.1821).

54 It is said that 170 works in Mongolian and over 180 in Tibetan written by Danzanravjaa have survived: 400 poems, 100 songs, philosophical writings, the ‘Moon Cuckoo’ play, commentaries, and stage notes on the opera, works of astrology and medicine, *sadbanas*, and schoolbooks. Part of the collection is housed at the National Archives of Mongolia and in the archives of the National University of Mongolia. A digitalisation project is led by Hamid Sardar with funding from the British Library: Humphrey 2005.

55 He was first recognised as the reincarnation of the tantrist Navang Agramba *tsorj* because the Qing had banned the reincarnation of the Fourth Noyon *butagt* after having arrested and executed him.

56 Contact relics, like corporeal relics, are receptacles of – and can bestow – *adis*, *adistid* (<Skt. *adhishthana*), or *adis zhinlav* (<Tib. *jinlap*, sacred energy, miraculous power of a deity or a saint). For more about powerful objects of Danzanravjaa’s collection that should only be touched by the *tahilch* or a lama who has reached a high religious level, see Kantzenbach 2009: 69.

6a



Figure 6a. The façade of the Museum in 1991 - © Birgit Kantzenbach 2005

6b



Figure 6b. The Museum building in 2008 - © Isabelle Charleux 2018



Figure 7. Exhibit of paintings and showcases on the first floor of the museum - © Vesna Wallace 2021

Paintings of the preincarnations of the Noyon *hutagt* lineage and showcases of the medicine tools and box.



Figure 8. Objects dedicated to the *tahilch* Tüdev in the first showcase of the second floor

© Chadraabal 2018

A portrait painting of Tüdev in a mountain cave lit by a small lamp and surrounded by wooden crates; a photograph of him and his family; some of the big crates he buried; the vow of the first *tahilch* mounted as a *thangka*, as well as various artefacts.



Figure 9. Scale model of the Shambhala Energy Centre and a large vertical painting

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

The painting is representing the female form of Manjushri, Chinese deity Guandi, and a monastery.



Figure 10. Showcase that displays a rug and various artefacts that used to be stored in the monastery's Treasure House (*jas*) - © Chadraabal 2018



Figure 11. Long showcase presenting about 50 objects that belonged to Danzanravjaa and the following reincarnations of the Noyon *hutagt* - © Chadraabal 2018

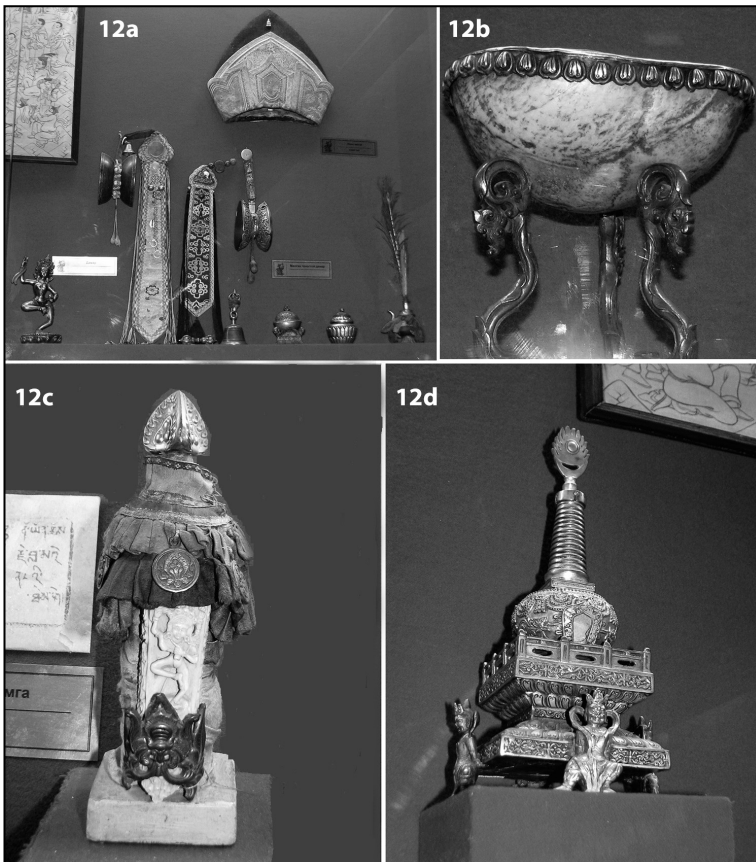


Figure 12. Some of the important objects in the long showcase (Figure 11) - © Isabelle Charleux 2018

12a. 'Lovon hat worn by the Noyon *hutagt*'; skull *damaru*, *vajra* and a bell, a ewer and bowls used during Danzanravjaa's enthronement ceremony; a metal *damaru* and brass statuette of a dancing *dakini*. 12b. 'Human' skull-cup on a silver pedestal; 12c. Square-shaped treasury seal (*sangiin tamga*); 12d. Metal stupa supported by four wrathful figures discovered during the 2009 excavations.

The next showcase displays articles from the monastery's Treasure House, including a silver mandala used during the enthronement of the Noyon *butagts*, printing blocks, and a print of Padmasambhava's life story (*Padma bka'i thang yig*) with gold letters. The same showcase also displays gifts offered by high-ranking lamas and officials that were central to Danzanravjaa's Display Temple, and highlight his international connections, such as a sabre offered by a Japanese disciple (Kohn 2010: 168) (Figures 13 & 14)⁵⁷.

Another showcase displays artefacts related to the theatre (Figure 15).⁵⁸ Three actors' costumes, inspired by *tsam* costumes, are exhibited together with various items such as make-up⁵⁹ and a whip to punish offending actors who bleated or did not follow instructions on stage (Kohn 2010: 100–101). A female costume with a tantric crown would be the costume of his consort Dadishura,⁶⁰ who was known to write music and to choreograph the plays (Figure 15d). In front of the showcase is a scale model of the temple-theatre of Hamar, known as the Story Singing Temple.⁶¹ The last showcase exhibits costumes and objects of *tsam* dances (Figure 16).⁶² One of the costumes is that of a female local lord called Ulaan albin (Red evil spirit) with one eye, a big fang in the middle of her mouth, and one breast, who was identified with Ekajati⁶³ (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 56) (Figure 16b).

The Palace of precious objects of worship

The northern wall of the second floor has no showcase but a small glass window with a frame in the shape of a pointed-arched opening: it evokes the opening of the niches of stupas that enshrine the image of a lama or a deity, and the opening of amulet boxes (Figure 17c). One has to get close to the opening to spy inside a small room that contains the golden stupa with Danzanravjaa's ashes made in 1991, and a quantity of precious objects arranged around a wax statue of him topped by an honorific multicoloured canopy (Figure 17b). This is called the 'Palace of precious objects of worship' (*Nandin shüteenii örgöö*) and is the core of the (public part of

57 Danzanravjaa was said to have had Buddhist disciples from Japan, China, Tibet, and Korea.

58 The performance required an entire month to be played in full, with more than 200 musicians, actors, and assistants, who were his disciples and lay subjects. Shorter performances were put on in one day or one week. Danzanravjaa also travelled with a group of 60 actors and a camel-drawn mobile theatre on wheels to perform the play in monasteries of the Gobi and Chahar regions. The Seventh Noyon *butagt* Agvaan Luvsan Dambi Jantsan (1875–1931) revised the play which was staged until the 1920s (Heissig 1964: 257–260; Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 18, 22–23).

59 One of the particularities of the 'Moon Cuckoo' play was the absence of masks and, as in Chinese opera, the use of make-up to exaggerate facial expressions.

60 It is said he had '108 women', including tantric partners and disciples. Two of them, Dadishura (or Dadishuuri, Dadishuur) *dakini* and Baljudmaa, were considered as his 'wives'.

61 The Story Singing Temple (*Namtar duulah datsan*) was especially built for the performance of the 'Moon Cuckoo', with a two-story stage and a separate orchestra box. The Mongolian Theatre Museum of Ulaanbaatar also has a scale model of this theatre stage.

62 *Tsam* was introduced in 1827 at Hamar Monastery on the model of the Badgar chöiling Monastery in Inner Mongolia (where Danzanravjaa studied between 1804 and 1818). Danzanravjaa introduced innovations in the *tsam*, such as the presence of female figures (the local deity), and a scene in which the White Old Man (*Tsagaan övgön*, who usually introduces a burlesque interlude in the ritual) milks an elephant by mistake, because of his poor eyesight.

63 Ekajati is one of the main protectors of the *Nyingmapas* and *Dzogchen* (Great Perfection); as the 'mother of the mothers of all the Buddhas', she represents the ultimate unity.

the) museum. This small room is presented in the catalogue as the reproduction of both a secret shrine for tantric meditation and the Relic Temple.⁶⁴ In front of it are a modern statue of four-armed Avalokiteshvara,⁶⁵ a donation box, a chest, an iron cauldron, and a tripod. The chest and the donation box serve as offering tables for an alms bowl, miniature prayer-wheels and offering cups. Ceremonial scarves (*hatag*) are presented to the statue and to the shrine: it is therefore considered to be a Buddhist shrine inside the museum (Figure 17a).

The wax statue depicts Danzanravjaa at a young age, sitting on a chair and writing on a big book placed on his knees. He wears a long rosary and a very peculiar dark blue robe (*deel*) with golden *shou* motifs (Chinese auspicious stylised character meaning 'longevity') and coloured peonies; the flap that forms the chest's pocket is decorated with skulls.⁶⁶ This peculiar robe resembles the costumes of the 'Moon Cuckoo' play.⁶⁷ The wax image does not evoke Danzanravjaa's mummy which was certainly sitting in a meditating posture: Danzanravjaa is represented neither as a monk nor a tantric practitioner, but as a scholar, like in the painting on the first floor (Figure 1a).

The *Tahilch*'s Shrine and the Statue of Ten Thousand Knives

Several of the objects displayed in the museum are related to tantric rituals, such as skull-cups and other ritual instruments (Figure 18).

However, there are some esoteric works that are not supposed to be seen by non-initiates because they can only be understood by those who have a high level of knowledge and practice, such as esoteric paintings and a treatise on tantric sexual practices,⁶⁸ and these are not exhibited, but are kept in a special room: the *Tahilch*'s room (Figures 9 & 20).

64 Altangerel & Hatanbaatar (2013: 8–9) mention a secret shrine in the ancient monastery's Lavran (residence of the reincarnated lama, located in the eastern part of Hamar) for tantric practice, where a collection of valuable objects (*nandinguud*, plural form of *nandin*) was preserved; Danzanravjaa's mummy was placed there after his death. Yet, these same authors as well as other sources write that the mummy was placed in the Display Temple, also known as Nandin, in the western part of the monastery (*ibid.*: 10–12): there seems to be a confusion between the two places.

65 In the online virtual tour of the Danzanravjaa Museum (undated), it is replaced by a statue of Padmasambhava.

66 The statue wears a copy of the rosary made of human skull said to have been offered to Danzanravjaa by the Dalai Lama which he always carried with him. It used to be kept with his mummy. For more on the particular significance and sanctity of this rosary, see Kantzenbach 2009.

67 Tsagaan & Altangerel (ca. 1991: 27) call it 'the *deel* of Ravjaa'. The movie *Dogshin butagtyn sahius* used visuals and copies of objects from the museum, including this robe.

68 This big album entitled 'The Sutra of Human Destiny', with 64 miniature paintings depicting different sexual positions, was written, and drawn by Danzanravjaa himself. It was exhibited in the first museum before 2008, but Altangerel realised that it should not be shown to the non-initiated. It is now kept in the storage rooms of the museum (V. Wallace, personal communication). For information on other artefacts that must remain hidden, see Kantzenbach 2009: 80 and fn. 63.



Figure 13. Showcase that displays articles used in the monastery's Treasure House, and gifts offered by high-ranking lamas and officials - © Chadraabal 2018



Figure 14. Some of the important articles of the monastery's Treasure House (Figure 13)

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

14a. Silver mandala of Tamdrin Yansan yadam (Hayagriva) used during the enthronement of the Noyon *hutagt*; 14b. Chinese wooden print-blocks depicting a pantheon from the *zasag lam* (head lama) of Yonggong Monastery in Beijing; 14c. Porcelain statue (Guanyin?) offered by a Qing minister; 14d. Print of the *Padma bka'i thang yig* (Mo. *Badmagatan*, life story of Padmasambhava) with Tibetan gold letters.

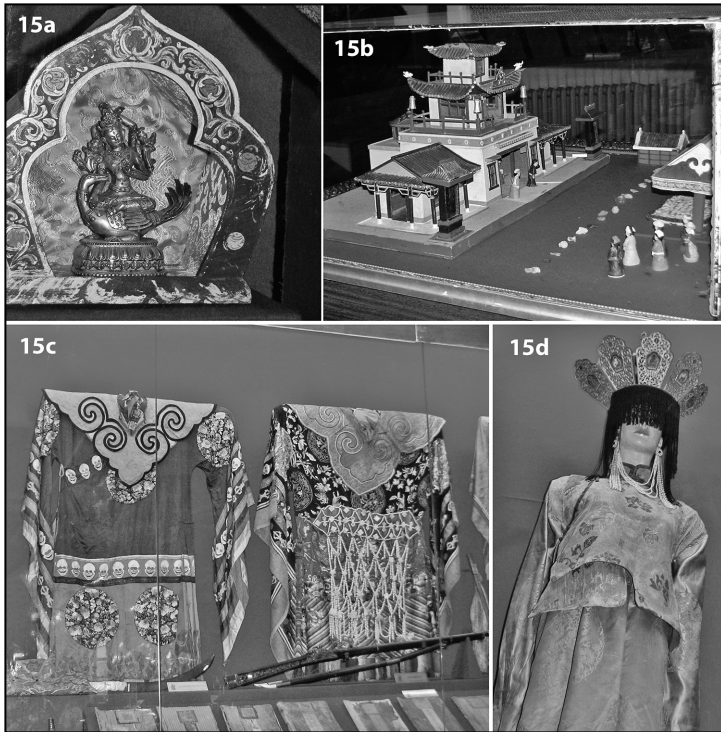


Figure 15. Showcase of artefacts related to the theatre

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

15a. Statue of the goddess Sarasvati; 15b. Scale model of the theatre building with small figurines of actors and spectators; 15c. Actors' costumes and original manuscripts of the 'Moon Cuckoo'; 15d. Blue costume for female character with the five-leaf crown of Dadishura.



Figures 16a. *Tsam* costume and mask of a red protector (Begtse?) & 16b. *Tsam* costume of the female local lord Ulaan albin - © Isabelle Charleux 2018



Figure 17. The Palace of precious objects of worship

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

17a. Wall of the second floor (Online virtual tour); **17b.** The wax statue of Danzanravjaa and his funerary stupa; **17c.** Window of the 'Palace' with a pointed-arch-opening decorated with dancing offering deities and a female bodhisattva and view of the funerary stupa.

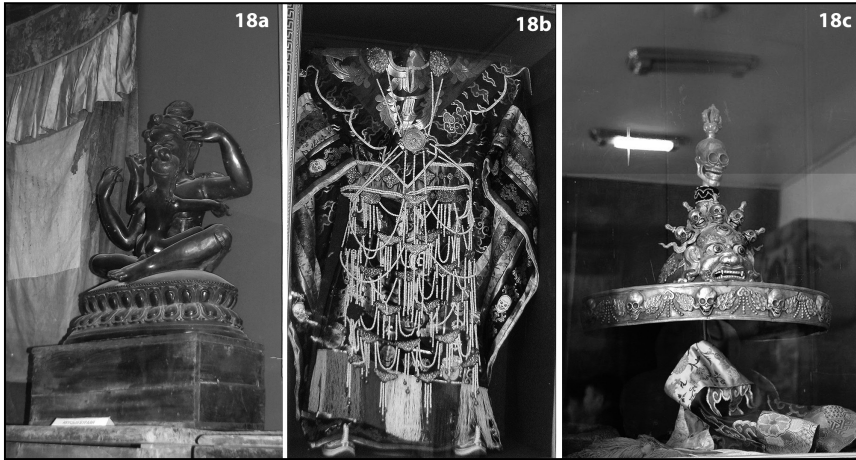


Figure 18. Some objects used for tantric rituals

© Isabelle Charleux 2018

- 18a.** Brass statue of Ghantapa, Danzanravjaa’s secret tantra deity* in union with his consort;
18b. Silk dress with a metal and bone apron for a tantric ritual;
18c. Silver hat with a wrathful protector’s head, a skull, and a *vajra*.

* I thank the anonymous reviewer who highlighted the fact that not only the ‘Red schools’ but also the ‘Yellow school’ *Geluk* tantric traditions also make use of these tantric implements.



Figure 19. *Thangkas* - © Tsagaan & Altangerel, s.d. (1990s); 32, 17, 34

- 19a.** Danzanravjaa as a naked acetic wearing a tiger skin as a loincloth and a five-skull crown, surrounded by his masters, his disciples, and devotional deities, who are identified with Tibetan captions (see **Appendix 2**); **19b.** Danzanravjaa as a tantric lama performing a ritual; **19c.** *Thangka* painted by Danzanravjaa, depicting deities of the Bardo cycle.

The *Tahilch*'s room (*Tahilchiin öröö*) is a locked room that holds the most precious objects of the museum, and which has a poor security system (several objects have been stolen since 1990).⁶⁹ The museum keeper keeps the key and used to call Altangerel to open the room and show it to visitors. Ordinary visitors are not aware of the existence of this large room, but locals know about it (Nipon' 2017), and Altangerel very willingly opened it for devotees and Westerners. There, he had them drink the *butagt*'s sacred water⁷⁰ from Danzanravjaa's own jade cup, offer incense to the Padmasambhava statue, prostrate in front of it, and make offerings.⁷¹

This large room is decorated as a shrine, with a large mandala painted on the ceiling, silk banners on the walls and hanging from the roof, and silk scarves. In its centre is the Ten Thousand Knives Padmasambhava – the holiest treasure of the museum – surrounded by smaller statues, masks, and altars with offerings of lamps, an incense burner, photographs, prayer-wheels, religious vessels, and ritual items (Figure 20).



Figure 20. The *Tahilch*'s room - © Isabelle Charleux 2019

The photo was taken in 2019, on the occasion of the visit of the American ambassador Michael S. Klecheski - <<https://twitter.com/hashtag/dornogovi>>.

- 69 As late as 2005, Altangerel's family members used to take turns standing guard in the museum (Sardar 2007: 258). Since 1990, there have been many cases in Mongolia of objects being stolen from newly-reopened monasteries and museums (Baatarnaran & Lang 2016: 93–94). However, the collection is certainly thought to be safer in the museum than in the monastery (that mostly displays recent artefacts). In the 2000s, some objects were exhibited inside the temples (McHugh 2004).
- 70 The *butagt*'s sacred water (*rashaan*) is the vodka that Danzanravjaa turned into water, said to have been preserved for more than a hundred years. Altangerel also made this beverage from vodka according to Danzanravjaa's secret recipe. This curative 'water', also known as 'non-alcoholic vodka', is given to the sick to drink and is used in massage (V. Wallace, personal communication).
- 71 Nipon' 2017. Altangerel also accompanied groups of visitors to the Shambhala Energy Centre and took them into the Gobi Desert during the full moon, where he had them sit in a circle, sing Danzanravjaa's songs, and drink non-alcoholic vodka made according to the secret recipe from Danzanravjaa's jade cup, to receive Danzanravjaa's blessings (V. Wallace, personal communication).

To the left and right of this central altar, two of the most precious *thangkas* of the collection hang on the wall: the left one depicts Danzanravjaa as an ascetic surrounded by clerics of Kathog Monastery and *Nyingma*-favoured deities; the right one shows him as a tantric lama performing a ritual (Figures 19 & 20). A very precious silk embroidery of Begtse (Mo. Begts, Ulaan Sahius, who was a main protector of Hamar) is also hung in this room.

The Ten Thousand Knives Padmasamhava, said to be made of melted knives, was the most worshipped icon of Hamar Monastery.⁷² In 1938, Tüdev secretly transported it to his tent, but in 1971, it was detached from its base and stolen (Konchog Norbu 2006; Nipon' 2017). In 2000, Altangerel recognised the statue on a TV programme about an exhibit of Buddhist art treasures in Ulaanbaatar, although it had lost its crown. Altangerel took his cause to a lawyer and Member of Parliament, Sharavdorj, who was able to obtain its restitution.⁷³

In January 2004, the statue of Ten Thousand Knives was reinstalled as the central worship image of the Red Temple at Hamar, and the following year, it received a new crown.⁷⁴ Pilgrims came to make offerings and make a vow of non-violence before the statue (Konchog Norbu 2006) (Figure 21). The statue was later installed in the *Tabilch*'s room of the museum.⁷⁵

The museum as a religious space?

Located in a modern building, the Danzanravjaa Museum presents a layout and scenography similar to those of the socialist-built museums of the capital. The objects come from a religious context, but except for the *Tabilch*'s room, the 'museum-like' nature of the place is unquestionable. It has the official status of a museum of private ownership; its collection belongs to the state, and it must respect the Mongolian museums' strict conservation regulations.⁷⁶

In an interview, Altangerel explained how he organised the museum and selected the objects to introduce the life and works of Danzanravjaa to the general public, and how several objects had to remain hidden (Kantzenbach 2009: 78–80). From a museology point of view, the 'palace' with the funerary stupa and the wax statue is

72 It is said that in the aftermath of a murder in his monastery, Danzanravjaa asked that every family of the region bring a knife to make a statue; he had all the knives melted down and forged into a statue of Padmasambhava (Konchog Norbu 2006; Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 59).

73 It was located in the Mongol Bank (as a pawn for a loan) and was registered as a National Treasure. To get the statue back, Sharavdorj "initiated a combination of government and legal pressure, as well as raising a one-time payment to the Mongol bank equalling about \$26,000. This secured the temporary release of the statue from the bank, and Sharavdorj and Altangerel transported it back to Khamar Monastery amidst great ceremony for a three-month tour of the region. Some say this was one of the main causes for Sharavdorj's re-election" (Konchog Norbu 2006).

74 Sharavdorj sponsored the creation of the new crown following the model of a small crown 'miraculously' found in the sand near Hamar. It was made from silver blended with metal from knives that had been used in recent fights or were used in a slaughterhouse, covered in gold plate, and studded with precious and semi-precious stones (including stones taken from Danzanravjaa's own collection).

75 It is occasionally moved to Hamar Monastery. It was there in June 2018 when I visited it.

76 The 'Law on culture' considers objects that belong to Mongolian museums as secular heritage, and the museum's artefacts are state property. According to the 1992 Constitution, the state and religion are separated and "are enjoined to support each other without interfering in the other's sphere" (Baatarnaran & Lang 2016: 93).

a diorama, which is common in Mongolian museums.⁷⁷

But for worshippers, it is a shrine for the authentic ashes of the saint. In addition, this room is located on the north side – the place of the altar with the main icons in Mongol temples (that usually open to the south). The objects are organised in the museum like in a temple, in a specific order: objects that are less important from a Buddhist viewpoint are on the first floor, while more important objects (personal relics, costumes of theatre and *tsam*) are on the second floor,⁷⁸ the climax being the ‘Palace’ with the funerary stupa and, for those who know about it, the *Tahilch*’s room with the Padmasambhava statue, which is akin to a *nandin* private shrine. Not only are the stupa, the relics and the Padmasambhava statue the most precious objects, but they also are the most sacred and ‘powerful’: they need to be worshipped and receive offerings.⁷⁹



Figure 21. Ten Thousand Knives Padmasambhava (when it was first installed in the Red Temple, around 2002) - © Vesna Wallace 2005

- 77 Dioramas are common in Russian, Chinese and Mongolian museums; they are one of the display techniques used by the communists to educate the masses.
- 78 The organisation is only partially thematic; the theatre and *tsam* showcases are homogeneous, but the others mix objects of different natures and origins (for instance, diplomatic gifts are exhibited in the same display cases as the vessels used in the monastery).
- 79 Statues that are not worshipped are still viewed as powerful and potentially dangerous. This is why it is a common practice in Buddhist countries such as Japan to temporarily deconsecrate Buddhist icons that are exhibited in secular places or being restored. Another powerful image in Mongolia, the Gur Gombo Mahakala of Erdene zuu, is kept in the storage facility of the Erdene zuu Museum (Övörkhanga)

The rooms provide few or no explanations to visitors, and those I met did not know the religious context in which these objects were used (many artefacts are not used anymore, and modern Mongolians are largely ignorant about Buddhist objects and rituals). However, this lack of explanations is not due to the lack of funding or of curatorial training: the museum was conceived as a collection to be explained by Altangerel himself and he used to guide visitors around and tell them the story of each object. According to interviews with locals in Sainshand, the museum is periodically visited by people of Dornogov' Province to worship Danzanravjaa. Yet there are not many visitors;⁸⁰ over one week in 2018, I only met a few visitors every day.⁸¹ Some of them were Mongolian pilgrims to the Shambhala Energy Centre, but most of the pilgrims I interviewed at Hamar and at the Shambhala Energy Centre did not visit the museum: they came directly by car without visiting Sainshand, stayed only one day, and slept at the *ger* (yurt) camp near Hamar.⁸²

The visitors I met displayed relaxed behaviour; they looked at the objects, read the labels, and tried to decipher the old Mongol script of books; several of them bowed to the funerary stupa and offered small banknotes. During specific periods the museum is animated with religious activities. An internet video shows what probably was the 2008 opening ceremony: people looked at the displays, but in front of the small window of the 'Palace', they lit lamps and burnt incense on the offering table that displayed the Eight Auspicious Symbols and the Seven Jewels of the Chakravartin, turned miniature prayer-wheels, offered banknotes, bowed, and touched the arched window with their foreheads. A mother made her baby bow and offer money.⁸³ On other occasions, Buddhist banners are hung in the rooms.⁸⁴ Buddhist visitors therefore turn into pilgrims at specific moments: for them, religious objects in the museum have not lost their power.⁸⁵ In other Mongolian museums such as Erdene zuu (which has both a religious community and a museum inside temple buildings), believers also worship inside the museum-temples in the same way as they do in a temple, so much so, in fact, that curators have to prevent them from putting milk offerings and touching the display cases with their foreheads (Baatarnan & Lang 2016: 96).

Province). The monastery's abbot complains that because the image is left in the dark without any offerings, it does not protect the Mongolians anymore (Baatarnan & Lang 2016: 95).

80 As with other Mongolian museums, a significant proportion of the visitors are schoolchildren. In the socialist period, Mongolians were 'educated' to visit museums.

81 About 200 people per day visit the museum on holy days (Sodbaatar 2012: 59). Visitors probably are more numerous when great rituals are organised at Hamar and at the Shambhala Energy Centre. The national website of statistics shows an increase in visitor numbers from 4,200 in 2002 to 14,700 in 2019 – which makes an average of 40 visitors a day – for all the museums (the Danzanravjaa and the Provincial museums) and exhibits of Dornogov' Province (Online article: “Музеин үзмер үзэгчдийн тоо, аймаг, бүсээр”).

82 Sainshand is located on the train line, ten hours from Ulaanbaatar, but few pilgrims take the train.

83 See the video: “The opening of Danzan Ravjaa Museum in Sainshand, Mongolia”.

84 Lisa Fink's blog “Under Mongolian blue Sky”: <<https://hellomongolia.typepad.com/photos/ulaanbaatar/dscn1331.html>>; Himalayan Art Resources website: <<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/53200>>.

85 The results of my survey on the sanctity and power of the objects are similar to Birgit Kantzenbach's conclusions. The visitors she met in 2005–2006 also regarded the museum as a religious place, worshiped Danzanravjaa's relics, and mentioned the healing power of some objects (Kantzenbach 2009: 80–81).

Is the modern museum in the continuity of the ancient Display Temple?

Can we call the ancient Display Temple a proto-museum, and can we consider the modern museum a revival of its earlier form? Baatarnaran and Lang (2016: 268) highlighted the fundamental distinction in Mongolian between *burhan shüteen* ('Buddhist images of worship'), and *muzein üzmer* ('museum exhibits') that are supposed to entail "changes in perception, value and attitude toward artefacts".⁸⁶ In my experience, unlike in museums,⁸⁷ Mongol temples, being dedicated to worship, do not exhibit icons in the light, to be seen, and space lighting indeed appears to be the main difference between a temple and a museum.⁸⁸ Although some paintings such as the wheel of reincarnations have a didactic aim, explaining religion to laypeople is not the primary function of temples. When worshipping in a temple, devotees hardly look at the statues' faces: temples are dark, and the largest images are awe-inspiring. Worshippers bow or prostrate to the statues, touch them (when possible) with their forehead, light lamps, and offer donations.⁸⁹ What is important is to personally visit the sacred site and be close to the holy, as prayers are said to be more effective in the presence of the deity, regardless of whether or not it is visible.

However, temples are not the only buildings in Buddhist monasteries. Models of heritage conservation and exhibition other than Western-style museums have always existed in the Buddhist world, and like Christian churches, Buddhist monasteries also have a long history of keeping culture. The existence of proto-museal practices in Buddhist Asia has been underestimated. Like museums, monasteries care for and present original objects that they removed from the mundane world of commodities, develop complex methods of preservation, and create a distance between devotees and objects to prevent them from being touched, by using high pedestals and glass windows.⁹⁰ Like museums, temples do not throw away damaged objects, but these are either restored or stored inside a stupa or a small building, while temples also tend to keep a catalogue of their valuables.⁹¹ They generally have special storage buildings; for instance, Thai monasteries often

86 This was certainly the aim of the museums built in the socialist period that used a whole range of display techniques (text, charts, reproductions, photographs, models, and dioramas) to educate the masses, inculcate visitors with a Marxist interpretation of history, and denounce religion (Paine 2009).

87 I here adopt the definition of the International Council of Museums: "A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, research, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment" (International Council of Museums 2007).

88 Similarly, for Mairesse (2014), the question of space lighting sets the museum, which "aims to provide the public with optimal conditions for legibility of objects," in opposition to the place of worship, in which "darkness sometimes reveals better the sacred dimension of objects".

89 This does not mean that some visitors did not take aesthetic pleasure when looking at images.

90 The analogy between temples or churches and museums, seen as modern sacred places and 'temples of culture', and the sacralisation of heritage, has been highlighted by many authors (Meyer & White 2013; Paine 2013: chapter 7; Buggeln, Paine & Plate 2017; Mairesse 2018). Like priests, curators respect the objects, assign extreme importance to their authenticity, have the authority to interpret them, and control their access and display (or hide them). The lines between museums and religious space are even more blurred when museums are housed inside former temples.

91 Inventories and lists of objects possessed by a temple are called *karchak* in Tibetan, and *dangsa* in Mongolian.

had small rooms that displayed gifts offered to the monastery, as well as “local crafts, or local archaeological finds, *curiosa* collected by the abbot, or collections of Buddha images or amulets” (Gabaude 2003a: 169). They also had display practices. In China, monasteries were places of conservation of both religious and ‘secular’ paintings and calligraphies; monks and literate laity gathered there for aesthetic appreciation practices (Weidner 2009). Japanese Buddhist monasteries stored their valuable holdings, including statuary, relics, and personal items of emperors, in treasure houses (Robson 2010; Rambelli & Reinders 2007: 27).⁹² From the 17th century onwards, they occasionally organised public exhibitions of these objects⁹³ and these practices gave birth to modern public exhibitions (Kornicki 1994).

In pre-socialist Mongolia, monasteries gathered collections in three kinds of buildings: temples open to lay worshippers; private shrines (*Nandin*), for the most precious statues, which were generally closed to worshippers and even to ordinary monks, and only open on special occasions⁹⁴; and ‘treasuries’.⁹⁵ The private collections of reincarnated lamas were shown only to a lucky few,⁹⁶ but there were also instances of public displays of images in the capital that were reminiscent of modern-day exhibitions (Tsultemin 2020: 214).

The Display Temple of Hamar Monastery therefore does not appear to be an exception and may be compared with other museum-like buildings of Buddhist Asia. In Mongolia, this was the structure closest to a modern museum: it publicly exhibited its collection, was open to all with an educational aim, and used complex techniques of conservation. It exhibited both consecrated objects of worship and non-religious objects, including natural items. We do not know whether these objects were exhibited differently – with incense, lamps, and offerings in front of the statues for instance –, nor whether rituals were performed in front of them. The fact that the building was called *sūm* (‘temple’), points to its hybrid nature, and we can assume that sacred images did not lose their religious status and power inside the temple.

The Display Temple was a ‘museum-temple’, while the modern museum is a religious museum. Because it is located in town and is not under the abbot’s authority, the

92 The most famous example is the Shōsō-in 正倉院, treasure building of the Tōdai Monastery 東大寺 of Nara, built in the 8th century, which stored more than 3,000 objects, including foreign objects which arrived via the Silk Roads, collected by the emperors (Robson 2010). Nowadays in Japan, many treasure-houses effectively function as museums, with entry charges, showcases, and labels.

93 These public exhibitions, called *kaichō* 開帳, ‘opening of the curtain’, were aimed at advertising the temple and raising funds (as well as at airing paintings and manuscripts and inspecting them for mould or pests). They were the occasion of public fairs and outdoor attractions and performances (*misemono* 見世物, lit. ‘things for showing’).

94 *Nandin* shrines are reminiscent of temples of modern Japan, in which the most sacred statues are usually hidden from lay view and only displayed on special occasions, or never at all (Rambelli 2002: 292).

95 In Mongolia, monastic treasuries (*jas*, *san*) stored perishable and non-perishable objects received as offerings (monk’s clothes, carpets, silk, silver), products for trade, religious implements, books, and other valuable objects.

96 The Eighth Bogd Gegeen kept in a Russian style building of his Winter Palace a personal collection of objects and stuffed animals, akin to the imperial *Kunstkamera* tradition of the curiosity cabinet. Confiscated in 1925, it was turned into a museum, the Bogd Haan Palace Museum.

Danzanravjaa Museum is no longer the monastery's museum. However, Altangerel, as the descendant of the first *tabilch*, claims continuity with the past,⁹⁷ and the museum shares the same aim as the ancient Display Temple: to preserve and promote the unique collection of about 1,500 objects centred on one lineage and its monastery. The 19th-century *tabilch*'s vows specified that the collection belonged to all Mongols. Because the collection belongs to the nation and could not be returned to the monastery, Altangerel built a museum instead of housing the collection in a temple.⁹⁸ Altangerel was not a monk, and in secularised Mongolia, the *tabilch* function had taken on the meaning of 'curator'. The monastery had to be rebuilt on its former powerful place, but the museum was located in the city to reach a larger audience.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to show that Lang and Tsetsentsolmon (2020: 268–269)'s assertion of the strict separation between museum exhibits and temples' Buddhist images of worship must be revisited. Built after 1990, the Danzanravjaa Museum is not a socialist-style secular museum but claims continuity with the Display Temple. It does not especially encourage visitors to show devotion, but the 'Palace' with the funerary stupa, the locked *Tabilch*'s room, and the fact that the space turns into a temple on special occasions show the ambiguity of its nature. It is not entirely public since only 'special visitors' can visit (and worship in) the locked room. Like the ancient Display Temple, the real nature of the museum is hybrid, reflecting the dual meaning of *tabilch* as lama in charge of sacrificial offerings, and also curator. More generally in Asia, museums are often not purely secular institutions, at least in the eyes of devotees.⁹⁹ As seen above, in Tibetan and Mongol Buddhism, material spaces (places, persons, relics, images, etc.) are considered to be enlivened with enlightened presence. Devotees seek contact and proximity with the incarnate lama, or his bodily or contact relics, with Buddhist statues, stupas, inner sanctums, and pilgrimage places. Although some special images are said to 'liberate upon/through Seeing',¹⁰⁰ Buddhist blessings are primarily transmitted through the sense of touch; devotees prostrate to touch the sacred ground and sacred items in order to augment merit and blessing, and purify themselves; they touch display cases with their foreheads if they do not have access to the objects.¹⁰¹ Religious objects have not lost their power in the museum.

97 "The Danzanravjaa Museum is in fact what the 'Display Temple' of Hamar Monastery used to be in the past even though it is located at some distance from the home monastery today" (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 10).

98 Altangerel was initially criticised for having appropriated Danzanravjaa's treasure for himself ("is it Altangerel's property or Ravjaa's heritage?"), because in 1990, nobody understood the function of *tabilch* (Sodbaatar 2012: 59).

99 For many accounts of religious behaviour in (secular) museums, see Paine 2013: chapters 2 & 6; Buggeln, Paine & Plate 2017. Some modern Western museums now allow and even encourage visitors to show devotion and go as far as building shrines and organising rituals inside museums (Paine 2013: chapter 2 & 3; Buggeln, Paine & Plate 2017, especially Roberts 2017).

100 If one merely looks at one of these special images such as the Jowo Shakyamuni of Lhasa, he or she will achieve immediate awakening and liberation from suffering, a favourable rebirth, or rebirth in a Buddhist paradise.

101 On the importance of the sense of touch in Mongol religious practices, see Charleux 2015: 340–342.

The museum and Buddhist heritage therefore play a performative role in the creation of individual and collective identities. In Thailand and Burma, one commonly sees visitors bowing to statues or touching them with their foreheads and giving offerings to them. The Danzanravjaa Museum can be compared with other Asian 'Buddhist museums' that combine museum exhibits and shrines, such as the Buddha Tooth Relic Temple-Museum in Singapore or the Ōkura Shūkōkan Museum in Tokyo,¹⁰² as well as museums located in Buddhist monasteries in other Asian countries. The wax figure of Danzanravjaa, for example, recalls statue-portraits of Thai saints depicted in their most familiar mood and attitude, surrounded by their contact relics, in their stupa-relic museum of Thailand (Gabaude 2003a: 278; 2003b: 116). Buddhist museums commonly exhibit relics that were previously hidden inside stupas, including objects from daily life.¹⁰³ Another point of comparison is how, in modern secular China, temples came to function like museums, and shrines and ancestral halls have been rebuilt under the appellation of cultural centres and museums, as a strategy for reviving religious practices under the guise of culture (Robson 2010).

The Danzanravjaa Museum is no longer the monastery's museum, but it is part of the Danzanravjaa promotional project and is a station of the pilgrimage, to worship Danzanravjaa's funerary stupa and the statue of Padmasambhava (although most pilgrims to Shambhala skip this 'station'). The most sacred object, the Padmasambhava statue, is shared between the museum and the monastery, and is worshipped as a religious icon in both places. There were no conflicts between the museum and the monastery over the restitution of Buddhist artefacts, as was the case elsewhere in Mongolia after 1990, especially when temples turned into museums were revived by religious communities (Charleux 2016: 20; Baatarnaran & Lang 2016: 96). This was likely because Altangerel is at the origin of the rebuilding of both the monastery and the museum.¹⁰⁴ The Danzanravjaa Museum is a highly personified museum around the key figure of Altangerel who served as a guide and the main interpreter of the collection and used to mediate the relationship between the visitor and the objects. Altangerel received oral transmission from Tüdev and oracular instructions from the local deity; he was the legitimate heir and 'embodied' Danzanravjaa's heritage: he was the tradition and took his role very seriously. As Peter Morrow (2002) wrote, "If Danzanravjaa is a Mongolian national treasure so is Altangerel."

102 McDaniel (2017: chapter 3) studies the rise of Buddhist museums in contemporary Asia and concludes that "Buddhist museums are neither a series of neatly configured display cases, perfectly presenting a linear narrative of Buddhist history, nor propaganda tools of profit-minded religious visionaries" (2017: 161).

103 Louis Gabaude, who studied museums that exhibit relics of famous monks inside monasteries of Thailand, remarks that "never in our wildest dreams could we imagine venerating a saint's toothpick or admiring his spittoon" (Gabaude 2003a: 169). "The stupa-museum shows Buddhahood in action, Buddhahood here and now, Buddhahood visible, as solid as crystal" (2003a: 281). See also Koanantakool 2006.

104 As V. Wallace reported to me, Altangerel and those around him – his relatives, Konchog lama, the old abbot of Hamar Monastery, the monks and nuns of Hamar, the lady working in the museum – "all are like one family".

After Altangerel's death, no one seems to be committed to Danzanravjaa's heritage anymore, and despite all the efforts he made, the place is now neglected, and the museum lacks sufficient resources. The *ger* camp and the entrance tickets of the Shambhala Energy Centre and the museum only bring a small income. The Kalachakra Temple that Altangerel planned to construct in the centre of the Shambhala complex was never built. Most of the monks who were sent to study in India did not come back to Hamar. Although he was trained to become the next *tahilch*, Altangerel's son Altan-Ochir (b.1991) runs his own business and is not eager to carry on the tradition.¹⁰⁵ The current Noyon *butagt* (Ninth), Danzan Luvsan Tüdev (b. 1984), lives in Ulaanbaatar and does not show interest in Danzanravjaa's heritage in the Gobi.¹⁰⁶ The future of the Danzanravjaa undertaking is uncertain, and it is possible that with a new curator, the museum could sever its link to Hamar Monastery and become a more secular place.

Altangerel's training and the Danzanravjaa museum collection are examples of the 'underground' continuity of some Buddhist practices throughout 70 years of socialism (See Shimamura 2000). After 1990, Buddhism was revitalised, and now flourishes in the capital. But in the Gobi, as in other parts of the countryside, the Buddhist clergy generally fails to attract sponsors sustainably, and young local monks who go to Ulaanbaatar, where they find a better religious education and stable income, often do not return to their countryside temple. Many countryside monasteries that reopened in the early 1990s eventually closed in the late 2000s due to a lack of funding, or when their old master passed away.¹⁰⁷ With its Shambhala Energy Centre that attracts Buddhists and syncretistic religious movements, and its museum collection, Hamar and Danzanravjaa's heritage nevertheless have better prospects than other countryside monasteries.

These blurred frontiers between the museum and the temple, and between the curator and the ritual officiant,¹⁰⁸ are related to the blurring of the frontier between the religious and the profane in the Shambhala pilgrimage, where tourist-pilgrims and pilgrim-tourists now give importance to experience and practice over belief, and to pragmatic over soteriological benefits. This seems to confirm that François Gauthier (2020)'s provocative theory of the entanglement of the religious and the profane linked with the blurring of the public and private social spheres, the

105 V. Wallace, personal communication; see also his interview with Lhagvadorj 2020. The museum and the Shambhala Energy Centre are a family business. The *ger* camp near Hamar belongs to Altangerel's family, and his daughter Enhtsetseg worked for the museum, the monastery, and the tourist organisation, while his brother Bayarsaihan runs the Dharma store attached to the museum that sells incense and Buddhist items.

106 The Eighth Noyon *hutagt*, Agvaan Samdan Jamts (b. ca. 1931, died during World War II), lived in Inner Mongolia and was not officially recognised. The Ninth was recognised by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in 2013 and enthroned in Néchung Monastery; he studied in the Gomang Monastic College of Drepung, a *Gélukpa* monastery in India, and also studied with *Kagyü* and *Nyingma* masters, according to the non-sectarian spirit of Danzanravjaa. He now lives a quiet life in an apartment in Ulaanbaatar.

107 Krisztina Teleki (2009) counted that almost half of all temples founded after the democratic change have become inactive by now.

108 To mention another recent example of the entanglement between exhibited heritage and religion in Mongolia: during an academic conference on sacrifices to Chinggis Khan organised on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition on 'Chinggis Khaan cult portraits' in December 2018, monks from Gandan Monastery read incense-offering texts to Chinggis Khan. See: "Chinggis haany san' hemeeh nomyg mongol heleer unshiv" 2018.

subjectification, and the ‘immanentisation’ of religion in the neo-liberal age of the global market, can also be applied to Mongolia. Reader (2014), Bruntz and Schedneck (2020), and other authors have shown how Buddhism creatively engages with modernity and extends its influence towards the secular sphere in several parts of Asia.¹⁰⁹ Religion is back in the public sphere and has come out of the ‘box’ in which it was locked up during socialist times.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

(1a) Tibetan phonetic and Wylie transcriptions (see page 213)

(1b) Sanskrit transcriptions (see page 214)

Appendix 2:

The main artefacts exhibited in the Danzanravjaa Museum

(see pages 215-221).

109 For a Mongolian example, see Charleux 2021.

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1a. Tibetan phonetic and Wylie transcriptions

<i>ache lhamo</i>	<i>a lce lhamo</i>
Bardo	Bar do
Changkya Yéshé Tenpé Gyeltsen	lCang skya Ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan
<i>chöd</i>	<i>gcod</i>
Drepung	'Bras spungs
<i>Dzogchen</i>	<i>rDzogs chen</i>
<i>Gélukpa</i>	<i>dGe lugs pa</i>
<i>gawaten</i>	<i>dga'ba brtan</i>
<i>gewa tenpa rapgyé</i>	<i>dge ba bstan pa rab rgyas</i>
<i>gewaten</i>	<i>dge ba brtan</i>
Gomang	sGo mang
<i>gönnyer</i>	<i>dgon gnyer</i>
<i>jinlap</i>	<i>byin rlabs</i>
Jowo	Jo bo
<i>Kagyüpa</i>	<i>bKa'brgyud pa</i>
<i>karchak</i>	<i>dkar chag</i>
Kathog	Kah thog
<i>ling</i>	<i>gling</i>
Milarépa	Mi la ras pa
<i>nangten</i>	<i>nang brten</i>
Néchung	gNas chung
<i>Nyingmapa</i>	<i>rNying ma pa</i>
<i>nyönpa</i>	<i>smyon pa</i>
<i>rapgyé</i>	<i>rab rgyas</i>
<i>terma</i>	<i>gter ma</i>
<i>tertön</i>	<i>gter ston</i>
<i>thangka</i>	<i>thang ka</i>

Appendix 1b. Sanskrit transcriptions

<i>adhishthana</i>	<i>adhiṣṭhāna</i>
Avalokiteshvara	Avalokiteśvara
Chakravartin	Cakravartin
<i>chintamani</i>	<i>cintāmaṇi</i>
<i>dakini</i>	<i>ḍākinī</i>
<i>damaru</i>	<i>ḍamaru</i>
<i>dharani</i>	<i>dhāraṇī</i>
Ekajati	Ekajaṭī
Garuda	Garuḍa
Hayagriva	Hayagrīva
Kalachakra	Kālacakra
Mahakala	Mahākāla
<i>mahasiddha</i>	<i>mahāsiddha</i>
Manjushri	Mañjuśrī
<i>puja</i>	<i>pūjā</i>
<i>sadhana</i>	<i>sādhana</i>
Sarasvati	Sarasvatī
Shakyamuni	Śākyamuni
stupa	stūpa
Tara	Tārā
Tushita	Tuṣita
Vajrayana	Vajrayāna

Appendix 2

The main artefacts exhibited in the Danzanravjaa Museum

Seven objects from Danzanravjaa's collection are officially described by the Cultural Heritage Centre as 'national cultural objects of unique value' to the Mongol nation. These are the Padmasambhava statue and the manuscripts of the 'Moon Cuckoo', the seal of Danzanravjaa, the skull-cup (*kapāla*) on a silver pedestal (Fig. 12b), the rosary offered by the Dalai Lama, the velvet hat of the Noyon *hutagt* used by Danzanravjaa during his enthronement ceremony, and a small gold buddha statue in its amulet case (Kantzenbach 2009: 86–87, figs 18 & 103; Appendix 3: State registered objects).

The museum has more than 2,000 objects and exhibits about 20% of its collection. Works on paper, documents, and costumes on display are often changed. See the catalogues: Tsagaan & Altangerel, s. d. (1990s); Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013. Four *thangkas* depicting *dākinīs* were published in Fleming & Lkhagvademchig Shastri (eds 2011: cat. 306, 308, 309); these are preserved in the storerooms of the museum. Why only these three *thangkas*, which are not representative of Danzanravjaa's collection, were chosen to be published in this catalogue of 441 *thangkas*, appliqués and embroideries qualified as 'masterpieces of Mongolian Buddhist art' is unclear to me.

Tibetan terms are given in both phonetic transcription (between square brackets) and transliteration following the Wylie system.

FIRST FLOOR

Wall:

1) Modern painting of Danzanravjaa (20th century);
2) Series of 24 paintings of the pre-incarnations of the Noyon *hutagt* lineage. It includes Amitābha and Vajradhara, *yidams* [yidam], Hayagrīva, Begtse [Beg tse], *bodhisattvas*, *mahāsiddhas* (including Kukuripa), and several *Kagyūpas*, *Sakyapa*, *Nyingmapa* and *Gelukpa* masters including the Fourth Karmapa Lama Rolpé Dorjé ([Rol pa'i rdo rje], 1340–1383, 22nd incarnation). Some of them are well-known historical figures, such as the 15th-century yogin Tsangnyön [gTsang smyon] Heruka. For a complete list of these incarnations, see Kohn 2010: 230; Wallace 2017.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 61–72.
- > In the article, see **Figure 7**.

3) Painting depicting the First Mongol Noyon *hutagt* Agvaangongchig (1622–1704), topped by Vajrabhairava.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 74.

Showcases:

1) Three personal objects: 1° A swan made of glass; 2° A seal with a scorpion design in a lozenge surrounded by four *vajras*; 3° A small golden statue of Tārā. These three objects of Danzanravjaa are explained by a poem he wrote: "The mother is a symbol of mankind; The swan is a symbol of lyrics; The scorpion is a symbol of philosophy" (*Eh hūn bol hūn törölhtnii bilig temdeg; Hun shuvuu uyangyn bilig temdeg; Digvaranz horhoig gün uhaany bilig temdeg*) (Tsagaan & Altangerel ca. 1991: 54). The scorpion is well-known as Danzanravjaa's symbol of wisdom; Danzanravjaa called his mother a swan, and often mentioned swans in his writings. The swan is also the mount of Sarasvatī, goddess of arts, music, and wisdom. In Tibet, the scorpion is a common symbol among the *Nyingmapas* and it confers protection.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 36.

2) Items used by his 'father' Dulduit: A flint, an axe, an green glassed flask, a *duldui*, an amulet in a box. A *duldui* (Skt. *khakkhara*) is a mendicant's rattling staff with rings; a *dulduichin (lam)* is a religious mendicant carrying a *duldui* who used to read prayers in exchange for money or gifts in kind. The rings of the *duldui* announced the visit of the mendicant; it was also used for rituals. The name of Danzanravjaa's father (or, more likely his mother), Dulduit (contraction of *duduichin*?) was a nickname.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 18.

3) Artefacts of the Children's College: 1° Manuals for Buddhist art lessons (in Tibetan); manuals for learning the Mongolian alphabet and Lantsa script; the text 'Tale of the paper bird' (*Tsaasan shuvuuny ülger*) in Mongolian written in Tibetan script; the 'Alphabet for teaching and memorising the Law of Living' which gives instructions on language and grammar; a text of astrological charts; an 'Eyes analysing chart' manual (*Melmii shinjih hürd*); a manual 'The mirror of animate and inanimate world' (*Sav shim yertöntsiiin tol*); a book that presents tongue and throat signs for singers; other books in Tibetan and Manchu (some of them bilingual); a stamp certifying graduation; drawings to learn iconometry, and *tsakli* cards (Tib. *tsakali* [tʃa ka li], miniature paintings); 2° Tools used in the Children's College, such as a chart wheel for calculation; an ash board; writing brushes and pens; ink slabs; seals; a marble board for writing; porcelain cups for paints; 3° Instruments for calculating teachers' salaries; a token given in lieu of a sheep as salary; and a ruler for measurement; 4° Other artefacts that have no connection with the school: a mould for making cheese (*aruul*) and offering pastries (classified in the catalogue as a personal item of Danzanravjaa); moulds for making *tsats* (Tib. *tsatsa* [tʃa tʃa], small clay images made using moulds); amulets and their block-prints.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 16, 30–39.

Individual showcase: Danzanravjaa's chessboard.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 39.

Showcase 'Medicine':

Mongolian medical texts; medical tools; various medicines in leather bags; a box of medicines made of an elephant bone and of dinosaur eggs; a stone pestle used for preparing medicines; porcelain jars; spoons for measuring medicine; scales; a petrified dinosaur's egg.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 40–41.

SECOND FLOOR

ENTRANCE ROOM

Showcase dedicated to the *tahilch*:

1) Portrait painting of Tüdev (Fig. 2); photograph of him and his family; crates;
2) Manuscript text of the vow of the first *tahilch* mounted as a *thangka* (Fig. 5);
3) Brass statue of a secret tantra deity (*nuuts tarniin бүтэлийн бурхан*, depicted naked in *yapyum* [yab yum] (sexual union) with his consort; he has an ascetic topknot held by a skull crown). Although his attributes are missing, he can probably be identified as *mahāsiddha* Ghantapa (Fig. 18a) (I thank Kunsang Namgyal-Lama for this identification).

4) A tripod container for ember used in a temple; moulds for making *tsats*; a small pot with a lid; a *kapāla*-like bowl; a gong; a Tibetan-style brass jar (*dombo*).

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 39, 48, 51, 80, 104–105.

> In the article, see Figures 5, 8, and 18a.

Thangkas [thang ka]:

1) A large vertical painting featuring a female form of Mañjuśrī (?) holding a book and brandishing a sword, riding on a snow lion; below, Guandi (warrior deity of Chinese origin) on a red horse followed by an attendant; in the bottom of the picture is a monastery composed of a three-storey temple, a stupa, and various other temples (Fig. 9);

- 2) A small, simple *thangka* of Yama and his consort; a small *thangka* of Vaiśravaṇa (*Namsarai*) on his snow lion; a *thangka* of Eye-healing Avalokiteśvara (Mo. Megjid Janraisig);
- 3) A small painting depicting a red-coloured deity riding a billy-goat –The deity looks like a *mamo* [ma mo], ‘grand-mother’, female demon) and is naked except for a loincloth. The figure is wearing a five-skull *dharmapāla* crown, brandishes a spear and holding a severed heart, and his/her body is covered with necklaces and jewellery. He/she can be identified with Yolhoi *sahius*, oracular deity and master-spirit of the land tamed by Danzanravjaa at the 108 caves, who became a protector deity of the place. In addition to this *thangka*, Yolhoi *sahius* is depicted as a male figure on a painting at the caves: he is of a red colour, has three eyes and the wrathful appearance of a *dharmapāla*, wears a red gown, holds a spear in his right hand and a heart in his left hand, and rides on a billy goat with crossed horns resembling that of Garwa Nagpo (Tib.) [mGar ba nag po], (Mo. Damjangerwa, Dorjé Lekpa [rDo rje legs pa]’s emanation). Garwa Nagpo, deity of blacksmiths, who belongs to the retinue of the oracle deity Pehar [Pe har], is very popular in Mongolia. See also the *thangka* that depicts Danzanravjaa as a yogi (Fig. 19a).

Individual showcase:

A scale model of the Shambhala Energy Centre showing the temple in the middle as a Chinese-style octagonal building covered with green tiles (which has not been built).

- > In the article, see Figure 9.

MAIN ROOM

Showcase on the right side of the door:

- 1) A rug to put at the entrance of a house or yurt that had belonged to the Noyon *hutagt*, decorated with three dragons;
- 2) Articles used in the monastery’s treasure house (*jas*): two terracotta jars for barley used by Danzanravjaa, a Chinese hot-pot, a round pot used when practicing (meditation) in a secluded place, a large metal basin, a stool;
- 3) Two items from the Children’s College: Chinese-style measuring scales made of bamboo, and wooden containers for measuring rice and barley as the teachers’ salary;
- 4) Two *thangkas*: Yama (Erlig han) and his consort on a bull with many attendants, six-armed Mahākāla on a black background with attendants;
- 5) Blockprints;
- 6) A modern painting of the reincarnation’s palace (*gegeentui örgöö*) of Hamar Monastery.
 - > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 37, 44, 48.
 - > In the article, see Figure 10.

Showcase of Danzanravjaa’s personal objects:

- 1) Objects from Danzanravjaa’s childhood: shirt, jacket, curious metal toys (a small horse, a human figure with a hole in the middle, and a small metal stick with a fish), cymbals (also for playing according to the label);
- 2) Items used by Danzanravjaa during his enthronement ceremony: a round velvet hat, a skull *damaru* (Mo. *damar*, hand double-headed drum made of two *kapālas*), a *vajra* and a bell, a ewer (*bumba*) with a peacock’s feather; a *kapāla* (Mo. *gabal*)-like bowl with a lid, another bowl with a lid used for offering barley (Fig. 12a);
- 3) Other ritual objects: a skull-cup (*kapāla*) bordered with silver on a silver pedestal decorated with dragons (discovered in the 2009 excavations, Fig. 12b), jade dice for divination, his personal *vajra* and bell, a ritual flaying knife (*katika*, Mo. *degür*) with a golder *vajra*-handle (The catalogue also reproduces three gold, silver, and jade bowls for sacred water (*rashaan*) used by Danzanravjaa for inner offerings);
- 4) A stone sculpture made by Danzanravjaa, called ‘a practitioner in a secluded place’ (*aglagt bui dayanch*), a small metal box enshrining a painted mandala of *Kālacakra* that served for the construction of the Shambhala Energy Centre, a small gold buddha statue in its amulet case (*guu*, <Tib. *gau* [ga’u]), a golden stupa, a golden ewer and two jade glasses, a whistle;
- 5) A book entitled *Shinjiin sudar* that explains the signs for recognizing the reincarnation of a *hutagt*;

6) A curious square-shaped treasury seal (*sangiin tamga*) with a big handle composed of various materials (Fig. 12c: from top to bottom: a metal triangular top decorated with the *triratna* (three jewels symbol), two layers of cloth with (probably four) metal medallions, the front one representing a *cintāmaṇi*, a white stone plaque representing Machik Labdrön [Ma gcig lab sgron] (11th–12th century), and a kind of reversed dark wrathful mask). The white stone plaque may come from a *tsam* costume bone apron. This strange object (evoking the shamanic *ongon* figurines) certainly had a special value. The seal, in Mongolian and Tibetan, writes: “Noyan corji blam-a-yin sangi (?) *on-u*(?) *temdeg* / [No yon chos rje bla ma’i na[ng]’i them deg]” (Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 19);

7) A large seal box: The collection also includes the banner official seal of the Noyon *hutagt* to administer his *shav* (‘disciples’, lay population of the monastic banner);

8) Items used by Danzanravjaa and probably by his following incarnations: the ‘Lovon hat worn by the Noyon *hutagt*’ (*slob dpon*, teacher, common epithet of Padmasambhava, Fig. 12a); a wooden tantric crown consisting of five leaves each decorated with a skull; various ritual instruments: a sandalwood *ḍamaru* with bone decorations; a *khaṭvāṅga* (tantric staff with skulls engraved on the body); small boxes for substances used in tantric rituals (*zai*); a sandalwood-carved *purba* (Tib. *purwa* [phuba], Skt. *kīla*, Mo. *pūrev*, ritual dagger); a steel *purba*; a metal *ḍamaru*; a hand prayer-wheel; tantric musical instruments; a *ganlin* (Tib. *kangling* [rkang gling]) horn (made of human femur – the ganlin horn is a type of trumpet that was traditionally made from the femur of a 16-year-old virgin girl) inscribed with *dhāraṇīs*; three horns used in tantric rituals or in reciting spells (*tunraa*, <Tib. *tünra* [thun ra]) – one is made of ox horn, the two others seem to be made of wood and metal –; a rod (*suntag*) with a *vajra* and silk scarf (*hadag*) used for blessing; fire *pūjā* spoons (*jinsregiin halbaga*);

9) Statuettes: a brass statuette of dancing Machig Labdrön ([Ma gcig lab sgron], holding a *ḍamaru* in her right hand and a bell in her left); a small brass image of Padmasambhava; a small metal statue of a *mahāsiddha* holding a bell (probably Ghantapa (<Tib. Drilbupa [Dril bu pa]); two small brass sculptures of deer (that should have surrounded the *dharmā* wheel);

10) A large pot topped with a *triratna* (three jewels) symbol; three delicately carved white stone plates representing wrathful deities, – the central one being Yama – (elements of a *tsam* costume? See the treasury seal *supra*); a lozenge cloth with a *visvajra* (double thunderbolt); various pots and ewers; a metal offering object with a parasol, two fishes and a wheel; two amulet boxes; a metal basin with a foot; a terracotta jar; a table made from a root; and a wooden table and a stool;

11) Other personal items of the Noyon *hutagt* are reproduced in the catalogue but are not exhibited, such as a substitute figure (*zoliḡ*) used in tantric rituals (composed of a cloth human figure on a stick); a carved steel club transmitted from India and Tibet with silk scarves attached to it; and a belt decorated with metal plates and two mice;

12) This display case also shows a hand prayer-wheel (*hüird*) identified in the catalogue as an item used by Danzanravjaa’s ‘father’ (the other artefacts having belonged to his father are displayed on the first floor – according to Kunsang Namgyal-Lama, this prayer-wheel looks like those used by *Nyingmapas* in Kham); and a metal stupa supported by four wrathful figures (discovered in the 2009 excavation, Fig. 12d).

13) Two large modern drawings illustrating a feast and a ritual.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 7, 13–21, 36–37, 89.

> In the article, see Figures 11 & 12.

Showcase with articles used in Hamar Monastery’s Treasure House, and gifts:

1) A fire screen (*galyn halb*); a silver mandala (*bot mandal*) of Tamdrin Yansan yadam (Hayagrīva; Fig. 14a; see Sardar 2007: 268) used during the enthronement of the Noyon *hutagt*; a three-dimensional Sūmeru (Mount Sumeru) with the twelve continents; a wooden print-block to print circular amulets; a print-block for wind-horse (*hiimor*) banners (for racing horses); a pile of print-blocks; wooden print-blocks for the *Badmagatan* (*Padma bka’i thang yig*) and a print of the same text with Tibetan gold letters (Fig. 14d, 216 woodblocks were preserved); eight symbols mixing some of the Eight Auspicious Symbols and of the Seven Jewels of the *cakravartin*; offering cups; a horse saddle of the Noyon *hutagt* decorated with yellow cloth (colour of the *Gelukpa* church);

2) Non-religious items from the Treasure House: a casket of books used as a pillow; Tibetan-style silver jars (*dombo*); brass ewers for sacred water. In this category, the catalogue also has a stick with a *svastika*-shaped brand (*tamga*) to mark livestock;

3) Gifts offered by high-ranking lamas and officials, that were central to Danzanravjaa's Display Temple. The items exhibited are a Chinese-style jade Buddha statue offered in 1842 by the Dalai Lama; a wooden statue of Milarépa [Mi la ras pa], 1052–1135 from the *amban* of Tibet; a porcelain statue (Fig. 14c: Guanyin?) from a Qing minister; a Chinese wooden print-blocks depicting a pantheon from the *zasag* lam of Yonghegong monastery in Beijing (Fig. 14b); a rosary made from human skull, inlaid with nine precious jewels, accompanied with a golden *vajra* and a *purba*, offered by the Dalai Lama (studied by Kantzenbach 2009); and a sabre from a Japanese disciple;

4) A small statue of Vajradāka (Mo. Sanjodhand; Tib. Dorjé Khandro [rDo rje mkha' 'gro]);

5) A large horizontal modern drawing depicts the travels of Danzanravjaa and his retinue, including his consorts in carts.

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 42–43, 45–50, 79.

> In the article, see Figures 13 & 14.

Separate, small showcase:

Two tantric five-leaves crown, musical instruments, various items and *thangkas*;

A small large metal basin stands alone.

Showcase of artefacts related to the theatre:

1) Original manuscripts of the texts used for the play of the “Moon Cuckoo;”

2) Manuscripts of poems and other writings by Danzanravjaa;

3) A small (silver?) statue (*shüteen*) of Sarasvatī, goddess of arts and music, on a swan, to whom was dedicated the play (*namtar jigjgiin shüüten*, Fig. 15a), placed in a *guu* box (discovered in the 2009 excavation);

4) Three actors' costumes (Fig. 15c). They are large colourful silk gowns with a large cloud collar and oversize sleeves, decorated with embroideries and semi-precious stones. One of them, for an actor playing a main role, has a bone 'apron', while one has rows of skulls decorating the flap, sleeves and belt;

5) A blue costume for a female character (silk *deel*, jacket, boots, pearl headdress, black veil for the face, and five-leaf crown) of a tantric practitioner for Dadishuari (Fig. 15d);

6) A hat for Samantabhadra in the 'Moon Cuckoo';

7) Yellow boots for a child, with a cuckoo's head at the tip and an embroidered image of a dragon at the top, worn by the young actor who played the cuckoo, Nomunbayasgalan;

8) A whip to punish offending actors; a sword used for the role of the soldier of King Ladram (Tib. Langdarma [gLang dar ma]), a gun, a silk shirt, containers for theatre make-up (see Kohn 2010: 61XX);

9) A gong and various musical instruments (conch shells, cymbals, big drum for signalling scene changes, *kangling* horn);

10) A large painting of *ganzai* (<Tib. *kangdzé* [bskangs rdzas]) by Danzanravjaa dated 1832 according to the label; it represents the central deity (Namsarai/Vaiśravaṇa?) in a Chinese-style palace and a galloping horse carrying a *cintāmaṇi*, surrounded by a large retinue and many symbols (Eight Auspicious Symbols, Seven Jewels of the *Cakravartin*, *Kālacakra* symbol, ...).

> Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 22–29.

> In the article, see Figures 15a, 15c, 15d.

Individual showcase: A scale model of the theatre building.

> In the article, see Figure 15b.

Showcase of ritual costumes and *tsam* dances:

1) A complete costume and mask of a red protector (Begtse?), with large flags decorated with skulls on the reverse (Fig. 16a);

2) Costume of a red-faced protector wearing a crown;

3) Costume of the female local lord Ulaan albin (Fig. 16b);

4) A large coral mask and a bronze mask of protectors of the doctrine; other masks and robes; musical instruments: a large trumpet, a large drum, and two small trumpets.

> In the article, see Figure 16.

Separate showcase:

A silk dress with a metal and bone apron, and a silver hat with a wrathful protector's head, a skull, and a *vajra* (Fig. 18b). This costume is said to be used in specific tantric rituals. The silver hat is like the ritual hat of the Eighth Jebtsündamba kept in the Bogd haan Palace (Béguin & Dashbaldan 1993: 214, fig. 4), and evokes the hat of the Black Hats tantrist dancers (Tib. *shanag* [zhwa nag]) who dance in the *tsam*, and the hat of oracle lamas.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 52–53.
- > In the article, see Figure 18b.

The Palace of precious objects of worship (*Nandin shüteenii örgöö*):

1) A wax statue of Danzanravjaa sitting on a chair, topped by an honorific multi-coloured canopy (*shüher*) (Fig. 17a);

2) On the chair's arms are placed a snuff-bottle, ritual instruments, and an ewer with peacock feathers;

3) Two stupas on an elephant statue are on the right and left sides of the wax statue;

4) Two black standards stand behind;

5) In front of the wax statue is an offering table with a Chinese-style incense burner;

6) In the foreground is the golden funerary stupa that enshrines Danzanravjaa's ashes, with a rosary on its 'neck';

7) To the right and left of it are two large *tormas* [gtor ma] (flour and butter sacrificial cakes), including a stupa-shaped *torma*;

8) In front of the stupa, there is an offering table with the Eight Auspicious Symbols;

9) Two lateral altars with Buddha images and miscellaneous objects (small metal statues of Mañjuśrī and of two monks; a scale model of the Mahābodhi temple of Bodhgayā, three-dimensional offering mandalas, bowls, a *damaru*, prayer-wheels); the left one has a Chinese-like temple architecture topped by the two deer surrounding the dharma wheel;

10) Decoration of the room includes wall-hangings depicting heads of wrathful protectors bordered by skulls; silk banners (*badan*, <Tib. *badang* [ba dang], long, broad bands sewn together and made from material in five colours), and a carpet decorated with an endless knot.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 8–9.
- > In the article, see Figure 17.

Along the north wall:

In front of the 'Palace': the statue of four-armed Avalokiteśvara;

Three large drawings of female deities of offerings against the wall.

- > In the article, see Figure 17a.

In the *Tabilch* room:

1) The statue of Ten Thousand Knives Padmasambhava (*Tümen mesnii Lovon Badamsambava*). He is sitting in *lalitāsana*, holds a *vajra* in his right hand while making the gesture of the annihilation of obstacles, has a *kapāla* in its left hand, and cradles a *khaṭvāṅga* in the crook of his left elbow. He wears a strange, coloured apron with the face of a wrathful deity. His hat is topped by a half-*vajra* surmounted by the three eagle feathers that look like the *triratna* symbol;

2) A silk embroidery of Begtse (Mo. Begts, Ulaan Sahius);

3) A *thangka* depicts a naked Danzanravjaa as an ascetic wearing a tiger skin as loincloth and a five-skull crown; he holds a *damaru* in his right hand and a *kapāla* in his left and is crossing his legs (Fig. 19a). At the top of the *thangka*, we see Samantabhadra (Tib. Küntu Zangpo [Kun tu bzang po]) and his consort, and the central figure is surrounded by 27 other characters identified with red inscriptions. Among them, Padmasambhava (Tib. Urgyen Padma Jungné [U rgyan padma 'byung gnas]), Shri Singha (Śrī Siṃha, teacher of Padmasambhava), Vajrasattva (Tib. Dorjé Sempa [rDo rje sems dpa']), Yéshé Tsogyel [Ye shes mtsho rgyal], Garap Dorjé ([dGa' rab rdo rje], first human master of *Dzogchen*), Langdro Könchok Jungné ([Lang gro dkon mchog 'byung gnas], one of Padmasambhava's disciples), several 17th and 18th-century clerics of Kathog [Ka' thog] Monastery in Kham (Eastern Tibet): Dudul Dorjé ([bDud 'dul rdo rje], 1615–1672), Longsel Nyingpo ([kLong gsal snying po], 1625–1692), Drimé Shingkyong Gönpö ([Dri med zhing skyong mgon po], 1724–178?), Tashi Özer ([bKra shis 'od zer], 17th century), Chönyi Gyatso ([Chos nyid rgya mtsho], 18th century), Namkha Gyatso ([Nam mkha' rgya mtsho], 17–18th century), Ngédön Wangpo ([Nges don dbang po], ?–1816), Sönam Detsen ([bSod nams lde'u btsan], 1675–1723), as well as Chemchog Dupatsal [Che mcho 'dus pa rtsal], who would be Danzanravjaa's 'root lama' (Tib. *tsawé lama* [rtsa ba'i bla ma]) (Sardar 2007: 280) and other clerics. (I thank Rémi Chaix for the identification of these characters). These masters of Kathog are not his previous incarnations, but represent one or more lines of transmission linked to *termas* of Longsel Nyingpo and of Dudul Dorjé of which Danzanravjaa would be a recipient and which he would have transmitted to his disciples (who would have commissioned this painting?) (Rémi Chaix, oral communication, February 2021). For H. Sardar, Danzanravjaa is depicted a second time on the painting, on the left, under the secret initiatory name Dömé Rangdröl [gDod ma'i rang grol]; immediately below him is Tsokdruk Rangdröl [Tshogs drug rang grol], who could perhaps be identified as the famous yogi Shabkar Tsogdruk Rangdrol ([Zhabs dkar ba tshogs drug rang grol], 1781–1851), "who, like Ravjaa, also professed a non-sectarian talent for combining the teachings of the Yellow and Red Hat sects. This connection becomes more tempting, given that they both carried secret initiatory names ending with Rangdrol ('self-liberating'), indicating a shared master or common lineage" (2007: 281). Sardar (2007: 280–281) also suggested that one of the clerics might be identified as Danzanravjaa's master, the Fourth Changkya *butag* Yéshé Tenpé Gyeltsen [lCang skya Ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan].

There are seven protector deities in the bottom register, including Ekajaṭī, Rāhu, and a red protector riding a billy-goat who can probably be identified as Yolhoi sahius (he wears the hat and garments with large floating sleeves of Garwa Nagpo and is devouring a heart (his second attribute, a spear or a club, is difficult to identify).

4) A painting depicts Danzanravjaa as a tantric lama performing a ritual; he holds a *purba* with his right hand, and a scorpion with his left, from which emanates a blue *dharmapāla* (Fig. 19b). He wears a blue gown decorated with a *dharm*a wheel on his chest, with long sleeves, an apron, and a hat topped by a skull: this costume resembles the robe and silver hat of the collection used in tantric rituals. He is surrounded by twelve figures.

5) A series of *thangkas* of deities painted by Danzanravjaa after seeing them in his dreams. Four are reproduced in the catalogue: they represent red Vajrayoginī, white Machig Labdrön, and deities of the Bardo [Bar do] cycle (Fig. 19c). These *thangkas* have a distinctive style with a dark blue background and a dominance of red, yellow, and green colours.

- > Altangerel & Hatanbaatar 2013: 58, 73, 81–83.
- > In the article, see Figures 19 & 20.