

# The Myth of Shambhala: Visions, Visualisation, and the Myth's Resurrection in the Twentieth Century in Buryatia\*

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In the 20th century, various utopian expectations began to manifest themselves in Buryatia, Mongolia and Tibet with much greater frequency than ever in the past. The most usual form that utopian expectations took was that of prophecies, clairvoyant predictions, legends situated into the future etc. Utopian narratives appeared both orally and in writing, but only rarely were they expressed visually. In the latter case, they are represented by various kinds of pictures. The most common is a specific Tibetan kind of painting: *thangka* [*thang ka*], a painted scroll of various size, either as hand-made colour paintings or black and white xylographs, sometimes coloured. There also exists a specific variety of sacred depictions, called *tsakli* in Tibetan [*tsak li*], (*tsakali*, *tsagli*): miniature pictures, also known in painted or xylographed forms. One purpose of the *tsakli* is to be inserted into “charm boxes” (or “relic shrines”, *gau* [*ga'u*] in Tibetan) or to be displayed in home altars.<sup>1</sup> A sample of such a miniature, as well as a larger printed *thangka*, will be discussed in the article.

The expectation of better times in the more or less distant future, as represented by various eschatological myths, has long been highly popular in the areas where Tibetan Buddhism has spread. There exist at least three figures whose arrival is awaited by Tibetan Buddhists as soteriological, and around whom various rituals exist to help or accelerate their coming to the Earth in the future. Buddhist eschatological myths are, according to Ronald D. Schwartz,<sup>2</sup> concentrated on three individuals, and the Buddhist eschatological mythology has the following personification:

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<sup>1</sup> *Tsakli* pictures are used also as miniature *thangka*, but their main functional purpose is rather different from the *thangka* pictures. *Tsakli* are used also as “cultic cards” (see Gerd-Wolfgang Essen – Tsering Tashi Thingo, *Die Götter des Himalaya. Buddhistische Kunst Tibets. Systematischer Bestandskatalog*, Prestel-Verlag, München 1989, p. 236), or they are used as “consecration cards” (see Valrae Reynolds – Janet Gyatso – Amy Heller – Martin Dan, *From the Sacred Realm: Treasures of Tibetan Art from the Newark Museum*, Prestel, Munich – London – New York 1999, pp. 237-239; see also Amy Heller, “A Set of Thirteenth Century *Tsakali*”, *Orientalions*, November 1997, pp. 28-52). For basic information about the *tsakli* see Juan Li, “*Tsakli*: Tibetan Ritual Miniature Paintings”, <http://www.asianart.com/li/li.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald D. Schwartz, *Circle of Protest: Political Ritual in the Tibetan Uprising*, Hurst and Comp., London 1994, pp. 230-231.

1. The future Buddha Maitreya (Sanskrit, Tib. Champa [*byams pa*], Mong., Bur. *Maidar*, literally *The Loving One*);
2. The final Shambhala ruler: king (25th kulika) Rudra Chakrin (Sanskrit, Tib. Khorlochän [*'khor lo can*], Mong., Bur. *Rigden Dagpo*, *Regdendagva*, *Eregdyn Dagbo Khaan*, literally *The Fierce One with a Wheel* or *The Ferocious One Who Holds a Wheel in His Hand*);
3. The mythic hero or king Gesar from Ling.

These three different types of individuals, three different types of myth, represent three different kinds of “saviours” who will bring liberation to their adherents. As well as differences in historical and mythogenetic background, the three saviours have different religious origins and roots. On the one hand, they are unique in their influence on the formation of ideas, world view and imagination of followers of Tibetan Buddhism, yet they are equally unique in their geographical and chronological distribution in Inner Asia (Buryatia, Mongolia and Tibet).

A special interest in the Shambhala myth and its personification in the figure of Rudra Chakrin was shown by believers not only in Tibet but also in Mongolia and Buryatia. One representative sample of the vivid presence of the Tibetan Shambhala myth in the 19th century is preserved thanks to a witness – the Russian explorer Major-General Nikolai Mikhailovich Przhevalsky (1839–1888) who led an expedition into Inner Asia (Outer Mongolia and Tibetan Amdo) in 1870–1873. Despite his original profession as a biologist and geographer and army officer, he additionally collected information about the culture and religious life of local Mongolians and Tibetans. Thanks to his breadth of research interests, an authentic record of a local version of an eschatological myth about Rudra Chakrin has fortunately been preserved. Przhevalsky’s version can be used as an apt and concise introduction, as well as an explanation of who the final Shambhala king is, or more precisely – what a common Amdo Tibetan imagined the king to be in the last third of the 19th century:

“Another, and a very interesting, narration we heard from Sorzhi was a legend about Shambalyn, the promised land of the Buddhists. All the adherents of the religion will leave for that land one day. The land is an island, placed somewhere far in the Northern Sea. There is a plentitude of gold, high fields of grain, no one is poor here; Shambalyn is rich in milk and honey. According to the legend, the Buddhists will leave for the promised land about 2500 years after this was forecast. Since that time, already 2050 years have passed, so there is only little time left. It will happen in this way: a gygen<sup>3</sup> living in Western Tibet is a living reincarnation of an immortal god; the god never dies, he simply passes from one body to another. This saint will be born as a son of the ruler of Shambalyn not long before

<sup>3</sup> Russian transcription of the Tibetan word *gegän* [*dge rgan*], literally an older monk, teacher, high ranked lama. In this case the “gygen” is the Panchen Lama, although his name or title is not mentioned in N. M. Przhevalsky’s text. It is very probable that his informant Sorzhi did not cite the Panchen Lama’s name or title. The traditional residence of Tibetan Panchen Lamas is Tashilhünpo [*bkra shis lhun po*] in Western Tibet, near the city of Zhikatsé. The residence was founded by the First Dalai Lama in 1447. The relationship between Panchen Lamas and the Shambhala myth is traditional and complex.

the expected event. Meanwhile, the Dungans<sup>4</sup> will rebel more severely than they used to in the past. The rebellion will destroy the whole of Tibet, and the Tibetan people under the leadership of the Dalai Lama will foresake their homeland for Shambalyn at the same time. The people will be welcomed by the saint, who will have become a ruler of the land just after his father's death. Dungans, encouraged by their success in Tibet, will conquer all of Asia and Europe and they will invade Shambalyn. The king of Shambalyn will gather troops and banish the Dungans back to their country and he will install the Buddhist faith in all the lands where he will have won. Even now, the immortal gygen regularly and secretly visits Shambalyn. He has a special horse, permanently saddled, which is able to bring his lord to the promised land and back in one night."<sup>5</sup>

The popular myth of Shambhala involves a detailed description of the utopian "hidden empire" or "hidden valley" (Tib. *bäyül* [*sbas yul*]),<sup>6</sup> where an idyllic relationship between rulers and people prevails. It also contains a description of the ultimate battle of Shambhala, depicting the cruelty of the struggle between good and evil. Both textual and visual descriptions are present. And yet, in addition to the geographical and eschatological meaning, the Shambhala myth also has a political dimension widespread amongst Mongolians and Buryats in the 20th century, mainly in its first half. This new interpretation – i.e. the political or politically motivated understanding of the Buddhist eschatological myth – assumed significance under the influence of the particular historical and political circumstances of the time. And hence the myth is considerably transformed, into a story set in the near future, for which the main narrative interest is paid to the final battle. The description of the battle is predominantly in the form of a prophecy and abounds in concrete details referring to the political events of that time. As an illustration of the extraordinary attraction of such narratives for Mongolians could be, as often cited in literature, that both sides of the armed conflict in the 1920s–1930s exploited the Shambhala myth for their own interests.

Revolutionary soldiers of Sükhbaatar's army entered their battles against anti-Bolshevik forces singing a song which clearly referred to Shambhala, which had great motivating power.<sup>7</sup> A more sophisticated case of the use of the myth in the struggle to establish independent Mongolia concerned the eighth Bogd Gegen, the theocratic ruler of Khalkha (Mong. *Jebtsundamba khutagt*), Ngawang Lobzang Chökyi Nyima (Tib., [*ngag dbang blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma*], 1870–1924). In the summer of 1921, the Mongolian People's Party, supported

<sup>4</sup> Northwestern branch of Chinese Muslims, the Hui.

<sup>5</sup> Nikolaj M. Prževalskij, *Mongolsko a země Tangutů. Třileté putování po východní vysoké Asii* [Mongolia and the Tangut country. Three-years wandering about Eastern Asia], Přírodovědecké vydavatelství, Praha 1951, p. 176.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Martin Slobodník, "Tibet a obrazy pozemského raja [Tibet and the pictures of terrestrial Eden]", *Hieron* 3/1 (1998), pp. 133-143, see also Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "Šambhala, eine tibetisch-buddhistische Utopie", in: H. Krasser – M. T. Much – E. Steinkellner – H. Tauscher (eds.), *Tibetan Studies. Proceedings of the 7th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Graz 1995*, Vol. 1, Wien 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "Utopian Thought in Tibetan Buddhism", *Studies in Central and East Asian Religions* 5/6 (1992–1993), p. 87.

by Bolshevik Russia, won the election and on the 25th July of the same year, the “permanent people’s government of independent Mongolia” was established, yet it did not dare to overthrow the theocratic ruler.<sup>8</sup> The result was that the eighth Bogd Gegen formally remained the head of the Mongolian state and Buddhist sangha till his death in May 1924. Only then did the constitutional monarchy “de iure”<sup>9</sup> turn into a communist dictatorship “de facto”. After the eighth Bogd Gegen’s death, the issue of his successor nonetheless arose. Because his status was that of an “identified reincarnation” (Tib. tulku [*sprul sku*], Sanskr. *nirmānakāya*), the procedure of finding a successor was subject to the traditional rules which, in general, were connected with the participation of the state government in the identification of the new theocratic ruler.

Nonetheless, the Communist power structures rejected these rules. A resolution of the Mongolian People’s Party officially forbade Mongolian Buddhists to search and recognize the new ninth Bogd Gegen. Yet strangely enough, this political act – whose intention was to eliminate the power of Mongolia’s theocratic rulers – was based on a religious idea. It is remarkable that an avowedly atheistic and purely political solution of the religious matter was based on recognition of a Buddhist myth as a truth:

“Bogd Gegend have worked much good for the Mongolian religion and state. The eighth Bogd Gegen liberated Mongolia from Chinese oppression, and his deeds were directed towards the foundation of the state. There is a tradition saying that the eighth incarnation will not be continued by the ninth. The ninth incarnation will come in a form of the great General Hanamand<sup>10</sup> in the Shambhala kingdom. Thus the question of the new Bogd Gegen’s installation does not arise.”<sup>11</sup>

The figure of Bogd Gegen is also the subject of mythological narration connected with the myth of Shambhala. Tibetan, Mongolian and Buryat literature and folk tales comprise a broad complex of myths about a ruler and warrior, Gesar, who is linked to the final battle of Shambhala. As Siegbert Hummel states, this

<sup>8</sup> According to Ivana Grollová and Veronika Zikmundová it was the evidence of political foresight and sensitivity and of the “nationalistic and bourgeois inclination of Mongolian government shortly after 1921”, see Ivana Grollová – Veronika Zikmundová, *Mongolové – pravnucci Čingischána* [The Mongols – Chingiskhan’s great-grandsons], Triton, Praha 2001, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> Bulcsu Siklos, “Mongolian Buddhism: A Defensive Account”, in: Shirin Akiner (ed.), *Mongolia Today*, Kegan Paul, London 1991, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> Correctly *Hanuman*. The Indian epos about kalkins (kings) is here transformed into a Buddhist form with some of the original figures. One of them is a monkey – Hanuman. In the Tibetan, Mongolian and Buryat conception, Hanuman is a general, subject to Rudra Chakrin. He commands the troops waging war on the side of Good in the final Shambhala battle. He is usually depicted alongside his commander, as he shoots an arrow to kill the enemy aggressor (see e.g. Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls III. Description and Explanation of the Tankas*, Rome, La Libreria dello Stato 1949, p. 598). The figure is mentioned also in Buddhist texts (see e.g. John Newman, “Eschatology in the Wheel of Time Tantra”, in: Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995, pp. 288-289).

<sup>11</sup> Bulcsu Siklos, “Mongolian Buddhism: A Defensive Account”, in: Shirin Akiner (ed.), *Mongolia Today*, Kegan Paul, London 1991, pp. 155-182; see also Karčnina Kollmar-Paulenz, “Utopian Thought ...”, p. 87.

supreme Khalkha Buddhist hierarch, Bogd Gegen, is seen also as the “reincarnation of Gesar’s horse”.<sup>12</sup>

Agvan Dorzhiev (1854–1938), Buryat Buddhist monk, tutor of the 13th Dalai Lama Thubtän Gyatso (*thub bstan rgya mtsho*, 1876–1933), Tibet’s ambassador in the Tzarist court in St. Petersburg and later in the Soviet Union, is connected with the political ramifications of the Shambhala myth at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in Tibet and Russia:

“Agvan Dorzhiev accentuated the idea of the cultural and religious unification of the Mongolian, Tibetan and Russian people. This idea of a great Buddhist confederation was broadly based upon the Shambhala myth.”<sup>13</sup>

Northern Buddhism has in fact two types of eschatology, represented or personified by Buddha Maitreya and king of Shambhala Rudra Chakrin; the third cited type connected with king Gesar is not as extensively based on Buddhist texts and the associated rituals. The two basic typologies of the myths (Maitreya and Rudra Chakrin) are expressed in two different kinds of rites and ceremonies. Myths, rites, ceremonies and specialised monks are concentrated on two specific types of sacral architecture as well: both the Maitreya and the Rudra Chakrin Shambhala eschatology have their own temples or shrines.

The first type of eschatology is represented by temples or shrines dedicated to Maitreya, which were relatively frequently constructed in Tibetan, Mongolian and Buryat monasteries. The temples contain a picture or statue of Buddha Maitreya, in some cases of gigantic size. The appropriate ritual and festive ceremony, in Mongolia and Buryatia termed *Maidar khural*, is the largest summer festival. Maitreya’s three-day’s festival is connected with the second most important Buddha and takes place usually in mid-summer. It is the second largest feast after the festival of the New Year (Bur. *Sagaan Sar*).

“For instance in Aginskoe Monastery, there were even two temples of the Wheel of Time [Sanskrit. *Kālachakra*, Bur. *Duinkhor sume*, Tib. *Dünkhor datshang* (*dus ‘khor grwa tsang*) – LB]. Rituals performed in these two main shrines were concentrated on two main areas – astrology and the Shambhala myth. The deity of *Kālachakra* [Tib. *Dünkhor* (*dus ‘khor*), Bur. *Duinkhor* – LB] was considered the supreme ruler of Shambhala. The sense of these rituals was to pray for the rebirth in the kingdom of Shambhala, for the coming of the Teacher of Buddhism, for salvation in the fight with heretics which will happen in the era of the reign of the 25th king Rigdän Dagma [Tib., (*rigs ldan drag pa*), i.e. Rudra Chakrin – LB].”<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Siegbert Hummel, *Eurasian Mythology in the Tibetan Epic of Ge-sar*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala 1998, p. 70; see also Siegbert Hummel, “Anmerkungen zur Apokalypse des Lamaismus”, *ArOr* 26 (1958), pp. 186-196, or see an English version of the article: “Notes on the Lamaist Apocalypse”, *The Tibet Journal* 22/4 (1997), pp. 33-44.

<sup>13</sup> Seseg P. Angaeva, *Buddizm v Buryatii i Agvan Dorzhiev* [Buddhism in Buryatia and Agvan Dorzhiev], Buryatskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, Ulan-Ude 1999, pp. 108-109.

<sup>14</sup> Darima Ts. Zhamsueva, *Aginskije datsany kak pamyatniki istorii kul’tury* [Datsans of Aginskoe – memorials of cultural history], Izdatel’stvo Buryatskogo Nauchnogo Tsentra, Ulan-Ude 2001, p. 112.

The second type of eschatology is represented by temples or shrines dedicated to the “Wheel of Time”. The temples’ rituals are devoted mainly to astrology and the Shambhala myth. It is a rule that large thangkas or inscriptions depicting the Shambhala kingdom and the final battle are displayed near the temple’s main entrance. Kalachakra, as depicted in various paintings and set down in various written texts, is considered a leading deity, a patron of Shambhala. The content of the rituals connected with Shambhala was expressed in various prayers for the rebirth in the Shambhala kingdom just before the final battle, as an expression of the wish to become a warrior in Rudra Chakrin’s armed troops in the next incarnation.<sup>15</sup>

Although myths, rituals and buildings were separated, there does exist evidence, though rare and sporadic, of mutual interconnections. One such example is provided by the Mongolian Kanjurwa Gegen’s<sup>16</sup> autobiography:

“On the sixteenth day of the first month, it was customary for us to perform a special ceremony in which we paraded the image of Buddha of the future, Maidar (Skt. Maitreya Boddhisattva), around the monastery in a sacred procession. This varied according to different monasteries, but ordinarily the image of Maidar was mounted on a beautiful, elaborate gold carriage and taken among the lamas and the people. The people would kneel and the image would be passed over them by the lamas as a blessing and dedication of a prophetic omen. This indicated that they would be the disciples of Maidar in the future in preparation for the great final battle for Shambhala, the sacred city that would become the end of the world, the battle site in the struggle between the forces of evil and those who support the Law of the Buddha.”<sup>17</sup>

Kanjurwa Gegen’s description of the ceremony is from Inner Mongolia in the 1930s. This ceremony of the future Buddha Maitreya has been preserved, though to a very limited extent, in Outer and Inner Mongolia and even in Buryatia till the 1990s. Its survival, though, is of interest and significance because of the political context of the Shambhala myth in the areas in question. During the Communist era, for political reasons, the practice of tantric rituals connected with the Shambhala myth was forbidden. For instance, Soviet Communists in

<sup>15</sup> See for instance the most popular “Prayer of Shambhala” (*sham bha la’i smon lam*) written by the Sixth Panchen Lama (the third according to another numbering) Lobzang Paldän Jeshe [*blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes*], 1738–1780. For an English translation see [http://www.berzinarchives.com/kala\\_shambh\\_pr.html](http://www.berzinarchives.com/kala_shambh_pr.html) (14 June 2002), for a German translation see Albert Grünwedel, “Der Weg nach Šambhala (*Shambha la’i lam yig*) des dritten Gross-Lama von *bKra shis lhun po bLo bzang dPal ldan Ye shes* aus dem tibetischen Original übersetzt, und mit dem Texte herausgegeben”, *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 29 (1915), München. For other kinds of prayers (Tib. *smoṅ lam*) for rebirth in Shambhala see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “Utopian Thought ...”, pp. 93–94.

<sup>16</sup> Kanjurwa Gegen, the title of an identified rebirth (Tib. *tulku, sprul sku*), whose traditional seat has been the monastery Badghar in Inner Mongolia. He was one of the thirteen most important tulkus from the region of Dolonor (Paul Hyer – Jagchid Sechin, *A Mongolian Living Buddha: Biography of the Kanjurwa Khutughtu*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1983, pp. ix–x; see also Robert J. Miller, *Monasteries and Culture: Change in Inner Mongolia*. Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1959, pp. 65–66.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Hyer – Jagchid Sechin, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

Buryatia regarded and understood the Shambhala myth and its appropriate rituals or ceremonies as anti-communist activities linked directly to the armed uprising in Buryatia and Mongolia during the 1920s. In this respect the Red commissars were right: they were themselves depicted by the traditionalist faction of the Buryat and Mongolian sangha as the worst enemies of the Yellow Faith (Gelugpa [*dge lugs pa*]). Another, and a very probable, reason to ban the spreading and performing of the myth and ritual was that they were oriented against all the godless people or “heretics”, to whom Bolsheviks certainly belonged. Of all the eschatological rituals, only the ceremony and ritual for hastening the coming of the future Buddha Maitreya was permitted. This ceremony is traditionally widespread in Buryatia and takes place for three days in the summer. The origin of the ritual is in Tibet and allegedly dates back to 1409, when it was established by Je Tsongkhapa.<sup>18</sup>

A Soviet researcher V. Ovchinnikov wrote:

“The lamas in Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva successfully spread the particular version of the Shambhala myth in the 1930s where they accented the idea of the final battle [Bur. *Shambalyn sereg* – LB] against all the heretics in the near future. In Aginskoe Monastery a *suburgan* [Sanskrit. *stūpa*] was erected, devoted to the soon coming of the final battle. The monks hid one hundred thousand needles into the foundation of the stupa. People believed that the needles will be transformed into the weapons of Rudra Chakrin at the time of the final battle. Kalmyk and Tuviniian lamas have also consecrated ritual offering places [Bur. *obo* – LB] where they proclaimed clearly anti-Soviet prophecies.”<sup>19</sup>

The author of the citation collected various versions of folk legends and prophecies connected with the Shambhala with the assistance of local university students from Chita in the 1970s:

“The Khan Rudra Chakrin [Bur. *Rigden Dagva* – LB] will be assembling his immortal troops for a long time. All the believers will be part of Rudra Chakrin’s army. The bravest Buddhists will fight in the front line. The followers of lama Tsongkhapa will command the troops of Rudra Chakrin. All the warriors will have the honour to bear the title of *lama*. The lamaist faith will spread across all the world in these days. The lamaists will celebrate and honour low and high lamas, and will show their gratitude to them for thorough spreading of the teaching about the Holy War.”<sup>20</sup>

Another record exists of a similar version of the narration:

“The war will break out just after Rudra Chakrin’s proclamation. He will ride a green horse<sup>21</sup> and he will show the direction where the heretics, atheists and anti-lamaists live. He will

<sup>18</sup> Tib., *tsong kha pa*, known also as Lobzang Dagpa [*blo bzang grags pa*] (1357–1419), Tibetan religious reformer and founder of the Gelugpa [*dge lugs pa*] order.

<sup>19</sup> V. Ovchinnikov, “Shambalyn-sereg – lamaistskaya svyashchennaya voyna [Shambalyn sereg – a holy war of Lamaists]”, *Nauka i religiya* 15/12 (1973), p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

<sup>21</sup> Of interest here is the colour of the Rudra Chakrin’s horse. The horse from the original Hindu myth is white in colour (the name *Kalki* is derived from the colour white). A green horse, though, is an attribute of Buddha Maitreya in Buryat Buddhism. For example a model of a green horse is depicted pulling Maitreya’s chariot in all the Buryat monasteries. This custom is widespread

give orders by his commander's baton to the lamas who will then spread death amongst the godless people and heretics who have dishonoured God's world. A large sea of blood will appear. All these events will happen in order for lamaists to live and flourish. It is Buddha Maitreya's wish. When the holy war ends, the sun will rise, the blood from the war will disappear, the grass will turn green, the trees will be full of blossoms, the birds will sing. People will hurry into temples in order to express their gratitude to Rudra Chakrin and they will also pray for the soon coming of Buddha Maitreya to the Earth."<sup>22</sup>

The last cited version of the Shambhala final battle is probably not as literal a transcription as the rules of field research demand. As one proof of why the cited record is partly incorrect: it is almost impossible that an old Buryat man's expression for Buddhists would be "lamaists". It is more likely that the man used a common term like "followers of Buddha's teaching" or "Yellow Faith adherents" etc. instead of the term "lamaists". Nevertheless, the core of the testimony is correct without any doubt. Another important fact is that the researchers recorded more than one isolated legend or prophecy in Eastern Buryatia in the 1970s.

Besides the figure of Rudra Chakrin, the future Buddha Maitreya also plays his role in the narrative. It is not clear from the record whether "people hurrying into temples" are entering one or two distinct temples. Moreover, there is another Buryat source unifying the Shambhala myth with Maitreya's myth, and it is of particular interest that such a union is historically placed into the 1920s, during the civil war. At the time, there were many prophecies of the rapid appearance of Buddha Maitreya. He will punish all the enemies of the *Khan of Three Worlds*, the head of the Buryat theocratic state Lubsan Sandan Tsydenov.<sup>23</sup> People also appealed to the king of Shambhala to precipitate the strike against all the enemies of the faith. Mongolian soldiers supporting the eighth Bogd Gegen sang a song with the following words: "We raise a yellow flag for the glory of Buddha's teaching; we, the pupils of the Khutukhtu, will start the battle for Shambhala!"<sup>24</sup> For additional evidence of the political connection, a Soviet researcher Aleksey Kochetov continued:

"... there appeared secretly and clandestinely spread prophecies or clairvoyances [Bur. *lundun*] whose authors allegedly could be Padmasambhava, Panchen Lama, Bogd Gegen etc. Processes like collectivisation, industrialisation etc. were labelled in the prophecies as signs of the End of Times, i.e. disaster (...) for all the heretics in the near future, victory of Buddhists allied with the heaven's powers."<sup>25</sup>

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around all the monasteries except one, the Tsugol Monastery, where the role of draught animal during the ceremony is assumed by a white wooden elephant. Is the green color of the horse one of the proofs of interconnections between the Shambhala and Maitreya myths in Buryatia? Probably yes, as another evidence comes from the explicit mention of Maitreya's name in the cited Buryat text. Such a mention of Maitreya's name is not common in Tibetan original texts about Shambhala.

<sup>22</sup> V. Ovchinnikov, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>23</sup> For details about Lubsan Sandan Tsydenov see e.g. Luboš Bělka, *Tibetský buddhismus v Burjatsku* [Tibetan Buddhism in Buryatia], Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2001, pp. 70-75.

<sup>24</sup> Aleksey N. Kochetov, *Lamaizm* [Lamaism], Nauka, Moskva 1973, p. 170.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.



Legends about the final Shambhala battle were most abundant, the interpretation where Japan was understood especially as the Shambhala land:

“Rudra Chakrin’s armies are attacking from the east (...) A new suburgan called ‘Concentration of Khuvraak’s Power’ was erected in Aginskoe Monastery with one hundred thousand needles in the stupa’s foundation (...) According to lamas’ testimonies they started a campaign for the emigration from Soviet Russia to Inner Mongolia at that time.”<sup>26</sup>

The idea of self-sacrifice, motivated by the intention to be re-born in Shambhala, is rather common in connection with the Shambhala myth. One example of this idea is from Buryatia during 1920s–1930s:

“In the hardest times for Buddha’s teaching a mighty army of the ruler *Qutagu kürdetü* will come from Shambhala, which will turn all the heretics and ungodly people into dust and ashes. Then mystic teaching [Bur. *tarniin shashin* – LB] will be spread. Who will live up to that time and will die in the final battle, will be reborn in the higher sphere [Bur. *degedü oron-a, deed oron* – LB]. Those of them who will destroy heretics, will be honoured by an even higher rebirth.”<sup>27</sup>

A similar story, situated in roughly the same time period, can be found in Mongolia, too. The testimony is given by the above-mentioned Kanjurwa Gegen, who met the Panchen Lama in Chakhar in Inner Mongolia in 1930. Both high lamas came to visit the local monastery where the great ceremony of Kalachakra initiation took place:

“We felt it was very important that we attended this great occasion because everyone who attended had his name recorded on the special roster of troops who were to be the faithful ones to defend the Law of the Buddha in the last days of chaos in the great struggle for the sacred land of Shambhala.”<sup>28</sup>

And finally the last example from that time which originated in Inner Mongolia:

“Sühkbaatar’s soldiers, who set Mongolia free from general Sü’s army, did so singing a march beginning with these words: ‘Warriors of Northern Shambhala (...) even if we all die in this war, we will be born again as the soldiers of the Khan of Shambhala.’ This march is still popular with Mongolian soldiers.”<sup>29</sup>

A similar attitude, not directly connected with the Shambhala myth, can be found in Tibet in the second half of the 20th century. Death which is the consequence of the fight against the Chinese occupation and for an independent Tibet brings about a “better rebirth as a human being”.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 175-177.

<sup>27</sup> G.-D. Natsov, *Materialy po lamaizmu v Buryatii* [Materials on Lamaism in Buryatia], vol. 2, Izdatel’stvo Buryatskogo Nauchnogo Tsentra, Ulan-Ude 1998, p. 136. According to the author, the text is dated the 28th July 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Hyer – Sechin Jagchid, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Jurii N. Rerikh [= Roerich], *Po tropam Srednei Azii* [On footpaths of Central Asia], Agni, Samara 1994, pp. 137-138; see also Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “Utopian Thought ...”, p. 87. Another possible translation of the song is: “Let us die in this war and be reborn as warriors of the king of Shambhala”.

<sup>30</sup> Ronald D. Schwartz, “Renewal and Resistance: Tibetan Buddhism in Modern Era”, in: I. Harris

Apart from the narrative forms of the Shambhala myth, we can also note visual depiction of the kingdom and the final battle. In Buryat monasteries, as well as Tibetan and Mongolian ones, thangkas and frescoes with the kingdom of Shambhala have been found depicting the Shambhala battle in which the winning troops of Good were led by the ruler and supreme army commander Rudra Chakrin. As Darima Ts. Zhamsueva wrote:

“When the war with the fascist Germany broke out, religious people asked whether it was not connected with the Shambhala war [Bur. *Shambalyn sereg*] because according to the classic description, the troops must lead the attack from the West to the East. However, pieces of art existed which showed the attack to be led from the opposite direction.”<sup>31</sup>

Another example of the Shambhala myth is documented by a British journalist, G. D. R. Phillips, who mentions that in 1935 and 1936, rituals for the earlier coming of the king of Shambhala were carried out in Khorin monasteries. In these rituals, monks used depictions where the Shambhala army is forming in the place where the sun rises, i.e. in the east. According to the author, this is a clear reference to Japan.<sup>32</sup> Yet nonetheless, the depiction of the final battle of Shambhala, where the troops of Rudra Chakrin attack from the right to the left, i.e. from the east to the west, is not limited to this period and this geographical area (Buryatia and Mongolia in the 1920s and 1930s): it can also be discerned in older east-Tibetan and Mongolian thangkas.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, we can assume that the interpretation of “turning the direction of the attack in the final Shambhala battle” by the above-mentioned authors may represent the addition of a new, secondary content into older depictions, rather than a new phenomenon with a clear political context.

The recovery of the Shambhala myth in the first third of the 20th century in Buryatia<sup>34</sup> had, like other features of religious life, two dimensions – an official i.e. monastic one, and unofficial, popular one. The former is based on monastic rituals and is more institutionalised. The popular version of the myth is looser,

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(ed.), *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia*, Pinter, London – New York 1999, pp. 240-241.

<sup>31</sup> Darima Ts. Zhamsueva, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> John Snelling, *Buddhism in Russia: The Story of Agvan Dorzhiev – Lhasa's Emissary to the Tsar*, Element Books, London 1993, p. 244.

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Marilyn M. Rhie – Robert A. F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: the Sacred Art of Tibet (Expanded Edition)*, Thames and Hudson, London 1996, pp. 378-379 (Fig. 157) and p. 482 (Fig. 157a).

<sup>34</sup> The resurrection of the myth can be illustrated via the testimony of G.-D. Natsov who writes: “Not long ago, in 1929, i.e. two years before the rebellion in the west of Mongolia, gabzha lama Balzhinyima from Arkhangai monastery Tariyata wrote a text, in which it is said: ‘The time of the beginning of the holy war has come. Previously we said that it was two hundred years till the start of the Shambhala battle [Bur. *Shambalyn sereg* – LB], but we must have been mistaken, the time is here!’ He evidenced his forecast by numerical data from Buddhist astrology. First, he spread his forecast secretly amongst lamas, then he made it public and available to the broad range of inhabitants; this forecast undoubtedly influenced the breakout of the rebellion in 1930.” See G.-D. Natsov, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-140.

less bound to the official cult and ritual and is expressed by folk tales, narrations, legends, songs, prophecies, and the like. Rudra Chakrin's cult in Buryatia is illustrated e.g. by a small votive xylograph with his depiction (see Fig. 1). Its origin is not known precisely, but as it was found in Aginskoe Monastery, we can assume it comes from a local printer or from the printer in Tsugol Monastery, which is not far away. It may also be a picture brought from a pilgrimage to distant lands. However, the paper is of Russian origin, not of Tibetan or Chinese and the painting is so simple, indeed rough, that the Buryat origin is highly probable.

With the majority of deities of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon, two contradictory ways of depicting a certain figure can be observed. On the one hand they are kind, quiet and peaceful, on the other hand the same deity can be wrathful, threatening, restless, furious, angry. Both the types of forms symbolize the contradictory characteristics of human consciousness, two types of energy needed for reaching one's aim. Destructive effort or energy is necessary for the elimination of obstructions and enemies. The angry appearance of deities serves in the visual expression of this necessary fight. Both the forms are complementary and they do not bear any sign of assessment in Tibetan iconography: the quiet form of Rudra Chakrin is not "better" than his wrathful form. His own name (*He Who Is Angry and Possesses the Wheel* or *The Fierce One with the Wheel*) seems to suggest that his primary appearance is angry, but in various texts about Shambhala we can read that the king starts to fight the enemy only after he is forced to do so by circumstances, when he has to defend his kingdom. Such an explanation of "defensive aggression" can be observed in other religious traditions as well. For instance *jihad* as the armed fight of Muslims for Islam is always explained as a defense against the enemy, never as unprovoked offensive aggression.

The quiet form of Rudra Chakrin is not as varied and variable as the wrathful form, i.e. the depiction of a commander in the terminal moment of the Shambhala battle when he kills the chief of the barbarians with a lance. In this kind of depiction, there are differences in Rudra Chakrin's "vehicle". It is either a horse or a military chariot. Another difference can be seen merely in the Buryat depictions published in this text where Rudra Chakrin stands in a fighting position on the chariot and strikes the enemy with a main symbol of Northern, Tibetan Buddhism, a vajra (Sanskrit, Tib. *rdo rje*) instead of the lance. The naturalism of more common Tibetan and Mongolian depictions (Rudra Chakrin stabs the enemy) is replaced here by a more metaphorical expression (Rudra Chakrin stands above the enemy), which corresponds to a more esoteric explanation, if we can interpret thangkas in this way at all. Because such an interpretation has no support in literature or in personal testimony, we must consider the "esoteric explanation" as a mere working hypothesis. The vajra in Rudra Chakrin's right hand can have a completely different meaning, but there is no mention of this feature in literature at all. The "esoteric explanation" can

be indirectly supported by the interpretation of a wheel in Rudra Chakrin's hand in the quiet form of depiction. The wheel is understood as a "peace" symbol of Buddha Śākyamuni – "the wheel of law" (Sanskrit. Dharmachakra, Tib. chökhörlo [*chos 'khor lo*]) yet also as a sharp weapon, a disc.<sup>35</sup> That a vajra can be used as a weapon is supported by a depiction of the Shambhala battle from Eastern Tibet.<sup>36</sup> Here, as in other pictures of this battle, a giant firing gun can be seen in the lower part.<sup>37</sup> The flash of the shot extends over the whole picture and in its track of light we can see what was the gun loaded with: balls, pointed cones and vajras. After all, the more original Vedic or later Hinduist concept of vajra as a thunderbolt or a flash of lightning explains this instrument as a weapon whose origin probably comes from the trident.<sup>38</sup>

### *The description of the xylographic thangka* (Fig. 2):

The thangka is printed in black from a wooden matrix on a thin and very fine white cloth: the height is 45,5 cm, the width is 35,8 cm. There are five figures who form four wholes bearing certain meaning; they are positioned around the central and biggest figure of Rudra Chakrin. In the highest place is the Panchen Lama; to the right, two figures are seated. The thangka can be interpreted also from the chronological point of view,<sup>39</sup> but what is more important is the mythological aspect. Six texts in Tibetan<sup>40</sup> help us to understand and identify the figures and the situations depicted. The figures are all named, and they have a place in the mythological context. From the top:

1. "I bow with respect to the Panchen Lozang Yeshe [*pan chen blo bzang ye shes*]."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> This is confirmed by a sentence explaining other possible translations of the Sanskrit name of Rudra Chakrin as "Possessed by the Circle" or "The Lord of the Wheel full of Anger" and saying that he will begin his rule in 2337: "An iron wheel will descend from heaven and will announce the beginning of his rule. This wheel will be used as a throwing disc for knocking down enemies." See Andreas Gruschke, *Posvátná místa království tibetského: Báj a pověsti od Kailásu po Šambhalu* [Holy places of the Tibetan kingdom: Myths and legends from Kailāś to Shambhala], Volvox Globator, Praha 2000, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Marilyn M. Rhie – Robert A. F. Thurman, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-159 (Fig. 43 and Fig. 43.1).

<sup>37</sup> Yuri N. Roerich directly says that the gun is of bamboo, see Yuri N. Roerich, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

<sup>38</sup> Liebert Gösta, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions: Hinduism – Buddhism – Jainism*, Brill, Leiden 1976, p. 318.

<sup>39</sup> The chronological interpretation places the figures and story in time. The "oldest" figure on the thangka is the first *kulika* Manjushrikirti, followed by the only historical figure of the Sixth (third) Panchen Lama. The latest, not yet born, is Rudra Chakrin, who will win over the powers of Evil (which are neither yet born) in the near future. The remaining figure is the goddess of Vagisvara, whom is not possible to place in time as she exists outside normal human time.

<sup>40</sup> Transl. from Tibetan by Daniel Berounský.

<sup>41</sup> The Sixth Panchen Lama (the third according to another numbering) Lobzang Paldän Jeshe [*blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes*], 1738–1780. In the Tibetan text on the thangka only *blo bzang ye shes* is mentioned, which is the name of the Fifth Panchen Lama (1663–1737), but his importance for the eschatological myth is much less significant than the deeds and work of the following one, the author of the basic texts about Shambhala.

2. "I bow with respect to the Jamyang Mawä Sengge [ 'jam dbyangs smra ba 'i seng ge]."<sup>42</sup>
3. "I bow with respect to the noble [Sansk. *kulika*] Rigdan Jamyang Dagpa [rigs ldan 'jam dbyangs grags pa]."
4. "I bow with respect to the threatening Dagpo Khorlochän [drag po 'khor lo can]."
5. "The honey [nectar] of naive people [literally children] Chipä Thangtsi [byis pa 'i sprang rtsi]."

This inscription sounds rather enigmatic, but can be better understood from its linguistic context. The Tibetan name of the commander of the defeated enemy troops of barbarians (i.e. Muslims) is rather enigmatic. It actually refers to the prophet and the founder of Islam, the religion which is mentioned in the Shambhala myth and then, in the year of the final battle, is the faith to be annihilated. How can we support this statement? At first sight, the text does not mention anything like that. Naive people, children, honey and nectar are mentioned there. The "child's mind" or more precisely the "child's intellect" in connection with the name of the barbarian king is dealt with by Edwin Bernbaum who mentions another variant of his name – "honey intellect". That it is not a mistake or confusion is evidenced by the fact mentioned by Tsendiin Damdinsüren:<sup>43</sup> Muhammed's Tibetan name Thangtsi Lodho [sprang rtsi blo gros] literally means "honey mind/intellect". Words on the xylographic thangka (Chipa Thangtsi [byis pa 'i sprang rtsi], see Fig. 2) are a combination of the name found on "Giuseppe Tucci's" thangka and of the name mentioned by Edwin Bernbaum. The original Sanskrit version of *Kälachakratantra* contained the transcription of Muhammad's name in two versions: *Mahumatu* and *Madhumati*, which literally translated means the above-mentioned "honey mind/intellect". Because Tibetans used to translate foreign names, rather than phonetically transcribing them, a name emerged which is not phonetically close to Muhammad and whose meaning corresponds to the Sanskrit distortion of the original term *Madhumati*. Of course, this is not the only name of the king of barbarians; in *Kälachakratantrarāja* his name is *Krnmati*.<sup>44</sup> The name *Madhumati* can also be found as the synonym for people from Kashmir, i.e. Muslims; in common Tibetan the word [*kha che*] means Kashmiri and is also used as a general designation of a Muslim.

6. "You, Great Master, who will [reside as] the Big Wheel of Kaläpa town in the future. Having changed into the Ferocious One, at the time of cutting the stream of barbarians, let me follow the culmination of saṃsāra."

The lower part of the picture represents a landscape with prevailing mountains; beside vegetative motifs, on the left three jewels (Sansk. *triratna*) with flames

<sup>42</sup> Tib. *djam dbyangs smra ba 'i sengge*, literally "roaring/talking lion", Sanskr. *Vāgīśvara*.

<sup>43</sup> See Tsendiin Damdinsüren, "Neskol'ko slov o Kalachakre [Some words on Kalachakra]", in: Louis Ligeti (ed.), *Proceedings of the Csoma de Körös Memorial Symposium*, Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest 1978, p. 61. The Mongolian researcher notes that Albert Grünwedel pointed out to the "mystery" of the correct explanation of Muhammed's name as early as in 1900.

<sup>44</sup> See Newman John, "Eschatology in the Wheel of Time Tantra", in: Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhism in Practice*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1996, p. 287.

in the background can be identified, to the right of it a mountain with three trees and bushes and on the far right a mountain whose shape resembles the sacred mountain of Meru or Kailaś.

The deity depicted is one of the forms of the Bōdhisattva of wisdom, Mañjuśrī. This form is called Vagiśvara and is known in two main types,<sup>45</sup> either as a eight-armed deity with four faces or a Bōdhisattva in human form (this type is found in the xylographic thangka, see Fig. 2). The main attributes of Mañjuśrī, a sword in his right hand and a book in the left hand, are clearly visible in the thangka; the book (Sansk. *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*) lain on the lotus blossom is found at the end of the stem behind his left shoulder. Vagiśvara holds a small jewel in his left hand clasped between his thumb and right finger, a detail not clearly visible in the xylograph thangka. Vagiśvara's riding animal (Sansk. *vāhana*) is a lion, which he either rides or (as is this case) he is seated on a disc placed on backs of two lions. In comparison with the standard depiction of Vagiśvara, as cited by Min Bhadur Shakya,<sup>46</sup> the main difference is in his position (Sansk. *āsana*).

Mythogenesis, especially of a eschatological and chiliastic nature, increases in times of danger, when otherwise disparate, heterogenous myths and rituals are joined and mobilised. This proposition is valid universally, not only in connection with Tibetan and Mongolian history.

The Shambhala myth was first used by both the warring sides in Buryatia and Mongolia in the 1920s and 1930s, but the Bolsheviks eventually lost in their struggle for Shambhala (or for its use for their benefit). They had their own eschatology, or utopian vision, so that in fact they did not need a religious myth about the "last paradise on the Earth". After they had unsuccessfully tried to make use of the symbolism of Shambhala, they decided to eliminate it and in this way force forward their concept of the end of history.

The Shambhala myth, personified by Rudra Chakrin, was undoubtedly the subject of a popular cult, which is proven both by texts (the above-cited prophecies, utopian visions, etc.) and by their visualisation (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 2). In the popular version at least two, but probably all three, Buddhist eschatologies were joined together, hence not only Rudra Chakrin and Maitreya, but also Khan Gesar met in Shambhala.

The concept of Shambhala has, similarly to its ruler the 25th kulika Rudra Chakrin, two ambivalent sides. The first one is quiet, peaceful and kind (or "nirvanic" as this quiet form of a deity is designated) and utopian. The other one is threatening, angry, aggressive and apocalyptic.

<sup>45</sup> Min Bhadur Shakya, *The Iconography of Nepalese Buddhism*, Handicraft Association of Nepal, Kathmandu 1994, p. 39.

<sup>46</sup> Min Bhadur Shakya, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The iconography of Vagiśvara has not been thoroughly studied on the academic level. For instance Frederick Bunce also cites two of his forms which differ in attributes and other important features from the above mentioned work of Min Bhadur Shakya (compare Frederick W. Bunce, *An Encyclopaedia of Buddhist Deities, Demigods, Godlings, Saints and Demons. With Special Focus on Iconographic Attributes. Volume 1*, D. K. Printworld, New Delhi 1994, p. 571).

Of similar ambivalence is the myth, cult and ritual connected with Shambhala. The first side is “academic”, monastic or “normative”, based upon canonic, para-canonic and other texts. It also has a popular side which is less subjected to doctrinal purity, but tends to reflect the quiet aspect of Shambhala – in times of peace and wealth, or the threatening aspect – in times of war, oppression, unrest and poverty.

The three personifications of Tibetan Buddhist eschatology (Buddha Maitreya, king Rudra Chakrin and hero Gesar) have different origins; that is to say, the mythological texts concerning them originated independently, in various places and times. However, we can ask whether these three stories about the end of history do eventually intermingle. The interconnection of the Shambhala and Maitreya myth is well evidenced in Inner Mongolia in the cited testimonies of Kanjurwa Gegen. Similar reports come from Buryatia (Archives of G.-D. Natsov). The interconnection of all the three stories is also possible, and a measure of information can be found with Nicolai Konstantinovich Roerich, though his findings are not as trustworthy as others mentioned.



*Fig. 1: 25th King of Shambhala Rudra Chakrin, wrathful form, Buryat xylograph miniature on paper (height 77 mm, width 68 mm), votive picture, probably beginning of the 20th century.*





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*Edited by Lygžima Chaloupková (Praha) and  
Martin Slobodník (Bratislava)*

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