

Zanabazar (1635-1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval Mongolia

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Introduction

The First Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu (T. rJe btsun dam pa sprul sku) Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar is the most celebrated person in the history of Mongolian Buddhism, whose activities marked the important moments in the Mongolian politics, history, and cultural life, as they heralded the new era for the Mongols. His masterpieces of Buddhist sculptures exhibit a sophisticated accomplishment of the Buddhist iconometrical canon, a craftsmanship of the highest quality, and a refined, yet unfettered virtuosity. Zanabazar is believed to have single-handedly brought the tradition of Vajrayāna Buddhism to the late medieval Mongolia. Buddhist rituals, texts, temple construction, Buddhist art, and even designs for Mongolian monastic robes are all attributed to his genius. He also introduced to Mongolia the artistic forms of Buddhist deities, such as the Five Tathāgatas, Maitreya, Twenty-One Tārās, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, and others. They constitute a salient hallmark of his careful selection of the deities, their forms, and their representation. These deities and their forms of representation were unique to Zanabazar.

Zanabazar is also accredited with building his main Buddhist settlement Urga (Örgöö), a mobile camp that was to reach out the nomadic communities in various areas of Mongolia and spread Buddhism among them. In the course of time, Urga was strategically developed into the main Khalkha monastery, Ikh Khüree, while maintaining its mobility until 1855. After Mongolia declared its dependence from the Qing rule in 1911 and was taken by Communist revolutionaries, Ikh Khüree became the Capital Ikh Khüree, renamed as Ulaanbaatar (“Red Hero”) by the Communist revolutionaries in 1924 only to be completely destroyed and transformed into a Soviet-style provincial town in the twentieth-century. Nowadays, Zanabazar’s surviving works are housed in Ulaanbaatar’s museums and in Gandantegchinling (dGa’ ldan theg chen gling) monastery, the only surviving monastery from the former Ikh Khüree, which was the main center of the Eighth Jebtsundamba Bogd Gegeen.

Although the information on Zanabazar’s life and work that is contained in the primary sources is fragmentary, we are able to discern the intention behind Zanabazar’s choice of the Buddhist deities he introduced to Mongolia. This is possible by examining the images of the deities as carefully planned sets. To do that we must reconstruct Zanabazar’s overall plan for what was essentially a new transmission of Buddhism into Mongolia. Lacing together the textual records, modern attributions to Zanabazar, and their historical contexts, this chapter will examine the representations of the deities to demonstrate the way in which they make up a larger scheme. The sources that are examined here for this purpose include Zanabazar’s hagiographies, his own writings, and his art. This chapter will also show why and how Zanabazar used art as the means of fulfilling his mission to build a Buddhist state in Mongolia and to promote the security and unity among the Mongols in the late medieval period.

Zanabazar: The Artist and Legendary Hero

Among Zanabazar’s extant hagiographies, the one written during the master’s lifetime by his main disciple, Zaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei (Jya pa’ita blo bzang ‘phreng las, 1642-1715) and a highly esteemed scholar, is regarded as the most reliable.ⁱ According to Luvsanperenlei, Zanabazar was born in extraordinary conditions, in the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month in 1635 as the second son of Tüsheet Khan Gombodorj (1594-1655), who, like his wife, belonged to the “golden clan” of the great Mongol emperors.ⁱⁱ Zanabazar proved to be a versatile prodigy early in his life. We are told, in the age of three he was able to recite by heart Buddhist prayers and texts related to the

MañjuŸrin᠋masa᠅giti, which was translated into the four languages and published by Choijamts (d. 1656?), a grandson of Altan Khan (1507-1582).ⁱⁱⁱ

Reportedly, at the age of three Zanabazar also twice recited the MañjuŸrin᠋masa᠅giti prayer.^{iv} According to the Mongolian, nineteenth century-biographer, Agwaanluvsandondov, when Zanabazar reached the age of three he knew by heart various prayers and s᠋᠋tras without being taught. He twice daily read the Gandalkhabjaa (dGa' Idan lha brgya ma) and the Jambaltsanjod ('Jam dpal mtshan brjad), surprising everyone.^v At the age of four, he received the Dharma name, Zanabazar (T. Yeshe rdo rje; Skrt. Jñ᠋navajra) and the vows of a novice from certain Jambalyn Nomyn Khan, about whom we do not have any further records. At the age of five, he was enthroned as the religious leader of the Khalkha at the site called Shireet Tsagaan Lake, was promoted to the higher monastic rank, and received his second Dharma name Luvsandambijaltsan (Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan).^{vi} Zanabazar traveled to Tibet twice, first in 1649-1651, and then again in 1655-1656. During those visits, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) and the Fourth Panchen Lama (1569-1662) recognized him as a reincarnation of Jonangpa (Jo nang pa) scholar, T᠋᠋᠋᠋tha (1575-1634), who, according to Mongolian sources, had died in Mongolia a year before Zanabazar was born.^{vii} Zanabazar traveled to Kumbum (Sku 'bum) and Amdo (A mdo), but spent most of his time in Central Tibet. The hagiographies mention various monasteries, mainly the Gelukpa monasteries, which he visited in Tibet. According to Luvsanperenlei,

At the age of fifteen in the Female Cow Year, when he visited Ü, Tsang, lamas from the Bogd Tsongkhapa-born Kumbum, Jachun (Bya khyung), Janraden Rinchenbrag (Byang rwa sgreng rin chen brag), Gandanchoinkhor (Dga' Idan chos 'khor), Taglung (Stag lung), three monasteries of Sera, Drepung, Gandan, and Tashilhunpo came to welcome him and showed him a great respect in accordance with the etiquette of [receiving] guests.^{viii}

The early twentieth-century biographer Davgajantsan informs us that in the Sixth Year of the Reign of Eyeber Jasagchi (Emperor Shunzhi), in the Year of the Yellow Fire Cow, at the time when Bogd Jebtsundamba was fifteen years old, he visited the land of Tibet:

...as overwhelmed by the desire to disseminate the faith of Bogdo Tsongkhapa in the northern land of Khalkha, at fifteen [Zanabazar] visited the monasteries such [as those] of the Bogdo Lama [Tsongkhapa], Kumbum, Jambaalin, Jachun (Bya khyung), Radin, Gandanchoinkhor (Dga' Idan chos 'khor), Taglung (Stag lung), where he was welcomed with respect and semburime (ser sbrengs)...^{ix}

The Mongolian nineteenth-century-scholar, Agwaanluvsandondov sought to emphasize Zanabazar's alleged close ties with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas by pointing out to Zanabazar's contact with both men in 1650, stating: ...he [Zanabazar] was reciting prayers line-after-line by heart without any hindrance as if he mastered letters, readings, and prayers. Also they marveled at many wonderful readings that he exhibited, and they sent a messenger to the Tibetan land to have this reported in detail to all head lamas and prophets presided by the All-Omniscient Panchen Bogdo and by the All-Powerful Fifth Dalai Lama. And those [two] recognized him as Jebtsun Tāranātha's and Mañjuśrī's reincarnation; and [this message] spread like a harmonious melody all over the world.^x

This account is not found in the Tibetan hagiographies of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas in Tibet.^{xi} The above-mentioned, hagiographies also consider Zanabazar's main teacher to have been the Fourth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang Chos kyi Rgyal mtshan (1569-1662), from whom he received his initiations into Yamāntaka and the instruction on the textual corpus of Vajrāvalī.^{xii} However, this does not explain Zanabazar's devotion to a selective pantheon of deities and his rendition of their specific forms. Contemporary studies on Zanabazar, which have mostly emphasized the Nepalese influence on his art, has yet to address these discrepancies in the textual and visual material. The forms that Zanabazar chose to represent did not belong to any particular school and were not followed by later Mongolian artists despite his fame and authority.

Upon his return from Tibet to Mongolia in 1651, he immediately became involved in the construction of temples and monasteries and in the production of art. Zanabazar's hagiographies describe him as an architect, a sculptor, and a painter, who created the works of art for his own temples and monasteries, such as Ribogejai-gandan-shadublin (Ri bo dge rgyas dga' ldan bshad sgrub gling), where he produced a substantial number of images from 1680 to 1686, for the Qing emperors, and for Tibetan monasteries. Among Tibetan monasteries that he embellished with his art was Jachun (Bya khyung) Monastery in Amdo, founded by Tsongkhapa's teacher Chos rje Don 'grub Rin chen.

Zanabazar also invented the new, Mongolian script, Soyombo (T. rang byung snang ba, Skrt. svaya'bhu) for the sake of facilitating better translations of Tibetan technical terms and names into Mongolian. He gradually came to be acknowledged as the political and religious leader of the Khalkha Mongols; and in 1691, Zanabazar decided to surrender Khalkha Mongolia to the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911) as a vassal state of Qing China. This decision was the result of internal strife and the incessant attacks of the Dzungar Mongols.^{xiii} Zanabazar reinforced his close contacts with the Kangxi Emperor and became the Kangxi Emperor's religious mentor from 1691 until the latter's death in 1722. In 1697, the two rulers traveled together for a pilgrimage to Wutaishan.^{xiv}

Zanabazar's Selection of Buddhist texts and images

In the 1680s, Zanabazar created his masterpieces such as the Five Tathāgatas (figs.1-2).^{xv} The Five Tathāgatas have identical dimensions (H: 28 1/8 x D: 17 1/2), The set of the Five Tathāgatas form a well-established group in Vajrayāna Buddhism. This group of five is a basic and earliest Vajrayāna set, already present at Dunhuang during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). It is a result an early effort to systematize the pantheon based on the Five Buddha families; it laid a foundation for Tantric practices and initiations based on the maṇḍala structure. Zanabazar is also said to have established the initial set of the three Dharma protectors (rigs gsum mgon po), or the three Buddha Families (the Lotus, Vajra, and Buddha Families), which formed the initial group that is extended into five, with the addition of Ratna and Viśvavajra families. Zanabazar's sculptures of the Three Buddha Families have not survived, but we know of them from his hagiographies. His Five Tathāgatas testify to the master's introduction of Vajrayāna essentials to Ikh Khüree, which enabled the beginnings of tantric teachings in Khalkha Mongolia. The production of the Three Buddha Families, which were most likely placed in the Rigsumgompo Temple in Ikh Khüree, and his production of the Five Tathāgatas testify to Zanabazar's aim of bringing to Mongolia a pantheon that would secure a long lasting and systematic Vajrayāna tradition in Mongolia, in contrast to the early, limited attempts at Buddhist conversion in Mongolia. As we will see, the two mentioned sets of Buddha Families, which formed a part of larger sets of deities introduced by Zanabazar, became instrumental in the introduction of Buddhist doctrinal teachings and tantric initiations. His systematic approach to the propagation of Buddhism was driven with far-reaching goals of Dharma practice through an organized teaching and with efficiently layered

private and collective practices. A similar systematization was taking place in Tibet and Qing China with Buton Rinchen Drup's (Bu ston Rin chen 'Grub, 1290-1364) compilation projects of Buddhist literature, classification of Tantras into four classes, and the Kangxi Emperor's printing of the illustrated Mongolian Kangyur in Beijing in 1717-1720.

In Zanabazar's collection of the Five Tathāgatas, the Buddha Vairocana is visibly central and prominent with his sumptuous and magnificent appearance that is in accordance with his essential nature of the "Resplendent One"^{xvi} (fig. 1). Vairocana appears in various manifestations many of which were known and depicted in Mongolia, such as Sarvavid Vairocana (the All-knowing Vairocana) with the meditation (dhyāni) and teaching (dharmacakra) hand gestures. In Mongolian art, Sarvavid Vairocana appears in several pantheons, such as the Three-Hundred icons and the Three-Hundred-Sixty Icons, both of which were compiled and commented on by the learned Jangjia Khutukhtu Rolpay Dorje (ICang skya Rolpa'i rdo rje; 1717-1786) in the mid-eighteenth century.^{xvii} The fact that this particular Vairocana is included in the Mongolian Ganjuur published under the auspices of the Kangxi Emperor in 1717-1720^{xviii} indicates the establishment of a particular textual tradition in Mongolia that promulgated a devotion to the Sarvavid Vairocana. This is attested by numerous surviving images in Mongolia.

Amy Heller and later Matthew Kapstein have argued that Vairocana was central in early Tibetan art and at the Tibetan court, where he was known through his role in the Avataṃsaka Sūtra, in which he is presented as a cakravartin.^{xix} Kapstein has suggested the possibility of the early East Asian and the Tibetan court's emphasis on Vairocana as closely associated with the royal cult, the ordering of the empire, and the creation of an imperial self-image.^{xx} By identifying themselves with Vairocana, Tibetan kings established their authority and the royal cult of a cakravartin. A similar identification with Vairocana was visible in the Mongol imperial court of the fourteenth century. It is possible that as a direct descendent of the Mongol imperial line, Zanabazar had seen the maṇḍala established by Toghon Tömör Khaan (r. 1333-1367) on the Juyong Gate near Beijing in 1345, in which Vairocana occupies a central position, but with a different hand gesture (What kind of hand gesture??).^{xxi} Following Kapstein's argument, it is quite plausible that Zanabazar, just like the early Tibetan and Mongol emperors before him, saw himself and his state homologous with Vairocana and his maṇḍala. However, unlike the earlier Mongol rulers, who limited a Buddhist influence to the court, Zanabazar's goal was to lay firm foundation for widely spreading Dharma among the masses. Therefore, Zanabazar seems to have been interested in various functions of Vairocana as prescribed in the Mahāvairocana Tantra. According to the Mahāvairocana Tantra, Vairocana as Abhisambodhi represents the Buddha Śākyamuni in his maṇḍala at the moment of enlightenment. At Samye monastery, as Kapstein has shown, Śākyamuni's enlightenment is clearly conveyed through the images of Vairocana and Śākyamuni at different levels of the architectural structure. In this case, enlightenment is understood in a tantric context. Therefore, in the Tibetan case, Vairocana is usually depicted with the meditation (dhyāni) hand gesture and accompanied by Eight Bodhisattvas, as described in the Mahāvairocana Tantra. In the case of Zanabazar, he may have been referring to the Buddha Śākyamuni by placing Vairocana at the center of the Five Tathāgatas, because Śākyamuni was clearly instructed to see "that Buddha [Vairocana as Resplendent] is myself with a different name, preaching the Dharma in that universe and saving living beings."^{xxii} In the form of Vairocana, Śākyamuni taught the Avataṃsaka Sūtra immediately after his supreme enlightenment in Bodh Gaya.^{xxiii} In the later Guhyasamāja tantric tradition, favored by Gelukpas, Akṣobhya takes a central position in the Five Buddha configuration. By elevating the Tathāgata family rather than the Vajra family (Akṣobhya), Zanabazar introduced Buddhism in Mongolia, this time, without any alliance to any specific school.^{xxiv} With lofty goals of building a Buddhist state based on Vajrayāna teachings, Zanabazar resorted to multifaceted aspects and functions of Vairocana. In Zanabazar's depiction, Vairocana's particular hand gesture, the highest

enlightenment gesture (bodhyagri mūdrā), points explicitly to the Vajradhātu form of Vairocana, attesting to Zanabazar’s introduction to Mongolia the Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha (Compendium of the Reality of All the Buddhas), a yoga-tantra that was essential to the early development of tantric Buddhism.^{xxv} It seems that none of Zanabazar’s own initiations directed his choice of Vairocana’s form. If Zanabazar were taught the “fundamental theories of the Gelukpa sect”^{xxvi} by the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, following the Guhyasamāja tradition, he would have brought the Vajra family with Akṣobhya to the center of Five Buddha Families. Zanabazar’s choice of the Vairocana’s form appearing in the mentioned yoga-tantra was therefore intentional as his goal was to establish the Vajrayāna tradition in Mongolia by introducing the Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha, believed to be the first promulgated by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. In contrast to earlier Mongol rulers’ connection with the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, for Zanabazar, none of the Tibetan schools played a decisive role in choosing the form of Vairocana. However, the meaning of the deities and their doctrinal roles were crucial to the ways in which he selected their depiction. Vajradhātu with his bodhyagri mūdrā was also rare in Himalayan art and does not appear in any visual form after Zanabazar.

The Twenty-One Tārās

The twenty-one Tārās receive special attention in Zanabazar’s oeuvre and do not appear prominently in later Mongolian art (fig. 3). An early twentieth-century Buddhist historian Davgajantsan interpreted Zanabazar’s devotion to Tārās as a sign of Zanabazar’s true following of Kadampa and Gelug orders by emphasizing Jowo Atīśa (982-1054), and the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drub (dGe ‘dun grub) (1391-1475), whose successes were commonly associated with the Green Tārā, who was their main tutelary deity.^{xxvii} Davgajantsan, a Gelug adherent, leaves out Tāranātha and elevates only Kadampa and Gelug masters, such as by Atīśa, Dromton (‘Brom ston 1005-1064) and Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa 1357–1419) in the promulgation and devotion to Tārā.

Davgajantsan writes:

Because Jowo Atīśa always prayed to Green Tārā, his deeds in India and Tibet were equal to space. The Kadampa sūtras stated that Green Tārā will patronize all of his (Atīśa’s) disciples, [will facilitate] all success of the Kadampas, therefore Atīśa’s disciples and all disciples of the Lord Tsongkhapa worship and always pray to Green Tārā, [who is] the Highest. Because the All-Omniscient Gendendrup Gegeen (the First Dalai Lama) worshipped Green Tārā for his own work and deeds, his deeds became equal to the limits of the space...Likewise, the All-Savior Jebsundamba created Green Tārā’s portrait and Temple and in every work prayed to Green Tārā ...^{xxviii}

Although Zanabazar had built the Tārā Temple in Ikh Khüree as one of the primary foci of the Tārā cult, the Green Tārā was not the only image there. In fact, Zanabazar’s set of the Twenty-One Tārās, following the Sūryagupta tradition, lacks both the Green and White Tārās, thus disproving the Gelug point of view put forward by Davgajantsan. Davgajantsan’s interpretation of Zanabazar’s choice of deities demonstrates the purposeful rewriting and recreating of the history at the hands of the biographers. Tārā attracted a widespread following in Tibet during the sarma (new) period of the Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug tradition.^{xxix} In his devotion to Tārās, Zanabazar faithfully followed the doctrinal roots common to all schools.

If Zanabazar indeed followed Atīśa’s line of Tārā worship, it could be that he was explicitly modeling himself on Atīśa. In the so-called second diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet, Atīśa was instrumental in reintroducing Buddhism to Tibet with rituals related to Tārā in a time when Tibetans were not quite ready to deal with the highest tantric deities. Or perhaps, it was Zanabazar’s biographers, such as

Davgajantsan, who wanted him to be seen as a latter-day Atīśa, as someone who reintroduced Buddhism to Mongolia in a similar manner and for similar reasons.

Davganjantsan dates Zanabazar's set of twenty-one Tārās and the construction of his Tārā Temple in Ikh Khüree to 1706.^{xxx} This set is derived from The Ode in Twenty-One Homages one of the major texts related to Tārā that was translated into Tibetan in the late eleventh-century and later revised and extensively explained by Tibetan scholars. Among them was the celebrated Sakya scholar, Trakpa Gyaltzen (Grags pa rGyal mtshan, 1147-1216), a lineage-holder of Sūryagupta's Tārā cycle, who wrote thirteen texts on Tārā, and Tsongkhapa's disciple, the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drub. The Tengyur (Bstan 'gyur) contains a set of five texts constituting the commentaries of Sūryagupta, a great, ninth-century Kashmiri paṇḍita, to whom, tradition holds, Tārā herself conveyed the cycle of her twenty-one manifestations.^{xxxi} Hence, known as Sūryagupta's Tārā cycle, it contained three major trends of the iconographic representations of Tārās—those of Sūryagupta, Nāgārjuna, and Atīśa—and that of the Nyingma traditions.^{xxxii}

It is possible that Zanabazar was exposed to the iconographic taxonomy of the Tārā representation at the Jonang Puntsogling (Jo nang Phun tshogs gling) Monastery of his previous incarnation Tāranātha, although it is not clear whether Puntsogling contained the set of twenty-one Tārās at the time when Zanabazar went there and when he returned from Tibet with an image and the Tārā related literature in 1651.^{xxxiii} Zanabazar most certainly was familiar with the Tārā texts included in the Tengyur, which he had seen during his visits to Tibet, and later through his own copies, which he received from Tibet in the 1690s.^{xxxiv} Despite his mentorship by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who overtly demonstrated his hostility to Jonangpas by transforming the order's monasteries, such as Puntsogling, into Gelugpa institutions, Zanabazar seemed to be responsive to Tāranātha's teachings. Tāranātha wrote extensively on Tārā and was known as a leading proponent of the cult of Tārā in Tibet.^{xxxv} If Zanabazar was the Gelug adherent, as his biographers suggest, why would he challenge the Dalai Lama's policy of exporting the Tāranātha's reincarnation into Mongolia and shaping Tāranātha's new reincarnate in Gelug terms?

Zanabazar's Twenty-One Tārās primarily follow the tradition of Nāgārjuna and Atīśa, where Tārās are similar in everything except in the colors of their bodies, which, as metal sculptures, are all gilt (fig. 3). In Nāgārjuna's and Atīśa's tradition, there are six red, five white, seven orange-golden-yellow, and three black Tārās described for a total of twenty-one.^{xxxvi} The consistent gilt color of Zanabazar's statues makes his Tārās appear remarkably similar. His Green and White Tārās (figs. 4-5) are additional to the group of Twenty-One Tārās as the Green Tārā is accompanied by the images of Ekajaṭī and Maṛīci (fig. 6), thereby bringing the entire group to a total of twenty-five figures. Zanabazar's White and Green Tārās are close in their prominent dimensions to the Five Tathāgatas and equally stand out among his works. As is the case in all of his sculptures, Zanabazar's Tārās are imbued with sumptuous details worked to the finest nuance and creative brilliance. An example is a remarkable lace on the forehead of the White Tārā, with tiny pearls held in the similarly small hands of its kīrtimukha. This refined detail is unprecedented.

The Green Tārā's companions maintain the seamless continuity of the set due to their remarkable similarity in the size and execution of the other twenty-one Tārās. Ekajaṭī appears in her semi-wrathful form. In accordance with the canonical description, she has one face and two arms; she holds a skull-cup in her left hand and a ritual chopper in her right hand.^{xxxvii} The current statue of Maṛīci at Bogda Khan Palace Museum poses a peculiar question of identification. If the identification is indeed correct, Zanabazar's Maṛīci appears as a male Bodhisattva wearing a five-tiered crown (fig. 6).^{xxxviii} As a

companion on the right side of the Green Tārā, he makes the boon-granting hand gesture with his left hand, and in his right hand he holds the stem of a lotus in the the gesture of religious discourse (vitarka-mudrā).^{xxxix}

Frederic Bunce identified one of Marīci's various forms as an "independent feminine Bodhisattva,"^{xi} but I have been unable to find textual liturgies related to Marīci as a male Bodhisattva. Moreover, it is unprecedented in Tibet and Mongolia to see Marīci in a male form with a deerskin (kṛṣṇasāra) over the shoulder, referring to Avalokiteśvara, Tārā's spiritual father. The ambiguity of this figure of Marīci propels us to reconsider a present identification of this statue as Marīci ('Od ser can ma). A statue of Marīci at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City (formerly in the collection of Pierre Jourdan-Barry in Paris)^{xli} could be a viable candidate for Zanabazar's original Marīci.

Vajradhara and Vajrasattva

Zanabazar's splendid Vajradhara and Vajrasattva (fig. 7-8) are visually distinguished there where had been ambivalence in prior iconographic representations.^{xlii} According to Zanabazar's main disciple Luvsanperenlei, the master created the Vajradhara statue "with his own hands" in 1683.^{xliii} Vajradhara was placed in the Vajradhara Temple, where it endured as the heart of Ikh Khüree long after the master's death and until the monastery's tragic demise in the early twentieth century.^{xliv} After that, it was moved to Gandantegchinling (dGa' ldan theg chen gling) Monastery in the 1940s, where it remained as the heart of Buddhism that was introduced by Zanabazar. Luvsanperenlei does not mention Zanabazar's initiations into Vajradhara, but according to later biographers,^{xlv} Zanabazar received further tantric teachings on Vajradhara from several lamas, including Duvtavjajam (sGrub thabs bRgya rgyam) and Duvtavrinchenjunai (Grub thabs Rin chen 'Byung gnas).^{xlvi} Aside to these textual references, Zanabazar's artistic activities, such as his art and the temple construction, firmly connect him to Vajradhara, the fundamental deity of the Unsurpassed Yoga Tantras (niruttarayoga-tantra).^{xlvii}

Zanabazar's Vajradhara and Vajrasattva are among his largest extant works. The unique physical qualities of these two statues, their external exuberance of the sculptural form, and the extraordinary finesse of their ornaments visually distinguish Vajradhara and Vajrasattva as the highest deities in Zanabazar's pantheon. The Vajradhara Temple in the Ikh Khüree and references to Vajradhara as essential to Zanabazar's teachings and Tantric practices mentioned in his hagiographies point to his personal relation to Vajradhara. Vajradhara is a primordial deity of the highest authority in the Vajrayāna pantheon. Akin to Tibetan schools, especially the Kagyu,^{xlviii} which visually illustrate Vajradhara as their progenitor and who is listed in their lineages, the basis for Zanabazar's affiliation with Vajradhara is quite intentional. If Zanabazar's royal pedigree provided him with unquestionable legitimacy, a new affiliation with Vajradhara would have brought legitimacy to the Jebsundamba lineage on a spiritual level.

Zanabazar's Vajradhara (fig.7) is an exquisite sculpture with many subtle details. He is seated in a full-lotus position on a large pedestal surrounded with lotus ornamentation (a hallmark of Zanabazar's style), and he holds a vajra in his right and a bell in his left hand. His hands are elevated and crossed at the chest in the vajra-humkara-mudrā, symbolizing wisdom and compassion. A closer examination reveals that Vajradhara's jewelry, other ornamentation, and physical stature is still more sophisticated due to the artistic execution that aims at Vajradhara's visual prominence, emphasizing his authority over Vajrasattva, who appears here as his counterpart (fig. 8). The two are most intimately connected, as demonstrated by the contents of their crowns: the Vajradhara's five-leaved crown contains the

images of the Five Buddha Families, and each of the five tiers of Vajrasattva's crown has their dhāraṇī syllables. The connection of the two as a firm set of primordial Buddhas carries an important doctrinal point. Just as Vajradhara is a "progenitor of the Vajrayāna system of Buddhism"^{xix} and therefore evades any sectarian affiliations, the exquisite Vajradhara statue testifies to Zanabazar's intent of founding a Buddhist state that is governed by a Vajradhara reincarnate ruler and that is based on an independent Vajrayāna tradition. This way of Vajrayāna introduction to Mongolia is fundamentally different from the earlier Mongolian imperial alliances with different orders of Tibetan Buddhism.

Maitreya, the Future Buddha

In his other statues such as those of Maitreya, Zanabazar repeatedly shows an individual approach. Several images of Maitreya have been preserved among Zanabazar's works. They are scattered throughout various museums in Mongolia and abroad, including the Chojin Lama Temple Museum (fig. 9),ⁱ the Gandantegchinling Monastery, and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum in the United States (fig. 25).ⁱⁱ As both Rhie and Berger have noted, all of three surviving statues appear to follow a specific, twelfth-century "Nepalese-inspired model" of Maitreya from the Narthang (sNar thang) Monastery (1190) in Central Tibet, which brings together the styles of both Gupta and Pāla India.ⁱⁱⁱ

Upon his return from Tibet, in 1656 Zanabazar was invited to the assembly of the four provinces (khoshuu) of the Khalkha nobility at Erdene-Zuu Monastery (built in 1586). There he performed the Maitreya Procession for the first time, an event that was repeated again in 1681.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ With this introduction, Maitreya began to play an essential role in the ritual life of Ikh Khüree. After the statue was installed by Zanabazar, the Bodhisattva form of the deity was used in a regular procession of Maitreya in Züün Khüree,^{lv} which was held at least annually. Zanabazar's interest in Maitreya was further welcomed and developed into a significant ritual by the later Jebtsundamba rulers, although their interest was more directed towards their alliance with the Gelug. As we will see in the Maitreya Chapter in this volume, later ritual practices related to Maitreya, including the rituals centered on the monumental statue of Maitreya at the Maitreya Temple in Ikh Khüree built by the Buddhist scholar Agwaankhaidav (Ngawang Khedrup, 1779-1838), used images of Maitreya seated in the posture of benevolence (bhadraśana), with both legs extended in a silent promptness, as if he is ready to stand up. Here, the Buddha of the Future holds his hands in a teaching gesture (dharmacakra), and his attributes are placed on two lotuses above his shoulders.^{lv} One wonders, what led Zanabazar to emphasize the early Tibetan models in his representation of Maitreya as a Bodhisattva, a model that was not adopted by later Ikh Khüree artists.

The rendering of Maitreya in a standing form seems to create a specific pantheon of Zanabazar complete with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and goddesses, in which Vajradhara and Vajrasattva, the Five Buddha Families, and the Green and White Tārās are all visually prominent and in a position of high spiritual authority. They are not only larger in size, but they also possess other visual qualities that bring out their magnificent. Zanabazar's three Dharma protectors (Rigs gsum mgon po), mentioned in his hagiographies^{lvi} but no longer existent, would have perfectly completed this core pantheon.

The Point of Production

In his pantheon, Zanabazar did not depict images of his own teachings and initiations. The hagiographies mention his early consecration (rjes gngang) into Mahākāla and later initiations into Yamāntaka, and initiated into the textual corpus of Vajrāvalī, images of which were never depicted by Zanabazar. His pantheon was envisioned for laying the foundation for beginning Buddhist practices,

and he mentally designed and recreated his pantheon of deities in his meditation temple, Tövkhön (T. sGrub Khang), in what is now the Övörkhongai province. This temple was built for him by the Khalkha nobles in his early years, and he used as his retreat temple and not as an actual site for the casting the statues as some have claimed. This misunderstanding derives from the ambivalent meaning of the Mongolian term, “büteelyn süm.”^{lvii} “Büteelyn süm” has been literally translated as a “creation (or production) temple,” and it has been interpreted to refer to the physical production of the castings.^{lviii} Yet, for Zanabazar (as for all serious practitioners), the creation and production denote a process of sādhana practices, the acts of incantation and visual evocation of the deity. Zanabazar’s mental design of the statues follows strictly from his meditation retreats. The term “büteelin süm,” which is a Mongolian translation of the Tibetan word dubkhan (sgrub khang) could well refer to this practice of meditation, since the Tibetan term explicitly means a “practice building,” a “cave,” or a “dwelling used for meditation.” The Tövkhön temple is located on the top of a mountain, in the midst of a dense, thick forest, and is not easily accessible to visitors. In contrast, Zanabazar’s mobile monastery, Ikh Khüree was accessible to the ordinary devotees. Because of the mobility of Ikh Khüree and its outreach to non-initiated masses, it is possible, as current evidence suggests, that Zanabazar’s pantheon comprised the peaceful forms of the deities that are more attractive to new converts than as wrathful deities.

Conclusion

In his project of unifying the Khalkha Mongols, Zanabazar’s eight silver stūpas, now long vanished, but mentioned in his hagiographies, testified to the permanent presence of the Buddha in Ikh Khüree, symbolizing the eight major events in the Buddha’s life.^{lix} The eight stūpas have been in the avid use in Tibet as a way of transplanting Indian Buddhist sites important in the Buddha’s life to Tibet. Zanabazar’s hagiographers do not specify the locations of the eight stūpas within Ikh Khüree. A possible reason for this is that the stūpas were meant to designate and exalt Ikh Khüree as the Buddha’s space, where the Tārā Temple and the images of the holy saviouress served to guarantee the present security and protection of the Mongol state. On the other hand, the Maitreya Procession, together with his Maitreya images, was intended to secure the future of Zanabazar’s realm; and his divine Amitāyus was to bestow a long life upon his nation. In his text Janlavtsozhol (Dus bstun gsol ‘debs byin rlabs mchog stsol ma bzhugs so), written in 1696, for “the peace and the stability” of his nation, Zanabazar states:

Clear away all the darkness of the ignorance of all beings.
 So that omniscient primordial wisdom may be illuminated, I make this dedication.
 From the boundless masses of total corruption and great darkness,
 With compassion, please protect us, we who have entered such evil times.

Having pacified all the various great flames of sufferings
 That ripen when afflicted negative karma produces its results,
 Please increase the auspicious marvels
 That are mutually loving, agreeable, and free of enmity.

May the sunlight of the teachings of the Victorious One spread in the ten directions.
 May all beings always enjoy peace, happiness, and fortune,
 And may they purify their obscurations, complete the accumulations,
 And quickly, ever so quickly, reach the state of omniscience!^{lx}

The initial pantheon of Zanabazar's images, "expand[ing] the wisdom minds...and aim[ing] at bringing the wisdom light,"^{lxix} had the lofty function of planting the seeds for the future and establishing the direction of the Mongolian Buddhism that would unify the people under the new Jebtsundamba rulers and legitimize their political governance. Zanabazar's images built the foundation of what he hoped would form a spiritual stronghold for the Khalkha Mongols in the present and in the future, in which Ikh Khüree was designated to be a central abode of the deities within his pantheon. It is this hope that explains Zanabazar's otherwise unusual neglect of the deities with whom he was closely associated in his initiations and consecrations.

With Vairocana in his Vajradhātu form, Zanabazar aimed at establishing a ritual environment in his Ikh Khüree, where the Vajradhātu Vairocana would contribute to the creation of a new polity of the pious Khalkha. By means of Vairocana statue, Zanabazar not only established the presence of the Buddha who eliminates all evil rebirths, but he also transformed the mental affliction of hatred into the "ultimate-reality, the perfection of wisdom."^{lxxii} For these altruistic goals, he introduced the Five Buddha Families to be located in the cardinal directions, as a part of the main imagery of Ikh Khüree. Not only did the Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha establish the foundation of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Mongolia, but it also meant to assist in the elimination of malevolent forces by means of tantric practices, just as much as the Buddha's victory over Māra was, as the text suggests, a tantric subjugation.^{lxxiii}

Zanabazar's images, on the other hand, were the material traces of history, or other "sites of memory," which constituted a new life for the Mongols. The hagiographically selective, but now collective, memory of Zanabazar, made possible through the materiality and visibility of his images facilitated the Mongols' survival as a nation during the destructive years, with his princely Vairocana in the center presided over by the kingly Vajradhara. The potent capacity of these images to mark the Mongolian Buddhist identity made them ideal targets for communists who sought to annihilate the very "sites of memory," with which the Mongols "buttressed their identities."^{lxxiv} Among Zanabazar's many images, it is his main pantheon with the primordial Buddhas and the Five Tathāgatas that were saved from the purges by his later devotees. Among his numerous writings was his prayer for peace and stability, the divine Janlavtsogzol, which was hidden away and rescued from the communist revolutionaries. The "miraculous" survival of his images and texts demonstrates that Zanabazar succeeded in his mission. His "desire that the peoples be united and the bases of the faith be spread"^{lxxv} was accomplished; and his people once again continue to maintain his images as central to their national identity, unity, and security to this day.

ⁱZaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei was a celebrated Buddhist scholar in Mongolia. We learn about him from his two hagiographies: the first written as an autobiography, and the second written by his disciple Kanjur Mergen Nomyn Khan. See Shagdariin, Bira ed. 1995. *Öndör Gëgëeniï namtruud orshivoï*. Ulaanbaatar: ShUA-iïn Èrdëm Kompani.

ⁱⁱLuvsanperenlei begins the hagiography, listing Zanabazar's royal pedigree.

ⁱⁱⁱShagdariin, Bira (1995), 27, n. 11.

^{iv}Shagdariin, Bira ed., 1995.

^vD. Tsedev transl. in Shagdariin, Bira, ed., 1995. *Öndör Gëgëeniï namtruud orshivoï*. Ulaanbaatar: ShUA-iïn Èrdëm Kompani.

^{vi}For a detailed story of Zanabazar's life, see Tsültem, N., 1982 and Berger, Patricia (1995), 261-263.

^{vii}This information exists only in Mongolian sources and is absent in Tāranātha's own autobiography. See Michael Sheehy "Tāranātha's Travels in Mongolia" at <http://www.jonangpa.com/node/1445>. The question concerning Luvsanperenlei's objectives for such an intentional creation of apocryphal history is still open. If Zanabazar was recognized as Tāranātha's reincarnation in Mongolia, then the question of when and how it happened requires more research for better understandings of the period of turmoil. See also Junko, Miyawaki (1994/52), 50-53.

^{viii}Luvsanperenlei in Sh. Bira ed., 1995.

^{ix}See Sh. Soninbayar transl. In Sh.Bira 1995

^xI. Demberel, transl, 1993.

^{xi}For detail see Junko 1994.

^{xii}Luvsanperenlei, pp. 8-10; Pozdneyev, Aleksei (1896-1898), 327.

^{xiii}Junko argues that Tūsheet Khan and Zanabazar, while seeking refuge from Galdan's attack at the Qing court, were forced to pledge their allegiance to Kangxi Emperor in 1691 at Dolonnur. Junko (1994): 56.

^{xiv}Agwaanluvsandondov in Demberel (1993), 56.

^{xv}Today the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar houses four of the original five Tathāgatas, while the Chojin Lama Temple hosts the fifth Tathāgata, Ratnasaḥbava. In the past century, the Five Tathāgatas were apparently located as a group at the Chojin Lama Temple, most likely until the late 1960s, when for the unknown reasons Ratnasaḥbava was separated from the group of five. The other four were transferred to the newly established Fine Arts Museum. See Fig. 1 in Berger (1995), 273.

^{xvi}I borrow these epithets from Snellgrove (2002).

^{xvii}Berger (2003); Frederic Bunce. 1998. *An Encyclopedia of Buddhist Deities, Demigods, Godlings, Saints and Demons*. (New Delhi, D.K. Printworld), p. 10. See more on Vairocana depictions in Lokesh Chandra (1999).

^{xviii}Berger (1995): 129.

^{xix}Heller (1998), 176. Kapstein (2000), 59-65.

^{xx}Kapstein (2000), 62.

^{xxi}Berger (2003), 56.

^{xxii}Quoted from the *Śūtra-gama Samādhi Sūtra* in Snellgrove (2002), 196.

^{xxiii}Rhie and Thurman (2000), 341.

^{xxiv}There is some evidence of the spread of Buddhism to Mongolia from the third century BCE onward. Vajrayāna Buddhism was practiced at the Mongol court during the Yuan period. For visual evidence, see L. Dashnyam (2003); and for a discussion of the early Buddhism in Mongolia, see Tserensodnom (1997).

^{xxv}Snellgrove (2002), 120-121 and 197-198. Weinberger offers another translation of the Sarvatathāgatattvasaḥgraha as "Compendium of Principles." See Weinberger (2003).

^{xxvi}Pozdneyev (1898: 328).

^{xxvii}Davvajantsan in Shagdariin, Bira (1995), 41.

^{xxviii} Ibid.

^{xxix} Wilson, (1986), 289-299. Tārā appears in the Mañjuśrīmulakalpa and Mahāvairocana Tantra as accompanying Avalokiteśvara and as his emanation as well. However, in Tārā's main text The Origin of All Rites, she assumes the prominent position of the Mother of All Tathāgatas. The Tibetan canon also contains texts related to Tārā as the Saviouress from Eight Fears, e.g. the Hundred and Eight Names of the Venerable *Ārya-Tārā*, and The Praise in Twenty-One Homages.

^{xxx} Davgajantsan, p. 40; Pozdneyev (1898), 337

^{xxxi} See Willson (1996), 107-166.

^{xxxii} See Beyer (1986), 118-119.

^{xxxiii} Khürelbaatar (2001) 65; Pozdneyev (1898), 327.

^{xxxiv} Zanabazar created two complete copies of Kangyur from the original bronze copy that he ordered from Central Tibet in 1683. He ordered from Desi Sanggye Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho, 1653-1705) the complete 225 volumes of the Tengyur, which he himself copied, together with his 470 disciples.

^{xxxv} Tāranātha's works on Tārā include The Golden Rosary Illuminating the Origins of the Tantra of *Tārā* and The Origin of *Tārā* Tantra. More on Tārā Tantra. See Beyer, 1996 and Wilson, 1986.

^{xxxvi} Willson's translation of The Praise in Twenty-One Homages. However, Beyer gives different set of colors for the twenty-one Tārās. According to Beyer, there are 4 red, 6 white, 3 yellow, 4 orange, 2 red-black and 2 black Tārās.

^{xxxvii} Bunce (1994), vol. 1, 156.

^{xxxviii} I doubt the validity of this identification and suggest reexamination. The earliest publication of this statue is in Tsültem, 1982, where the statue is listed by its Tibetan name 'Od ser can ma and is noted as male. Berger also notes the unique male gender of this deity. See Berger (1995), 292.

^{xxxix} Tsültem, 1982, shows an erroneous museum display of the Green Tārā triad, which positions Ekajaṭī on the left and Marīci on the right (fig. 12). As Ekajaṭī's extended leg shows, the statue must be correctly placed to the right of Green Tārā, and Marīci's extended arm points to the left position in the set.

^{xli} Bunce (1998), Vol. 1, 156.

^{xlii} The Rubin Museum of Art has not been able to show me Marīci statue during my visit in March of 2008. This splendid Marīci statue was published and annotated by Jane Casey Singer in 2003. For a considerable reconsideration of Marīci identification, one needs to examine the statue at the Rubin Museum of Art. My current examination is based on the publications and the www.himalayanart.org website, which shows that Marīci housed at the Rubin Museum of Art could likely be a strong candidate for an authentic Marīci of Zanabazar.

^{xliii} Vajrasattva appears as a Bodhisattva in the early Tibetan art. See, for instance, Vajrasattva in Tabo Cella in Luczanits (2004), 37. See also Rhie and Thurman (2000), 331-333. It seems it is later in Tibetan history that Vajrasattva occupies the position of a primordial deity as a counterpart of Vajradhara.

^{xliiii} Luvsanperenlei cited in Sh. Bira, 1995. p.12.

^{xliiii} L. Khürelbaatar (2001), 175-176.

^{xlv} According to Agwaanluvsandondov and Davgajantsan. His initiation into Vajradhara is not mentioned by Luvsanperenlei.

^{xlvi} Luvsanperenlei cited in Sh. Bira, 1995. p. 12

^{xlvii} The fourfold classification of tantras includes the Kriyā, Caryā, Yoga, and Niruttarayoga Tantras. I use the latter term Niruttarayoga (T. *rnal 'byor gong na med pa'i rgyud*) to replace an erroneous but widely used term Annuttara-yoga following the recent scholarship by Jacob Dalton. See Dalton, 2005, Vol. .28/1, p. 152.

^{xlviii} See especially Taglung (sTag lung) and Drigung ('Bri gung) paintings, where, as a rule, the top register in each thangka visually lists the Kagyu doctrinal lineage starting with Vajradhara, including the

Tantric adepts (mahāsiddhas) Tilopa and Naropa, and the Tibetan teachers Marpa and Milarepa. See images and discussions in Jane Casey Singer and Steven Kossak, 1998.

^{xlix}Jeff Watt refers to the Hevajra Tantra in a personal communication, May 2008.

^lFirst published by Tsültem in 1982. For discussion and description, see Berger (1995), 280-281.

^{li}Rhie and Thurman (2000), p. 141. Also see Berger (1995), 79.

^{lii}Rhie and Thurman, (2000), 45; Berger (1995), 281, fig. 1.

^{liii}Luvsanperenlei cited in Sh. Bira, 1995. p. 11

^{liv}Ikh Khüree consisted of two major parts: the Gandantegchinling Monastery and Züün Khüree.

^{lv}This large statue of Maitreya was completely destroyed along with the temple in the 1930s.

^{lvi}Agwaanluvsandondov cited in Demberel 1993. Luvsanperenlei cited in Sh. Bira, 1995. P. 12

^{lvii}This translation is found in the modern Mongolian scholarship about Zanabazar, as for example, in Ichinnorov's Zanabazar.

^{lviii}See Ichinnorov, 2001.

^{lix}These Eight Great events of the Buddha's life are: the Buddha's Birth at Lumbinī; his Enlightenment at Bodhgayā; the First Sermon at Sārnāth; his Descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods at **Sāṃkāśya**; his Multiplication Miracle at Śrāvastī; his Taming of the Elephant Nalagiri at Rājagḥa; the Gift of Honey at Vaiśālī, and his Mahāparinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara.

^{lx}Zanabazar. (1696) reprint, 1995. Ulaanbaatar: Olon Ulsyn Mongol Sudlalyn Kholboo. Translation is mine.

'gro kun ma rig mun pa kun bsangs ste
kun mkhyen ye shes snang ba phyir bsngo
cher snyigs mun chen lhag par gtibs pa yi
bdag cag dus ngan 'gro la thugs rjes skyobs

las ngan nyon mongs 'bras bu dus smin pa'i
sna tshogs sdug bsngal me chen kun zhi nas
phan tshun khon bral byams brtses yid mthun pa'i
bde legs phun tshogs rgyas par mdzad du gsol

.....

rgyal bstan nyi 'od phyogs bcur rgyas pa dang
'gro kun bde skyid dpal la rtag spyod cing
sgrib byang tshogs rdzogs kun mkhyen go 'phang la
myur zhing myur ba nyid du reg gyur cig

^{lxi}Zanabazar. Janlavtsogzol, 1696.

^{lxii}Rhie and Thurman (2000), 347.

^{lxiii}Weinberger (2003), 189-191.

^{lxiv}Nora (1989), 21.

^{lxv}Inscription on the thangka of Amitayus that was presented to Kangxi Emperor in 1691. Pozdneyev (1898), 336.