

Монголын Сүм Хийдийн Түүхэн Товчоо Төсөл

UB 33 Mongol unshlagat Buyan arvijkhui khiid

Written Mongolian name: Mongol unshlagat buyan arvijkhui khiid

English name: Buyan Avijikhui Mongolian reading monastery

Bayangol district, Damdinbazar Street

NOTE in 2011: the yurt temple may have moved

Informants: D. Ganbaatar, head of the monastery (born 1978); and Pürevbaatar lama, astrologist of the monastery (born 1978)

Written sources: Mönkhsaikhan, D., *Tövd-mongol khandmal unshlaga. Bod sog shan spyar kha-'don, Töbed-mongyol qadamal unshilaya*. Ulaanbaatar 2002. pp. 1-12.

Pozdneyev, A.M., *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in late 19th-century Mongolia*. ed.: Krueger, J.R. The Mongolia Society. Bloomington 1978

This relatively small temple is housed in a yurt with a metal roof and wooden covering on the outside. Until November, 2005, it was situated at Ikh toiruu (N. 47 55.688', E. 106 56.367') near Manba datsan. A big notice board visible from the road gives the name of the Monastery in Cyrillic script and in classical Mongolian. In November 2005 the temple moved to Damdinbazar Street, near the 25th pharmacy, Bayangol district, 4th khoroolol. The same yurt has been re-erected within a very small *khashaa* (fenced compound) in front of an estate of big houses.

The specialty of the temple is that all of the texts used in ceremonies are written in Classical Mongolian and chanted in modern Mongolian in order to enable people participating on the ceremonies to understand more and, potentially, follow the meaning. (In all other monasteries in Mongolia today chanting is done in Tibetan, a language only ever known by the monastic community.) Thus in this temple, unlike any other in Mongolia today, the daily chanting, the special ceremonies of the big days of the month, the readings requested by the believers and the remedies (*zasal*) given are all in modern Mongolian. The texts they use were originally translated from Tibetan into written Mongolian by the third incarnation of Mergen Gegeen (see below).

The head of the temple often visits his teacher at Labrang monastery to consult and work on corrections of the old translations. In 2002 he published a book on the history of Mongolian chanting (D. Ganbaatar: *Burkhanii shashnii mongol unshlaga*, 2002, Buyan Arvijikhui khiid) sponsored by the Tibet Foundation. The first subject studied by the young lamas in the temple is Written Mongolian (the old Uigur-origin writing system). After this they study Tibetan, and once they are proficient in the two languages, they assist in the correction work on the old translations. Collectively they compare and contrast the Mongolian texts with the Tibetan original texts. They primarily use the translations of Mergen Gegeen but also use Mongolian translations of texts translated by other Mongolian lama scholars. They use the written old Mongolian texts but chant them following the rules of modern Mongolian. As far as can be ascertained, some part of the chanting is understandable by the believers. However, as these texts are chanted in a very elaborated literary language, it is far from the everyday language, and also the devotees should know religious vocabulary in order to understand the specialist Buddhist meaning and comprehend the text in full. For those special tantric texts that can be heard only by those who have received initiations on them, the chanting may be conducted in such a way that prevents listeners from understanding them in full to prevent any harmful consequences.

The monastery was opened in 2001. The abbot is D. Ganbaatar who was a lama in Darkhan city. He graduated from the Department of Religious Studies in the National University of Mongolia. At present, the monastery has 13 lamas, 4 of whom are adults (aged around 30) with all the others being young boys aged around 14 years old. Currently five lamas in this community are studying at Kumbum and Labrang, the famous monastic universities in North-Tibet, near Lake Kukur, where they learn the holy texts in Tibetan and Mongolian in parallel. Also two lamas are studying in India.

There are four lamas with *getsel* vow. The monastery has the following ranks: abbot, *lovon*, chanting master and a disciplinary master. An astrologist (*zurkhaich*) belongs to the temple, too.

Монголын Сүм Хийдийн Түүхэн Товчоо Төсөл

The main protector of the temple is *Ochirvaani* (Tib. *phyag-na rdo-rje / phyag-rdor*, Skr. Vajrapani). The sculpture of Buddha is in the middle of the altar. On its left side is the image of Mergen gegegen and on its right side there is an image of Öndör gegegen Zanabazar. On the left side of the altar there is a statue of Buddha placed in a box, and on the right side there is a statue of *Ochirvaani*, the main protector of the temple. From the wooden frame of the smoke hole of the yurt, an image of the assembly tree hangs down. Thangkas of Buddha, Tsongkhapa, *Nogoon Dari ekh* (Tib. *sgrol ljang*, Skr. Shyamatarā, the Green Tara), *Tsagaan Dari ekh* (Tib. *sgrol dkar*, Skr. Sitatara, the White Tara) and *Manzshir* (Tib. *'jam-dpal / 'jam-(dpal)-dbyangs*, Skr. Manjushri) also hang around the walls in the yurt.

The daily chanting is held from 9.00am to 1.00pm. Every month, on the 8th of the month there is a ceremony in honour of *Dari ekh*, called The Four Mandalas of Tara (*Dari ekhiin mandal shivaa*), on the 15th *Naidan chogo* is performed as a ritual for the 16 disciples of Buddha, on the 25th the volumes of *Ganjuur* are read, on the 29th a ceremony is performed for the protective deities (*Sakhuis*), and on the 30th *Maidariin chogo* is chanted to the honour of *Maidar* (Tib. *byams-pa*, Skr. Maitreya), the future Buddha.

There are no lists of the texts that can be requested in the temple, nor are there fixed prices for readings. Believers usually ask the *zurkhaich* what should be read and they pay according to their ability.

In Ulaanbaatar, there was another small temple in Bayangol district, on the way up to Gandan (Zanabazar Street), where chanting was done in Mongolian. It was called *Mongol Unshlagat Töv* (Mongolian Reading Centre) and was led by P. Sükhbat (Luvsan Darjaa) lama. However, it ceased operating in October 2005. Thus currently the *Buyan Avijikhui* Mongolian reading monastery is the only one in Ulaanbaatar where the religious ceremonies are conducted in Mongolian.

Background to the use of Mongolian chanting

Translation of Tibetan texts (canonical and extra canonical as well) into Mongolian began in the 14th century with the activity of Choiji odzer (Tib. chos-kyi 'od-zer) and his disciple Sherab Sengge (Tib. shes-rab seng-ge). During the reign of Altan (1543-1583) and Ligdan khan (1604-1634) more texts from the Tibetan Ganjuur and Danjuur were translated. The translation of the whole Canon was completed and printed in the 18th century on the orders of the Manchu emperor Kien-lung (1735-1796). This was done using 200 translators led by Rolbiidorj (Tib. rol-pa'i rdo-rje, 1717-1786), the 2nd *Janjaa khutagt* (Tib. *lcang-skya*), who was the abbot of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing. Bilingual and multilingual dictionaries were composed in this period to help the work of the translators and to fix the agreed terminology. The Janjaa khutagt himself also compiled a terminological dictionary in 1741-42, *Merged yarqu-yin oron* (Tib. *dag-yig mkhas-pa'i 'byung-gnas*, 'Dictionary entitled the Source of Wisdom'). Other important terminological dictionaries composed in the 17th-18th centuries were the Mahavyutpatti, *Lisi-yin ordu qarsi*, *Ming-gi nam-grangs* etc. However, the ceremonial language remained Tibetan in Mongolian monasteries, though there were efforts and attempts from time to time in certain monasteries, especially in today's Inner Mongolia, to conduct the ceremonies in Mongolian.

One of these initiators of using Mongolian, well before this period, was Neyichi toyin (1557-1653), who spread Buddhism in Inner-Mongolia and studied for many years in Tashilhunpo monastery in Tibet. On completion of his studies he returned to Inner-Mongolia in 1638 where he translated books of Buddhist teaching and traditions, visited many parts of the country to preach, established many monasteries and ordained numerous lamas. Neyichi toyin established *Bayankhoshuu* monastery in Khorchin Tüshee vangiin khoshuu (in Inner-Mongolia), and *Baga zuu* monastery in Khökhhot, in the centre of the present Inner-Mongolia. These two monasteries followed and perpetuated the tradition of chanting in Mongolian. Over time the number of monasteries using the Mongolian recitation system increased to around 20 or 30.

One of these monasteries was *Mergen khiid* in Urad khoshuu (in present Inner-Mongolia), the original monastery of the first Mergen gegegen, who was a disciple of Neyichi toyin. The third incarnation of *Mergen gegegen*, Luvsandambiijaltsan (Tib. blo-bzang bstan-pa'i rgyal-mtshan, 1717-1766), a lama in *Mergen khiid*, reformed the system of Mongolian recitation laid by Neyichi toyin. He renewed the system of chanting by balancing the syllables in the lines of the Mongolian translated words, to make the chanting closer to the original Tibetan. By doing this, the Mongolian chanting became more rhythmic and easier to recite. As a translator and poet he composed dozens of books of verses in a very sophisticated style. The Mongolian texts retained the meaning of the Tibetan texts, but some words were added or left out to keep the number of syllables the same. As a special Mongolian feature the lines of the verses were written with

Монголын Сүм Хийдийн Түүхэн Товчоо Төсөл

head rhymes (this is where the first two or preferably four lines of the verse begin with the same letter – a vowel or consonant).

In 1587, Ayushi Gūūshi from Khorchin, an Inner-Mongolian area, created a writing system, called Ali-Kali to make it possible to write Sanskrit, Tibetan and Mongolian characters with the same alphabet. It was necessary as the ceremonial texts contain daranis (special magic spells or phrases in Sanskrit), which must be transliterated correctly for correct pronunciation, otherwise they could cause difficulties when chanting in Mongolian. However, Ali-Kali writing system did not find favour so its use was not widespread, a similar fate to other invented Mongolian writing systems, such as the Soyombo and the horizontal square scripts of Zanabazar.

There seem to have existed other 'schools' of Mongolian chanting, of which we have information on two: one which uses texts composed by the third incarnation of Mergen Gegeen who lived from 1717 to 1766 and who reformed the original texts of the first Mergen Gegeen; and one which uses the texts printed in 1742 composed by *Janjaa khutagt*, Rolbiidorj, the abbot of Tibetan Buddhism in Beijing.

According to Pozdneyev (*Religion and Ritual in Society* p. 401.) at the end of the 19th century ceremonies were performed in Mongolian language in the area of Togtokh türüü khoshuu, Setsen khan aimag, in today's Mongolia. The lamas in this khoshuu used the Janjaa khutagt's *sūmbūm* (Tib. *gsung-'bum*, collected works). At that time (and also later on) it was very rare for chanting to be in Mongolian and hence the special mention by Pozdneyev.

Another effort to chant the texts in Mongolian was made by a Buryat scholar, Sumatiratna or Nomtiin Rinchen who lived from 1821-1907. He compiled a terminological dictionary (Sumatiratna, *Bod-hor-gyi brda-yig ming-tshig don-gsum gsal-bar byed-pa'i mun-sel sgron-me*, Ulaanbaatar 1959) to assist the Mongolian reading, but this attempt was as unsuccessful as the previous ones.

There is no other data confirming that Mongolian reading was practiced in any countryside monasteries (apart from isolated cases) in the area of the present Mongolia, and definitely not in Ikh khüree, the old Mongolian monastic capital and its temples.

In 1944 after the re-opening of Gandan monastery on 1st June, Parliament decreed that Buddhist texts should be chanted in Mongolian as one of the conditions they made to allow its partial reopening. Some of the old Gandan lamas still living today attest the after the first text was recited in Mongolian in 1947, from 1951 more than ten texts of the daily chanting were in Mongolian. For example: *Itgel* (Tib. *skyabs-'gro*, 'taking refuge'), *Dashchiirav (san)* (Tib. *bkra-shis char-'bebs (-kyi bsangs)*, 'incense offering to cause rainfall of auspiciousness'), *Khiimoriin san* (or *Lündai san*, Tib. *rlung-rta'i bsangs*, 'incense offering for spiritual strength'), *Gandanlkhavjaa/Gandanlkhavjamaa* (Tib. *dga'-ldan lha brgya-ma*, 'hundred deities of Tushita'), *Dari ekh* (Tib. *sgrol-ma*, a text to Tara), *Gavsüm/Gavsümba* (Tib. *skabs gsum*, 'the three times', the beginning words of an eulogy of Buddha written by Tsongkhapa), *Manzshiriin magtaal* (Tib. *'jam-dpal-gyi bstod-pa*, eulogy of Manjushri), *Janraisigiin magtaal* (Tib. *spyen-ras-gzigs-kyi bstod-pa*, 'eulogy of Avalokiteshvara'), *Ochirvaaniin magtaal* (Tib. *phyag-na rdo-rje'i bstod-pa*, 'eulogy of Vajrapani'), *Tüi/Tüisol* (Tib. *khros (gsol)*, ablution, cleansing ritual), *Dünshag* (Tib. *ltung bshags*, confession of sins or downfalls), *Shivdagdorma* (Tib. *gzhi-bdag-gi gtor-ma*, 'sacrificial cake offering to the local spirits') (Mönkhsaikhon, pp. 9-10.). However, this practice did not become established in the long term and is currently not practiced in *Gandan*. Similarly, beside the Mongolian reading temple described here, there is no other temple known in the whole area of Mongolia where chanting is done in Mongolian currently.