

Additional Material collected by Survey Team

ᠬᠤᠪᠡ 022 Tövkhön/Düvkhan monastery

Mongolian names: *Büteeliin süm*, E Vam gachillin, *Arga bilegiin aglag bayasgalant Tövkhön khiid*

Tibetan name: *sgrub-khang*, *E-wam dga'-khyil gling*

English name: Place of practice

Sources:

Leaflet of Tövkhön monastery in Mongolian, in English

Information board of Tövkhön monastery

Daajav, B. *Tövkhön khiid*. (in: Dashnyam, L. (ed.) *Mongol nutag dakh' tüükh soyoliin dursgal. Sedevchilsen lavlakh*. Mongoliin Khümüünligiin Ukhaanii Akademi. Ulaanbaatar 1999. pp. 263-264.)

Choinkhor, J., Undur Geegen Zanabazar. Ulaanbaatar 1995 (pp. 17-18.)

Data provider:

Shagdarsüren, hermit of Tövkhön monastery

Tövkhön monastery is a hermitage contemplation and meditation, one of the most marvelous pilgrimage sites of Mongolian Buddhists. This meditation retreat, surrounded by a forest is situated in Shiveet-Ulaan Mountain, Bat-Ölzii sum, Övörkhangai aimag about 500 km from Ulaanbaatar and 40 kms from Erdene zuu monastery on the west. In 2004 Tövkhön was included on the list of the World's Cultural Heritage Sites thank to its cultural importance and natural beauties. The place is operating with the support of the government and donation of individuals.

Historical background

The Tibetan term *sgrub-khang* 'house of practice' is used for meditation halls as well as enclosure caves or dwellings for intensive contemplation. The pronunciation of the word became modified as Düvkhan or Tövkhön in Mongolian. According to information board of the monastery Tövkhön became also called as "The Utai (Wu Tai Shan, a pilgrimage place in China)" of Outer-Mongolia and became a pilgrimage site visited by pilgrims and tourists. Wise monks and sages came to meditate here during the centuries.

The establishment of this contemplative place or hermitage is connected to Öndör Geegen Zanabazar, who was born in the wood pig year of the 11th cycle or 1635 as a son of Tüsheet khan Gombodorj, descendent of Chinggis khan. According to the legend when Zanabazar was only three years old, his ability and talent for memorizing religious texts amazed everyone. Later he became the religious and political leader of Mongolia and spread the Buddhist Teaching, compiling more volumes of Tibetan texts, creating unique works in fine arts and forming two new writing systems, Soyombo and Khevtekh dörvöljin to enable the writing down of Mongolian, Tibetan and Sanskrit languages with their special characters.

As the legends say Öndör Geegen showed an outstanding ability for acquiring the Teaching in the three ways of listening, thinking and meditating as main methods of Buddhist studies. He started to meditate here, on Shiveet-Ulaan Mountain, belonging to the Khangain mountain range. According to Choinkhor's book after Öndör geegen's returning from the Tibetan Tashilhunpo monastery the Mongolian nobles and princes promised to build a meditational dwelling for practice to Öndör geegen, he said that Shiveet-Ulaan Mountain was waiting for him. So, at the place designated by his command he arrived with his accompany in 1654 or 1655, and established the Düvkhan or *E-wam dga'-khyil* temple ('purity of method and wisdom'). According to Daajav's description Öndör Geegen visited this place in 1648 first time and started to meditate here from 1651. According to the information board while Öndör Geegen was meditating here, he composed several prayers as the one entitled 'Giving the greatest blessing' (*Jinlav tsogzol*), *Chogdin jamba* or the short text of the Medicine Buddha (*Baga Manal*), and the incense offering for strengthening and reviving people's spiritual strength (*Madjün jinlav, Khiimoriin san*). These texts have special importance in Buddhist readings until today.

According to the monastery's leaflet the sanctum statuettes and the *Bogd* temple were created by Öndör geegen himself. Besides his contemplation cave and temple, the joined tree, where he tied his horse can also be seen here as well as the footprint of his boots, and his stone throne (details see below). Later, in the 18th century an assembly hall (*khuraliin dugan*), a palace (*lavran*), a storage house (*jasiin bair*), a contemplation *ger* (*nügnee sakhidag ger*), a bodhi stupa (*janchiv choddin*, TIB: *byang-chub mchod-rten*), a fence and an entrance gate were built on the initiation of *tsorj Luvsandagvadarjaa* (1734-1803), the abbot of the near Erdene Zuu monastery.

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Furthermore, at the beginning of the 19th century Sain Noyon Khan built a summer palace (*serüün dugan*) here, too. Daajav states that during the wars of the Oirad Galdan boshigt, started in 1688, the retreat was out of use, but from 1773 it was discovered again and became a hermitage being reconstructed in 1786. He mentions that the complex had an assembly hall (*khuraliin dugan*), Vajrapani (*Ochirdar'*) and Gombogür temples, a temple for contemplation, and a temple for eternal butter-lamps (*Mönkh zuliin süm*), two stupas, a prayer-wheel, a storage of *jas, gers* for fire and visitors, and wells.

According to Shagdarsüren monk the army of Gamin went through this area in 1920. Tövkhön monastery was closed and totally destroyed in 1937. In 1970 the area was taken under the protection of the Övörkhangai local administration.

Current situation

Tövkhön pilgrimage site was re-opened in 1993. Since that time until now only one monk, the “monk of Tövkhön” (*Tövkhöni lam*) Shagdarsüren (aged 47) resides here permanently. He became a monk 20 years ago, studied in Kharkhorin, Erdene zuu monastery. His teacher sent him to this holy place to revive the meditational retreat. At the time of his coming there was nothing remained of the previous temple complex.

In 1994 the area was taken under protection of the state. The main temple was rebuilt and reopened in 1997 and the statue of Mahakala was settled in it as the main protector deity of the retreat place. That time Gurudeva rinpoche consecrated the revived temple accompanied by Mongolian monks. In 1998 the bodhi stupa was rebuilt, in 2001 the Bogd temple, the bedroom temple (*semchin dugan*, TIB: gzim-khang), an offering temple (*takhiliin dugan*), the summer palace (*lawrin dugan*), the fence and the entrance gate were re-built. In 2004 Tövkhön was included on the list of the World's Cultural Heritage Sites.

Thank to the endless efforts and merits of Shagdarsüren monk Tövkhön today shows the same state as before 1937. Pilgrims and tourists come to worship for the holy place of Öndör Gegeen from May until October. The place has a calm and peaceful atmosphere. Young novices from Yidgaachoinzinlin datsan, Gandan monastery, Ulaanbaatar comes time to time for some days or some month to practice and help the work of Shagdarsüren monk..

There is a path in Tövkhön which helps to discover all the sanctuaries of this holy and marvelous place and make the heart rejoicing and opening the eyes and mind. According to the information board and the leaflet of the monastery these sanctuaries (*byasalgakhuin oron*) are the following from the foot of the hill to the top.

- The joined two trees (*kholboo mod*). Öndör Gegeen used to tie his horse to it.
- There is an artificial pavement from the foot of the hill up to the fenced-off area of the temples, where you can purify your body, speech and mind before taking refuge and enter to the sacred place of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar.
- If you enter the first gate you can see a wooden house and a *ger* of the hermit, as his summer and winter dwellings and a storage building.
- If you enter the entrance of the complex you can see a court with the wooden temple buildings, reconstructed in their original style in 2001 in reddish-brown colour with green roof and golden top ornaments. Three shrines belong to the complex. The first one, the *Bogd* temple, originally founded by Öndör Gegeen as a meditational shrine (*byasalgaliin süm*), is closed from laymen. There are prayer wheels in front of it.
- The second shrine is the assembly hall (*khurliin dugan*) called *Dga'-Idan phun tshogs gling*, where people can place offerings and take a refuge. Shagdarsüren monk holds here the everyday ceremony from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m., reading the same prayers every day. On the 8th of the lunar month he holds the ceremony in honour of the Medicine Buddha (*Manal*). On the 15th he reads the Guhyasamaja tantra (*Sandüin jüd*). In the temple there are place and equipment for many monks. There is a throne for the disciplinary master, two drums, two kinds of cymbals and shell conch (*lawai*). The main protector of the temple is Mahakala (Makhgal). On the altar of the north part of the temple (gonkhan, T. mgon-khang) many old sculptures and thangkas can be seen, such as of Buddha, Tsongkhapa, the Medicine Buddha and wrathful deities like Mahakala, *Namsrai, Lkham*. In the morning and in the evening the monk prepares and places the offerings to the altar. On the altar there are *balin* for the master, for Yamantaka and for the wrathful protectors (*Lamiin balin, Jigjidiin balin, Sakhiusnii balin*).
- There are stupas re-erected in their ancient style.

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- The third, separated temple building situated on the left is the bedroom temple (*semchin dugan*). Today the thangka of *Jigjid* is hanged inside and the building is used as accommodation when monks and novices of Gandan monastery arrive.
- Following the path you can see the meditation cave (*byasalgaliin agui*) of Öndör Gegeen. On the rocks there is the Soyombo symbol.
- On a rock the footprint of the boots (*mör*) of Öndör Gegeen and his disciple can be seen marked with the Tibetan inscription *zhabs* ('feet'). According to the legend he left it as a memory in 1723 before his journey to Manchuria.
- The human made stone wall (*örmöl chuluun khana*) is the creation of human beings and nature.
- The seat rock (*sentii*) where Öndör Gegeen used to sit is indicated with the Tibetan inscription: *bla-ma'i seng-khri* or the lion-throne of the lama.
- There is a small cave where Jamiyaan gelen monk used to sit in meditation for 11 years.
- There is the mother womb or cave (*ekhiin agui*), where you can think every sentient beings as your beloved mother. There are three different caves in the rock. One for women (with the inscription: *OM SHÍ GU HYA rdo-rje btsun-ma'i bhak//*), one for men. If you enter there and turn back all your sins will be cleared away. The third cave is decorated with the syllables E WAM, which means method and wisdom or the unity of the principles of man and women. Actually its entrance is from the other side, where are many large stones and rocks, an *owoo* and a Tibetan inscription *bde chen sgo*, which means the Gate of Great Bliss.
- Next to the caves there is a stone called baby's wrap-around (*ölgii khad*). It is indicated with the inscription: *E WAM dga'-'khyil rdo-rje brag ... rdzong gling//* It is said to help to obtain enlightenment.
- The temple of nymfs (*lusiin dugan*, Sanskrit naga) or spirits of land and water. Here Luvsan jalba (the King of Nagas) deity is worshipped.
- The main *ovoo* (*goliin ovoo*, stone-heap) is situated in the top of the hill. It strengthens and revives people's spiritual strength. Women are forbidden to go up there.
- The tree of wishes. The wrathful deity Mahākāla and the goddess Tara are said to be dissolved into it therefore one can express his wishes there. You can take a refuge in Mahakala tree (*Makhgaliin mod*) and get a blessing from Tara in Tara tree (*Dar' ekhiin mod*).
- The two wells. The one on the right contains water used for the offerings (black coloured), the one on the left side (yellow coloured) is used as drinking water to purify your body. These wells were created in 2004.

This holy place and its surroundings has a special atmosphere. On the rocks mantras like OM MANI PADME HÚM, OM BADZRA PÁNI HÚM PHAT, OM ÁH HÚM can be seen in Tibetan and Soyombo script. On the foot of the hill there are three other small storage buildings and a spring near here. Although there is a car park, the real pilgrims come on horseback or on foot from many kilometers. You are forbidden to throw any litter to keep the clean of this pure place.

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