

Bělka, Luboš

Conclusion

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3. CONCLUSION

The Dandaron mandala was created as an updated version of the ancient mandala of Vajrabhairava, known from Tibet, Mongolia and Buryatia,¹ to reflect the circumstances of the last third of the 20th century in the concrete environment of Buryatia. The mandala has several levels: (1) It illustrates religious texts (Skt. *sadhana*, tantra).² (2) It is a meditation aid of a particular sangha, and therefore cannot be used by another religious group (however, this applies to every mandala, in case the adept fails to have the appropriate authorization (Tib. *wang*, Skt. *abhisheka*, Bur. *lun*). Thus, the primary religious function of a mandala is that it presents illustrations and a meditation aid. (3) Finally, it can be seen as a physical carrier of the collective memory of Dandaron's sangha and it captures the position of Bidia D. Dandaron in the historical as well as mythological context. Why is this mandala unique? Particularly in its rendition, its form: the mandala has something that the other Tibetan Buddhist mandalas lack, even though some of them also depict historical and mythological figures. The unique feature is that thirteen to fourteen figures out of the forty present in the mandala were copied from photographs including one color photograph from 1965. Both Dandaron and his teacher are portrayed in ritual attires as well as in civil clothes. This is not

1 For other types of Vajrabhairava mandalas see e.g.: Tsyren-Bazar Badmazhapov, *Buddiiskaya zhivopis Buryatii. Iz fondov Muzeia istorii Buryatii im. M. N. Khangalova* [Buryat Buddhist Paintings. From Khangalov History Museum Collections, in Russian], Ulan-Ude: Nyutag 1995. pp. 156–157; Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, *Mongolskaya natsionalnaya zhivopis "Mongol zurag"* [Mongol National Paintings. Mongol zurag, in Russian], Ulan-Bator: Gosizdatelstvo 1986, fig. 39; Kimiaki Tanaka et al. (eds.), *Art of Thangka: From Hahn Kwang-ho Collection, vol. 1-4.*, Seoul: Hahn Foundation for Museum 1997 (vol. 1); 1999 (vol. 2) and Martin Brauen, *Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*, New York: Rubin Museum of Art 2009, p. 142, Fig. 33.

2 For basic Tibetan texts concerning the deity of Vajrabhairava, see e.g.: Daniel Berounský, "Tibetská sádhana tantrického božstva Vadžrabhairavy" [Tibetan Sadhana of the Tantric Deity Vajrabhairava, in Czech], *Studia Orientalia Slovaca* 5/1, 2006, pp. 115–138.



Dandaron's stupa – the White Stupa of Vajrasattva, consecrated on 18 September 2006, erected by Dandaron's sangha in the memory of its teacher. Ust-Orot, the Kizhinga valley, Buryatia. Photograph by Vladimir M. Montlevich.

surprising in Dandaron's case; it is surprising in Tsydenov's, who, unlike Dandaron, left the monastery but nevertheless had no secular profession. Although, according to James Watt, siddhas in this type of Gelugpa mandalas are impossible to identify, there are certain characteristic features in the Dandaron mandala: from the sixteen siddhas eleven are Asians and five are Europeans.

If it holds true that the collective memory consists of parts formed by other collective memories, then Dandaron's thangka may be perceived as the collective memory of one particular group of Buddhists in Buryatia. This group consists of two sub-groups: Those members of Dandaron's sangha who directly participated in the creation of the mandala (Aleksandr I. Zheleznov, Vladimir Montlevich) or who got to know it shortly after its production. The other sub-group includes its current interpreters. The mandala also contains features that point to the suppression of religion in the Soviet Union and these are events worth studying. The context of its production is remarkable from the point of history of anti-religious policies; the image was finished by Dandaron's disciple, who was subjected to the reprisals as well.

The primary purpose of the creation of Dandaron's mandala of Vajrabhairava was not to visually present a collective memory of anti-Buddhist reprisals; however this feature is present in it, and both its authors and "users" were well aware of this fact. What are the concrete features that we speak about? We may highlight three elements: the death of Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov in a Buryat jail, which seemed to anticipate subsequent reprisals presented in the depiction of B. D. Dandaron on a bench in a prison uniform, and finally Lenin's Mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow as part of the cemetery circle, clearly referring to an impure place, something primarily negative. Various cemeteries, including the mausoleum, were captured by Zheleznov in the Vajrabhairava thangka as well.

To create a mandala for a group of unofficial Buddhists was a dangerous and courageous thing during the years of Neostalinism. To create a mandala that *expressis verbis* refers to the reprisals was an extraordinary deed. Although anti-Soviet symbols are not primarily present, prosecuting authorities with the help of experts could easily decipher its content and draw the relevant conclusions, as we have seen in Dandaron's process.

In fact we are lucky that this visual illustration of the time has survived and besides expressing admiration we can try to search for an interpretation.

If we speak of the Dandaron mandala as of collective memory capturing all the aspects of history of Dandaron's line including the reprisals, we should mention one more interesting fact. The common Buddhist understanding is that karma is an individual phenomenon, based on free and deliberate action of a human being capable of distinguishing good from evil. In the same way as karma is individual, the liberation from the cycle of rebirth (termination of samsara, awakening, bodhi, attainment of nirvana) is individual. Buddhist soteriology, as well as eschatology, is an individual matter in this respect. However, in Tibetan Buddhist eschatology we may also speak of the collective (or universal, historical) eschatology, which transcends the individual and concerns complete societies. Two eschatological myths connected with two persons – the future Buddha Maitreya and the last Shambhala king Rudra Chakrin are well identifiable. Bidia D. Dandaron in his last, summarizing book, entitled *The Black Notebook*, introduces the idea of the social karma, which is unique.

Finally, we should mention that, besides a small group in Ulan-Ude, which tries to continue in the tradition of Bidia D. Dandaron without much publicity, his mandala lives its virtual life on the internet, and Dandaron's sangha thus lives on, both in Buryatia and in Saint Petersburg.

