

**On brief history of Amarbayasgalant lamasery
and its current state[▼]**

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The Amarbayasgalant as one of valued monuments of Mongolian ancient history and culture was built in 1727-1736 in the south side of mountain Burenkhan, Selenge aimag. It was founded by decree of Manchu emperor Yongzheng in honour of Mongolian First Bogdo Jabtsandamba Khutugtu Zanabazar (1635-1723). The First Bogdo Jabtsandamba was famous religious and state figure, enlightener, who played an important role in spreading of Buddhism in Mongolia. In the half past of 19th century, when Buddhism was spreading in Mongolia famous Russian traveller A.M.Pozdneyev during 1892-1893 had travelled in Mongolia and on the basis of his notes wrote a book "Mongolia and Mongols". There is a note in this book about Amarbayasgalant, which he wrote from 2nd to 6th July of 1892¹. From this notes we can know appearance of former Amarbayasgalant lamasery. In that time Amarbayasgalant consisted of 8 datsans and 6 aimags. Only in Zoogai and Choinkhorlin aimags there were 500-600 lamas and other aimags had 250-300 lamas, altogether this lamasery had over 2000 lamas. There were other datsans in that time, such as:

1. Dashchoimbel datsan
2. Gungaachoilin datsan
3. Tantric datsan
4. Medical datsan
5. Astrological datsan
6. Yoga datsan
7. Lamrim or Path to Enlightenment datsan.

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¹ A.M.Pozdneyev, *Mongyol ba Mongyolчууд. Өбүр Mongyol-un keblel-ün qoriyi-a, Nigedüger boti*, 54.

The six aimags, in that time were as:

1. Aimag of Shuteen
2. Aimag of Dejidlin
3. Aimag of Sangai
4. Aimag of Zoogai
5. Aimag of Puntsoglin.

The worship of prayer's was held not only in tsogchin temple but there were other places of worship such as Nugnee, Tunelkha, Zagdsambhara, Kalachakra, Gurem, Gurvan Zuu, Ayush, Manla, Maitreya, Narkhajid. The Russian traveller wrote that near Amarbaysgalant lamasery many people were settled that it reminded of a complete town.

The Amarbayasgalant was flourished until 40s of XX century and number of lamas during this period reached 2084. This number of lamas in datsans were as:

Tsanid datsan-779
Tantric datsan-70
Maitreya datsan-50
Medical datsan-18
Astrology datsan-5
Yoga datsan-12
Lamrim datsan-11
Gunrig khural-8
Nugnee khural-5.

Number of lamas in aimags are:

Shuteen-134
Sangai-99
Dejid-52
Zoogai-52
Puntsogiin-171
Choinkhorlin-204.

If we list all lamas or 779 lamas, who had Buddhist services in Tsogchin temple by ages it is as below:

Lamas up to 18 age-115
From 18-25 ages-85
25-35 ages-127
35-45 ages- 100
above 45 ages-352.

Of all lamas 18 lamas were registered who knew mongolian script, 120 lamas were noted as had been studying. The lamas of lamasery had next appointments such as:

1. Khamba (tib.mkhan po) lama or the head of lamasery
2. Ded khamba or vice khamba lama
3. Tsoj (tib. chos rje or Dharma Lord) lama or foremost in dharma; the holy spiritual master
4. Lovon (tib. slob dpon) lama or master, teacher; title of high lama
5. Chovombo (tib.mchod pa po) - lama in charge of sacrificial offerings
6. Gesgui (tib.dge bskos)- a monk disciplinarian; disciplinarian of a monastery; the monk in charge of enforcing the monastic rules and regulations
7. Unzad (tib.dbu mdzad)- precentor or director of services in a lamasery
8. Shanzodba (tib.pyag mdzod)- the administrator of an ecclesiastical estate or shavi
9. Gonner (tib.dgon gnyer)- attendant on a high lama
10. Soivon (tib.gsoi dpon) - senior attendant on a high lama
11. Tahilch -lama in charge of sacrificial offerings
12. Duganch - caretaker in a lamasery
13. Shunlaiv (tib.gzhung las pa)- title of the head or director of studies of certain of the Urga colleges
14. Daa lama -head lama, next below the Shanzav of Urga, two in number
15. Zaisan -title of an official in the administration of a lamasery or an ecclesiastical estate)
16. Demch (tib.dem chi) -an official
17. Daamal -controller
18. Nirav (tib.gnyer pa)- bursar of a lamasery treasury
19. Jam (tib.ja ma)- cook in a lamasery.

There were also registered lamas with the title or degree. For example in Amarbayasgalant registered number of lamas with such degrees were as:

Agramba(tib.sngags rams pa) -a lama versed in spells- 84
 Gavj (tib.dka' bcu)- a lamaist clerical degree, above that of gevsh-164
 Gebsh (dge bshes)-spiritual master; spiritual friend; religious teacher; a Guru-0
 Rabjamba (tib.rab 'byams pa)- lamaist doctor of theology-2
 Ziirembe (tib.rtsis rams pa)- title of a lamaistic degree in astrology-1
 Number of jas or property was registered 20.

Moreover there were ordinary 465 lamas, 2 traders, 162 livestock workers, 160 workers for wages, 9 workers in enterprise or co-operative, 9 craftsmen, 9 makers of Buddhist images, 9 astrologer-lamas without an official post, 2 fortune-tellers². This number of lamas show that Amarbayasgalant was a big centre of Buddhism in that time. As like other

² Ulsiin Tagnuulin tub arkhiiv, fond'1-3-4. Selenge aimag Baruun Buren sum dekh Undur geegenii khemeekh Amarbayasgalant khidiin baidliig todorkhoitson burtgel, 1937 onii 6 sariin 14-nii udur.

Mongolian lamaseries in 1930's Amarbayasgalant was closed in 1938. All worships including Buddhist books were destroyed.

Amarbayasgalant lamasery consisted of over 40 temples. Only 28 temples now remain and they have been under State protection since 1944³. In 1970 restoration work of Amarbayasgalant was begun, which was founded on the base of 6th paragraph of Mongolian People's Republic Law on protection of cultural monuments, published in 1970. At this time workers from Historic Monument Restoration Office and Japanese building engineers, Vietnamese carpenters were arriving. In 1979-1982 experts from UNESCO also arrived. It was restored partially only tsogchin temple's wall and temples in inner wall, but they were looked like empty containers. In 1988-1989 carpenters-artists from capital city headed by master Jamba restored the Maharaja⁴. So the restoration work was begun but it didn't continue entirely⁵.

Under the influence of democratic changes which was developed in Mongolia in 1990, communist ideology predominating about 70 years had collapsed and began new period of reviving Mongolian national consciousness, culture and religion. Thanks to the new time in 1989, 1990 a base of policy for spreading traditional Buddhist religion was laid. So was developed a movement on beginning Buddhist service in Erdene Zuu, Amarbayasgalant, Right Urga or Dashchoilin and building lamasery in countries step by step. In this way by the resolution number 10, from 22nd February, 1990 of the Presidium of the Great People's Khural, Amarbayasgalant lamasery's Buddhist activity was begun again after being closed in 1938⁶. In summer of 1990, old people headed by T.Jamyandagba held Buddhist service. The khamba lama T.Jamyandagba, lama T.Davaakhuu, Sundui being young were pupils in Amarbayasgalant lamasery and after the lamasery had closed some lamas were engaged in labour. These lamas all have being believers in Buddha and all took part earnestly in restoration of Amarbayasgalant. The Mongolian Buddhist centre the Gandantegchinlin lamasery and public organisations in country, masses have been supporting the restoration of Amarbayasgalant lamasery. The Gandantegchinlin lamasery spent 28 mln.

³ Mongolia's tentative list cultural and natural heritage, The Mongolian Ministry of Enlightenment and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Unesco Beijing Office, Ministry of Enlightenment Mongolia, China national radio, 1996, 20

⁴ Maharaja (tib. rgyal chen bshi) - four Great Guardian kings of Quarters acting as guardians of a lamasery and often depicted at the end of xylograph.

⁵ S.Erdene, Amarbayasgalant khiidiin tuukh amarjuulakhiin chimeg, Ulaanbaatar, 1996; D.Migmar, D.Yondonsuren, Ariyun nom un orun Amarbayasgalant keyid ün čadiy orusibai, Ulaanbaatar, 1993, 1-18; Khargana J.Ulzii, Mongoliin tuukhiin dursгалт Kara Korum, Erdene zuu, Amarbayasgalantiin tuukh, Ulaanbaatar, 1999, 67-106; Ogtorguin chimeg Amarbayasgalant khiidiin tuukhen shastir orshvoi, Ulaanbaatar, 2001; Bokhoogui zul (Amarbayasgalant khiid sergesen on, jiliin bichig orshvoi), Ulaanbaatar, 2000.

⁶ The Decree of Presidium of Great Khural of Mongolian People's Republic from 22nd of February, 1990 '10 About problems connected with the restoration and protection of some monasteries. Taking into account the believers desire Presidium of Great Khural establishes:

To agree to use Buddhist lamaseries such as Amarbayasgalant in the territory of Baruunburen sumun, Selenge aimag and Erdene Zuu lamasery in the territory of Khar Khorin sumun, Uburkhangai aimag for religious service. To advice to Assembly of People's Deputies of Selenge and Uburkhangai aimags to extend required help for carry out regular religious service and rite.

Chairman of the Presidium of the Great People's Khural of the MPR J.Batmunkh

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tugrigs for country's lamasery and especially for Amarbayasgalant it sent 2 min. tugrigs. It is also worth mentioning that such organizations as executive authority of Selenge aimag, Central Council of Trade Unions, Tsagaan Tolgoi State Farm, Erdenet Carpet Factory, Erdenet Mining Concentration Plant, Moriton and Hilganat companies of Selenge aimag and Mongolian masses, who were respecting Buddhism also have been making contribution. Among the people supported the restoration of this lamasery Gurdeva Rinpoche must be mentioned first. Rinpoche devoted to the restoration of Mongolian Buddhist lamaseries, especially to Amarbayasgalant with all his property, knowledge and force. So it is difficult to say something about restoration of Amarbayasgalant without saying about Ven.Rinpoche's activity in Mongolia. By his nationality Gurdeva is khorchin Mongol. He was born in 1910 in the aristocratic family in Inner Mongolia. As elder of three sons in childhood he became a pupil of Pandit Darmajaltsan-Osor and later he went to Amdo, Dashi-humbo, Jabugumen lamaseries in Tibet to continue his studies. In 1946 he went to Dorjijigjee temple, in Nepal to meditate. In 1953 he built the Gandanchoinbolin temple in Nepal. Until 1970 he lived in Nepal and then he went to Dharamsala and Varanasi's lamaseries on pilgrimage. In 1972 he founded the Dashi-humbo temple in South India. In 1970 he founded the Dashi-humbo temple in south India. In 1970 by the invitation of Gandan lamasery's head khamba lama S.Gombojav, Rinpoche arrived in Mongolia for the first time and took part in the World Buddhist Conference for Peace, which held in Ulaanbaatar. Being in Mongolia he thought to built a lamasery in Mongolia. But he understood that this time was not suitable for fulfilling his dream, so he decided to wait. When he arrived in Mongolia in 1991, situation in the country life was changed. He met with leaders of the government and said to them his thought about restoration of Buddhist lamasery. Ex-First deputy Mr. D.Ganbold received him and said he would give him permission on building the lamasery. Thus he arrived in Mongolia next year and began his restoration activity of Amarbayasgalant in 1992. The Amarbayasgalant lamasery's external appearance is looked safe but its roofs and walls were damaged. So Rinpoche began his restoration activity from external side. Then he began collection of internal means of lamasery such as worships, offering, musical instruments, books and scriptures. To be brief he prepared all needs for holding Buddhist services. The Rinpoche is paying attention on publishing works of Mongolian famous scholars such as Zava Damdin(1867-1937), consisting of 17 volumes; collected works of Damtsagdorj (1781-1848). Nowadays restoration of Amarbayasgalant is continuing, but the main work is done. Now, remained to restore are 2 white temples. Rinpoche also is paying attention not only on education of young lamas but on supplying them by foods. Gurdeva by his wish became Mongolian citizen. In 24th of April, 1992 Gurdeva was given title of Darkhan lama or sacred khamba lama.

Today in Amarbayasgalant about 30 lamas are holding Buddhist service. The lamasery's Darkhan khamba, khamba lama, tsorj, lovon, daa lama, darkhan un zad, soivon, gesgui, golch (assistant to a precentor), duganch (caretaker in a lamasery) are holding Buddhist service. In lamasery's jas or property work such laymen as bursar (of a lamasery treasury), an accountant, controller. If we list lamas by age it will be as:

Lamas from age 8-13	-----	15
14-17	-----	8
above age 15	-----	6
old lamas	-----	3

The lamas follow traditional lamasery rule of Sera⁷. Young lamas study in Buddhist Ravdan Choilin lamasery in Jeneva, Switzerland. The Ravdan Choilin lamasery was built by the initiative of Ravdan Rinpoche in the middle of 1970. He arrived from Dharamsala to Switzerland in 1970s and had founded the lamasery Tharva Choilin, which was renamed after Ravdan Choilin. He devoted all his knowledge and forces for spreading Buddhism in western countries . After his death the main student of Rinpoche named Gonsar Rinpoche nowadays carries on activity of lamasery. Gonsar Rinpoche had been lived with his teacher Ravdan Rinpoche 33 years until his death from his 5 years age, he worked as an English translator of his teacher. Today Gonsar Rinpoche is the head not only of Ravdan lamasery, he is also the head of Dash Ravdan and Deleg Ravdan lamaseries in Austrly and Puntsog Ravdan lamasery in Munich, Germany. Also he is the head of Ravdan Treasure House⁸. Two young lamas from Amarbayasgalant had studied 4 years in Ravdan Choilin, near the Gonsar Rinpoche and else 2 lamas are studying there now. Gonsar Rinpoche pays all expences of Mongolian lamas. It consists of teaching, accomodation and food. The lamasery head gives special attention to the lama's teaching. The Mongolian Buddhist centre Gandantegchinlin's master-lama Danzan and other scholar lamas, including Tibetan lama Tuvden from Switzerland teach Buddhist literature. The main teacher-lamas are tsorj and lovon lamas. The tsorj Luvsandarjaa was studied Buddhist philosophy at Ravdan Choilin lamasery, Switzerland. Except his teaching activity Luvsandarjaa had translated Tibetan books into Mongolian and is preparing Tibetan textbook. In the future the lamasery authorities are going to teach english and mathematics, to open Buddhist College. Today lamas are engaged in teaching by two groups: the group of young lamas and the group of old lamas. Amarbayasgalant lamasery has opened its educational and international centre called "Peace Path" in Ulaanbaatar, in 25th May, 2001. It is said in programme that main goal of centre is interpretation of Buddhist teaching among public, broadening international relation of lamasery, raising educational level of lamas, development of Buddhist research work, doing virtuous acts among poor people. In the beginning of 1990 Amarbayasgalant lamasery had Buddhist services with about 10 lamas, today the lamasery has services with about 30 lamas and opened its centre in Ulaanbaatar.

Thus, on the example of Amarbayasgalant lamasery we have tried to describe restoration of Mongolian lamasery's in the country.

⁷ Sera (tib.se ra)-lit.place of wild rose or brier; name of a large monastery near Lhasa, built in 1419.

⁸ Geshe Rabten, The life of a Tibetan Monk ,Edition Rabten, Switzerland, 2000, pp.271-284.