

## A Case of Allegoresis: A Buddhist Painter and His Patron in Mongolia<sup>1</sup>

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### Art as material evidence of “Dharma deed”

The cosmopolitan Qing Empire (1644–1911), ruled by the ethnically non-Chinese Manchus, disintegrated in the early twentieth century ending China’s millennial dynastic history. One of the empire’s vassal states, Mongolia,<sup>2</sup> once home to the largest Eurasian empire in history, seized the opportunity to proclaim its independence in the winter of 1911. Landlocked and sandwiched between China and Russia, Mongolia became a pawn in the political maneuverings of competing warlords, Communists (Bolsheviks), and Chinese Republicans.<sup>3</sup> At this time, an extraordinary painting was made for the Mongol ruler who was destined to be the last king of the Mongols before the Soviet takeover in 1921.<sup>4</sup>

The Mongol leader in 1911 was the Bogd Gegeen (1870–1924), the eighth reincarnation of the Tibetan Jebtsundampa (Tib. *rje btsun dam pa*) lineage that had held political and religious power in Mongolia since the seventeenth century.<sup>5</sup> He was fascinated by visual images, and especially paintings, evidenced by his avid collecting and commissioning activities. Known as the Bogd Gegeen (literally: Holy Saint), and after the fall of the Qing as the Bogd Khan (Holy Khan), the Eighth Jebtsundampa

<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the following institutions: Inner Asia and Altaic Studies at Harvard University in February 2011; Association of Asian Studies conference, Honolulu-Hawaii, 2011; Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Stanford University, in November 2011; and Townsend Group of Asian Art and Visual Culture, University of California-Berkeley in January 2012. The final draft was completed at John W. Kluge Center, Library of Congress, in spring 2013. This article was first published in *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. 78, Issue 1 (2018), pp. 61-94. Reprinted with the permission. I thank Susan Meinheit for library assistance, Prof. Christopher Atwood, Prof. Li Narangoa and Prof. Nakami Tatsuo for their comments at the conference presentation in 2011.

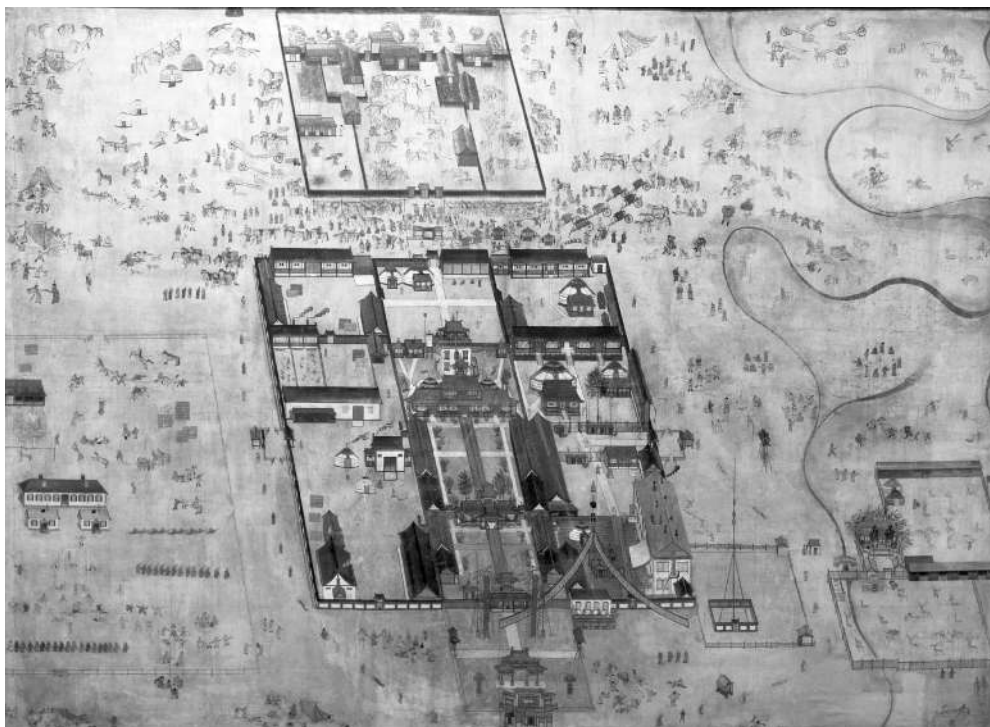
<sup>2</sup> Early in the Qing rule in the seventeenth century, Mongolia was divided into Outer (Northern) and Inner (Southern) parts to enable the gradually staged conquest, where the Inner Mongols were used in Qing army to finally subjugate the resilient Mongols. See more of Qing conquests and rule in Peter Perdue *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), esp. Part Two.

<sup>3</sup> See more details in Nakami Tatsuo, “Russian Diplomats and Mongol Independence, 1911-1915” in Stephen Kotkin and Bruce Al Elleman, eds., *Mongolia in the Twentieth-Century* (M.E. Sharpe: Armonk, New York, London, 1999), 69-78.

<sup>4</sup> Fujiko Isono “The Mongolian Revolution of 1921” in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (University of Cambridge, 1976), 375-394.

<sup>5</sup> The Jebtsundampa (Tib. *rje btsun dam pa*) lineage was imported from Tibet in the 17<sup>th</sup> century within political interests of the Qing court, Khalkha (Central) Mongol nobility and Tibetan Gelug (dGe lugs) Order. Altogether there were eight Jebtsundampa reincarnate rulers in Mongolia, only the first two were Mongolian-born and the rest were brought from Tibet. There are several publications of Jebtsundampa hagiographies. See a fully annotated translation in Charles Bawden, *The Jebtsundampa Khutugtus of Urga* (Wiesbaden, O. Harrassowitz, 1961); D. Baasan transl. *Bogd Javzandamba Hutagt* [Bogd Jebtsundampa Khutugtu] (Ulaanbaatar: Mönhiin üseg Press, 2011).

resided in his monastery Ikh Khüree (Classical Mong. *Yeke Kūriye*), the center of Mongolian Buddhism, which also served as the capital of the new state.<sup>6</sup> The Bogd Gegeen's paintings, created in Ikh Khüree, went beyond *thangka* Tibetan-style religious icons (Tib. *thang ka* or *thangka*), to include scenes that are often witty but also quite perverse. One such painting is *The Green Palace*, attributed to the painter Balduugin Sharav (1869–1939), which portrays the Bogd Gegeen's private residence and his summer meditation retreat Sharavpeljeelin Biligiig Khöggjüülen Badruulagch Süme or Temple for Prosperity of Mind, commonly known as the Green Palace (Fig. 1).



The colorful compound stretches north–south at the center of numerous and varied activities. The palace is depicted as a pilgrimage site, with many devotees shown approaching the structure or camping nearby. There are pilgrims on foot and nobles on horseback or in sedan chairs, arriving and dismounting in the northern sector. This seemingly idyllic picture of devotion and pilgrimage is subverted by a military garrison to the west filled with disturbing scenes of men standing alone or in groups of two or three, with exposed and exaggerated genitals. Each is engaged in what seems to be a painful act: hanging weights from their long phalluses, or even having their phalluses

<sup>6</sup> This article follows transliteration method outlined in Christopher Atwood *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (Facts on File, 2004), ix. Instead of both Classical Mongolian (pre-1940) and Cyrillic (post-1940) spellings, however, this article aims to assist English reading by using only modern Khalkha pronunciations and spellings. The exception is Jebtsundampa, for which several modern spellings are available. For pre-1940 Mongolian titles in references and bibliography, Mostaert's system is used. For Tibetan words and terms, standard Wylie transcription is given in brackets. Chinese words and names are transcribed according to the pinyin system of romanization.

forcefully pulled. Just outside the garrison, several tents are pitched to the south and north showing men and women sneaking around and male couples engaged in sexual intercourse. The entire garrison is observed by married noblewomen looking on in horror, judging by their hands cupped over their mouths. These unusual sexual scenes are disturbing in proximity to the dazzling depiction of the Bogd Gegeen's compound. As the work of a Buddhist monk-artist, the painting is all the more provocative, as it does not have clear parallels in any Buddhist visual culture.

In Vajrayāna Buddhism, which was the official state religion of Mongolia, Buddhist images were often used to assert political power and legitimization. China's Qing dynasty was particularly versatile in this area, especially in the eighteenth century, and *The Green Palace* follows suit in certain respects. The Qing emperors were Vajrayāna Buddhist converts and had Mongol lamas as their allies and personal teachers.<sup>7</sup> However, none of their Buddhist images contained scenes of violence and naked sexuality among the common people in the vicinity of a Buddhist ruler's residence. Many juxtapositions in *The Green Palace* do not connect with any liturgical texts and rites and therefore generate questions about the imagery's meaning and the underlying intentions of both the artist and patron.

The Eighth Jebtsundampa (full name: Ngawang Lobsang Chökyi Nyima Tenzin Wangchuk; Tib. Ngag dbang blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma bstan 'dzin dbang phyug) was born near Lhasa in 1870 to Gönchög Tsering (Tib. dkon mchog tshe ring), a well-to-do financial assistant to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama. In 1874, soon after he was identified as the Eighth Jebtsundampa, the child was brought to Ikh Khüree in Mongolia. Unlike previous Jebtsundampas, hagiographies of the Eighth are scarce; however, details of his life provide a unique and rich biography.<sup>8</sup>

The Bogd Gegeen had a volatile character and, as discussed later, a notorious sex life, but he was also a prominent political figure who addressed increasing conflict between linguistic and ethnic communities in Ikh Khüree, as well as aggressive intrusions by Russian and Chinese farmers and merchants into Mongolian territory.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the Bogd Gegeen was the only one among the eight Jebtsundampa reincarnations to receive the *gavj* (Tib. *dka'bcu pa*) rank of learned monkhood.<sup>10</sup> The complexity of the ruler's character, reputation, and abilities renders him enigmatic. He seems to have relished his reputation for inscrutability, stating that, "Some people say I [have simply] wandered

<sup>7</sup> The Kangxi Emperor had a close relationship with the First Jebtsundampa Zanabazar, whereas the Qianlong Emperor's *guru* and the National Preceptor was another Mongol Zhanjia Khutugtu Rolpay Dorje. There is a good number of literature on Zanabazar and Rolpay Dorje in Mongolian and Tibetan languages, some of which has been translated to English. See, among others, Dharmatāla Damcho Gyatsho, *Rosary of White Lotus, Being the Clear Account of How the Precious Teaching of Buddha Appeared and Spread in the Great Hor Country*, transl. Piotr Klafkowski (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987).

<sup>8</sup> Two monographs illuminating the life of the Bogd Gegeen from mostly historical and political perspectives have come out recently: G. Jamsranjav, *VIII Bogd Khan* [The 8<sup>th</sup> Bogd Khan] (Ulaanbaatar, 1998); O. Batsaikhan, *Mongolin Suulchin Ezen Khayan VIII Jebtsundampa* [The last Mongol Khan, the Eighth Jebtsundampa] (Ulaanbaatar: Admon Press 2008).

<sup>9</sup> The historian Batsaikhan's recent research specifically highlights how politically active the Bogd Gegeen was. Batsaikhan 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Batsaikhan, 199.

about having fun. I have a secret by which I helped the state and the religion. The result will be known in future days.... [K]eeping the secret is a Dharma deed.”<sup>11</sup>

Recent studies have shown that the Bogd Gegeen kept many of his deeds secret in attempts to protect his nation from foreign exploitation and to cope with political power games that affected Mongolia in the early twentieth century when this painting was made.<sup>12</sup> In China, imperial history ended in 1912, and in Russia the Bolshevik revolution overthrew imperial rule in 1917. Although occupied with their own radical social and political changes, these neighbors did not lose interest in Mongolia. China refused to recognize Mongolian political independence. Yuan Shikai, the first president of the Republic of China (袁世凱 1912–1916), sought to bring Mongolia back under Chinese control through military force.<sup>13</sup>

Xu Shuzheng (徐樹錚; 1880–1925), a Chinese general of the Anhui Clique, and commander-in-chief of the Northwest Frontier Defense Army, mounted a successful attack against Ikh Khüree in October 1919. In the process, the Bogd Gegeen was imprisoned in the Green Palace and on February 20, 1920 forced to prostrate himself before a photograph of the Chinese president and the Chinese flag.<sup>14</sup> These actions, coupled with massive Chinese immigration (which had been traditionally forbidden) and the return of Outer Mongolia to Chinese control did much to inflame Mongolian outrage towards China, resulting in a drastically pro-Russian attitude with several delegations dispatched to Russia with requests for military aid.<sup>15</sup> The Bogd Gegeen and his palace was at the center of all these turbulent events that rapidly changed the Inner Asian politics, shaped new borders, and led to the suppression of Buddhism in Mongolia. Was art, then, one of his secret ways to express his concern about his people and the fate of Dharma? How might we apprehend the execution of this work by a Buddhist monk, at the behest of a Buddhist ruler, against the backdrop of the country’s struggle for political sovereignty and nationhood?<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> G. Jamsranjav and N. Dugarsuren eds., *Bogdin lünden* [Gegeen’s *lung bstan* (prophecies)] (Ulaanbaatar: Khaadyn San, 2002). Translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

<sup>12</sup> As Alicia Campi has recently shown, the Bogd Gegeen sent various requests to the United States asking for support. See Alicia Campi and R. Baasan, *The Impact of China and Russia on United States–Mongolian Political Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 60–63, 69–73, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989), 200.

<sup>14</sup> Many scholars have noted this incident. Fujiko Isono, 382. See also Bawden 1989, Campi and Baasan 2009: Ch. 1. Bawden 1989: 205.

<sup>15</sup> Bawden 1989: 191. Bawden mentions that a special “colonization bureau” was established in Ikh Khüree in 1911. Aleksei Pozdnev, among others, mentions about strong anti-Chinese sentiments. See Pozdnev *Mongolia i Mongoli* [Mongolia and the Mongols] (St Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1896–1898): 46. Mongol delegations to Russia were dispatched since 1911 almost yearly visiting Russian, later Soviet authorities for military and diplomatic support. See S.G. Luzianin *Rossiia-Mongolia-Kitai v pervoi polovine XX veka* [Russia-Mongolia-China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.] (Moscow: IDV RAN, 2000), esp. Chapters 2–3; Campi and Baasan 2009: Ch. 1. The Bogd Gegeen also reached out to Americans for the support of the feeble independence. See Campi and Baasan 2009 and William W. Rockhill, “The Question of Outer Mongolia” in *Journal of the American Asiatic Association* XIV (4) (May 1914).

<sup>16</sup> There are no records of secular artists in Mongolia prior to the 1930s. The painting, as discussed shortly, is attributed to a well-known Ikh Khüree monk Balduugin Sharav.

In the context of European sociopolitical change and upheaval, the historian Francis Haskell has ascribed to art a type of “prophetic” function attributed to the genius and (perhaps unconscious) foresight of the artists themselves.<sup>17</sup> For Haskell, among many artists, an instance of this extraordinary sensibility and artistic genius is Albrecht Dürer in his *Apocalypse*.<sup>18</sup> Allegories and prophecies offered possibilities of leveled readings of high and low, implicit and explicit meanings in medieval-era paintings as well as in Buddhist art. In Mongolia specifically, *ülger* or allegories were often used in textual and visual narratives to aid the comprehension of Buddhist teachings in an accessible and readable manner. In Western paintings, *allegoresis*, or a European Medieval notion of multiple levels of reading, produced diverse techniques in which images were meant to be read as content, ethical statements, paths to God, and so forth.<sup>19</sup> A scholar of comparative literature Zhang Longxi has shown how *allegoresis*, initially rooted in Christian literature and later in medieval European art, has been appropriated cross-culturally for exploring the interpretive power of texts and the exchange between author and reader. Zhang focused on *allegoresis* as a reading and interpretive practice in diverse cultural and political settings in Europe and East Asia.<sup>20</sup>

In this article, similar allegorical associations of art and prophecy are drawn in *The Green Palace*. To my knowledge, documentation on the pursuits of the Bogd Gegeen and his artists, including Sharav has not yet been found or released. Given this absence, I take the painting itself and the visual complexity of the style and pictorial details as the principal material evidence that demonstrate a rather complicated *allegoresis*: the artist’s views of *samsāra*, references to the Bogd Gegeen’s prophetic vision of the end of Dharma (i.e., Buddhism as a state religion and the disappearance of Buddhist beliefs and teachings), and vision for Buddhist liberation (i.e., realization of *samsāra*, faith in the Teacher, and self-transformation).

*The Green Palace* demands various layers of reading and broader vision of artistic production and Buddhist visual culture, especially at the times of decline. Therefore, I discuss the painting in relation to original sources from the period, mainly the Bogd Gegeen’s own writings, oral legends, memoirs of Ikh Khüree residents, and historical

<sup>17</sup> Francis Haskell *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 389-430.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 409-422.

<sup>19</sup> A German Medievalist Beate Fricke asserts that the process of generation of meaning regarding its perception and cognition is described in Medieval sources as *allegoresis*. According to Fricke, the existing scholarship have not yet illuminated the functions and nature of Medieval allegories but rather concentrated on individual types. As she claims, theoretical definition and discussion of allegories is still lacking in art historical research. See Fricke “Matter and Meaning of Mother-of-Pearl: The Origins of Allegory in the Sphere of Things” in *Gesta*, 51/1 (The International Center of Medieval Art, 2012), 35; 48, n. 4, 8. A scholar of Medieval Literature Jennifer Summit refers to Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* to also argue how *allegoresis* “produced distinctive technologies of reading” at different levels of the texts that do not outwardly conform to orthodoxy to arrive at hidden meaning. See Summit, “Monuments and Ruins: Spenser and the Problem of the English Library” in *ELH*, vol. 70, No. 1 (Spring 2003). 11-12.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Longxi, *Allegoresis: Reading Canonical Literature East and West* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), esp. Chapter 3.

scholarship to analyze the intricate web of agency and levels of meaning generated.<sup>21</sup> I consider the conditions and aims of the patron (the Bogd Gegeen), ambitions of the artist speaking to his potential audience (which, of course, also includes his patron), artist's and patron's unique collaboration to address the wishes and needs of the wider monastic and lay communities, and multivalent levels of meanings through allegories of desire, misery, and transformation communicated in various scenes. I argue that the painting constitutes an instance of a mutually informing, creative collaboration of *both* the presumed artist, Sharav, *and* the patron whose vision of a tragic future, as we shall see, provide insight into the unusual nature of the work. Unlike Haskell, however, this analysis does not see the role of the artist as "prophetic genius"; the role of the artist should be neither overly exaggerated nor underestimated at the expense of a patron's vision.

While Soviet-era scholars such as L. Sonomtseren, N. Tsultem, and I. Lomakina have made brief mention of *The Green Palace*, they did not seriously explore the work itself within these intersecting nexuses (patron, artist, and wider community).<sup>22</sup> The unusual and disturbing imagery of this painting clearly was not to Socialist tastes, and consequently the painting remained unexamined, effectively vanishing for many years. Even in a recent publication (2009) about Sharav, a Mongolian art historian L. Batchuluun chose not to discuss these uneasy scenes of torture and open promiscuity.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Green Palace*, attention is focused on chaos and power, satire and pain, but still presupposes the penetrating and transformative ability of the meditative process as envisaged in Tantric practice, only in unexpected ways. That is, the process operates not in terms of the standard conception of the image as an aid for the individual transformation of the practitioner into a deity, but rather as visual reflection upon Buddhist soteriology as a collective mode of broader social and political transformation. Here in this article, I discuss *The Green Palace* in the context of both external and internal *samsāra*, as well as in conjunction with *lūnden* existing prophecies (Tib. *lung bstan*) and other texts. Next, I analyze *The Green Palace* as a visual strategy to convey the Bogd Gegeen's apocalyptic vision of the need for awakening in his efforts to protect his people and as a way of grappling with the imminent chaos, destruction, and revolution that would ultimately bring the demise of Buddhist culture and religion to his nation. I will discuss in detail how the visual language of shock and discordance constituted new ways of translating Buddhist ideas into a composite narrative at a time of political unrest and catastrophic change in Mongolian cultural and religious life.

<sup>21</sup> Alfred Gell discusses the nexus of parties involved in the production of art as agencies in his *Art and Agency: an Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> I. Lomakina *Marzan Sharav* [Funny Sharav] (Moscow: Moskva : Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1974), 124-125; L. Sonomtseren *Uran zuraach B. Sharav* [Artist B. Sharav] (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolyn Urchuudyn Ēvlél, 1969); Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, *Mongol Zurgijn Khugjij irsen tuuh* [History of Development of Mongol Zurag] (Ulaanbaatar, 1988).

<sup>23</sup> L. Batchuluun *Marzan Sharavyn tuurviltzui* (Ulaanbaatar: Soëmbo Printing, 2009), 74-98.

### The *Samsāra*

The Green Palace was located in Ikh Khüree, a major Mongolian monastery since the First Jebtsundampa Zanabazar (1635–1723), had it built as a private *ger* (*yurt*) residential compound in 1639. Each Jebtsundampa strategically developed Ikh Khüree until it became the largest and most significant monastic and political center in Mongolia by the late 1800s when the Bogd Gegeen came to power. He soon built his summer meditation retreat, known as the Green Palace, in 1893. Ikh Khüree remained the principal seat of all eight Jebtsundampa reincarnate rulers from its conception until its demise in the 1930s.<sup>24</sup>

In *The Green Palace*, the palace compound is nearly empty, and neatly structured and organized along the south–north axis following both nomadic and Chinese planning traditions (Fig. 1). Here the artist chose a limited palette of maroon and green, and the compound prominently stands out as a colorful, vibrant structure. The contrast between the central palace with its annexed northern enclosure (storage area) and the crowds of people, horses, chariots, the military garrison, and the zoo, is startling, as all appear gray, undersized, and insignificant, thereby elevating the superiority, power, and glory of the palace. The palace is not only a site of supreme authority (Fig. 1), but also a major pilgrimage destination, seen also in the artist Jügder’s map.<sup>25</sup> A few pilgrims are circumambulating the compound on foot and others are seen in full-body prostration. At the main gates in the south, a couple of pilgrims kneel in front of the palace as they worship.

The horsemen and sedan chairs are shown to be arriving from the east (right), and more *gers* and pitched tents are located in the west (left) portion of the painting, creating an illusion that the dynamic of movement towards the palace is directed from right to left. The right part of the painting is sparsely populated, with a river bed vertically stretching from north to south and branching out towards the west side, enhancing the right-to-left dynamic.

The bird’s eye perspective reveals a scattered and seemingly disorganized space, until close observation reveals important details; what catches the eye immediately is the Bogd Gegeen’s major achievement, the new palace of Ikh Khüree. Even closer examination shows that Sharav depicted the palace in detail, thus presenting the entire complex holistically for single-glance observation. Built initially as a summer retreat temple, the Green Palace gradually expanded by the time of Sharav to include several temples, *gers*, and a two-storey, white, Russian-style building with glass windows

<sup>24</sup> See more about Ikh Khüree’s history and development in L. Dүгeрsүren *From the History of Ulaanbaatar* [*Ulaanbaatar khotin түүкhees*] (Ulaanbaatar, 1956), S. Пүревjav *Khuvsgalin өмнөх Ikh Khüree* [Pre-revolutionary Ikh Khüree] (Ulaanbaatar 1961), S. Idshinnorov, *Ulaanbaatar khotin khu-raangui* [Survey of Ulaanbaatar city] (Ulaanbaatar, 1994), O. Пүрев et al. *Niislelin Öv soyol* [Cultural Heritage of the capital] (Ulaanbaatar, 2004). In English, see Chapter One in Uranchimeg Tsultem “Ikh Khüree: a Nomadic Monastery and the Later Buddhist Art of Mongolia” Ph.D. Dissertation, UC Berkeley, 2009, and Krisztina Teleki *Bogdin Khüree: Monasteries and Temples of the Mongolian Capital (1651-1938)* (Ulaanbaatar, 2011), Uranchimeg Tsultemin, *A Monastery on the Move: Art and Politics in Later Buddhist Mongolia*, forthcoming.

<sup>25</sup> Jügder’s parental name is not known. He is recorded only with the name of Zoogai, his regional house.

that was built in 1905. According to some sources, this building was based on the design sent to the Bogd Gegeen by Russian Tsar Nikolai II, while others suggest that it followed the architecture of the Russian consul building in Ikh Khüree.<sup>26</sup> This building served as a winter residence for the Bogd Gegeen and his consort Dondogdulam, and spawned a new appellation for the complex, the Winter Palace, while the Chinese green tiles account for its more popular name, the Green Palace.

The central entrance is to the south with a three-fold *yampai* (影壁 *yingbi*) protection wall, three-fold ceremonial arcade gates, and three-fold ceremonial “peace” gate, all constructed in 1912–1919<sup>27</sup> and intended to serve only the ruler. The compound impressed the visitor with its architectural internationalism: Chinese-style architecture dominated the complex, which also included several Mongolian *gers* in each courtyard, a Tibetan-style building in the back (the tallest in the complex), and a large Russian-style building right at the entrance.

Beyond detailing the palace architecture, Sharav also provides a clear sense of what went on there. The compound next to the palace is the scene of riveting and shocking events, where couples engage in sexual intercourse and men appear with exposed genitals, all near the Buddhist meditation temple. At a more basic level, Sharav’s revelation of life outside of the palace brings attention to violence and human suffering visualized in traumatic ways. According to Jacob Dalton, violence was not uncommon in Tibetan Buddhism from early times. Whereas some ritual texts detail “liberation” rites with human sacrifice, Dalton also shows myths and legends that constantly refer to the presence of demons and their subjugation by the righteous.<sup>28</sup> The distinction between ritual and real forms of violence, all deal with presence of blood and death, either symbolic or real. The scenes of explicit violence in *the Green Palace* do not relate, at least visually, to any liturgical rites; instead, they are combined with overt nudity and copulation, among other activities typically inconceivable in any monastery.

The men engaged in acts of torture inflict pain and suffering on themselves and others, while seemingly enjoying it. In addition to the aforementioned genital pulling, their victims’ ill treatment includes being poked with sharp instruments, and even burning flesh with red-hot tools. A man watching one of these scenes of torture appears to be enjoying the suffering and pain of his colleague as he claps his hands with what can only be described as glee. In another scene, the victim appears to be in extreme pain, as he wipes away tears. Such unconventional grotesquerie conveys an acute sense of disturbing realities of the time.

<sup>26</sup> Z. Oyunbileg in L. Dashnyam ed., *Mongol nutag dah tuukh soyolin dursgal* (Ulaanbaatar, 1999), 248–250.

<sup>27</sup> In none of Jügder and Sharav’s paintings the heavy three-layered roofs of final construction are depicted. Thus, this painting dates in or before 1912. J. Ülzi *Mongolin Dursglat uran barilgin tiiükhees* [From the history of Mongolian architectural monuments] (Ulaanbaatar: Soyombo Printing, 1992), 32.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob Dalton, *The Taming of the Demons: Violence and Liberation in Tibetan Buddhism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).



The painting was produced *circa* 1911-1912, that is, around the time when the Eighth Jebtsundampa was proclaimed as the Sun-Lit, All-Inaugurated *Mahāsammata* (“the Great Elect”) Bogd Khan of independent Mongolia on December 29, 1911. Even before the Chinese Wuchang uprising in October 1911, the Bogd Gegeen approved the Mongolian nobles’ aspirations to request military assistance from Tsarist Russia to further their own nationalist goals.<sup>29</sup> Russia played what B. Baabar has referred to as “the double game,”<sup>30</sup> that is, signing treaties in Ikh Khüree to pursue formal trade agreements with the new Mongolian state in 1912, while also entering into a secret treaty with Republican China in 1913 that recognized China’s sovereignty over Outer Mongolia and Inner Mongolia’s integral status as part of China.<sup>31</sup> In a secret treaty with Japan, Russia acknowledged Mongolia and Manchuria as territories in the “Russian and Japanese spheres of influence.”<sup>32</sup> In 1915, the tripartite Kyakhta treaty was signed by China, Mongolia, and Russia to rectify Chinese suzerainty over Outer Mongolia.<sup>33</sup>

Tibet’s leader, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876–1933), who was in Mongolia in 1904-1907,<sup>34</sup> continued to maintain his holdings in Khüree banks, and in 1913 sent his representative to sign an important treaty with the Bogd Khan’s Government. Signed in 1913, a Mongol–Tibetan treaty was the only document that formally recognized the sovereignty of both nations.<sup>35</sup> Ikh Khüree appears in numerous documents as the locus of machinations involving politically diverse groups from the Chinese, Russian, Tibetan, and Mongolian communities. It is also in Ikh Khüree, where the Bogd Khan wrote his letters to the foreign governments, such as Japan and the U.S., requesting support and military aid to protect Mongolia’s fragile independence.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Bawden 1989: 193-194.

<sup>30</sup> A Mongolian historian B. Baabar first used the phrase “the double game.” See in Baabar, *Twentieth-Century Mongolia* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 1999), 255.

<sup>31</sup> The treaty was signed by I. Korostovets, a Russian Minister in Beijing, who spent nine months in Ikh Khüree in 1912-1913. See more on his stay in Mongolia in his own diary in O.Batsaikhan, Olga Bakich and Nakami Tatsuo eds., *Ivan Yakovlevich Korostovets: Deviat’ mesyatsov v Mongolii* [Nine Months in Mongolia] (Ulaanbaatar: Academy of Sciences, 2009). Also see Campi and R. Baasan, 6.

<sup>32</sup> The phrase is literally repeated in 3 sources: Ewing 1980: 542; Campi and Baasan 2009: 473, n. 26; Baabar 1999: 246. The original source of this pact is unknown.

<sup>33</sup> Bawden 1989: 200-201; Campi and Baasan, 6-7. According to Christopher Atwood, the Kyakhta treaty was largely written by Russia. About 1/3 of Mongolia’s national budget and all of its military equipment came from Russia. Due to such financial dependence on Russia, Mongolia was forced to sign the treaty for Chinese suzerainty. See more about this in “Kyakhta Trilateral Treaty” in Atwood, 324.

<sup>34</sup> Tsering Shakya, “The Thirteenth Dalai Lama” in Martin Brauen ed., *The Dalai Lamas: A Visual History* (Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich/Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2005), 143-144. William W. Rockhill *The Land of the Lamas: Notes of a Journey Through China, Mongolia, and Tibet* (New Delhi, India: Asian Publication services, 1975 [1891]), 62-63.

<sup>35</sup> See a special issue of *Lungta* 17 titled *The Centennial of the Tibeto-Mongol Treaty: 1913-2013* dedicated to this treaty (New Delhi: Archana Advertising, 2013), esp. pp. 7-29.

<sup>36</sup> As Alicia Campi has recently shown, the Bogda Gegeen sent various requests to the United States asking for support. See Alicia Campi and R. Baasan, *The Impact of China and Russia on United States–Mongolian Political Relations in the Twentieth Century* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 60-63, 69-73, 111. For Bogda’s letters to Japan, see O. Batsaikhan’s several papers, including “Letter of Bogd Javzandamba to His Excellency Emperor of Japan” and “Bogdin Zasgiin Gazrin

This was the *samsāric* milieu during which *The Green Palace* was most likely painted by Sharav for his patron, the Bogd Khan. *The Green Palace* bears no inscriptions or signatures. The painting is deemed to be Sharav's work by certain Mongolian art historians, who based their attributions on stylistic analysis and details in the painting.<sup>37</sup> Because no sources were located that argued against Sharav or in favor of another artist, in this article I refer to Sharav as the probable creator.

Sharav worked on several projects for the Khan. Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem published the memoirs of the former Ikh Khüree's monk-artist D. Damdinsüren in 1995, who identifies Sharav as one of the four artists that the Bogd Khan selected to paint the famed *Daily Events*.<sup>38</sup> Sharav is also known to have made the portrait of the Bogd Gegeen and his consort Dondogdulam, where he captures the royal couple's physiognomy in a realistic, even photographic style that is unique for the time.<sup>39</sup> The humorous details that he frequently includes in his *Daily Events*, as well as the later political propaganda and caricatures he was ordered to produce at the behest of the post-1921 revolutionary regime after his forced departure from monastic life, earned Sharav the nickname "Funny Sharav" (Mong. Marzan Sharav). Sharav's *Daily Events* painting reveal him to have been an open-minded and brave monk, eager to experiment with new styles, innovative themes, and unusual subject matter, yet all still within the parameters of a Buddhist exegetical framework, and under the auspices of his powerful patron. Given the boldness of the shocking details in *The Green Palace*, should we assume that the artist was simply the ruler's passive follower, a "brush substitute"?<sup>40</sup> The compositional arrangement that creates a contrast between color and drabness, the shame of public disclosure of what is typically hidden, and details of suffering, all suggest a strong artist's voice that was selective and independent. As accounts of the Bogd Gegeen's bisexuality and his eventual diagnosis with terminal syphilis were well known throughout Ikh Khüree, this painting might also be taken as the artist's exposure of the harmful types of behavior that need awakening. In the following, I will discuss how both the artist and patron's perspectives can be seen in *The Green Palace* in quite distinctive and unique ways.

### **Internal *Samsāra*: the Notorious Patron and the Artist's Agency**

While the political unrest in Ikh Khüree was the main reason for the decline of Buddhism and its gradual obliteration by pro-Bolshevik groups, the Bogd Gegeen

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Yapontoi Hariltsah gesen Gurvan Oroidlogo" [Three Attempts of the Bogda's Government to Communicate with Japan] MS. on [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu). Retrieved on May 08, 2016. Also O. Batsaikhan, *Mongolia: Becoming a Nation-State* (Ulaanbaatar: Bitpress, 2013), Chapter 4.

<sup>37</sup> I. Lomakina *Marzan Sharav* [Funny Sharav] (Moscow: Moskva : Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1974), 124-125; L. Sonomtseren *Uran zuraach B. Sharav* [Artist B. Sharav] (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolyn Urchuudyn Évlél, 1969); Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, *Mongol Zurgiin Khugjij irsen tüüh* [History of Development of Mongol Zurag] (Ulaanbaatar, 1988). L. Batchuluun *Marzan Sharavyn tuurvilzui* (Ulaanbaatar: Soëmbo Printing, 2009).

<sup>38</sup> D. Damdinsüren, *Ikh Khüreenii Nert Urchuud* [Eminent Artists of Ih Huree] (Ulaanbaatar, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Ts. Damdinsüren ed., *Övgön Jambalin yaria* [Conversations of Old Jambal] (Ulaanbaatar, 1969), 70. This book was later translated by Charles Bawden as *Tales of an Old Lama* (Tring, 1997). Jambal mentions paintings that he knew were made by Sharav.

<sup>40</sup> I owe this term to Patricia Berger *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).

experienced his own internal *samsāra* filled with human struggle and psychological distress. Future Mongolian revolutionary heroes as well as monks and lamas visited him to discuss important matters of the time.<sup>41</sup> At the onset of the new century and the proclamation of Mongolian independence, there was a real possibility that a nobleman of Mongol royal pedigree from the Chinggis Khaan lineage (ca.1262–1227) might be installed as ruler. Despite his Tibetan origins, the Bogd Gegeen was nonetheless unanimously chosen and promptly inaugurated as the Mongol Khan, suggesting the reverence, honor, and trust he received. Yet, and despite this reverence, his open sex life, including bisexual affairs, was well known throughout Ikh Khüree.

According to the Bogd Gegeen's assistant Jambal, his early affair with the noblewoman Norov, wife of Duke (Gün) Tserendorj, became mired in complications, including the birth of a daughter. The affair resulted in long-lasting hostility between the Bogd Gegeen and Tserendorj.<sup>42</sup> This hostility directly affected the building of the Green Palace, as it was Tserendorj who was to supply the building materials for the Bogd's project. Tserendorj disputed and objected to the building of the palace by refusing to transport supplies, thereby deliberately delaying construction.

Norov was replaced in the Bogd's affections by another, Dondogdulam (1874–1923). After the relationship became known, the Bogd Gegeen married Dondogdulam, who was soon presented as an emanation of White Tāra, a popular savior for Ikh Khüree through the Jebtsundampa's lineage connection with the Tibetan scholar-historian and Tāra devotee, Tāranātha (1575–1634),<sup>43</sup> and, as such, provided legitimacy for his union. This marriage, however, was not his only one; after Dondogdulam's death in 1923, the Bogd Gegeen married the Lady Genenpil (1905–1938), while simultaneously engaged in other heterosexual as well as homosexual affairs.<sup>44</sup> In other words, in addition to the wider political instability of the time, *samsāra* and human misery also meant, in the Bogd Gegeen's case, his incredibly convoluted private life, which was neither exemplary nor a secret in the Ikh Khüree

<sup>41</sup> Christopher Atwood also mentions about reverence given to the ruler “despite his wild behavior.” See Atwood 2004: 269.

<sup>42</sup> Ts. Damdinsüren, 70.

<sup>43</sup> The Mongol sources claim that First Jebtsundampa Zanabazar (1635–1723) was the reincarnation of the Tibetan Jonangpa historian Tāranātha (1575–1634). See Zanabazar's numerous hagiographies listed and discussed in Agata Bareja-Starzyńska *The Biography of the First Khalkha Jebtsundampa Zanabazar by Zaya Paṇḍita Luvsanprinlei: Studies, Annotated Translation, Transliteration and Facsimile* (Warsaw: Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw, 2015). This hagiography written by Zaya Paṇḍita Luvsanperenlei (1642–1715) is the first biographic narrative about Zanabazar. See also: Sh. Bira ed., *Öndör Gegeeni namtruud orshvoi* [Hagiographies of Zanabazar] (Ulaanbaatar, 1995); Kampfe, Hans-Rainer *Sayin qubitan-u susug-un terge. Biographie des 1. Jebcun dam-pa Qu-tuqtu Ondur gegen verfasst von Nag gi dban po 1839* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981). Brief hagiographies are in Aleksei Pozdnev *Urgiinskiye Khutugtu* [Khutugtus of Urga] (St Petersburg: Tipografiia brat. Pantelevikh, 1880); Charles Bawden, *The Jebtsundampa Khutugtus of Urga* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1961), Uranchimeg Tsultem, “Zanabazar's Art: The Building of Buddhist State in late Medieval Mongolia” in *Meditation. The Art of Zanabazar and His School* (Warsaw: State Ethnographic Museum, 2010), and “Zanabazar (1635–1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval Mongolia” in Vesna Wallace ed., *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116–137.

<sup>44</sup> See Ts. Damdinsüren 1969 and Bawden 1997.

community. Given this context and Sharav's inclusion of provocative details that construct a narrative of pleasure and pain in *The Green Palace*, the artist's agency may have exceeded his patron's expectations. Sharav's other paintings show a similar courageous approach to respond creatively to the Bogd Gegeen's quest to see the world as it truly was.

In his *Daily Events*, to take another example, Sharav was one of the four artists sent to the countryside with the mission to observe and depict secular life outside of Ikh Khüree that the Khan had only rarely seen.<sup>45</sup> As a southerner who had moved to the northern city, Sharav was well able to visually capture the diverse geographical zones in central Mongolia, the region inhabited by the Khalkha: the forest depicted at the top refers to the northern part of the country, known for rich stands of trees; the west is prominent with significant mountain ranges and rocky hills; and the east is rather plain and flat topographically.<sup>46</sup> The southern Gobi region is signaled by camels, and a large scene with felt-making is placed in the southwest sector.

D. Damdinsüren reports that the *Daily Events* was publicly displayed, suggesting that it satisfied the Bogd Gegeen's quest to learn about the world and orient himself in it.<sup>47</sup> Not only was the painting a window for the ruler to study and observe life outside of Ikh Khüree in detail, but it was also an example of anthropological fieldwork, as understood at present. Some texts mention how the Bogd Gegeen gathered artists to instruct them to go in all four directions and depict "everything they see on their way,"<sup>48</sup> that is, to collect ethnographic knowledge about ordinary people's lives in a manner similar to the Qing production of the ethnographic Miao albums.<sup>49</sup>

In *Daily Events*, Sharav depicts a lama seated in a tent mourning the dead right in the center of the composition, and surrounding him are numerous scenes of human life, including marriage, sexual intercourse, child-bearing, a family starting a new *ger*, felt-making, harvesting, forestry, mountain-worshipping, and so forth. This central scene of death, with skulls and human bones scattered in front of the ritual space, eloquently reminds viewers of the Buddhist concept of the impermanence and illusory nature of life. The scenes produce a continuous narrative that inevitably brings to mind the Bhavacakra, the Buddhist Wheel of Life.<sup>50</sup> *The Green Palace* also conveys Buddhist concepts through the *allegoresis* of desire and pain offering the promise of eventual survival in times of decline.

These acts of translating Buddhist ideas into visual images in the secular mundane world recall suggestions put forward by the Zhangjia Khutugtu Rolpay Dorje (Icang skya rol pa'i rdo rje, 1717–1786), the translator and national preceptor of the Qing Qianlong Emperor, (乾隆, 1711–1799). The Bogd Gegeen's interest in novel images

<sup>45</sup> G. Jamsranjav 1998: 23.

<sup>46</sup> See my analysis of this painting in Tsultemin, "Cartographic Anxieties in Mongolia: the Bogd Khan's Picture-map" in *Cross-Currents*, No. 21 (December 2016), 66-87.

<sup>47</sup> D. Damdinsüren 1995: 62-63

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise: Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>50</sup> Johan Elverskog also briefly hints at this idea. See Johan Elverskog, "Things and the Qing: Mongol Culture in the Visual Narrative" in *Inner Asia* 6 (2004): 137-78.

and collecting and translating texts, as well as appreciation of the creative role of translators, recalls the Qianlong Emperor's deeds.<sup>51</sup>

In creative translation, Rolpay Dorje specifically mentioned that in capturing subtle nuances, the translator needs to use “stylistic effects” to “*make up for the lack of strict equivalence*” [italics are mine].<sup>52</sup> He further suggested that the vocabulary of emotional words, such as “admiration, abuse, wonder, and happiness, sorrow, fear, and *all the like expressions* [italics are mine] must all be translated ... [to] show the same degree of power, capture the same attention, and take the same time.”<sup>53</sup> This creative translation elicits an interactive exchange between author and reader-which is the modern scholar Zhang Longxi's definition of *allegoresis*-to read behind the surface. Evidence of such stylistic effects is seen in Sharav's works, especially in *The Green Palace*, where he, the artist (translator) chose unusual motifs to relay the “degree of power and capture the same attention...”

In *The Green Palace*, Sharav, a talented and courageous artist, resorts to the language of visually shocking allegories for the internal chaos and pain created by self-destructive behavior that also ultimately generates social calamity. His graphic detail of the irrepressible, erect organ (lust) was a depiction of how lust could be forcefully managed and painfully treated. For the Buddhist reincarnate ruler, whose careless violation of Vinaya norms was to his own and others' detriment, the artist uses the grotesque depiction of that “root,” or “that source of all evil ... the penis,”<sup>54</sup> and depicts the ways in which virile energy could be cut off and turned into the opposite of gratification. The imagery here suggests violation of the viewer's expectations. With reference to desire, pleasure, and suffering, the Bogd Gegeen himself wrote:

There are many sufferings for a layman. The disasters of fire,  
water, weapons, war, robbery, poisonous snakes, wolves and tigers,  
fierce rain, hunger and starvation, separation from parents, and  
couples separating without meeting again...

When desire increases, ethics and morality (*sīla*) decrease ...

At the times of getting infectious disease in a marriage

Get recovered with the help of Three Jewels ...

Why are you obsessed with worldly joys?

There is no end to ignorant greed

What will you say to the Lord of Death [Yama] who comes to  
torture [you]? ...

<sup>51</sup> Jamsranjav 1998: 46. The library and the texts were destroyed during the socialist purges in the 1930s.

<sup>52</sup> Patricia Berger, *The Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 37.

<sup>53</sup> Dharmatāla Damcho Gyatsho, *Rosary of White Lotuses, Being the Clear Account of How the Precious Teaching of Buddha Appeared and Spread in the Great Hor Country*, transl. Piotr Klafkowski (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987), 391-408. Quoted in Berger 2003: 37.

<sup>54</sup> Bernard Faure *Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton University Press, 1998), 34-37.

In a clear mirror, observe and analyze your faces and your physiognomy. In the pure ... Dharma mirror, observe critically your own deeds.<sup>55</sup>

The *Green Palace* may effectively be read as the artist presenting a visual “Dharma mirror” to complement the Bogd Gegeen’s textual admonitions in numerous prophecies and instructions, some of which are discussed in the next section. *Samsāra*, in other words, for both artist and patron included not only sociopolitical turmoil in the present and future, but also self-destructive behavior. It is not surprising then that the Green Palace, the most visible and physically imposing accomplishment of the Bogd Gegeen’s worldly success, is the central focus of the painting. The very construction of this meditation retreat represented a triumph over obstacles laid by his long-time adversary Tserendorj, cuckolded husband of the Lady Norov. *The Green Palace* is ingeniously rendered by Sharav into a visual meditation for the Bogd to reflect upon negative karmic deeds and their consequences. Sharav seems to be warning viewers of future desolation caused in part by the karmic seeds already sown into the foundations of the Green Palace itself whose very construction was complicated by the Jebtsundampa’s debauchery. Indeed, Duke Tserendorj was to exercise his animosity toward the Bogd by forming a crucial alliance with the Manchu ambassador (*amban*, 昂邦) in Ikh Khüree by working to destabilize the Jebtsundampa’s rule.

The images, including *Daily Events*, *The Green Palace*, and *The Capital Ikh Khüree* discussed in the following comprise a few of many unusual images made for the Bogd Gegeen. He was a patron who accepted the creativity of his artists in that he destroyed neither the paintings nor the artist who exposed a variety of unsavory dimensions of life in the capital as well as in the countryside. The relation between emperor and artist known elsewhere in East Asia was different in Ikh Khüree. Sharav and other artists, including Jügder, are explicitly mentioned as affiliated with *aimag* (monastic regional house): Sharav belonged to Bizya, one of thirty *aimags* of Ikh Khüree, while Jügder was from the Zoogai *aimag*.<sup>56</sup> Similar to Tibetan regional houses known as *khantsen* (Tib. *khang tshan*), *aimags* represented monastic communities, each one a financially independent administrative unit in its own right, with its own abbot, temple, and rituals. Each artist, in other words, had his own affiliation in Ikh Khüree and the Khan’s court did not include artists, in contrast to China and Japan. This structure suggests that subordination of the artist to the Khan was not like a servant’s relation to the king. The documents that mention the names of artists typically list their community (*aimag*) affiliation and that they were chosen by the Khan as the most qualified artists for specific projects.<sup>57</sup> We may deduce that this

<sup>55</sup> G. Jamsranjav and N. Dugarsüren eds., *Bogdin lünden* [Bogd Gegeen’s *lungs ton*] (Ulaanbaatar, 2002), 58-59.

<sup>56</sup> Sharav’s full appellation goes as Sharav of Bizya aimag. The last name Balduugin was discovered by modern scholars. See Lomakina 1974, L. Sonomtseren 1969, Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, 1988, L. Batchuluun 2009. See S. Pürevjav, 30. On Tibetan Gelug regional houses *khang tshan*, see Georges Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: the Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> “Ikh Dans” [Great Record]. Archival document n.86-87 lists names of artists and the awards in the form of tea by the Khan. See also in D. Altannavch “Bogd Khaani Ordon musein uzuulegt buy “Ge-

relationship was grounded on the Khan's respect for artists, further corroborating the high probability of some degree of artistic freedom or creative license in realizing projects for the ruler.

In the production of *The Green Palace*, both the artist and the patron were monks, and thus both knew the potential efficacy of images in Buddhist practice. The Bogd Gegeen was aware that the demise of Ikh Khüree was fast approaching and the painting would soon be public; during his own lifetime he kept *The Green Palace* in his private chambers. In contrast, *Daily Events* was put on public view outside the Green Palace under a roofed structure specially built for display. *The Green Palace*, having never been displayed in such a way, may have been intended primarily for the Bogd Gegeen's private reflection on his own deeds and the deeds of others in his proximity. The current Bogd Khan Museum curator, D. Altannavch, has reported that the painting was found in the Bogd Gegeen's *lavran* ("lama's estate," Tib. *bla brang*), located immediately to the east of the Green Palace.<sup>58</sup>

Several recent publications have convincingly shown the critical role played by the Bogd Gegeen in the politics of his country.<sup>59</sup> Surviving memoirs and oral histories provide a picture of a beloved ruler whose word was respected and honored,<sup>60</sup> while at the same time he was a notorious debauchee. Although the innovative style and subject matter of *The Green Palace* must have come from the artist, likely as a monastic voice of admonition regarding patterns of self-destructive behavior, the Khan nonetheless endorsed the artist if only because his rendering of Buddhist concepts referred to all sentient beings, the Khan included.

### Decline of Faith

In *The Green Palace*, the large crowd is gathered in the rear quarter of the compound, far away from the main gates, as if captured by the artist in the moment of arriving and deciding where to go--join the tents, military garrison, empty undefined space at the right, or the Bogd Gegeen. Indeed, little activity is seen at the front gates or even near the palace itself. Instead the crowd gathers to the left of the palace, where the new arrivals have comfortably settled themselves in tents. A Russian visitor to Ikh Khüree Aleksei Pozdneev describes the frequent appearance of the Bogd Gegeen for his devotees:<sup>61</sup>

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geeni Bodol" tanka zuragt hiisen sudalgaa" [Research of the Tanghka painting "Meditations of [Bogd] Gegeen" that is on display at Bogd Khan Palace Museum" in *Studia Museologica: Museum Nationale Historiae Mongoli* vol.5, facsimile 8 (Ulaanbaatar: National Museum of Mongolia, 2003), 87-91.

<sup>58</sup> Personal communication with D. Altannavch, October 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Jamsranjav 1998; O.Batsaikhan 2010; 2011; 2013.

<sup>60</sup> My own mother Chojijilin Ichinkhorloo, born in 1927, recollects the stories about the Bogd Gegeen, which all depict him as a beloved and respected ruler.

<sup>61</sup> Pozdneev 1896-1898: 568-570; Pozdneev 1880: 31-33. Charles Bawden also mentions about annual worship of the Bogd Gegeen by referring, most likely, to the lavish rituals *danshig* (Tib. *brtan bzhuvs*) which were attended by both commoners and the nobility. Charles Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989), 193. Uranchimeg Tsultemin, *A Monastery on the Move: Art and Politics in Later Buddhist Mongolia*, forthcoming.

The people can see him now only at celebrations and also when worshipping.... As far as ... worshipping the Gegeen by the common people is concerned, it is performed in the square in front of the Gegeen's palace ... every other day.... Crowds of worshippers find seats in long rows directly out from the gates of the Gegeen's palace, and in that position they await his appearance. One may be surprised by the veneration with which they look in the direction whence the Gegeen is to appear.... And finally the Gegeen appears carried on a yellow litter by eight *gelongs* [Tib. *dge slong*; ordained monks].... Having passed around the lines, the Khutugtu [reincarnate] hides himself accompanied by the sounds of ... instruments, and the people wait reverently.... The second worshipping, in which a *maṇḍala* is presented is performed daily and even several times a day, by various persons; it takes place, not in a temple, but the reception hall of the Khutugtu's own residence.<sup>62</sup>

*The Green Palace* illustrates a very different pilgrimage site: the tent scenes with naked coupling bodies and drunk and vomiting strangers seem discordant, as they suggest lengthy stays near the palace. These visitors seem to have forgotten their principal reason for being there, which was to pay homage to the ruler by prostrating themselves and worshipping.<sup>63</sup> Instead, they are indulging in debauchery--a clear indicator of the decline of faith--and indeed Buddhism was soon to be all but wiped out, just as the Bogd Gegeen himself knew better than anyone.

In this dreary worldliness, the painting further suggests, display of pain, suffering, torture, and military training and preparedness in the garrison are part of a visual trope of distress that surrounds the tranquil palace of the Bogd Gegeen, where the ruler sees just a few loyal people paying him devotion, and even fewer prostrating themselves. To the patron-ruler, this would demonstrate the transgressions that permeated all layers of Ikh Khüree and how very few remained truly devout.

The scenes of torture and sexual pursuits are omitted from discussions about the *The Green Palace* by earlier writers, such as the Mongolian art historians L. Sonomtseren and Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem, and the Soviet writer-journalist I. Lomakina. The obvious sexual and sadistic nature of the imagery explains the silence of these socialist-period authors. Lomakina cautiously hints at the blatant straightforwardness of Sharav's intimate scenes with only one sentence: "There was no other Uрга painter than Marzan (Funny) Sharav who would have allowed himself to show the decadence of the Khan's favorites; in this picture, he does it with sufficient straightforwardness."<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> The English translation is by John Roger Shaw and Dale Plank in John R. Krueger ed., *Mongolia and the Mongols [by] A. M. Pozdnev* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1971), 381-382.

<sup>63</sup> Circumambulation was considered as central in maintaining faith and collecting merit in Tibet and Mongolia. Ikh Khüree's main abbot, *khamba lam* (Tib. *mkhan po bla ma*) and an eminent Buddhist scholar Agwaankhaidav (1779-1838) wrote extensively on the merits of circumambulation. See his work on circumambulation of Ikh Khüree specifically, titled *Ri bo dge rgyas dga' ldan bshad sgrub gling gi skor tshad* [The Standard Accumulation for Circumambulation of Ri bo dge rgyas dga' ldan bshad sdrub gling] in *Collected Works*, vol. 1, folios 577-611 (Leh: S. W. Tashigangpa, 1972-1974; also available in TBRC).

<sup>64</sup> Inessa Lomakina *Marzan Sharav* [Funny Sharav] (Moscow, 1974), L. Sonomtseren *Marzan Sharav* [Funny Sharav] (Ulaanbaatar, 1964). Lomakina, however, has confusions with the titles of the paintings attributed to Sharav. Lomakina, 145.



Tsultem, who in 1988 was the first and only scholar thus far to discuss the *Green Palace* in its entirety, suggested that the imagery reflected the decadent reality of military officers coping with tedium.<sup>65</sup>

These socialist-period writers were not allowed to read the painting from a Buddhist perspective. The scenes of distress and the absence of faith were Sharav's visual strategies to recall and complement the Bogd Gegeen's own writings on decline and tragic *tsevüün tsag* "savage times" (Mong. *čöb-ün čay*). Not only did the Bogd Gegeen write about the decline of faith, but, more significantly, he highlighted the activities that cause such decline:

Ordained monks (gelongs and getsul (Tib. *dge tshul*)! You leave the temples for engagements in trade, obsessed with feasts, being mocked by women and children.... The times are coming when the smoke of your cigars will obscure the sun and the moon, and the alcohol you drink is as vast as the ocean... The Yellow Faith [The Gelug Order of Tibetan Buddhism] will become obscured by a shadow of clouds. Your misconduct and evil behavior of these *tsevüün tsag* are as clear as the mirror of the Lord of Death held in your right and left palms...<sup>66</sup>

The activities leading to decline of faith are outlined in canonical Buddhist texts and include acceptance of women in a monastic setting, lack of respect toward Buddhist traditions, lack of diligence in meditation practice, and excessive association with secular society, all of which we see here depicted by Sharav.<sup>67</sup>

While the political circumstances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were overtly alarming, existing texts suggest that the Jebtsundampa rulers were familiar with the Mahāyāna prophetic literature on the decay of Dharma, and specifically, the prophecy found in the *Questions of (the Bodhisattva) Candragarbha* (Skt. *Candagarbhaparipṛcchāsūtra*; Tib. *Byang chub sems dpa' zla ba'i snying pos zhus pa las lung bstan pa*), for which there are Mongolian translations.<sup>68</sup> In the early literature of decline, as Jan Nattier has shown, this *sūtra* was most popular in East and Inner Asia, with its primary theme being the time and causes for decline of Buddhist teachings. Other scholars, such as Alice Sárközi, Walter Heissig, and A. G. Sazykin, among others, inform us about prophetic texts translated into Mongolian from

<sup>65</sup> Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem *Mongol Zurgijn Khugjij irsen tüüh* [History of Development of Mongol Zurrag] (Ulaanbaatar, 1988), 198. Tsultem, however, did not publish these scenes, reproducing only the palace and the northern storage enclosure.

<sup>66</sup> *Bogd Javzandamba Gegeeni Aya Gaihamshigt Lünden Orshvoi* [Wonderful Prophecies by Bogd Jebtsundampa Gegeen]. MS. Translated and Published in D. Gun-Uils ed., *Bogd Khayan: Namtar Tsadig, surgaal aildvar, Boshig Lünden* (Ulaanbaatar: Tört yos, Khaadin san, 2013), 119-121.

<sup>67</sup> Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 120-21. Other three of the seven categories of canonical Buddhist texts on causality of decline include the following: carelessness in the transmission of the teachings, the emergence of divisions within the *sangha*, and the emergence of a false or "counterfeit" Dharma. Nattier analyzes a substantial corpus of literature to suggest seven categories, which include such Pāli texts, as *Samyutta-nikāya*, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, among others.

<sup>68</sup> Jan Nattier discussed the Mongolian translation in her doctoral dissertation, "The *Candragarbha sūtra* in Central and East Asia" (Harvard University, 1988), ff. 60. According to Nattier, the Mongolian translation of this *sūtra* dates to the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

Sanskrit and Tibetan, currently housed in St Petersburg, Budapest, Ulaanbaatar, and elsewhere, and which include Buddha Śākyamuni's prophetic sermons, prophecies attributed to Nāgārjuna, Padmasambhava, Tsongkhapa, and various writings by Dalai and Panchen Lamas.<sup>69</sup>

The genre of prophetic literature was not new in East and Inner Asia, and the Mongols used sources from China and Tibet in their translations, inscriptions, and writings of new texts. In Tibet, prophecies were a widely spread genre from early times as evidenced by findings from Dunhuang, and many were included in Kangyur and Tangyur.<sup>70</sup> An example of an early engagement with prophecies is the Mongol inscription quoted from the *Kūtāgāra sūtra* on the Juyong Gate in Beijing during the imperial period in the fourteenth century that mentions such calamities as disease, war ("kalpa of knives"), and natural disasters leading to decline.<sup>71</sup>

Nattier cited Vinaya as saying that one of the major causes of Buddhist decline is the admission of women to monastic orders. In the *Candagarbhaparipṛcchāsūtra*, the duration for Buddhist Dharma is specified as 2,000 years, which in turn is divided into four segments of 500 years, each segment seen as a specific stage in the process of decline. The *sūtra* specified the causes and signs of decline, which include loss of faith and practice, illness, famine, and warfare, and at a later period, monks' misconduct and their engagement in various worldly activities.<sup>72</sup>

While these are the signs of decline that the Bogd Gegeen wrote extensively about, and illustrated in *The Green Palace*, the Bogd Gegeen's predecessors, the First Jebtsundampa Zanabazar and the Fifth Jebtsundampa (1815–1842) in particular, were also inspirational writers. All these rulers wrote prophetic texts composed in poignant verse predicting the coming of "savage times" that would precede the ultimate demise of the Dharma.<sup>73</sup> In his notable work, *A Prayer for the Three Times: Bestowing the Supreme Blessings* (Mong. *Janlavtsogzol*; Tib. *Dus gsum gsol 'debs byin rlabs mchog stsol ma bzhugs so*), known simply as, composed in 1696, a text still widely used in Mongolian temples to this day, Zanabazar put forward this powerful appeal:

[When] the great darkness of great dark ages falls,  
Purify all the darkness of the ignorance of all beings;  
Transmit illuminating omniscient wisdom.  
With compassion, help us get through these evil times!<sup>74</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Alice Sárközi *Political Prophecies in Mongolia in the 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1992) with references to Walter Heissig 1956 and 1959; Ch. Zhugder 1972, A.G. Sazykin 1988.

<sup>70</sup> Sárközi, 11 referring to Frederic W. Thomas *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1935).

<sup>71</sup> Sárközi, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Nattier 1988: 63.

<sup>73</sup> This term, repeatedly used in Mongolian writings, is more similar to the Chinese concept of *mo-fa* ("final Dharma"), reflecting on the time of final decline. According to Nattier, the term does not have Sanskrit or Tibetan equivalents, and denotes the time, when "traditional religious practice loses its effectiveness and the spiritual capacity of human beings reaches an all-time low." Nattier 1991: ff.66.

<sup>74</sup> Zanabazar *Janlavtsogzol*, 1696. Reprinted in Ulaanbaatar, 1995.

If Zanabazar's activities and writings reflected on his struggles with the Dzungars,<sup>75</sup> evil times were also continuously prophesied in many *lung bstan* prophetic writings by the Fifth Jebtsundampa, whose times were relatively peaceful. Moreover, the Fifth reincarnate lists the calamities that would befall Mongolia year after year, projecting into the tumultuous times of his heir, the Eighth Jebtsundampa, with stunning accuracy<sup>76</sup>:

From the Metal Monkey Year [1860; 1920] will hardships begin...  
In those bad times, in the Metal Rooster Year [1861; 1921],  
Cattle will be slaughtered  
And eaten by the military;  
All kinds of illnesses will spread...  
The sun of the Dharma will darken in Mongolia  
And temples and monasteries will turn into military barracks...  
Men will be eaten by wolves and beasts;  
Fathers and sons will fight;  
And human bones will pile up like mountains...<sup>77</sup>

The Bogd Gegeen reminds his people about these prophecies by stating:

People of Khalkha, in my many reincarnations as the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Bogd Gegeen I gave you my admonitions. You heard but behave as if you have not; you saw them, but behave ... carelessly as if you have not.<sup>78</sup>

Very similar ideas were expressed in Tibetan prophecies translated into Mongolian since the seventeenth century. For instance, in the Mongolian translation of the *Decree of the Bogd Panchen Lama* (Mong. *Boyda Bančin Erdeni-yin jarliγ*), among a list of ten transgressions heralding decline were the following:

[T]hey do not believe in the Buddha and guardian spirits, and live according to false ideas;

[T]hey do not honor their lamas, teachers, mothers and fathers, but cause them sufferings in different ways....

The same translation mentions dates and instructions:

Especially from the Blue Rat Year [1864; 1924], the sufferings of people will become very severe...

<sup>75</sup> The Dzungars led by Galdan Boshogtu (1644-1697) purged Zanabazar and destroyed his Dharma seat in 1689. See more debate on Dzungars and Zanabazar in Peter Perdue *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), esp.144-152.

<sup>76</sup> See hagiography of the Fifth Jebtsundampa in *Jebtsundampa Luvsantsultemjigmeddambijantsanbalsambuugiin tsadig tuuh Galbarvas modon* [Galbarvas story of Jebtsundampa Luvsantsultemjigmeddambijantsanbalsambu] MS. National Library of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.

<sup>77</sup> *Tabuduyar Boyda Jibjundamba-yin lündeng* [Fifth Bogd's lung bstan] MS. National Library of Mongolia.

<sup>78</sup> *Bogd Javzandamba Gegeeni Aya Gaihamshigt Lünden Orshvoi* [Wonderful Prophecies by Bogd Jebtsundampa Gegeen]. MS. Translated and Published in D. Gun-Uils ed., *Bogd Khaan: Namtar Tsadig, surgaal aildvar, Boshig Lünden* (Ulaanbaatar: Tört yos, Khaadin san, 2013), 120.

Copy this order many times and spread it among many living beings....<sup>79</sup>

Dalai Lamas are also known for prophecies. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who met the Bogd Gegeen in Ikh Khüree in 1904, predicted hardships for Tibet in the same manner.<sup>80</sup> The theme of such prophecies, written in a time already prophesied by his previous incarnations to be one of demise and tragedy, continued in the writings of the Bogd Gegeen at the turn of the new century. As in *The Green Palace* painting, where the lack of faith is visually emphasized, in his writings the Bogd Gegeen repeatedly refers to persistence of faith in times of hardship, such as in the following:

Evil is coming. All over the world the time for the accumulation of evil is about to come. My fellow Mongolians, *aspire for good through your faith* [italics are mine] and remove evil. From the Year of the Rat (1924) [our] suffering and disaster will be even greater.<sup>81</sup>

The Year of the Rat to which the Bogd Gegeen refers here recalls the Panchen Lama's reference to the "Blue Rat Year" previously quoted. That year, 1924, turned out to be the year of the Khan's death. This date suggests that the Khan was predicting the upcoming years of destruction that would indeed be particularly harsh, as his death made way for the establishment of a new socialist government intolerant of religious practice. Not only in his writings, but also with Sharav's help in *The Green Palace*, the Bogd Gegeen visualizes the evils of the "great darkness of the great dark age" (to paraphrase Zanabazar), in which he found himself at the center of "savage times."

In his many writings, the Bogd Gegeen reiterates the idea of Buddhist awakening. As discussed here, the Khan had these far-reaching thoughts projected into the future in *The Green Palace*: for him, the ruler and his artist's collaborative acts assisted in maintaining the Bogd Gegeen's irreproachable authority during times of increasing menace in Mongolia and Inner Asia. It was also instrumental for the ruler to show his people where the potential for cessation of suffering was and how to survive "savage times."

### **The Exit Path from Suffering**

In the view that Sharav provides, the palace was the apex of authority as well as a major pilgrimage site, just as it was in other contemporaneous paintings and maps, such as Jügder's 1912 map of Ikh Khüree. Like *The Green Palace*, Jügder's map was also specially ordered by the ruler in 1912-13. As the map shows, the Green Palace was a brilliant new addition to Ikh Khüree.

Ikh Khüree contained the monastic and secular authorities, noble families, merchants, and foreign residents and diplomats, and, as the artist implies, all within the Bogd Gegeen's immediate sphere of influence and power. Like Jügder, Sharav

<sup>79</sup> Sárközi, 66-67.

<sup>80</sup> Dalton, 156-157. Dalton quotes the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's statement around his death (1933) that contains similar ideas of destruction of Buddhist teachings in Tibet. Dalton suggests the Dalai Lama's language and the ideas of threats recall violent ritual practices described in early Tibetan tantras.

<sup>81</sup> *Boγda Jibjundamba-yin surγal* [Bogd Jebtsundampa's admonitions]. MS. Mongolian National Library, Ulaanbaatar.

uses a variable perspectival view to highlight the diversity of architectural styles within a single palatial complex, where all buildings are represented via different scales and perspectives, with the central temple visually exaggerated in size.

The Bogd Gegeen followed the Qing imperial simultaneity manifested in distinct internationalism of styles and cultural idioms. The Manchu emperors presented themselves to various constituencies as a Daoist sage, a Confucian scholar, a Buddhist monk, and even as a European prince in architecturally appropriate spaces, whereas the Bogd's new temple exemplify what Patricia Berger termed as "quotation of styles."<sup>82</sup> The Chinese-style temples, Tibetan- and Russian-style buildings, and several nomadic *gers* are all located near each other in different parts of the compound, recalling the various ethnic communities who lived in Ikh Khüree.<sup>83</sup> Given that the diversity and international quality of Ikh Khüree developed over many years during the rule of several Jebtsundampas, the Green Palace was the Bogd Gegeen's singular masterpiece, an excellent example of the Bogd's "simultaneous" but transcendent rule in the wake of the Qing emperors.<sup>84</sup>

As mentioned previously, Ikh Khüree became a key locale for political power games among Russia, China, and the new Mongolian state. During the Bogd Gegeen's rule, foreign visitors were numerous. Following are a few such visitors: the Thirteenth Dalai Lama; Russian diplomats and travelers, including Ivan Korostovets (1862–1933), Aleksei Pozdnev (1851–1920), and Piotr Kozlov (1863–1935); several Americans, such as a young engineer and future U.S. president, Herbert Hoover (1874–1964), the previously mentioned diplomat Rockhill, and the paleontologist Roy Chapman Andrews (1884–1960); the Swede Frans August Larson (1870–1957), who spent forty-six years in Mongolia; and the Dane Henning Haslund-Christensen (1896–1948).<sup>85</sup> Hoover later wrote about the Bogd Gegeen in his memoir: "The Living Buddha--Hutuktu Lama--was riding a bicycle madly around an inner court in the great Tibetan Lamasery. He entertained us with a phonograph supplied with Russian records."<sup>86</sup>

For the Bogd Gegeen, who had to stand and present himself as the centerpiece in the ongoing aggressive struggle among the Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Russian populations, the new architecture of the Green Palace provided the means to convey his engagement with each party through his deliberate knowledge of the international styles employed by his architects. It is here, within the walls of the compound, with

<sup>82</sup> Berger, 2003: 33ff.

<sup>83</sup> See fn. 24 on more bibliography on Ikh Khüree.

<sup>84</sup> On Qing "simultaneous" but transcendent rule, see Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>85</sup> See Fujiko Isono 1976, Stephen Kotkin and Bruce Elleman eds., *Mongolia in the Twentieth-Century: Landlocked Cosmopolitan* (New York/London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), esp. pp. 69-78; 107-121. Each of these travelers wrote about Mongolia, Ikh Khüree (aka Urga) and the Bogd Gegeen. See, among others, Frans A. Larson, *Larson, Duke of Mongolia* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1930); Roy Chapman Andrews, *Across Mongolian Plains; a Naturalist's account of China's "great northwest"* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1921); Ivan Korostovets, *Von Cinggis Khan zur Sowjetrepublik* (Berlin, Leipzig: W. de Gruyter & Co., 1926).

<sup>86</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs: Years of Adventure, 1874-1920* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), 42.

its complex and multifaceted architectural and artistic styles, that the Bogd Gegeen's private audiences with foreigners took place. The cosmopolitan mix of architectural styles in his new compound displayed and celebrated his knowledge and association with each party on seemingly equal terms.

Among the Bogd Gegeen's writings, we also find numerous written regulations (*jarliy*) that suggest his sincere efforts to bring order and discipline to his country. These efforts are also captured in *The Green Palace* as Sharav shows in the fenced compound. Here, the garrison and the men represent a select corps of guards who were specifically detached from the military battalion created by the Bogd Gegeen a few years after his investiture. Out of this battalion, the Bogd Gegeen instructed that healthy young males between sixteen and thirty years of age, who "do not have a monastic education, are not mixed up with girls and women, [and who] are not bound by monastic laws" were to be selected for induction into the military, where they were taught everything from forming ranks to shooting.<sup>87</sup> Such training is what we see in this part of the painting, in both its literal and allegorical sense. It is the training of soldiers, as well as a type of military "exercise" designed to suppress sexual desire in an army that had no access to women. However, the training is also aimed at restoring order and serves as an indicator of the need to restore order, an artist's reminder of a sinful present requiring awakening and liberation. The imagery is deeply ambivalent and polysemic. This pattern of repetition and the striking contrast between order and perversity is an artistic device to remind the viewer that everyone has an option for a choice of one or the other.

*The Green Palace* was another maneuver on the part of the Bogd Gegeen to legitimize his deeds for the sake of his own and his people's ultimate enlightenment. Despite, or even in the midst of, his licentiousness and violation of monastic precepts, *The Green Palace* illustrates and highlights the Bogd Gegeen's great accomplishment, the colorful new temple in Ikh Khüree, while the disturbing facts of his life are blurred as part of a larger *saṃsāric* universe. It is the palace, the painting suggests, that validates, endorses, and justifies the ruler's theocratic prominence above all else.

The Bogd Gegeen thus wrote about construction of the Green Palace as follows:

I built the new building with two storeys, put glassed windows in all directions, representing both those foreign and domestic, and decorated it with ornaments in golden paints. I established a wonderful palace and placed likenesses of *yidam* [tutelary deity] protectors at the four directions not just for me to reside there, nor merely for my own usage and enjoyment. Rather, I did it solely with the aim of leading my disciples in the northern land of tranquility. Therefore, for that purpose, I founded it to put in place all the conditions [conducive to my disciples' enlightenment].<sup>88</sup>

These lines from the Bogd Gegeen sound like self-aggrandizement, suggesting again the ways in which *The Green Palace* was likely a part of the ultimate sanction

<sup>87</sup> Jamsranjav 1998: 120.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

for his projects, interests, and deeds. Yet, these lines simultaneously express his deep concern for peace, to “lead[ing] [his] disciples in the northern land of tranquility,” for whom he “founded it [the Green Palace] to put in place all the conditions” conducive to enlightenment. And likely in this desire of protecting and leading his people toward peace, he also composed his prophetic and didactic writings, as well as produced paintings with the efficacious power for manifesting the true nature of *samsāra* and suffering. This realization must come via the viewer’s active involvement with the painting in multiple ways: a panoramic view of the liberation path as well as a close reading of intricate details that remind the viewer of the dire need for awakening to highlight the idea of transformation.

Returning once more to the painting, in one scene where a woman is lying down and a man leans into her, apparently touching her body, there are clear signs of surface wear, as if the area where her naked body is exposed to the male touch was indeed literally touched and the paint rubbed off. While other parts of the painting do not show such explicit signs of wear, it seems evident that this scene was indeed *actively* viewed. In the other scene of copulation, the couples are male, and the male organ is clearly depicted. In this area of the painting, we hardly see women, as intercourse, fighting, drinking, and vomiting all become the domain of the male sex. This explicit depiction of gender disappears at the top of the painting, which is filled with pilgrims’ tents, where Sharav leaves the genders of the naked couple undefined. Here the exposure of privacy is forcefully apparent as the artist transforms “a private history into a public form [of bliss].”<sup>89</sup>

Sharav gestures toward gender as a site of potentiality and transformation, from cross-sex to same-sex coupling, to a human with no clear gender identity, to a naked layperson. In addition, by displaying individuals’ ultimate fragility when naked, and thus equipped with nothing but his or her own flesh, he or she becomes an inseparable part of a dreary worldliness, a visual trope of distress that surrounds the tranquil palace of the Bogd Gegeen.

Sharav’s gender mutations also point at forceful identities and imposed divisions: political and spiritual, monastic and tantric, Tibetan and Mongolian, hetero- and homo-sexual, all concentrated in the ambivalent nature of his ruler. From ethnic and gender awareness, as the painting implies, there is a transformation to an ultimate ego-less body. Thus the artist includes a dynamic scene of a Tantric Chö (Tib. *gcod*) (literally “cutting” or “severing”) ceremony at the top, above the naked copulating couple. In this scene, the two lamas in red hats--the Chö practitioners--are drumming and blowing a thigh-bone trumpet, known as a *kang ling* (*rkang gling*), to demonstrate that the ritual is in progress. Chö is an old Tantric practice in Tibetan Buddhism that refers to “cutting through the ego,” cutting through one’s defilements and obscurations of self-delusion, and visualizing the offering of one’s own body.<sup>90</sup> It is conducted

<sup>89</sup> Steven Levine, following Sigmund Freud in Steven Z. Levine, “Between Art History and Psychoanalysis: I/Eye-ing Monet with Freud and Lacan” in Mark A. Cheetham, Michael Ann Holly, Keith Moxey eds., *The subjects of Art History: Historical Objects in Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 198.

<sup>90</sup> According to Stephen Beyer, the Machig Labdön is the founder of the practice of *chöd*. See Stephen Beyer, *The Cult of Tārā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 47.

outdoors, oftentimes in graveyards, to impress upon the practitioner the key concepts of “emptiness,” impermanence, and the ego-less body. As Sarah Harding has put it, Chö practice, “with a stunning array of visualizations, song, music, and prayer [...] engages every aspect of one’s being and effects a powerful transformation of the interior landscape,” aiming at a complete severing of attachment to the ego.<sup>91</sup> The artist’s layered composition that places the tantric scene precisely above the genderless bodies suggests that transformation and the Buddhist renunciation of the ego are part of an ongoing process, which could potentially permeate all layers of Ikh Khüree’s diverse community.

The spatial arrangement and composition that mark the palace as the center highlight the patron’s and artist’s vision to see it as a single point of necessary redemption. By virtue of the composition and the dramatic effect of comparison-contrast, the palace appears as the Bogd’s own “*maṇḍalic* space” that sacralizes the world and offers a path of liberation—that is, a path of devotion and service to him as ruler—and, through him, connection to the transcendent. The scattered scenes of torture and sadism reveal a suppressed dissatisfaction with reality by mimicking a literal representation of graveyards in the *maṇḍala* depictions. The artist thus places the crowd scenes on the left side of the painting leaving the right side sparsely populated to reinforce the clockwise viewing of the painting. If the charnel grounds in the *maṇḍala* indicate the impermanence and illusory nature of the world, the anguish of human existence enmeshed in chaos suggests the increasing sufferings and hardships of the Mongols at this unstable time. It is not only the authority of the Khan that extends “like the light of ten thousand suns radiating in ten directions” (as he himself put it) but also that of the artist, who covertly but successfully renders the very essence of *samsāra* in visual terms that would be legible to any viewer in Ikh Khüree at the time, including the ruler himself. Meanwhile, the viewer is invariably drawn from these peripheral scenes around the palace’s enclosure toward the center where the exit path from suffering resides, (dis)embodied in the invisible but implied figure of the Bogd Gegeen himself.

The Bogd Gegeen’s writings suggest his desire to be remembered as the leader, teacher, and protector of his people. For instance, he wrote:

If the lake does not dry out, thousands of birds will not stop to gather. So, as in this allegory, may my life and health and [the health] of those who adhere to the faith be firm and steady. May I rejoice with you, my many disciples, at the Dharma celebration!

...

If faith is firm, no danger will arise.<sup>92</sup>

...

All sentient beings, big and small, listen to the Bogd Gegeen’s instructions (*jarliy*).

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Harding in "Preface" in *Machik's Complete Explanation Clarifying the Meaning of Chod*. (Snow Lion Publications, 2003).

<sup>92</sup> The Fifth Jebtsundampa “jiruge-yin üy” [Words from Heart], reprinted in Jamsranjav and Dugarsüren eds., *Bogdin lüngden* [Bogd Gegeen’s *lung bstan*] (Ulaanbaatar, 2002), 41-45.



If [you] write [them] down with devotion and worship, it will be good.  
 All my disciples, disseminate the Bogd Gegeen's instructions,  
 My instructions!  
 During this time of hardship  
 [I am] the bright light irradiating the gloomy day...<sup>93</sup>

As a true monk of Ikh Khüree, even possibly a favorite, according to the Bogd Gegeen's biographer Jamsranjav, Sharav (and all pilgrims) would have understood that the ruler is he who leads devotees to the awakening and exit from suffering; this is why the pilgrims gather at the palace. To emphasize this trust, Sharav accentuates the palace where a living Buddha, the Bogd Gegeen, invisible here in the painting, resides. The shining palace, which both the artist and the ruler command, is the site for enlightenment in and of itself.

### Conclusion

In *The Green Palace*, allegories, grotesqueness, and the language of shock demonstrate the artist's wish for visual engagement by an audience that extends far beyond his powerful patron. The scenes of pilgrimage and central focus on the temple-palace illustrate Buddhist concepts creatively translated by the artist for his patron. The artist is the active translator, as Walter Benjamin would have put it,<sup>94</sup> the one who is vigorously involved in reformulating conventional forms into a message that imparts his own agenda. This language is the interactive product of both artist and patron where different interests resolve into the multivalent *allegoresis*. The artist, familiar with the didactic nature of images and their role in meditation and ritual, was able to craft a new kind of visualization appropriate for his dire time, his patron, and his potential viewers.

The extremity of the subject matter in *The Green Palace* is triggered by the extreme conditions of *samsāra*. The Bogd Gegeen undoubtedly witnessed human misery at every level in a particularly acute and disturbing way, confronted as he was in such a short space of time with the radical overthrow of centuries-old traditions of rule in Mongolia, China, and Russia. In addition to the referential images of internal causes of decline in *The Green Palace*, there are also hints of external causes of decline, inasmuch as the invasion of Ikh Khüree by the Russian and Chinese armies was certainly the other key factor in the final destruction of theocratic rule. The Bogd Gegeen's struggle reminds us of earlier cases elsewhere-in India, for example-in which foreign invasion contributed to the demise of Buddhism, alongside divisions within the monastic community and the willful choice by many people to go their own way.<sup>95</sup> In Mongolia, the tragic consequences of the story are well known, as many victims of the purges, still alive in the 1960s and 1970s, witnessed widescale killing

<sup>93</sup> "Light to radiate a gloomy day" reprinted in G. Jamsranjav and N. Dugarsuren eds., *Bogdin lünden* [Bogd Gegeen's *lung bstan*] (Ulaanbaatar, 2002).

<sup>94</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York, Schocken Books, 1969), 71.

<sup>95</sup> Nattier 1991. However, it is no longer completely accepted that the Mogul invasion of India was the proximate cause of the demise of Buddhism there. Yet, the role of Islam in the demise of Dharma is hinted at in the Kālacakra texts, where the *kla klo* are likely references to Muslims.

and the mass destruction of 1,050 Mongolian monasteries. Only two monasteries were spared—Gandan and Erdene-Zuu—and they remain standing to this day.<sup>96</sup>

*The Green Palace* is constructed with visual contrast between chaos versus tranquil temple-palace, recalling the structure of a *maṇḍala* as it expresses the Khan's wish to demonstrate the exit path from suffering. The Bogd Gegeen likely endorsed his artist's choice of the visual language of sexuality and violence to represent the all-too-human world of *samsāra*, in which the Bogd Gegeen himself was enmeshed. His artist delivers the idea of *samsāra* in a manner reflective of the Khan's internal *samsāra* and extendable to all sentient beings. Sharav's other painting, *Daily Events*, is another example of Buddhist teachings and concepts conveyed by weaving doctrine (e.g., the suffering of *samsāra*, karmic causes and outcomes, etc.) into the fabric of the mundane.

In addition to the exceptional sensitivities of artistic genius that enable art works to herald war and revolution as Haskell has shown, Sharav also depicted the ruler's vision of the future and the protection of his people as revealed in the Bogd Gegeen's own writings. While it is not uncommon to use parables with secular scenes in teaching the Dharma-*avadāna* and *jātaka* stories are good examples—in *The Green Palace* the didactic functions of Buddhist images took an unusual form during a modern period of political turmoil. Here the dramatic departure from the Tibetan Buddhist painting tradition and iconography, and the acceptance—and even encouragement—of stylistic innovation made the painting accessible for multilevel readings facilitating viewers' active engagement. The painting became *public* to reach broader audiences as the Green Palace was transformed into a museum in 1926.<sup>97</sup> In the Bogd Gegeen's own words, the paintings, including *The Green Palace*, were meant to be “an offering for the prosperity of the Buddha's religion, my own long life, your success and your thriving in happiness.”<sup>98</sup>

The Bogd Gegeen often used *ülger* (allegories) in his writings; hence in this first comprehensive analysis of *The Green Palace*, I have considered this painting as a case of *allegoresis* that is based on interpretive power and suggests polysemy. Consequently, future discoveries will likely generate other perspectives and new ways of reading.

The Bogd Gegeen's prophetic vision of “savage times” and his efforts to highlight the need for faith and transformation continued to resonate in the hearts and minds of his people long after his death. Throughout the years of destruction and beyond, the Khan remained to be the one for his people to lead and navigate the way through *samsāra* with his numerous writings and extraordinary works of art.

<sup>96</sup> The latest research yielded the record of 1,022 monasteries in Khalkha Mongolia prior 1930. See Teleki 2011, and Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki, “Monasteries and Temples of Bogdiin Khüree, Ikh Khüree or Urga, the Old Capital City of Mongolia the First Part of the Twentieth Century” posted online at [www.mongoliantemples.com](http://www.mongoliantemples.com). Only two of them, the Gandan Tegchinlin of Ikh Khüree and Erdene Zuu were spared by the Bolsheviks.

<sup>97</sup> O. Mendsaikhan ed., *Bogd Khaani ordon muzei: uzmeriin deejis* [Masterpieces of Bogd Khayan Palace museum] (Ulaanbaatar, Bogd Khayan Palace Museum, 2013), 11.

<sup>98</sup> *Boyda-yin üy* [Bogd's words]. MS. National Library of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.