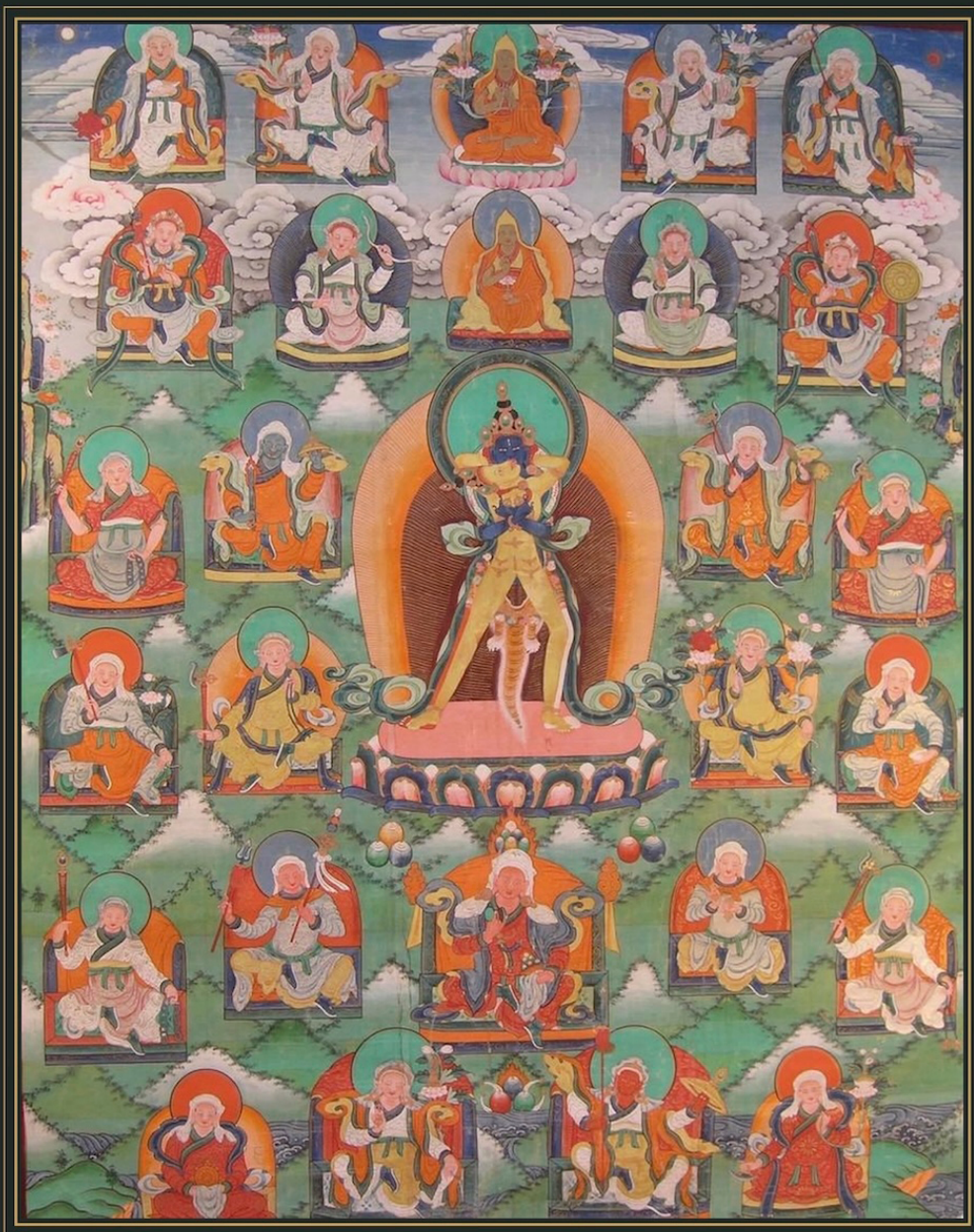


The Interrelationship between the Texts, Images, and Rituals in Mongolian Buddhism



VESNA A. WALLACE

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Across the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions of India, Tibet, and Mongolia, imagination permeates all aspects of Buddhist practice, including prayer, ritual, and meditation, integrates the practitioner's vocal, physical, and mental activities, and offers opportunities for new cognitive discoveries. Buddhist ritual texts abound with guidelines on what to imagine and how to imagine in particular contexts of the given meditational and ritual practices. In addition to a textual basis, visual forms of imagination often rely on previously observed material and artistic images as external props.

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Vesna A. WALLACE

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Kālacakra and Viśvamātā, surrounded by the kings of Śambhala, Zanabazar
Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar. Photo by Vesna A. Wallace.

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Foreword

The three MaMa Distinguished Lectures included here are based on the research for the chapters I am contributing to the co-authored volume *Image and Imagination in Mongolian Buddhism: Arts, Texts, and Rituals*, forthcoming from Columbia University Press. The three lectures take as their subject the mental and linguistic forms of imagination, mental images, and memory inherent in Mongolian prayers, rituals, and meditational practices related to rebirth in Śambhala.

In the history of Buddhism in Mongolia, interest in the Kālacakra tantric tradition can be traced to the thirteenth century, when the Yuan court began to promote and financially support translations of Kālacakra tantric literature and the conferral of its empowerments. We do not know to what extent interest in this tradition expanded beyond the Mongol court during the period following the collapse of the Yuan empire and before the latter part of the seventeenth century, when Qing patronage of Buddhism in Mongolia began to support the larger monastic institutions, contributing to the further development of *Kālacakratantra* teachings and practices in their Kālacakra temples and colleges.

A considerable surge of interest in the *Kālacakratantra* and its Śambhala prophecy, which began in the eighteenth century, continued throughout the early decades of the twentieth. Testimony to this is a considerable body of literature in diverse genres, the most numerous being ritual manuals, aspirational prayers, *sādhana*s, and yogic meditation manuals composed by well-known Mongolian scholastics such as Zaya Paṇḍita Luvsanprinlei (1642–1715), Khüree Khamba Agwankhaidav (1779–1838), Bicheech Tsorj Agwantseren, Lamin Gegeen Luvsandanzanjantsav, Gün Gombojav, and others whose works are discussed in this three-lecture series. Among the contributors to the spread of *Kālacakratantra* teachings and ritual practices was the Fourth Jebtsundampa (Blo bzang thub bstan dbang phyug ‘jigs med rgya mtsho dpal bzang po, 1775–1813), who, having traveled to Lhasa and received the *Kālacakratantra* empowerment there, returned to Mongolia in 1805 with Kālacakra texts among other canonical works. In 1806, he began the construction of a three-storied Kālacakra temple in Ikh Khüree, the Dechingalva temple (Tib. Bde chen bskal pa), where elaborate services related to the *Kālacakratantra* came to be performed. Thereafter, and until the early twentieth century, a dozen Kālacakra temples and colleges were established across Mongolia, the latest being the Kālacakra datsan founded in 1927 at Jalkhanz Khüree (Jalkhanz Gegeen’s Monastery) in Khövsgöl province.

The dissemination of *Kālacakratāntra* teachings, empowerments, and rituals among Mongolian monastics generated a strong interest in the land of Śambhala, and it inspired the production of new legends concerning the otherworldly Śambhala and its marvels, prayers, and rituals for rebirth there, and prophetic and eschatological writings relevant to the social crises of early twentieth-century Mongolia. In addition to addressing the socio-political conditions in which these Śambhala-related writings and practices emerged, the three lectures included here also examine how Mongolian authors integrated textual, ritual, and imaginative forms of practice into a multi-modal system aimed at the most effective outcomes.

Introduction

Texts, rituals, and images have long served as crucial vehicles for the transmission and preservation of Buddhist culture and religious practice. They are intentional acts that encompass processes of experiencing, understanding, and communicating religious experience through mental, verbal, and physical activity imbued with symbols and metaphors. As such, they are the means of mental training that combines the intentional, constructive imagination often filled with mental images to facilitate the mental and epistemic changes in the practitioner.

In this three-lecture series, we will:

- 1) Examine the dynamic relation between texts, rituals, and images
- 2) Explore how these three modalities of expression work together, and
- 3) Investigate how the processes of imagination and imagery can be productive of new knowledge.

This lecture series draws from various textual sources to demonstrate different Buddhist perspectives on ritual techniques involving visualization, imagination, and visual material culture. The goal is to highlight how linguistic, mental, and material imagery can effectively shape religious experiences.

2 The Interrelationship between the Texts, Images, and Rituals in Mongolian Buddhism

CHAPTER ONE

Imagination, Mental Image, and Memory

The first lecture of the series serves as an introduction designed to contextualize the examples of tantric practices that will be discussed in the subsequent two lectures. It will cover two main areas:

1. The historical background in which these ritual and contemplative practices emerged.
2. A general theoretical model that arises from the analysis of these practices.

Historical Background

By examining selected Mongolian Buddhist sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this lecture intends to unveil the profound connections among texts, rituals, and imagery. It is essential to recognize that a text—whether it takes the form of descriptive prose, a lyrical prayer, a mantra, or a ritual manual—cannot exist in isolation from the rituals performed, the tangible images created, or the mental imagery evoked. Each of these elements is intrinsically linked, functioning together as a cohesive cognitive process. What makes this interdependence particularly compelling is its flexibility; the text, image, and ritual can engage in various relational sequences, with none occupying a marginal position in this intricate network. Their convergence facilitates a rich, multimodal experience that transcends simple understanding. Within this framework, the text gains authority not through its content alone but through its capacity to legitimize and reinforce the rituals and meditative practices it describes. This dynamic interplay among texts, rituals, and imagery is cyclical, with each component inspiring and generating the others. Written words can unleash powerful visual images—both material and mental—while those very images can spark the creation of new texts, prayers, and liturgical expressions. Therefore, beyond merely observing intertextual relations among Buddhist writings, we must acknowledge the profound “inter-modality” among texts, ritual performances, imaginative acts, and the production of tangible images. This interconnectedness not only enriches our understanding but also highlights the transformative power of these elements working in concert.

We must acknowledge that ritual performances, imaginative acts, and the creation of images are not merely substitutes for the text; they are essential expressions in their own right. Texts acquire profound new meanings when approached from different contexts or transformed into various forms of communication, each embodying its own semiotic codes and intricate structures. This is particularly significant for interpreting prophetic and eschatological writings. For instance, Mongolian authors of the early twentieth

century artfully reinterpreted the prophecy from the early eleventh-century *Kālacakratantra*, which describes a global Śambhala war—a fundamental struggle between good and evil. They understood this prophecy through the lens of their own experiences with ideological conflicts and revolutionary upheavals.

An important rationale for examining the works of authors active during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries lies in the shared socio-political contexts and experiences that shaped their literary production. This cohort includes prominent scholars and *yogīs* from Ikh Khüree, the center of Khalkha Buddhism, as well as from Buryatia and Southern/Inner Mongolia. They generated a diverse corpus of literary genres, including chronicles, versified prayers for rebirth in Śambhala, guides to Śambhala, ritual and contemplative manuals, funerary rites, and ceremonial rituals for the recitation of the *Kālacakratantra*, including a subset of rituals aimed at countering external threats to the Buddha Dharma. The political and social transformations prevailing during their era significantly influenced these authors, fostering innovative expression and shaping recurrent thematic motifs within their works. These motifs encompass liturgical, contemplative, and ritual texts associated with the *Kālacakratantra* tradition and various renditions of the Śambhala legends, which originated in the eleventh century in India and subsequently inspired new literary endeavors in Tibet and Mongolia. Moreover, these authors engaged in a process of adaptation, recontextualizing Indian and Tibetan legends and practices to align with their specific historical and cultural milieus. Their writings elucidate how texts, rituals, and both material and mental images within the Mongolian Kālacakra tantric tradition intersect and coalesce, thereby constructing a cohesive epistemological framework aimed at facilitating rebirth in Śambhala and ensuring the safeguarding of the Dharma during periods of social discord and uncertainty. In addition, the authors' works articulate a constructive vision of an idealized Buddhist society founded on ethical principles of governance and livelihood. This aspirational framework emphasizes the importance of stable and harmonious social relations, assurances of material well-being, aesthetically delightful environments, and access to teachings provided by venerable bodhisattvas. Consequently, their writings not only reflect the authors' insights regarding the tumultuous conditions of their circumstances but also serve as a vehicle for contemplating the spiritual and aesthetic ideals that can guide societies in times of crisis and transformation.

The social and political crises encountered by Mongolian authors of that period unfolded during the latter stages of the Qing dynasty's decline, when the erosion of economic and political authority in Inner Asia profoundly impacted the Mongolian economy and tested national identity. Additionally, the significant toll of infectious diseases—including smallpox, sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis, and tuberculosis—continued into the early twentieth century, further contributing to the decline of the Mongolian

population. Following their determined struggle for independence from the Qing, Mongolia established a period of autonomy under a theocratic government led by Bogd Gegeen (1869–1924), the Eighth Jebtsundamba. However, this newfound self-governance was marked by further deteriorating social and economic conditions. Positioned between China and Russia, Mongolia became a pivotal player in the political machinations of competing forces, including Russian Bolsheviks, White Russian troops, and Chinese warlords. During the Russian Civil War, this conflict spilled over into Mongolian territory, with various factions occupying Ikh Khüree at different times. The collapse of the Bogd Khan's theocratic state in 1924 ushered in a systematic assault on Buddhist institutions, leading to the imprisonment, execution, and exile of numerous monks. In just a single lifetime, these authors navigated the policies of three distinct governments: the Qing colonial regime, the autonomous theocratic government of the Bogd Khan State, and the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Government. Amid these tumultuous changes, the literary and artistic achievements of Mongolian scholars and artists flourished during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the next two lectures, we will explore the remarkable works of influential figures from this vibrant intellectual community, including Zava Damdin (1867–1937), Erdene Mergen Tsorj Agramba Luvsanchoinzin (Tib. Chos rje Sngags rams pa blo bzang chos 'dzin; 1875–1937), Danzanravjaa (Tib. Bstan 'dzin rab rgyas; 1803–1856), Minjüür Dechin Sharav (Mi 'gyur bde chen shes rab), Sherab Gyatso (Shes rab rgya mtsho), and others. Their enduring creativity and resilience stand as a powerful testament to the strength of Mongolian culture in the face of adversity. Experiencing the uncertainties and threats to their lives and to monasticism in general, they wrote about the imagined, advantageous conditions for Buddhist practice and liberation from *samsāra* in Śambhala, desiring escape from political chaos, persecution, imprisonment, or death. They developed their own perspectives on the utopian era of Śambhala, which reflected their perilous circumstances and gave the sense of urgency. Their culturally and politically conditioned views assigned particular significance to the Mongolian land in relation to Śambhala and its global battle. They affirmed the connection between Mongolian national and Buddhist identities as expanding beyond the geographical borders of Mongolia. Along with that, they repackaged political and religious prophecies inherited from India and Tibet.

Monastic scholars like Zava Damdin not only prayed for rebirth in Śambhala but also composed fierce ritual texts aimed at expelling external enemies of the state and the Buddha Dharma. Zava Damdin's ritual text, titled the *Vajra Key*,¹ exemplifies how Buddhist rituals can be appropriated, modified, and

1 The full title of the text is *A Vajra Key That Turns the Wheel of Magic: The Appendix to "Repelling the Army of Barbarians Relying on Vajravega, the Lord of Fierce Deities," Together with Arranged Liturgies* ('Khro rgyal rdo rje shugs la brien pa'i kla klo'i dmag

adapted to fit various social contexts and political circumstances that justify their use. The practice of reworking, recontextualizing, and blending different rituals and prayers from earlier traditions—and sometimes from competing traditions—has been well-documented across diverse Buddhist cultures. Rituals often transform as they are transmitted from one culture to another and from one social situation to another. In almost all Mongolian ritual texts associated with the *Kālacakratantra* and Śambhala practices, one can readily identify intertextual and inter-ritual elements. Mongolian Buddhist rituals often draw from established tantric traditions, existing structural frameworks, and deeply embedded codes of meaning that originated in India and Tibet. Within the Buddhist context, texts, paintings, and rituals are not constrained by a necessity for originality. A fierce ritual, like that of repelling the inimical forces to the Dharma, described by Zava Damdin in his ritual text titled the *Vajra Key*, which in its original form was considered effective in early eleventh-century Indian Buddhism, was viewed as equally effective in early twentieth-century Mongolia. This ritual's call for violence against the enemy of the Dharma was presented as a Mongolian Buddhist strategy of collective and personal self-defense against the danger of aggression. Its violent nature is subordinated to that very aim. The fierce ritual of repelling the enemy was an emergency response to the dire situation facing Mongolian Buddhism in the early twentieth century. In his *Vajra Key*, Zava Damdin implemented a reworked version of the Vajravega ritual, which was originally utilized in India and is still performed in the Tibetan tradition as a ritual for removing obstacles to the *Kālacakratantra* initiation. By repackaging versions of the eleventh-century Indian Vajravega ritual, Zava Damdin created a new ritual. In his amalgamation of different ritual and liturgical elements into a single practice, Zava Damdin made every effort not to depart from the Kālacakra tantric lineage. As he pointed out in the colophon to the *Vajra Key*, for a ritual to be authentic and authoritative, its contents must be based on practices established within one's own tradition, transmitted from the great masters of the past; they should not be mixed with those from other traditions. Thus, rituals are viewed by the tradition as being simultaneously the vehicles of the tradition's preservation and its innovations.

Furthermore, prophetic narratives surrounding the eschatological battle of Śambhala, which circulated in various forms throughout Mongolia since the early eighteenth century, gained prominence during a time marked by troubling political events and social crises. These circumstances were often interpreted as ominous signs heralding the end of a degenerate eon (Skt. *kaliyuga*) and foretold cataclysmic events of global scale. In the face of a significant breakdown in the socio-political and religious landscape, the authors envisioned Śambhala as a sanctuary—both a physical destination and an imaginative refuge—where individuals could seek solace during

bzlog gi zur rgyan 'don 'grigs dang bcas 'phrul 'khor skor byed rdo rje'i lde mig). Belonging to the private collection of Ma Lama Amgalan.

tumultuous times. They interpreted prophetic writings on the Śambhala war not only as reflections on their fractured society but also as a roadmap for future preparation. The expectation of an impending era of Śambhala was deeply rooted in their prayers, rituals, artistic expressions, and imaginative visions. Much of the artistic and literary output of the early twentieth century was spurred by this awareness of imminent destructive events, as the authors endeavored to offer guidance and alert their audiences to the lurking dangers through their creative works.

In Mongolian writings, Śambhala is recognized as a realm where notable Mongolian heroic figures, such as Chinggis Khan (c. 1162–1227), and esteemed Tibetan and Mongolian religious leaders, have either taken rebirth or are destined to be reborn as powerful rulers or valiant military commanders. Since the seventeenth century, Mongolian leading scholastics have shown a deep familiarity with Indian and Tibetan prophetic literature that discusses the decline of the Buddha Dharma. Like other prominent scholars in Mongolia, these authors produced insightful commentaries, crafted new translations of significant Tibetan, Chinese, and Sanskrit texts, and composed prophetic writings addressing the decline of Buddhist faith. Their works on the deterioration of faith predict the eradication of Buddhist culture in Mongolia starting in 1920. The ritual and meditation manuals we will examine in the next two lectures were specifically designed for the Mongolian monastic audience, who engaged with these texts with shared interests and practical concerns. These texts are not merely intended for reading; they are meant to be actively practiced and integrated into various contexts to fulfill their purpose effectively. Thus, we can consider each ritual and meditation text to have multiple authors: those who write them and those who perform the rituals or visualize their contents. This notion also applies to visual imagery, which can be converted into a mental image during contemplative practice. The functional significance and structural aspects of these ritual and meditation texts enable them to be performed, thereby transforming them into dynamic events or, one could even say, into living entities. Through ritual and meditative practices, these texts become embodied and personalized through verbal, mental, and physical actions.

The ritual performer, the agent of imagination, and the artist inspired by the text are all equally significant as the text itself. They serve as conduits for transmitting the text's semantic values and aesthetic qualities into tangible and mental images, vocal expressions, and physical gestures. The act of ritual performance, the process of imagination, and the creation of mental and material images are not merely aids for visualization; rather, they represent creative expressions of the text's function.

In Buddhist tantric practices, imagination is rarely regarded merely as a thought experiment or an imaginative exercise; it is fundamentally rooted in the belief that what is envisioned can be actualized, provided the practitioner

approaches it with the right mindset, follows the prescribed guidelines on the structure and contents of imagination, and fulfills the ritual requirements. As Zava Damdin states in his *Vajra Key*, without these elements, the entire ritual is reduced to mere child's play. For a ritual to be effective, its execution must transcend the dichotomy between mental and physical actions, as well as between mental and linguistic imagery.

General Theoretical Thoughts

A) Imagination and Memory

Not long after our authors perished during Stalin's purges of Buddhism in Mongolia, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his work *L'Imaginaire* published in 1940, discussed imaginary objects as a "mélange of past impressions and recent knowledge." He posited that while we recognize the imaginary as unreal, we nonetheless tend to ascribe our emotions, beliefs, and other responses to it. Throughout the upcoming two lectures, it will be demonstrated that the use of mental and material images in Mongolian Buddhist rituals is rooted in the belief that such images can effectively transform a person's cognitive, conative, and affective states. Although our Mongolian authors would likely concur with Sartre to some extent, they firmly believed that the act of creating new mental impressions through imaginative practice not only contributes to episodic or semantic memory but also generates new knowledge that would otherwise remain inaccessible in one's current life. They contended that this knowledge could be accessed in a qualitatively different manner upon rebirth, particularly in a desired rebirth in Śambhala. This idea rests on the understanding that all our experiences and knowledge of the world are shaped by the impressions of prior experiences, which manifest in our habitual tendencies (Skt. *vāsanā*) and remain dormant until activated by internal or external stimuli. An archival interpretation of imagination, as articulated in Western philosophy, views memory as a mechanism for registering, storing, and reproducing representations of specific past experiences. This perspective is applicable to the Buddhist concept of imprints from past experiences stored within consciousness; however, it does not align with the Buddhist understanding of memories that arise from previously generated imprints. A constructivist approach to memory may be more fitting in this context, as memories intentionally generated through specific rituals or contemplative practices are inherently productive. They yield representations, interact with various internal and external factors, reconstruct experiences, generate new knowledge, replace outdated narratives, enhance physical and verbal skills through repeated ritual practice, and motivate practitioners to take action. All memories are conditioned, malleable, and impermanent. As such, memories that arise from misperceptions of reality—often seen as obstacles on the path to transcendent, liberating knowledge—can and should be eliminated. Given that the contemplative and ritual generation of memories is always designed with a particular purpose in mind, the architects of these practices insisted that the objects of contemplation should represent the sublime. Consequently, they

selected contemplative objects that effectively engender elevated memories, as well as devotional and affectionate sentiments, fostering the sublimation of the mind and the experiences of the practitioner. Memory serves as a conduit for unmediated access to what has been learned or experienced. Thus, the authors recognized memory as vital for maintaining and encoding already acquired knowledge. Additionally, they viewed memory as a gateway to the development of increasingly nuanced understandings of the world, which would ultimately transcend current cognitive and sensory limitations. Furthermore, they recognized that the relationship between the perception of an image—whether it be material, literary, or purely conceptual—and memory produces various forms of knowledge, including an understanding of history, doctrine, time, geography, and religious and cultural practices. The mentioned authors were acutely aware that images are integral to a network of associations and symbols that serve both as components of memory and as triggers in the process of recall. Consequently, they focused on two primary objectives:

1. preserving the memory of traditional religious and cultural values that were at risk of being erased by the military and symbolic measures enacted during the revolution, and
2. creating present memories that would serve as a foundation for an anticipated future.

A transformation of present experience in anticipation of the future, stimulated by imagination, mirrors the transcendent transformation that goes beyond the immediate moment. As historian and anthropologist of African religions, Katharina Wilkens, eloquently articulated: “Positioned between past, present, and potential futures, imagination serves as a flexible and creative space teeming with possibilities and ambiguous promises, transcending everyday occurrences. Past and present experiences can be reshaped and re-valued, while utopian futures can be explored. Imagination can be harnessed to facilitate transformations across various dimensions, including the body, cultural context, time, and political strategy.” For our authors, ritual performances and acts of imagination represent processes of transition between different cognitive realms and experiences, giving rise to a facsimile of transcending the ordinary world and one’s place within it.

Contemplative practices that involve imagination and visual imagery, along with accompanying liturgical and ritual practices, demonstrate their effectiveness in several significant ways:

1. *Memory creation*: These practices foster the formation of new memories through the repeated engagement of imagination and the visual observation of artistic images. As highlighted through specific examples in the upcoming lectures, memory plays a crucial role in the development of a practitioner’s identity and environment by generating new sensory and conceptual memories, along with their subtle traces.

2. *Transformation of Self-Identity*: Liturgies and rituals that incorporate imagination and visual imagery are influential in transforming one's self-identity. They accomplish this by imaginatively reconstructing a practitioner's self-conception and sense of belonging, thereby catalyzing an envisioned identity for the future.
3. *Promoting Cognitive Discoveries*: Additionally, these practices cultivate experiences that encourage cognitive discoveries and perceptual shifts in both a practitioner's inner and outer realities.
4. *Envisioning a New World*: Lastly, they are instrumental in shaping how a practitioner imagines a new world, specifically, the world of Śambhala, and the community they yearn to be part of.

B) Imagination and Mental Imagery

Imagination has emerged as a distinct category of scholarly analysis across various disciplines—philosophy, anthropology, cognitive sciences, literary studies, art history, and more—each recognizing it as a fundamental capacity of the human mind. While these fields offer diverse interpretations of the nature of imagination, they collectively acknowledge its creative power and ability to generate positive experiences. Additionally, imagination has become a focal point for scholarly reflections on rituals, texts, and art. In the broader Buddhist context, the concept of imagination stands in stark contrast to the Kantian view of imagination as blind and barely conscious. The authors in this tradition do not see the acts of imagination they prescribe as mere fantasies that violate the laws of reason. Rather, they view imagination as a portal to alternative possibilities and latent potentials, serving as a medium for accessing different modes of understanding. For them, imagination is an act of structuring what is attainable before it can be realized. It gradually blurs the distinctions between the present and the future. In the works of our authors, imagination is perceived not only as a mental process but also as a form of verbal and bodily performativity. These Mongolian authors would largely concur with David Hume, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher, who asserted in his *Treatise of Human Nature* that whatever the mind clearly conceives encompasses the notion of possible existence. For Hume, anything imaginable—no matter how physically improbable—is at least logically conceivable. However, as we will explore in the next two lectures, for our authors, what is imaginable within the prescribed Buddhist practices transcends mere logical possibility.

In the context of Mongolian Buddhism, the role of imagination is integral to various practices, including tantric meditation, rituals, liturgy, and artistic expressions. Much like rituals themselves, the processes of imagination exhibit diversity in their structures, contents, and applications. The authors reveal that acts of imagination can be either individual or collective, visual or conceptual, oriented externally or internally, and can occur simultaneously with verbal recitations or physical actions, or during the intervals between

these activities. Furthermore, they categorize practices of imagination into two types: objectual imaginations, which involve a variety of imagined objects, and non-objectual imaginations, where one envisions a state of affairs or specific events. Objectual acts of imagination, characterized by visual mental imagery, are more prevalent in ritual practices, while non-objectual, or conceptual, acts occur less frequently and often serve to complement their visual counterparts. As is the case in general ritual and contemplative tantric practices, the structures and contents of imagination are prescribed, creating a restrictive framework. These frameworks act as mental blueprints and road maps aimed at facilitating the practitioners' cognitive engagement with the imagined objects, ultimately transforming their ordinary perceptions of themselves and the world around them. This cognitive engagement is intended to influence their mental attitudes, religious experiences, and behaviors in both this life and future existences.

The contents of imagination are intricately linked to textual or oral descriptions, as well as visual artistic representations. Consequently, imagination can be understood as a form of recollection based on previously acquired information. It is within the interplay of recreative imagination and reconstructive memory that the boundary between imagination and memory becomes blurred in the practices designed by our authors. Their works indicate that acts of imagination engage not only cognitive processes but often involve conative and affective dimensions as well. Given their content and purposes, the acts of imagination discussed in their texts are deemed commendable. As we will explore in the next two lectures, even imagined acts of merit-making conducted during ritual exercises are considered to carry the same karmic and soteriological significance as actual participation in such activities.

Visual materials and mental images, along with ritual bodily gestures, encompass both representational and communicative dimensions. While material images and ritual gestures serve public interests, mental images are personal and private, which is why they are often regarded as more conducive to personal transformation than their material counterparts. The creator of a physical visual image may exercise certain artistic and aesthetic freedoms when interpreting linguistic imagery, all while adhering to established, Buddhist artistic conventions of painting or sculpture making. In contrast, practitioners who engage in acts of visual imagination—a contemplative practice—are typically expected to follow textual descriptions of the objects being visualized more closely, transforming linguistic imagery into visual representation. This expectation arises from a widely held belief in the transformative power of the representational aspect of mental imagery, influencing the mind of the practitioner and shaping their perception of the world and their role within it, which in turn affects their interactions with both their physical and social environments.

The texts and practices we will explore in the next two lectures suggest that for an act of imagination to be genuinely transformative, contemplatives must grasp the significance of a visual image or imagined event, its purpose and experiential values, as well as the insights it offers about an alternate reality that lies beyond ordinary perception—and about their own mental processes. In this context, the act of imagination serves an instructive role, distinguishing it as a valuable epistemological tool that enhances the cognitive abilities of the contemplative and fosters both epistemological and religious advancement. Visual images and imagined events are effective in reconstructing prior experiences drawn from reading a text; this experience itself acts as a unique form of communication, bridging the written word with mental imagery and connecting the social with the mental realms. While a mental image is inherently subjective and evokes a personal experience, it interacts with religious concepts conveyed in the text, in material images, and with the contemporary social and historical events encountered by practitioners. Through imagination, contemplatives transform the text and its linguistic imagery into their own perceptual and experiential understanding. Like visual mental imagery, linguistic imagery connects ordinary experience with the transcendent while preserving the essential nature of the referent. Therefore, imagination plays a crucial role in transfiguring the impact of text, prayer, and ritual.

The ritual performer, the agent of imagination, and the creator of a painting inspired by the text are all equally important to the text itself. These figures serve as conduits for transmitting the semantic values and aesthetic qualities of the text into material and mental images, vocal sounds, and bodily gestures. Ritual performance, imagination, and the creation of mental and material images represent creative expressions of the text's function, rather than merely acting as visualization aids. A Buddhist practitioner, whose meditative ritual performance is guided by the text, serves as a mediator between the text and its performance, interpreting the text and redefining their personal identity through the act of imagination or another performative role. Furthermore, the practitioner's ritual recitation or liturgical performance of the text, which resonates with the text's message, breathes life into the text through vocal sound and nuanced intonation. This principle of animation also applies to the physical enactment of the text, where its message is conveyed through bodily postures and hand gestures. However, the performance of the text—whether in ritual or through meditative pictorial imagination—does not simply reflect the meaning of the text; it generates a new type of perceptual and epistemological experience. While it is impossible to convey all the conceptual information contained within the text through the semiotic systems of ritual and visual expression, there remains an understanding that these ritual or visual forms can shape the aspects of experience expressed in or intended by the text. All these elements are characterized by sociality and communicative modalities, which may be implicit or explicitly directed toward a singular audience or to multiple audiences, including deities or other entities that range from neutral to hostile.

Although texts are transmitted through visual materials and mental images, as well as verbal and physical performances that effectively convey their essential messages, they inherently possess a durability that surpasses that of ritual performances or mental constructs formed during meditation. Linguistic images, visual representations, and mental constructs generated in both ritual and meditation illuminate profound truths about the invisible world, various deities, the diverse species of sentient beings within the cosmos, the barbarian enemy that threatens the Buddha Dharma, and an individual's personal existence. More importantly, they reveal a practitioner's inner divine nature that has yet to be fully actualized.

This underscores the epistemological value of the texts, which encompass powerful linguistic images and evocative metaphors presented to the reader. Their persuasive power is rooted in their ability to resonate with the religious, emotional, and aesthetic sensibilities of practitioners, reinforcing a foundational reliance on established systems of Buddhist thought and religious experience. Linguistic, material, and mental imagery, alongside verbal and physical ritual performances, play a crucial role in shaping religious, aesthetic, and social values, imbuing religious practice with profound meaning.

In communicating the aesthetic features of the land of Śambhala—its deities and kings—linguistic expressions and visual images are intricately connected to the social and political contexts in which they were created. They are deeply infused with references to both present and future social dynamics, as well as to the political, religious, and ethnic polarizations at play. The politicization of imagery is particularly salient in texts, rituals, and visual materials, in contrast to the more subdued practices of visualization. Indeed, all three modes of communication—textual, ritual, and visual—were integral to the Buddhist religious and social discourses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They served as vital vehicles for articulating the aspirations of Mongolian monastics for the emergence of a more just social and religious landscape, responding to the social upheaval and dissonance that affected the common good.

C) Ritual

The close interrelatedness of text, image, and ritual revealed through examined sources underscores that a comprehensive understanding of ritual meaning cannot be achieved solely through the analysis of ritual actions. The rituals examined in this study possess specific conventions for constructing and reconstructing meaning and experiences, alongside their own unique prerequisites. However, the meanings and purposes of these rituals can only be fully appreciated when analyzed in connection with their doctrinal, social, cultural, and historical contexts. As it will be demonstrated in the upcoming two lectures, beyond their intended goals, rituals also encompass a transformative dimension and a communicative function, conveying messages

to both human participants and, from the perspective of the faithful, non-human and divine entities. These rituals may be private or collective, holding the potential to unite individuals. They function as specialized systems of communication, involving mental, verbal, and physical actions that integrate prescribed modes of expression and content. The rituals we will explore transcend ordinary communication by encompassing physical, verbal, and imaginative aspects of religious performance. Additionally, they fulfill an instructional role that goes beyond merely conveying knowledge about the purpose, method, and structure of ritual activities. As previously mentioned, rituals can generate new insights into the diverse ways philosophical and religious concepts, which form the broader context of a given ritual, can be embodied, enacted, and further developed through ritual action. Therefore, we can view all three forms of expression—text, imagination, and ritual—as mutually interactive epistemological tools through which practitioners acquire new knowledge and experiences. As we will see in the specific examples of ritual practices in the upcoming lectures, they are all purposeful, instrumental, and communicative. They each consists of a series of sequentially connected subsidiary rituals subsumed under the three main stages of practice—the preliminaries, the main part, and the final stage. The essential component in all three main stages is the arrangement of liturgical performances and practices of visualization. Different ritual strata, intermixed with linguistic, visual, musical, and physical modes of action, render these rituals as multilayered means of communication.

CHAPTER TWO

Imagination and Linguistic Imagery

This lecture explores various aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala, considering several motivating factors that influenced their creation. These include descriptions of Śambhala and related eschatological events, visions received through prophetic dreams, and the social and political contexts surrounding the composition of these prayers.

Rebirth in Śambhala

Aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala constitute a distinct subgroup within the genre of aspirational prayers found in Mahāyāna Sūtras and tantric contemplative sadhana practices. They serve as contemplative prayers where aspiration, petition, and eulogy often intersect, taking the form of either verbal expressions or pilgrimages. Characterized by imagination, intentionality, and pragmatic objectives, these aspirational prayers act as religious exercises imbued with auspicious words that reflect the aspirant's determination to engage in self-cultivation practices and the preservation of the Buddha Dharma. The fundamental premise is that the aspirants must articulate their intentions in prayer before those intentions can be realized. The aspirants' longing for rebirth in Śambhala and their commitment to actively participate in the eschatological struggle for the preservation of Dharma are explicitly conveyed to both the invoked divine guru and the *kalkī* kings of Śambhala. Aspirational prayers express the aspirant's conscious awareness of their current circumstances and the transformed reality they seek upon fulfillment of their aspiration. The prayers serve as the foundational experiences on the aspirants' religious journey toward life in Śambhala and beyond.

The practitioner holds the belief that pure intention, when paired with appropriate action, yields corresponding results. He understands that his connection to Śambhala is solidified through sincere prayer. The aspirational prayers primarily reflect the aspirant's commitment and self-reliance, while also embodying an expectation of divine blessing. By praying for rebirth in Śambhala, the aspirant actively crafts his own future narrative. Although focused on the future, the aspirations enable the aspirant to gain new experiences through visionary language that ignites the imagination, allowing him to transcend both temporal and spatial limitations and, for a moment, enter the realm of enlightened beings. Through prayer, the aspirant accesses a subjective time that breaks through the ordinary boundaries of his physical existence.

The visionary language found in aspirational prayers profoundly influences both the cognitive and emotional processes of the aspirant, a characteristic that permeates both the versified prayers dedicated to Śambhala and the prose narratives that describe it. Through the use of the evocative language and the practices of self-objectification and self-heroization, the aspirant, dissatisfied with his current existence, temporarily transcends his reality, immersing himself in a realm that promises a more fulfilling social and spiritual life. In this envisioned world, he assumes the role of a courageous protagonist engaged in the defense and preservation of the Dharma. By anticipating his involvement in an eschatological event poised to transform the social and religious landscape, he envisions a new chapter in his religious identity and personal narrative. In the aspirational prayer, much like in the act of imagination that will be explored later, the aspirant sees himself maintaining the same religious and gender identity but stepping into a different social role. This dynamic illustrates yet another way in which aspirational prayer bridges the present with the future.

The effectiveness of the linguistic imagery in the narrative descriptions of Śambhala originates from the authors' ability to diminish the epistemic distance for Mongolian aspirants who are culturally and religiously familiar with the concept of Buddhist other-worlds. This allows the aspirants to vividly interpret Śambhala through the authors' perspectives. The literary and poetic imagery embedded in the descriptive narratives and aspirational prayers acts as a meaningful substitute for the aspirants' direct perception of Śambhala, leaving enduring impressions on their minds. It also guides them on an inner journey to this utopian realm, offering a fleeting sense of its immediate presence by transforming their experiences of physical, temporal, and social space. The literary imagery effectively renders the realm of Śambhala both conceivable and knowable.

Before we explore the various Mongolian aspirational prayers for Śambhala, it is important to consider the Mongolian descriptions of Śambhala and its associated eschatology. This inquiry will illuminate the strong connections between the narrative descriptions of Śambhala and the aspirational prayers related to it. These aspirational prayers signify a vital initial phase in the aspirant's objective experiences of Śambhala, grounded in the given narratives, and reflected in their subjective and intersubjective experiences. The experiences are further manifested through rituals and *'pho ba* practices aimed at facilitating rebirth in Śambhala. As clear expressions of the aspirants' desire for rebirth in Śambhala and their commitment to actively participate in the eschatological event, the aspirational prayers are essential components of the larger rituals associated with Śambhala and the *Kālacakratāntra*. By articulating both aspiration and steadfast confidence in the compassion of a benevolent guru, aspirational prayers carry a communicative function enriched with an emotive tone.

Descriptive narratives aim to inform, inspire, and predict, while aspirational prayers are designed to be actively performed and experienced. By vocalizing an aspirational prayer, the aspirant can integrate the emotional and cognitive dimensions of their religious experience, thereby alleviating any uncertainty surrounding the prayer's outcome. As we will explore, aspirational prayers for Śambhala serve as ritualistic and, in the Austinian sense, performative expressions that establish a karmic connection between the aspirant and the Śambhala lineage. These prayers evoke an immediate emotional experience of that connection. They provide a means for the aspirant to express admiration and make petitions to the enlightened rulers of Śambhala, while also engaging in imaginative interaction with their realm in anticipation of meeting them in a future existence. This interactive element is particularly prominent in rituals that incorporate aspirational prayers, which will be examined in the third lecture. John Urry's argument suggests that individuals travel in search of proximity to three dimensions: face-to-face interactions with others, encounters with distinct locations, and moments shared during special events. His argument resonates with the aspirants' desire to connect with the world of Śambhala and to physically participate in that realm. In the interim, until this goal is realized, the aspirants become temporary visitors to the utopian world of Śambhala through the imagery generated in their prayers for rebirth in that desired realm. That realm is virtually inaccessible in their current physical state. But their future participation in that world is not entirely otherworldly; rather, it is intricately linked with earthly space and time.

Inspirational, Narrative Descriptions of Śambhala in Mongolian Sources

The Mongolian author Gachoi Lama Damba Agramba (Tib. *sngags rams pa*), also known as Shes rab rgya mtsho, or as Prajñāsāgara, who lived during the 19th and 20th centuries, presents an intriguing narrative regarding the origin of the term "Śambhala" as a place name in his 1921 text titled *Precious Crystal Stairway That Illuminates the Path of Journeying to Glorious Śambhala, the Abode of Siddhi*.¹ His aim is to illustrate the close relationship between Śambhala and the Śākya clan, thereby connecting it to the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. According to Gachoi Lama, Śambhala evolved into a sacred *maṇḍala* of the earth, animated by the Wheel of Dharma and celebrated through the illusory dance of the heirs of the Victorious Ones, particularly represented by the seven Dharma-kings and twenty-five *kalkīs*.

In contrast, another esteemed Mongolian lama, Agwaan Damdinsüren, referred to as Bizyagiin Lam (Ngag dbang rta mgrin bsrud, b.?-1940), recounts a different tale in his 1917 work titled *A Swift Path to Kalāpa: A*

1 Gachoi Lama Damba Agramba, *Grub pa'i gnas dpal ldan sham bha lar bsgrod ba'i lam gsal bar byed ba'i rin chen shel gyi them skas shes bya ba bzhugs so*, xylographic copy in private collection and in photocopied version published in Shambald Zorchson Nuuts Temdeglel; the reprint is in Damba Agramba of Wangiin Khüre, *Shambal Zorchson Nuuts temdeglel* Ulaanbaatar: Shambal niigemleg, 2005.

*Compilation of the Layout of Śambhala and a Ritual Offering to the Kalkīs, the Dharma Kings.*² He discusses a branch of the Śākya lineage that originated in Kapilavastu and made its way to Śambhala through the power of prayer. This lineage's successor was King Sūryaprabha, the father of King Sucandra of Śambhala, who compiled and taught the *Kālacakratantra*.

In his chronicle *Crystal Mirror (Bolor Toli)*,³ written in 1848, Jambadorj highlights the connection between Śambhala and the Śākya lineage, a relationship first mentioned in the *Kālacakratantra*. He describes the *kalkī* kings of Śambhala as embodying the exceptional qualities of highly realized beings who have attained bliss, boundless wisdom, an unobstructed mind, supernatural abilities, and magical powers through the peak of both sūtric and tantric meditative practices. According to Jambadorj, Śambhala is situated to the north of a region known as Rin Tin, which is inhabited by the Mongol people referred to as the Hua Hua (Muslim). He portrays it as circular, resembling an eight-petalled lotus. The center of this lotus spans 500 leagues, while each of the eight petals extends 1,000 leagues. Surrounding the outer rim of the lotus are snow-capped mountains. Within this structure lie one million towns covering 200 leagues, encircling the capital of Śambhala, Kalāpa. At the heart of Kalāpa stands a magnificent palace belonging to the Holy Emperor (Mong. *boydo qayan*) of Śambhala, crafted from five types of precious materials: emeralds, crystals, diamonds, and others.

The brilliance of its radiance surpasses that of fifteen suns. The light emanating from the jewels adorning the walls of the *kalkī*'s palace renders it impossible to distinguish between night and day. Numerous manifestations of living beings are visible on the transparent walls of the palace, extending up to 500 leagues in every direction. The palace windows, fashioned as wheels of jewels, provide a view of the solar and lunar mansions, constellations, heavenly pleasure groves, and stars. The king's throne, crafted from gold sourced from the Jambu River, exudes the fragrance of sandalwood perfume in all directions. The value of the cotton or silk materials used for the throne mats reaches ten million taels. The king adorns himself with an artificial *uṣṇīṣa* made of a lion's mane and wears a crown also composed of gold from the Jambu River. Each jewel on his wrists and ankles boasts a value of ten million taels. His body manifests a whitish hue, encircled by a translucent red light that commands awe. The magnificence of the king, along with his ministers and army generals, is beyond what anyone can bear. They possess various modes of transportation, including whitish-yellow antelopes, winged elephants, swift horses, and chariots. Their treasures include offerings from *nāgas*, asuras, and kinnaras, all of whom serve them faithfully. In Śambhala,

2 Agwaan Damdinsüren, *Sham bha la'i zhing gi bkod pa'i don sgrigs chos rgyal rigs ldan rnam la mchod ba'i tshog ka lā par bgrod pa'i myur lam zhes bya ba bzhugs so*.

3 Jambadorj, *Bolor Toli*, Vol. 2. Transliterated, introduced, and commented by Nyamaa, D., Abarbayar, S., and Byambakhöröl, P. (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian National University, 2006): Book 3,

the culinary offerings surpass even those of the god Indra. Although the king possesses many queens, only one will bear a son destined to become the most illustrious emperor, known as *qubilyan*.⁴ Upon his birth, the radiant light shines from his body for seven days, after which he ascends to the throne. When a daughter is born into the families of the ninety-six million minor kings, a rain of blue lotuses) falls at the time of her blooming, marking her as the future queen who will give birth to the crown prince *qubilyan*. To the south of the city of Kalāpa lies a Malaya pleasure grove, encompassing a grand area of twelve leagues. Here stands a *kālacakra-maṇḍala*, crafted from precious jewels and erected by Sucandra, an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, the tenth-stage bodhisattva. The *maṇḍala* itself measures 412 cubits on each side. Within this sacred space, visitors can also admire numerous other *maṇḍalas* constructed by later kings. There are two expansive lakes, one located on the eastern side of the *kālacakra-maṇḍala* and the other on its western side. The waters flowing from these lakes branch out in two directions, delineating the eight petals of Śambhala and forming eight distinct peninsulas. Within each of these peninsulas, there are twelve million towns. Each minor king governs over ten million towns; consequently, the 96 minor kings collectively rule 96 million towns. Each of these kings possesses a powerful staff, which enables his messenger to reach the intended location in an instant. The inhabitants of Śambhala are characterized by their attractive appearance, and their provisions of food, drink, clothing, and ornaments are luxurious. Even those of modest means typically own around one hundred treasure houses. The people thrive under gentle laws, with absolutely no instances of killing or beating, nor any sicknesses or natural disasters. Every resident of Śambhala exhibits good manners and possesses sharp intellect. They are also inclined towards virtuous speech and are attentive to the profound secrets found within the scriptures and *dhāraṇīs*. Upon death, each individual is reborn in a Pure Land, rather than in an unfortunate realm. On the 15th day of the third month each year, the *kalkī cakravartī* bestows the Kālacakra empowerment and teaches the *Kālacakratantra* to many fortunate beings.

Minjüür Dechin Sharav (Mi 'gyur bde chen shes rab, 19th-20th century), who served as the tutor to the eighth Jalkhanz Khutugtu Damdinbazar (1874-1923), elaborates on the concept of Śambhala in his work, *The Jewel Steps of a Fortunate Disciple: A Prayer for a Sure Rebirth in the Land of Śambhala of the Great Siddhi, in the Land that Captivates the People's Minds, and for the Definite Meeting with the Dharma of Raudra Kalkī*.⁵ He presents Śambhala as an esoteric manifestation of Sukhāvātī within the human realm, referring to

4 Qubilyan is a title for a high incarnate lama, or a *tulku*, who is of the age of eighteen or younger.

5 Minjüür Dechin, Sharav, *Khüinii Oyunyng Barigch Oron, Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuvyitai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgiür Khemeekh Orshvoi*. Translated from the Classical Mongolian translation of the Tibetan original into the Modern Mongolian by B. Batsanaa. Ulaanbaatar: Shambal Niigemleg, 2003).

it as “the place of the highest *siddhi*” and “the marvelous Pure Land,” where one can achieve Buddhahood within a single lifetime. In Sharav’s vision, all the minor kings governing the 96 million villages of Śambhala are seen as actual manifestations of the buddhas. They rule according to a dual law—the law of Dharma and the law of State—first established by the mythical king Mahāsammata. Thus, when the 25th *kalkī*, Raudracakrī, ascends to the throne of Śambhala as a universal emperor in the Year of the Fire Sheep during the 22nd year of the sixtieth cycle, he will govern in the same spirit, fostering the simultaneous flourishing of both the State and religion. In his endeavors, he will be undifferentiated from the Buddha.

The anticipation among Mongolian monastics of encountering the *kalkī* king as an intimate guru and swiftly attaining Buddhahood led to a burgeoning number of aspirational prayers, *sādhana*s, and various rituals. As the prospects for Buddhist life in Mongolia became increasingly bleak, greater emphasis was placed on the fortunate era of perfection—a new phase in Buddhist history marked by the restoration of the Buddha Dharma and the enduring flourishing of both nature and humanity. Śambhala, envisioned as a harmonious Buddhist society founded on the concept of a vast autonomous religious clan-ship, is also a site of contention between insiders and outsiders posing external threats. In contrast to the premodern Mongolian writings that employed a futurist approach to interpret the *Kālacakratantra*’s prophecy of the great Śambhala war, early twentieth-century scholars adopted a historicist method. They infused a sense of immediacy into their analyses, relating the events depicted in the *Kālacakratantra* and subsequent Tibetan and Mongolian texts directly to their contemporary circumstances.

Aspirational Prayers for Rebirth in Śambhala

Among the preserved aspirational prayers for Śambhala composed by Mongolian authors, some texts remain anonymous, while others are included in their respective Collected Works. The numerous dangers that await those journeying to terrestrial Śambhala in their current bodies have led many to prefer rebirth in that sacred realm. Rebirth in Śambhala appears to be more attainable through the power of aspirational prayers, rituals, and contemplative practices. An untitled and anonymous Mongolian text, discovered by Galbaabadra in Buryatia and partially based on the Sixth Panchen Lama Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes’ *Guide to Śambhala* (*Sham bha la’i lam yig*, 1775), cautions of the various risks faced by travelers to Śambhala who have not yet mastered the *vidyā-mantras*. After detailing the types of dangers that may be encountered along the journey, the author concludes with the following remarks:

Thus, as the Omniscient One has explained, one should aspire to reach Śambhala through strong prayers for rebirth at the time when the *kalkī* king Rudra (Raudra) turns the Wheel of Dharma. It is

taught that through these aspirational prayers, one will certainly meet him. May all sentient beings, without exception, encounter the *kalkī* Rudra and others through the truth of aspirational prayers and connect with the buddhas!⁶

The descriptions of Śambhala, which are incorporated to varying degrees in aspirational prayers for rebirth, reflect those found in narrative accounts. In many cases, the recitation of these aspirational prayers includes a meditation that involves visualizing Śambhala. In his earlier work, Minjüür Dechin outlines the practice of five different kinds of aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala. These prayers typically follow the confession of sins and precede the practice of transference of consciousness to Śambhala, a topic that will be addressed in the third lecture. Among the five prayers, the first prayer is a contemplative prayer aimed at establishing a connection with Śambhala. This involves reciting and simultaneously visualizing the layout of Śambhala, its aesthetic features, the sublime *kālacakra-maṇḍala*, and all of its inhabitants. Therefore, to forge a personal connection with Śambhala, the aspirant must first imaginatively envision and become familiar with it. Once this visualization is accomplished, the aspirant prays to be reborn in the “glorious, perfect Śambhala,” to practice Dharma, become a fortunate disciple, and swiftly achieve Buddhahood. This prayer serves as a petition for rebirth in Śambhala, where the aspirant further entreats that his virtuous mind be quickly transferred there, reciting:

Teacher, [when I am] in the bardo, please show me the path! Divine assembly with supreme minds, please lead me; and *ḍākas* and *ḍākinīs*, please welcome me! Dharmapālas, please remove the obstacles and those who do me harm! May I reach this fortunate and pure land through the power of their kind words and blessings! . . . At the time of [my] delivery, may the enlightened ones, bodhisattvas, *ḍākas*, and *ḍākinīs* grant me initiation, bestowing a shower of blessings!⁷

The final three phases of the prayer focus on engaging with Raudracakrī, his queens, sons, noblemen, *dhāraṇī* holders, *yogīs* and *yoginīs*, as well as other prominent figures of Śambhala. This engagement involves receiving their guidance and striving towards the attainment of Buddhahood. The themes present in these five prayers of Minjüür Dechin Sharav often constitute key elements of singular prayers found in various sources. The aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala, which reference the dramatic eschatological events

6 Galbaabadra, L., “Shambald zorchikh zam mor,” in *Shambalyn orny baidal khaaduudyn üe khiiged zorchikhiyn ęs arga zam nuuguudyg üzüülsen sudar ene boloi* (Śambal-yin orun-u baidal qayadud-un ü-e kiged jorčiqu-yin yosu ary-a jam nuγud-i üjegulegsen sudar ene bolai), MS: 39–49, Modern Mongolian translation, pp. 16–22. Place of publication, the publisher, and date are not given.

7 Minjüür Dechin, Shiirav, *Khünii Oyunyγ Barigch Oron, Deed Büiteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiiged Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuvytai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgüür Khemeekh Orshvoi*, 2003: 18.

and the heroic triumph of Raudracakrī, evoke the essence of Mongolian heroic poetry. One notable example is *A Prayer for Śambhala* (*Śambal-yin irügel*), composed by the Inner Mongolian lama, the Fourth Mergen Gegeen, Luvsangdambijalsan (Tib. Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1717–1766), who is renowned for popularizing Buddhist teachings among the Mongolian laity. In his versified prayer, Mergen Gegeen vividly depicts the magnificent palace of Kalāpa, the residence of the ruler of Śambhala, while extolling him and celebrating his valorous deeds in battle and his triumph over the enemies of Dharma. At the conclusion of the prayer, Mergen Gegeen expresses his aspiration for rebirth in Śambhala, hoping to be appointed as a leader among the companions of the king of Śambhala during the impending great battle against the adversary, ultimately seeking the supreme siddhi of Awakening. His portrayal of Śambhala mirrors the narrative descriptions found in prose texts.

By this prayer to you, Guru, the Savior,
Who disseminates the great, ancient tradition of Glorious Kālacakra
In Śambhala, in the great city in the north,
May these true words of mine be accomplished!

The great city of Kalāpa in the northern direction,
The world of the Sublime Dharmas of great beings
Who worship Kālacakra, bodhisattvas, and others,
Clearly surpasses Indra's palace.

That quadrangular palace, twelve leagues wide, and
Decorated with jewels of various kinds,
Is surrounded by 900 million towns. Its [size]
Is larger than a palace of celestial gardens.

The two arisen *kālacakra-maṇḍalas*, a large and a small one,
Which, as soon as perceived, grant the supreme siddhi,
Are made of utterly immeasurable jewels.
And on their two sides are pleasurable lakes,

Filled with immense jewels [and measuring] twelve leagues.
From now on, upholding the Holy Guru from
Within the midst of the riches of human companions, Dharma, and material
goods,
As soon as seven hundred years have passed,

Having become a fierce king, O' *kalkī*
Who crushes the antagonistic clan,
Not forgetting your ancient vow in the era of perfection,
Please appoint me as the leader of your companions!

Noble Savior, Holy Lama, Eternal One,
Riding a perfect mountain horse with the wings of wind
And projecting a spear in [your] hand at adversaries,
May you instantly and surely accompany me!

Dwell in the assembly of the fierce reinforcement,
Which crushes [the enemy's] ten million military troops of various colors,
And [their] four hundred thousand elephants drunken with liquor
With [your] hundred thousand maddened elephants,
And [their] golden chariots with [your golden] chariots, and
[Dwell with your assembly] that exterminates all [their] minor soldiers with
knives!

One called Hanumanda, having hurled a sharp spear
at Mahācandraputra on a horse,
By himself stabbing the heart of him who holds wrong views,
Punishing the twelve gods led by Mahārudra
And all asuras, and the like,

Destroying [their] elephants with [your] great elephants,
Vanquishing [their] horses with [your] mountain horses,
Pulverizing [their] great golden chariots with [your] chariots,
And having subjugated [their] kings,
Cutting off the entire line of the adversaries,
At the time of making the entire Dharma of the turning
of the Kālacakra [teachings] prosper,
Please accompany me!

Likewise, after teaching the Dharma for many years,
On the 22nd of the second month of the Horse Year,
At the time when *vīras* and *ḍākinīs* sound the music,
When you, together with your 10,000 assistants,
Manifest the Enjoyment Body in the Akaṇiṣṭha heaven,
Please make me achieve the supreme siddhi!

When You, Savior, Guru, become a king
Who sets in motion the fierce wheel
In a palace of the future era in order to benefit them,
Please kindly take me as the first-ranked among your assistants,
And compassionately grant me the supreme *siddhi*.⁸

By reciting these verses, the aspirant imaginatively reconstructs the image of Śambhala and the great battle, generating a quasi-sensory experience that simulates the actual perception of Śambhala and the individual's role in its conflict. Mergen Gegeen's prayer resonates with the earlier composed aspirational prayer for Śambhala by the Sixth Panchen Lama, entitled *The Words of Prayer for Rebirth in Northern Śambhala* (*Byang shambha lar skye ba'i smon tshig*). Both Tibetan and Mongolian versions of this prayer circulated widely in Mongolia, inspiring Mongolian monastics to create

8 Mergen Gegeen. 1997. Šambal yin irügel, in *Včir dhara mergen diyanči blama-yin gegen-ü gbom jarlii*. In *Collected Works of the Reincarnation of Vajradhara Mergen Diyanchi Lama*. Khokhot: Öbür Monggul-un suryan kömüjil-ün keblel-ün khoriiy-a (Inner Mongolia Educational Press, Vol. 3, folios 149–181, in Mergen Gegeen's *gsung 'bum* printed in Beijing in 1783.

similar prayers. Subsequent Panchen Lamas emphasized their predictions of rulership in Śambhala, which further motivated Mongolian lamas to aspire to participate in the battle for Śambhala. Consequently, in Mongolian aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala, we find declarations of high-ranking Mongolian lamas expressing their aspirations for exalted positions in Śambhala and a desire to align with the Panchen Lama, who is destined to lead Śambhala's army against the barbarian forces and promote the Dharma throughout Jambudvīpa. This inspiration can be traced back to a short, versified homage to the lineage of Panchen Lamas, titled *The Lotus Face of the Lord of Sages* (*Thub dbang zhal pad ma*).⁹ In this text, the Fourth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662), praises one of his previous incarnations as Mañjuśrī *kalkī* with the following words:

I supplicate the *kalkī*, the lord of the clan,
Known as Mañjuśrī, who abbreviated
The *Glorious Ādibuddhatantra*
In the great jeweled palace beautified by Kailāśa.



General Hanuman surrounded by the fourfold army; a detail from the thangka, Shankh Monastery, Övörkhangai Province, Mongolia; photo courtesy of Don Croner.

⁹ Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, *Collected Works* (*gsung 'bum*), TBRC W23430, vol. ka, folio 455:

kai la shas mdzes nor bu'i pho brang cher
dpal ldan dang po'i sangs rgyas rtsa ba'i rgyud
slar yang sdud mdzad 'jam pa'i dbyangs shes grags
rigs ldan rigs kyi gtsa la gsol ba 'debs

The notion that successive incarnations of the Panchen Lamas are regarded as the first and last *kalkis* of Śambhala, as propagated by Longdol Lama—a renowned Tibetan teacher influential among Khalkha scholars in the eighteenth century—was later echoed in various writings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This includes notable works such as Jambadorj’s previously mentioned chronicle, *Crystal Mirror*, Prajñāsāgara’s *The Precious Crystal Staircase: Illuminating the Way to Śambhala* (1921), and an anonymous Mongolian text from Buryatia titled *This is a Sūtra that Shows the Conditions of the Country of Śambhala, the Epoch of the Kings, and the Ways and Means of Traveling [There]*,¹⁰ along with other Mongolian sources. Among the many oral traditions concerning Mongolian lamas seeking a connection with Śambhala is an account detailing the experiences of the Fifth Noyon Khutugtu, Danzanravjaa (Tib. Bstan ‘dzin rab rgyas, 1803–1856), a prominent lama and *yogi* from the Gobi region. In his later years, Danzanravjaa developed a keen interest in Kālacakra teachings and Śambhala. According to his autobiography, he often experienced visions and dreams foretelling times of social turmoil and a significant battle between hostile barbarian forces and the army of Śambhala. In 1827, following his second Kālacakra initiation from the Fourth Changkya Khutugtu, Danzanravjaa recorded a prophecy he received during one of his visions, which states:

The great [Tibetan] siddha Longdol Rinpoche will sit on the royal throne of Śambhala. At that time, [you, Danzanravjaa,] establish a Kālacakra monastic college.¹¹

Around that time, he composed his *Short Guru Yoga of Glorious Kālacakra* in the Tibetan language (*Dpal dus kyi ‘khor lo bla ma’i rnal ‘byor mdor bsdus*), in which he expressed his aspiration for rebirth in Śambhala and instructed his disciples to do the same:

Homage to Kālacakra!
 (How to practice here a *guru-yoga* of Glorious Kālacakra in a condensed way).
 I go for refuge with utmost faith
 To the Teacher Buddha, who has attained supremacy,
 To the Dharma of the indivisible method and wisdom taught by him, and
 To the twofold *saṅgha* established in that [Dharma].
 I will generate pure thoughts,
 And abandon the grasping onto I and mine.
 From now until enlightenment,
 I generate bodhicitta.
 In an instant, within the state of the luminous Dharma Body
 I become of the nature of Lord Kālacakra,

10 Galbaabadra, L., *Šambal-yin orun-u baidal qayadud-un ü-e kiged jorčiqu-yin yosu arɣ-a jam nuɣud-i üjegulegenen sudur ene bolai*.

11 Hamid Sardar, “Noyon Khutuktu Danzan Ravjaa,” *Treasury of Lives*, accessed September 03, 2020, <http://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Danzanravjaa/13588>. See also *Namthar*, folio 7a.

With one face and two arms, embracing the consort Viśvamātā,
Perfectly blazing with the lights of the major and minor marks.

Oṃ āḥ hūṃ ho haṃ-kṣa-ma-la-va-ra-ya hūṃ phaṭ.

By the power of such single-pointed meditation and recitation,
May the powerful protector take care of me without separation,
And may [my] journey on the very pure, excellent path
To northern Śambhala, the jewel treasury, be accomplished!¹²

According to Danzanravjaa's autobiography, in 1854, two years prior to his death, he experienced a troubling prophetic vision, which included a premonition of his own impending death. As a result of this dream, he felt compelled to swiftly construct a Kālacakra temple surrounded by a complex of 108 *stūpas* at a sacred site near his Khamar Monastery, a location previously consecrated by the Seventh Panchen Lama during his visit to Mongolia. At this site, Danzanravjaa envisioned the celestial Sukhāvātī, and that same year, it was consecrated once more as a portal to Śambhala—a place where pilgrims could come to pray for their rebirth in Śambhala. This portal was also intended as a refuge during times of global crisis and a place to engage in the purificatory practices for rebirth in Śambhala. Following Danzanravjaa's death, the construction of the temple was completed in a hundred and twenty-four days. It featured a three-dimensional *kālacakra-maṇḍala*, a wall of 108 white *stūpas* symbolizing the ring of snow-capped mountains encircling the land of Śambhala, gates on three sides of the *stūpa* wall, and a large *ovoo* (stone cairn) where prayers for rebirth in Śambhala could be offered. Visiting this site is regarded as equivalent to an actual pilgrimage to the land of Śambhala, providing an embodied sensory experience that ritualizes the pilgrimage's aim of rebirth in Śambhala, ultimately leading to the pilgrims' actual rebirth there. The pilgrimage commences with prostrations, along with offerings and prayers at Khamar Monastery. The pilgrims then set out on foot, traversing a two-kilometer path leading to the Śambhala portal, while reciting mantras for purification along the way. Before entering the site, pilgrims will begin from the eastern direction, circumambulating the exterior of the *stūpa* wall in a clockwise manner three times, all the while supplicating for the auspicious fulfillment of their pilgrimage. As pilgrims pass through the gate, they should reflect, "I am purifying my body, speech, and mind." Upon entering this sacred site, they are encouraged to pray and meditate on their past negative actions. They write those actions on a piece of paper and burn it in a stone cavern known as the "Preta's Belly." After purifying their body, speech, and mind in this manner, pilgrims should think, "The blessing bestowed by Gegeen (Danzanravjaa) has been included in my merit." Next, they pay homage to Kālacakra with body, speech, and mind, contemplating, "By the virtue of the blessing bestowed by you, Kālacakra,

12 I am grateful to Ma Lama, Amgalan Erdenbat for sharing the Tibetan text with me.

who have transcended time, may I, after being born in the land of Śambhala, attain the sanctity of the Buddha!” They then mentally offer tribute to all 108 *stūpas* and aspire to attain Buddhahood. Continuing further into the enclosed site, pilgrims encounter three small rock cairns arranged in a diagonal line pointing toward the sacred mountain called Khan Bayan Zurkh Uul. While facing this mountain, they are to cultivate wholesome aspirations and make an offering of vodka (*serjim*) across the three cairns. The pilgrims should mentally make offerings and recite prayers to Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Tsongkhapa, while thinking: “With a happy mind, I rejoice in following the Dharma assembly of Śambhala.” After that, they should also make actual offerings of grain and water poured into stone containers. From there, pilgrims reach the farthest part of the portal, where a small rounded hill is surmounted by the *ovoo* called Tarkhi (“Brain”). Upon reaching the *ovoo*, which symbolizes the crown-*cakra*, pilgrims offer a blue ceremonial scarf each and recite three times, “OM, may happiness prevail!” After circumambulating the *ovoo* three times, as they walk toward the exit gate, they are encouraged to cultivate utmost faith and imagine, “I am in the land of Śambhala.” Pilgrims are advised to pray for blessings and exit through the eastern side of the central gate, known as the “Gate of Establishing Virtue and Destiny and Inviting Peace.” Having exited the site, they return to the ordinary world as purified and transformed individuals, establishing a strong karmic connection with the Śambhala lineage.

The pilgrimage to Danzanravjaa’s Śambhala portal embodies the physical, verbal, and mental expressions of the pilgrims’ aspirations for rebirth in Śambhala. This journey transforms into a specific type of aspirational prayer, where the pilgrims convey their desire to encounter the enlightened ruler of Śambhala in a future life. Through the bodily and mental realization of a visit to Śambhala, the spatiotemporal gap between the pilgrims and the actual realm of Śambhala is effectively bridged. Danzanravjaa represents just one of numerous Mongolian lamas who endeavored to connect their native regions and monasteries to the Śambhala lineage, thus integrating them into the Śākya clan. Additionally, there were lay noblemen—such as those from the early twentieth century—who pursued similar aspirations. Among them was the hereditary Khalkha prince, Sain Noyon Khan, Tögs-Ochir Namnansüren (1878–1919), who played a significant role in the Mongolian independence movement against the Qing and later served as Prime Minister of the Bogd Khan State from 1911 to 1915.

According to oral traditions, he successfully integrated his territory into the Śambhala lineage with the help of the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundampa (Ngag dbang blo bzang chos rje nyi ma bstan ‘dzin dbang phyug, 1869–1924), who reportedly possessed a ring containing a magical stone (*ze*, Tib. *rdzas*). This stone is believed to have originally come from Wutai Mountain, brought there by the Fourth Jebtsundampa (Blo bzang thub bstan dbang phyug, 1775–1813), who established the first Kālacakra college in Ikh Khüree. The

stone's power is such that merely holding the ring allows one to transform into any form desired. Using this ring, the Eighth Jebtsundampa manifested as a king of Śambhala in front of the gatekeeper of Śambhala, commanding him to permit Sain Noyon Khan Namnansüren's inclusion in the Śambhala lineage. It is said that as a result of this connection, Sain Noyon Khan's territory was free of debt. This account likely emerged after the Eighth Jebtsundampa composed a prayer for Śambhala, titled "A Wish-Prayer for Śambhala" (Shambha la'i smon tshig), at the request of Sain Noyon Khan. The colophon of the prayer explicitly states that Sain Noyon Khan Namnansüren requested the Eighth Jebtsundampa to compose a prayer for his rebirth in Śambhala. Similar to Mergen Gegeen's prayer for rebirth in Śambhala, the Eighth Jebtsundampa's prayer reflects both his and Sain Noyon Khan's aspirations to unite with Raudracakrī during the great battle against barbarian forces. In this prayer, he asks:

May I and other mother beings without exception,
By the power of effort in pure, virtuous activity,
Be born before too long in Śambhala of the northern direction
And be also perfected in the practice of the heirs of the Victorious Ones!

After assuming the form of the fierce Hanumanda,
When you thrust a sword into the heart of the enemies and obstructors who violate pledges,
May I also, after being born in your retinue,
Please you, O' Protector!

May all the transmigrating beings who make such aspiration
Never be separated from the gracious Guru!
Having eliminated the seeds of the two [types of] obscurations,
May they bring to completion the two [types of] benefit and swiftly attain
Perfect Buddhahood!¹³

The content of this prayer contributed to the widely circulated reports of the early twentieth century, which predicted the rebirth of the Eighth Jebtsundamba as General Hanumān within the army of the Panchen Lama (Banchen Erdene), who is anticipated to be the *kalkī* Raudracakrī. Among the works associated with the Kālacakratantra and Śambhala practices authored by the previously mentioned Luvsanchozin (Mergen Tsorj Agramba Luvsanchoinzin, Mergen Chos rje Sngags rams pa, Blo bzang chos 'dzin) is an aspirational and petitionary prayer for Śambhala titled *A Spontaneous Fulfillment of One's Desires: The Words of Supplication for Rebirth in Śambhala* (Shambha lar skye ba'i smon tshig 'dod don lhun grub ma), in which, he expresses his feelings of helplessness, the desire for longevity, and requests permission to soon attain Śambhala with these words:

13 *Sham b+bha la'i smon tshig bzhugs so*, in *Collected Works (Gsung'bum)* of Bstan 'dzin rab rgyas (Collection of Tibetan and Mongolian Manuscripts in Cambridge, APS031/1/633).

Since I am roaming in impure realms, O' Gracious One, help [this] wanderer!
 Because I am helpless, may I swiftly reach Śambhala's city
 From within a white wind energy of the three times!¹⁴

In another prayer titled *The Spontaneous Fulfillment of All Wishes: A Praise to the Dharma Kings and the Assembly of Kalkīs of Northern Śambhala*, Luvsanchoinzin expresses his admiration for the *kalkī* kings of Śambhala. He prays for himself and others to be reborn in Śambhala, to dwell within the main retinue of the *kalkī* king, to attain the highest *siddhi*, and to enjoy long life and vitality in this existence. He also prays for the flourishing of both the Dharma and the secular world, which have politically entangled him and posed threats to his life. In the colophon of this prayer, Luvsanchoinzin notes that he composed it “out of relevant necessity.”¹⁵

Another notable scholar from Ikh Khüree, Zava Damdin, who faced significant scrutiny when Luvsanchoinzin was pressured to label Zava Damdin's works as antirevolutionary during interrogations by the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Government in 1936. Amidst these challenging circumstances, Zava Damdin turned to Kālacakra practices, aspiring for rebirth in Śambhala. With that aspiration in mind, he composed a text entitled *A Quick Path to the Empty Form: A Method of Reciting the Essence of the Condensed Tantra in Union with a Kālacakra Guruyoga*,¹⁶ which will be explored in greater detail in the third lecture. In this ritual text, Zava Damdin synthesizes the paths of preparation, initiation, and the stage of generation, offering a prayer for rebirth in Śambhala.

In the aspirational prayers referenced, the immediate objective of attaining rebirth in Śambhala is not deemed as a final destination but rather as a crucial step toward achieving Buddhahood. The twentieth-century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein noted that to pray is to reflect on the meaning of life. For our authors, prayer signifies a declaration of one's commitment to new social and religious realities that foster the realization of a deeper understanding of life's meanings. On December 3, 1928, a monk named Balden (Tib. Dpal ldan) crafted a five-line prayer for rebirth in Śambhala. This prayer would later be used as the briefest Kālacakra *'pho ba* practice during the political turmoil against Mongolian lamas who recited it in their final moments

14 *Shambha lar skye ba'i smon tshig 'dod don lhun grub ma*, in *Khal kha'i khu re chen mo'i chos rje blo bzang chos 'dzin dpal bzang po'i gsung 'bum. The Collected Works of Tsorj Lubsandchoindzin (Chos rje blo bzang chos 'dzin) (1875–1937)*, Mongol Bilig *gsung 'bum*, Volume 38. (Ulaanbaatar: R. Byambaa's publication, 2013): Vol. 3, fols. 621–624).

15 Mergen Chos rjes Sngags rams pa Blo bzang chos 'dzin, *Byang 'Shambha la'i chos rgyal rigs ldan tshogs la bstod pa 'dod don lhun grub ma*, in *Collected Works*, (*Gsung 'bum*), Vol. 3, folio 42.

16 Blo bzang rta mgrin, *Dus kyi 'khor lo'i bla ma'i mal 'byor dang 'brel bar bsduṣ rgyud snying po 'don thabs stong gzugs myur lam*.

before execution. The prayer aimed to assist the monks in transferring their consciousness to Śambhala immediately following their deaths, far from their current place and inauspicious political conditions.

Conclusion

We have seen that prose narratives and versified aspirational prayers for Śambhala serve as communicative and prayerful expressions, rich with imagery deeply embedded in their religious and social contexts. They are inextricably linked to the religious and cultural past, reflecting the aspirants' dissatisfaction with their present reality from which they seek to distance themselves both spatially and temporally. The aspirational prayers articulate the aspirants' yearning for a deeper connection with the envisioned place and its inhabitants, and offer a glimpse into transcendence. Aspirational prayers serve as calls for the emergence of extraordinary religious experiences within daily life and invoke a vision of military victory over both present adversaries and anticipated future foes. Furthermore, we have noted how a convergence of multimodal interactions—encompassing linguistic expressions, imagination, and bodily activity—contributes to the multimodality of cognition and religious experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Imagination in the Rituals of the Transference of Consciousness to Śambhala and Other Related Rituals

The formation of aspirational prayers for rebirth in Śambhala coincided with the emergence of various pertinent ritual texts. These include manuals dedicated to the practices for the transference of consciousness (*‘pho ba*) to Śambhala, rituals for caring for the deceased, and the ritual methods for reciting the *Kālacakratāntra*. Notable examples of such texts were composed in the early twentieth century. Within these texts, we observe three primary types of ritual performances: those that are entirely internalized, those that are externalized, and those that blend internal and external elements. The internalized components, such as imagined actions within mentally simulated ritual scenarios, are part of longer, more intricate rituals. The internalized performances being entirely mental are considered to possess a purificatory efficacy is essential for rebirth in Śambhala. In the segments that merge internalized and externalized performances, the distinction between bodily and vocal actions and acts of imagination becomes less defined. Despite their differences, the three modes of ritual activity share several common features. They all involve formalized and stylized forms of interaction and communication with the visualized world of Kālacakra’s tantric deities, the *kalkī* kings of Śambhala, and others. The imaginative acts inherent in these rituals serve to create and enact new realities. The stylized bodily postures, hand gestures, and the formalized manner of addressing the deities and kings of Śambhala, along with the modulated tone used in reciting the text, are crucial as the content of the message is conveyed or enacted. These ritualistic actions and vocal intonations significantly influence the imagination by animating mental imagery. Embedded with symbolic meanings, the prescribed conventions for interacting with the deities and rulers of Śambhala—whether actual or imagined—enable practitioners to recreate their self-identity in relation to Kālacakra and those residing in Śambhala, and actively enact it. The interplay of visual and motor imagery fosters a reverent mindset and a sense of joy, since a new self-identity is envisioned to be fundamentally divine in nature. Therefore, these rituals and their integral acts of imagination function as processes of identity formation.

Types of Imagining

In the rituals we explore in this lecture, we identify three broadly defined types of imagining: envisioning oneself or something else as a particular entity (e.g., a ritual agent in the otherworldly realm, a military general,

a deity, etc.); conceptualizing oneself or something else in relation to someone or something (e.g., in relation to the inhabitants of Śambhala, the great war of Śambhala, etc.); and determining what actions to perform and how to execute them. Given that selected ritual practices are designated for specific objectives, the acts of imagination and visualization within them are deliberately limited in their methods and content. Practitioners cannot freely select what to imagine or how to imagine. This restriction on free-floating imagery in guided visualizations establishes the boundaries of a phenomenological horizon, compelling practitioners to forgo their unrestricted, playful creativity that lacks purificatory and soteriological efficacy. In the context of visualizing Śambhala, the restriction on autonomy in performing a designated visualization stems from the belief that Śambhala is not solely a mental construct generated within the practitioner's mind. Rather, it is an empirical world characterized by specific landmarks, measurements, landscapes, and customs, and situated in a geographical location. Moreover, within the practices aimed at transferring one's consciousness to Śambhala, Śambhala is an interior world—an embodiment of a mental space activated through imagination. Consequently, the visualization of Śambhala encompasses both the mental and physical dimensions. Thus, the mental image must closely align with the description of Śambhala found in texts or represented in paintings. In essence, before the terrestrial Śambhala can be actualized in meditation through visualization or confirmed through sensory experience, it must first be internalized and subjectivized as a state of mind. Therefore, the mental image of Śambhala exists concurrently with, and for the duration of, the representation of the terrestrial Śambhala that it reflects. The causal relationship between the text and the images generated during meditation is clear. However, there are instances where the recitation of prescribed phrases coincides with the act of imaginative thinking. This interplay activates mental images that can be revisited in subsequent silent meditations. The potency of these mental images is such that once an image is formed, it can consistently be recalled from memory, whether in newly composed texts or in fresh artistic creations. In turn, these tangible representations help sustain the engagement of mental imagery. The transference of imagery and the interplay between mental, textual, and material images is undeniably central to the practices of Buddhist tantras, particularly the ones we will explore in this lecture by focusing on three texts that relate to the practice of transference of consciousness. The texts under examination are Agwaan Damdinsüren's *The Swift Path to Kalāpa: A Compilation of the Layout of Śambhala and Ritual Offering to The Dharma Kings and Kalkīs*¹ (1917); Minjüür Dechin Sharav's *The Jewel Steps of a Fortunate Disciple: A Prayer for a Sure Rebirth in the Land of Śambhala of the Great Siddhi in the Land*

1 Agwaan Damdinsüren, *Sham bha la'i zhing gi bkod pa'i don sgrigs chos rgyal rigs ldan rnams la mchod ba'i tshog ka lā par bgrod pa'i myur lam*.

that Captivates a people's Mind for a Definite Meeting with the Dharma of Raudra Kalki;² and Zava Damdin's *Elucidation of the Swift Path—A Guidance Manual for the Transference of Consciousness to the Pure Land of Śambhala*.³

For the sake of clarity, I will provisionally categorize the acts of imagination discussed in our texts on the transference of consciousness into two general types: inwardly oriented imaginations and outwardly oriented acts of imagination. These two types sometimes intertwine; at other times, they represent distinct stages of a single practice, with external visualization preceding the more internalized imagination with the subjectivized content. The acts of imagination that involve imagery signify a process of cognitive self-transformation, which we can classify as inwardly oriented, employing subjectivized imagery. Inwardly oriented types of imagination are utilized both in the preliminary phases and at the core of the practices surrounding the transference of consciousness.

The mental image created, evoked, and examined is activated by memories drawn from textual descriptions and previous encounters with material representations of Śambhala, Kālacakra, and the *kalki* kings, including paintings and statues. For instance, in the aforementioned *Elucidation of the Swift Path*, Zava Damdin instructs practitioners to properly display images of Kālacakra and a painting of the layout of Śambhala as essential supports for body, speech, and mind. Here, as in various other rituals involving imagination and visualization, three types of interactive media are at play: textual, visual, and mental. Offering to the displayed material images suggests that they possess the power to create a sense of immediacy similar to that intended by mental images. One of the purposes of the material representations is to be addressed and engaged with. The aspirant is advised to visualize the land of Śambhala, through which his consciousness will transition upon death. He is also encouraged to visualize his external appearance, imagining himself robed as a monastic with a *paṇḍita*'s hat and seated in a meditative posture. Upon envisioning his outer form, the practitioner conceives of his inner subtle body as embodying the inherently divine nature of the Buddha Kālacakra, thereby transforming himself into the embodiment of all objects of refuge. After making offerings and reciting the prayer of supplication for Kālacakra's blessing in securing the swift transference of consciousness to "the supreme land of Śambhala," the practitioner is to engage in the core practice of this transference by visualizing his body as an immaterial, subtle form that transcends his social or monastic identity. This shift from visualizing a gross physical form to a subtle one aims to bring forth the manifestation

2 Minjüür Dechin, Sharav, *Khüinii Oyung Barigch Oron, Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuvytai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgiür Khemeekh Orshvoi* (Ulaanbaatar: Admon, 2003).

3 Blo bzang rta mgrin, *Zhing mchog shambha la'i 'pho 'khrid myur lam gsal byed ces bya ba bzhus so*, in *Collected Works (Gsung 'bum)* vol. *tha*, No. 1869/97 (Mongolian National Library, Ulaanbaatar).

of the subtle mind, which will play a crucial role in the subsequent phases of practice and later emerge in the intermediate state between death and rebirth. It is through the subtle mind that one embarks on the path of the transference of consciousness. To facilitate this, the practitioner must also pray with deep devotion to Kālacakra, seeking protection from the dread associated with the Lord of Death and the harrowing journey of the bardo. After this prayer, he is to proceed to the final phase of practice by imagining the upper tip of the visualized central *nāḍī* in Kālacakra's body touching the tip of his own central *nāḍī* in the region of his heart, achieving a unification with it. The acts of imagination taught by Zava Damdin tend to elude explanatory frameworks rooted in mind-body dualism. Throughout the sequence of imaginative acts described by Zava Damdin, imagination can manifest as a visual image at times, while at other times, when the imagined experience defies visual representation, a mental image may appear merely as a conceptual thought or proposition, such as imagining Śambhala and offerings to be the embodiments of gnosis. The visualizations of Śambhala, as presented in the other two, previously mentioned texts on the transference of consciousness to Śambhala by Agwaan Damdinsüren and Minjüür Dechin Sharav, involve the imaginative recreation of an alternate reality and the imagined participation of the practitioner within that realm. In these *'pho ba* practices, the practitioner envisions a journey to Śambhala and engages with its past, present, and future kings and *kalkīs*. The visualization of visiting Śambhala is considered an essential precursor for actualizing the experience of Śambhala itself. Through sensory imagination, the practitioner engages his mind with the essence of Śambhala, fostering a familiarity that generates new memories beneficial for the bardo experience. In this context, consciousness rapidly transitions to Śambhala upon death. This is why the practices emphasize mental imagery of Śambhala rather than favoring a nonconceptual meditation that lacks imagination. The repeated visualization of the landscape, its natural beauty, and its rulers equips the practitioner with knowledge and experience that will facilitate immediate recognition of both the site and the kings during the practitioner's first encounter with them in the next life. Therefore, the sensory imagination of Śambhala possesses a significant phenomenal character, bearing both epistemological importance and a soteriological purpose.

Rooted in the Buddhist tantric understanding that a mentally constructed image is inseparable from the mind that creates it, the degree of subtlety in the visualized image is seen as corresponding to the subtlety of the mind itself. On this premise, Minjüür Dechin Sharav and Agwaan Damdinsüren devised a sequence of visualization practices designed to progressively unveil increasingly subtle visions of Śambhala, reflecting the evolving levels of the practitioner's mind. According to Minjüür Dechin Sharav's *The Jewel Steps of a Fortunate Disciple*, after the practitioner initially visualizes the image of Śambhala and cultivates the aspiration to be reborn there, the next step is to reimagine it—not as a physical, terrestrial realm, but as a celestial Pure Land.

This transition from perceiving Śambhala as a physical location to envisioning it as a subtle, celestial space signifies a shift to a more refined mental state, bridging the initial and final stages of the practice of consciousness transference to Śambhala. Just as with the earlier phase of imagining terrestrial Śambhala, this visualization of it as a Pure Land is approached not through negation but rather through familiar and relatable images. The ability to envision the elusive world of Śambhala through sensory images and symbols suggests that it is indeed expressible and not beyond comprehension. For the aspirant who has fulfilled the necessary conditions for rebirth in Śambhala, the moment of death brings the clear light of death alongside the dissolution of the four great elements. At this time, a stirring of the subtle *prāṇa* mind destined for rebirth in Śambhala occurs, followed by the dissolution of the clear light of death. Once the bardo being, bound for Śambhala, takes form, a white light emerges in the northern direction of Śambhala. By following this white light with unwavering courage and without fear, exhaustion, or shock, the bardo being is said to reach the majestic Śambhala almost instantly. Through the practice of visualizing the increasingly subtle manifestations of Śambhala, the practitioner's subtle mind begins to perceive itself as a luminous spatial realm, familiarizing itself with its eventual manifestation in the bardo state. In this state, the practitioner can come to realize that Śambhala is, in essence, nothing other than the inner light of one's own mind.

In all the texts examined regarding the transference of consciousness to Śambhala—whether in the context of preliminary practices or the innermost practices—we observe a simultaneity of recitation and visualization, alongside a shift from spoken words of prayer and eulogy to silent imagery. In his work, *A Swift Path to Kalāpa*, Agwaan Damdinsüren introduces practitioners to the ancient roots of the dynastic line of Śambhala, providing essential knowledge for those aspiring to reside in that spiritual realm. The practitioners are also expected to be familiar with the location of their future homeland within the larger framework of the Small Jambudvīpa. This signifies the beginning of a series of visualizations of Śambhala. Additionally, both Agwaan Damdinsüren's text and Minjüür Dechin Sharav's work employ a method of projecting images from detailed textual descriptions rich in suggestive imagery to derived visual forms. Although the causal relationship between the text and the images generated during the act of visualizing Śambhala is unmistakable, it is important to note that the processes of reading and imagining are inherently interconnected. The images invoked by reading are revived in meditative practice. In the tradition of Zava Damdin, the practitioner is tasked with arranging material, visual representations of Śambhala alongside its Dharma kings and *kalkīs* on his altar, accompanied by abundant offerings presented before them. This devotional act serves to sanctify the space of practice and bridge the practitioners' external and internal realms. By cultivating a strong aspiration to be reborn in Śambhala, the practitioner engages in an intricate visualization that encompasses the location, layout, and natural environment of Śambhala, as well as the *kalkī*

king, his palace, retinue, and the inhabitants, all as depicted in various texts. After purifying himself through this imagined divinization, the practitioner mentally reconstructs the scenes and conditions of Śambhala. He visualizes a ground adorned with various jewels, vast and splendid, resembling the palm of a hand. He is also to envision the remarkable qualities of this ground and the royal throne at its center. Having crafted a magnificent scene imbued with radiance and grandeur, the practitioner performs a series of ritual prayers and mantras aimed at further purifying the offerings to Kālacakra, the Dharma kings and *kalkīs*, as well as the assemblies of gods. In his visualization, the practitioner sees Kālacakra as the *kalkī* king and imaginatively creates a bathhouse, inviting Ādibuddha Kālacakra and the past, present, and future Dharma kings and *kalkīs* of Śambhala to partake in a cleansing bath. He further envisions offering them soothing bodily ointments, fine garments, beautiful ornaments, and a vase, beseeching them to remain in the world for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Upon doing so, the practitioner envisions the kings and *kalkīs* returning to their thrones, taking their seats with dignity. He pays homage to each one individually, addressing them by name and reciting a litany of their unique enlightened qualities and virtuous activities. He presents them with offering water for various purposes: to cool their feet, to sprinkle upon them, and to rinse their mouths, following the ancient Indian custom of welcoming esteemed guests. Additionally, he offers both inner and outer offerings by means of ritual hand gestures. Through this multimodal communication—which unfolds through imaginative enactments, nonverbal expressions, and stylized verbal invocations—the practitioner engages with the visualized deities, the *kalkīs*, and their retinues using his body, speech, and mind. In these imaginative acts, the practitioner immerses himself not merely in a mental image but participates in a ritual performance within a visualized space. He becomes both the subject and an agent of visualization within the imaginary event, functioning as both a visualizing participant and a secondary agent acting within the imagined ritual. After concluding the extensive series of prayers, the practitioner is guided into the core practice of transferring consciousness to Śambhala. The practitioner visualizes the guru Kālacakra at the crown of his head and imagines his own mind manifesting as a white vajra at the level of the heart on the brink of soaring upward through the central *nāḍī*. Upon visualizing his mind in this way, the practitioner prays for the purification of his karma and seeks the guru's guidance towards Śambhala. He envisions that through the power of his focused supplication, luminous, hook-like rays of light emanate from the guru's heart, striking the shimmering white vajra within his own mind. As illustrated in Zava Damdin's work, this entire ritual process culminates in a very subtle image of light at the heart, symbolizing the mind of clear light, which will naturally manifest in the bardo state and journey towards Śambhala in the north. In all three of the core practices aimed at transferring consciousness to Śambhala, the act of envisioning oneself as a transparent sphere of light becomes essential

for familiarizing the subtle mind with its own luminous nature, which will reveal itself in the bardo state and direct it either to terrestrial or celestial Śambhala, or to the realization that Śambhala is merely a manifestation of his mind's light of gnosis. Consequently, every manifestation and experience of Śambhala depends upon the subtlety of the mind that perceives it. These practices, along with the described modes of visual perception of Śambhala, serve as methods for incrementally developing new forms of awareness that recognize different manifestations of the same reality known as Śambhala, ultimately leading to the nonduality of the mind of clear light and Śambhala. The expressive capabilities of mental images in these practices allow us to grasp the transformative power of imagination in shaping the person's experiences in the world. Just as pictorial signs in physical images represent specific Buddhist traditions, mental images serve a similar purpose.

Imagining While Ritually Reciting the *Kālacakratantra*

In another ritual text composed by Luvsanchoinzin, titled *An Entrance into the Ocean of the Collection of Tantras: How to Read the Śrīkālacakratantra*,⁴ the author instructs the tantric practitioner wishing to recite the *Kālacakratantra* to first take refuge and generate *bodhicitta* by reflecting in this way: "For the sake of all mother sentient beings throughout limitless space, I shall swiftly and by any means necessary attain the unified state of Vajradhara. To accomplish this, I shall acquire the precious collection of the *Splendid Kālacakratantra*, keep it in mind, read it, reflect on its profound meaning, and recite its auspicious words." Following this, the practitioner must purify and transform himself into the Buddha Kālacakra. He is also required to purify both the inanimate and animate worlds by imaginatively transforming the inanimate realm into celestial palaces and its inhabitants into infinitely pure gods and goddesses, who will serve as the audience for his ritual recitation of the *Kālacakratantra*.

After completing this preparation, the practitioner further sanctifies the space for the ritual recitation of the *Kālacakratantra*. This is done by simultaneously reciting and visualizing the presence of the guru Kālacakra in front of him, along with an assembly of the deities from the *kālacakra-maṇḍala*, the tutelary deities from the four, main classes of tantras, the countless Victorious Ones, and the peaceful and fierce deities surrounding the area. The practitioner should envision all these beings instantaneously appearing before him, because they serve as witnesses to his recitation. Once the deities are visually summoned in this manner, the practitioner must pay them homage, present a multitude of offerings, and request their blessings to

4 Sngags rams pa Blo bzang chos 'dzin, *Dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i rgyud kyi klog thabs rgyud sde rgya mtsho'i 'jug ngos*, *Gsung 'bum*, in the *Collected Works of Tsorj Lubsanchoinzin* (*Chos rje blo bzang chos 'dzin*, Mongol Bilig Gsung 'bum, Vol. 3 (Ulaanbaatar: R. Byamba, 2013).

ensure that the meaning of the *Kālacakratāntra*'s words is clear and truthful during his recitation. After supplicating in this manner, the practitioner invites another group of listeners. This time, he calls upon the assemblies of *śrāvakas*, pratyekabuddhas, bodhisattvas, *vidyādharas*, and sages, along with the six classes of sentient beings, including the gods, *nāgas*, and non-human beings from the boundless spaces in all ten directions. He urges them to arise in unity and come into his presence to listen with faith and reverence, emphasizing this exceptional opportunity to hear the Dharma. Once he has addressed his imagined audience in this way, he envisions them gathering. He then imagines himself at the center of an infinite realm of space, filled with the ocean of assemblies of *vīras* and *ḍākinīs*. From this vast imagined space, he recites the clear words of the *Kālacakratāntra* in a melodic and pleasing manner. By placing himself in this space, he visualizes his body as Kālacakra's all-encompassing, universal form. He does this by imagining that within each atom of his body are inconceivable *kālacakra-maṇḍalas*, equal to the disks of boundless space. At the center of the atoms within those visualized *maṇḍalas* are manifestations of divine forms emanating throughout the limitless *dharmadhātu*. He imagines that all these divine forms proclaim the words of the tantra, producing a sound reminiscent of the simultaneous eruption of a thousand rolls of thunder. Envisioning his own body as a cosmic entity embodying multitudes of deities simultaneously proclaiming the sacred words of the *Kālacakratāntra*, the practitioner channels his imaginative power towards the scripture laid before him. He is encouraged to regard this tantric text as representing the essence of renunciation and the realization inherent in the mind of Kālacakra, manifesting as a collection of letters inscribed in melted gold upon lapis lazuli-colored pages. He then visualizes the text's golden letters radiating as blazing rays of light. Following this, he imagines that the light and ambrosia, reflecting the five colors associated with the achievements of various rites emanate from the pages of the tantra. Each letter of the text is envisioned as expressing its own sound of unborn echoes, with drops of ambrosia flowing forth from the pages. He further conceptualizes that the words of the tantra resonate from all facets of both the inanimate and animate worlds, as well as their inhabitants, embodying the innate sound of ultimate reality and bringing joy to the minds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas across the three times. Ultimately, he imagines the purification of the sins and mental obscurations of all sentient beings, along with their karmic imprints, allowing each sentient being to attain Buddhahood in the form of Kālacakra. He further imagines that the harmful thoughts and actions of malevolent beings—those who are challenging to subdue and who harbor negative sentiments towards the Buddhist teachings and sentient beings—are swiftly pacified and guided onto the authentic path. After contemplating the transformative effects of this ritual recitation of the tantra on others, the practitioner further visualizes the cessation of harms caused by epidemics, conflicts, famine, frost, hail, and other adversities across all realms of existence. He imagines the flourishing of prosperity and well-being in both *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. After imaginatively creating this magnificent cosmic

scene filled with divine and purified audiences, the practitioner, having imagined himself at the center, must begin to recite the *Kālacakratantra* with faith and reverence, using a pure voice with a clear, sweet-sounding tone. After reciting as much of the tantra as is possible, the practitioner must seal the recitation with a prayer of dedication. At the conclusion of this prayer and the ritual recitation of the *Kālacakratantra*, the practitioner imagines the objects of refuge melting into light and dissolving into him. He further imagines that the minds of those who have come to hear the recitation are now ripened and liberated, and visualizes these beings departing to their individual buddha-fields. According to Luvsanchoinzin, it is appropriate for a practitioner who has excelled in the practice of the higher tantras to imaginatively manifest his own mind as the Buddha Kālacakra in order to actualize himself as Kālacakra. He thus indirectly points to the soteriological significance of the described acts of imagination. By reciting and contemplating the *Kālacakratantra*, one becomes like Primordial Buddha Vajradhara.

Thus far, we have seen that in this ritual practice of reciting the *Kālacakratantra*, multiple acts of imagination are arranged in a particular sequence, beginning with self-divinization, which allows the reciter to imaginatively purify and sacralize the terrestrial and celestial worlds. Not only must the reciter's personal space be sanctified, but also the cosmic space that has become his arena, in order for his recitation of the tantra to be transformative for himself and his audience. The acts of imagination employed in this ritual recitation represent three types of imagination: sensory, purely conceptual, and participatory. They involve both cognitive and verbal processes and provide the ritual reciter with an expanded mental horizon through the cosmic vision he creates. Their epistemological role lies in providing the practitioner with perception of sublimated worlds and his own sublimated identity, which are otherwise inaccessible to his ordinary sense faculties yet no less real than the ordinary phenomenal world perceived through the lens of habitual propensities rooted in ignorance. The imagined, sublimated world is understood to be integrable into daily life—either propositionally or sensorily—through repeated recollection, until that imagined sublime reality is no longer imagined but actualized.

Imagining While Ritually Caring for the Deceased by means of Kālacakra

Closely linked to the Śambhala-related transference of consciousness practices is a short ritual practice intended to secure rebirth in Śambhala for a person who has recently died. One such ritual is described in the text titled *A Complete, Easily Implemented Method of Caring for the Deceased by Means of Glorious Kālacakra*,⁵ authored by the previously mentioned Luvsanchoinzin. In this ritual, after taking refuge, generating *bodhicitta*,

5 Mergen Chos rje Sngags rams pa Blo bzang chos 'dzin, *Dpal dus kyi 'khor lo'i sgo nas tshe 'das rjes su 'dzin thabs 'khyer bde don tshang*, in *Gsung 'bum*, vol. 3: 615–620, folios 1–3.

and visualizing Kālacakra in one's own presence, one recites the words of supplication. Having supplicated, a practitioner visualizes rays of light and floods of ambrosia emanating from the body of the divine refuge, which purify the sins and defilements of the deceased, establishing them in the glory of higher rebirths and liberation. Afterward, he must recite the Kālacakra mantra as many times as possible and conclude the ritual with a prayer for the deceaseds' opportunity to meet the teacher, to practice the Dharma, and to take rebirth in Śambhala as a rightful heir of the *kalkī* king, where they may achieve the Buddhahood with aspects taught in the *Kālacakratantra*, acquiring the experience of the *vajra-yoga* of the profound path and achieving the union of the reflection of emptiness and sublime bliss!

In this practice, as in the aforementioned transference of consciousness practices, the act of imagination is as much a performative act as are the particular utterances that one recites. By imagining oneself to be purified by the flows of ambrosia or the light rays emanating from the visualized deity, one is considered to be actually purified.

In the rituals discussed this far, we have seen that the same performative efficacy of imagination is implied with regard to the purification and sanctification of ritual offerings and ritual space in the previously discussed practices of transference of consciousness to Śambhala. Moreover, it is understood that by imaginatively bringing the deity into one's presence, the deity actually becomes present, hears one's supplication, and grants blessings. Since, according to the Kālacakra tantric system, a visualized deity is inseparable from the mind that imagines it, the agent of imagination is implicitly also the agent of one's own purification and blessings. This dual agency of the imager suggests that some acts of imagination can be performative acts and that the performativity of imagination is not necessarily contingent on the accompaniment of linguistic utterances conceived as performative acts. While the utterances with which one addresses the deity tend to objectify it, acts of imagination in which one propositionally imagines the deity's essential nature in the form of light merging with one's mind in the region of the heart interiorize the deity and transform the imager's ordinary identity, at least for the duration of the ritual. In this regard, the imager also becomes a source of refuge and blessings for others.

Fierce Ritual of Repelling the Enemy

In a ritual for repelling barbarian troops and forces inimical to the Dharma, described in Zava Damdin's previously mentioned text *A Vajra Key That Turns the Wheel of Magic: The Appendix to "Repelling the Army of Barbarians Relying on Vajravega, the Lord of Fierce Deities," Together with Liturgical Arrangements*,⁶ various modes of communication are directed toward both

6 'Khro rgyal rdo rje shugs la brten pa'i kla klo'i dmag bzlog gi zur rgyan 'don 'grigs dang bcas 'phrul 'khor skor byed rdo rje'i lde mig.

external and internalized Buddhist deities, and indirectly toward the enemy who must be repelled. Through a prescribed deity-yoga in which the ritual performer assumes the identity of Vajravega, who is the fierce aspect of Kālacakra, the imaginatively transformed practitioner becomes simultaneously a medium and an agent of violent ritual action. Zava Damdin composed the *Vajra Key* in a religious and cultural environment that already accepted fierce Buddhist rites of defense and offense against the enemy, which had been transmitted to Mongolia in various forms, from medieval Indian esotericism through Tibetan Buddhism. As a ritual of expelling, the *Vajra Key* is fundamentally a ritually enacted, violent drama in which the primary protagonists—Vajravega and his frightening army of sixty protective deities—are dispatched into battle to repel barbarian troops. Through a series of liturgical utterances, this fierce army is alternately entreated and commanded to repel, beat, and utterly annihilate the enemy's forces. The repetitive structure of the stanzas amplifies both the power of liturgical persuasion and the authority of the ritual performer, whose efficacy is further enhanced through self-generation as the wrathful Vajravega. The ritual's liturgical components also include the strategic deployment of sacrificial cakes (*torma*) bearing specifically prescribed decorations and colors considered to be inauspicious to the enemy, along with various other symbolically encoded ritual implements and the threatening sounds of musical instruments. The notion that the colors, shapes, and images of ritual objects, as well as the sounds of percussion, exert their own power in the phenomenal world through ritual performance has its roots in ancient Indian ritual praxis and has permeated virtually all Buddhist tantric rituals. The ritual performer imagines himself in the form of the tutelary deity to incite the mind of Vajravega to action and visualizes Vajravega's numerous manifestations and those of his retinue as issuing from his heart in the ten directions, subduing the enemies in the regions where they dwell, expelling them, and transforming them. After a long series of liturgical recitations, a ritual performer imaginatively sends the *tormas* to the deities and requests them to capture the enemy troops in their home and to destroy them by gun bullets.

In this ritual of repelling the enemy, the practices of visualization, liturgical recitation, and bodily actions are performed at times interchangeably and complementarily, and at other times simultaneously. As in the previously described practices for the transference of consciousness, here too we see what Van Leeuwen calls "constructive imagining," which differs from "imagistic imagining" in that it involves the production of mental representations devoid of perceptual content. Furthermore, this repelling ritual features liturgies that convey the ritual performer's command to the deities, expressing his ritual authority over them. The ritual serves as a medium through which even the Perfectly Awakened Vajravega must be persuaded and stirred to violent action. Without the ritual, his protective power would remain dormant and his pledge to protect inactive. Like other rituals, this ritual is the means of bringing deities into the performer's presence; if not summoned, they do not

come on their own. Throughout this ritual, the performer's role intermittently shifts from instigator of the deities' actions to one who assumes the deity's identity, only to revert to the role of supplicant seeking the vanquishing of his enemies. Through its violent mental images and utterances, the ritual becomes a conduit for the performer to channel his own antipathy toward the enemy through a sublimated, divine form.

Conclusion

The processes of imagination described here are structured ritual acts of mentally creating an alternate reality, bringing it to mind through recollection, and participating in it. In these practices, a mental image operates on different levels. Like material images, intentionally created mental images are conceptual tools that simulate the experience of an alternate reality. Some of them, such as images of Kālacakra and Śambhala, are iconic images whose religious and cultural histories are connected to the Kālacakra tantric traditions of India, Tibet, and Mongolia. They are often imbued with events and narrative qualities. We have also seen that mental images in these practices possess positive value and the power to change how the imaginer thinks or perceives the visible and invisible worlds. They have the power to create new experiences and transform the imaginer. Through the process of creating images and participating in them as both imagining subject and object of imagination, the imaginer is recreated by them in new forms, identities, and environments. The expressive capacities of mental images in the practices discussed in this chapter provide a venue for understanding the power of imagination in creating and sacralizing ritual space. We have also seen in this chapter that imagery is transportable: it can be transferred from an image embodied in a material object to a mental or poetic image, from a linguistic image to a mental image, or vice versa. Although the mental images in the practices described above are replicated from material and linguistic images available to others, they always remain private, accessible only to the imaginer.

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