

51 Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin: *Annotations that Clarify the Meaning of Some of the Holy Emperors' Secret Prophecies* (1924)

Translated and introduced by Matthew W. King

Introduction

Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin (Tib. Blo bzang rta mgrin, *alias* Blo bzang rta dbyangs, 1867–1937) was a Qalqa Mongolian Buddhist abbot, philosopher, historian, tantric master, and pilgrim.¹ He completed his education in the great monastic colleges (Tib. *grwa tshang*; Mo. *datsan*) of Yeke-yin Küriy-e (present day Ulaanbaatar), and, in the early years of the twentieth century, undertook wide-ranging travels to eastern Tibet, Wutaishan, and Beijing. He returned to Qalqa just before the Qing Empire collapsed and an autonomous Mongolian theocratic nation-state was declared in 1911. In the ruins of the Qing, Zava Damdin assumed leadership positions in the monastic institutions of Küriy-e and in his central Gobi Desert homeland, then part of the Tüshiyetü Qan region. For the next quarter of a century – during which White Russians and Chinese warlords ended Qalqa Mongolia's short-lived autonomy in 1919, and then Soviet-backed Buryat and Mongolian revolutionaries founded the Mongolian People's Republic in 1921 – Zava Damdin was a sought-after interlocutor for many of the architects of pan-Mongolian nationalism and secular socialist state building. These included the framers of Mongolia's socialist manifesto, the founders of the forerunner to the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, reformers intent on secularising Buddhist monastic education, and a host of Russian Orientalists, including a member of the Bakhtin Circle.

Despite this, until the dramatic escalation of state violence against Buddhist institutionalism in the late 1930s, led by General Choibalsan (at Stalin's infamous behest), Zava Damdin remained a staunch critic of secularist revolutionary programmes. Indeed, until his death by natural causes in 1937, just weeks before the mass execution, imprisonment, and forced disrobing of monks in the urban and desert monasteries he had sought desperately to protect, Zava Damdin remained an ardent ideologue for enduring models of place, time, and community formations deeply embedded in the Qing Empire and outside of emergent nationalism. Zava Damdin interpreted his revolutionary present using Qing-derived models of place and community, history and power, past and future, decades after the Qing Empire's political endings. These ideas exceeded and erased the newly state-favoured discourses of secular modernism. According to his wide-ranging study of

¹ On Zava Damdin, see Matthew W. King, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood: A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

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the Indian, Tibetan, Mongolian, Chinese, and European historical records available to him in revolutionary Qalqa, human affairs had clearly been governed by enlightened buddhas manifesting as saffron-robed monks and silk-garbed qans, emperors, and kings. For the duration of recorded history, “contact” (Tib. *mjal*) between the enlightened and the human had always ushered in eras of security, material prosperity, social harmony, and soteriological possibility. The social reorganisation of Buddhist societies in these models was interpreted as individual relations between “patronised” monks and “patron” political rulers (Tib. *mchod gnas dang yon bdag*). Often-cited historical examples included Ásoka’s Mauryan Empire (third century BCE), the Tibetan Empire (seventh to ninth centuries CE), the Mongol Empire (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries CE), and the Qing Empire (1644–1911). Činggis Qan had been an enlightened buddha, playing the part of world conqueror, in order to bring about abundances in social security and the possibility of salvation. So, too, had leaders of ancient societies such as the Xiongnu, the Turks, and the Uighur; most recently culminating in the Qing Empire and its partnership with the trans-Inner Asian Géluk Buddhist tradition.

Zava Damdin’s understanding of these periods of abundance followed a long tradition of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Siberian thought, focused upon relational spheres of Dharmic and temporal sovereignty, knowledge, and ethics summarised as “the union of Dharma and politics” (Tib. *chos srid zung ’brel*), or simply “the Two Systems” (Tib. *lugs gnyis*; Mo. *qoyar yosun*). The Two Systems had been the protagonist of much of the trans-Inner Asian monastic historiography of Zava Damdin’s Gélukpa (Tib. *dGe lugs pa*) tradition for centuries, indebted in untold ways to the Fifth Dalai Lama in seventeenth-century Central Tibet (explored in text no. 45).

In the ruins of the Qing in the early twentieth century, Zava Damdin spent Mongolia’s imperial-socialist transition trying to interpret his revolutionary present through the rubric of the Two Systems, a pre-nationalist model of separate but complementary spheres of Dharmic and temporal affairs. He was temporarily drafted by the autonomous theocratic government to research the union of the Dharma and politics – and then again by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, on behalf of the Mongolian nation-state; despite this, by the early 1930s, Zava Damdin had determined that conditions would no longer allow for their combination or flourishing. History itself had ended, as such. Temporal security, social harmony, legal structures, and benevolent political power lay in the decades’ old rubble of the Qing. The institutional and ethical basis of self and community cultivation, according to Géluk tradition, had long ago been severed. The halls of temporal and monastic power were now occupied by scoundrels and frauds; the enlightened had left the human stage. Such was Zava Damdin’s pessimistic assessment by the early 1930s. This was especially clear in the pages of his historical magnum opus, the 1931 *Golden Book* (Tib. *Gser gyi deb ther*; Mo. *Altan debter*), and his 1936 autobiography.

However, Zava Damdin’s dismal diagnosis of Inner Asia’s post-imperium had not yet taken hold in the early 1920s, then only a few years into Mongolia’s socialist period. In the short text translated below, we read an account of the “Spiritual Friend

Who Pleases Mañjughoṣa,” an epithet for Zava Damdin, who, in 1924, publicly addressed an assembly of monks, laymen, and gods gathered in a monastic courtyard in the Qalqa capital. Often speaking about the Qing Empire in the present tense – despite its then being more than a decade after the empire’s political collapse – Zava Damdin unravels a vast view of the world historical order that was both *at odds* with prevailing Marxist-Leninist historical materialism and programmes for social emancipation, and *representative* of the dominant intellectual and institutional context for Asia’s first experiment in socialist state building. All this was couched in a commentary on “the secret prophecies” of the (by then deposed) holy Manchu emperors, long considered to be emanations of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (*alias* Mañjughoṣa). Herein, Zava Damdin concisely surveys models of historical time, imperial-era law and sovereignty, moral authority, and socio-religious organisation between complimentary spheres of Dharmic and temporal affairs. As he spoke these words, revolutionary cadres and reformist monks alike were working to dismantle and redirect imperial frameworks towards state building and socialist social engineering; a project that would, just thirteen years later, end in mass state violence and erasure.

Bibliographical Information

Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin. *Dam pa gong ma'i gsang ba'i lung bstan 'ga' zhig gi don mchan bus gsal bar byas pa*. Mongolian Lama Guru Deva: New Delhi, India, 1975–76; 360–63.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

Translation by Matthew W. King

Namo Guru [Prostrations to the Lama!]

I bow to the *gandharva-rāja*

[Exalted Mañjughoṣa] [with youthful body],

[Orange in color] like the peak of a saffron mountain,

Who [since long ago] has acted

For the benefit of the sentient beings of China and Mongolia

In the direction of the rising sun, to the east of the land of Tibet.

[India’s *vajrāsana*] Magadha is the centre of

[All] the lands of [this] continent, which are named after the Jambu tree.

In the borderlands to the northeast

Are the [emanated] mountains Wutaishan,

And the very beautiful, great city called Beijing (*ba yāi kying*).

This great place, obviously possessing many¹ marks of virtue,

Is Mañjuśrī’s emanated pure land in the form of cities and monasteries.

¹ MWK : lit. “tens;” *bcu phrag*.

Therein, the protector of fortunate beings, Mañjughoṣa, appears in saffron,
 And plays the role of the Supreme Refuge and Protector,
 As if a second Brahmā^{II} had transferred to this earth.
 From China and Mongolia, patronised and patron [emanations of] Mañjuśrī met.
 At that time, the abundance and fortune from
 Unifying the Two Systems of the [Buddhist] teachings and politics
 Swelled like a summer lake.
 The holy body of that great Chief of the Gods, the Mañjuśrī [Manchu] Emperor,
 Appeared like a full moon atop the crowns of the sentient beings of China, Tibet, and Mongolia.
 The jewel at the pinnacle of the diadem (*cod pan*) [i.e. his advice and prophecy]
 Of that great emperor in the centre of the world in China
 Is beautiful [p. 360/361] like a jewel.
 He gathers like a cloud in the sky of fortunate sentient beings,
 And rains very white virtue and goodness uninterruptedly.
 His command-prophecy (*bka' lung*) was that
 Sky-Iron Vajras (*gnam lcag rdo rje*) will rain like lightning
 Upon the heads of the haughty.
 The sound of the thunder of
 The praiseworthy who sustain the Dharma and politics will roar in the ten directions.
E ma ho!
 From now on, there should be no doubting
 That directly seeing the excellent tradition of Dharma and politics
 Of the patrons and patronised,
 [Or] even just hearing about it
 In dependence upon that field of merit,
 Will produce the seed of a very white collection of virtues,
 And, especially, it will quickly ripen the great fruit of the three buddha bodies!
 After that, the stainless Yellow Hat Dharma tradition [i.e. the Gélukpa]
 Joined together with the mighty dominion (*chab srid*) of the Manchu emperor.
 For a long period of many centuries [this unified system] was sustained
 And remained in the lands of China, Tibet, and Mongolia.
 At that time, intelligent scholars from China and Mongolia
 Increased the teaching and practice of
 The Buddha's sūtra and tantra teachings everywhere.
 Many supreme beings arose
 From among those diligent Dharma captains:
 Some travelled [with] hundreds of hardships
 To Ārya Avalokiteśvara's snowy land of [p. 361/362] an ocean of Dharma [i.e. Tibet].
 Having arrived, they became scholars and adepts, and,
 By means of the goods of the vast and profound
 Teaching and practice of the holy Dharma of sūtra and tantra,
 They removed the poverty of the ignorance obscuring
 Ultimate reality and cause and effect amongst sentient beings
 Living in the lands of China and Mongolia.
 Also, many scholars wearing the three Dharma robes, the banner of the sages,
 Travelled to Mongolia from the cool land of Tibet,

II MWK: lit. "worldly forefather;" *'jig rten mes po*.

Pretending to collect donations from China and Mongolian areas,
 In order to elevate many beings into higher realms and liberation.
 For example, just as the varieties of colour and shape
 Are clearly reflected in a crystal mirror,
 So too does the great emperor
 Directly perceive all phenomena associated with the Two Systems,
 As these clearly appear in the mirror of his heart-mind.
 Oxen, for example, will imitate the behaviour of the bull at the head of their herd.
 Similarly, all the sentient beings of China, Tibet, and Mongolia,
 As well as the Manchus and the barbarians (*kla klo*)
 Follow any and all [of the emperor's] edicts,
 And also follow exactly the decrees (*bkas bcad*)
 Which are in accordance with the Dharma system (*chos kyi tshul*) [p. 362/363]
 [. . .]
 For example, it is natural that the wind from Mt. Malaya smells of sandalwood.
 Similarly, it is natural for all those higher lamas and leaders
 Endowed with the good quality of knowledge about the Two Systems
 To also follow the consecutive manifestations of Mañjuśrī as holy lama and ruler.
 Nevertheless, by means of [the emperor's] strict commandments (*bka' khri*ms),
 [We] are protected from those officials
 Who are ignorant about what to adopt and what to discard,
 And who have come under the power of non-virtuous behaviour.
 A rain of activity banishes them from our land, to the far side of an endless ocean!
 If I were to express this in a conclusion:
 When the Manchu political authority (*man ju'i rgyal srid*)
 Was unified with the teachings of the Yellow Hats
 All the five human races (*mi rigs rnam lnga*)
 Were satisfied in a period of emanated (*'phrul yun*) well-being and happiness.
 From this, they avoided all stains of unfavourable, demonic activity [p. 363/364].
 From this, all the fruits on the branches
 Of a pleasure grove of white lotuses,
 Which are the accumulated merits
 Of the virtuous causes and conditions of purification and liberation,
 Increased and extended.
 By whatever signs of the collection of merit that has arisen,
 By means of a garland of great wish-granting trees –
 Which are the amazing and wondrous powerful worldly palace (*srid mkhar btsan po*) –
 And by the pure Dharma teachings (*chos sde gtsang ma*),
 Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongol lands were beautified accordingly and in every way,
 As a support for the prayers of the nine types of beings.

