

Mongolian Adaptations of Utopian Alternatives in the Legends of Śambhala and Their Eschatological Narratives

Vesna A. Wallace

Abstract: Mongolian rhetorical and ritual strategies of promoting the legends of Śambhala and eschatological war and preparing various guides to Śambhala proliferated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the established cultural norms, model of government, social order, and Buddhist tradition were perceived to be under a threat. The yearning for an escape from the troubling times and for a Buddhist, utopian society of Śambhala became particularly pronounced in the early decades of the twentieth century, which were characterized by the percolation of new, scientific knowledge from Europe and looming Communist revolution. This paper briefly touches only on some of the ways in which certain monastic figures in Mongolia adapted and presented to their contemporaries the preexisting, eschatological discourses on the Śambhala war and on Śambhala's utopian society.

The eschatological and millennial narratives that proliferated in various versions in Tibet and Mongolia on the inspiration of the *Kālacakratāntra's* apocalyptic teachings often became the means of bringing together religious and socio-political realms within historical periods characterized by social crises, ominous political events, and conditions that at the time seemed immanent to the final phase of the *kali-yuga*. This is particularly true of the works written during the Qing rule in Tibet and Mongolia, when such narratives began to be widely disseminated. This is also characteristic of the period of political conflicts caused by Chinese

Communist revolution in the early twentieth century. These eschatological discourses connected to the Śambhala war place that which is ideal, desirable, and soteriologically positive in the future and in a different spatial dimension within the human world. They also seek to reinforce certain values and convictions that must be passed down through generations.

Eschatology in the *Kālacakrantra* and in its later Tibetan and Mongolian variants signifies a process of the restoration of the Buddha Dharma, not its destruction; it is a process of the ethical, social, and religious development of humankind, and not its end. It is fundamentally an optimistic eschatology, which offers a triumphal vision of the Buddhist mission and Buddhist identity, perceived as quintessentially esoteric. In this eschatology, the nature of time, which is both destructive and productive, is imprinted on all events, including the apocalyptic ones, which give rise to the fortunate era of perfection (*kr̥ta-yuga*), a new phase in Buddhist history.

When one examines eschatological writings of the *Kālacakrantra* tradition in India, Tibet, and Mongolia, one immediately notices that their authors were more interested in the events leading to the eschatological moment than in what comes after it. The *Kālacakrantra* itself offers a minimal account of the anticipated golden era that follows the eschatological battle. It contains only a few, brief statements regarding the time when the entire human civilization on earth will be filled with Buddha Dharma, pleasure, and wealth, after the Barbarian Dharma is fully eradicated. In the *Kālacakrantra*, we are told there will be a time when grains will grow in the wild and the trees bow with everlasting fruit, when the lifespan of humans will be at first 1,800 years and gradually decline to 100 years, and when the Buddha Dharma will prosper for 18,000 years.¹ Later Tibetan and Mongolian commentators interpreted the period of the flourishing of Dharma in different ways. While Bu ston Rin chen grub (1290-1364) understood it to mean that the Buddha Dharma will flourish for 1,800 years sequentially in each of the twelve sections of Jambudvīpa, and thus thrive for 21,600 years altogether, Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438) interpreted it as prospering for 1,800 years in each of the twelve sections simultaneously.² Jambadorj, the Mongolian author of the nineteenth century-chronicle, *Crystal Mirror (Bolor Toly, 1848)* interpreted it to last for 450 years during each of the four *yugas* within the twelve sections of Jambudvīpa, thus amounting to 1,800 years within each section and 21,600 years in total.³ The Mongolian monk-scholar from Ikh Khüree of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Minjüür Dechin Shiirav⁴ (a teacher of Jalkhanz Khutukhtu) understood it to last for 20,000 years, thriving for 5,000 years in each of the four

1 Newman, 1987: 650-52.

2 The *Kālacakrantra*, Ch. 1, 1986: 155-56, v. 164, *padās c* and *d*, and vs. 168-9.

3 Jambadorj, 2006, Vol. 2, 2006, Book 3: 294.

4 Minjüür Dechin Shiirav was a teacher of the famous Jalkhanz Khutukhtu Damdinbazar and belonged to the *Vizaya aimag* of Ikh Khüree.

continents of Jambudvīpa.⁵ The *Kālacakratāntra's* meager exposition on the era of perfection and the Vimalaprabhā's silence on this topic provided the opportunity for creative and varied interpretations on the part of later Tibetan and Mongolian authors.⁶

I suspect several, possible reasons for which a negligible attention has been given to the portrayal of the era of perfection in the writings related to the *Kālacakratāntra's* eschatological prophecies. One reason may be that from the Buddhist non-fatalistic perspective, the course of eschatological events is susceptible to redirection, whereas, the faraway era of perfection has its own course and cannot be presently reevaluated. Another reason may lie in the immediate objective of these prophecies, which is namely, to inspire certain transformations in the recipient. Related to this is the fact that in Tibet and in Mongolia, considerations of the felicities of the distant epoch gradually became curtailed and supplanted by a growing preoccupation with rebirth in Śambhala, which is deemed empirically achievable in the foreseeable future by the power of prayer and by skill in Buddhist tantric practices. The life and conditions of the Buddha Dharma in the land of Śambhala and Śambhala's prominent, tantric orientation, described in various guides to Śambhala and other related texts, significantly resemble those of the large Jambudvīpa during the era of perfection. A closer look at the descriptions of the golden era that follows the prophesized cataclysmic battle reveals that a result of the victory of the 25th kalkī king of Śambhala, Raudra Cakrī, over the Barbarian army is nothing other than a transformation of the entire world into the universal Śambhala, ruled by Raudra Cakrī by 100 years and later by his two sons Brahmā and Sureśa. In the Mongolian textbook of ritual prayers for rebirth in Śambhala, titled *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 Peoples' Minds, and [a Prayer] for the Definite Meeting with the Dharma of Raudra Kalkī*, composed by the aforementioned Minjūūr Dechin Shiirev, we are told that people of that era will have a pleasant appearance, will be young and vigorous, and will have all the necessities

5 *Khünii Oyunyng Barigch Oron, Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuvytai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgüür Khemeekh Orshvoi*, 2003: 25. In support of this interpretation, Minjūūr Dechin Shiirav references the "Great Commentary" on the *Kālacakratāntra* as his authoritative source. Since the author of the *Vimalaprabhā* is silent on this topic, justifying his silence by assertion that this topic does not require any commentary, Minjūūr Dechin is most likely referencing mKhas grub rje's "Great Commentary." If so, he obviously misunderstood mKhas grub rje's interpretation. Minjūūr Dechin obviously misread the phrase from the *Kālacakratāntra*, which reads: "twenty thousand minus hand hundred." The Sanskrit word "hand" (*kara*) in the phrase is a symbolic term for the number two. Hence, 20,000 years less 200 is 18,000 years.

6 From among the Tibetan works, the most influential on Mongolian writings on this subject were mKhas grub rje's (1384-1438) commentary on the *Kālacakratāntra*, the Sixth Pan chen Bla ma's (Blo bzang Dpal ldan Ye shes, 1738-1780), *Guide to Śambhala*, and his *Prayer for Birth in Śambhala of the Northern Direction*, the works of the Seventh Pan chen Bla ma, Bstan pa'i Nyi ma (1781-1852), and Klong rdol Bla ma Nga dbang Blo bzang (1719-1794) history of Kālacakra.

of life, including ornaments. There will be neither the poor nor the low, and people's sense-faculties will be equal to those of the Trayamstrimśa gods. They will enjoy freedom, live in accordance with gentle rules, and dwell in peace. Harm, illness, demons of obstacles, disasters affecting livestock due to harsh winters, and so on will not befall them.⁷ His vision of the life in the golden era closely resembles a description of the conditions of Śambhala's inhabitants found in the somewhat earlier Mongolian chronicle, *Crystal Mirror (Bolor Toly)*, composed by Jambadorj in 1848. There we are told that people born in Śambhala are beautiful and have abundant food, clothing, and ornaments. Residents of Śambhala live under gentle laws, and adversities such as killing, beating, disease, and cattle pestilence are unknown to them.⁸ Jambadorj's depiction of Śambhala is obviously based on the Sixth Pan chen Bla ma Blo bzang Dpal ldan Ye shes's, *Guide to Śambhala*, which, in turn, has its source in Tārānātha's translation of the Nepalese text, *Kalāpāvatāra* (Tib. *Ka la par 'jug pa*).

Śambhala and the world of the golden era also share the same *varja* lineage and are seen as equally conducive to the attainment of awakening within a single lifetime. In his aforementioned text, Minjüür Dechin tells us that although all the teachings of Śākyamuni will be widely circulated in all the four continents of the Great Jambudvīpa during the era of perfection, it will be the Mahāyāna and the Unsurpassed Yoga Tantras, such as the *Guhyasamāja*, *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Yamāntaka*, and *Kālacakra tantras*, that will develop in an inconceivable manner. Among them, the *Kālacakratantra*, which will be re-disseminated by Raudra Cakrī, will be a chief *tantra*. Due to practicing these *tantras*, many will attain awakening within a single lifetime. Minjüür Dechin assures us by referencing two of his Tibetan, textual sources, that this is a reason why even Bodhisattvas in Sukhāvātī pray for their rebirth in Śambhala,⁹ thus suggesting that a rebirth in the Vajrayāna-oriented Śambhala is more desirable than the rebirth in Sukhāvātī, where a long Bodhisattva path of Sūtrayāna is only practiced. Moreover, the conditions of Śambhala depicted in Minjüür Dechin's work and in other Mongolian writings also allude to Śambhala as a special type of Sukhāvātī, as an

7 *Khüni Oyunig Barigch Oron, Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuyvtai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgüür Khemeekh Orshvoi*, 2003: 25-27. According to the colophon, Baldan Jigmed wrote the inscription. Translated from Tibetan into Mongolian by the Third Nalandra, a monk of Dashchoinbel Datsan.

8 Jambadorj, 2006, Vol. 2, Book 3. See also Bawden, 1984-85, Mon. Ser. 36 (1984-85): 459-67.

9 *Khüni oyunig barigch oron, deed büteeliin Shambalyn orond magadtai törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn shashintai magad uchrakhin erööl, khuyvtai shaviin erdeniin gishgüür khemeekh orshvoi*, 2003: 26-27. See also *Khüni Oyunig Barigch Oron, Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Erööl, Khuyvtai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgüür Khemeekh Orshvoi*, 2003: 25-27. To support this statement, he references Vagindra's *Wish-Prayer for Śambhala, the Response to Questions regarding Śambhala* written by the Second 'Jam dbyangs Bzhad pa, Dkon mchog 'Jigs med Dbang po, 1728-1791), and Darmabazar's *Composition of the Land of Śambhala* (the 18th century).

esoteric Sukhāvātī of the human realm, or as Minjüür Dechin called it "the place of the highest *siddhi*."¹⁰ After all, similarly to Amitābha's Sukhāvātī, Śambhala was brought into existence by Guhyādhipati (Vajrapāṇi) in his form of the king Sucandra. Gachoi Lam Damba Agramba (Shes rab Rgya mtsho, Prajñāsāgara, 19th-20th centuries),¹¹ in his *Precious Crystal Stairway That Illuminates the Path of Journeying to Glorious Śambhala, the Abode of the Siddhi*, written in 1921, refers to Śambhala as a sublime *maṇḍala* of the earth, which is rotated by the Wheel of Dharma and celebrated by the illusory dance of the Sons of Jina: specifically, the seven Dharma-kings and twenty-five *kalkīs*.¹²

Śambhala is most intimately connected to a celestial Sukhāvātī. Hence, everyone born in Śambhala is able to depart to the celestial Sukhāvātī at death. Likewise, those dwelling in a celestial Sukhāvātī can, at their will, descend to Śambhala from Sukhāvātī and take on a physical form if their relics have remained in our world. After their work is accomplished here, they can return to Sukhāvātī. For instance, on the example of the Sixth Pan chen Bla ma's *Guide to Śambhala*, where we are told that at the dawn of the era of perfection, Nāgārjuna will descend from Sukhāvātī into his remains in the noble land of India, the aforementioned Mongolian chronicle, *Crystal Mirror*, and the anonymous Mongolian text discovered in Buryatia and 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 Travelling [There]*, predict that Nāgārjuna will enter his relics, which he previously turned into a stone and upon which he laid his blessings. Tsong kha pa will also enter his relics after the teacher Ringchin Choyijil steals them away from Tsong kha pa's Gandan monastery. Having entered his relics, Tsong kha pa will proceed in the form of a great *siddha*.¹³ According to the same anonymous text, Nāgārjuna and Tsong kha pa will accompany the *kalkī* Raudra Cakrī in illuminating the teachings of *sūtras* and *tantras*, and will remain on the earth for as long as Raudra *kalkī* remains, that is, for 150 years.¹⁴

As evidenced by a proliferation of liturgical and ritual texts containing the prayers and *sādhana*s for rebirth in Śambhala and 'pho ba practices of directing one's own and other's consciousness to Śambhala upon death, a fixation with rebirth in Śambhala became particularly pronounced in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth-centuries Mongolia. In these writings, the requirements necessary for taking rebirth in Śambhala are reminiscent of those in the Pure

10 This phrase is a part of the title of his previously mentioned work.

11 He was born in Khantai *sum* of Bulgan *aimag* and belonged to the Hand chin vang khoshuu of Tüsheet Khan *aimag*. He also produced works on *Lam rim*, medicine, and other topics.

12 *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*, folio 2a.

13 Jambadorj, 2006, Vol. 2, 2006: 294. *Shambal-yin orun-u baidal qayun-ud-un üy-e kiged zorčiqui-yin yosu ary-a jam noyud-i üjügüleksen sudur ene bolai*, MS:18.

14 *Shambal-yin orun-u baidal qayun-ud-un üy-e kiged zorčiqui-yin yosu ary-a jam noyud-i üjügüleksen sudur ene bolai*, MS: 18-19.

Land practices. For example, in Minjüür Dechin's view, three main conditions must be met for a guaranteed rebirth in Śambhala: 1) the accumulation of merit and gnosis, 2) a purification of the obstacles of sins, and 3) a generation of wishful prayers, or aspirations, for rebirth in Śambhala. Wishful prayers are to be of the five types: 1) a prayer for the connection with a composition of the land of Śambhala, accompanied by a *sādhana* on the land of Śambhala 2) a prayer for being conceived in Śambhala, 3) a prayer for encountering Raudra *kalkī* there at the time of his reign 4) a prayer for listening to his teachings, and 5) a prayer for attaining awakening. One who practices in this way is promised to reach Śambhala in a single moment during the *bar do* state by following a white light appearing in the direction of Śambhala in the northern direction, without suffering the shock, exhaustion, and fear.¹⁵

Similarly, according to the early twentieth-century Mongolian text composed by the high lama of Ikh Khüree, Agvan Agwaan Damdinsüren (Ngag dbant Rta mgrisn Bsrud) and titled *The Swift Path to Śambhala: A Compilation of the Layout of Śambhala and a Ritual Offering to Dharma kings and the Kalkīs*, one must first clean one's residence and embellish it with decorations such as banners and the like. After that, one should reverently set out representations of the Three Jewels and Śambhala, and the images of its Dharma kings and *kalkīs*. One is to offer the mound of offerings on the altar in front of those images, sit on a cushion and practice the *sādhana*s of Kālacakra and Śambhala, recite the eulogies to various deities and to the kings of Śambhala, utter prayers and *mantras*, and lastly practice a '*pho ba*'.¹⁶

As a Sukhāvātī of the human realm, Śambhala is a Buddhist kingdom, governed by Dharma-kings and *kalkī cakravartins*, the royal emanations of Vajradhara in his forms of Vajrapāṇi and Mañjuśrī. In his *Crystal Mirror*, Jambadorj reminds us that the *kalkī* kings of Śambhala are endowed with all the excellent qualities of the realized beings who achieved the bliss, inexhaustible wisdom, unimpeded mind, supernatural abilities, and magic powers (*rddhis*). Sucandra, the first *kalkī* king of Śambhala, chose to be born in the Śākya lineage, which originated from the king Mahāsammata of the first *kalpa*.¹⁷ The 25th *kalkī*, Raudra Cakrī, an emanation of Mañjuśrī, will also choose his birth in the same Śākya lineage.¹⁸ Minjüür Dechin's work also informs us that all the minor kings ruling over the 96 million villages of Śambhala are actually manifestations of the Buddhas, governing in accordance with the principle of a dual

15 *Khüniī oyunig barigch oron, deed büteeliin Shambalyn orond magadtai törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvin shashintai magad uchrakhin eröööl, khuvitai shaviin erdeniin gishgüür khemeekh orshvoi*, 2003: 50.

16 *Sham bha la'i zhing gi bkod pa'i don sgrigs chos rgyal rigs ldan rnams la mchod ba'i tsho ga kā la par bgrdo pa'i myur lam zhes bya ba bzhugs so*. Note that the name of the capital of Śambhala, Kalāpa is written in the title and throughout the text as "*kāla pa*." Agwaan Damdinsüren died in 1944.

17 Jambadorj, 2006, Vol. 2, Book 3: 295.

18 According to the *Kālacakratāntra*, 1986, Ch. 1, v. 157, *pada d*, p, 154, the seven kings of Śambhala will be born in the glorious line of Śākyas, and the eighth will be Śrī Yaśas. The seven are: Sucandra, Sureśa, Tejī, Somadatta, Sureśvara, Viśvamūrti, and Sureśāna.

law—the law of Dharma and the law of the State. At the time when the *cakravartin* Raudra Cakrī ascends to the throne of Śambhala in the Year of the Fire Sheep of the 22nd year of the sixtieth cycle, he will rule in the same manner, making the State and religion equally prosper. He will be undifferentiated from the Buddha in his deeds.¹⁹ Thus, Śambhala is the only place in the human realm that is continually preserving the line of cakravartins, the Dharma-kings. As such, it represents an ideal, and as Minjüür Dechin calls it, an "eternally strong"²⁰ Buddhist kingdom. Its strength rests on its theocratic foundation, characterized by the unified laws of State and Dharma embodied in its rulers. Śambhala is undoubtedly an ideological world, in which all the desirable features of the era of perfection seem to be perpetually present, making the life in Śambhala more appealing. We are told, as the era of perfection begins to fade away, social and ethical inequalities will resurge in the world outside of Śambhala.²¹ By contrast, in Śambhala, the social and religious distinctions that were obliterated due to the inhabitants' conversion to the *Kālacakrantra* practices by Sucandra, the 1st *kalkī* king of Śambhala, are precluded by its teachings preserved by the subsequent kings of Śambhala.

In Jambadorj's *Crystal Mirror*, the prophesized battle between the army of Raudra Cakrī and the army of the Barbarians' leader Kṛṇmati is not driven by nationalistic or racial sentiments, as it appears in the early twentieth-century Mongolian writings. Jambadorj interprets the word Maka (Mecca) to mean "Mongol", and "those Muslims (Mong. *lal. Tib.. kla klo*)," he says, are all "Mongols", whose "false view will increasingly proliferate after this period;" and as a result, "the majority of the countries of Jambudvīpa will adhere to the views of Islam."²² It is possible that Jambadorj's interpretation comes from his misunderstanding of the usage of the Tibetan ethnonym *sog po*, which in some contexts designates Mongols, but is also used as a synonym for a "Muslim" in other contexts, as for instance, in Bu ston's annotations and in the Tibetan translation of the *Padminīnāmapañjikā*, a word commentary on the *Kālacakrantra* and the *Vimalaprabhā*.²³ Like other authors before him, starting with the author of the *Kālacakrantra* and the *Vimalaprabhā*, Jambadorj fails to adequately explain the false views of Muslims that separate them from Buddhists, other than their dietary customs, the manner in which they kill their livestock for food, and their faith in the god Bishmillā. "In accordance with their false theory," he says, "they eat meat of the livestock that did not die on

19 Khünii Oyunyg Barigch Oron, *Deed Büteliin Shambalyn Orond Magadtai Törökh khiigeed Rigden Dagvyn Shashintai Magad Uirakhyn Eröööl, Khuvytai Taviin Erdeniin Gishgüür Khemeekh Orshvoi*, 2003: 19-22.

20 In the Mongolian *Wish-prayer for Śambhala*, translated by Charles Bawden, Śambhala is referred to as "eternally strong." See Bawden, 1984-85, Mon. Ser. 36 (1984-85): 473.

21 *Kālacakrantra*, 1986, Ch. 1, v. 166.

22 Jambadorj, 2006, Vol. 2, Book 3: 292.

23 The *Padminīnāmapañjikā* commentary on the *Kālacakrantra*, Ch. 1, v. 154, Peking ed. #2065, Vol. 47. See also Newman, 1987: 596-97, and p. 533, ft. 5; Tucci, 1940: 94, which interprets the *sog po* in this way: "In some places there are Muslimans, that is, *sog pos*" (*la la na mu sur man zhes pa sog po yod*).