



Sixth Guard of the Priest's spirit

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Today every Mongol knows the name of Danzanravjaa, a renowned Buddhist educator, scholar, philosopher and poet, who lived in the early 19th century in Gobi Desert. Monk and warrior, fierce fighter for the Mongolia's independence, he was murdered by Manchurian rulers of China.

However, very few know that all we know today about this outstanding man become possible only by the courage of an old herder, Tudev Gombyn, from Dornogobi province, who, risking his life, saved many personal belongings, manuscripts and drawings of Danzanravjaa a priest to our days.

Z. Altangerel, his grandson tells the story: "When I saw my grandfather crying, I understood the meaning of his service. It was in 1969, when one of the caves he hid the treasures of Danzanravjaa was discovered. Government officials, police, internal security all were summoned. Grandfather told me to join the crowd and to try to rescue any small item. However, the powers piled all what was found and set it to fire. Seeing fire smoke from distance, grandfather understood what has happened. When I found him, he was sitting on grass, crying and repeating "Why? It has nothing to do with religion, these are theatre costumes only... "

1938. The years of Red Terror and political repression- monks, aristocrats, intelligentsia, leading military officers- all were decimated, monasteries destroyed, libraries burned and cultural artifacts taken away.

With the arrival of a new, communist era, nothing should remind about past culture, religion and history. More than 30,000 Buddhist monks were executed and another 60,000 imprisoned or exiled. Thousands of intellectuals and aristocrats lost their lives.

In those days of fear, Tudev, that time a young monk, took an oath as the Guardian of Danzanravjaa spirit. Every night he sneaked to the abandoned Hamryn monastery in Dornogobi province, taking away and hiding the precious treasures in small mountain caves. Altogether, he stored 64 large boxes.

Every spring, under a pretext of collecting medical herbs, old Tudev went to mountains to inspect his secret treasures. During one such trip he was arrested by the Internal Security agents, charged with secret practice of religious ceremonies, and spent some time in prison.

Old man knew the danger his secret mission poses to his family, his grandson's future, but he believed that what he preserved in caves and in his memory is worth any sacrifices, and it's his duty to pass on the secret knowledge to future generations.

When his grandson Altangerel was five, Tudev began to train him as his successor. He taught the grandson Tibetan and Manchurian languages, traditional Mongolian script, basics of Buddhism, even how to compose verses.

" Now I think that he wanted not only to teach me the basics of Buddhism, but to train my mind and to prepare me both psychically and mentally to overcome any problems I may encounter being a Guardian."

" Composing verses? This is also a very important skill for a Guardian. Knowledge is complete only when one's spirit is open to beauty."

An ordinary pupil during a day, in the evening Altangerel turned into a devoted pupil of his grandfather. He had to memorize by heart hundreds of manuscripts and verses as not a single line of writing was allowed.

He slept for 4-5 hours only, and his food ration was reduced to boost perception and memory. Despite a decade long hard study, his grandfather still thought that he did not pass on all the knowledge and skills necessary to Guardian of the Spirit.

Altangerel, now 41, revealed his secret only in 1989 when the local community built a small temple on the site of Hamryn Monastery founded by Danzanravjaa himself. He donated some of belongings to the local museum but the remaining 38 large boxes are still being kept in caves.

Mr. Altangerel says that the local museum has no money to buy conservation material or funds for restoration. Scripts and textile kept for more than 60 years in a humid condition become fragile.

Third exhibition of Danzanravjaa Priest Museum held last March in the capital city lasted only one week attracting much public attention and with exhibition halls filled with visitors from early morning until closing. People were leaving the museum touched with the rich intellectual heritage of the Danzanravjaa priest.

The Danzanravjaa museum in Sainshand town in Dornogobi province presently has holds more than 2000 items. Though old Tudev risk

ed his life saving these priceless treasures, his deed was not appreciated during his life. The museum now mostly lives by money provided by Altangerel, the Sixth Guardian of Danzanravjaa Priest's spirit.

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