The world is drunk, it takes no notice.

Strong out on boozee and tobacco,
The world is drunk, it takes no notice.
I'll go my way

Will you join with me?

Simon Wickham-Smith

The quantity and quality of his works is such that it would be impossible here to give an accurate overview. What can be said, though, is that his work emphasizes love for the natural world and for the vast expanses of the Gobi. His love of horses far surpasses that of the average Mongolian: he uses the horse, and the vast distances of the Gobi, as a way of illustrating the spiritual path of a Buddhist practitioner. His own spiritual practice extended to long retreats in a specially-designed doorless ger. Moreover, his frequent references to his lovers, to intimacy and to ecstasy, evokes similarities with western spiritual writers such as Jalaluddin Rumi or St John of the Cross.

Danzanravjaa is also often compared with the 6th Dalai Lama, Tshangs-dbyangs rgya-mtsho, who also wrote poetry¹ and who also lived what, on the surface, could be called a strangely dissolute life for a Buddhist lama. That Danzanravjaa was a lama of the Nyinmapa school of Tibetan Buddhism meant that his vows ruled out neither marriage nor alcohol: there are many stories concerning his love of alcohol and women – he took two wives and often referred to himself as ‘the boorser’ (sksaktai) – and these themes appear frequently in his poems.

Of course, there is a tradition of maverick lama-poets throughout the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world – Milarepa, for instance, Drukpa Kunley, the 6th Dalai Lama, Gendun Chophel and Chogyam Trungpa. Danzanravjaa’s significance lies in his ability to connect on many levels with those around him. He enjoyed a certain respect within the establishment – even though he made enemies by criticising their hypocrisy and pretence and lack of spiritual effort – while, at the same time, he was loved by the laypeople who appreciated his realism and compassion as much as his love of wild parties.

The circumstances of his death are uncertain. There is a strong possibility that he poisoned himself, so profoundly was he at odds with the establishment and with the world at large. Nor can murder be discounted. His awkward relationship with the Manchu, primarily due to his opposition to their desire to rule Mongolia, might well have been one reason for his murder. Other suspects included the widow of a local ruler, whom Danzanravjaa is supposed to have insulted. But whether he committed suicide, was murdered or whether he simply succumbed to illness, we will never know. That he was only 53 when he died, however, shows the great loss which Mongolian culture suffered and how much more he could have achieved.

His attendant Balshinchoijoo lived on and took care of Khamar monastery. Before he died, he established a family tradition, called nahklij, by which his descendents would preserve the history and achievements of Danzanravjaa and this tradition has survived, through the Communist decades, to the present day.

Despite his love of alcohol, Danzanravjaa continued to make a distinction between mindless and mindful behavior. We should give him the final word:

Outside the Cross.

For further information please visit: http://danzanravjaa.org

¹ Of course, there is a tradition of maverick lama-poets throughout the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world – Milarepa, for instance, Drukpa Kunley, the 6th Dalai Lama, Gendun Chophel and Chogyam Trungpa. Danzanravjaa’s significance lies in his ability to connect on many levels with those around him. He enjoyed a certain respect within the establishment – even though he made enemies by criticising their hypocrisy and pretence and lack of spiritual effort – while, at the same time, he was loved by the laypeople who appreciated his realism and compassion as much as his love of wild parties.

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