

CEREMONIAL PERFORMANCE OF THE MAITREYA BUDDHA

The ceremonial performance of the *Maitreya Buddha* of *Vajra-yana* was formed and practiced in temples of the yellow sect of Mongolia. Together with its rites and chanting, it spread widely and became very a significant ceremony, especially while the sovereign state of the *Bogd Khan* existed. The *Bogd Khan* and other Buddhist saints declared the day to perform a ceremony of *Maitreya Buddha* with all the proper solemnities at the *Gandan Monastery* and at its branches of *Ikh Khüree*. There were very religious rituals which could be called as a grand demonstration around the temple. There is a view that Buddha in the form of the *Maitreya Buddha* may revisit this planet and resurrect his teachings in the next epoch. The *Maitreya Buddha* revisits and practices benevolence for the goodness of all beings in six realms. The purpose of the ritual is clear.

All the temples and monasteries prepare for ceremonial performances of the *Maitreya Buddha*. The congregation for the ceremonial performance of the *Maitreya Buddha* starts at five o'clock every morning for almost ten days before the ceremonial performance. This congregation starts at sunrise on the appointed day of the performance and ends at six o'clock. The *Maitreya Buddha* is enshrined in a small glass case and transferred on a two-wheeled cart with a green wooden horse made of papier-mache.

The head of the monastery (*khamba lam*) and his subordinate monks take the gilded statuette of the *Maitreya Buddha* out of the temple; dignitary monks, organized according to rank, carry sutras containing five classes of works about the *Maitreya Buddha* and set them before the statuette of the *Maitreya* figure. Monks burn juniper needles and incense and offer flowers, seven treasures of the state, auspicious eight offerings and offerings of five desires. Thus, the ceremonial performance of the *Maitreya Buddha* starts. The high dignitary monks clad in tall hats are at the head of pro-

cession. They are accompanied by the monks of monastery, trumpeters, and conch-blowers.

During the ceremonial period almost twenty monks take the lashes of horse and attach them to the cart and drag the cart before the procession. Two monks holding the tails of tigers and five monks holding whips have the duty of controlling the crowd of devotees. The procession starts from the door of the congregation hall and go out of the door of the court. The cart with the *Maitreya Buddha* is turned clockwise and stops to look to the congregation hall.

This ceremony starts with offering a *Mandala* to the *Maitreya Buddha* and requesting the *Maitreya* who supports the exalted one's cause to give his sacred teachings. It also instructs these participants to abide by these teachings. Then the cart with the *Maitreya Buddha* is turned clockwise. They drag the cart with the Buddha and walk slowly around the monastery accompanied with soft musical tunes. This kind of moving should be like an elephant plodding along as the sutra says. They stop at the north of the monastery and make an offering and chant. Then monks make a break and leave the cart there.

After almost three hours monks gather and sit before the *Maitreya Buddha* and congregate to attain the sanctity of Buddha-hood including reception and benevolence chanting and get reincarnation in the land of happiness. The cart is moved to the door of the eastern side of the monastery and the Idol is placed facing the south. Then the monks congregate and chant five kinds of works about the *Maitreya Buddha*. The two or three pieces of sutra are distributed to each chanting monks.

The procession of the *Maitreya* enters the main door of the monastery while the monks congregate and chant. The Idol is placed in the main temple, thus bringing this ceremony to a close.

