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# Religious History of the *Gaṇḍī* Beam: Testimonies of Texts, Images and Ritual Practices

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**Abstract:** The *gaṇḍī* beam is a monastic tool which was already known to have been used in Buddhist monasteries in ancient India for the purpose of calling the monks to gather for a joint activity. With the spread of Buddhism the instrument was transmitted to the Tibetan and later Mongolian Buddhist cultures. It has been in use in the Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist monastic traditions till the present day. One of the most prominent cases of the *gaṇḍī* beam application in modern Mongolia relates to the *poṣadha* ritual. In this article I attempt to present the history of the *gaṇḍī* beam within the framework of material culture studies. The analysis aims at the investigation of the mutual relations between the artefact and the societies that have made use of it as well as of the ways in which these relations could have changed. In order to accomplish this task I study the testimonies of the original Sanskrit and Tibetan texts, religious images and accounts of ritual practices.

**Keywords:** *gaṇḍī* beam, Tibetan Buddhism, Mongolian Buddhism, Material culture studies, *poṣadha* ritual



**Figure 1:** The *gaṇḍī* beam and *gaṇḍī*-striker used in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery, Ulan Bator, June 2011.

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# 1 Introduction

The inspiration for this article came from witnessing *gaṇḍī* beam striking in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery of Ulan-Bator in summer 2011. The paper's conceptual focus was influenced by the international, cross-disciplinary, academic and associative lecture panel "Mongolian Space and Heritage", held in Paris in 2012 and organized by OTASIE's research group "Réflexions d'Asie". The panel discussed tangible and intangible Mongolian heritage as well as the history of its formation and development within the frameworks of Mongolian culture.<sup>1</sup>

In the past few decades it has become common for scholars working in the classical humanistic disciplines to look at material objects more closely. This trend has been accompanied by the development of new methodologies and theories in material culture studies, which have called for the investigation "through artifacts of the beliefs – values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time".<sup>2</sup> The *gaṇḍī* is an instrument known to scholars to have been made in the form of a wooden beam and to have been used in the Buddhist monasteries since ancient times for different purposes. Research into the history of the *gaṇḍī* beam involves data of different kinds, ranging from written texts, through to images and the beam itself, as a material object. It therefore provides a good opportunity to apply methods established within the field of material culture studies, combining them with theoretical and practical approaches traditionally used in philology, cultural anthropology and historical studies.

Although the starting point of my investigation is the *gaṇḍī* beam as a physical object, I will not limit the discussion to its intrinsic material features, i.e. to features which are observable and have been documented in texts and images. My purpose is to trace the history of this artefact and its development within the frameworks of Buddhist culture, placing special emphasis on changes in perception by the bearers of Buddhist tradition. Of even greater interest to me is the analysis of the factors that caused these changes and the affects that they had on the ways people used and expressed their attitude towards this object.

Material culture studies are generally based on the assumption that "objects made or modified by man reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of individuals who made, commissioned, purchased, or used them, and by extension the beliefs of the larger society to which they belonged".<sup>3</sup> The example of the *gaṇḍī* beam offers sufficiently abundant and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://calenda.org/216883?file=1> (19.11.2014)

<sup>2</sup> Prown 1982: 1.

<sup>3</sup> Prown 1982: 1–2.



relevant material for a case study of the mutual relations between an artefact and a society and the ways in which they can change.

In an attempt to better understand the transformations which material objects like the *gaṇḍī* may have undergone as part of Buddhist religious culture, I will make use of the common idea in the material culture studies that material objects “do ‘social work’”. “Social work” in this sense speaks to the capacity of objects to serve as signifiers of both social and subjective (of self) identity.<sup>4</sup> Even more important is the comprehension of the material objects themselves as social objects into which they are transformed by being embedded in a narrative.<sup>5</sup> Investigating the appearance of the *gaṇḍī* beam as described in various sources, thus, goes hand in hand with the analysis of the narratives related to the object and the ways in which they have endowed it with social meaning. The investigation of the mechanisms of constructing such meaning and of its evolution might contribute to our understanding of the role that materiality plays in the creation and development of both practical and philosophical aspects of complex socio-cultural phenomena (such as religion).

## 2 Semantics as a hint at the notion of form and material

Mentions of the *gaṇḍī* can be found in various Buddhist treatises dating back to at least the first centuries CE. Many of these texts relate the events that took place during the life-time of the Buddha, thereby testifying to the application of the *gaṇḍī* by the communities of Buddhist monks during this period. This information, however, should certainly not be taken for granted. On the one hand, the texts were written several centuries after the occurrences they describe. On the other hand, the circumstances in which, according to the texts, the *gaṇḍī* was used, allude to the existence of well-developed Buddhist monasteries which did not exist prior to the first centuries CE.<sup>6</sup>

While the question of the *gaṇḍī* application during the early days of the life of the historical Buddha should be set aside for further investigation, we may argue with a high degree of certainty that Indian Buddhist monasteries present at the beginning of our era made extensive use of the instrument. Schopen finds numerous textual testimonies in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* indicating that the

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<sup>4</sup> Woodward 2007: 134–135.

<sup>5</sup> Harre 2002: 25.

<sup>6</sup> Schopen 2004: 1–2.



main reason for striking the beam was to call the monks to gather together for a joint activity. In these sources, the application of the *gaṇḍī* is usually described to have been associated not so much with a special spiritual event or sacral act, but rather with an everyday routine of monastic life or other mundane affairs. It was struck, for example, to announce a monk's death and to signal the beginning of the formal funeral proceedings, to call the monks to gather for a joint meal, or to alarm the residents of the monastery in case of danger, e.g., an attack by robbers.<sup>7</sup> Schopen also notes indirect indications of the possibility of using the *gaṇḍī* as a physical weapon.<sup>8</sup>

The word *gaṇḍī*, with which the instrument came to be designated, is encountered in Indian languages such as classical Sanskrit and Pāli. Its etymology, however, seems to be problematic for scholars, as many modern dictionaries suggest interpretative definitions for the entry *gaṇḍī* and explain it with the word “gong”, which is a possible description of the instrument based almost exclusively on its sound-producing function.<sup>9</sup>

Discussing the etymology of the word *gaṇḍī*, Hu-von Hinüber stated that the word seemed not to have been documented in classical Sanskrit, while it was known to exist in the so-called Buddhist Sanskrit and Pāli. She referred among others to PTSD<sup>10</sup> by Rhys Davids and Turner, who stated a possible connection between the Pāli *gaṇḍī* and the Sanskrit *ghaṇṭā* related to its second meaning, which is “a bell” according to the dictionary by Monier-Williams.<sup>11</sup> One of the meanings that PTSD itself offers for *gaṇḍī* is “a gong”.<sup>12</sup> The same explanation can be found in BHSD, which is the only meaning proposed for the word *gaṇḍī* in this dictionary.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Schopen 1992: 6; Schopen 2004: 261, 265, 269.

<sup>8</sup> Schopen 2004: 267, 277, n. 11.

<sup>9</sup> With the spread of Buddhism the term *gaṇḍī* was transmitted directly, that is, phonetically to the Tibetan and consequently Mongolian languages. In the Tibetan sources and modern dictionaries it is presented in slightly divergent forms such as *gaN+DI* or *gaN+Di* and *gaN DI* or *gaN+TI*. Das 1902: 214; Tshig mdzod: 349; DGS: 301b; KrS: 346a; Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 2–5. Mongolian sources as well offer slightly different ways of writing the term down. All of the variants, however, keep close phonetic resemblance to the Indian original. Kas'yanenko 1993: 244, N° 796; Ligeti 1942: 286, N° 1058; 287, N° 1050. The Wylie and the extended Wylie transliteration schemes supported, among others, by the Thlib.org and Tbr.org Internet resources are used in this article for the transliteration of Tibetan.

<sup>10</sup> The meaning of this and other abbreviations can be found in the list of abbreviations at the end of the article.

<sup>11</sup> Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 737–738; Monier-Williams 1974: 375; PTSD: 71.

<sup>12</sup> PTSD: 71.

<sup>13</sup> BHSD: 208.



In an attempt to identify the appearance of the *gaṇḍī* instrument etymologically, Hu-von Hinüber confronted our European understanding of the term “gong” as it is normally associated with a flat and round object made of metal, with a description of the *gaṇḍī* encountered in the Buddhist original sources, as well as in contemporary Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese and Tibetan-English dictionaries. The fact is that the majority of the sources to which Hu-von Hinüber referred characterizes the *gaṇḍī* as a wooden instrument. Some even provide its measurements and define it as a beam. This led Hu-von Hinüber to the conclusion that the Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit word *gaṇḍī* is derived not from the classical Sanskrit *gaṇṭhā*, but that it is semantically related to the middle Indian word *gaṇṭhi*,<sup>14</sup> and therefore in Sanskrit, *granthi*.<sup>15</sup>

In my opinion, there is no contradiction between the numerous descriptions of the *gaṇḍī* found in the original Buddhist sources and presenting the instrument as a long, slim and smooth wooden beam, and the semantics of the word taken either in its Sanskrit or Pāli form. The fact is, when making her analysis, Hu-von Hinüber, for whatever reason, did not take into consideration the word *gaṇḍi*, as explained by the Monier-Williams dictionary. There it is “the trunk of a tree from the root to the beginning of the brunches”.<sup>16</sup> She also did not mention the first meaning suggested for the word *gaṇḍī* by PTSD, namely “a shaft or stalk, used as a bar”.<sup>17</sup>

Later testimonies of texts and images that I will discuss in detail below provide a more definitive idea of the *gaṇḍī* as being a wooden beam. Regarded as the earliest available evidence of the existence of the object in question, the signifier *gaṇḍī*, taken in its different forms and with their semantics provide reason to believe that the instrument itself has not changed significantly in appearance since the days when it became included in the variety of material objects pertaining to Buddhist culture. Although the argument of semantics and

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<sup>14</sup> The second meaning proposed by PTSD for the word *gaṇṭhi* is “a (wooden) block”. Hu-von Hinüber herself noticed that the Sanskrit word *granthi* was provided without any similar explanation in either the Monier-Williams dictionary or the Böhtlingk/Roth dictionary. She also cited the dictionary by Mylius, in which the word *granthi* was furnished with the definition “Glocke”. This definition, according to the scholar, was not found in the dictionaries by Monier-Williams or Böhtlingk/Roth. In fact, at least in the former the *granthi* is also defined as “a bell” just as in the dictionary by Mylius. This example, therefore, appears to be inadequate and breaks the scholar’s own logic, bringing us back to the etymological connection between the classical Sanskrit *gaṇṭhā* and *gaṇḍī*, which Hu-von Hinüber herself questioned. Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 739, 760, n. 22; Mylius 1992: 146; PTSD: 70; Monier-Williams 1974: 371; Böhtlingk/Roth 1858: 833.

<sup>15</sup> Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 738–739.

<sup>16</sup> Monier-Williams 1974: 344.

<sup>17</sup> PTSD: 71.



etymology should not be considered absolutely plausible, I suggest highlighting its importance in building the history of the *gaṇḍī* beam, as it agrees much with and supports textual data dating back to the first centuries of Buddhist cultural development.

### 3 Classifications of the *gaṇḍī* beam and conceptual differences in their basic criteria

One of the starting points in the examination of a physical object within the framework of material culture studies is to classify it among other artefacts. Starting with the notion that the “most promising mode of classification is by function” Prown suggested the following classification of material objects:

1. Art (paintings, drawings, prints, sculpture, photography)
2. Diversions (books, toys, games, meals, theatrical performances)
3. Adornment (jewelry, clothing, hairstyles, cosmetics, tattooing, other alterations of the body)
4. Modifications of the landscape (architecture, town planning, agriculture, mining)
5. Applied arts (furniture, furnishings, receptacles)
6. Devices (machines, vehicles, scientific instruments, musical instruments, implements).<sup>18</sup>

The functional affiliation of the *gaṇḍī* beam is not obvious. Judging from descriptions of its application provided by sources dating from different times the *gaṇḍī* has been used for various purposes and, thus, could have been ascribed to different categories of the aforementioned classification, sometimes probably to several categories simultaneously.

Some original Buddhist sources which contain fragments devoted to the *gaṇḍī* present classifications of the instrument based on divergent criteria. Studying these classifications might be helpful in the investigation of the dynamics of the *gaṇḍī*'s functionality.

One of the earliest texts that include a classification of the *gaṇḍī* beam is the *Posadhavastu*. This text comprises a part of the *Vinayavastu*<sup>19</sup> treatise, which in

<sup>18</sup> Prown 1982: 2–3.

<sup>19</sup> This part of the Sanskrit *Vinaya* corresponds to the *Khandhaka* section of the *Theravāda Vinaya* written in Pāli. Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 52; Hirakawa 1990: 72.

its turn is included in the *Vinayapiṭaka*, one of the three main parts of the Indian Buddhist canon, the *Tripitaka*.<sup>20</sup>

In the translation of Hu-von Hinüber the classification of the *gaṇḍī* from the *Poṣadhavastu* reads as follows:

So gab es fünf Arten von *Gaṇḍī*; (*die Gaṇḍī*) für die gesamte Gemeinde (*sārvasaṃghikā*), die *Gaṇḍī* für die Verhandlung (*karmagaṇḍī*), die *Gaṇḍī* für den Todesfall (*aṃsagaṇḍī*), die *Gaṇḍī* für die Meditation (*prahāṇagaṇḍī*) und die *Gaṇḍī* für den Unglücksfall (*āpadgaṇḍī*).<sup>21</sup>

The text continues with the description of the exact method for striking each type of the *gaṇḍī* listed in the passage given above. It does not, however, contain any details concerning the appearance or physical features of the instrument or any further clarification of the occasions on which the instrument was to be struck in the particular modes provided. I therefore consider it highly probable that the *Poṣadhavastu* classification is based on the criterion of special occurrence. However, it is not quite clear whether the text refers to the same instrument that was struck in different ways on different occasions or rather to five instruments that varied from one another according to particular physical characteristics.

The text of the *Poṣadhavastu* belonging to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* school was transmitted into Tibetan and later adapted for Mongolian Buddhist culture, and included in the Tibetan and Mongolian Kanjur.<sup>22</sup> The Tibetan version of the text

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<sup>20</sup> It is probable that some version of the *Poṣadhavastu* constituted a part of the *Vinaya* corpus of every school of Indian Buddhism. Currently, however, the original texts of only two schools are available to us – the one in Pāli belonging to the *Theravāda* school and the one in Sanskrit recognized to be a *Mūlasarvāstivāda* version. The latter text was found in 1931 in the form of a manuscript enclosed within a *stūpa* in Naupur near Gilgit, present-day North Pakistan. This manuscript was investigated, analysed, compared with the Tibetan version and translated into German by Hu-von Hinüber. Hu-von Hinüber 1994. There also exist several small fragments of the Sanskrit texts of the *Poṣadhavastu* attributed to the *Sarvāstivāda* school. Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 78–84.

<sup>21</sup> Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 746.

<sup>22</sup> The *Poṣadhavastu* comprises the second chapter of the Tibetan version of the *Vinayavastu* included in the Kanjur. Ue et al. 1934: 1, N° 1. The Tibetan translation of the *Poṣadhavastu* (Tib. *gso sbyong gi gzhi*) is the only existent full version of this treatise belonging to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda* tradition. The Sanskrit manuscript from Gilgit has not been preserved in full while the Chinese translation of this version, if there ever was one, has not survived to the present. The Tibetan translation corresponds generally to the Gilgit manuscript. Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 65–66, 72.



included in the *sDe dge* redaction of the Kanjur<sup>23</sup> offers the following translation of the fragment regarding the five types of the *gaṇḍī*:

Therefore, as regards that *gaṇḍī*, there are five types: the *gaṇḍī* for gathering monks together, the *gaṇḍī* for communal sittings, the *gaṇḍī* of the dead, the *gaṇḍī* of the renunciation and the *gaṇḍī* for the dangerous situations.<sup>24</sup>

Another classification of the *gaṇḍī* can be found in the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma*, the Tibetan translation of which is included in the Tibetan Tanjur.<sup>25</sup> About four types of the *gaṇḍī* that are associated with the fourfold tantric practice of *nirvedha-bhāgīya* and its four stages which are “heat” (Tib. *drod*; Sanskr. *uṣmagata*), “summit” (Tib. *rtse mo*; Sanskr. *mūrdhāna*), “patience” (Tib. *bzod pa*; Sanskr. *kṣānti*) and “the highest worldly dharma” (Tib. *chos kyi mchog*; Sanskr. *laukikāgrya-dharma*),<sup>26</sup> the text states the following:

Then the small *gaṇḍī*, completely purified by the meditative heat. [...] Also the second *gaṇḍī*, completely purified by the clear realization of the summit. [...] Also the third *gaṇḍī*, completely purified by the patience. [...] Similarly the fourth *gaṇḍī*, completely purified by the highest worldly *dharmas*.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> As a part of the Kanjur the *Vinayavastu* has been translated into Mongolian and can be found in the Liydan qayan manuscript redaction (1628–1629) as well as the Kangxi xylographic redaction (1717–1720) of the Mongolian Kanjur under the title *Nomoyadqaqui-yin sitügen* (alternatively *Vinai-yin sitügen*, *Nomuyadqaqui sitügen* or *Nomoyadqaqu-yin sitügen*). Kas'yanenko 1993: 182–187, N° 599–602; Ligeti 1942: 306–309, N° 1125–1129.

<sup>24</sup> 'di ltar gaN+DI de ni lnga ste/dge 'dun bsdu ba'i dang/las kyi gaN+DI dang/shi ba'i gaN+DI dang/spong ba'i gaN+DI dang/gnod pa byung ba'i gaN+DI'o/PV: 136a1–2. Compare with the Sanskrit version and the translation by Hu-von Hinüber. Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 746.

<sup>25</sup> In the *sDe dge* edition of the Tibetan Tanjur, the text is placed in the *Ku* volume of the *Tantra* (Tib. *rgyud*) section. The colophon to the treatise names Rigs kyis byin, or Kuladatta, as its author and Kirticandra and Yar lungs pa grags rgyal mtshan as its translators into Tibetan. Lokesh Chandra 1992–1994: 1851; KrS: 362a6–7; Ue et al. 1934: 389. Although the text itself represents an important source of various ritual practices, the author's identity remains unclear. According to scholars' tentative estimations, he was active in the second part of the eleventh century. The practices he documented in his treatise may therefore also be dated at least to the same period, with a high degree of probability that they had been used at some earlier time. Rospatt 2010: 197–198, n. 1, 2.

<sup>26</sup> KrS: 346a2–6; Sakaki 1925: 93; Tanemura 1993: 1123. On the practice of *nirvedha-bhāgīya*, see, for example, Gethin 1998: 188, 196–197; Tenzin Gyatso 2000: 107–108.

<sup>27</sup> de nas drod rnam par dag pa gaN+DI chung ba ni [...] /de bzhin du rtse mo mngon par rtogs pa'i rnam par dag pa gaN+DI gnyis pa ste/[...] /de bzhin du bzod pa'i rnam par dag pa ni gaN+DI gsum pa ste/[...] de bzhin du chos mchog gi rnam par dag pa ni gaN+DI bzhi pa ste/ KrS: 346a3–6.



The text does not explain the grounds for drawing this parallel between the stages of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* and the types of the *gaṇḍī*. The primary principle of this classification remains unclear. Along with the list of the types of *gaṇḍī*, the text also provides the measurements for the length and circumference of all four of these types. These measurements, which I will discuss later in detail, are not given as bare figures but are associated with particular Buddhist concepts. However, the source does not specify what the connection is between these concepts and the stages of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* practice, and whether they are related at all.

## 4 Physical features

### 4.1 As specified by textual sources

The analysis of the physical features of a studied artefact or the “substantial analysis” constitutes the basis for research conducted within the frameworks of material culture studies. The description of physical features includes firstly an account of measurements, material and the so-called “content” of an artefact, according to which various decorative or symbolic motifs and inscriptions should be understood.<sup>28</sup>

I did not succeed in finding any scientific substantial analysis of an actual *gaṇḍī* beam dating to the more-or-less remote past. Artefacts currently available in modern Buddhist monasteries in Tibet or Mongolia, for example, are not known to have been subjected to this type of scientific examination by contemporary scholars.

What we have in abundance, on the other hand, are normative guidelines for the *gaṇḍī* beam production. These guidelines generally state the materials suitable for the creation of the *gaṇḍī* and the precise measurements of not only the *gaṇḍī* itself, but also of a stick used as the *gaṇḍī*-striker.

Another source provides us with notions of the possible appearance of the *gaṇḍī* and its physical features. These are the beam’s visual representations, found on a multitude of Buddhist *thangkas* and on other religious images.

The primary material for the *gaṇḍī* production appears to have always been wood. Referring to Chinese sources, Hu-von Hinüber and Staël-Holstein note that in the Chinese tradition, the *gaṇḍī* could have been produced from other materials such as metal or stone.<sup>29</sup> Textual materials confirming the application

<sup>28</sup> Prown 1982: 7–8.

<sup>29</sup> Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 739–740; Staël-Holstein 1913: XXII, n.1.



of similar variations in the *gaṇḍī*-making process in the Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist tradition have not been found to date.

For my analysis, I discovered four original sources offering practical prescriptions for the production of the *gaṇḍī*. These texts date to different time periods and possess different genre affiliations. The first of these, the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* or *gaN DI'i mdo*,<sup>30</sup> contains the following passage enumerating 16 types of trees suitable for creating the *gaṇḍī*:

Sandal, Bengal quince,<sup>31</sup> bastard teak,<sup>32</sup> sacred fig,<sup>33</sup> red sandal, *Mespilus cotoneaster*, Palmyra tree, bastard teak, aloe wood, false mangosteen,<sup>34</sup> mango tree, walnut tree, gooseberry,<sup>35</sup> *tintisara* and *ashoka*. If all of them are absent, it should be diligently made from mulberry.<sup>36</sup>

The Tibetan translation of the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma*, which has already been noted above, states five types of trees from which the *gaṇḍī* should be made:

It should be made from trees such as *Cassia sophora*,<sup>37</sup> banyan, sacred fig, Ceylon iron-wood,<sup>38</sup> and cluster fig tree.<sup>39,40</sup>

Yet another list of trees that constitute proper material for the *gaṇḍī* can be found in the manual to the ritual of the purification of vows, titled *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba'i gzhi gsum gyi cho ga la sogs pa so sor thar pa'i blang dor gyi*

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**30** A Mongolian translation of the *sūtra* under the title *Gaṇḍī-yin sudur* has been included in the Liydan qayan manuscript redaction (1628–1629) and the Kangxi xylographic redaction (1717–1720) of the Mongolian Kanjur. Kas'yanenko 1993: 244, N° 796; Ligeti 1942: 286, N° 1058. As a part of this canonical collection the text has been transmitted in Mongolia. I am not aware of any separate Mongolian redactions of the text having been in circulation or in use in the Mongolian Buddhist monasteries.

**31** *Aegle marmelos*.

**32** *Butea frondosa*.

**33** *Ficus religiosa*.

**34** *Xanthochymus pictorius*.

**35** *Emblica officinalis*.

**36** *tsan dan bil ba pa la sha// a shwad tha dang tsan dan dmar// rgya star (3) ta la king shu ka// shing sha pa dang ta ma la// a mra star bu skyu ru ra// tin ti sa ra a sho ka// 'di dag thams cad med na yang// 'o se las ni 'bad de bya* DGS: 302b2–3.

**37** This identification is tentative and is derived from phonetic resemblance of the Tibetan *kA shA rI*, found in the text, and the Sanskrit *kāsari* defined as *Cassia sophora* by the Monier-Williams dictionary. Monier-Williams 1974: 281.

**38** *Mesua ferrea*. This is a possible identification based on the phonetic similarity of the Tibetan *ke shar* to the Sanskrit *keśari* or *kesara*. Monier-Williams 1974: 310–311.

**39** *Ficus racemosa*.

**40** *de yang kA shA rI dang/nya gro d+ha dang/a shwa d+tha dang/ke shar dang (3) u du m+wA ra'i shing rnams las bya'o* KrS: 346a2–3.



*gnas rnams mdor bsdus pa* and composed by 'Dul ba 'dzin pa grags pa rgyal mtshan<sup>41</sup>:

As for the *gaṇḍī*, [it should be made] from mulberry tree provided there is no white and red sandal, Bengal quince, bastard teak, *Mespilus cotoneaster*, or *ashoka*.<sup>42</sup>

The same list can also be found in the *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba'i cho ga sdom brtson dgyes byed*, written by Ching su tsug thu no mon han blo bzang nor bu shes rab.<sup>43</sup> Closer analysis immediately revealed that the entire passage devoted to the description and implementation of the *gaṇḍī* was borrowed by Blo bzang nor bu shes rab from the treatise by Grags pa rgyal mtshan and was cited directly without indicating the original source.<sup>44</sup>

Out of the three texts noted above, the enumeration from the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* might be the earliest and most detailed. Included in the text that has become a part of the Tibetan Kanjur collection, this enumeration seems to have gained normative status. It has also been cited by other Tibetan authors writing about the *gaṇḍī* beam.<sup>45</sup>

The list from the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* is the shortest and most peculiar. It obviously does not follow the tradition established or transmitted by the *Gaṇḍīsūtra*.

The latter two examples show us what the main line of the *gaṇḍī* presentation in the monastic *dGe lugs pa* tradition was. They also allow us to presume that this tradition was likely transmitted to Mongolia and further cultivated there.

All four of the aforementioned sources also contain some information on the measurements of the *gaṇḍī* beam and details of its appearance, as well as the form and size of the *gaṇḍī*-striker. However, the content and the way in which the four sources present the information differ significantly from one text to another. Thus, the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* states the following:

As for the measurements, make the smallest to be 84 of the eight fingers. As to the fingers in breadth, make it six. In height also make it two. Measuring in finger joints, the size on the

<sup>41</sup> 'Dul ba 'dzin pa grags pa rgyal mtshan (1374–1434) is considered to be one of the most important *dGe lugs pa* teachers. He was one of the main direct disciples of Tsong kha pa. The scholar was especially known and respected for his writings on *Vinaya*. TBRC: P1591; <http://www.treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Duldzin-Drakpa-Gyeltsen/2891>.

<sup>42</sup> *gaN+Di ni/rgyu tsaN+Dan dkar dmar dang/bil ba dang ba la sha dang/rgya star dang/a sho ka 'am/med na 'o ma si'i shing la* Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ching su tsug thu no mon han blo bzang nor bu shes rab (1677–1737) was a *dGe lugs pa* teacher who was active in Mongolia. Not a lot is known about his life and work. His main place of residence was the *dGe ldan bshad sgrub bstan 'phel gling* monastery. TBRC: P411.

<sup>44</sup> Cho ga: 2a3–4a2.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *dGe 'dun grub pa*: 118b2–3 or *Dung dkar*: 482–483.



four edges is two. The perfect evenness is made very evident. Both ends are similar to the frog's head. Then also the striker should be cut from the same wood. Measuring 12 fingers, it is round and with the mongoose heads at both ends. The size of the handle is also like that.<sup>46</sup>

The *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* provides four different sizes for the *gaṇḍī*, corresponding to the four types of instruments distinguished by the text. All measurements are associated with different Buddhist doctrinal concepts. The first *gaṇḍī*, related to the “heat” stage of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* practice is described thus:

In length – the purity of the 84 collections of dharma<sup>47</sup> – three of the 84 parts. Due to the 12 elements of the interdependent origination<sup>48</sup> it is round having 12 parts in circumference.<sup>49</sup>

The second *gaṇḍī*, related to the “summit” stage of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* practice is described thus:

In length – the five higher perceptions<sup>50</sup> and marks of excellence – 85. Due to the purity of the 13 stages<sup>51</sup> – 13 parts [in circumference] and round.<sup>52</sup>

The measurements of the third *gaṇḍī*, related to the “patience” stage of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* practice are presented thus:

In length – the purity of the 10 strengths, 10 merits, 10 powers, 10 *pāramitās*, 10 cognitions, and the 37 accessories of enlightenment<sup>53</sup> – 87 parts. In circumference 15 parts – the purity of the 15 vowels such as those of an unobscured type and others. Because of the 12 kinds of the Buddha's teachings<sup>54</sup> – 82.<sup>55</sup>

46 *tshad ni chung ngu sor brgyad kyi// brgyad cu rtsa bzhi nyid bya zhing// zheng du sor ni drug bya ste// 'phang du yang ni gnyis bya'o//sor mo'i tshigs kyi tshad dag gis// zur bzhir tshad ni gnyis pa yin// legs mnyam nyid ni shin tu gsal/(7)/rtse gnyis sbal pa'i mgo bzhin no// de nas rdung bar byed pa yang// shing de nyid las bcad de bya// sor bcu gnyis kyi tshad dag la// zlum zhing rtse gnyis ne'u le'i mgo// chang zungs tshad kyang de bzhin te DGS: 302b6–7.*

47 *Dharmaskandha* (Sansk.).

48 *Pratītyasamutpāda* (Sansk.).

49 *chos kyi phung po brgyad cu rtsa bzhi'i nam par dag pa cha brgyad cu rtsa bzhi pa gsum ste srid du'o// rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba'i yan lag bcu gnyis kyi nam par dag pas khor yug tu cha bcu gnyis (4) te zlum po'o KrS: 346a.*

50 *Abhijñā* (Sansk.).

51 *Bhūmi* (Sansk.).

52 *mngon par shes pa lnga dang dpe byad bzang po brgyad cu rtsa lnga ste srid du'o//sa bcu gsum gyi nam par dag pas cha bcu gsum pa ste zlum po'o KrS: 346a.*

53 *Bodhipākṣikadharmā* (Sansk.).

54 *Dvādaśāṅgapravacana* (Sansk.).

55 *stobs bcu dang dge ba bcu dang dbang bcu dang pha rol tu phyin pa bcu dang shes pa bcu dang byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos sum cu rtsa bdun gyi nam par dag pa cha brgyad cu rtsa bdun te*

The measurements of the fourth and the biggest *gaṇḍī* related to the “highest worldly *dharmas*” stage of the *nirvedha-bhāgīya* practice are explained as follows:

Due to the purity of abolishing the 98 afflictive emotions 98 parts in length. The purity of the 18 distinctive qualities of the *buddhas*<sup>56</sup> – 18 parts in circumference. Due to the purity of the 16 truths – 86.<sup>57</sup>

The beam’s striker is characterized by the treatise thus:

It is necessary to tell about the size of the *gaṇḍī*-striker: its upper section has ten parts – the purity of the 10 female spiritual consorts. It is round having six parts in circumference – the purity of the six recollections.<sup>58</sup> Below it is round similarly to the five pristine cognitions. The purity of the five accumulations.<sup>59</sup>

The *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* contains one more passage regarding the form of the instrument. The details provided by this fragment are found neither in the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* nor in the work by Grags pa rgyal mtshan. It reads as follows:

One part that is the middle one of the upper five parts of all types of the *gaṇḍī* should be hollowed out. It should be cut one part deep all around. The purity of the five aggregates transcending the physical world. On this, due to the purity of the seven highest offerings, there are seven decorative paintings. From among these make whichever you like.<sup>60</sup>

The *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba’i gzhi gsum gyi cho ga la sogs pa so sor thar pa’i blang dor gyi gnas mams mdor bsdus pa* by Grags pa rgyal mtshan also contains a passage that provides information on the size of the beam and its striker<sup>61</sup>:

(6) *srid du’o// sgrib pa med pa’i nam pa la sogs pa’i dbyangs bco lnga’i mam par dag pa cha bco lnga ni zhum po’o// gsung rab yan lag bco gnyis kyi dag pas brgyad cu rtsa gnyis so* KrS: 346a.

56 *Āveṇikabuddhadharma* (Sanskrit).

57 *nyon mongs pa dgu bcu rtsa* (7) *brgyad spangs pa’i mam par dag pas cha dgu bcu rtsa brgyad srid du’o// sangs rgyas kyi chos ma ’dres pabco brgyad nam par dag pa ’khor yug tu cha bco brgyad do// bden pa bcu drug gi mam par dag pas brgyad cu rtsa drug go* KrS: 346a.

58 *Anusmṛti* (Sanskrit).

59 *gaN+DI thi’u’i tshad brjod par bya* (3) *ste/de la steng gi cha la cha bcu ste gzungs ma bcu’i nam par dag pa’o// khor yug tu cha drug gis zlums te rjes su dran pa drug gi mam par dag pa’o// ’og tu ye shes lnga de dang mtshungs pa’i zlums so// phung po lnga’i dag pa’o*/KrS: 346b2–3.

60 *gaN+DI thams cad kyi yar cha lnga’i dbus kyi cha gcig dma’ par bya’o//* (2) *khor yug tu cha gcig gis dman pa’o//’jig rten las ’das pa’i phung po lnga’i nam par dag pa’o// de la blan med pa’i mchod pa bdun nam par dag pas tshon ris bdun no// ’di mams kyi nang nas yid la gang ’tshad pa de bya’o*/KrS: 346b1–2.

61 Although the *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba’i cho ga sdom brtson dgyes byed* by Ching su tsug thu no mon han blo bzang nor bu shes rab also contains a passage with such information, it is not cited here, because it directly repeats the treatise by Grags pa rgyal mtshan.



The size of the biggest is 108 fingers. The smallest has 84. In breadth six fingers. In height two fingers. At the four edges it has the size of two fingers. The ends are like the head of a frog. The striker is cut from the same wood. The size is 12 fingers. Round with the ends looking like the head of a mongoose. The size of the handle is also equal to that.<sup>62</sup>

The fragments of the three treatises show that, with regard to the size and form of the *gaṇḍī*, the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* and the manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan belong to the same tradition. The latter text, in fact, transmits very closely the content of the *sūtra* and paraphrases it slightly. The only major difference between them is that the manual mentions the big-sized *gaṇḍī*, which measures 108 fingers, while the *sūtra* does not. The measurements given for three dimensions and four edges<sup>63</sup> let us understand that the texts describe an object that is an octagonal prism. The form of the striker, in turn, appears to be a cylinder with no numbers given to determine the circumference of its base.

The data provided by the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* create a picture of a *gaṇḍī* that is essentially different from the two other descriptions. In the case of all four types of the instrument that it mentions, the text specifies only two parameters, i.e., length (Tib. *srid*) and circumference (Tib. *'khor yug*). Such specifications lead us to the conclusion that according to the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma*, the *gaṇḍī* was supposed to have a cylindrical form. As to the striker, although the description is not easily intelligible, it definitely depicts the instrument in an entirely different way than the two other sources. It is at variance with these sources regarding all the parameters of the striker – its length, circumference, form and even decorations, as it does not mention any of them adorning the ends of the tool. It is also worth mentioning that, describing the size of the instruments, the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* uses different units of measurement. While both the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* and the manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan provide the sizes of the *gaṇḍī* and its striker in “fingers” (Tib. *sor*), the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* defines them in “parts” (Tib. *cha*). Interestingly all three texts are not in agreement as regards the terminology when they speak about the *gaṇḍī*-striker. The *Gaṇḍīsūtra* uses the phrase *rdung bar byed pa* to designate it. In the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* it is

<sup>62</sup> *tshad rab mchur sor brgya rtse bryad/tha ma bryad cu rtse bzhi/zheng sor drug pa/dpangs su sor gnyis pa/zur bzhi sor gnyis kyi tshad dang ldan pa/rtse mo sbal ba'i mgo bo 'dra ba/gaN g. yog shing de nyid las bcad pa/sor bcu gnyis kyi tshad/zlum po rtse mo gnyis ne'u le'i mgo 'dra ba/'chang zung kyi tshad kyang de dang mnyam pa'o* Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 2.

<sup>63</sup> I believe that the phrases *zur bzhi tshad ni gnyis pa yin* and *zur bzhi sor gnyis kyi tshad dang ldan pa* of the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* and the manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan respectively refer to the edges of the beam and mean that these edges should be cut so as to create four faces, the width of which is to measure two fingers. Therefore, the measurements of the three dimensions, that is, length, width and height give us a picture of a parallelepiped. Supplemented with cut edges, the parallelepiped is transformed into an octagonal prism.



called *gaN + DI thi'u*, while the term *gaN g.yog* is applied in the treatise by Grags pa rgyal mtshan.

In terms of the physical features of the *gaṇḍī*, we should pay special attention to what Prown called the “content” of an artefact, that is, to decorations or inscriptions of any kind.<sup>64</sup> The passages from the Tibetan translation of the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* and the manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan cited above both mention specific decorations placed on both ends of the *gaṇḍī* and the beam's striker. The texts are in accord with one another concerning the appearance of these decorations, which are in the form of the head of a frog in the case of the beam itself and a mongoose head in the case of the striker. The choice of decorative motifs is not clear. The texts provide no explanation for these symbols, nor any legends narrating the circumstances of their becoming a part of the *gaṇḍī* ornamentation. The *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* also instructs making the ends of the *gaṇḍī* in the form of a frog's head. Its description, however, is more precise in terms of measurements. It also provides a type of explanation as to the application of this particular ornament:

At the end of the four types of the *gaṇḍī* the head of a frog<sup>65</sup> measuring two, three, three and a half or four parts should be made. *Maṇḍa* – the core or the essence, that is, the pristine cognition of the complete awakening of a frog is to be expressed with the frog's voice.<sup>66</sup>

The text also gives more exact information about the decorative paintings mentioned as ornaments of the hollowed part of the beam:

Then it is necessary to speak about the successions of colors of the decorative paintings: they are the collection of four – yellow, red, green and blue. Therefore, yellow is the *Mahāsāṃghika*, red is the *Sarvāstivāda*, green is the *Sammitiya*, blue is the *Sthaviravāda*.<sup>67</sup>

The *Gaṇḍīsūtra* contains a passage that also refers to seven ornaments:

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<sup>64</sup> Prown 1982: 8.

<sup>65</sup> *Maṇḍūka* (Sanskrit) – a frog. Monier-Williams 1974: 776.

<sup>66</sup> *gaN+DI mam pa bzhi la rtse mo ru cha gnyis dang cha* (346b1) *gsum dang phyed dang bcas pa'i cha gsum dang cha bzhi'i tshad kyi maN+Du ka'i mgo bo bya'o// maN+Da ma snying po'am gtso ste maN+Du ka'i rdzogs pa'i byang chub kyi ye shes ni maN+Du ka'i sgras brjod par bya'o/* KrS: 346a7–346b1.

<sup>67</sup> *de la tshon ris bdun gyi tshon gyi rim brjod par bya ste/ ser po dang /dmar po dang/ ljang gu dang/sngon po dang/bzhi tshogs pa dang nmams so//de la ser po ni dge 'dun phan chen po'i 'o/ /dmar po ni thams cad yod (7) par smra ba'i 'o/ /ljang gu ni mang pos bkur ba'i'o/ /sngon po ni gnas brtan pa'i'o/* KrS: 346b6–7.



After that in every monastery it should be struck in the mode of the developing stage,<sup>68</sup> in the same way as those adorned with the seven *nāgas*.<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately I was unable to discover what type of decoration the text might refer to when speaking about the seven *nāgas*. It is also not quite clear whether the *gaṇḍī* itself is meant to possess this ornamentation. The manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan does not repeat or specify information about any decorative motifs. I also found it difficult both to draw any parallels between the seven ornaments mentioned by the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* and these seven *nāgas* and to state whether the texts tell about the same type of decoration. As we can see from the relevant passages cited above, the relation or correspondence between the colour scheme and the decorative elements is not explicitly explained in the text.

## 4.2 As depicted on images

It is difficult to overestimate the role of images for studies conducted within a variety of humanistic disciplines, including cultural and historical anthropology, as well as historical studies. The testimonies of images are equally important for material culture studies and when available should necessarily be taken into consideration to fully understand the historical development of a particular tangible object. Although some images may function as direct historical evidence, such a straightforward purpose is certainly not the only one that they may serve. Speaking about the value of images for historical studies, Burke noted:

The uses of images in different periods as objects of devotion or means of persuasion, of conveying information or giving pleasure, allows them to bear witness to past forms of religion, knowledge, belief, delight and so on. Although texts also offer valuable clues, images themselves are the best guide to the power of visual representations in the religious and political life of past cultures.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *Bskyed rim* (Sanskrit. *utpattikrama*) is a specific meditative practice developed within the *Vajrayāna*, or the so-called Tantric Buddhism. It is one of the two main parts of the *annuttarayogatantra*. It represents the first stage of a twofold process. If passed successfully, it is to be followed by the perfection stage (Tib. *rdzogs rim*; Sanskrit. *saṃpannakrama*). The practitioner is in this stage involved in the process of visualizing himself as the divine form of a deity and of his environment as the pure field of the *maṇḍala* of the deity. Garab Dorje 1996: 28; Buswell/Lopez 2014.

<sup>69</sup> *de 'og gtsug lag khang kun du// klu bdun gyis ni brgyan pa ltar// bskyed pa'i rim gyis brdung bar bya* DGS: 303a2.

<sup>70</sup> Burke 2008: 13.



Not all images that I will examine here in connection with the history of the *gaṇḍī* beam possess documental value. The majority of them are Buddhist religious paintings, the so-called *thangkas*, which portray the *gaṇḍī* as an attribute of a certain Buddhist deity. Ruled by the established principles of Buddhist iconography, these images are highly symbolic and multilayered in terms of their conceptual content. The *gaṇḍī* beam is very likely to have never been actually created in the form in which it can be seen in these pictures. However, this does not undermine their importance for the understanding of the dynamics of the social reality that the *gaṇḍī* has been part of.

As Morgan asserts:

What makes an image “religious” is often not simply its subject matter or the intention of the person who created it but the use of the image as well as the context of its deployment and interpretation. In every instance, the image is better understood as an integral part of *visual practice*, which is, properly speaking, a visual mediation of relations among a particular group of persons and the forces that help to organize their world. The medium of belief – using *belief* in the relational sense of a covenant and not merely assent to a proposition – is not only an image but also everything that a person or community does with and by means of an image.<sup>71</sup>

Applying such a practice-oriented discursive approach to the analysis of religious pictures containing images of the *gaṇḍī*, I seek to discover the way in which images may have influenced or modified the cultural context in which the *gaṇḍī* has been practically used and conceptually perceived.

In the Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist tradition, the *gaṇḍī* beam is a regular attribute of the iconography of the protector deity *Pañjara Mahākāla*. In fact, the *gaṇḍī* is a distinctive symbol of this particular form of *Mahākāla*. The tradition of this deity was brought to Tibet from India by the great Buddhist scholar and propagator of the Teaching in Western Tibet, Rin chen bzang po (958–1055). *Pañjara Mahākāla* was favoured by the Tibetan *Sa skya pa* school of Buddhism and became popular with the rulers of the Mongolian Empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and later at the time of Liḃdan *qayan*. For the Mongolian rulers, the deity appeared to be a symbol of Imperial strength and royal legitimacy.<sup>72</sup>

The Tibetan name of the deity is *gur gyi mgon po*. The Tibetan *gur* may be translated as “tent”,<sup>73</sup> while the entire name can be understood as “the protector

<sup>71</sup> Morgan 2005: 55.

<sup>72</sup> Berger 1995: 54–55; Rhie 2004: 47, 52; Beer 2003: 139–140; Grupper 1984: 52–54, 67–69. Relevant information on the topic can also be found in Grupper 1979. This work was unfortunately not available to me in the course of this article’s preparation.

<sup>73</sup> Das 1902: 222.



of the tent". This erroneous translation was commonly accepted by scholars at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and to the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>74</sup> This interpretation of the name might also have been the result of popular etymology disseminated among the bearers of the tradition themselves. In this way, popular etymology may have contributed to the belief that *Pañjara Mahākāla* was of Central Asian origin. The deity was therefore considered to be the patron of the nomadic people who dwelled predominantly in tents.<sup>75</sup> In reality, it was the Sanskrit *pañjara* in the title of the *Vajrapañjaratantra*<sup>76</sup> that came to be translated in Tibetan with the word *gur*. With *pañjara* meaning "a cage" or "a skeleton",<sup>77</sup> this form of *Mahākāla* was thought of as the lord of cemeteries and symbolically, as the deity who leads to the destruction of physical body attachment, which prevents humans from attaining the awakening.<sup>78</sup> Huntington and Bangdel suggest that given the fact that *Pañjara Mahākāla* is "the lord of the exterior vajra enclosure, containing the whole Hevajra mandala palace and the charnel fields, the term *gur* is probably short for *gur khang*, a sacred pavilion".<sup>79</sup>

Although the origin of *Pañjara Mahākāla* is difficult to trace, we can state with a high degree of certainty that the *gaṇḍī* which has become his distinctive attribute is a late addition to his iconography. As an argument for this hypothesis, Tucci suggests the fact that *Mahākāla* already had a specific object in each of his hands: a curved knife (Tib. *gri gug*; Sanskr. *kartari*) in the right and a scull-cup (Tib. *thod pa*; Sanskr. *kapāla*) in the left.<sup>80</sup> The *gaṇḍī* on the *thangka* images and in statuette form is placed horizontally across the two elbow pits of the arms, bent at the elbows.

*Pañjara Mahākāla* is a representative of the pantheon of the Tantric Buddhist tradition. A more rewarding approach would therefore be to understand how such a practical and routine instrument as the *gaṇḍī* became a distinctive feature of one of the most powerful transcendent protectors of Buddhism. One way toward this status might have already begun during the era of *nikāya* Buddhism. The functions of the *gaṇḍī* were very likely gradually turning from utilitarian to ritualistic. This means that the beam was no longer

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<sup>74</sup> Grünwedel 1900: 177; Waddell 1895: 70.

<sup>75</sup> Beer 2003: 139. Schumann writes that, meaning "a cage", *pañjara* refers to the carcase of nomadic tents. Schumann 1993: 196.

<sup>76</sup> The *Vajrapañjaratantra* (Tib. *rdo rje gur gyi rgyud*) belongs to the *Hevajratantra* cycle and is classified as a non-dual *annuttarayoga*. Nientiedt 2007: 59.

<sup>77</sup> Monier-Williams 1974: 575.

<sup>78</sup> Tucci 1989: 124–127.

<sup>79</sup> Huntington/Bangdel 2003: 335.

<sup>80</sup> Tucci 1989: 124–127.



struck for the purpose of actually gathering monks together or for informing them about important events. Its usage may have been integrated in a sequence of compulsory steps of certain communal procedures as a traditional, symbolic element already deprived of the majority of its pragmatics. Concurrently, the instrument gained ever more conceptual value as it became symbolically denser.

The fixation on the qualitative change concerning the notion of functional use to which the *gaṇḍī* was supposed to be put occurred also in textual form. The *Gaṇḍīsūtra*, classified among the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, presents a vivid example of the completion of this process.

In the text of the *sūtra*, an extended passage explains a protracted range of powers with which the *gaṇḍī* was believed to be endowed:

It is the perfect protector of all sentient beings by the material embodiment of the sound of the *Prajñāpāramitā* that is the mother of all sentient beings, the creator of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* worshiped, revered, contemplated and practiced by *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *samyaksambuddhas*; the total destroyer of all the *tīrthikas*; the pacifier of all angry thoughts; the suppressor of sinful thoughts; the perfect clearer of aggressive thoughts; the eminent destroyer of the delusive thoughts; the complete banisher of the lustful thoughts; the excellent protector of the *bodhicitta*; the encourager of the thoughts about awakening; the attender of the Buddha appearance; the pacifier and destroyer of all fights, splits, quarrels, arguments, sufferings, bad dreams; the subduer of incidental diseases and deaths; the subduer of the untimely deaths, droughts and others; the pacifier of the hostile armies; the perfect destroyer of demons; the dispeller of torments; the efficient multiplier of the great fortune; the bestower of long life without diseases; the queller of the fear of death; the expander of freedom and auspiciousness; to those who heard it and rejoiced [it is] the real bestower of the results like the wish-fulfilling gem. The mother, the *Prajñāpāramitā* resides in the form of the *gaṇḍī*.<sup>81</sup>

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**81** 'di ni sems can thams cad kyi ma sangs rgyas dang/byang chub sems dpa' skyed pa/nyan thos dang/rang sangs rgyas dang/yang dag par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas thams cad kyis phyag (4) byas pa/mchod pa/bsams pa/bsgoms pa/shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa sgra'i gzugs kyis sems can thams cad yongs su skyong bar byed pa/mu stegs pa thams cad rnam par 'jig par byed pa/sdang ba'i sems 'dul bar byed pa/sdig pa'i sems 'joms par byed pa/zhe sdang ba'i sems rnam par (5) sel bar byed pa/gti mug gi sems rab tu 'jig par byed pa/'dod chags kyi sems mam par spong bar byed pa/byang chub kyi sems yongs su skyong bar byed pa/sangs rgyas kyi sems 'phel bar byed pa/sangs rgyas 'byung ba bsten par byed pa/'thab pa dang/'gyed pa dang/'khrug pa dang/rtsod pa dang/(6) sdug bsngal ba dang/rmi lam ngan pa dang/kun 'dul ba thams cad 'jig par byed pa/glo bur gyi nad dang/'chi ba zhi bar byed pa dang/dus ma yin par 'chi ba dang/ri mas la sogs pa zhi bar byed pa/pha rol gyi dpung 'dul bar byed pa/bdud mam par 'jig par byed pa/gdung ba sel bar byed pa/skal ba (7) bzang po yang dag par 'phel bar byed pa/tshe dang nad med pa ster bar byed pa/'chi ba'i 'jigs pa zhi bar byed pa/thar ba dang dpal 'phel bar byed pa/gang gis thos nas rjes su yi rang ba de la yid bzhin gyi nor bu ltar 'bras bu rab tu ster ba/yum shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa gaN DI'i (302b1) gzugs kyis bzhugs so zhes thos pa dang/DGS: 302a3–302b1.



Having been involved in the elaborated structure of the profound *Mahāyāna* philosophy, the *gaṇḍī* came to be closely associated with its central and most powerful concept, that of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. As a physical embodiment of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, the *gaṇḍī* was no longer treated as a mere wooden idiophone calling monks to gather together, but as a sacred religious item, an object of reverence and worship.

Other sources referring to the *gaṇḍī* also contain passages which mention the relationship between the beam and the *Prajñāpāramitā* and its consequences. The *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* reads as follows:

Through the sound of the *gaṇḍī* being struck the voice of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is being naturally uttered. By the sound of the *gaṇḍī* being struck benedictions will be pronounced. In the monastery in which the *gaṇḍī* is struck monks and nuns, male and female lay followers will completely overcome all the illnesses. They will become entirely awakened.<sup>82</sup>

Grags pa rgyal mtshan notes only a couple of sentences in this regard:

As the *gaṇḍī* expresses the essence of the *Prajñāpāramitā*, it should be venerated very much. In the same text it is said – the mother *Prajñāpāramitā* resides in the form of the *gaṇḍī*.<sup>83</sup>

*Thangkas* and statuettes that present *Pañjara Mahākāla* and originate from Tibet and Mongolia have been preserved in abundance.<sup>84</sup> They date to different time periods and represent various styles of fine art. Of course, we cannot judge the material and precise size of the *gaṇḍī* from these images of the deity. Nonetheless, they may be used as sources of information about the content of the beam and its form.

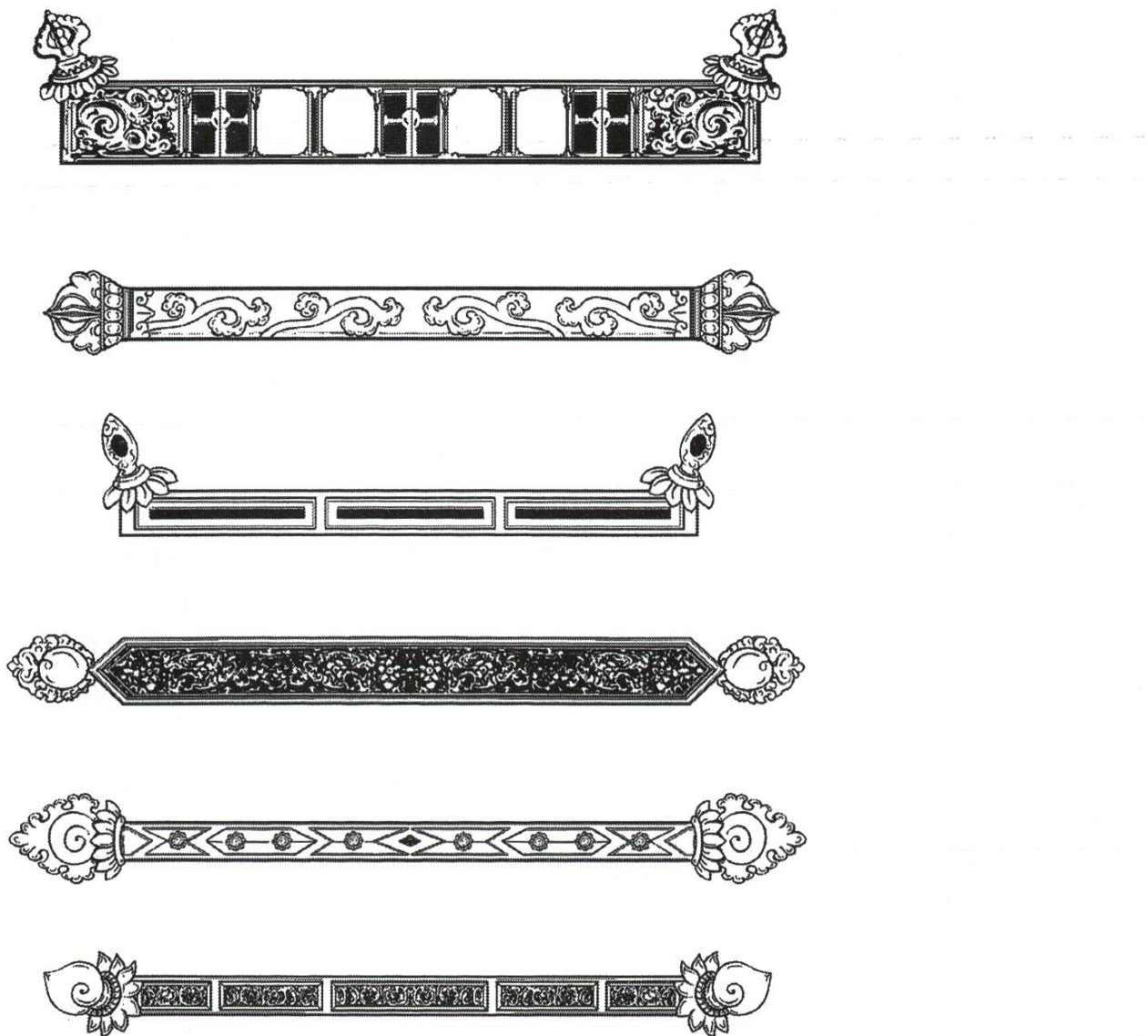
The content of the *gaṇḍīs* encountered on the images is quite varied. The ornamentation often covers the entire length of the beam and is sometimes simply a floral or geometrical motif. In other cases, the images of several fortress gateways that are believed to conceal the armies of gods and *asuras* are depicted on the body of the beam. The ends of the *gaṇḍī* as they are shown in religious images are also shaped in different ways, taking the form of *vajras*, lotus-

<sup>82</sup> *gaN+DI brdungs ba'i sgras shes* (4) *rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i sgra'i rang bzhin du brjod par 'gyur ro// gaN+DI brdungs ba'i sgras bkra shis kyi tshigs su 'byung bar 'gyur ro// gang du gaN+DI brdungs ba'i gtsug lag khang de ru dge slong dang dge slong ma dang dge bsnyen dang dge bsnyen ma nad thams cad nye* (5) *bar zhi bar byed do// byang chub tu yongs su 'gyur bar byed do//KrS: 346b3–5.*

<sup>83</sup> *gaN+Di ni yum sher phyin gyi ngo bor gsungs pas shin tu gus par bya ste/de nyid las yum shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa gaN+Di'i gzugs kyis bzhugs so zhes so/Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 5.*

<sup>84</sup> For examples, see <http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setid=265%26page=1> or Rhie 2004: 46–91.

mounted jewels or scrolling *makara*-tails.<sup>85</sup> Investigation of the images leads us to the conclusion that the manner of depicting the *gaṇḍī* has not been very strictly determined, or that a number of traditions for its presentation existed. This is important to highlight that, as an attribute of *Pañjara Mahākāla*, the *gaṇḍī* was generally depicted in a richly adorned form (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Different forms of iconographic representation of the *gaṇḍī* beam.<sup>86</sup>

The two dimensional images of the *thangkas* do not allow us to state with certainty what the exact form of the beam is. The *gaṇḍī* is depicted on them as

<sup>85</sup> Beer 2003: 140; Willson/Brauen 2000: 564.

<sup>86</sup> The illustration is made by P. Sobkowiak on the basis of the material provided by Beer and original Tibetan *thangkas*, available via [himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org). Beer 2003: 139; <http://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=265>.



a long and narrow rectangle, the width of which is in most cases the same along the entire length.

Interestingly, the visual representations of the *gaṇḍī* found on the images of *Pañjara Mahākāla*, although generally pertaining to the same tradition of Tantric Buddhism, do not resemble the descriptions of the beam included in the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma*.

The history of *Pañjara Mahākāla* visual representation in Mongolia has not yet been thoroughly studied. Yet in my investigation I came across visual evidence testifying to the special attention that has been devoted to the *gaṇḍī* as a characteristic feature of *Pañjara Mahākāla* in the Mongolian Buddhist tradition. One of the colour images, with which a manuscript copy of the Mongolian Kanjur preserved in the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ulan-Ude, Buryatia, Russian Federation is illuminated, provides a typical iconographic representation of *Pañjara Mahākāla*. Remarkable is a title written in classical Mongolian in golden ink. The title reads *gandi maq-a kala*.<sup>87</sup> Being principally defined by the presence of the *gaṇḍī* among its attributes, in this case *Pañjara Mahākāla* even borrowed his name from the instrument. The data currently available to me are not sufficient to draw any further conclusions about this specific designation. Further research is needed to establish whether the deity has been commonly known under this name in Mongolia or the example provided by the Kanjur illustration is rare and possibly pertains to some particular tradition.

## 5 Manipulations of the *gaṇḍī*

### 5.1 Modes of striking the *gaṇḍī*

First and most basic among the functions of the *gaṇḍī* is its striking. We may assume that initially this used to be a simple procedure, the major goal of which was the extraction of a loud sound out of the *gaṇḍī*. The sources relate some special modes of striking, the application of which depended on the occasion for which the beam was used. Original texts are not in accord with regard to these special occasions. As I mentioned earlier, the *Poṣadhavastu* presents five such

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<sup>87</sup> The image can be found on the last page (373a) of the volume 23 ('a) of the *Dandir-a* section of the Kanjur. I would like to express my gratitude to Nikolai Tsyrempilov, who found the picture and made it available to me.



occasions, which correspond to the five types of the *gaṇḍī* distinguished by the text. The beam is reported to have been struck differently on these five occasions:

Therefore the *gaṇḍī* for gathering monks together [is struck in] three successions and three hard strokes.<sup>88</sup> The *gaṇḍī* for communal sittings [is struck in] one succession and three hard strokes. The *gaṇḍī* of the dead [is struck as] an unadorned one.<sup>89</sup> As the *gaṇḍī* of the renunciation a beggar's staff<sup>90</sup> [is struck]. The *gaṇḍī* for the dangerous situations [is struck] until it is enough.<sup>91</sup>

In the treatise by the first Dalai Lama Dge 'dun grub pa (1391–1474), titled *Legs par gsungs pa'i dam pa'i chos 'dul ba mtha' dag gi snyig po'i don legs par bshad pa rin po che'i 'pheng ba zhes bya ba'i smad cha la shog grags*, we find a detailed commentary on the abovementioned five modes of striking the *gaṇḍī*. The text in the most part agrees with the Tibetan version of the *Poṣadhavastu*. However, it also provides additional information about different traditions of striking for the second, third and fourth occasions:

In order to gather the entire monastic community together at the time of a big assembly three successions and after them three loud strokes are to be made. As to the striking of the *gaṇḍī* in order to perform the duties – one succession and three hard strokes. From some other tradition, it is known that in order to perform the duties – three successions and two hard strokes. As to the *gaṇḍī* being struck for taking away the corpse of the dead on the shoulders – an unadorned one, that is, it should be struck in successions for a short time and after that no hard stroke is to be given. According to some other tradition, when the *gaṇḍī* is struck for the dead, it is one succession and one hard stroke. In order to gather the renunciants the *gaṇḍī*'s task is fulfilled with a mendicant's staff. According to some other tradition, the small *gaṇḍī* is struck for the renunciants. When the *gaṇḍī* is

<sup>88</sup> There is a difference in the transmission of this particular mode of striking the *gaṇḍī* between the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts of the *Poṣadhavastu*. According to the Sanskrit version, when using the *gaṇḍī* for calling the monks to communal sittings (Sanskrit. *karmagaṇḍī*; Tib. *las kyi gaN+DI*), it should be struck in three successions of strokes and two strong strokes. According to the Tibetan text, the number of successions in this case is one and the number of strong strokes is three. Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 748; PV: 136a2.

<sup>89</sup> The Tibetan *byi bo* corresponds here to the Sanskrit *muṇḍikā*. Hu-von Hinüber equates the form *muṇḍikā* with *muṇḍa* and considers that the Tibetan iteration was intended to convey the first meaning of the latter, namely, “shaved, bald”. Monier-Williams 1974: 822; Hu-von Hinüber 1991: 751. I suggest taking into consideration such meanings of the Sanskrit word as “stripped of top leaves or branches, lopped (as a tree), the trunk of a lopped tree”. Monier-Williams 1974: 822.

<sup>90</sup> Also *'khar gsil* (Sanskrit. *khakkhara*). Monier-Williams 1974: 334; Hu-von Hinüber 1994: 292–293.

<sup>91</sup> *de la dge 'dun bsdu ba'i gaN+DI de ni rgyud gsum dang tog gsum mo// las kyi gaN+DI de ni rgyud gcig dang tog gsum mo// shi ba'i gaN+DI de ni byi bo'o// spong ba'i gaN+DI de ni khar sillo// gnod pa byung ba'i gaN+DI de ni ji tsam gyis chog pa'o/* PV: 136a2–3.



struck at the time of hail and similar dangerous occasions, it should be struck until it is enough.<sup>92</sup>

The text specifies at least one more occasion on which the *gaṇḍī* is to be used:

In order to gather the monks for a meal the *gaṇḍī* and the small *gaṇḍī* is struck.<sup>93</sup>

The text also contains the instructions for where the beam should be placed or kept in the monastery, by whom and how exactly the successions and hard strokes should be performed:

As to the place of keeping the *gaṇḍī*, put it in some ascended place like above the monastery gates or so. As to the performer of the striking, it is struck by somebody keeping at least the vows of an *upāsaka*. As to the way of striking, he should come up to the roof of a granary or other elevated place and at first bow to the three jewels and make three *shangs tsha*.<sup>94</sup> After that three successions and three very loud strokes are done or alternatively three successions and two strokes are performed. In every succession there are 35 strokes. 108 strokes are made in the same way as with the full moon.<sup>95</sup>

**92** 'dus pa chen po'i tshe dge 'dun thams cad bsdu ba'i phyir ni// rgyud gsum dang de nyid kyi mjug tu tog sgra chen po lan gsum bya'o// las bya ba'i don du gaN+DI (3) brdung ba ni rgyud gcig dang tog gsum mo// lugs kha cig las ni las bya ba'i don du rgyud gsum dang tog gnyis shes'o// shi ba la phrag pas phung po dbyung ba'i don du gaN+DI brdung ba ni byi bo ste rgyud nyi tshe brdung zhing mjug tu tog mi brdung de// lugs kha cig las (4) ni shi ba'i don du gaN+DI brdung ba la ni rgyud gcig dang tog pa cig go zhi'o//spong ba pa bsdu ba'i don du 'khar gsal gyis gaN+DI'i bya ba bya'o// lugs kha cig las ni spong ba pa'i don du gaN+DI chung ngu brdung ngo zhe'o//ser ba la sogs pa'i gnod pa byung ba'i tshe gaN+DI (5) brdung ba la ni ji tsam gyis chog pa'i bar du brdung bar bya'o/Dge 'dun grub pa: 317b2–5.

**93** dge 'dun rnams zan gyi phyir 'du ba'i don du ni gaN+DI dang gaN+DI chung ngu gnyis ka brdung ngo/ Dge 'dun grub pa: 317b5.

**94** Although this particular mode of the *gaṇḍī* treatment is mentioned in several sources I did not manage to find any explanation of it. The orthography of this expression in the Tibetan translations of the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* varies. The *sDde gde* as well as the *sNar thang* and *Co ne* redactions read *shad rtsa*, while in the *sTog* palace version it is written as *shing rtsa*, and in the *lHa sa* redaction – *shangs tsha*. DGS: 303a2; NGS: 469b4; CGS: 359b5; HGS: 561b3; TGS: 286a6. I managed to find the only comment on this action in the monograph by Pozdneev. He describes the procedure of the *gaṇḍī* striking that he observed in one of the Mongolian monasteries and says that before making three successions containing 35 strokes and three separate, louder strokes of the *gaṇḍī* the monk performed three *shantsza* meaning that he passed the striker over the beam as if caressing it. Pozdneev 1887: 347.

**95** gaN+DI bzahag pa'i gnas ni/sgo khang gi steng sogs (5) mtho sar bzahag/brdung ba po ni dge bsnyen yan chad sdom ldan gyis brdung/brdung ba'i tshul ni// bang steng la sogs pa mtho sar phyin nas/dang por dkon mchog la phyag byas shang tsha lan gsum byas nas rgyud gsum dang tog sgra chen po gsum bya ba'am/yang na rgyud (6) gsum dang tog gnyis bya/rgyud re re la sum cu rtsa nga nga ste/brgya rtsa brgyad kyi tshul du bya la de yang zla ba nya ba ltar bya'o/Dge 'dun grub pa: 118b4–6.



In his manual, Grags pa rgyal mtshan also refers to these questions, but provides an even more detailed explanation regarding the successions and hard strokes:

As to the place in which it is put, it is installed on a platform above the monastery gates, an elevated place in the center of the monastery or similar places.<sup>96</sup> As to the one who strikes – a fully-ordained monk, a novice or a lay devotee observing the *poṣadha*. As to the way of striking, after coming up to the ascended place such as the roof of a building hearable for everybody or similar at first he bows to the three jewels. After that he makes *shangs tsha* three times and in order to gather for food and drink consumption performs three successions and at the end three very loud strokes. In order to call for *poṣadha* or similar communal sittings as well as for listening to the teachings he makes three ‘recitational’ successions and three very loud strokes or alternatively three successions and two strokes. In every succession there are 35 strokes made by the hammer. Namely, from the first till the hundred and eighth every next stroke is louder than the previous one. Then every next stroke is quieter than the previous one – certain persons instruct so. According to this, in three successions and three hard strokes there is the usual striking series of 108.<sup>97</sup>

We can once again see from the sources that there were different traditions of the *gaṇḍī* treatment. It must also be noted that the *gaṇḍī* is said to be used not only before rituals or official gatherings of the monastic community, but also before mundane activities such as having a meal.

## 5.2 Ritual treatment

The usage of the *gaṇḍī* in connection with the *poṣadha* ritual presents a special case. It is the only ritual that is distinguished by the sources that speak about the *gaṇḍī* being struck for communal sittings. The *gaṇḍī* striking was obviously considered an important part of the ritual, because shorter or longer references

<sup>96</sup> Compare with the *Gaṇḍīsūtra*: 'og tu 'ang de yi khri (303a1)/bya ba// gtsug lag khang gi sgo stengs sam// yang na dbus ma'i steng du bya. DGS: 302b7–303a1.

<sup>97</sup> de 'jog pa'i gnas ni/gtsug lag khang gi sgo khang gi steng ngam/gtsug lag khang dbus ma'i steng la sogs par khri la gzhas go/[...] /brdung pa po ni/dge slong nam dag gam/dge tshul nam dag gam/dge bsnyen gso sbyong la gnas pa'o// ji ltar brdung pa'i tshul ni/kun gyis thos pa'i gnas khang steng la sogs pa mtho sar phyin nas/dang por dkon mchog gsum la phyag byas la/shangs tsha lan gsum byas nas dge 'dun bza' btung la bsdu ba'i phyir ni rgyud gsum dang mjug tu tog sgra chen po gsum bya la/gso sbyong la sogs pa'i las dang chos nyan pa la bsdu ba'i phyir ni bzlas pa'i rgyud (3) gsum dang/tog sgra chen po gsum bya ba'am yang na rgyud gsum dang tog gnyis bya'o// rgyud re re la yang gaN g.yog gis sum cu rtsa lnga re brdeg cing/de yang dang po nas bco brgyad kyi bar du rang rang gi snga ma las phyi ma sgra che bar brdung zhing/de nas rang rang gi snga ma las phyi ma sgra chung bar brdung ngo zhes kha cig bzhes do//de ltar na rgyud gsum dang tog gsum yod pa nams la spyir brdeg thebs brgya rtsa brgyad do/Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 2–3.



to the beam can be found only in the sources that are entirely devoted to the *poṣadha* such as, for example, the *Poṣadhavastu*, the *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba'i gzhi gsum gyi cho ga la sogs pa so sor thar pa'i blang dor gyi gnas nams mdor bsdus pa by 'Dul ba 'dzin pa grags pa rgyal mtshan* or the *Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba'i cho ga sdom brtson dgyes byed* by Ching su tsug thu no mon han blo bzang nor bu shes rab. For the *poṣadha* ceremony, the *gaṇḍī* striking is an important but ultimately supportive element that signifies the beginning of the main act. Yet, there is one ritual performance in which the beam plays a major role, i.e., the rite of the *gaṇḍī*'s consecration (Tib. *rab gnas*).

Consecrations are special procedures that constitute an important part of the ritual routine of Buddhist monasteries. As Bentor states: “[n]ot only are consecrations one of the rituals most frequently performed by reincarnated lamas and abbots, they are also the means by which religious objects are made sacred or holy.”<sup>98</sup> The consecration of the *gaṇḍī* is described by the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* in only three syntagmas:

The body of a thoroughly taught *dharma* is virtuous in its being not generated, non-destructable, and unborn from the origin.<sup>99</sup>

This short instruction pertaining to the consecration ritual has drawn special attention from scholars, as it is provided by the *sūtra* genre-affiliated text. This is rather untypical and appears to be a unique case. Bentor specifically refers to this passage when discussing the problem of the existence of the so-called “*sūtra*-style consecration”, as opposed to the consecration procedures found in abundance in the *Tantras*.<sup>100</sup>

The manual by Grags pa rgyal mtshan appears to mention the same procedure as the *Gaṇḍīsūtra*. It is, however, presented by the treatise in a slightly different way:

The consecration ceremony is to be conducted by displaying devotion saying: “The body of the *dharma* is devoid of arising, ceasing and residing, unborn from the origin and virtuous.”<sup>101</sup>

Both fragments regard the *dharmakāya* – characterizing it in the first case as non-created and non-destructible, as well as virtuous by being primordially non-

<sup>98</sup> Bentor 1996a: 190.

<sup>99</sup> *shin tu bstan pa'i chos kyi sku// skyed pa ma yin 'jig byed min// gdod nas ma skyes par dge ba/DGS: 303a1.*

<sup>100</sup> Bentor 1992: 2–3.

<sup>101</sup> *chos kyi sku skye 'gag gnas gsum gyis stongs pa gdod nas ma skyes shing dge ba'o//zhes mos pas rab gnas byas pa'o/Grags pa rgyal mtshan: 2.*



arising, and in the second as devoid of the three processes of arising, ceasing and remaining, primordially non-arising and virtuous. The very procedure of the consecration is not entirely clear from these passages. Commenting on the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* citation, Bentor maintains that the consecration “consists in the recitation of three lines of verse”.<sup>102</sup> The version by Grags pa rgyal mtshan can also be understood in this way.

The *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* offers its own, much more elaborate variant of the *gaṇḍī* consecration. The procedure described by the text proves to be a regular consecration ritual typical of the *Tantra* literature. It includes inviting the *Vajrasattva* deity by visualizing it in the form of the *samayasattva* from its seed syllable, empowering it with the water of the ritual vase by reciting a particular mantra and offering the five dairy products, five nectars and others, worshiping with flowers and so on.<sup>103</sup>

The performance of the consecration ritual of the *gaṇḍī* beam indicates that the instrument has been classified among sacred objects as opposed to it being an ordinary utilitarian tool. Already at the time when the *Gaṇḍīsūtra* was created, that is, likely the first centuries CE, the *gaṇḍī* had the status of a highly venerated religious artefact which was deeply embedded in Buddhist philosophical narratives. It is these narratives that had imbued an instrument like the *gaṇḍī* with

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**102** Bentor 1992: 3

**103** For details of the standard consecration rituals, see Bentor 1996a: 97–117; Bentor 1996b: 290–299. The performance of the *gaṇḍī* consecration is described by the *Kriyāsaṃgrahanāma* in the following way:

de (347a) nas slob dpon rdo rje sems dpa'i bdag nyid kyis skad gcig gis zla ba la gnas pa'i d+hIH yig las bskyed pa'i gaN+DI'i nram par bsgoms la rang gi snying ga'i sa bon gyi 'od zer gyis shes kyi gaN+DI gdan drangs la dam tshig sems dpa'i nang du bsgoms nas rang gi sa bon gyis lhag par gnas pa'i bum pa'i chus mngon par dbang bskur la/ oM d+hIH shru ti smri ti ma ti bi dza pra dznyA pra dznyA blo N+hA ra d+hA ra Ni swA hA/ 'dis lan brgya rtsa brgyad bzlas par bya'o//de nas ba'i nram lnga dang bdud rtsi lnga dang dri lnga la sogs pas dbang bskur nas slar yang bkra shis kyis tshigs su bcad pa sngon du 'gro bas bum pa'i chus dbang bskur nas me tog la sogs pas yang dag par mchod nas oM ba dzra bhA Sha raM swA hA zhes pa'i sngags kyis kyang lan bdun lhag par gnas par bya'o/ /de nas paM yig gis bon las skyes pa'i the'ur nram par bsgoms la/ de nas ye shes sems dpa' rang gi snying ga'i sa bon gyi 'od zer gyis gdan drangs la dam tshig sems dpa'i nang du bsgom par bya'o/ /rang gi sngags kyis lhag par gnas pa'i bum pa'i chus dbang bskur la me tog la sogs pas yang dag par mchod nas/ oM ba dzra ti? d+haM swA hA/ 'dis lan brgya rtsa brgyad yongs su bzlas par bya'o//de nas lcags kyis mes bsrung ba byas nas mchod yon la sogs pa phul la me tog la sogs pas yang dag par mchod nas lha khang gi nang gi dbang ldan gyi zur du rin po che'i chu skyes kyis steng du bzhugs par bya'o/ /ye d+ha rMA la sogs pa'i tshigs su bcad pas rab tu gnas par bya'o//oM d+hIH h+rIH shru ti smr-I ti ma ti bi dza ye swA hA/ 'dis lan brgya rtsa brgyad yongs su bzlas par bya'o KrS: 346b–347a.



so-called “attached” value, in addition to the inherent value that is “intrinsic in the fabric of an object itself” and “established by the rarity of the materials used”,<sup>104</sup> or the complexity of its production process. The attached value does not depend directly on the physical properties of an object and due to its higher variability, is more difficult to estimate precisely. In other words, such symbolic religious objects mean “different things at different times, and can best be understood in the context of the historical process of their development”.<sup>105</sup> In the case of the *gaṇḍī*, textual records seem to be the exclusive sources for both the physical features of the beam and its attached value, revealed through people’s attitudes toward the object. The different types of evidence that European scholars obtained and which are available to us for the study of the *gaṇḍī*’s history date back only to the end of the nineteenth century and later years.

## 6 Testimonies of modernity

Although described in Buddhist literature, the *gaṇḍī* striking ceremony is rarely mentioned in historical or scientific sources. I only managed to discover one account of this ceremony, given in a monograph by the Russian scholar Pozdneev, who depicts the instrument as a faceted quadrangular wooden beam made predominantly of red sandalwood, with a smooth surface and the images of a frog carved onto both ends. Pozdneev states that the length of the beam equals five ells (Rus. *lokot*)<sup>106</sup> with its perimeter being three thirds of an *arshin*.<sup>107</sup> The *gaṇḍī*-striker, according to Pozdneev, looked like a small round stick made of the same red sandalwood as the beam itself, having a smooth surface and images of mouse heads on both ends. Pozdneev further states that the procedure of the *gaṇḍī* striking starts with a monk coming up to the *büreein shata* (Mong. *büriy-e-yin šatu*)<sup>108</sup> and carrying the beam on his left shoulder. The monk makes three bows in northerly direction, takes the beam’s striker in his right hand and makes three *shantsza*, which are followed by three separate

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**104** Prown 1982: 3.

**105** Kieschnick 2003: 85

**106** *Lokot*’ was a unit of measurement used in medieval Russia. One *lokot*’ equals approximately 54 cm.

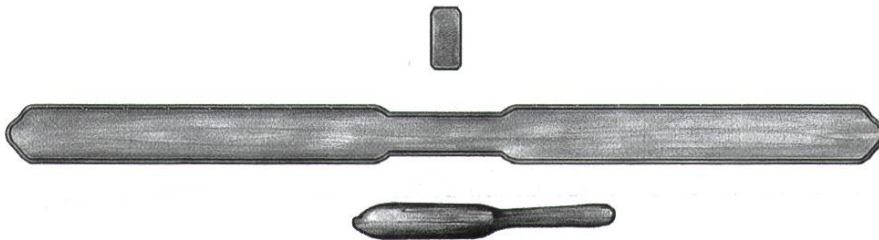
**107** *Arshin* is a unit of measurement that has been commonly used in Russia since the second half of the sixteenth century. It measures around 70 cm.

**108** *Büriy-e-yin šatu* is a wooden raised platform erected on four poles at a height of 1.5 or 2 *sazhen*’, which is approximately three to four metres. A wooden ladder is attached to the platform. The platform is used to call the monks of a monastery for gatherings and services. Pozdneev 1887: 30.



strong strokes and three successions of 35 strokes each. Pozdneev goes on to say that the summoning of the monks for the *poṣadha* ritual was carried out with the help of this special device in the Mongolian monasteries in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>109</sup> In his monograph, Pozdneev provides a detailed description of the economic, household, ritualistic and educational routine of the Mongolian Buddhist monasteries of this period. However, the *gaṇḍī* beam is mentioned only once in connection with the *poṣadha*. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the ceremony of the *gaṇḍī* striking was performed exclusively as an initial part of the *poṣadha* ritual.<sup>110</sup>

The appearance of the *gaṇḍī* was reported in yet another academic work dating to the beginning of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his monograph devoted to the Sanskrit text of the *Gaṇḍīstotragāthā* and preserved in a Chinese transcription, Staël-Holstein presents a drawing by S.M. Dudin that shows the *gaṇḍī* of the Saint-Petersburg Buddhist temple and its striker, and which provides measurements for both instruments. According to Staël-Holstein, the *gaṇḍī* in question was made of palisander, 173 cm in length and 5.5 cm thick. Regarding its width, in the widest area it measured 10.5 cm. The length of the *gaṇḍī*-striker equalled 43.7 cm with its circumference being 5.8 cm at the thickest point. The picture shows that neither the *gaṇḍī* nor the striker had any decorations at their ends (see Figure 3).<sup>111</sup>



**Figure 3:** Illustration of the *gaṇḍī* and the *gaṇḍī*-striker used in the Buddhist temple of Saint-Petersburg in the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>112</sup>

In her article on the *gaṇḍī* Helffer provides us with a photograph of a chanting master holding the instrument. The photograph was taken in Darjeeling, West Bengal, India in August 1979.<sup>113</sup> The *gaṇḍī* presented in the image has no decorations. Its surface is smooth and of the same width along its entire length.

<sup>109</sup> Pozdneev 1887: 346–347.

<sup>110</sup> Pozdneev 1887: 346–347.

<sup>111</sup> Staël-Holstein 1913: XXI.

<sup>112</sup> The illustration was made by P. Sobkowiak from the drawing by S.M. Dudin.

<sup>113</sup> Helffer 1983: 119.



It looks very similar to the instrument currently used in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery in Ulan Bator.

I took a photograph of the *gaṇḍī* in June 2011 while conducting field research on the *poṣadha* tradition in contemporary Mongolia. The ritual of *poṣadha* is a strictly monastic, closed ceremony. No lay person is allowed to be present at the ceremony or to take part in it. For this reason it is impossible for a researcher to have first-hand experience of the performance and to give an eyewitness account of it. One is, however, allowed to observe how the only public part of the *poṣadha* is conducted. This particular part consists of the *gaṇḍī* beam-striking rite.

It is not uncommon that a ritualized action is preceded and immediately followed by specific acts. Although those acts are not essential for the very process of ritualization, they serve to mark the boundaries between non-ritualized and ritualized activity.<sup>114</sup>

In the case of the *poṣadha* as it is performed in contemporary Mongolia, the most prominent boundary-marking act of the ritual is the *gaṇḍī* beam-striking ceremony.

The ceremony is performed in four steps: a novice monk carries the beam called in Mongolian *gandi* or *gandi mod* (ModMong.) and a fully ordained monk carries a beam-striker, they ascend to an elevated place or raised platform (see Figure 4); the fully ordained monk who is to perform the striking makes



**Figure 4:** *Gaṇḍī*-striking ceremony performed on 30 June 2011 in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery in Ulan Bator. The monks ascend to an elevated platform.

<sup>114</sup> Humphrey/Laidlaw 1994: 77.



three bows (see Figure 5); the fully ordained monk takes the beam and the beam-striker and strikes the beam in a special manner 108 times (see Figure 6); the monks descend from the platform and proceed directly to the temple in which the *poṣadha* ceremony is to be conducted.

At least in some monasteries, the tradition of the *gaṇḍī*-beam striking is maintained. The monks whom I interviewed in the course of field research conducted in summer 2011 in the monasteries of *Gandantegchenlin*, *Dashchoilin*, *Betüv*, *Amarbayasgalant* of Mongolia and the *Ivolginskii dacan* in Buryatia



**Figure 5:** *Gaṇḍī*-striking ceremony performed on 30 June 2011 in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery in Ulan Bator. A fully ordained monk is making three bows praising the Buddha.



**Figure 6:** *Gaṇḍī*-striking ceremony performed on 30 June 2011 in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery in Ulan Bator. A fully ordained monk is performing the *gaṇḍī* beam striking.



(Russian Federation) confirmed the usage of the *gaṇḍī* in their monasteries' activities. Their reports which specify those activities, however, differ. The monks from the *Amarbayasgalant* and *Gandantegchenlin* monasteries claimed that in their communities the *gaṇḍī* is struck solely before the *poṣadha*, and serves to mark the beginning of this ritual alone. Meanwhile my respondents in the *Dashchoilin* and *Betüv* monasteries stated that the *gaṇḍī* is used on various occasions, and its application is not exclusively associated with the *poṣadha* ritual.

Speaking about manuals which describe details of the *gaṇḍī* application and which are currently used in the Mongolian Buddhist monasteries, only one of my respondents mentioned that kind of texts. He was a *dge slong* of the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery of Ulan Bator called Gantulga. In the course of our conversation he gave an extended description of the manner in which the *gaṇḍī* should be manipulated. Responding to my question on the source of these data he only referred to the existence of a number of Tibetan texts providing the information on the *gaṇḍī* handling but did not specify them by titles. Inquiring into the corpus of texts on which modern Mongolian Buddhist monks rely when studying the rules and mastering the methods of the *gaṇḍī*'s physical treatment should therefore be considered as a promising direction of further research on the cultural history of the instrument.

As I observed in the course of my fieldwork in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery of Ulan Bator, the appearance of the *gaṇḍī* does not correspond with the descriptions found in the sources cited above. Furthermore the beam does not look similar to the image presented by Staël-Holstein and is not exactly like the instrument mentioned by Pozdneev. It is a smooth beam without any decorations, painted or carved and has the same width along its entire length. It is a prism in cross-section. The *gaṇḍī*-striker is round in cross-section and has the same circumference along its entire length. Its ends are not cut perpendicularly to the axis but made round in the form of hemispheres. As the beam itself, the striker is not adorned in any way.

The usage of the beam, or, at least, the way in which it is used before the *poṣadha*, is in the main symbolical and ritualistic. The purpose of the performance can be determined as purely spiritual. This coincides well with what is written about the instrument in the original sources. My respondent in the *Gandantegchenlin* monastery informed me that the beam is a material representation of the *Prajñyāpāramitā*. For this reason, the instrument came to possess certain intangible, metaphysical qualities. As such, the sound of the *gaṇḍī* brings good fortune to all living creatures and helps to circumvent bad destinies.

The fact that the striking of the beam is considered to be an obligatory part of the *poṣadha* might be related to the special importance attributed to the latter.



The proper performance of the *poṣadha* is of great significance for the monastic community to prove and maintain its legitimacy and authenticity. Although the *gaṇḍī*-striking has nothing to do with the content of the ritual it is obviously believed to be an indispensable element of its structure. It might be that without the *gaṇḍī*-striking preceding it the very ritual of *poṣadha* would be regarded as incomplete, and therefore not valid.

## 7 Conclusion

The modern Mongolian tradition of the *gaṇḍī* treatment is first of all based on the attached, symbolical value of the artefact. The transcendent powers attributed to the beam, thanks to its incorporation into the complex system of Buddhist philosophy and mythology, are actively exploited by religious specialists, that is, the Buddhist clergy, and are also readily appreciated by the laity. Used exclusively for the performance of inner, monastic rituals such as the *poṣadha*, the *gaṇḍī* facilitated interaction between monkhood and lay followers on the social level, and between humans and divine entities on the transcendent level. To me, these functions of the object were most visible when I observed the final phase of the *gaṇḍī* striking, performed as an introductory part of the *poṣadha* in the *Gandantegchenlin*. While the monk performed the striking a group of lay devotees gathered below the platform on which he conducted the ceremony. After he finished and went down from the platform, the people rushed to him one by one to get the blessing which he granted by touching their bowed heads with the *gaṇḍī*-striker (see Figure 7).



**Figure 7:** A monk blesses lay people with the *gaṇḍī*-striker. *Gandantegchenlin* monastery, Ulan Bator, June 2011.



Another important function of the artefact is its role in creating and manifesting communal identity.<sup>115</sup> By keeping and applying the *gaṇḍī* as required by the Buddhist monastic tradition, as established in theoretical texts and over time and through practice of ritual performances, the Mongolian clergy seeks to demonstrate the genuine character of the monastic community and its spiritual maturity. It furthermore attempts to confirm the legitimate status of the community and its members. This seems to be even more so as the *gaṇḍī*-striking ceremony is conducted in direct relation with the *poṣadha*, which is one of the most important rituals in the monthly ritual schedule of a monastery and acts to confirm and strengthen the unity of this community. The experience of the *gaṇḍī* treatment shared by monks and lay people naturally helps to create a sense of belonging in a community that adheres to the same religious ideals and preserves its corporate unity and identity by maintaining traditions.

Yet what can we say about the object's "social work" after having analyzed various examples of the intellectual perception and physical treatment of the *gaṇḍī* beam? Has the nature of this work changed over time? It is difficult to say how characteristic the application of the *gaṇḍī* was to the Indian Buddhist monastic communities or, in other words, whether possession and usage of the *gaṇḍī* was one of the characteristic features that defined a community as Buddhist. We only know that at the time when the Buddhist monasteries in India were growing into well-developed socio-economical organizations, the *gaṇḍī* was a regular monastic tool of rather utilitarian nature. However, the information is not enough to establish what the attitude of the laity to the instrument was.

Taking the special case of the modern Mongolian Buddhist monasteries we can say that the *gaṇḍī* has evolved into a highly specific religious object, which manages to signify the cultural identity of the people who handle it. It has also maintained its initial ability to order time and space. The number of occasions that it marks temporally and spatially has decreased and therefore its significance in fulfilling these tasks has grown.

The cultural history of the *gaṇḍī* constitutes a good example of how a tangible object has gradually become a part of an intangible heritage of a religious transnational culture by having become deeply embedded in the various narratives that represent the divergent traditions of this culture. Taking into consideration the large amount of original texts which refer to the instrument and its treatment, as well as the inconsistency of information provided in these sources, further research seems promising. In this regard, a task might be to thoroughly analyze the sources, which obviously follow different

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115 Morgan 2005: 59.



traditions of the *gaṇḍī* perception and handling, and to trace these traditions up to the present day by researching contemporary Buddhist monastic communities.

## Abbreviations

BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
CGS	GaN DI'i mdo, Co ne bka' 'gyur
Cho ga	Bslab pa yogs su sbyong ba'i cho ga sdom brtson dgyes byed ces bya ba bzhugs so
DGS	GaN DI'i mdo, sDe dge bka' 'gyur
Dung dkar	Dung dkar tshig mdzod chen po
Grags pa rgyal mtshan	Bslab pa yongs su sbyong ba'i gzhi gsum gyi cho ga la sogs pa so sor thar pa'i blang dor gyi gnas rnam mdor bsdus pa by Rje 'dul ba 'dzin pa chen po grags pa rgyal mtshan
HGS	GaN + DI'i mdo, lHa sa bka' 'gyur
KrS	Bya ba bsdus pa zhes bya ba by Rigs kyis byin
NGS	GaN DI'i mdo, sNar thang bka' 'gyur
PTSD	The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary
PV	Gso sbyong gi gzhi
TGS	GaN DI'i mdo, the Stog Palace Manuscript of the Tibetan Kanjur
Tshig mdzod	Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo

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