

Edited by VESNA A. WALLACE

Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society



BUDDHISM IN MONGOLIAN HISTORY,
CULTURE, AND SOCIETY



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Contents

Acknowledgments vii

Notes on Transliteration ix

Contributors xi

Introduction xv

Vesna A. Wallace

PART I |

1. *Whatever Happened to Queen Jönggen?* 3

Johan Elverskog

2. *The Western Mongolian Clear Script and the Making of a Buddhist State* 23

Richard Taupier

3. *Shakur Lama: The Last Attempt to Build the Buddhist State* 37

Baatr Kitinov

4. *Modernities, Sense Making, and the Inscription of Mongolian Buddhist Place* 53

Matthew King

5. *Envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist Identity Through Chinggis Khan* 70

Vesna A. Wallace

PART II |

6. *Establishment of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism* 95

Uranchimeg B. Ujeed

7. *Zanabazar (1635–1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval Mongolia* 116

Uranchimeg Tsultemin

8. *The Power and Authority of Maitreya in Mongolia Examined Through Mongolian Art* 137
Uranchimeg Tsultemin
9. *A Literary History of Buddhism in Mongolia* 160
Simon Wickham-Smith
10. *How Vajrapāṇi Became a Mongol* 179
Vesna A. Wallace
11. *What Do Protective Deities, Mongolian Heroes, and Fast Steeds Have in Common?* 202
Vesna A. Wallace
12. *Buddhist Sacred Mountains, Auspicious Landscapes, and Their Agency* 221
Vesna A. Wallace
- PART III |
13. *Criminal Lamas: Court Cases Against Buddhist Monks in Early Socialist Mongolia* 243
Christopher Kaplonski
14. *Transition and Transformation: Buddhist Women of Buryatia* 261
Karma Lekshe Tsomo
15. *The Social and Cultural Practices of Buddhism: The Local Context of Inner Mongolia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* 280
Hürelbaatar Ujeed
- BIBLIOGRAPHY 295
- INDEX 321

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Notes on Transliteration



FOR CLASSICAL TIBETAN we have followed the Wiley transliteration. For Classical Mongolian we have followed the spelling style employed in Lessing's *Mongolian-English Dictionary*, using the symbol “γ” for “r.” In the spelling of Classical Mongolian words, we retained the letter “Π,” but in Modern Mongolian words, we followed a standard Modern Mongolian transliteration, which renders it as “ch.” For the sake of simplicity, we used the letter “kh” in all Modern Mongolian words—disregarding whether it is followed by Mongolian front vowels or by back vowels. To make it more accessible to the reader unfamiliar with Mongolian spelling, in all cases where the word “Khaan” occurs to designate a Mongolian emperor, we have changed it to “Khan.” For the same reason, we spelled the Classical Mongolian word “Qutuytu” as Khutugtu in all cases except in Chapter 6, dedicated to the Inner Mongolian Mergen tradition, where the author preferred to retain her transliteration. Chapters 2 and 3, dedicated to Buddhism among Oirats and Kalmyks, retained the Oirat-Mongol spelling. With regard to Modern Mongolian, the contributors have preserved the spelling differences between the dialects of Khalkha, Inner Mongolia, and Buryatia, especially in personal names.

Contributors



Johan Elverskog is Professor and Chair of Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University. He is the author and editor of seven books, including *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, and the State in Late Imperial China* and *Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road*, which won multiple awards.

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Matthew King received his Ph.D. from the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. His dissertation examines Buddhist responses to the “crisis” of the Qing imperial collapse and the embrace of nationalism, science, and socialism in revolutionary Mongolia (1911–1937). He has published research on Buddhist–missionary encounters, Buddhist revival in postsocialist Mongolia, and the impact of Buddhist Modernism on

monastic education in Asia. His next major project explores mediations of the humanities and physical sciences in the work of Ngakwang Nyima, a refugee abbot dispatched by the Tibetan diaspora as a professor at Leiden University in the early 1960s.

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Simon Wickham-Smith received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington with a dissertation on the contemporary Mongolian poet G. Mend-Ooyo. He is currently the Ts. Damdinsüren fellow in the Department of Mongolian Language and Literature at the Mongolian National University in Ulaanbaatar. His publications include the *Perfect Qualities*, which is a translation of Danzanravjaa's poetry; *The Secret Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama*; and *The Interrelationship of Humans and the Mongol Landscape in G. Mend-Ooyo's Altan Ovoo: A Study of the Nomadic Culture of Mongolia* (currently in press).

Introduction

Vesna A. Wallace



FOLLOWING THE INCREMENTAL appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism, initiated in the thirteenth¹ and in the late sixteenth centuries, Mongolians adapted Buddhist deities, symbols, and practices to their nomadic and pastoral lifestyle, pre-Buddhist beliefs and customs, and artistic and intellectual pursuits. In so doing, they created a variant of Buddhism, which, in part, facilitated a reformulation of Mongolian cultural and religious identities, and state policies. The intricately woven connection between Buddhist esoteric ideas and practices and Mongolian folk and shamanic cultural matrices gave rise to the complex religious and cultural phenomenon we call “Mongolian Buddhism.”²

In academic practice and in public discourse, especially among contemporary Tibetan lamas and even in some Mongolian circles, it is most common to speak about Mongols as practicing Tibetan Buddhism or some variant thereof. Equating the essential character of Mongolian Buddhism with Tibetan Buddhism, the tendency has been to overlook the cultural uniqueness of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition with its abundance of distinctively Mongolian cultural elements. Tibetan missionaries who participated in the revitalization of Buddhism in Mongolia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and witnessed the reemergence of traditional Mongolian beliefs and customs in Mongolian Buddhism often publicly criticized Mongolian Buddhists for confusing a refuge in the Buddha Dharma for refuge in their traditional culture.³

In response to these appraisals of Mongolian Buddhism, the Mongolian Buddhist scholar Khürelbaatar Lkhamsürengiin, in his 2002 book *Wisdom of Sūtras and Śāstras (Sudar Shastiryn Bilig)*, sought to demonstrate that Mongolian Buddhism is neither a mere replica of Tibetan Buddhism nor essentially non-Buddhist. He likened Buddhist

teachings to the flow of a river that adapts itself to the contours of its banks. In his view, Buddhist teachings become attractive and give rise to faith only after those teachings establish a strong connection with the lifestyle, customs, beliefs, and intellectual life of a country.⁴ Arguing against the longstanding conception of Mongolian Buddhism as a mere replica of Tibetan Buddhism, Khürelbaatar states:

Nowadays, we should not talk about this cultural link from the point of view of the mere influence of an alien culture, but from the point of view of assessing a creative experience of this country in developing its own, independent culture by transplanting all the beneficial [elements] of the foreign culture onto new soil.⁵

Khürelbaatar's argument is applicable not only to those interpretations of Mongolian Buddhism that overemphasize its Tibeto-centrism, but also to the scholastic tendency to overstate the policies of the Qing to the detriment of exploring the Mongols' own ingenuity in the process of acculturating Tibetan Buddhism. The Mongols often defied Manchu influence, rejected Chinese Confucian culture, and cultivated a uniquely Mongolian Buddhist culture as a strategy for counteracting their own marginalization and the Manchu Qing's attempts at imposing cultural hegemony. While the ruling Qing was increasingly coming under the influence of Confucianism and becoming assimilated into the predominantly sedentary culture of China, Mongols were progressively becoming more Buddhist. In the interactive network of relations among the Qing, Tibetan Gelugpa tradition, and Mongolian indigenous culture, neither the Qing nor the Tibetan tradition can be taken as a self-contained model of interpreting the heterogeneous facets of Mongolian Buddhism. Unlike European colonial powers in Asia, the Qing was neither indifferent nor disdainful of Mongolian cultural sensibilities and was supportive of the prevalence of Buddhism among the Mongols. Although this stance on the part of the Qing was largely politically motivated, it also resulted from the affinity of the Manchus, who themselves were originally a seminomadic people, toward the Mongolian pastoral and nomadic culture.

The aims of this volume are to show some of the effects of the interaction between the Mongolian indigenous culture and Buddhism, to illuminate the features that Buddhism acquired through the processes of its appropriation and adaptation to the Mongolian cultural sphere, and to demonstrate the ways in which the Mongols have been constructing their Mongolian Buddhist identity. It is the editor's hope that the volume will contribute to a better understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts within which Buddhism has operated as a major social and cultural force among the Mongols. Although the field of Mongolian studies has been in existence since the early twentieth century in Europe and somewhat later in America, the Buddhist tradition in Mongolia has remained mostly unexamined. The profound sociopolitical, cultural, and religious impact that Buddhism has had over the past eight hundred years on the lives of the Mongolian people still awaits an in-depth analysis. This volume is a small window onto the

vast expanse of Buddhist heritage in Mongolia that sketches a portion of the richness of Mongolian Buddhism. It draws attention to historical figures and events that have in part shaped the course of development of Buddhism among Mongols, but have not been given adequate attention in Western scholarship. Engaging with a variety of topics related to Buddhism among the Khalkhas, Kalmyks, Buryats, and Inner Mongols, the volume also brings to light the interrelation between Buddhism and political or state powers that determined the course of development of Buddhism in Mongolia. Therefore, the reader will often find multiple arguments at play within a single chapter.

Aware of the absence of a single and uniform Mongolian Buddhist identity, contributors approach this subject in terms of the processes by which these identities have taken shape and their functions in Mongolian social and religious contexts. Several chapters pay attention to the processes that have involved the invoking of cultural and state heritage, the creation of imaginative histories that superimpose Buddhist symbols and their meanings onto the past and provide a sense of their shared origins, and the demarcations of national and cultural boundaries. They reveal that, despite the Qing's imposition of the political hierarchical structure in the triangular interrelationship between the Qing, Tibet, and Mongolia, and regardless of the increasing dominance of the Tibetan language in Mongolian Buddhist scholasticism, Mongolian cultural and artistic diversity did not vanish and Mongolian language-centered Buddhist practices were not absent. Owing to its versatility and different historical developments among various Mongolian ethnic groups and regions, Mongolian Buddhism evades a single and ready-made interpretative template. Hence, contributors to the volume have taken diverse methodological approaches in their respective studies, including historical, anthropological, ethnographic, textual, art historical, and literary criticism.

Given the breadth of the topics of this volume, it is impossible to address all relevant themes in a single book. The influence of the political and religious agendas of the Qing dynasty and Tibetan establishments on the development of Buddhism among different Mongolian ethnic groups has been fairly well studied. Likewise, the influence of the Mongol Empire on the political and religious conditions of Buddhism in Tibet has been in some respects well examined by scholars of Tibetan Buddhism. But the extent of the Mongols' contribution to scholastic knowledge of the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition prior to and during the Qing period has been hardly explored. A comprehensive study of the Mongolian influence on Tibetan Buddhism requires further research into the abundance of available material. Likewise, a balanced approach to the study of Mongolian Buddhism that does not exclude Mongolian indigenous knowledge and culture from contributing factors in a mutual, cross-cultural pollination among these three socially, economically, and culturally interconnected geopolitical realms calls for more research. Each of these understudied areas deserves a separate treatment that goes beyond the scope of the present volume.

The volume has three parts consisting of fifteen chapters in total. Chapters included in Part One are centered on Mongolian Buddhist personages of the prerevolutionary period,

whose religious and political activities reflect the social conditions of their times that called for the reinforcement of the Buddhist and national or ethnic identities. They also point out the participation of certain Mongolian figures in the important matters of Gelugpa Buddhism in Tibet. Chapter 1, by Elverskog, addresses the Mongolian Queen Jönggen's (1551–1612) involvement in bringing the remains of the Third Dalai Lama from China to Tibet and in the selection of the Fourth Dalai Lama. His chapter also provides insight into the influence of Buddhism on the transformation of Mongolian familial culture that terminated the custom of levirate marriage, which produced strong women and shaped familial norms of the Mongolian pre-Buddhist society. Taupier, in Chapter 2, introduces the seventeenth-century Oirat Lama, Zaya Pandita Namkhai Jamtsu, who officially participated in the ordination of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1638, and whose creation of the so-called Clear Script (*Todu bičig*⁶) was to be a key factor in building Oiratia as a Buddhist state. Even after the Oirat state of the early seventeenth century dissipated, the Clear Script remained in use not only among the Oirats but also among other Mongolian ethnic groups, thus testifying to the Mongolian Buddhists' uninterrupted practice of writing in the Mongolian language despite the dominance of the Tibetan language in Mongolian Buddhist scholastic institutions.

Kitinov dedicates his chapter (Chapter 3) to the religious and political activities of Shakur Lama, a prominent figure of the Kalmyk Khanate in the early eighteenth century. He sheds light on this Kalmyk figure as one of the close confidants of the Sixth Dalai Lama and as a rector of Shakhor College of Drepung Monastery in Lhasa, who sought to establish a Buddhist state founded on the principle of “two laws” (the laws of Dharma and state) in eighteenth-century Züngharia. His attempt was in good part motivated by the Christianization of Kalmyks living in Russia and by a growing influence of Islam on Kalmyks living in the Xinjiang province of China.

Chapter 4, by King, shows that, at the time when the power of the Qing began to fade in 1911 and the Autonomous Bogd Khan State was emerging, Mongolian and Buryat intellectuals living in Mongolia, China, and tsarist Russia already had begun to envision pan-Mongolian identity, language, and political heritage. Focusing on Mongolian language and literature, folk traditions, and indigenous knowledge and customs, they sought to create a new, heightened awareness of Mongolian identity that could factor in the creation of a pan-Mongolian ethnic family, sheltered in Buddhism. A central theme of King's chapter is the Mongolian Buddhists' encounter with European and Russian secular views and scientific discoveries in the post-Qing era, which challenged the Buddhist cosmology and caused anxiety to Mongolian Buddhist scholastics. King pays special attention to the sections of Zawa Damdin's *Golden Book* (*Altan Devert*, 1931) that illustrate how this scholastic hierarch perceived the new scientific knowledge and emerging political ideologies of revolutionaries as a threat and an insult to the Buddhist tradition.

The editor's chapter on Chinggis Khan and Buddhism (Chapter 5) examines the contemporary, dominant discourses on Mongolian Buddhist identity as relating to

Chinggis Khan, based on the historical writings of the Mongolian and Tibetan scholars dating from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. It illustrates the attempts of the traditional Mongolian chronicles and contemporary Mongolian Buddhists to recontextualize Chinggis Khan within a Buddhist framework and thereby indigenize Tibetan Buddhism and authenticate the Mongolian Buddhist identity.

Part Two deals primarily with the Mongols' strategies of indigenizing and popularizing Buddhism among the masses, involving the religious, cultural, and artistic practices. The authors also bring to light the ways in which the cultivation of unique elements of Mongolian Buddhism and its broad dissemination factored in the efforts of constructing a Mongolian Buddhist identity and building a Buddhist state. Uranchimeg Ujeed delineates in Chapter 6 a project of the indigenization of Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia that resulted in the new Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism, which was based in the Mongolian language. Developed in the eighteenth century from the earlier lineage of Mongolian Buddhist popular practices and centered in Mergen Monastery and in the considerable number of its affiliated monasteries, the Mergen Tradition was neither a Manchu-centered nor entirely Tibet-oriented tradition, but a locally sponsored network of monks and laypeople. Its founder, Mergen Gegeen, promoted the composition of liturgies in the Mongolian language with Mongolian melodies and the writing of original Mongolian-language works. He harmonized Buddhist practices with Mongolian indigenous customs and resisted Tibetan Buddhist cultural hegemony among Inner Mongols. Owing to its unique Mongolian features, the influence of the tradition spread beyond Inner Mongolia to Khalkha and has endured to the present.

Chapters 7 and 8, contributed by Tsultemin, are dedicated to the artistic creations of Zanabazar, the First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, who sought to promote Buddhism among all layers of Khalkha Mongols by means of his art in order to unify the Khalkhas and establish a Buddhist state at the time of social and political turmoil in Mongolia. His creation of a new Mongolian script was related to the same mission. Tsultemin's study of Zanabazar's earlier statues shows that through them he intentionally emphasized his imperial heritage and promoted a nonsectarian form of Vajrayāna Buddhism rather than replicating the deities central to both the Gelug and Jonang traditions. Agwaankhaidav's painting and statue of a seated Maitreya served Gelugpa ideology of a cakravartin ruler who endorses Gelugpa dominance in later Buddhist Mongolia.

Wickham-Smith's chapter (Chapter 9) illustrates that Mongolian poets of the eighteenth through the early twentieth century moved away from the influence of Tibetan culture while appropriating new literary themes and poetical forms from Tibetan Buddhist literature. Wickham-Smith argues that the thematic scope and genre of Mongolian Buddhist literature testify to this fact even in the case of Mongolian authors who were writing in the Tibetan language. One such genre is the so-called *üge*, which developed from the popular oral tradition in the eighteenth century by Agwaankhaidav (T. Ngag dbang mKhas grub) and further expanded in the nineteenth century by Sandag.

Characterized by the combination of the advice and social criticism expressed through the words of animals and inanimate objects, the *üge* genre was closely related to the indigenous literature of pastoral Mongols.

Chapter 10, the editor's chapter dedicated to the Mongols' adoption of Vajrapāṇi as a tutelary deity of the Mongolian state, illustrates the ways in which this Buddhist deity became acculturated, naturalized, and politicized in Mongolian cultural and political realms. The chapter also shows how the reinstatement of Vajrapāṇi in democratic Mongolia expressed the state's affirmation of the inseparability of the Mongolian national and Buddhist identities. Her two other chapters—one dedicated to the analyses of the convergence of the Mongolian heroic culture and Buddhism (Chapter 11), and the other delving into the Mongolian Buddhist practices related to the natural world (Chapter 12)—reveal the manner in which the dynamics of the pastoral-nomadic and heroic culture of the Mongols gave a specific character to Buddhism in Mongolia.

Part Three consists of three chapters, two delving into the issues pertinent to the revitalization of Buddhism in contemporary Inner Mongolia and Buryatia, and one dealing with the court practices of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary government involving lamas during the communist purges of religion. As is well known, the emergent political ideology of Mongolian People's Revolutionary government did not merely deride Buddhist modes of knowledge and practices, but, under Stalin's influence, it also actively engaged in secularization campaigns, legal persecutions, mass killings of lamas, and the destruction of Buddhist monasteries, seen as hotbeds of the counterrevolution.

Chapter 13, by Kaplonski, demonstrates that the creation of new legal practices and a new criminal code was just one of many strategies of political violence deployed by the People's Revolutionary government against Buddhist monks and institutions during that tumultuous period. During 1936 and 1937, the government conducted court trials against high-ranking lamas who were accused of being counter-revolutionaries, intent upon overthrowing the people's government and restoring a feudal-theocratic regime. Kaplonski analyzes a set of mock court trials against lamas. Being scripted or having predetermined outcomes, these "show trials" were designed to justify the violent assertion of the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Mongolian communist state during the revolutionary period.

Although systematic and aggressive antireligious campaigns of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary government succeeded in abolishing Buddhist institutions and destroying Buddhist education and heritage, they were ineffective in eliminating the faith of many Mongolians. As Ven. Chojamts, the Abbot of Gandantengchileng Monastery, stated in his lecture at the University of Oxford in the spring of 2010: "The regime was able to control our bodies and speech, but it could not control our minds." Thus, as soon as democratic changes in Mongolia allowed for greater freedom of religious expression in the late 1980s, a resurgence of Buddhist religious and artistic expression began. Soon a restoration of Buddhist monastic education; a reconstruction of old Buddhist temples, monasteries, and *stūpas*; and the building of new temples were under way. Buddhist TV

and radio programs, popular and academic publications on Buddhism, and other Buddhist projects were also undertaken. At present, among the many religions in Mongolia, Buddhism once again holds a central position in society and seems to be favored by the state. A similar comeback of Buddhism has taken place in Russian republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia and in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia. Due to the sociopolitical and economic circumstances of the Mongols living in the territories belonging to Russia and China, the revitalization of Buddhism in these regions does not appear equal to that in Mongolia, where 95 percent of the population is Mongols.

Throughout all the regions populated by Mongolian ethnic groups, the preservation of popular Buddhist practices and the revitalization of Buddhism in the postsocialist period have been also carried out by Buddhist laywomen. Tsomo's chapter (Chapter 14) delineates the position and contribution of laywomen in post-Soviet Buryatia, as she re-evaluates women's role in Buddhist institutions and practices. Her study shows that in Buryatia, as in Mongolia and Kalmykia, the increase in secondary education opportunities for women brought about by the Soviet educational policies made it possible for the activities of contemporary Buddhist women to be no longer limited to devotional and ritual practices. In contemporary Buryatia, women's projects extend to the dissemination of Buddhist knowledge, the betterment of women's lives, and monastic training. Nevertheless, as Tsomo discovered, when it comes to the recognition of Tibetan lamas in their Buryat incarnations, the birth mother is invariably a Tibetan woman.

The editor has found a similar practice in contemporary Mongolia. Whenever the search and recognition of new reincarnations of the famous Mongolian lamas of the past are initiated—be it by individual Mongolian monks, monastic institutions, nonprofit Buddhist organizations, and the like—Tibetan lamas and institutions are invariably involved, even when a new incarnation is Mongolian born from the Mongolian mother. For the most part, this is due to the lack of a centralized authority and unity among Mongolian Buddhists in the current phase of the revitalization of Mongolian Buddhism.⁷

Hürelbaatar Ujeed demonstrates in Chapter 15 that, similar to the conditions in Mongolia and Buryatia, 90 percent of the monasteries in Inner Mongolia were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Nevertheless, as was the case in Mongolia and Buryatia, some lamas continued to practice Buddhism in secret, and the rural population maintained the Buddhist ceremonial practices such as the house-warming, the first hair-cutting, and the veneration of sacred landscape until the institution of religious freedom in 1980. Taking as examples the life of Khulustai Monastery and the diversity of gift exchanges between lamas and laity, Ujeed also reveals that characterizations of Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia put forward by twentieth-century scholars must be corrected. He repudiates the validity of the rigid classification of Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia into academic and ritualistic types and demonstrates the flaws of the twentieth-century scholars' preconceived notion of lamas as an unproductive force responsible for the economic stagnation of society, which justified the harsh measures implemented by the Cultural Revolution.

The findings presented by the contributors to this volume carry broader implications in understanding that the heterogeneous history of Mongolian Buddhism, its various representations among different Mongolian groups, and a wide array of popular indigenous beliefs and practices that it encompasses point to the phenomenon of “Mongolian Buddhism” as an overarching category open to different interpretations and contextualizations. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible to write a general history of Buddhism among the Mongols: The question “A history of *which* Mongolian Buddhism?” would inevitably arise at the very start.

NOTES

1. The link of the Mongol empire with Tibetan Buddhism began in 1247, when Köten, Möngke Khan’s second son, who lived in Tangut territory, was sent on expedition to central Tibet to renew Tangut’s tie with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, which was established in the twelfth century. Köten’s meeting with Sakya Pandita facilitated Phag pa’s (‘Phags pa) visit to Qubilai Khan’s camp and the initiation of Qubilai into the *Hevajra Tantra* in 1253.

2. One such connection between Buddhism and Mongolian shamanic practices is exemplified in various Mongolian Buddhist beliefs and practices. One such example is Chakhar Geshe Lubsang Tsültim’s (1740–1810) work titled *The Offering of Mare’s Milk in Mongolia*, which in detail describes the manner in which the old, shamanic tradition of the spring *kumis* festival and the offering of mare’s milk became closely associated with Buddhist purification ceremonies of incense offering.

3. This observation is based on my multiyear ethnographic research, during which I witnessed such criticisms and evaluations of Mongolian Buddhism as “superficially Buddhist” expressed in public forums and teachings and in private interviews with Tibetan lamas who lived and worked in Mongolia during that period.

4. Lkhamsürenгийн, 2002, 31.

5. *Ibid.*, 33.

6. Whenever an Oirat word or phrase appears in the text, the Oirat Clear Script spelling from the text in which it was found is used, transliterated into Latin script. However, it is important to note that spelling of even common terms varied significantly over time and among various Oirat groups.

7. I owe this observation to Mr. Lkhvademchig Jadamba, a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the Mongolian National University, whose research involves a history of the *tulku* institution in Mongolia.

PART I



I

Whatever Happened to Queen Jönggen?

Johan Elverskog



ONE OF THE most important and powerful individuals in sixteenth-century East Asia was, without a doubt, Queen Jönggen (1551–1612). In fact, during the period from 1570 to 1612, she is mentioned “more often than any other in Chinese records dealing with Mongol affairs as wielding great power in Mongolia.”¹ And invariably it was not only Chinese officials and court chroniclers who documented her power and status, but also the Mongols themselves, as is amply attested in the 1607 history of Altan Khan and his descendants, the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*.² Yet, curiously, this fame and stature did not last. In later Mongol histories of the Qing period (1644–1911), Queen Jönggen is completely absent, which raises a host of questions. What follows is therefore an exploration of these issues focusing in particular on why this historical erasure happened, and what it tells us about Mongol Buddhist history.

QUEEN JÖNGGEN

To elucidate these later developments, however, it is necessary to begin with a short sketch of Queen Jönggen’s life, which, as we know it from contemporary Chinese sources, began in a convoluted family drama that was to shape subsequent Sino-Mongol history. In particular, what set everything in motion is that Altan Khan wanted to take the future Queen Jönggen as his third wife.³ But the Khan had previously promised to give her in marriage to his elder brother’s son, Noyandara Jinong. Thus the Jinong became outraged when Altan Khan took her back for himself. So to placate Noyandara the Khan took another woman, whom he had promised to one of his grandsons, and

gave her to his nephew. Such a move may have placated Noyandara, but it infuriated the grandson, Daiching Ejei, who had been orphaned as a child and raised by Altan Khan's first wife. Yet, even though the grandson had such close relations with Altan Khan, when the Khan took his wife and gave her to another relative, Daiching Ejen was so angered that he abandoned his grandfather's Mongol realm and submitted to the Ming dynasty. In turn, it was this defection and the subsequent attempts to resolve it—as well as the long-running trade disputes along the border—that ushered in the famous Sino-Mongol peace accord of 1571, an event that was to shape a great deal of subsequent East Asian history, including the life of Queen Jönggen.⁴

Much of this had to do with the title Shunyi Wang 順義王 (“Obedient and Righteous Prince”), which the Ming court bestowed on Altan Khan during these 1571 proceedings, since it was this title and the person who held it—and the accompanying seal to be used on official correspondence—that controlled the lucrative Sino-Mongol border trade.⁵ As it was, during the last years of Altan Khan's life, it turned out that Queen Jönggen actually became the key figure controlling this seal and the trade it made possible. This gave her a great deal of power, since if any Mongol prince crossed her—or the Ming court, for that matter—she could retaliate with a financially devastating boycott on account of the control she exerted over access to the Chinese market. Thus, over the course of the 1570s, Queen Jönggen's influence increased dramatically, which, invariably, did not please everyone. Most outraged was Altan Khan's eldest son, Sengge Dүүreng, who was incensed not only by her growing financial and political clout, but also quite simply by how Altan Khan had treated his own mother after marrying the younger Jönggen. Sengge Dүүreng, therefore, had a long-running feud with both his father and his younger wife and even moved with his retainers away from the family's traditional territory.

Yet, when Altan Khan passed away in 1578, Sengge returned from his self-imposed exile in order to reclaim his father's territory and, more importantly, his Shunyi Wang title and seal that enabled legal trade with the Ming. When he returned, however, Queen Jönggen had taken the seal and the tablets of military authority and set herself up independently. At first she planned on remaining outside the control of the other Mongol princes, which could have been feasible since, with the Ming seal and the Chinese court's support, she controlled tribute relations. However, she also wanted Budashiri, her eldest son and Altan Khan's seventh son, to be recognized by the Ming court as Shunyi Wang, which meant that the rightful heir in primogeniture, Sengge Dүүreng, would be disenfranchised. Doing so would have been politically explosive and the Ming court therefore hesitated, and when they received a petition from seventy-nine Mongol noblemen to maintain the status quo, the Ming decided to grant the title and seal to Sengge. One stipulation of this recognition, however, was that he had to marry Queen Jönggen, whom the Ming perceived as being “pro-Chinese” and therefore tempering any possible future problems.

They married in October-November 1582. Matrimonial bliss did not, alas, ensue. Instead, Queen Jönggen continued her struggle for ascendancy and control. Taking

advantage of Sengge's ineptitude resulting from drunkenness, she took control of his best troops and installed herself independently of him to the west of Altan Khan's capital. Furthermore, to consolidate her power, she wanted her son Budashiri, who had been denied the title Shunyi Wang, to marry Bagha Beiji, who had inherited control of the capital after her husband Daiching Ejei's death. However, Dayan Khiya—Altan Khan's adopted son and true powerbroker in the capital—opposed her actions. As a result, Namudai Sechen, Sengge's son, married Bagha Beiji in 1584, thwarting Jönggen's plan again.

Thus after Sengge's death in 1586, the struggle for control of the Shunyi Wang title and Altan Khan's domains continued between Jönggen and Namudai. Jönggen promoted her son to the Ming court; however, after 280 Mongol noblemen wrote a petition in favor of Namudai Sechen the Chinese acquiesced. Yet, once again they demanded that the prince in question marry Queen Jönggen, which he did. Thus, on May 3, 1587, the court bestowed on him the title Shunyi Wang and the privilege of controlling trade and tribute relations that the title entailed. But in the course of marrying Jönggen, Namudai had divorced Bagha Beiji, and thus, as the Queen had long desired, Bagha then married her son Budashiri. They had a son named Sodnam.

On account of being Queen Jönggen's grandson, over the course of time Sodnam came to wield a great deal of power. In fact, when Namudai Sechen passed away in 1607 it was actually Sodnam who was the most powerful prince in the Ordos. As a result, he felt that the title Shunyi Wang and its control of tribute and trade relations belonged rightfully to him. The Ming court did not agree. Yet they were hesitant to bestow the title of Shunyi Wang on Namudai Sechen's son and heir, Boshugtu Khong Taiji. However, as several Mongol noblemen requested yet again that the title be granted to Altan Khan's legitimate heir through primogeniture, the Ming finally agreed. But, once again, they demanded that Altan Khan's great-grandson Boshugtu marry his wife, Queen Jönggen, Sodnam's grandmother. At first she refused to be married a fourth time; however, she eventually acquiesced. Thus, in 1612, five years after Namudai's death, his son Boshugtu Khong Taiji married Jönggen and received the title Shunyi Wang.

Queen Jönggen died shortly thereafter. Nevertheless, it is clear that during her life Jönggen had been a pivotal figure in the high-stakes political and economic world of Sino-Mongol relations, as is amply evidenced in the Chinese sources that focus on her purported "pro-Chinese" sentiments and therefore highlight her role in resolving tensions on the border. Yet, as we also know from Mongol sources, that is not all she did. Rather, although she is certainly presented as a powerful presence during the reigns of Altan Khan and his two successors, she is not portrayed as the ultimate arbiter of Sino-Mongol power relations, as the Chinese sources claim. Instead, what comes to the fore in the Mongol presentation of Queen Jönggen is that she was always by the side of the ruler at the pivotal moments of early Mongol Buddhist history. And although she is not given credit specifically for driving these events, it is certainly evident from the historical account found in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra* and other Mongol sources that she was a strong supporter of the Buddhist conversion.

For example, when the Amdo monk Asing Lama first came to Altan Khan's court and expounded the Dharma, he did so specifically to the Khan and Queen Jönggen.⁶ They in turn sent envoys to Tibet with an invitation to the Dalai Lama. And when they all met in 1578 on the shores of Lake Kōkenuur, the Dalai Lama gave them both titles and a tantric initiation. Subsequently, when Altan Khan passed away, it was Queen Jönggen who had Manjusri Khutugtu give Buddhist teachings on impermanence in order to help deal with the grief. It was also she who sent envoys to inform the Dalai Lama of her husband's death. Thus when the Dalai Lama came to Mongolia in 1585 it was Queen Jönggen and Sengge Diiüreng who met him and presented a large number of gifts not only to him, but also to the Juu Śākyamuni temple that Altan Khan had built before his passing.⁷ And it was during this event that the Dalai Lama praised her Buddhist devotion and had her commission a Nepalese artist to make a diadem for the temple's Jowo statue. Shortly thereafter, the Dalai Lama convinced Queen Jönggen and Namudai Sechen, who had succeeded his father the previous year, to exhume Altan Khan and cremate his body according to Buddhist custom, which they did.

The following year, however, the Dalai Lama passed away. It was therefore Namudai and Jönggen who not only brought his remains back to Tibet—an ordeal that took almost three years—but also played the key role in finding the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso (Yon tan rGya mtsho, 1589–1617). And although they wanted the child, who was born to a grandson of Altan Khan, to stay in Mongolia, they were eventually persuaded by the Tibetans to allow him to go to Lhasa, whereupon Namudai and Queen Jönggen turned their devotion toward Maitreya Khutugtu, the Dalai Lama's representative in Mongolia. Most remarkably, at this time they also launched a project to have the entire Ganjuur (T. Bka 'gyur) translated into Mongolian.⁸

Unfortunately, at this point the historical narrative of the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra* comes to an end. Thus, we do not know—from the Mongol perspective—what Queen Jönggen did during the last five years of her life; however, based on Chinese records we know that she continued to shape Sino-Mongol relations. And based on her life as found in other Mongol sources we also know that she continued her strong support of the Dharma.⁹ Regardless of what she actually did, however, all of it was about to become moot. Instead of being heralded as a key figure in supporting Sino-Mongol peace and mutual trade agreements for almost forty years, or a pivotal figure in Mongol Buddhist history, Queen Jönggen and all she stood for was about to be erased from the historical record.

REWRITING HISTORY

Sagang Sechen (Saryang Sečen), the author of the famous 1662 *Precious Summary* (*Erdeni-yin tobči*), was the main historian who transformed Queen Jönggen's role in Mongol history. He did this in two ways. The first was to simply exclude her from his history. Thus, although Sagang Sechen has the longest section devoted to the Buddhist

conversion of any seventeenth-century Mongol source, he shifts the focus wholly away from Queen Jönggen. In his presentation, she therefore plays absolutely no role either in the conversion to Buddhism or in the larger historical context of Sino-Mongol relations. In fact, Sagang Sechen mentions her only once, in a list of people who went with Altan Khan to Lake Kökenuur to meet the Dalai Lama.¹⁰ Queen Jönggen is never mentioned again. Unlike in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, she does not receive a tantric initiation, nor does she receive her illustrious title: “Ārya Tārā, the incarnation of Bodhisattva Tārā.”¹¹ Rather, according to Sagang Sechen, Queen Jönggen’s role in shaping sixteenth-century history, including her important role in establishing the Dharma among the Mongols, was minimal, if not largely irrelevant.

As a result, we can rightfully wonder why Sagang Sechen made the editorial choices that he did, especially since his historical elision effectively erased Queen Jönggen from all subsequent Mongol histories. In fact, on account of Sagang Sechen’s work becoming the authoritative historical presentation that was to shape not only later Mongol historiography but also much Western scholarship, this historical rewriting needs to be addressed. And in both cases it seems as if little thought has been given to the possible historical biases or interpretive moves that may have shaped Sagang Sechen’s narrative. However, one need not read too much against the grain in order to come to the conclusion that much of his presentation was aimed to glorify the actions of his family and its web of aristocratic allies. This narrative strategy was used not simply to promote his lineage, but also to make it clear to the new Manchu ruling elite that they were the true local powerbrokers and thus should rightfully be granted the appropriate seals and titles of nobility within the new Qing state.¹² Thus, highlighting Queen Jönggen and the long-running feud between the competing lineages of Altan Khan was probably not in his, or his family’s, best interest. Indeed, rather than dwelling on these historical realities and their implications he simply ignores them and elevates instead the history of his uncle, Khutugtu Sechen Khung Taiji, and Namudai Sechen Khan’s son, Boshogtu Khung Taiji, who upon Sodnam’s death in 1625 had married his widow, annexed his land and wealth, and been appointed the last Shunyi Wang.

On one level, it is therefore rather clear why Sagang Sechen wrote his history as he did: family honor and the tandem benefits of political and economic power enabled through Manchu recognition. Yet there are other elements in his narrative that point to different forces at work as well. For example, his work also reflects the growing Buddhist persecution and legal disenfranchisement of “shamanism” that occurred over the course of the seventeenth century.¹³ And it is in many ways this anti-shamanist discourse that plays a role in Sagang Sechen’s transformation of a pivotal episode in the history of the Mongols’ Buddhist conversion: the exhumation and cremation of Altan Khan by the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1534–1588). In particular, it confirms that earlier Mongol funerary practices were fundamentally wrong and that the Dharma and its ritual practices were inherently correct.

Of course, such a “relapse” to preconversion religious practices is a common trope of many conversion narratives. To Wit, the lapse back to earlier practices reveals fully how egregiously wrong they are in relation to the new religion and thereby solidifies both the righteousness of the conversion and the faith of those newly converted.¹⁴ It is precisely within just such a framework that the story operates in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*; namely, when Altan Khan dies, the Mongols follow earlier customs and thereby summon Chinese *feng shui* masters and Buddhist lamas to find a proper burial site, and then bury him in “Buddho-shamanic” fashion on the south side of the Daqing 大青 Mountains.¹⁵ In turn, however, when the Dalai Lama comes to Mongolia he invariably informs them that this “ecumenical” religious service, and especially the burial of Altan Khan, was a mistake. He therefore recommends that a new Buddhist ceremony and cremation be performed:

To the Khan, Queen, and the greater and lesser lords of the Twelve Tümed,
 The All-knowing Dalai Lama personally said,
 “Our Lord, the wonderful Holy Brahmā Great Mighty Cakravartin Altan
 Khan,
 By the power of collected heaps of merit and wisdom in each and every birth,

Was born as a mighty powerful sovereign.
 He peacefully held the Jewel Buddha’s religion and the worldly state,
 And greatly helped all beings in this direction.
 By the power of the ripening of this supreme merit’s fruit,

And being compassionate towards the decline of Buddha’s religion at that time,
 Bodhisattva Altan Khan took birth among the Mongols in order to help.
 In his vigor of youth he prudently put the hard and fierce ones under his power.
 Through the holy blessings, he met me, the Offering-Site,

And newly established in this direction the powerful Buddha’s religion.
 If we bury in the golden earth this great holy shining corpse, that is like the
 Cakravartins who conquered the ancient four continents,
 And thus treat him like an ordinary sovereign, how can we see the signs?

If we cremate his shining corpse, we shall see the signs.
 And if we erect a *stūpa*, like that of the Magisterial Liberator Buddha,
 The recompense will be immeasurably great!”
 Speaking together, [Namudai Sechen] Khan, Queen [Jönggen] and the greater
 and lesser lords agreed.

On the 26th day of the third month in the Pig Year [1587] the Vajradhara Dalai Lama
 Made a *maṇḍala* as was done with the previous Tathāgatas’ majestic remains.

When he cremated him as an offering by the principle of the Dharma,
The color of the sky became spotless, clear, and majestic.

Then a five-colored rainbow appeared and it rained flowers.
Marvelous and wonderful signs were seen by everyone.
The seed syllables of the five Sugatas appeared,
And the entire Great Nation praised and wondered greatly.

Afterwards they opened the vase with [the ashes] of the majestic remains.
And when they collected and placed [the ashes] with a bejeweled spoon into the
golden vessel,
From the Holy Khan's majestic remains, Peaceful, Expansive, Powerful and
Fearsome Buddhas,
Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's white seed syllable, *hriḥ*,

And other worship objects of body, speech, and mind were repeatedly and rapidly
produced.
Immediately the Sugatas' seed syllables,
The unparalleled syllables, *om hūṃ traṃ hriḥ āḥ*,
Distinctly appeared strung as a five-colored pearl rosary.

When an unfathomable variety of relics including a relic like a wishing jewel,
A white conch shell with whorls turning to the right,
And other uncountable five-colored relics, were seen by everyone,
Together with innumerable signs, they venerated in faith.

The Five-Colored Nations, each individually, took them as a site of worship.
Then the wonderful shining remains were inhumed in a great
[*stūpa*], made by a Nepalese craftsman of jewels, gold and silver,
In the fashion of the ancient Sugata's reliquary *stūpa*, named Bodhicitta.

On the west side of Juu Śākyamuni monastery,
A magnificent blue palace was constructed,
And appropriately the incarnation of Vajrapāṇi, Jedrung Khutugtu, and
The four-fold *saṅgha* sprinkled barley and consecrated it.

On that occasion the Alms-masters and lords of the Twelve Tümed, each
individually,
Invited the famous splendid Vajradhara Dalai Lama,
And presented an immeasurable amount of merit.
Thus they entered simultaneously into the Pure Buddha's religion.¹⁶

Thus, as noted above, this particular story fulfills perfectly the structural mandates of a conversion narrative. By recognizing the lapse into earlier practices the story not only identifies these traditions as being wrong, but also powerfully confirms the righteousness of the Mongols' subsequent return to the Buddhist fold.

Similar narrative processes are also found in Sagang Sechen's telling of this event, but his presentation is also radically different. In particular, he minimizes the actual burial of Altan Khan and shifts the focus instead to another funeral with even more monstrous practices. This narrative turn not only amplifies the horrors of non-Buddhist traditions but also enhances the power of the Dalai Lama, since he is able to rectify the situation by means of a powerful tantric exorcism:

Thereupon, when [the Dalai Lama] headed northwards, many benefactors and princes on the way invited him and made grand offerings. Arriving outside Boshogtu Sechen Jinong's place, they indicated [to him] the place of the Temple of the Three Times, and whilst they were at Kökebür, the three persons, Boshogtu Sechen Jinong, Sechen Khong Taiji and Sechen Daiching, received the totally-perfected four initiations (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) of the Splendid Hevajra from the Vajradhara Dalai Lama, and they took an oath saying, "Do not calumniate one another." He established the Two Realms in accord with yore, and made the Sun of Religion to flourish in the Dark Continent.

Then proceeding and arriving at the Twelve Tümed, he criticized their having buried in *onggon*-fashion the corpse of Altan Khan, saying, "How can you bury in the earth such a beloved and inestimable jewel?" Thus, when they exhumed it and brought it forth and [ceremoniously] burned it, it distinctly came to be [replete with] marvelous tokens and incalculably numerous relics, and so on; all the peoples and populace marveled jointly.

Then further, Altan Khan, after his late father had gone to heaven, married Queen Molan, the third of the three wives of [Bodi] Alag Jinong, his father. From this there was only the single son, called Töbed Taiji. When he died, the queen, heedless of the sin, said:

"Slaying the children of a hundred persons,
One will make [them] accompany [the deceased];
Slaying the offspring of a hundred female-camels,
One will cause [them] to bellow [likewise]."

When more than forty children had been slain, the great folk were on the point of an uprising, and the son of Sinikei Örlüg of the Monggoljin, named Jugantulai Kiya Taiji, said:

"In the place of a stranger [i.e., the queen],
Making children suffer, I shall go.
Let her [just try to] kill me and make [me]
Accompany [her dead son]."

Because there were no possibilities of slaying him, one left off, and henceforth they abandoned the killing.

Thus when that queen died, her corpse was buried in *onggon*-fashion. Now that queen, owing to her sin[s], Erlig [Yama, the Lord of Death] did not separate her from her body, so that she [could] rise upwards and advance to be an unfettered spirit. [Therefore] the Holy Dalai Lama deigned to pacify [her spirit]. So as to make a fire *maṇḍala* of the fierce deeds of Yamāntaka, performer of frightening [things], the splendid Vajra-one, [the Dalai Lama] prepared in proper fashion the opening of a triangular gusset and so on; and inside this, he placed the queen's robe which had been [folded] seven times, and at once great truth uttered from the lama's mouth. He assembled the Lords of Death through the four *dhāraṇīs* and four *mudrā*-gestures, and at the time when they were made to enter the gusset, a lizard came and crept into the left sleeve of the robe, and stuck out its head through the yoke.

Then, when the Holy Lama had preached well about the benefit of salvation, and the harm of perpetual reincarnation, and the doctrine about the truth of dying in general and so on, that lizard turned about three-times as if bowing its head, straight-way dying, [and of course] it was indeed that one [i.e., it was the queen all the time].

Then he introduced fire through meditative concentration (Skt. *samādhi*), and when he proffered the goods of sacrifice to the mundane and supramundane guests, and when that robe and lizard were burned, there was perceived [i.e., smelled] an unendurably severe and foul odor. Some fainted, and some grew hysterical, and some awoke and came to themselves, and as they looked, there arose upwards a white column with the smoke of the *maṇḍala*, and on top of it, there was a Son of Heaven in the shape of Vajrasattva. And when everyone who was there saw how he went they marveled and they acquired an excessively firm faith. Just as the dawn lights up the dark night, the Precious Religion, as if grown illumining the gleaming sun broadly, greatly expanded.¹⁷

As noted above, Sagang Sechen clearly changed the story quite markedly from the earlier *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*. And on one level it is possible to argue that he has simply amplified the narrative tropes of conversion; namely, the lapse back to earlier practices was not simply a “shamanic” burial, but actually the performance of ritual sacrifice.¹⁸ His act of artistic license, then, clearly made Buddhism and its ritual practices seem all the more righteous. Yet, is that all that is going on in Sagang Sechen's narrative transformation? Indeed, what are we to make of Sagang Sechen's elaborations of this particular historical episode? Moreover, what does it possibly tell us about the historical fate of Queen Jönggen?

BUDDHISM AND MONGOL CULTURE

To begin to answer these questions, it is possible to look at several aspects of the story that seem to shed light on the larger cultural transformations taking place in Mongol

society at the time. The first of these is how Sagang Sechen shifts the focus completely from Altan Khan's burial—and its implications—to Queen Molan's mournful and murderous funeral for her son Töbed Taiji. This narrative transformation invariably raises many questions, ranging from why Sagang Sechen focused on her story to, quite simply, who Queen Molan was.

In terms of the latter, the truth is that we know very little. In fact, Queen Molan is not mentioned in any other Mongol or Chinese source.¹⁹ We do know, however, that Altan Khan was twelve when his father died, and thus it is possible he took his father's third wife as his own according to Mongol custom. Yet that would mean that he had already married his first wife, Yeke Qatun, before he was twelve, which is certainly possible. Even so, Queen Molan or her existence is still not found in any other source. We do know, however, that Altan Khan's third son was in fact called Töbed Taiji, and thus it is apparently his mother who is being presented in this story. And in this regard, Sagang Sechen's description of a bereaved mother may contain a kernel of truth, since we do know that Töbed Taiji did pass away as a young man. Of course, whether his mother, whoever she was, actually carried out his funeral as Sagang Sechen narrates is another question entirely. Regardless of this point, however, a further element that Sagang Sechen does not include in his telling is that when Töbed Taiji passed away as a young man he left behind a three-year-old son, Daiching Ejei, who, as noted above, would eventually flee to Ming China on account of the spousal imbroglio surrounding Altan Khan's love of Queen Jönggen. What should we make of all this?

On one level, of course, Sagang Sechen's choice of Queen Molan makes sense since it fits the temporal and narrative frames. Her actions clearly confirmed the perfidy of "shamanism." Moreover, if Töbed Taiji had passed away around 1550, it would make temporal sense that when his mother passed away sometime thereafter she could thus become the evil spirit that the Dalai Lama would exorcise in 1586. But even so, one can still wonder: Why her story? And why did it have to be included above and beyond—in fact, eclipsing—the initial ritual transgression of Altan Khan's funeral and burial? Indeed, what kind of narrative work did Sagang Sechen intend by including this dramatic episode in his history of the Mongols' Buddhist conversion?

Of course, these are questions that may at this point be unanswerable. However, a clue of sorts seems to be reflected in how Queen Molan is introduced and described by Sagang Sechen. In particular, she is described as having been the third wife of Bodi Alag Khan, and, after his death, as having married and had a child with his son, Altan Khan. Whether this actually happened is unclear; it is certainly the case, however, that levirate marriage was a long-established custom on the steppe. Chinese sources from the early Han dynasty, for example, note with disapproval that it was a custom among the Xiongnu.²⁰ Similarly, all the European travelers to the Mongol court during the imperial period disparagingly took note of the custom as well.²¹ William of Rubruck, for example, notes that "[w]idows among them do not marry, on the grounds of their belief that all who serve them in this life will do so in the one to come; and so in the case of a widow

they think that after death she will always revert to her first husband. Consequently, there is to be found among them the shameful practice whereby a son sometimes marries all his father's wives except his mother."²² And as we have seen, this practice continued as a well-established custom among the Mongols up through the sixteenth century, most famously in the case of Queen Jönggen, who married four generations of fathers and sons. An interesting question, therefore, is: How long did this tradition continue? Indeed, is it possible to conjecture that Queen Molan's true sin was not her "shamanism," but rather what many cultures and the Buddhist tradition would identify as her "incestuous" relationship with Altan Khan.

MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM?

In the study of Buddhism a longstanding topic has been the dynamic of accommodation and acculturation—how the Buddhist tradition not only transformed and adapted itself to new cultural worlds, but also how this dynamic shaped the new host society in the process. In many ways the study of Mongolian Buddhism has been no different, at least in the sense that many scholars have framed their discussion of the Dharma among the Mongols as one of a common process of interaction between local pre-Buddhist practices and those of Tantric Buddhism. Yet, on account of various factors, the nature of this dynamic in the Mongol world has also resulted in Mongolian Buddhism often being presented as something inauthentic. To a certain degree it is understood that Mongolian Buddhism neither is really authentic Tibetan Buddhism, nor is it fully its own tradition.

While there are numerous reasons for this discourse to have developed, ranging from Victorian constructions of Buddhism and the Humean "two-tier" model of religion to the romantic and antimodern tendencies of Western Mongolists,²³ the result has been that Mongolian Buddhism has often been represented by means of two opposite, although not mutually exclusive, paradigms. One builds on the anticolonial model and sees Tibetan Buddhism as largely a vehicle of imperial control, and thus Mongolian Buddhism is simply no different from Tibetan Buddhism, or else it is an inferior version. The second, on the other hand, turns this framework around and presents the imposition of Buddhism, especially on account of its origins among the political elite, as being superficial, and thus Buddhism among the Mongols is only a veneer covering lightly the eternal "shamanic" nature of the Mongols. Regardless of the frame, however, the underlying implication of all these models is the same: For various historical reasons there never really did develop a distinctive and deeply culturally engrained "Mongolian Buddhism" as happened in China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, or anywhere else the Dharma took root. Thus, still today it is common academic practice to speak about the Mongols as practicing Tibetan Buddhism,²⁴ or some syncretistic bastardization thereof.²⁵

The consequences of this circumlocution are no doubt many. Not only does it have historical import, but it also bears heavily on the discourses surrounding the current revival of Buddhism across the Mongol world, from Inner and Outer Mongolia, to Buryatia and Kalmykia—namely, what are they reviving? Mongolian Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Gelugpa (dGe Lugs pa) Buddhism (in its traditional, reform, or post-modern forms?), Buryat Buddhism, Kalmyk Buddhism, or something wholly new? And while these are obviously large and complicated questions with no doubt many possible answers, there remains at the root of all of them the historical reality of whether there ever was something like “Mongolian Buddhism.” Or to turn the question around: Was there anything authentic in the Mongol adoption of the Dharma?

While such a question may seem odd in many ways, it also needs to be recognized that it does address head on the larger problem of inauthenticity and/or duplicity that shapes so much of the discourse about Mongolian Buddhism. Most notably, if the Mongol conversion to Buddhism can be shown to reflect the same dynamic processes of both acculturation and cultural transformation as occurred in other parts of Asia, then this lends credence to the notion that not only was the Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism authentic, and not solely politically motivated or superficial, but also the very reality of a Mongolian Buddhism was legitimate and authentic. And in this regard, the historical realities of levirate marriage present an interesting example of how Buddhism did in fact profoundly transform Mongol culture. In fact, based on the available material it appears as if the Dharma played a role in bringing to an end a tradition that had shaped the familial norms and social structures of the steppe for at least two thousand years.

BUDDHISM AND MONGOL WOMEN

Unfortunately, however, we know very little about how this happened. Clearly something did happen, though, since not one Mongol source after the meeting of Altan Khan and the Third Dalai Lama in 1578 mentions levirate marriage. Most notably, neither of the two earliest Mongol legal codes—the Code of Altan Khan and the Mongol-Oirat Code of 1640—mentions it, which is surprising, since both contain much material concerning marriage and the family.²⁶ And this silence, if one can call it that, is also reflected in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, which never once mentions that Queen Jönggen actually married any of Altan Khan’s successors. Instead, she is simply presented as being a key figure working in tandem with both Sengge Dūüreng and Namudai Sechen Khan; she is certainly not their “wife.” In fact, in the one passage in which her post-Altan Khan marriage status is mentioned—when Abatai Khan of the Khalkha visits the Tümed court to meet with the Dalai Lama—he, or perhaps more aptly the anonymous author, specifically identifies her as the wife of his (i.e., Abatai’s) uncle, meaning Altan Khan.²⁷ Thus even in this early source that very much glorifies Queen Jönggen it appears as if a Mongol reevaluation of levirate marriage was already beginning to take place.

Of course, at the same time, we also know that Queen Jönggen did eventually remarry a fourth time. Yet it should be noted that she was extremely hesitant to do so; in fact, it took the Ming court and the Mongol nobility more than four years to convince her to do so. Indeed, as a result, we can rightfully ask: Why did it take so long? Clearly, as evidenced from the Chinese sources, there were all kinds of economic, familial, and political issues involved in this particular decision. There were questions of border trade and who controlled it. There was also the feud between Boshugtu and Sodnam, the grandson of Queen Jönggen. And there was not only the growing fragmentation of Mongol society, but also the fact that the Ming dynasty was stagnating and slowly falling apart. Thus, clearly Queen Jönggen had many issues to grapple with as she pondered whether or not to be remarried for a fourth time to a man who was the same generation as her grandson. Was Buddhism, as suggested above, one of them? Or in other words: Did the adoption of Buddhism play a role in the Mongol abandonment of levirate marriage?

On one level, it would seem as if answering such a question should be rather straightforward. However, unlike many other religious traditions, the Dharma has in general very little to say about the social practices of the laity. Thus, unlike monks and nuns, who are bound by the voluminous dictates of the Vinaya, there is no corresponding law code for the Buddhist laity.²⁸ There is no Buddhist Deuteronomic Code, no Buddhist Dharmasāstra, nor is there even anything remotely like Islamic Shari'a. As a result, there is no Buddhist text that either explicitly condones or condemns levirate marriage as there is in the Deuteronomic Code²⁹ and the Hindu Dharmasāstra literature.³⁰ And thus, it is perhaps not a surprise that in the Buddhist world there exists a vast array of different marriage practices.³¹ For example, solely in the tantric Buddhist world of the Himalaya, there is both levirate and sororate marriage³² (as well as monogamy, polyandry, polygyny, and polygynandry³³). It therefore seems unlikely that something like an anti-levirate ruling developed among the Buddhists of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Mongolia.³⁴

Yet at the same time we do know that Buddhists were injecting the Dharma into Mongol society by means of legal institutions. The Mongol-Oirat Code of 1640, for example, had a range of rulings related to the disenfranchisement of "shamanism" and the institutionalization of the Dharma.

Thus the law prescribed that Ongons (idols) be removed and that persons resisting such removal be fined (111). Persons inviting a male or female shaman were fined one horse and the shaman also had to pay a fine of a horse (111). A shaman was fined five horses for casting a spell over a house of a noble and two horses if he bewitched the habitation of a commoner. For killing a widgeon, a sparrow and a dog for ritual purposes, the offender was fined a horse (112). The Regulations ruled that "the clergy have the right to take one of ten men," i.e. of every ten males in a family one had to be consecrated to God, but his relations could ransom the person so dedicated by paying 5 animals if he were a prince and 3 if a commoner (9). For arbitrary

violation of the monastic vows and renunciation of the clerical dignity a heavy fine was collected—a half of the offender's cattle and other property (18). Messengers (*elchis*) travelling on the affairs of religion and government had the preference above all others (16). Anyone who took carts from the Lamas and Bandis (novices) was fined a cow, and whoever took a horse consecrated to Buddha for his cart was fined a horse (19). Insults by word or deed offered to the clergy were severely punished (art. 17, cf. art. 20). The looting of an Aimak belonging to the clergy was punished with a heavy fine (5).³⁵

Such laws clearly reflect the fact that the Mongols had taken their conversion to the Dharma seriously and were therefore implementing policies in order to transform their society in accord with Buddhist doctrines. As is well known, a pivotal issue in this dynamic was the question of blood sacrifices, especially in relation to funerals, which was the ritual *par excellence* of the Buddhist tradition across Asia.³⁶ And based on a Chinese ethnographic account from the turn of the seventeenth century, it appears as if the Mongols had in fact abandoned blood sacrifices at funerals, but not levirate marriage.

As Xiao Daheng notes, “This custom of killing [living beings] on the occasion of funerals has changed [. . .] Although the deceased's concubines are no longer killed, they are still taken by his son, with the exception of their own mother.”³⁷ In many ways it was therefore these two issues that lay at the heart of the Queen Molan story: She was both a levirate wife and had performed human and animal sacrifices at her son's funeral, and therefore she had been reincarnated as an evil spirit that the Dalai Lama needed to exorcise. On one level, the story is therefore clearly about righteous action and ritual power: Buddhism is good and proper, while “shamanism” is evil and wrong. Yet that basic narrative frame is also central to the original story of Altan Khan's exhumation and cremation found in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*. Thus, one can rightfully ask why Sagang Sechen felt the need to marginalize that entire historical episode and instead expand greatly upon the legend of Queen Molan.

While there may be many possible answers to this question, a starting point is the observation that the story is a retelling of the famous legend of Maudgalyāyana rescuing his mother from hell.³⁸ In this retelling, the Dalai Lama fulfills the role of rescuer and thereby confirms his power and stature, which was an important narrative strategy in both Tibetan and Mongolian sources throughout the seventeenth century, as the institution of the Dalai Lama was not only being consolidated in Tibet at the time,³⁹ but also being formally recognized by the Manchu court.⁴⁰ Clearly Sagang Sechen's work is operating within this discourse of confirming the legitimacy of the Dalai Lama and thus the Mongol adoption of Gelugpa Buddhism. Yet that is not all that is going on in the story: Indeed, as evidenced in the above-mentioned legal regulations, the Dharma was also becoming an integral part of all aspects of Mongol society. Thus in thinking about these transformations we should not ignore the possibility that the introduction of Buddhism may also have involved a transformation in gender roles.

In fact, it is probably not a coincidence that the famous legacy of powerful Mongol women did not continue into the Buddhist period.⁴¹ Rather, the history of Mongol women completely disappears during the Qing dynasty.⁴² Of course, the vanishing fate of women, especially that of widows during the Manchu period, has long been a topic of scholarly investigation.⁴³ And certainly many of the dynamics that came to shape the lives of Han and Manchu women influenced Mongol women as well, especially as Chinese legal and cultural systems came to define increasingly all of the Qing domains.⁴⁴ However, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this was not the case, and it was instead the Dharma that was playing a role in transforming Mongol society. I would argue this also included the status of Mongol women.

In thinking about this possibility it is imperative to recall that unlike in modern feminist readings of the Dharma, the fact of the matter is that Buddhism has historically been misogynistic.⁴⁵ It is therefore appropriate to recognize that while the story of Queen Molan is certainly about Buddhist conversion, it is also about a powerful woman being put in her place by a more powerful man.

CONCLUSION

The story of Queen Molan—as well as the disappearance of Queen Jönggen in the historical narrative, and their connection to the broader issue of levirate marriage—therefore needs to be situated within this larger frame of the Buddhist fear of women, a phenomenon perhaps best reflected in the well-known story of the island of man-eating women found in the *Valāhasa Jātaka* and its numerous iterations across Asia.⁴⁶ Indeed, to make sense of all these intersecting elements and their implications in the case of Queen Molan, it is necessary to understand the nature of Mongol marriage, especially the tradition of levirate.

In particular, contrary to other cultures where brides would receive a dowry and thereby could potentially become “free agents” after divorce or the death of their husbands, in steppe society the “rights to the woman’s person were transferred to the groom’s family in return for a payment of bride-price . . . [thus the] levirate illustrated the concept that rights over a woman’s body and labor belonged now to her husband’s family, in perpetuity.”⁴⁷ Thus, even though many women were given livestock and property by their husbands shortly after getting married, “the levirate ensured that these assets stayed in the family.”⁴⁸ Yet among wealthy families this dynamic could be short-circuited—namely, a widow who had received these commodities could technically resist the “levirate marriage and use her assets to maintain an independent household with herself at the head. This was possible because Mongol women in fact often had considerable authority in the household. They were responsible for managing the camp when the husband was away on hunting or military campaigns, and some could acquire considerable wealth of their own.”⁴⁹

In other words, by default, the tradition of levirate could generate powerful, independent women. The prime example of this phenomenon was, of course, Queen Jönggen,

who after the death of Altan Khan set herself up as the most powerful person in the Ordos. This was clearly viable in the Mongol tradition wherein women had historically held a great deal of power; however, it was not appropriate within the patriarchal structures of the Dharma, one wherein women were to know their place. If not, they ended up in a hell as seen not only in the case of Queen Molan, who took upon herself the organization of her son's funeral, but also in all three of the famous Buddhist "hell-stories" popular among the Mongols,⁵⁰ all of which revolve around women being sent to hell for their troublesome behavior. And it is this larger gendered discourse that truly lies at the heart of not only Sagang Sechen's story of Queen Molan, but also his larger narrative move of erasing Queen Jönggen from Mongol Buddhist history, since it is precisely the history of a strong woman—and the levirate tradition that enabled it—that needed to be forgotten for the Mongols to become truly authentic Buddhists.

NOTES

1. Serruys, 1974–1975, 191.

2. For a cursory overview of how Queen Jönggen is presented in this source see Kollmar-Paulenz, 2000, 190–204.

3. Although Chinese sources claim that Queen Jönggen was Altan Khan's granddaughter, thereby fulfilling all the Chinese tropes of Mongol depravity, based on the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, it seems as if she was actually the daughter of an Oirad prince who offered her as part of an alliance after being defeated by Altan Khan; see Elverskog, 2003, 112 n. 149; hereafter JTS.

4. Serruys, 1960, 1–66.

5. The following historical sketch is drawn from JTS, 36–37.

6. Asing Lama, also known as Arig Lama and A-seng bla-ma-ki 'Dzo-dge in Tibetan sources, was a Tibetan monk whose name, it has been argued by G. N. Roerich, implies that he was from the Arig tribe of southern Amdo. Okada, however, has noted that 'Dzo-dge may be the same as Mdzod-dge, a county in the northern part of Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, close to the borders of Qinghai and Gansu (Okada, 1992, 645 n. 2). Little is known about him, except that he was the principal monk who initiated Altan Khan's advances toward Tibet. In the *Erdeni-yin tobči* Asing Lama was captured during Altan Khan's campaigns in Tibet in 1573 and then taught the Khan the theory of incarnation and the six-syllable mantra: de Rachewiltz and Krueger, 1990, 70v06–70v13 (hereafter ET). In the *Erdeni tunumal*, however, as corroborated by Tibetan sources, Asing Lama simply came to Altan Khan's court and gave teachings (Ahmad 1970, 87). A recently discovered history from Küriye Banner, which claims Asing Lama as the first local lama, provides a more detailed history of his life. It asserts that Asing Lama was born in Amdo in the "Samlau" lineage and was originally named Sherab. When young he went to study in central Tibet and then went to Wutai Shan in Shanxi. After some time he went into Mongol territory and lived north of present-day Khökhöt, whereupon he met Altan Khan. Later, in the beginning of the seventeenth century, he began proselytizing in the Baarin and Kharchin areas, whereupon he eventually came into contact with the Manchus. And when Hong Taiji moved the capital to Mukden, he invited Asing Lama to come live there, which he did and became famous as Mañjuśrī Khutugtu. Later, he returned to Inner Mongolia and established what came to be the

Manjusri Monastery. He passed away at the age of 80 in 1636, Čigči, “*Asing lama-yin udum üile-yi tobči tanilčayulqu ni*,” (Öbör mongyol-un neyigem-ün sinjilekü uqaγan 3 [1983], 177–181).

7. The Juu Sakyamuni temple was built by Altan Khan at the request of the Dalai Lama in what is now Hohhot. In 1581 the Wanli Emperor granted it the title Hongci Si, whereupon it became a center of intensive translation activity. In 1640 the temple was refurbished and expanded, at which time it became known as Yeke Juu (“Great Temple”) and received the imperial title “*čaglası ügei süme*” (Wuliang Si), the “Immeasurable Temple” (Altan’orgil, 1981, 98–126).

8. Although the JTS asserts that the Kanjur was translated in its entirety between the years 1602 and 1607, no copy of this edition has been found. The oldest extant redaction of the Mongolian Kanjur is from the time of Ligdan Khan, who commissioned thirty-five persons headed by the Sakya monk Kunga Odzer to translate the Kanjur in 1628–1629. At that time six manuscript copies were supposedly prepared. One, written in gold and now housed in the Library of the Academy of Social Sciences in Hohhot, may in fact be older: Heissig, 1998, 158. Five were written in black ink; one is housed at St. Petersburg University: Kasyenko, 1993. However, Kollmar-Paulenz, 2002, has argued that this may in fact be a different redaction. Nevertheless, as evidenced in JTS and in several colophons, including one that confirms the translation of the Kanjur at this time (Kasyenko, *Gandjura*, 158), it is clear that the idea, and possibly even the work, of translating the Kanjur was begun and completed at this time: Heissig, 1984, 216–220; Uspensky, 1997, 113. It is therefore possible to conjecture that when Ligdan Khan was engaged in his failed campaign against the Ordos in 1627, he acquired a copy of this earlier Kanjur translation and then used it as the basis for the later translation. And in the process not only were the colophons altered to erase the evidence of this earlier translation, but the translators also reorganized the contents. A similar phenomenon did in fact occur when the Kangxi emperor ordered a Mongolian Kanjur to be prepared in Beijing in 1718–1720. See Heissig, 1954b, 110.

9. The colophons of five Mongol Buddhist texts, for example, identify Queen Jönggen as a sponsor of the following texts: the *Diamond Sūtra* (Sárkozi, 1973, 43–102); two versions of the *Mdo mdzangs-blun* (Heissig, 1975; Serruys, 1975, 178); the *Prajñāpāramitā in 10,000 Lines* (Heissig, 1954a, 35); and the *Lotus Sūtra* (Heissig, *Blockdrucke*, 27–28).

10. ET, 151; de Rachewiltz and Krueger, 1991, 133.

11. JTS, 161.

12. Elverskog, 2005a.

13. The Buddhist persecution of Shamanism is well known from Walther Heissig’s pioneering work on Neichi Toin. See Heissig, 1953, 1–29, 493–536; see also Kollmar-Paulenz, 2008.

14. DeWeese, 1994.

15. “Thereupon, to inter the majestic corpse of Altan, King of the Dharma, Chinese astrologers and the supreme Manjusri Khutugtu Dalai Lama/Personally inspected the good and bad signs of the burial site. Then, according to the <three jewels>, they constructed a palace on the sunny side of the Kharaguna Mountains” (JTS, 180).

16. JTS, 191–194.

17. ET, U81v–U82v.

18. Both Buddhist and Chinese sources from this period record the use of blood in Mongol shamanic rituals, but not in regard to funerals, nor in terms of human sacrifice. Rather, all such works note how rituals toward the *onggon* (figures representing various spiritual forces—mountains, rivers, deceased ancestors, etc.) can include animal sacrifice. The only exception to this is Xiao Daheng 蕭大亨 in his *Bei lu feng su* 北虜風 of 1602, wherein he states that such

rituals can include the sacrifice of slaves and animals (Serruys, 1945, 135). Of course, in earlier records from the empire period there is evidence that Mongols' funerals did entail human sacrifice. According to the Persian chroniclers Juwayni and Vassaf, for example, human companions were buried with Chinggis, Ögedei, and Hülegü. See Barthold, 1970, 207–208. Similarly, Juzjani, in describing the funeral of Batu, wrote that “they buried him in conformity with Mughal custom . . . they place <in the tomb> vessels and numerous effects together with his arms and weapons, and whatever may have been his own private property, and some of his wives, and slaves, male or female, and the person he loved most above all others.” See Boyle, 1976, Chapter 23, 7–8. And contemporary Armenian chronicles note the same: “if it was one of their great men, they laid some of his men-servants and maid-servants with him in the tomb, because, they said, they might wait on him, and also a horse, because, they said, there would be fierce fighting there.” See Boyle, 1976, Chapter 19, 203–204. And as noted in this Armenian chronicle, a ritual sacrifice of horses is also well attested in sources from this early period. John of Plano Carpini, for example, notes that “they bury with him a mare and her foal and a horse with bridle and saddle, and another horse they eat and fill its skin with straw, and this they stick up on two or four poles, so that in the next world he may have a dwelling in which to make his abode and a mare to provide him with milk, and that he may be able to increase his horses on which to ride.” See Dawson, *The Mongol Mission*, 12–13. This practice of providing the deceased with a horse continues among the Daur Mongols today; see Humphrey and Onon, 1996, 194–195.

19. Queen Molan is not mentioned in either of the *Altan tobči* chronicles, nor is she found in the detailed genealogical records of the contemporary Chinese sources. Indeed, the question of whether Altan Khan even had a second wife is difficult to answer. On one level it would seem as if he did, since in Chinese records Queen Jönggen is always identified as the “third queen” (San Niangzi 三娘子), which readily implies that there was both a first and second wife preceding her. Similarly, Chinese sources do seem to distinguish between these two first wives by adopting two different transcriptions for the title of Altan Khan's wife: Yeke Qatun. Thus in almost all cases this title is transcribed as Yike Hatun 一克哈屯; however, in rare cases it is written as Aike Hatun 矮克哈屯. Yet whether these two transcriptions actually denote two separate women is unclear. Indeed, within these various Chinese records none of Altan Khan's nine children is specifically identified as being the child of Aike Hatun, including Töbed Taiji. In fact, in Qu Jiusi's 瞿九思 Wanli Wugong Lu 萬歷武功錄, the mother of both Sengge Diiüeng and Töbed Taiji is identified as Yike Hatun. Thus, whether there was a second wife remains unclear, especially since in JTS Queen Jönggen is never identified as a third wife as she is in Chinese sources. What is clear, however, is that it is only in the work of Sagang Sechen that a second wife named Queen Molan appears playing a pivotal role in the history of the Mongols' conversion to Buddhism. See Serruys, 1958, esp. 84, 88.

20. “When a father dies, [the son] takes his stepmother as his own wife, and when their brothers die, they take their [brothers'] wives as their own” (Watson, 1958, II, 129). For the Chinese, the practice of levirate was a gross aberration of social norms since in their view it was “incest with an older generation” (*zheng 烝*). Thus in the Han dynasty it was a capital offense for someone to take the concubine of his father (Goldin, 2002, 168 n. 66).

21. Roux, 1969, 63–67; Holmgren, 1986, 129–192; Birge, 1995, 107–146; Noh, 2000, 113–124.

22. Jackson and Morgan, 2009, 91–92.

23. Elverskog, 2004, 137–140.

24. Lopez (2004, 22), for example, defends this practice by drawing parallels with the use of Roman Catholicism. For a critique of this rhetorical move and its larger implications see the introduction of Elverskog, 2008.

25. Elverskog, 2007b.

26. Bira, 1994, 277–309; Buyanöljei and Bao Ge, 2000.

27. “As soon as he arrived he offered his merit *paramita* and prostrated himself./The Dalai Lama was gracious and deigned on Abatai Sain Khan the title Vajra Khan. He met and bowed down to his elder brother’s wife, the Bodhisattva Incarnation of [Tara] Queen Jönggen. He adopted the Gegen Khan’s State and Religion in imitation, and without delay returned” (JTS, 189–190).

28. For an attempt at elucidating the intersection of Buddhism and law see French, 1995, as well as van Kuijp, 1991.

29. “If brethren dwell together, and one of them die, and have no child, the wife of the dead shall not be married abroad unto one not of his kin; her husband’s brother shall go in unto her, and take her to him to wife, and perform the duty of a husband’s brother unto her” (Deuteronomy 25:5).

30. The practice of *niyoga*, whereby a ritually sanctioned relative is allowed to marry and impregnate a widow in order to ensure an offspring and thereby the continuity of the family line, was a contentious issue in the Hindu tradition. Namely, in the earliest *Dharmaśāstras*, such as those by Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vāsiṣṭha and even the *Viṣṇu-smṛti* the practice of *niyoga* is accepted, while the later and more puritanical *Āpastamba* is silent on the issue. Manu, on the other hand, both allows the practice (9.56–63) and condemns it (9.64–68). Yet ultimately he allows that properly produced levirate children have inheritance rights (9.120–121, 9.143ff). And as is evidenced in the *Mahābhārata*, which is full of examples of *niyoga*, the practice was a recognized part of early Hinduism: Sutherland, 1990, 77–103. Subsequently, however, most Hindu jurisprudence came to condemn the practice: Kane, 2006, esp. Vol. 1, 50–51; vol. 2, Part 2, 600–606.

31. See, for example, Jaffe, 2001.

32. Sororate is the opposite of levirate, where a widowed man marries his deceased wife’s sister or someone else affiliated with the spouse’s group, which is practiced in Bhutan. On levirate marriage among the Sherpa see von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964, 55, 76. In some regions of Tibet it has been also a custom for one man to marry two sisters or for a woman to marry two brothers.

33. Childs, 2008, 72–75.

34. Even so, it is also possible to conjecture that the long-established rhetoric about mother–son incest in the Buddhist tradition could have played a role in critiquing levirate marriage (Silk, 2009).

35. Riasanovsky, 1965, 92–93.

36. As Cuevas and Stone (2007, 3) note: “From its beginnings in India to its varied cultural and regional forms throughout Asia, Buddhism had been and continues to be a religion concerned with death and with the dead.”

37. “Cette coutume de tuer [des êtres vivants] à l’occasion des enterrements a beaucoup changé [...] Bien que ses concubines ne soient plus tuées, elles sont encore prises par ses fils, à l’exception de leur propre mere” (Serruys, “Pei-lou fong-sou,” 137).

38. Mair, 1983, 87–122.

39. Schaeffer, 2006.

40. Elverskog, 2006.

41. See, for example, Rossabi, 1979, as well as Weatherford's popular history (2011).

42. One measure of the limited amount of sources available about Mongol women in the Qing period can be seen in Veit, 1993.

43. Elvin, 1984, 111–152; Mann, 1987, 37–56; Elliott, 1999, 33–71.

44. Heuschert, 1998, 310–324.

45. Although there have been numerous attempts to represent the Buddha as a proto-feminist, the bulk of the material discounts this modern interpretation. See, for example, Slingerland, 1991; Watson, 1996; Faure, 2003; and Gutschow, 2004.

46. The Pāli version is translated in Cowell, 1973, 89–91. For studies on its role in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Japan see Holt, 1991, 46–53; Lewis, 2000, 49–97; and Moerman, 2009.

47. Birge, 1995, 114–115.

48. *Ibid.*, 115.

49. *Ibid.*, 115.

50. Sazykin, 1979, 327–329.

2

The Western Mongolian Clear Script and the Making of a Buddhist State

Richard Taupier



INTRODUCTION

It is possible that the mid-seventeenth-century (1648) creation of the Western Mongolian Clear Script (*todo bičig*)¹ is one of the most important yet least heralded events in the history of Buddhist Inner Asia. It signified the last time in Eurasian history when an entire people and the state of which they were members embraced the Buddhist religion. The creation of a new writing system often served as an important marker in the adoption of a new religion and the evolution of an emerging state. It signaled newly realized political, cultural, and religious maturity and aspirations. In the case of the Western Mongolian Oirats, it was a key element of their state-building enterprise. In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Oirats had achieved a new parity with Eastern Mongols and were key players of an organized Central Asian steppe alliance, formed in 1640 to maintain independence from the recently established Qing empire.

The Oirats in 1648 controlled an immense but noncontiguous territory reaching from the Tibet–Nepal border in the south through modern-day Qinghai and Xinjiang and into the Volga steppes of Russia to the northwest. They were critical in establishing the religious and political institutions of seventeenth-century Tibet, establishing the Fifth Dalai Lama (Ngag dbang bLo bzang rGya mtsho) as both spiritual and temporal leader of that country. Yet today they are a largely forgotten people. Oiratia was conquered or subsumed by the Qing and Russian empires in the eighteenth century. While there are perhaps more than a half-million Oirats alive today, they constitute a minority people wherever they live.

Any discussion of the Oirats faces some significant challenges. Shortly after the majority of nonaligned Oirats were conquered in Züngharia in the 1750s, the Manchu emperor, Qianlong, ordered that all Oirat texts in Züngharia should be collected and brought to the capital in modern-day Beijing. They were used as the basis of an official Qing retelling of Oirat history and were destroyed.² Those texts that did survive ended up in libraries in faraway places such as St. Petersburg in Russia, or as sacred family objects outside of Züngharia, even when the ability to read the Clear Script was lost. Thus, the limited knowledge of Oirat history in the West has been derived primarily from non-Oirat sources, mostly Russian and Chinese. As a consequence, seventeenth-century Oirat history is still poorly understood, with seemingly significant conflicts arising from disparate sources.

Until quite recently Oirat voices have been largely silent in the rediscovery of their history. An Oirat organization established in contemporary Mongolia under the name Tod Nomyn Gerel (Clear Light of Dharma) has in the past ten years made remarkable progress in recovering Oirat textual materials and is in the process of transliterating and translating the twenty most important Oirat historical texts into Modern Mongolian. A few of those texts have been transliterated into Latin script, but none has been translated and published in English. An unpublished English translation of the best-known Oirat text, *Light of the Moon* (*Saran-u gerel*), the biography of the Oirat scholar Zaya Pandita, is a key source for this chapter.³ *The Mongol-Oirat Great Code* of 1640 is another important source, and while portions have been published in English,⁴ there is as yet no full translation. This chapter is influenced by the content of the *Saran-u gerel* and of the 1640 *Great Code*. It introduces an emphasis reflective of those works. One will note, for example, that due to the use of the *Light of the Moon* the focus here is skewed toward the Khoshuds, somewhat at the expense of the other three Oirat polities (*ulus*), the Dörböds, Torghuds, and Khoids.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BUDDHIST STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA

Given the scarcity of primary sources on Oirat history in modern languages, it is necessary to approach the topic of Oiratia as a Buddhist state in an indirect manner. That is, one must first consider the characteristics of Buddhist states in the history of Central Asia, then draw on what we know about the Oirats in the seventeenth century, and, finally, see to what extent they displayed those same characteristics. Buddhism and statecraft in Central Asia were virtually inseparable, although Buddhism competed with Confucianism, Islam, and the Chinggisid heritage as important, competing ideologies of statehood.

One feature that is characteristic of all Central Asian Buddhist states is that their rulers were proclaimed to be Dharma-kings, Buddhist universal emperors (*cakravartins*);⁵ or Bodhisattvas, and in some cases all three. Along the Silk Road, the *cakravartin*

ideology merged with other ideas of political legitimacy, including the early Turkic concept of a universal ruler. Aśoka and Kaniška set a powerful example that Central Asian rulers continued to emulate for the next thousand four hundred years.

A second Buddhist source of imperial ideology came from the notion of kings and rulers as Bodhisattvas; indeed, many rulers were cast in the role of Bodhisattva kings retrospectively. Crossley points out that in the early Tang period, imperial bodhisattvahood became a necessary though not sufficient element in the imperial ideology.⁶ From the seventeenth century onward, even Chinggis Khan was reimagined by Mongolian historians as an emanation of the Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi. Rulers of other Buddhist states were seen as emanations of a particular Bodhisattva; the Dalai Lama as Avalokiteśvara and the Qing emperor as Mañjuśrī. When Russia entered the scene, Russian Buddhists equated even Catherine the Great and later Russian tsars with White Tārā.⁷

Buddhist rulers were also expected to support Buddhist monks and monastic institutions and create laws that protected those institutions and the rights of the monks, nuns, and senior clergy who lived within them. Rulers were responsible for ensuring that Buddhism spread among their people through funding the acquisition of Buddhist texts and the translation of those texts into languages and scripts that could be understood by their subjects. In this respect the Tibetan and the Tangut empires provide well-documented examples to which we can look in the discussion of the Clear Script in Oiratia.

Kapstein⁸ describes the three great cultural innovations of the seventh-century Tibetan Empire as the creation of the Tibetan script, the written codification of laws, and the introduction of the Buddhist religion. In the cases of the Tibetan and Tangut empires it is difficult to uncouple these three advancements; indeed, the birth of nearly every new culture, state, or empire in Central Asia can be seen to require these elements. In the case of Tibet, those cultural advancements are all attributed to Songtsen Gampo (Srong mtsan sGan po, r. 617–650) and his minister, Thonmi Sambhota (Thon mi Sambho ṭa), who was sent to Kashmir to study and create the Tibetan script. Tibetan historians later came to interpret these events in the context of a greater Buddhist narrative, as intended primarily for the transmission of Buddhism. What we can say with certainty is that language and religion arose in the early Tibetan empire about the same time and both were integral elements of a new state and cultural enterprise.

In relation to the Tangut empire, according to Dunnell, the invention of a script was an act of state creation and a creation of the state that asserted cultural claims and advanced dynastic legitimacy.⁹ The Tangut example is more recent, and the destruction of the Tangut empire by the Mongols removed the opportunity for later Tangut historians to further reinterpret its creation. The Tangut graphic script was created between 1032 and 1038. During that same period the first Tangut imperial ruler, Li Yuanhao, twice requested copies of the Chinese Tripiṭaka from the Song dynasty officials. After the second request in 1035 the texts were obtained and Emperor Yuanhao immediately sponsored the translation of the entire canon into Tangut,¹⁰ an effort that lasted sixty years. What is especially notable in the Tangut example is the perceived need not merely to

possess the Buddhist Tripiṭaka as a kind of royal and national treasure, but to translate it into a native script. This indicates a perceived need to internalize Buddhism, to make it accessible within the context of the new cultural identity the Tangut rulers were creating. Cultural identity never simply arises, but rather it is constructed as a means of asserting what values and characteristics are important. It is a process of defining relations, of invoking heritage, of establishing cultural boundaries, and of charting a plan for the future.

Although the Mauryan, Kushan, Tibetan, and Tangut empires established and contributed to the tradition of Buddhist statehood in Central Asia, of which the Oirats would have been aware, the more recent example of the eastern Mongolian adoption of Buddhism would have played a greater role in the Oirat decision to adopt Buddhism. Indeed, Oirats were reported to have been among those who gathered in Kökenuur in 1578 to hear the teachings of the Third Dalai Lama and some young Oirat nobles began to study in Tibetan monastic colleges.¹¹ The Oirats were also acutely aware of the decentralization of Mongol rule in the later sixteenth century¹² and the manner in which Buddhism and the Dalai Lama became a source of external political legitimation for non-senior Chinggisid khans.¹³

The Manchus also began to employ Buddhist symbolism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as they sought to bring the Mongols and an increasingly diverse Central Asian population under their control.¹⁴ In 1634, following the death of the senior, direct Chinggisid heir, Ligdan Khan (r. 1604–1634), the symbols of his office were delivered to Hong Taiji in Mukden, including the Mahākāla statue of Qubilai Khan that symbolized his role as the protector of the Dharma. Thus, for the Oirats to play in that political theater, the adoption of Buddhism may well have been a *sine qua non* relative to Oirat statehood.

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY OIRATS

There can be little doubt that the Oirats were involved in charting a new future in the early seventeenth century. Momentous changes were taking place. The Manchus had become the rising Central Asian power under Nurhachi (r. 1616–1626) and his son Hong Taiji. The Chinese Ming dynasty was growing weaker with each passing year. The Eastern Mongols had decentralized political power in the later sixteenth century and the last senior Chinggisid heir, Ligdan Khan, had been driven into exile by a combined Manchu–Mongol army in 1634 and died that same year. In 1636 Hong Taiji proclaimed the new Qing dynasty, and by 1640, five of the six Eastern Mongol polities had been conquered or voluntarily joined the Manchus in that enterprise. Only the Khalkha Mongols of present-day Mongolia remained free of Manchu rule at that time.¹⁵ The Oirats were the only significant political and martial power with which the Khalkha Mongols could ally in their hope to remain free of Manchu suzerainty.

The Oirats, for most of their six hundred-year-long history, had been ruled by a confederation of aristocratic families. The Four Oirats (Dörbön Oirad), as they were known, acquired that title as early as the thirteenth century. The *Secret History of the Mongols* describes the Mongol Horde as the Forty-and-Four (Dochin-Dörbön), referring to the forty Mongol *tümens* (10,000s) and the four Oirat *tümens*. Throughout history the primary distinguishing feature of the Four Oirats was that members of Chinggis's Golden Lineage did not rule them. The Four Oirats of the seventeenth century were a diverse group, consisting of the Khoshud, Dörböd, Torghud, and Khoid polities.

Only the Khoid leaders claimed descent from the original Oirats of the time of Chinggis Khan. The Torghuds were descendants of the Kereyid Ulus, who may have descended from the Tatars.¹⁶ The aristocratic Choros clan, thought to be of Uighur ancestry, ruled the Dörböds. Esen Khan of the Choros clan had led the Oirats to Central Asian steppe supremacy in the mid-fifteenth century. But when he tried to claim the title of Khan of the Western and Eastern Mongols in 1453, even his own military generals revolted because of his lack of Chinggisid descent. Only the Khoshuds, ruled by the Galwas aristocracy, who claimed descent from Chinggis Khan's brother Qasar, shared a patrilineal link to the Golden Borjigid Lineage. They appeared among the Oirats only around 1580 and are reported to have originated from a Mongol group driven out of Mongolia by Esen Khan in the fifteenth century.¹⁷ It is important to note that Oirat polities were not based on kinship, as each of the Four Oirats was composed of many "bones" (patrilineages). Members of each bone might well be found within each of the Oirat political units. Only members of white bones lineages,¹⁸ however, constituted the aristocracy that ruled major and minor political groups.

For the first thirty years of the seventeenth century the Oirats were concentrated around what came to be known as the Zünghar Valley, between the Altai and Tian Shan Mountains in modern-day Xinjiang China. The first Oirat leader of the seventeenth century to take the title of Khan was the Khoshud Baibaghas Baatar Noyon, a direct descendent of Chinggis's younger brother, Qasar. It does not appear that an external authority bestowed this title. It is likely that just as the non-senior,¹⁹ Eastern Mongol leaders had appropriated the title of Khan with greater frequency in the late sixteenth century, Baibaghas was regarded as equally entitled, as long as his claim did not extend beyond the Khoshuds or the Oirats. In the opening stanzas of the *Light of the Moon*, Baibaghas is identified as the senior Oirat leader, a first among equals. It is Baibaghas who is credited with the 1616 decision initiating the process by which the Oirats were to become a Buddhist state,²⁰ with each noble family sending one son to become a monk. In spite of the wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not one of the Four Oirats reversed that decision, even as some migrated as far as the Volga steppes to live among Muslim Turkic and Orthodox Russian people.

At the same assembly held in 1616 at which the Oirats agreed to adopt Buddhism, they also agreed to maintain internal peace and not to support those who attacked other Oirat leaders.²¹ External threats also had a unifying effect on the Oirats. During the first

thirty years of the seventeenth century, the greatest threat to the confederated Oirat state came from the Khalkha Altan Khan to the east.²² Twice the Oirats raised large armies to confront Altan Khan and in each case it was Baibaghas who raised the largest number of warriors to lead into battle. In the first Oirat army of 50,000, the Khoshuds under Baibaghas constituted 30,000 of that number. When it was again necessary to confront Altan in the 1620s, Baibaghas raised 16,000 men out of an army of 36,000. By contrast, the Dörböd tribe under the Choros leaders Dalai Taiji and Khara Khula sent only 8,000 and 6,000 men into the first and second battles. Those numbers and the leadership role played by Baibaghas Khan support the view that the Khoshuds were the strongest of the Four Oirats during that period.

Events in the 1630s, however, propelled the status of the Oirats in general and the Khoshuds in particular to a new status as a Buddhist people. The Fourth Dalai Lama (Yon tan rGya mtsho, 1589–1617), who was of Khalkha Mongol descent and enjoyed obvious support and protection from the Khalkhas, had passed away in 1617. Without Khalkha protection, the Gelugpas held a tenuous position in Central Tibet. Gelugpa persecution reached its peak in 1618 when the hills around Lhasa were littered with dead Gelug monks, killed by the forces of Karma Phuntsok Namgyal, a powerful Kagyu political leader from Shigatse.²³ He even went so far as to forbid recognition of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and so when the Fifth was born it was necessary to keep him in hiding outside of Lhasa until 1625, when he was eight years of age. While sectarian violence somewhat died down, in 1634, first the Chakhar Mongols and then a Khalkha Mongol group, both exiled to Kökenuur, posed new threats to the battered Gelugpas. That threat materialized in 1635 as a Khalkha Tsogtu²⁴ Mongol army of 10,000 headed toward Central Tibet intent on Gelugpa destruction.

When the Oirats initiated their adoption of Buddhism in 1616 they were very specific in their commitment to the Gelug tradition, demonstrating fervent devotion to the Dalai Lamas. In 1635, hundreds of young Oirat monks from nobility were studying in the Gelugpa monasteries of Tibet, and they represented a very tangible element of the Oirat Buddhist future. Thus, when Sonam Choephel, the Tibetan regent during the Fifth Dalai Lama's minority, approached the Oirats with a request to intercept the Tsogtu army, he found willing recruits. Gūshii Khan, the younger brother of Baibaghas Khan, who had died in 1630, went to central Tibet with a small force and convinced the leader of the invading Tsogtu army, Arsalang, not only to desist in his attack but to become a supporter of the Dalai Lama.

Arsalang was assassinated for his betrayal by order of his father not long after. His army had encamped north of Lhasa, where they were lulled into complacency by the lack of apparent threats. In 1637, Gūshii Khan finally attacked and defeated Arsalang's forces. Between 1636 and 1642, increasing numbers of Oirat tents migrated to the Kökenuur region under Gūshii Khan. Gūshii Khan became known as "Religious King and Defender of Buddhism,"²⁵ a title bestowed on him by the Fifth Dalai Lama in recognition of his service in vanquishing the non-Gelugpa regional rulers of Tibet. Dharmatāla in his

*Rosary of White Lotuses*²⁶ refers to Gūshii Khan as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi. In the *Light of the Moon*, Zaya Pandita is reported to have met the “three Bogdos” between Lhasa and Shigatse, namely the Dalai and Panchen Lamas and Gūshii Khan further confirming Gūshii Khan’s status as an enlightened ruler.

To the Oirats, Tibet became known as Baroun-tala,²⁷ the Right Wing of the Oirat domain, in contrast to Zūngharia, the place of the Left Wing.²⁸ While Gūshii Khan was clearly in charge of the Right Wing in Tibet, and the senior Khoshud leader, there are few clear statements of who ruled the Left Wing at that time. Khoshud tents remaining in the Zūnghar Valley were many fewer, but the sons of Baibaghas Khan, Ochirtu Taiji, and Ablai Baatar still ruled large Khoshud contingents in Zūngharia. Yet, as Perdue points out at some length, it was Baatur Khung Taiji, the Choros leader of the Dörböds, who at that time ruled the largest number of tents in Zūngharia. Baatur Khung Taiji had also accompanied Gūshii Khan on his military excursion to Tibet from 1636 to 1642, leading a significant contingent of soldiers. He was given the title of Erdeni Baatur Khung Taiji by the Fifth Dalai Lama and returned to Zūngharia with significant spoils of war and Gūshii Khan’s daughter as his wife.²⁹ It appears that it was he who ruled the Left Wing. Not only had a large portion of the Khoshud polity relocated to Kökenuur to constitute the Right Wing, nearly the entire Torghud polity had migrated to the Volga steppes under Kho Urluk, leaving Baatur Khung Taiji with the greatest manpower in the Zūnghar Valley.

This bifurcation of the Oirat polity into the Left and Right Wings is further discussed in Dharmatāla’s *Rosary of White Lotuses*, which speaks of the lineages of the Left and Right “Oilods.”³⁰ Dharmatāla places Gūshii Khan as the founder of the lineage of the Right Wing and Baatur Khung Taiji as the founder of the lineage of the Left. As most traditional Dharma histories were compilations of earlier texts in the same genre, it is reasonable to assume that although Dharmatāla’s work appeared in the late nineteenth century, it was repeating the traditional view of the seventeenth-century Oirat polity. Dharmatāla is known to have relied heavily on the eighteenth-century work of the Upper Mongol scholar Sumpa Khambo Ishbaljor (Sum pa mKhan po Ye shes dDal ‘byor, 1704–1787).

In Tibet, another threat to the Gelugpas rose in the east and south through the efforts of the Bönpo King of Beri³¹ and the Kagyü Desi Tsangpa in Shigatse. Gūshii Khan again attacked and defeated each force in turn so that by the end of 1641 virtually all Gelugpa enemies in Tibet were utterly vanquished. In 1642, Gūshii Khan enthroned the Fifth Dalai Lama, now in his majority, as the religious and secular leader of all Tibet, and the Oirats (in particular the Khoshuds) assumed the role of Gelugpa protectors.³² It happened two years prior to the final collapse of the Ming dynasty and the Manchu ascendency in Beijing. The Manchus had already begun to build relationships with the Tibetans, but those were yet to mature. The Right Wing of the Oirat state, however, was firmly in control of Tibet and replaced all previous political authorities in the patron–priest relationship to which Tibetan Gelugpa leaders had become accustomed.

Dharmatāla describes the relationship between Gūshii Khan and the Great Fifth, Lob-sang Gyatso as the same that existed between Qubilai Khan and Sakya Phagpa Lama.³³

THE GREAT OIRAT GEGEEN, ZAYA PANDITA NAMKHAI JAMTSU

Zaya Pandita, the creator of the Clear Script, was the adopted son of Baibaghas. He was sent to study in Tibet a year after the Oirat nobles decided that each of them would send one son to become a monk. His previously mentioned biography, *Light of the Moon*, speaks of the future pundit in this manner:

His bones were Khoshud. His clan was Gürööchin. His sub-clan within Gürööchin was Shangkhas. His grandfather Kungkui Zayachi was renowned among the Four Oirats for his great wisdom. Babakhan was the oldest of the sons of Küngkūi. Among the eight sons of Babakhan, the Holy Zaya Pandita was the fifth.³⁴

At age eighteen, in 1617, he arrived in central Tibet, where he remained for twenty-two years and achieved great fame. In the year he took his Geshe exams he was considered the best among all scholars, winning the title of Lhasa's Doctor of Buddhist philosophy (*rab 'byams pa*). His scholarly success allowed him to become a familiar to the Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama, and he was welcome in their presence for the remainder of his life. He served as one of ten official monks in the 1638 ordination of the nineteen-year-old Fifth Dalai Lama.

The Fifth Dalai Lama and the Second Panchen Lama asked Zaya Pandita to return to his homeland and teach the Oirats. His fame as a teacher spread rapidly, and soon that translated into donations that allowed him to establish a large nomadic monastery (*khüree*) that eventually grew to be the home of some 750 lamas and servants, with significant livestock. In 1640, Zaya Pandita accepted an invitation to teach from the Khalkha Jasagtu and Tūshiyetü Khans, and while among them, he attended the Mongol-Oirat assembly of 1640. He was invited to stay in Mongolia for several more years but declined, stating the following:

Because the three Bogdos made an order to Ochir Dhara Khutugtu³⁵ saying to go to the seven banners (*khoshuu*) [of the Khalkhas and] ordered me to go to the Four Oirats, I must return to them without delay.³⁶

Thus, Zaya Pandita became the most accomplished Buddhist lama to teach among the Oirats. Nearly half of his biography describes his³⁷ travels and activities following his return to Oiratia from 1638 until his death in 1662. The text poetically states:

He sowed the seeds of white merit causing a rainfall of higher teachings that watered many dried souls.³⁸

He returned to Tibet in 1650–1651, after a twelve-year absence, with a large delegation and bringing great offerings to the monasteries and senior lamas. It is then that he met the three Bogdos traveling between Lhasa and Shigatse. As a result of this meeting and the vast offerings he and his entourage made, the Fifth Dalai Lama accepted an invitation to teach the Oirats in Kökenuur in 1651, in the same area in which the Third Dalai Lama (bSod nam rGya mtsho) first met and taught the Eastern Mongols under Altan Khan in 1578.

THE CLEAR SCRIPT

Just as the 1616 decision by the Oirat aristocracy to adopt Buddhism as the state religion marked the initiation of a concerted effort toward promulgation of the Dharma, the 1648 creation of the Clear Script marked a new, more mature stage in that process. The adoption of Tibetan Buddhism and the intensive education of young Oirat nobles in Tibetan monastic colleges opened for the Oirats an entirely new world of literature and knowledge, not just in matters of religious doctrine, but also in botany, medicine, logic, mathematics, architecture, astronomy, and art. It connected them also with the older Sanskrit-based treasury of knowledge and the rich Indic cultural world. It placed them in contrast to the Confucian and Islamic cultural spheres at their borders. But what was still needed was an effective means of transmission, the process by which this new knowledge could be internalized and made accessible to the majority of Oirats who were not literate in Tibetan. The old Mongol script was perceived as too crude and imprecise even to communicate spoken Oirat well, let alone to facilitate the transmission of complex and precise new concepts.

The very form of the new Clear Script contained cultural and political cues as well.³⁹ The new Oirat script was an improvement of the old Mongol-Uighur script and did not represent a major break from the Mongolian tradition. But its intended effectiveness in facilitating translations from Tibetan implied a different cultural fusion, that of Oirat and Tibetan cultures. Perhaps it was also intended to facilitate a new joint Oirat-Khalkha Mongol cultural identity in the wake of the 1640 Great Code. But we cannot ignore that the process of creating the Clear Script in 1648 was similar in some respects to that used by the Manchus under Hong Taiji sixteen years earlier. Although Nurkha-chi had commanded the adoption of the old Mongol script for the writing of the Jurchen language in 1599, it proved to be ineffective in many respects and the new script could not be vocalized in Jurchen. In 1632, Hong Taiji commissioned the creation of new orthographic elements, a system of circles and dots to “represent the actual sounds and mechanisms of the language that would soon come to be known as Manchu.”⁴⁰

The creation of the Clear Script could not be clearly interpreted as an element of Oirat state building if Zaya Pandita had acted without sponsorship. Myangad Erdemt, in his article published in the *Bibliotheca Oiratica* series, provides a detailed analysis of the

sponsors of the Clear Script that is based on multiple primary and secondary sources.⁴¹ Erdemt describes the positions of five different historians on this issue and the primary sources on which each position was based. He also relies on Zaya Pandita's poem about the Clear Script, in which Zaya Pandita explicitly praises both Ablai Baatar and Ochirtu Taiji, the biological sons of the Khoshud Baibaghas Khan, as enablers of the creation of the script. Thus, while their uncle Gūshii Khan ruled Tibet as "Religious King and Defender of Buddhism" on the Right Wing of the Oirat state, Ablai Baatar and Ochirtu Taiji continued complementary state-building activities in the Zünghar Valley. As Dunnell has so aptly put it in reference to the Tanguts, a script "was an act of state creation and a creation of the state."⁴² It was followed immediately by an aggressive translation project, funded not just by Ochirtu and Ablai but by other Oirat nobles as well.

Between 1648 and Zaya Pandita's death in 1662, he and his disciple translated 214 Tibetan texts into the Clear Script. A full list of these texts is given in his biography. But there is no present historical evidence that the undertaking was as ambitious as the Tangut commitment to translate the entire Tripiṭaka. Within the Zünghar basin and surrounding Oirat regions significant resources began to flow in support of translations, teachings, and institutions of the Buddha Dharma. Zaya Pandita's biography is full of surprisingly exact accounts of the offerings made by nobles who invited him to give teachings and to preside over the funeral rites of noblemen and noblewomen. Taels of silver were a common offering, but a greater wealth was transferred in the form of animals, servants, and novice monks. Livestock was the principal form of wealth available to the nomadic Oirats, and the meat, milk, hides, and wool obtained from them supported the growing monastic community. It was estimated by Radnabhadra, the biographer and disciple of Zaya Pandita, that one Oirat noble donated as many as 20,000 horses to the Gegegen and his disciples.⁴³

Novice monks came most often from noble families. Those of lesser social standing were more often given as servants, who became the herders maintaining livestock and extracting food and fiber for felt and other necessities. Excess animals were driven to border markets and sold, generally to the Chinese who traded silver, silks, and other luxury goods. When Zaya Pandita returned to Tibet in 1651 he carried with him 110,000 *taels* of silver (4,125 kg) to be distributed to the senior lamas and monasteries.⁴⁴ It was in ways such as this that newly pious Oirats began to fulfill their obligations as patrons of the Dharma.

The monastic communities that they funded were at first entirely nomadic. A *khüree* was essentially a moving monastery with a large central *ger* for statues, rituals, and books. Lay servants who served as herders and cooks generally had separate living areas, often following herds from pasture to pasture. While the grazing lands were not actually owned, regional leaders had to provide grazing rights. Eventually, access rights to some lands became the exclusive property of monastic communities. The needs of the growing Oirat monastic communities also led, in part, to the first city-like structures. One such walled monastic city was built by Ablai Baatar, the younger of Baibaghas Khan's two

biological sons. Ablai Baatar sought protection within its walls during the war that broke out between him and his brother Ochirtu Taiji around 1658. Perdue also mentions an Oirat city built by Baatur Khung Taiji, who ruled the Dörböd politics and the Left Wing of the Oirat Federation.⁴⁵

FAILURE TO FIND PEACE AND PROSPERITY

Based on the trajectory in the first fifty years of the seventeenth century, the Oirat Buddhist state seemed on its way toward a peaceful and prosperous future as a buffer between the growing Qing and Russian empires. But two wars of succession, first between the two sons of Baibaghas Khan and second among the sons of Baatur Khung Taiji, disrupted that trajectory and the peaceful propagation of the Dharma. The second war of succession led soon after to an all-out war for supremacy among the Oirats in Züngharia. That war was initiated by Galdan Boshugtu, the second son of Baatur Khung Taiji and a recognized incarnate lama, who left his life as a monk in Tibet to return to the Zünghar basin and avenge the assassination of his older brother Sengge.

When Ochirtu Taiji, then called Sechen Khan, lost in battle with Galdan in 1676, the balance between Khoshud and Dörböd leaders in Züngharia vanished. Historians often mark this event as giving rise to the Zünghar empire, what we might call the Empire of the Left Wing. Soon after Ochirtu's defeat, tens of thousands of refugees from his and other Oirat polities fled Züngharia into Kökenuur and other regions. The Left and the Right Wings of Oiratia split from one another. By 1684 many of the Oirats who escaped from Züngharia sought refuge with the Qing and were resettled under Qing protection.⁴⁶ In 1688, Galdan was drawn into a conflict with Khalkha Mongols and soon after into direct conflict with the Qing. By 1692, when Radnabhadra finished the biography of Zaya Pandita, only 100 of the 750 lamas and servants in Zaya Pandita's monastery had survived the bloodshed and upheaval of those wars.

The Khoshud of the Right Wing maintained more or less peaceful conditions under the heirs of Gūshii Khan until 1717. In 1720 a Qing army took up residence in Tibet and the Oirats could no longer look there for a source of Buddhist ideological legitimacy. With the final Qing conquest of the Zünghar Oirats in the 1750s, the Qing emperor assumed the role of reigning *cakravartin*. Even the Dalai Lamas were made by the Qing to seem subservient. Indeed, the Tibetans, Khalkha Mongols, and remaining Oirats had to kowtow to the emperor or face nearly certain destruction. Only with the fall of the Qing in 1911 were Tibet and Mongolia able to assert independence, but Oiratia had been so decimated that no spirit of independence rose from the ashes of the Qing empire.

Yet Buddhism among the Oirats did not die. Dharmatāla cites many further developments under Galdan Boshugtu and later Zünghar rulers, although the descriptions are unfortunately brief. The Khoshuds who remained in Tibet became, as Atwood tells,

Tibetanized and known as the Upper Mongols. Their religious lives became centered on the great monasteries of Kumbum (sKum 'bum Byams-pa gling) and Labrang (bLa-brang bKra shis 'khyil) and many lesser monasteries in Kökenuur. Their numerous accomplishments came to be seen as those of Tibetans rather than of Oirats.⁴⁷

The Oirats who migrated to the Volga steppes and became known as Kalmyks built their own monastic community in isolation, but young monks continued to travel to Tibet whenever possible for their education. The ashes of all the Kalmyk khans were carried to Lhasa and interred in the walls of the Potala. Nearly all the Torghud Kalmyks migrated back to Züngharia in 1771 to escape tightening Russian political control and were resettled by order of the Qing emperor on lands that had belonged to the vanquished Zünghars.⁴⁸ But the majority of the Dörböd Kalmyks were left behind in Kalmykia, trapped by the lack of ice on the west bank of the Volga River in early 1771 when the flight to Züngharia began.

Although the Oirat state of the early seventeenth century fell apart, the Clear Script remained in use among Oirats even after they were assimilated into other states. The Oirats in fact became a highly literate people and it was soon customary for many Oirats (especially descendants of the nobility) to learn to read and write in the Clear Script by the age of ten. An examination of known Oirat manuscripts show that many were written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, long after the Oirat states of Züngharia and Kalmykia had been assimilated by the Qing and Russian empires.

NOTES

1. Whenever an Oirat word or phrase appears in the text, the Oirat Clear Script spelling from the text in which it was found is used, transliterated into Latin script. However, it is important to note that spelling of even common terms varied significantly over time and among various Oirat groups.

2. Perdue, 2005, 476.

3. A. Boskhomdziev and R. Taupier translated the *Saran-u gerel* into English in 2008, but it has not yet been published. Translations in Japanese and Russian are extant. When quotes from the *Saran-u gerel* are used in this chapter a footnote will give the text in Latin script referenced according to the page of the original text as given in the Bibliotheca Oiratica series, 2009, Vol. 12.

4. For more details see Sneath, 2007, and Lkhamsüren, 2010, 269–288, which has translated sections of the 1640 Code.

5. The historical embodiment of the *cakravartin* theory began on the Indian subcontinent with the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka (r. 269–232 B.C.E.), the first king who is said to have turned the wheel (*cakra*) of the Buddha Dharma.

6. Crossley, 1999, 234.

7. Snelling, 1993 (reprinted in 2002), 10.

8. Kapstein, 2006, 56.

9. Dunnell, 1996, 37.

10. *Ibid.*, 38.
11. See endnote 33 on Neichi Toin.
12. Elverskog, 2003, 32.
13. This term applies to those who were not considered in the direct line of descent as heirs to Chinggis Khan, the oldest sons of the oldest sons. Altan Khan of Tümeds is an example, for he was the second son of the third son of the fifteenth-century direct Chinggisid heir, Dayan Khan. Ligdan Khan of the Chakhar Mongols was the rightful Chinggisid heir of the great Mongol state at the time of Altan Khan.
14. Crossley, 1999, 210–215. While both Nurhachi and Hong Taiji began to employ Buddhist symbols, receive Buddhist monks, and support construction of at least one temple, neither was clearly Buddhist. It was only with the Shunzhi emperor after 1644 that the Qing court became overly Buddhist.
15. The Khalkha Mongols did not join the state with the Qing until 1691, some fifty-one years later.
16. Atwood, 2004, 295.
17. *Ibid.*, 310.
18. There were both white and black bone lineages. The black bones lineages were those of the commoners, the subjects who were ruled by the aristocratic white bone lineages.
19. Elverskog, 2003, 18.
20. Kitinov, 2010, reports contacts between Oirat, Uighur, and Tangut Buddhists in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and with Tibetan Buddhists from the time of Qubilai Khan onward.
21. Perdue, 2005, 102.
22. The Khalkha Altan Khan is not the Altan Khan of the Tümeds, who died in 1586.
23. Dhondup, 1984.
24. Dhondup spells this name as Chogthu. Kapstein spells it as Tsoktu. Atwood uses Tsogtu and writes that Tsogtu Taiji, a Khalkha prince, was a supporter of Ligdan Khan as the rightful Khan of all the Mongols. He was driven out of Khalkha territory and into Kökenuur shortly after Ligdan in 1634 and assumed leadership of Chakhar and Tsogtu Khalkha Mongols in Kökenuur after Ligdan Khan's death.
25. Dhondup, 1984, 18.
26. Dharmatāla, 1987, 129.
27. The term, meaning the Right (or West) side (or wing), is spelled Barayun-ta in the Kalmyk version of the *Saran-u gerel*. The term appears twenty-four times in the *Saran-u gerel*, Bibliotheca Oiratica, (1999), 19: 1987, and in 182 it lists the page and line number of the text for all twenty-four occurrences.
28. This division of steppe empires and states into right and left wings was customary, dating back to at least the Xiongnu.
29. Atwood, 2004, 622.
30. Oilod is an alternate name for the Oirats.
31. Dhondup, 1984, 18.
32. It was consistent with Central Asian imperial method to appoint local rulers to maintain control over major political units within an empire rather than to rule directly.
33. Dharmatāla, 1987, 136.

34. This and all subsequent quotes from the *Saran-u gerel* are from an unpublished translation completed in 2009 by A. Boskhomdziev and R. Taupier. While three versions of the text were consulted during translation (there are significant variations), for the purposes of this chapter the relevant lines from the Bibliotheca Oiratca, 2009, vol. 12, are given in the endnotes. Rabjam Zaya Bandidin Tooj's *Saran Gerel Khemeekh Orshiv* (2009), 84, lines 2104–2114: “*yasun-inu xošoud otoy-inu gürööčün. gürööčün dotooron dotur sangyas amui. öböki inü dörbön oyirodtu yeke čečen-du aldarašiqsan küngküi jayaaci kemekü bui. küngkü-yin olon köböün bui-eče bui yeke köböün-inu babaxan kemekü bui. babaxan-du nayiman köböün bui-eče tabtayar köböün inu boydo ja-ya bandida bui.*”

35. Ochir Dhara Khutugtu is in reference to Neichi Toin, a Torghud born in 1558, who was educated in Tibet and achieved a significant notoriety. He did not teach among the Oirats but among various eastern Mongol groups.

36. *Rabjam Zaya Bandidyn Tooj: Saran Gerel Khemeekh Orshiv* (2009), 89, lines 4110–4116: “*γurban bogdoyin jarlig-eče očiro dhara xutugtu dolön xošoun-du yartuyai. namai dörbön oyirodtu yartuyai kemeegsen jarlig buyin tula. bi tüdel-ügei xariya kemeegsen-du.*”

37. Gegeen, literally meaning “bright,” is also an honorific term meaning “Holiness.”

38. *Rabjam Zaya Bandidin Tooj* (2009), 90, lines 5119–5123: “*čayaan buyani körönggü čačaysan-du dedü nomiyin xurayin ürgülji-yi oroulji emnig gangdagsan sedkiliiyin γajar delekei debeteji.*”

39. Consider, for example, the case of the eleventh-century Tanguts. Although the Tanguts were of Tibetan ethnic and linguistic heritage, they elected to create a graphic script based on the Chinese model even though it would have been much more simple and perhaps effective to fashion a script based on a new alphabet. And although the Buddhism they practiced was primarily of Tibetan and not Chinese derivation, the Tripiṭaka they requested and translated was from the Chinese Song Dynasty. They also borrowed heavily from Confucian bureaucratic models in the administration of their state. Hence, the script was symbolic of their hybrid cultural identity and the need to obtain recognition from the dominant political state on their eastern border.

40. Crossley, 1999, 185–186.

41. See Erdemt, 2008.

42. Dunnell, 1996, 37.

43. *Rabjam Zaya Bandidyn Tooj*, 2009, 116.

44. Perdue, 2005, 103.

45. *Ibid.*, 108.

46. *Ibid.*, 143.

47. Arjia Rinpoche, recognized by the tradition as the current incarnation of Tsongkhapa's father and former abbot of Kumbum Monastery, who now heads the Tibetan Mongolian Cultural Center in Bloomington, is one of those Tibetanized Oirat Mongols.

48. There are in fact several accounts of this tragic flight of the Kalmyks. Nearly 170,000 fled Russian control but half died en route due to winter conditions, attacks by Kazaks, loss of livestock, disease, and starvation.

3

Shakur Lama: The Last Attempt to Build the Buddhist State

Baatr Kitinov



AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT PATH

Shakur Lama was a prominent religious leader of the Kalmyk Khanate in the early eighteenth century, who is widely mentioned in the historical literature.¹ His important role in Kalmyk Buddhism and politics was also noted by his contemporaries.² According to the common opinion of historians, Shakur Lama was mainly a political figure whose primary goal was to bring the Kalmyks back to Züngharia, as if that had been demanded by the Dalai Lama, usually without mention of which Dalai Lama exactly—the first Sixth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso (T. Ngag dbang Ye shes rGya mtsho), or the second Sixth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso (T. Ngag dbang Ye shes rGya mtsho). However, this assessment of Shakur Lama's political deeds, as discussed below, is fairly one-sided. It is often based only on a consideration of the history of the Kalmyks in this particularly difficult period of the nation's history, and it does not imply any changes in outlook on the part of this prominent religious leader. In the historical literature we do not find any speculation about his vision of Buddhism's future among the Kalmyks, although a careful investigation of his actions provides us with crucial data about it. It is important to keep in mind that Shakur Lama was a prominent Kalmyk religious figure, one of the closest confidants of the Dalai Lama. Since the roles of this and other external factors have been often overlooked by historians, their impact on the aims and objectives of the Shakur Lama during the various periods of his stay in the Khanate has not been taken into account. But the Khanate and its leaders were connected through many ties to the outside world, which exerted some influence on the political situation in the Khanate, on the Buddhist clergy, and on the rulers.

Shakur Lama spent many years in Tibet. His contemporary, Vassily Bakunin, wrote about Shakur Lama's life among Tanguts, stating: "Being sent there at the age of ten for [the study of] science, and living there a little over twenty years, [he] learned the Tangut language and other sciences that were necessary for their religious leaders."³ Bakunin considered it important to emphasize the high religious and political positions of Shakur Lama in the Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy: "[He] was a lama in the local monastery, called Shakur, and was a governor of the province, [which was] subordinated to the monastery. The Tangut people have seven such monasteries, and this is why the Tanguts are divided into seven provinces. Lamas rule over these provinces not only as religious leaders, but also as secular powers, and Shakur Lama was among them."⁴ Indeed, Shakur Lama was the head of Shakhor monastic college.

It is necessary to point out that there were seven monastic colleges in the Drepung Monastery in Lhasa—Gomang (Sgo mang), Loselling (bLo gsal gling), Deyang (bDe dbyangs), Shakhor (Shag skor), Gyelwa (rGyal ba), Dulwa ('Dul ba), and Ngappa (sNgags pa)—and that all of them had a prominent role in the education and spread of Buddhism among the Oirats and the Kalmyks. Although the Oirats and the Kalmyks studied mainly in the Gomang College, other monastic colleges of Drepung Monastery were also opened to them, as is attested by the fact that one of the most famous heads of the Shakhor College was Shakur Lama himself. He was most likely educated at Drepung Gomang, and later was appointed the head of Shakhor College in accordance with established tradition. In the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Shakhor monastic college probably no longer existed as a separate division of Drepung;⁵ nevertheless, the highest lamas of Gomang (and sometimes of Loselling) monastic colleges were usually the heads of Shakhor.⁶

The appointment of Shakur Lama to the rectorship of one of Drepung's colleges testifies to his outstanding personality and to the great achievements of his monastic career. For Shakur Lama to be able to return to the Kalmyk territory, it was necessary for the Kalmyk Ayuka Khan to appeal personally to the Dalai Lama for permission. This attests to Shakur Lama's great importance in the Tibetan Buddhist establishment. The need for his return to the Kalmyks perhaps arose due to the death of Bukang Lama, who occupied a significant position in the political life of the Khanate in the early eighteenth century. Shakur Lama's role in political events throughout the Kalmyk steppes in the early eighteenth century is undoubted, even though he was not the only famous Kalmyk lama of the time. In fact, during the same period another prominent Kalmyk Buddhist leader, Anjjatan (Andzhatan) Lama, studied in the Tibetan Gelugpa (dGe lugs pa) monasteries. As the well-known Russian ethnographer Alexei Pozdneev noted, "the high priest of the first Kalmyk Khan Ayuka was Anjjatal Lama."⁷ Anjjatan Lama also spent more than twenty years in Tibet. He was a disciple of the famous Ngawang Tsondu, the abbot of Drepung Gomang who founded the line of incarnations of Rje bstun 'Jam dbyangs bZhad pa. According to Alexei Pozdneev, Anjjatan Lama returned to the Khanate shortly before the death of the Khan Ayuka. Information on the religious activities of Anjjatan Lama is nearly nonexistent, although his achievements were known among the Kalmyks and among the high Gelug clergy of Tibet.⁸ Similarly, in the case of

Shakur Lama there is hardly any information available about his religious activities among the Kalmyks.

It is difficult to establish the specific dates of the early period of Shakur Lama's life. In particular, we do not know his birth year and hence the year of his departure to Tibet. We do not know in which monasteries, apart from Shakhor, he studied and what his role was in the political events in Tibet. In all likelihood, Shakur Lama left Tibet with the permission of the Sixth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Yeshe Gyatso (Ngag dbang Ye shes rGya mtsho), and went to the Kalmyks of the Volga region before the invasion of Tibet by the Zünghars—that is, prior to the fall of 1717. This can be assumed on the basis of a report made by an envoy of the Kalmyk Embassy of 1729, which notes that a Kalmyk clergyman named Donir Aran Jamba went for studies in Tibet along with Shakur Lama. He became there his disciple, and after the departure of Shakur Lama he remained in Tibet and was taken a prisoner by the Zünghars when they seized Lhasa, although fortunately he managed to escape.⁹

Reaching the camp of the Kalmyk Khan, Shakur Lama immediately became involved in local political processes. At the court of Ayuka Khan and at the courts of various nobles (*noyon*) and clan leaders (*zaisan*),¹⁰ disputes and discussions about the future of the Khanate were carried out. Not even four years had passed since Ayuka Khan had hosted the famous Qing delegation headed by Tulishen, the prominent Qing politician. It is very likely that among other issues, the possibility of the Kalmyk Torghuts returning to the patronage of the Qing Emperor was also discussed. Among the Kalmyk leaders there were those who felt it was necessary to return to Züngharia, which was left some hundred years earlier. Their intention had been facilitated by circumstances relating to the situation in Central Asia and in Russia itself, due in particular to the active foreign policy of Tsevan Rabten (T. Tshe dbang Rab brtan, r. 1697–1727), the Zünghar Khan, in response to the convergence of boundaries of two khanates, Kalmyk and Zünghar. However, the contemporaneous situation in Tibet was problematic, and at that point, Shakur Lama's authority could have been crucial for the final decision. The contemporaries of Shakur Lama noted that he had brought to the Khanate a "Letter of Call" from the Dalai Lama for the Kalmyks to return to China.¹¹ Relying on this information, some hold that Shakur Lama played a negative role in the preparation for the eventual exodus of the Kalmyks to China.¹² However, based on an analysis of political events of that time and on the analysis of documents related to the famous delegation sent by the Kalmyk court in 1729 to the leaders of Tibet and China, this appears doubtful. One also cannot deny the likely transformation in Shakur Lama's attitudes and his expectations regarding the future of the Kalmyks during the significant events that unfolded in the Kalmyk steppe of that period.

THE INNER FACTORS AND INFLUENCES

The most famous Kalmyk Khan, Ayuka generally conducted an independent foreign policy, and had diplomatic relations with Qing China, Persia, and Turkey, as well as with the Central Asian and Crimean khans. Bakunin rightly noted the following regarding

Ayuka Khan: “[Throughout] his entire life, he had ties not only with the Crimean khans, but he also sent his messengers to the Shah of Persia and to the Sultan of Turkey.”¹³ Several scholarly studies show the connections of Khan Ayuka with Persia and Turkey that are revealed by his letters of 1703 and 1710. Chantal Lemerrier-Quellejey, who studied the letters of Ayuka Khan to the Turkish sultan, noted that in the eighteenth century, memories of the great Mongol Empire were still alive.¹⁴ This kind of “memory” could be expressed in the promotion of one type of actions and in the banning of others. In particular, in the sphere of religion it is possible to trace the influence of Chinggis Khan's requirements on freedom of religious choice. The religious policy of Ayuka was tolerant. While maintaining and supporting Buddhism, he did not insist on the conversion of the Tatars, Turkmens, Nogaes, and other Muslim nations that were under his jurisdiction. His close contacts with the leaders of Islamic states could have alerted Shakur Lama, who aspired to strengthen ties with Tibet as a sacred Buddhist region and with the Qing, as an ally in matters of faith.

Interest in events in Züngharia increased significantly due to the arrival of Louzang Shuno, one of the sons of Tsevan Rabten, to the Kalmyk Khanate at approximately the same time as Shakur Lama. It is safe to assume that Louzang Shuno wanted to fight for the throne of the Zünghar Khanate and hoped to get support from Ayuka and his circle. The promises and bright perspectives offered to Donduk Ombo (a grandson of Ayuka Khan, son of his son Gundzhap) by Louzang Shuno were attractive enough that they made the marriage of Louzang Shuno to Donduk Ombo's daughter possible. Donduk Ombo himself was going to lead the Kalmyk Khanate by taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the death of Chakdordzhab, who was appointed by Ayuka Khan as his successor, on February 19, 1722. The problem of succession had not been resolved by Ayuka, as the old khan died in February of 1724, exactly two years after Chakdordzhab's death. Ayuka's death had a very negative impact on the power and future existence of the Kalmyk Khanate. Chakdordzhab's sons (Dasang, Baksaday Dorji, Nitar Dorji, Donduk Dashi, Bodong, and others) engaged in the Kalmyk succession feud. The problem of succession was the main issue taken up by Shakur Lama. The issue arose just three years after Shakur Lama's arrival to Ayuka Khan's territories, and it was resolved shortly before his death in 1736. After the death of Ayuka Khan, however, Shakur Lama initially decided to support Tseren Donduk, the eldest son of Ayuka, as is evidenced by his own statement: “The Khan asked me to look after his son Tseren Donduk and his states (*ulus*).”¹⁵ Two major candidates, Donduk Ombo and his uncle Tseren Donduk, came to struggle for power. According to Bakunin, in 1722, in the town of Astrakhan, Dorji Nazarov (a great-nephew of Ayuka, who ruled a large number of Torghuts of the “five *otoks*”) met with two high Russian officials, the General Admiral Earl Apraksin and Privy Councilor Tolstoy. At this meeting, Dorji was informed that the Emperor Peter wished him to become a khan after Ayuka's death. In response, Dorji gave his written consent, but in September 1724 he withdrew this consent,¹⁶ and due to the active support of Shakur Lama, Tseren Donduk became the leader of the Kalmyks.

Although Shakur Lama saw that Tseren Donduk was not capable of being the Kalmyk khan, he nevertheless remained at his side and tried to guide him with advice on how to manage the Kalmyk people. But he was not able to correct Tseren Donduk, and he brought Donduk Ombo against himself.¹⁷ The Russian authorities also took into consideration a special situation on account of which they refrained from supporting Donduk Ombo as the Kalmyk khan. In 1721, Donduk Ombo had married Dzhan, a daughter of the Kabardinian khan, and abandoned his former wife Sol, who was from the Kalmyk Khosout tribe. It is worth noting that when, in 1722, Tseren Donduk wanted to marry a daughter of Chepa Chepalov, the Muslim Koumyk bai, Ayuka received a letter from the Governor Volynskiy in which he was asked not to allow “Tseren Donduk to marry . . . because it would be contrary to His Majesty’s will, and why his marriage . . . was prevented.”¹⁸

The Russian government monitored the ethnic and religious situations in the Kalmyk Khanate and in neighboring territories. It “couldn’t find it possible to satisfy the request of Dzhan [to appoint her son Randula to be the Kalmyk khan], reasonably arguing that as a Mohammedan by faith, Dzhan ‘will always be on the side of the Kabardians.’”¹⁹ Donduk Ombo himself, shortly before his death, tried to get the title of khan for Randula from the Sixth Dalai Lama, but his request was refused, as Donduk Dashi, another descendant of Ayuka, was appointed as the khan of the Kalmyks.

The matter of religion must be seen as crucial for understanding the activities of Shakur Lama, which arose in response to active proselytism among Kalmyks by Orthodox priests. Already at the end of 1723, Baksaday Dorji and Nitar Dorji, the previously mentioned sons of Chakdordzhab, had announced to Volynskiy their intention to be baptized.²⁰ In the spring of 1724, Baksaday Dorji was baptized and received the new Christian name Peter Tayshin. Nitar Dorji later refused baptism and died the following year. In the spring of 1725, Peter Tayshin returned to the Kalmyk steppe with a mobile church “and with the monk Nicodemus Lenkeevich and a few students from Moscow’s Spassky School to study the Kalmyk language and writing, so that later they could be priests and deacons.”²¹ Peter declared that the late Tsar Peter had promised to build a city for the baptized Kalmyks near the town of Astrakhan. Statements like these significantly worried Shakur Lama. The problem of Christianization also became important for some nobles and clan-heads.²² Wary of religious conflicts, and wishing to prevent the “return” of the newly baptized back to Buddhism, the Russian government decided to take the rare step of building a fortress for the baptized Kalmyks and bringing them under the control of Peter’s widow, Anna Tayshina. The fortress, named Stavropol, was built in 1738 on the left bank of the Volga River, above the town of Samara.

Another issue that troubled Shakur Lama was the growing influence of various forms of Islam among the Kalmyks. The fact is that, from the time of their stay in Züngharia, there were dependent Muslims among the Kalmyks who eventually married Kalmyk women. Their descendants were, as a rule, Muslims by faith. These Kalmyks were called Tomuts. They enjoyed considerable power and influence at Donduk Ombo’s court even

before he became a khan. Nikolai Palmov, referring to Bakunin, noted that Tomuts constituted the bodyguard of Donduk Ombo: “Tomuts watched over his house to guard his health, and [he] allowed them to become rich . . . [this is] why they were hated by all Kalmyks.”²³ Donduk Ombo, who became a khan illegally, often ordered others to be killed even without an obvious reason, and without discriminating between laypeople or clerics, be they male or female. All of the murders ordered by him were actually carried out by Tomuts.

Along with religious issues, the problem of returning to Züngharia became current. This issue of return to Züngharia was raised by Dharma Bala, a widow of Ayuka Khan, in 1724–1725. But Shakur Lama and some nobles actively opposed this idea and convinced Tseren Donduk to remain in Russia. This fact is crucial for understanding the changes in motivation of the head of the Kalmyk Buddhist Church. He had previously supported and developed the pro-Tibetan direction in Ayuka’s foreign policy, but now, when the chance to submit to the protection of his spiritual teachers arose, he was opposed to any movement toward the East, whether to Züngharia or Tibet.

THE OUTER FACTS OF INTEREST

A number of circumstances influenced Shakur Lama, and these cannot be overlooked when analyzing his actions and statements. First, he frequently used examples from the past, particularly from his predecessors, those prominent Oirat religious leaders who played a significant role in the history of the nation and in his own personal life. Their achievements and their views on the role of Buddhism in the future of the Oirats and the Kalmyks had an important influence on Shakur Lama’s intentions. These predecessors were the well-known Zaya Pandita (died in 1662), a famous interpreter and creator of the Clear Script (*todo bičig*), and Galdan Boshogtu, a Zünghar Khan (r. 1672–1697) who was educated in Tibetan Gelugpa monasteries.

We do not yet know who were the teachers and mentors of Shakur Lama in Tibet, but we can assume that one of them was the famous Torgut Dondub Gyatso (T. Thor god Don grub rGya mtsho), previously unknown in modern Oiratian and Kalmykian studies. He belonged to the Torghud tribe by birth²⁴ and was also one of the leading figures in Tibetan Buddhism in the latter part of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries. He was also known as Tsenpowa Dondub Gyatso (T. Bstan po ba Don grub rGya mtsho), who was the founder of Ganden Damchoiling (T. dGa 'ldan Dam chos gling), the famous monastery in Serkhong. He was also the tenth abbot of the Gonlung Monastery in Amdo²⁵ and the forty-eighth abbot of Ganden Monastery. As is noted in *The Story of the Life-Omniscient Chzhamyan Shadbi-Dorje, The Mighty Scholar and Siddha, Called ‘Wade, the Leads to an Amazing Good Fate,’* “the great Bodhisattva Torgod Dondub Gyatso, known [as a person who] reached the Ways of Implementation on the Path of Salvation, replaced the rector of Gomang [Lodoi Gyatso].”²⁶

It is certain that current political circumstances had a direct influence on the goals and intentions of Shakur Lama. Soon after arriving to Tibet for his studies, he found himself in the thick of tumultuous events. It should be noted that the situation in the late seventeenth century among the Mongol-speaking tribes in Tibet was difficult. First, it was the time when the death of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama became known, though he had died nearly fifteen years earlier in 1682, and when his new incarnation, who was already fifteen years old, was discovered. Secondly, in May 1691, the Congress of the Mongol khans in Khalkha Dolonnor confirmed the inclusion of their people and lands in the Qing empire due to the war of Galdan Boshogtu with the East Mongolian Tüshetü Khan and Bogdo Gegeen. Thirdly, the Qing emperor Kangxi was planning to attack Zünghar troops headed by Galdan, and he had sent Chinese-Manchu troops to the western border of Mongolia and Tibet for that purpose. The situation subsequently eased when Galdan's nephew Tsevan Rabten became the new khan of Züngharia in 1690, recognized as the khan after Galdan's death in 1697.

Shakur Lama's fate was closely intertwined with the activities of the Sixth and Seventh Dalai Lamas. The first Sixth Dalai Lama, bLo bzang Rin chen Tshang dbyangs rGya mtsho, was born on March 23, 1683, in Mongul (modern Tawang region in the Indian Arunachal Pradesh state), to the family of followers of the Tibetan Karma Kagyu lineage. The complicated political situation in Tibet led to the announcement of the news of his discovery being delayed until December 1697. Despite his special position and outstanding qualities, in 1702 Tshang dbyangs rGya mtsho refused to receive the ordination of a fully ordained monk. The situation became even more complicated a year later, in 1703, when political authority in Tibet had fallen into the hands of Lhazang Khan (T. Lha bzang han, r. 1703–1717), a grandson of the famous Oirat Khoshud Güshi Khan. Tensions between the Dalai Lama and the Khoshuds worsened an already uneasy situation, because Lhazang Khan's attempts to replace "the false" Dalai Lama had prompted a change in direction in Beijing's policy, with the Emperor's court ordering him to "seize the false Dalai Lama and to send him to Beijing."²⁷

On June 27, 1706, the Sixth Dalai Lama was deported and sent under Khoshud escort to Beijing. On the way to Beijing, the escort was attacked by a group of Drepung monks, who liberated the noble prisoner. After a short siege of the monastery by the Khoshuds, the Drepung lamas handed over the Sixth Dalai Lama to Lhazang Khan's soldiers. The subsequent fate of the first Sixth Dalai Lama was tragic: In mid-November of the same year he died not far from the Kökenuur Lake in today's Qinghai region.

Lhazang Khan enthroned a new Sixth Dalai Lama, Ngag dbang Ye shes rGya mtsho, who had been recognized by the Fifth Panchen Lama, Lobsang Yeshe (bLo bzang Ye shes, 1663–1737), and by the authorities in Beijing. According to Tsepon Shakabpa, "people did not recognize him as a true reincarnation of the Dalai Lama."²⁸ Anti-Khoshud sentiment, which arose due to the majority of the Tibetan population refusing to recognize the new Sixth Dalai Lama, defined the search and discovery of the "true" reincarnation of Tsanyan Gyatso. The new incarnation turned out to be

Lobsang Kalzang Gyatso (bLo bzang bsKal bzang rGya mtsho, 1708–1757), born two years after the death of his predecessor in 1708. The tangled situation in Tibet and the unauthorized solutions of Lhazang Khan displeased Beijing. When the Qing court became aware of the new pretender, it decided to support Lobsang Kalzang Gyatso, who in 1716 (or in 1714), under the protection of the Qing cavalry, had been taken to Kumbum (sKu 'bum) monastery in Amdo. As some scholars have noted, “after the arrival of the Seventh Dalai Lama to Koko-nor and Amdo . . . the religious life considerably quickened . . . Increased religious activities and the arrival of many clerics to Amdo may have been linked to the keeping of the little Dalai Lama in Kumbum, whose identity had not been in doubt any more.”²⁹

A high-ranking Tibetan cleric needed to resolve this complicated issue. By that time (the early 1710s), Shakur Lama must have already become the head of Shakhor monastic college. Being an Oirat (Torghud) by origin, he must have been among the lamas belonging to the three largest monasteries of the Gelugpa sect—Sera, Drepung, and Tashi Lhunpo—who asked the Oirat Zünghar Tsevan Rabten Khan in 1714 to help them overthrow Lhavzan Khan and replace “the false” Sixth Dalai Lama with the “true” incarnation from Kumbum.³⁰ We cannot prove his participation in the appeal to the Zünghars as a fact, but the chain of events in Tibet at the time might offer us the reasons for which Shakur Lama understood the significance of the so-called principle of two laws—the principle of the unification of the law of Dharma and the law of state.

Having left Tibet, Shakur Lama returned to the Kalmyks before Tsevan Rabdan's troops entered Tibet. The Zünghars crossed the Kunlun Mountains (some of them died due to the weather and the highlands), and at the end of November 1717, they attacked Lhasa from all sides and seized it by force. Plundering in the city lasted for three days. Not only did the enemies of the Zünghars and the Gelugpa sect suffer from plundering and violent attack, but the Gelugpas themselves did as well. In the fall of 1720 the Zünghars left Lhasa, and in February of the following year, they again returned to the Ili region. The Tibetan capital was occupied by the Chinese-Qing army, which brought Lobsan Kalsang Gyatso from Kumbum to Lhasa. The new power built a new system of administration in Tibet, with the new Dalai Lama as its head. The regent institution (*sde srid*) was substituted by a council of four ministers (*bka' gshags*), with Sonam Gyalpo (bSod nam rGyal po), who operated under the supervision of the leader of the imperial garrison in Lhasa, at the head. The Zünghar lamas of different Tibetan monasteries were accused of the supporting the aggressors and sent to prison.

In early 1723, Emperor Kangxi died. Taking advantage of the situation, the Kökenur Khoshuds decided to revolt. However, the new Emperor Yung-cheng (r. until October 1735) crushed the rebellion and annexed several territories, including Qinghai. In Tibet, the situation remained tense. Clashes between supporters of the different schools, quarrels between the Kalons, and the young age of the Seventh Dalai Lama once again moved the country toward the turmoil of civil war. After a series of battles, Pho lha nas came to power. In the fall of 1728, the young Dalai Lama was sent into exile for more than seven

years. Perhaps the rumors about events in Tibet also provided Kalmyk leaders with reasons to send a delegation to the Dalai Lama.

THE DELEGATION OF 1729 AND ITS RESULTS

In early March 1729, Shakur Lama asked the Russian government for permission to travel to Tibet “to worship the Dalai Lama.”³¹ Dorji Nazarov also expressed a desire to travel to Tibet. Historians have failed to pay attention to the fact that the desire for this journey for the sake of meeting the Dalai Lama was expressed by two persons who were in a mutual conflict over political power. It should also be noted that almost all nobles and clan-heads participated in preparations for travel, although they themselves did not want to go to Tibet. It is interesting to note that all of them had their own lamas (from their *uluses*) in Tibetan monasteries. In the end, Shakur Lama and Dorji Nazarov were prohibited from leaving the Khanate, and the delegation went to the East without them.

As noted above, by 1729, when the Kalmyk Embassy went to Tibet, the Dalai Lama had not been in the Potala in Lhasa, to which he returned only in April 1735. We have no record of where and when the envoys met with the Dalai Lama, although it is known that the Embassy brought gifts to him. It is also known that the ambassadors were able to meet with the Kalmyk lamas living in Tibet and in Beijing. The delegation received a number of requests from Shakur Lama. Thus, the Ambassador met with the lama Don Aran Jamba, a friend of Shakur Lama who was also a Kalmyk Torghud. According to this lama, Shakur Lama asked him to return to the Kalmyks, but he did not know why he should return.³² It is noteworthy that Aran Jamba wrote to Shakur Lama about his troubles. He had been captured by the Zünghars but managed to escape to Beijing. He wrote in his letter that he “came to His Majesty Manjushrian Khan (Qing Emperor) . . . from whom he received the ineffable grace and salaries and carried on the throne of the Eastern Kiit as the lama and guardian of rights.”³³ Shakur Lama also appealed to other lamas to return to the Khanate, although, apparently, without offering any reasons to them, either. A Khoshud leader, the unnamed *zaisan*, whose son Bire Bodee was one of Shakur Lama’s assistants, was also asked to return to the Kalmyk lands, but he was not able to do so because of the Zünghars, Kazakh Turks, who could kill him, as well as because of his old age.³⁴

Among the documents housed in the Kalmyk National Archive there are those describing the interrogation of the members of the delegation. From an investigation of these documents we can outline at least two points, which give us a fresh look at the content of Shakur Lama’s religious activity in that period. The first point is the unexpected mention of Tsan dan Jo wo, a sandalwood statue of the Buddha. To clarify this point it is important to give some details regarding the history of the statue, which is both very interesting and not yet adequately studied. According to legendary sources, the statue was made during the life of the Buddha and was later kept in various parts of India.

The Russian scholar Andrey Terentyev, who studied the history of the statue, noted that in the fourth century, a Kashmiri monk named Kumarayama, wishing to protect the statue from the armed clashes of that period in North India, decided to bring it over the Himalayas to Central Asia. He went to Kucha, the well-known oasis on the Silk Road, where his patron, a local ruler, asked him to forsake his monastic vows and marry the ruler's sister, Jivakā. Their son was named Kumarajīva, by combining the parents' names. Kumarajīva (344–413) became known as a great Buddhist philosopher and translator. He was invited to China in 384, where he went with the sandalwood Buddha statue. The statue was kept in Changan until 417, in Nanjing until 588, and later in Yangzhou and other places. In 970, at the beginning of the Song Dynasty, it was kept in Kaifeng. Sarat Chandra Das noted that the sandalwood Buddha statue had been moved from Bodh Gaya to Bactria in the third century B.C.E., and from there it was moved to China at the end of the first century B.C.E. Terentyev cites a portion from the writings of Chankya Rolpa Dorje's (lCang skya Rol pa'i rDo rje, 1717–1786) work, the *Precious Garland of the Authentic, Beneficial, and Concise Account of the Sandalwood Buddha Statue* (*Tsan dan jo bo'i lo rgyus skor tshad phan yon mdor bsdus rin po che'i phreng ba gsung 'bum*):

At the time of the great Mongol Yuan Dynasty, Zandan Zhuu [Tsan dan Jo wo] had been erected at Shenan-sy monastery. Emperor Kublai Sechen (Wise) ordered the building of the monastery . . . and provided unprecedented and constant homage and prayers. Subsequent emperors of the Yuan and Ming Dynasties prayed and worshiped assiduously and diligently, too. At the time of the Qing Dynasty in the fourth year of Emperor Kangxi, merciful Chakravartin, the embodiment of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, issued an order to build a new temple called “Excessive Mercy” near the Forbidden city on the North-West, in the halls of the Yellow City, and brought there the Precious Zhuu.³⁵

According to Sarat Chandra Das, the statue was stored in the temple Zandan-sy in Beijing and was seen (by him) in 1885.³⁶ Terentyev informs us that when Zandan-sy monastery was destroyed in 1900, during the Boxer Rebellion in China, the statue disappeared. The lama, Zhimboy Zhamtso Tsybenov, reported that the temple had been set on fire by Buryat Cossacks; he kept the statue somewhere on the outskirts of Beijing and later took it to the Russian region of Transbaikalia.³⁷

It is obvious that the history of the statue has been little known until now due to the lack of specific references to dynastic periods and the abbots of the temple. However, I have discovered new data in the archival material stored in the National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic that contains revealing information regarding the history of this statue. According to these documents, the Kalmyk delegation of 1729 brought back a book from China that described the “history of the structure of Tsan dan Jo wo, which belonged to their spiritual Kalmyks in Beijing.”³⁸ This new information raises two questions. First, does this statement refer to the temple where the statue was kept or to the

statue itself? Second, why was Shakur Lama interested in the history of the “structure” of the temple or statue? Our archival materials have not yet helped us answer these questions with any certainty. In my view, the book contained information about both the temple and the statue itself. It is possible that the leaders of the Kalmyk monastic community wished to know (or to recall) the architectural design of the temple and the specifics of the composition of the statue itself. Their interest could be dictated by only one reason: their desire to recreate a similar statue and to build a similar temple. It was believed that the presence of that statue in a certain place guaranteed the prosperity of the Buddha’s teachings. It can be assumed that the appearance of Tsan dan Jo wo in the Kalmyk lands was conceived by Shakur Lama as a fundamental step in revitalizing the faith and strengthening the united Kalmyk state. The importance of this newfound fact lies in showing that at least in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the temple of Zandan-sy was under the supervision of the Kalmyk lamas. This is not surprising, since in the main Tibetan temple in Beijing, Yunhokung, the Kalmyk lamas occupied high positions.

The aforementioned document also contains further valuable information that has escaped the attention of historians. It mentions the word “state” or “homeland” (K. *nutuk*). The Russian scholar Boris Vladimirtsov notes in his book *The Social System of the Mongols* that the term *nutuk* is a space where any economic-social unit of nomads could roam.³⁹ According to the contemporary view, words like *nutuk* are defined in the lexicon of the Moscow’s *Prikaz*⁴⁰ as a political entity headed by a khan.⁴¹ Thus, the *nutuk* meant an area with pastures, usually separated from other *nutuks* by natural barriers such as mountains, rivers, forests, and the like. In the context of Russian circumstances, this concept acquired a different semantic meaning, closer in meaning to the word *ulus*, meaning the “state” or “country, or homeland.” Hence, a *nutuk* can be understood as an area with its people led by the khan. In one of his letters to an unknown person at the Qing court, Dorji Nazarov mentions another letter in which he wrote about *nutuk*. A translator (in Russian) of this letter notes: “this [word] in the Kalmyk dialect means ‘home’ or ‘people.’”⁴² The Kalmyk Ambassador Choi Getsül, who led the appointed delegation in 1729, was asked the following by Russian officials: “In which power [sense] was the *nutuk* mentioned? Is the aforesaid letter an original document or a copy? And if it is a copy, what about the original document . . . [and] which response was received?”⁴³ Choi Getsül answered that he knew nothing about it.

The examined archival materials do not answer the question: What specifically did Dorji Nazarov request from the imperial court in Beijing, or even from the Tibetan leader? But they do offer this distinctive information: The Russian authorities repeatedly asked the members of the delegation whether there was anything that their rulers ordered them to transmit verbally rather than in letters or other documents. Scholars have noted this “feature of Kalmyk ambassadorial custom as a transfer of verbal information, as a rule, of confidential nature, through a messenger.”⁴⁴ Therefore, one can assume that Dorji Nazarov’s request was orally transmitted.

We can also assume that Dorji Nazarov, who five years earlier had refused the position of the khan, now looked for an opportunity to lead the Kalmyks under the principle of the “two laws” (the laws of the state and Dharma). Being a very religious person, to whose *ulus* belonged many Kalmyk religious leaders, including Shakur Lama, Dorji Nazarov was one of the few persons, if not the only person, who would have had the right and the opportunity to become the Kalmyks’ secular ruler having a religious preceptor. His desire to meet the leaders of China and Tibet, with whom he could discuss the matter of *nutuk*, indicates the special status that Dorji Nazarov was going to provide to the new state. It is also important to remember that at that time Tseren Donduk was not yet the khan, but only Namestnik.⁴⁵

The delegation of 1729 ended in 1734, when the rest of the delegation, Namkhai Gehlen and others, returned. Their luggage contained a letter stamped by the seal of the Seventh Dalai Lama, in which he awarded the title of the Khan to Tseren Donduk. Seventeen lamas and doctors who had been requested by Shakur Lama, Dorji Nazarov, and nobles to return to the Kalmyks were left in Beijing. During the course of those five to six years (1729–1734), the political situation in the Khanate had changed. In particular, on January 13, 1731, two Chinese delegations arrived in Moscow. One, headed by the Ambassador Askhani Amba Tushi, arrived for talks with the Russian authorities; the second, led by Mergen Zangi Mandai, arrived to meet with the heir of Ayuka Khan. Suspecting that the Chinese ambassadors might be carrying a decree of the Qing emperor appointing Tseren Donduk as the khan, the Empress Anna issued a decree on February 17, 1731, in which she appointed Tseren Donduk as the khan, and which she sent to the Kalmyk state through Major-General I. Izmailov, the Astrakhan Regional Governor.

A COLLAPSE OF THE DREAM

If we were to follow the logic of the historians (A. Kurapov, I. Nozdrina) who accuse Shakur Lama of preparing the “Kalmyk escape” to China, we would find ourselves opposed by the evidence, as shown by the archival documents analyzed above and as understood through analysis of the events of the 1720s and early 1730s. It is significant that during the civil strife that engulfed the Kalmyks in 1731, none of the major political players of the Khanate—Donduk Ombo, Donduk Dashi, or Dorji Nazarov—showed any desire to move to China. On the contrary, Donduk Ombo, the main opponent of the new Khan (Tseren Donduk), went to the Crimea. The Russian authorities, fearing the escape of the Kalmyks to the Turks, demanded from the Turkish authorities through Neplueff, the Russian representative in Constantinople, to “send in advance decrees to the Crimean Khan and Azov Pasha not to accept the Kalmyks, but to banish them away from the borders of their lands.”⁴⁶

When the project of creating a coalition (the lama–patron relationship) between Shakur Lama and Dorji Nazarov did not take place, the latter began to pursue an active

anti-Khan (anti-Tseren Donduk) and anti-lama (anti-Shakur Lama) policy. However, after clashes that took place in 1730 and 1731, in 1732 Dorji Nazarov and his son Lubzha reconciled with Tseren Donduk and Shakur Lama.⁴⁷ But a year later, they were again at odds. Tseren Donduk, Shakur Lama, and Donduk Dashi complained to the Major General Tarakanov about the Nazarovs. Shakur Lama already understood that the prospects of his idea to unite the Kalmyks had collapsed. In particular, he said to Tarakanov: “Earlier, they [the Kalmyks] . . . all trusted each other without any juration . . . and now they are not people, but dogs who eat each other; and although they see this, they cannot be corrected because of the disagreement and instability.”⁴⁸

Researching the development of Shakur Lama’s vision about the future of the Khanate, it becomes clear that by the mid-1720s he no longer relied on the Zünghar option (the option to move to Zünghar land). However, it is possible that the Zünghar option had become a big question already in the early 1720s, when the Kalmyks first heard the news about the troubling situation in Tibet (i.e., the replacement of the Dalai Lamas and the Zünghar occupation), and that the option was finally erased after the return of the delegation that was sent to Tibet in 1729. A study of archival material leads to the conclusion that during Shakur Lama’s stay in the Kalmyk Khanate the events of three specific time periods affected his plans. In 1719–1724, he arrived among the Kalmyks and participated in internal events, especially at the time Chakdorzhav, a son of Ayuka, died in 1722, until Ayuka Khan’s death in 1724. Secondly, in 1724–1734, the struggle for power between two major candidates, Donduk Ombo and his uncle Tseren Donduk, took place. Tseren Donduk was appointed as the Khan in 1731, which should be seen as a victory of Shakur Lama’s policy; and the Embassy returned from Tibet in 1734. Thirdly, in 1734–1736, Shakur Lama met with the members of the Embassy and realized that his plans had failed. Donduk Ombo was appointed the Khan in 1735; and Shakur Lama journeyed to St. Petersburg, where he died in 1736.

An examination of the policy of Shakur Lama, especially his activities concerning the delegation of 1729, shows that he strove to revive the principle of “two laws” and to create a Buddhist state based on that principle. It may be noted that in the period of 1724–1729, a significant transformation of Shakur Lama’s plans took place. Sending envoys to the Dalai Lama in 1729, he had the preservation of Buddhism among the Kalmyk people as his main objective. He also wished to solve the existing problems by the following means. He hoped to become a religious preceptor of Tseren Donduk, with the opportunity to influence the policy of the Khanate, since he thought that the Khanate, being split in two parts, should be merged. Secondly, he strove to strengthen Buddhism among Kalmyks, seeing it as their identity marker. To diminish the influence of Christianization and Islam on the Kalmyks, he intended to build a palace (or a temple) in which he would place the statue of Zandan Zhuu. He also sought to swiftly increase the number of his supporters by the return of Kalmyk lamas from Tibetan monasteries to the Khanate. Thirdly, some Kalmyk nobles and clan leaders considered the possibility of creating a special *nutuk* founded on the principle of “two laws.” Two important facts support this

assumption. First, the two rivals, Shakur Lama and Dorji Nazarov, planned to travel together to Tibet.⁴⁹ When the attempt failed, they sent special letters to Beijing and Lhasa. Perhaps, the future investigation of the archival material will explain the ways in which Shakur Lama was going to solve the problem of the state leader with Tseren Donduk and Dorji Nazarov. It is worth noting that the previously mentioned lama, Aran Jamba, referred in his letter to Dorji Nazarov “with the title . . . and in the same way as to Tseren Donduk”⁵⁰—that is, treated him like a Kalmyk Khan.

CONCLUSION

The Russian authorities concerned about the turmoil among the Kalmyks understood that Donduk Ombo’s forces were more powerful than those of Tseren Donduk. This was a critical moment before the new war between Russia and Turkey, since Russian authorities were interested in the Kalmyk forces. On March 7, 1735, the Empress Anna Ioannovna signed a charter to Donduk Ombo in which he was recognized as the true “ruler” of all the Kalmyks. Nevertheless, to avoid the suspicion of disrespect to the charter issued by the Seventh Dalai Lama on September 10, 1735, a ceremony of the granting of the Dalai Lama’s charter to Tseren Donduk as the Khan was organized by the Russian authorities. However, afterward Tseren Donduk was called to “Tsaritsyn town,” where he was arrested and sent to St. Petersburg.⁵¹ Tseren Donduk, along with Shakur Lama and the entourage, arrived in the Russian capital in January 1736. Meanwhile, on November 14, 1735, Donduk Ombo was sworn in.

For the Kalmyk Khanate that event meant the beginning of a new phase of its history, where Buddhism no longer had an active political role. Shakur Lama’s project to create a Buddhist state, relying on the principle of “two laws,” could not be realized. There were several reasons for that, both internal and external. Buddhism itself was passing through a precrisis period. The deep crisis would start thirty-five years later, in January 1771, with the exodus of the Kalmyks to Züngharia. This process led to tangible results. The development of Buddhism among the Kalmyks in a newly organized Xinjiang province, where the main portion of them had been settled by the Qing court, was largely determined by the policies of the Beijing rulers, whereas Buddhism among the Kalmyks who remained in Russia stayed the same. Buddhism’s political potential was severely limited by the difficult conditions of the Kalmyks trying to survive the coming adversities, in particular the abolition of the Kalmyk Khanate in 1771, when its territory was incorporated into the Russian Astrakhan province, which was mainly populated by Muslim peoples.

In the early eighteenth century, Buddhism among the Kalmyks was closely intertwined with the political situation in Tibet, where Buddhism was a serious competitor to civil policy. The events of the 1720s and 1730s in Tibet and among the Kalmyks marked the beginning of a further crisis in these regions, in which the influence of the Qing and Russian authorities over these territories and nations began to rise.

NOTES

1. Kurapov, 2007; Kolesnik, 2003; Batmaev, 1993; Mitirov, 1998.
2. Bakunin, 1995. Vassily Bakunin was the Secretary of Kalmyk Issues at the Russian Kollegiya of Foreign Affairs, Valid State Councilor, the translator, and actively participated at the events in Kalmyk land in 1720–1730. The National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63; The Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russian Empire, Fond 119, Descr. 1. 1736, Case 2.
3. Bakunin, 1995, 32.
4. *Ibid.*
5. In particular, in “The Story of the Life-Omniscient Chzhamyan Shadby-Dorje, the Mighty Scholar and Siddha, called ‘Wade, the Leads to an Amazing Good Fate,’” (Gonchok-Chzhigmed-Vanbo. 2008. Translated by N. Tsyrempilov. Ulan-Ude: Buryat Scientific Center of SO RAN), p. 147, Gonchok-Chzhigmed-Vanbo noted: “In the fall [of 1699] kushab (the Dalai Lama) Tsanyan-Chzhamtso came to Breybun and visited all of its four colleges.”
6. Doboom, 1974.
7. Alexei Pozdneev, 2007. “A Diary of the Journey to the Kalmyks in 1919,” preserved in the Archive of IOS RAS, St. Petersburg, Fond 44, Discr. 1, Case 61. List 19, cited in Kurapov, 216.
8. See Kitinov, 2010, 226–232.
9. The National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63, List 36.
10. Noyons and Zaisans are the titles for the Kalmyk nobles.
11. The National Archive of Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 15, List 211.
12. Kurapov, 110; Nozdrinam, 2007, 16.
13. Bakunin, 37. See also Rota, 2006, 189–204.
14. Lemercier-Quelquejay, 1996, 7(1), 70.
15. The Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russian Empire, Fond 119, Descr. 1. 1736, Case 2, List 29.
16. Bakunin, 1995, 36.
17. *Ibid.*, 73.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. Palmov, 1992, 48.
20. Bakunin, 40.
21. *Ibid.*, 50.
22. *Ibid.*, 51–52.
23. Palmov, 1992, 196.
24. Perhaps he was originally from the Zünghar Torghuds. Sometimes he is called Tokhor (Tib. Stod hor) Dondub Gyatso. For Tokhors as Oirats of Züngharia see: Kitinov, 2010, 96–98; Kitinov, 1995, 49.
25. Thuken Losang Chokyi Nyima, 2009, 284.
26. Gonchok-Chzhigmed-Vanbo, 2008, 102. According to Sarat Chandra Das, the lama played an important role in promoting Buddhism among the Torghuts. See: Das, 1984, 54.
27. Zahiruddin, 1970, 332.
28. Shakabpa, 2003, 146.
29. Gonchok-Chzhigmed-Vanbo, 2008, 54.
30. Rockhill, 1998, 32.
31. The Archive of the Foreign Policy of Russian Empire, Fond 119, Descr. 1. 1729, Case 12, List 13.
32. The National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63, List 6.

33. Ibid., Fond 36, Case 63, List 38.
34. Ibid., Fond 36, Case 63, List 69.
35. Terentyev, 2008, 41, 102–112.
36. Das, 1903, 996. Terentyev also makes references to several studies that mention the statue, some of which were composed by Tibetan authors: *Sandalwood Buddha Statue of the King Udayana*. URL: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/49714591/Udayana-Buddha-book-Engl>. See also Terentyev, 2010.
37. Now the statue is kept at the Tsuogolsky datsan in the Buryat Republic.
38. The National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63, List 40. In a footnote of that list, the translator of the text from the Kalmyk language into Russian pointed out that Zandan Zoe is “a house of prayer.”
39. Vladimirtsov, 1934, 43. This opinion is also accepted by Ilya Zlatkin, an expert on the history of the West-Mongolian tribes.
40. *Prikaz* meant the Administrative Office (Ministry) in pre-reformed Russia up to the Empress Ekatherine the Great (the last quarter of the eighteenth century).
41. Mustakimov, 2012. See also Abeeva, 2006.
42. The National Archive of the Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63, List 27.
43. Ibid., Fond 36, Case 63, List 37.
44. Mustakimov. *The New Documents on the History of the Volga-Ural Region in the Beginning of the Eighteenth Century*. URL: http://www.archive.gov.tatarstan.ru/magazine/go/anonymous/main/?path=mg:/numbers/2006_2/02/02_3/
45. *Namestnik* meant something like Vice-Khan, or the Representative of Russian central authority.
46. Bakunin, 1995, 81.
47. Ibid., 89.
48. Ibid., 109–110.
49. Ibid., 66.
50. The National Archive of Kalmyk Republic, Fond 36, Case 63, List 23.
51. Bakunin, 146.

4

Modernities, Sense Making, and the Inscription of Mongolian

Buddhist Place

Matthew King



AS THE QING empire began to falter in 1911, Mongolian nobility in Ikh Khüree (otherwise known as Urga, present-day Ulaanbaatar) founded an independent theocracy under the Jebzundamba Khutugtu, who was enthroned as the Bogd Khan (“Holy King”). A perilous autonomy ensued for several years, wherein a fascinating project was undertaken to construct a “modern” Mongolian nation-state that incorporated a parliamentary system subsumed under the authority of the Bogd, a new legal code, and a constitution. All of this captured the nationalist imagination of a variety of Mongol-Buryat intellectuals elsewhere in China and Tsarist Russia, who in many cases had already begun to newly conceive of a pan-Mongolian identity, religion, language, and sociopolitical heritage. The autonomous Bogd Khanate (Bogd Khant Mongol Uls) weathered the manipulative designs of Russia and China for several years before falling first to the forces of the Chinese general Xu Shuzheng in late 1919, and then to the White Russian troops of Baron R. F. von Ungern-Sternberg, who ended the Chinese occupation in 1921. Ungern-Sternberg was in turn routed by Soviet-backed forces later that same year; in the vacuum left by his defeat, a nascent socialist group, the Mongolian People’s Party (Mongol Ardyn Nam), took control and relegated the Bogd to the status of a Constitutional Monarch. The Mongolian People’s Party (renamed the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party [MPRP] in 1924, the year of the Bogd’s death) then began a slow and uneven project to consolidate their power. This would increasingly entail annexing and displacing the Buddhist institutional monopoly on the economic system, education, and political authority.

How did Mongolian Buddhists themselves, especially those who commanded both the authority and scholastic learning of an increasingly threatened Buddhist

institutionalism, frame the project of stepping into a post-Qing “modern” world? How did they mitigate, refute, or coopt newly intruding, alternative modes of producing and organizing knowledge (for instance, those associated with positivist science? When and how were these “other” ways of knowing the world and organizing knowledge communities adopted by Buddhist scholastics to ensure an enduring place for Buddhist institutionalism in an increasingly hostile revolutionary environment?

In this chapter I attempt to answer some of these questions by turning to the work of one of the most prolific scholars of the late Mongolian Buddhist tradition, Zawa Damdin Luvsandamdin (1867–1937).¹ Zawa Damdin’s magnum opus, the 1931 *Golden Book* (*Altan Devter*), was the last great history of Mongolia’s religious, political, and ethnic past produced by Buddhist monastics prior to the purges. As such, it provides us with a rich resource to begin an inquiry into how they engaged the flood of new, foreign modalities for knowing the world in this revolutionary period. If we contextualize this engagement in terms of the very real affront faced by Buddhist hierarchs and their institutions during this period, we can better appreciate just what was at stake. To this end, here I will first introduce Zawa Damdin and survey his life on the basis of some of his autobiographical writings. Then, I will look at the *New Mirror* (*Shine Toly*), a secular newspaper that was an early source of non-Buddhist knowledge claims circulating in the Mongolian capital during the Autonomous Period (1911–1919). Particularly troubling for Zawa Damdin were articles asserting that the earth is round and rotates. Below I will survey his attempt to refute this scientific proposition from the opening pages of the *Golden Book* and analyze just what it was about this that proved so challenging to his scholastic sensibilities. I conclude by suggesting the value to be had by developing a comparative scholarship on competing techniques of knowledge production in the revolutionary contexts of postimperial Inner Asia.

ZAWA DAMDIN: WANDERING AUTHOR OF PLACE

To this day, Zawa Damdin is variously known in Tibetan and Mongolian scholastic circles (and in contemporary Mongolian society more broadly) as an innovative doctrinal exegete, a subversive ritualist, and even, to some contemporary Mongolian nationalists, as the first Mongolian scientist,² although the irony of this anachronism will become apparent below. He was also, importantly, someone who wrote prodigiously about the past. Because of limited space, it cannot be Zawa Damdin the philosopher (whose radical Madhyamaka treatises have registered on the scholarly radar in recent decades³) or Zawa Damdin the ritualist⁴ (whose works on Dorje Shugden have begun to register in the polemics associated with that global Gelugpa schism⁵) who concerns us here.⁶ Rather, it will be Zawa Damdin the historian, traveler, and archivist who will occupy our attention, even if only in a cursory way.⁷ Since his life

spanned so many of the profound upheavals in Mongolian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, I will first survey his autobiographical writings before turning to his historiography and his engagements with a troubling European empiricism.

In addition to some contemporary Mongolian scholarship and popular press on Zawa Damdin's life and works,⁸ for biographical sources we have at our disposal a significant *Record of Teachings Received* (T. *Thob yig*) written in three volumes and totaling 1,540 folios in length.⁹ This astounding work deserves a full study in its own right, since it not only tracks the minutiae of Zawa Damdin's scholastic and meditative training but also provides an exhaustive history of every lineage of religious transmission he ever received. As a source for a generalized "map" of classical scholastic training in Mongolia's monastic institutions in this late period, there are surely few better sources. Whereas the *Record of Teachings Received* is written in the narratively thin, genealogical style common to that genre, Zawa Damdin also wrote a versified autobiography entitled *Briefly About the Acts of this Life, the So-Called Determinant of Worldly Vanities* (*Rang gi byed spyod rags bsdoms 'di snang za zi' i rjes gcod*).¹⁰ At the behest of his students, this work was completed just a year before his death in the tumultuous year of 1936—perhaps drawing from notes taken over the course of his life, since there are markedly different styles throughout. This was well into the MPRP's¹¹ aggressive attack on Mongolia's Buddhist institutions, which culminated in widespread purges that would, after thirteen years in power, finally displace Buddhism from Mongolian social, political, and economic life. His autobiography, just like his historiography, is, to my knowledge, the last of its kind produced at this late point in the Mongolian Buddhist tradition. According to Shagdaryn Bira, it survived the socialist period in the personal possession of one of Zawa Damdin's students, Gonchigdorj, before being included in published collections of his extant works in the 1970s.¹²

Zawa Damdin organizes the narrative of "Briefly About the Acts of this Life" as a series of many *yeng pa* (*gyengs pa*), a Tibetan word that can mean "to wander," or else to be "distracted" or "disturbed." As we shall see, this ambiguity is telling. He "wandered" through diverse intellectual, mystical, and physical topographies "on the move" before and after the Qing collapse and into the socialist period. Throughout, Zawa Damdin's own scholastic career and literary output were regularly "distracted" and, as time went on, deeply "disturbed" by the quickly changing sociopolitical scene around him. As he wandered through disrupted Inner Asian spaces, he increasingly appealed to the authority of a utopian past to argue that Buddhism should endure as a central religio-political entity in what he saw as the decidedly dystopian Mongolian present. In his more than five hundred compositions encompassing the breadth of Buddhist scholastic learning, he occasionally referred to himself self-deprecatingly as that "thick-headed logician in the remote north of the world."¹³ In light of his engagement with competing practices of knowledge production in post-Qing Mongolia described below, this will prove to have been a very apt moniker indeed.

While the details of his fascinating biography cannot detain us in any detail here (I deal with them extensively elsewhere), I will provide some general notes that will help contextualize the discussion below, and elsewhere,¹⁴ in this volume. In “Briefly About the Acts of this Life,” we read that Zawa Damdin was born in 1867 in a rural community deep in the Gobi Desert of Outer Mongolia. This was then part of TüsHEET Khan’s Banner, today near the rural district of Delgertsogt in Central Gobi Province (Dundgovi *aimag*). Many auspicious signs accompanied his conception and birth, such as his mother dreaming of a Buddhist *paṇḍita* coming to her while pregnant. While he seems never to have been recognized as an incarnate lama of even a minor rank, unusual behavior as a child, such as staring at the sky for long periods of time and pretending to give Dharma teachings and initiations to fellow children, garnered much attention. Soon enough his family acquiesced to his demands to leave home to study with his uncle, a monk at a local monastery. Once installed there, we read that Zawa Damdin excelled in his studies, and once he became old enough he went north to the monastic capital Ikh Khüree to enroll in the scholastic colleges there. Some years later, as the nineteenth century was coming to a close, Zawa Damdin took leave of his formal studies and set out on a pilgrimage to the great Buddhist complexes of Amdo, on the Tibetan cultural region’s northeastern frontier with China and Mongolia. There, in monasteries such as Gönlung (dGon lung Byams pa gling) and Kumbum (sKu ‘bum byams pa gling), he studied poetry and other minor topics outside of the mainstream Gelug-sect curriculum. The transit of persons, knowledge, and material effects through these multiregional Gelug monastic networks in the late Qing—which extended from Central Tibet east to Beijing, then north through Inner and Outer Mongolia, all the way to St. Petersburg in Tsarist Russia—is something whose complexity and richness we are still far from adequately conceptualizing.

Zawa Damdin soon returned to Ikh Khüree and completed his scholastic education by undertaking a so-called short-cut Geshe degree (*‘phar ma dge shes*) at the urging of an unnamed “Great Lama.” At about this time, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, fleeing the British invasion of Tibet in 1904, arrived in Ikh Khüree under the advisement of his Buryat confidant Agwang Dorzhiev.¹⁵ Zawa Damdin met with the Dalai Lama and his entourage on several occasions, traveling in his company to and from the compounds of various nobles and high lamas. The Dalai Lama’s visit attracted many international visitors, such as the Russian Orientalist F. I. Stcherbatsky, whom Zawa Damdin met and with whom he “joyfully conversed about Buddhist and Non-Buddhist doctrine.”¹⁶ Soon after, he sold his yurt and embarked upon another pilgrimage, first south to Mt. Wutai and then to Beijing, capital of a Qing empire by then in its twilight. We read that at Mt. Wutai, Zawa Damdin saw visions of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī in the sky and recovered lost “magical” reliquary *stūpas* and quadra-lingual stone tablets from the earth. He attracted crowds of Tibetan, Mongolian, and Chinese devotees as he performed devotional practices at the temples that dotted the five peaks of what was, by that time, a truly cosmopolitan site of Buddhist pilgrimage.¹⁷ He also wrote a still-extant praise to the

mountain and its temples.¹⁸ In Beijing, he paid homage to the palace of the Qing emperors and visited what he considered to be a magically emanated Chinese temple that, we read, vanished upon his departure. The fact that this trip was made in the final years of a crumbling Qing empire is, characteristically, left unmentioned in his autobiography. We might wonder whether the mystical turn in the narrative of this journey through Qing space compensated for an imperial collapse in the mind of an author who, we detect from the *Golden Book* and elsewhere, suffered from a rather unpopular (if not criminal) Qing nostalgia until his death.

Indeed, the separation from the Qing, the establishment of the Bogd Khanate, the Chinese and White Russian occupations, the rise of the MPRP, and even the death of the Bogd Khan are almost totally unmentioned in “Briefly About the Acts of this Life.” Instead, entries for these monumental years are crowded with exhaustive narratives of religious transmission, building projects, and large public rituals (such as Maitreya processions), which Zawa Damdin felt compelled to initiate with greater and greater relish in the last decades of his life. For example, consider the muted, sparse entry for 1924: “In the spring of the Wood Mouse Year (1924), I sponsored the Lhasa Geshe so that he could begin the system of giving the transmission of the Canon of the Buddha’s Word (bKa’ gyur) in this monastery. During the spring, I went to the tantric college of Gung Khüree in Thauli, and then in the summer came back. In the autumn, I travelled in the east and west of Thauli by way of Gung Khüree, and then came back.”¹⁹ Remember that this was the year of the Bogd Khan’s death, the full ascension of the socialist regime to the helm of the Mongolian political establishment, and the rise of various hard-line elements in the government. This precipitated a flurry of party purging and also a renewed call to put pressure on the financial assets and privilege of the major monasteries and their prelates and to begin programs to induce class consciousness among lower-ranked monks in the monasteries. All of this was surely felt by our Zawa Damdin, but none of it enters the pages of this work (or any other, for that matter).

Also conspicuously absent are mention of his associations with several prominent figures of the early socialist period. These include his companion and teacher Darba Bandita for whose incarnations he composed a praise-biography²⁰, who had very publicly sought to use Buddhist doctrine to theologize the Mongolian socialist project in the early days of its movement. The same is true of two prominent members of the Buryat Intelligentsia, Tseveen Jamtsarano and Agwang Dorzhiev. These were nationalist architects of the Mongolian socialist movement and Buddhist Reform movement respectively, and we know Zawa Damdin was consulted by each on issues such as introducing secular education into monasteries and the plight of Buddhism in newly secularizing Russo-Mongolian societies.²¹ Nothing of their demise in Soviet gulags, nor of the plight of countless “monastic bourgeoisies” who had become the target of state violence by the time he penned this autobiography, ever enters its pages.

Indeed, as we come to the end of “Briefly About the Acts of this Life,” it is reasonable to assume that these palpable absences were the result of a very deliberate act of

self-censorship on the part of an old monk wearily writing his life story in very dangerous times. Of those final years, we read only sparse narratives of rituals performed to “advert obstacles,” some printing efforts sponsored, and a few textual transmissions given. These were all, he writes, “difficult to do.” In deteriorating health and in deteriorating times, our author describes retiring to the seclusion of his tent far away from the monasteries he had labored his entire life to protect and nourish, having made a “final testament” (*bka’ chems*) to engage in solitary retreat for six years. Oral histories collected by the Mongolian journalist G. Akim from still-living disciples in the early days of the postsocialist period tell us that Zawa Damdin died of illness in Ulaanbaatar in the company of his sister and brother. He was cremated in his Gobi homeland and the ashes were quietly interred after a short tour to the homes of local devotees. Within a month of his passing, arrests and mass executions began in his home monastic institutions.²²

We glean his displacement as an aged Mongolian Buddhist scholastic by paying close attention to the colophon of the autobiography. Of the hundreds of compositions penned earlier in his career and included in his published *Collected Works* (*T. gsung ’bum*), this is the only one of any substance whose colophon fails to describe its place of composition. In nearly every other work he produced, from the histories examined below to simple one-page ritual texts or catalogs, Zawa Damdin took pains to locate the auspicious event of his textual composition at a particular monastic site. For instance, “I, known as Suddhi Aśvaghōṣa, in the form of a monk, holding an ocean of *sūtra* and *tantra* teachings, wrote this at the place of the great Da Khüree, the source of the Teachings in the north of the world!”²³ Even the letters of his to which we have access (formal though they may have been) poetically evoke spatiality and a specific monastic site of production in their closing lines, such as his *Amber Rosary* letter to Tseveen Jamtsarano, “sent into the knowledgeable Dharma Minister’s hand by the stubborn logician who lives in the north of the world at Tashi Chöjor Ling Monastery.”²⁴ In light of all this, the absence of a place of production in the colophon of this autobiography leaves us to draw the rather pitiable conclusion that upon its completion, there simply was no properly Buddhist institutional “place” left from which to write. Nor was there a suitable institutional place to which he could direct the good karma of his works, as was standard practice in the closing lines of Buddhist compositions. Instead, his autobiography ends with an uncharacteristically personal focus, directing the karmic merit accrued from his composition only so that, “when my consciousness goes to the next life, may it separate from non-virtue, illusion, and fear. May messengers of the Buddha Maitreya show me the path, and may I be born without difficulty in [the Pure Land of] Tuṣita!”²⁵

These closing notes of his autobiography stand in sharp contrast to the firm engagement with, and constructions of, “Buddhist place” that defined his many historiographic projects in the earlier, somewhat happier days of the Autonomous and early socialist periods. Years before he faced direct physical violence and state coercion in his old age, he and his fellow monastics had been faced by an epistemological threat in the form of newly circulating, “scientific” modalities for producing and organizing knowledge about

the world. In those happier days, he still occupied an authoritative institutional space from which to mount a counter-attack, and command of what was still a privileged discourse of knowledge in Mongolian society.

AN AVENUE OF MODERNIST INTRUSION: *THE SHINE TOLY*

The *Golden Book* was begun in 1919 as a “commentary” to an earlier, versified “root” historical text that Zawa Damdin had composed in the very early days of the Autonomous period, the *Melodious Sounding of the Auspicious Dharma Conch* (*Byang phyogs hor gyi yul du dam pa'i chos rin po che byung tshul gyi gtam rgyud bkra shis chos dung bzhad pa'i sgra dbyangs*). In both of postimperial works, Zawa Damdin sets out to reconcile contradictory claims in Buddhist canonical sources regarding the physical layout of the “vessel-like” world (*snod*) and its living “contents” (*bcud*). Many biographical and historical works produced by Mongolian Buddhist literati and their Tibetan counterparts spatially²⁶ and temporally arrange their narrative subjects in relation to several foundational socio-religious events, such as the enlightenment of the Buddha or the life of Chinggis Khan. None of the historical works Zawa Damdin cites begin their accounts with the type of extended delimitation of the physical universe we see in his works.²⁷ Why such an extensive and, we intuit, defensive presentation? Part of the answer is that Zawa Damdin was seeking to introduce a very expansive vision of the Mongolian Buddhist past, which depended upon identifying “Mongol” actors across a vast swath of Buddhist literature.²⁸ This, in turn, depended upon a particular presentation of the physical universe and its living contents that could be mined convincingly for “Mongolian” and “Buddhist” stories lost in what he often described as “the rivers of *sūtra* and *mantra*.” In the *Melodious Sounding of the Auspicious Dharma Conch*, completed in the first years of the Autonomous period, this entailed merely synthesizing the views expressed in Buddhist canonical presentations and their associated exegetical material. However, by the time he began writing the *Golden Book* in 1919, it was not simply contradictory claims in his Buddhist sources that required careful synthesis or refutation, but also the troubling claims made by European science then in circulation in learned Mongolian society.

From whence did these troubling claims, and their empiricist modes of production, intrude upon his scholastic horizon? The answer lies in the flurry of Euro-Russian scientific and cultural achievements that began circulating into Mongolian erudite circles beginning in the Autonomous period. These transits were largely the products of what Robert Rupen labeled the “Buryat Intelligentsia,” a group of Buryat nationalists who, from their position as intermediaries between Russia and Mongolia, engaged in all manner of intellectual and sociopolitical projects in post-Qing Mongolia, from gathering folk songs to drafting the platform of the Mongolian People’s Party.²⁹ Their wide-ranging intellectual interests were, at their core, inspired by a particular brand of progressive nationalist politics. Their focus on Mongolian languages, folk traditions,

epic and historical traditions, literature, and ritual life were both motivated by, and produced anew, an “increased consciousness of “Mongolness.”³⁰ This group generally considered Buddhism the very condition for conceiving of a pan-Mongolian ethnic family:

The more strenuously the government and missionaries pursued their policy of Russification and religious conversion, and the more they subjected the Buryats to persecution and violence, the stronger and more unanimous became the movement toward Buddhism and towards those of their brethren [i.e., Transbaikalian Buryats and Mongols] who had conserved their writing and national integrity and solidarity thanks to Buddhism.³¹

An important caveat here is that for these reform-minded Buryat intellectuals and their sympathizers in Mongolia, even though Buddhism was considered the “shelter of the national spirit,”³² there was a need for reformation based in large part upon introducing what were considered the technological, pedagogical, and cultural advances of European civilization (often by way of the Russian academy).

One of the early interfaces by which these products of Euro-Russian “modernity” entered into Mongolian Buddhist space in the Bogd Khanate was the *New Mirror*, an immensely controversial secular newspaper. This initiative was backed by a Tsarist representative in Ikh Khüree named I. Y. Korostovets, but it was effectively directed by the Buryat reformer and nationalist Tseven Jamtsarano. In the pages of the *New Mirror*, literate Mongolians, including Zawa Damdin and other Buddhist scholastic elites, were able to read, in their own language and for the first time, excerpts from the works of Leo Tolstoy, Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, and more.³³ They also encountered what was then cutting-edge scholarship on Mongolian linguistics and history by foreign academics. In many cases, these articles proposed alternative visions of the Mongolian past than what had been widely promoted in Qing-era historiography since the seventeenth century. In these earlier indigenous compositions, Mongolian history, Buddhist identity, and Qing rule had been historicized and naturalized selectively according to newly emergent models of “Buddhist rule” associated with Qing statecraft. These circumscribed royal genealogies were projected back from Chinggis Khan to the rulers of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty, and on to the mythic Indian sovereign Mahāsammata.³⁴ In contradistinction to these familiar historical tropes, monks and literati who flipped through the pages of the *New Mirror* encountered, for instance, Ramstedt’s challenging article “History of the Uighur” (*Uiyur ulus-un quriyangqai teiike*).³⁵ Ramstedt introduced the radical idea that Mongolians shared Turkic origins with other Central Asian peoples, not Buddhist kings in India or Tibet, nor even the minority sociopolitical identities that had been issuing from Qing centers for the past two-and-a-half centuries. Readers of the *New Mirror* also encountered the work of the Frenchman David-Léon Cohan, whose histories and fictional works on a shared Turkic-Mongol past would prove to be so influential in nascent Turkish nationalist movements

far away in the Ottoman Empire.³⁶ The degree of scholastic engagement with these foreign materials is affirmed in part by the fact that both Ramstedt and Cohan's pieces from the *New Mirror* were translated into Tibetan and included *in toto* in the *Golden Book* (Zawa Damdin apparently not recognizing that Cohan's *The Blue Banner* was a work of popular historical fiction!).

In addition to fiction and history, and far more troubling, the *New Mirror* also regularly published pieces that amounted to "popular science." These, in part, "embod[ied] modern conceptions which demolished the Buddhist cosmology. Mongolian folklore and western science were presented almost simultaneously."³⁷ Whereas newly available historical information actually buttressed emerging conceptions of a broad Mongolian ethnic family and Buddhist history for Buddhist scholastics such as Zawa Damdin, these scientific notions cut deeply against classical Buddhist hermeneutical traditions for producing "valid knowledge" (T. *tshad ma*). Among them, the claims of European astronomy specifically proved to be the least palatable for Buddhist scholastics. These were a direct affront to the cosmological claims of standard Indian Buddhist sources such as Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidharmakośa*) or the *Kālacakra Tantra*. More dangerous still, they also introduced empiricism onto the Mongolian scene, a theory and practice of knowledge seemingly capable of disproving Buddhist validation of its sources on the origin and composition of the world and the universe (which, we must remember, was for Zawa Damdin the precondition for telling the story of the Mongolian religio-ethnic past).

Before looking at just how this played out in Ikh Khüree, and then in the pages of the *Golden Book*, I must note that the challenge of European astronomy (and especially the idea that the earth was round) had already infiltrated the worlds of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist scholastics resident in Qing imperial centers. Those scholars had enjoyed regular contact with Jesuits employed as astronomers and cartographers in the courts of Kangxi and Qianlong, for instance. In the eighteenth century, several Tibetanized-Mongol Buddhist scholars from the Amdo region began to incorporate "the new Chinese astrology" (T. *rgya nag rtsis gsar*) into their own Tibetan-language compositions.³⁸ This, in turn, influenced some later Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist scholastics working in Qing cosmopolitan environments to write more expansive and widely read geographical works that incorporated newly available European astronomical notions about planetary movement. For instance, the Mongol Sumba Khambo Ishbaljir's³⁹ *General Description of Jambudvīpa* ('*Dzam gling spyi bshad*, 1777) introduced to a reading public literate in Tibetan (which at this time very much included Mongolian regions) descriptions of previously unknown European countries such as France. What did prove unbearably vexing about this work for readers at the time was a description of the Arctic midnight sun, a phenomenon explainable only by appeal to a spherical earth.⁴⁰ This was something widely decried as impossible by Buddhist scholastics, whose canonical sources described a flat earth. However, in some quarters, including those of some progressive hierarchs such as the Seventh Panchen Lama, Tenpé Nyima (dPal ldan bStan pa'i Nyi

ma, 1782–1853), Buddhist literati were encouraged to keep an open mind and to take these contradictory claims seriously.⁴¹ In other words, they were encouraged to adopt a sort of epistemic syncretism that could entertain the wild claims of European empiricism, while still promoting the contrary claims of Buddhist scripture (scholastic fundamentalism if ever there was such a thing!).

The point here is that what was “new” in European astronomy (both at the Qing court and for the monastic readership of the *New Mirror*) was not simply a privileging of empirical evidence over scriptural descriptions, something we associate with European modernity and which we might be overly excited to detect in these Buddhist-scientific encounters. As Matthew Kapstein has rightly noted, those cosmopolitan Mongols and eastern Tibetans simply incorporated new facts about the world in circulation in Qing centers without modifying core cosmological views (such as a flat earth containing four continents arranged around the axis mundi, Mt. Meru, described in Buddhist scripture).⁴² They buttressed scripture, or, more specifically, the assertions of particular exegetical traditions. The historical and geographical works that emerged from this Qing cosmopolitanism acted, it turns out, as primary sources for Zawa Damdin’s own historiography, and they determined in large part how he encountered the popular science and Orientalist scholarship in the *New Mirror*. As José Cabezón has shown, there was (and is) a Gelug-sect scholastic compulsion to take contrarian claims seriously, whether this entails refuting them or synthesizing them with orthodox positions.⁴³ The ambiguity of the post-Qing Mongolian Buddhist encounter with European arts and sciences is evident in Zawa Damdin’s *Golden Book*. In places, this material was incorporated straightaway to strengthen his historiographic theses (for instance, the case of Ramstedt). Others required a decisive refutation in order to safeguard the coherence and authority of Buddhist ways of knowing the world, and, crucially, the validity and basic coherence of the “Buddhist” world thus known.

Returning to the *New Mirror* and the turmoil of the post-Qing period, its first edition was published in 1913 and sent shockwaves through literati circles in Ikh Khüree. This was so, at least at first, for much the same reason as Ishbaljir’s *General Description of Jambudvīpa* almost one hundred and fifty years earlier: European astronomical claims of a round and moving earth. It is unsurprising perhaps that such controversial claims graced the first issue, since its then-editor Jamtsarano was committed more than anything else to extending what one witness, Wilhelm Alexander Unkrig, described as “modern astronomical knowledge among the Mongols.”⁴⁴ The first edition in 1913 sold out immediately, being consumed by a fascinated and apparently outraged audience. Its contents seem innocuous enough to us today, containing simple descriptive accounts of topics such as “The Earth, the Continents,” “Heat and Cold,” “Wind and Atmosphere,” “Thunder and Lightning,” “The States of the World and Their Forms of Government,” “The Development of Culture,” “Race and Religion,” and “The Life Expectancy of Man.”⁴⁵ Elites from Gandentegchenling Monastery (including perhaps Zawa Damdin, who was a prominent scholar there at this time) complained to the Bogd Khan himself that Jamtsarano’s public dissemination of “Western” ideology and “scientific” falsities

was an affront to Buddhism.⁴⁶ While the *New Mirror* continued to be published for some time, Zawa Damdin apparently still had a bone to pick six years later when he began to compose the *Golden Book* in 1919.

REFUTING THE ROUND WORLD IN THE *GOLDEN BOOK*

Following some standard poetic verses and opening homages, Zawa Damdin broaches his description of the world with a quote from the *Flower Garland Sūtra* (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*)⁴⁷ on the nature and form of the waters bounding the land whose stories he will soon narrate:

In the lands of all directions oceans have appeared,
Several are round and several are triangular.
In several directions are [oceans in the shape of a] square.
Moreover, [in the final analysis] it is the ocean of *karma*
that writes (*br̥is*) the form [of these waters].⁴⁸

The point of this quotation for his larger argument is stated poetically in its final line—the world is “written” by the karma of sentient beings. This provides an important scriptural authority for what he develops as a “karmic relativity defense” against the perceived threats of scientific description:

There are a variety of ways of explaining the number, size, measure, and so forth of the underlying *maṇḍala* base, the mountains, the oceans, the continents, and so forth in [the scriptures] of *sūtra* and *tantra*, [such as] the Higher and Lower Abhidharma,⁴⁹ the *Kālacakratantra*, and so on. However, these are never mutually contradictory.⁵⁰ Those [mountains, oceans, etc.] are not established from their own side, but rather they are established from the karma of sentient beings. In our own world, many different oceans, mountains, and islands have all appeared at once. These might appear to the vision of one sentient being, but not another [depending on their karma] [. . .] because of this we cannot object if one person does not see what another sentient being sees.⁵¹

This point, which for Zawa Damdin preemptively provides an explanation for the contradictions found in the primary Buddhist presentations of the “arrangement of the world and its beings,” is further supplemented by a classic Buddhist example of karmic relativity. He writes that if a god, a human being, and a hungry ghost were all to gather in front of one cup of water, “at that time, because of their different karma, for one it would appear as nectar, for one it would appear as water, and for one it would appear as pus. While this is true, we would not say that there is more than one cup of water.”⁵² The point, he continues, is that Buddhist canonical sources describe the world in which we live differently, according to the different karmic potentialities of sentient beings. As such, it is not the varied

presentations of space and time in the Buddhist scriptures that are invalid, partial or limited. Instead, what at first presents itself as a collection of contradictory accounts is, in fact, a collection of explanations tailored to the varied dispositions of beings. The contradictions are, as such, ultimately noncontradictory. They also, by this logic, prove the “enlightenment” of their authors, since the assumption here is that different presentations depend on an omniscient reading of the karmic potentiality of any given audience.

While a clarification of confusing cosmological presentations from canonical sources also occupies Zawa Damdin in his earlier *Dharma Conch* (to which the *Golden Book* is ostensibly a commentary), a more specific polemical target soon becomes abundantly clear in this later work:

[When] non-Buddhist barbarians use their many different machines to investigate all over the world, it is not necessary that they see by means of their direct cognition in the same way as is described in the *sūtras* and *tantras*.⁵³ This is so since most of them are obscured by karma and so this [Buddhist] presentation remains a secret to them. [Additionally, in relation to] some of those [geographical features, etc.], the names and objects have already changed [since the time they were described in Buddhist sources], and now they are identified differently, and have different shapes, and so on. This is why the “superficial intellectuals”⁵⁴ [i.e., scientists] of Europe (Yi wa ro pa) use machines to describe this world as being shaped like an egg [i.e., round] and always continually rotating—something they believe they are actually seeing! [This is akin to] the “Story of the Eighteen Blind People Describing the Elephant”⁵⁵ depicted in the *Compendium of the Great Vehicle (Mahāyānasamgraha)*.⁵⁶

According to Zawa Damdin, a flaw of these foreign “superficial intellectuals” is that their “machines” allow them to produce knowledge about the world only by means of “sense perception” (*mngon sum*). The implicit critique is that they do not employ that more extensive sort of reasoning prized by scholastics that, among other things, produces a provisional inferential cognition (*rjes dpag*) of hidden truths about the world, such as past and future lives, the workings of karma, and so forth. The association of knowledge gleaned from direct cognition alone (empiricism) and an imminent threat to Buddhism itself surfaces elsewhere, in Zawa Damdin’s correspondence with the famous Buryat monk-diplomat Agwang Dorzhiev. There, as almost a side note to what is otherwise a series of pointed critiques of the former’s historiography, Dorzhiev queries Zawa Damdin on a solution to what he also saw as the troubling threat of empiricism:

Especially nowadays in this region,⁵⁷ there are many people who don’t accept the existence of previous or future lives since they accept only direct cognition and not inferential cognition.⁵⁸ If we can clarify the wrong view of those people, then it is possible that they would become Buddhist. You possess one thousand (wisdom)

eyes, so who else other than you could wield the sharp logical reasons which would completely destroy this type of wrong view? Please deliberate upon this important topic and provide an answer.⁵⁹

It seems that this was a problem keenly felt by prominent internationalist scholastics experiencing the decontextualization of post-Qing elsewhere in Inner Asia. Since Zawa Damdin chooses to humbly decline answering Dorzhiev's questions directly in his response,⁶⁰ we return to the opening passages of the *Golden Book* to identify at least one of his strategies for mitigating this threat. There, as we have read, he transposed the dangerous epistemology of scientific empiricism that had already infiltrated the press, schools, and political discourse of Ikh Khüree into the safe literary confines of hermeneutics. There, such troubling claims (and their implicit suggestions of alternative social forms for the organization of knowledge) could be whisked away as folly by appeal to the logic of karmic relativity and the appeal of a more total, salvific knowledge in the form of inferential cognition. In the Buddhist discursive arena of the *Golden Book* at least, the intruding empiricism and its debased modalities of knowledge production could be safely routed.

Having “subdued” the epistemic challenges stemming from this “scriptural tradition of heretical others” (*mu stegs gzhan gyi gzhung lugs pa*), Zawa Damdin begins his vast historical presentation. On the basis of this initial engagement with European empiricism, the entire *Golden Book* can be read as a polemical argument for the centrality of an increasingly threatened scholastic mode of organizing knowledge in revolutionary Mongolia. If we remember the actual threats posed to Buddhist institutionalism over the years that it took to complete, we can appreciate how Zawa Damdin could not accept injunctions such as those of the Seventh Panchen Lama to simply adopt a hermeneutic syncretism in relation to European empiricism and its astronomical assertions. This was not Qing cosmopolitan environment of the eighteenth century, but rather an appeal in the midst of very real socioeconomic and militarized pressure.

His scorn for the “superficial intellectualism” of science (increasingly centered in the Soviet-inspired initiatives of the MPRP) surfaces again in a note to his readers from the final pages of the *Golden Book*: “The intelligent should take what I have already given here as your example, and make any [further] investigations that are necessary. In contradistinction, nowadays barbarian non-Buddhists write about meaningless and backward topics—such as the types of insects in the world and how many fish are in the four different oceans, and so on—and conceitedly claim that they are writing a *śāstra* [i.e., a scriptural commentary].”⁶¹

POST-QING BUDDHISM AND PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Zawa Damdin's attention to these alternate claims to cosmological truth is not reducible to simply a staunch conservatism or xenophobic reaction to foreign influence. Indeed, some of the most important sections in the *Golden Book*, such as its elaboration of

arguments for a Buddhist dispensation into “Mongolia” prior to China or Tibet (and, on that basis, the centrality of “Mongol” actors in the Buddhist conversion of those two regions), or the Turk-centric gaze of its genealogical sections, incorporate rather freely the intellectual fruits of the Euro-Russian academy and its literary heritage. We have already seen how the work of Ramstedt and Cahun supplemented large portions of Zawa Damdin’s narrative in the *Golden Book*. Elsewhere in its pages, he cites conversations with “knowledgeable” (*mkhan po*) Russian scholars such as F. I. Stcherbatsky and M. Tubyansky and photographic and archaeological evidence produced by Orientalist scholars, philology, and even French and German museum holdings to authorize his theses. Most amusingly, given the discussion above, he even substantiates part of his argument for an expansive Mongolian ethnic family with geographical information gleaned from having been shown a round globe!

I have argued that what seems to have been so troubling for Mongolian Buddhist scholastics who read the *New Mirror* were not alternative narratives about the Mongolian past, geography, or the literary flourishes of Verne. Post-Qing (and then post-Tsarist) Inner Asia was, for a time, defined by a great diversity of practices for the production and organization of knowledge. The monastic writings of Buddhist literati who engaged with these new currents provide us with a fascinating, and largely untapped, archive of both scientific and socialist colonization of Inner Asia. Developing a comprehensive and comparative analysis of these sources will surely provide us with a more detailed picture of the ideological negotiations and alternative social imaginaries that marked the decades-long march to first Mongolian national independence, and then state socialism.

NOTES

1. rTsa ba bLo bzang rTa mgrin; alias bLo bzang rTa dbyangs.
2. This is because he is considered to have been one of the first members of an early iteration of what became the Mongolian Academy of Sciences (Mongol Ulsin Shinjlekh UKhany Akademi), first established by the new revolutionary government in 1921. I have yet to confirm this or clarify any of the historical details.
3. See Levinson, 1994; Napper, 1989, 722; van der Kuijp, 1979, 421 n. 5; Hopkins, 1992, 256 n. 5.
4. For references to non-Shugden ritual works by Zawa Damdin, see Bentor, 2000.
5. T. rDo rje shugs ldan; M. Dorj Shugd.
6. For discussion on this grossly understudied controversy see Dreyfus, 1998. For an example of Zawa Damdin’s evocation by contemporary Shugden advocates in Europe and North America, see www.dorjeshugden.com/great-masters/enlightened-lamas-series/lobsang-tamdin-1867-1937/.
7. For references to Zawa Damdin’s historical works, see Uspensky, 2002, 233; Smith and Schaeffer, 2001, 305 n. 426; Schuh, 1977, xvii, 18, 51, 76 n. 125; Faxian, 1970; Dharmatāla, 1987, xv; bLo bzang rTa mgrin and Chandra, 1964.
8. See endnote 7.
9. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976a.
10. Ibid.

11. The Mongolian People's Party (Mongol Ardiin Nam) was renamed the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (Mongol Ardiin Khuvsгалт Nam) in 1924.

12. Bira, 1964, 6. Many thanks to Marianna Siniakova at the University of Toronto for her help with this invaluable Russian source on the life and work of Zawa Damdin.

13. *Dzam gling byang mtha'i rtog ge mgo mkhregs*. For instance, see colophon in Blo bzang rta mgrin, 1975–1976c, 660.

14. While we read nothing about Agwang Dorzhiev in Zawa Damdin's autobiography, the two certainly knew each other and a letter correspondence between the two concerning some of Zawa Damdin's historical claims is found in both editions of the latter's Collected Works. These letters are studied in my doctoral dissertation (University of Toronto, 2014). For Agwang Dorzhiev's questions, see bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–76d, and for Zawa Damdin's answers, see bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976e.

15. See endnote 14.

16. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976b, 183.

17. See, for instance, Elverskog, 2011, 243–274.

18. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976f.

19. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976b, 195.

20. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976g.

21. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976c, d, and e.

22. Akim, 1997, 7.

23. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976h, 35.

24. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976c, 660.

25. Ibid.

26. Tuttle, 2011.

27. Dharmatāla's *Rosary of White Lotuses*, for instance, begins straightaway with a "General Account of the Emergence and Spread of Buddhism in the World" (*sPyir 'jig rten du chos ji ltar byung tshul*) (1889, xxv). Likewise, Gushri Tshe 'phel's 1819 (1981) *History of Buddhism in Hor* promptly begins with an account of the early "enlightened" kings of Tibet, their connection to Mahāsammata, and their work to import Buddhism during the Yarlung empire. While several eighteenth-century Amdo scholars (all Qing cosmopolitans) did apply themselves to either geographical projects or geographically heavy, historical works, we do not find in their pages an extensive defense of traditional Buddhist cosmology (its limits and contradictions).

28. On an earlier, influential attempt to do the same, see Elverskog, 2005.

29. See, for instance: Jamtsarano, 1907, 21, quoted in Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, 1999. Also see Rupen, 1956a and 1956b; Bernstein, 2009; King, 2013.

30. Rupen, 1956a, 396.

31. Jamtsarano, 1907, 21, quoted in Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, 1999, 83–84.

32. Ibid.

33. Rupen, 1956a, 396 n. 34.

34. On these transitions, see Elverskog, 2006.

35. Written in 1912, but I am unclear just when it was published in the *New Mirror*. Schorkowitz, 2001, 296 n. 79.

36. Cahun and Lix, 1877, and Cahun, 1896.

37. Rupen, 1956a, 397.

38. For instance, Mnyang bzod pa rGyal mtshan's *rGya rtsis snying bsdus*, 1744, and in the notes of A skya Blo bzang bśTan pa'i rGyal mtshan (1708–1768). See Yongdan, 2011, 76.

39. Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor (1704–1788).

40. Yongdan, 2011, 77.

41. *Ibid.*, 88–89.

42. Cabezón, 1994.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Unkrig, 1926, quoted in Rupen, 1964, 221 n. 126.

45. Yongdan, 2011, 88–89.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Skt. *Buddha Āvatamsaka-mahāvaiṣṭya Sūtra*, T. *Sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo*. See, for instance, Chos kyi 'Byung gnas, 1976–1979. Zawa Damdin composed a praise based on one of the most famous characters in this *sūtra*, the Bodhisattva Gzhon nu Nor bzang (Skt. Sudhanakumāra), who is one of the archetypes of the perfect Buddhist disciple in Mahāyāna literature. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976i.

48. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976j, 44.

49. The Abhidharma is one of the “Three Baskets” of the Buddhist canon (Skt. *tripiṭaka*; T. *sde snod gsum*) and is a term that is notoriously difficult to translate. It has been rendered into English variously as “phenomenology,” “higher knowledge,” “manifest knowledge,” and so forth. Abhidharma is, in general, concerned with classifying experience and systematizing many of the topics mentioned in the *sūtras* (the *Sayings of the Buddha*, another of the canonical “baskets” of the *tripiṭaka*). Topics include the five psychophysical aggregates (Skt. *pañcaskandha*, T. *phung po lnga*), which are the basis for imputing the “self”; the six sense-faculties and their six sense objects (Skt. *dvadaśa āyatana*, T. *skye mched bcu gnyis*); the eighteen classifications of all knowable things (Skt. *aṣṭadaśa dhātu*, T. *khams bco brgyad*), and so forth. One such classification, which Zawa Damdin evokes here, concerns the physical structure and genesis of the universe. These are generally divided up into the physical world, understood as a “vessel” (T. *nod*), and the beings that inhabit it, known as the “contents” (T. *bcud*). Famous commentaries to the Abhidharma include Asaṅga's fourth-century Compendium of Abhidharma (Skt. *Abhidharmasamuccaya*; T. *Mngon pa kun btus*), and his younger brother Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidharmakośa*; T. *Chos mngon pa'i mdzod*) and *Auto-Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma* (Skt. *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya*; T. *Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi bshad pa*).

50. Phan tshun 'gal 'dur mi 'gyur.

51. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976j, 44.

52. *Ibid.*, 44.

53. That is to say, the fact that they do not see the world in the same way as is described in Buddhist canonical sources does not disprove the validity of those sources.

54. The designation Zawa Damdin uses for “scientist” here is *rtog ge pa*. Instead of an adaption of a foreign word to describe this class of people, or even a favorable indigenous term, his use of *rtog ge pa* positions them in rather derogatory terms. This word is generally used in scholastic contexts to designate a logician or “reasoner” who relies too heavily upon logic and scripture without any real experience of what the terms actually mean (through, for example, meditative practice). As such, I render this above as “superficial intellectuals,” as opposed to simply ‘logicians.’

55. The *Mahāyānasaṃgraha* (T. *Theg pa chen po bsdus pa*) attributed to Asaṅga. This story describes the limited, inaccurate descriptions of an elephant by eighteen blind people who can

only access some partial feature (a tail, a foot, etc.) by means of their other senses. The analogy points to the classical Buddhist characterization of unenlightened experience, which is defined as necessarily “blinded” by *karma* and delusions.

56. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976j, 44.

57. Lhag par deng sang ‘di phyogs su. It is unclear just what “region” or “place” (*phyogs*) Dorzhiev means. Since their topic of discussion in the letters concerns Zawa Damdin’s historiographic claims regarding what we might gloss here, for simplicity’s sake, as a broadly “Mongol cultural region” (T. *hor yul, sog yul*), we might presume that Agwang Dorzhiev is referring to the newly autonomous Mongolian state and his own Buryat homeland.

58. Given Agwang Dorzhiev’s extensive diplomatic travels, and his engagement with a great diversity of people holding such “wrong views” along the way (Orthodox Christians, European scientists, Russian Orientalists, and of course, Russian and Mongolian socialists), exactly whose conversion to Buddhism he is hoping for here is hard to gauge. On those travels, see Snelling, 1993; Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, 1999, 79–97; and Andreev, 2003. For his autobiography, see Ngag dbang bLo bzang (date unknown), 3–91.

59. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976d, 554.

60. See bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976e, 571–572.

61. bLo bzang rTa mgrin, 1975–1976j, 428.

5

Envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist Identity Through Chinggis Khan

Vesna A. Wallace



INTRODUCTION

The question as to whether the Mongols understood the concept of nationality defined by customs, language, and ancestry prior to the early twentieth century has been a contested issue. In the view of Atwood and Kaplonski, Mongols historically did not understand the concept of national identity as different from citizenship.¹ The contemporary Mongolian scholar Mönkh-Erdene argues that during the Qing period, all social classes in Mongolia in fact experienced a genuine fear of Chinese cultural and physical assimilation that would lead to the disappearance of Mongol identity threatened by the Qing's preoccupation to transform its ethnically and linguistically diverse empire into the envisioned geo-body. A clearer sense of nationality among the Mongols emerged out of the early-twentieth-century-turmoil brought by Chinese occupation and the White Russians' army, which followed the Mongols' independence from the Qing in 1911. Few decades after Mongolia's independence from the Qing, any expression of nationalistic sentiments became suppressed during the Soviets' presence in Mongolia, while patriotism was interpreted as loyalty to the communist state. For this reason, the effort to rediscover Mongolian identity and to construct the concept of "being a Mongol" in contrast to being Russian or Chinese became apparent in the early 1990s, with the collapse of communism and independence from the Soviet Union. A departure from the communist period provided the condition for creating new concepts of what it means to be a Mongol, reemphasizing the thirteenth-century historical roots of the ethno-cultural Mongolian identity and

the positive aspects of Chinggis Khan's political and military exploits. In different historical and cultural contexts the name of Chinggis Khan signified different things. For Soviets he was as an oppressor, for European historians a bloodthirsty barbarian, and for the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party a feudal leader. In the post-Soviet Mongolia, Chinggis Khan reappeared as an exemplar of an ideal man and became the primary referent of Mongolian identity, especially among Khalkhas, who have seen themselves as true Mongols and other ethnic groups as only nominally or partly so due to their intermarrying with Russians and Chinese. The aim of this chapter is also to show that the concept of Mongolian Buddhist identity, which endured from the time of Buddhist renaissance in Mongolia until the present, had to be continually reinvented through inventive interlocking of historical facts and imaginations.

DISCOURSES ON CHINGGIS KHAN AND MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST IDENTITY
IN MODERN MONGOLIA

At the third Congress of Mongolian Writers, held in 1962, the renowned Mongolian author Damdinsüren Tsendiin (1908–1986) expressed his sharp criticism of European scholars' portrayal of Chinggis Khan in this way: "When arrogant European historians fall in trance, praising Alexander the Great and Napoleon, their mouths foam. When they talk about great figures of Asia, about Mongolian Chinggis Khan, and Indian kings, they tighten their lips and clench their teeth. One should not, like a parrot, continue to repeat the words of those historians."² During the Socialist period, Damdinsüren could not yet publicly speak of Chinggis Khan as a Buddhist. Some thirty years later, the well-known Mongolian scholar Khürelbaatar Lkham-sürenгийн voiced a similar stance in the essay titled "Chinggis Khan and Mongolian Buddhism" (*Chinggis Khan ba Mongolyn Burkhany Shashin*). He stated in that essay: "mentioning the name 'Chinggis' is no longer prohibited. However, now when we speak about Chinggis Khan, we do not speak about Chinggis. We speak of his campaigns, but we do not speak of the reasons for his campaigns. When we do speak, we do not turn to the evidence in the profound historical sources . . . We are imagining Chinggis Khan through novels composed by writers who have caused damage to the real history throughout several centuries."³ There he also took a liberty to speak of Chinggis Khan as a Buddhist. Similarly, in the volume *Temüjin from a Boy to a Divine Lord* (*Temüjin Khövögüünees Tengerleg Ezend*), the contemporary Mongolian academic Choimaa Sharavyn calls for a balanced view of Chinggis Khan, pointing to both perspectives—one that vindicates Chinggis Khan's conquests on the basis of his celestial power and the other that sees him as a personification of a "bloodthirsty barbarian" and a "slaughtering maniac"—as exaggerations. At the same time, Choimaa Sharavyn appreciates Chinggis Khan as the first among Mongol emperors to

hold Buddhism in a higher esteem than any other religion due to its superior ability to induce a mental purification and due to the profundity of its philosophy.⁴

In this post-Soviet period, the understanding of the Mongolian identity has been once again invariably linked to Chinggis Khan. With that, the image of Chinggis Khan as the founder of the first Mongol state and as the father of the Mongol “nation” reappeared in public discourse. When the renowned Mongolian scholar Shagdaryn Bira, in his speech delivered in New York in 2001, called Chinggis Khan a “true father of Mongolian nation,” “the Lord of the nation,” as often stated in Mongolian chronicles, and “the flesh and blood of nomadic civilization,” he expressed the sentiment of nearly every contemporary Mongol.⁵ Seen as a holder of infallible power and as a symbol of national, cultural, and religious identities, Chinggis Khan has been a powerful device in reinventing and reimagining the traditional powers of state and religion. Everything that appears to be in need of authentication as genuinely Mongolian, and thereby implicitly powerful, efficacious, and acceptable, is in one or another way brought into connection with Chinggis Khan. The tendency to utilize the name of Chinggis Khan in justifying political and religious stands, agendas, and programs is noticeable in the discourse of nearly every contemporary political and religious group. The issue of the uniqueness of Mongolian identity linked to the legacy of Chinggis Khan and the great Mongol empire also has become the basis for national pride. The question of the religious orientation of Mongolian identity has been a subject of contention in contemporary Mongolia. The emphasis on the inseparability of Mongolian national and cultural identities from Mongolian Buddhism in public discourse, which has brought about the integration of Chinggis Khan and Buddhism into the theory of Mongolian identity, has been resorting to the Mongolian Buddhist, prerevolutionary idea of Chinggis Khan as a Buddhist.

In the ongoing disputes concerning what constitutes “true Mongolian identity,” the glorification of Chinggis Khan has provoked the strong emotional responses from dominant religious groups. With growing nationalism, characterized by the reinvention of power through the authentic Mongolian genealogy and through the appeal to traditional sources for ethical, political, and legal standards, the appeal to Chinggis Khan has emerged as the epitome of infallible power and moral principle, an iconic figure of innate nobility and sanctity that has become one of the strongest instruments in arousing national pride and validating one’s religious tradition as authentically Mongolian. Admired as a quintessential hero who demanded justice and cherished honesty, Chinggis Khan has inspired a renewed call to responsibility on the part of political leaders to honor, protect, and learn from the legacy he left.

In the article “The Issues Pertaining to Chinggis Khan and World Religions” (*Chinggis Khan Delkhiin Shashin Soëlyn Asuudal*), in a section called “I am a Mongol” (*Bi Mongol Khun*), the lama D. Baasan expresses his concern that in the twenty-first century, not every Mongol will be able to revitalize his Mongolian Buddhist identity, which governed the Mongols’ ethical life for two thousand years. In his view, the influence of European culture on Mongols is detrimental to the flourishing of Mongolian Buddhism.

In explaining what it means to be a Mongol, he proposes the five main factors that should be considered as determinative of the Mongolian identity. As one would expect, the first factor is that “the Inspired and Holy Chinggis Khan (Suut Bogd Chinggis Khan), the second son of the god Indra, and an emanation of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi,”⁶ who having been born in Jambudvīpa, turned the Wheel of Power, unified the Mongols, and built the Mongolian state. It is clear that Baasan here reiterates passages from the Mongolian Buddhist chronicles such as the *Precious Summary* (*Erdeni-yin Tobči*, 1662), composed by Sayang Sečen (Sagan Setsen); *The Pearl Rosary* (*Subud-un Erike*), composed by Gonchugjab in 1835; and others, in which Chinggis Khan is lauded as the son of Indra, the lord of gods.⁷ The second decisive factor for Baasan is the transformation of Mongolia into a “bodhisattvic country” whose citizens are endowed with the mind of awakening (*M. bodhicid*, Skt. *bodhicitta*) and unite the Buddha Dharma with the state and with world religions in accordance with Chinggis Khan’s teachings. The third significant feature of Mongolian national identity is writing in the Mongolian language and in the classical Mongolian script. Under the category of the fourth feature are mentioned the five types of livestock that are traditionally kept by Mongolian herders, beautiful virgin pastures of Mongolia, and the purity and beauty of the homeland inherited by contemporary Mongols. Lastly, the presence of the divine descendants among the Mongolian people is listed as the fifth, decisive feature of Mongolian identity. In Baasan’s view, by establishing the dharmic state (*nomt uls*), named “Mongolia” in 1206, Chinggis Khan showed the world how to build a state based on the Buddha Dharma. Chinggis Khan’s *Great Yasa* and his wisdom teachings (*Oyun Tülkhüür*) are said to testify to the spirit of his Buddhist ideals. Baasan further wants us to believe that Chinggis Khan’s founding of the Mongol state should not be seen as an unexpected event, since under the patronage and assistance of the god Indra, who was an ally of 1,000 Buddhas, Chinggis Khan built the “first state” in Asia and Europe, repossessing the Muslim and Christian countries that held false beliefs and that were building theocratic states. His successors further developed and refined the Mongolian dharmic state. Since people living in Jambudvīpa at that time were overcome by suffering caused by the persistent conflicts that succeeded the Christian Crusades, Chinggis Khan ended those wars by forceful means and created the conditions for every occupied country to prosper. Prophesized by the Buddha to the god Indra as the future manifestation of Vajrapāṇi, who would display the immense power and strength of all the Buddhas of the three times at the time when evil kings will trouble and confuse people, Chinggis Khan eliminated wrongs and abstained from evil, following the example of the Dharma kings of the past. In his concluding words, Baasan urges contemporary Mongols to rebuild a Mongolian state that will be characterized by the unification of the two laws, those of the state and religion, integrating Chinggis Khan’s state with the law of Dharma. He also appeals to them for a worldwide celebration of the Mongolian state in conjunction with a veneration of the Buddha in the year 2006, which marked “800 years after the *cakravartin*, Vajrapāṇi, Chinggis Khan built the Mongol State with Dharma.” For Baasan, the best way to rebuild the Mongolian state characterized by the principle of dual

law is by means of restoring a “dharmic person, a dharmic *ger* (traditional Mongolian home), a dharmic country, and dharmic mundane activities in the twenty-first century.”⁸ As will be shown below, Baasan’s claim of Chinggis Khan’s dharmic activities has its basis in Mongolian and Tibetan sources dating from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries.

The earliest literary reference to Chinggis Khan as a Buddhist universal emperor (*cakravartin*) whose birth is a result of the maturation of the fruits of his previous good deeds is found in the *Explanation of the Object of Knowledge* (*Shes bya rab gsal*), composed by Phag pa Lama (‘Phags pa bLama ma bLo gros rGyal mTshan) in 1278 for Qubilai Khan on the order of Qubilai Khan’s son Jingim.⁹ In the same text, Phag pa reserves the designation of the first Mongolian Dharma king for his own imperial patron, Qubilai Khan. The idea of Chinggis Khan’s birth 3,250 years after the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa* and his right to rule due to the merit accumulated from his previous lifetimes reappeared in the first half of the seventeenth century, in Samdan Sengge’s 1623 translation of the *Abhiniṣkramaṇa Sūtra*,¹⁰ and it continued to be propagated.

MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST CHRONICLES ON CHINGGIS KHAN’S CONTRIBUTION TO BUDDHISM

Among Mongolian sources, probably the earliest reference to Chinggis Khan’s acquaintance with Buddhism is in the thirteenth-century chronicle *The Secret History of the Mongols*, which mentions his meeting in 1227 with Burqan, the king of Tanguts, whom he executed soon after their meeting. Apart from mentioning Burqan’s honoring of the great Khan with gifts of gold and silver, among which the first offering was a golden statuette of the Buddha, the chronicle lacks any references to Chinggis Khan’s real interest in Buddhism.¹¹ It is in the early part of the seventeenth century that new narratives pertaining to Chinggis Khan’s favorable interaction with Buddhists and his commitment to the Dharma began to emerge in Mongolian historiography, enforcing the idea that Mongolian national identity, embedded in the figure of Chinggis Khan, was a specifically Buddhist identity. Chinggis Khan is said to have established his relations with Tibetan Buddhism after bringing Central Tibet under his power and upon hearing of great Tibetan adepts from a distance. In the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, the 1607 history of Altan Khan, Chinggis Khan is said to have invited the first Supreme Sakya master of Tibet, Kunga Nyingpo (Sa chen Kun ‘dga sNying po, 1092–1158), and to have been the first to promulgate the Buddha Dharma.¹² Similarly, Ligdan Khan’s “White Stūpa” inscription of 1626 accredits Chinggis Khan with faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, especially in those of the Tibetan Sakya lineage.¹³

Despite the temporal differences among the chronicles and histories of Buddhism that will be examined in this chapter, their portrayals of Chinggis Khan’s involvement with Buddhism converge in accrediting him with important contributions in the

dissemination and flourishing of Buddhism in Mongolia and in Tibet. The work of the great sixteenth-century Tibetan scholar of the Kagyu tradition, the Second Pawo Tsuglag Threngwa (Dpa' bo gTsug lag 'Phreng ba, 1504–1564/66), titled *A History of the Dharma: A Feast of the Wise* (*Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*),¹⁴ which mentions Chinggis Khan's interest in Buddhist doctrine, was referenced in the later Mongolian chronicles, some of which will be discussed hereafter. There he writes of Chinggis Khan's meeting with Tibetan Kagyu and Sakya master after occupying the Tangut.

Chinggis Khan is also said to have facilitated the further spread of Dharma in his incarnation as Qubilai Khan, who became a disciple of Phag pa Lama, and spread the Gelugpa tradition in China as an incarnation of the Emperor Yung-lo of the Chinese Ming dynasty, who became a disciple of the Tibetan teacher 'Jam chen mTsho rje. He supposedly also revitalized the Dharma among the Mongols in his incarnation of Altan Khan, who became a disciple of the Third Dalai Lama. Thus, as a Dharma-protector who maintained the principle of two laws through his ties with his religious preceptors in all of these incarnations, Chinggis Khan performed the function of Vajrapāṇi in protecting the Dharma and the state.

Another text closely connected to the cult of Chinggis Khan, which portrays him as a divinely destined ruler, is the anonymous Mongolian text *The Golden Summary of Chinggis Khan* (*Činggis qayan-u altan tobči*), which Leland L. Rogers dates to the sixteenth or early seventeenth century on the basis of the orthographical and lexicographical evidence in the surviving manuscript.¹⁵ We find the same portrayal of Chinggis Khan in *The Pearl Rosary*, which speaks of Chinggis Khan as “the Lord who by heavenly decree of the powerful Indra was incarnated in Jambudvīpa to become the most powerful of humans,” and who set out on the path for innumerable eons in order to lead beings by means of love and compassion.¹⁶

The accounts of the events connecting Chinggis Khan to the proliferation of Buddhism also can be found in later Mongolian and Tibetan historical works. Among them worth mentioning are *A History of the Sublime Dharma in India, Great China, Tibet, and Mongolia*,¹⁷ written in 1748 by the great Mongour lama Sumpa Khempo Yeshe Paljor (Sum pa mkhan po Ye shes dPal byor, 1704–1787/88); *A Great Chronicle Called A Precious Garland*,¹⁸ written by the Ordos paṇḍita Luvsan Lhundub (T. bLo bzang Lhun 'grub) in 1760; *A Crystal Mirror of Tenets*, composed by the eighteenth-century Tibetan Gelugpa scholar Tukwan Lobsang Chokyi Nyima (Thu'u bkwan bLo bzang Chos kyi Nyi ma, 1732–1802);¹⁹ Tsembeḷ Gūūshi's *A Lamp That Illuminates the Precious Teachings of the Jina: A History of the Sublime Dharma in the Great Region of Hor*,²⁰ written in 1819; Dharmatāla's *Rosary of White Lotuses: Being the Clear Account of How the Precious Teachings Of the Buddha Appeared and Spread in the Hor Country*,²¹ written in 1889; and Zawa Damdin's *Golden Book*,²² composed in 1931.

In these historical writings, Chinggis Khan is credited with laying a foundation for the spread of Buddhism in thirteenth-century Mongolia and for instituting the principle of the dual governance (the emperor's law and the law of Dharma) through his patron–priest relationship with the already mentioned great Sakya master, Kunga

Nyingpo.²³ However, the possibility of Chinggis Khan's contacts with Kunga Nyingpo is known as problematic due to discrepancies in the timelines of these two figures. In his *Rosary of White Lotuses*, Dharmatāla rejects the existence of a patron-priest relationship between Chinggis Khan and Kunga Nyingpo on the basis of the report in Sumpa Khempo Yeshe Paljor's *History of the Wish-Granting Tree*, which was Dharmatāla's primary source of information on Chinggis Khan. According to Dharmatāla, it is Sakya Paṇḍita Kunga Gyaltzen (Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rGyal mtshan, 1182–1251) to whom Chinggis Khan sent a letter of invitation with gifts, stating: "I have not finished the wars of my reign yet, but as soon as these are over, please come to Hor with your disciples and spread the teaching of the Lord Buddha."²⁴ Although these two never met in person, Sakya Paṇḍita acted as his preceptor from afar, and Chinggis Khan became the first protector of Dharma in the country of Hor, producing measureless accomplishments in supporting Dharma in Tibet.²⁵ In Sumpa Khempo Yeshe Paljor's account, having become a patron of the head lamas of the Sakya order in Tibet, Chinggis Khan is also said to have sent for three Buddhist statues²⁶ to be brought to Mongolia from Central Tibet. We are also told here that with the rise of Buddhist clergy in Mongolia, the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia began, evoking faith in the Dharma among all Mongols, resulting in the feast of peace and happiness increasing like an ocean in the summer by the power of the sun and the moon of the state and Dharma.²⁷

In Güüshi Tsorj Luvsankhündev's *Precious Rosary (Erdeni-yin erike)*, Jambadorj's *Crystal Mirror (Bolor toly)*, and Zawa Damdin's *Golden Book*, a slightly different story is given. In 1207, when Chinggis Khan went to Central Tibet at the age of forty-five, the great Tibetan scholars and noblemen such as the Sakya lama Tsalpa Kunga Dorje (Tshal pa Kun dga' rDo rje)²⁸ and others came with 300 men to greet him. Celebrating his arrival for days, they announced their willingness to become his subjects and offered him the three provinces of Ngari, the four administrative units of Ü-Tsang, and the three provinces of southern Kham.²⁹ From there, Chinggis Khan sent a letter and gifts to the previously mentioned Kunga Nyingpo,³⁰ conveying his regret for being unable to bring him to Mongolia at that time due to unfinished state matters, despite his wish to do so. We are told, in that letter, Chinggis Khan also asked the Sakya master for his protection, thereby demonstrating his reverence and acknowledging him as his teacher. Reportedly, the letter also stated: "Afterwards, when my work comes to an end, you must increase the religion of the Victor in the country of Mongolia through [my] sons and others."³¹ Kunga Nyingpo, greatly pleased with these words, praised Chinggis Khan and sent him three consecrated statues. Although Chinggis Khan did not meet the Sakya master in person, he worshipped him from afar, exempted all Tibetans from taxes, and made large donations to monasteries in Central Tibet, to clergy, and others.³² By benefiting Dharma in this way, Chinggis Khan demonstrated the qualities of a truthful and strong Dharmaking, who resembles the Indian and Tibetan Dharma-kings such as Aśoka and Songtsen Gampo (Srong bstan sGam po).³³

The *History of Dharma: A Feast of the Wise* and Zawa Damdin's *Golden Book*³⁴ mention that when three or four years had passed after Chinggis Khan brought all the countries under his authority, the Tibetan teacher Tsangpa Dunkhurwa (gTsang pa Dung khur ba dBang phyug bKra shis) of the Tshal pa Kagyu tradition and his six disciples arrived in Mongolia and meditated in a mountain cave. Having heard of their arrival, Chinggis Khan had them brought to his court, where he received Buddhist teachings from them through an interpreter. Witnessing the Tibetan master's ability to purify one of his officials from an evil spirit, Chinggis Khan became greatly pleased and bestowed favors upon the lama. However, due to the animosity of the envious Taoists and Christians (in some texts it is a shamaness instead of Christians), the Tibetan teacher and his disciples were unable to remain in Mongolia and returned to the country of Tangut. Several years later, in 1227 Chinggis Khan dispatched the troops in order to suppress a mutiny of Tanguts. As his troops were plundering Buddhist temples and monasteries there, Tsangpa Dunkhurwa requested to meet with the Khan. During that meeting he pleaded with Chinggis Khan to cease the destruction of monasteries and gave him teachings on karmic fruition and on the greatness of Dharma. He urged the Khan to respect Buddhism, "since the peace and happiness of beings will depend on the Buddha Dharma."³⁵ Following this, Chinggis Khan conferred upon Tsangpa Dunkhurwa the title of the "Wholly Heavenly" (*teb tengri*), and the Khan's youngest son Touli and his wife and sons became the lama's patrons. That meeting also resulted in Chinggis Khan exempting Buddhist monks from military service and taxes, granting the certificate of merit to Buddhist clergy, and taking steps to restoring the demolished monasteries.³⁶ In this account, before Chinggis Khan died, he instructed his son Ögödei to invite the Tibetan lama Kung thang pa to Mongolia, from whom Ögödei Khan and his family later received the *Cakrasamvara* empowerment in Kharakhorum. Following that, in the succession of Chinggis Khan until Togoontömör Khan (1320–1370), fifteen Mongol Khans contributed to the spread of Buddhism in their territories, following the example of their ancestor by inviting learned lamas from the Sakya and Karma Kagyu orders to their territories.³⁷

According to the work of two Tibetan scholars, titled *An Examination of the Fields of Knowledge of Tibet and Mongolia*,³⁸ in 1206, in the year in which Chinggis Khan united the Mongols and established the Mongol state, he sent an invitation to a Kagyu monk from Upper Kham by the name of Sherab Sengge (Shes rab Seng ge), who had been previously invited to Minyak Tangut as the supreme head lama after completing his studies at Drikung ('Bri kung) and Taklung (sTag lung) monasteries in Central Tibet. Chinggis Khan, we are told, appointed this lama to the position of the tutor of the empire (T. *gu śri*).³⁹ According to the same source, Sina Dorje Gyaltzen (Si na rDo rje rGyal mtshan), known also as Sina Geshe (or Si na mKhan po Shes rab Ye shes), having been instructed by the goddess Tārā to go to the country of the Mongol Khan in the north to disseminate Dharma, came to Mongolia, accompanied by three *geshes* (*dge bshes*) from 'Jang, sKyor mo lung, and Gung thang monasteries near Lhasa. During their meeting with Chinggis

Khan in his Shandu palace, they introduced themselves as Tibetans who were learned in Dharma. Hearing this, Chinggis Khan said to them: "I know the Buddha Dharma. I am the lord of this great earth. There is no one greater in this world than me. If you are all learned like that, make it now rain from the sky." When he said this, those four, closing their eyes and rubbing their thumbnails against the fingernails, brought down much rain. As a great flood submerged the mountains and planes, Chinggis Khan ordered the monks to bring the rain to an end. As soon as he said that, they stopped the rain, and the sky became cloudless, bright, and clear as before. Seeing this, Chinggis Khan, his companions, and others, said: "These lamas do control the sky." Later, in the winter of that year, those four expressed their desire to leave in order to worship at Wutai Mountain and other holy sites. Allowing three of those monks to leave for pilgrimage, Chinggis Khan had Sina Geshe remain in Mongolia, return his monastic vows, and marry a person belonging to his court. When Sina Geshe's son Zeji was born, Chinggis Khan asked his youngest son, Touli, to raise the child as his own; the child then became known as Touli's fourth son. Later, Chinggis Khan gave to Zeji the title of assistant to the West Mongolian governor (T. *ching sang*). It is said this was the manner in which Sina Geshe was able to perform the task of uniting Tibet and Mongolia and building the foundation for the implementation of the principle of dual law, without causing any conflict. Later on, Chinggis Khan sent Sina Geshe back to Tibet and granted him the rank of Śrī Bagshi (Illustrious Teacher) for guiding the work of ruling and putting in order three regions of "Great Tibet" in accordance with Buddhist thought.⁴⁰

The presentations of Chinggis Khan's involvement with Buddhism given in these sources have inspired some contemporary Mongolian scholars to portray Chinggis Khan as a just sovereign who gained power over a large portion of the world not merely by means of military tactics, but also through reliance on the Buddha Dharma. Lham-sürengiin Khürelbaatar, in his article "Chinggis Khan and Mongolian Buddhism," promotes an image of a peace-loving Chinggis Khan who "was not the kind of person we often describe today," as "someone whose intention was to plunder and ravage countries and people, solely for the sake of waging a brutal war, aimed at expanding the homeland, killing, and harming." In his view, Chinggis Khan "did not worship shamans and their one-sided drum," nor did he issue a decree by which all religions must be followed. Instead, to bring peace to the country and prosperity to the people, he learned from Indian *sūtras* about mental illumination, and he adopted the laws and principles of the ancient, great civilization of Asia. "In fact," Khürelbaatar asserts, "he was a Dharma-king who handed over to later generations a golden rope of the great tradition that revered Tibetan religious scholars as religious state preceptors." Khürelbaatar argues that although diverse groups with different religious backgrounds lived within Chinggis Khan's empire, it is most certain that he did not establish a state in which diverse religions were official state religions.⁴¹ One must keep in mind that Khürelbaatar wrote this at the time when competition for Mongolian converts among various religious groups—Christian, Shamanistic, and Buddhist—was becoming fierce, with the shamans disparaging Buddhism

as a foreign religion, unsuitable for Mongols, and asserting Shamanism as an indigenous tradition that was followed by Chinggis Khan himself. By insinuating that Chinggis Khan adopted Buddhism as the official religion of the state while also supporting other religions within the Mongol Empire, Khürelbaatar seeks to legitimate Buddhism as an authentic Mongolian religion in a postcommunist period characterized by religious pluralism.

CHINGGIS KHAN AS A BUDDHIST DEITY AND ETHICIZATION OF HIS
MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

The development of these ideas contributed to the conception of Chinggis Khan as a fundamentally supernatural being who was the fierce manifestation of a Buddhist deity; it also contributed to the development of related ritual practices of worshipping the Khan in his higher Buddhist forms. The “buddhification” of Chinggis Khan evolved within the framework of the growing Buddhist influence and new political circumstances that characterized the period from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries in Mongolian territories colonized by the Qing. As shown by Elverskog, the Qing administration undoubtedly contributed to the “buddhification” of Chinggis Khan for both political⁴² and religious reasons. Ritual performances of worshipping Chinggis Khan, which initially were primarily Shamanic and in all probability only influenced by Confucian and Buddhist elements during the Yuan dynasty, became increasingly Buddhist under the Qing patronage. In 1821, a Buddhist temple was constructed for official guardians of Chinggis Khan’s shrine in Ejeen Khoroo (in the contemporary Ordos municipality), where Buddhist monks were performing prayers for blessings of Chinggis Khan.⁴³

The justification of Chinggis Khan’s military adventures given in the traditional historical narratives and their reappearance in contemporary discourses in Mongolia also has its basis in the perception of Chinggis Khan as a transcendent being manifesting in this world to vanquish evil by turning the Wheel of Power. According to several writings dating from the sixteenth to the early twentieth centuries, such as the *White History* (Čayan teüke, sixteenth century),⁴⁴ Luvsandanzan’s (bLo bzang bšTan ‘dzin) *Golden Summary* (Altan tobči, 17th–18th century), Rashipuntsag’s *Crystal Rosary* (Dai yuwan-u bolur erike, 1774–75), Dharmatāla’s *Rosary of White Lotuses*,⁴⁵ and Zawa Damdin’s *Golden Book*, Chinggis Khan contributed to the development of Buddhism in Mongolia not only through his contacts with the Tibetan Sakya and Kagyu masters, but also by the virtue of his ontologically transcendent nature. According to these historical narratives, the powerful universal emperor (*cakravartin*), the Holy Chinggis Khan, an incarnation of the mythical Indian king Mahāsammata, was born by the destiny of Heaven as an emanation of the two fierce Buddhist deities, known as protectors of the Buddha Dharma. One of them is the white-bodied god Brahmā

(M. Tsamba/Chamba, T. Tshang pa), who holds a knife in his right hand to subdue the enemy. This deity is said to have been a famous and harmful being in a previous life, who was overpowered by Vajrapāṇi and was forced to give the oath to protect the Buddha Dharma. Among people of the Altai region in western Mongolia, White Brahmā came to be worshipped as a lord (*ezen*) of the Tsambagarav (T. Tshang po dkar po) Mountain in Bayan Ölgii province.⁴⁶ The other deity believed to have emanated into the figure of Chinggis Khan is the blue-bodied Vajrapāṇi himself, the Lord of Secrets, who holds a *vajra* in his right hand to crush the enemy in protecting the Mongol state.

The *White History* (*Čayan teüke*), traditionally dated to the late thirteenth century but widely circulated in the late sixteenth century) was most likely the earliest Mongolian source of inspiration for the later Mongolian historians of Buddhism who depicted Chinggis Khan not only as a divinely destined ruler but also as an enlightened being, or the Buddha Vajrapāṇi. The Mongolian chroniclers' retrospective recognition of Chinggis Khan as an emanation (*khuvilgaan*) of Vajrapāṇi, who set in motion the Wheel of Power, echoed in various prayers to Chinggis Khan. For example, in the prayer called "A Great Supplication for the Lineage of the Golden Horde" (Altan Ordny Golomtny Ikh Öchig), one reads the following lines:

From the father Esükei Baatar
 Arisen through destiny
 From the ninety-nine heavens above
 From the mother Suutai Öülen
 Arisen through flowers
 Born content in an iron cradle
 He was transformed as the heroic Bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi.⁴⁷

Even today, during the ritual of the White Standard of Chinggis Khan, as the standard-bearers move, they shout, "My highest sovereign, my sacred tutelary guardian Vajrapāṇi, hurai, hurai, hurai," and when they dismount from their horses, in prayer they utter, "My Buddha Vajrapāṇi, Holy Lord Chinggis." In fact, the nine great tutelary deities (*tngris*), the emblems of the nine standards of Chinggis Khan representing the protectors from the enemy, are said to be companions and chief attendants who follow Vajrapāṇi's commands.⁴⁸

As an emanation of the god Brahmā, Chinggis Khan is said to have pacified the world as a divine peacekeeper; and as an emanation of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, he crushed the heretical enemies of Dharma, laid the foundations for Buddhist teachings in his empire, and placed his subjects on the Buddhist path. According to Luvsandanzan's *Golden Summary* and Sagang Setsen's *Precious Summary*, the birth of Chinggis Khan was prophesized by the Buddha Śākyamuni himself, who predicted that more than 3,250 years⁴⁹ from his own *nirvāṇa* and prior to the birth of Chinggis Khan, there would be twelve corrupt kings in the world of Jambudvīpa, who would cause much distress to

numerous living beings, but by the mandate of Heaven, Chinggis Khan would be born as an emanation of the blazing god Brahmā, as an unwavering wish-fulfilling gem, and will take charge of living beings in Jambudvīpa.⁵⁰ Aiming to substantiate the divine origin of Chinggis Khan, these historical writings in part followed the example of the thirteenth-century *Secret History of the Mongols*,⁵¹ in which the concept of the divine origin of kingship and Chinggis Khan and of his divine mission entrusted by the Eternal Heaven (*möngke tenggri*) and prophesized by the state shaman Teb Tenggri are contained. In part they were also based on Tibetan Buddhist formats of writing genealogies and history, which often linked Tibetan rulers to Indian Buddhist kings and to the mythical king Mahāsammata.

In the *Golden Summary* it is said that three years prior to Chinggis Khan's birth, the Sakya master Kunga Nyingpo (Kun dga' sNying po) ordered two Chinese men by the names of Ilisada and Shigü Biba to engrave the words about Chinggis Khan's birth on the Burqan Qaldun Mountain. Just as the Buddha Śākyamuni is said to have prophesized Chinggis Khan's birth from above, so too the king of *nāgas*, Nandi Upanandi, is said to have brought out a jade seal from the subterranean world, which testifies to Temüjin's right to imperial power.⁵² Similarly, in *The Golden Summary of Chinggis Khan* (*Činggis-qayan-u altan tobči*) the birth of Chinggis was both decreed by the Buddha and divinely destined. This source tells us that Chinggis was born with auspicious marks, and his rule was legitimized with the bestowal of a "bejeweled jade cup full of holy liquor from the powerful deity Indra . . . due to the power of his previous merits." In this account, his four younger brothers try to drink from the jade cup but are unable to swallow the elixir it contains. Seeing this, Chinggis addressed them, saying:

Previously when I was born, by the Buddha's decree it transpired that I had a precious jade seal from the place of the dragons in my right hand. Now from the mighty deity Indra a jade cup full of holy liquor has been bestowed *upon me*. Am I *not* the divinely destined Lord?⁵³

Stories of supernatural and miraculous events that surround Chinggis Khan's birth and legitimize his rule appear in somewhat different variations in various other Mongolian chronicles. According to the *Precious Summary*, for three mornings prior to the day on which Temüjin sat on a throne as a Khan, a bird looking like a five-colored lark perched on a white, square rock in front of his *ger* and sang: "Chinggis, Chinggis." At that time, a jade seal called Khasbuu, which measured one span in breadth and length and was decorated with two dragons intertwined on a tortoise, emerged from the rock that had spontaneously split apart, disclosing the mandate of Heaven.⁵⁴ In the *Crystal Rosary*, we are told a large bird circled in the sky near the Khan at the time when he sat on the throne at the age of forty-five, and it sang

“Chinggis, Chinggis” many times. Those witnessing this marveled and said: “The High Heaven gave the title of ‘Chinggis’ to this Khan of ours.”⁵⁵ In Byamba Erke Daičing’s historical work *Asarayči neretü-yin teüke* (1667), we find the mention of both the blood clot in Temüjin’s hand and the appearance of an imperial seal in connection with Chinggis Khan’s birth.⁵⁶ Hangin’s analysis of the historical novel *Blue Chronicle (Köke Sudur)*,⁵⁷ composed by Inner Mongolian author Injannasi in 1870–1871, enumerates nine auspicious signs that appeared at the time of the enthronement of Chinggis Khan, most of which he brought into his novel from various Mongolian chronicles. In addition to the previously mentioned signs, he calls attention to an incense stick burning for two hours, a drought-relieving rain, a fragrant mist descending and making flowers blossom, a clearing of a heavy rain within an hour, wind bringing a precious stone, nine steeds coming to the Khan of their own accord, and the appearance of enduring light.⁵⁸ As we will see, the idea of the predestined rule of Chinggis Khan and its favorable effects on Buddhism continued into the early twentieth century.

According to the Mongolian scholastic hierarch Zawa Damdin (1867–1937), from early on Chinggis Khan was entrusted to the Sakya master Kunga Nyingpo, by whose order a temple was built at the northern gate of the city called Brahmā; and therefore, from the time of Chinggis Khan until Togoontömör Khan, Sakya lamas were revered by Mongol emperors.⁵⁹ At the age of forty-five, Chinggis Khan became renowned as a *cakravartin* Khan, “taking duties and taxes from states with 720 languages and 361 clans of Jambudvīpa, beginning with four foreign countries and five colors.”⁶⁰ Zawa Damdin clearly relied upon earlier sources such as *The Golden Summary*⁶¹ and the *White History With Ten Virtues* for his description of the extent of Chinggis Khan’s empire. The *White History With Ten Virtues* tells of the prince by the name of Temüjin, recognized as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, in the place of Jad Mongolia, who vanquished the twelve great khans, called “the lords of men,” and brought the world of Jambudvīpa under his power.⁶² According to Zawa Damdin, having conquered the world, the Holy Lord Chinggis Khan administered the dual law (the law of state and the law of Dharma), which was previously instituted by Mahāsammata and later followed by Indian and Tibetan Dharma kings.⁶³ He made sixteen great countries with 360 languages and 700 clans into a single state, and he founded the Buddhist realm consisting of “the four foreigners and the five colors,”⁶⁴ comprising the “white” Korea, “red” China, “yellow” Turkestan, and “black” Tibet, surrounding the “blue” Mongols.⁶⁵ This particular narrative reverberates throughout Mongolian Buddhist ritual texts and practices. For example, in a liturgy recited during the ritual of making offerings to Chinggis Khan titled *The Holy Chinggis Khan’s Offering for the Productive and Effective Accomplishment of Actions and Business*, Chinggis Khan is extolled as a tutelary deity who became honored among the 84,000 kings for administering “the five colors and four foreign countries” and for crushing the heretic kings in accordance with the mandate of Heaven and by means of his own *siddhis* and supernatural powers (M. *rid*, Skt. *ṛddhi*).⁶⁶

Zawa Damdin speaks of the birth of Brahmā in the form of the powerful *cakravartin* Bogd Khan, an emanation of Vajrapāṇi as the one who initiated the second phase of the development of Buddhism in Mongolia and its transmission from Tibet in the thirteenth century.⁶⁷ In the third chapter of his *Golden Book*, titled “The Period of the Spread of Buddhism from the Snowy Tibet [during the] Dominion of the Powerful Cakravartin Chinggis Khan Over Most of Jambudvīpa,”⁶⁸ he mentions two Indian Buddhist texts, the *Root Tantra of Mañjuśrī* (*Mañjuśrīmūlatantra*) and the *Questions of the Goddess Vimalā* (*Vimaladevīparipṛcchā Mahāyāna Sūtra*, T. *Lha mo dri ma med pas zhus pa'i mdo*) as sources of the prophetic passages in which the Buddha Śākyamuni foretold the birth of Chinggis Khan and his subjugation of the twelve cruel kings. His reference to the mentioned prophecy in the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra* most likely has Gonchugjab's *Pearl Rosary* (*Subud erike*) as its source. In the *Pearl Rosary*, it is said that the Buddha prophesized the birth of Chinggis Khan and the spread of his power at the time when different types of Muslims (*laloo*) will be in existence as stated in the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra*.⁶⁹

According to Zawa Damdin, having overthrown the twelve corrupt kings, who entered the wrong path and maltreated their subjects, Chinggis Khan established his state and brought all of his subjects into magnificent peace and happiness. His primary reason for subjugating those kings was to eliminate the circumstances that were hindering the development of the Buddha Dharma. The twelve kings and their dominions that fell under the jurisdiction of Chinggis Khan are said to be the following: (1) the minor king Van Süen of the Manchus of Jurchen origin; (2) all the provinces of the Taich tribe (a Mongol tribe of northern Mongolia at the time of Chinggis Khan), together with Bökh Chilger; (3) all of the tribes of the thirteen Chinese provinces that Altan Khan subjugated; (4) the Tibetan king Toji; (5) Sülden Khan of the Sartulls of Togars, or Sartuls; (6) Mangul Sülden, the king of Khünkheer, or Togmog; (7) Ün, the king of Khereids; (8) Dayant of Naiman and his ministers; (9) Arslan, the khan of Qarlig; (10) three provinces of Ngari, four administrative units of Central Tibet, and three regions of Southern Kham; (11) from there, he placed under his jurisdiction every nationality in the north, beginning with Minyag of the Tanguts; he divided them into three categories (those who do military service, those who pay taxes, and those who work); and (12) Ambagai, the king of Sartagch, from whom Chinggis Khan took control over his dominion in 1208.⁷⁰

In Zawa Damdin's interpretation, Chinggis Khan brought the kings of Buddhist countries under his power by gentle means, whereas he took control over countries of Bukhara, Khünkheer, Barsigba, and the countries of Europe, which were inimical to Buddhism in China, Tibet, and Mongolia through harsh means. He tamed the kings of those countries and punished them in accordance with the decree of the god Indra. Zawa Damdin also tells us that having conquered them, Chinggis Khan declared, “Now, the body and mind should stay peaceful,” and for nineteen years, the peace and happiness of these kings, their officials, and others was like a divine splendor.⁷¹ There is

no doubt that here too Dharmatāla's *Rosary of White Lotuses* served as Zawa Damdin's main source, where Chinggis Khan, having confirmed his conquest of the twelve kings and their countries, declares: "From now on, my body and mind must stay in peace."⁷² According to Dharmatāla's *Rosary of White Lotuses*, the religious preceptor of the Qing state, Janja Khutukhtu Rolbiidorje (1717–1786), seeing Chinggis Khan as a protector of the world, officially recognized him as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi.⁷³

Zawa Damdin assures his readers that while Chinggis Khan displayed ferocity in his actions, internally his mind was free from mental afflictions. His thoughts were dharmic, and he was above the earth just as the god Brahmā is above heaven. Although in the course of seven years he paved a bloody road from the eastern direction of Jambudvīpa to its western regions, "a continuous path of the milk of Dharma follows his trail up to the present." Finally, we are told that by subjugating Tibet, which adhered to the law of Dharma, and China, which observed the emperor's law, Chinggis Khan facilitated the flourishing of Buddhism in Mongolia by uniting the law of Dharma and the law of the emperor.⁷⁴ To highlight the wisdom of a policy implemented by Chinggis Khan during his military campaigns, Zawa Damdin writes: "Nearly 1,000 years have passed since the time of Chinggis Khan until now. In this time, in all three countries—in China, Tibet, and Mongolia—the lamp of the sublime Dharma has not been put out by the inimical red wind [of Communist Revolution], and no one can discredit the efficacy of Chinggis Khan's wise policy."⁷⁵ To further justify Chinggis Khan's military campaigns against the twelve kings as rooted in his dharmic and compassionate motivation, Zawa Damdin points to the previously mentioned Tsemel Gūūshi's history of Buddhism in Mongolia, where it is said that although Chinggis Khan's external conduct seemed harsh, he genuinely loved suffering beings, and although he took the form of a householder (and not of a monastic), "his abundant, milk ocean-like motivation was to increase the Buddha's religion."⁷⁶

In his *Crystal Rosary*, Rashipuntsag mentions the *History of Yuan* (*Yuan shi*, 1370) as his source for understanding the reasons behind Chinggis Khan's appearance in this world. He tells of the degenerate conditions of Jambudvīpa such as the decline of humans' lifespan, wrong views, and mental afflictions, and of the deterioration of time and sentient beings, manifesting in the rise of harsh, oppressing kings. In response to these conditions, Brahmā was born as person of the noble birth on the day of the full moon of the first month of the summer of the Water Horse Year, 2,189 years after the birth of the Buddha Tathāgata in the place called Deligin Boldaga at the Onon River in order to punish those kings and to bring happiness to the entire country.⁷⁷ As he governed the state in harmony with Buddhist teachings, "for the higher not to oppress the low, for the low not to fight with the higher, for the equal not to compete with their equals, for the wise to discuss state matters, and for the unintelligent to submit to the law," all people were pacified. As a result, Rashipuntsag writes, "there was no illness among the people or plague among the livestock. Thus, the entire country dwelt in prosperity."⁷⁸

It is clear that by associating Chinggis Khan's warfare against evil rulers with the mandate of Heaven or with the prophecy of the Buddha Śākyamuni, the authors of the mentioned historical works seek to provide a moral justification for Chinggis Khan's actions, freeing him from any moral responsibility for killing the twelve "corrupt" kings and subjugating their peoples. The emphasis on Chinggis Khan's success in militating against the "corrupt" kings by means of his supernatural powers is to underscore his advanced spiritual attainments and abilities and to show that he was not a mere puppet controlled by the string of Heaven, but that he was also a greatly skilled and powerful warrior for justice and the Dharma.

The idealization of the conditions in Chinggis Khan's rule and ethicization of his military campaigns are not limited to Mongolian historical writings and have also found their way into Mongolian poetry. In his composition called *Brahmā's Melody* (T. *Tshangs pa'i sgra dbynags zhes bya ba bzhugs so*), the Khalkha poet Khanchen Khambo Jamyangarav (mKhan chan mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs dKar po, 1861–1917) takes Chinggis Khan's intention for vanquishing the twelve kings as an illustration of the "ornament of a marvelous motivation." In his view, although Chinggis Khan's military operations seemed inappropriate because they were in conflict with the interests and authority of those kings, in reality they were reformative, because they brought the appropriate result of ending a crisis created by those kings. Hence, he tells us that at the rising of the sun of Chinggis, the lotus flowers of those kings closed during the day, and at the rising of the moon of the Lord Chinggis, their lotus flowers closed during the night and their policies became powerless.⁷⁹

BUDDHIST RITUALS OF WORSHIPPING CHINGGIS KHAN

Chinggis Khan's divine status as a protector of the Buddha Dharma in the above-mentioned chronicles has led to the development of Buddhist ritual practices, specifically directed toward worshipping him as the ideal Buddhist ruler. In the text called *A Sūtra of Incense Offering to the Lord Chinggis Khan* (*Ezen Chinggis Khaany San Takhilgin Sudar*), Chinggis Khan is extolled as an "illustrious tutelary deity" (*togs tsogt saikhiusan*) and as a mighty Dharma-*cakra* emperor, who with great power vanquishes the enemies of Dharma and the entities manifesting as obstacles.⁸⁰ As such, he is summoned in prayer, worshiped with incense and other ritual offerings, and entreated for the blessings of pacification of obstacles.

In another ritual prayer, titled *The Worship of the Lord Chinggis Khan* (*Ejen Chinggis-un Sang Takily-a Oruṣiba*), recited in Mergen Gegeen's monastery in Inner Mongolia, the invocation of Chinggis Khan and his companions is followed by "the pure and pleasing offerings of the best of food complete with hundred flavors and the elixir of spring water filled with the taste of milk." The fire offering, lights, and fragrant incense are offered to "the Divine Majesty (Sodu Boyda), Chinggis Khan and his companions." This is followed by requests to Chinggis Khan for his blessings of the *siddhis* of pacifying the

obstacles, evil entities, and wicked fights, for the accomplishments of fame and glory, development of virtue, increase of intelligence, and so on. Chinggis Khan is honored here as an illustrious protector (*tegüs čoytu sakiyuluysun*), as the best among the 84,000 emperors, who oversaw the countries of the four foreigners and five colors, turned into dust the animosity of the kings of heretics with his supernatural power (*ridi*, Skt. *ṛddhi*) of swiftness, and so on.⁸¹

In yet another elaborate ritual, Chinggis Khan is offered ritual cakes, invoked as the *guru* Vajra-Yamāntaka and Yamarāja, as the Victor, and Tathāgata who arises in a wrathful form. In the course of ritual, he is meditated upon as emerging from the syllable *hum* that appears on a saddle and a bridle encrusted with wish-fulfilling gems and placed on a fierce lion standing in the center of the *maṇḍala*, where the fire of the end of time blazes in the middle of an ocean of blood. He is visualized as having a white body, one face, two hands, and three fierce-looking eyes. In his right hand, he wields a short spear pointing to the sky, and in his left hand he holds at his heart a platter of great treasure, which has the power to dispel the miseries of cyclic existence. He wears a white silken garment on his upper body and a blue silken cover on the lower part of his body. His head, ears, neck, and limbs are adorned with ornaments, and his belt is made of wish-fulfilling jewels. He wears boots made of jewels, and his royal head is decorated with a nine-sided silken crown studded with nine gems. He is surrounded by thousands of companions, gods, *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *ḍakas*, and other entities. Meditated upon in this way, Chinggis Khan is summoned as the highest among the heavenly kings, as the one who entered the highest bliss of Dharma but takes birth for the sake of others, manifesting as an emperor.⁸² As the worshipper ritually offers the “blood fragrance of the hearts of whirling enemies,” “the flowers of the organs of those who broke their oath,” “the cloud of incense that melts the fat and flesh,” and “a lamp that illuminates the triple world,” he asks for the Lord’s removal of obstacles. After a ritual cake has been offered and Chinggis Khan invoked, the worshipper beseeches him to punish those who hold wrong views, who broke their vows, who offended the teachers and Dharma, and who took the lives of others, because if the ignorant people of the degenerate era are not eliminated by harsh law, then Dharma and living beings will not abide in peace and happiness. This request is followed by eulogies to Chinggis Khan as the god of gods, who has Siddhas for his ancestors, who at times takes on a wrathful form and at other times a peaceful form. This is accompanied by recitation of a fierce *mantra* for dispelling enemies and obstacles, and by offering ritual cakes along with prayers. At the conclusion of the ritual, the worshipper addresses Chinggis Khan in the following manner:

Ho! By this cake offering performed by me
 To the king of heaven, to his assistants, and others,
 May the lord of gods save those
 Who denigrated the crown of important dignitaries,
 Who destroyed the Mahāyāna tradition,

Who caused the destruction of Dharma,
 Who harmed the body of a teacher,
 And who became angry with us!
 Kill the enemies and hindrances *phaṭ!*⁸³

The ritual ends with a benediction for the blessing for long life, material well-being, and the flourishing of Dharma in the country.

The text recited during the incense-offering ritual of purification to the golden spirit (*altan süld*) of the Holy Chinggis Khan, titled *The Offering to the Spirit of Chinggis Khan (Bogd Chingesiin Süldiin San)*, also identifies Chinggis Khan with Yamāntaka. He is honored as the one who “holds the *vajra* spear of Yamāntaka, has a thousand eyes, and wears a circular ornament on his face that does not misconstrue any secret actions,” and who “in a single moment fully grants a great happiness out of his kindness.” He is beseeched to make the fierce land and waters suitable, and to fulfill the wishes of the state officials, allies, and others by the blessing of the Three Jewels, the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.⁸⁴

Thus, as a protective deity, Chinggis Khan is ritually approached for assistance in diverse religious and secular matters of the state and the people. In the previously mentioned *Bogd Chinggis Khan's Offering for the Productive and Effective Accomplishment of Actions and Business*, he is beseeched to promulgate “Varjadhara’s religion in the ten directions by cutting off with a strong *vajra*-like sword the main artery of the enemies who fight against the religion of the Buddha.” He is lauded for his might, with which he smashes the soldiers of devils (*simnus*, Skt. *māra*) and makes the warriors of the enemy crawl, stepping on them, staring at them with 1,000 glaring eyes. Here, he is also addressed as the lord of the world, who became an object of worship for the state (*ulsad shüteen bolson*); and as “a compassionate protector who exhibits the highest supernatural powers,” he is entreated to multiply the worshipper’s friends, herds, and possessions, prolong life, grant health, and repel hail, rainstorms, severe winters, and violent windstorms.⁸⁵

CONCLUSION

Most of the sources discussed above demonstrate that throughout the period in which Tibetan Buddhism was exerting a strong influence on Buddhism in Mongolia and the Qing dynasty controlled Buddhist establishments, the authors of the above-discussed chronicles strove to recontextualize Chinggis Khan within a Buddhist framework, indigenize Buddhism through him, and authenticate the notion of the Mongolian Buddhist identity. In his volume *Our Great Qing*, Elverskog notes that the Mongolian sources written during the Qing period lack the emphasis on Chinggis Khan as the founder of the Mongol “nation” and tend to universalize his Buddhist character.⁸⁶ In Elverskog’s view it is due to the Qing’s dismantling of local systems of political authority.

Although this may be true, it is interesting that Mongolian chronicles discussed in this chapter invariably credit Chinggis Khan, and not the Qing, with a contribution to the flourishing of the Buddha Dharma in Mongolia and Tibet. Because of Chinggis Khan, these texts argue, one does not cease to be a Mongol by becoming a Buddhist. In fact, the message in many of these texts appears to imply that “to be a Mongol is to be a Buddhist.” Thus, one could say that these chronicles not only reflected the political and social situations in Mongolia during different periods, but also produced a new discourse that entered a public arena and continues to be a subject of appropriation.

Just as Zawa Damdin promulgated the idea of Chinggis Khan as a Dharma protector during the post-Qing and prerevolutionary period when Mongolian Buddhism was threatened by the communist ideology and European modernity, so too in contemporary Mongolia, which is characterized by a multiplicity of worldviews and lifestyle choices brought by modernity and globalization, many Buddhists seek to construct both a personal and national Buddhist identity around the figure of Chinggis Khan. This has led them to legitimizing historical narratives of Chinggis Khan’s Buddhist identity. Thus, as an enduring core of the Mongols’ historical consciousness, and through the authors’ inventiveness, Chinggis Khan has been continually revived and reapplied to the changing political and social environments in Mongolia. With the development of Buddhist rituals of worshipping Chinggis Khan, he also has become an object of a new type of knowledge that transcends mere historical information. The representations of Chinggis Khan as a progenitor of the Buddhist culture in Mongolia can be viewed as the strategies employed to inspire Mongols’ self-perception as the inheritors of the innate qualities of their most famous ancestor.

NOTES

1. See Atwood, 1994, 37–73, and Kaplonski, 1998, 35–37.
2. Tsendiin Damdinsüren, 2001, 146.
3. Lkhamsürengiin, 2006, 16.
4. See the chapters “Distinct Personality of Chinggis Khan” and “Chinggis Khany Bichig Soëlyn Bodlogo” in Bira, 2012.
5. His speech titled “Nomadism, Buddhism, and Communism in Mongolia” was published in the collection of his essays *Studies in Mongolian History, Culture, and Historiography*, 2001, 385–393.
6. D. Baasan, Gevsh, 2006, 76.
7. Sagan Setsen, 2006, 110.
8. D. Baasa, 2006, 77, 92–94.
9. *Sa skya bka’ bum*, Vol. *ba*, *Shes bya rab gsal*, folio 196.
10. Elverskog, 2006, 56–57.
11. *The Secret History of the Mongols*, 2006, 212.
12. Elverskog, 2003, 63–64.
13. Elverskog, 2006, 56.

14. Also known as *Lho brag chos byung*.
15. Rogers, 2009, 5–10.
16. Elverskog, 2007, 10, 19–20; Gochigjav, 2006, 13; Žamcarano, 1955, 68.
17. Sum pa mKhan po Yes shes dPal byor (1704–1787), known among the Mongols as Ishibajlor or Ishi Baljur. *Phags yul rGya nag chen po Bod dang Sog yul du dam pa'i chos 'byung tsul dpag bsam ljon bzang zhes bya ba bzugs so*.
18. *bStan rtsis chen mo rin chen 'phren ba zhes bya ba bzugs so*.
19. Thu'u bkwan blo bzang Chos kyi nyi ma (1737–1802). *Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang 'dod tshul ston pa legs bshad shel gyi me long (The Crystal Mirror: An Excellent Exposition That Shows the Sources and Assertions of All Systems of Tenets)*.
20. dByangs can sGreg pa'i bLo gros 'jigs med Rig pa'i rDo rje. *Chen po Hor gyi yul du dam pa'i chos ji ltar byung ba'i tsul bshad pa rgyal ba'i bstan pa rin po che gsal bar byed pa'i sgron me zhes bya ba bzugs so*.
21. *Chen po Hor gyi yul du dam pa'i chos ji ltar dar ba'i tsul gsal bar brjod pa padma dkar po'i phreng ba zhes bya ba*.
22. bLo bzang rTa dbyangs. *Ser gyi deb ther*. The full title of the text is *'Dzam gling byang phyogs chen po Hor gyi rgya khams kyi rtogs pa brjod pa'i bstan bcos chen po dpyod ldan mgu byed ngo mtsar gser gyi debt her zhes bya ba*.
23. Known also as Sa chen Kun dga' sNying po, he was the first of the five founding patriarchs of the Sakya tradition in Tibet, the Third Sakya Trizin, Khri 'dzin, and considered an emanation of Mañjuśrī.
24. Dharmatāla, 1987, 65 [75].
25. Dharmatāla, 1987, 156 [171]–157 [172].
26. The text does not specify which deities were represented by those statues.
27. *Phags yul rGya nag chen po Bod dang Sog yul du dam pa'i chos 'byung tsul dpag bsam ljon bzang zhes bya ba bzugs so*, 312b5–7. See also Bira, 2001, Vol. 3, 190.
28. I could not identify this Sakya master by this name and I wonder whether there is some confusion in these sources with the fourteenth-century Kagyu master Tshal pa Kun dga' rDo rje, in which case Chinggis Khan's meeting with him would be impossible.
29. Güüsh Tsorj Luvsanlkhündev, 2009, 53; *Bolor Toly*, 2006, Vol. 2, 315; *Ser gyi deb ther*, 69a4–b2; Dharmatāla, 1987, 156.
30. Kun dga' sNying po (1092–1158) is known as one of the five great masters of the Sakya order of Tibetan Buddhism.
31. *Bolor Toly*, 2006, Vol. 2, 315–316; *Ser gyi deb ther*, 70a1–3.
32. *Bolor Toly*, 2006, Vol. 2, 316; *Ser gyi deb ther*, 70a1–3.
33. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 70a3–4; *Bolor Toly*, 2006, Vol. 2, 316. Chinggis Khan's contact with the Sakya master Sa chen Kun dga' sNying po is also mentioned in Thu'u bkwan Rin po che's *Crystal Mirror of Tenets (Grub mtha Shel dkar Me long)*.
34. The Second Dpa' bo gtsug lag 'phreng ba's *Chos 'byung mkhas pa'i dga' ston*; Zawa Dandin's *Ser gyi deb ther*, 85b2–4; and mKhas dbang Dung dkar bLo bzang Phrin las mchog's *Bod rig pa'i tsiig mdzod chen mo shes bya rab gsal zhes bya ba zhugs so (A Great Dictionary of Tibetan Knowledge)*, 2000, 2286. Choiji, 1998, 123. See also Khüreeelbaatar, 2006, 11.
35. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 85b6–86a4.
36. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 85b6–86a4. See also Bira, 2001, 190.
37. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 86a4–b3.

38. *Bod Sog gi rig gnas 'brel ba'i zhib jug.*

39. Sangs rgyas Rin chen and 'Brug 'thar, 2003, 16. Cited in Khürelbaatar, 2006, 12.

40. Sangs rgyas Rin chen and 'Brug 'thar, 2003, 50–54. Cited in Khürelbaatar, 2006, 14.

41. Lkhamsürengiin, 2006, 15–16.

42. For the analysis of Qing authorities' strategies and political reasons for Buddhization of Chinggis Khan see Elverskog, 2006, Chapter 3: "Qing Ornamentalism and the Cult of Chinggis Khan."

43. Bayar, 2007, 203–204.

44. The full title of the text is *The White History of the Dharma With Ten Virtues (Arban buyant-tuü nom-un çayan teüke).*

45. Dharmatāla's account of a legend of Chinggis Khan's vision of a prostrating blue unicorn on his way to conquer India, which he took as a sign that he should not occupy the country that has the seat of enlightenment and Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, was reiterated by the early-twentieth-century Mongolian scholar Zawaa Damdin and those after him as indicative of Chinggis Khan's high regard for Buddhism.

46. It is generally believed by Mongols that if one worships and invokes Brahmā, together with Padmasambhava, with the mantra *om śrī mahā brāhmaṇa hum phat*, one's works will be accomplished like an unceasingly gushing spring water. See Soninbayar, 2006, 44.

47. *Chinggis Khan ba Mongol Burkhany Shashin*, 2006, 63:

Deer eren yosön tengerees

Zayagaar egüüdegsen

Esükhei baatar etsgees

Tsetsgüüdeer egüüdegsen

Suutai öülen ekbees

Tömör ölgii tavlon törögsön

Oçirvaany baatar bodisadua bolon khuvragsan.

48. *Chinggis Khan ba Mongol Burkhany Shashin*. Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandantegchenling Monastery, 2006, 64–65.

Oroin deerkh dayan ee

Ongun shüüten Ochirvaany miny ee

Khurai khurai khurai.

49. Already in the earlier Tibetan chronicle *The Mirror Illuminating the Tibetan Genealogies, Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long*, composed by bLa ma Dam pa bSod rnam rGyal mtshan (1312–1375), the emergence of Chinggis Khan as a great emperor was dated to 3,250 years after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha Śākyamuni. See Sorensen, 1994, 88.

50. Sagan Setsen, 2006, 78, 278.

51. For example, a comparative study of the *Secret History of the Mongols* and Luvsandanzan's *Golden Summary* has shown that out of 282 paragraphs of the *Secret History of the Mongols*, 233 are incorporated into the *Golden Summary*. See Bira, *Studies in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society*, 2001, 338.

52. *Altan Tovch*, 2009, 67–68, 118; *Altan Tovch*, 2006, 45; see also Sárközi, 1993, 218–219. The account of the origin of his name of Chinggis Khan, given in the *Golden Summary*, tells that seven days after Chinggis Khan's birth, an auspicious blackish bird sang for three days and nights, moving around in a clockwise direction on a black stone in a peninsula. When his father Esükhei Baatar smashed the black stone, a golden seal appeared and flew into the sky. After that,

the stone became whole again, and the bird resumed its singing. When the stone was smashed again, a silver seal appeared and departed into the body of water. Then the stone became whole again, and the black bird resumed its singing. After Esükhei Baatar smashed the stone one more time, a jade seal appeared. Esükhei Baatar took the seal home and honored it with pure incense and candles. While he was honoring it in this way, the blackish bird sat on the roof-flap of the *ger* and sang “Chinggis, Chinggis.” On account of this, the child was named “Chinggis Khan.”

53. Rogers, 2009, 69, 99–10.

54. *Erdeniin Tovch*, 1961, 86–87. See also Sárközi, 1993, 218–219. The appearance of either auspicious or authenticating objects and miraculous and supernatural events that surround the birth of the founder of a dynasty or empire and his ascendance to the throne were common devices for legitimizing the authority of a political or a religious figure in Inner and Central Asia.

55. *Bolor Erikh*, 2006, 49.

56. See Sárközi, 1993, 219.

57. The full title of the work is the *Blue Chronicle of the Rise of the Great Yuan Dynasty (Yeke Yuwan ulus-un mandugsan törö-yin khökhe sudur)*.

58. See Hangin, 1973, 128–149. See also Sárközi, 1993, 220, where she reports Hangin’s analysis.

59. Luvsandanzan, 2009, 67–68, 337.

60. Luvsandanzan, 2009, 67–68; *Arvan Buyant Nomin Tsagaan Tüükh*, 2006, 19.

61. See Rogers, 2009, 75.

62. *Arvan Buyant Nomyn Tsagaan Tüükh*, 2006, 19.

63. *Ibid.*, 23.

64. *Ibid.*, 21. See also Atwood, 2004, 82.

65. *Arvan Buyant Nomyn Tsagaan Tüükh*, 2006, 23.

66. “Bogd Chinggis Khany San, Ajil khereg Üilsiiḡ Türgenee Büteegch Sangiin Sudar Orshivoi” in *Nuutsyn Khuraanqui Alivaa Zam Mör, Tüünii Üriin Nuuts Anis Bükhniig Khuraanguil-san Dandar Sudar Orshivoi*, 2009, 167.

67. According to Zawa Damdin, Buddhism was disseminated in Mongolia in three different periods, the first being a period characterized by the coming of Buddhism to Mongolia directly from India, and the third being a period when the teachings of Tsong kha pa spread in Mongolia.

68. bLo bzang rTa dbyangs. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 1964, 63. See also Soninbayar, 2006, 44.

69. See Elverskog, 2007, 36; and Gonchigjav, 2006, 61. After reading through a Sanskrit version of the *Mañjuśrīmūlatantra*, I was unable to identify the prophecy referred to by *The Pearl Rosary*. I have also not found there any reference to the twelve corrupt kings.

70. Blo bzang rTa dbyangs. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 1964, Ka (I) vol. pp. 67a–70a4. According to Dharmatāla, at the age of thirty-one, in 1195, Chinggis Khan vanquished the East Korean king by the name of Tsagaan and Naran Sümber, khan of the Inner Mongolian Gorlos clan. Cited in Lkhamsürenḡiin, 2006, 7.

71. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 70b6–71a2.

72. Dharmatāla, 1987, 67.

73. For more on Chinggis Khan as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi see the chapter “How Vajrapāṇi Became a Mongol,” included in this volume.

74. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 83a5–b3, 84a4–1b. See also Lkhamsürenḡiin, 2006, 8.

75. Blo bzang rTa dbyangs. *Ser gyi deb ther*, 1964, 83a2–4.

76. Blobzang rTa dbyangs. *Sergyi deb ther*, 1964, 83b1–3. See also Lkhamsürengiin, 2006, 8–9.
77. Rashipuntsag, 2006, Vol. 1, 27–28.
78. The *Crystal Rosary*, cited in Bira, 2001. See also “‘Bolor Erikhe’ Rashpuntsaga” in Bira 2001, Vol. 3, 437.
79. mKhan chan mkhan po ‘Jam dbyangs dKar po. *sNyan ngag rTza ‘grel gyi spyi don rnam par bzbag pa Tsangs pa’i sgra dbyangs zhes bya ba bzbug so*, in a private collection of Khürelbaatar Lkhamsürengiin. See Lkhamsürengiin, 2006, 9.
80. Bulgan, 2006, 53.
81. Ganbaatar, 2010, 90–91.
82. “Ezen Chinggis Khany Takhilga Orshvoi” translated from Tibetan into Mongolian by T. Bulgan. See *Chinggis Khan ba Mongol Burkhany Shashin*, 2006, 53–57.
83. Not having access at this time to the original Tibetan version, I had to base my translation on T. Bulgan’s Mongolian translation of this ritual text. See “Ezen *Chinggis* Khany Takhilga Orshvoi” in *Chinggis Khan ba Mongol Burkhany Shashny*, 2006, 53–57.
84. “Bogd Chingesiin Süldiin San,” in *Nuutsyn Khuraangui Alivaa Zam Mör, Tüünii Üriin Nuuts Anya Bükhniig Khuraanguilan Dandar Sudar Orshvoi*, 2009, 171–172.
85. “Bogd *Chinggis* Khany San Ajil Khereg Ülsiig Türgenee Büteegch Sangiin Sudar Orshvoi” in *Nuutsyn Khuraanqui Alivaa Zam Mör, Tüünii Üriin Nuuts Anis Bükhniig Khuraanguilan Dandar Sudar Orshvoi*, 2009, 166–170.
86. See Elverskog, 2006, chapter 4: “The Poetics, Ritual, and Language of Being Mongols, Buddhist, and Qing.”

PART II



6

Establishment of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism

Uranchimeg B. Ujeed



INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the development and unique features of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism, which stands as a unique tradition in the history of Buddhism in Mongolia. Apart from the Mergen Tradition and some Buddhist popular practices, virtually all of Mongolian Buddhism has been practiced in the Tibetan language throughout its history, spreading over eight centuries since the reign of Qubilai Khan. The Mergen Tradition originated from the Neichi Toin's lineage of Mongolian Buddhist practices, which form a set of local Buddhist practices centered in Mergen Monastery and in approximately twenty-four affiliated monasteries of the Urad Right Duke Banner of Inner Mongolia. Since this unique tradition originated and endured in Mergen Monastery and its core figure, Mergen Gegeen, was the chief incarnate lama of Mergen Monastery, I call it here the "Mergen Tradition." The Third Mergen Gegeen, Lubsangdambijaltsan (T. bLo bzang bStan pa'i rGyal mtshan, 1717–1766, Mergen Gegeen hereafter), was a great scholar who established it as the Mongolian language-based tradition, which never became a Manchu-centered or exclusively Tibet-oriented tradition. As such, the Mergen Tradition became a locally sponsored, internally oriented, and self-generating system, which has endured to the present, and whose influence has spread to different parts of Inner and Outer Mongolia.

Seeking to shed light on the tradition in terms of its sociopolitical and religious contexts, I have based my analysis of the Mergen Tradition largely on the following primary sources preserved in Classical Mongolian, dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, and on Mergen Gegeen Lobsangdambijaltsan's works: Prajñā Sāgara's *Rosary of Wish-fulfilling Gems: The Illuminator of the Narrative About the Holy Lama Neichi Toin Dalai Mañjuśrī* (DCH hereafter),¹ Dharma Samudra's *Lamp of Faith That is Perfect with Seven Jewels: A Biography of the Holy Neichi Toin Khutugtu Vakisuwra Sumadi śa sa na dhvaja, the Glorious One With an Exalted Birth* (CHJ hereafter),² Galdanwangchugdorji's *Record of the Origin of the Two Monasteries Called "Prospering Religion and Gathering Joy" which is kept in the Da Lama's Office of the Western Monastery* (DB hereafter),³ the collected works of Mergen Gegeen Lobsangdambijaltsan, titled *Collected Works of the Reincarnation of Vajradhara Mergen Diyanchi Lama* (CW1 hereafter),⁴ and Lobsangdambijaltsan's *Golden Summary* (AT hereafter).⁵

THE ORIGIN OF THE MERGEN TRADITION OF MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM

In the early period of the second conversion of the Mongols to Buddhism, Tibetan teachers and scholars such as Mañjuśrī Khutugtu,⁶ Shiregetü Gūūshi Chorji,⁷ and Maidar (Maitreya) Khutugtu,⁸ who were officially sent to Mongolia, had close ties to relatively independent Mongol rulers, and they helped them establish a Tibetan line of Buddhist practices. Later, their Mongolian successors and reincarnations and the leading Mongolian monasteries, such as Yeke Juu and Shiregetü Juu monasteries in Khökhöt, created a basis for the Manchu-controlled Tibetan line of Buddhism in Mongolia.

Two Mongolian Buddhist teachers who endeavored to disseminate Buddhism in the Mongolian language were Zaya Pandita Namkhai Jamtsu (1599–1662) and Neichi Toin (1557–1653). Although these two scholars belonged to the same Gelugpa tradition, they took two different routes in their efforts to spread Buddhism in the Mongolian language. While Zaya Pandita was a scholastic monk who built monasteries and translated scriptures from Tibetan, Neichi Toin was a tantric master who widely spread Vajrayāna Buddhism among Mongolian laity. He deliberately chose to disseminate Buddhism in the eastern part of today's Inner Mongolia because of the prevalence of Shamanism in this region at that time. He initiated a Mongolian line of Buddhist practices in this region, which I refer to as the Neichi Toin line.⁹

In the DB: 234, we read the following:

Thorgud Gegeen Neichi Toin, the first generation of the Toin Gegeen Neichi Toin,¹⁰ advanced the extraordinary Tantrism of Tsongkhapa, which combined the *sūtras* and *tantras* [spread] among the completely fortunate people in the East during the reign of Degedü Erdemtü (Ch. Emperor Chong De, 1636–1644). Therefore, Mergen Gegeen called him the "Second Tsongkhapa" and prayed to him. At that time, [Neichi Toin] taught the reading and memorization [of the doctrine] in the Mongolian mother tongue in conformity with the beginners' mental level. Due to the growth of the people's enthusiasm as a result of reading, together with

the compassion of the Bogd Lama (His Holiness) and with the power of people's faith, more and more people achieved *siddhis* and knowledge. Furthermore, religion was widely disseminated in Tibetan and Mongolian languages. Bogd Toin Qutuγtu-yin Gegeen (Neichi Toin) bestowed the quintessential instructions on listening, contemplation, and meditation to the completely fortunate people of our direction in the Mongolian mother tongue, and he led them to the path of liberation. The Mergen Gegeen further promoted the path and turned it into a type of practice with new translations. (DB: 234)

Two events mark the beginning of the Mergen Tradition—the establishment of Mergen Monastery and the initiation of Mergen Gegeen's line of reincarnations. Mergen Monastery lies south of Mona Mountain and north of the Yellow River. It has been known under different names: as Mergen Keid, Mergen Juu, and Mergen Süm-e, all carrying the meaning of “Mergen Monastery.” A name given to it by the Qing court was Šašin-i Badarayuluγči Süm-e (“A Monastery That Makes Religion Prosper”).¹¹ Mergen Süm-e was a chief monastery of the Urad Right Duke Banner of Ulaanchab League (present-day Urad Front Banner of Linhe City).¹² The Urad people (literally meaning “craftsmen”) became subjects of Qabtu Qasar, who occupied the eastern part of the Mongol Empire, when they were given to him by his brother Chinggis Khan. Urad nobles considered themselves descendants of Qabtu Qasar and are known as a branch of the Khorchin Mongols. However, the name “Urad” has been in use only since the seventeenth century. Burakhai, the fifteenth in the line of the descendants of Qabtu Qasar, named the people he ruled Urads and divided them into three groups within the Külün Buir region. Around 1633, Urads, together with the Khorchins, were allied with the Manchus and gained political merit by fighting for the Manchu Dynasty in the cause of empire building. In 1648, they became organized into Front Urad (Urad Emünedü), Middle Urad (Urad Dumda), and Rear Urad (Urad Khoitu) banners. Their chiefs were made into rulers (*jasag*) bearing the title of duke (*güng*). In the same year, they were moved from Külün Buir to the present Mona Mountain territory by the Qing court to guard the region from the Khalkha Mongols to the north and from the Oirat Mongols to the west.¹³

Although there is no available information on the Urads' acquaintance with Buddhism prior to their move to the Mona Mountain region, it is possible that they already had some contact with the First Neichi Toin, because they were related to the Khorchins through their joint fighting on behalf of the Qing court. Once the Urad Mongols had settled in the Mona Mountain area, they built their own monastery. In the DB, Galdanwangchugdorji gives two accounts of the introduction of Buddhism to the Urads. In the first account, he states the following:

The reason why my ancestors worshipped this lama [Mergen Gegeen] and the reason for building the monastery is that Duke Darmashiri generated faith, since our great

grandfather Duke Nomun had made Bogd Toin Gegeen (Neichi Toin) his lama. The Duke Darmashiri cooperated with a man called Mangkha and built the first monastery in a place called Mergen. Therefore, the previous Mergen Monastery was called Güng-ün Süm-e (Duke's Monastery). Duke Darmashiri also invited Mergen Diyanchi Lama from a place called Khairtu and installed him on the throne of Mergen Monastery, because Bogd Toin Gegeen gave him a golden Tsongkhapa [statue] and appointed Mergen Gegeen to Duke Nomun as his lama at [Duke's] request. (DB: 5)

In the second account, Galdanwangchugdorji says:

Mergen Diyanchi Dinu-a was well known as the first of the dearest, heartfelt sons, the thirty disciples of Bogd Toin Gegeen. It is recorded in the archive kept in our government that at the time of Nomun, the fourth Imperial Duke asked for Neichi Toin Khutugtu Lama, invited his disciple Mergen Diyanchi Lama, and worshipped him in his banner. Later he [Mergen Diyanchi Lama] changed his robe (passed away) and reincarnated into the family of a man called Solungkhur of the Middle Urad Duke Banner. Our fifth Duke Darmadai also invited him and worshipped him. His [Mergen Dayinchi's] name was recorded as Danjinjamsu in the archive presented to the great Department. (DB: 178)

Also, according to the DB: 234, 178, and 228, Mergen Monastery was first built in the forty-first year of the Kangxi Emperor (1701), and the second reincarnation of Mergen Diyanchi was invited to the throne of Mergen Monastery in the forty-fourth year (1704) (DB: 234). The text also relates the following:

The Duke Darmashiri invited the reincarnation of the high lama from the place called Khairtu¹⁴ to his monastery and presented him with the chair and the cushion (i.e. he gave him the monastery's throne), a *maṇḍala*, and a ritual scarf (*M. khaday*, *T. kha btags*); Janggi¹⁵ Amugulang presented him the chair (i.e. the throne) on the twelfth of the White Month (the first lunar month of a year) of the forty-fourth year of the Kangxi Emperor, the Year of the Monkey¹⁶ (1704). The lama was quite possibly the reincarnation of the Mergen Diyanchi Dinu-a, Danjinjamsu. After the Mergen Diyanchi-yin Gegeen was invited to the throne of Mergen Monastery, the Banner Monastery in the forty-fourth year of the Kangxi Emperor [1704], the Gegeen ordered his disciples to come and stay in Güng-ün Süm-e (Duke's Monastery) in the fiftieth year of Kangxi (1710). (DB: 178, 228)

After Mergen Diyanchi Dinu-a's death, the Duke Darmadai found his reincarnation, the Second Mergen Diyanchi, called Danjinjamsu. He built a monastery, which became

both Mergen Monastery and a banner monastery. Since the previous Mergen Monastery was called Güng-ün Süm-e, it is possible that there had been a monastery before Darmashiri's Mergen Monastery and that the First and Second Mergen Diyanchi resided there. This can be inferred from the sources.

Mergeen Gegeen notes in one of the texts, I-14 ("I" stands for volume one and "14" for text number fourteen, same rule applied hereafter), included in his collected works:

Before Mergen Monastery was built, the place was called Mergen because there was someone called Mergen living in the vicinity of Mona Mountain. Later, the ruling Duke Darmashiri of the Front Urad Banner built a monastery at the mouth of the Mergen [Valley] on account of his faith, for the sake of benefitting living beings and religion, and for the sake of the longevity of the Holy Lord, Mañjuśrī (Emperor Kangxi). He invited Mergen Diyanchi Lama to reside there. From then, the monastery was called "Mergen Monastery." (CW1, I: 88v-89r)

The Mongolian scholar Mōngke rightly points out that the Neichi Toin, who appointed Mergen Diyanchi Lama to the position of the Duke Nomun, cannot have been the First Neichi Toin (1557–1653), but must have been the second one (1671–1703). It is also worth noting that the Mona Mountain area was very close to Khökhöt, the center of Inner Mongolian Buddhism, which followed the Tibetan line of Buddhism and had long-established lineages of high lamas. There are two possible reasons why the Duke Nomun did not worship any high lama in Khökhöt and why he chose Neichi Toin as his lama. One reason could be his ethnic affiliation with the Khorchins, the patrons of Neichi Toin; or, he and his predecessors, together with their subjects, had some prior contact with Neichi Toin.

Mergen Diyanchi was a key figure in the founding of Mergen Monastery. The name "Mergen Diyanchi" first appears in the biography of the First Neichi Toin. However, two individuals by the name Mergen Diyanchi are mentioned in the DCH. One is Arigun Mergen Diyanchi, and the other is referred to as Mergen Diyanchi. In the DCH: 115–116, we are told that when the First Neichi Toin went to meditate in the Chogtu Sümbür Agula (Magnificent Sumeru Mountain) in Abaga Khara-yin Agui (Cave of Black Uncle), all of which is situated east of Khökhöt, Arigun Mergen Diyanchi was already meditating there. At first, Neichi Toin served the Arigun Mergen Diyanchi as his disciple until the latter recognized him as an extraordinary lama and regretted the way he had treated him. In the DCH: 128, Arigun Mergen Diyanchi is described as the one who "achieved a single-pointed meditative concentration."

By the time Neichi Toin arrived in eastern Inner Mongolia, Arigun Mergen Diyanchi had already been there for some time because of military unrest in the area of Kökek-hota. He offered all of his wealth to Neichi Toin and asked him to be his lama for the rest of his life and never to be separated from him (DCH: 133). It seems that he stayed with Neichi Toin from then on, accompanying him to Khökhöt, when the latter was sent

there by the Fifth Dalai Lama, Nawang Lobsang Gyatso (Ngag dbang bLo bzang rGya mtsho). Upon the death of Neichi Toin, Arigun Mergen Diyanchi was put in charge of a temple that was built over a *stūpa* on the spot where Neichi Toin's body was cremated (DCH: 177). Since no other material about Arigun Mergen Diyanchi is available to us, we do not know if he stayed there to guard the temple in eastern Inner Mongolia or whether he returned to Khökhöt.

The Mergen Diyanchi who was appointed to the Right Urad Duke Banner could have been one of the two previously mentioned disciples by the same name. But it was most likely Mergen Diyanchi because the above-mentioned accounts of him match the preciously cited account from the DB, which states that Mergen Diyanchi Dinu-a was well known as the first of the dearest heartfelt sons, the thirty disciples of the Bogd Neichi Toin Gegeen, and that he was appointed as the worshipping lama of the Right Urad Duke Banner (DB: 177).¹⁷ The claims made by Möngke and other scholars¹⁸ that Arigun Mergen Diyanchi was the first of the Mergen Gegeen line of reincarnations have no basis. Khurchabilig's suggestion that Mergen Diyanchi was Ariyan Diwa seems more reasonable.¹⁹ Ariyan Diwa used to be called Chagan Ubashi (White Upāsaka) during his discipleship to Bogd Chagan Lama. With the approval of the Bogd Chagan Lama, he became a disciple of Neichi Toin, who named him Ariyan Diwa.²⁰ In Khurchabilig's view, the word "Dinu-a" is a variation of Diwa, which implies that Ariyan Diwa was the first disciple of Neichi Toin. This interpretation accords with a repeated saying that the Mergen Diyanchi was the First Neichi Toin's disciple. It is also reasonable to assume that he was called Mergen Diyanchi because he was accomplished in meditation (*diyan*, Skt. *dhyāna*). Unfortunately, Khurchabilig still related Ariyan Diwa to Arigun Mergen Diyanchi rather than to another Mergen Diyanchi who was ignored by all the scholars concerned, including Khurchabilig. According to the CHJ: 225, the old disciples of the First Neichi Toin found, recognized, and installed his second incarnation, the Second Neichi Toin, and were in charge of his early education. However, neither Arigun Mergen Diyanchi nor Mergen Diyanchi is mentioned among them. On the contrary, it is said that the Second Neichi Toin gave initiations of the *Guhyasamāja* and other *tantras* to his disciples, who were headed by Mergen Diyanchi Tenzin Gyatso (T. bStan 'dzin rGya mtsho). When the Second Neichi Toin was invited to visit the Khorchins at the age of twenty-four, there were very many people who requested initiations and teachings from him. Hence, he assigned the task of giving teachings to the people on his behalf to the first of his accompanying disciples, Mergen Diyanchi Tenzin Gaytso and to others (CHJ: 205). It is certain that Mergen Diyanchi cannot be either of the two Mergen Diyanchis who appear in the DCH. Prior to his death, the Second Neichi Toin ordered Tenzin Gyatso and others to teach his other disciples (CHJ: 234). When the CHJ relates the accomplishments of the Second Neichi Toin's disciples, Mergen Tenzin Gyatso is mentioned first and described as "the first and best among the disciples, the one of wisdom, of good will and purpose, perfected in virtue, majesty, and splendor" (CHJ: 240). This accords with the statement about the Mergen Diyanchi given in the DCH.

Mergen Diyanchi took his own disciples to Gūūshiri Mergen Shiditü of the Ordos to learn the Mongolian *Ali Kali* script, reading and writing rules of the nine kinds of scripts, including the Nepali *lanza* script, translation from Tibetan into Mongolian, and the secret “black and white ways of astrology” (CHJ: 240). Mergen Diyanchi, who is mentioned as the first and best of the Second Neichi Toin’s disciples, was not among the old disciples of the First Neichi Toin who were the teachers of the Second Neichi Toin. Instead, he was taught by the Second Neichi Toin. Furthermore, the Mergen Diyanchi accompanied the Second Neichi Toin until the latter’s death. This Mergen Diyanchi was most likely a reincarnation of the Mergen Diyanchi, but not the Arigun Mergen Diyanchi who appears in the DCH. However, the CHJ does not give a clear picture of how Mergen Diyanchi was appointed to the Duke Nomun, nor of what happened to him after that appointment.

A brief account of the Second Mergen Diyanchi in the DB provides some clarification:

After he (the First Mergen Diyanchi) changed his robe (died), he reincarnated into the family of a man called Solungkhur of the Middle Urad Duke Banner. He was invited and made a lama by our Fifth Duke Darmadai. His name was recorded as Danjinjamtsu in the archive presented to the government office. On the 12th of the white month of the forty-fourth year of Kangxi (1704), the Duke Darmashiri invited the reincarnation of the High Lama (the Second Mergen Diyanchi Damjinjamtsu) from a place called Khairtu to his monastery. In the fifty-fifth year of Kangxi [1715], the Second Mergen Diyanchi Danjinjamtsu went to Dolon-nuur to see the Second Jangjia Khutugtu Agwanglobsangchoindan. He received many initiations and consecrations and presented the latter with two hundred *lans* of silver and two hundred horses. He died in the fifty-sixth year of Kangxi (1716). His relics were enshrined in a sandalwood *stūpa* and placed in the hall of worship behind the great hall of Mergen Monastery. (DB: 178)

Since Danjinjamtsu is a Mongolian pronunciation of Tibetan bStan ‘dzin rGya mtsho, it corresponds to the name of the Mergen Diyanchi spoken of in the CHJ. The periods of these two lamas, the Second Neichi Toin (1671–1703) and the Second Mergen Diyanchi (1680s–1716), is also very close.

We can assume that the First Mergen Diyanchi was requested to be a lama of the Duke Nomun in his old age, during the time of the Second Neichi Toin’s early age. Not long after, the First Mergen Diyanchi died and his reincarnation, the Second Mergen Diyanchi, was sought and found by Duke Darmadai. The Second Mergen Diyanchi studied with the Second Neichi Toin and came to be the first and best of his close disciples, as his predecessor had been to the First Neichi Toin. At the same time, he was still a revered lama of the Right Urad Duke Banner. Therefore, the Mongolian line of practices was able to endure without disruption. All the other six lineages of reincarnations

of other lamas in Mergen Monastery came into existence at the time of the Second Mergen Diyanchi, and they all became his disciples. Apart from the Second Neichi Toin, there was no other accomplished lama who could have been a master of the Second Mergen Diyanchi. This means that the First Mergen Diyanchi did not and could not foster a new generation of disciples in the Right Urad Duke Banner. The Second Mergen Diyanchi learned and inherited the First Neichi Toin's tradition of Mongol practices not only from the Second Neichi Toin, but also from some of the old disciples of the First Neichi Toin. Thus, the Mergen Diyanchi who truly transplanted and developed the Neichi Toin's Mongolian line of Buddhist practices in the Right Urad Duke Banner was the Second Mergen Diyanchi and not the First Mergen Diyanchi. The Second Mergen Diyanchi was the actual initiator of the Mongolian line of Buddhist practices in Mergen Monastery. His study of translation skills and various scripts, together with his disciples in Ordos, laid a solid foundation for the later development of a Mongolian line of Buddhism. His training of many highly educated scholars played an important role in the Third Mergen Gegeen's great success in establishing the Mergen Tradition. As will be discussed later, some of his disciples were very influential teachers of the Third Mergen Gegeen. Thus, the Second Neichi Toin and the Second Mergen Diyanchi were crucial figures in transplanting a Mongolian line of Buddhism in Mergen Monastery, which was initiated by the First Neichi Toin. The First Mergen Diyanchi served only as a connection between the two lines.²¹

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE MERGEN TRADITION

Galdanwangchugdorji asserts that before Mergen Gegeen's "new translation" appeared, the First Gūūshi Da Bagshi's "old translation and old chanting" had been used (DB: 179). The First Gūūshi Da Bagshi was among the Second Mergen Diyanchi's disciples summoned to stay in Gūng-ūn Sūm-e. He was known as a great translator and scholar, and his name was Urad Dharma Samudra (Nomundalai). He authored the biography of the Second Neichi Toin. The First Gūūshi Da Bagshi Nomundalai translated a large number of texts from Tibetan, among which are the liturgies used in Tashilhunpo (bKra shis Lhun po) Monastery and other monasteries of Tibet. However, it was by the endeavor of the Third Mergen Gegeen that a Mongolian line of Buddhist practices developed into an independent tradition of Mongolian Buddhism.

Due to the Third Mergen Gegeen's institutionalization of the Diyanchi Tradition, the tradition turned into a strict monastic establishment. In Galdanwangchugdorji's words:

Bogd Toin Khutuγtu-yin Gegeen (Neichi Toin) had bestowed quintessential instructions on listening, contemplation, and meditation to the completely fortunate people of our country in the Mongolian mother tongue and led them to the path of

liberation. Mergen Gegeen further promoted the path and made it into a type of practice with new translations and new regulation of services and rituals. (DB: 234)

Galdanwangchugdorji frequently speaks of the qualification for Mongolian chanting and regulation of services set by Mergen Gegeen as special criteria for appraising the accomplishment of the clergy of Mergen Monastery. He supposedly heard others saying that the Second Chorji Bagshi was an outstanding holy person who had strictly held services exactly as it had been set out by Mergen Gegeen (DB: 5, 177–185).

A clearer picture of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism emerges from the complete works of the Third Mergen Gegeen. Later practices of the Mergen Tradition essentially follow the program and regulations set by the Third Mergen Gegeen and were based on his written works until the communist revolution in Inner Mongolia. In contemporary times, the monks of the Right Urad Duke Banner maintain that their liturgical texts and their way of chanting originate from the Third Mergen Gegeen's reformation of practices.²²

A LINEAGE ROOT LAMA OF THE MERGEN TRADITION

In Mergen Gegeen's writings, Neichi Toin is firmly established as a lineage root lama of the Mergen Tradition. Mergen Gegeen refers to Neichi Toin with exalted names such "Glorious Lama" (Tegüs Chogtu Lama), "Vajradhara Lama," "Holy Lama" (Bogd Lama), "the Second Tsongkhapa," "Holy Mañjuśrī," and "Bodhisattva Lama." These names denote not only the special position of Neichi Toin in the Mergen Tradition but also give a special identity to the lineage of the Mergen Tradition. Several of Mergen Gegeen's works are dedicated entirely to Neichi Toin. The first two texts of Mergen Gegeen's collected works, which deal with refuge taking, mention Neichi Toin as the most important refuge. In the text I-1, titled *Taking Refuge (Itegel yabuylqui)*, he writes: "I prostrate to you, Vajradhara, Holy Lama. I will follow you, Holy Lama, in order to abandon what is inappropriate and to do what is appropriate until I achieve enlightenment" (CW1, I: 2r). In text I-2, "The Meaning of Instructions of Taking Refuge" (*Itegel-ün kötülbür-in utya kemegdekü orusiba*), the Third Mergen Gegeen explains why his Holy Lama is to be taken as the most important refuge even though he is not mentioned in Tibetan texts on refuge taking. In Mergen Gegeen's view, the Bogd Lama Neichi Toin is the most important refuge because he was the first to disseminate the Gelugpa tradition in eastern Inner Mongolia. Text I-3 consists of a prayer dedicated to Neichi Toin and is titled *A Prayer to the Second Tsongkhapa, His Brilliance of the Holy Lama (Qoyaduyar Tsongkhapa boyda blam-a-yin gegeen-ü jalbaril kemekü orusiba)*. In this prayer, Mergen Gegeen enumerates various kinds of Neichi Toin's virtues and accomplishments: He was more compassionate than all the Buddhas, became a Holy One in Mongolia, generated an altruistic motivation of *bodhicitta* and abandoned the desire for happiness, firmly

observed his precepts, eliminated faults, became perfected in wisdom, and delivered all kinds of teachings. During the final phase of the degenerated era, when religion was in a substandard condition, he disseminated the three trainings (*urban surtal*, T. *bslab pa gsum*), transmitted scriptures and insight, and spread the light of the essence of the heart of the supreme and precious *sūtras* and *tantras* among all the people using the Mongolian language. He gave a complete consecration into Vajrayāna, preached the *vajra-tantras*, gave doctrinal instructions, and bestowed *vajra* blessings. Mergen Gegeen avows to Neichi Toin in these words: “I will worship you on the top of my head throughout all my lifetimes with your blessings, and I request, ‘Bless me to fulfill your instruction and please your mind’” (CW1, I: 101). In the colophon to this text, he declares himself to be a servant living by the grace of the Holy One.

In I-6, titled *A Code of Writing* (*Jokiyal-un temdeg bičig kemegdekü orusiba*), Mergen Gegeen again stresses the important role of Neichi Toin in the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia:

Although there had been translations of the Ganjur and Danjur, the teaching and learning of the doctrine became distorted due to the efficacy of time. Neichi Toin came to Mongolia to illuminate the darkness here, and he made the religion of the Lord Buddha like the sun. He widely spread the doctrine of *tantra*, a short path, by teaching [it] in our language. Following this custom, readers and watchers, learners and teachers prospered and received the tradition without wasting it. (CW1, I: 19v–20r)

In the subsequent text I-7, *Indoctrinating the Monks* (*Quvaray-un tsoydam ailadqal*), Neichi Toin is mentioned again as a Holy Lord, Saintly Monk of Noble Origin (Ejen Bogd Toin Qutuγtu), who initiated the Buddhist religion of Mongolia and bestowed the benefits of the *sūtras* and *tantras* (CW1, I: 21r–25r). In I-8, *Jewel Rosary: Various Documents Designed as an Instruction to the Monks of Öljei badaryasan Süm-e* (*Öljei badaryasan Süm-e-yin quvaray-tur jaqiy-a bolγan totayaysan bičig eldeb jüil erdeni-yin irike kemekü orusiba*), Mergen Gegeen asserts the greatness of Neichi Toin, saying: “We are successors of the master of religion of the Mongols in the east, of a refuge of beings, the liberator Bogd Neichi Toin, a jewel of brightness” (CW1, I: 26v). In the text I-36, *A Prayer to the Reincarnations of the Deliverer, the Holy Lama* (*Getülgegči boyda blam-a-yin törül üyes-ün jalbaril kemegdekü orusiba*), Neichi Toin is spoken of as Mañjuśrī who had been prophesied to become Siṃhanāda Buddha (CW1, I: 175v). *The Definite Emperor of the Power at the Top of the Standard: A Biography of the Mañjuśrī Dalai, Holy Neichi Toin*, and I-37, *A Prayer to His Three Generations with a Verse of Supplication to Remain Stable* (*Manjusiri dalai boyda neiči toin-u čadiγ ba manduγulun yurban törül boluγsan-u jalbaril masi batu orusil-un silüg lüge nigen-e mayad tuy-un orui deki erke-in qayan kemekü orusiba*), is a versified biography designed for chanting purposes. Its account of the life of Neichi Toin corresponds to that in the DCH. In I-38, *A Prayer to the Brilliance of the Lama: A Prayer for the Longevity*

of the Holy Lama (*Blam-a-yin gegegen-u jalbaril ölmei batudqu selte kemekü orusibai*), Mergen Gegeen points out that the name of Neichi Toin is mentioned for the sake of evocation (CW1, I: 188r). A reason for that is that usually one is not allowed to utter the name of such a venerable lama. Indeed, the name Neichi Toin seldom appears in any other texts of Mergen Gegeen, apart from the biography mentioned above.

Thus, Neichi Toin is considered to be a founding lineage lama of the Mergen Tradition because he disseminated the Gelugpa tradition in Mongolia. He widely propagated the doctrine of *tantra*, a swift path to liberation, and most importantly, he taught Buddhism in the Mongolian language. Mergen Gegeen indirectly suggests that Neichi Toin was the first to succeed in spreading a proper Buddhism in Mongolia, since prior to his arrival Buddhism in Mongolia was unsuitable. This might mean that Buddhism prior to Neichi Toin was practiced in Tibetan with Tibetan masters and confined only to the monasteries that were sponsored by rulers. From the previously mentioned prayers it appears that Mergen Gegeen did not consider himself a follower of any tradition other than that of Neichi Toin.

MERGEN GEGEEN'S REGULATIONS REGARDING MONASTIC PRACTICES

Mergen Gegeen's first contribution toward the institutionalization of the Mergen Tradition involved the systematization and regularization of all the practices in Mergen Monastery. His collected works include five texts pertaining to the regulation of the practices in the monastery. The text I-9, *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony"* (*Dotuyadu eye-ber tükegerekü jüül-ün sanay-a kemekü dürimlekü bičig*), presents a systematized body of regulations regarding administration, precepts, study, services, and readings in Mergen Monastery. According to the text, the monastery disseminated Buddhism in all directions by turning the following three wheels: (1) the wheel of deeds: lamas and monks observe their vows and do everything in conformity with the given rules; (2) the wheel of meditation: lamas and monks meditate on the stages of the paths of *sūtra* and *tantra* during the summer and winter seasons; and (3) the wheel of learning: lamas and monks listen and reflect upon the stages of the path of *sūtra* and *tantra* in spring and autumn. In Mergen Gegeen's words, he instituted these regulations because "a coherent, internal rule is necessary for an easy management of religious affairs" (CW1, I: 53v).

According to Galdanwangchugdorji's account, there were twenty-four monasteries in the Right Urad Duke Banner, all of which conducted services in Mongolian (DB: 229). As seen from the following passage, the rules given in Mergen Gegeen's above-mentioned text, I-9, were designed for the cohesive management of all the twenty-four monasteries.

Divide all the monasteries into four divisions (*aimag*). Choose one person from each division as a manager (*dayayamal*) of the division. Make one of them a

main master of discipline (M. *gebküi*, T. *dge bskos*), one a minor master of discipline, and two the stewards of the monastery at the place of assembly. Choose one person from each division and make one of them a main chanting leader (*umjad*, T. *dbu mdzad*), one a minor chanting leader, and two the ordinary chanting leaders. Appoint one head lama (*terigün lama*), one chair lama (*shiregen lama*), and one a deputy lama (*ded lama*). The seats of the head lamas will be arranged according to their learning at the time of teaching, but according to their duties and ranks at the time of ritual and assembly. At other times, they are arranged according to their vows or convention. Under the head lama, appoint two major bursars (*demči*) and two minor bursars. Place a treasurer (*nirba*, T. *gner-pa*) and an assistant treasurer in every treasury. (CW1, I: 54r)

Although this collective administration of twenty-four monasteries of the Mergen Tradition developed in a strictly hereditary, aristocratic, Mongolian society, it itself was to some degree flexible and open, as the following rule indicates:

If the duration of a position is long, things will become habitual; if it is too short, one's mind will not be sufficiently used. The chair lamas and deputy lamas serve in nine-year terms; the masters of discipline, chanting leaders, treasurers, and stewards [serve] in seven-years [term]; and assistants in five-year term. If one's personality and performance are good and if there is not a suitable replacement, one can remain [in the same position] for three terms. (CW1, I: 55r–56r)

However, the holders of the aforementioned positions were not elected but were appointed by their superiors. All the monks in a given division had to be registered, and their certificates, positions, and social status had to be recorded. Likewise, their former occupations, their original banners, and their monastic status such as that of a fully ordained monk (*gelong*), a partially ordained monk (*getsül*), or a novice (*bandi*) also had to be recorded. The records would be handed to the head lamas or masters of the relevant disciples. A decision as to whether one should be excluded from the record or included in it was to be made by one's own lama and by the master of discipline through discussion. Those registered were not allowed to leave as they wished. It was necessary to seek permission from the manager for a three-day leave, from the chair lama for a seven-day leave, and from the head lama for a fifteen-day leave or for a leave longer than fifteen days when the attendance at a service in another banner was needed (CW1, I: 56r). The text further relates punishments for not returning to the monastery at the designated time, a regulation of seating arrangements in the service, and allocation of shares (CW1, I: 57v–58r). After giving a list of the rules for administration, Mergen Gegeen specifies the readings for annual services, regular services, and daily services.²³ Regulations pertaining to the precepts are also given in detail. For example, only dried meat may be included in an assembly meal, and no meat may be cooked in the assembly's meal pot (*mangjan toyu-a*). One was not allowed to slaughter an

animal within the boundaries of the monastery unless the meat of the animal was used for nourishment. No alcohol was to be kept in the monastery, and women were prohibited from spending the night in the monastery. When a woman's stay was necessary, it had to be reported to the lama and to the master of discipline (CW1, I: 61v–62r). The agendas of the daily routine, activities, and relevant discipline are also detailed in the text.

In the work titled *A Text of Regulations Called "A Punishing through Internal Harmony"* (*Dotuyadu eyeber šidgekü kemekü dürimlekü bičig*), Mergen Gegeen specifies different kinds of punishment for a violation of the discipline. The colophon indicates the date of the text as the "fifteenth year of Qianlong" (1750). In the text I-10, called *Instruction (Jakiy-a bičig)*, Mergen Gegeen specifies the discipline and general conduct of monks that need to be maintained at the time of assembly. In the text I-11, titled *The Eight Points of Instruction (Naiman jüil suryal)*, he gives an eight-pointed instruction regarding the bad behavior of monks. It is stated in the colophon: "This is the order decided by *lamain Gegen* [Mergen Gegeen] and posted in the main hall of the monastery. It was copied on the fourteenth of the second month of the Year of the Red Dog, in the thirty-first year of Qianlong (1766)" (CW1, I: 82r–82v). The colophon was obviously copied from a regulation pasted on a wall of the hall after the death of the Third Mergen Gegeen within the same year. In the text I-12, *A Program of Chanting in Mergen Monastery's Services (Mergen Süm-e-yin qural-un unghily-a-yin temdeg bičig)*, Mergen Gegeen provides a program of daily readings. The text was written on the fifteenth of the middle winter month of the Year of the Dragon, which could be either 1748 or 1760. In the text I-13, *A List of Readings in Mergen Monastery's Services (Mergen süme-yin qural-un ongsilg-a-yin toy-a bičig kemekü orusiba)*, Mergen Gegeen designated a minimum number of texts necessary for memorization for the monks to hold services.²⁴ The contents of the above-mentioned five texts of regulations overlap and yet lack consistency. Since I-9, *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony,"* includes the components of all the other four texts and since its regulations are presented in a more standardized and systematic manner, it can be assumed that the other four texts were written individually and chronologically prior to the composition of this text. They most likely were written during the process of Mergen Gegeen's institutionalization of the tradition, whereas *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony"* was composed at the end of the process.

Taking this into consideration, the Year of the Dragon in which *A Program of Chanting in Mergen Monastery's Services* was written must be 1748 and not 1760, whereas *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony"* was written two years later, in 1750. Likewise, in the above-mentioned text I-13, the following is suggested: "Decide separately how to read and which texts [to read] during big services such as those in the intermediate services (*jabsar-un qural*) and during the New Year aspiration prayer services (*irügel-ün qural*). However, in *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony,"* all of the prescribed texts must be read during these two big services. Thus, one can say that Mergen Gegeen's institutionalization of the

Mergen Tradition was not a simple and straightforward task, but a long process of reworking and reformulation, culminating in *A Text of Regulations Called "The Idea of Managing with Internal Harmony."*

Mergen Gegeen's second contribution to the institutionalization of the Mergen Tradition was reformation of the Mongolian chanting by his composition of standardized liturgical texts for all the services and practices in the Mongolian language. His liturgical texts for monastic services include new translations, rewritings, and new writings as well as matching Mongolian melodies to the texts. These will be explored in the following sections.

MERGEN GEGEEN'S REFORMATION OF THE MONGOLIAN CHANTING

In addition to Neichi Toin's Line and the Mergen Tradition, certain other monasteries conducted their services in Mongolian. According to the available, fragmentary information, these were Qonichi-yin Monastery in Gobi Mergen Wang Banner, Biligün Monastery in Tüshiyе Güng Banner of Khalkha, Tegüs Bүritgeltү Monastery in Bagarin Banner, Jarliy-iyer Keshig-i Shitүgчи Monastery in Juu Uda League, and Gegeen Monastery of Jarud of Inner Mongolia. They all conducted services in Mongolian.²⁵ With the exception of Mөngkebuyantu Monastery in Bayankhushigu in Tүshiyetү Banner, it is difficult to determine with certainty whether a Mongolian language-based chanting in those monasteries, especially in the monasteries of eastern Inner Mongolia, had any connection with Neichi Toin, the Mergen Tradition, or Mergen Gegeen's works.

The focal point of concern regarding chanting in Tibetan or in Mongolian during religious services was related to the efficacy of the services. In the DB, Galdanwangchugdorji remarks:

I heard many people say that the blessing of Tibetan scriptures is greater than that of Mongolian ones because the Buddha taught in Sanskrit, from which teachings were translated into Tibetan, and from which they were translated into Mongolian. Thus, the blessings of Mongolian scriptures are smaller. I think such statements were made inconsiderately by those ridiculous, narrow-minded people who have not heard of the saying "there is no difference between the nature of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha and all phenomena." (DB: 37)

In Mergen Gegeen's view:

The rules of Tibetan texts originated from Indian scholars, but Tibetans composed readings by themselves for their chanting and practices. If one has to seek authenticity, there is nothing superior to Sanskrit texts. If you cannot chant [them] in Sanskrit, it is better to have them in your own language. (CW1, I: 84r)

Considering the use of the Mongolian language in Buddhist services as more effective, the holders of the Mergen Tradition sought to make Buddhism more accessible to the public and to make people firmly rooted in Mongolian society. Mergen Gegeen was convinced that a Tibetan tradition of Buddhist practices made Buddhism intangible, mysterious, and detached from Mongolian society, which would eventually cause the disappearance of Buddhism in Mongolia. In his chronicle, *The Golden Summary* (*Altan tobči*), Mergen Gegeen cautions in this way:

Nowadays, some nobles and officials in Mongolia discriminate against all the religious teachings except Tibetan ones. Although these [Tibetan teachings] look powerful at the moment, they will completely disappear after filling the bags” (*tulum-iyen dügürgeged*).²⁶ (AT: 32)

Mergen Gegeen also regarded the Mongolian liturgies that were chanted in Tibetan tunes from the old, literally translated texts as inadequate, and he emphasized the need for standardization of Mongolian chanting in the previously mentioned text, *A Program of Chanting in Mergen Monastery Services*. In this text, he describes the characteristics of the Mongolian language and writing system as unfitting to Tibetan chanting tunes. In his view, the old Mongolian chanting in Tibetan tunes sounds like a stammering of tongues and distorted rhythms (CW1, I: 83v). Mergen Gegeen made all the liturgical texts suitable for chanting in the Mongolian language by equalizing the number of syllables in all the lines of a verse.²⁷ He initiated the unique “Mergen Gegeen style” of Mongolian poetry, characterized by several patterns of a “strict, isosyllabic prosody”²⁸ and facilitating a chanting with smooth, harmonious, and even rhymes. He did so by modifying the flexible patterns of Mongolian traditional poetry while preserving its most essential characteristics.

Following his innovation in Mongolian poetry, Mergen Gegeen composed distinctive Mongolian tunes to suit the readings. To this day, people of the Right Urad Duke Banner sing the songs composed by the Third Mergen Gegeen. Galdanwangchugdorji says the following about Mergen Gegeen’s contribution: “When he was initializing a chanting with new rhythms and melodies, Mergen Gegeen seemed a bit discouraged, as it was new to the followers, and there were many kinds of people who were familiar with various other rules [of chanting]” (DBA: 13). The Mongolian scholar Chering-sodnam, who has compared the recordings of some chants of Mergen Monastery with Tibetan chants performed in Gandantegchenling and Dashichoiling monasteries, and in Western Monastery of Outer Mongolia, points to the similarity of Mergen Gegeen’s melodies to the melodies and rhythms of Mongolian folk songs and to the manner in which folk poetry is recited. He has also found that the tune of each chant is unique and matches the meaning of the text.²⁹ Owing to Mergen Gegeen’s creative work, chanting in Mergen Monastery became the indigenous Mongolian way of chanting.

MERGEN GEGEEN'S REWORKING OF TRANSLATED TEXTS

Many of Mergen Gegeen's translations are more or less his reworking of a given text. In the colophon to his I-15, *Liturgy for Offering to a Lama*, Mergen Gegeen gives a reason:

There is a text for the ritual of offering to a lama written by the Panchen Lama, which was popular among both Tibetans and Mongols. In addition, there is a Mongolian translation that strictly follows the words and meanings of the original. In fact, there is no need to change it. However, when I try to cut the words into even lines, there are interruptions and distortions, and it becomes unclear whether or not it is Panchen Erdeni's work. Therefore, I have made it into a Mongolian writing based on the Tibetan original. Then there will be less trouble and those [words] will be easier to read. (CW₁, I: 94r–94v)

In this way, some of his new translations became more an independent composition than a translation. Mergen Gegeen's reworking extended from the Mongolian poetic forms and tunes to the content of a text, as he asserts in the previously mentioned text I-12:

It is good to follow the old tradition. However, nobody with a contesting mind has abandoned the few unnecessary poems, such as the "Glorious One" (Tegüs čoytu) and the "Emptiness of Non-apprehension," which were read before the "Taking Refuge" in the early Mongolian line of practices; and nobody with a creative mind has produced at present a few necessary poems like the "Dependent Origination." Taking unrealistic texts and using them to teach future generations, while criticizing predecessors is a questionable activity. One clear thing is that even if Tibetans learned the doctrine from India, Tibetan masters did not directly adopt the prayers of Indian *paṇḍitas*. Now the Mongols take the prayers of Tibetan scholars (*ubadini*) to be supreme among all the liturgical manuals, and cause the trouble of endless, dull memorizing. This imitation needs to be examined. (CW₁, I: 83v–85r)

His above-cited statement implies that monks of his time followed literal translations mechanically, without omitting components of the original Tibetan texts that were irrelevant to their practices, and without adding other useful passages when needed. In doing so, they blamed their predecessors for memorizing the irrelevant elements and teaching them to the new generations.

Mergen Gegeen compiled a number of works by including translations of relevant episodes from other authors' works. He expressed the necessity for such compilations in the same text I-12, with these words:

Tibetans did not merely adopt the prayers of Indian scholars even though the doctrine came from India. Nowadays Mongols always highly esteem the prayers of

Tibetan masters. It is truly worth questioning the difficulties of endless memorization because of this convention. Of course, it is best if intelligent people can memorize the Ganjur and Danjur. However, for everyday chanting during services, since there have been no ready readings, it is difficult for young monks to memorize all sorts of those borrowed texts. (CW_I, I: 84v–85r)

Mergen Gegeen simplified liturgical texts as much as possible. An example of this is the text I-1, *A Reading for Taking Refuge (Itegel yabuylqui)*, which has its own distinctive features. When relevant, Mergen Gegeen indicates which part of the text is from Atiśa's work, which is from the *Vajra Guru Tantra*, and which is from a Yoga-Tantra. The text III-9, *Readings for Offering Sacrificial Cakes for the External Meditation on the Oath-bound King of Dharma (Tangyariγtu nom-un qayan)*, is compiled from the writings of several scholars, such as Tsongkhapa, Lalitavajra, Dalai Lama Gendunjamtsu (dGe 'dun rGya mtsho), Lama Umapa, and Panchen Sumadi Dharma Dhvaja. At the conclusion of this text, Mergen Gegeen asks the *dharma-rāja (nom-un qayan)* to forgive him, because he must have made some mistakes when writing Mongolian verses that had not previously existed.

MERGEN GEGEEN'S COMPOSITION OF NEW TEXTS

Through the experience of his new translations, Mergen Gegeen concluded that it would be good to write his own texts as much as possible. In the I-6, *A Code of Writing*, he says:

Some people who seek interesting things revere Tibetan, and they change and modify Mongolian words and style, which diverges a translation and a tune. No matter how many corrections are made again and again to such translations, there are still things to be corrected, and chanting rules are still Tibetan, which leads to a mixture. Although Tibetans had treatises, like the Danjur, translated from India, they still wrote in their own language . . . Most of their liturgical texts are also Tibetan writings. They rarely use Indian. If we Mongols write in our own language, the trouble of changing a translation again and again will be reduced. (CW_I, I: 20r)³⁰

Another of Mergen Gegeen's contributions is his popularization of Buddhism and integration of lay communities into the Mergen Tradition. This aspect of his work is of two types. One consists of his writings for popular rituals, in which he combined the traditional Mongolian folk literature with Buddhist liturgical patterns. By doing so, he infused Buddhist teachings into the minds of the laity and Buddhist character into popular rituals. The other contribution consists of writing various genres of popular literature in an attempt to educate and improve the quality of the entire community.

Many such works have been passed down to the present day through oral transmission and are still popular among the Urad Mongols.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one can characterize the Mergen Tradition as particularly practice-oriented in its use of the Mongolian language. It brought Buddhism home and rooted it in Inner Mongolian society through understandable and harmonious liturgies. This explains why the Mergen Tradition's chants became attractive to Mongols from other regions, why these chants survived the political turmoil of the communist revolution, and why they continue to gain an increasing popularity in Inner and Outer Mongolia.

According to Mergen Gegeen's view, his tradition is distinctive and authentic. He constantly maintained that the form of Buddhism he practiced was Bogdo Lama Neichi Toin's Mongolian Buddhism. But he also indirectly acknowledged that it was Tsongkhapa's religion. He did so by declaring Neichi Toin to be the Second Tsongkhapa, who disseminated the Gelugpa tradition in Mongolia. Therefore, one should not look at the Mergen Tradition merely as a "curious copy of Tibetan Buddhism" in a "degenerate and corrupt state," as it was seen at the start of the twentieth century.³¹ Mergen Gegeen hoped that the form of Buddhism that he institutionalized would reach the entire Mongolia. He saw the establishment of a firmly rooted Mongolian Buddhism as vital, as he firmly believed that a Tibetan line would in time completely disappear in Mongolia. This may explain why he endeavored to spread his program of practices among the Khorchins in eastern Mongolia.

NOTES

1. *Boйда Neičii Toin Dalai Manzuširi-yin domuy-i todurqai-a geigülügči čindamani erike kemegdekü orusiba*, available as a wooden block print published in Peking in 1739.

2. *Degeдү törülkitü boyda gnas bju Toin qutuγtu wagisuwara sumadi ša sa na dhvaja sain čoytu-yin čedig doluyan erdeni tegüsügsen süsüg-ün jula kemegdekü orusiba*, published in wooden block print in Peking in 1756.

3. *Barayun Süm-e-yin da blama-yin γajar qadayalaqu šašin-i badarayuluyči, bayasqulang-i quriyaγči qoyar süm-e-yin uy eki-yin dangsa bičig*.

4. *Včir dhara mergen diyanči blam-a-yin Gegeen-ü 'bum jarliy*, which was published by wooden block print in Peking in 1783. It is a complete copy of the original wooden block print of Mergen Gegeen's collected works, now held in the British Library.

5. *Altan tobči*. While the *Golden Summary* chronicles Mergen Gegeen's ideas regarding the Mongolian line of Buddhist Practices, the DCH, CHJ, DB, and DBA discuss the institutionalization of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism. Following a restoration of Mergen Monastery in the 1990s, Inner Mongolian scholars have extensively studied the available Mongolian sources of the Mergen Tradition. An editorial committee for Mergen Gegeen Studies was

organized and pioneered by Professor B. Möngke. A series of books including the DB and the CW, an introduction to the Mergen Monastery, Mergen Geegen's works and collected papers on Mergen Monastery and Mergen Geegen have been published since 1994 until the present. Möngke's seminal work (2004) on Mergen Geegen summarizes previous studies and Mergen Geegen's contribution to Mongolian Buddhism.

6. The second Dūngkūr Khutugtu Yon don rGya mtsho accompanied bSod nams rGya-mtsho on the occasion of Altan Khan and the Dalai Lama's meeting. The Mañjuśrī Khutugtu title was conferred upon him by the Third Dalai Lama on that occasion. He went to Mongolia with Altan Khan. Later he was invited to visit the Khalkhas in Outer Mongolia (Li, 1989, 105).

7. A *dka'bcu* Lama accompanied the Third Dalai Lama on his second visit to Mongolia in 1585 and stayed there as his representative, conducting religious affairs after his master's death. Because he was given the title Pandita Gūūshi Chorji by the Dalai Lama and installed on the throne of the Dalai Lama in Shiregetū Juu Monastery, he was known as Shiregetū Gūūshi Chorji or simply Shiregetū Khutugtu.

8. See endnote 7.

9. For further information on Neichi Toin's spread of Buddhism in Eastern Mongolia, see Ujeed, 2011, 265–278.

10. For the purpose of veneration, Neichi Toin is rarely addressed directly, but is addressed as Bogd Lama and by other names. Galadanwangchudorji uses the title Toin Geegen here, which means “a reincarnation lama of a noble origin.” Toin refers to a lama of noble origin, usually of Chinggis Khan's lineage. Torghud is a name of a western Mongol tribe from which the First Neichi Toin originated. He also uses the title Bogd Toin Qurγtu-yin Geegen, adding the highest title, *Khutugtu* for a reincarnated lama, which was usually conferred by the Dalai Lama and the Qing emperors. However, Neichi Toin never had this title officially conferred upon him.

11. A number of Mongolian words are used for “monastery,” including *keid*, *süm-e*, *juu*, *küriy-e*, and *datsan*. *Keid* is the earliest name. It came from Central Asia and originally referred to a hermitage. *Juu* derives from the Tibetan *jo bo* and refers to a statue of Śākyamuni Buddha that was brought to Tibet by the Chinese princess Wen Cheng when she married Srong btsan sGam po in 641 C.E. Therefore, Mongols gradually came to call the temples or monasteries that contain the statue of the image of the Buddha *juu*; even Lhasa was called *juu*. So Tibet was called “land of *juu*” (M. *juu-yin orun*). Similarly, *süm-e*, derived from the Tibetan numerical word *gsum* for three, refers to a monastery because it is a place that contains the three jewels: the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha. *Süm-e* seems to have become most popular later. Now *süm-e* and *keid* are combined together as *süm-e keid* to designate monasteries. *Küriy-e* literally means “enclosure” or “encircling camp.” It was used for the monasteries in Khalkha and only in eastern Inner Mongolia. It might have come from the fact that Mongolian monasteries there and then were composed of numerous yurts camped in a circle. *Datsan* is used in Buryatia following the Tibetan *grwa tshang*, meaning monastic college. It is likely that the monastery's first name was due to its affiliation with the tantric tradition of Neichi Toin and Mergen Diyanchi. But one could also argue that its first name was *Juu*, following the examples of nearby Khökhöt temples.

12. In the 1960s, Mergen Monastery came under the jurisdiction of Bugutu city when the eastern part of Front Urad Banner became the territory of the city.

13. In 1753, the three Urad banners were renamed into the Right Urad Duke Banner (Urad Barayun Güng-ün Qshiyu), the Middle Urad Duke Banner (Urad Dumda Güng-ün Qshiyu), and the Rear Urad Duke Banner (Urad Jegün Güng-ün Qshiyu), and they became a part of the

Ulaanchab League. After the establishment of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 1947, the original names of the banners were restored and reorganized into the Bayan-nuur League. In 1952, the Middle and Rear Urad banners were combined into Urad Middle-Rear Banner. Since 1960, despite certain changes, the three Urad banners have remained the same. In 2002, the league administrative unit was changed from the Bayan-nuur league into Linhe City.

14. According to the Mongolian scholar Mōngke (1994, 50), Duke Nomun built a small monastery in the place called Khairtu and installed the First Mergen Diyanchi Dinu-a there. When Darmashiri built Mergen Monastery and invited the Second Mergen Diyanchi, the monastery in Khairtu became the Duke's Monastery. This seems reasonable, although there is no mention of these events at all in the DB.

15. *Janggi* is a Manchu word that refers to a head of a *sumu* (an administrative unit).

16. There is a year difference in counting Kangxi's year of coronation (i.e., 1661 or 1662). Therefore, the forty-fourth year is said to be the year of the blue monkey (1704) or the year of the blue rooster (1705).

17. However, there is an additional name Dinw-a found here and in other instances in the DB (178 and 184). Neither of the two Mergen Diyanchi is mentioned in the DCH by the name Dinu-a.

18. Mōngke, 1994, 52; Galluu, 2003, 25.

19. Khurchabilig, 1997, 178.

20. The dates of the life of the first Mergen Diyanchi are not known. However, it was sometime between 1619 and 1630 when Neichi Toin met the Bogd Chagan Lama, who was a relative of one of the officials of Altan Khan, and he became the follower of the Kagyü School of Buddhism (Wakamazi Hiroshi, 1985, 70). According to Heissig, Bogd Chagan Lama Rashijamsu was a famous preacher and hermit of unknown origin who came during the time of Ming Emperor Wanli (1571–1620) to the mountains 80 *li* west of Khökhöt died in 1627.¹ If Ariayn Diwa was the Mergen Diyanchi, we can assume that he was already a young adult in the 1620s when he became Neichi Toin's disciple.

21. The Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism was practiced within the territory of Urad Right Duke Banner. Monasteries in the "brother" banners—the Middle Urad Duke Banner and the Left Urad Duke Banner—practiced a Tibetan line of Mongolian Buddhism. The most academic monastery in Inner Mongolia, Jibqulangtu, or Badgar Monastery, in the territory of the Left Urad Duke Banner, was a leading academic monastery in the Tibetan line. Although these three banners comprised members of the same ethnic group, in terms of Buddhist practice they were divided into two distinct lines. There must have been strong reasons for the Mergen Tradition to be able to coexist with the established Tibetan line as its neighbor.

22. Based on a personal conversation with the monk Mōngkebatu on May 18, 2005.

23. The services of the Mergen Tradition are not detailed here but will be discussed elsewhere.

24. They are the following: Going for Refuge, Glorious Candana, Goddess Tārā, Prajñāpāramitā, Siṃha-vakīrū (Arslan terigütü), Vajravādāraṇa, Torma Offering, Lustration (Ukiyal, T. Khrus), Maṇḍala, Čaysom (T. Cha gsum), White Dough Offering, Tea Offering,

¹ Heissig, 1992, 77.

Migzem (T. dMigs brtse ma), Offering to Lama, Five Prayers, Sitapatrā, Seven Hundred Million (Kūlti), Growing Youth (Urγumal jalayū), A Prayer for Prosperity of Religion, A Prayer for the Living and the Dead, Petition to the Glorious King, The Power of Mighty One (Čidaγči-yin ekrhe), The Noble-minded One (Sain oyutu), Three Important Points (*γurban učirtu*), Arhat, The Four Deities: Yamāntaka, Guyasamāja, Amitāyus, and Vairocana, The Two Mahākālas, The Lord of Hell, Goddess (Lhamo), and Vaiśrāvaṇa.

25. Naranbatu, 1997a, 72.

26. His statement can be understood, as the Tibetan lamas would disappear after collecting enough alms, which was their purpose of teaching in Mongolia.

27. The DBA: 13 reads: “The sage reincarnation (Mergen Düri) of Mergen Gegeen, the Third, translated all the readings into Mongolian by equalizing the syllables and making them easy for chanting.”

28. Möngke, 1995, 496; Atwood, 2004, 147.

29. Cheringsodnam, 2001, 157–165.

30. Mergen Gegeen also composed texts that were too rigid for chanting. Texts included in his collected works (numbers I-36 to I-52) consist of prayers and supplication to various lamas of the Mergen Tradition.

31. Siklos, 1991, 156

7

Zanabazar (1635–1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval

Mongolia

Uranchimeg Tsultemin



INTRODUCTION

The First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (T. rJe btsun dam pa sprul sku) Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar is the most celebrated person in the history of Mongolian Buddhism, whose activities marked the important moments in the Mongolian politics, history, and cultural life, as they heralded the new era for the Mongols. His masterpieces of Buddhist sculptures exhibit a sophisticated accomplishment of the Buddhist iconometrical canon, a craftsmanship of the highest quality, and a refined yet unfettered virtuosity. Zanabazar is believed to have single-handedly brought the tradition of Vajrayāna Buddhism to the late medieval Mongolia. Buddhist rituals, texts, temple construction, Buddhist art, and even designs for Mongolian monastic robes are all attributed to his genius. He also introduced to Mongolia the artistic forms of Buddhist deities, such as the Five Tathāgatas, Maitreya, Twenty-One Tārās, Vajradhara, Vajrasattva, and others. They constitute a salient hallmark of his careful selection of the deities, their forms, and their representation. These deities and their forms of representation were unique to Zanabazar.

Zanabazar is also accredited with building his main Buddhist settlement Urga (Örgöö), a mobile camp that was to reach out the nomadic communities in various areas of Mongolia and spread Buddhism among them. In the course of time, Urga was strategically developed into the main Khalkha monastery, Ikh Khüree, while maintaining its mobility until 1855. After Mongolia declared its independence from the Qing rule in 1911 and was taken by communist revolutionaries, Ikh Khüree became the Capital Ikh Khüree, renamed as Ulaanbaatar (“Red Hero”) by the communist revolutionaries in

1924 only to be completely destroyed and transformed into a Soviet-style provincial town in the twentieth century. Nowadays, Zanabazar's surviving works are housed in Ulaanbaatar's museums and in Gandantegchenling (dGa' ldan theg chen gling) Monastery, the only surviving monastery from the former Ikh Khüree, which was the main center of the Eighth Jebtsundamba Bogd Gegeen.

Although the information on Zanabazar's life and work that is contained in the primary sources is fragmentary, we are able to discern the intention behind Zanabazar's choice of the Buddhist deities he introduced to Mongolia. This is possible by examining the images of the deities as carefully planned sets. To do that we must reconstruct Zanabazar's overall plan for what was essentially a new transmission of Buddhism into Mongolia. Lacing together the textual records, modern attributions to Zanabazar, and their historical contexts, this chapter will examine the representations of the deities to demonstrate the way in which they make up a larger scheme. The sources that are examined here for this purpose include Zanabazar's hagiographies, his own writings, and his art. This chapter will also show why and how Zanabazar used art as the means of fulfilling his mission to build a Buddhist state in Mongolia and to promote the security and unity among the Mongols in the late medieval period.

ZANABAZAR: THE ARTIST AND LEGENDARY HERO

Among Zanabazar's extant hagiographies, the one written during the master's lifetime by his main disciple, Zaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei (Jaya paṇḍita blo bzang 'phreng las, 1642–1715), and a highly esteemed scholar, is regarded as the most reliable.¹ According to Luvsanperenlei, Zanabazar was born under extraordinary conditions on the morning of the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month in 1635 as the second son of Tüsheet Khan Gombodorj (1594–1655), who, like his wife, belonged to the “golden clan” of the great Mongol emperors.² Zanabazar proved to be a versatile prodigy early in his life. We are told that at the age of three he was able to recite by heart Buddhist prayers and texts related to the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti*, which was translated into the four languages and published by Chojjamts (d. 1656?), a grandson of Altan Khan (1507–1582).³

Reportedly, at the age of three Zanabazar also twice recited the *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti* prayer.⁴ According to the Mongolian nineteenth-century biographer Agwaanluvsandondov, when Zanabazar reached the age of three he knew by heart various prayers and sūtras without being taught. He twice daily read the *Gandalkhabjaa* (dGa' ldan lha brgya ma) and the *Jambaltsanjod* (Jam dpal mtshan brjad), surprising everyone.⁵ At the age of four, he received the Dharma name Zanabazar (T. Yeshe rdo rje; Skrt. Jñānavajra) and the vows of a novice from a certain Jambalyn Nomyin Khan, about whom we do not have any further records. At the age of five, he was enthroned as the religious leader of the Khalkha at the site called Shireet Tsagaan Lake, was promoted to the higher monastic rank, and received his second Dharma name, Luvsandambijaltsan (Blo bzang bsTan pa'i rGyal mtshan).⁶ Zanabazar traveled to Tibet twice, first in 1649–1651 and then again

in 1655–1656. During those visits, the Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682) and the Fourth Panchen Lama (1569–1662) recognized him as a reincarnation of the Jonangpa (Jo nang pa) scholar, Tārānātha (1575–1634), who, according to Mongolian sources, had died in Mongolia a year before Zanabazar was born.⁷ Zanabazar traveled to Kumbum (sKu 'bum) and Amdo (A mdo) but spent most of his time in Central Tibet. The hagiographies mention various monasteries, mainly the Gelugpa monasteries, which he visited in Tibet. According to Luvsanperenlei,

At the age of fifteen in the Female Cow Year, when he visited Ü Tsang, lamas from the Bogd Tsongkhapa-born Kumbum, Jachun (Bya khyung), Janraden Rinchenbrag (Byang rwa sgreng rin chen brag), Gandanchoinkhor (Dga' ldan chos 'khor), Taglung (Stag lung), three monasteries of Sera, Drepung, Gandan, and Tashilhunpo came to welcome him and showed him a great respect in accordance with the etiquette of [receiving] guests.⁸

The early twentieth-century biographer Davgajantsan informs us that in the Sixth Year of the Reign of Eyeber Jasagchi (Emperor Shunzhi), in the Year of the Yellow Fire Cow, at the time when Bogd Jebtsundamba was fifteen years old, he visited the land of Tibet:

... as overwhelmed by the desire to disseminate the faith of Bogd Tsongkhapa in the northern land of Khalkha, at fifteen [Zanabazar] visited the monasteries such [as those] of the Bogd Lama [Tsongkhapa], Kumbum, Jambaalin, Jachun (Bya khyung), Radin, Gandanchoinkhor (Dga' ldan chos 'khor), Taglung (Stag lung), where he was welcomed with respect and semburime (ser sbrengs) ...⁹

The nineteenth-century Mongolian scholar Agwaanluvsandondov sought to emphasize Zanabazar's alleged close ties with the Dalai and Panchen Lamas by pointing out Zanabazar's contact with both men in 1650, stating:

... he [Zanabazar] was reciting prayers line-after-line by heart without any hindrance as if he mastered letters, readings, and prayers. Also they marveled at many wonderful readings that he exhibited, and they sent a messenger to the Tibetan land to have this reported in detail to all head lamas and prophets presided by the All-Omniscient Panchen Bogdo and by the All-Powerful Fifth Dalai Lama. And those [two] recognized him as Jebtsun Tārānātha's and Mañjuśrī's reincarnation; and [this message] spread like a harmonious melody all over the world.¹⁰

This account is not found in the Tibetan hagiographies of the Dalai and Panchen Lamas in Tibet.¹¹ The above-mentioned hagiographies also consider Zanabazar's main teacher to have been the Fourth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang Chos kyi Rgyal mtshan

(1569–1662), from whom he received his initiations into Yamāntaka and the instruction on the textual corpus of Vajrāvalī.¹² However, this does not explain Zanabazar's devotion to a selective pantheon of deities and his rendition of their specific forms. Contemporary studies on Zanabazar, which have mostly emphasized the Nepalese influence on his art, have yet to address these discrepancies in the textual and visual material. The forms that Zanabazar chose to represent did not belong to any particular school and were not followed by later Mongolian artists despite his fame and authority.

Upon his return from Tibet to Mongolia in 1651, he immediately became involved in the construction of temples and monasteries and in the production of art. Zanabazar's hagiographies describe him as an architect, a sculptor, and a painter, who created the works of art for his own temples and monasteries, such as Ribogejai-gandan-shadublin (Ri bo dge rgyas dga' ldan bshad sgrub gling), where he produced a substantial number of images from 1680 to 1686, for the Qing emperors, and for Tibetan monasteries. Among Tibetan monasteries that he embellished with his art was Jachun (Bya khyung) Monastery in Amdo, founded by Tsongkhapa's teacher Chos rje Don 'grub Rin chen.

Zanabazar also invented the new Mongolian script Soyombo (T. *rang byung snang ba*, Skrt. *svayambhu*) for the sake of facilitating better translations of Tibetan technical terms and names into Mongolian. He gradually came to be acknowledged as the political and religious leader of the Khalkha Mongols, and in 1691, Zanabazar decided to surrender Khalkha Mongolia to the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) as a vassal state of Qing China. This decision was the result of internal strife and the incessant attacks of the Zünghar Mongols.¹³ Zanabazar reinforced his close contacts with the Kangxi emperor and became the Kangxi emperor's religious mentor from 1691 until the latter's death in 1722. In 1697, the two rulers traveled together for a pilgrimage to Wutaishan.¹⁴

ZANABAZAR'S SELECTION OF BUDDHIST TEXTS AND IMAGES

In the 1680s, Zanabazar created his masterpieces such as the Five Tathāgatas (figures 7.1 and 7.2).¹⁵ The Five Tathāgatas have identical dimensions (H: 28-1/8 × D: 17-1/2). The set of the Five Tathāgatas form a well-established group in Vajrayāna Buddhism. This group of five is a basic and earliest Vajrayāna set, already present at Dunhuang during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). It is a result of an early effort to systematize the pantheon based on the Five Buddha families; it laid a foundation for tantric practices and initiations based on the *maṇḍala* structure. Zanabazar is also said to have established the initial set of the three Dharma protectors (*rigs gsum mgon po*), or the three Buddha Families (the Lotus, Vajra, and Buddha Families), which formed the initial group that is extended into five, with the addition of Ratna and Viśvavajra families. Zanabazar's sculptures of the Three Buddha Families have not survived, but we know of them from his hagiographies. His Five Tathāgatas testify to the master's introduction of Vajrayāna essentials to Ikh Khüree, which enabled the beginnings of tantric teachings in Khalkha Mongolia. The production of the Three Buddha Families, which were most likely placed in the

Rigsumgompo Temple in Ikh Khüree, and his production of the Five Tathāgatas testify to Zanabazar's aim of bringing to Mongolia a pantheon that would secure a long-lasting and systematic Vajrayāna tradition in Mongolia, in contrast to the early, limited attempts at Buddhist conversion in Mongolia. As we will see, the two mentioned sets of Buddha Families, which formed a part of larger sets of deities introduced by Zanabazar, became instrumental in the introduction of Buddhist doctrinal teachings and tantric initiations. His systematic approach to the propagation of Buddhism was driven with far-reaching goals of Dharma practice through an organized teaching and with efficiently layered private and collective practices. A similar systematization was taking place in Tibet and Qing China with Buton Rinchen Drup's (Bu ston Rin chen 'Grub, 1290–1364) compilation projects of Buddhist literature, classification of *tantras* into four classes, and the Kangxi emperor's printing of the illustrated Mongolian Kangyur in Beijing in 1717–1720.

In Zanabazar's collection of the Five Tathāgatas, the Buddha Vairocana is visibly central and prominent with his sumptuous and magnificent appearance that is in



FIGURE 7.1 Zanabazar. *Vairocana* circa 1680. Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts.



FIGURE 7.2 Zanabazar. *Amitābha* circa 1680. Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts.

accordance with his essential nature of the “Resplendent One”¹⁶ (figure 7.1). Vairocana appears in various manifestations, many of which were known and depicted in Mongolia, such as Sarvavid Vairocana (the All-knowing Vairocana) with the meditation (*dhyaṇi*) and teaching (*dharmacakra*) hand gestures. In Mongolian art, Sarvavid Vairocana appears in several pantheons, such as the Three-Hundred icons and the Three-Hundred-Sixty Icons, both of which were compiled and commented on by the learned Jangjia Khutugtu Rolpay Dorje (lCang skya Rolpa’i rdo rje; 1717–1786) in the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁷ The fact that this particular Vairocana is included in the Mongolian Kangyur published under the auspices of the Kangxi emperor in 1717–1720¹⁸ indicates the establishment of a particular textual tradition in Mongolia that promulgated a devotion to the Sarvavid Vairocana. This is attested by numerous surviving images in Mongolia.

Amy Heller and later Matthew Kapstein have argued that Vairocana was central in early Tibetan art and at the Tibetan court, where he was known through his role in the

Avatamsaka Sūtra, in which he is presented as a *cakravartin*.¹⁹ Kapstein has suggested the possibility of the early East Asian and the Tibetan court's emphasis on Vairocana as closely associated with the royal cult, the ordering of the empire, and the creation of an imperial self-image.²⁰ By identifying themselves with Vairocana, Tibetan kings established their authority and the royal cult of a *cakravartin*. A similar identification with Vairocana was visible in the Mongol imperial court of the fourteenth century. It is possible that as a direct descendent of the Mongol imperial line, Zanabazar had seen the *maṇḍala* established by Toghon Tömör Khan (r. 1333–1367) on the Juyong Gate near Beijing in 1345, in which Vairocana occupies a central position, but with a different hand gesture.²¹ Following Kapstein's argument, it is quite plausible that Zanabazar, just like the early Tibetan and Mongol emperors before him, saw himself and his state homologous with Vairocana and his *maṇḍala*.

However, unlike the earlier Mongol rulers, who limited a Buddhist influence to the court, Zanabazar's goal was to lay a firm foundation for widely spreading Dharma among the masses. Therefore, Zanabazar seems to have been interested in various functions of Vairocana as prescribed in the *Mahāvairocanatantra*. According to the *Mahāvairocanatantra*, Vairocana as Abhisambodhi represents the Buddha Śākyamuni in his *maṇḍala* at the moment of enlightenment. At Samye Monastery, as Kapstein has shown, Śākyamuni's enlightenment is clearly conveyed through the images of Vairocana and Śākyamuni at different levels of the architectural structure. In this case, enlightenment is understood in a tantric context. Therefore, in the Tibetan case, Vairocana is usually depicted with the meditation (*dhyāni*) hand gesture and accompanied by Eight Bodhisattvas, as described in the *Mahāvairocanatantra*. In the case of Zanabazar, he may have been referring to the Buddha Śākyamuni by placing Vairocana at the center of the Five Tathāgatas, because Śākyamuni was clearly instructed to see "that Buddha [Vairocana as Resplendent] is myself with a different name, preaching the Dharma in that universe and saving living beings."²² In the form of Vairocana, Śākyamuni taught the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* immediately after his supreme enlightenment in Bodh Gaya.²³ In the later *Guhyasamāja* tantric tradition, favored by Gelugpas, Akṣobhya takes a central position in the Five Buddha configuration. By elevating the Tathāgata family rather than the Vajra family (Akṣobhya), Zanabazar introduced Buddhism in Mongolia, this time without any alliance to any specific school.²⁴ With lofty goals of building a Buddhist state based on Vajrayāna teachings, Zanabazar resorted to multifaceted aspects and functions of Vairocana. In Zanabazar's depiction, Vairocana's particular hand gesture, the highest enlightenment gesture (*bodhyagri mūdrā*), points explicitly to the Vajradhātu form of Vairocana, attesting to Zanabazar's introduction to Mongolia the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* (*Compendium of the Reality of All the Buddhas*), a *yogatantra* that was essential to the early development of tantric Buddhism.²⁵ It seems that none of Zanabazar's own initiations directed his choice of Vairocana's form. If Zanabazar were taught the "fundamental theories of the Gelugpa sect"²⁶ by the Dalai and Panchen lamas, following the *Guhyasamāja* tradition, he would have brought the Vajra family with Akṣobhya to the center of the Five Buddha Families. Zanabazar's

choice of the Vairocana's form appearing in the mentioned *yoga-tantra* was therefore intentional as his goal was to establish the Vajrayāna tradition in Mongolia by introducing the *Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha*, believed to be the first promulgated by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. In contrast to earlier Mongol rulers' connection with the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism, for Zanabazar, none of the Tibetan schools played a decisive role in choosing the form of Vairocana. However, the meaning of the deities and their doctrinal roles were crucial to the ways in which he selected their depiction. Vajradhātu with his *bodhyagri mūdrā* does not appear in any visual form after Zanabazar.

THE TWENTY-ONE TĀRĀS

The Twenty-One Tārās receive special attention in Zanabazar's oeuvre and do not appear prominently in later Mongolian art (figure 7.3). An early twentieth-century Buddhist historian, Davgajantsan, interpreted Zanabazar's devotion to Tārās as a sign of his true following of Kadampa and Gelug orders by emphasizing Jowo Atīśa (982–1054) and the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drub (dGe 'dun grub) (1391–1475), whose successes were commonly associated with the Green Tārā, who was their main tutelary deity.²⁷ Davgajantsan, a Gelug adherent, leaves out Tāranātha and elevates only Kadampa and Gelug masters, such as by Atīśa, Dromton ('Brom ston 1005–1064), and Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa 1357–1419) in the promulgation and devotion to Tārā.



FIGURE 7.3 Zanabazar. 21 Tārās. 1706. Bogd Khan Palace Museum.

Davgajantsan writes:

Because Jowo Atīśa always prayed to Green Tārā, his deeds in India and Tibet were equal to space. The Kadampa *sūtras* stated that Green Tārā will patronize all of his (Atīśa's) disciples, [will facilitate] all success of the Kadampas, therefore Atīśa's disciples and all disciples of the Lord Tsongkhapa worship and always pray to Green Tārā, [who is] the Highest. Because the All-Omniscient Gendendrup Gegeen (the First Dalai Lama) worshipped Green Tārā for his own work and deeds, his deeds became equal to the limits of the space . . . Likewise, the All-Savior Jebtsundamba created Green Tārā's portrait and Temple and in every work prayed to Green Tārā . . .²⁸

Although Zanabazar had built the Tārā Temple in Ikh Khüree as one of the primary foci of the Tārā cult, the Green Tārā was not the only image there. In fact, Zanabazar's set of the Twenty-One Tārās, following the Sūryagupta tradition, lacks both the Green and White Tārās, thus disproving the Gelug point of view put forward by Davgajantsan. Davgajantsan's interpretation of Zanabazar's choice of deities demonstrates the purposeful rewriting and recreating of the history at the hands of the biographers. Tārā attracted a widespread following in Tibet during the sarma (new) period of the Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug traditions.²⁹ In his devotion to Tārās, Zanabazar faithfully followed the doctrinal roots common to all schools.

If Zanabazar indeed followed Atīśa's line of Tārā worship, it could be that he was explicitly modeling himself on Atīśa. In the so-called second diffusion of Buddhism to Tibet, Atīśa was instrumental in reintroducing Buddhism to Tibet with rituals related to Tārā at a time when Tibetans were not quite ready to deal with the highest tantric deities. Or perhaps it was Zanabazar's biographers, such as Davgajantsan, who wanted him to be seen as a latter-day Atīśa, as someone who reintroduced Buddhism to Mongolia in a similar manner and for similar reasons.

Davgajantsan dates Zanabazar's set of Twenty-One Tārās and the construction of his Tārā Temple in Ikh Khüree to 1706.³⁰ This set is derived from *The Ode in Twenty-One Homages*, one of the major texts related to Tārā that was translated into Tibetan in the late eleventh century and later revised and extensively explained by Tibetan scholars. Among them was the celebrated Sakya scholar Trakpa Gyaltzen (Grags pa rGyal mtshan, 1147–1216), a lineage-holder of Sūryagupta's Tārā cycle, who wrote thirteen texts on Tārā, and Tsongkhapa's disciple, the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drub. The Tengyur (Bstan 'gyur) contains a set of five texts constituting the commentaries of Sūryagupta, a great ninth-century Kashmiri *paṇḍita* to whom, tradition holds, Tārā herself conveyed the cycle of her twenty-one manifestations.³¹ Hence, known as Sūryagupta's Tārā cycle, it contained three major trends of the iconographic representations of Tārās—those of Sūryagupta, Nāgārjuna, and Atīśa—and that of the Nyingma traditions.³²

It is possible that Zanabazar was exposed to the iconographic taxonomy of the Tārā representation at the Jonang Puntsogling (Jo nang Phun tshogs gling) Monastery of his previous incarnation Tāranātha, although it is not clear whether Puntsogling contained the set of Twenty-One Tārās at the time when Zanabazar went there and when he returned from Tibet with an image and the Tārā-related literature in 1651.³³ Zanabazar most certainly was familiar with the Tārā texts included in the Tengyur, which he had seen during his visits to Tibet, and later through his own copies, which he received from Tibet in the 1690s.³⁴ Despite his mentorship by the Fifth Dalai Lama, who overtly demonstrated his hostility to Jonangpas by transforming the order's monasteries, such as Puntsogling, into Gelugpa institutions, Zanabazar seemed to be responsive to Tāranātha's teachings. Tāranātha wrote extensively on Tārā and was known as a leading proponent of the cult of Tārā in Tibet.³⁵ If Zanabazar was the Gelug adherent, as his biographers suggest, why would he challenge the Dalai Lama's policy of exporting the Tāranātha's reincarnation into Mongolia and shaping Tāranātha's new reincarnate in Gelug terms?

Zanabazar's Twenty-One Tārās primarily follow the tradition of Nāgārjuna and Atīśa, where Tārās are similar in everything except in the colors of their bodies, which, as metal sculptures, are all gilt. In Nāgārjuna's and Atīśa's tradition, there are six red, five white, seven orange-golden-yellow, and three black Tārās described, for a total of twenty-one.³⁶ The consistent gilt color of Zanabazar's statues makes his Tārās appear remarkably similar. His Green and White Tārās (figure 7.4) are additional to the group of Twenty-One Tārās as the Green Tārā is accompanied by the images of Ekajaṭī and Marīci, thereby bringing the entire group to a total of twenty-five figures. Zanabazar's White and Green Tārās are close in their prominent dimensions to the Five Tathāgatas and equally stand out among his works. As is the case in all of his sculptures, Zanabazar's Tārās are imbued with sumptuous details worked to the finest nuance and creative brilliance. An example is a remarkable lace on the forehead of the White Tārā, with tiny pearls held in the similarly small hands of its *kīrtimukha*. This refined detail is unprecedented.

The Green Tārā's companions maintain the seamless continuity of the set due to their remarkable similarity in the size and execution of the other Twenty-One Tārās. Ekajaṭī appears in her semi-wrathful form. In accordance with the canonical description, she has one face and two arms; she holds a skull-cup in her left hand and a ritual chopper in her right hand.³⁷ The current statue of Marīci at Bogd Khan Palace Museum poses a peculiar question of identification. If the identification is indeed correct, Zanabazar's Marīci appears as a male Bodhisattva wearing a five-tiered crown.³⁸ As a companion on the right side of the Green Tārā, he makes the boon-granting hand gesture with his left hand, and in his right hand he holds the stem of a lotus in the gesture of religious discourse (*vitarka-mudrā*).³⁹

Frederic Bunce identified one of Marīci's various forms as an "independent feminine Bodhisattva,"⁴⁰ but I have been unable to find textual liturgies related to Marīci as a male Bodhisattva. Moreover, it is unprecedented in Tibet and Mongolia to see Marīci in a



FIGURE 7.4 Zanabazar. *Green Tārā* 1706. Bogd Khan Palace Museum.

male form with a deerskin over the shoulder, referring to Avalokiteśvara, Tārā’s spiritual father. The ambiguity of this figure of Marīci propels us to reconsider a present identification of this statue as Marīci (‘Od ser can ma). A statue of Marīci at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City (formerly in the collection of Pierre Jourdan-Barry in Paris)⁴¹ could be a viable candidate for Zanabazar’s original Marīci.

VAJRADHARA AND VAJRASATTVA

Zanabazar’s splendid Vajradhara and Vajrasattva (figures 7.5 and 7.6) are visually distinguished, where had been ambivalence in prior iconographic representations.⁴² According to Zanabazar’s main disciple, Luvsanperenlei, the master created the Vajradhara statue “with his own hands” in 1683.⁴³ Vajradhara was placed in the Vajradhara Temple,



FIGURE 7.5 Zanabazar. *Vajradhara* circa 1680. Gandantegchenling Monastery.

where it endured as the heart of Ikh Khüree long after the master's death and until the monastery's tragic demise in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴ After that, it was moved to Gandantegchenling (dGa' ldan theg chen gling) Monastery in the 1940s, where it remained as the heart of Buddhism that was introduced by Zanabazar. Luvsanperenlei does not mention Zanabazar's initiations into Vajradhara, but according to later biographers,⁴⁵ Zanabazar received further tantric teachings on Vajradhara from several lamas, including Duvtavjajam (sGrub thabs bRgya rgyam) and Duvtavrinchunai (Grub thabs Rin chen 'Byung gnas).⁴⁶ Aside from these textual references, Zanabazar's artistic activities, such as his art and the temple construction, firmly connect him to Vajradhara, the fundamental deity of the Unsurpassed Yoga Tantras (*niruttarayoga-tantra*).⁴⁷



FIGURE 7.6 Zanabazar. *Vajrasattva* 17th–18th c. Choijin Lama Temple Museum.

Zanabazar's Vajradhara and Vajrasattva are among his largest extant works. The unique physical qualities of these two statues, the external exuberance of the sculptural form, and the extraordinary finesse of their ornaments visually distinguish Vajradhara and Vajrasattva as the highest deities in Zanabazar's pantheon. The Vajradhara Temple in the Ikh Khüree and references to Vajradhara as essential to Zanabazar's teachings and tantric practices mentioned in his hagiographies point to his personal relation to Vajradhara. Vajradhara is a primordial deity of the highest authority in the Vajrayāna pantheon. Akin to Tibetan schools, especially the Kagyu,⁴⁸ which visually illustrate Vajradhara as their progenitor and who is listed in their lineages, the basis for Zanabazar's affiliation with Vajradhara is quite intentional. If Zanabazar's royal pedigree

provided him with unquestionable legitimacy, a new affiliation with Vajradhara would have brought legitimacy to the Jebtsundamba lineage on a spiritual level.

Zanabazar's Vajradhara (figure 7.5) is an exquisite sculpture with many subtle details. He is seated in a full-lotus position on a large pedestal surrounded with lotus ornamentation (a hallmark of Zanabazar's style), and he holds a *vajra* in his right and a bell in his left hand. His hands are elevated and crossed at the chest in the *vajra-humkara-mudrā*, symbolizing wisdom and compassion. A closer examination reveals that Vajradhara's jewelry, other ornamentation, and physical stature are still more sophisticated due to the artistic execution that aims at Vajradhara's visual prominence, emphasizing his authority over Vajrasattva, who appears here as his counterpart (figure 7.6). The two are most intimately connected, as demonstrated by the contents of their crowns: The Vajradhara's five-leaved crown contains the images of the Five Buddha Families, and each of the five tiers of Vajrasattva's crown has their *dhāraṇī* syllables. The connection of the two as a firm set of primordial Buddhas carries an important doctrinal point. Just as Vajradhara is a "progenitor of the Vajrayāna system of Buddhism"⁴⁹ and therefore evades any sectarian affiliations, the exquisite Vajradhara statue testifies to Zanabazar's intent of founding a Buddhist state that is governed by a Vajradhara reincarnate ruler and that is based on an independent Vajrayāna tradition. This way of Vajrayāna introduction to Mongolia is fundamentally different from the earlier Mongolian imperial alliances with different orders of Tibetan Buddhism.

MAITREYA, THE FUTURE BUDDHA

In his other statues, such as those of Maitreya, Zanabazar repeatedly shows an individual approach. Several images of Maitreya have been preserved among Zanabazar's works. They are scattered throughout various museums in Mongolia and abroad, including the Chojin Lama Temple Museum (figure 7.7);⁵⁰ the Gandantegchenling Monastery, and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum in the United States.⁵¹ As both Marilyn Rhie and Patricia Berger have noted, all three surviving statues appear to follow a specific, twelfth-century "Nepalese-inspired model" of Maitreya from the Narthang (Snar thang) Monastery (1190) in Central Tibet, which brings together the styles of both Gupta and Pāla India.⁵²

Upon his return from Tibet in 1656 Zanabazar was invited to the assembly of the four provinces (*khoshuu*) of the Khalkha nobility at Erdene-Zuu Monastery (built in 1586). There he performed the Maitreya Procession for the first time, an event that was repeated in 1681.⁵³ With this introduction, Maitreya began to play an essential role in the ritual life of Ikh Khüree. After the statue was installed by Zanabazar, the Bodhisattva form of the deity was used in a regular procession of Maitreya in Züün Khüree,⁵⁴ which was held at least annually. Zanabazar's interest in Maitreya was further welcomed and developed into a significant ritual by the later Jebtsundamba rulers, although their interest was more directed toward their alliance with the Gelug. As we will see in Chapter 8 in this volume, later ritual practices related to Maitreya, including the rituals centered on the



FIGURE 7.7 Zanabazar *Maitreya*. 17th–18th c. Choijin Lama Temple Museum.

monumental statue of Maitreya at the Maitreya Temple in Ikh Khüree built by the Buddhist scholar Agwaankhaidav (Ngawang Khedrup, 1779–1838), used images of Maitreya seated in the posture of benevolence (*bhadrāsana*), with both legs extended in a silent promptness, as if he is ready to stand up. Here, the Buddha of the Future holds his hands in a teaching gesture (*dharmacakra*), and his attributes are placed on two lotuses above his shoulders.⁵⁵ One wonders what led Zanabazar to emphasize the early Tibetan models in his representation of Maitreya as a Bodhisattva, a model that was not adopted by later Ikh Khüree artists.

The rendering of Maitreya in a standing form seems to create a specific pantheon of Zanabazar complete with Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and goddesses, in which Vajradhara and Vajrasattva, the Five Buddha Families, and the Green and White Tārās are all visually prominent and in a position of high spiritual authority. They are not only larger in

size, but they also possess other visual qualities that bring out their magnificence. Zanabazar's three Dharma protectors (*rigs gsum mgon po*), mentioned in his hagiographies⁵⁶ but no longer existing, would have perfectly completed this core pantheon.

THE POINT OF PRODUCTION

In his pantheon, Zanabazar did not depict images of his own teachings and initiations. The hagiographies mention his early consecration (*rjes gnang*) into Mahākāla and later initiations into Yamāntaka, and his initiation into the textual corpus of Vajrāvalī, images of which were never depicted by Zanabazar. His pantheon was envisioned for laying the foundation for beginning Buddhist practices, and he mentally designed and recreated his pantheon of deities in his meditation temple, Tövkhön (T. Sgrub Khang), in what is now the Övörkhongai province. This temple was built for him by the Khalkha nobles in his early years, and he used it as his retreat temple and not as an actual site for the casting the statues, as some have claimed. This misunderstanding derives from the ambivalent meaning of the Mongolian term “*büteelyn süm*.”⁵⁷ “*Büteelyn süm*” has been literally translated as a “creation (or production) temple,” and it has been interpreted to refer to the physical production of the castings.⁵⁸ Yet, for Zanabazar (as for all serious practitioners), creation and production denote a process of *sādhana* practices, the acts of incantation and visual evocation of the deity. Zanabazar's mental design of the statues follows strictly from his meditation retreats. The term “*büteelin süm*,” which is a Mongolian translation of the Tibetan word “*dubkhan*” (*sgrub khang*), could well refer to this practice of meditation, since the Tibetan term explicitly means a “practice building,” a “cave,” or a “dwelling used for meditation.” The Tövkhön temple is located on the top of a mountain, in the midst of a dense, thick forest, and is not easily accessible to visitors. In contrast, Zanabazar's mobile monastery, Ikh Khüree, was accessible to the ordinary devotees. Because of the mobility of Ikh Khüree and its outreach to the non-initiated masses, it is possible, as current evidence suggests, that Zanabazar's pantheon comprised the peaceful forms of the deities that are more attractive to new converts than as wrathful deities.

CONCLUSION

In his project of unifying the Khalkha Mongols, Zanabazar's eight silver *stūpas*, now long vanished but mentioned in his hagiographies, testified to the permanent presence of the Buddha in Ikh Khüree, symbolizing the eight major events in the Buddha's life.⁵⁹ The eight *stūpas* have been in the avid use in Tibet as a way of transplanting Indian Buddhist sites important in the Buddha's life to Tibet. Zanabazar's hagiographers do not specify the locations of the eight *stūpas* within Ikh Khüree. A possible reason for this is that the *stūpas* were meant to designate and exalt Ikh Khüree as the Buddha's space, where the Tārā Temple and the images of the holy saviouress served to guarantee the

present security and protection of the Mongol state. On the other hand, the Maitreya Procession, together with his Maitreya images, was intended to secure the future of Zanabazar's realm, and his divine Amitāyus was to bestow a long life upon his nation. In his text *Janlavtsogzol* (*Dus bstun gsol 'debs byin rlabs mchog stsol ma bzbug'so*), written in 1696, for "the peace and the stability" of his nation, Zanabazar states:

Clear away all the darkness of the ignorance of all beings.

So that omniscient primordial wisdom may be illuminated, I make this dedication.

From the boundless masses of total corruption and great darkness,

With compassion, please protect us, we who have entered such evil times.

Having pacified all the various great flames of sufferings

That ripen when afflicted negative *karma* produces its results,

Please increase the auspicious marvels

That are mutually loving, agreeable, and free of enmity.

May the sunlight of the teachings of the Victorious One spread in the ten directions.

May all beings always enjoy peace, happiness, and fortune,

And may they purify their obscurations, complete the accumulations,

And quickly, ever so quickly, reach the state of omniscience!⁶⁰

The initial pantheon of Zanabazar's images, "expand[ing] the wisdom minds . . . and aim[ing] at bringing the wisdom light,"⁶¹ had the lofty function of planting the seeds for the future and establishing the direction of the Mongolian Buddhism that would unify the people under the new Jebtsundamba rulers and legitimize their political governance. Zanabazar's images built the foundation of what he hoped would form a spiritual stronghold for the Khalkha Mongols in the present and in the future, in which Ikh Khüree was designated to be a central abode of the deities within his pantheon. It is this hope that explains Zanabazar's otherwise unusual neglect of the deities with whom he was closely associated in his initiations and consecrations.

With Vairocana in his Vajradhātu form, Zanabazar aimed at establishing a ritual environment in his Ikh Khüree, where the Vajradhātu Vairocana would contribute to the creation of a new polity of the pious Khalkha. By means of the Vairocana statue, Zanabazar not only established the presence of the Buddha who eliminates all evil rebirths, but he also transformed the mental affliction of hatred into the "ultimate-reality, the perfection of wisdom."⁶² For these altruistic goals, he introduced the Five Buddha Families to be located in the cardinal directions, as a part of the main imagery of Ikh Khüree. Not only did the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* establish the foundation of Vajrayāna Buddhism in Mongolia, but it also meant to assist in the elimination of malevolent forces by means of tantric practices, just as much as the Buddha's victory over Māra was, as the text suggests, a tantric subjugation.⁶³

Zanabazar's images, on the other hand, were the material traces of history, or other "sites of memory," which constituted a new life for the Mongols. The hagiographically selective, but now collective, memory of Zanabazar, made possible through the materiality and visibility of his images, facilitated the Mongols' survival as a nation during the destructive years, with his princely Vairocana in the center presided over by the kingly Vajradhara. The potent capacity of these images to mark the Mongolian Buddhist identity made them ideal targets for communists who sought to annihilate the very "sites of memory" with which the Mongols "buttressed their identities."⁶⁴ Among Zanabazar's many images, it is his main pantheon with the primordial Buddhas and the Five Tathāgatas that were saved from the purges by his later devotees. Among his numerous writings was his prayer for peace and stability, the divine *Janlavtsogzol*, which was hidden away and rescued from the communist revolutionaries. The "miraculous" survival of his images and texts demonstrates that Zanabazar succeeded in his mission. His "desire that the peoples be united and the bases of the faith be spread"⁶⁵ was accomplished, and his people once again continue to maintain his images as central to their national identity, unity, and security to this day.

NOTES

1. Zaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei was a celebrated Buddhist scholar in Mongolia. We learn about him from his two hagiographies: the first written as an autobiography, and the second written by his disciple Kanjur Mergen Nomyn Khan. See Luvsanperenlei in Bira, 1995.
2. Luvsanperenlei begins the hagiography, listing Zanabazar's royal pedigree.
3. Bira, 1995, 27 n. 11.
4. Bira, 1995.
5. D. Tsedev translated in Bira, 1995.
6. For a detailed story of Zanabazar's life, see Tsültem, 1982, and Berger, 1995, 261–263.
7. This information exists only in Mongolian sources and is absent in Tāranātha's own autobiography. See Michael Sheehy, "Tāranātha's Travels in Mongolia," at <http://www.jonangpa.com/node/1445>. The question concerning Luvsanperenlei's objectives for such an intentional creation of apocryphal history is still open. If Zanabazar was recognized as Tāranātha's reincarnation in Mongolia, then the question of when and how it happened requires more research for better understandings of the period of turmoil. See also Junko, 1994/52, 50–53.
8. Luvsanperenlei in Bira, 1995.
9. See Sh. Soninbayar translated in Bira, 1995.
10. Demberel, 1993.
11. For detail see Junko, 1994.
12. Luvsanperenlei, (manuscript), pp. 8–10; Pozdneev, 1896–1898, 327.
13. Junko argues that Tüsheets Khan and Zanabazar, while seeking refuge from Galdan's attack at the Qing court, were forced to pledge their allegiance to the Kangxi emperor in 1691 at Dolonnur (Junko, 1994, 56).
14. Agwaanluvsandondov in Demberel, 1993, 56.

15. Today the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar houses four of the original five Tathāgatas, while the Chojjin Lama Temple hosts the fifth Tathāgata, Ratnasambhava. In the past century, the Five Tathāgatas were apparently located as a group at the Chojjin Lama Temple, most likely until the late 1960s, when for unknown reasons Ratnasambhava was separated from the group of five. The other four were transferred to the newly established Fine Arts Museum. See figure 7.1 in Berger, 1995, 273.

16. I borrow these epithets from Snellgrove, 2002.

17. Berger, 2003; Bunce, 1994, 10. See more on Vairocana depictions in Chandra, 1999.

18. Berger, 1995, 129.

19. Heller, 1998, 176; Kapstein, 2000, 59–65.

20. Kapstein, 2000, 62.

21. Berger, 2003, 56.

22. Quoted from the *Śūraṃgama Samādhi Sūtra* in Snellgrove, 2002, 196.

23. Rhie and Thurman, 2000, 341.

24. There is some evidence of the spread of Buddhism to Mongolia from the third century B.C.E. onward. Vajrayāna Buddhism was practiced at the Mongol court during the Yuan period. For visual evidence, see Dashnyam, 2003; and for a discussion of the early Buddhism in Mongolia, see Tserensodnom, 1997.

25. Snellgrove, 2002, 120–121 and 197–198. Weinberger offers another translation of the *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha* as “Compendium of Principles.” See Weinberger, 2003.

26. Pozdneevev, 1898, 328.

27. Davgajantsan in Bira, 1995, 41.

28. Ibid.

29. Wilson, 1986, 289–299. Tārā appears in the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and *Mahāvairocana Tantra* as accompanying Avalokiteśvara and as his emanation as well. However, in Tārā’s main text *The Origin of All Rites*, she assumes the prominent position of the Mother of All Tathāgatas. The Tibetan canon also contains texts related to Tārā as the Saviouress from Eight Fears (e.g., the *Hundred and Eight Names of the Venerable Ārya-Tārā*, and *The Praise in Twenty-One Homages*).

30. Davgajantsan in Bira, 1995, 40; Pozdneevev, 1898, 337.

31. See Willson, 1996, 107–166.

32. See Beyer, 1986, 118–119.

33. L. Khürelbaatar 2001, 65; Pozdneevev, 1898, 327.

34. Zanabazar created two complete copies of Kangyur from the original bronze copy that he ordered from Central Tibet in 1683. He ordered from Desi Sanggye Gyatso (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rGya mtsho, 1653–1705) the complete 225 volumes of the Tengyur, which he himself copied, together with his 470 disciples.

35. Tāranātha’s works on Tārā include *The Golden Rosary Illuminating the Origins of the Tantra of Tārā* and *The Origin of Tārā Tantra*. For more on Tārā Tantra, see Beyer, 1996, and Wilson, 1986.

36. Willson’s translation of *The Praise in Twenty-One Homages*, 1996. However, Beyer gives different set of colors for the Twenty-One Tārās. According to Beyer, there are four red, six white, three yellow, four orange, two red-black, and two black Tārās.

37. Bunce, 1994, vol. 1, 156.

38. I doubt the validity of this identification and suggest reexamination. The earliest publication of this statue is in Tsültem, 1982, where the statue is listed by its Tibetan name ‘Od ser can ma and is noted as male. Berger also notes the unique male gender of this deity. See Berger, 1995, 292.

39. Tsültem, 1982, shows an erroneous museum display of the Green Tārā triad, which positions Ekajaṭī on the left and Marīci on the right (figure 7). As Ekajaṭī’s extended leg shows, the statue must be correctly placed to the right of Green Tārā, and Marīci’s extended arm points to the left position in the set.

40. Bunce, 1998, vol. 1, 156.

41. This splendid Marīci statue was published and annotated by Jane Casey Singer in 2003. For a considerable reconsideration of Marīci identification, one needs to examine the statue at the Rubin Museum of Art. My current examination is based on the publications and the www.himalayanart.org website, which shows that the Marīci housed at the Rubin Museum of Art could likely be a strong candidate for an authentic Marīci of Zanabazar.

42. Vajrasattva appears as a Bodhisattva in early Tibetan art. See, for instance, Vajrasattva in Tabo Cella in Luczanits, 2004, 37. See also Rhie and Thurman, 2000, 331–333. It seems it is later in Tibetan history that Vajrasattva occupies the position of a primordial deity as a counterpart of Vajradhara.

43. Luvsanperenlei cited in Bira, 1995, 12.

44. L. Khürelbaatar, 2001, 175–176.

45. According to Agwaanluvsandondov and Davgajantsan. His initiation into Vajradhara is not mentioned by Luvsanperenlei.

46. Luvsanperenlei, cited in *Bira*, 1995, 12.

47. The fourfold classification of *tantras* includes the *kriyā*, *caryā*, *yoga*, and *niruttarayoga tantras*. I use the latter term “*niruttarayoga*” (T. *rnal ‘byor gong na med pa’i rgyud*) to replace an erroneous but widely used term “*annuttarayoga*” following the recent scholarship by Jacob Dalton. See Dalton, 2005, vol. 28/1, 152.

48. See especially Taglung (sTag lung) and Drigung (‘Bri gung) paintings, where, as a rule, the top register in each *thangka* visually lists the Kagyu doctrinal lineage starting with Vajradhara, including the Tantric adepts (*mahāsiddhas*) Tilopa and Naropa, and the Tibetan teachers Marpa and Milarepa. See images and discussions in Singer and Kossak, 1998.

49. Jeff Watt refers to the *Hevajra Tantra* in a personal communication, May 2008.

50. First published by Tsültem in 1982. For discussion and description, see Berger, 1995, 280–281.

51. Rhie and Thurman, 2000, 141. Also see Berger, 1995, 79.

52. Rhie and Thurman, 2000, 45; Berger, 1995, 281, figure 7.1.

53. Luvsanperenlei, cited in Bira, 1995, 11.

54. Ikh Khüree consisted of two major parts, the Gandantegchenling Monastery and Züün Khüree.

55. This large statue of Maitreya was completely destroyed along with the temple in the 1930s.

56. Agwaanluvsandondov, cited in Demberel, 1993; Luvsanperenlei, cited in Bira, 1995, 12. This translation is found in the modern Mongolian scholarship about Zanabazar, as for example in Ichinnorov’s *Zanabazar*.

57. See Ichinnorov, 2001.

58. These Eight Great Events of the Buddha’s life are the Buddha’s Birth at Lumbinī; his Enlightenment at Bodhgayā; the First Sermon at Sārnāth; his Descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods at Sāmkāśya; his Multiplication Miracle at Śrāvastī; his Taming of the Elephant Nalagiri at Rājagṛha; the Gift of Honey at Vaiśālī, and his Mahāparinirvāṇa at Kuśinagara.

59. Zanabazar. (1696) reprint, 1995. Ulaanbaatar: Olon Ulsyn Mongol Sudlalyn Kholboo. Translation is mine.

60. 'gro kun ma rig mun pa kun bsangs ste kun mkhyen ye shes snang ba phyir bsngo
 cher snyigs mun chen lhag par gtibs pa yi
 bdag cag dus ngan 'gro la thugs rjes skyobs
 las ngan nyon mongs 'bras bu dus smin pa'i
 sna tshogs sdug bsngal me chen kun zhi nas
 phan tshun khon bral byams brtses yid mthun pa'i
 bde legs phun tshogs rgyas par mdzad du gsol

...

rgyal bstan nyi 'od phyogs bcur rgyas pa dang
 'gro kun bde skyid dpal la rtag spyod cing
 sgrib byang tshogs rdzogs kun mkhyen go 'phang la
 myur zhing myur ba nyid du reg gyur cig

61. Zanabazar. *Janlavtsogzol*, 1696.

62. Rhie and Thurman, 2000, 347.

63. Weinberger, 2003, 189–191.

64. Nora, 1989, 21.

65. Inscription on the *thangka* of Amitāyus that was presented to Kangxi emperor in 1691. Pozdneevev, 1898, 336.

8

The Power and Authority of Maitreya in Mongolia Examined

Through Mongolian Art

Uranchimeg Tsultemin



INTRODUCTION

The eminent Mongolian sculptor, painter, architect, and Buddhist scholar the First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, the reincarnate ruler Zanabazar (1635–1723), created several sculptures of Maitreya in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although he fashioned, “with his own hands,”¹ the basic sets of the Vajrayāna pantheon with Vajradhara and Vajrasattva, the Five Tathāgatas of the Vajradhātu-*maṇḍala*, the Eight Great Stūpas, the Twenty-One Tārās, and Amitāyus, only Maitreya remained a subject of his repeated interest. Thus, currently there are three Maitreya statues housed at various locations and known as Zanabazar’s work. They are held in the collections of three museums: the Chojin Lama Temple Museum (figure 7.7) and the Gandantegchenling Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum in Washington, DC.² Maitreya (M. Maidar or Asralt) is one of the most widely known deities in Asia, whose earliest mentions are in Pāli and Sanskrit sources such as the non-canonical Pāli *Anāgatavaṃsa* and the Sanskrit *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*.³ In canonical literature, according to an early prophecy regarding Maitreya given in the *Cakkavatti-sīhanāda Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, 26, during his sermon to the monks, the Buddha spoke of the coming of Maitreya as a future Buddha at a time when the people’s lifespan will be eighty thousand years.⁴

ZANABAZAR'S STATUES OF MAITREYA

Maitreya, however, is mainly mentioned as a Future Buddha⁵ in texts such as the Mahāvastu, where the concept of innumerable Buddhas appears together with the past Buddha Kāśyapa and the Śākyamuni-appointed Future Buddha Maitreya. In the *Sukhāvativyūha*, Maitreya descends with other Bodhisattvas to hear Śākyamuni's discourse,⁶ and according to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, the Bodhisattva Maitreya currently resides in the Tuṣita Heaven.⁷ It is most likely that Zanabazar was familiar with these accounts of Maitreya.

Zanabazar's statues of Maitreya depict him in his Bodhisattva form, as a standing youthful figure accompanied by his two main emblems: the vase of immortality (*kundikā*) held by his right hand and a *stūpa* in front of his remarkably high hair knot. In Zanabazar's statue, this *stūpa* is extremely prominent, especially in the statues housed in the Gandantegchenling Monastery in Ulaanbaatar and in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, in which Maitreya's hair is still retained in the blue color. The youthful Maitreya is holding the vase of immortality in his left, opened hand, while the right hand is elevated and in the *vitarka-mudrā* (the gesture of teaching). A Brāhmaṇic thread rolls down from his shoulder, following the curved shape of the torso and the hips. It is elegantly crossed by one of the sashes, creating a small stylish loop on the right hip. This sash, which is tied diagonally across the hips with a long ribbon on the left, falls down in an elegant shape of rhythmic lines, and it merges with the undulating pleats of the garment. The lower garment (*dhōti*), sleek and remarkably transparent, is fastened by a long sash at the waist, which is tied in an elegant knot. This stylish sartorial arrangement also appears in other works of Zanabazar. As Marilyn Rhie, Gilles Béguin, and Patricia Berger have noted, all of the three surviving statues appear to follow a specific, eleventh-century "Nepalese-inspired model" of Maitreya from the Narthang (sNar thang) Monastery (1093) in Central Tibet, which brings together the styles of the Gupta and Pāla periods in India.⁸

The slim, elegant figure of Maitreya depicted is balanced to his left (viewer's right) in an exuberant sway, as he steps slightly forward with his right leg, while in Zanabazar's sculpture, Maitreya is balanced to his right with his left foot pacing forward. In the Arthur M. Sackler Museum piece, Maitreya's feet are more aligned. Akin to the Narthang image, Zanabazar's Maitreya could be a part of the Eight Bodhisattvas or an accompanying figure to the Buddha Śākyamuni in a sculptural group. For example, in the eleventh-century temples of Yemar and Kyangbu (rKyang bu) in Tsang, the representations of the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the Eight Bodhisattvas surround a statue of the Buddha Amoghadarśin.⁹ However, in contrast to the Bodhisattva sets that are often found in Inner Mongolian temples and in early Tibetan temples historically, we do not have any further evidence to support these hypotheses in Khalkha Mongolia. In Zanabazar's case, his statues were likely used (or even made for) the notable Maitreya Procession that perhaps began at the first Vajrayāna Buddhist monastery of the Khalkha, in the Sakya-consecrated Erdene Zuu monastery in 1657.¹⁰ One of the early temples built

in this monastery was the Maitreya Temple. Since the temple is long extinct, no images of its architecture and iconographic program have survived. The Maitreya Procession, first performed in Erdene Zuu monastery, was widely spread throughout Khalkha Mongolia. Centuries later, Maitreya continued to be of primary importance, as testified by the construction of the Gandan (dGal dan or Tuṣita) Tegchinling Monastery and the Maitreya Temple with a monumental Maitreya statue in Ikh Khüree, the main seat of Zanabazar and all subsequent Khutugtus.

The Maitreya *sādhanās* contained in the *Niṣpannayogāvali* and in the *Sādhanamālā*, which give a detailed description of Maitreya, do not include the two forms that appear to be most popular outside of India, particularly in the Himalayan regions, namely a youthful, standing Bodhisattva and a Buddha seated in the *bhadrāsana* posture. Both forms have the two arms and a single head.¹¹ Other forms of Maitreya described in the Maitreya *sādhanās* that depict him as a “three-faced, three-eyed, and four armed”¹² figure are infrequent. Some surviving examples of this form can be seen in murals at Gyantse¹³ in Central Tibet and at early sites of Ladakh, specifically at the thirteenth-century Mangyu, Sumda Chung, and Alchi.¹⁴ As the latter sites became known through publications that introduced these heretofore unknown images, they have triggered a question regarding various forms of Maitreya at different sites and the prevalence of the two primary forms in later Vajrayāna Buddhist art. Jan Nattier, in her review of the meanings of the Maitreya myth in Buddhist texts, refers to Maitreya with the Weberian term “religious virtuosi.”¹⁵ She clarifies the concept of Maitreya in relation to his devotees and their meeting with him as the Future Buddha in time and space. However, the nature of Maitreya’s virtuosity, deliberately displayed in art with his two major forms, remains obscure: How should we understand the meaning and role of Maitreya in society through the flexibility of his forms in the Mongolian case as a standing Bodhisattva or as a full-fledged Buddha?

The question of Maitreya’s various forms of representation has puzzled various scholars over the years. On the basis of the primary Indian sources, including the *Niṣpannayogāvali*, Musashi Tachikawa hypothesizes that the image of a standing Maitreya in his Bodhisattva form originated from the West Asian Mitra and eventually spread to Afghanistan, Tibet, China, and Mongolia, whereas the seated Maitreya originated in India in a later period.¹⁶ While Inchang Kim suggests that Maitreya as a Bodhisattva refers to his presence in Tuṣita, and Maitreya as a Buddha refers to his arrival,¹⁷ the questions remain: What influence do these two functions have on the social, political, and religious life of a society? A possible answer can be found in the historical and sociopolitical contexts of Mongolian Buddhism and its art, as we will see elaborated in this chapter. In the case of Mongolian art, questions that may also arise are the following: (1) How do the two different forms of Maitreya determine his meaning and the usage of his images? and (2) How does the concept of Maitreya’s future-ness manifest through these two forms? Despite the fact that Maitreya is one of the most popular deities in all of Asia, an analysis of the Maitreya cult in Mongolia has never been conducted.

This chapter aims to illuminate the later (after 1700) Mongolian interest in Maitreya beyond sectarian affiliations and within the propagation of Buddhism among the Khalkha Mongols. The chapter will argue that Maitreya, appearing in different forms, had specific functions aimed at different communities. In the form of a Bodhisattva, Maitreya was important in consolidating the integrity of various layers of community, and as such, he was utilized in Zanabazar's mission to unify the Khalkha Mongols for the sake of establishing a Buddhist state in Mongolia. Moreover, Maitreya as an enlightened universal emperor (*cakravartin*) appears to indicate the dominating Gelugpa (dGe lugs pa) influence and Jebtsundambas' reinforcement of the Gelugpa sect in Mongolia. Hence, the two aforementioned artistic forms of Maitreya signified functions that are not directly tied to doctrinal issues. Specifically, the Mongolian examples of the later period demonstrate how and why the different forms of deities—in this instance, the forms of Maitreya—are preserved without the due existence of doctrinal texts. In the Mongolian case, the matters of the propagation of Buddhism and of building a unified state were interwoven, and the usage of the images of Maitreya became important for successful service in both enterprises. In fact, the mass conversion of the Mongolian peoples to Buddhism was never achieved in Mongolian territories prior to the appearance of the leading religious figures of the Jebtsundambas. Therefore, Maitreya played a decisive role in the propagation of Buddhism and the unification of the laity around a single protagonist, who was initially Zanabazar, and later, for legitimating the authority of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism and the rule of the Jebtsundambas.

MAITREYA IN THE MURAL PAINTINGS IN ALTAN KHAN'S
MAITREYA MONASTERY

Zanabazar's interest in Maitreya was not unique among Mongol rulers. One of his great relatives, Altan Khan (1507–1582),¹⁸ built a Buddhist monastery that was active in the promulgation of the Maitreya cult among the Tümed Mongols after his death. Altan Khan's palace Yekhe Baishing, (re)built by the Chinese in 1565–1567,¹⁹ was transformed into a Buddhist monastery in 1572,²⁰ and it became home to a Maitreya statue and the newly invited Maidar Khutugtu Gendün Pelzang Gyatso (dGe 'dun dPal bzang rGya mtsho, 1592–1635) from Tibet in 1606.²¹ While the Maitreya statue inlaid with precious stones and commissioned by the Buddhist Queen Machang Khatan (1546–1626)²² perished during the Cultural Revolution, the Maidar Zuu (Maitreya Monastery) still stands near Khökhöt, exhibiting splendid murals with narrative scenes from the life of Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), the founder of the Gelug order, and the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1543–1588), whom Altan Khan met in 1578.²³ At their meeting in 1578, the two men exchanged the historical titles of the “wonderful Vajradhara, good, brilliant, commendable ocean” (*yaikhamsiy čir-a dar-a say-in čoy-tu buyantu dalai*), shortened as Dalai Lama, and the “Dharmarāja, great Brahmā of the gods”

(*chos kyi rgyal po lha'i tshangs pa chen mo*).²⁴ The Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso is believed to have resided in Maitreya Monastery.²⁵ The subsequent Fourth Dalai Lama Yonten Gyatso (Yon tan rGya mtsho, 1589–1617), a great-grandson of Altan Khan, sent the newly appointed Maidar Khutugtu²⁶ to handle Buddhist affairs among the Tümed Mongols.²⁷ In the mural paintings of the monastery, the meeting and subsequent alliance of the Tibetan Gelug representatives with the Mongols is lavishly demonstrated through a set of horizontally composed, rich narrative illustrations of the Buddha Śākyamuni, Tsongkhapa, and the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso. These murals depict Maitreya with his wheel, the symbol of a Buddhist universal emperor (*cakravartin*).²⁸

The Buddha here indicates the Indian and hence the genuine origin and legitimacy of the Gelugpa order, while the Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso, the accompanying Altan Khan, and his entourage signify the far-sighted, crucial alliance of the tripartite polities of Inner Asia with China as their third counterpart. The Mongol-empowered Gelugpas and their new lineage of Dalai Lamas began their “blessed” interventions in the affairs of the various Mongol confederations and their interactions with the imperial courts of China.²⁹ As the murals suggest, the protagonists across the borders unite here under the watchful eye of the universal emperor Maitreya, whose millenarian nature endorses the tripartite coalition between the parties, which is to be long-lived. With the inclusion of Maitreya, the image is suggestive of the Gelugpa presence as universally alive through times and across geopolitical borders, particularly acute due to Maidar Khutugtu’s initial Nyingma (rNying ma) affiliation.³⁰

This mission of Maitreya as a Buddhist universal emperor is not unusual, and it seems to have remained through centuries as one of his important roles in Mongolia. This is evidenced by a large *thangka* made some two centuries later, in the nineteenth century, in Ikh Khüree (figure 8.1). Maitreya here appears as a Buddha seated in the *bhadrāsana* posture, or “in European fashion,” with both feet touching the ground as if ready to stand up, and his hands are making the teaching *dharmacakra* hand gesture. His main attributes, the vase of immortality and the wheel, are prominently placed above his shoulders on the top of lotus leaves, while his other indispensable attribute of the *stūpa* is in front of his high hair knot. This *stūpa* is generally believed to refer to the *stūpa* on Mount Kukkuṭapāda, located near Bodh Gaya, where Mahākāśyapa, one of the principal disciples of Buddha Śākyamuni, resides, waiting for Maitreya’s arrival. Upon his descent, Maitreya will go directly to this holy site, where the mountain will magically open, facilitating the meeting of the two, and enabling Mahākāśyapa to deliver Śākyamuni’s robes to Maitreya.³¹ According to Gouriswar Bhattacharya, who denies the relation of this legend to Maitreya, Maitreya’s *stūpa* represents the Dharmakāya or *parinirvāṇa* of the previous Buddhas.³² Lewis Lancaster, on the other hand, relates Maitreya’s ubiquitous *stūpa* emblem to textual references in which Maitreya holds in his hand a lotus pedestal with a *stūpa* dedicated to the Buddha Vairocana.³³

The intimate relationship between Śākyamuni and Maitreya, which is often described as that of a “father and son” or as that of a “teacher and disciple,” with Maitreya



FIGURE 8.1 *Maitreya*. 19th c. Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo: Author.

enthroned as Śākyamuni's "heir,"³⁴ is often depicted in arts. Similar to Alchi Monastery's Maitreya, whose lower garment contains images and narratives about the Buddha Śākyamuni, here in this *thangka*, Śākyamuni appears right below Maitreya, testifying to Maitreya's legitimacy and to their direct connection. In the *Mahāvastu*, the Buddha designates Maitreya as the future Buddha,³⁵ and in the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, Maitreya is said to look after and safeguard the Buddha Śākyamuni's disciples as his own.³⁶ In Ikh Khüree's *thangka*, Śākyamuni is surrounded by his disciples, who, due to the close connection between the two Buddhas, automatically become disciples of Maitreya, who takes care of them by bestowing upon them the teachings contained in The Five Treatises of Maitreya prior to the appointed time of his descent from the Tuṣita Heaven.³⁷

Furthermore, the *thangka* shows Maitreya accompanied by two Bodhisattva Mañjuśrīs on the two sides of Maitreya and topped by Tsongkhapa. The images of Mañjuśrī and Maitreya appear in various parts of the painting surrounded by groups of

monks and deities. Maitreya and Mañjuśrī are presented in the early Mahāyāna literature in relation to the Buddha Śākyamuni;³⁸ here, they are often topped by Tsongkhapa. This suggests that the image producers, both the patrons and the artists, not only had a direct affiliation with the Gelug order, but also had the Buddha Maitreya preside as a central authority of the Gelug tradition. Among many texts about Maitreya, this *thangka* painting most likely is a reference to the early Mahāyāna text, the *Vajraccedikā Sūtra*, which had a great popularity in Khalkha during the later dissemination of Buddhism in Mongolia, because it is in the *Vajraccedikā Sūtra*, favored by Mongolian Gelugpas, that Maitreya appears with Amitābha and Mañjuśrī.³⁹

In most cases that I have examined, this particular depiction of the Buddha Maitreya as accompanied by Amitābha and Mañjuśrī became most prevalent in Mongolia after 1800, whereas his depiction with other associations seems to be very rare, if not nonexistent. Consider, for example, another image of Maitreya, which is currently held in Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar. In this image, Maitreya takes a position similar to that of the Buddhist universal emperor situated in the center of the *maṇḍala*: He holds the emblems of the wheel and the vase of immortality above his shoulders, his hands are in the *dharmacakra* hand gesture, and he has the Buddha Śākyamuni and Tsongkhapa as his immediate companions. While the style of the two aforementioned *thangkas* reveal the hand of two different artists, the iconography that derives from Altan Khan's sixteenth-century mural still provides the main framework. The vision of the future that it suggests is strictly in the form of a teaching Maitreya, whose *maṇḍala*-palace is inclusive of the Buddha Śākyamuni and Tsongkhapa. The devotee, who is either a monastic Gelugpa adherent or a layperson, does not seem to have any other concept of the future age: The three will continue to be inherently connected in the Maitreya-represented next eon, since he is a legitimate and legitimating heir to the both.

Maitreya dominates the entire composition of the *thangka* (figure 8.1), with visually imposing, colossal measurements as described in the texts. In the *Anāgatavaṃsa*⁴⁰ and in the *Daśabodhisattuppatti-kathā*, Maitreya's lifespan is eighty-two thousand years, his height is 88 cubits (elbow lengths),⁴¹ his length is 22 cubits, and his every eye and ear measures 7 cubits. In other words, he is colossal.⁴² These dimensions appear to have served as the measurements for the monumental statues of Maitreya in Tibet and in Mongolia as the Gelug reinforcement of power, which is evidenced by Lhasa's fifteenth-century Barkor Jampa Lhakhang,⁴³ Tashilhunpo's monumental Maitreya, and Ikh Khüree's nineteenth-century Maitreya statue.

A GRAND MAITREYA STATUE OF IKH KHÜREE

In Ikh Khüree's later ritual practice of Maitreya, the eminent Buddhist scholar and abbot (M. *khambo*, T. *mkhas po*) of Ikh Khüree, Agwaankhaidav (T. Ngag dbang

mKhas grub, 1779–1838), was a key protagonist in the propagation of the Maitreya cult.⁴⁴ He is said to have built a Maitreya statue as the main image in Ikh Khüree's Medical College (M. *datsan*, T. *grwa tshang*) and a human-sized, gilt copper Tongwa Donden (Mthong ba Don ldan) Maitreya statue.⁴⁵ Unable to forget the vision of a large Maitreya who appeared in his dream when he was aged seventeen, Agwaankhaidav remained determined to build a monumental statue of Maitreya in Ikh Khüree. This giant Maitreya, known to measure 80 *tokhoi* (elbow lengths), seems to have followed the above-mentioned textual dimensions, and Agwaankhaidav's choice of the *bhadrāsana* posture follows the later iconographic preference for Maitreya in Mongolia, which we have seen already on several occasions in a mural and in two *thangka* paintings. The nineteenth-century *thangka* (figure 8.1) appears to be close in style and execution to Agwaankhaidav's monumental Maitreya, which he had installed in his Maitreya Temple in Ikh Khüree.

As Agwaankhaidav claims, he built his large-scale Maitreya statue in Ikh Khüree in the Year of the Fire Mouse, when he was thirty-eight years old⁴⁶ (1816). The statue was consecrated in 1833 by the Fifth Bogd Jebtsundamba (Rje btsun dam pa bLo bzang Tshul khriṃs 'Jigs med bṣTan pa'i rGyal mtshan, 1815–1842) and was housed in the Maitreya Temple that he built for that purpose in Ikh Khüree (figure 8.2). Agwaankhaidav, together with his colleague Lama Ngag dbang Tshe ring and the astrologer monk bLo bzang rGyal mtshan, led the foundation rites in the Year of the Dragon (1820).⁴⁷ The construction of the temple took two years, with a salary of 7,000 silver *liang* paid to the carpenters and artists.⁴⁸

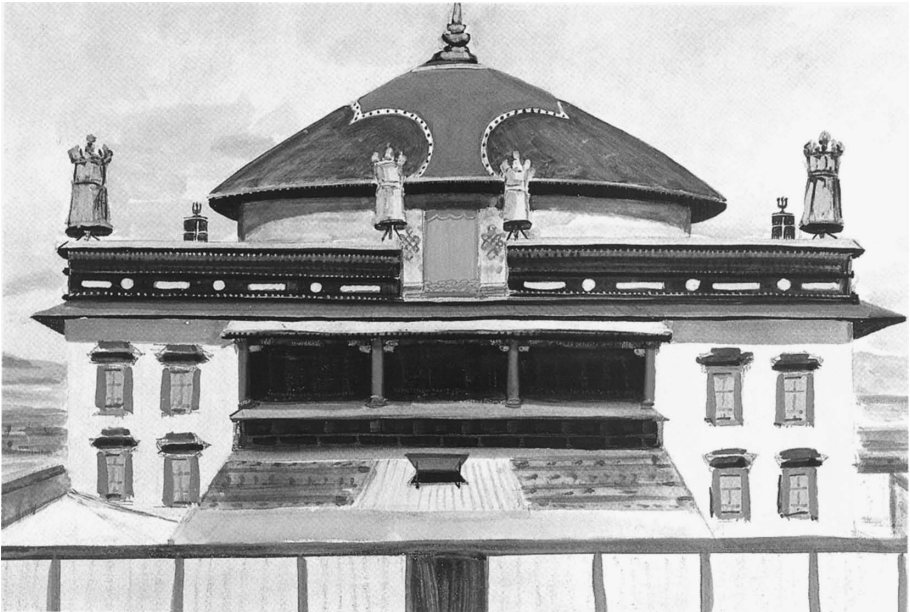


FIGURE 8.2 Agwaankhaidav. Maitreya Temple. 19th c. Courtesy of B. Daajav.

The three-story building that housed the Maitreya statue (now extinct) was a fine blend of architectural styles of Tibet, Mongolia, and, according to Agwaankhaidav, India.⁴⁹ According to the popular belief of that time recorded by a Russian traveler to Ikh Khüree, Alexei Pozdneev, Maitreya himself chose to reside in a Tibetan-style building, since all the earlier Maitreya temple buildings were astonishingly short-lived until a new building was built by combining Mongolian and Tibetan architectural styles.⁵⁰ As seen from the surviving photographs of its facade, the Tibetan flat-roofed, white-walled building was topped with a round nomadic *ger* (traditional Mongolian home). The architecture of the interior remains unknown, since the temple fell victim to the communist purges in the 1930s. Based on the accounts of old residents of Ikh Khüree, it is possible that its interior, similar to that of Lhasa's Jokhang temple (built in the eighth century), resembled Indian classical structure.⁵¹

Although it was the tallest building in Ikh Khüree prior to the construction of the Avalokiteśvara or Janraisig (sPyan ras gzigs) Temple (built in 1911) in Gandantegchenling Monastery,⁵² as Pozdneev recollects, the Maitreya Temple seemed quite small inside due to the overwhelming size of the main statue. Twenty special lamas who did not belong to any divisions *khang tshan* (*aimags*) of Ikh Khüree were appointed by the Bogd Jebtsundambas to maintain the ritual services at the Maitreya Temple.

Maitreya seemed to constitute a project of special significance for the Fourth and Fifth Bogd Jebtsundambas, as evidenced by several major Maitreya establishments, all constructed with the involvement of these two. In 1838, the Fifth Jebtsundamba established a new monastery in Ikh Khüree by moving its philosophical colleges (T. *mtshan nyid grwa tshang*) to the western hills of Ikh Khüree to escape “the contaminated wind of merchants,” who were aggressively moving into Ikh Khüree's territories.⁵³ The new monastery with “several thousand lamas”⁵⁴ was named Gandantegchenling (dGa' ldan Theg chen gling) Monastery, or the Abode of Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven, named after Tibet's foremost Gelug institution in Lhasa.⁵⁵ Although Tuṣita Heaven is a temporary location for a Buddha-to-be before the final descent,⁵⁶ for the Mongolian interest, the monastery's name Gandan referred directly to Tsongkhapa and the Gandan Monastery established by him in Tibet, as attested by Agwaankhaidav's own words, thereby suggesting the Gelug preeminence in Ikh Khüree by the early nineteenth century.⁵⁷ In Ikh Khüree, in 1838, the Fifth Bogd Jebtsundamba wanted his stable presence in the Gandantegchenling Monastery to be secured. Therefore his Winter Palace was built within the monastery. Several monastic colleges of Züün Khüree (East Khüree)—the Dashchoimbol (bKar shis chos 'phel), Gungaachoin (Kun dga' chos gling), and Badamyoga (Padma yo ga)—moved to the monastery and became the core institutions for the higher study of Buddhist doctrine and tantric learning from that time onward.

In the year of the Female Wooden Bird (1813), discussion of a Maitreya statue began in Ikh Khüree, and the Fifth Bogd Jebtsundamba offered his advice and instructions for the removal of obstacles.⁵⁸ The statue was made in pieces at Dolonnor⁵⁹ by twelve Chinese artists, with the manager Gao and the chief artist Wu Gai-tai,⁶⁰ whom Agwaankhaidav

describes as “extraordinary” and as “sharp (*rmo ba*) and diligent (*brtson ‘grus che ba*).”⁶¹ The face of Maitreya, made by “top artists” in Ikh Khüree, emulating the Maitreya image at Yerpa Lhari in Tibet,⁶² which was one of the four most powerful Maitreya statues located in Jampa Lhakhang (Byams pa lha khang) in the Yerpa cave site near Lhasa, was miraculously expanded to seven arms’ length to fit the statue.⁶³ Pictures of the Maitreya statue at Yerpa have not survived, as they perished during the Cultural Revolution,⁶⁴ but from Agwaankhaidav’s description of his Maitreya statue, we can get some insight into the statue at Yerpa. Agwaankhaidav describes his statue of Maitreya as seated on a lion-throne, measuring 55 elbows from the feet to the top of the hair knot⁶⁵ (over 54 feet in height).⁶⁶

Dominating the interior of the Maitreya Temple, the Maitreya statue represented a seated Buddha similar to the contemporaneous *thangka* paintings of Maitreya. Since the statue has not been preserved, Agwaankhaidav’s own description gives us a good picture of it:

In the presence of Ajita Maitreya

[Who] in the sky assumes a seated posture on the lotus and moon disc on a lion throne,

Like a golden mountain [that shines] with the blazing splendor [of] the major and minor marks of the Buddha,

With the full appearance of a universal emperor,

[Holding] the Buddha at the heart,

[Having] the head adorned with the Stūpa of Enlightenment

On the top of *nāgapuṣpa* tree [making] *dharmacakra* guest gesture

[With] emblems of the Dharma Wheel [and] water pitcher

The face greatly blossoms [with] a smile,

Surrounded by light, fearless love [is] in his heart.

The root teacher, Lama Tsongkhapa,

Smiling and rejoicing, is so alive and radiant.

With the light of the *hum*, the sign of the Three Syllables,

Welcome the teacher Maitreya from the joyful Tuṣita Land,

Who embodies the essence of the Three Jewels,

And my highest Protector, the Lord . . . !⁶⁷

Agwaankhaidav’s above-cited verses about the statue suggest that it is in the form of a Buddha that Maitreya bonds with Tsongkhapa, enabling “salvation” and protection, and representing the idea of a Buddhist universal emperor. Here, Agwaankhaidav added a new meaning to Maitreya by surrounding him with sculptures of the 10,000 statues of the Buddha Amitāyus, which are surrounding Maitreya along the western and eastern walls of the temple, thereby linking Maitreya—and the engaged community of worshippers—to longevity.⁶⁸ For the purpose of long life, Agwaankhaidav suggests a meditation related to Maitreya in the following way:

Recite the *dhāraṇī* of Maitreya's promise as many times as you can. At that moment, at the [visualized] heart of Maitreya, all around the syllable mi, the *mantra* thread will generate flowing nectar with rays of light to be transmitted [for] the attainment of blessings, without exception, for all sentient beings, self and others. Observe and recite . . . If [you want to] develop the practice at the intermediate space, invoke the Root Lama at the top of your crown, and practice in accordance with instructions. Then, through the glorious Root Lama and so forth, dissolve [him] into the inseparable nature of [your] own mind at your heart center . . . Maitreya Protector will compassionately take care of all sentient beings due to this cause [of practice].⁶⁹

In the writings of Agwaankhaidav, who was an ardent Gelugpa and who studied at Gomang (Sgo mang) monastic college at Drepung ('Bras spungs) monastery for thirteen years,⁷⁰ the term "root lama" refers to both Maitreya and Tsongkhapa, indicating that for him, these two are inseparable in securing a long life. In his devotion to the Gelug order, Agwaankhaidav speaks of the old pilgrimage site of Jowo Atīśa and Kadampa gompa (bKa' gdams pa dgon pa) at Rag Yerpa (bRag yer pa) Lhari near Lhasa and establishes his direct link with the Tibetan Gelug pedigree.⁷¹

THE MAITREYA PROCESSION AND LONGEVITY RITE IN THE PAINTINGS OF THE EIGHTH JEBTSUNDAMBA BOGD GEGEEN

Agwaankhaidav's association of Maitreya with longevity was not an isolated case. The Buddha Maitreya as a universal Gelugpa ruler who secures longevity resurfaces in the early-twentieth-century *thangka* set of the empowerments (*abhiśeka*) of the Eighth Bogd Gegeen Jebtsundamba (1870–1924). The set includes the "Meditations of Bogd Gegeen" and "Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala*," both made not long before the ruler's death around 1924. The two images illustrate the Bogd Gegeen's immaculate, divine authority as he receives initiations directly from numerous deities.⁷² Vajrabhairava, presented here as the Gelugpas' main tutelary deity (*yi dam*), dominates the center of the two paintings, with his thirteen companions appearing in the center in the former painting and situated in the Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala* within the latter painting. Maitreya is depicted as seated in the *bhadrāsana*, accompanied by Tsongkhapa and Amitābha, while Vajrabhairava with his thirteen companions appears in the center. Here the register closely mimics the mural in Maidar Zuu with Sonam Gyatso and the Buddha Śākyamuni substituted for Amitābha, Tsongkhapa, and Maitreya, who occupy the top register, authorizing the legitimate power of the Eighth Bogd Gegeen and the rulership of all the Jebtsundambas in Mongolia.

In this painting, the locale of the initiating event is quite specific, as Maitreya is visually connected to the Maitreya Procession that is taking place in Ikh Khüree, or

Jebsundamba's residence, which was the political and religious center of Mongolia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Maitreya Procession was a regular ceremonial celebration with a long history in Mongolia and Tibet by the Bogd Gegeen's time. As the Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala* illustrates, the Procession included a circumambulation of Ikh Khüree's largest district, Züün Khüree (figure 8.3). According to Alexei Pozdnev, who witnessed the event in 1896, preparations for the Procession lasted for two weeks.⁷³ In the early morning on the day of the celebration, after having read *rabsal* prayers (T. *rab gsal*) at 5 a.m., the monks brought out Maitreya's Five Treatises from the main temple and took them to the southern gate and stood facing the north. After the monks finished reading Maitreya's texts while facing the north, the Procession moved clockwise to the western gates, then to the northern, where it was dispersed for lunch. In the afternoon, the Procession continued in the direction of the eastern gates, and finally, proceeding through the southern gates, it entered the main temple, bringing back the texts and the gilded statue of Maitreya in his Bodhisattva form into the temple.⁷⁴ The Five Treatises and the statue of Maitreya were placed into a colorful wooden chariot decorated with a green horsehead.⁷⁵

Although carrying the texts of Maitreya inside the chariot was an old ritual practice of worshiping Maitreya,⁷⁶ it became particularly favored in the Gelugpa tradition, as evidenced by Maitreya processions that have been conducted regularly up to the present date in major Gelug monasteries in Tibet and Mongolia. In Tibet, however, there has



FIGURE 8.3 *Vajrabhairava Maṇḍala*. Detail. circa 1920. Bogd Khan Palace Museum. Photo: Author.

never been a custom of using a chariot with a wooden, green-headed horse or an elephant, which, as Pozdneev recounts, was common in Mongolian Maitreya Processions.⁷⁷ A horse and an elephant are known as two of the seven symbols of a Buddhist universal emperor, and in the *Mahāvastu*, a white elephant is indicated in connection with the sign of a Buddha's descent from Tuṣita Heaven.⁷⁸ The Bogd Jebtsundamba's *thangka* highlights the use of the two mentioned animal figures by vividly depicting them marching together with the Procession. In this way, the *thangka* alludes to Maitreya as a *cakravartin* and to his descent from Tuṣita Heaven. Here, a green horse, which is absent from Tibetan processions, raises an interesting question of this Mongolian invention.

Another two images depicting the Maitreya Procession in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries vividly illustrate the notable event. Gempelin Dorj, the painter of the "Lamin Gegeen's Maidar" places the Procession on a green background filled with fruits and flowers, placing the event on a summery day, which stands in contrast to the Tibetan tradition that holds the procession during the Great Prayer Festival in the early days of the Lunar New Year. The cart with a slim gilded Bodhisattva statue is carefully detailed: Maitreya, making the *dharmacakra* hand gesture and wearing a colorful lower garment, is standing in the cart, accompanied by two attending monks. The painted statue most likely represents one of the Maitreya statues made by Zanabazar. Maitreya's head, moved slightly forward, seems to be awakened, as if Maitreya is descending from the image right above into the gilded statue in the cart. The diverse array of drums, trumpets, and other musical instruments makes a lively and loud musical accompaniment, together with the chanting. Monks are also carrying banners and standards, and the Seven Precious symbols of the *cakravartin*—the wheel, horse, gem, elephant, queen, deity, and throne—indicate the royal status of Maitreya, reinforcing his status as the universal ruler.

As the colors of the cart indicate the presence of the Five Buddhas, the Bodhisattva Maitreya resides in the center of the Buddha-field, with the green horse signifying Amoghasiddhi. In the next eon, Amoghasiddhi and Maitreya share a direct doctrinal connection, since according to the doctrine of the three bodies of the Buddha, Amoghasiddhi in his Sambhogakāya and Maitreya in his Nirmanakāya forms belong to the same Buddha family.⁷⁹ Amoghasiddhi occupies the northern direction, and the northern direction frequently designates Mongolia in Mongolian Buddhist literature.⁸⁰ Thus, the painting suggests that the arrival of Maitreya is to take place in and for Mongolia. Hence, it should come as no surprise that the Procession itself begins and ends with monks facing the north, halting the movement for the longest interval right at the northern gates. In the Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala*, the artist deliberately places the Maitreya Procession next to the green, or northern, part of the *maṇḍala*, suggesting once again that Maitreya is invited to preside in the Buddha-field in the specifically given locale, in Züün Khüree,⁸¹ and broadly, in Khalkha Mongolia, which is blessed by Maitreya's present and future arrival.⁸²

As stated in the History of Erdene Zuu (HEZ), the function of the Maitreya Procession in the early days of Altan and Abatai Khans was quite different. The critical meeting

of the two men, Altan Khan and Sonam Gyatso, was preceded by another important appointment of Altan Khan's younger relative Abatai Khan (1552–1588)⁸³ with the Dalai Lama in 1577.⁸⁴ As different versions of the manuscripts of the HEZ indicate, Abatai visited Altan Khan's residence, bestowing 1,000 horses and various other gifts on the soon-to-be Third Dalai Lama Sonam Gyatso, who was on his way to Altan Khan's camp.⁸⁵ In some ways Abatai Khan seems to have considered Altan Khan's Juu (Tibetan: Jowo) Monastery when building Erdene Zuu. As Isabelle Charleux notes, stylistic similarities in carpentry and in the circumambulatory corridor due to the employment of carpenters from Khökhöt point to this fact. Anya Tsendina finds even more stylistic similarities between the two monasteries.⁸⁶ Yet, nothing is known about the Maitreya Temple in Erdene Zuu, which was built by the second son of Abatai Khan, Eriyekei Mergen (1587–early 1600s).⁸⁷

The Maitreya Procession that was first staged in 1657 in Erdene Zuu was conducted to celebrate Zanabazar's twenty-third birthday. It was carried out along with the long life ritual known in the Tibetan world as *danshig* (T. *brtan bzugs*).⁸⁸ The Khalkha nobility reenacted the *danshig* ritual and Maitreya Procession in Erdene Zuu in 1681 for Zanabazar's forty-seventh birthday.⁸⁹ This implies that at this early period, the Maitreya Procession was not an annual ritual and was mainly focused on devotion to Maitreya and the celebration of the long life of Jebtsundamba. Maitreya in his Bodhisattva form was invited and welcomed for securing the long life of the beloved ruler. This reminds us of the longevity that Agwaankhaidav aimed at when he placed Amitāyus Buddhas on the two sides of the monumental Maitreya statue in his temple. The same idea is injected into the presentation of Maitreya in Bogd Gegeen's thangka, where the Buddha Maitreya is deliberately aligned with Amitābha on the top register for the sake of Jebtsundamba's longevity.

As evidenced by several surviving paintings housed in Mongolian museums, *danshig* celebrations continued well into the Bogd Gegeen's time. They were extensive festivities that included the traditional Mongolian sports of horseracing and wrestling, coupled with Buddhist rituals, including a Maitreya Procession. Several paintings that illustrate *danshig* are very similar to the paintings of the Maitreya Procession in filling the composition with crowds. In depicting the Maitreya Procession, as we have seen earlier, Dorj places a cart in the lower left corner, while the majority of the composition along the horizontally stretched format is filled with rows of mixed crowds of monks and lay devotees. Even in the space behind the cart, where there does not seem to be sufficient space for more figures, the artist manages to squeeze in the marching people who follow the Procession. The painting uses the linearity of the two-dimensional surface to its benefit by stretching the format along the horizontal axis. The marching rows delineate the horizontal stretch and enhance the visual sensation of a throng. The other Maitreya Procession painting uses a similar type of elongated composition, but reversing the direction of the movement of the crowd from right to left. In fact, instead of elaborating on the chariot, on the Maitreya image, on the recitation of Maitreya texts, or on any other

aspect of the long ritual, all the surviving images of the Maitreya Procession focus on the visual sense of the crowded nature of the Procession itself. Likewise, the danshig paintings also highlight the populous aspect of the ritual and focus less on the main subject of the theme, thereby suggesting that the very quintessence of the Maitreya Procession is a unifying event that brings forth the community spirit and togetherness of the monastics and laity and of the nobility and the commoners. It is quite possible that the two celebrations were conducted as a single event precisely for the sake of gathering in one place the multifarious layers of society around Maitreya as their universal ruler and around the Bogd Jebtsundamba. It should then come as no surprise that the Maitreya Procession in Mongolia takes place in the warmer days of late spring or summer, as Dorj depicts it in his painting. This means that in addition to celebrating Maitreya descending from the Tuṣita Heaven to Khalkha, the Procession is meant to enhance the fellowship of the monastically ordained and lay communities for the sake of the propagation of Dharma.

A depiction of Maitreya as a Bodhisattva in an early painting (figure 8.4) provides us with another clue concerning his role among the Mongols prior to Agwaankhaidav. The youthful Bodhisattva here occupies the center of the eighteenth-century painting,

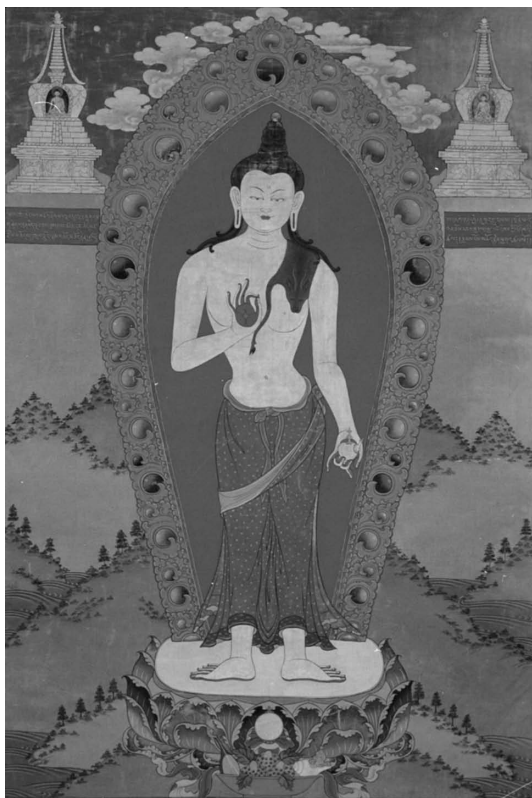


FIGURE 8.4 *Maitreya*. 18th c. Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo: Author.

standing in the midst of the hilly terrain with the halo and his head situated in the heavenly realm. The image is reminiscent of Zanabazar's Maitreya statues, portraying him in his slim, tender form, holding the pitcher in his left hand, and making the *vitarka* hand gesture (of transmission of the teaching) with his right hand. Maitreya is well balanced with a slight curve of his body that brings a sense of his gentle movement. His colorful lower garment has an elegant sash, and an antelope skin is placed over the right shoulder. Having no companions at his side, Maitreya has above his shoulders two *stūpas* in the heavenly realm. The Tibetan inscription on both sides of the Bodhisattva's image reads:

[The Bodhisattva] having descended from the gods' realm,
 To the supreme, sacred city of Sāṃkāśya,
 Has been worshipped by the crowns of the Great Brahmā and Brāhmaṇas,
 I prostrate to this *stūpa*, worshipped by Trayastrīṃśa gods,
 [To heal] the past schism in the Saṅgha.
 For the very harmony of the Buddha's disciples,
 In the Bamboo Grove of Kalandaka in Rājagṛha,⁹⁰
 I prostrate to the *stūpa*, to the actual Maitreya.⁹¹

The inscription indicates that the two *stūpas* depicted above Maitreya belong to the set of the Eight Stūpas, which commemorate the eight great events in the Buddha's life.⁹² These particular two stūpas are the Stūpa of Descent from the Gods' Realm and the Stūpa of Reconciliation, which aim at bringing a "harmony" to the Buddhist community through Maitreya's descent. By depicting these two *stūpas* with Maitreya, the painting suggests that the purpose of Maitreya's descent is the unity and peace of the Buddhist community, as "this world is impermanent, mortal, inconstant, momentary and unsteady. One has to become worn out and destitute as soon as one penetrates this."⁹³ An emphasis on the unity and integration made in the mentioned depictions of the Maitreya Procession and *danshig* festivals is once again clearly indicated: Maitreya as a Bodhisattva is presented here with the specific mission to reconcile the Buddhist community "for the very harmony of the Buddha's disciples." Since the painting was made in the 1700s, at the time of the internal strife between the Khalkha and Zünghar Mongols, for the producer of this painting, integrity and peace in the future are seen as necessary. This vision is similar to the unifying mission of Zanabazar. Like in the paintings of the Maitreya Procession, Maitreya is here invited as a true heir to Buddha Śākyamuni to secure the peace, welfare, and protection of disciples. Similarly to the spirit of community that the artists expressed in visualizing the rituals of *danshig* and the Maitreya Procession, this painting makes social integration its key message by choosing these two stūpas out of the eight in order to integrate with Maitreya's millenarian mission.⁹⁴

Similar images of Maitreya as a Bodhisattva were made in Tibet prior to the Gelugpa rise to dominance, in which he is depicted either alone or in the group of the eight or sixteen great Bodhisattvas, in accordance with the three sets of Bodhisattvas mentioned in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, two of which are headed by Maitreya.⁹⁵ Here, in the painting

discussed above, the Mongols are aware of the fact that no sectarian affiliation is specific to Maitreya as a Bodhisattva. The Mongolian images of Maitreya that depict him abiding in the Tuṣita Heaven reflect the Mongolian wishful eye for millennial peace and for the unification of the Mongols.

It is likely that similar goals of social and religious unity motivated Zanabazar's repeated focus on Maitreya, as indicated by several of his statues of Maitreya in Bodhisattva form. Although his images do not include inscriptions, his own text, *Janlavtsogzol* (*Dus bstun gsol 'debs byin rlabs mchog stsol ma bzbug'so*), is an open call for pacification. It is still recited for the sake of unity and solidarity among the Mongols. In this text, Zanabazar prays in this manner:

[May he] Purify the entire darkness of the ignorance of all beings
 In order that they obtain the illuminating, omniscient, primordial wisdom!
 [May he] protect us, sentient beings, with compassion
 [From] the degenerate time of the greatly clouded, deep darkness of the Dark Age!⁹⁶

Zanabazar's text appears in its entirety on the back of the painting depicting the empowerment of the Bogd Gegeen into the Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala*, which includes the two images of Maitreya: one seated in the topmost row flanked by images of Amitābha and Tsongkhapa, and the other present in the Maitreya Procession. A large monastic figure appears right underneath the Maitreya Procession near and to the right of the Bogd Gegeen, together with whom he is receiving an empowerment from Heruka, the "Jou [Jowo] *yidam*." Another inscription underneath the Maitreya Procession states: "the two Vajradhara Bogdos reside in the position of the heart mantra of the Three Buddha Families." It thus suggests that the large—and therefore significant—anonymous, monastically ordained figure with an equally large and bright halo is the desired "reincarnation body" of the Bogd Jebtsundamba. This "Vajradhara Bogd" is holding at his heart the image of Heruka, and similar to the Bogd Jebtsundamba, he is making the gesture of Vajrasattva. His new home, empty as it is at present, is waiting for him with all the gates and doors open. It is safeguarded by the favorite Gelug protector Pehar, who is standing on top of the home. At the gates of the home, monks are standing in silent expectation and veneration, ready for his prompt arrival. The *thangka* was made around 1924, the year of the Bogd Gegeen's death. Therefore, the vertical alignment of Jebtsundamba's "reincarnation body" with the Future Buddha Maitreya is overtly logical and intentional. Here the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba receives the "*bodhi* teachings" and "the elixir in golden vase" directly from the Buddha Maitreya, which is yet another indexical sign of disciples' hopes and expectations. It is up to Maitreya, who is ensuring the future of the Mongols, to secure the future reincarnation of the Eighth Jebtsundamba and the long life of the Gelug tradition. In his *Janlavtsogzol*, inscribed on the back of the image, Zanabazar cries out: "Protect us! Protect us!" (*skyobs skyobs*) "Behold us! Behold us!" (*gzigs gzigs*).

The Bogd Jebtsundambas were not the only rulers with an interest in Maitreya. The legitimating power of Maitreya was attractive to various rulers at different periods, as evidenced by statues of Maitreya commissioned by the Toba Wei rulers at Yungang in the late fifth century and by the notorious Tang ruler Wu Zetian (r. 684–705), who also claimed to be the incarnation of Maitreya, at Dunhuang.⁹⁷ In Tibet and in Mongolia, as asserted by Agwaankhaidav⁹⁸ and as evidenced by Zanabazar's three statues, Maitreya played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism. Agwaankhaidav gives a list of the temples and people who built Maitreya statues and concludes in this way: "all over Tibet, the statues of Maitreya are like mountains decorating the earth."⁹⁹ Maitreya's affiliation with Tsongkhapa and with the Third Dalai Lama in Mongolian art indicates the spreading of the Gelug tradition outside of Tibet with Maitreya's monumental statues and rituals to Mongolia. A Maitreya statue in Yonghegong Temple in Beijing attests to the spread of Gelug influence to Qing China, as well. The previously described Altan Khan's mural and the Maitreya-related activities in Ikh Khüree corroborate the claim given in the HEZ that the Dalai Lama promised to build Maitreya statues outside Tibet proper.¹⁰⁰ In accordance with this perception, Jebtsundambas, blessed and endorsed by the Dalai Lamas, continued to focus on Maitreya, the Future Buddha and universal emperor, in order to reinforce Gelug dominance and the Jebtsundambas' rulership and to facilitate the unity and integrity of the Mongolian ordained and lay communities.

CONCLUSION

As a Buddhist savior who delivers the hope of a new era, and who has a potential to greatly influence the present, Maitreya is given various roles across cultures and has assumed various forms of artistic representation, many of which, as we have seen, do not have specific doctrinal references. While the two mentioned perspectives on Maitreya's role in society are dominant in Mongolia, they are not unique to the Mongolian case. Akin to Maitreya's role as a revolutionary, a savior and a messenger,¹⁰¹ or even a guardian in Korean perception,¹⁰² Maitreya in Mongolia is a Buddhist universal emperor who secures Gelug dominance and the long life for the Bogd Jebtsundamba ruler and his community, unified around Maitreya's arrival in Mongolia.

The use of Maitreya in the Mongolian case demonstrates the social, cultural, and political influences on the formation of these two forms of Maitreya, shedding light on the development of their further use outside of India and Tibet. If we assume that Tachikawa is correct and that the representation of a standing Maitreya has a West Asian origin, in the later Vajrayāna diaspora, this early West Asian origin seems to have lost its meaning. As we have seen, Maitreya was given diverse roles in Mongolia, which are closely associated with the sociopolitical context of the spread of the Maitreya cult during the later development of Buddhism in Inner Asia.¹⁰³

In Mongolian visions of his two functions, Maitreya is seen to be descending to the North, where the Mongols would “control [their] restless mind and avail [themselves] of a strong determination so that [they] could view the Maitreya Buddha.”¹⁰⁴ It is with this hope, as Agwaankhaidav laments, that Maitreya is invited to Mongolia in order to “quickly lead to the Buddha-land,”¹⁰⁵ to enlightenment, and to Tuṣita.¹⁰⁶ These are the same expectations that motivate the modern-day revival of Maitreya in Mongolia and the reconstruction of Agwaankhaidav’s Maitreya Temple and statue in Ulaanbaatar.

NOTES

1. Zanabazar’s biography written by his disciple Zaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei (1642–1715) and translated by Sh. Bira, 1995.
2. The latter was first published by Marilyn Rhie in 1991 in the internationally renowned exhibition and catalog *Wisdom and Compassion*, where Rhie suggested that it belongs to “the same school, if not actually a work by Zanabazar himself.” See Rhie and Thurman, 1991, 141.
3. Padmanabh S. Jaini, “Stage in the Bodhisattva Career of the Tathāgata Maitreya” in Sponberg and Hardacre, 1988, 54–55.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Kim, 1997, 14–17.
7. Luczanits, 2005, 184.
8. Rhie and Thurman, 1991; Béguin, 1993, Berger and Bartholomew, 1995.
9. See Vitali, 1990, plates 19–21. There are numerous images of the well-established set of Eight Bodhisattvas in Tibet, Nepal, and China of the early period. This set, however, does not seem to be as popular in Mongolia.
10. *Erdene Juu-yin teūke (History of Erdene Zuu)*, 71.
11. See Das, 2003 includes the primary *sāadhanās* of Maitreya from the *Sāadhanamālā* and in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, together with her own translations. These *sāadhanās* mention multi-faced, multi-armed Maitreya images in either seated or in standing postures, holding the *nāgakeśara* flower, chowrie jewel, or a mendicant bowl.
12. The translation of the excerpt on Maitreya *sāadhanā* from the *Sāadhanamālā* is the following: “He is three-faced, three-eyed, and four-armed. His right and left faces respectively are of blue and white color. His complexion is yellow like that of gold. He sits in the *paryāṅka* posture on an animal. His two hands are engaged in exhibiting the *vyākhyāna-mudrā*, and he shows in his other right and left hands the *varada-mudrā* and a full-blown *nāgakeśara* flower with its branches. He is decked with many ornaments. Meditating thus . . . This is a *Sāadhanā* of Maitreya.” Das, (2003) 17. The closest image based on this *sāadhanā*—albeit different—is a mural at Gyantse. See Rhie and Thurman, 1991, figure 8.19.
13. Rhie and Thurman, 1991, 55, figure 8.19.
14. Luczanits, 2004, 137–140, 164–169, 186–187.
15. Nattier, “The Meanings of the Maitreya Myth: a Typological Analysis.” In Sponberg and Hardacre, 1988, 29.
16. Personal correspondence with Dr. Tachikawa, November 3, 2012.

17. Kim, 1997, 114.

18. Altan Khan, the ruler of the Tümed Mongols, is the grandson of Batumöngke Dayan Khan (1470–1543).

19. Isabelle Charleux (2013), referring to Altan Khan's biography, notes that the initial walls for Altan Khan's Yekhe Baishing were erected as early as 1539–1543. In 1556–1557, Altan Khan apparently built Eight Great structures (Baishing) and five towers, which were all burnt by Ming troops in 1559.

20. The monastery is mentioned in *Erdeni-yin Erike*, fol. 37r, which draws the information from Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor's *Dpag bsam ljon bzang* [*Precious Tree*] of 1748, where it is called Jobo'i lha khang ["Lord's temple"]. See Charleux, 2013, referring to Walther Heissig, 1961.

21. Saṅg Sečen's *Erdene-yin tobči*, fol. 85–86, in Haenisch, ed., 1955; Charleux, 2013.

22. Machang Khatan Uran Beiji, also known as Baga Beiji (Younger princess), ruled the Right Wing of the Tümed Mongols after Altan Khan's death, and was the wife of Altan Khan's grandson Daičing Ejei Taiji. Mačag Khatan is known to have invited Maidar Khutugtu in 1606.

23. *Čagravardi Altan qayan-u tujuji* (*History of the Cakravartin Altan Khan*), 1602–1607. MS. folios 20–42. In Tsanjid and Choimaa, eds., 2006, 39–70.

24. Kollmar-Paulenz, 2005, 58.

25. Zhang, 2010, ff. 20.

26. Isabelle Charleux, referring to an eighteenth-century manuscript of *Erdeni-yin tobči* (Haenisch, ed., 1955, fol. 85–86), mentions him being recognized as the reincarnate of Byams ba rGya mtsho, a disciple of Padmasambhava. See Charleux, 2002, fn. 106.

27. Zhang, 2010, 25–36.

28. Ibid.

29. For more on Inner Asian politics and history, see Perdue, 2005.

30. As *Erdeni-yin tobči* notes, Maidar Khutugtu was recognized as a reincarnation of Byams ba rgya mtsho, disciple of Padmasambhava. Charleux (2002, fn. 26) also mentions his depiction in murals in Maitreya Monastery with red hat together with various protective deities of Nyingma tradition. See Saṅg Sečen's *Erdene-yin tobči*, fol. 85–86 in Haenisch, ed., 1955, and Charleux, 2002.

31. According to Jaini (1988), 75, the episode is described in *Maitreya-samiti*. Das (2003, 19, has mistaken Mahākāśyapa with the Buddha *Kaśyapa* in this event.

32. Bhattacharya, 1980, 100–108.

33. Lancaster refers to Taishō, 9:285 and Yu-min in his "Maitreya in Korea," in Sponberg and Hardacre, 1988, 145, 152, n. 49.

34. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected works of Ngag dbang mKhas grub, TBRC, LC # 72908334, vol. 1, fol. 180.

35. Kim, 1997, 20.

36. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected works of Ngag dbang mKhas grub, TBRC, LC # 72908334, vol. 1, fol. 180.

37. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected works of Ngag dbang mKhas grub, TBRC, LC # 72908334, vol. 1, fol. 180.

38. Jaini, 1988, 59. Jaini mentions such Mahāyāna texts as *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Mahāyānasūtra* and *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama Mahāyānasūtra*, which bring Maitreya and Mañjuśrī in relation to the Buddha Śākyamuni.

39. Das, 2003, 45.

40. Das translated the entire text consisting of 142 verses. Maitreya's size is given in verse 105: "this All-Conqueror will be 88 cubits tall and the teacher's chest will be 25 cubits broad." See Das, 2003, 42.

41. Das refers to I. B. Horner, who suggested that cubit (*hatha*) "is the distance between the elbow and the tip of the extended middle finger." See I. B. Horner, "A Chronicle of *Budhavamsa*: The coming Buddha Ariya Maitreya," p. 41, note 3, op. cit. in Das, 2003, 22, note 13.

42. Das, 2003, 42.

43. Alexander, 2005, 165–166. As Alexander surveys, the original monumental Maitreya statue made of metal was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and a new two-story Maitreya image made of clay replaced it in 1991–92.

44. As Gene Smith notes, his other appellations included Ngag dbang bLo bzang mKhas grub, Mkhas grub, and Wa gindra pa tu siddhi. The latter two names were his signatures. See Smith, "Introduction."

45. Soninbayar, 2009, 17, 19.

46. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected Works, vol. 3, fol. 520; also vol. 5, fol. 111.

47. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected Works, vol. 1, fol. 191.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Pozdneev, 1896, 93–95.

51. According to an old feature film, which was based on interviews with eyewitnesses of Ikh Khüree, the interior of Maitreya Temple suggests similarities to Lhasa's Jokhang, both going back to Indian shrine architecture (*caitya*). See the plan of Jokhang in Alexander, 2005, 36.

52. Gandantegchenling monastery, built in 1838, was a new addition to Ikh Khüree.

53. Rupen, 1957, 162.

54. According to L. Dügersüren, "several thousands of lamas" initially included 2,250 lamas. See L. Dügersüren, 1956, 36.

55. Pozdneev, 1896, 117; Dügersüren, 1956, 36. Dügersüren suggests the year 1837 as the date of the establishment of Gandantegchenling Monastery. However, the current consensus, supported with more primary sources, dates the establishment of Gandantegchenling Monastery by the Fifth Jebtsundamba to 1838.

56. Jaini, 1988, 71; Luczanits, 2005, 179.

57. Tsongkhapa's Gandan Monastery remained one of the "great three" Gelug institutions since 1409, built to the northeast of Lhasa. Tsongkhapa was the first abbot of Gandan Monastery and served until his death in 1419. He was entombed in a golden funerary *stūpa* at Gandan, and later the tombs of his two main disciples were built next to that *stūpa*.

58. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected Works, vol. 1, fol. 186, 188.

59. According to Patricia Berger, it was made in seven pieces: the head, chest, two arms, lower trunk, and two legs. Berger and Bartholomew, 1995, cites Pozdneev, 1898, 61–62.

60. Agwaankhaidav also gives the names of other artists: "Li Qiang-tao, Wa Ti-jiang, Jiang De-ming, Li Xiao-za, Hao Wang-li, Jao, Tai, Peng, Ye, and Qiang, and so on." Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected Works, vol. 1, fol. 197.

61. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, Collected Works, vol. 1, fol. 199. According to Pozdneev (1898, 61–62), the Mongolian name of the chief Chinese artist was Ayush-tunjan, referring to Chinese *tongjian* ("metallurgist"). I thank Isabelle Charleux for this point.

62. Agwaankhaidav unfortunately does not mention the names of the “top artists” who worked on the face of Ikh Khüree Maitreya statue.

63. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, fol. 200.

64. See more on Brag Yer pa in Dowman, 1988, 73–79. In 1986, when Dowman surveyed the Yer pa valley, he saw only the legs and feet of a thirteenth-century, once-giant Maitreya remaining on a central, freestanding altar.

65. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, fol. 198.

66. Berger and Bartholomew, 1995, 66.

67. Translation, otherwise noted, is mine. Agwaankhaidav, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, folio 281.
mdun . . . nam mkhar seng khri pad zla'i steng/ bzang po'i bzhugs stangs mdzad pa'i mi pham mgon/ gser ri ltar brdzid mtshan dpe dpal 'bar zhing/ 'khor lo sgyur ba'i cha lugs rnam par mdzem/ snyom pa rgyal po snying po ru/ bzhugs pa'i byang chub mchod rten dbu la spras/ chos 'khor phyag rgyas klu shing me tog steng/ chos kyi 'khor lo ril pa spyi blugs mtshan/ zhal gyi dkyil 'khor shin tu rgyas shing 'dzum/ thugs kar 'od gyi dpa' be'us mtshan pa'i nang/ gyes pa'i 'dzum zhal ston cing lham med bzhugs/ gnas gsum yi ge gsum mtshan hum 'od gyis/ sbyan drangs mchog gsum 'dus pa'i bdag nyid du/ bdag gi mgon skyabs dam par bzhugs par gyur.

68. Pozdneev, 1896, 93–95.

69. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, vol. 1, fol. 285: *byams pas dam bca'i gzungs ci nus bzla/de'i tshe byams pa'i thugs kar miem yig gi mtha' skor du sngags 'phreng gis slong ba las 'od zer bdud rtsi dang bcas pa'i rgyun babs pas rang gzhan sems can thams cad kyi byin rlabs ma lus pa thob pa'i dmigs pa dang bcas pas bzla/ pho ba sbyong na'ng mtshams 'dir dpal ldan rtsa ba'i mas spyi bor sbyan drangs ste man ngag bzhin du bya/de nas dpal ldan rtsa ba'i zhes sogs kyi rang gi snying khar rang sems dang ngo bo dbyer med du nyer bsdu bya/*

70. Soninbayar, 2009, 16–20. Also see Smith, “Introduction.”

71. See more on Brag Yer pa in Dowman, 1988, 73–79.

72. Patricia Berger published the “Meditations of Bogd Gegeen” and gave the first interpretation in in Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan, 1995. The second painting of the set has never been analyzed and only recently has been published in Fleming and Shastri, eds., 2011.

73. Pozdneev, 1993, 386.

74. Pozdneev, 1887, 390–392.

75. *Ibid.*, 388.

76. “Maitreya Procession.” *Chö-yang*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (1987): 94–96. (The name of the author of the article is not mentioned.)

77. *Ibid.*; Pozdneev, 1887, 387.

78. See Luczanits, 2005, 174–175.

79. Kim, 1997, 15.

80. Agwaankhaidav, among others, for example, uses the designation “North” (T. *byang phyogs*) to indicate Mongolia, when speaking of his patron, the Fifth Jebtsundamba as the “Protector of All North” (*skyabs mgon rje btsun dam pa blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang*), who had “reincarnated in the North.” See vol. 1, fol. 185. Such appellations are common in the primary texts written in Mongolian and Tibetan languages.

81. Here in the Vajrabhairava *maṇḍala* painting, Züün Khüree is presented as a *maṇḍala*.

82. The *Anāgatavaṃsa*, verse 137. See Das, 2003, 97.

83. Abatai Khan was a great-grandson of Batumöngke Dayan Khan, the grandson of Batumöngke's eleventh son Geresenje jalayir qung tayiji (1513–1549). Abatai's father is Onoqu üjeng noyan, the third son of Geresenje.

84. According to other sources, such as Bayan-a, 1984, and Saṅg Sečen, 1987, the meeting of Abatai Khan and Sonam Gyatso took place in 1586. For more details on this controversy see Tsendina, 1999, 40–41.

85. HEZ, fol. 11.

86. Tsendina, 1999, 35; Charleux, 2006.

87. The manuscript of HEZ mentions the master Üizen Mañjuśrī (Üjeng mangjusir), who built Juu Temple and the Temples of Yama and Avalokiteśvara.” HEZ, fol. 13.

88. HEZ, fol. 15r.

89. HEZ, fol. 16r.

90. As Kim notes, this reference to Rājagrha appears in the *Larger Sukhavatī-vyūha*, F. Max Muller’s translation in *Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 49, Part II, pp. 1–2. Kim, 1997, fn. 35.

91. *Grong khyer dam pa mchog ni gsal ldan du/lha rnams gnas gshegs bla na med pa babs/ tshangs pa tshangs dbang cod pan gyis mchod pa/sum cu’i lhas mchod mchod rten phya mtshal lo/ dge ‘dun dbyen du sngar gyur las/ston pa’i nyan thos rab mthun pa/rgyal po’i khab kyi ‘od ma’i tshal.../byams [d]ngos mchod rten phyag [mtshal] lo/I thank my assistants Khenpo Yeshe and Ülziedelger for their help in translating this inscription.*

92. The Eight Stūpas that commemorate the eight great events of Buddha’s life are (1) the Stūpa of the Heaped Lotus or of the Birth of the Sugata in Lumbinī; (2) the Stūpa commemorating his enlightenment in Bodhgayā; (3) the Stūpa of Many Gates, commemorating his First Sermon in Sārṇāth; (4) the Stūpa of His Descent from the Trayastrimśa Heaven in Sāmkāśya; (5) the Stūpa of Great Miracles, commemorating his miracle of multiplication in Śrāvastī; (6) the Stūpa of Reconciliation, commemorating the Buddha’s resolution of a dispute in the Saṅgha; (7) the Stūpa of the Complete Victory of the Buddha, commemorating the Buddha’s successful prolongation of his life by three months; and (8) the Stūpa of his Mahāparinirvāṇa in Kuśinagara.

93. The *Anāgatavaṃsa*, verse 135, in Das, 2003, 97.

94. Hypothetically the painting can be a part of a set representing all eight *stūpas*; however, there is no surviving evidence of such a set. Therefore, it is likely to be a single piece.

95. Das, 2003, 18. The third set is headed by Samantabhadra.

96. *‘gro kun ma rig mun pa kun bsand ste/kun mkhyen ye shes snang ba rgyas phyir bsngo/cher snyigs mu chen lhags par gtibs pa yi/bdag cag dus ngan ‘go la thugs rjes skyobs/Zanabazar. 1696. Janlavtsogzol (Dus bstun gsol ‘debs byin rlabs mchog stsol ma bzhuḡs so). Reprinted in Ulaanbaatar in 1995.*

97. Berger and Barthlomew, 1995, 63.

98. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, fol. 184–185.

99. *Ibid.*

100. HEZ, fol. 8f. The text speaks of the Dalai Lama without specific reference to which one.

101. Overmyer, “Messenger, Savior, and Revolutionary: Maitreya in Chinese Popular Religious Literature of the 16th–17th Centuries.” In Sponberg and Hardacre, eds., 1988, 110–132.

102. Lancaster, “Maitreya in Korea.” In Sponberg and Hardacre, eds., 1988, pp. ff. 147.

103. See Sponberg and Hardacre, 1988, for discussions of Maitreya’s cult in various Asian traditions, other than those in Mongolia, Tibet, and Himalayas.

104. The *Anāgatavaṃsa*, verse 138. See Das, 2003, 97.

105. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, folios 164–165.

106. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, *Collected Works*, vol. 5, folios 110–111.

9

A Literary History of Buddhism in Mongolia

Simon Wickham-Smith



A BRIEF HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION: MONGOLIAN LANGUAGE AND MONGOLIAN WORLDVIEW

It is language, which begets literature. The spoken word, frequently passed down across the generations, is changed by interaction, and finds itself inscribed, most frequently in ink upon paper, and in so static a way that it enters over time into a canonical relationship with the society that preserves it. In Mongolian nomadic society, a language and a way of communicating ideas that developed was intimately connected with the experience of livestock herding, with the seasonal movement between pastureland and steppe, and with the immanence of the natural world.

In her book *Metaphors and Nomads* Alena Oberfalzerová points to the powerful relationship between Mongolian linguistic culture and its nomadic tradition. She points out that “Mongolian nomads have, to a certain extent, preserved the archaic ontology of the world, characteristic of native thinking in general . . . Among these [native] groups, we can detect certain similarities in their concept of the world, in the magic power of the word, in the role of the individual’s name, in the approach to symbols, and so forth.”¹ Clearly, for a nomadic community, the spoken word remains the most convenient way of transmitting knowledge, books being cumbersome and unwieldy in transit. In Mongolia, the expression of thought through speech, with all the requisite metalinguistic elements that it entails, remains the principal literary medium, primarily in the form of poetry.

The cultural expression of language was also inherent in the gradual development of the relationship between indigenous Mongolian traditions and Vajrayāna Buddhism,

introduced from Tibet. As we will see, the Mongolian mentality, unconsciously informed perhaps more by indigenous knowledge than by Buddhism, regards the landscape as sacred, with hills being manifestations of local spirits² and flowers and grasses being manifestations of the ancestors. Thus, a description of the landscape, so frequent in Mongolian literary writings, can in some ways be seen as a spiritual map of the homeland (*nutag*), as the nontemporal and ancestral landscape, a worldly representation of Sukhāvātī, the Land of Bliss.

Although the primary theme here is the literary history of Buddhism in Mongolia, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that Mongols consistently see Mongolian Buddhism through the prism of nomadic folk traditions, and that the Mongolian worldview is defined, and not simply influenced, by the immanence of the spirits and the ancestors. I believe that this is true especially of post-Soviet literature, which is today composed amid a revival of once-condemned religious traditions. An image that emerges from Mongolian poetry suggests that we should nonetheless be aware that Buddhism is an imported tradition, never completely comfortable in a land inhabited by people more attuned to the spirits of the wind and the hills and the grasses, and to the ever-present Heaven (Khökh Tenger), than to the world of Buddhist contemplation and philosophy.

In his standard text on Mongolian Buddhist literature, the modern Mongolian scholar Tserensodnom includes early accounts of Buddhism during the Hunnu (ca. the third-century B.C.E. to the first-century C.E.) and Kitan (911–1125 C.E.) civilizations. While none of these are explicitly recounted in the literature, they do have currency in terms of the early Mongolian literary tradition, which informs later writings. However, scholars such as Tserensodnom regard them as historical speculation. Indeed, it was really only in the late sixteenth century that Buddhism became sufficiently established to have founded its own traditions of creative literature and translation.

Mongolian nobility had already toyed with Buddhism in the form of the Sakyapa sect, at that time preeminent in Tibet. When the Sakya Pandita (Sa 'skya Pandita Kundga' rGyal mtshan) and his two nephews arrived at the court of Gödan Khan in 1246, they both handed over political control of Tibet to the Khan and stirred his interest in Buddhism. Three years later, Gödan became a protector of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus it was that Mongolia and Tibet were able to favor each other through the simple expedient of religious observance. Between that point and 1374, with Buddhism having all but disappeared from Mongolia, its importance had become as much sociopolitical as cultural. As Jerryson notes, Qubilai Khan had already been converted in 1242 and “had moved the political capital of the Mongols from Kharakhorum to Peking. Under these circumstances, [Qubilai] needed to have his political role socially recognized, and that was made possible through Buddhism.”³ This earlier wave of Buddhist expansion among the Mongols was limited to the imperial court and nobility, and so the problem of how to communicate the ideas of Buddhism in the Mongol language for a literate Mongolian

Buddhist audience was not addressed until the next period of expansion, which took place in the sixteenth century.

In 1576, Altan Khan invited the Gelugpa hierarch Sonam Gyatso (Bsod rnam rGya mtsho) to Mongolia, a moment that catalyzed the first period of genuine Mongolian Buddhist literature. The Mongolian scholar Shagdaryn Bira equates this development with the common acceptance of Buddhism as a national religion and suggests that it now began to play “a decisive role in the formation and development of Mongolian culture.”⁴ This took the form as much of educational and scientific formation as of literary formation, and these all came together to bring about both a revival of the Uighur-Mongol script and a broadening of the literary focus, to include in particular translations of canonical Tibetan and Indian Buddhist texts.

In 1629, the first complete Mongol translation of the Tibetan Kangyur was made under the direction of Gunga Odser (Kun dga’ ‘Od ser), although there is reason to believe that some parts of the corpus had been translated already during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). That notwithstanding, it seems that in Mongolia of that time, the amount of effort that went into this seventeenth-century translation stimulated considerable interest in literature in general, and translation in particular. An increased enthusiasm for Mongolian historiography⁵ necessitated both a greater expertise in translation among writers and a greater literary and stylistic ability. Thus, by the second quarter of the seventeenth century, Mongolian Buddhism not only had catalyzed a focus on translation and on historical study but had also laid the ground for the development of a Mongolian literary tradition, founded upon, but in no way in thrall to, Indian and Tibetan religious discourses.

Half a century following the conversion of the Khalkha noble Abatai Khan in 1576, one of his descendants, Gombodorj, established his own son, Ishdorj, as a reincarnate lama. Although Ishdorj, Abadai’s great-grandson, otherwise known as the First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar (1635–1723), is justly famous for his sculpture and contributions to music and to script reform, his literary output consisted primarily of prayers, unremarkable when compared with the work of other cultural figures. That said, his development of the Soyombo script, based on the Nepāli *rañjana* (T. *lanza*) script, offered a new approach to textual transcription and so to the experience of scholars and writers alike.

The early eighteenth century also saw the mysterious disappearance of the Sixth Dalai Lama from Lhasa and his journey through Mongolia, recounted in one of the earliest Tibeto-Mongol narratives, in Darjé Nomunkhan’s Tibetan language-based text titled *The Hidden Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama* (*Tsang dbyangs rGya mtsho’i gsang rnam*).⁶ This text is significant insofar as it purports to be a true account of the Dalai Lama’s self-imposed exile and subsequent life, meditating, wandering, and teaching in Mongolia and Tibet between his supposed death in 1706⁷ and the year 1746, when the Mongolian tradition has him die in what is now Inner Mongolia. We might see this strange text—with its fantastic accounts of yetis and zombies, alongside more sober narratives

about the establishment of monasteries—as indicating a period in which Buddhism gradually took root and became truly present in Mongolia.

STYLISTIC FEATURES OF MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST LITERATURE OF THE
EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The thematic and stylistic breadth of Mongolian literature during the Qing period reflects a number of sociopolitical factors. Not only did local politics become of greater significance—especially in light of the financial changes brought about by the growing numbers of serfs (*shabinar*) and the introduction of the monastic estate as an economic institution (*jas*)—but on a larger scale, the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century China was beginning to come to terms with the need to embrace Europe as a trading partner resulted in the gradual adoption of the novel as a literary form. *The Blue Annals* (*Khökhe Sudar*) of Injanashi (1837–1892)⁸ represents the first attempt at Mongolian prose fiction. While Injanashi was never explicitly engaged in religious writing of the kind under discussion here, we should be aware that his influence laid the groundwork for the tradition of fiction in which writers such as Natsagdorj and Yadamsüren would later offer commentary on the state of Buddhism during the Soviet period.⁹

The political importance of Buddhism and the monastic hierarchy in Mongolian life during the nineteenth century can be seen in the dramatic expansion of literary focus, an expansion that reached its zenith with the groundbreaking life and work of the Noyon Khutagt Danzanravjaa (bṣTan ‘dzin Rab rgyas) in the first half of the nineteenth century. Even before Danzanravjaa’s rise to literary prominence, and following the death of the First Jebtsundamba, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar, in 1723, the scholar-poet Luvsantsültem (Blo bzang Tshul khirms, 1740–1810) had opened the way for Mongolian Buddhist literature to widen and deepen its scope, to move away from the influence of Tibetan culture and toward a discourse more inclusive of Mongolian culture and religious worldview.

Luvsantsültem was born in the Chakhar region and was generally known by the name Chakhar Gevsh. Having received ordination at the age of six, he was trained in Mongolian, Sanskrit, and Tibetan. His poetic output is characterized by the influence of Sanskrit and Tibetan poetic forms as much as by indigenous Mongolian verse. In his explicitly Buddhist writings, Luvsantsültem would reconfigure traditional subject matter for his Mongolian audience, although his use of non-Mongolian classical literary styles suggests that his intention might have been to broaden the outlook of his audience to educate them in the more traditional Buddhist discourse. Many of his texts, such as *The Description of Sukhāvātī* (*Suugaradi-yin oron-u jokiyal*) and the combined *A Treasury of Eloquent Sayings* (*Erdeni-yin sang subhasida*, Skt. *Subhāṣitaratnanidhi*) translation and commentary—show Luvsantsültem’s skill in presenting complex ideas in simple form, which became a hallmark of his work on classical Buddhist texts.

It could be argued that many translations and commentaries, which Luvsantsültem prepared from Tibetan and Sanskrit, and his detailed exploration and explication of traditional Buddhist themes, were merely a complex preparation for his magnum opus, his 1794 biography of Tsongkhapa, *The Source of All Good Fortune* (*Sain amuyulang bükün yarqu-yin oron*). This work was a radical departure for Mongolian Buddhist literature, presenting the life of the founder of the Gelugpa order in the vernacular and offering to the wider Mongolian Buddhist society material previously available only in Tibetan. The opening up of Tibetan Buddhism in this way to a wider public during the late eighteenth century also illustrates how Luvsantsültem, fifty years before Danzanravjaa, was able, concisely and with considerable literary flair, to present the biography of Tsongkhapa to a wider audience.

It is not only Luvsantsültem's renditions of traditional themes that characterize his work. His poetical handling of the themes of Buddhist views, and especially of traditional Mongolian pre-Buddhist views,¹⁰ touches subjects as diverse as the god of the hearth, the gods who bring a rain of blessings, fire offerings for the Old White Man,¹¹ and rituals to welcome a bride. Throughout his poetic work we find at once a great clarity of expression and sophistication in the development of traditional Buddhist imagery, which, I would argue, is heretofore unknown in Mongolian religious verse.

The commonality between the work of Luvsantsültem and the Noyon Khutugtu Danzanravjaa is seen especially in the extent to which they both sought to reveal the failings of the monastic community, so as to preserve a constant flow of religious and political soul-searching and reformation. In one of Luvsantsültem's more explicit critiques, *You Should Hold It in Your Heart* (*Sedkil-dür qadayalaqu keregtei*), he is clearly trying to sway his fellow monks away from immorality:

It is not a bad omen when the Peking duck says quack quack,
 But it is surely a bad sign when monks hire themselves
 Out to men and women at home,
 When they joke about with wicked words
 And trick each other with haha hehe.¹²

Luvsantsültem died in 1810, a year after Urga, the capital of the Khalkha Mongols, was proclaimed the Qing capital of Mongolia,¹³ and the year when Danzanravjaa, at the age of six or seven, wrote his first poem, "Indra" (*Khurmusta, Khurmusta Tngri*). During his relatively short life,¹⁴ Danzanravjaa would do more than perhaps any other writer of the premodern period to preserve and promote Mongolian culture, both within his own community of the Gobi and through his interactions with foreign travelers. This first poem, written in honor of the-sky god Indra,¹⁵ is a significant prefiguring of the work that Danzanravjaa would carry out within his immediate society, both monastic and lay.

It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of Danzanravjaa's poetic work to the development of Mongolian literature. While Luvsantsültem's detailed and sophisticated

treatment of Buddhist themes made his contribution central to the understanding of Mongolian Vajrayāna, and his social criticism exposed the problems inherent in the relationship between the monastic and lay communities, Danzanravjaa's work expressed the social and religious implications of Buddhist practice in new and dramatic ways.

We can understand Danzanravjaa's contribution to nineteenth-century Buddhism in Mongolia from the viewpoints of social criticism and pedagogy. Beyond his literary work and his religious teaching, he was an expert in animal husbandry, dramaturgy, music, and astrology, and a keen promoter of equal education for girls and boys.¹⁶ His motivation seems always to have been educational, and his literary work was apparently intended to reflect common experiences in the lives of his audience.

Unlike Luvsantsültem, Danzanravjaa chose consistently to couch his ideas in language that reflected the nomadic life of the people of the Gobi around his monastery of Khamryn Khiid.¹⁷ This not only endeared him to his students, but it also meant that the discourse of Mongolian Buddhism was given room to grow. For example, we find many of his poems in which the long journey to enlightenment is mediated by the horse, revealing its important cultural role. There are times, moreover, where the horse becomes almost a metaphor for the practitioner's commitment to the path:¹⁸

Riding my beloved
Far across the earth,
From the depths of my heart
All is clear, like a mirror.¹⁹

At other times, as with the poetry of Tibetan *yogīs* such as Milarepa or Drukpa Kunley ('Brug pa Kun legs), so with Danzanravjaa—who, like both of these Tibetan figures, had been trained within the Karma Kagyu and Nyingma schools—conflating the journey with the goal, making the poetry of love from the poetry of religious experience.

What is this thing called love?
It is a lovely ancient benediction.
Let us take the short cut by the southern slope
And reach the distant land.

It is a pleasure to meet
The one you desire.
You'll need the riches of the Dharma.
Let's enter the Abhidharma and enjoy eternity.²⁰

Danzanravjaa's gift, shown in this poem expressing the interplay of romantic love and spirituality, the interplay of horsemanship and Buddhist practice, is to reveal his understanding of the human condition and the Mongolian nomadic way of thinking. The significance of movement and of journeys on horseback to the nomadic people of the Gobi remains even today a potent force. While it is true that, having been raised in a poor nomadic family, such

an equation would have been natural even to Danzanravjaa, his ability to bring together the most profound spiritual concepts and the daily life of his audience must not be overlooked.

Unlike many senior Buddhist teachers of his generation, Danzanravjaa never traveled to, or studied in, Tibet. Despite his facility with the Tibetan language, he tended to write in Mongolian, and developed in his later years fierce anti-Manchu sentiments. Like the Gelug monk Luvsantsültem, Danzanravjaa found much to be dissatisfied with in monastic circles, as we can hear in his famous poem of excoriation, “Shame, Shame” (*Ichige Ichige*):

And oh, the old get older without collecting merit—what a shame!
 And oh, the young get dressed up without straightening their minds—
 what a shame!
 And oh, the wise don’t join their Dharma minds—what a shame!
 And oh, the princes are showy when they serve—what a shame!
 And oh, the monks study by day in the monastery and wander the
 streets by night—what a shame!
 And oh, the students pray openly and stuff themselves in secret—
 what a shame!²¹

For all his irritability and brilliance,²² one of Danzanravjaa’s saving graces was recognition of his own failings. Much in the style of the Tibetan “crazy wisdom” practitioners (*mnyon pa*), he refers frequently to himself with monikers such as “fool” or “crazy monk” or “staff-wielding beggar,” and at the end of the “Shame, Shame,” he writes: “And oh, if I have these faults myself, then I am first amongst equals—what a shame!” It seems to be partly this acceptance of his own nature that both endeared him to his students and protected him, at least temporarily, from the anger of the Qing authorities.

While Danzanravjaa was able to compose in Tibetan, he was clearly more comfortable when writing in Mongolian. The work of scholars such as Ts. Damdinsüren and Ch. Altangerel has shown that many of the Tibetan texts ascribed to Danzanravjaa might, in fact, have been composed or translated by his students or amanuenses.²³ This preference for his native language, as opposed to Tibetan, the Buddhist *lingua franca*, would suggest that Danzanravjaa’s intentions were focused on the development of the indigenous literary aspects of Mongolian Buddhism, and its defining references to the folk tradition and the Chinggisid ancestry.

Even in Danzanravjaa’s more lyrical writings there are constant references to the path of enlightenment, and his social criticism also seems to be aimed more toward reforming, rather than damning, the errant. This focus is seen most clearly in his teaching poems (*surgaal*), which are often lengthy expositions of complex ideas, couched in literary figures designed to appeal to his nomadic audience. In these poems, we can see his sharp humor at work, as for instance in the “Springtime Pleasures” (*Khavar tsagiin zugaa*), where he speaks about the fundamental Buddhist ideas of determined practice and impermanence:

Although you are a small person,
The lotus of purity opens if the teaching is made clear.
If it's not held fast to its mother's breast, the suckling wastes away.
If they're not taken in by faithful and wealthy relatives,
Infants get into trouble.
You can strip a banana tree, but there's nothing inside.
You can help a crazy fool, but they have no true mind.
You can rub a black face, but it won't turn white.
You can teach an ignorant student, but they'll ignore your helpful words.
In autumn, the falling rain turns the leaves yellow.
Time ticks by and,
Though knowledge of the five desires helps, old age comes.
And, though the flowers bloom and sway,
Who knows when hail and frost will pass through?²⁴

Images of the natural world, central to Mongolian literature, were especially meaningful to Danzanravjaa. It was not unusual for him to give teachings to his students and to the nomadic herders of the Gobi, which included comments more pertinent to equine management and the accurate reading of the seasons than to spiritual development. Furthermore, such concerns were so deeply ingrained in the literature that, at the time Danzanravjaa was writing, a genre called *üge*,²⁵ an admixture of advice and social criticism expressed through words spoken, in the main, by inanimate objects or animals developed along more secular lines. This genre developed from an idea ascribed to Agwaankhaidav (T. Ngag dbang mKhas grub, 1779–1838) and later expanded by Sandag (1825–1860). It began in part as a Mongolian reframing of the traditional Tibetan moralistic commentarial literature, a genre with which Agwaankhaidav was clearly familiar. And while he wrote primarily in Tibetan, he reserved the Mongolian language for the less serious, albeit doctrinally no less meaningful, *üge*.

Agwaankhaidav appears to have set the bar high, placing the onus on the writer not only to make his audiences laugh, but also to make them think. Subsequent writers, employing this particular genre in addressing important social and religious questions, have tended to rise to the challenge. Following Agwankhaidub's lead, Sandag²⁶ sought to develop the *üge* away from a dialogue, be it between a human and an animal or entirely between animals, to a monologue in which a character presents a specific point of view.

The *üge*, as the scholar Kh. Süglegmaa writes, arose “from the popular oral tradition, and it developed alongside the artistic tradition of oral texts.”²⁷ Sandag also introduced the inanimate character to the *üge* tradition, as attested in “What the China Cup Said” (*Sayajing kelegsen üge*), where he puts the following words into the mouth of a china cup concerned for its safety:

Don't let the children see me!

Place me in a dresser.

If I make a sound, then I'm dead!²⁸

Here then we have an example of how Sandag (and, by extension, the *üge* tradition in general) perceived the world around him. He was aware of the value of china, and in speaking for the cup, rather than for the cup's owner, who clearly in this case wanted to show off her possessions or to offer to her guest the very best she had, he was able to comment with humor upon an everyday hazard in the small environment of a nomadic *ger*. Although Sandag was not a monk, we should realize how heavily his work was influenced by Buddhist ideas such as impermanence and compassionate action. Nonetheless, that his characterization and subject matter were less obvious in their adherence to religious concerns rendered them more popular.

Danzanravjaa did not seem to have had any interest in writing *üge*, and his didactic texts (*surgaal*) already deal in many ways with the same moral and practical complexities as were addressed within the *üge* tradition. Both he and the *üge* writers turn their humor upon human failings, but the dynamic between the spiritual and practical serves to illustrate the differences and the similarities between a monastic writer such as Agwankhaidub and a layman like Sandag.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Mongolian literature developed along two distinct tracks. One was the secular literature of writers such as Injanashi, who adapted historical and romantic themes into literature for entertainment; the other was represented by monastic Buddhist writers who sought to counter this trend, imitating some of the wit and philosophical sophistication of Sandag and Danzanravjaa to present an exposition of the nature of reality. One such Buddhist writer was Isisambuu (T. nGag dbang Ye shes bZang po, 1847–1906/7). Not only were Isisambuu's fables the natural development of Agwaankhaidav's *üge*, but he himself was also held to be Agwaankhaidav's reincarnation. For this reason, as Heissig suggests,²⁹ Isisambuu's choice of thematic material resulted as much from cultural expectations as from his personal concerns. Clearly, though, Isisambuu had a deep empathy with the animals about whom he wrote, sharing their suffering and joy in language of great sensitivity and great passion. In his long poem "The Words of Wisdom, in the Form of a Conversation in Which a Young Antelope, a Marmot and a Milk Cow Each Tell the Story of Its Life, With All Its Sadness, to the Slaughterer" (*Önöcin injaya tarbaya kögsin üniye yurba-ber öber öber-ün orosiqu yosu kiged jobalang-iyān alayčīn kümüñdū kelegesen-ü yosun-du bičigsen udqa-tai nom-un üges terigüten*), Isisambuu expresses in highly emotional language his feeling for the young antelope wandering forlornly after its mother has been killed by a hunter.

In the coda to this poem, Isisambuu says that this song is designed "to arouse pity for the orphaned and motherless young antelope," an apparent reference to the Buddhist idea of compassion. Isisambuu has here expanded the ideas of the *üge*, in which moralistic lessons are offered to the reader through the medium of talking animals,

into a treatment of the way in which animals, implicitly because of the *karma* of their previous lives, are subject to cruelty and misfortune. This is not so much a presentation about how humans should act with compassion toward animals, although that is definitely one aspect of the message, but rather it is a wake-up call to those who, by “arous[ing] pity” for the antelope, will be empowered to arouse pity for their own situation.

FEATURES OF MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST LITERATURE OF THE EARLY
TWENTIETH CENTURY

Despite the political upheavals during the period of Qing decline and during the decade of Mongolian independence between 1911 and 1921, the output of traditional literature continued apace. One is led to believe, from reading secular and religious literature from those periods, that the change in governance had very little impact on how the established literary traditions developed. Most of the major figures continued to write secular Chinese-influenced poetry, while the *üge* tradition continued to present moralistic subject matter with an ever-greater sophistication. In addition to literature expressing Buddhist themes in secular form, the more traditional Buddhist textual genres were expressions of the strong influence of Tibetan literary forms such as praise (*irügel*) and blessing (*magtaal*). Arguably, the most influential of writers in this genre was Geligbalsang (T. dGe legs dPal bzang, 1846–1923), whose death, just before that of the Eighth Bogd Khan, came at a point when there remained to Buddhism only a few years before the communist purge.

Geligbalsang’s *œuvre* consists primarily of a large number of prayers, ostensibly written for a specific circumstance. While it is believed that he wrote many prayers celebrating people’s birthdays and wishing them good fortune in the year to come, none of these are extant. We can get an understanding of the way in which Geligbalsang weaves together intention and technique in the poem “Prayer Requesting the Gods for Rain” (*Tngri-eče boruyan qura yuyuqu*), which was composed during the terrible drought of 1905. Having spoken of the people’s anger with the powers of nature and their frustration at the situation, he continues, lamenting the absence of rainfall:

What will happen tomorrow? “Let it go,” they say,
Your cattle, with which you have always been good friends,
Who are now in agony, die,
And their hearts cannot endure it.³⁰

This relationship with livestock is, as with the *üge* tradition, a common *topos* in Mongolian literature. Geligbalsang’s work also illustrates a very powerful aspect of Mongolian Buddhism, marking it out as separate from the Tibetan Buddhism with which it is so frequently confused. This is that the relationship between the people and from

Mongolian indigenous tradition remains powerful, notwithstanding the popular syncretism with Buddhist philosophy and praxis.

Geligbalsang's precatory work covers many different aspects of Mongolian life, and it influenced the literary skills of his students. Heissig devotes several pages to the legacy of Geligbalsang and other specifically religious writers,³¹ but suffice it to say here that, by the time Sükhbaatar and the Red Army marched into Urga in 1921, the importance of indigenous beliefs as an adjunct of Buddhism had not diminished, nor had the influence of writers such as Danzanravjaa, Sandag, Isisambu, and Geligbalsang grown weak over time. During the period of independence under the Eighth Bogd Khan, Mongolian literature remained much the same as it had during the later Manchu period. This was the case in 1921, and latterly in 1924, when the Mongol People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) was established, and when Urga was renamed Ulaanbaatar after the revolutionary hero Sükhbaatar, who had died the previous year. At this time, Mongolian Buddhism remained a powerful influence, although secularism was coming into vogue, and although the philosophical thought of Buryat intellectuals, such as the journalist Tsüben Jamtsarano, was gaining attraction.³²

THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD AND BEYOND

On May 20, 1924, the Eighth Bogd Gegeen died. The MPRP prohibited the traditional search for the Bogd Gegeen's reincarnation, thus opening the way for the proletarian government to take control with the support of the Soviet Union, which formally recognized Mongolia's independence from China. In the furor stirred up by the revolution, and to enable Mongolia to take its place in the new world order, the MPRP began sending some of its young intellectuals to Europe. Among them was D. Natsagdorj (1906–1937), who is still regarded as the founder of modern Mongolian literature. In Leipzig during the latter years of the 1920s he gained a sufficient knowledge of German to translate the German literature that was emerging after the First World War. In so doing, he introduced the European short-story form to Mongolia. This was quite a different style of fiction from the long and verbose historical and romantic works of Chinese-influenced authors such as Injanashi. Natsagdorj also imported the ideas of character development and psychological motivation, which he had assimilated from Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Together with his near-contemporary M. Yadamsüren (1904–1937), who himself had been in the first tranche of Mongols sent to study in Moscow during the 1920s, Natsagdorj transformed the way in which literature, and prose in particular, was understood and constructed, read, and critiqued.

The first years of the MPRP government saw a move toward collectivization, which, in turn, catalyzed a series of protests by the country's nomadic herders. As in neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, a considerable number of herders preferred to kill their livestock, and sometimes to take their own lives too, than to subject themselves to the

stability and shared property of collective farms. The death of seven million heads of livestock, together with inadequate Soviet assistance in the face of famine, brought Mongolia to the brink of civil war. In 1931–1932, a brutal crackdown against intellectuals and protesters, predominantly but not exclusively in the west of the country, resulted in the first wave of antireligious repression. This sudden and draconian treatment of the monastic establishment prefigured the greater purges that would take place in 1937–1938, which would claim the lives of many thousands of monks, as well as intellectuals like Natsagdorj and Yadamsüren. A result of the initial five-year plan in 1928, which included the policy of collectivization, and which further encouraged antimonastic sentiment, was that writers began to produce work that, to a greater or lesser extent, confirmed the party line. While the impact upon Buddhist literature itself was minimal,³³ these new works of fiction in particular (maybe because the short story was seen as a modern, European, and therefore sophisticated³⁴ genre) began to treat Buddhism as a subject of close and unforgiving inspection.

Two stories in particular from this period—Natsagdorj’s “The Venerable Lama’s Tears” (*Lambugain Nulims*) and Yadamsüren’s “The True Story About the Old Woman Who Worships What She Sees and the Monk Who is Poisoned by Jealousy” (*Ankhaarch Biskhirsen Chavagants, Ataarkhan Khorsson Lam Khoyorin Ünen Baidal*)³⁵—stand out as examples of work combining the mocking satire of poets such as Danzanravjaa and Sandag and the modernist genre of the short story. Natsagdorj’s central character, the monk-scholar Geshe Lodon, in his gradual seduction and gulling by the prostitute Tserenlkham is portrayed as weak and naïve, and we are led to believe that his naïveté was caused by his monastic education. The parallelism of the long opening paragraph shows Natsagdorj’s stylistic genius, but his description of Geshe Lodon and the prostitute as they came together near Gandan monastery in the center of Ulaanbaatar implicitly lays out the tragedy of the story:

When Geshe Lodon, who meditated on the world as being empty, who kept the monastic vows, and had persevered with his robes of yellow and red [colors], came down the eastern terrace at Gandan, it happened that a young woman called Zi Bai-hua, or Tserenlkham, whose determined study of song was an education in the sharp heat of passion, was coming in the opposite direction, in a shimmer of white and black, down a muddy street out of the Western Traders’ quarter of Uрга.³⁶

The ensuing tragedy is one in which Tserenlkham (and perhaps Natsagdorj too) makes a mockery not only of Geshe Lodon but also of the monastic life in general. Geshe Lodon’s sad verse to Tserenlkham, in which he speaks of returning home to find the house he had bought for the two of them bolted from within, and she having sex with another man, recalls traditional tales of unrequited love around the world, and the “dark, worldly tears” that fall from his eyes in the final sentence express the quotidian, yet deeply personal, suffering that he, “who meditated on the world as being empty,” has finally experienced.

In contrast to Natsagdorj's story, Yadamsüren's short piece, which could almost be described as a micro-fiction, is already well described by its title. However, what it is that the old woman sees is a plane, flying overhead, which reminds her of her son, gone to the military to defend Mongolia. As she makes offerings to this wonderful vision, the monk castigates her, saying that she should be worshipping the Buddha instead. The old woman's retort demolishes the monk's arrogance and establishes a redirection of the old ways toward Mongolia's revolutionary benefit. She says:

Away with you, you good-for-nothing! In some sixty years, I have not seen any of the reincarnations, holy men, or Buddhas that you all claim can fly, but with my two eyes I have seen a flying machine built by the children of the people, thanks to the education and culture of the people; and I am happy for this—and so, wise lama, I'm making offerings.³⁷

These two stories, written respectively in 1930 and, most probably, in 1935, illustrate the way in which Mongolian writers were starting to come to terms with the new approach to Buddhism, which resulted from the repression of monks in the early 1930s. Neither Natsagdorj nor Yadamsüren wrote much about Buddhism, which was outlawed by government policy toward the end of their short lives. Nonetheless, as we begin to look at what literary expression there was of Buddhism during the years that followed the purges of 1937–1938, we should be aware that the poems of writers such as Natsagdorj and others, which reflect in part the indigenous and Buddhist traditions of identifying the natural environment with local deities and ancestors, seems to have been a direction that writers followed during the time of the greatest governmental censorship, in order to speak of the religious faith that still remained in the cultural psyche.

In his 1961 article “The Standard Poetic Form of the 1940s and 1950s and the Reasons for its Adoption,” the poet B. Yavuukhulan gives a precise account of the moment when the focus of Mongolian letters shifted to the celebration of revolutionary politics and political leaders. Yavuukhulan writes: “Suddenly, in the second 1938 issue of the journal *The People's Cultural Road* (*Ündesnii Soëlin Zam*), numerous poems were published praising the Marshall Choibalsan.³⁸ Before this issue of the magazine, Choibalsan's name had not appeared in poetry, although there had been poems concerning Sükhbaatar.³⁹ Not only did the work published in this edition feature for the first time the names of Choibalsan and the Dotood Yaam,⁴⁰ but the laudatory way in which their work was described was somewhat awkward.²⁴¹

Yavuukhulan's account is noteworthy for its specificity, and it indicates that the MPRP had decided that this would be the moment at which a new cultural path would be forged. This moment coincided with the ongoing purges of the so-called anti-revolutionaries, in the form of intellectuals and monastics, while at the same time it focused upon the personality of Choibalsan and the work of his Ministry of Internal

Affairs (Dotood Yaam). Henceforward the official literary output of Mongolian writers took a definitive turn. The model that developed (which, Yavuukhulan claimed, would “suggest that Choibalsan had, through his own strengths and abilities, singlehandedly made the discoveries which had in fact been made by the people’s revolution of 1917”) held sway until 1959, only two years before this essay was written. It created what Yavuukhulan describes as “severe obstacles for the development of poetry.”

Thus, it was then that Mongolian literature, and Mongolian society in general, entered the period in which “the cult of one man”⁴² was the norm. The year 1939 marked the outer limit of the “purges” conducted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs at Choibalsan’s instigation.⁴³ This led not so much to the death of writers and intellectuals but to their silencing. The practical manifestation of this was simply that no writer might be published whose work did not conform to the explicit MPRP guidelines for both the content and the style of poetry.⁴⁴ The result was that, having lost writers such as Natsagdorj and Yadamsüren, those who controlled Mongolian letters now raised up the likes of L. Tsend-Ochir, D. Sengee, and B. Baast, who were at best second-rate writers and at worst apologists for the regime that had eliminated many of the first-rate writers.

One of the most interesting, yet ultimately tragic, examples of the literary expression of Buddhism during the years following the purges is that of G. Ser-Od (1917–1940). In his autobiographical essay “Original Mind” (*Ekhiin Setgel*),⁴⁵ Ser-Od writes about what he calls the “wrong behavior” at the monastery of Dari Ekh (Tārā), where he had been sent as a small boy. It is uncertain how Ser-Od understood the developments of his own life as they related to the period of the communist government’s oppression of monks during the late 1930s. However, when he writes about the Dari-Ekh monks as cruel and vicious, hinting at his own teacher’s sexually abusive behavior, it is clear that he intends his readers to set up the monks as examples of counter-revolutionaries. Many of Ser-Od’s poems address the traditional ideas of Mongolian nomadic society, landscape, and family life. His work provides an entry into the relationship between literature and indigenous tradition during the twenty years between the antimonastic purges and Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin in 1956.

The changing face of the arts in Mongolia before, during, and after the Second World War not only involved the excision of the nation’s religious worldview but also entailed a forced refocusing of faith toward the political leaders such as Stalin and Choibalsan and toward communist ideology. For this reason, it is hard to find anything from this period that might be understood as explicitly Buddhist literature. During the 1960s certain strategies were commonly used to express the importance of the relationship between people and the natural world. It would not be impossible to look at certain texts written during the 1940s and early 1950s with this in mind, although the works published during this period, which Yavuukhulan’s student G. Mend-Ooyo⁴⁶ describes as “a void,” were essentially empty of the Mongolian religious expression. They expressed political loyalty, whether fabricated or genuine, to the MPRP and to its heroes.

Yavuukhulan was almost single-handedly responsible for the revival of Mongolian *belle lettres* during the late 1950s and into the 1960s. His enthusiasm for the natural world and for the life of the nomadic herders nurtured a situation in which some form of religion, even if it was expressed simply as an appreciation for life, could be reintroduced. We should not be under the illusion, however, that religious ideas suddenly became acceptable to the state censors or that Yavuukhulan and his students were failing to express their own deep-seated religious motivation. The truth, I would suggest, is far more complex, given that none of these writers had lived without the constraints of MPRP control.

During the period of Tsedenbal's leadership,⁴⁷ Mongolia languished in something of sociopolitical mire. Censorship became more pronounced and pervasive, although perhaps less stifling, than it had been under Choibalsan. Writers such as Yavuukhulan and his students were offered some thematic latitude. Religious sentiments, however, were never explicitly expressed, and it became necessary for writers to find a way to talk about the spiritual world without mentioning the names of deities. We have seen how Yavuukhulan was looking to inject poetry with Mongolian nomadic and religious ideas as early as 1959. This period of thaw, immediately following Khrushchev's speech against Stalin's policies, lasted until Brezhnev began to restrict Khrushchev's reforms. But there was a period of experimentation that showed Yavuukhulan that the way to talk about religion was to couch these themes in the language of landscape, and of the people's relationship with the landscape surrounding them.

Thus it was that one of the main focal points for Yavuukhulan and his students became the expression of the landscape. Nyamsüren, Dashbalbar, and Mend-Ooyo chose to address this in different ways, observing carefully the contours not only of the physical world, but also of the psychological world of Mongolian nomads. As Nyamsüren himself wrote about the ancestors who protect the Mongolian people and who are manifested as the grasses underfoot:

I tread upon the grasses now,
But later they will grow upon me.⁴⁸

This specific discourse, which speaks of a direct link between the ever-present and all-protecting ancestors and the grasses that cover the Mongolian steppes, runs throughout the work of Yavuukhulan's students and in the work of writers today. The connection between the ancestors, deities, and the Buddhas is a close one, and one that resonates throughout Mongolian society, for which hills are held to be the Buddhas, and where offerings are left in the form of small stone cairns (*ovoo*). The identification of the ancestors and Buddhist deities with the grasses allowed for the expression of a religious worldview to creep back into the literature almost unsuspected.

Parallel to this revival of the theme of the natural world, in 1992 Mend-Ooyo published the first version of his magnum opus, *Golden Hill (Altan Ovoo)*, the first section of which is a dedicatory prayer to the originally Indian goddess of melody and poetry,

Sarasvatī. This is preceded by an even more explicit prayer, “Homage to the Dharma,” which shows how censorship in Mongolia was already changing, and that it was now possible for writers to express Buddhist sentiments.⁴⁹ Starting in the early 1990s, the re-introduction of monasteries and the appearance of monks in the media made Buddhism a significant presence within the nation’s cultural life. The legacy of Yavuukhulan, who died in 1982, has been continued in the work of his immediate successors and in the most recent generation.

In conclusion, Buddhism has expressed itself through Mongolian literature, following historical developments. The past century has seen exceptional changes in the fortunes of Buddhist monks and lay practitioners alike. Even before the 1921 revolution, the importance of the Buddhist clergy and their public teaching could be seen in the way in which the writers of *üge*, and the likes of Danzanravjaa, chose to satirize certain practitioners, while encouraging their students and others to focus on the most beneficial aspects of a religious life.

It could be argued, of course, that Buddhism, being a constant presence in Mongolia, whether explicitly or implicitly, has always exercised a substantial influence over the general populace and over the *literati*. In this way, the breadth and depth of the literary treatment of Buddhism in all its forms, whether open or politically subversive, has interacted with educators, nomads, monastics, local, and national rulers. It has culturally advanced the Mongolian people and the Mongolian state, which now, during the first quarter of the twenty-first century, sits at the geopolitical center of the new Asia.

NOTES

1. Oberfalzerová, 2006, 29.

2. Now called *savdag*, a Mongol version of the Tibetan *sa bdag* (“land ruler”). There are also water spirits called *luus*, again a version of the Tibetan *klu* (Skt. *nāga*).

3. Jerryson, 2007, 16.

4. Bira, 2002, 122.

5. Bira (2002) treats this in considerable detail.

6. See Wickham-Smith, 2010.

7. We should note here that the Seventh Dalai Lama, Bskal bzang rgya mtsho, was born in 1708 and enthroned in Lhasa in 1720.

8. It is more accurate to say that Injanashi finished this book, which had been begun by his father, the nobleman Vanchingbal (1795–1847), one of the leading writers of the early nineteenth century.

9. Heissig (1972, 265–346) gives an excellent account of the development of Mongol prose during the nineteenth century.

10. It should be pointed out that these texts are found only in his Tibetan Collected Works, and it is uncertain whether he also prepared Mongol versions.

11. Tsagan Övgön, the old white-bearded guardian of the natural world, a figure originally imported from China, and who has been assimilated into the Buddhist pantheon and into the monastic *tsam* dances.

12. *Anggiyad sira sibayun ha ha kelekü anu mayu irua busu. Aliba gelong getsül eres emes gerte selte čiyulju. Aliyalan eldeb jüil nigül-tü üges-i ügüleldün. Asuru ha ha he he kemen üiledükü anu čoqum mayu irua bui.*

13. Which act removed social and religious influence away from the previous capital Kharakhorum and placed it closer to the Manchu capital.

14. He was born in 1803 and died in 1856 (by poisoning, administered ostensibly by his own hand in order to save one of his lovers, who it is said had been bribed by the Manchu rulers to kill him, from the torments of hell).

15. In fact this word appears to be a corruption of the name for the Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda and is elsewhere identified with Indra, which suggests that Hurmusta (Modern Mongol. Hormust) is not in fact indigenous to Mongolia.

16. See Kohn (2006) and Wickham-Smith (2006), both *passim*, for extensive accounts of Danzanravjaa's life and career.

17. There is now a museum devoted to Danzanravjaa in the nearby town of Sainshand, containing at least one of his manuscripts.

18. There is also a connection to be made here with the Tibetan genre of *Calling the Lama from Afar* (*Bla ma rgyang 'bod*), in which we might see the horse as the metaphor upon which the practitioner is carried to the lama.

19. Danzanravjaa, "My Proud and Feisty Grey" (*Bardam sergelen borigoo*), in the *Perfect Qualities* (2006), 24:

Gants amrag ter miny.

Gazryn khol morilokhod.

Dotor zükrhnii dundaas.

Toly met ilerkhii.

20. Danzanravjaa, "Gently" (*Dömön*), in the *Perfect Qualities* (2006), 43:

Yanag gej yuu ve?

Ertanii sakikhan yerööl bui.

Ene khol gazrig.

Engereer ny dötölie.

Egeerch sanasan khün-teigee.

Uulzaad mordokh ni bakhtai.

Ene yavakhad nom buyan kheregtei.

Etses khoitin sünsend Avidin üüdend jargal.

21. Danzanravjaa, *Perfect Qualities* (2006), 328:

Aya bas, buyanig khuraasangüi nasjsan khögshin ichig.

Aya bas, setgelee zassangüi gangalagch zaluus ichig.

Aya bas, nomig setgelteigee niiliüülsengüi merged ichig.

Aya bas, albataa alaglagch noyod ichig

Aya bas, ödör khiided suugaad shönö ail khesegch khuvraguud ichig.

Aya bas, il süjigleed dalduur idegch shavi nar ichig.

22. Indeed, one of the most common labels attached to him is *dogsbin* ("fierce"), which suggests a combination of genius and barely controlled aggression.

23. See for instance the introduction to Altangerel (1968), and especially the analysis of the Tibetan and Mongol versions of the *Perfect Qualities*.

24. Danzanravjaa, “A Piece of Advice Called ‘The Pleasures of Springtime,’” Composed by the Princely Teacher” (*Noyon gegeenii zokhioson Khavar tsagiin zugaa khemeekh surgaal orshiv*), in the *Perfect Qualities* (2006), 235–244.

25. The word *üge* literally means a “word” or “utterance,” but “dialogue” or “monologue,” although perhaps unwieldy as Hellenistic terms, might better indicate its inherent expository nature.

26. Sandag’s skill is reflected in his title *Khaulich*, which appears to refer not to legal expertise (the term meaning a “lawyer,” “legislator,” or “jurist”) but rather to his facility with language and with wordplay.

27. Sülegmaa, 2005b, 17 (my translation).

28. *Khüükhed bitgii üzүүл. Khöndii gazar tavi.*

Duugarlaa l bol ükhlee.

29. Heissig, 1972, 616.

30. *Üde-düni orkiyaad kebtete getele.*

Ürgüljide ijilisügsen mal ud-iyān

Üküjü jobaji bayiqu duni

Üneger sedkil töbdekü ügei.

31. Heissig, 1972, 472–491.

32. Jerryson, 2007, 44–45.

33. Those monastic scholars who remained following the antireligious crackdown continued to write for the consumption—whether by reading or by listening—of the Buddhist majority. Given the fact that, even in 1941, 90% of the population remained illiterate, the import of these texts was most likely transmitted orally. The traditional forms, such as the *üge*, continued to be written and continued to have Buddhist themes, although it is clear that self-censorship was beginning to be exercised among those writers who remained favorable to Buddhism.

34. It is interesting to see how European style began to infiltrate Mongol society during the early years of the MPRP government. Natsagdorj is invariably shown in a homburg hat and a western-style jacket, eminently European, while Yadamsüren’s highly influential novellas, *The Young Couple* (*Khos Zалуu*) and *Three Young Women* (*Gurvan Khüükhen*), both portray the wearing of modern, Western clothing as a positive and progressive statement.

35. Natsagdorj’s story is translated in Wickham-Smith (2012), 20–23. Yadamsüren’s is as yet unpublished in translation.

36. *Orchlont yertöntsiig khooson khemeekh khürdiig byasalgaj vinain yosig sakhisan gevsh Lodon ulaan sharig tunuulsaar, Gandangiin naad khür uruu buuj irmegts, uran tachaanguin khurts ildiig bolovsruulj duchiin erdmüig sudalsan avilagch khüükhen Zi Bai-hua khemeekh Tserenkhham tsaagan kharig gyalbalzuulsaar, Baruun damnuurchni shavartai gudaamjnaas garch irkeh ni esreg tkoholdov.*

37. *Za yarshig daa, bi chukham ödii jaran garui nas khürtlee lam nar ta narin kheldeg khuvilgaan, khatagt, burkhan tenger gedgiin chiny nisej yabaag nüdeer üzsen udaagui. Kharin ardyn khüükhed, ardyn bolovsrol soyoloor бүтэесен нисдэг тегендее суугаад нисей явааг би khoyor nüdeeree үзөж байарлаад сүүгее өргөж байна.*

38. Marshal Khorloin Choibalsan (1895–1952) was the leader of the Mongolian People’s Republic from 1936 until his death. As a close follower of Josef Stalin, he implemented the severe antimonastic and anti-intellectual purges that took place during 1937–1938.

39. D. Sükhbaatar (1896–1921) was the de facto leader of the 1921 revolution, though there is evidence that his position was no greater than that of any other of the principal revolutionaries.

40. The Dotood Yam (Ministry of Internal Affairs), represented by the feared Nagoon Tsamts (Green Shirts), was the official body employed by the MPRP to control those people and groups perceived as antirevolutionary.

41. Yavuukhulan, 1990, 90–91.

42. The phrase *neg khüniig takhij shütekh yavdal* has similarly disturbing overtones in both languages.

43. These purges are covered extensively in Sandag and Kendall (2000) and Jerryson (2007).

44. I have tried to ascertain the extent to which writers circulated the work that was not approved by the Party, whether in handwritten MSS or in samizdat versions. As yet I have not discovered information on this, although I suspect that there was a healthy, if careful, group of writers doing precisely that throughout this period.

45. Translated in Wickham-Smith (2012), 141–150.

46. Email communication with the author, 2010.

47. Tsendenbal (1916–1991) served as the prime minister (1952–1974) and as the president (1974–1984).

48. *Övsim deer bi gishgenem.*

Ono khögjim nad deer urganam.

49. Mend-Ooyo was a member of the group that funded and built a large statue of Migjed Chenrezi (Eye-Opening Avalokiteśvara) at Gandan monastery in Ulaanbaatar soon after the introduction of democracy.

10

How Vajrapāṇi Became a Mongol

Vesna A. Wallace



INTRODUCTION

In its response to diverse historical and sociocultural stimuli across Asia, Vajrayāna Buddhism has occupied multiple cultural and national identities through the processes of adaptation, acculturation, and transformation. Providing the example of the Mongols' adoption and adaptation of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist deity Vajrapāṇi, this chapter will illustrate the manners in which the assimilation of the Buddhist deity Vajrapāṇi has found its expression in both Mongolian cultural and political arenas and in his transformation into a Mongol.

Vajrapāṇi, also known as the Lord of Secrets (*nuutsiin ezen ochir barigch*, Skt. *gubhyādhīpati*) is most influential among Buddhist deities that were adopted, naturalized, or politicized by the Mongols. He is invariably represented in Mongolian iconography in his blue, fierce form, and most frequently appears either with or without a white *stūpa* depicted over his right shoulder. These two common representations play a part in different ritual practices involving the worship of Vajrapāṇi, ranging from rituals carried out for a deceased person to other types of private and state rituals. On account of his renown for having extraordinary strength, Vajrapāṇi has been widely known in Mongolia as one who bestows strength (*chadal khüch khairagch*) and removes obstacles. As such, he has been approached as a protective deity capable of safeguarding the Mongolian state, territories, and people. His widespread popularity among the Mongols is also evidenced by the invocations of his name in the summoning rituals performed by black and yellow Shamans.¹

Becoming a part of the Mongolian geocultural landscape, the image of a fierce Vajrapāṇi inspired the creation of Mongolian folk tales that celebrate his valor and glorious deeds. In these tales, he appears as a mighty, divine hero who creates the world and subdues demonic forces, and who as the Buddha's warrior is delegated the task of subjugating the powerful, malevolent entities that pose a threat to the natural world and its inhabitants. In some tales he is portrayed as a deity of immense strength and power, while in other folktales he succumbs to the effects of the natural world in which he finds himself. Thus, the Varjapāṇi of Mongolian folk narratives differs from the Buddha Varjapāṇi of the ritual texts or from Vajrapāṇi in his Mongolian incarnations. In these narratives, he neither brings about inner changes of the individual nor does he alter the social and political realities.³

The following Mongolian *sādhana* of Vajrapāṇi interprets the symbolism of his appearance in such a way as to indicate Vajrapāṇi's elevated status in the Mongolian Buddhist pantheon.

His body is of a dark blue color. With his right hand he wields a five-pointed *vajra*, symbolizing the crushing of the five mental afflictions—attachment, aversion, delusion, pride, and envy. His left hand is placed near his heart with the *mudrā* of defeating the eight classes of demons. His open mouth expresses ferocity, and his four white, crossed fangs subjugate the four Māras. With his three terrifying eyes that exhibit compassion for all sentient beings in the three times, he incinerates the poisons of attachment, aversion, and delusion. His blazing reddish-yellow hair, which stands on its end, subjugates all living beings within the three realms and maintains his authority over the three states of existence—those of gods, humans, and *nāgas*. His crown, decorated with five jewels representing the five Buddha families, symbolizes the bestowal of initiation to the Buddhas of the three times. His head, throat, arms, and legs decorated with *vajras* symbolize the achievement of the six perfections. He wears an apron of tiger skin on his lower body in order to frighten Māras and demons. Standing in the *ālīḍha* posture (with his right leg extended forward and his left leg contracted) on the sun-disc located on a lotus, he crushes fetters and obstacles. He emits hot fire from his body to dry the ocean of *samsāra*; to set in motion the three realms. He honors the teachings in the ten directions, secret *mantras*, wisdom-*dhāraṇīs*, and so on.^{3,4}

Acknowledged in this *sādhana* as a manifestation of the ferocious mind of awakening (*bodhicitta*), considered to be more powerful than ordinary *bodhicitta*, Vajrapāṇi is said to fill the entire space with the wrath emanating from his heart. The *sādhana* ends with a supplication for the purification of sins and for spiritual progress, fame, glory, long life, and happiness. Its concluding verse attests to Vajrapāṇi's role in assisting the worshipper in both religious and mundane affairs.

In his diverse human and nonhuman emanations, Vajrapāṇi has been incorporated into the religious and political domains of Mongols' lives and has permeated Mongolian folklore, literature, art, and rituals. At the present time, praises and prayers to Vajrapāṇi in their various versions are found in contemporary Mongolian poetry, folk songs, and even popular music.⁵ One such prayer emphasizes his ability to remove the obstacles caused by one's misdeeds in the following way:

I go for refuge to you, Vajrapāṇi, who terrifies and scatters in the four directions the wrathful servants of the Lord Yama and others, [merely] glancing at them.

I have previously disobeyed your instruction and am facing a great danger now. Let me supplicate and go to you for refuge! Please swiftly remove my perils.⁶

In the Mongolian Vajrayāna tradition, among all of the wrathful deities, it is Vajrapāṇi who has the greatest power to pull sentient beings from the ocean of suffering. To those who worship him, he grants great strength to engage in acts of virtue and to purify their bodies, speech, and minds. To those born in particular years, he is astrologically assigned as their tutelary deity (*yidam*) to be worshipped with one hundred thousand recitations of the above-described *sādhana*. In Mongolian Buddhist astrology, they are advised to ride only a black horse that has been consecrated with ribbons to Vajrapāṇi and decorated with black ornaments.⁷

In the daily life of Mongolian nomads, Vajrapāṇi protects the family's livestock from thieves and wolves and assists the family in retrieving stolen or lost livestock. A prayer to Vajrapāṇi for the protection of livestock invariably accompanies a ritual of the offering of vodka (*serjim*, T. *gser skyems*) spilled in the direction of the livestock. Likewise, offerings are made to Vajrapāṇi and his troop of *yakṣas* in a preparatory ritual for hunting a rabid wolf that is killing off one's livestock. A supplication for the retrieval of stolen livestock forms a part of the *vajra* ritual (*ochir üilgekh*), in which the thief is paralyzed or made unconscious. As the officiating lama recites the appropriate *mantras*, a ritual *vajra*, which is tied to a silken scarf (*khadag*), and held in the right hand, begins to shake and turn toward the direction of the thief, enabling the ritual sponsor to find his stolen animals. The vodka offering is also made to Vajrapāṇi for protection from gossip, harm caused by *nāgas*, and sickness. His *mantra* "*om vajrapāṇi hum phaṭ*" is recited for the elimination of ulcers and boils, and his heart *mantra* is believed to terrify enemies, cut off the root of the ten non-virtues, and bring courage, strength, and power to his worshiper.⁸ Those in need of protection are told in Mongolian lore to wear Vajrapāṇi's protective amulet, since Vajrapāṇi himself declared, "If any danger comes to a person wearing this [amulet], I am not a Buddha."⁹

Vajrapāṇi is propitiated for both the well-being of the head of a household and for the well-being of the head of the state, for it is said that if these two are strong, the entire

family and the state will be as well. Vajrapāṇi's protective role in Mongolia extends beyond the private domain to the Mongol state, and he is revered as a powerful guardian against the enemies of the state and the Buddha-Dharma. Therefore, during the turbulent time following World War II in the Mongolian districts of Zasagt Khan and Sain Noën Khan, the famous Mongolian lama Dilova Khutugtu¹⁰ (1883–1965) sent a letter to the League Head of Zasagt Khan district (*aimag*), advising every household of that district to resort to Vajrapāṇi's expelling rites (*dordog*, T. *gtor zlog*) and to his warrior god (*dalkhaa*, T. *dgra lha*) prayers, so that they may pass through the difficult time without encountering the perils of war.¹¹

In the Indian and Tibetan Buddhist sources,¹² Vajrapāṇi was entrusted by the Buddha the tasks of enforcing religious and state laws, subduing those who are difficult to subdue, and crushing various obstacles in the form of demons, enemies, and heretics. For these reasons, in Mongolia he has been deemed suitable for the position of protector of the Mongolian state. In this regard, it has been common for the state and religious leaders in Mongolia to issue decrees urging people to worship Vajrapāṇi for the benefit of all beings in Mongolia. One such mandate issued by the Fifth Bogd, Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (1815–1842), to the Mongolian people reads:

At this time apply yourselves to the Dharma of Vajrapāṇi, the full magnificence. [Then] there will be long life and absence of disease for all sentient beings throughout the nation. There will be the fruit of happiness through peace for all beings in this country!¹³

Likewise, in his short, prophetic text, the *Edifying Words of the Fifth Bogd Gegeen* (*Tabuduyar boyda-yin lüngden*), in which he warns the Mongols of the hardships that will befall upon them in the Year of the Snake and be followed by peace in the Year of the Horse, begins with his homage to Vajrapāṇi and further urges Mongols to “follow diligently the instructions of the mighty Vajrapāṇi.”¹⁴ As will be shown in what follows, during different historical periods, the heads of the Mongolian state have issued similar decrees.

VAJRAPĀṆI AS THE OTGONTENGER MOUNTAIN

Proclaimed as the land of Vajrapāṇi, Mongolia has been seen as his home, where he permanently resides on the snow-capped Otgontenger Mountain of the Khangai mountain range, which stretches 750 km through the midwestern region of Mongolia. At 4,032 meters,¹⁵ Otgontenger has been worshipped as a sacred site since pre-Buddhist times. Once it was declared a residence of the actual Buddha Vajrapāṇi it became known as the “Dwelling Place of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi” (Ochirvaany Burkhy Oron) and as a “Palace (*lavran*, T. *bla brang*) of the Holy Vajrapāṇi.” However, being also identified with Vajrapāṇi himself, the mountain is also called “Holy Vajrapāṇi” (Bogd Ochirvaany).¹⁶ It

is in this place that Vajrapāṇi now permanently resides among them and where they began to worship him with offerings on behalf of the state in 1779, in accordance with the decree of the Qing emperor Qianlong (1736–1796).

It is said that Vajrapāṇi Mountain offers three types of gifts to sentient beings—ambrosial spring water on its northern side, medicinal plants, and the best purifying juniper infused with Vajrapāṇi's blessings. Small rivers and streams that flow from and around Vajrapāṇi Mountain, a broad terrace of 108 hot and cold mineral springs of Small Otgontenger (Baga Otgontenger), and eight lakes, which embellish the site, are extolled as expressions of the mountain's blessings to people. The same is said for the 400 types of medicinal plants and five kinds of purifying juniper that grow in that region, and for the healing golden sand of a surrounding lake. For this reason, the mountain has also been affectionately referred to as a "physician of the precious life" (*anmy erdeniin ototch*). To the natives of Zavkhan district, Otgontenger is their own Mt. Meru, the axis of the world, with Aḍakavatī heaven on its top as Vajrapāṇi's residence.¹⁷ For this reason, Otgontenger is also referred to as a sovereign mountain (*dayan uul*) of Mongolia, on which thousands of Buddhas gather. It is generally believed that if one meditates near the mountain, one will swiftly attain the *vajra*-like *samādhi* owing to Vajrapāṇi's presence. In the view of the previously mentioned Dilova Khutugtu, a native of Zavkhan, if one sees the mountain even from a distance one is destined for rebirth in a Buddha-field.¹⁸ Among the people of Zavkhan district, many legends have been told about miraculous events related to the mountain and many lyrics have been composed and sung about the mountain's majesty and mercy.¹⁹

As an epitome of grandeur, stability, and power, Otgontenger Mountain has been worshipped not only as a residence of Vajrapāṇi but also as his powerful emanation (*burrelbaa*, T. *sprul ba*).²⁰ For this reason, the natural features of the mountain and its nearest environment are described in terms of their correspondences with the bodily characteristics and posture of Vajrapāṇi as seen in his wrathful iconographical representations. Described as being of a deep dark blue color, the mountain is said to correspond to Vajrapāṇi's blue body. Small Otgontenger Mountain, situated on the northwestern side of Otgontenger's peak and rising 3,430 meters above sea level, is interpreted as Vajrapāṇi's right hand wielding a five-pointed *vajra* in the sky and called "Stirrup" (Döröö). This right hand of Vajrapāṇi is also referred to as "The Mountain that Protects One Thousand Buddhas of the *bhadra-kalpa*" (Sain Tsagiin Myangan Burkhdyyg Khamgaalagch Uul).²¹ It is said that if a person from another region, a troublesome person, or an evil-minded person approaches Small Otgontenger, or the right hand of Vajrapāṇi, it will respond with wrath, enveloping the person with fog and sending down lightning, heavy rain, and hail.²²

Having become transformed into a living entity, the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, the mountain has been granted agency and an identity in accordance with Vajrapāṇi's temperament. When the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (1870–1924), as a joint political and religious leader of the Mongolian state, issued the decree by which Otgontenger Mountain was

awarded the rank of “Khalkha’s Reverent Prince” (Qalq-a-yin Bishereltei Tüshi-ye Güng),²³ he not only underscored the existing perception of the mountain as a living being, but he also indirectly granted the title of a Mongolian nobleman to Vajrapāṇi himself.

A continuation of Otgontenger on the northern side is identified as Vajrapāṇi’s left hand with a threatening hand gesture at the heart and called “Brown Dodder” (Khüren Oroongo). On the eastern side of Otgontenger is said to be Vajrapāṇi’s stretched-out left leg, called “Snowy Wall” (Tsastai Khana). On its western side stands a smaller mountain called “Spotted with Rocks” (Chuluut Ereen), identified as the tiger skin worn by Vajrapāṇi, studded with rocks and trees. Sometimes it is also called the “Small Sovereign” (Baga Dayan) Mountain, from whose peak the worshippers of Vajrapāṇi may observe Vajrapāṇi’s crown of snow on Otgontenger’s peak. The sun rising on the eastern side of Otgontenger’s summit and the sun setting on its western side are said to be a blazing fire on the top of Vajrapāṇi’s head. A flat wall on the southeastern side of Otgontenger is considered an offering table at which the kings of *nāgas* gather, feasting and delighting, and the eight freshwater lakes in its vicinity are considered to be the eight offerings to Vajrapāṇi. The deep and clear lake Badarkhundaga (Begging Bowl), which occupies 320 × 400 square meters and which embraces Otgontenger on its northern and southern sides, is interpreted as Vajrapāṇi’s begging bowl. It is at this very lake on the northern side of the mountain that state offerings are made to Vajrapāṇi. Historically, the main offering to Vajrapāṇi consisted of a white horse with a silver saddle and bridle or of a silver cup decorated with nine jewels. After 1821, silver, gold, corals, pearls, and silver ingots were annually offered at the lake.²⁴

In the post-Soviet period of the revitalization of Mongolian national and Buddhist identities after the decades of communist suppression, Mongolia’s first democratically elected president, Punsalmaagiin Ochirbat, publicly declared the Otgontenger Mountain as a Buddhist holy site and decreed that it be ceremonially worshiped every four years. In 1992, during his presidency and according to the eleventh resolution of the State Small Assembly (Baga Khural),²⁵ the 95,510 square hectares of the Otgontenger area were taken into special protection by the state.²⁶ Even after his presidency, in 2004 Mr. Ochirbat wrote the following benediction:

May the protection of the merciful Snowy Holy Vajrapāṇi Otgontenger, unequalled in the world, keep on watching over the Mongolian public and all of you, many tens of thousands from Zavkhan territory, from generation to generation!
Om, May Happiness Prevail!²⁷

In the year 2003, his successor, President Bagabandi, a native of Zavkhan district, offered a large bowl of *airag* (fermented mare’s milk) to Vajrapāṇi in the restored ceremonial worship on behalf of Mongolian state. Having placed the bowl on the Badarkhundaga Lake, he and the group of government officials and Mongolian Buddhist monks

attending the ritual waited to see whether the bowl would float toward the mountain or would return to the shore of the lake. If it were to float toward the mountain, this would be a sign that Vajrapāṇi had accepted the offering, that the country would be safe, and the people would prosper. In May 2004, he expressed his admiration for the mountain with the following words:

The highest peak of the Khangai range, leaning against the skirt of the monumental high mountains, my merciful Otgontenger and its silvery white peak “like an emperor’s crown,” appear white from a mile of distance. It keeps standing magnificent and noble, exhibiting its splendor in the four cardinal and eight intermediate directions. The majesty of the merciful Vajrapāṇi Otgontenger, which “became the sky’s ornament,” is the crowning, highest object of worship for all the Mongols.²⁸

A month earlier, on April 29, 2004, the Mongolian government issued the ninth resolution, which required the organized protection of Otgontenger as a sacred mountain and as a nature preserve. The appendix to this resolution specified the governmental personnel appointed as official participants in the ceremonial worship of Otgontenger and of the other two sacred mountains in Mongolia, Bogd Khan and Burkhan Khaldun. According to the resolution, those allowed to represent the state at the ceremonial worship are the president of Mongolia, the prime minister, and the chair of the Great Assembly.²⁹ Their offerings should include the silken scarves, incense, and food offerings made on behalf of the state, whereas the heads of Zavkhan district, the mayor of the district’s capital, and a group of the representatives of the Citizens’ Assembly are to oversee and coordinate the offerings to the mountain and its *ovoo* (stone cairn).³⁰

ENTHRONEMENT OF VAJRAPĀṆI’S *THANGKA* AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

The ritual worship of Vajrapāṇi mountain that took place in 2003 was repeated in June 2007 under the auspices of Mongolia’s former president, Mr. Enkhbayar. In 2007, he also commissioned from the renowned Buddhist artist and lama Purevbat a large silken appliqué *thangka* of Vajrapāṇi, studded with precious stones and measuring eighteen meters in height and twelve meters in width. On December 29, on the commemorative day of the Mongols’ independence from the Qing dynasty, the *thangka* was placed in Chinggis Khan’s state ceremonial complex as a symbol of the Mongolian national and Buddhist identities.

In the precommunist period, a Vajrapāṇi *thangka* of similar size was publicly displayed at yearly state ceremonies honoring Vajrapāṇi, when it was carried by monks on long wooden poles in processions through the streets of Urga (now Ulaanbaatar). This ceremony was regularly completed with a traditional Mongolian *tsam* (T. *cham*) dance. During the performance of Jakhar (T. *lcags mkhar*, “iron house”) *tsam* dances, associated with the lord Yama, in East Khüree (Züün Khüree),³¹ a fifteen-meter-high silken *thangka*

of Vajrapāṇi was regularly displayed on the southern side of the square in front of Dechingalba (T. bDe chen kal pa) temple,³² facing north. In the early twentieth century, a *thangka* of Vajrapāṇi measuring twelve by sixteen meters was taken out of Maitreya temple and displayed in a specially prepared frame at the gate of the palace of the Eighth Bogd, Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, on the day of the great *tsam* performances of Ikh Khüree. Known as an averter and as an oppressor of the hosts of demons, Vajrapāṇi became the main figure in Khüree's *tsam* performances.

Prior to the democratic changes in Mongolia that took place in the late 1980s, the last public procession of Vajrapāṇi's *thangka* in Mongolia took place in 1935. To renew this traditional form of worship, former president Enkhbayar decreed that the *thangka* of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi be enthroned in the independent and democratic Mongolia. A year prior to the enthronement of the Vajrapāṇi *thangka*, he issued the decree signed and sealed with the presidential seal on May 31, 2007. The decree reads as follows:

A Decree of the President of Mongolian State

Regarding the Creation and Enthronement of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi

Holy Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets and a Vajra-Holder, has a connection with Mongolia to specifically safeguard Mongolian land and the glorious spirit, destiny, and virtue of the Mongols. Recreating him and enthroning him signifies the revival and development of national awareness, religion, culture, and historic tradition. He inspires and empowers the minds of people, their endeavors, faith, and aspiration. The following decree is being issued in accordance with Article 34 of the Constitution of Mongolia:

"Support initiatives made by people, scholars, and religious figures to make the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, who safeguards the Mongols, in the year 2007, by applying the traditional Mongolian appliqué method and technique according to the Buddhist theory of art and by using precious materials and gems.

Appeal to the citizens and Buddhist devotees of the capital city and of all the provinces, to Gandantegchenling, the Center of Mongolian Buddhists, to Buddhist monasteries and temples of the city and provinces, and to NGOs and artists to actively participate and unite their contributions and endeavors in making Vajrapāṇi, a symbol of national unity and glorious spirit."

[Signed:]

President of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar³³

Forty representatives and artists from all twenty-one provinces of Mongolia as well as from Tuva, Kalmykia, Buryatia, and Inner Mongolia took part in making the appliqué modeled on the painting prepared by the renowned lama and artist Purevbat, who at that time gave the following statement to the press: "A creation of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, a protector of Mongolia and an icon of eternity, longevity, health, and wellbeing, is one of the expressions of respect for Mongolian national culture, art, and history."³⁴

The first public display of the *thangka* was carried out on October 29, 2002, in the Small Stadium in Ulaanbaatar during the Buddhist musical celebrations called “Sounds of Galbinga.”³⁵ That *thangka* of Vajrapāṇi measured 11.30 × 14.30 meters and was embroidered on silk. At the opening ceremony of displaying Vajrapāṇi’s *thangka* held in May 2008, Mr. Enkhbayar indicated that the purpose of the commissioned image is to bring merit and security to the state and prosperity to the nation. The following statement was printed on the back of the photographs of Vajrapāṇi’s *thangka* that were widely distributed at the occasion of the enthronement of Vajrapāṇi:³⁶

Wishes in Connection with the Making and Enthronement of the Holy Image of the Supreme Vajrapāṇi

Holy Vajrapāṇi, a Buddha who expands and inspires the virtue and glorious spirit of the Mongols, has been restored and recreated by sagacious Mongols and enthroned as one of the supreme, spiritual holy objects.

The Buddha Vajrapāṇi embodies the profound meaning and precious symbolism of the restoration and flourishing of the state, religion, culture, and of worshipping and respecting the earth and Mother Nature. It has been made and enthroned by order of the President of Mongolia. As the head of the state, I see it extremely auspicious that this [image] is not only making a significant contribution to the great ocean of art and culture of mankind, but that it also brings joy to the eyes and minds of the Mongols, awakening their glorious spirit and inspiration, and reinforcing their harmony and the flourishing of their aspirations and will.

Since ancient times, our ancestors, Dharma kings, and sages had faith in and worshipped the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, regarding him as a great protector safeguarding the Mongolian land and Mongolian people. The fact that the making and enthronement [of his image] is taking place simultaneously with the endorsement and implementation of the national development policy at the beginning of the twenty-first century is a sign of securing power and progress by the Mongols and Mongolian state.

Hereby, I am extending my prayers that you and your families may be in good health and have a prosperous life. May all your good wishes be realized by the power of Holy Buddha Vajrapāṇi, who has been made and enthroned by the initiative and offerings of the people who uphold the holy and clear mind and a stainless and virtuous motivation!

May Mongolia flourish and develop ever more!

The President of Mongolia Nambaryn Enkhbayar

The 15th of the first month of summer of the Earth Mouse Year “Keeper of all goodness” of the 17th sixty-year cycle

This re-enthronement of Vajrapāṇi in 2008 was conceived as a response to the social and political problems prevalent during a period in Mongolia's history characterized by economic and social instability and a delicate position in regional and global politics. The *thangka* depicts Vajrapāṇi as accompanied above by Avalokiteśvara on the right side and Mañjuśrī on the left, and by three great Mongol khans below—Chinggis Khan below the image of Vajrapāṇi, Qubilai below the image of Mañjuśrī, and Ögödei below the image of Avalokiteśvara. These three paradigmatic figures of stately strength and martial power are portrayed as royal emanations of the three Buddhist protectors (T. *rigs gsum mgon*). Constituted by these religious codes, the *thangka* expresses the historical, political, and religious concerns held by the head of the Mongolian state. As such, it links the current government with important leaders from Mongolia's past and communicates the intention of the head of the Mongolian state to reawaken religious and national consciousness among the Mongols, especially among the generations of those who were subjected to the Soviet educational system, which suppressed any aspect of Mongolian historical discourse that could inspire religious and nationalistic sentiments.

VAJRAPĀṆI AS MONGOL RULERS AND AS FAMOUS RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL FIGURES

The connection between Vajrapāṇi and the Mongol rulers as his powerful, royal emanations, promoted in Mongolian traditional histories of Dharma, can be seen as yet another reason for Mongolian Buddhists' view of Mongolia as the land of Vajrapāṇi. Mongolia, together with neighboring Tibet, the land of Avalokiteśvara, and China, the land of Mañjuśrī, has come to form the unified landscape of the three well-known Buddhist protectors in the Mongolian Buddhists' imagination. As human emanations of Vajrapāṇi, who represent the power and strength of the Buddha's body and his enlightened activities, the Mongol rulers, together with the Dalai Lamas of Tibet, the emanations of Avalokiteśvara, and the Qing emperors, the emanations of Mañjuśrī, came to symbolically form the stately and imperial manifestations of the Buddha's body and mind.

The Mongolian practice of retrospectively recognizing the Mongol khans as emanations of Vajrapāṇi has its earliest inspiration in Buddhist historical sources dating to the fourteenth century, when the practice of identifying rulers with various Bodhisattvas began to emerge among the Mongols, Chinese, and Tibetans.³⁷ The Mongolian Buddhist chronicles from between the late seventeenth and nineteenth centuries that present the Mongol khans as emanations of Vajrapāṇi sought to elevate the stature and ethos of the Mongol khans that would be on par with those of the Dalai Lamas and Qing emperors.³⁸ These histories also reveal the ways in which their authors used Indian and Tibetan accounts of Vajrapāṇi's attributes and enlightened activities in explaining the political activities of their rulers.

In Indian esoteric sources, Vajrapāṇi, as the Lord of Secrets and as the general of *yakṣas* (Skt. *yakṣasenādhipati*), guards the Mantra Vehicle (Mantrayāna) and keeps the treasury of its scriptures safe; he protects the *mantrins* and vanquishes the enemies of the Buddha-Dharma. With his *vajra*, symbolizing a martial staff (*daṇḍa*),³⁹ he enforces religious and state laws, crushes the demons of heretical enemies who mislead others with their polluted doctrines, and forcefully converts them. In iconography, of his thirty-eight enlightened manifestations, only three are depicted as peaceful.

As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, “Envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist Identity Through Chinggis Khan,” in the traditional Mongolian chronicles, Chinggis Khan is retrospectively identified as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi. According to Gonchugjab’s *Jewel Rosary* (*Erdeni-yin Erike*), the fact that the Mongols have been called the “Blue Mongols” is due to Vajrapāṇi’s manifestation as Chinggis Khan. The same explanation for the reason behind the name “Blue Mongols” is also given in Galdan’s *Jewel Rosary* (*Erdeni-yin Erike*, the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries), which acknowledges Chinggis Khan as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi.⁴⁰ These traditional Buddhist interpretations of Chinggis Khan as Vajrapāṇi resonate with the contemporary political discourse that glorifies and seeks to restore a sense of pride in Mongolian statehood and Buddhist heritage. Thus, during the previously mentioned re-enthronement of Vajrapāṇi’s *thangka* in 2008, Vajrapāṇi’s identification with Chinggis Khan was reaffirmed by the former president Enkhbayar in his speech, and the state-sponsored ritual consecration of Vajrapāṇi’s *thangka* also became a celebration of the greatness of Chinggis Khan.

During celebrations of the enthronement of the Vajrapāṇi *thangka* in 2008, a small booklet entitled “The Image of Holy Vajrapāṇi, ‘The Lord of Secrets, Vajradhara’ Predestined to Safeguard the Glory and Good Fortune of Mongolian Land and People” was issued by the Vajrapāṇi Fund (Ochirvani San TBB), which was established by the group of the state representatives and businessmen for this occasion; it was widely distributed in the capital. As indicated by the title of the booklet, Vajrapāṇi is presumed “predestined” to secure the glory of Mongolia, and as such he is held responsible for the condition of the country. Nevertheless, he has to be propitiated by the Mongolian state and people. Explaining the significance of reintroducing the propitiation of Vajrapāṇi as a state ritual, the booklet reaffirms the identification of Chinggis Khan with Vajrapāṇi, which began to be expounded in Mongolian chronicles in the seventeenth century; it also reinstates him into the position of the Buddha of the Mongolian state and people. It makes these points in this manner:

The meaning of worshipping the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, a Buddha of unity, strength, wisdom, creative power, virtue, destiny and glorious spirit, by every Mongol lies in the following:

(1) It is a symbol of worshipping Chinggis Khan, who is believed to be a reincarnation of Vajrapāṇi.

- (2) It is a symbol of the revitalization and development of the historic tradition of a statehood based on the historic fact that Abatai Sain Khan enthroned Vajrapāṇi as the Buddha of the Mongolian state and people.
- (3) It is a symbol of the revival of the Mongolian traditional religion, since the Buddha Vajrapāṇi is believed to be a tutelary deity safeguarding Mongolia.
- (4) It is a symbol of worshipping Mother Nature and the earth, since the Mongolian sacred mountain Otgontenger is an abode of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi.
- (5) A tradition of producing the Buddha Vajrapāṇi in many different forms by carpenters and masters has been for many generations. Therefore, remaking it in the twenty-first century is a symbol of the revival of Mongolian art and culture.⁴¹

The enthronement of Vajrapāṇi in Mongolia was also seen as an opportunity to offer a lesson on morality and social responsibility by presenting the ethical and socially responsible life as a manner of worshipping Vajrapāṇi and as the method of securing one's own well-being and that of the Mongolian state. On the inspiration of the wisdom sayings attributed to Chinggis Khan, a declaration published in the same booklet presents the loyalty and responsibility to Vajrapāṇi as inseparable from one's loyalty and responsibility to the Mongolian state, people, and religion:

The following actions and practices in the everyday life of every Mongolian citizen reflect the manner in which one is worshipping and respecting Vajrapāṇi, who holds within himself the profound meaning and precious symbolism of the relationship between the state, religion, culture, and humans.

- (1) Always endeavor to seek harmony among yourselves. Never hinder the good deeds of others, and support them with a good heart.
- (2) It is believed that fulfilling the wishes of others makes one's own wishes fulfilled. Therefore, consider the interests of the nation and public in your every activity.
- (3) Prefer to act rather than talk. Endeavor to perform a truly beneficial action for yourself and for the people, and try to help.
- (4) Instead of seeking faults in others, analyze your own actions, reflect upon your faults, define your faults, and remedy them when causing wrongs and losses [to others].
- (5) Abandon the habit of considering your own physical comfort and looking for readymade things. Forsake laziness and strive to learn [how] to engage in difficult tasks instead of becoming indulgent.
- (6) Abstain from all intoxicants and avoid being taken by the harms and obstacles of bad habits.
- (7) Set up life goals, dreams, and aspirations, and enthusiastically endeavor to fulfill them without being discouraged by difficulties.

- (8) Behave ethically, choosing to act honestly, judging and curbing the wrong and promoting the right.
- (9) Enthusiastically strive to study earnestly in any discipline and to carry out the work with knowledge.

If one acts in the above [mentioned] ways and follows them in work and life, one will be blessed by the great deity [Vajrapāṇi], one's good wishes will come true, one's own mind will dwell in peace, and one will be granted to live with one's own family and in prosperity.

May Vajrapāṇi, the Lord of Secrets and a Vajra-Holder, always bless you!⁴²

The state-sponsored ritual consecration of Vajrapāṇi's image and the simultaneous honoring of Chinggis Khan were also seen as a part of the Mongolian national development policy based on the Mongolian Millennium Development Challenge initiated by former president Enkhbayar. The fact that the following statement given by him immediately follows the above-cited guidelines for social ethics and that it begins with words attributed to Chinggis Khan, attest to it. As shown below, Mr. Enkhbayar began his speech with a citation of the inspirational saying attributed to Chinggis Khan, imbricating the heritage of Chinggis Khan, the state's endeavor for national development and unity, and Vajrapāṇi's role in Mongolia:

National Development Policy initiated by President of Mongolia N. Enkhbayar based on the Millennium Development Challenge

*Endeavor to reach the top of the mountain.
Never discourage yourself saying, "it is far."
You will reach it if you walk upward.*

*Endeavor to reach the other shore of the ocean.
Never panic saying, "it is vast."
You will ford it if you have courage.*

(Teachings of Chinggis Khan)

A state with a vision and a well-structured policy has responsibility. A country with a well-structured and implemented policy becomes powerful and its people become affluent. Development of the country is defined by the "path" of its policy. The national development policy based on the millennium development challenge is a highly important document of national unity, which stipulates that we have one goal: to have unity among citizens, parties, political powers, and social groups in order to reach the goal. It demands from us to work for the protection of common interests. The national development policy's content can be condensed into "three sets of fifteen" policy. Its purpose is to increase [annual] economic development by 15% in the course of fifteen years. It means that GDP (gross domestic

product) will be \$15,000 per capita. At present, the figure is \$1,200–1,500 per capita. Due to implementing the national development policy in a consistent manner, the economy will grow ten times more than at present. At the same time, the life of each Mongolian will be better. However, the policy and goal cannot be fulfilled spontaneously. They can be achieved by cooperation of the responsible state and you, a creative and enthusiastic citizen. To be creative, one should first of all learn to use time efficiently. Time is gold. Each wasted hour and minute brings a great loss to both country and individual. We should not waste any time and we should immediately start working on the “three sets of fifteen.”

In addition to habituating oneself to doing things on time, we should increase the life energy and speed to a higher level. Speed is success. We should be faster to catch a person in front of us. Likewise, we can fulfill our goals if we are determined to work fast. In so doing, it is important to work with knowledge. Knowledge is power. It is not possible to go far without a good-quality education and knowledge. If one relies on a profession and knowledge from learning, one knows well what to do. If one knows what to do, one finds work. The life of a person who has a job becomes better. Therefore, let us endeavor for reaching the goal of the “three sets of fifteen.” It is beneficial for everyone and for Mongolia.

If we lack a policy and a goal, we know that life will be dull and low, we will be in conflicts with others, seeking faults in others, lacking harmony among each other, and the country’s development will lag behind. If the national development policy materializes, Mongolia will become a beautiful country, in which everyone’s dreams and aspirations will come true.⁴³

In addition to Chinggis Khan, other important personages in the history of Mongolian Buddhism became declared as emanations of Vajrapāṇi. According to Dharmatāla, most of them were acknowledged as such by the Third Dalai Lama. For example, we are told in Khalkha Zaya Pandita Luvsanprenlei’s (bLo bzang ‘Phrin las, 1642–1716) biography of the First Jebtsundamba, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar, and in the much later text *Jebtsundamba Khutugtus of Urga*⁴⁴ that Abatai Khan (1554–1588), who initiated the conversion of the Khalkha Mongols to Buddhism, was the first to be recognized as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi by the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho), when Abatai went to Khökhöt in 1589 for an audience with the Dalai Lama. After the Dalai Lama witnessed Abatai Khan’s power to subdue hostile spirits and the lords of the ground (*gazaryn ezen*, T. *sa bdag*) and to tame “the breed of ruthless, man-eating dogs,” the Dalai Lama declared him an “Emanation of Vajrapāṇi, Strong like Vajra Tüsheet Khan.”⁴⁵ During his visit to Tibet, Abatai Khan, searching for the Buddha of his liking, encountered an image of Vajrapāṇi and felt an immediate affinity for him. Declaring, “This Buddha will be of assistance to me who has come from afar,” he invited Vajrapāṇi to Mongolia.^{46,47}

The Altan Khan (1508–1582) of Tümeds, although being recognized as the great Brahmā by the Third Dalai Lama, was also identified by him as a royal emanation of

Vajrapāṇi,⁴⁸ for he had endeavored to spread Buddhism among the southern Mongols in the late sixteenth century, reintroducing the principle of dual law—the law of Dharma and the state law. His suppression of Shamanism and forceful conversion to Buddhism are now deemed as a ferocious activity of Vajrapāṇi, whose *vajra* delegated his use of force to purify the country and establish his people in Buddhist virtues. In the *Rosary of White Lotuses*, Dharmatāla extols Altan Khan as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi⁴⁹ and calls him the “Turner of the Wheel of the Golden Age.”⁵⁰ In Dharmatāla’s view, Altan Khan himself was secret and mighty lord Vajrapāṇi manifested in human form, always caring for the Dharma and sentient beings.⁵¹ Thus, Altan Khan fulfilled the role of Vajrapāṇi when he dispensed punishments without prejudice, led everyone toward glory, peace, and happiness, and facilitated the magnificence of the religious and state laws.

In the *Rosary of White Lotuses*, the same is said of Gūūshi Khan (1582–1655) of the Oirat Mongols. Referring to Altan and Gūūshi Khans, Dharmatāla writes: “Their wisdom broadened and blossomed forth like a lotus. As rulers of men, they dispensed punishments and tributes without prejudice, leading one and all towards the sharing of the glories of peace and happiness; the power they exercised took everyone under its wing. . . . By the power of those virtuous endeavors, the complete glory of both religious and state rule was reached.”⁵² In Dharmatāla’s account,⁵³ Gūūshi Khan, as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi, defeated the Karmapa and Bonpo rivals of the Tibetan Gelugpa order and the Dalai Lamas in a series of battles in Tibet. Vajrapāṇi’s emanation in the form of Gūūshi Khan, who would bring peace to Tibet, was reportedly prophesized by the Tibetan state oracle. Seen as fulfilling that prophecy, Gūūshi Khan has been hailed for respecting the Dharma and Dharma-holders and for leading beings to the path of enlightenment. His involvement in the Tibetan sectarian war was interpreted by Mongolian chroniclers, who themselves were Gelugpas, as the righteous, wrathful activity of the mighty Vajrapāṇi.

In Dharmatāla’s account, in addition to the Chinggis Khan and other aforementioned rulers, the Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar, the First Bogd Gegeen, Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (Taranatha rJe btsun Dam pa Rin po che Blo bzang bsTan pa’i rGyal mtshan dPal bzang po, 1635–1723), was declared as an emanation of Vajrapāṇi by the Third Dalai Lama, who foresaw that Zanabazar and his successive incarnations would become “a treasure house of *sūtras*, *tantras*, sciences, empowerments, exegeses, lectures, etc.”⁵⁴ His later incarnation, the Eighth Bogd Gegeen, Jebtsundamba, having become an absolute monarch in 1911, and having embodied the unification of the laws of Dharma and state, is believed to have manifested Vajrapāṇi’s engagement in both religious and political domains.

Identifying various leaders throughout Mongolian history as emanations of Vajrapāṇi, Mongolian sources have given a moral dimension to their involvement in acts of violence on behalf of the Buddha-Dharma by indirectly ascribing it to Vajrapāṇi’s ferocious *bodhicitta*. The same principle of justification has been applied in recent years to the former communist ruler of Mongolia, Marshal Choibalsan (1895–1952), who, as Stalin’s pawn in

Mongolia, carried out the destruction of Buddhist institutions and executed, imprisoned, and exiled tens of thousands of Buddhist monks during the communist purge, but later seemed to display certain nationalistic inclinations. He too has been said to be a manifestation of Vajrapāṇi by a group of contemporary Mongolian Buddhist nationalists. For them, it is through the destructive acts of Choibalsan that Vajrapāṇi carried out the secret thirteenth deed of the Buddha, namely the destruction of the Buddha-Dharma at the time of its degeneration.

Thus, through Vajrapāṇi, a new genealogical line has been formed in which the Mongol khans, religious heads, and one communist leader have been brought into the same Buddhist *vajra*-family, despite differences in their political agendas, their careers, and the historical outcomes of their activities. At the same time, one could say that through his Mongolian line of incarnations, some of which are also connected to him through the Golden Lineage of Chinggis Khan, and by means of his mountainous emanation in Mongolian land, Vajrapāṇi has been made a Mongol.

CONCLUSION

Vajrapāṇi's life in Mongolia is only one of many illustrations of the processes of acculturation, naturalization, and politicization of a Buddhist deity by its adoptive society. In this example, we see the various ways in which particular features are ascribed to a Buddhist deity, drawing upon both traditional Buddhist symbols and the social, political, and religious ideals toward which a culture aspires. The ascription corresponds to the religious and political values upheld by a particular society and its projection of these values onto its own historical past. In the case of Mongolia, it is Vajrapāṇi's physical strength, valor, and power that have made him attractive to the Mongols, who have always highly valued these qualities as external manifestations of one's virtue, purity, and moral integrity. As we have seen, through the politicization of Vajrapāṇi, the Otgontenger Mountain, associated with him, became politicized as well.

Each new sociohistorical context in which Vajrapāṇi has appeared in Mongolia since his adoption as patron-deity until the present has produced his further transformation. Nevertheless, these transformations should be viewed not only as products of the social reality of any given period of Mongolian history, but also as an active force in determining the course of social, political, and historical events. Having become a part of the Mongolian natural, religious, and political landscapes, Vajrapāṇi became a powerful social agent who encompasses political, moral, and soteriological functions. As such, he has had his own social life among the Mongols through which he has influenced Mongolian Buddhist culture and at the same time has been shaped by it. As an integral part of the social and religious life of the country, a chronicle of his transformations and activities among the Mongols reveals the historical, religious, and ideological textures of Mongolian Buddhist society and its culture.

Despite the apparent differences in their forms and public expressions, Mongolian emanations of Vajrapāṇi are not irreducibly different from each other, for they share a common, primary social role—namely, a multifaceted service to the Mongolian state, to its land and people. Part of a creative process through which the Mongolian state has sought to define its unique Buddhist character, Vajrapāṇi’s function has also been to signify the spirit and capabilities of the Mongolian people. Therefore, all of his diverse Mongolian manifestations can be seen as externalizations of the envisioned realities of the Mongolian state. Although manifesting in diversified forms, Vajrapāṇi has been a unifying agent for generations of Mongolian Buddhists, whose general expectations from him have not changed over the centuries. Throughout each of his transformations, Vajrapāṇi has remained a prominent constituent of Mongolian Buddhism.

APPENDIX: VAJRAPĀṆI AS A MAIN HERO IN MONGOLIAN FOLK TALES

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a retelling of the Mongolian folk tales about Vajrapāṇi’s early adventures from the time long before he became a Mongol.⁵⁵

“HOW VAJRAPĀṆI CREATED THE WORLD” (VERSION ONE)

At the beginning there was no earth, there was only water and air. At that time, Vajrapāṇi resided in the sky. When he looked down upon the waters, this desire arose in him: “I wish I could create land in place of this great water.” However, his strength alone was not sufficient, and he realized he needed the assistance of a companion. As he searched for a companion, he found one by the name Tsagaan Shūkheert (Skt. *Sītapatrā*), a female Buddha holding an umbrella in her hand. When the two of them approached the waters, they noticed a large frog in the middle of the ocean. Then Vajrapāṇi said to the goddess, “Dive into this ocean, pull the frog to the surface, turn upward its belly, and let me sit on it. Then you dive to the bottom of the ocean and bring some soil from there. As you do this, think of me, and your wishes will be fulfilled.” When Tsagaan Shūkheert reached the bottom of the ocean and tried to gather some soil, she felt it was hard under her fingers and difficult to grasp. Then she thought to herself, “I do not want to take this, but Vajrapāṇi did order me to bring this to him.” At that moment, her hand was filled with soil. She brought it to the surface of the ocean and placed it on top of the frog. The frog gradually disappeared, and only the two of them remained sitting on that soil.

Previously, these two never had to sleep. However, this time due to the influence of the nature of the earth, they suddenly nodded off and fell asleep. In the meantime, a certain demon arrived and noticed that dry land could not be found anywhere except in the spot where these two were sleeping. Then the demon thought, “Let me throw them into the water together with the soil while they are still sleeping.” As he snatched them with this intention, the water disappeared and the dry land began to expand. No matter how fast

the demon ran to reach the limit of the dry land, he could not see it. He finally became exhausted from running and abandoned these two deities in a remote place. After the demon disappeared, Vajrapāṇi, having woken up, awoke his female companion and said, “When we were about to drown, the dry land that we created saved us.”

While the two of them were roaming the earth, they said to each other, “Let us make living beings on this earth!” Having made a man out of mud, they again said to each other, “Let us find a human consciousness!” But they needed a trustworthy guardian who would protect the mud-made man from the demon’s harm while they were searching for a consciousness. For this reason, Tsagaan Shūkheert created a dog and appointed him as a guardian. However, the dog was hairless, so the two of them left in search of both the dog’s hair and a human consciousness. Soon after they left, the demon arrived. As the dog, protecting the human, was about to attack him, the demon said to him, “Do not bark at me and hinder me. I will give you dog’s hair, food, and drink.” Then he gave hair to the dog, and when the dog under demonic influence asked for food, the demon replied, “This human being will be your master and will feed you.” Then the demon approached the mud-made human, burned some hair and blew smoke into the nostrils of that man. Immediately after that, the man became conscious and desired to know his environment. In the meantime, the demon disappeared.

When Vajrapāṇi and Tsagaan Shūkheert returned, the man was already conscious and interested in everything around him, and the dog had his hair. “Who gave you all this?” asked Vajrapāṇi. “I do not know,” replied the human. Then after creating many wild animals and livestock, Vajrapāṇi declared, “Now, we need someone who will be responsible for this created human, animals, and livestock.” Expressing his conviction of Tsagaan Shūkheert’s inability to carry out that task, Vajrapāṇi offended her. The displeased Tsagaan Shūkheert responded by saying: “If I were not here, you would not have a chance to do anything.” Then they began to quarrel.

All this happened due to the harmful influence of the demon. Then Vajrapāṇi suggested, “Let us fill our cups with water and sit down together! In whoever’s cup a flower spontaneously appears, that one will become the owner of the humans and animals on this earth.” They both agreed to this.

A long time passed after they sat down with their cups in front of them, and due to the influence of the earth, they were unable to stay awake. After some time passed, Tsagaan Shūkheert opened one of her eyes and saw a self-arisen flower in Vajrapāṇi’s cup, whereas hers was still empty as before. As Vajrapāṇi was still asleep, she seized the opportunity by removing the flower from his cup and placing it into hers. Opening his eyes and noticing his flower in her cup, Vajrapāṇi knew what she had done. He realized that people on this earth will cheat on each other and will become liars and dishonest. Aware of this, he flew into the sky.

Although the man was created by Vajrapāṇi and Tsagaan Shūkheert, it was the demon who gave him a consciousness. Thus, although humans have the pure Buddha-nature, due to the influence of the demon, they engage in all kinds of negative actions.

“HOW VAJRAPĀṆI CREATED THE WORLD” (VERSION TWO)

In ancient times there was nothing but water in the world. At that time, Vajrapāṇi ordered his disciples to scoop the ocean for him to see what was lying in that great body of water. In the first scoop, the sun emerged from the ocean, radiating beams of light. Vajrapāṇi placed the sun in the sky for the day to be bright. Then he ordered his disciples to scoop the ocean again, and the moon emerged. Vajrapāṇi decided to place it in the sky so it can be seen during the night. When Vajrapāṇi ordered his disciples to scoop the ocean for the third time, a spring of immortality arose, and Vajrapāṇi announced the end of scooping. But one of his disciples scooped it for a fourth time, and a fearsome being with a grandiose body came out. Seeing that demonic creature, Vajrapāṇi cut him in half, splitting his chest and his bottom with his *vajra*. The demon's chest reached the sky and became Rāhu; his lower part fell into the ocean and became the monster called Matar-zugii. When this monster shows itself in the ocean, only its back can be seen. If a bridge were to be made out of its chest bone and ribs, a horseman could ride on that bridge for twenty days from one end to the other. Such is the size of its body. Moreover, when this monster eats and drinks, it sucks out all the water of eight rivers for six months, and it swallows the surrounding settlements, humans, and livestock. After that, it sleeps for twelve months.

“HOW VAJRAPĀṆI SUBDUED RĀHU”

In ancient times, the Buddha had the elixir of life, which gives immortality to humans and animals. Snatching it, Rāhu drank it and fled away. In his flight, Rāhu passed by the sun and the moon. Then the Buddha ordered Vajrapāṇi, “Bring that Rāhu to me.” While searching for Rāhu, Vajrapāṇi came across the sun and asked, “In what direction did Rāhu go?” “He went in that direction,” the sun replied. As Vajrapāṇi went further, he came across the moon and asked, “In what direction did Rāhu go?” “He went in that direction,” the moon replied. Later on, Rāhu found out that the sun and the moon had pointed out the direction in which he had gone. For this reason, Rāhu has been swallowing the sun once every three years and the moon once every three months. However, since Rāhu does not have an anus, the sun and the moon come unharmed out of his belly. This is the reason for which people speak of the eclipse of the sun and the moon. Due to drinking the elixir of life, Rāhu became immortal. When Vajrapāṇi pierced Rāhu, the elixir of life spilled from Rāhu's body onto the ground, and it fell on the juniper, the Joint Pine,⁵⁶ and the pine. Therefore, these plants remain green in all four seasons of the year.

“HOW VAJRAPĀṆI SUBJUGATED A DEMON”

If there was not a certain demon causing troubles, Vajrapāṇi would have enjoyed the love and blessings of Heaven (*tengri*). But at one time when Vajrapāṇi left for a certain place, leaving his ambrosia with the sun and the moon for keeping and disappearing into a

mountain, a demon arrived. Drinking Vajrapāṇi's ambrosia and urinating into the empty cup, the demon inquired, "Where did Vajrapāṇi go?" The moon indicated the way by which Vajrapāṇi left, but the sun remained silent. Then, the demon followed the way by which Vajrapāṇi had left. When upon his return Vajrapāṇi learned what had happened, he went in pursuit of the demon. Reaching the top of a hill and spotting the demon, he threw his *vajra* at him, injuring the demon's eyes and face, breaking his arms and spine, and wounding him seven times. Then he seized the demon with his hands and broke his body in half, placed an iron cover on his nose, and took him to the sun and the moon for keeping. The demon's chest, which is kept by the sun and the moon, is called an "enemy," or Rāhu. The spots that one sees on the moon are the other half of the demon's body.

"HOW VAJRAPĀṆI BECAME BLUE IN COLOR"

Once upon a time, a certain demon stole and drank the Buddha's elixir of life. Therefore, the Buddha dispatched Vajrapāṇi to subjugate that demon. Having taken hold of the Buddha's *vajra*, Vajrapāṇi caught the demon and cut through him. At that moment, the demon's poisonous urine began to drip, and Vajrapāṇi, out of concern for sentient beings, drank up the demon's urine. Because of this, he became blue. Therefore, the Buddha's envoy, Vajrapāṇi, used to say, "I do not wish to be blue, for I am destined to be white."³⁷

"HOW VAJRAPĀṆI OVERPOWERED A NĀGA"

In ancient times, there was a certain *nāga* who lived in water. From the beginning, that *nāga* had been causing harm by devouring humans and livestock. Therefore, Heaven (Tngri) decided to send Vajrapāṇi down to the earth to subdue the *nāga*. However, Vajrapāṇi was short of the power needed for that task. Hence, he flew to Mt. Meru, where he made prostrations to Heaven, offered incense, and consequently increased his strength. A week later, Vajrapāṇi took on the form of a *garuḍa* king, snatched the head of the *nāga*, and made three rounds around Mt. Meru, dragging the *nāga*'s head and smashing it against a cliff. Since the *nāga* was extremely large, his head stayed on the top of the mountain, while his body spiraled the mountain three times and his tail remained submerged in the ocean. Then the *nāga* asked Vajrapāṇi, "Who are you?" "I am Vajrapāṇi," he replied. "Were you always powerful like this?" asked the *nāga*. "I became this strong after prostrating to Heaven (*tngri*) for seven days," replied Vajrapāṇi. This is the manner in which Vajrapāṇi subdued the *nāga*.

NOTES

1. See "Ar Khorchiny Sharyn Böögiin Duudalga," "Dayan Deerkhiiin Duudlaga," "Sharyn Taltai Khosolson Böögiin Matgaal Daatgal" in Darmagiin, 2005, 123, 176, and 180. See also Dondogiin, 2005, 101.

2. In contrast to traditional historical accounts and contemporary political discourse, which place Vajrapāṇi's activities in the real historical time of his Mongolian emanations and in specific geographical locations, the folk narratives set his activities in primeval time.

3. See "Ochirvaany Burkhan Erönkhii Baidal" in *Otgontenger Uulyñ Takhilga ba Ochirvaany Burkhan*, 2004, 34–35.

4. "Tsogt Gartaa Ochirtyn Bie Khel Setgeliin Magtaal Khemeekh Orshivoi," 2005.

5. Mongolia's popular pop singer Sta. D. Sarangua has been performing songs of praise to Vajrapāṇi and has produced a music video and song on the CD entitled "Itgel," released in 2004.

6. Sukhbat and Darjaa, 2004, 111:

*Khen alin üzvees erleg Khany
Uur khilent zarts tergüüteng
Ailgan dörrvön zügt butruulagč
Ochirvaany tanaa itegmoi bi
Uryd tany zalrigaas davav bi
Edügee ikh ayoulyg üzej baina
Tand idgen zalbirsugai bi
Üten arligan soerkh ayoulyg miny.*

7. *Tsag Toony Bichig: Tögs Buyant Zurkhain Yesny XVII Jarny "Barsh Ügü" Khemeekh Gal Nokhoi Jiliin, 2006–2007 Ony*, 2006, 5. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, 106.

8. Nuutsyn Khuraangui Alivaa Zam Mör, *Tüüny Üriin Nuuts Anys Bükhniig Khurananguil-san Dandar Sudar Orshvoi*, 2009, 68, 70. *Shidet Tarniin Sangaas: Ach Tus Bükhniig Khičeegeč Tarnin Chuulgan*, 2003, 5.

9. Nuutsyn Khuraangui Alivaa Zam Mör, *Tüüny Üriin Nuuts Anys Bükhniig Khurananguil-san Dandar Sudar Orshvoi*. 2009. Erdenet: Nairgiin Nairamdalt Töv, p. 70.

10. Dilova, or Dilowa, is considered to be an incarnation of the Indian tantric master Tilopa.

11. Sukhbat and Darjaa, 2004, vol. 1, 111.

12. The *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, *Mahāvairocanaḥbhisambodhitāntra*, *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, *Tathāgataguhyasūtra*, *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, and so on.

13. *V Bogdyn Zalrig*, manuscript #5079/96 kept in the State Central Library in Ulaanbaatar, cited in Sukhbat and Darjaa, 2004, vol. 1, 111:

*Oron dayaar amytan bükhnii
Nasan urt ovchingüi bolmoi
Oron tüünd amytan bükhen tus amgalangaar
Jargabyn ür bolmoi
Ter tsagt tsog tögöldör
Ochirvaaniin nomyg shamd!*

14. See Sárközi, 1992, 94–96.

15. Its snow-covered peak measures 13 square km.

16. The Mongolian Buddhist custom of naming mountains after Buddhist deities is linked to the pre-Buddhist period when mountains were viewed as the abodes of various spirits of nature. Similarly, the Khentii Khan Mountain in the Khentii *aimag* is named Gündüsambuu.

17. Etügen, 2004, vol. 2, 255–353.

18. This view is cited in Sukhbat and Darjaa, 2004, vol. 1, 140.

19. One such collection of fourteen songs dedicated to the mountain was published in CD format, entitled *Hymns to Merciful Vajrapāṇi (Ochirvaany Khairkhany Duulal)*. One also finds

a considerable number of songs with the same title “Jewel of the Country” (Oroin Chimeg). One of the legends describes the origination of the mountain, which spontaneously emerged from the vast body of ocean that was covering Jambudvīpa three thousand years ago.

20. When Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, a Ladakhi lama who served as Indian ambassador to Mongolia, saw the mountain from a distance during his visit to Zavkhan district, he said to his Mongolian companions: “If this pure mountain is worshipped not only by the Mongols but throughout Asia, misfortune will not come. This is indeed a pure object of veneration. Go and worship it.” See Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, 105.

21. In the earlier Indian sources, Vajrapāṇi is already mentioned as being in charge of the protection of the Tathāgatas of the *bhadra-kalpa*. Cf. the *Sāratamā* of Ratnākārasānti (Padmanabh, S. Jaini, ed. *Sāratamā: A Pañjikā of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra by Ratnākārasānti*. Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswai Research Institute, 1979, p. 4), where Vajrapāṇi is said to be the head of the protection (*rakṣādhikṛta*) of the form-body (*rūpa-kāya*) and the body of the teachings (*dharmakāya*) of the Tathāgatas belonging to the *bhadra-kalpa* (*bhādrakālpika*).

22. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, 219–225.

23. This is a title for a prince of the fifth rank, which used to be given by Manchu rulers in Mongolia, and it was also awarded by the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu to the Orkhon River.

24. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, 105–106, 224–225.

25. The assembly that functions between the sessions of the Parliament.

26. In 1995, this resolution was reinforced by the second statue of the State Great Khural.

27. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, xxxi.

28. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, xxx.

29. The State Great Assembly (Ikh Khural) is Mongolia’s unicameral Parliament. For a copy of the document issued by the government see Barsbold 2004, 31.

30. Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, xxv–xxvi.

31. Züün Khüree was located north of the center of contemporary Ulaanbaatar.

32. Dechingalba Temple was built by the Second Jebtsundamba Khutugtu in 1739. It was destroyed by fire in 1892 and later rebuilt.

33. My translation of the document is based on its published copy issued by the Vajrapāṇi Fund (Ochirvani San TBB) in the booklet “Mongol Gazar, Khün Zony Tsaog Khiimory Zaya Buyanig Iveen Daakh Uchral Eröolt ‘Nuutsyn Ezen Ochir Barigh’ Bogd Ochirvani Shüüten,” published in 2008 on the occasion of the enthronement of the *thangka*.

34. *UB Post*, May 22, 2008.

35. Galbinga is the Mongolian pronunciation of the Sanskrit *kalavinka*, a name for the Indian cuckoo.

36. “Oroin Deed Ochirvani Shüteen Buteen Zalsantai Kholbogduulan Devshüülekh Erööl,” in Avga Zararin Chimdedbaldaryn Dungat, 2009, 24.

37. The eulogy to Qubilai Khan inscribed on the monument erected by the last Mongol emperor of the Yüan dynasty, Toyon Temür (r. 1333–1367), makes an indirect reference to Qubilai as Mañjuśrī (the Wise One from the vicinity of Mount Wu-t’ai). Later on, the sixteenth-century chronicle *White History* (*Čayan Teüke*) also refers to Qubilai Khan as Mañjuśrī.

38. See Farqurah 1978, 5–34, where he points to Mongolian references to Qianlong as Mañjuśrī, such as ‘Jigs med rig pa’ rdo rje’s *Khor čos ‘byung* (1819), in which Manchu emperors are referred to as the “Mañjughoṣa Emperors” (T. ‘Jam dbyangs Gong ma), and Ngang dbang Chos ldan’s *Subud erike* (1729), which speaks of the Emperor Shunzhi (r. 1644–1722) as the

“Sublime Mañjuśrī Shunzhi” (*degedü mañjuśrī eye-ber jasayči*) and of the Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) as “Mañjuśrī, the sublime Kangxi” (*mañjuśrī degedü engke amuyulang*). Likewise, later pictorial representations of the Emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) as a semi-ferocious Mañjuśrī (Qurča Manjushiri, T. Jam dpal rNon po), depicted with four arms and frowning eyebrows, holding the *dharmacakra*, and accompanied by Nāgārjuna, Citipati, Marpa, and Milarepa, were also well known to the Mongols. One of the earliest references to Qing rulers as emanations of Mañjuśrī dates to the Fifth Dalai Lama’s (1617–1682) “autobiography” composed in 1680.

39. See Davidson, 2002, 127, where he points to a similar description of Vajrapāṇi in the *Vajrapāṇyabhisekatantra*.

40. Galdan, 2006, 98, 100, 102.

41. “Mongol Gazar, Khün Zony Sang Khiimory Zaya Buyanig Iveen Daakh Uchral Eröölt ‘Nuutsyn Ezen Ochir Barigh’ Bogd Ochirvani Shüüten,” 2008, 2.

42. *Ibid.*, 3.

43. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

44. Bawden, 1961, 35, 37–39.

45. Dasheegve, 2000, 103; Etügen, 2004, vol. 1, 106; Dagvadorj, 2000, 70; Bayasgalan, 2003, 12–14.

46. Bayasgalan, 2003, 12–15; Barsbold, 2004, 39–42.

47. Bawden, 1961, 38.

48. Although in the account of *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, the Third Dalai also bestows upon Altan Khan the title of “All-Brahmā, Great Powerful Cakravartin, King of Dharma” (Elverskog, 2003, 160), and in Dharmatāla’s *Rosary of the White Lotuses*, the Third Dalai Lama grants him the title of Cakravartin, Great Brahmā (Dharmatāla, 1987, 225).

49. Dharmatāla, 1987, 219.

50. *Ibid.* 224.

51. *Ibid.*, 219.

52. *Ibid.*, 448–449.

53. *Ibid.*, 129–158.

54. *Ibid.*, 344.

55. The folk tales of Vajrapāṇi narrated in this chapter are most commonly transmitted orally, and my retelling is based on the versions given in Barsbold, 2004, 47–52, and in Sh. Bayasgalan, 2003, 20–24.

56. *Ephedra, E. sinica*.

57. The Mongol ethnic group Darkhad interprets the eclipse of the moon as a demon with seventy heads swallowing the moon.

11

What Do Protective Deities, Mongolian Heroes, and Fast Steeds

Have in Common?

Vesna A. Wallace



INTRODUCTION

The later phase of the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia, which began in the second half of the sixteenth century, facilitated the appropriation and widespread worship of fierce protective deities to whom the military works of the state could be entrusted. Their frightening and majestic appearance, which expresses their innate strength and power, soon came to be viewed as that of the great Mongolian heroes of old times. They resemble Mongolian men of remarkable strength, courage, and ability who engaged in memorable battles, established noble lineages, acquired the Mongol empire, and fought for its freedom from colonial powers. Traditional Mongolian culture is suffused with the hero cult and a martial ethos that hails physical strength and bravery as manifest signs of inner virtue. Fierce protective deities have been absorbed into this culture as archetypes of the Mongolian ideals of valor, strength, and power. They became appropriated not only as guardians of the Mongolian state, its people, and their Dharma, but also as examples for Mongolian men to emulate. With their appropriation, celebrated Mongolian warriors and national heroes became eulogized as diverse emanations and manifestations of fierce protective deities. The deities were naturalized as the mountainous Mongolian landscape itself, as is the case with Vajrapāṇi and Olgontenger Mountain, as well as with Jamsran (T. lCam sring) and the Khögnö Khan Mountain and other mountainous localities. One such mountain is Büren *sum* in the central province (Töv *aimag*) of Mongolia, where Jamsran Mountain is considered by locals as the father and the nearby salt lake Tökhöm as the mother of the local land. To the people of the region,

it is a peaceful and gentle mountain that, unlike the fierce mountains of Mongolia, allows women to climb it. Yet to enemies, it is said to appear ferocious. Legends say that Jamsran provided protection to the people of the region who sought shelter in the mountain while fleeing from the pursuing Qing army, as it enveloped the enemy soldiers with heavy fog and sent lightning upon them. It is also said to have sheltered local lamas who were hiding in its caves from communist revolutionaries for up to a decade.¹ In the present time of peace, Jamsran Mountain performs another function for students from Büren *sum*, who worship it during the late spring of every year, before the final examinations begin, for their success in the exams. Having become a body of the fatherly deity, and therefore inseparable from it, the mountain is the medium of the deity's activities, which, as we have seen, vary according to the needs and requests of the worshippers.

The adjustability of Vajrapāṇi and Jamsran to different political and cultural contexts in Mongolia suggests that while their fundamental characteristics remain unchanged, they themselves are not entirely fixed entities. Due to their adaptability they are both tied to a particular locale and are trans-local. As such, they are subject to creative transformations, and just like Mongolian heroic personages, they arise from within their unique social and political circumstances. They do not emanate as human heroes randomly, but only when necessary, at times of anticipated danger and arisen adversities. They are not self-sufficient either, for they are not independent of a hero or a mountain as the intermediaries of the deities' manifestations. The deities' attributes and deeds are illustrated by the activities of the heroes in whom they emanate. It is through the activities of such heroes that the deities become a domain of actual sense experience for others. Until they are manifested in the hero, they are merely a potential and anticipated possibility. When the deities emanate as a human hero, his struggles are valorized. As national protectors, these deities themselves are heroes of a high rank, ready-made paradigmatic figures of valor. An example of the efficacy of their human emanations is the ability to instill courage in the hearts of their associates, frighten their adversaries, and transform society. Through their heroic human manifestations, they demonstrate the human potential to achieve greatness and prowess in one lifetime.

Emanated into the human flesh of the Mongolian sociocultural category of "hero," these deities became neither fully divine nor fully human, and some Mongolian heroes, like Chinggis Khan, who has been worshiped as both Vajrapāṇi and Vajradhara, became theomorphic. In their human emanations, when thrown into exceptional events and situations, these superheroes with hyper-bodies can be wounded and are mortal, and although courageous and powerful, they lack omnipotence. While it is clear why these deities became attractive to the Mongols, the question remains: What makes them subject to such a diverse range of cultural appropriations? Is it due to the transcultural nature of the notions of valor and strength that they epitomize, or is there something in the nature of the deities themselves that renders their simultaneous

adaptation to localized mountain-deity cults and to trans-local cults of the hero? Is their adaptability to new contexts facilitated by their transcendence of a single socio-historical, cultural, and geographical demarcation, which results from their being ultimately mere abstractions of the ideas of strength and courage? The conventions that govern their adaptability seem to involve both the Mongols' prior cognizance of the relevance of the ideas personified by the deities and their cognizance of the deities' essential transcendence of spatial, temporal, and cultural boundaries, which makes them applicable to the Mongolian cultural context. Their fundamental features remain unaltered in the process of their recontextualization within the Mongolian heroic culture due to their lack of an ontological basis. These deities are not ultimately real, but they are not merely imagined either, instead, they are purposeful and functional phenomena. Despite their display of ferocity in form and action, they are positive forces in this world, committed to eradicating evil and safeguarding the Buddha Dharma and those who uphold it. Capable of transforming social conditions and determining historical events, they are productive phenomena efficacious for religious and political interventions.

This is particularly the case with two superheroes—Vajrapāṇi and Jamsran—who have become a constitutive part of the Mongolian national, heroic past and popular consciousness. They have been mobilized in the service of religious and political affairs by repelling and punishing the foreign enemies of the Mongolian state and the Buddha Dharma. In return for their service, and by the decree of the Mongolian state, they have been worshipped with offerings and eulogies in both religious and state ceremonies. Although Vajrapāṇi and Jamsran do not mutually differ in their strength, valor, and ability to keep Mongolia safe, nor in their early background that required a conversion to Buddhism, Vajrapāṇi seems to hold a higher position. Despite the fact that Jamsran is considered to be an indigenous deity, Mongolia is declared as the land of Vajrapāṇi, and not as the land of Jamsran. While great ruling personalities like Chinggis Khan and others, all of whom were integral in the construction of Mongolian national identity, are among those retrospectively declared as emanations of Vajrapāṇi, Jamsran's emanations came from Mongolian nobility but were not equal to the rank of the Mongolian rulers. In addition, these figures were identified as Jamsran's incarnations while they were still living. There are several possible reasons for this. One important reason is Vajrapāṇi's position in the Asian Buddhist cosmopolis as one of the three main protectors, along with Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī. Vajrapāṇi also has a royal pedigree, which goes back to his emanation as Sucandra, a king of Śambhala, which Jamsran lacks. A lesser reason may be Jamsran's association with extremes of martial behavior and his literal relish for his adversaries' blood, kidneys, and heart. As in the case of Vajrapāṇi, so with Jamsran, his appropriation extended later to Shamanism, particularly to Yellow Shamanism, as attested by some shamanic rituals of summoning, in which the names of these deities are mentioned along with the names of other Buddhist deities during mountain worship.²

JAMSRAN (“BROTHER-AND-SISTER”), OR BEGZEE (T. BEG TSE,
“A COAT OF MAIL”)

In the Mongols’ view, Jamsran, also popularly known as the Red Protector (Ulaan Sakhuis), was originally a Mongolian Shamanic war god, in whom the entire power and ability of shamans and shamanesses was absorbed. When the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1543–1588), converted Jamsran into a Dharma protector in the latter part of the sixteenth century, that power was not diminished by conversion.³ Some scholars maintain that Jamsran did not come into the Buddhist pantheon prior to the new wave of the Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism in the sixteenth century.⁴ According to Amy Heller, Jamsran must have been worshiped in Tibet as early as the fifteenth century, since he is first mentioned in the 1494 biography of the First Dalai Lama, Gendun Drup (dGe ‘dun grub, 1391–1474), under the name Beg tse Jamdrel. Together with his consort, Jamsran was also a guardian of the personal monastery of the Second Dalai Lama, Gendun Gyatso (dGe ‘dun rGya mtsho, 1475–1542), founded in 1509,⁵ and a personal protector of the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1543–1588), who popularized the worship of Jamsran as he spread the Gelugpa teachings to Kham and Mongolia. In the Tibetan Sakya and Kagyu traditions, Jamsran is a main protector of the Hayagrīva⁶ cycle of practice. His association with Hayagrīva is also known in the Mongolian Gelugpa tradition. In the Mongolian “Hymn of Praise to Jamsran” (*Jamsrangiin Magtaal*), composed by Badamjalbuuzal, who calls himself “Hayagrīva’s *yogī*,” Jamsran is eulogized as an emanation of Hayagrīva’s mind. This hymn illustrates the perspective on Jamsran’s distinctive fiery temperament and his role in Mongolia, which were later emulated by some of the most renowned Mongolian war heroes. The hymn reads thus:

Jee! I extol you, the magnificent one, greatly fierce to all,
An emanation of the powerful Hayagrīva’s mind,
[And] a supreme tutelary deity of the *yogīs*
Who performs a ferocious dance to tame various disrupters!

I extol you, who seizes the lives of the adversaries,
Who strikes a thunderbolt on the heads of those with deteriorated
commitments,
And who grants the accomplishment of the supreme and ordinary *siddhis*
[Even] to those who have merely mentioned you!

I extol you, the military governor and hero,
Who wages war and flies a pennant,
Partake of the lungs and hearts of the saboteurs in your mouth,
[And] wield a greatly blazing copper sword against the enemy!

I extol you, who became a sister of the *yogī*
 And the mother, Ulaan Khanshaart,⁷ who kills the adversary,
 Who nakedly rides a dark blue bear,
 [And] manifests the unbearable magic powers in the east!

I extol you, the fierce, red Lord of Life,
 A consumer of the warm blood of the enemy's heart,
 Who visits the three worlds riding a jackal,
 The essence of the friends who listen and act on the ordinance!

I extol the ocean of those with commitments, who listen to the ordinance,
 Who assist, using all their strength by supporting the works of the *yogī*,
 Who joyfully consume the flesh and blood of the enemy,
 And exhibit various frightening, magic transformations!

May you all, the entourage and others,
 Pulverizing the injurious adversary of ours,
 Bring without delay under my power
 The glory of the three worlds!

Having increased the life, glory, and good fortune
 Of the teachings of the Victor Sumatikīrti (Tsong kha pa),
 And especially of the lamas who hold it, and of the patrons,
 Please swiftly accomplish [their] wishes and affairs.

Je! Manifesting the fierce body from the primordially pure *dharmadhātu*,
 Please come from the higher place to accomplish these deeds!

Please partake of the *torma* and of the offerings of tea, vodka, and the like,
 Which are offered to him with the appearance of the greatly ferocious demon
 from among the quarreling demons and demonesses.

The protector of the Buddha Dharma, and the lord of the lives of those with
 deteriorated commitment,

Please overcome our adversaries—[their] teachers, disciples, friends, and others.
 Flying the red pennant of the winner in battle, and wearing the crown of dry
 skulls,

Joined by your entourage that wears elephant hide, please overcome the enemy.

Although you rescue, pacifying the suffering of cold and heat of the inferior
 [beings],

Please overcome the enemy of the legendary religion like a lion [overcomes]
 a fox.

With a display of magic powers, loud roars, fierce blasts, thunder, and hailstorm,
please terrify the hidden and obvious adversaries.

I offer the articles of the commitment: a brown gelded goat, a reddish horse,⁸
armor, helmet, and the like until the three worlds are filled.

The accomplisher of Hayagrīva's command, having accepted this offering,
Please overcome the evildoers in the *dharmadhātu* of emptiness.⁹

As we see in the cited prayer, at times Jamsran is revered as an enlightened deity who requires elaborate ceremonies for his invocations.¹⁰ Similarly, in the Mongolian confessional prayer to Jamsran called "A Confession of Transgressions Against Jamsran" (*Jamsran dor Gem Nüglee Namanchlakh ny*),¹¹ Jamsran is referred to as a "benevolent *guru*" whom one does not perceive as Vajradhara due to one's own grasping onto impure vision:

Jee. Root *guru*, be pleased with me.

I remorsefully confess the deeds accumulated through mistakes,
Wrongfully grasped by not having purified the view of the Self
And the root of the accomplishment
To always see the benevolent *guru* as the Lord Vajradhara!

I remorsefully confess for contradicting, in the course of my actions,
Commitments to the secret *tantra*, the source of peace!
O, assembly of the joyful tutelary deities in the center of the expansive space
Of the Dharma Body, the clear light, be pleased with me!

Mighty protectors of the Victor's religion of the three times,
By bringing about the accomplishment of the four types of activities,
Although not moving from the space of the greatly peaceful Dharma Body,
Be pleased with me in the assembly of the ocean of those with commitments.
I remorsefully confess for not worshiping with offerings on time to return
a favor.

In brief, the mind is of a non-corrected nature
From being hindered by obscurations due to ignorance,
As [when] seeing an extreme dream state.
I confess to the Dharma Body, which is free from conceptual elaborations.¹²

At other times Jamsran is regarded by some Gelugpas as an emanation of Amitābha¹³ and Yamāntaka. Manifesting the fierce aspect of those two, Jamsran is often invoked as a *yakṣa*, a military general who swore to defy and conquer enemies and to punish those who break their commitments to him. In the *Mongolian* offering prayer to Jamsran titled "The Offering to the Red Protector" (*Ulayān sakīyus jamasrang-yin takil-a orusibui*),

which has been read during the *dogshid* service, Jamsran is invoked as a heroic *yakṣa* who safeguards the Dharma by the decree of Vajradhara. Being a fierce *yakṣa*, he is provided with liquor and sacrificial offerings of flesh and blood, blessed with the *om ā hūm mantra*. In *dogshid* services, he is asked to protect the Bogd Gegeens and the Buddha Dharma:¹⁴

Jee. Yakṣa Jamsran, I summon you,
The protector of Dharma,
By the order of the Victorious Vajradhara,

Come swiftly, without delay!

Hero, let us see [your] body
On the top of the human and equine corpses,
On the top of the southern lotus and the sun!
Prevail extremely strong!

Openly providing the sight of the external eyes,
The things of an inner pledge
And the *torma* offering,
I present to you who are transmuting [them].

I present to you a ritual cake of the varied, desirable abilities,
Of the supreme elixir,
And of thoroughly red blood and flesh.
Enjoying [it], accomplish the tasks!

I pay homage to you, fierce *yakṣa*,
Having a fierce and angry body,
The mandate song of the fierce *dhāraṇī*,
And the fierce mind, free of attachment.

Having worshiped you, Protector,
I pray, evoking you.
Becoming a safeguarding ally, and protecting,
May you counteract the demons!

Completely accomplish the works,
Especially those mentioned!
May you grant the appropriate *siddhi*
That eliminates obstacles.

By the kindness of the splendid, precious Guru,
The tutelary deity, and the *dākinīs*,

The Dharma protectors,
And you, *yakṣa*,

May the feet of the Holy Lama be firm!
May the Dharma of the Three Wheels blaze!
May my life and virtue increase!
May there be good fortune and happiness!

As a protective deity of the Mongolian Jebtsundamba Khutugtus, Jamsran was, by extension, also a protector of the Mongolian state during the short reign of the Ninth Bogd Gegeen. The First Bogd, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar (1635–1723), himself composed the offering prayer to Jamsran titled “The Cloud of Offering the Goods to the Dharma Protector, the Fierce Begtse.” The legend of his journey to Tibet in 1665 is often mentioned in Mongolian writings as the earliest evidence of Öndör Gegeen’s worship of Jamsran as a Buddhist deity. The legend tells that while Öndör Gegeen was passing a night with his entourage in the region of Golok, a thief succeeded in stealing seven of his horses. Just as Öndör Gegeen wondered why his protector Jamsran had failed to guard his horses, a cloud of red dust appeared in the eastern direction from the gallop of his returning horses. On the tails of two of those horses was tied a fresh, human head, presumably that of the horse thieves. Witnessing this, Öndör Gegeen acknowledged Jamsran for accomplishing the task that he himself was unable to carry out, and in gratitude, he offered him *serjim* (T. *gser skyims*, a sprinkling of vodka offering).¹⁵ We are told that due to Jamsran’s assistance, the delegation safely and swiftly arrived at Tashilhunpo (bKra shis lhun po) Monastery in Shigatse within a week.

Jamsran’s popularity in Mongolia reached its peak in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were characterized by the Mongols’ long struggle for independence from the Qing and from the Republic of China. In the nineteenth century, a Jamsran *dogshid* service was performed in Urga (modern Ulaanbaatar) on a daily basis. According to the Russian ethnographer Pozdneev, who conducted his research in Mongolia during the monarchical period, during *dogshid* services to Jamsran, the ritual cake (M. *dorom*, T. *gtor ma*) offerings were “flesh and blood offerings” made of barley flour mixed with water. The human hands, feet, eyeballs, nose, tongue, ears, heart, and brain in the ritual cake offerings represented the enemies of Dharma, who were brought before Jamsran for punishment. At the end of the *dogshid* service, this offering was burnt behind the monastery’s walls.¹⁶

From the establishment of the independent monarchical state in 1917, which followed the collapse of the Qing dynasty, until 1924, the Mongolian Ministry of Defense worshiped Jamsran as its tutelary deity, with offerings and prayers for the pacification of obstacles and for safeguarding the peace of the country. During the same period, all banner-princes (*zasag van*), dukes (*gün*), noblemen (*noën*), and official dignitaries (*tüshmel*) paid homage to Jamsran every year in western Urga and took an oath in front of his image. Following this custom, in 1921, members of the two communist revolutionary

parties assembled for the first time in front of Jamsran's statue in western Khüree (previous Urga), wrote the words of oath on a ceremonial scarf (*khadag*), and, raising it above the offered food and dairy products, they took the oath and saluted him.¹⁷

During the Stalin era and during the socialist period, when the suppression of religious expression was under way, Jamsran's temples were destroyed and his worship was prohibited. However, with the onset of democratization and freedom of religion in Mongolia, Jamsran has been reinstated as a protective deity of the Mongolian military and police, and renewed ritual services to Jamsran sponsored by the Ministries of Defense and Internal Affairs are now carried out yearly at Gandantegchenling Monastery in Ulaanbaatar.

In Mongolia, Jamsran has been primarily worshiped as a wrathful and extraordinarily powerful god of war, who instantly terrifies and smashes to smithereens the enemies of the Dharma and the state. In his fierce *mantra*, he is invoked as a "life-devouring and destroying" (Skt. *prāṇādmakṣi*) deity, called to injure and repel every adversary (Skt. *sarvaśtru*).¹⁸ In addition to suppressing and destroying the demons of obstacles that manifest as harassing enemies, similarly to Vajrapāṇi, this Red Protector is also summoned to prevent thefts, robberies, and disputes.

In iconography, Jamsran is invariably represented as red in color. He has four fangs, a rapidly moving tongue, three protruding eyes, and eyebrows and a mustache blazing like the fire at the end of the world. He wears armor and a rosary made of fifty fresh human skulls, and his head is decorated with dry human skulls as well. In his right hand he brandishes a flaming copper sword toward the sky, and with his left hand he holds the heart and kidneys of the enemies of Dharma. On his neck hangs a mirror with the syllable *braṃ*. On whatever day or night he looks at the entire world in a mirror with his sharp eyes, he finds a party inimical to the Dharma and pulls it apart. He is girded with nine layers of ceremonial scarves. In some representations, he has a banner tucked under his armpit, and in others, he holds a bow, arrow, and leather banner in the crook of his arm. He crushes with his feet an equine and a human corpse, while standing in the militant archer pose on a sun disk supported by a lotus pedestal.

His sister and consort Okhin Tngri, Rikpay Lhamo (T. Rig pa'i lha mo), who stands at his side, has a red face, dark blue body, three eyes, four fangs, and a half-opened mouth. She wields a copper sword in her right hand, and in her left hand she holds a ritual dagger (T. *phur pa*), threatening adversaries. Naked, she rides a bear holding a human corpse in its mouth. On the right side of Jamsran stands the red Las mkhan srog bdag, the Master of Life, riding a rabid wolf and wearing armor. With his left hand, he is ready to lasso the heads of opponents, and with his right hand, he holds a spear. Jamsran's inner retinue consists of eight red deities, the Sword Bearers (Selmechi), who, like Jamsran, have been included often in Mongolian *tsam* (T. *cham*) dances. Jamsran's outer retinue consists of a group of twenty-one assassins draped in the wet skin of the enemy. They each hold a knife in the right hand, and in the left hand they hold the enemy's liver, heart, lung, spleen, eye, marrow, scalp with hair, and the like. They carry out gruesome tasks,

untangling the enemy's stomach, tearing his skin and flesh, stamping the ground with their feet, jumping, and swirling around.

Jamsran is believed to have manifested multiple times in various divine and human emanations among the Mongolian heroes. This can be seen, for example, in a prayer to the Mongolian Geser Khan deity, who, as yet another paradigmatic figure of heroism and martial skills, is also eulogized as an "actual" incarnation of Jamsran in "Chinggis Khan's Own Prayer to Geser" (*Chinggis Khany Ööriin Takhilga Geseriin Erööl Magtaal*).¹⁹ In the early twentieth century, some Mongolian war heroes who fought for Mongolian independence against the Qing in 1911 and later against the Republic of China, which sought to colonize Khalkha Mongolia at the outbreak of World War I, were perceived as high incarnations of Jamsran. To qualify as Jamsran's heroic emanation, one must be incapable of defeat in anything, one must be able to suppress arrogance, and one must bring the foreign enemies of the state to their knees.²⁰ Such heroes are said to have gained their martial power by integrating Mongolian military strategies with Buddhist tantric *siddhis*, which they developed in the course of military conflicts.

One such war hero who was recognized as a twentieth-century emanation of Jamsran is Sandagdorjiin Magsarjav (1878–1927), who was born to the hereditary duke (*sul gūn*) of Itegemjit Zasag Banner of Sain Noën Khan (nowadays in Bulgan province) and who later became the Major military commander under the theocratic White Russian and revolutionary regimes. Magsarjav was never monastically ordained and trained. Listening from infancy to the legends and heroic epics sung by elders during the long winter nights, he dreamt of becoming a hero who would raise his voice in a heroic ode and frighten the enemy. His childhood dreams became reality in 1912 when, together with Manlaibaatar J. Damdinsüren, he led an army of some 5,000 young men from different Mongolian ethnic groups (Khalkhas, Dörvöds, Baits, Uriangkhai people, and others) in the campaign to liberate the town of Khovd and the western frontier from Qing domination. It is said that prior to entering the battle, in front of the town of Khovd, Magsarjav offered his military flag to Baatar Khairkhan Mountain to arouse the mountain's ferocity, while a famous bard of the Dörvöds by the name of Parchin intoned the heroic epic *Bum-Erdene* (*Hundred Thousand Jewels*) with his two-string lute (*tovshuur*). Enthusing his soldiers with courage and pride on the northeastern side of Khovd near the Rashaant Mountain, Magsarjav, together with Jalkhanz Khutugtu and his disciples (*shavi*), recited the fierce *mantra* of Vajrapāṇi, meditated on the fierce activities, and performed the ritual exorcism of *sor*²¹ in order to incinerate the foreign demons until there was no trace of their activity left. The reports say that, shooting their rifles until not a single living soul remained, they shattered the fortress of the enemy's heart into pieces.²² In the course of that battle, Magsarjav's martial ability and courage became evident. In appreciation of his military merits, in 1912 the Eighth Bogd Gegeen Jebtsundamba conferred upon him the title of National Hero (Ardyn Khatanbaatar), along with the titles of a prince of the fourth rank (*beis*) and a prince of the third rank (*beil*). He gave him a plume of peacock feathers with three eyes, which was worn on official hats as an insignia

of the rank of a dignitary, and he gave him brown reins, symbolizing the power to run the country. After that year, the Talyn Ulaan Mountain in his home region became named after him, as “Baatar Khairkhan” (Hero Mountain). In a traditional, long song that celebrates Magsarjav’s deeds, these words are sung:

Having looked at your rocky, red mountain,
 We remember [you,] Khatanbaatar Magsarjav.
 Having seen the khan of your wide fortress,
 We sing of [how] you vanquished the foreign enemy.²³

Following that, Magsarjav embarked on a ten-year-long struggle for the freedom and independence of the Mongolian state, intercepting and overpowering the Manchu and Chinese forces that were trespassing across Mongolian borders in all four directions—from the high mountains of Altai in the west to the great lakes of the Khingan Mountains on the eastern border, and from the Gobi in the south up to the junction of Khem in the north. He crossed about 20,000 km on horseback, engaged in about thirty battles both small and large with an army of some 20,000 soldiers, and was not even once defeated in battle.

In Mongolian twentieth-century military history, Magsarjav is celebrated as a hero unequalled in bravery or military tactics, whose fight and course of victory call to mind the generals of the Mongolian army who shook the world in the thirteenth century. We are told that from the time he exerted himself in the matters of the state army he developed unusual magical powers. Seen as someone who mastered the tradition of Secret Mantra through his military feats, he was installed as a great State Oracle (*töriin choijin*),²⁴ capable of channeling Jamsran. Sources tell us that in 1915, one night during the war against the Qing in Inner Mongolia, Magsarjav’s bloody sword with which he severed enemy heads leaped out from its sheath at the end of a day of battling the enemy. From then on, Magsarjav gained fame among Northern and Inner Mongols as a *choijin* endowed with extraordinarily great *siddhis*, and he became an object of their worship. Before engaging in a battle, Magsarjav would enter a trance, put on his armor and helmet, carry his gun and saber, and by means of a *mantra* he would summon Jamsran into his body. It is said that on such occasions, his sword would leap out of its sheath and his arrows leap out from his bow-case, chasing away the demons, evil spirits, ghosts, and other obstructive forces. Records also tell us that when he loosened his belt after a battle, his arrows by themselves fell from his quiver on the chest. Witnessing these occurrences, his soldiers gained greater pride, courage, and power to overcome the enemy. According to the report of a certain partisan, Dovdoi, when Magsarjav entered the trance of a *choijin*, he whipped his soldiers with a whip made of leather straps, and if any soldier had a cold at that time, he was immediately cured.²⁵

Magsarjav’s military banner, decorated with a trident, was similar to the shamanic Dogshin Khar (Fierce Black) tutelary deity (*süld*) of the ancient Mongolian army, and

Magsarjav's custom of worshipping the banner with a sacrificial offering of the enemy's heart was in accordance with the old Mongolian military custom. Marshal Khorlogiin Choibalsan (1895–1952), who was set up as a ruler of Mongolia after 1940 by Stalin's decree and had many lamas killed and imprisoned, but is nowadays viewed by some Mongolian nationalists as an incarnation of Varjapāṇi, wrote a book dedicated to Magsarjav's heroic deeds. There he recounts Magsarjav's demonstration of his "heroic majesty" in cutting off the head of a soldier captured from the enemy's army, slitting his belly, and pulling out his heart, which he offered to his military flag. To flare up the passion of his soldiers, having lined up the entire army, Magsarjav tasted the blood of the enemy executed in this way and made his soldiers taste it as well.²⁶ The origin of this custom is in the old Mongolian practice of taking blood revenge. In this practice, a banner was worshiped with an offering of the heart belonging to an influential military leader captured from an inimical clan. The four limbs of a captured soldier were tightened with a narrow leather strap, squeezing the blood that would pour into the heart. Opening the chest and breaking up the heart, the blood collected within the heart was offered, gushing toward the flag. Or, having opened the stomach of a captured enemy with a narrow leather strap, and twining it around with Anabasis (saltwort plant) in accordance with the rhythm of the heart, a military general would pull the heart out with a jerk, lick it, and suspend it on his flag. As seen from Jamsran's iconographic depiction, he too carries the heart and kidneys of the enemy in his hand, and is ready to devour them. This synthesis of an ancient martial ritual among the peoples of the steppe and the horrifying image of Jamsran partaking of the enemy's organs seems to be intentional, and it suggests the possibility that Jamsran's martial character was fashioned on the example of the martial ethos of Inner Asian clans.

To show Magsarjav's softer side, A. Pürevdagva, the author of the *Memoires of the Mongolian People's Voluntary Army (Mongol Ardyn Juramt Tsergiin Durtgaluud)*, speaks of Magsarjav's evening practice of lining up his soldiers and having them take off their hats and gather Buddhist scriptures at the flag. Then, having paid homage to the protective banner deity, he had them read a prayer to White Tārā.²⁷ In J. Boldbaatar's view, "Khatanbaatar Magsarjav was a talented general who, during combat, was internally in meditation but externally manifested ferocity, hardening his soldiers and assembling the army's wonderful mind with great capacity to summon good fortune (*khiimori lund*)."²⁸

In 1918, the Eighth Bogd Gegeen Jebtsundabma, further honoring Magsarjav's merit, awarded him a special *khoshuu* (a banner-administrative unit). After that, from 1919 to 1920, Magsarjav built a monastery in his subordinate *khoshuu*, which was popularly known as Khatanbaatar's Monastery (Khatanbaataryn Khüree). The monastery had about 100 lamas, western and eastern *datsans* (T. *grwa tshang*), and a main assembly hall (M. *tsogchin dуган*, T. *tshogs chen 'du khang*). The monastery's main worship was that of Jamsran, the Red Protector to whom a special temple was dedicated for offerings and prayers that were made to him on a regular basis.²⁹ In 1922, together with the general of the Mongolian revolutionary army, D. Sükhbaatar, and deputy general, Choibalsan,

Magsarjav received an award from the Soviet government for his heroism in defeating the “white brigands, the enemies of the Mongolian and Soviet people.” The award was declared “a strong sign of the eternal friendship between Mongolia and Soviet Union.”³⁰ He remained loyal to the revolutionary regime for the remainder of his life and enjoyed “his reputation of an unwavering and invincible hero, a rescuer of the people,” which “echoed among the northern and southern Mongols” until his death in September 1927.³¹

As an incarnation of Jamsran, who is beyond accusation and justification for his wrathful and violent actions, Magsarjav was free from any need for repentance and self-justification. Unlike some heroes in the Hellenistic world or in the medieval Christian legends of trial by suffering and temptations, Magsarjav cannot be conceived as a martyr. Moreover, from among these two cooperating protagonists on the stage of a battlefield (Jamsran and Magsarjav), Jamsran, who is beyond accusation and justification, is more authorial. Through the accounts of Magsarjav’s military escapades, imbued with ideological and nationalistic content and even invoking the iconography of the deity, Jamsran was led to intervene in secular events. Through the medium of Magsarjav and his deeds, Jamsran became an agent of cultural and ideological communication, situated at the intersection of the cultural, religious, and political realms. Remodeled into a recognizable hero, Jamsran reflects the ideals of early-twentieth-century Mongolia, while ultimately transcending them.

HERO’S STEED AND HAYAGRĪVA AS THE PROTECTOR OF THE STEED

Just as the fate of this Mongolian hero was tied to Jamsran, so was the well-being and performance of his steed linked to Hayagrīva,³² the protector of horses, from whose mind Jamsran emerges. The worship of a protective deity of horses and other livestock (*malyn tenger*) was already a part of Mongolian Shamanic practice prior to the advent of Buddhism in Mongolia, which facilitated the popularity of Hayagrīva among the pastoral Mongols. The concept of a Mongolian hero separate from a fast horse is inconceivable. The hero’s internal “wind horse” (*khiimory*) is most intimately connected to his fast horse, eulogized as a “wind horse” with fearless, fiery eyes and steel-like, firm hooves.³³ It is not uncommon that in Mongolian epics horses themselves are heroes or have an important role in the epic literature, in which the main character is a human hero. The hero converses with his horse, relies on the counsel and advance warnings of his horse before he ventures into dangerous escapades, and is often saved by his horse. In heroic poems, the triumphs of the hero are in fact the achievements of his horse.³⁴ Such works often include farewell scenes in which the hero’s steed exchanges benedictions with his herd before his departure. These benedictions contain similar if not identical verses that foreshadow the heroic deeds that will bring fame to the horse. One such passage, in which steed’s companions bid him farewell, reads:

Vanquish the foe,

Acquire the title of *darkhan*,³⁵
Destroy the evil ones,
Acquire the fame,
Bury the strong ones
And return home soon.³⁶

Thus, like a human hero, the equine hero does not die in battles but returns home victorious. His fame and that of the human hero are symbiotic.

The well-known Mongolian author Bari Lam Damsagdorj, who wrote extensively on the Hayagrīva cycle of practices in the eighteenth century, reminds us that even the Buddha Śākyamuni depended on a horse in the pivotal moments of his life. It is by riding the Nirañjana horse that young prince Siddhārta set out to explore the reality of cyclic existence and to eventually conquer it, and he rode a horse to the Akaniṣṭha heaven in his Body of Gnosis.³⁷ Moreover, in the *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, the Buddha Śākyamuni speaks of his previous lifetime as the seafaring merchant Siṃhala who, shipwrecked on an island inhabited by *rākṣasīs*, was delivered from a man-eating *rākṣasī* and from the fear of death by the flying horse Bālāha, an emanation of Avalokiteśvara, a peaceful form of Hayagrīva.³⁸ Similarly, in the Mongols' triumphant past, the conquests that secured the great Mongol Empire were won with a fast and reliable horse, as were the later liberations from the Qing and the Republic of China. As the old Mongolian saying goes: "A Mongol is destined to be born at the udders of a horse and to die in the saddle."³⁹ In military campaigns, mare's milk and horse blood provided nourishment for exhausted warriors, and the ritual offering of mare's milk to warriors at their departures to military campaigns gave them fortitude. A fast steed has contributed to the victory and honor of the hero whether on a battlefield at the time of war or in a horse race at the time of leisure. A strong steed is a hero in its own right. Similar to the fearless hero who helps his people, a strong steed safeguards the herd from wolves, dogs, and bandits, and it knows how to find a proper pasture to protect its herd from windstorms, heat, and cold. In sharing both common tasks and glory, the hero and his fast horse share the two closely related protectors.

Hayagrīva is both a protector of the horse and its true and kind master, imbued with compassion. The last stanza of the Mongolian "Praise to Hayagrīva" (*Khayakhirvaagiin Magtaal*), who is "a greatly fierce emanation of the Lord Āryabala Hri," or Avalokiteśvara, and "the greatly powerful body," emphasizes his compassionate nature in these words:

I pay homage to the body of the magnificent grandeur,
Which, having destroyed beings with bad, poisonous deeds,
Blazes like the fire at the end of time with atrocious ferocity,
Although inseparable from the kind and compassionate nature!⁴⁰

Therefore, those who worship Hayagrīva as their tutelary deity are prohibited from eating horsemeat, shouting at a horse, cursing it, or disrespecting the herds. Until 1950,

Mongols did not kill a horse for its meat, and it was considered taboo to allow a person who killed and ate a horse to enter one's home.⁴¹

Two distinct Tibetan lineages of Hayagrīva worship have been influential in Mongolia: one belonging to the Karma Kagyu school, the other to the Gelugpa school. The most commonly used prayers and rituals to Hayagrīva for the protection of horses from diseases, injuries, and obstacles to winning a race come from the *Treasury of Precious Terms* (*Rin chen gter mdzod*) of Jamgön Kongtrul the Great (1813–1900).⁴² The other common lineage traces back to Se ra rJe btsun Chos kyi rGyal mtshan (1469–1544), a textbook writer (*T. yig cha*) for Sera Je Monastery in Lhasa, who installed Hayagrīva as the tutelary deity of Sera Monastery. This particular lineage found its home in Zayin Khüree Monastery in Mongolia, which was affiliated with Sera Monastery in Tibet, as well as in Galuutai Khüree, and several other monasteries. Mongolian lamas themselves composed a great number of *sādhana*s, ritual texts, and hymns to Hayagrīva.

Among the various forms of Hayagrīva in Mongolia, the most popular is his Remānta form, depicted as having three faces, each with three eyes and a horse head protruding from the crown, six arms, and trampling the male and female enemies of Dharma. The ritual worship of Hayagrīva for the prevention and removal of horse-related diseases and for increasing the herd has been widely popular in Mongolia. It involves the usage of a ritual dagger, and as seen from the short ritual text titled *Śrī Remānta: A Dhāraṇī That Greatly Pacifies All the Diseases of a Horse*, the ritual begins with a *sādhana* of Hayagrīva in which the practitioner, having taken on the identity of Remānta, makes the following resolve: “I will protect all horses. I will instantly crush all obstacles that are harmful to a horse . . . I will greatly pacify all illnesses, [such as] pulmonary diseases, limping, and so on, which are easy to contract through an unexpected enemy.” After that, one extols Remānta and his *mantra om mahā krodha remānta hana hana hūṃ phaṭ* as unique within the three realms of existence, and one prays in this way: “Glorious Hayagrīva king, please safeguard the four-legged horses. O king, please protect horses from all illnesses. *Om padma nāda kṛta hayagrīva vajra krodha hūṃ phaṭ* . . . Please remove all the dangers and enemies of the path with regard to increasing the leading horses of the herd. I pay homage to the terrifying lord of the mighty ones, to the god of gods.” Afterward, one completes the *dhāraṇī* with the following words: “Please give me the *siddhi* of possessions, *om* Ārya Remānta, [you] who greatly pacifies all the diseases of a horse.”⁴³ The same *dhāraṇī*, extolling Hayagrīva Remānta as “the lord of the path of faith, the holder of sublime splendor,” and “pacifier” who is “higher than a war god,” asserts his, and indirectly Jamsran’s, supremacy over any war god.

According to a short ritual text titled *A Method of Incense Offering and Making a Horse Run Fast* (*rTa rgyug lus bsangs bya tshul bzhugs so*), one must burn pure incense, read the incense-offering *sādhana*, and meditate on Hayagrīva in order to obstruct the demons causing misfortune and obstacles to the horse and its rider. To purify the faults that may reside in the steed itself, one recites Hayagrīva’s heart *mantra om hrī vajra*

krodha hayagrīva hulu hulu hūṃ phaṭ twenty-one times and offers him burnt incense. By tying a protective *yantra* on the neck of a racehorse, one further removes additional obstacles to the race.⁴⁴

Nowadays, like in other times of peace when the heroic deeds of Mongolian warriors are celebrated and enacted in horse races, the horse race is regularly held in all the regions of Mongolia as one of the three games of manhood. For two weeks prior to the race, Hayagrīva's main attendant's *mantra om hrī padma damdil vajra krodha haya grīva hulu hulu hūṃ phaṭ* is recited by monks for the purpose of consecrating juniper, which thereby becomes a special type of incense used only for racehorses. Just before the start of a horse race, Hayagrīva is ritually invited to the top of the head of the steed, while young riders recite Hayagrīva's heart *mantra om hrī vajra krodha haya grīva hulu hulu hūṃ phaṭ* in order to ensure that demons of obstacles and harms are hindered and disabled and that the young riders' lives and the horses' well-being are guarded by the deity. At the completion of the chant, an appliqué *thangka* of Hayagrīva is displayed at the starting line for the young riders to worship in silence.⁴⁵

It is believed that if the rider prays to Hayagrīva during the incense offering asking, "Please grant that I race well a fast horse, the foremost in the herd," draws an image of Hayagrīva on a piece of paper, and wears it, his horse will race fast and his legs will be spared of injuries. The rider is also advised to take a handful of soil at the starting point of a race and to recite the *mantra nama so nama ama sod* twenty-one times before racing. If he does so, it is said that he will win the race or at least finish second.⁴⁶ The glory and fame that accompany a winning horse racer and his steed are facsimiles of those gained on a battlefield by way of Hayagrīva in his Remānta and Jamsran forms.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, one could say that in the Mongolian Buddhist cultural arena, in which the three protective deities—Vajrapāṇi, Jamsran, and Hayagrīva—have come together, they preserve some continuity between traditional preferences and representations of heroic ideals and the processes of the appropriation and reconfiguration of extratemporal deities into temporal rulers and warriors. The overlapping and similar characteristics of strength, valor, and power built into the mentioned deities and into those that were integral to pre-Buddhist Mongolian culture resulted in new embodiments of the deities' attributes and abilities as well as the reinforcement of the Mongolian heroic and martial ethos. This in turn facilitated the induction of the deities into secular and religious services to the Mongolian state and to Mongolian pastoral and heroic culture in different historical and political circumstances. The wind, speed, power, and ability attributed to Hayagrīva and Jamsran have been traditionally seen as factors that have guided Mongolian warriors and pastoralists in overcoming the hardships of wars and nomadic migrations.⁴⁷

NOTES

1. These legends were related to me by the Batchuluun family from Büren *sum* during my ethnographic research in July 2011. Local people assert that the footprints of Mongolia's First Bogd Gegeen, Öndör Zanabazar, can be seen on that mountain.

2. Darmagiin, 2005, 245, 347–348.

3. According to the story of the conversion of Beg tse to Buddhism, given in Sayang Sečen's *Precious Summary (Erdeni-yin Tobči)*, when the Dalai Lama was on his way to Mongolia to meet with Altan Khan, Beg tse tried to obstruct him with demons appearing in the form of various animals. In response, the Third Dalai Lama took the form of the four armed Avalokiteśvara, and his horses' hooves left imprints on the ground in the shape of the *om mani padme hum mantra*. Seeing this, Beg tse admitted his defeat and converted to Buddhism. See Grünwedel, 1900, 82, and *Shashny Khamgaalagch Nomyg Tetgegh Ulaan Sakhuusny Gar Devter*, 2005, 9–10.

4. See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1956, 88.

5. Heller, 1989.

6. T. rTa mgrin yang gsang, M. Damdin Yansan.

7. The meaning of the name Ulaan Khashaart is “One having the red bridge of the nose.”

8. When honoring Jamsran with the offering of a consecrated gelded goat or horse, the color of the coat of the animal must correspond to that of Jamsran. An animal that is consecrated to Jamsran becomes his possession and is set aside from other animals in the herd. It can never be sold, killed, or put to labor. If it is a sheep, it cannot be sheared, and if it is a horse, a woman can never ride it. Its male owner is not permitted to place on a consecrated horse a saddle, a halter, or a bridle from another horse. A consecrated animal is visibly distinguishable from other animals in its herd by a silken scarf (*khadag*) or by a multicolored ribbon called *seter* that is tied around its neck.

9. *Ach Avralt Burkhan Tengerüüd: Khorin Esön Burkhany Byasalgal*, 2007, 153–154.

10. See Hyer and Sechin, 1983, 96.

11. *Ach Avralt Burkhan Tengerüüd: Khorin Esön Burkhany Byasalgal*, 2007, 154. The Mongolian author of this confessional prayer is unknown. Due to the inability to access the original composed in Tibet, my translation had to be based exclusively on the Modern Mongolian version, which may deviate from the original.

12. The original composed in Classical Mongolian was published in Gatanbaatar, 2010, 85.

13. See Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar's *Chos skyong dregs pa lCam sring gi chas 'bul mchod phreng dang bcas pa*, which begins with the homage to Amitābha.

14. The original composed in Classical Mongolian was published in Gatanbaatar, 2010, 85.

15. Myagmarsambuu, 2001, 13; Charles Bawden, 1961, 48–49.

16. Pozdneev, 1999, 430–442.

17. Myagmarsambuu, 2001, 12.

18. His *mantra* is *om prāṇādmakṣi ruṣa rukha lohita sarvaśatruṃ raya hum phaṭ*.

19. Nuutsyn Khuraangui Alivaa Zam Mör Tüüny Üriin Nuuts Anyś Bükhniig Khuraanguil-san Dandar Sudar Orshvoi, 2009, 163–167. See also Rinchen, B. 1958. “En Marge du culte de Guesser Khan en Mongolie.” *Journal de la Societe Finno-Ougrienne*. Vol. 60 (1958): 1–51, cited in Heissig, Walther. 1980. *Religions of Mongolia*. Translated from the German Edition by Geoffrey Samuel. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, p. 97.

20. Myagmarsambuu, 2001, 32.

21. *Sor* is a model of a human skull made of dough and placed upon a pyramidal substructure of stalks of grain, to which red jagged paper streamers, which represent flames, are attached. It can measure from one to two feet in height. It is painted red and burnt in a tantric ritual of purification.

22. Khürelbaatar, L. *Ogtorguin Tsagaan Gardi*. Ulaanbaatar, 1996, p. 308, cited in Myagmarsambu, 2001, 33.

23. Khorloo, 2004, 80.

24. During that period there were other *choijins* who assisted in warfare against the Qing army. One of them was Daryzavyn Losol (1890–1939), who was born as a Daichin prince of the fourth rank (*beis*) of Dashtserengiin *khoshuu* of Setsen Khan province (nowadays Batnorov *sum* of Khentii province), and sent to a monastery for studies after the age of nine. Later in life he became a *choijin*. In 1913, on the request of the commander Manlaibaatar J. Damdinsüren, he helped to protect the Mongolian southeastern border from the Manchu army. On the recommendation of the lamas of Damdinsüren's army, he was awarded the high rank of *tsorj* (T. *chos rje*, Skt. *dharmarāja*). Although a nobleman and a monk, in 1919 he joined a secret revolutionary group of Consular Glacis in the Mongolian capital; in 1920, he became a member of the agents of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, which elicited support from the Soviet Union. Having gained fame for being able to tame minds and encroach on the foreign enemy, in July 1921, the *choijin* Losol was sent on a mission by the lamas of the state army to persuade Mongolian soldiers to follow the military's lamas. From 1923 to 1925, he held the post of an official dignitary (*tüshmel*) who managed a military hospital, and in 1925, like other lamas of that time, he became a layman. From then he served in different governmental positions until 1939, when he was falsely accused as a counter-revolutionary and executed. However, in 1962, two years after the Mongolian People's Republic became a fully socialist country, Losol was posthumously cleared of those charges.

25. Boldbaatar, 1999, 27–34.

26. Kh. Choibalsan, 1942, 40, cited in Myagmarsambu, 2001, 37.

27. A. Pürevdagva, 1985. *Mongol Ardyn Juramt Tsergiin Durtgaluud*. Vol. 1, p. 862, cited in Myagmarsambu, 2001, 38.

28. Boldbaatar, 1999, 33.

29. Myagmarsambu, 1988, 40–42. In 1921, Magsarjav was sent with a detachment of troops to camp at the town of Uliastai (Zavkhan province in northwestern Mongolia), where the troop of Mongols and Buryats camped. There, on a certain day, during the evening prayers, Magsarjav and the Mongolian soldiers slaughtered all of those Buryats. See Bawden, 1989, 236–237.

30. Ölzii, 1992, 144.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Like Jamsran, Hayagrīva's fierce form has a red appearance, similar to a blazing fire. He wears five dry skulls on his crown and a necklace of fifty fresh skulls.

33. Badral, 2003, 10.

34. One of examples of the epic story in which the horse counsels and wins a battle for the hero is *The Best among Men: Eristen Mergen* (*Eriin sain Eriusten Mergen*). In his analysis of various Khalkha epics, N. Poppe gives a brief summary of the epic titled *Tale of the Chinggis Khan's Two Runners*, in which the main heroes are two horses. See Poppe, 1979, 22–23, 56–60.

35. As an adjective, *darkhan* carries the meaning of sacred, someone who is set aside as sacred.

36. The cited passage is a translation by Poppe, 1979, 156.

37. It is pointed out by Bari Lam Damtsagdorj, among whose collected works the two works the *E Bam (Evam)*, which has two volumes, and the *Om Ā Hum*, which has three volumes, deal with Hayagrīva. See Badral P. 2006. “Yansan Yadamyn Bilgiin Gegee.” In Bragri Lama Damtsigdorj, 2006, 45.

38. Studholme, 2002, 77. The legend of the merchant Siṃhala’s deliverance from a *rākṣasī* by Bālāha, the king of horses, also appears in the *Valāhassajātaka*, *Divyāvadāna*, and *Mahāvastu*.

39. Damdinjavyn Davaa, 2006, 194.

40. See *Ach Avralt Burkhan Tengerүүд: Khorin Esөн Burkhany Byasalgal*, 2007, 77.

41. Damdinjavyn Davaa, 2006, 248.

42. *Rin chen gter mdzod* is one of the five treasuries of Jamgön Kongtrul Lodro Thaye.

43. “Khutagt Remanda Aduuny Övchin Bükhniig Mashid Amiraluulakh Üildegch Togtool,” in *Ikh Nuuts Tarniin Chukhal Kheregtei Sakhius, Tarniiyдин Tailbar*, 2004, 61–62.

44. Taken from the Mongolian translation of the *Rta rgyug lus bsangs bya tsbul bzhuḡs so* given in Damdinjavyn Davaa, 2006, 250–251.

45. Damdinjavyn Davaa, 2006, 248.

46. Bragri Lama Damtsigdorj, 2006, 486.

47. Badral, 2003, 7.

12

Buddhist Sacred Mountains, Auspicious Landscapes, and Their Agency

Vesna A. Wallace



INTRODUCTION

The complex interconnection between the traditional pastoral and Buddhist culture and the landscape of Mongolia is undeniable. In part, this interconnection has shaped the sense of identity and cultural values of Mongolian Buddhists. The Mongolian landscape and its climatic conditions, which evidence the experiences and struggles of both humans and livestock, have influenced the Mongolian Buddhist culture and its reverential approach to the natural environment and the nonhuman entities controlling the landscape. Replacing some pre-Buddhist, Shamanic practices while absorbing the others, the Mongolian Buddhist tradition constructed a new set of symbolic meanings of the indigenous landscapes. It also provided new ritual means for purifying the natural environment and controlling the weather. In this way, it used various natural sites as mediums of representation of its power over the Shamanic tradition and over the invisible entities that are believed to control the natural world. As in other Buddhist cultures, here, too, interactions with entities such as *nāgas*, the masters of the land (*savdag*, T. *sab bdag*), the masters of the ground (*delkhiin ezen*, T. *gzhi bdag*), the masters of the country (*orny tenger*, T. *gnas bdag*), and others believed to have a jurisdiction over certain sites and regions are characterized by a special relationship between power and freedom from misfortunes negotiated through prescribed prohibitions and ritual actions of worship and purification.

In his introductory comments to a volume on the *Sūtras of Incense Offering to Mountain Ovoos*, Khambo Lama Choijamts, the current abbot of Gandantegchenling Monastery, the

official center of Mongolian Buddhism, emphasizes the ecological relevance of the ritual sanctification of the environment. He points out that selecting an ecologically important site inhabited by rare species of wildlife and vegetation as a sacred locale for ceremonial worship should not be seen merely as a religious activity but also as the preservation of the natural environment for future generations. He also asserts the social importance of the preservation of the traditional worship of sacred landscapes as prevention from natural disasters, suffering, and sickness that gives rise to material and social insecurity.¹ His view is shared by other Mongolian Buddhists and represents a traditional Mongolian way of thinking about the relationship between the culture and nature. In 2008, when the former president of Mongolia, N. Enkhbayar, met with representatives from different Buddhist monasteries on the eve of the lunar New Year, he announced the government's stand on the Mongolian Buddhist tradition of worshipping mountains and waters, stating: "The root of human existence is the natural environment. We have restored the custom of mountain worship according to our traditions. We further intend to revive a water worship that will comply with the content and objectives of the state policy to protect rivers and lakes."²

In the case of certain sites, their sanctity has been granted only when the following conditions have been met: the examination of a prospective sacred site by Buddhist monastic experts, the approval of the local governor for the construction of an *ovoo* (a stone cairn) as a signifier of the sacred site, and the government's official confirmation of the sacredness of the site and its status as a protected area. With this cooperation of the Buddhist establishment and the government, such sites become indicative of the multiple power relations between the landscape, Buddhist clergy, and the state, although the residual influence of the Shamanic tradition that originally worshipped those sites should not be ignored. This power relation has also been suggested by U. Barsbold, the former minister of the environment and Cabinet member in his keynote speech on Buddhism and the environment given in 2005. As Barsbold stated, "Among the most important traditions of respecting nature is a public *ovoo* worship ceremony." He also acknowledged Buddhism for its significant role in promoting knowledge about environmental protection and warning about disastrous consequences for those who hunt wild animals and kill birds, cut trees, collect stones, or pollute waters at sacred mountains. His concluding statement, "The state has used religion as a tool to implement its environmental protection policy,"³ underscores the Mongolian environmental practices as an interface between Buddhism and the state.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION: RELIGIOUS TABOOS AND STATE REGULATIONS

The Mongolian Buddhist view of the natural world is characterized by both pre-Buddhist beliefs and prohibitions regarding man's relation to his environment and by the Buddhist view of the natural world. Some of the taboos, such as prohibiting the cutting of

tree saplings, the picking of unripe vegetables, fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, and flowers, or plucking them in excess, have arisen from a concern for the regeneration and growth of vegetation. Other prohibitions came from a variety of popular folk beliefs, including the belief that unusually shaped rocks, stones, and trees or the trees belonging to shamans are sacred and therefore should not be touched or removed. Other taboos concerning the preservation of the virgin environment disallow marking the ground with one's finger or with a sharp instrument, digging it without a purposeful use, destroying the nests of birds and ants, leaving behind rubbish when changing the site of a *ger* at the time of migration, polluting waters with milk, blood, or other impure substances, and so on. These resulted from the merging of popular beliefs with a Buddhist perspective on the natural world as a habitat of powerful entities that are capable of negatively affecting the condition of humans and livestock if their dwellings are desecrated and their well-being is harmed.

Similarly, the Buddhist legal codes and regulations that were instituted in different historical and political climates, such as the *Altan Khan's Code of Law* (the sixteenth century), the *Khalkha Juram* (1709), the *Mongol-Oirat Law*, the *Mongolian Code of Law*, and the *Laws and Regulations to Actually Follow* (1913–1918), provided the statutes for the preservation of the environment and for the protection and ceremonial worship of sacred sites that were protected under the previous decrees.⁴ Those laws also laid down penalties for the improper use of pastures, cutting trees and setting forest fires, gathering rare species of medicinal plants, polluting rivers, lakes, and springs, unlicensed hunting of wildlife, and other infractions. Already in the legal document titled the “Record of Legal Provisions Established by the Decree of Mongolia,” issued in 1294 by Ölziit Khan, Bogd Khan Mountain, Burkhan Khaldun (Khentii) Mountain, Otgontenger Mountain, Müser Davaa of Altai region, Khyatan Mountain, and several other mountains were declared sacred.⁵ From the latter part of the eighteenth century, the most famous mountains of Khalkha Mongolia were declared protected areas by imperial and monarchical edicts.

In 1778, the subordinate officer Sanzaidorj of Yondendorj, the governor of Ikh Khüree, and the imperial son-in-law (*efü*), submitted a letter of request to the Qing court, asking the emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) to preserve the purity of the Bogd Khan, Khentii, Otgontenger, Bürenkhan, and Batkhan mountains by declaring them as sacred sites. The document underscored that the mentioned mountains are the localities where Chinggis Khan and other great Mongol emperors were born and where assemblies of Khalkha's four districts meet. The document also emphasized the majestic beauty of the mountains' landscape extolled by many, and the abundance of wildlife, forests, and waters in the mountains' areas. As an outcome of that appeal, in the same year (1778), Bogd Khan Mountain, which towers on the southern skyline of Mongolia's capital, was declared a protected area and wildlife refuge and thus became the first protected area in Mongolia. A year later, in 1779, Otgontenger Mountain in northwestern Mongolia (Zavkhan province) became the second protected area in Mongolia, and in

1818, Burkhan Khaldun (or Khentii) Mountain, which lies at 2,361.5 km above sea level in northeastern Mongolia (Khentii province), became the third. In the *Secret History of the Mongols*, Burkhan Khaldun Mountain is mentioned as a site of worship since the time of Bodonchar, the forefather of Khiad Borjigin tribe, and is associated with Chinggis Khan. In the postcommunist period, in 1995 President Ochirbat Punsalmaagiin reinstated the ceremonial worship of Burkhan Khaldun Mountain, which is performed every four years. During the ritual worship of the mountain carried out on May 31, 2010, on behalf of the state, the current president of Mongolia, Mr. Elebergdorj Tsakhagiin, addressed the public, calling for continuing conservation of the mountain's area and emphasizing its cultural significance. The president also stated the importance of registering the mountain as a world heritage site.

In case of Bogd Khan Mountain,⁶ it was the Qing governor Yondendorj who had a temple and a monument built on the mountain in order to inaugurate it as a protected area. The text on the monument reads in the Mongolian and Manchu languages: "Built by the Holy Prince Yondendorj."⁷ He also initiated the construction of a small wooden temple in the place called Dünjigarav's Ravine, named after the king of *nāgas*, Dünjigarav (T. Dung skyong dKar po, "White Shell Protector"), who is said to have this mountain as his body and to protect the descendants of Chinggis Khan.⁸ The temple housed a large figure of the Old White Man (Tsagaan Övgön), traditionally revered as a protector of nature, and the bows, arrows, armor, helmet, sword, gun, saddle, bridle, and other items supposedly used by Chinggis Khan's descendant, a prince of the third rank (*beil*) by the name of Baatr and by Abadai Khan. To keep the water of the river Tuul clean, Governor Yondendorj had the *mantra om ā hum* arranged with stones on the eastern and northern sides of Bogd Khan Mountain. On his request and that of his subordinate officer Sanzaidorj, Bogd Khan Mountain was granted the title "Bogd" ("Holy") after the title of the Second Bogd, Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (1724–1757). The two large peaks of Bogd Khan Mountain were given the ranks of "Tsetsee Prince" and "Tüshee Prince," and during the yearly worship, these two peaks received silver ingots as their allowance. Dünjigarav, the king of *nāgas*, was also granted the official title of "Protector of Dharma." Soon after that, on the 19th of the first month of the summer of 1779, extensive offerings were made to Bogd Khan Mountain by the four districts of Khalkha. From that time until 1921, the mountain was worshipped every year in summer and autumn.⁹ During the Qing period, some fifty lamas selected from Ikh Khüree were dispatched to perform the ceremonial worship of Bogd Khan Mountain, accompanied by the representatives of the five ministries, other official dignitaries, Mongolian nobility, and the Qing-Mongolian army. In the post-Qing period, during the independent Bogd Khan State (1911–1921), according to the established custom, on the day of worship, white horses, white sheep, white goats, white camels, and white cows, all in groups of nine, and a white dog, which belonged to the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba's treasury, were consecrated with a nine-colored silken ribbon and offered to the mountain.¹⁰ On the cliff near the mountain's main *ovoo*, where ceremonial offerings were made, there were two small *ovoos*

representing the Buddhist establishment and the government. The *ovoo* on the left was referred to as “Bogd’s *ovoo*” and represented Mongolian Buddhism, and the *ovoo* on the right was referred to as “the *ovoo* of the state.” Their placement—the *ovoo* of the Dharma on the left and the *ovoo* of the state on the right—are reminiscent of the Buddhist notion of wisdom and method, which came to be interpreted by some early-twentieth-century lamas as a symbol of the unification of religion and state.¹¹ Owing to this legacy, Bogd Khan Mountain is now officially designated as a Strictly Protected Area, covering over 103,000 acres, in which it is forbidden to establish a permanent residence, pasture animals, hunt, fell trees, and pluck flowers. The flat area of the mountain’s 7,440-foot high Tüshegün peak is marked with a large *ovoo* draped with ceremonial scarves (*khadag*) and prayer flags, and offerings of blocks of tea, vodka, and incense are made at the site during the ritual worship of the mountain. At the foot of the Bogd Khan Mountain, in the summer of 2003, the former president Enkhbayar brought the members of his cabinet to receive Buddhist teachings on how to compassionately and ethically govern the state.

Similarly to the Bogd Khan Mountain, the snow-capped Otgontenger Mountain, known also as White Mountain (Tsagaan Uul/Tsagaan Khairkhan) and as Ochirvaany (Vajrapāṇi) Mountain, after being officially declared a protected, sacred site in 1779, has been ceremonially worshipped with the participation of lamas and government officials for the protection of the state. It continued to be worshipped until 1924, and after the collapse of the socialist government, its worship was restored by the decree of the former president Ochirbat. Believed to be the body of the Buddha Vajrapāṇi, Otgontenger Mountain became another focal point where the Mongolian Buddhist establishment and state met for the same purposes—to worship the mountain and to protect the Mongolian state and Buddhism.¹²

The ceremonial worship of Mongolian protected areas on behalf of the Mongol state during the Qing period involved large expenditures and lavish offerings to the mountains involved. For example, for the ceremonial worship of Burkhan Khaldun Mountain that was performed in 1910, the Qing governor of Ikh Khüree and other officials provided three *gers*, fifteen square tents, eighty-two riding horses, ten horses for the transportation of luggage, thirty-nine attendants with relay horses, two camels, nine horses with provisions, twenty-five sheep, and four cows for meals. The provisions needed for ceremonial worship also included 4,040 bundles of yellow tea, forty pounds of fruit, eighty liters of vodka, sixty sacks of dairy products, and eighteen sacks of fermented mare’s milk. All of the mentioned supplies were collected from levies. This large amount of supplies points to the magnitude of a ritual worship and of the official participants in the ritual, but it also suggests that such an amount of provisions most likely resulted in a considerable amount of rubbish and hence in the inconsistency of the event that honors the site as sacred and at the same time downgrades its sacredness.¹³

Due to the regular yearly offerings of consecrated (*setertei*) livestock to sacred mountains, the mountains’ herds grew considerably. According to the report of Borin Jambal, who served as the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba’s chaplain, during the latter part of the

Qing emperor Kangxi's rule (r. 1661-1772), Bogd Khan Mountain owned nearly two thousand geldings with coats of different colors,¹⁴ and by the end of Qing rule the herds belonging to Burkhan Khaldun Mountain became very large. After gaining its independence, the government of the Bogd Khan state appointed thirty families to look after the mountain's herds and two officials (*tüshmel*) to administer those families.¹⁵ In this way, the sacred mountains protected and worshipped by the state became owners of large herds, similar to Mongolian aristocracy, and acquired their own serfs who looked after their livestock and officials who administered their serfs. When the Qing practice of conferring the honorific titles of noblemen on particular landscapes came into practice among Mongols, certain regions in the Mongolian landscape gained aristocratic status. The Eighth Bogd, Jebtsundamba Khutugtu (1870-1924), having ascended the throne as the head of the church and state in 1911, awarded the Orkhon River the title of a prince of the fifth rank, or duke (Orkhon Tüshee Gün), for its merit of flooding and drowning the soldiers of the Ööld Mongols during the ethnic conflict between the Khalkhas and Öölds that took place close to the end of the seventeenth century. Likewise, by his decree, the rank of a "Khalkha's Reverent Duke" (Khalkhin Bishrelt Tüshee Gün) was conferred upon Otgontenger Mountain in the winter of 1911, and Bogd Khan Mountain was once again given the official title of the "Great Khan Khairkhan Mountain, Supporter of the Faith" and had its own residential police guard. Honored as a living entity that demands respect, expects levies, allowances, and gifts, and is capable of granting wishes, protecting, disciplining, and afflicting, a sacred mountain also parallels a ruler of the state.

Protected sacred areas have been invested with their own agency in power relations with those subjected to the law, while at the same time they themselves were state-dominated through the same law that protected them. It seems, in the relationship between a protected sacred mountain and the Buddhist social and cultural systems in which it is embedded, neither can be said to be a single controlling agent. As a reported incident involving the Qing governor (*amban*) and Bogd Khan Mountain illustrates, the mountain's legally sanctioned right to respect was not in all instances well received. One such instance was an occasion at which the Qing governor, who blamed Bogd Khan Mountain for unleashing an unpleasant snowstorm on the autumn day when he set out to worship it, punished the mountain with twenty lashes and condemnation to wearing wooden fetters that were placed on the mountain's *ovoo*.¹⁶ Addressing the mountain with the words, "I am worshipping you because it is my duty, not because I want to. What do you think you are up to?"¹⁷ the governor acknowledged the mountain as an animate, willful agent, whose power manifests not only in dictating the weather conditions but also in the legally binding matters that bound him to the observance of the mountain's worship. While acknowledging his lack of freedom with regard to this legally binding observance of the rite of worship, he sought to exercise his authority to scorn the mountain and to reverse the control in this power relation by punishing it with lashing and shackling.

The reinstatement of the tradition of state ceremonial worship of sacred mountains that began with democratic changes in Mongolia demonstrates the fact that sacred mountains remained part of the historical and cultural memory throughout the communist period. With the participation of Buddhist monks, democratically elected presidents of Mongolia, the members of the parliament, government ministers, and the public, the protected areas have received a renewed agency in the political and public life of Mongolia. In fact, their agency never ceased in the religious lives of the lay Buddhists who worshipped sacred sites in secret during the prohibition of the freedom of religious expression.

Having officially regained their eminence as part of Mongolia's natural and cultural heritage, the four main sacred mountains historically worshipped by the state as part of a sacred Mongolian Buddhist landscape once again came under the government's protection and became worshipped on behalf of the state. As we will see, by this they also became state-dominated. The reinstatement of government control over these sites has renewed tensions between members of Mongolia's shamanistic and Buddhist traditions. Illustrating this point is a recent incident surrounding the ritual worship of Süütei Mountain of the Altai range in the far western region of Mongolia that was carried out in the summer of 2008 by Mongolian lamas on the initiative of Mongolian government. During the ceremony, some seventy local shamans and their followers, who claimed "ownership" of the mountain as their sacred site worshipped by the Shamanic tradition long before Buddhism made its way into the region, interrupted the lamas' ritual, ordering them to leave the mountain. The government and local police intervened, driving out the shamans and their companions from the mountain and enabling the lamas to carry on with the Buddhist ritual.¹⁸

ANIMATED LANDSCAPES AND THEIR HIDDEN AGENTS

While governments, sociopolitical and cultural conditions, and the individual visitors to sacred sites change, their true and invisible masters and owners remain. These invisible owners can be a Buddhist deity, a *yogī*, or various entities such as *nāgas* and *savdags*. Inhabiting a particular site, they animate its landscape and infuse it with their own power.

Like in the case of Otgontenger Mountain, worshipped as the body of Vajrapāṇi, the holy Bayanzürkh Mountain in Dornogovi province is worshipped as the body of one of the previous incarnations of the famous Mongolian tantric *yogī* and poet Danzanravjaa (Bstan 'dzin Rab rgyas, 1803–1856). A local legend says that while abiding in profound meditative concentration, Danzanravjaa went to the city of Yama, the lord of death, to serve as a witness at Yama's court in a case that involved an argument between his father and a Tibetan man to whom his father owed a debt. While visiting Yama's court, the lama's disciples, who thought him dead, cremated his body. Unable to regain his

previous body upon his return from the city of Yama, he appropriated the mountain as his body, from which he promised to serve his people.¹⁹ Referred to as a “Holy Mountain that grants all wishes,” Bayanzürkh Mountain has been a popular pilgrimage site; throughout the year pilgrims come to worship it and to make their wishes known, writing them on a paper and burning it in a large incense burner.

The places where *nāgas* and *savdags* are said to reside are not considered to be their bodies, but the domains in which they exert their power and assert their ownership. While *savdags* are believed to live primarily on lands and mountains, *nāgas*, although inhabiting the lands and mountains, most commonly dwell in the bodies of water such as oceans, seas, rivers, creeks, and springs.²⁰ They are said to be of various types, having different dispositions, and their classifications, based on various sources of Indian, Tibetan, and Mongolian origins, differ from one text to another. For instance, *nāgas* are sometimes divided into eight groups according to their colors: white, black, brown, blue, yellow, green, red, and black-spotted. White *nāgas* are said to protect the Dharma, whereas the black-spotted *nāgas* bring harm. At other times, *nāgas* are classified according to their social classes: The white *nāgas* are kings, the yellow ones are saintly (*bogd*), the black ones are Brāhmaṇas, the green ones are commoners, and the black-spotted ones are assassins. In yet other instances, they are differentiated according to their origin as the western paternal *nāgas*, eastern heavenly *nāgas*, water *nāgas*, wind *nāgas*, city *nāgas*, family *nāgas*, and stream *nāgas*.²¹

Classificatory systems for *savdags* list ninety-one to one thousand distinct types. It is believed that *savdags* of mountains are able to change form and become invisible, and regularly take on a shape that is similar to the shape of a mountain they inhabit. For instance, a *savdag* of the birdlike-shaped Bogd Khan Mountain has the shape of a mythical bird *garuḍa*, the *savdag* of Songin Khaikhan Mountain situated on the west of Ulaanbaatar has the form of a blue old man, the *savdag* of Chingeltei Mountain on the north of the city has the form of a pig, and the *savdag* of Bayanzurkh Mountain on the eastern side of the city has the form of a dog.²²

Descriptions of the domestic lives of *nāgas* and *savdags* and their hierarchical societies are reminiscent of those characterizing kingdoms in the human realm. They have their kings and queens who rule individual states and districts and who are accompanied by princes, ministers, generals, and attendants. Their royalties dwell in magnificent palaces situated in the waters, under the earth, and in the sky; and their garments, ornaments, various implements, saddles, and bridles are inlaid with wish-fulfilling jewels, like those of Mongolian khans and nobility.²³ Just as rulers of Inner Asian kingdoms were traditionally male, so the *nāgas* and *savdags* who have Mongolian sacred mountains as their dominions are invariable male. Since the fierce ones among them dislike women, female worshippers are not allowed to climb the peaks of their mountains to worship the *ovoos* of the summits. Offerings of meat and alcohol are often made in the worship of mountains occupied by a fierce deity, while those inhabited by peaceful deities are offered dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and fermented mare’s milk. In some regions, the practice of worshipping an *ovoo* for the sake of bringing rain involves both types of offerings.²⁴

Similar to the Buddhist kings in the human world, *nāgas* and *savdags* are recognized as custodians of the riches above and below the earth, responsible for the vegetation and for animals living in the waters, on the earth, and in the sky. They retaliate when their natural habitat is disturbed and their property taken without their permission, when their wildlife is killed and insects are burned, or when the sky, mountains, and rivers are verbally abused. These beliefs have persisted in the democratic Mongolia. For instance, in 2011, five officials from the local government of Büren *sum* in central Mongolia signed a contract with a Chinese company that would collect salt from the lake Tökhöm near Jamsran Mountain in spite of protests from the local community. When the officials unexpectedly died of natural causes within six months of signing the contract, the local people considered it a punishment inflicted by the *nāga* of the lake and by the deity of the mountain. The contract was cancelled and the lake remained undisturbed.²⁵

As evident in different Mongolian ritual texts of appeasing *nāgas* and *savdags*, a wide scope of their influence includes both mundane and religious realms. The potential harms they can inflict and the favors they can grant also range from those that affect a larger community to those whose impact is limited to an individual. For example, at the completion of a ritual of tea offering to the *savdag* Dochi (T. 'Gro phyin), known as the lord of the world (*delkhiin ezen*) who moves through the twelve zodiacs and through the seats of the eight classes of *nāgas*, a supplicatory prayer is uttered in which one asks the *savdag* not to cause drought, lightning, wild fires, flood, tornados, earthquakes, torrential rains, hail, loss of livestock, and dangers from wolves, wild beasts, thieves, and bandits, but to bring a timely rain, ripen the potatoes and seeds, increase the herds of livestock, multiply one's goods, bring peace and happiness, and enhance the glory of the Dharma.²⁶ Thus, one may say that although the state has the authority to choose a ritual procedure that would determine a religious affiliation of the *nāgas* and *savdags* who are in charge of the state-dominated, sacred sites, and while it has the power to protect the territories of these entities from desecration, it also through ceremonial worship acknowledges their authority over the environment and weather conditions and their efficacy in bringing about the well-being of Buddhism and society. The complexity of this relationship between the two types of power—the power of the state and the power of the spirit world—is further augmented through mediation of Buddhist ritual specialists and astrologers, whose domain of influence extends to both powers. Without a specialized knowledge of Buddhist intermediaries, the results of communication and interaction between the two mentioned powers could be disastrous for both parties.

Nāgas are said to arrive and depart on certain days and to hibernate during the last month of winter (Month of the Ox), in accordance with the lunar calendar. They arrive from their homes during different lunar months for various purposes. If one ritually summons them with offerings that correspond to the purpose of their arrival, they will bring desired rewards.²⁷ On the days of the *nāgas*' arrival, one must abstain from cutting trees and killing animals, and from performing a ritual of summoning *nāgas* on the days

of their return. Those who wish to make ritual offerings with incense (*san*) to mountains and *ovoos* at other sacred sites must know exactly the days of the *nāgas*' arrival and departure based on astrological calculations.²⁸ If offerings are made to a sacred mountain or to an *ovoo* on any of the days when *nāgas* depart or hibernate, those offerings become harmful to the *nāgas*.²⁹ In that case, it is expected that enraged *nāgas* will retaliate and cause various calamities, ranging from diseases induced by "*nāga*'s poison" to death.

The following Inner Mongolian prayer of summoning with offerings *nāgas*, *savdgas*, and other spirits inhabiting the natural world, entitled "*Nāgas' Offering*" (*Luus-un sang orusiba*), illustrates the efficacy ascribed to the *nāgas* in procuring well-being of people and livestock:

Jee! Possessor of great compassion,
 Protector of great Nāgārjuna,
 Please, grant many blessings
 With great loving kindness!
 King of the five *nāga* families,
 Eight [kings of] *nāgas*,³⁰ and lords of the lands,
 Mountains, and waters please, come here!
 Burning the ingredients of various goods
 In the blazing fire,
 I purify [them] by filling the actual space.
 Pleased with this offering,
 [And] refraining from cruel harms,
 Accomplish the deeds, needs, and desires
 Of all: our, [our] friends', and others'!
 I extol you by means of a truly compassionate meditation
 [And] with genuine respect!
 Please, surely and swiftly grant [us]
 True happiness, long life, and good fortune!
 By the power of the Three Jewels,
 May there be a blessing
 That clears away all the diseases of *nāgas*
 [And] makes livestock happy!³¹

On the day of the offering rite to *nāgas* and *savdags*, it is prohibited to hunt, cut a tree, pollute waters, or touch stones in the vicinity of an *ovoo* where the rite was performed. Such an *ovoo* carries a sacred status, for it indicates the veneration of the *nāga* or *savdag* of that place. Its significance also lies in that it is a power spot, a center of interaction between the powers of the worlds of humans and spirits, at which the exchange of favors can take place. In the case of these *ovoos* at which the Mongolian government performs regular state rituals—Otgontenger, Burkhan Khaldun, Altan

Khokhii, Tsetsee Gün (Bogd Khan), and Altan Owoo—the *ovoo*s also signify focal points of the state's claim to the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mongolia, which, as already indicated, should not be in conflict with the territorial dominion of *nāgas* and *savdags*.

An *ovoo* at which *nāgas* and *savdags* are worshipped can be constructed on the top of a mountain or a hill, or near the shores of a river or a lake. Other common types of *ovoo*s include clan *ovoo*s erected by certain clan near the ancestral region, memorial *ovoo*s constructed in a place where great rituals were performed by famous lamas,³² border *ovoo*s built to mark the boundaries between certain pastures and regions, and government *ovoo*s at which offerings are made on behalf of the state.³³ All *ovoo*s should be erected in accordance with prescribed rules and with ritual prayers and offerings. Prior to the construction of an *ovoo*, a set of prayers for purification and protection are recited and rituals of offerings to the Buddhas and other deities are made. The rituals of water offering to the “masters of the land” (*sa bdag chab gtor*), the ritual prayer of “the three auspicious signs” (T. *cha gsum*), and the offering for the removal of hindrances (T. *bgegs tor*) are also performed. Construction of an *ovoo* begins with making a hole in the ground where a copper vase with an image of the Buddha Nāgarāja is placed. The lid of the vase is covered with brocade of five colors, its neck is wrapped with a thread inlaid with nine jewels, and the vase is buried with tea, silver, corals, and pearls surrounding it. This is followed by the recitation of another set of prayers, namely the “Seven-limb Prayer” (*Yan lag bdun pa*), “Heart of Wisdom” (*Shes snying*), “Auspiciousness Doubled” (*Bkra shis brtegs pa*), “A Drop of the Golden Sūtra” (*Gser gyi mdo thig*), and others. Then, a piece of wood, referred to as the “tree of life” because it represents the central channel in the body (*madhyamā*) and symbolically enlivens the *ovoo*, is placed in the center, together with *mantras* and an image of the Buddha. Around the center, a circle of firmly piled rocks and stones is constructed to withstand strong winds and rains. The interior is filled with juniper incense, barley, wheat, and nuts, and occasionally with bows and lances. Upon the completion of the *ovoo*, a flag with *mantras* and prayers for blessings is raised on the top of it. Similar to a new incarnation of a holy person, a newly constructed and consecrated *ovoo* is given an auspicious name;³⁴ after that it is circumambulated three times in a clockwise direction and is offered gifts. An *ovoo* that is constructed, enlivened, and sanctified in this manner has its own agency through which it can give and receive blessings. Therefore, when showing reverence to an *ovoo*, the visitors traditionally would utter the following words, while circumambulating it and placing small stones on it:

Greatness of *ovoo* to you!
Greatness of gain to me!
Greatness of glory to you!
Greatness of spirit to me!
Greatness of height to you!
Greatness of good fortune to me!³⁵

It is generally believed that if in the course of time offerings to an *ovoo* become meager, if it disintegrates due to people's neglect, or if trash is left on it, the wrath of *nāgas* and *savdags* will bring disasters of various kinds. To evade their wraths, certain taboos have been devised: taboos that prohibit one from standing on or climbing the *ovoo*, circumambulating it without adding stones on it, fishing, hunting, or cutting grass or trees in its vicinity, and so on. Although these taboos are well known to contemporary Mongolian lamas and shamans, they are less known to general public. While some visitors leave rubbish near *ovoos*, others offer to *ovoos* items considered to be inauspicious. In the interview given in the Mongolian *Daily News (Odryn Sonin)* in 2012, D. Amarbodl, the director of the Department of Nature and Environment at Gandantegchenling Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, criticized such practices and spoke of their karmic consequences. He warned those who leave their canes at *ovoos* of the consequence of having to use the canes in future rebirths; he also cautioned those who leave empty bottles of vodka at *ovoos* that empty bottles symbolize an empty offering and foretell misfortunes.³⁶

Moreover, in contemporary public discourse, the preservation of the natural environment, endangered by the increasing mining of natural resources in Mongolia, is often considered to be intimately connected to the preservation of the tradition of worshipping and maintaining the *ovoos*. When the former president of Mongolia, Mr. Enkhbayar, said: "Mongolians have long venerated *nāgas* and *savdags*, or non-physical beings inhabiting the waters and the land, while observing a variety of taboos intended to protect the natural environment,"³⁷ he was simply reiterating a well-established connection between the preservation of the natural environment and the rules governing the installation and maintenance of *ovoos*.

THE POWER OF LANDSCAPES AND THE "MONGOLIAN BUDDHIST SEMIOTICS OF NATURE"

While some sites have been designated sacred due to their height, impressive and unique geographical features, and bountiful plants, wildlife, waters, or mineral properties, or because they mark the location of a domain of a *nāga* or *savdag*, other sites have been declared sacred due to memorable historical events that took place at these sites. The given name of these sacred sites reflects either the features of its landscape, its mineral properties, or a historical event associated with it. Similarly to Tibet, in Mongolian Buddhist culture, not only supernatural beings but also the landscape itself is capable of exerting influence on humans and livestock in accordance with its auspicious or inauspicious characteristics. Likewise, places in which high Mongolian lamas and great Buddhist scholars were born have been deemed auspicious and extolled as sites facilitating the proliferation of the ten Buddhist virtues. Locations of important monasteries such as Ikh Khüree, Zayin Khüree, Khamar Khiid, Delgermörön Khiid, and others were selected in accordance with the established guidelines for how to analyze and

interpret the characteristics of their landscape. A landscape qualifies as auspicious if the relationship between the land and sky is regarded as somehow symmetrical, or if the land resembles an eight-petaled lotus surrounded by a range of mountains resembling a wheel with eight spokes, a symbol of the Eightfold Noble Path. Likewise, sunlight and moonlight must be distributed evenly over its surface, and the water found there must possess the excellent qualities of clarity, coolness, lightness, pleasant taste, mildness, warmth, and harmlessness to the throat and stomach.³⁸

The auspicious or inauspicious characteristics of a landscape are regarded as indicative of the future experiences of the person settling in that place. Inauspicious characteristics of a landscape such as a single rock situated in the middle of a steppe that resembles a single person suggests that one who settles there will be without a spouse and child. A landscape that resembles a bladder is a sign that nothing can remain there; a single tree is seen as an omen of fear and tears; and a land shaped like the tip of a bullet or of a bag of arrows is a sign of potential harm from weapons. Mountains have been similarly analyzed in terms of their peaceful and fierce characteristics. The features of the landscape have been invested with symbolic meanings and with an efficacy that can determine the outcome of the inhabitant's activities. An illustration of the way in which the landscape's potential agency is taken into consideration is given here from the account of the construction of the Amarbayasgalant Monastery, recorded by Agwanluvsan Dondov (Ngag dbang bLo bzang Don grub, twentieth century), a *chorje* (T. *chos rje*) of Ikh Khüree, in his *Biography of Gyaltzen Pal Zangpo: A Celebration that Fulfills Fortunate Beings's Hopes for Liberation* (*Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam thar skal ldan thar 'dod re ba skong pa'i dga' ston*). The text tells us that the Qing emperor Qianlong (r. 1735–1796) sent a land inspector to find an auspicious site on which to build a monastery that had previously been promised by the late emperor Kangxi to the Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu. The inspector found a place with two small mountains situated in front of the Bürenkhan Mountain, one situated to the west and the other to the east. The small mountain to the west looked as if it was pressing on the shoulder of China, whereas the small mountain to the east looked as if it was pressing on the shoulder of Mongolia. Hence, the emperor's inspector chose the small mountain on the eastern side as the site for a new monastery. The small eastern mountain was destroyed and the monastery was built on its location because, in his view, the features of that landscape symbolized cutting self-grasping.³⁹

Concerns about the qualities of a landscape, its soil, and its water have been pervasive among the traditionally pastoral and nomadic Mongols, resulting in a proliferation of oral and textual traditions that address the interpretation of any geographical area's auspicious and inauspicious signs. These traditions have provided descriptions of the qualities of various landscapes and explanations of the ways of interpreting the symbolic meanings of their features in order to predict various harmful or beneficial effects. The Tibetan and Mongolian language-based sources that impart this kind of knowledge range from medical, veterinary, and astrological texts to tantric ritual texts. Among the

influential Tibetan medical texts in Mongolia that offer methods for interpreting the landscape, three are worth particularly mentioning: Desrid Sangye Gyatso's (Sde srid Sangs rgyas rGya mtsho, 1653–1705) *White Beryl* (*Vaidūrya dkar po*), *Yellow Beryl* (*Vaidūrya ser po*), and *Blue Beryl* (*Vaidūrya sngon po*). These texts describe the thirty-seven features of an inauspicious site and are often consulted by Mongolians prior to moving a camp to another pasture, erecting an *ovoo*, or building a temple.

The range of methods for identifying the qualities of the landscape is also presented in the anonymous text titled *The Tiger's Back-plate that Inspects the Land* (*yaṣar-i sinjigči baras-un nirayubči kemekü orusiba*), written in the early twentieth century. The colophon to the text attributes the context of the text to the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, and it mentions Erdene Ubashi (*upāsaka*) as a translator of the text into Mongolian (possibly from Tibetan), who dedicated it to some *tsorj* (T. *chos rje*) lama. The text contains instructions on how to perform the rituals and fulfill various other prerequisites in preparation for the inspection of a landscape. The preparation involves taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, making offerings, reciting the *mantra* of Mañjuśrī, and reading the astrological text *Eight Lights* (*Snaṅg brgyad*) and the *Litany of the Names of Mañjuśrī* (Skt. *Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgiti*). This is followed by the tying a ceremonial scarf on a tree, making milk offerings with a *tsatsal*,⁴⁰ riding a horse, and leading a *nāga*. When the inspector notices a place that displays the signs promising a long life, the increase of sons, and the expansion of wealth and fame, he is to meditate on Mañjuśrī; otherwise, it is said, a fault will arise in the inspector. If the inspector who arrives at a place endowed with auspicious signs generates a mind of desire, hatred, or ignorance, he is advised to meditate on Mañjuśrī and emptiness as antidotes to these mental afflictions.⁴¹

The text further describes the auspicious signs of a given landscape and of the qualities of the landscape determined by its color and the possible effect that such a landscape may have on both people and livestock. For example, a land of white color is where a *tengri* (Skt. *deva*) is present and is therefore auspicious for humans and livestock. A red landscape has a wrathful quality, and while it is good for horses, it is dangerous for others. A black landscape has a fierce quality; it is a dwelling place of monsters and is thus inauspicious for humans and livestock. A yellow landscape is auspicious for everyone except horses; a blue landscape with rocks is good for goats but bad for everyone else; a brown landscape is good for horses but it is dangerous for wolves; and so on. Further guidelines on how to choose a place for herding livestock during different seasons of the year in accordance with the colors, directions, and conditions of a given landscape are also described. The features of a landscape in which one can settle after moving to different pastures during different seasons⁴² and the properties of different types of water that are contingent on season and the location, direction, and source of water must be also known.⁴³

There are other methods for examining the qualities of a landscape, such as observing the smoke of burning incense. If the color of the smoke is light and the smoke spirals clockwise in an upward direction and dissipates toward the east, the site is considered auspicious. If the smoke dissipates toward the north or in the space between the cardinal

directions, the site is deemed inauspicious.⁴⁴ Another frequently used method of identifying the favorable features of a site is based on astrological calculations that take into consideration the birthday of the head of a household, the twelve-year calendar, the four cardinal directions, and the characteristics of its landscape. For instance, east is considered an auspicious direction for a person born in the Year of the Tiger. Thus, if the land to the east is wooded, it is auspicious for that person, but if it is rocky, it is inauspicious. For persons born in the Year of the Dragon, Cow, Dog, or Sheep, all four cardinal directions are auspicious. If the land to the north has red rocks, it is auspicious for them, but if it has trees to the east, it is inauspicious. West is considered the auspicious direction for those born in the Year of the Monkey or in the Year the Rooster. A natural landscape is said to be auspicious for them if there are red rocks to the west and trees to the east. It is also very auspicious for them if there are mountains in all the four directions and water to the north. Lastly, the north is auspicious for persons born in the Year of the Mouse or the Pig. Any landscape with trees to the east and mountains to the west is considered auspicious for such persons.⁴⁵

Once more we see the agency of a site at play. In these cases, however, this agency does not depend upon the powerful presence of spirits and deities or some form of ritual of sanctification but is considered a quality possessed by the features of the landscape itself. The ways that these texts analyze features and qualities of the natural landscape demonstrate how Buddhist authors responded to the needs of nomadic pastoralists for the best pastures, the safest locations to camp, and a life free from the common dangers of nomadic pastoralism. The conception that landscape is invariably endowed with attributes that indicate the experiences that its inhabitants may expect is based on the potential threats that accompany a nomadic lifestyle. Having taken up the concerns of a largely nomadic culture, the Mongolian Buddhist tradition formulated it into an intricate system of interactions among the astrological influences, the environment, humans, and livestock, suggesting that the person's immediate natural environment structures his experiences. These systems allow one to find a way of avoiding or negotiating the obstacles that may arise from a web of different potentially helpful or harmful powers. Some of these forces are regarded as inherent in the natural environment, and some arise out of the relationship between a particular person and the natural features of the landscapes he inhabits. The Buddhist tradition in Mongolia adopted and expanded upon various systems of interpreting signs in the natural landscape from Tibet. In this way, it has contributed to the development of a particular type of the Buddhist semiotics of nature.

CONCLUSION

The categories of sacred sites and auspicious landscapes in Mongolia are defined and authorized within their political, religious, and cultural contexts, which have patterned certain spatial practices and prohibited others. One may say that the Mongolian Buddhist

tradition can be defined by both its social and environmental contexts. Natural environment and its geographical features that are at the center of the network of sociocultural, religious, and ecological interventions have shaped social, cultural, and religious practices in Mongolia. As much as Buddhism has embraced and given a meaning to the natural environment in Mongolia, it has been also influenced by it and it has tied itself to it.

NOTES

1. Mönsaikhan, 2004, 15.

2. *Montsame News*, January 31, 2008, http://www.montsame.mn/index.php?option=com_news&ty=3&au=0.

3. See the *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development. An Initiative of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, the World Bank, and the Government of Mongolia*, 2005, 36–37.

4. Such sites were Khan Uul, Khüshger, Khögnö, Tükhem, Shavart, Ongoni, Berkh Khushuu, Khoyur Shaakht, Ongon, Önjüül, Bayan-Ulaan, Zorgol, Suman-Ulaan, Adaatsag, Ulaannuur, Ögü, and others.

5. Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 31–32, 38.

6. Bogd Khan Mountain is one of the four sacred mountains surrounding Ulaanbaatar: Bogd Khan Mountain to the south, Chingelt Khaikhan to the north, Bayanzurkh to the east, and Songin Khaikhan to the west of the city.

7. Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 106.

8. See the ritual text recited during the worship of the Bogd Khan Mountain, composed by Ikh Khüree's abbot Agwaankhaidav (1779–1838) and titled *Pho lha dung skyong dkar po'i gsol mchod bzhugs so*, included in Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 120–122. In addition to Agwaankhaidav, see also the works of other lamas such as Luvsanbaldan Choglomanjil, Agwaandorj, and Agwantseren, who wrote in Tibetan the texts of *serjim* and incense offering to the Bogd Khan Mountain.

9. The letter of appeal is cited in Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 106, 111.

10. Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 98–99, 111.

11. One of them was Tserenjäv; in his work *Notes on Important Words Selected for the Ordained and the Laity*, he puts these words into the mouth of a Buddhist teacher: "... the principle of abandoning one's own ten non-virtues is the teaching of the Buddha; whereas, causing others to abandon the ten non-virtues is the teaching of the State. Hence, they both strive for the same goal but use different methods. For this reason, the dual governance is to be understood as a sharp, double-edged sword, whose two edges are the integrated state and religious laws that cut through the faults of a mundane life." See collected works of sNgags ram pa Ngag dbang Tsering's Complete Works, vol. 2, 7b4/218/-8a2/219. See also Wallace, 2010, 94.

12. For more on Otgontenger Mountain, see Chapter 10 in this volume.

13. In the contemporary Mongolia, visitors to sacred sites often leave behind the empty plastic and glass bottles in which they brought milk or vodka for offering, paper-wrapped candies, and other offerings that eventually turn into rubbish. Although this behavior has been criticized by lamas and politicians in their public speeches, punitive measures for such conduct have not been implemented.

14. Bawden, 1997, 16.

15. Diiürenjargal et al., 2011, 32, 38.

16. Bawden, 1997, 16.

17. Ibid.

18. As the popularity of worshipping sacred mountains continues to grow in contemporary Mongolia, the familiar problems of modern civilization, such as inorganic trash left behind by negligent visitors and the use of ceremonial scarves made of synthetic material, began to affect their ecological balance. Synthetic scarves are shown to cause death to trees and to the animals that get entangled in them. The call to prohibit the use of synthetic scarves in worshipping the trees and *ovoos* at sacred sites like Bogd Khan and other mountains has come not from the government but from Buddhist clergy involved in environmental matters. D. Amarbold, the director of the Department of Nature and the Environment of the Gandantegchenling Monastery, expressed these concerns in a *Daily News* interview on September 24, 2012.

19. According to the legend told to me by local people on several occasions during my field research in this area. The father of one of Danzanravjaa's previous incarnations borrowed money from a Tibetan man to build a temple on the top of Bayanzürkh Mountain, but later denied that he borrowed the money. Eventually the lender died and the borrower died soon after him. Having met in front of the Lord Yama, they continue to argue over whether the transaction took place. Therefore, the Lord Yama invited the lama to testify at his court, where the lama testified that his father did borrow money from the Tibetan man.

20. *The Ten Thousand Nāgas* text, rephrased in Mönkhsaikhan, 2004, 51.

21. Mönkhsaikhan, 2004, 52–54.

22. Mönkhsaikhan, 2004, 47, 56; Urantsatsral et al., 2009, 16.

23. Khandsüren, 2011, 57–58.

24. In a rain ritual performed in July 2007 in Yaruu *süm* of Zavkhan province, which I witnessed, the offerings to a local *ovoo* consisted of the tail and head of a sheep, milk, vodka, dry cheese (*aruul*), candies, and incense; milk and vodka were offered to a local mountain and to Lake Khag Nuur.

25. When someone commits suicide a small piece of land must be bought from the government to bury the corpse. Once purchased, that piece of land is no longer considered the property of a local *nāga*, for it now belongs to the corpse.

26. Byambasüren, 2005, 47–49.

27. During the Month of the Tiger, *nāgas* arrive on hearing a recitation of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*; and if one makes them offerings of *bali* and the like on the days of their arrival, the blessing of long life and the flourishing of the Dharma will occur. During the Month of the Rabbit they arrive when being summoned, and if pleased with offerings, they become subservient and friendly. During the Month of the Snake, they arrive to enforce the law; during the Month of the Dragon they come for a discussion, and if gladdened with offerings, they fulfill one's wishes. During the Month of the Snake they come to enforce the law; during the Month of the Horse they come to conduct summer business; and during the Month of the Sheep they come not looking for anything particular, but if worshipped on the days of their arrival with grains, livestock, and various goods, they fulfill all wishes. During the Month of the Monkey, *nāgas* arrive to collect seeds, and if worshipped on those days, they protect against drought and enlarge one's wealth. During the Month of the Rooster, they arrive to consume dairy products, and if worshipped with offerings on those days they provide food, clothing, and the like. During

the Month of the Dog, they come to collect wood, and if worshipped, they strengthen one's goods. During the Month of the Boar, they do not cause harm nor do they give assistance, and during the Month of the Mouse they come to conduct winter business; if worshipped during those days they bring peace and happiness. See the *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 56.

28. See the *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 56–57, which, relying on the information given in the astrological text *Crystal Mirror (Bolor Toly)*, lists the following days of *nāgas*' arrivals and departures:

- (1.) In the month of the Tiger, they arrive on the 4th, 11th, and 14th days and return on the 5th, 8th, 10th, and 15th.
- (2.) In the Month of the Rabbit, they arrive on the 1st, 3rd, 10th, 16th, and 19th days and return on the 18th, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 25th, and 28th.
- (3.) In the Month of the Dragon, they arrive on the 25th day; then arrive and return on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th; and on all other days they return to their homes.
- (4.) In the Month of the Snake, they arrive on the 10th, 15th, and 23rd days; arrive and return on the 21st day; and return on the 2nd, 8th, 16th, 20th, 25th, 26th, and 30th.
- (5.) In the Month of the Horse, they arrive on the 5th, 9th, 14th, 19th, 20th, 22nd, 25th, 28th, and 30th; they arrive and return on the 16th; and they return on the 6th, 8th, 11th, and 15th.
- (6.) In the Month of the Sheep, they arrive on the 4th, 5th, 9th, 10th, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 29th, and 30th days; arrive and return on the 18th and 22nd; and return on the 1st, 7th, 8th, 11th, 13th, and 15th.
- (7.) In the Month of the Monkey, they arrive on the 1st, 9th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 20th, 23rd, and 25th days and return on the 28th, 5th, 6th, and 7th.
- (8.) In the Month of the Rooster, they arrive on the 15th, 16th, 25th, 29th, and 30th days and return on the 3rd, 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 13th, 16th, 22nd, and 23rd.
- (9.) In the Month of the Dog, they arrive on the 1st, 11th, 16th, 21st, 22nd, and 29th days and return on the 2nd, 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th.
- (10.) In the Month of the Boar, they arrive on the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 18th, 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 25th, 27th, 28th, 29th, and 30th days; arrive and return on the 21st and 24th; and return on the 1st, 9th, 19th, and 26th.
- (11.) In the Month of the Mouse, they arrive on the 2nd, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 17th and 27th and return on the 6th, 10th, 16th, and 26th.
- (12.) In the Month of the Ox, they hibernate.

29. It is believed that it causes a rain of blood and knives to fall, injuring them, causing them weakness and disease, maddening them, and even killing them.

30. The eight classes of *nāgas* are Nanda (T. Rnor rgyas, M. Ed delger), Utpalaka (T. Bad ma, M. Badam), Karko₂a (T. Vāsuki, M. Esön Tergüünt), Takṣaka (T. 'Jog pa, M. Talbui), Anavata-pta (T. Pad ma chen po, M. Ikh Lyankhua), Sagara (T. Dung skyong, M. Dun Sakhigch), Upananda (T. Rigs ldan, M. Yazguur togs), and Śeṣa (T. mTha' yas, M. Khyazgaar).

31. A translation from the Classical Mongolian. "Luus-un sang orusiba," in Ganbaatar, 2010,

32. One such *ovoo* is the so-called White Ovoo (Tsagaan Ovoo), which is the only *ovoo* remaining in the capital, situated behind the Geser Temple. It was constructed to commemorate a ritual performed by monks from Züün Khüree and Gandantegchenling Monastery prior to their philosophical debates.

33. Four *ovoos* are designated as the government's *ovoo*. They are located on the top of Bogd Khan Mountain, Khentii (Burkhan Khaldun) Mountain, Olgontenger Mountain, and Dariganga Altan Ovoo.

34. Mönsaikhan, 2004, 50–51; *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 47–48.

35. Mönsaikhan, 2004, 28, 48–49:

Ovoony ikh ny tanyd

Olzny ikh ny manyd

Süriin ikh ny tanyd

Süldnii ikh ny manyd

Öndöriin ikh ny tanyd

Ölziinii ikh ny manyd.

36. *Odryn Sonin*, September 24, 2012.

37. *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 36–37.

38. Lkhamsürengiin, 2002, 413–414. See also *Gazryn Shinjiin Mongol Sudar (The Sūtra of the Land Inspection)*, 2002, 12.

39. Mkhan zur pa chos rje Ngag dbang Blo bzang Don grub. *Rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po'i rnam thar skal ldan thar 'dod re ba skong pa'i dga' ston*, folio 86. See also Lkhamsürengiin Khürelbaatar, 2002, 420.

40. A *tsatsal* is a wooden implement with nine holes used in a ritual of sprinkling with milk.

41. *γajar-i sinjigči baras-un nirayubči kemekü orusiba*, folios 261–267, 967–968, 367–312. Some of the auspicious signs of a landscape, mentioned in the same text, folios 266–362, are the following: a place is auspicious if its west side is short, if the southern direction is like a covering curtain, if a mountain on the north side is high, if a mountain in the south is like a jewel, if its western direction has plenty of water, if the north has many forests, if its western side has many stones and grass, if the western mountain is like a lying lion, if the north is like a large, lying elephant, if the east side is quadrangular, if there is a lake in the east, if the western side is triangular, if a mountain between the east and west is like a burning fire, and so on. See also Lkhamsürengiin, 2002, 423–425.

42. *γajar-i sinjigči baras-un nirayubči kemekü orusiba*, folios 5612–7ab: When moving in summer, it is good if a mountain in the west is high. During spring it is good if a mountain in the north is high. In autumn, it is good if a mountain in the south is high. It is good if one moves to the upper side of a mountain looking like a sitting person. It is good to settle in the rib of a mountain looking like an elephant. It is good to settle on the shoulder of a mountain looking like a lion. It is good to settle in the beginning of a mountain like a saw. It is good to settle in the hair of a mountain looking like an owl. It is good to settle in the wing of a mountain looking like a bird. It is good to settle in the tail of a mountain looking like a snake. It is good to settle in the middle of a mountain looking like a curtain. It is good to settle in the center of the body of a mountain looking like a tin. It is good to settle in the head of a mountain looking like a camel. It is good to settle in the nose of a mountain looking like a pig. It is good to settle in the leg of a mountain looking like a horse. It is good to settle in the wheel of a mountain looking like a

carriage. It is good to settle on the top of a mountain looking like a chair. It is good to settle in the center of a mountain like a surrounding one. It is good to settle in the rib of a square mountain like a box. It is good to settle in the thoracic spine of a mountain looking like a sheep. It is good to settle in the junction of a mountain looking like a trumpet. It is good to settle in the middle of a mountain looking like a square supporting column. It is good to settle in the crossroads of a scattered mountain. It is good to settle in the foot of a triangle mountain. It is good to settle in the middle of a mountain looking like a mirror. It is good to settle in the front foot of a high mountain. It is good to settle in the upper part of a short mountain. It is good to settle near the mountain with stones in some parts. It is good to settle near the top of a small mountain. It is good to settle in any place that looks like a lotus, shell, precious jewel, umbrella, twin fish, flag and a wheel, etc. The spirits of that land will be happy. See also Lkhamsürengiin, 2002, 327–328.

43. *γaǰar-i sinjigči baras-un nirayubči kemekü orusiba*, folios 7a9-8a1, 8a2-966. See also Lkhamsürengiin, 2002, 430–432.

44. *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 54.

45. *Northern Buddhist Conference on Ecology and Development*, 2005, 54–55.

PART III



13

Criminal Lamas: Court Cases Against Buddhist Monks in Early

Socialist Mongolia

Christopher Kaplonski



IN THE CENTRAL Historical Archives in Ulaanbaatar, there are two documents that date from October 1938.¹ One is a registry of “High-ranking Lamas Convicted of Minor (*khöngön*) Crimes” and who had been released from prison (1-6-403: 5-7).² The other concerns high-ranking lamas currently serving terms in construction labor (i.e., prison) camps (1-6-403: 8-15). In total, the lists cover seventy-six lamas. They tell us the lamas’ names, age, what they were convicted of, their sentence, as well as their current location. For those released from prison, it also lists their current occupation. These two documents are remarkable for a number of reasons and highlight issues that I will explore in this chapter about the role of legality and the legal system in the context of political violence. In particular, this chapter examines the way the legal system functioned in parallel with other measures while multiple forms of violence, including eventually mass killings, were deployed against the lamas.

Perhaps the single most significant fact about these documents is that they—and the high-ranking lamas they reference—exist at all. The late 1930s, from late 1937 to mid-1939, saw a brutal wave of arrests and executions and the destruction of innumerable monasteries.³ The violence affected both religious and secular people. We will probably never know the full number of people killed, but credible estimates range from 35,000 to 45,000.⁴ Of these, approximately 18,000 were lamas. Roughly one out of every five lamas in Mongolia would be arrested and executed. The weight of the executions would fall mostly on high-ranking lamas, usually under the guise of their being counter-revolutionaries.

Most of the lamas had been driven out of the monasteries by the end of July 1938. In September 1937 there were 83,203 lamas reported in the monasteries. By July 25, 1938, the

number was 562 (1-6-403: 3).⁵ Based on rehabilitation records, the majority of executions of lamas appear to have taken place by the end of July 1938.⁶ In other words, although we cannot be sure these seventy-six lamas were not later killed, they had survived longer than many, if not most, of those classed as “high-ranking lamas” (*deed lam nar*) by the socialist state. In one of the great ironies of the time, if the lamas did ultimately survive, they did so because they were convicted criminals. Being convicted of a crime shielded them—at least until October 1938, by which time the greatest period of danger had passed—from the greater danger of being labeled a counter-revolutionary.

This raises the second significant fact to be gleaned from these documents: Even high-ranking lamas, the arch-enemy of the early socialist state, were convicted of crimes in a court of law. These seventy-six lamas were not convicted by the “Special Commission” that existed from October 1937 to mid-1939, precisely to try people on charges related to national security. It was this Commission that sentenced the bulk of the lamas and so many others to be shot as counter-revolutionaries and spies. Rather, these seventy-six lamas were sentenced by the court system, and often by provincial-level courts. The vast majority of them were not sentenced for anything that approached explicitly treasonous activities. A few were sentenced for rumor-mongering, which in the 1930s often meant they were accused of wishing for the government’s downfall, but most were convicted of tax avoidance.⁷

It is this second fact that I want to focus on and examine in this chapter: the use of criminal court cases as a means of combating the influence of lamas and the Buddhist establishment. Both charges of counter-revolutionary activity and criminal activity more broadly defined were used against the lamas as part of a wide spectrum of measures deployed with varying degrees of success. From almost the moment of the victory of the “People’s Revolution” in 1921 to the late 1930s, the socialist government in Mongolia confronted what it called “the question of the lamas” (*lam naryn asuudal*).⁸ Simply put, the question was: What to do about the lamas? When they came to power in 1921, the socialists had approximately one hundred Party members. Mongolia was a Buddhist country with an estimated 80,000 lamas. By some reckonings, fully one third of the adult males in Mongolia were monks, although not all of these would have lived in monasteries. Prior to the socialist revolution, Mongolia had been a feudal theocracy under the Bogd Khan, a Buddhist “living god,” more properly known as the Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu.

The question of the lamas, then, was a question of how to break the political, economic, social, and cultural power of the lamas. In the end, the state would resort to genocide. This is a term seldom used in Mongolia to refer to the mass killings of the late 1930s, but the definition of genocide in the 1948 UN convention on the prevention and punishment of genocide is worth quoting here, as it encapsulates many of the measures the socialist government took against the lamas: Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁹

These were clearly applicable to the case against the lamas (and Buryats) in the late 1930s. There is a two-fold point to using a term that most Mongolians avoid. It is not to engage in placing blame, but first to drive home the seriousness of what took place and second to underline that fact that even when genocide was taking place, other measures, including the legal system and criminal law, continued to be deployed alongside trumped-up arrests and executions.

Before the socialist government reached the stage of mass killings and destruction, they would resort to a number of measures, including propaganda, job and educational incentives, punitive taxation, and onerous laws. I term these measures, which changed and shifted over the 1920s and 1930s, “technologies of exception.”¹⁰ They represented a shifting constellation of measures taken up and abandoned, modified, or discarded in repeated attempts to break the power of the Buddhist establishment. Criminal court cases were a key, if under-appreciated, element of these technologies. Indeed, apart from my own work, such court cases appear not to have been studied at all. A few of the show trials that took place have been acknowledged, but not the more common criminal cases. This chapter is thus part of a larger project I have been pursuing for a number of years on how the early socialist government in Mongolia addressed the question of the lamas. It draws upon archival research and fieldwork stretching over a period of five years and draws upon hundreds of archival documents stretching to thousands of pages to build an understanding of what was taking place in Mongolia in the 1930s and why.

I will not rehearse my entire larger argument here, but the key point to understand is that the concern with legality, and the legal system, can be linked to the need for the nascent socialist state to appear to be in control at the same time it was still attempting to assert control and claim legitimacy. It could not afford to suspend the rule of law at the same time it was seeking to establish the rule of law, for to do so would simply highlight its own precarious nature. An emphasis on legality, and the use of the legal system as a key tool against the lamas, was thus a performance of state sovereignty.¹¹ In addition, for most of the period of the question of the lamas, the socialists were careful to divorce private belief from public actions. The socialists, or so they claimed, were concerned only with the political, economic, and social power of the Buddhist establishment, rather than what people believed. At a practical level, the question of the lamas was more a question of anticlericalism rather than antireligion *per se*.

In this chapter, I perform a double maneuver through the lens of court cases against lamas. At one level, I look in more detail at one particular aspect of the legal emphasis that

lay behind the use of courts. The other is to document more fully the range of measures used against the lamas, and the simple, but important, fact that these included recourse to laws that were not explicitly aimed at either religious or overtly political ends. By this I mean that while the intentions of the laws were clearly political, they in and of themselves did not address political topics. Here again, tax avoidance serves as an example. The taxes were intended to be onerous and to drive lamas from the monasteries, but at a purely legal level, the charge against a lama was tax avoidance, not being a lama. It may, with some validity, be objected that this is a simple political expediency. I would agree that this is accurate as far as it goes—but I would also argue that from an analytical point of view, the consequences of this should not be disregarded. Analytically, convictions for such crimes as tax evasion folds lamas back into the realm of criminals, rather than political opponents. They are placed in a different symbolic register. The two registers are not so easily separable in practice, but my point here is that, at least superficially, in recognition of their widespread support among the public, the lamas were not being criminalized as lamas (for who they were) but for tax evasion and other crimes (for what they did).

It may be useful here to draw parallels with John Comaroff's concept of "lawfare"—"the effort to conquer and control indigenous peoples by the coercive use of legal means."¹² He was writing about the use of law in colonial Africa, but a similar argument can be made for early socialist Mongolia. Comaroff goes on to argue that "colonial legal cultures, precisely because they were constitutive of entire colonial worlds, were simultaneously languages of practice; symbolic and ritual systems; abstract principles for the production of social order, citizenship, and subjection; and immanent material realities."¹³

In Mongolia, instead of the law being used against "indigenous peoples," it was deployed against certain classes of people, such as lamas and secular nobility. Comaroff's observations, however, do have some traction here. Even if the lamas were not targeted and convicted within the legal framework as lamas, they were a targeted group, and the legal system was being deployed as a means of punitive control, rather than a broader means of regulating behavior. If the tactic worked, it was essentially a win-win scenario for the government. If lamas paid their taxes, for instance, their economic power would be broken. If they respected laws that prohibited certain religious practices, they would lose their *raison d'être*. If they ignored such laws or didn't pay their taxes, they were criminals, worthy of punishment and contempt.

Numerous laws and decrees would be promulgated in an attempt to answer the question of the lamas. As importantly, if not more so, than law as a means of coercion and control was the fact that the legal culture being implemented in Mongolia was both a practice and means of producing social order. Lamas would and could resort to protests and violence against what they regarded as excessive taxation and deploy propaganda and threats against the government in an effort to maintain a semblance of their way of life. What was taking place in the 1920s and 1930s was a struggle for the identity and future of Mongolia, and the socialist government would deploy the legal system and the criminal code among their weapons.

POLITICAL COURTS

That courts and laws are used for political purposes is far from a novel observation. Political control of the courts or interference in the court is often assumed to be a hallmark of authoritarian regimes, although more recent scholarship has tended to complicate this picture, arguing for a more dynamic interaction.¹⁴ While much remains to be elucidated about the exact nature of the relationships between the courts and the Mongolian political and security apparatuses, it is clear that the courts did at times display some autonomy, although they clearly were also subject to political pressure. In one instance, we can clearly follow a case being passed back and forth between the court system and the sentencing arm of the state security services (see 285-I-103).¹⁵

Whatever the exact relationship between the judiciary and the political apparatus, early socialist Mongolia represents an intriguing variation on the theme of courts in authoritarian systems, one that also has certain ramifications for how we understand the use of the court system. In brief, the legal system was effectively an innovation of the socialist era in Mongolia. There had been a legal system under previous regimes, of course, but the administration of justice lay in the hands of nobles, religious and secular, and not in a judicial apparatus as such. As a result, herders in the countryside, for instance, could find themselves with the problem that the person they wished to lodge a complaint about was the same person to whom they were supposed to address their grievances. The Mongolist Charles Bawden has noted: “The first steps to modernise the administration of justice in all its aspects were however not taken till late 1925, when courts with elected justices were instituted.”¹⁶ The first full civil code was not promulgated until 1926.¹⁷ Until that point, the old Qing system had remained in effect. Reforms had been attempted during the Autonomous Period (1911–1921), but these had little impact. The ways in which people encountered the legal code and its administration would have been changing during the same period they were being deployed, and we can only surmise about the suspicion, if not hostility, they must have been met with. More importantly, this must raise questions about the effectiveness of such an approach. Obviously Mongolians would have been familiar with punishments and appeals to authority, but just how the new system was received is not known. The legal system, in other words, did not possess longstanding legitimacy. We can easily imagine one of any number of scenarios, where the new system was greeted with suspicion and hostility or indifference, or perhaps even welcomed as a way to curb the power of officials from the old regime, many of whom remained influential, and often in office, throughout the 1920s.

LAMAS AND THE LAW

Doubtless, in popular understandings of the 1930s in Mongolia, the apparent lawlessness of the late 1930s plays a prominent role: a time of terror and fear, destruction and death striking seemingly at random, with the secret police appearing in the night to take

people away. We may think of the Special Commission sentencing hundreds of people, the overwhelming majority to death, in a single session. Links with a casual acquaintance or a wrong word could lead to arrest and sentencing as a counter-revolutionary. There are stories of people being rounded up off the street to fulfill a quota of arrests or executions, and others being able to slip away during the night when the truck taking them to prison or to be killed stopped momentarily.

Yet alongside and underneath this was a concern with legality and the law. I do not intend to downplay what people experienced, but neither should we let the horror and suffering blind us to what the socialist state was doing, and how. This again holds in two senses. First, as the main point of this chapter, there was the handling of cases against lamas through the court system. I return to this shortly. But secondly, even within the physical violence itself, there was a thread of legality; it was not completely arbitrary. Not only were there specific targets, as we would well expect, but the process itself adhered largely—although not totally—to certain frameworks and procedures. Chief among these were the Special Commissions. There were two such commissions. The first existed from February 1930 to sometime in 1935, although the exact end date is unclear. The second existed from October 1937 to April 1939.¹⁸

The first commission was created to handle cases pertaining to national security, cases that could not, for whatever reason, be handled in the open courts. The second was brought into existence to deal explicitly with cases connected to a famous show trial in October 1937.¹⁹ The decree that created it noted that the case of the Yonzon Khamba, probably the most prominent lama in Mongolia at the time, his deputy Damdin, the ex-Prime Minister Genden, and ex-Minister of War Demid was handled by the court, but other connected cases would be referred to the Commission.²⁰

I have no intention to defend the fairness of these commissions, but we need to step back from the view that such commissions were simply kangaroo courts or troikas (both had, at least initially, three members, similar to such commissions in the Soviet Union upon which they were modeled) that arbitrarily decided people's fate. There was much of this, but particularly with the earlier Commission, a slightly different picture emerges of its relationship to the legal system once we examine the details.

Let me start with a brief comment on the second Commission, since, in legal terms, it is less interesting if much more deadly. The second Commission was responsible for a large portion of the executions in the late 1930s. Nearly 26,000 people were sentenced by the Commission in a space of fifty meetings; of those, 20,474 were shot.²¹ It is unclear how many of these were lamas. Given that literally hundreds of people were often sentenced at any one meeting of the Special Commission, it is clear that these sessions were largely a formality. Yet the fact remains that people were in fact sentenced for specific charges, no matter how trumped-up, and a percentage (often around 10 to 15 percent) of the people would receive prison sentences rather than being shot. Even when sentenced by the Special Commission, they were convicted according to certain articles of the penal code. My point here is to call attention to the concern with legality. People were

indeed at times simply rounded up and shot, but those sentenced by the special commissions were at least nominally convicted of specific crimes, violations of the legal code. This can be compared with, say, Nazi Germany where, at roughly the same time, the Nuremberg laws, passed in 1935, defined on a legal basis who was Jewish. Here, the crime was to be Jewish. This was not the case with the lamas.

One can also contrast the treatment the lamas received with the case of the Buryats in Mongolia. The Buryats, an ethnic minority, suffered disproportionately in the late 1930s, and here it was their ethnicity that mattered. Many Buryats had fled the Soviet Union in the 1920s, settling in Mongolia, and thus were seen as being of dubious loyalty, and often regarded as White Russian sympathizers. Although the Buryats were clearly targeted, there is no clear archival record of a “question of the Buryats” as there is for the lamas.

There is an interesting “twist” to the Mongolian case, where in the 1934 revision of the law separating religion and state, the high-ranking lamas were legally defined as “reactionaries” (284-1-613: 8). This was not the same as being a counter-revolutionary, but it does suggest a movement to treating the lamas as inherently troublesome, not simply because of their influence and power. Even here my larger point remains: This provided a legal basis for acting against the high-ranking lamas because of who they were, but even once this law was in effect, they continued to be linked at least nominally to other cases when arrested as *esergüü* (counter-revolutionaries).

If the Commission of the late 1930s used the law as something of a fig leaf, the case is more complicated from a legal perspective for the first Commission. It was established in February 1930 to deal with cases that could not be tried in open court. It seems to have existed until 1935, by which time it had grown from the initial three members to an unknown size. A number of different sections, for dealing with economic crimes, political ones, and so forth, existed, however, suggesting at least a sizeable bureaucracy, if nothing else. Unlike the later decree that would create the 1937 Special Commission, the one from 1930 was explicitly designed to work alongside the legal system. Evidence, in the form of notes on cases handled by the Special Commission and filed in the archives (see, as an example, 284-1-536 for case summaries), as well as at least one court case, indicates that this was indeed what happened. Cases handled by the Special Commission were sometimes referred to the courts for resolution, and the courts interacted with the security services, which also served as an investigative arm of the state.

I do not want to spend much time on these commissions, which I have written about in more detail elsewhere.²² My chief point is to draw attention to the role of the court and actual convictions, particularly in the Commission from the first half of the 1930s. The legal system was not neglected and indeed, as the documents mentioned at the beginning of this chapter show, continued to function in parallel with other measures throughout the entire period of the question of the lamas. In other words, even when thousands of lamas were being rounded up and shot, others were being convicted through the courts and sentenced to prison.²³

SEPARATING RELIGION AND STATE

The question of the lamas was rooted in law at its very base. In September 1926, when the government was still contemplating possible accommodation with the Buddhist establishment, the law on the separation of religion and state was passed. Separation of the state and religion had also been mentioned in the 1924 socialist constitution, but it was the 1926 law that provided the motivating force behind many of the steps taken over the following decade. The law would undergo a number of revisions, in 1934 and 1936. The 1934 version, among other steps, confirmed the ban on the recognition of reincarnations that had taken place in 1929. It also restricted the number of people who could become lamas, limiting it to one in three boys from any family, and only then upon reaching their eighteenth birthday.

The law was clearly political in intent. It was meant to break the power of the monasteries, and this became increasingly evident as control and surveillance structures were developed over the 1920s and 1930s and further refinements on the restrictions placed on lamas came into force. Yet, at least in the earlier incarnations, it was careful to note that the separation of state and religion operated in two directions. The law “guarantees people’s right to believe—thus implicitly freeing them from state interference—but it also protects them from interference by the monasteries. (Many people owed, either by regulation or tradition, various offerings, payments and work contributions to the monasteries.)”²⁴ Further, the 1926 version of the law established what was known as the “religious administration.” This was intended to be a means of monitoring, and if necessary controlling, the monasteries. However, the earliest versions comprised not only lamas, but also high-ranking ones, the very people the socialist government was most concerned about. More germane for the present discussion is the fact that, at least at first, the monasteries retained control over their own internal administration and discipline. For most purposes, the legal apparatus stopped at the monastery gates. This would change as the 1930s went on and the government attempted to extend its control, but it is a clear indication of how carefully the socialists had to tread with regard to the question of the lamas.

LAMAS ON TRIAL

To demonstrate the range of cases handled under the legal system and how this fit into the broader question of the lamas, I now turn to a survey of cases handled by the court system and take a closer look at some of them. I am interested in cases handled under the criminal code, which covered counter-revolutionary activity. It was not only a charge leveled against the lamas, as we have already seen, but in looking at the legal system, it is a charge that cannot be ignored. Before I do so, however, let me make clear that I am largely leaving aside the issue of “show trials” in this chapter. Show trials were an important tool in the socialist arsenal.²⁵ Julie Cassidy, writing of the Soviet Union, whence Mongolia took the model, described show trials as “the most important genre of legal

propaganda in the 1930s.”²⁶ They are interesting analytically as they blur the boundaries between the concern with legality and political expediency. A “classic” show trial has all the public and visible characteristics of a trial, but was one with a predetermined outcome. It is theater in the form of a legal proceeding. Yet this distinction was not always so clear-cut. The 1930s in Mongolia were book-ended by two major public trials. One, in early October 1937, was against the Yonzon Khamba and others and presaged the violence and destruction that followed. Another public trial, in the autumn of 1930, concerned the case of a noble, Eregdendagva, and thirty-seven others who were accused of a conspiracy to overthrow the government. A few high-ranking lamas were involved, but rather peripherally. This was a trial open to the public, and to those explicitly invited to attend. What is important to note in this case is that it was seen as relatively fair by one of the participants,²⁷ and his account does suggest more give-and-take and uncertainty than are found in later show trials.²⁸ In other words, just as there was a clear development in the two commissions, from one tightly and explicitly linked to the law to one still drawing upon legal issues and the criminal code but given freer rein and an expansive remit, there was a similar if mirror development in the public use of trials for political ends, from relatively open trials to predetermined political theater.

The cases of counter-revolutionary activity follow what we can think of as a reverse trajectory, away from the courts and toward the Special Commission. Of the high-ranking lamas who were working in construction camps in October 1938, few if any readily fall into the category of counter-revolutionary, the most politically charged claim. Most, but not all, of these cases were handled by the Special Commission. Throughout the 1930s, however, lamas *were* charged in court with being counter-revolutionaries, so the court system was seen, at least at times, as capable of dealing with such issues. Indeed, while the 1932 “armed uprising” led to tribunals in the countryside for many of those who took part, those seen as the ringleaders were again put on trial. Here we feel pretty sure that the outcome was predetermined, yet the testimony suggests that at least some of the defendants testified more or less freely.²⁹

THE PANOPLY OF CHARGES

Before I turn to specific cases, let me return in a bit more detail to the two documents cited at the start of this chapter, the lists of high-ranking lamas from 1938. There are sixty-three cases mentioned across the two documents, covering seventy-six lamas. It is not always easy to categorize each case based on the information given, but some observations may be made, which are informative. The single largest category in a combined examination of the two lists is economic crimes, particularly in relation to tax issues. Over one third of the cases are explicitly linked to some form of tax avoidance or misreporting. Another four cases can be linked to the *jas*, the monastic (or individual) treasuries that were a particular target of the socialists. These were thus also economic crimes, as were four that are linked to profiting from donations to the monastery, a blend of

economic and religious offenses. Taken together, this means that roughly half (31 out of 63) of the convictions are for economic crimes. This makes sense given the socialists' fear of the lamas' economic power and their concomitant focus on combating it through measures such as heavy taxes. In response, of course, lamas (and others) attempted to avoid the most onerous obligations. Numerous taxes were deployed, with some being at least nominally directed at the population as a whole, and others, brought to bear later in the 1930s, that focused more specifically on lamas. Taxes were to remain in place throughout the entire period, with reports being filed with the government even as late as 1939.

In marked contrast to the preponderance of economic cases, less than a quarter (14 out of 63; 7 in each document) can be linked either to violating the law separating religion and state, or to a general category dealing with children. This includes allowing children to be lamas, but also includes interfering in their education. I group these two together since charges such as interfering with a child's education had religious overtones. The intent was to cut off a source of future lamas as well as cutting the links that children reinforced between families and the Buddhist monasteries. As court cases at such a late date indicate, and as is amply confirmed in the archived reports to and from government representatives, this was an aspect of the question of the lamas that the socialist government was never able to resolve. As late as the first part of 1937, in Arkhangai province, less than 5 percent of the children known to be in monasteries had been returned to their parents (1-6-379, 65). A handful of other cases also had a religious flavor: Four cases can be linked to either the repair of temples or new construction, activities that were forbidden in later versions of the law separating religion and state and would provide the basis for court cases throughout the 1930s, including some prominent cases. There are individual cases of a more varied nature, but still with religion at their heart: one charge of deceiving people through religion, one of consecrating a Buddhist statue, another of holding prayer sessions. Finally, there are several cases that can only intrigue us. We can suspect that "incorrectly marrying someone" may well be linked to religion. It is not clear if it is a marriage ceremony carried out erroneously, or whether the lama was accused, in essence, of breaking his vows, but either way, religion would have been implicated. However, insulting someone while drunk simply seems like an odd crime to be convicted of. The only other case similar to this that I am familiar with involved a person revealing state secrets when drunk. In that case, the concern was with the state secrets, not the drunkenness *per se*, and the case was thus handled by the Special Commission of the early 1930s. Similarly, one suspects that in a case of illegally exporting marmot skins, that fact that the person was a high-ranking lama was ultimately immaterial to the conviction, although perhaps not the decision to pursue the case. A similar case, brought to the attention of the Special Commission in the early 1930s, of illegal border crossing and trade involved lamas, but both lamas were relatively low-ranking and poor. Nonetheless, an important point remains: While the fact that the accused were lamas may have made pressing the charges more likely, they were the sort of charges that would not be leveled solely against lamas.

We can get a sense of the scale of offenses from a report the Justice Minister, Tserendorj, wrote to the government representative responsible for monitoring the monasteries in Arkhangai and surrounding regions in March 1937. Among other items, he refers to a comment made by Dongrub, the representative, in a previous report, indicating that more than fifty lamas had violated laws and regulations. This was distinct from lamas spreading rumors, an activity more likely to fall under the aegis of counter-revolutionary activity. We do not have further information on these lamas, and while fifty is a relatively small number out of the thousands of lamas encompassed by Dongrub's area of responsibility, it is still a telling number, particularly so late in the day. The socialists were clearly looking for any and all means to deal with the lamas without resorting to arbitrary arrests or physical violence.

COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARIES

Let me now take up a few specific court cases in more detail. The first court case I want to consider is intriguing for multiple reasons. On the surface, it seems like exactly the sort of case that would be handled by the Special Commission: It was a case of several high-ranking lamas said to be plotting against the government. It is not clear why this one was referred to the courts, although the most logical assumption was that it was meant as a performance of state power, and there are additional reasons to suspect this. Whatever the reason, it was handled by the courts and illustrates the type of complaint made against lamas and others in the early 1930s. It differs from the cases I will consider later in that it explicitly deals with allegations of fairly standard forms of counter-revolutionary activity, but it is nonetheless instructive.

The case of Dorjgiv, a lama from Övörkhongai, dates from 1931. Dorjgiv and twenty others were accused of what were fairly standard charges at the time: wanting to overthrow the “people’s government” and bring back the old one. They were accused of a number of other things, conspiring with the Banchen Bogd (the Panchen Lama, a noted anticommunist active in China), saying the government wanted to confiscate property from rich people, the government was deceiving the people, and so forth.³⁰ These are quite typical charges that would have been brought against lamas and others in the early 1930s. The Banchen Bogd was a favorite bogeyman of the Mongolian socialist government, although he never actually attempted the long-rumored invasion. The charge of saying the government wanted to confiscate the property of rich people was a reflection of policy at the time, although others were also charged with spreading this “rumor.” The nature of these charges are such that they would often have been handled by the Special Commission, since they parallel the charges of a great number of other cases the Commission did handle. For whatever the reason, this particular one was handled by a traveling session of the country’s General Court, which was evidently open to the public (*Ėronöönkhii Shüükh*).³¹

Some of the other charges laid against the defendants are a bit more unusual in their specificity, if not their general tone. The charge that they claimed the people’s

government was destroying Buddhism was not itself particularly new, but that by doing so it was “increasing sin” (*nügel khilents ikhdej*) is unique in my experience. But given that fifteen out of the twenty-one defendants appear to have had some sort of religious training, if not being explicitly lamas (although most of them were as well), perhaps this should not be too surprising. It does resonate with the tendency of lamas to fall back on Buddhist terminology. Other charges, such as being accused of saying that the government was “shortening lives” (*nas boginosch*), are again unique, as far as I am aware, as was criticizing the teachings of Lenin *bagsb* (teacher, a title of respect as well as a job description in Mongolian). While being accused of harboring thoughts of fleeing across the border is also unprecedented, there are at least vague parallels to charges of illegal border crossings, which were not uncommon. Here the charge is thinking about fleeing, rather than the actual fleeing, or even explicitly planning to flee. At a stretch, we can perhaps see this as an equivalent of a conspiracy charge (such as conspiracy to murder), but that does indeed seem to be a stretch.

Thus far, there is nothing in particular to make this case stand out. What begins to draw our attention is the sentences handed down. According to both the court records and the rehabilitation documents, four of the top conspirators were to be shot. These were Dorjgiv, a sixty-two-year-old lama from Lamyn Gegeen Khiid; Luvsandanzan, age fifty-six, a *khuvilgaan* (reincarnation), but also a Party member; Sodnomtseren, age forty-nine, described as the Erdem Mergen Noyon Khutugtu; and Dorjbat, a forty-nine-year-old lama (285-1-89: 76–77). Dorjbat, like a number of the other conspirators, had a criminal record, over an affair related to taxes. Death sentences for such charges were unusual, but even here, things were less than straightforward. Others received mostly prison sentences or a suspended sentence, and one person was released (*sullajee*) on account of his apparently minor role and age of sixty-nine.

However, before moving on the complications, it is worth noting that this would have been a particularly prominent case in Arkhangai. Three of the accused were reincarnations (Luvsandanzan, Tserendorj, and Sodnomtseren) and at least one other was a *khamba* (abbot). Most were lamas, and many of the others were secular nobles (*taij*). Five in addition to Dorjbat had previous convictions for tax or other offenses, some related to debt.

The central-western region of Mongolia (what is now Övörkhangai, Arkhangai, and Khövsgöl) appears to have been particularly restive at this general time. This was roughly the same area that would be engulfed in the civil war that would break out in the spring of 1932, but there were other trials centered around, among other places, Lamyn Gegeen Khiid, where Dorjgiv was from. In this case as well, the defendants were again relatively well educated or had held government positions.

Returning to Dorjgiv’s case, there are a number of other points worth examining. Reading the list of the accused, who seem to be particularly well-educated and prominent lamas, as well as the relatively high number of those with prior convictions, one begins to suspect that this was a trial intended to make a larger point. It is unclear if the

trial received newspaper coverage, but the standard socialist-era history of the “question of the lamas,” Pürevjav and Dashjamts’s *The Resolution of the Question of the Monasteries and Lamas in the MPR*, does briefly mention the case, claiming it was part of a wider Buddhist conspiracy but that this particular aspect had been uncovered and cut short.³² It also appears to have been something of a fishing expedition, as parts of the court record report that it was only upon subsequent questionings of the accused, not their first interrogations, that they mentioned things they could be charged with. The case also seems to have been passed around multiple levels of the courts and the security services—the Bureau of Internal Security (Dotood Khamgaalakh Gazar), as it was then known. This, however, may be explained, at least in part, by the fact that the security services seem to have also functioned, at least at times, as the investigative arm of the judicial apparatus.

From what can be determined, at least some of the lamas who received prison sentences were shot in the late 1930s. Given that coming to the attention of the judicial system or the state security apparatus would almost invariably lead to a death sentence in the late 1930s, we would expect most of those given prison sentences to have later been executed, but it has not proven possible to check all of them. Somewhat oddly, two of those who were sentenced to be shot were also sentenced to be shot in 1937. One is in fact listed twice in one register of rehabilitated people. The only answer is that they somehow escaped being shot the first time, but this also raises numerous unanswerable questions. The most glaring is: Why weren’t they shot? In the court documents, they were explicitly ruled ineligible for the amnesty that celebrated the Mongolian People’s Republic’s tenth anniversary, a period when criminals, including lamas, could be pardoned. Such a prohibition also suggests that their statutory right of appeal would not have been received favorably. Yet, somehow, they were spared.

Let us leave aside the counter-revolutionaries, and look at a case from 1935–1936 that dealt with lamas accused of violating the law separating religion and state.³³ Starting in 1935, according to the court documents, lamas at Baruun Khüree, near Erdene Zuu, in what is now Övörkhangai, were accused of saying they would hold a *tsam* ceremony and construct a new monastery as a way to solicit donations in the form of goods and livestock from the faithful (285-1-156: 59). The ringleader was said to be Luvsantsevenravan, a seventy-one-year-old *khuvilgaan*, who is described as the “Noyon Lam” (Princely Monk). He had over 10,000 *shabis*, a huge number of disciples (p. 62).

The court documents use the term *barich* (gift or offering) to describe what the people were asked to give, and these would have violated at least two provisions of the legal code. The first was a ban on religious ceremonies and processions (285-1-613: 8). “Ceremonies” referred to public events, rather than sessions held within a temple. Second, the announcement could easily have been said to be a case of using religious belief to take advantage of people, since “donations,” although technically voluntary, were no doubt expected, and viewed by many as compulsory. Finally, Robert Rupen, citing a Russian-language version of a law, notes that the construction of new monasteries, even “under

the guise of ‘repair’ of old ones,” was forbidden.³⁴ In the course of the investigation, Luvsantsevenravdan admitted that he knew that “to repair old *dugans* [temples], and build new ones was forbidden,” but he claimed to have not known or been told that it was prohibited to hold *tsam* ceremonies (285-1-156: 24, 26).

The 1934 revision of the law on separating religion and state forbade the imposition of religious beliefs and customs. This included such major events as a *tsam* ceremony, to which people would have been expected to contribute. People were theoretically free to practice their religion but could not be imposed upon by the lamas. Other people questioned in the case claimed that money and livestock were sent voluntarily (*sain dūrүүр*, p. 28) by the people, but many if not most would have felt compelled to donate, and even if not, it would be easy enough for a prosecutor to argue this was the case.

There are several aspects to the case worth drawing attention to. The first is that Luvsantsevenravdan had been sentenced as a counter-revolutionary at least once before, in 1932. He was a known counter-revolutionary. He had been sentenced to seven years in prison, although evidently he had been released early, perhaps as part of an amnesty in the summer of 1932. The court record for the 1936 case says that he had been sentenced to three years. It is possible that the original sentence was reduced. This, and early release, were not unknown before the late 1930s, particularly in high-profile cases, where keeping the population content was seen as more important than striking a major blow against the Buddhists.

More intriguing and telling of the situation in Arkhangai at the time of Luvsantsevenravdan’s case is the fact that most people involved seem to have gotten off with a light fine or similar sentence. Luvsantsevenravdan himself was to be jailed for two years. This is the most severe sentence, which falls short of the maximum of three years.³⁵ Additionally, given his previous conviction, it would not have been hard to justify a more severe penalty for Luvsantsevenravdan. Similarly, the only two other people in the case with a prior conviction (one of eight months in prison, the other a 100-*tögrög* fine) received one-year sentences. This, although not conclusive, is strongly suggestive that the government could not and would not allow certain things to take place, but was also treading very carefully. One more point about this case must not be overlooked: This was *not* a case of counter-revolutionary activity. Perhaps that explains the relatively lenient sentences. The lamas had broken the law but had not conspired against the state.

Let me turn again to counter-revolutionaries. The final case I cover is somewhat different from the usual counter-revolutionary charges. Rather than plotting to overthrow the government or work with the Banchen Bogd or the Japanese (another standard accusation), Zindal, a forty-five-year-old lama and doctor, was accused of poisoning people through Tibetan traditional medicine. This, along with the timing of the case, demands our attention. The issue of lamas and health care was a prominent aspect of the lama question. The monasteries had provided a traditional source of health care for much of the population. It was probably only second to education as one of the key fronts on which the socialist

government waged its struggle against Buddhism. It was for this reason that this particular case was presented at the Central Theatre in Ulaanbaatar, where the Yonzon Khamba and others had been tried in October 1937 at the start of the mass arrests. The case of Zindal was a chance to show not only lamas as counter-revolutionaries, but also the harm that Tibetan medicine, still popular throughout the country, could cause. In mid-November 1937, the Ministry of Health wrote to the Ministry of Justice, observing that in the first three months of the year, 40 percent of the patients in the central hospital had been previously treated by lamas (285-1-186: 1). In the initial comments, the Ministry talked about “lamas” in the plural, noting their lack of qualifications to treat people. They did not follow proper methods, which included such things as noting family medical history. Later in the letter, they single out Zindal as what was presumably an especially egregious example. The legal system acted relatively swiftly, and within two weeks Zindal was being questioned.

At the trial, held in March 1938, Zindal was accused of impairing people’s health and causing their deaths through poisoning. The prosecution argued that he said he was treating them with Tibetan medicines, but he had in fact deceived them and was only out for his own gain. He convinced some patients to leave the “scientific” (i.e., Western biomedical) hospitals to be treated by him, which counted as spreading counter-revolutionary propaganda. Ten instances were named, including one of a four-year-old girl who died under his care. The case lists her ailment as *khaniad*, influenza (p. 2). While most patients are merely described by their ailments (usually internal ailments [*dotor övchin*]) and fate (invariably, death), two are singled out for having worked in a *kombinat*. Perhaps this was intended to show that even workers (as opposed to herders), the socialist vanguard, could be lead astray by the perfidious lamas. Zindal was found guilty. He was sentenced to death, and all of his possessions, except those necessary for his family to survive, were confiscated. His appeal for clemency was rejected.

This seems a fitting example to end with, since it fairly clearly marks the shift of the use of the courts and legal system to a purely political basis. I do not pass judgment on whether or not Zindal did cause the deaths he was accused of, and deserved to face justice, or what would pass for it in Mongolia in the late 1930s. Yet the decision to hold the trial in the Central Theatre makes it clear that a political statement was intended. The timing also reinforces this point. By the time of the trial, the mass arrests and executions were already well under way. Indeed, even by the time the Ministry of Health reported its concerns, mass arrests and executions had begun. The trial could only have been intended to reinforce the need for the moves being taken against the lamas.

CONCLUSION

I opened this chapter with two documents on convicted high-ranking lamas. Let me book-end this chapter with them, returning to these documents for a final observation. I noted at the start of this chapter that one of the intriguing things about the lists was

that they existed at all, a point then put aside. Here I take it up again, but to use it in essence as a cautionary tale about the limits of the concerns with legality by the socialists. My argument has been, and remains, that the legal system was an important element of the “question of the lamas.” What I have explored here are some cases that illustrate the range of offenses the socialists charged the Buddhist lamas with.

This emphasis on legality was one of the ways that the socialists tried to contain the exceptional, to perform for both the Mongolian people and themselves their strength and legitimacy as the new rulers of Mongolia. This emphasis on normality—the strength of the state to deal with the exceptional challenge of the Buddhist establishment—was addressed through two concerns with legality. One was that even the Special Commissions operated with reference to the criminal code. The other was that up to the very end of the “question of the lamas,” the court system itself was used to deal with lamas who transgressed both ordinary criminal law and the provisions covering counter-revolutionary activity. The two lists of high-ranking lamas are evidence of this concern until very late in the day.

One question I have not addressed is *why* these documents were created. We cannot know for sure, but we can make some very good guesses. The main reason for these documents to have existed is that they were part of the control and surveillance leveled against the lamas. The documents were created in October 1938, a year after the first arrests that signaled the start of the wave of killings. The high-ranking lamas mentioned in the first document who had been released were clearly targets for rearrest and execution, even if the majority of the arrests of lamas had already taken place. Most lamas who had come to the attention of the security services earlier in the 1930s suffered this fate. We cannot guarantee this is what happened to these lamas, as I have been unable to trace their fates. Perhaps a few of them, working in a leather factory as some did, were allowed to live, as an example of how high-ranking lamas could be reformed and partake of socially useful work. The second document—those lamas still in labor camps—is harder to read. But again, the simple fact that it exists indicates that the government was concerned to track the lamas. Perhaps lamas survived the executions by being in the labor camps, or perhaps they were removed from the camps and killed. Either way, the important analytical point was that the government was concerned to make sure it had knowledge of the high-ranking lamas. They could not be allowed to fade into the general population; they were too dangerous. This in turn suggests that, after all, legality was important, but it was not enough. Legality, in the shape of the court system, functioned side by side with the Special Commissions to handle cases of counter-revolutionary as well as more ordinary criminal activity. They were a key, if often neglected, element to addressing the lama question. Even when the trials were not scripted, with predetermined outcomes, they worked as a political performance, where the state performed its sovereignty and claimed legitimacy. Yet, in the end, this did not solve the “question of the lamas”: The question, finally, would only be answered with mass deaths and destruction.

NOTES

1. Support for work in the archives came from a British Academy Small Research Grant (SG-50260) and Franklin Research Grant of the American Philosophical Society.

2. Since documents in the Mongolian archives, particularly court cases, often do not have individual titles, I have given the reference for the document in the text but have not included each item individually in the bibliography. The three numbers (e.g., 1-6-403) indicate the *fond*, *dans*, and *khairtsag* (fund, account, box or folder) and are used to catalogue the documents. Unless otherwise noted, archive references are to the Central Historical Archives.

3. The usual figure given is roughly 800 monasteries. However, if the smaller, individual temples that dotted the countryside are included, the estimates range into the low thousands.

4. It is unclear if these numbers are intended to include all victims of the socialist period, the 1930s, or the late 1930s. Some authors, particularly in the early 1990s, have suggested numbers several times larger, up to 100,000 victims, but here they seem to be counting lamas who left or were forced out of the monasteries as victims of repression.

5. Somewhat more than 40,000 of the lamas who had left the monasteries were said to have secularized, and 17,338 were said to be living in the countryside, but still as lamas.

6. With the collapse of socialism in 1990, people convicted of political crimes during socialism were eligible for rehabilitation, an overturning of their conviction, and a recognition that they had been repressed—that is, convicted on spurious grounds for political reasons. For more on the rehabilitation process and documents, see Kaplonski, 2011.

7. One cannot but help realize that in the United States, earlier in the decade, the same charge was used to convict Al Capone.

8. The phrase can also be translated “the lama problem” or the “the lama issue,” and I occasionally use such translations for the sake of variety.

9. <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/genocide.html> Accessed on October 1, 2013.

10. Kaplonski, 2012.

11. For fuller discussions of this, see Kaplonski, 2012 and 2014.

12. Comaroff, 2001, 306.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Ginsburg and Moustafa, 2008.

15. In this chapter, I use the terms “secret police” and “state security apparatus” (or service) interchangeably. The actual organization underwent a number of name changes and was elevated to ministry level in 1936.

16. Bawden, 1989, 255.

17. Sükhbaatar and Oyundelger, 2002.

18. The second is technically an “Extraordinary Plenipotentiary Commission” (*Ontsgoi büren erkht*), but I refer to both as “Special Commissions” for the sake of simplicity.

19. Kaplonski, 2008.

20. Rinchen, 1993, 123–124.

21. Ölziibaatar, 2004, 294.

22. Kaplonski, 2014.

23. Similarly, even as monasteries were being shut and lamas forced out, taxes were still being levied.

24. Kaplonski, 2012, 78.
25. See Kaplonski, 2008; for the Soviet case, see Carmichael, 1976, and Fitzpatrick, 1993.
26. Cassidy, 2000, 161.
27. Lattimore and Isono, 1982, 10.
28. This was also the case in the Soviet Union, where the earliest show trials were relatively unscripted.
29. See Kaplonski, 2014, Chapter Six.
30. Supreme Court, 2001.
31. This, I think, is probably indicative of a lack of infrastructure, such as permanent courts, in the Mongolian countryside.
32. Pürevjav and Dashjamts, 1965, 142.
33. For additional context on this case and the following one, see Kaplonski, 2014.
34. Rupen, 1964, 248, n. 30. Rupen calls the law “On the naming of special full-powered representatives of the Government in the large monasteries for the control and supervision of fulfillment of the laws of the country by the monastery administrations,” but he references the Special Section of the Criminal Code rather than a particular law.
35. Rupen, 1964, 248, n. 30.

14

Transition and Transformation: Buddhist Women of Buryatia

Karma Lekshe Tsomo



ALTHOUGH SIBERIA MAKES up about 40 percent of Asia's total landmass, it is frequently ignored in studies of Asia. In the field of Buddhist studies, and religious studies in general, little attention has been paid to this vast and historically significant region of the world. This immense landscape constitutes more than three quarters of Russia's territory and contains a majority of Russia's natural resources, many of which have yet to be exploited. Siberia's indigenous Turkic, Buryat Mongolian, Tungus Manchu, Samodii, Yugrian, and Palaeoasiatic populations have generally managed to preserve their distinct languages and cultural traditions, but they are outnumbered approximately thirty to one by the descendants of European Russians and others who have settled there beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹ This chapter focuses on the roles of women in Buryat Buddhism and the vital contributions they have made in the renewal of their religious heritage since the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

The active role of women in the revival of Buryat religious traditions raises many issues related to religion, tradition, and social adaptation, and it thereby highlights the tensions that exist between religious and political institutions. I will argue that the response of Buryat women to traditional male domination in Buddhist institutions mirrors Buryatia's responses to Russia's domination of the Transbaikal region. Although on the surface Buryats appear content under Russian rule and have largely accepted their subsumed political status as the most desirable among potential alternatives, resentments and tensions exist beneath the surface that have yet to be adequately addressed. In this chapter, I explore the implications of the Buryat–Russian

encounter for Buddhist women in Buryatia today and women's roles in helping revitalize Buddhist institutions since 1990. I argue that the gender dynamics in Buryat Buddhism are similar to the political dynamics of any ethnic minority within a powerful state: Subordination is preferable to exclusion. Buryat women are grateful for the degree of access to Buddhist teachings and rituals that they do have. However, as with any minority group subject to discrimination, tensions are present.

THE HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE

The history of Buddhism in Buryatia is closely connected to the spread and development of Buddhism in Mongolia, which traces its roots to Tibet. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Siberian territories gradually came under Mongol rule; Buryat lands came under the rule of Chinggis Khan's son Ögödei in 1224. The Siberian *uluses* (peoples or provinces) were required to pay tribute to the Khan in the form of gifts and the sending of soldiers in times of war. Otherwise, they were allowed to live freely, which they did, although engaging in continual conflicts among themselves.² Under Mongol rule, the Buryats began to rely less on hunting and fishing and to adopt a nomadic life of herding animals, gradually settling on lands near Lake Baikal.³

During the thirteenth century, Buddhist teachings began to appear sporadically among the Mongols, but Shamanism remained dominant, since it satisfied the needs of nomadic peoples living closely in touch with the natural elements.⁴ As the Mongolian tribes moved toward unification, social structures began to change and the influence of Buddhism began to grow; however, its nonviolent principles were not universally embraced all at once. As Buddhism took root in Mongolia and *datsans* (monastic colleges) were constructed, local heroes and deities were incorporated and honored as embodiments of Buddhist teachings. It was during the sixteenth century, under the rule of Altan Khan, that Buddhism, with its teachings on universal suffering and universal compassion, became politically expedient for unifying the Mongols. Buddhism spread among the Selenginsk and Khorinsk Buryats in the seventeenth century, and thence gradually to the Tabanguts, Tsongols, Atagans, and Khatagins.⁵

Over several centuries, Buddhist rituals and institutions gained strength and developed their own unique cultural expressions in Buryatia and other areas of Siberia. As Buddhism expanded in Buryatia between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries, agriculture began to replace nomadic culture and Buddhism gradually supplanted ancient shamanic rituals and attitudes. The *datsans* became centers of education and culture that promoted literacy and moral development, and thus Buddhism became dominant in Buryat personal, cultural, and social identity. By the seventeenth century, Buddhist rites and rituals were woven into the social and cultural life of Buryats at all levels of society. In the eighteenth century, Buddhism was declared the official religion of the region.

BURYAT BUDDHISM UNDER EARLY RUSSIAN RULE

Using the familiar myth of an “empty land,” Russian historians claim that Siberia became Russian not through conquest or colonization, but through a process of assimilation that occurred after the land was opened up for agriculture and development. In fact, however, the process of Russian rule involved considerable conflict, exploitation, and resistance by indigenous peoples from the beginning.⁶ In the sixteenth century, resentment in response to the abuses of Russian settlers, tax collectors, officers, and civil servants began to break out and armed resistance to Russian domination of Siberia began, but the local population seemed to prefer Russian to Chinese rule. In 1703, leaders of the Hori-Buryat clan petitioned Tsar Peter I to incorporate the lands east of Lake Baikal into the Russian Empire. The Russians were indebted to the Buryats for their support in securing the border with China.

Despite mutual antagonisms over centuries, Russian rule has not been totally negative for Buryatia, since it has facilitated the economic development of the region and brought amenities such as education and trade. It cannot be denied that Russian cultural domination has been overwhelming, yet the encounter with Russian culture impelled the Buryat Mongol tribes and other Siberian peoples to examine and reevaluate their own traditional values, and to gradually shape a reflective awareness of their own unique cultural identities. Over time, the Buryats self-consciously created a national identity that drew on both Tibetan and Mongolian influences, especially emphasizing Buddhist cultural features. Buddhism was valued for its moral philosophy, as a means of regulating society by moderating human behavior, and for its rituals, as a means of securing protection and blessing. The Edict of Toleration promulgated by Catherine the Great in 1773 granted the freedom to practice all forms of religion. With that, Buddhism became officially recognized as the religion of the Buryats, who were then free to practice their faith and develop Buddhist religious institutions as they wished, alongside indigenous shamanistic practices and the Orthodox Christian and Muslim practices of settlers and peoples from neighboring territories.

SIBERIAN RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS

In Buryatia, as in Kalmykia, Tuva, and other areas of Russia, Buddhism exists in close proximity to other religious traditions, particularly Orthodox Christianity and Shamanism. As remote as Siberia was from both European and Asian urban centers, it was also a cultural crossroads for Tartars, Turks, Old Believers, Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and religious dissidents of all persuasions.⁷ For centuries, mutual influences, primarily benign, have ebbed and flowed, but all of these traditions have coexisted against the backdrop of ancient naturalistic shamanic values and rituals. Referencing the work of Caroline Humphrey, Znamenski states, “shamanism was not a reflection about the

world but an action on the world. Native healers responded to the needs of communities, and that role automatically placed shamanism in the context of power relationships.⁹⁸ Of course, the same might be said of all religious traditions—that tending to the spiritual needs of a community situates one within a nexus of power relationships. However, this idea is useful for gaining insight into the ethnic, national, cultural, and gender dynamics of Buddhism in Buryatia today.

A major point of contrast between shamanic and Buddhist practices and practitioners is their sources of authority, specifically their respective modes of initiation or empowerment. Shamans in Siberia and elsewhere typically become recognized as religiously empowered as the consequence of a spontaneous event, such as a vision, revelation, or traumatic experience of some kind, which may be the result of an illness, psychotic break, dream, or mystical experience. In normative Tibetan Buddhist tantric traditions, by contrast, initiations or empowerments are conscious and intentional. Tantric empowerments are traditionally bestowed upon a limited number of disciples, and the lamas who perform the rituals, almost all of whom are male, are formally authorized in continuous lineages of practitioners that purportedly can be traced to ancient Indian origins.

As elsewhere, when Buddhism spread in Buryatia, its religious specialists were called upon to address the uncertainties of life, amidst the potential dangers of the harsh Siberian landscape and the potential dangers of social and political change. Roberte Hamayon notes that: “the holistic background of shamanism was not important in itself. Rather, its significance was associated with the uncertainty that should be symbolically overcome. Therefore, a shaman acted as a person who prevented panic and brought the individual or the community back to normal daily life.”⁹⁹ To a great extent, Buddhist lamas have acted similarly to prevent panic, embodying the roles of scholar, healer, diviner, and mystic in Buryat communities. Just like shamans, lamas mediate between the ordinary and spiritual realms, assisting with rites of protection, regeneration, healing, and well-being. Like shamans, lamas may combine the functions of teaching, ritual, healing, and counseling, or they may specialize in one branch of practice or another. Their philosophical orientation generally reflects the Buddhist worldview, but their ritual practices derive from an enormously diverse body of ancient knowledge and millennia of religious experience.¹⁰⁰ These diverse patterns of religious ritual intervention have continued from tsarist times through the Soviet era and up to the contemporary transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy. Significantly, although shamanic religious specialists may be either male or female, the recognized purveyors of Buddhist knowledge and ritual practice have all been male.

Buddhist encounters with Orthodox Christianity were somewhat more complex, although the two traditions share some key features. Monasticism was a central feature of both Russian Orthodox Christianity and Mongolian Buddhism, and in both traditions, male monastics played the key roles in the transmission of the teachings. Contemplative practices are another shared feature, and both traditions have produced myriad saints and seers. Both are universalistic in their worldviews and soteriological goals and have

therefore been termed “missionizing” religions. Citing A. V. Kamkin, Znamenski mentions that “some [Orthodox] monasteries gradually evolved into missions,”¹¹ and the same might be said of Buddhist monasteries. The difference is that whereas Orthodox monks often traveled to Siberia motivated by ascetic impulses and only later or secondarily became engaged in missionary activities, Buddhist monks were specifically invited to Siberia to introduce and spread Buddhist teachings and practices. In both traditions, monastic training was a valued prerequisite for religious work. Referring to the Orthodox tradition, Znamenski says, “As late as the nineteenth century many missionaries still felt obliged to gain a monastic background to qualify for the role of a missionary.”¹² The same is true of the Buddhist teachers who traveled to Siberia to spread Buddhism: Monastic training was seen as both necessary and desirable. Among Gelugpa followers, virtually all lamas had received their training in monasteries. Nuns are notably absent in accounts of both Orthodox and Buddhist religious activities.

Despite their similarities, the missionaries of the Orthodox tradition were affected by racist attitudes in ways that the Buddhists were not. Buddhism was propagated by Mongols and occasionally by Tibetans, so there were few racial or cultural barriers, and their languages were related like cousins. As in Alaska, so in Siberia up to the nineteenth century the Orthodox Holy Synod distrusted native and racially mixed clergy and some regarded them as subhuman.¹³ By contrast, Mongolian Buddhist teachers were viewed as kin. The Russian Orthodox Church understood the usefulness of employing local clergy who “understood the aspirations of local people and could employ traditional channels in making the Orthodox message attractive and appealing,”¹⁴ but the Mongolian lamas who brought Buddhism had few cultural adjustments to make. The adaptation of Buddhism to the Buryat shamanist landscape was easily accomplished, since similar adjustments had already had been made in Mongolia. Perhaps the greatest cultural dissonance that existed was between the Buddhist idea of no harm and the flourishing fur trade, upon which the Siberian economy depended. The Orthodox Church had no scruples about hunting, whereas the killing of animals is in direct conflict with Buddhist beliefs and is regarded as nonvirtuous. Since the first Buddhist precept is to refrain from taking life, including the lives of animals, hunting is best avoided, since it is believed to result in a lower rebirth. Even today, although most Buryat Buddhists eat meat, they feel uncomfortable about hunting for profit, and tales of misfortune befalling hunters are common.

BUDDHISM UNDER SOVIET RULE

During the period of Soviet rule that began in 1923, the Buryat Mongols were severely oppressed, thousands of Buddhist monks were murdered, and Buddhist institutions were almost obliterated. Yet despite decades of persecution, Buddhism survived because for most Buryats it was not simply a religious tradition, but also an intrinsic aspect of Buryat society and culture. Over several centuries, Buddhism had exerted a strong

influence on moral philosophy as well as political thinking, and was therefore not easy to erase. Some prominent figures such as Agwan Dorzhiyev even made a case for the compatibility of Buddhism and socialism. As Anna Reid notes, “towards the end of 1921, the Bolsheviks turned to Nicholas II’s old envoy to Tibet, Dorzhiyev . . . [who] attempted a reconciliation between Communism and Buddhism, arguing that they preached the same virtues, and that since Buddhism did not assert the existence of a universal God it was a ‘religion of atheism.’”¹⁵ After 1926, however, despite Dorzhiyev’s conciliatory overtures, the Communist Party began persecuting Buddhists through heavy taxation and increasingly intense antireligious propaganda.¹⁶

Nesterkin ably analyzes the hierarchical systems of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions as plural, especially the administrative and spiritual, although the analysis could also be applied to political, social, religious, and cosmological systems.¹⁷ He notes, “The plurality of hierarchical systems creates problems in establishing the supremacy in Sangha and provides wide opportunities for its subdivision.” Not only are decentralized systems liable to divisions and subdivisions, but these divisions and subdivisions have their own hierarchies, which may be contested and subject to continual realignment. The fluid and plural nature of Buddhist religious hierarchies makes for dynamic interactions, including ample potential for conflicts, while simultaneously being closely linked by a relatively unified worldview in which doctrinal agreement is not required. To manage the complex relationships of multiple, decentralized Buddhist hierarchies, Nesterkin says, “In Russia . . . The status of the head of Buddhists (in Buryatia—Khambo Lamas) was initially determined by the tsarist administration based on the considerations of convenience of management.”¹⁸ It is no secret that a unified Buddhist *saṅgha* is easier to control than a diversified one, yet it is equally true that a divided *saṅgha* can be easier to subvert. The hierarchical ordering of Buddhist monasteries is germane to our study here because women have been systematically excluded from them. The patently obvious fact that women historically have had no place in these hierarchies, either in Buddhist institutions in Russia or in any other country, is pertinent in assessing the prospective relationships between women and the male Buddhist institutions and hierarchies that exist in Buryatia today.

RESTORATION AND REVITALIZATION

Since 1990, Buddhists in Russia have worked to restore the institutions and practices that are integral to their Buddhist cultural heritage. Among the new opportunities that people enjoy in “the new Russia,” one of the most visible is the freedom to practice religion, a freedom that is widely celebrated among the faithful. The social, political, and economic transitions occasioned by the disbanding of the Soviet Union in 1990 opened the door for the revival of Buddhism, especially in the republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. The reestablishment of religious traditions that were devastated by the loss of

three or more generations of teachers and countless texts and monasteries is a daunting challenge that has required tremendous energy and determination. After so many decades of religious oppression and cultural disruption, this restoration has not been an easy process. As difficult as the political, economic, and social transition has been, it has allowed for a resurgence and re-envisioning of religious traditions and values through the lens of redefined social structures and mores in these republics.¹⁹

In 1997, the Law on Religious Activity in the Territory of the Republic of Buryatia was passed, according to which the Buryat people were “allowed to study folk medicine, to carry on industrial and economic activities, to smoothly hold worship, religious rites.”²⁰ At face value, this law may not sound revolutionary or especially significant, but in a landscape where lamas had been murdered by the thousands, it represented a major breakthrough and guaranteed the religious rights of indigenous Buddhists who wished to engage in traditional cultural practices. During the Soviet period, indigenous cultural identities were carefully managed, trotted out for purposes of tourism and national unification, while a pervasive Soviet identity was propagated and enforced in both subtle and overt ways.

After the Soviet period, as unequal power relationships began to shift, openings for rethinking the status quo began to appear and the lifting of an imposed, homogenous Soviet identity led to a revival of indigenous ethnic identities. Referring to the post-Soviet era, Baatr Kitinov observes that, for peoples who have been separated by alien political and administrative constructs, religion may enact important “parameters” or “civilizational images” to help resuscitate cultural “potencies,” political distinctions, or even military achievements.²¹ If this is the case, then it is conceivable that Buddhists in the Russian republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva could develop a new pan-Buddhist identity, forged through their unique and interrelated cultural identities, their devotion to the Dharma, and most especially their allegiance to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. How such an alliance would be perceived by the Russian government can be surmised by the central administration’s unwillingness to grant the Fourteenth Dalai Lama another visa to visit Russia, despite years of impassioned pleas by Russian Buddhists. The government’s reluctance is no doubt due to Chinese pressure, an economic and political expedient, but subservience to Chinese pressure could backfire for Russia. In cultural politics more broadly, the revival of Buddhism in Russia holds great importance for relations with Buddhists in other parts of Asia and around the world and therefore has major geopolitical implications. India has long been seen as the source of Buddhist teachings and culture for peoples around the world. Even today, young men from the Buddhist republics of Russia go to study in Tibetan monasteries in South India, and large groups of lay Buddhists travel to India to receive Buddhist teachings and empowerments. Tibetan teachers are also invited to teach, becoming active participants in the revival of Buddhist teachings in Russia. If Russia were to leverage these historical ties skillfully, the Buddhist republics and their devout and energetic populations could help serve as a balance against Chinese economic and political dominance.

BURYAT WOMEN'S LIVES AND VALUES

One of the most striking aspects of the revitalization of Buddhism in Buryatia is a re-evaluation of the roles of women in Buddhist practice and institutions. Throughout history and up to the present day, women have been systematically excluded from the institutions that preserve and propagate Buddhist knowledge and ritual practices. Rather than expressing dissatisfaction or resentment about their exclusion, however, most Buryat Buddhist women express gratitude for the lamas' ritual expertise, upon which they and their families depend for prosperity and well-being. As in other patriarchal cultures, it is widely assumed that religious expertise is a male prerogative, and as a consequence there is a dearth of information about eminent female practitioners. Male lamas, regardless of their competence or moral excellence, remain emblematic of Buddhism; in fact, although the word "lama" means "teacher" and theoretically could be applied to teachers of both genders, in actual practice the word is used almost exclusively for male teachers. Without traditionally trained female Buddhist scholars and ritual specialists and without female exemplars of religious attainment, women's religious devotion is concentrated around male teachers, upon whom they are reliant for their spiritual needs.

In contrast to women in many other Buddhist societies, Buryat women benefitted from the Soviet policy to end illiteracy and to implement universal education ("Study, study, and study," as Lenin invoked). After 1917, unlike in earlier times, Buryat women began to receive a secular education that prepared them for professional careers, which represented a major change in society's expectations of women's potential. Today, with the advantage of widespread secondary education and access to the text-based religious knowledge that it opens, many women no longer see themselves as merely passive devotees, but wish to participate fully in the benefits of Buddhist learning and ritual practice. The reconstruction of *dugans* (temples) in villages, towns, and cities allows women to frequently visit to make offerings, seek blessings and counsel, and attend Buddhist ceremonies (*khural*).²² Periodically, especially on special religious holidays, devotees as well as their families or friends visit *datsans* further afield to make offerings, perform clockwise circumambulations (*goroo*, T. *ko ra*) around the various shrines, recite *mantras*, request prayers, and pay respect before the sacred images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and lineage masters. The vast majority of visitors to *dugans* and *datsans*²³ are women who, despite often having jobs and many household responsibilities, make it a priority to create meritorious actions for the benefit of their families and friends in this way. Buryat women have also been central in restoring and maintaining altars for Buddhist images (*burhkan*) in their homes, where they offer incense (*adiss*) to dispel negative influences, create a spiritual atmosphere, and pray before the images of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and revered figures such as H. H. Dalai Lama and other renowned lamas, both living and deceased.

As Zhargal Aiakova points out, Buryat women are generally credited with having kept the flame of Dharma lit during Soviet times:

During the years of suppression of religion, a generation grew up and into old age without the benefit of the Dharma. The transmission of Buddhist religious values from one generation to the next was lost and restoring these links has not been easy. Due to the efforts of Buryat women and their natural religious consciousness, religious values were maintained in the family even without external support or expressions of religious behavior. Buryat women had boundless faith in good will, good health, and good karma based on their knowledge of Buddhism and lived their lives according to Buddhist ethical values. In the family, women initiated Buddhist practices and taught their children Buddhist traditional practices in everyday life.²⁴

Throughout the Soviet era, when religious activities were proscribed, groups of Buddhist women practitioners met clandestinely to recite *mantras* and support each other in the practice of Dharma. These groups continue to meet even today, especially in the villages. There is a longstanding tradition of devout older women in Buryatia known as *shabgansa* who shave their heads, wear national dress, observe the five lay precepts, earnestly recite *mantras* and prayers, and frequently visit *datsans*.²⁵ According to G. M. Osokin, based on observations from the nineteenth century, *shabgansa* tended to be older women who continued to live with their families but were vegetarian, associated closely with lamas, observed either five or eight precepts, and wore a long dark red shawl (*orkhimzho*) similar to the upper robe of a monastic over their left shoulder.²⁶ In some cases during Soviet times, the word *shabgansa* was used pejoratively, as if these pious women represented the remnants of superstitious feudal culture.²⁷

In the revival of religious faith and practice that has taken place throughout Russia since 1989, women have been very visible. The educational level of Buryat women is among the highest in Russia and women hold high positions in education, medicine, government, and other fields. Yet, while women's devotion is deeply felt and their participation in Buddhist religious life is very active and visible, their opportunities for Buddhist learning and leadership are quite limited. Historically, for women, the encounter with Buddhism brought an increased awareness of their own Buryat identity but did little to foster their identity as women, as nuns or teachers, or as educated or advanced practitioners. Although women have been the strongest bastions of support for the survival and transmission of the tradition, they have been excluded from the most powerful and essential aspects of Buddhism for centuries. Is it possible that they have been oblivious to their exclusion? To explore this question, I would like to examine the lives of four Buryat Buddhist women whose lives have taken very different trajectories.

The first example is Zorigma Budaeva, who exemplifies the expanding roles that Buddhist women are playing in the revitalization of Buddhism in Buryatia. In 1993, Zorigma, her family, and a small group of devotees founded Zuungon Darzhaling, a *datsan* on the outskirts of Ulan Ude that is unique in being the only *datsan* in the whole of Russia established especially for women. Most women associated with the *datsan* have taken the

five precepts of a *geninma* (T. *genyenma*), a female layfollower.²⁸ A few of these *geninmas* have adopted burgundy dress and cropped their hair in monastic style, but they have yet to receive the traditional ten precepts of a novice nun. The women of Zuungon Darzhaling have received very meager support for their efforts to establish a practice center for women and encountered many obstacles, but they persevere in their determination to benefit Buryat women. The story of the temple tells the larger story of the revival of Buddhism in Buryatia through women's eyes. Cooperation with the religious establishment helps women gain access to basic Buddhist teachings, rituals, and spiritual counseling, yet limits them to subservient roles. Zorigma and her associates have worked very hard to create a space for women's practice, but independent efforts by women are supported neither by the Buddhist establishment nor by the broader Buddhist community, which seems to distrust the intentions of women who operate outside the ranks of religious orthodoxy. Zorigma is unusual in reaching beyond Buryatia and seeking international contacts in the Buddhist women's community. In 2004, she attended the Eighth Sakyadhita Conference in Seoul, Korea, where she presented a paper titled, "The History of a Buddhist Women's Datsan in Buryatia," and in 2006, she attended the Sakyadhita Conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Her participation in these international Buddhist women's forums brought Buryat Buddhism to the attention of many people for the first time and inspired her to continue her work for the benefit of women in Buryatia. The death of Zorigma's mother, Tsynguyeva Darima, in November 2012 signaled the end of the important initial phase of Zuungon Darzhaling's development; a new phase of development and reformulation of the *datsan's* aims is currently under way.

The life of a Buddhist nun illustrates a different approach to Buddhist practice for a Buryat woman. Tenzin Chodron (Irina Urbanayeva) was ordained as a novice nun (T. *getsulma*) by His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala in 1993 and studied Tibetan at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics at Sera from 2002 to 2004.²⁹ Since then, she has worked as a researcher at the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist, and Tibetan Studies at the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science in Ulan Ude. She is one of very few women in Russia and the only one in Buryatia who has taken the precepts of a novice nun. She holds a doctoral degree in philosophy, has worked as the principal editor at Je Tsongkhapa Publishing House in Ulan Ude,³⁰ and has served as the director of Green Tara Temple (Nogon Dara Ekhe), also in Ulan Ude. With more than one hundred publications to her credit, including eight monographs and numerous articles and translations from various languages, she is one of the most prolific scholars and disseminators of Buddhist thought and culture in Buryatia today.³¹ She has also been politically active: She initiated a petition to protest the silence of Putin's government in response to the Chinese government's renewed oppression and violence in Tibet since 2008, and organized efforts to bring H. H. Dalai Lama again to Buryatia.³²

Forging a path as an ordained Buddhist nun in Buryatia is not easy: It is far more common for women to live a household or professional life and to engage in Buddhist practice as a laywoman. For example, Zhargal Aiakova is a senior lecturer in sociology

and political science at Buryat State Academy of Agriculture. After studying English and French at Buryat State Pedagogical Institute, she received a Ph.D. in social philosophy at Buryat State University. She has written extensively about Buddhism in Buryatia, including articles on Buddhist ethics, monastic culture, spiritual ecology, and Buddhist women. She presented papers about Buryat Buddhist women at the Eleventh Sakyadhita Conference in Bangkok in 2011 and at the Twelfth Sakyadhita Conference in Vaishali in 2013. Also in 2013, she received a Fulbright research grant to conduct research on Buddhist women in the United States, becoming one of the first Asian scholars to study American Buddhism. She contends that her understanding of Buddhism originates not so much from philosophical treatises as from the cultural practices and ethical values she learned as a child from her grandmother.

According to Aiakova, Buryat Buddhist women are strongly inclined to ritual practices. As an example, she mentions the circumambulation of sacred sites such as Alhkanay. This circuit is becoming increasingly popular each year, as more and more women undertake the pilgrimage around the mountain, either the shorter route that can be completed in five or six hours, or the longer, more intensive route that takes two to three days. Pilgrimage groups are typically accompanied by two or three lamas, most often from Aginsk Monastery, who explain certain principles of the practices along the way. The women believe that circumambulating sacred sites purifies their negative karma and improves their good fortune. Often they will undertake such practices before a major life event, such as the marriage of one of their children, before undertaking a journey alone, or for the benefit of a family member who is ill. Although the women are not ready to renounce all the comforts of worldly life and dedicate themselves exclusively to Dharma practice, and may not always understand the meaning of the rituals they perform, they do understand that these practices will bring happiness for their families and improve their karma for future lives. They also believe that the more physically demanding the practices are, the more purifying and beneficial the practices will be. They deeply respect ancient Buddhist traditions and the elder generation who preserve these traditions. Aiakova is deeply committed to Buryat cultural continuity and also to the idea that women can play more active and more meaningful roles in Buddhism.

Ordinary Buryat women who are neither professionals nor scholars reflect yet another understanding of Buddhist thought and practice. One day in August 2012, on a train from Aginsk to Ulan Ude, I spoke with a fellow traveler named Zarina, whose story is typical of many Buryat women. Born in 1978, she had been married twice, to Russian husbands, and had two sons, aged eleven and three. When I asked Zarina whether she was Buddhist, she replied that she is Buryat, equating Buryat identity with Buddhism. She mentioned that her mother visited the *datsan* frequently, to make offerings and consult lamas. Zarina did not go, she said, because she did not know the Buryat language and did not know how to behave at the *datsan* or how to make offerings. She understood basic Buddhist principles, such as the law of cause and effect and the idea that human beings are responsible for the results of their actions, but she said that the Russian

language is not adequate to express what she wants to say. Once she went to a *datsan* for advice, but the advice she received sounded very negative to her. The lama said that he wanted to explain the advice to her in Buryat language, which would be more accurate. Because she did not understand Buryat language, she called her mother, who listened to the lama's advice in Buryat and then explained it to her in Russian.

My brief encounter with Zarina afforded me insight into several aspects of Buryat Buddhist culture. First, Buddhism is inextricably linked with Buryat cultural identity: To be Buryat is to be Buddhist. Even if they have not received in-depth teachings or training, the primary religious identity of most Buryats is Buddhist. Second, the older generations of Buryat women are devout Buddhists who frequent *datsans*, are fluent in Buryat, and are familiar with ritual offerings and local lamas. Third, the younger generation is less familiar with Buddhist customs and religious practices, partly because they are less conversant in Buryat, the language that was traditionally used to convey Buddhist teachings and rituals. Nevertheless, young Buryat women are familiar with basic Buddhist moral principles. For example, according to Zarina, "Lamas say 'Don't gossip, because it's bad for your karma, your destiny,'" as she expressed it in Russian. The use of the word "destiny" reveals an inadequate understanding of Buddhist philosophy, since it implies an inevitability or deterministic element to life that is absent from orthodox Buddhist teachings on the workings of cause and effect. Nevertheless, it is clear that Buddhist beliefs and teachings on such principles as the law of cause and effect have a strong influence on the moral sensibilities of ordinary Buryats. Zarina's personal story also reveals the eclecticism of Buryat culture. In addition to recounting her mother's devotions at Buddhist *datsans* and her own experiences of seeking the advice of lamas, she told me that after traveling to Arshan, she planned to visit a sacred site where she would pray to the native spirits. She also mentioned a *babushka*, an old woman in her native village, who was able to cure curses. She told me the story of a woman named Nimayeva Irina Mikhailovna, from her native place, who became a shaman at the age of thirty-four and had read many Tibetan texts.³³ By un-self-consciously interweaving strands of multiple religious fabrics, Zarina innocently revealed the complicated, syncretistic texture of Buryat religious cosmology.

Although women are disenfranchised in most Buddhist institutional settings, they are certainly brokers in the power relationships that characterize Buryat society and culture. Even if women may choose to exercise their influence in subtle ways, their sheer numbers, even apart from their piety and generosity, indicate the enormous power they potentially wield. From Buryat women's perspectives, Buddhism is a treasure trove that satisfies many deep-felt needs. Not only do they seek refuge in the Three Jewels and rely upon lamas for settling conflicts and for solving personal problems, but also after the collapse of Soviet ideological hegemony, they turn to Buddhism as a source of moral values and spiritual solace. Buryat women practitioners seem to take seriously the tantric admonition to view the phenomenal world with pure perception, while not turning away from the sufferings of the world. Like many citizens of the former Soviet Union, in

what can be a painful and confusing process of introspection and reevaluation, many Buryat women are reestablishing connections to their cultural heritage and rethinking issues of ethnic and religious identity. The Buddhist teachings on equanimity and the hope for a better future are a great consolation in this time of transition, but contradictions lie just beneath the surface, for the ideal of social equality they have grown up with is belied by a male-dominated Buddhist hierarchy. Buryat women may smile when the highest lama of their land declares that the best way for women to achieve liberation is to produce children (“A woman who gives birth to seven children is assured of liberation”³⁴) and feel privileged that they have access to even some areas of the *datsan*. But gender awareness is on the rise in Buryatia, and the younger generation of educated women may not so readily accept the patriarchal worldview for their future.

Although living the life of householders, Buryat women have a growing awareness of Buddhism’s relevance, both as a spiritual path and as a source of practical solutions to the daily dilemmas of family, finances, and social relations. As a consequence, a sense of the importance of Buddhist learning as a foundation for practice is emerging among women, accompanied by less dependence on the services of male religious specialists. Many Buryat women seek to expand their involvement with Buddhism beyond daily devotions and periodic ritual prayer sessions (*khural*) to a deeper philosophical understanding of the teachings. Buryat women appreciate the opportunity to commission and participate in rituals on behalf of their families and loved ones; at the same time, a significant number of them long for greater access to Buddhist teachings and training. The suppressed spiritual longing that has been pent up in the hearts of three generations of Buryat Buddhists is now emerging and seeking expression against a panorama of conflicting contemporary values.

As in other societies, the orientations of Buryat women toward Buddhism are diverse. Some are more inclined to philosophy while others may tend toward ritual, and the two perspectives do not necessarily conflict; many women who express a deep interest in philosophy and are eager to learn more about the intricacies of Buddhist thought also make prayers at the *datsan* and at home. But because virtually all Buryat women have received a sound secondary education and many also have received tertiary education and training, most are not content to remain ignorant of the deeper philosophical and ritual aspects of Buddhism. Many Buryat women are devout, but having been educated under the Soviet system and influenced by scientific materialism, many are inquisitive as well as skeptical about the seeming disparities in the Buryat approach to Buddhism, especially regarding materialism and attitudes toward women.

A QUESTION OF GENDER

What roles are accessible to Buryat Buddhist women and what roles are off limits? In principle, based on early Buddhist texts and teachings, women have the potential to achieve the fruits of the path (that is, to achieve liberation from *samsāra*), as

demonstrated by many women at the time of the Buddha, such as his own foster mother and aunt, Mahāprajāpatī. In addition, based on tantric texts and teachings, women have the potential to become enlightened and achieve perfect awakening as a Buddha in a female body, as demonstrated by exceptional women such as Tārā, Yeshe Tsogyal (Ye she mTsho rGyal), and Mandāravā (T. Man da ra ba). The texts and teachings that document women's potential to achieve the highest goals in both the earlier and later Buddhist traditions are available in Tibetan and have been translated into Mongolian, but are not widely known in Buryatia. In the current revival of Buddhism, the existence of outstanding women practitioners in the annals of Buddhist history has come as a welcome surprise to many Buryat women, constituting a source of encouragement and inspiration. Much remains to be done, however, to bring the stories of these exceptional women to life in Buryat women's religious imaginations.

The *tulku* institution, a distinctive feature of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, was not instituted in Buryat Buddhism in earlier centuries. In recent years, however, several Tibetans in the exile community in India have been recognized as the *tulkus* of Buryat lamas, effectively cutting across both national boundaries and the boundary between death and rebirth. Anya Bernstein cites Martin Mills in pointing out that the *tulku* system may be seen as a "reproductive technology, where fictive kinship is created through all-male lineages."³⁵ This technology has paradoxically enabled "key Buryat lamas to 'father' descendants beyond the borders of their immediate nation-state" in a process that "reverses the traditional cultural hierarchy, in which Tibetans are regarded as superior for their more developed and ancient Buddhist culture," placing certain Tibetan lamas in positions of religious and cultural authority in Buryatia. Women *tulkus* are rare in the traditional Tibetan system, however, effectively shut out of a gender-based hierarchy. In the traditional system, women play a biological role in giving birth to male children who may be recognized as *tulkus* and inherit all the privileges of their predecessors. In the case of the Tibetan reincarnate lamas who are currently being recognized as reincarnate Buryat lamas, the role of the birth mother is played by a Tibetan rather than a Buryat woman. In this self-perpetuating system of power and privilege, women are momentarily honored, and then set aside. The child is raised by monks and the mother's life-giving role is minimized. It is difficult or impossible to weigh the relative merits of cultural, spiritual, and institutional continuity, economic benefit, and the psychological health of parents and children in this equation. What can be ascertained is that women's essential contributions to the process remain tangential.

Another sphere in which males, especially *tulkus*, enjoy a distinct advantage is religious education. For example, boys and young men of all backgrounds and nationalities have access to the large Tibetan monastic universities in India that were established exclusively for males. Men enjoy additional advantages in social and interpersonal relationships by virtue of male privilege and prestige. Women who wish to study Buddhism face greater challenges than men, both in the scarcity of educational opportunities and financial support available to them, and in social expectations, which generally disapprove,

discourage, or ridicule women's aspirations to become renunciants. At *datsans* in Buryatia today, women are allowed to attend public teachings, even though, like many men, they may be insufficiently prepared to fully understand what is being taught. In smaller Buddhist centers, however, women are increasingly coming into their own. Unlike in the past, today women have the opportunity to demonstrate their skills, efficiency, and commitment to Buddhist ideals in the process of serving the *datsans* and Dharma centers. And although women's contributions are primarily in support of male clergy and are often of a menial nature—cooking, cleaning, answering phones, organizing events, and so on—women highly value this involvement, and male religious specialists are grateful for their support. By limiting women's access to philosophical and ritual knowledge, however, the lamas uphold the traditional male-dominated gender hierarchies and therefore effectively maintain control over the most spiritually rewarding and financially lucrative aspects of the tradition, as well as its interpretation.

A RECIPROCAL TRANSFORMATION

As the Buryat Mongols became more thoroughly integrated into the Russian empire, their sense of themselves as a distinct people evolved in response to their cultural and political encounters with Russian immigrants and institutions, which altered their own sense of identity as a people. Certain aspects of the Russian encounter filled gaps in education, defense, and commerce, which the Buryats viewed as positive, but the relationship has not been entirely advantageous. For example, native Siberians paid a heavy price for political security and economic development—indigenous populations became minorities in their own land, their cultures became relegated to minority status, foreign defense entailed submission to the Russian (and Soviet) state, trade agreements were often exploitative, natural resources were plundered, and massive abuses occurred. Overall, however, resistance was muted and the Buryats acquiesced in order to avoid conflicts, both in view of the superior might of their rulers and in light of the improvements to be gained by the association.

Buryat ethnic identity contains the seeds of intransigence, because Buryat economic interests and political aspirations are, to some extent, at odds with Russian economic and political hegemony. At the same time, Buryat Buddhist identity also contains the seeds of successful political integration, as long as local political and economic aspirations can be skillfully managed and allowed to develop equitably, with minimum interference. For this strategy to be successful, it is also essential that the Buryats' unique cultural identity be respected—an aim that can be most effectively accomplished by nurturing a broader Russian Buddhist identity that integrates Buryat, Kalmyk, Tuvan, and other Russian Buddhist peoples in a unified, or at least not fractious, religio-cultural alliance. This strategy would serve not only to quell discontents in a time of economic uncertainty, but also to situate local nationalisms safely within a larger Russian Buddhist framework, creating a positive climate of religious and cultural diversity that could

offset grievances over ethnic discrimination, economic exploitation, and cultural marginalization. Similarly, nurturing healthy understandings of gender identity, ensuring greater access to Buddhist knowledge and leadership for Buryat women, and addressing gender inequalities in Buddhist institutions can help forestall discontent and strengthen Buryat Buddhist cultural awareness.

Overall, Buryat women's encounter with Buddhism has been viewed positively. Buddhism has provided a moral framework for behavior, a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity, and a wide range of ritual practices to help ensure the health and well-being of Buryat families. Women have willingly relinquished their individual agency in exchange for the advantages available to them through association with male religious specialists, and resistance has been muted. Over time, they have created ritual spaces of their own within the home and sublimated a sense of their own identity as women within the larger sphere of their Buddhist identity. Buryat women have been willing to accept their secondary status within Buddhist institutions in exchange for access to the precious Buddhist teachings and efficacious ritual benefits. They have paid a heavy price for this submission—economically, educationally, and personally—but have submitted willingly in exchange for perceived social and ritual benefits. At the same time, the religious cards were stacked against women. Until the late twentieth century, without access to the *datsans*, women had no way to learn the intricacies of the rituals for protection and blessing upon which they and their families rely. Rather than risk exclusion from the beneficial consequences of Buddhist ritual practices, women have acquiesced to the status quo, either without noticing or ignoring its patriarchal structure. Meanwhile, for the most part, the *datsans* seem absolutely disinterested in sharing their ritual knowledge or resources with women, despite the fact that the *datsans* benefit handsomely from women's devotion to Buddhism and their patronage of Buddhist rites and rituals. The lamas' apparent reluctance to expand ritual knowledge to women is not surprising, because if women learned the rituals themselves, they would no longer need to pay lamas to perform them on their behalf and the lamas' social capital would diminish accordingly.

REFLECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Buryats are the largest ethnic minority group in Siberia, with an estimated population of 350,000, and they are in a strong position to provide leadership in the restoration of Buddhist culture in Russia. Women are actively involved in the current revival of Buddhism in Buryatia, which is not surprising, given women's history of devotion to the religious heritage of their elders. What is new is Buryat Buddhist women's expanding access to knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and practice and their increasing awareness of other communities of Buddhist women throughout the world. Buryat women are using this knowledge and awareness to transform their lives and the lives of their families. Instead of relying solely on male ritual specialists to ensure the well-being of their loved ones,

women are gaining confidence in their own abilities to apply the Buddhist teachings in practical ways, which include meditation, moral guidance, and many other valuable tools for daily living. Direct experience of the benefits of Buddhist practice can lead some women to take up the renunciant way of life and forge monastic communities, or guide other women toward new, socially transformative paths.

From the stories of the Buryat Buddhist women profiled in this chapter, it is clear that their experiences are widely diverse—from casual temple visitor to committed scholar-practitioner—depending on their family backgrounds as well as their individual interests and aspirations. Buryats in general are strongly bonded with Buddhism and consider it to be a major constituent of their ethnic, cultural, and social identity. They regard it as strongly determinative in strengthening family ties and community values from one generation to another. Although the current evolution and re-envisioning of Buryat Buddhism is occurring very rapidly in response to secular influences and global culture, it can either strengthen or weaken Buryat Buddhist identity, depending on the quality and vision of its leadership. Should they be granted full inclusion, women could play a decisive role in shaping the future development of Buryat Buddhism and the strength of its contributions to Buryat society. With an eye to the future, women could assert visionary leadership by organizing programs for children, such as weekly classes and summer camps where Buddhist principles and practices are taught. Helping educate ethical, well-disciplined, and compassionate children is just one way that women can help ensure a bright future for the Buryat people and culture. An alliance of Buddhist women across Russia that nurtures stronger ties with Buddhist women around the world could encourage greater inclusion and attainment of full religious rights for women, whether through the reform of older Buddhist institutions or the creation of new, more democratic institutions.

NOTES

1. Naumov, 2006, 4.

2. *Ibid.*, 47.

3. *Ibid.*, 45.

4. Ayakova and Tsibikzhapov, 2007, 7.

5. *Ibid.*, 2007, 33.

6. Forsythe, 1992, 109–110.

7. After many years of gradual Jewish migration to Siberia, in 1934 the Soviet government established a Jewish Autonomous Oblast near the border of Manchuria. The population of Jews in Siberia has fluctuated from 34,477 in 1897 to 57,654 in 1957 to 14,579 in 2002.

8. Znamenski, 1999, 30. He refers to Humphrey's "Theories of North Asian Shamanism," *Soviet and Western Anthropology*, ed. Ernest Gellner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), pp. 243–54.

9. Hamayon, 1994, 121, cited in Znamenski, 1999, 30.

10. This ritual diversity contributes a palpable dynamism to less highly institutionalized Buddhist traditions, but it can also undermine religious unity by promoting specific teachers or

teachings. One example is the Shugden affair, which has caused significant rifts in the Tibetan diaspora, as described by Lopez (1999, 188–195).

11. Znamenski, 1999, 48.

12. *Ibid.*, 48.

13. *Ibid.*, 62.

14. *Ibid.*, 62.

15. Reid (2002, 85) notices that some of his supporters went even further, suggesting that Lenin was Buddha's latest reincarnation.

16. Reid, 2002, 87.

17. Nesterkin, 2011, 39–50.

18. *Ibid.*, 47.

19. Sabirov, 2012, 235–248.

20. Mitypov, 2011, 28.

21. Kitinov, 2011, 66–67. An example of such a “civilizational image” is the Chinggis Khan cult that has gained strength since Mongolia achieved independence in 1990.

22. I am indebted to Zhargal Aiakova for her invaluable assistance during my 2012 visits to Buryatia, Alkhanai, and Aginsk, and for her descriptions of Buryat religious life in Aiakova, 2011, 16–19.

23. Aiakova explains that a *dugan* is a “praying house,” a small temple like a *suma* (a *stūpa*-like structure). A *datsan* is generally larger and encompasses numerous buildings; a *datsan* may be constructed on the foundations of a *dugan*. Oral communication, June 29, 2013.

24. Aiakova, 2011, 17.

25. A parallel tradition of older women is found in Mongolia, in Kalmykia, where they are known as *magtsa*, and in Tibet, where they are known as *genchö*. A literal meaning of the word is a “senior Dharma practitioner.”

26. The word *orbimzho* derives from the word *orbim*, which means “to let go,” and it connotes letting go of mundane life.

27. I am indebted to Zhargal Aiakova for this information, gleaned from her experience of Buryat village life.

28. Taking these precepts entails a life-long commitment to refrain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants.

29. Zhargal Aiakova, “Buryat Nun and Scholar Venerable Tenzin Chodron,” p. 1. Paper prepared for a panel on Buddhist Women Masters at the DANAM (Dharma Association of North America) Conference, Baltimore, MD, November 22, 2013.

30. H. H. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama visited Buryatia in 1991, but since then the Russian government has thwarted all efforts to bring him again. Some suspect that the Buryat Buddhist authorities have obstructed further visits, perhaps seeing the Tibetan lamas as threatening to their indigenized, no longer celibate lifestyle.

31. Her translations from Tibetan to Russian include Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Namkha-pel's *Mind Training like the Rays of the Sun*, Pabongka Rinpoche's *Liberation in the Palm of Our Hands*, and Dharmarakṣita's *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*. She is currently working on a monograph titled *Tibetan Buddhism in Comparative Contexts*.

32. Aiakova, 2011, 2.

33. Zarina's uncle is also a shaman. His path to becoming a shaman was somewhat serendipitous, but not common. When he was younger, he became ill, as did other members of his family.

A shaman told him that if he became a shaman, his illness would be cured, so he underwent a specific ritual to become a shaman and thereby became cured of his illness.

34. Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev, the head lama of Buryat Buddhism. Personal communication, Ivolginsky Datsan, August 2, 2012.

35. Bernstein, 2012, 278.

15

The Social and Cultural Practices of Buddhism: The Local Context of Inner Mongolia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Hürelbaatar Ujeed



INTRODUCTION

In his article on the anthropology of Buddhism, David Gellner points out that until the 1980s there was little substantial anthropological work done on Mahāyāna Buddhism, although more has recently begun to be published.¹ For various reasons, it was Theravāda Buddhism that first attracted high-quality anthropological scholarship.² Apart from Miller's *Monasteries and Culture Change in Inner Mongolia* (1959) and Humphrey and Ujeed's *Monastery in Time: The Making of Mongolian Buddhism* (2013), to date there have been hardly any specific field-based studies of grassroots practices in the Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna Buddhism of Inner Mongolia, despite the fact that the Gelugpa sect of Buddhism was widespread in Inner Asia and reached a high stage of development in Inner Mongolia over the past four hundred years. The Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna form of Buddhism in Inner Mongolia is virtually unstudied by anthropologists and ethnographers, particularly from the perspective of sociocultural history.

The discussion presented in this chapter is based on my fieldwork and on historical accounts. It seeks to make a contribution to the anthropological, sociocultural, and historical study of Mongolian Buddhism, as practiced on the ground. As such, it will not have a central argument but will be exploratory in nature. The chapter will occasionally make references to the ethnography of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia to contrast it with Vajrayāna Buddhism in Inner Mongolia, and as a guide to my own exploration of the social and cultural practices of Buddhism in the local context of Inner Mongolia. The central focus of this essay is an analysis of grassroots Buddhist practices.

In conformity with Edmund Leach's contention that in studies of comparative religion a failure to take into account the distinction between philosophical religion and practical religion has led to grave misunderstanding,³ the chapter will show the complexity of Buddhist social and cultural practice in Inner Mongolia. In so doing, it will tentatively demonstrate that a more encompassing methodology is required to study Buddhism among Inner Mongols. This will be done through a case study of a small Inner Mongolian monastery, the Khulustai Monastery, and its lay communities in Naiman Banner of Jirim League (present Tongliao municipality). The discussed material relates mostly to events of the 1940s through 1960s, based on the following: my interviews with senior lamas and with older generations of lay Buddhists, published materials, and the experiences of my family living in that region.

A BRIEF SURVEY OF BUDDHISM IN INNER MONGOLIA

Some twentieth-century scholars argued that Buddhism among the Mongols greatly reflects Buddhism in Tibet. One of these scholars was Walther Heissig, who wrote:

... for Lamaism in Mongolia remained spiritually dependent on Tibet, faithful to orthodox Lamaism. . . . It is true that Mongolian lamas wrote significant theoretical works, but all this happened within the doctrinal structure of the Lamaist church, and in the Tibetan language, and represented no special theological development.⁴

Although there is some truth in Heissig's assertions, it extends only to the esoteric aspects of Mongolian Buddhism and to its scholastic tradition. As in other Buddhist regions, Buddhism in Mongolia comprises a wide spectrum of theories and practices, ranging from the fully elaborated esoteric philosophy of the vocational lamas to the day-to-day beliefs of local lay communities. When referring to the Mongolian version of Vajrayāna Buddhism, twentieth-century scholars invariably used the terms "Lamaism"⁵ and "Lamaist Buddhism."⁶ In contrast, throughout the centuries, Mongolian lay Buddhists and monks have referred to their Buddhism as "Burkhany Shashin" (Buddha's Religion) or as "Shira-in Shashin" (Yellow Religion).

No historical records of Buddhism in Mongolia before the thirteenth century have been found. Tibetan lamas of the Sakya sect were the first to bring Buddhism to the Mongols during the reign of Ögödei Khan (r. 1229–1241) and were active at the court of the Yüan dynasty (1271–1368). Qubilai Khan (1215–1294), a grandson of Chinggis Khan, bestowed the title of *kuo-shi* (*güüshi*, "Teacher of the Realm") on the renowned Tibetan scholar Phagpa Lama ("Phags pa bLa ma). During that period, Buddhism was not widely disseminated throughout Mongolia, and Mongols in rural areas continued to practice Shamanism. With the fall of the Yüan dynasty, Buddhist influence in Mongolia greatly

diminished. From the second half of the sixteenth century,⁷ Tibetan Buddhism of the Gelugpa order became predominant. During the period of the Qing dynasty (1616–1911), when most Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia were built and Buddhist establishments were supported, Buddhism in Mongolia reached its peak. The decline of Buddhism in Inner Mongolia, which followed the demise of the Qing, was largely due to the strong influence of modernization in Inner Mongolia, the so-called Enlightenment Movement, and due also to the development of secular education in the early part of the last century. In the early years of the “Cultural Revolution,” more than 90 percent of the monasteries in Inner Mongolia were destroyed. During that period of the prohibition of religious expression, which lasted until the late 1970s, many lamas and lay Buddhists continued to practice Buddhism in secret.

Since the end of the 1970s, Buddhism in Inner Mongolia has been experiencing a slow revival. Some old monasteries have been repaired, and new, smaller temples have been built. Some monasteries, such as the Usutu Monastery in Khökhöt and others, house Buddhist schools in which Buddhist texts and Tibetan language are taught. Other monasteries, such as Arshian Monastery of New Bargu Left Banner, also offer courses in traditional Tibetan-Mongolian medicine. In Inner Mongolia’s countryside, Buddhism is commonly viewed as a part of traditional Mongolian culture, especially by younger generations. Moreover, pilgrimages to places of worship are becoming a common practice. For instance, after the freedom of religious expression was instituted in 1980, more than thirty residents of Shabar Nuur village visited important Buddhist sites in Beijing and Wutai Shan, and Kumbum Monastery in the Amdo region of Tibet. Two thirds of the households in that village worship privately in their homes, while others visit monasteries or invite lamas to their homes for domestic rituals.⁸

Buddhism has been an integral part of the common Mongolian culture for over four hundred years. Therefore, although it was severely suppressed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), laypeople continued to practice it without monasteries, religious specialists, lamas, proper knowledge, or philosophy. In my personal observation, the funeral rituals that were performed during the Cultural Revolution by villagers themselves (since it was prohibited to have them performed by a lama) were very similar to the ones now performed by contemporary monastic ritualists. Other Buddhist celebrations and ceremonies that were conducted without lamas during the period of the Cultural Revolution were of these types: the first hair-cutting, house-warming, weddings, New Year celebrations, the veneration of sacred landscapes, and so on. These ceremonial practices were very similar to those carried out among Buryat Mongols during the Soviet period. Caroline Humphrey’s field research shows that Buddhism has not completely lost its influential and distinct role in village life; on the contrary, it is often related to national sentiment, kinship, and other social groups.⁹ Since the 1980s, a growing number of Inner Mongolian intellectuals have been involved in Buddhist practices primarily for two reasons: to strengthen their religious beliefs and to reinforce their sense of national and cultural identity.

MONASTERY

The monastic system in Inner Mongolia was highly developed prior to 1947. Most of the larger monasteries did have the whole range of social, economic, and administrative organizations run by lama-specialists. Buddhist monasteries, particularly large ones, were culturally, religiously, and economically important in the region. In the nineteenth century, there were about two thousand monasteries in all of Mongolia. Of these, about twelve hundred were in Inner Mongolia and more than seven hundred were in Outer Mongolia.¹⁰

One of these monasteries was Khulustai Monastery, which was one of many smaller, local monasteries in Inner Mongolia. It was a subordinate monastery of the larger Borkhushu Monastery, which had altogether four subordinate monasteries: Khulustai, Khitang, Bultei, and Kuis.¹¹ It was initially situated somewhere south of its present location. According to the report that Arsanlang, an eighty-nine-year-old man from that region, gave me in the late 1980s, the monastery housed three hundred lamas at the height of its prosperity. However, in the early part of the twentieth century, the monastery had around forty monks, and in the early 1940s, at least five of its lamas were recruited into the Japanese military. On the eve of the “Land Reform Revolution” in 1947, the monastery retained fourteen subordinate households (*khariyatū erūkhe*). Approximately one hundred households were scattered in the vicinity of the monastery, and only fourteen lamas continued to stay in it.¹² In contrast to large monasteries, which had a distinct division of labor between lamas of various ranks, in this small monastery an Incarnate Lama (*Khutugtu, T. sprul sku*)¹³ was also involved in most of the monastery’s functions.

The history of Khulustai Monastery is intimately related to the lineages of its high Incarnate Lamas. In most monasteries monks had certain mundane duties, such as cleaning and repairing the building and yards of the monastery; otherwise, they had to pay money to the monastery to which they belonged. According to oral narratives, reported to me by Arsalang and others, in the late eighteenth century, one of Khulustai’s highly learned lamas named Chorji Lama, who was born to an aristocratic family (*taiji*), refused to fulfill his labor duty or to pay the monastery on the grounds that he was an aristocratic lama (*toyin lama*). As a result of this, he was expelled from the assembly, and he built a small temple in the vicinity of the original monastery. After his death, his subsequent incarnation was installed as the head of the new temple. Later on, in 1877, the original temple and the new temple were amalgamated, and a new monastery, Khulustai, was established at its present site. After the Land Reform Revolution in 1947, all of the monastery’s lamas left, and the monastery’s buildings were converted into the local administrative offices, a school, and a storeroom. In 1968, the monastery was completely destroyed.

While larger monasteries owned herds and land, smaller, local monasteries such as Khulustai depended primarily on donations from wealthy families. Neither the local Mongolian government nor the Qing court provided any salary to the lamas of

Khulustai. Khulustai had an *oboo* (*ovoo*, stone cairn) in its vicinity, at which lamas and laypeople jointly performed an offering ritual once a year, on May 13 of the lunar calendar. During *oboo* ceremonies, lama-wrestlers and lay-wrestlers engaged in mutual wrestling matches for entertainment. The Incarnate Lama of the monastery had his own professional lama-wrestlers, who represented the monastery and its Incarnate Lama in wrestling competitions that were held either in their own district or elsewhere. Lamas in possession of horses also participated in horse racing. In addition to these events, the monastery organized several public services throughout the year. The services included the New Year's prayer sessions, the *sūtra* reading session that took place in the fourth lunar month, the offering of oil lamps during the tenth month, and so on. The *tsam* (T. *'cham*) ritual dances, regularly performed during the sixth month of the lunar year, were the most popular. *Tsam* dances were usually performed on the last day of the prayer meetings attended by the neighboring lay communities, whose members would gather around the monastery for prayer sessions and to offer donations to the *saṅgha*.

In Khulustai, children from the age of seven were taught Tibetan language through chanting Tibetan Buddhist texts. Some were also taught the Mongolian alphabet. In contrast to Khulustai and other small monasteries, larger monasteries also offered one or more courses on Buddhist doctrine and philosophy. Certain larger monasteries such as Badgar Monastery in Ulaanchab League (in current Bogutu, Ch. Baotou, municipality) and Bandida Gegeen Monastery in Shilingol League, which were referred to by the twentieth-century ethnographer Miller as “academic monasteries,” established colleges of Buddhist philosophy.¹⁴ In these colleges, lamas specialized in both exoteric and esoteric Buddhist theories and practices, including philosophy, astronomy, medicine, and literature. Many well-known Inner Mongolian thinkers, historians, physicians, and rhetoricians were trained in these monastic colleges.

The Inner Mongolian cultural heritage was kept alive through monastic education and through learned lamas' literary creations that were prompted by translations of Buddhist canonical works. In addition to monasteries, the so-called private home schools (*ger-ün surguuli*) played a vital role in promoting literacy among the young. Home schools, alongside the monasteries, educated the first aristocratic and ecclesiastical intelligentsia of Mongolia. Among them were many prominent translators, men of letters, historians, experts in doctrine, and philologists. These scholars translated the ecclesiastical and secular literature from India and Tibet into Mongolian, and they laid the foundation for Mongolian aristocratic, ecclesiastical historiography. Mongolian Buddhist specialists, especially those who were trained from the age of seven, were well versed in many other disciplines such as poetry, cartography, painting, and other arts and crafts.

Miller categorized the monasteries of Inner Mongolia into two basic types according to their functions: the “academic monasteries” and the “ritualistic monasteries.” According to Miller, the main activity of the lamas in “academic monasteries” was the study of Buddhist texts. In these monasteries, lamas were granted one or more monastic academic degrees, and little attention was paid to lay worshippers. In “ritualistic

monasteries,” in which the main activity of lamas was the performance of ritual services, monastic academic degrees were not granted, and studies were focused solely on basic Buddhist ideas. Ritualistic monasteries did not make any provisions for specialization, and their main aim was to encourage faith and worship among the laity.¹⁵ Despite these differences between the two types, there was a certain degree of overlap, as Buddhist ritual practices were also carried out in the monasteries offering scholastic training.

Laypeople commonly expressed a stronger faith in better-known monasteries, including the academic monasteries that had greater educational provisions than ritualistic monasteries, whose lamas lacked a higher knowledge of philosophy. However, some smaller monasteries, such as Mongguljin Gegeen Süme Monastery in the current Liaoning province of China, Badgar Monastery nearer Bogutu (Ch. Baotou) city, and Bandida Gegeen Monastery in Shilingol, had highly educated lamas who taught Buddhist philosophy to some degree to young monks, who afterward went to other monasteries for higher education. Although there were very few academic monasteries among the 182 monasteries of the Jirim League prior to 1947, they nevertheless housed many highly learned lamas.

Among the twenty-four monasteries of Naiman Banner and among the approximately twenty monasteries of Khüriy-e Banner of Jirim League, none would qualify as academic monasteries by Miller’s definition. Borkhoshu, one of the larger monasteries of Naiman Banner, had 305 lamas in 1945 (and, reportedly, seven hundred lamas at its height), four subordinate monasteries, and 103 subordinate households. Although this was not a scholastically oriented monastery, it had many highly learned lamas. Even in small monasteries, like Khulustai, there were certain highly learned lamas with disciples well trained in Buddhist doctrine, as Dambadorji lama from Shabar Nuur village reported:¹⁶

There were more than four lamas from Khulustai monastery studying Buddhist texts in other “academic” monasteries, and they came back to the monastery to teach Buddhist texts to young disciples of the monastery. Because of them, prior to the “Land Reform Revolution,” this monastery was becoming more famous, while other neighboring monasteries were in decline. A young lama, Serengdorji, who was a disciple of Altankhürdü, was able to debate philosophical issues with those who studied in an “academic monastery.”

According to Dambadorji, in certain families that had learned lamas, there were also lay members who engaged in Buddhist philosophical debates. They usually were learned senior laymen, known as “wise, old men” (*mergen ebügon*). One such “wise, old man” was a layman by the name of Arsalang, who could explain the structure of the cosmos, the deeds of the Lord Buddha, and what the Buddha taught. In this respect, there was no sharp distinction between an ordained lama and a lay teacher.

LAMAS

Some Mongolian and Western scholars have assumed that lamas constituted 40 to 60 per cent of the Mongolian male population during the late Qing period.¹⁷ According to Heisig, “A son from practically every family belonged to the clergy; it comprised about one-third of the entire population. Before 1900, there were altogether 243 Incarnate Lamas living in the territories of the Mongols; of them, 157 resided in Inner Mongolia alone.”¹⁸

Prior to the Land Reform Revolution (1947) there were certain women who, after reaching the age of fifty, took the five vows of a Buddhist novice and became nuns who are also householders (*chabagancha*). Their main practice was chanting the *om mani padme hum mantra*. In Inner Mongolia there were no particular monasteries for nuns, and nuns were not allowed to live in monasteries for monks. A few Inner Mongolian nuns did manage to go to Wutai¹⁹ monasteries for the study of Buddhist texts, though. Among them was a nun from my case-study area by the name of Injinliang who, prior to 1947, went to Tibetan-Mongolian monasteries at Wutai for this very purpose.

The twentieth-century ethnographer Kuo-Yi Pao, who studied at a smaller, local monastery in his home village (Bayanmangha in Jirim League), a short distance from Khulustai, describes the lamas of that monastery in a manner similar to my own observation of Khulustai. According to Pao’s account:

The Tibetan word “lama” means “saint” or “teacher.” Lamas have long been regarded as belonging to the highest-ranking class, and theirs was a sacred occupation. They led a holy and respected life. They alone could explain the Law for the people and lead them to salvation. The sutras they chanted were in Tibetan, a language that the common people did not learn . . . In addition, the lay people were untutored; except for a small number of them who could read and write Mongolian, they were illiterate. Many of the lamas, on the other hand, were well trained in Tibetan philosophy and were very articulate, because a part of their training during their senior years consisted of debating religious questions with their fellows. The lamas thus had little difficulty in dealing with their clients, the lay people, and the latter respected the lamas highly . . . the religious functions of the lamas were considered by most of the elderly people as vital to the prosperity of the community and to the happiness of the villagers. Lamas as well as some laymen believed that the presence of the lamas contributed to the safety and peace of Mongolian society. Cattle and crops, human life, and afterlife greatly depended on the prayers of lamas. Lamas were in general regarded as protectors of the people, and to be a lama was thus something to be proud of . . . It was believed that a man who becomes a lama not only benefits his own “next rebirth,” but also “accumulates virtue” for the others in his family . . . Lamas led easier lives, dressed better, and kept themselves cleaner than lay people. Their financial condition was also better, on the average, than that of laymen; and they were often able to assist their secular relatives.²⁰

It is worth noting that in Mongolia the term “lama” has been employed to designate those who take only primary vows, which are collectively called the “small vow,” while fully ordained monks followed the monastic regulations prescribed in the Vinaya, popularly called the “great vow.” Some lamas from smaller monasteries who desired to study in the monastic institutions that offered a higher education could not do so due to their meager economic means. Only financially secure monks were able to afford their living expenditures in monastic universities. For example, in Khulustai Monastery there were two Incarnate Lamas, the Left Incarnate Lama and the Right Incarnate Lama, so named according to the locations of their temples within the monastery. Due to his lack of financial resources, the Left Incarnate Lama was unable to attend a monastic university, whereas the wealthy Right Incarnate Lama was able to study at the famous Tibetan monastery of Kumbum (sKu ‘bum). Those fortunate ones who were able to attend monastic universities usually returned to their home monasteries and took charge of the monasteries’ administration. For instance, during the 1930s, the highly learned lama Altankhürdü from Khulustai Monastery, who studied for a year in Badgar Monastery, a year in Kumbum, and five years in Lhasa, returned to his temple after obtaining the senior title of *dorumba* (T. *rdo-rams-pa*, a *geshe* degree obtained through examination in debate in Lhasa). His return to Khulustai Monastery increased its fame.

As previously mentioned, Khulustai had fourteen subordinate households (*khari-yatu*), whose members maintained the monastery, supplying the firewood and hay and doing repairs. The costs of the maintenance of ordinary lamas were covered by their families. The income of a knowledgeable and respected senior lama came from collections gathered at religious services, as devout families, especially wealthy ones, gave monetary donations or other gifts as payment for religious services. Apart from few exceptions, in smaller, local monasteries, support for senior lamas came from lay devotees. In Khulustai, apart from the wealthy Left Incarnate Lama, Jamsa Dalam, and the lama physician by the name of Yeshibaljar, the lamas were relatively poor.

In the region under discussion, a family would send its young son to the monastery for ordination only if another relative already resided there; otherwise, they would invite a senior lama to their home to conduct an ordination ritual for their son. When a monk of tender age was to be sent to the monastery, he would first receive his religious education at home and would attend the monastery meetings or other religious services only occasionally. After the age of ten, a young monk would be sent to the monastery, where he would live with his ordained relative or with a senior lama as his tutor, whom he would serve in exchange for education.

In the first half of the twentieth century, there were very few laymen who were trained physicians. Most monasteries and temples had monastic physicians, who were trained in medical schools (*mamba drasang*, T. *sman pa grwa tshang*) belonging to larger monasteries. In monastic medical schools, senior physicians taught medicine to younger lamas, who later returned to their home monasteries.²¹ It was a common practice for most lamas to study medicine to some degree. In Dambadorji’s words, the commonly accepted

reason for this was that, without a healthy body, one could not study Buddhism well nor properly perform meritorious deeds. Therefore, monastically ordained physicians were considered as having the most important role in Mongolian society.²² In Khulustai there were more than three professional lama doctors, among whom the most famous was Yeshibaljuur. Both laypeople and monks would visit lama doctors at times of need and would cover their medical fees in money, in domestic animals, or in grain. When the physician's treatment failed, people often approached an Incarnate Lama for assistance and protection, and he would often suggest a particular religious service. Most of these services required that a group of lamas visit the patient's home and perform the appropriate *pūja*. In return, the patient would offer either some money or livestock as a payment; the amount depended on the patient's financial condition, disregarding whether or not the patient recovered. In some cases, an Incarnate Lama would suggest to a layperson to bring a shaman for a healing ritual. One such case was reported by Arsalang from the case-study area, which occurred in the family of his sister-in-law. When Arsalang's married niece became seriously ill, she first received treatments from lama doctors. The family also sponsored healing rituals and paid the officiating lama a formal fee called *barlig*, for which there is no fixed sum. When none of the lamas' treatments proved efficacious, the family sought the second "rescue" (*abural*) from the Living Buddha (a high incarnate lama); and on his recommendation, they invited a "white Shaman"²³ by the name of Taipongga to perform a shamanic healing ritual.

Some twentieth-century scholars such as Altanorgil, Jagchid, and Hyer claimed that Mongolian lamas led unproductive lives in monasteries and caused economic stagnation.²⁴ A more objective study shows that this could not be true, at least not at the grassroots level, since the majority of ordinary lamas took part directly in economic production. For example, in Khulustai, most young lamas had close relationships with their families in various ways. During the busy seasons of spring and summer, and especially in autumn, they herded livestock, weeded fields, and helped in harvesting. Many ordinary lamas spent nearly half the year with their families.²⁵ Moreover, many monasteries had numerous lamas who, being neither scholars nor solitary *yogins*, engaged in the work of the daily maintenance of the monastery, including accounting, managing the large number of herds, and farming. Moreover, some lamas lived permanently in the monastery in order to keep religious services going and to manage daily events. These were mainly senior lamas who taught young monks and performed the monastery's religious services. In many cases, senior lamas performed rituals in laypeople's homes. This explains why knowledgeable senior lamas often had a higher income than other lamas.

In contrast to the assertions of the aforementioned twentieth-century scholars, the following is recorded in *The Monasteries of Jirim*:

It is interesting that monasteries managed production and that lamas participated in labour production in the early part of this century. The majority of ordinary lamas of Monchog monastery belonging to Naiman Banner worked on the

agricultural land instead of participating in monastery meetings. In the 1940s, some rich lamas bought agricultural land, rented out the land to the ordinary lamas, and shared in production.²⁶

LAITY

As in the case of Theravāda Buddhism in Southeast Asia, the Vajrayāna tradition in Mongolia adapted itself to the indigenous people's traditional rituals and local folk religions, which became key factors in the formulation of Mongolian Buddhism. A similar observation was made by Humphrey with regard to Buddhist religious services among rural Buryat Mongols:

Lamas used to conduct or be otherwise involved in numerous Buryat life-cycle rituals—ritual purification of infants, name-giving, first hair-cutting, invocation of the personal guardian-spirit, betrothal, marriage, death, and the leading away of the soul . . . Lamas used to conduct the ceremonies at *oboo*, . . . at sacred springs, and other places where spirits were thought to reside . . . Lamas used to cure illness, set bones, carry out purification rites, pray for success in particular ventures, foretell the future, give astrological advice, and interpret omens.²⁷

It is worth noting that all of the mentioned religious services were also conducted by lamas in the rural areas of Inner Mongolia.

The convergence of Shamanism and Buddhism in Inner Mongolia can also be witnessed in ritual fire worship, which was one of the Mongolian pre-Buddhist folk religious practices. After Buddhism became widely accepted in Mongolia in the late sixteenth century, ritual fire worship became associated with Buddhism. Many Mongolian families in the case-study area had a lama specializing in this ritual, called a "lama of fire" (*gal-un lama*). The frequency of the ritual fire worship varied from family to family. It had to be performed at least once a year on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month of the lunar calendar. But some families would invite lamas more frequently for the sake of the fire ritual, either every month or every season. It was commonly believed that the fire-worshipping ritual pleases the Fire God (Gal-un Burkhan),²⁸ who, in return, would bring many blessings to the family sponsoring the ritual. It is said that the Fire Goddess would leave the family on the twenty-third day of the twelfth month and go to Heaven (*ingri*) in order to take part in the New Year celebration. On the early morning of New Year's Day, she would bring blessings from Heaven to the family. According to Mongolian popular belief, girls like gossiping. Therefore, every family was concerned whether the Fire God would report the family's bad deeds to Heaven, causing Heaven to be less munificent in satisfying the family's needs in the New Year. Inviting a lama to perform

a ritual to satisfy the Fire Goddess would secure her positive report about the family. All family members took active part in the final phase of the fire ritual, called “beckoning blessing” (*dalalg-a abkhu*), and expressed their strong desire for happiness and prosperity.²⁹

Other popular lay Buddhist practices consisted of visits to monasteries for the sake of divination, for having lamas read a prayer for absent family members, for choosing the auspicious date for a wedding or the auspicious location for building a new home, and so on. At the end of the lunar year, people visited monasteries to request prayers or blessings (*irügel*) for the deceased. As in other parts of the Buddhist world, in Mongolia Buddhist laity engaged in merit-making practices (*buyan üildekh*), such as going on a pilgrimage to a monastery with donations and the like. At such occasions, wealthier Buddhists supplied banquets for all the lamas of a monastery. As for daily practices, they were diverse and differed from one person to another. In the mentioned case-study area, every family worshipped images and statues of various Buddhas. They offered to the Buddhas oil lamps and incense, and the “top” (*deji*) of their everyday tea and food. They chanted *mantras*, which they learned from incarnate lamas or senior lamas. As among Tibetans, here, too, the most common *mantra* was the six-syllable mantra of Avalokiteśvara.

CONCLUSION

From its inception, Mongolian Buddhism was monastically oriented. In the “old,” pastoral Inner Mongolia, monasteries were not only centers of religious life but also cultural, social, and economic centers. As already indicated, the monastic system itself tightly bonded lamas with laity. Monasteries required certain labor, social services, and goods that were supplied by laypeople, who saw these both as their religious duties and as merit-making activities. This kind of relationship between the laity and monastics based on the exchange of merit is as old as Buddhism and is seen in other Asian Buddhist countries. As Spiro points out:

Exchange is fundamental to Buddhist ritual. “The layman provides the monks with all physical requirements—and more—necessary to pursue his salvation-oriented goal, while the monk in turn provides the layman with the spiritual requirements (merit) necessary for his salvation-oriented goal. At the same time, the monk acquires merit by accepting the pretensions through which the layman acquires merit.”³⁰

On the whole, exchange in this general sense was fundamental to the survival of the monasteries and lamas in Inner Mongolia. However, the majority of the Inner Mongolian lamas, especially those from eastern Inner Mongolia who lived in monasteries, depended mostly on their own labor, on their families, and on gifts and donations from the laity.

Most local monasteries in Inner Mongolia, which were smaller monasteries (see the Appendix), did not own large herds or much land. Lamas often had to go out to beg (*badarlakh*). In many cases, the “spiritual requirements” that were fulfilled by lamas for laypersons were completed for the members of the lamas’ own families. One may wonder whether in this case the theory of “the gift exchange” is a useful way of speaking about the exchange of merit. The particular case of Khulustai village and its monastery can clarify this. Among the Mongols in the case-study area, the general field of “gift exchange” has had different meanings in different contexts. An exchange between fellow villagers was called *tal* (literally meaning a “side”). The fellow villagers helped one another when in need of additional labor in building a new house, digging a well, branding horses, shearing sheep, harvesting, and so on, or in activities such as weddings, birthdays, funerals, and house-warmings. These reciprocal “debts of honor” required villagers to bring gifts and offer other services to each other at such occasions. This type of exchange between fellow villagers— including the exchange of labor— involved reciprocity and obligation. The gift exchange between kin was called *beleg*. It was practiced in symbolic and unpredictable ways in terms of the quality and quantity of a gift. It was customary to bring a gift when visiting one’s kin. According to the Mongols’ common view, richer kin should not ignore poor kin. Relatives visited each other frequently, and poorer relatives would often bring a package of tobacco or a piece of cheese as a gift, which was called a *chaasun beleg* (“a paper gift”). In the context of gift giving among relatives, the giving carried a psychological undertone. In the case of the exchanges between the laity and lamas, the gift exchange was more diverse and often not clear.

In the case-study area, some well-to-do individuals donated livestock, crops, or money to the monastery for the sake of merit making. Some wealthy and socially conscious families also helped the poor villagers. Smaller, local monasteries in eastern Inner Mongolia suffered from financial difficulties, and their lamas frequently had to go begging for their monasteries. As the laity tried to meet the lamas’ needs, the lamas in return chanted blessing texts in the donors’ homes. Wealthy families usually supported their ordained sons and close relatives and financed their education in distant monastic schools. Lamas seldom refused to visit poor families for religious services. When a poor family was unable to pay lamas for religious services, the family gave a timeframe within which it would remunerate lamas for their service or would promise a labor service for lamas, such as supplying firewood or hay, or plastering lamas’ homes for a given number of days.³¹

Although the relations between lamas and laity can be considered in general as “exchanges,” the term “exchange” does not tell us much about the most interesting aspects of these relations. On the one hand, there have been economically important transfers of wealth, even though in many areas of Inner Mongolia poverty has not allowed for large transfers; on the other hand, the lamas’ relations with close lay family members have had filial and religious aspects, which deserve further field research.

APPENDIX: MONASTERIES AND LAMAS IN NAIMAN BANNER

Name of Monastery	Year of Founding	Number of Lamas/Year	Subordinate Households
Dachin.	1710	174/1940s	69
Monchag	1738	180	?
Delderut	?/Old	0	
Tabin	1693	31/1940s	31
Chorji Lama	1737	151/1940s	78
Jangutai	1746	37/1940s	16
Bultei	1746	309/?	103
Hatog	1750	145/?	53
Tosalagch	1822	53	15
Sine	1821	55	16
Hulustai	1877	14/1947	14
Ulji-Mangshi	1900	64	15
Yamun	1926	25	9
Suburgan	1900	48	26
Mongon	1877	60	28
Sirgi	?/Old	0	
Gurban-Bulag	?/Old	2	0
Bayantal	?/Old	0	
Huis	1806	69	19
Hitang	1853	83	29
Ori-hirgal	1893	100/1947	29
Dogui	1932	50	18
Huhuun	1740	222	90
Amurchengelt	1813	305	103
Isom	1920s	2	

NOTES

1. Gellner, 1990, 95.
2. Gombrich, 1971; and Tambiah, 1970.
3. Leach, 1968, 1.
4. Heissig, 1980, 1.
5. Altanorgil, 1982, 9; Heissig, 1980; Weber, 1967 [1958], 282; Miller, 1959; and most Japanese Mongolists.
6. Jagchid and Hyer, 1979, 179.
7. Altan Khan (1506–1582) invited the head of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, Sodnamjamsu (1543–1581), to Mongolia in 1578, marking the starting point of modern Buddhism in Mongolia.

8. Ujeed, 1997, 80.

9. Humphrey, 1983, 423–424.

10. Heissig, 1980, 1.

11. Larger monasteries always had several subordinate temples or other smaller monasteries. Following Miller (1959, 12–14), for the sake of simplification I will use the term “monastery” to refer to any such unit. There were also some monasteries that had joint monastery meetings. This kind of monasteries was called *khural nigetei süm* (monasteries with a common meeting).

12. Most of the monasteries had households, which were monasteries’ serfs (*shabi*), also referred to as “black disciples or serfs” (*khara shabi*). However, in eastern Inner Mongolia, they are called “subordinate household of a monastery” (*süme-in khariyat erükhe*).

13. An Incarnate Lama is often referred to as a “Living Buddha” after the Chinese “Huo-fo.” Mongols use certain terms for the different ranks of incarnate lamas, such as *shabrang* or *khuvilgan* for lower-rank incarnate lamas, *gegeen* for middle-rank lamas, and *Khutugtu* and *Bogd* for higher-rank ones.

14. Miller, 1959, 20.

15. *Ibid.*, 20–21.

16. Dambadorji lama was eighty-one years old when I interviewed him in 1990.

17. Jagchid and Hyer, 1979, 177; Miller, 1959, 27.

18. Heissig, 1980, 1.

19. Wutai (M. Utai) is a famous monastery complex in the Chinese province of Shanxi. It is one of several monasteries that have been places of pilgrimage for Mongols. See Charleux, 2011, 275–326; and Elverskog, 2011, 243–274.

20. Pao, 1970–1971, 670.

21. Lobsanchoidan (1981, 313–317), a member of the Inner Mongolian elite, wrote about Mongolian customs in the early part of this century and about lama doctors: “In the past, someone who wanted to be a doctor could go to Lhasa in Tibet to study medicine for about ten years. Then he came back to Mongolia and started to treat diseases. Later, there were schools of medicine in larger monasteries. Most of the Inner Mongolian doctors learned medicine in Mongoljin Gegeen Süm. . . . As payment for the doctor, there were no fixed criteria. Patients gave a piece of cloth, or the head of a sheep, depending on their wealth . . . A famous doctor would perform a ritual once a year in worship of Otoch Buddha, known as the Buddha of medicine. People, especially those who saw the doctor, had to take part in this ritual, offering gifts, such as sheep, cloth, tea, money, cattle, horse, etc.”

22. Even today, in Inner Mongolia’s large cities and countryside, many people, especially those with unidentifiable illnesses, often go to old lama physicians. The majority of larger hospitals in contemporary Inner Mongolia have a ward for traditional Mongolian medicine, and there are also many famous physicians who were either originally lamas or studied traditional medicine from lamas who are physicians.

23. After Buddhism became the major religion of Mongolia, shamans were divided into two basic types: the “Black Shamans,” who practice a form of Shamanism that has not been influenced by Buddhism, and “White Shamans,” known also as “Yellow Shamans,” whose practices contain certain Buddhist elements.

24. Altanorgil, 1982, 24–5, 70, and 1985, 182–184; Jagchid and Hyer, 1979, 177–178.

25. *The Group of Monasteries of Mongolian Ethnicity*, 1993, 14.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Humphrey, 1983, 421–422.

28. The term *burkhan* can also refer to God or Goddess, and even to a statue.

29. Ujeed and Ujeed, 1988, 216–217, 363–364.

30. Spiro, 1982, 412.

31. Every monastery held special chanting ceremonies for the happiness of sentient beings within the six realms of existence, which took place during the New Year's prayer meeting, the sixth-month prayer meeting, and twelfth-month prayer meeting. These kinds of services are deeply rooted in their ethical and obligatory value system, although characterized as merit-making services.

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INDEX



Note: The letter 'n' following locators refers to notes

- Abatai Khan, 14, 21n27, 149–150, 158n83,
159n84, 162, 190, 192
- Agwaankhaidav, Agwankhaidub, xix, 130,
143–147, 150–151, 154–155, 157n60, 158n62,
158n80, 167–168, 236
- Agwaanluvsandongov, 117–118, 135n56
- Agwang Dorzhiev, 56–57, 64–65, 67n14,
69n57
- Altan Khan, 3–8, 9–10, 12–14, 16, 18n3, 18n6,
19n7, 20n19, 28, 31, 35n13, 35n22, 74–75, 83,
113n6, 114n20, 117, 140–141, 143, 150, 154,
156nn18–19, 162, 192–193, 201n48, 218n3,
223, 262, 292n7
- Amitābha, 121, 143, 147, 150, 153, 207, 218n13
- Amitāyus, 115n24, 132, 136n65, 137, 146, 150
- Anāgatavamsa*, 137, 143
- Āryabala, 215
- Atiśa, 111, 123–125, 147
- Autonomous Period, 54, 59, 247
- Avalokiteśvara, 25, 126, 134n29, 145, 159n87,
178n49, 188, 204, 215, 218n3, 290
- Ayuka Khan, 38–42, 48–49
- Badgar Monastery, 114n21, 284, 285, 287
- Baibaghas Khan, 27–30, 32–33
- Banchen Bogd, 253, 256
- Baroun-tala, 29
- Blue Annals*, *Blue Chronicle* (*Khökbe Sudar*,
Khökb Sudur), 82, 91n57, 163
- Bodhisattva, 7–9, 21n27, 24–25, 42, 46, 56,
68n47, 80, 90, 103, 122, 125, 129–130,
135n42, 138–140, 142, 148–153, 155n3, 188,
234, 268
- Bogd Gegeen, Bogdo Gegeen, 43, 117, 147–148,
150, 153, 158n72, 170, 182, 193, 208–209, 211,
213, 218n1
- Bogd Khan Mountain, 223–226, 228, 236n6,
236n8, 239n33
- Bogd Toin, Bogda Toin, 97–98, 102, 104, 113n10
(*see also* Neichi Toin)
- Boshogtu Sechen Jinong, 10
- Boshogtu Khong Taiji, Boshogtu Khung Taiji,
5, 7
- Brahmā, 8, 79–85, 90n46, 140, 152, 192,
201n48
- Buddha families, 119–120, 122, 129–130, 132, 153,
180
- burhkan* (altar), 268
- Buryatia, xx, xxi, 14, 113, 186, 261–264,
266–271, 273–276, 278n30

- cakravartin*, xix, 8, 24, 33, 34n5, 73–74, 79,
82–83, 122, 140, 141, 149, 201n48
- Catherine the Great, 25, 263
- Chinggis Khan, xviii, xix, 20, 25, 27, 35n13, 40,
59–60, 70–88, 90n49, 90n52, 91n70,
91n73, 97, 113, 158n72, 185, 188–194,
203–204, 211, 223–224, 262, 278n21, 281
- choijin*, 212, 219n24
- Chojin Lama Temple Museum, Chojin Lama
Temple Museum, 128–129, 130, 134n15, 137
- Clear Script, xviii, xxii n6, 23–25, 30–32, 34n1, 42
- Cultural Revolution, xxi, 140, 146, 157n43, 282
- Dalai Lama, 6–12, 14, 16, 19n7, 19n15, 21n27,
25–26, 28, 31, 37–39, 43–45, 49, 56, 111,
113n10, 140, 150, 154, 159n100, 192, 218n3,
268, 270
- Fifth Dalai Lama, xviii, 23, 28–31, 43, 100,
118, 125
- First Dalai Lama, 123–124, 205
- Fourteenth Dalai Lama, 267, 268, 270, 278n30
- Fourth Dalai Lama, xviii, 6, 28, 141
- Second Dalai Lama, 205
- Seventh Dalai Lama, 44, 48, 50, 175n7
- Sixth Dalai Lama, xviii, 37, 39, 41, 43–44, 162
- Third Dalai Lama, xviii, 7nn6–7, 14, 26, 31,
75, 113nn6–7, 140–141, 150, 154, 192–193,
201n48, 205, 218n3
- Thirteenth Dalai Lama, 56
- Danzanravjaa, 163–168, 170–171, 175, 176n17,
176nn19–21, 227, 237
- Dashbalbar, 174
- datsan*, 52n37, 113, 144, 213, 262, 268–273,
275–276, 278n23
- Dharma Samudra (Nomundalai), 96, 201
- Dharmatāla, 28–30, 33, 67n27, 75–76, 79, 84,
90n45, 91n70, 192–193, 201n48
- Diyanchi Dinu-a, 98, 100, 114n14
- Diyanchi Lama, 96, 98–99
- Dondub Gyatso, 42, 51 n24
- Dörböds, 24, 27–29, 33–34
- dugan*, 213, 256, 268, 278n23
- Eight Bodhisattvas, 122, 138, 155n9
- Eight Great Stūpas, 137, 159n92, 159n94
- Ekajātī, 125, 135n39
- Enkhbayar, N., 185, 186, 187, 189, 191, 222, 225, 232
- Erdene Zuu Monastery, 129, 138, 139, 149, 150, 255
- Five Tathāgatas, 116, 119, 120, 122, 125, 133,
134n15, 137
- Five Treatises of Maitreya*, 142
- Galdanwangchugdorji, 96–98, 102–103, 105,
108–109, 113
- Gandantegchenling Monastery, Gandan
Tegchinling Monastery, 18, 109, 117, 127,
129, 135n54, 137–139, 145, 157n52, 186, 210,
221, 232, 237, 239
- Geligbalsang, 169–170
- Gelugpa, xvi–xix, 14, 16, 28–29, 42, 44, 54, 75,
96, 103, 105, 112, 118, 122, 125, 140–141, 143,
147–148, 152, 162, 164, 193, 205, 207, 216,
265, 280, 282, 292n7
- gender dynamics, 262, 264
- Gödan Khan, 161
- Golden Book (Altan Devter)*, xviii, 54, 57, 59,
61–66, 75–77, 79, 83
- Golden Summary (Altan tobči)*, 201n9, 79–82,
90nn51–52, 109, 112n5
- Golden Summary of Chinggis Khan*
(*Činggis qayan-u altan tobči*), 201n9,
75, 81
- goro* (circumambulation), 268
- Guhyasamāja*, 100, 122
- Güshii Khan, 28–30, 32–33
- Hayagrīva, 205, 207, 214–217, 219n32
- high-ranking lamas, 18, 243–244, 249, 251,
257–258
- Ikh Khüree, 53, 56, 60–62, 65, 116–117, 119–120,
124, 127–132, 135n54, 139, 141–148, 154,
157nn51–52, 158n62, 186, 223–225, 232–233,
236n8
- Indra, 73, 75, 81, 83, 164, 176n15
- Injanashi, 163, 168, 170, 175n8
- Isisambu, 168, 170
- Jamsran, 202–205, 207–214, 216–217, 218n8,
219n32, 229
- Janlavtsogzol*, 132–133, 153
- Jebsundamba Khutugtu, xix, 116, 137, 162,
182–183, 186, 192–193, 200n23, 200n32,
209, 224, 226, 233, 244
- Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, 3, 5–8, 11, 14, 16, 18n3,
74, 201n48

- Kalmykia, xxi, 14, 34, 186, 263, 266–267, 278n25
 Kalmyks, xvii, xviii, 34, 36n48, 37–42,
 44–50, 257
 Kangxi, 19n8, 43–44, 46, 61, 98–99, 101,
 114n16, 119–121, 133n13, 136n65, 201n38,
 226, 233
 Kapstein, Matthew, 25, 35n24, 62, 121–122
keid, 97, 113n11
 Khalkhas, xvii, xix, 14, 26, 28, 30–31, 33, 35n15,
 35n22, 35n24, 43, 71, 85, 97, 108, 113n6,
 116–119, 129, 131–132, 138–140, 143,
 149–152, 162, 164, 184, 192, 211, 219n34,
 223–224, 226
 Khökhöt, 96, 99, 113n11, 114n20, 140, 150,
 192, 282
 Khorchin, 97, 99–100, 112
 Khulustai Monastery, xxi, 281, 283–288, 291
khural (ritual prayer session), 268, 273, 293n11
 Khutugtu, xix, 6–7, 9, 18, 19n15, 30, 36n35, 53,
 96, 98, 101, 113n6, 113n10, 116, 121, 137,
 139–141, 156n22, 156n30, 162, 164, 182–183,
 186, 192–193, 200n23, 200n32, 209, 211,
 224, 226, 233, 244, 254, 283, 293n13
 Khuvilgaan, 80, 177n37, 254–255
 Kökenuur, 6–7, 26, 28–29, 31, 33–34,
 35n24, 43
 Kumbum (sKu 'bum), 34, 36n47, 44, 56, 118,
 282, 287

 Land Reform Revolution, 283, 285, 286
Light of the Moon (Saran-u geres), 24, 27, 29–30,
 34n3, 35n27, 36n34
 Lubsangdambijaltsan (T. bLo bzang bsTan pa'i
 rGyal mtshan), 95 (see also Mergen
 Gegeen)
 Luvsantsültem (Chakhar Gevsh), 163–166

 Magsarjav (Khatanbaatar Magsarjav), 211–214,
 219n29
Mahāvairocanatantra, 122
Mahāvastu, 138, 142, 149, 220n38
 Maidar Khutugtu, 96, 140–141, 156n22,
 156n30
 Maitreya, Maidar, 96, 137
 Maitreya Procession, 57, 129, 132, 138–139,
 147–153
 Maitreya Temple, 130, 139, 144–146, 150, 155,
 157n51, 186
Maitreyavyākaraṇa, 137, 142
 Manchus, xvi, xix, 7, 16–17, 18n6, 24, 26, 29,
 31, 43, 83, 95–97, 114n15, 119, 166, 170,
 176n13–14, 200n23, 200n38, 212, 219n24,
 224, 261
maṇḍala, 8, 11, 63, 86, 98, 114n24, 119, 122, 137,
 143, 147–149, 153, 158n81
 Mañjuśrī, 6, 18n6, 19n15, 25, 56, 83, 89n23, 96,
 99, 103–104, 118, 142–143, 156n38, 159n87,
 188, 200n37–38, 204, 234
 Mañjuśrī Khutugtu, 6, 18n6, 19n15, 96, 113n6
Mañjuśrīnāmasaṃgīti, 117, 234
mantra, 18n6, 59, 86, 90n46, 147, 153, 180–181,
 189, 208, 210–212, 216–217, 218n3, 218n18,
 224, 231, 234, 268–269, 286, 290
 Marīci, 125–126, 135n39, 135n41
 Mergen Diyanchi, 96, 98–102, 113n11, 114n14,
 114n17, 114n20
 Mergen Gegeen, xix, 85, 95–98, 100, 102–112,
 112n5, 115n27, 115n30
 Mergen Monastery, xix, 95, 97–99, 101–103, 105,
 107, 109, 112n5, 113n12, 114n14
 Mergen Tradition, xix, 95, 97, 102–103, 105–106,
 108–109, 111–112, 112n5, 114n21, 114n23,
 115n30

nāga, 81, 86, 175n2, 180–181, 184, 198, 221, 224,
 227–232, 234, 237n25, 237n27, 238n28,
 238n30
 Nāgārjuna, 124–125, 201n38, 230
 Namudai Sechen, 5–8, 14
 Natsagdorj, 163, 170–173, 177n34–35
 Neichi Toin, 19n13, 36n35, 95–105, 108, 112,
 113n10–11, 114n20
New Mirror, 54, 60–63, 66
Niṣpannayogāvali, 139, 152, 155n11
 Nyamsüren, 174

 Ochirtu Taiji, 29, 32–33
 Ögödei Khan, 77, 188, 262, 281
 Oiratia, xviii, 23–25, 30, 33, 42
 Oirats, xviii, 23–24, 26–34, 35n30, 36n35, 38, 42,
 51n24
 Orthodox Christianity, 27, 41, 69n58,
 263–265
 Otgontenger Mountain, 182–185, 190, 194, 202,
 223, 225–227, 230, 236n12, 239n33
ovoo (oboo), 174, 185, 221–222, 224–226, 228,
 230–232, 234, 237n18, 237n24, 239n32–33,
 284, 289

- Panchen Lama, 29–30, 43, 61, 65, 110, 118, 122, 253 (*see also* Banchen Bogd)
- People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP), 53, 67n11, 71, 170, 219n29
- Phagpa Lama ('Phags pa bLa ma), xxiin1, 74–75, 281
- Pozdneev, Alexei, 38, 145, 148–149, 175n61
- Prajñā Sāgara, 96
- Precious Summary (Erdeni-yin Tobci)*, 6, 73, 80–81, 218n3
- Qianlong, 24, 61, 107, 183, 200n38, 223, 233
- Qubilai Khan, xxiin1, 26, 30, 35n20, 74–75, 95, 161, 188, 200n37, 281
- Queen Jönggen, xviii, 3–8, 11–15, 17–18, 18nn2–3, 19n9, 20n19, 21n27
- Queen Molan, 10, 12–13, 16–18, 20n19
- Rigsumgompo Temple, 122
- Rosary of White Lotusess*, 29, 67n27, 75c76, 79, 84, 193
- Russia, xviii, xxi, 23–25, 39, 42, 50, 52n40, 53, 56, 59, 261, 266–267, 269–270, 276–277
- sādhana, sādhanā*, 131, 139, 155nn11–12, 180–181, 216
- Sagang Sechen, Sagang Setsen, 6–7, 10–12, 16, 18, 20n19, 80
- Sakya Pandita, xxiin1, 161
- Śākyaṃuni, 80–81, 83, 85, 90n49, 113n11, 122–123, 138, 141–143, 147, 152, 156n38, 215
- Sandag, xix, 167, 168, 170–171, 177n26
- Sarvatahāgatattvasaṃgraha*, 122–123, 132, 134n25, 199n12
- saṃdag*, 175n2, 221, 227–232
- Sechen Khung Taiji, Sechen Khong Taiji, 7, 10
- Secret History of the Mongols*, 27, 74, 81, 90n51, 224
- Sengge Düüreng, 4, 6, 14, 20n19
- Ser-Od, 173
- shabgansa*, 269
- Shakhor monastery, xviii, 39, 44
- Shakur Lama, xviii, 37–45, 47–50
- Shamanism, 7, 12–13, 15–16, 19n13, 79, 96, 193, 204, 262–264, 281, 289, 293n23
- Shireet Tsagaan Lake, 117
- Siberia, 261–265, 270, 275–276, 277n7
- Soviet Union, 70, 170, 214, 219n24, 248–250, 260n28, 261, 266, 272
- Special Commission, 244, 248–249, 251–253, 258, 259n18
- stūpa*, xx, 8–9, 56, 74, 100–101, 131, 137–138, 141, 146, 152, 157n57, 159n92, 159n94, 179, 278n23
- Sumpa Khempo Yeshe Paljor (Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal byor), 75–76
- Sūryagupta, 124
- Tangut, xxiin1, 25–26, 32, 35n20, 36n39, 38, 74–75, 77, 83
- Tārā, 7, 21n27, 77, 114n24, 123–126, 131, 134n29, 134n35, 274
- Ārya Tārā, 134n29
- Green Tārā, 123–126, 135n39, 270
- Twenty-One Tārās, 116, 123–125, 134n36, 137
- White Tārā, 25, 124–125, 130, 213
- Tārānātha, 118, 123, 125, 133n7, 134n35
- Tashilhunpo Monastery, 102, 118, 143, 209
- Tenzin Chodron (Irina Urbanayeva), 270
- thangka*, 135n48, 136n65, 141–144, 146–147, 149–150, 153, 185–189, 217
- Tövkhön temple, 131
- Tseren Donduk, 40–42, 48–50
- Tsongkhapa, 96, 98, 103, 111–112, 118, 123–124, 140–143, 145–147, 153–154, 157n57, 164
- tulku*, 274
- Tümed, 8, 9, 10, 14, 35n13, 35n22, 140–141, 156n22, 192
- Tuṣita, 58, 138–139, 142, 145–146, 149, 151, 153, 155
- two laws, xviii, 44, 48–50, 73, 75
- üge*, xix, xx, 167–169, 175, 177n24
- Urad, 95, 97–103, 105, 109, 112, 113n12–13, 114n21
- Urga, 53, 116, 164, 170–171, 185, 209–210
- Vairocana, 120–123, 132–133, 141
- Vajrabhairava maṇḍala, 147–149, 153, 158n81
- Vajradhara, 8–10, 96, 103, 116, 126–130, 133, 135n42, 135n48, 137, 140, 153, 189, 203, 207–208
- Vajrapāṇi, 179–198, 199n5, 199n19, 200n21, 200n33, 201n39, 201n55, 202–204, 210–211, 217, 225, 227
- Vajrapāṇi Mountain, 183, 185, 225 (*see also* Ogtontenger Mountain)
- Vajrasattva, 11, 116, 126, 128–130, 135n42, 137, 153

- Vajrayāna, xix, 96, 104, 116, 119–120, 122–123,
128–129, 132, 134n24, 137–139, 154, 160,
165, 179, 181, 280–281, 289
- Yadamsüren, 163, 170–173, 177nn34–35
- Yamāntaka, 11, 86–87, 115n24, 119, 131, 207
- Yavuukhulan, 172–175
- Zanabazar, xix, 116–133, 133n2, 133n7, 133n13,
134n15, 134n34, 135n41, 137–140, 142–143,
149–154, 155n2, 159n96, 162–163, 192–193,
209, 218n1
- Zava Damdin, xviii, 54–66, 67n14, 68n47,
68n49, 68n54, 69n57, 75–77, 79, 82–84,
88, 91n67
- Zaya Pandita Luvsanperenlei, 117–118, 126–127,
133nn1–2, 133n7, 135n45, 192
- Zaya Pandita Namkhai Jantsu, xviii, 24, 29–33,
42, 96
- Zünghars, 34, 39, 44–45
- Züngharia, xviii, 24, 29, 33–34, 37,
39–43, 50
- Züün Khüree (East Khüree), 129, 135n54, 145,
148–149, 158n81, 185, 200n31, 239n32

