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Buddhism in Mongolia after Socialism: Continuity, Change,and Modernity

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Abstract: This work examines the rise and development of Mongolian Buddhism as a Mongolian tradition, as well as the challenges and issues it faced following the democratic revolution of 1990. After decades of religious prohibition under state socialism, Mongolians began searching for a renewed sense of national identity in the post-communist era. With the fall of the Communist Party, they turned to key cultural and historical symbols that had defined their heritage before the advent of communism, most notably, Chinggis Khan and his Golden Lineage, along with Mongolian Buddhism. This study is structured into two main sections. The first provides a brief historical overview of Mongolian Buddhism, tracing its origins and early development. The second focuses on its resurgence after 1990, highlighting the role of Buddhism in shaping Mongolia's post-socialist identity. It explores how Mongolians are actively redefining their national identity within a modern society and their efforts to rebuild Buddhism as a genuine Mongolian tradition. Additionally, this work examines the pivotal role Tibetan scholars played in the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia. The analysis sheds light on the intertwined destinies of Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the contemporary era.

Keywords: Mongolian Buddhism; post-socialist religious revival; Buddhist NGOs; state-religion relations

Revival and Reconnection

The revival of Mongolian Buddhism since the early 1990s has been deeply intertwined with efforts to reclaim national identity and cultural heritage after decades of suppression under state socialism. Following Mongolia's democratic revolution in 1990, the resurgence of Buddhism was not only a spiritual awakening but also a symbol of national pride and a reconnection with the country's historical ties to former Buddhist traditions. As a cornerstone of Mongolian identity, Buddhism played a critical role in articulating a sense of continuity with the pre-socialist past, reinforcing cultural values, and providing a moral framework during a period of rapid social and political transformation. Amid this revival, Tibetan Buddhist institutions emerged, particularly those affiliated with Tibetan monks in exile. These groups positioned themselves as custodians of "authentic" Buddhist teachings in Mongolia. Their interventions were not limited to the spiritual realm but extended to institutional innovation, including the establishment of Buddhist non-governmental organisations. This paper argues that while Tibetan Buddhist networks influenced Buddhist NGOs in Mongolia, their formation and activities were also driven by local efforts to reclaim and redefine Mongolia's Buddhist heritage. By targeting both monks and lay practitioners, Tibetan-affiliated NGOs introduced a new paradigm of Buddhist education that emphasised textual study, meditation practices, and philosophical inquiry alongside traditional rituals. These organisations provided structured programmes, international connections, and funding that many Mongolian monasteries lacked. However, this intervention raises important questions about power dynamics, cultural authenticity, and the role of external actors in shaping Mongolia's religious landscape.

This article draws on fieldwork I have conducted in Mongolia from 2018 to 2021. My engagement consisted of a series of visits and research activities that allowed me to observe and participate in the contemporary revival of Buddhism in Ulaanbaatar. This involvement included attending classes, assisting with fundraising efforts, and participating in initiatives at several Buddhist centres, namely the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu Centre, Jampa Ling Asral Centre, Avidyn Oron Centre, and the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. These experiences provided valuable first-hand observations and interactions, which form the basis of this study. The establishment of Buddhist NGOs reflects broader trends in the globalisation of religion, where transnational networks and institutional frameworks play a pivotal role in the dissemination of religious traditions. Scholars like Abrahms-Kavunenko (2019) and Sinclair (2008) have explored the intersections of religious revival and reform in post-socialist contexts, highlighting the complexities of these processes. By framing this discussion within the broader context of post-socialist religious revival and transnational religious networks, this paper seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on the

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globalisation of Buddhism and its implications for national identity, cultural heritage, and religious practice in Mongolia. The focus on Buddhist NGOs sheds light on the subtle yet impactful ways in which Tibetan Buddhist monks have navigated the socio-political landscape of Mongolia, shaping its religious revival in ways that merit critical examination.

While extensive research has explored the history, traditions, and revival of Mongolian Buddhism, anthropological studies on Buddhist NGOs in Mongolia remain limited. This gap highlights the need for further examination of their role in shaping Mongolia's post-socialist religious landscape. Existing research, however, offers useful conceptual frameworks for understanding Buddhism's transformation in the country. Scholars have suggested various analytical dichotomies to capture the complexity of Mongolian Buddhism and to highlight tensions between different currents of practice, authority, and identity. One key theme in the literature is the distinction between traditional and reformed forms of Buddhism in post-socialist societies. Abrahms-Kavunenko (2019) categorises Mongolian Buddhism into two forms: cultural and reformed. The cultural form, rooted in rituals and monastic traditions that survived socialism, contrasts with reformed Buddhism, which emerged in Tibetan-supported centres emphasising philosophical study and personal spiritual growth. A similar framework appears in Sinclair's (2008) study on Kalmykia, where she distinguishes between revival, the restoration of pre-socialist Buddhist traditions and reform, driven by international Tibetan Buddhist organisations. Notably, younger generations in both contexts tend to engage more with the philosophical and educational aspects of Buddhism rather than its ritualistic elements.

The pluralistic nature of Mongolia's post-socialist religious landscape further complicates these dynamics. Unlike Kalmykia, where Buddhist revival was centred on monastic institutions, Mongolia witnessed an influx of diverse religious movements in the 1990s, including Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian organisations. Sinclair (2008) argues that this religious diversity contributed to the categorisation of reformed and new religions in Mongolia, reflecting broader global influences on local religious practices. Another relevant perspective comes from Elverskog (2006), who adapts Numrich's framework of national and convert Buddhism to the Mongolian context. He suggests that Mongolia's Buddhist revival is not merely religious but deeply tied to national identity and cultural heritage. This emphasis on tradition sometimes contrasts with international Buddhist organisations, which focus more on meditation and philosophical study than on cultural preservation.

Beyond doctrinal and institutional changes, Buddhist organisations in Mongolia also engage in social work. A study by Yanjinsuren, Batkhishig et al. (2018), in collaboration with the Asian Research Institute of International Social Work, examines how Buddhist monasteries integrate social welfare into their religious activities. Their research highlights karma as a foundational principle guiding Buddhist social work, linking spiritual practice to community welfare and moral development. Taken together, these studies provide a nuanced understanding of Mongolian Buddhism's transformation in the post-socialist era. They illustrate the tensions between tradition and reform, national identity and globalisation, and ritual practice and philosophical engagement. As Buddhist NGOs continue to shape Mongolia's religious landscape, further research is needed to explore their social, cultural, and political significance.

Historical Overview

To explain the origins of Tibetan Buddhist NGOs in Mongolia's post-socialist religious revival, it is essential to examine how Buddhism historically took root in Mongolia, evolved over centuries, and became intertwined with Mongolian identity and governance. Mongolian Buddhism has undergone significant transformations shaped by various cultural and political forces, which can be broadly categorised into three periods: the Tibetan influence in the 13th century, the Qing Dynasty's dominance in the 17th century, and the impact of Soviet rule in the 20th century. The first major influence was the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism during the 13th century. During the Mongol Yuan dynasty, founded by Kubilai Khan (1215-1294), Tibetan Buddhist practices and teachings were incorporated into Mongolian culture. Following Altan Khan's (1507-1582) meeting with the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588), Tibetan Buddhism became the dominant form in Mongolia, establishing the religious and cultural framework that would persist for centuries.

In the 17th century, under Qing dynasty rule (1644-1912), Mongolian Buddhism was further consolidated and institutionalised, but also placed under stricter political control. The Qing emperors sought to integrate Buddhism into state governance, shaping hierarchical structures while maintaining strong Tibetan influences. The most disruptive period occurred under Soviet rule in the 20th century, when systematic suppression of religious practices targeted high-ranking monks and scholars, with executions, persecution, and widespread bans on Buddhist rituals. This state-enforced atheism caused a deep rupture in Mongolia's religious and cultural fabric, the effects of which persisted into the post-socialist era. Together, these three phases, the Tibetan introduction, Qing consolidation, and Soviet repression, shaped Mongolia's unique religious landscape. While Tibetan and Qing

influences established doctrinal, institutional, and cultural frameworks, the Soviet period inflicted the most profound disruption, fundamentally altering both religious practice and the broader social structures that sustained Buddhism.

The historical relationship between Mongolian rulers and Tibetan Buddhism illustrates how religion served as both a spiritual and political instrument in the region. This pivotal alliance solidified the connection between Mongolia and Tibet, with Mongol rulers adopting Tibetan Buddhism and administering Tibet through the leading monks of the Sakya sect. During the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), founded by Kubilai Khan, Buddhism gained significant influence at the imperial court, not only as a spiritual force but also as a means of legitimising Mongol rule. In 1253, Kubilai Khan, then a prince under the Mongke Khan, sought to summon Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyeltsen (1182-1251), but upon learning of his passing in 1251, he was introduced to Sakya Pandita's nephew, Phagpa Lodro Gyeltsen (1235-1280). Upon ascending to the throne in 1260, Kubilai Khan elevated Phagpa to the rank of State Preceptor and later Imperial Preceptor in 1270, marking a formal institutionalisation of Tibetan Buddhism within the Yuan court. Phagpa's creation of the Phagpa script, a writing system designed for the Mongol administration, further strengthened the integration of Tibetan Buddhism into Mongolian governance.

Following the collapse of the Yuan Dynasty, Mongol rulers continued to foster ties with Tibetan Buddhism. Altan Khan (1507-1582), a descendant of Kubilai Khan, played a crucial role in revitalising Mongol-Tibetan relations. In 1578, he invited the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588), to a historic meeting at Khökh Nuur (modern-day Qinghai). During this encounter, Altan Khan bestowed upon Sonam Gyatso the title "Dalai Lama", meaning "Ocean of Wisdom". This meeting reinforced the spread of the Gelug school (also known as the "Yellow Hat sect") in Mongolia and set a precedent for Mongol rulers' patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. The tradition continued with the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso (1589-1617), who was born into Altan Khan's lineage, further intertwining Mongolian royal heritage with Tibetan religious authority. Abatai Khan (1554-1588) also played a crucial role in the propagation of Buddhism. In 1581, he established relations with the Third Dalai Lama, who gifted him a statue depicting Buddha Shakyamuni and bestowed upon him the title Ochirbat Tusheet Khan. In 1586, Abatai Khan (1554-1588) built Erdene Zuu Monastery near the ruins of Karakorum, marking the establishment of the first major Buddhist centre in Khalkha, Mongolia (Bao 2024).

The second major historical phase shaping Mongolian Buddhism occurred during the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644-1912). The Qing emperors strategically controlled Mongolian-Tibetan relations to prevent Mongolian unification while consolidating their own dominance. Policies ensured that the reincarnations of the Mongolian khutugtu (tulku; reincarnated monk) were recognised only in Tibet or Khökh Nuur, rather than in Mongolia. By centralising religious authority in Tibet, the Qing weakened Mongolian autonomy, mirroring earlier politico-religious strategies employed by the Mongol Empire. From the 16th century onward, Buddhism became deeply woven into Mongolian society, reaching its peak in the 17th century. The First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar (1635-1723), played a key role in institutionalising the Gelug school in Khalkha, Mongolia. A direct descendant of Chinggis Khan through Tusheet Khan Gombodorj, Zanabazar emerged as both a spiritual and political leader. His tenure coincided with the military campaigns of the Oirat (Western Mongol) leader Galdan Boshugtu Khan (1644-1697), which led the Khalkha Mongols to seek Qing protection. In 1691, Zanabazar's decision to submit to Qing rule at the Doloon Nuur Chuulgan marked a turning point in Mongolian history, formally bringing Khalkha Mongolia under Manchu control. Under Qing rule, Buddhism became deeply entrenched in Mongolian society, but it was also carefully managed to prevent political consolidation. The Qing required that the reincarnations of the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu be identified in Tibet, ensuring imperial oversight. Despite this, Buddhism flourished, with the Jebtsundamba lineage continuing across nine recognised reincarnations, only the first two of whom were born in Mongolia. The Eighth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Bogd Khan (1870-1924), played a crucial role in Mongolia's struggle for independence. On 29 December 1911, he was declared the spiritual and political leader of Mongolia following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, marking the beginning of Mongolia's modern era.

By the early 20th century, Buddhism had reached its peak in Mongolia, numbers ranging around over 700 monasteries, 1,000 temples, and a monastic population exceeding 110,000, accounting for one-fifth of the total population (Bira 2010) During the communist era, more than 1,200 monasteries were destroyed, according to a study conducted by the Arts Council of Mongolia (ACM, n.a.), along with their libraries, sacred artwork, and medical equipment, effectively erasing centuries of religious and cultural heritage. However, this period of religious prosperity was abruptly curtailed by Soviet influence. Following the 1921 revolution and the establishment of a socialist state, the Mongolian People's Republic systematically dismantled traditional religious structures. By 1937, an estimated 17,500 monks had been arrested, and around 14,200 had been executed (Genden 1999: 104). With the Soviet-backed abolition of the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu institution and the introduction of the Khamba Lama system to regulate Mongolian Buddhism under

state control, Mongolian Buddhism entered a period of severe repression. Nonetheless, Buddhism endured in a limited form, and following the democratic revolution of 1990, it experienced a revival, with renewed monastic activity and public religious observance. The historical trajectory of Buddhism in Mongolia thus reflects its dual role as a spiritual force and a political tool. From its adoption by Mongol rulers during the Yuan Dynasty to its manipulation by the Qing and suppression under Soviet rule, Mongolian Buddhism has remained a central pillar of cultural identity and national history. Today, its revival continues to shape Mongolia's religious and social landscape, maintaining its deep historical and spiritual connections to Tibetan Buddhism.

After the death of the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba in 1924, Soviet-backed reforms led to the suppression of Buddhism in Mongolia. It was not until the 1990s, after the Soviet Union's collapse, that Mongolian Buddhism began to recover. When the Eighth Bogd Jebtsundamba passed away in 1924, the depiction of the Bogd and other khutugtus (reincarnated monks) was officially banned by the government. This marked the beginning of a long period of suppression of Buddhist practices and institutions in Mongolia.

In 1944, amidst the geopolitical tensions of World War II, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) sent a delegation to the Soviet Union and Mongolia. Anticipating international scrutiny, Joseph Stalin (1878-1953), who was well-informed about Mongolia's situation, instructed the Mongolian leader Khorloogiin Choibalsan (1895-1952) to reopen select religious sites. As a result, Gandantegchilen Monastery in Ulaanbaatar, one of the few monasteries not destroyed during the purges, was renovated and reopened. Trusted monks were carefully selected to operate it, and the monastery was re-established under the name "Murgulyn Dugan" (Praying Temple) in 1944 (Bareja-Starzyńska & Havnevik 2006). This marked one of the rare instances where Buddhism was allowed to function during the communist period, albeit under heavy state control. The democratisation movement of the late 1980s, influenced by the political restructuring (perestroika) in the Soviet Union, provided Mongolia with new opportunities to reclaim its religious and cultural traditions. On 9 March 1990, the resignation of the entire Politburo of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) marked a pivotal moment in Mongolia's democratic revolution. This event paved the way for the adoption of a new constitution in 1992, which officially enshrined the principles of a civil democratic society, including the protection of religious freedom.

The Revival of Buddhism

In the wake of these political changes, significant efforts were made to revive traditional religious practices and cultural heritage. The Mongolian Constitution guarantees both the right to religious practice and the right to remain without any religious affiliation. It established a legal framework for the "Law on Relations between the State and Monasteries." This legislation provided the foundation for the restoration of previously destroyed monasteries and the revitalisation of religious practices. As a result, Mongolians reconstructed old monasteries, built new ones, and re-established religious communities across the country. In February 1990, the government formally approved the restoration of some key historical monasteries, including Erdene-Zuu Monastery of Övörkhangai province, Amarbayasgalant Monastery of Selenge province, and Shankh Monastery of Övörkhangai province, allowing the resumption of religious services (Altaibaatar 2018: 92). Two years later, in 1992, the First Mongolian Buddhist Congress convened and officially recognised Gandantegchilen Monastery as the Centre of Buddhist Religion in Mongolia.

After the democratic movement in Mongolia, Buddhism experienced rapid growth, with many monasteries opening in a relatively short period. Following the collapse of the Soviet regime, the leaders of the democratic revolution sought to reconnect Mongolians with their pre-socialist history and culture, positioning Buddhism and Chinggis Khan as central elements of the new national identity. This approach mirrored the strategies of other post-socialist states, which often drew upon their historical and cultural legacies to construct a cohesive national identity (Abrahms-Kavunenko, 2012). Chinggis Khan became an emblem of national pride, his image featured prominently on banknotes, and his name was associated with airports, central squares, and even vodka brands. Intriguingly, concepts such as Zagarvad Khan[1] or the incarnation of Vajrapani, which intertwined Chinggis Khan's legacy with Buddhist principles, emerged during this period (Bareja-Starzyńska & Havnevik 2006).

The symbols of Mongolian national culture and Buddhism were deliberately incorporated into the design of the flag, state emblem, and state seal of Mongolia. The state seal prominently features the Soyombo, a symbol of Mongolian independence, placed on a base of a badam (lotus flower). The word "Mongolia" is inscribed on both sides, and the seal handle is adorned with a lion. Additional Buddhist symbols, such as the spirit horse, the chandmani (cintamani) gem, and the white lotus base, further emphasise Mongolia's cultural and spiritual

[1] *Cakravartin Khan or Zagarvad Khan (tib: khor los sgyur ba'i rgyal po) is the Buddhist title for a universal monarch, applied to Chinggis Khan to elevate his spiritual legitimacy.*

heritage. These elements were also present in the national symbols during the reign of the Bogd Khan, reinforcing the continuity of Mongolia's historical identity. The modern coat of arms and flag of Mongolia were first created in 1911, following Mongolia's liberation from the rule of Qing Dynasty. At this time, Mongolia established itself as an independent state amidst a global context where many European nations and American republics were asserting their sovereignty. To reflect its newfound independence, the Russian composer Andrey Vyacheslavovich Kadlec was commissioned to create a national anthem in 1915, the song we know today as the *Zuun Langiin Joroo Luus*[2], while the *Soyombo* symbol was incorporated into the national flag for the first time (Bulag 2016). In 1924, after the abdication of Bogd Khan, the country's name was changed to the Mongolian People's Republic. The first national emblem under the new constitution featured the Soyombo symbol on a base of a badam (lotus) flower. However, in 1926, as part of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party's anti-Buddhist policies, the Fifth Party Congress adopted a new emblem. This emblem depicted a horseman riding towards the sun, accompanied by five heads of cattle, with a communist five-pointed star positioned at the top.

The connection between Buddhism and Mongolian state-building during this period is further exemplified by the participation of high-level political figures in religious ceremonies. In 2001, President N. Bagabandi and Prime Minister N. Enkhbayar visited Gandantegchilen Monastery, where they took part in a mandala-offering ceremony, signalling the state's ongoing role in the religious and cultural revival. The gilded statue of Janraiseg (Avalokiteshvara) holds a special place in the history of Mongolia's religious and political landscape. Originally constructed in 1913 to symbolise Mongolian independence, the Janraiseg statue was destroyed in the 1930s as part of the state's anti-Buddhist campaigns during the state socialist period. Although the statue was not unveiled as originally scheduled after the state socialist era, it was finally revealed on 27 October 1996. Its unveiling marked a symbolic gesture of national revival, reasserting Mongolia's independence and religious heritage in the post-socialist era. This event was not only a religious but also a political statement, as it demonstrated the state's interest in aligning itself with the symbolic power of Buddhism in consolidating national identity.

In 2007, under the leadership of President N. Enkhbayar, another important religious monument, the Dharma protector Ochirvaan (Vajrapani), was created by a team of artists led by the artist-monk Purevbat. The creation of this tanka was part of an effort to link Mongolia's contemporary religious practices with its historical traditions. The Ochirvaan, along with representations of Mongolian historical figures such as Chinggis Khan, Ögedei Khan, and Kubilai Khan, was created using the *zeegt naamal* method. The Mongolian Buddhist community holds that Ochirvaan (Vajrapani) is a protector deity of the Mongols and that Chinggis Khan was an incarnation of this deity. This belief is rooted in historical texts such as the 16th-century "Erdeniin Erikh", which explicitly identifies Chinggis Khan as an incarnation of the Vajrapani, linking the Mongol rulers to the divine and reinforcing the sacred nature of their political authority. A significant event in this context occurred on 6 July 2019, when Buddhist NGOs, in collaboration with the Gandantegchilen Monastery, organised a cultural event which commemorated both Vesak Day and the 84th

[2] *Translates as Pacer Mule worth a hundred silver coins.*

Figure 1. Celebrating the 84th birthday of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama outside the Avolokateshvara statue, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. © Bavuudorj Bumbayar, 2019.07.06.

birthday of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, with participation of other religious figures in Mongolia. This gathering not only celebrated the Dalai Lama's role in Buddhist education but also demonstrated the growing cultural and religious autonomy of Mongolia in the post-socialist period. It highlights the re-establishment of Mongolia as an important player in the global Buddhist community, particularly in relation to Tibetan Buddhism, which historically shared close cultural and religious ties with Mongolia.

Vesak Day is the most important Buddhist festival that celebrates the birth, enlightenment, and passing away of Gautama Buddha. It usually falls on the full moon of May. On this day, Buddhists visit temples, offer flowers and candles, meditate, and do good deeds to honor the Buddha's teachings of peace, kindness, and wisdom. Mongolian Government's recognition of Buddhism was solidified with the passage of a law on 20 December 2019, which declared the Burkhan bagshin duitsen udur (Buddha Jayanti), the 15th day of the first summer month of the lunar calendar, as a public holiday. This policy initiative underscores the importance of Buddhism not only as a spiritual tradition but as a critical part of Mongolia's national identity. The establishment of such a holiday can be interpreted as a form of state-sponsored recognition and validation of Buddhism's central role in Mongolian society, reinforcing its position as an essential element of cultural continuity and national unity. The connection between Buddhism and Mongolian national identity can also be seen in the modern observance of the Great Day of the Buddha or the Vesak Day, a national celebration in which Buddhist devotees participate in a festive parade from Gandantegchilen Monastery to Sukhbaatar Square. This event culminates in a Chinggis Khan sacrifice ritual performed by monks, further highlighting the convergence of Buddhist rituals with Mongolian historical narratives and national symbols. In this context, Vesak Day becomes not just a religious observance but also a vehicle for expressing a collective national consciousness, where Buddhism is mobilised to strengthen the political and cultural unity of the nation.

Among the influential foreign Buddhist figures, the 19th Kushok Bakula Rinpoche (1918-2003) stands out as one of the most significant contributors to the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia. On 31 December 1989, Bakula Rinpoche was appointed Ambassador of India to Mongolia, a position he held for ten years. During this period, he became a central figure in the efforts to restore Mongolian Buddhism. Bakula Rinpoche first visited Mongolia in 1969 to organise the Asian Buddhist Peace Conference, a time when Buddhism was still a taboo subject under Mongolia's socialist regime. Despite the restrictions, he secretly taught Buddhism to a small group of people in his hotel room. One of his students, Choijamts, who later became the Abbot of Gandantegchilen Monastery, reflected on this period: "Bakula Rinpoche taught us secretly during the closed and strict socialist regime in Mongolia, which brought us closer to our teacher" (Wallace 2014). In 1999, he founded his own monastery in Ulaanbaatar, named Betub Danjai Choinkhorlin. His dedication to spreading Buddhist teachings and reviving religious practices was evident in his willingness to travel across rural Mongolia, often on rough roads, to preach, perform rituals, and connect with devotees. Bakula Rinpoche's growing popularity led many to gather outside the Indian embassy to meet him, affectionately referring to him as *Elchin bagsh* (Ambassador teacher).

Bakula Rinpoche emphasised the importance of traditional monastic education and was instrumental in sending young Mongolian monks to study in India. He

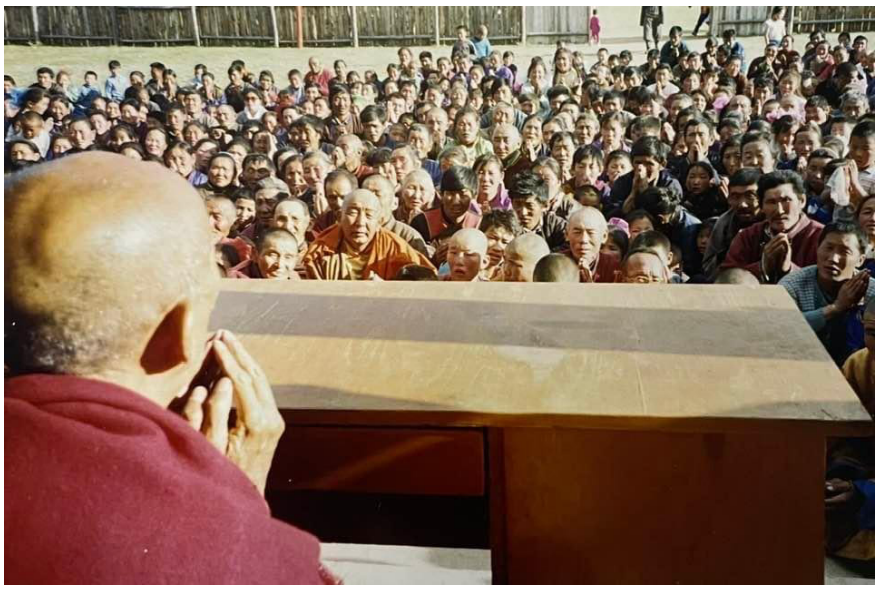

Figure 2. Elchin bagsh's arrival in Mongolia. 1990s, outside of Gandantegchenlin monastery. © Baasansuren

facilitated visas and arranged for these monks to study at prestigious institutions such as the Gomang and Sera monasteries in India and the Buddhist Studies Institute in Dharamsala. Additionally, he organised Indian government scholarships for young monks to pursue studies in Buddhism and Tibetan Studies, ensuring a steady foundation for the future of Mongolian Buddhism. The other famous Rinpoche contributing to the revival of Mongolian Buddhism was Gurudeva Rinpoche (1908-2009), a highly esteemed monk of Inner Mongolian origin, born in Ordos. From the age of 20, he studied in Tibet at Drepung Gomang Monastery. With the Chinese takeover of Tibet, he became a refugee in India. However, he came into conflict with the Dalai Lama over the worship of the protector deity, Shugden, banned by the Dalai Lama, and was consequently forced to leave India for Nepal. From there, for the same reason, he emigrated to Mongolia in 1991. He contributed greatly to the revival, restoration, and reopening of temples in Mongolia but, at the same time, spread the controversial worship of the Shugden[3] deity. In addition to these two Rinpoche, various foreign organisations and Buddhist institutions offered help from the very beginning, not only Tibetan ones from India but others from Europe, North America, and Asian Buddhist countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Nepal, Hong Kong, South Korea, and India. These included organisations of Buddhist traditions other than Tibetan ones. Although these Buddhist organisations have significantly contributed to the revival, their ongoing presence still represents an external influence on "Mongolian Buddhism", which retains uniquely Mongolian features in its recitations, rituals, and monastic practices as preserved and revived by the elder monks who survived the purges and the communist period. These foreign Buddhist organisations have exerted an influence on the way that Buddhism has developed during this revival period by introducing different lineages and practices not previously present in Mongolia and by requiring the keeping of strict monastic discipline, an issue handled differently in Mongolia.

However, the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia has not been without its challenges. Monasteries have faced financial and human-resource constraints, and there has been an ongoing struggle to adapt religious practices to modern contexts. During the socialist era, many monks married and had families, and some of their students have followed suit. This has led to criticism from Western and Tibetan monks, as the tradition of celibacy was not strictly upheld by certain Mongolian monks. The constitutional guarantee of religious freedom in the 1990s further complicated the religious landscape. Western and Tibetan Buddhist practitioners introduced their own interpretations of Buddhism, while missionaries from various Christian denominations, equipped with substantial financial resources and modern strategies, actively sought to spread their faith in Mongolia. Additionally, new religious movements promoting meditation, yoga, vegetarianism, and alternative spiritual practices have gained attraction, creating a competitive environment for the spread of Buddhism. Tibetan monks, many of whom had established Buddhist centres in the West, also founded new centres alongside traditional monasteries in Mongolia, adding to the diversity and complexity of the religious revival.

One of the major government initiatives aimed at supporting Mongolian Buddhism in the post-socialist era was the decision to permit the Dalai Lama's visits to Mongolia, despite the potential for tension with the People's Republic of China, which views the Dalai Lama as a contentious figure due to his advocacy for Tibetan autonomy. The decision to allow such visits reflected a broader political and religious shift in Mongolia, where Buddhism, once suppressed under socialist rule, was increasingly embraced as a vital component of the nation's cultural and spiritual heritage. The Fourteenth Dalai Lama as the re-incarnation of the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism is highly revered by many Mongolians as both a religious teacher and a symbol of Tibetan-Mongolian cultural ties (Lhagvademchig 2010). The engagement with the Dalai Lama by the Mongolian state reflects an attempt to reassert Mongolia's Buddhist identity and establish ties with Tibetan Buddhism, despite the potential diplomatic consequences with neighbouring China.

In addition to these symbolic acts of recognition, the Mongolian state took further steps to affirm its commitment to Buddhism by facilitating the formal recognition of spiritual leadership within the country. On 17 August 2010, President Elbegdorj Tsakhia granted Mongolian citizenship to the Ninth Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Jamphel Namdrol Choykyi Gyeltsen (1933-2012), a figure of immense spiritual significance in Mongolia, who had been confirmed by the Dalai Lama in 1991. The recognition of the Ninth Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu by the Mongolian state was further solidified on 2 November 2011, when all Mongolian monasteries officially honoured him as the head of Mongolian Buddhism at the Gandantegchilen Monastery. This gesture marked a significant moment in the state's role in re-establishing Buddhist leadership structures within Mongolia after decades of religious suppression during the socialist era. The reverence for the Ninth Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu is indicative of the symbolic power of religious leaders in contemporary Mongolia, where the state continues to navigate the complex intersection of religious authority, cultural identity, and political power.

[3] *The Shugden controversy in Mongolia became particularly visible after the 1990 democratic transition, as religious revival allowed greater freedom for Buddhist practice, and intensified in the 2000s, when debates over Dorje Shugden worship intersected with the influence of the Dalai Lama.*

Tibetan Dharma Centres and Their Influence in Mongolia

Tibetan Buddhist non-governmental and community organisations began to take shape in the West during the 1960s, a period marked by significant geopolitical upheaval in Tibet. The catalyst for this migration and the subsequent establishment of Tibetan Buddhist centres in the West was the military invasion of Tibet by the Chinese People's Liberation Army in 1959. Amid the violent suppression, the Dalai Lama, along with many Tibetan monks and laypeople, fled Tibet, crossing the Himalayas into India (Coleman 2001). Approximately 80,000 Tibetans fled to India in 1959 following the Dalai Lama's escape, according to demographic research on Tibetan refugees (Bhatia 2002).

In the face of an inability to return to their homeland, Tibetan monks established Buddhist monasteries in India, where they began to teach and spread the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. From the 1960s onward, Tibetan Buddhist monks began to tour the West, giving lectures, publishing books, and organising cultural events. These efforts helped generate a substantial following for Tibetan Buddhism, particularly in the United States and Europe. The growing international influence of Tibetan Buddhist teachers became evident in 1989 when the Fourteenth Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, followed by the conferral of the US Congressional Gold Medal in 2007. These accolades further elevated the prestige and recognition of Tibetan Buddhism on the global stage. Tibetan Buddhist monks began their outreach to the West by visiting countries like England, France, and Switzerland in the late 1960s to establish small Buddhist centres. These visits were significant in generating interest in Tibetan Buddhism, paving the way for the Dalai Lama's first visit to the West in 1973. His visit was transformative in attracting a large and diverse following. In the subsequent decades, the four major Tibetan Buddhist schools, Gelugpa, Nyingma, Sakya, and Kagyu, expanded their presence in Western countries, and Western Buddhists increasingly travelled to Dharamsala in India to study under the guidance of the Dalai Lama and other prominent Buddhist masters.

In the context of Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist relations, the first Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist organisation in the West was established in 1955 by Geshe Wangyal, a Kalmyk monk who had fled Soviet persecution in the 1930s and eventually settled in New Jersey. This organisation marked the beginning of a wider trend of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhists seeking to preserve and promote their traditions in diaspora communities (Lopes 2011). According to Richard Seager, there have been three main forces driving the promotion of Tibetan Buddhist traditions in the United States over the past several decades (Seager 2012). First, the Tibetan liberation movement, supported by American human rights organisations and celebrity advocates, has successfully brought the issue of Tibet to the attention of a global audience. The second factor has been the translation and distribution of Tibetan Buddhist scriptures, making these teachings more accessible to Western practitioners. Third, the establishment of training centres and the coordination of operational and political issues has been crucial in institutionalising Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Prominent celebrities, such as Richard Gere, have played an important role in these efforts, particularly in their support for the "Free Tibet" movement.

The wave of Tibetan Buddhist influence extended to Mongolia after the democratic revolution of 1990. Tibetan teachers began visiting Mongolia to share their teachings on Buddhism, with the first notable teachers being Jhado Rinpoche and Yelo Rinpoche. They taught Buddhist doctrines and philosophies at the Mongolian Buddhist Institute (Lhagvademchig 2013). In 1999, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition was established, followed by the Jampa Ling Centre (based in Ireland), founded by the venerable Panchen Otrul Rinpoche in 2001. These centres represented an expansion of Tibetan Buddhist influence within Mongolia, which was further supported by international Buddhist organisations from Tibet, India, Australia, Ireland, and the United States. The rise of Tibetan Buddhist institutions in Mongolia is mirrored by the growing number of Buddhist monasteries and lamas since 1990. After decades of suppression under the socialist regime, during which only the Gandantegchilen Monastery was operational, Mongolia experienced a religious revival that saw the establishment of numerous Buddhist centres. By 1996, Mongolia had approximately 2,000 monks and 155 officially registered monasteries. Following the development of new monasteries and doctrine schools, those numbers kept increasing; by 1998, these numbers had increased to 3,000 monks and 200 monasteries. This resurgence of Buddhist institutions in Mongolia was part of a broader process of spiritual and cultural revitalisation following the collapse of socialist governance. According to a 2016 survey of religious institutions in Mongolia, of the 848 legal entities operating in the religious field, 34.6% (294) were Buddhist monasteries (Altaibaatar 2018). These monasteries have continued to serve as centres for religious rituals and education, thereby re-establishing the role of Buddhism as a component of Mongolian society. In examining these developments through the lens of religious diffusion and transnationalism, we see that Tibetan Buddhism's spread in the West and its subsequent introduction to Mongolia align with broader patterns of religious globalisation. Tibetan Buddhism's journey from a persecuted religion in Tibet to a globally recognised

spiritual tradition is emblematic of the ways in which religious movements can thrive in exile and become influential in new social and political contexts.

The Relation of State and Religion in Post-Socialist Mongolia

The "Law on State-Monastery Relations"[4] adopted in 1993, established the legal framework for religious organisations in Mongolia, defining them as "monasteries, temples, monastic schools, centres, and their governing bodies, established to meet the religious and spiritual needs of the faithful and engaged in religious rituals, meetings, and educational activities, and which possess an official license". This law not only reaffirmed the central role of monasteries in Mongolian Buddhism but also marked a significant shift in the post-socialist era, where religious institutions, now freed from state control, were legally recognised and given the authority to operate openly. Under the new legal framework, while monasteries remained the principal form of religious organisation, new types of public religious organisations began to emerge.

These organisations, which differ from traditional monasteries in terms of their structure and operations, reflect the evolving social and political conditions in Mongolia. They represent a diversification of religious practice in the country, characterised by their ability to operate more flexibly than traditional monasteries, often focusing on a broader range of activities such as community outreach, education, and charitable work, alongside religious rituals. Importantly, these new religious organisations sometimes fall outside the purview of the "Law on State-Monastery Relations". In such cases, they are registered under the "Law on Non-State Organisations"[5], which governs the operation of entities that do not meet the criteria of a traditional religious establishment but still serve the religious and spiritual needs of the population. The emergence of these non-traditional religious organisations marks a significant development in the religious landscape of Mongolia. As Mongolian society transitions from a state-controlled to a more pluralistic religious environment, these organisations are playing an increasing role in shaping the practice and transmission of Buddhism in the country. Four major centres currently operating in Ulaanbaatar, the Jampa Ling-Asral Centre, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, the Avidyn Oron (Realm of Avid), and the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu Centre, are notable examples of such organisations. These centres, while formally established as non-monastic religious entities, contribute significantly to the religious life of the capital city and provide spaces for Mongolians to engage with Buddhist teachings in diverse ways. In light of this approach, some Western Buddhists, in particular, criticise Mongolian beliefs as "superstition" and argue that Mongolian practitioners are "not true Buddhists". Because the majority of people who identify as Buddhists in Mongolia practise Buddhism by visiting temples and monks for religious rituals, most of them are unfamiliar with the Buddhist doctrine or the true meaning of the religious scriptures chanted by monks and the rituals they perform in Tibetan script.

The most common practices include the fortune-calling ritual, dallaga, asking for divination, and worshipping statues of Buddhist protectors. Buddhist centres emphasise that Buddhist scriptures should be taught by qualified teachers and that the primary goal of Buddhism is to study its teachings, understand key Buddhist concepts and principles such as karma, and engage in good deeds. For instance, the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu Centre promotes an approach that incorporates Mongolian cultural and nationalistic elements. Initiatives such as "Let Mongolians Love Mongolians" and "Support for Pastoral Herders" focus on rural herder families, reflecting the influence of local Mongolian representatives in these programmes. The head monk of the centre, Jhado Rinpoche, obtained Mongolian citizenship in 2020.

Buddhism in Post-Socialist Mongolia

Since 1990, the resurgence of Buddhism in Mongolia has involved a dynamic process of negotiation between domestic traditions and foreign influences. Within this context, two distinct schools of thought have emerged: the "new" and the "old" forms of Buddhism. The terms "new" and "old" Buddhism are analytical labels used in this study to describe observable patterns of religious engagement. They are not fixed or prescriptive categories, but tools for understanding differences in practice, knowledge, and devotion among lay practitioners in contemporary Mongolia. This refers to practices emphasising structured study, meditation, and participation in centres or classrooms, reflecting a deliberate and systematic approach to learning, in contrast to traditional practices that centre on ritual participation, monastery visits, and receiving blessings or sutra recitations from monks, often without formal study. These labels help highlight differences in how laypeople experience and negotiate Buddhist knowledge, devotion, and authority in a post-socialist context.

The "old" Buddhism, which Mongolians sought to revive in the post-socialist era, represents an effort to restore the pre-socialist Buddhist traditions that were deeply rooted in Mongolian history and culture. This revival aimed to reconnect with the pre-20th-

[4] *Retrieved from https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/485*

[5] *Retrieved from https://legalinfo.mn/mn/detail/494*

century Buddhist practices and institutions that had been suppressed during the socialist era. However, this restoration process was not entirely insulated from external influences; it incorporated the impact of Tibetan teachers, both during and after the socialist era, shaping its current form. The distinction between these reflects the broader theoretical framework of religious change in post-socialist societies. The "old" Buddhism, in this sense, represents an attempt to reclaim and reassert indigenous religious identity in the face of historical disruption. However, the influence of Tibetan teachers and the Western Buddhist diaspora has introduced elements of "new" Buddhism, characterised by a more modernised, globally connected approach to Buddhist practice. The revival of "old" Buddhism involved reconstructing physical structures such as monasteries, reinvigorating traditional rituals, and re-establishing the hierarchical systems of religious authority that were integral to pre-socialist Buddhism. This movement emphasised the continuity of historical practices and knowledge, which Mongolians regarded as an essential component of their national and cultural identity. For instance, the reintroduction of teachings from the Gelug tradition, historically predominant in Mongolia, was central to this revival.

Conversely, the "new" Buddhism, heavily influenced by Tibetan teachers, reflects the transnational nature of Buddhist revivalism in Mongolia. Since the 1990s, prominent Tibetan Buddhist figures have played key roles in the dissemination of Buddhist teachings in Mongolia (Lhagvademchig 2013). These teachings often emphasised a modern, globally oriented interpretation of Buddhism that appealed to younger generations and urban populations. The "new" Buddhism also introduced innovative organisational structures, including non-monastic religious centres, educational programmes, and charitable initiatives that were less bound by traditional monastic frameworks. The "old" Buddhism seeks to rebuild this sacred canopy by emphasising historical continuity and national identity, while the "new" Buddhism redefines it in a more flexible, transnational context. This duality highlights the interplay between local and global forces in shaping religious revival in Mongolia. Comparatively, this negotiation between "old" and "new" Buddhism mirrors similar dynamics in other post-socialist countries, such as Russia and the former Soviet states, where religious institutions have sought to reclaim their pre-socialist heritage while also adapting to the influences of globalisation. The Mongolian case, however, is uniquely shaped by the historical and cultural ties to Tibetan Buddhism, which have both enriched and complicated the revival process. In conclusion, the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia since 1990 represents a complex interplay of tradition and modernity, domestic identity and foreign influence, and historical continuity and adaptation. The "old" and "new" schools of thought reflect this multifaceted process, with each contributing to the re-establishment of Buddhism as a vital component of Mongolia's spiritual and cultural life.

To revive traditional monastic training, young Mongolian monks were sent to India, continuing the historical practice of studying Buddhist philosophy at the main Gelugpa monasteries in India, such as Drepung, Sera, and Ganden. Since 1996, the Mongolian Buddhist Centre has also re-established historical monastic colleges or dratsang, including Gungaachoilin, Idgaachoilin, Geser Temple, Zurkhain Datsan (astrology school), and Manba Datsan (monastic-based medical school), to strengthen monastic education domestically. In 1992, responding to requests from Gandantegchilen and *Zuun Khuree* Dashchoilin monasteries, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama drafted a code of conduct to guide Mongolia's newly restored monasteries, ensuring adherence to traditional monastic principles while adapting to contemporary needs. One interesting point to look at the revival of Buddhism is

Figure 3. Weekly class by a Tibetan teacher at the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu Centre. © Bavuudorj Bumbayar 2020.06.05.

that during the post-socialist era, many elderly monks who had been expelled from monasteries in the 1930s rejoined the monastic community, resuming religious roles and participating in Buddhist ceremonies. These monks had been compelled to abandon their robes, adopt secular lifestyles, and marry following the suppression of religion during the socialist regime. Despite these pressures, some monks continued to practice Buddhist rituals and maintain scriptural readings in secret, preserving their faith during decades of religious prohibition (Teleki, 2025).

The Mongolian communist government sought to dismantle the monastic system further by passing a 1934 law that permitted monks to marry, aiming to undermine traditional monastic celibacy and reduce the influence of Buddhism as an institution. This historical decision significantly reshaped Mongolian Buddhism, creating a unique dynamic in which monks could fulfil religious duties while embracing aspects of secular life. In 1992, as part of efforts to revitalise traditional monastic practices of Mongolian monks, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama issued the "Rules of the Monastic Order in Mongolia" (Erdem soyolyn khureelen 2006). These guidelines emphasised adherence to the vinaya, a core Buddhist text detailing the ethical and disciplinary principles for monastic life. The Dalai Lama described monks as embodying "outward calm and peacefulness in their Vinaya practices, with a firm foundation in the mind of the Buddha" (2006). The Vinaya is a comprehensive framework that not only governs behaviour but also reflects a deep understanding of the human mind and body (Luvsantseren & Ariunaa 2007). Mongolia's distinctive adaptation of Buddhist traditions has drawn scholarly attention (Abrahms-Kavunenko 2012: 97). The practice of allowing married monks distinguishes Mongolian Buddhism from other Buddhist traditions, particularly those adhering strictly to celibacy. This adaptation highlights the interplay between religious doctrine and socio-political pressures, illustrating how Buddhism in Mongolia has historically been shaped by the negotiation of cultural, political, and ideological influences. Comparative analyses with other Buddhist societies reveal that while celibacy remains a central tenet in many Buddhist communities, Mongolia's historical trajectory demonstrates a unique form of resilience and flexibility in maintaining monastic traditions within a complex and often challenging socio-political environment.

Since the revival of Mongolian Buddhism in the early 1990s, Tibetan monks and Buddhist organisations have played a significant role in rebuilding monasteries, educating young monks, and integrating Mongolia into global Buddhist networks (Kaplonski, 2014). The presence of Tibetan monks in Mongolia, including notable figures such as Jhado Rinpoche, has contributed to the strengthening of religious institutions and monastic education. In analysing these events from a broader theoretical perspective, it is evident that the Mongolian state has adopted a policy of promoting Buddhism as a key component of its national identity in the post-socialist era. This approach aligns with the framework of "civic religion," as described by sociologist Robert Bellah (1967), where religion becomes intertwined with national identity and political legitimacy. The state's strategic engagement with Buddhism, particularly through its support for the Dalai Lama and the formal recognition of religious leaders, demonstrates a conscious effort to redefine Mongolia's national narrative in a way that emphasises its Buddhist cultural heritage. This shift is also part of a wider trend in post-socialist nations, where religion, once suppressed under communist regimes, has been revived and re-integrated into the public and political spheres as a means of consolidating national identity and stability.

Comparative analyses of other post-socialist countries, such as Russia and Eastern European nations, reveal similar patterns in which religion has been leveraged by the state to foster nationalism and legitimacy. Like

Figure 4. Meditation class at the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition. © Bavuudorj Bumbayar2021

Mongolia, these countries have often viewed the re-establishment of religious institutions and practices as an important step in recovering from the cultural erasure of the socialist era. In the case of Mongolia, Buddhism's revival serves not only as a spiritual renewal but also as a means of reinforcing the country's distinctive cultural and historical identity in the modern globalised world.

Conclusion

The historical and religious relationship between Mongolia and Tibetan Buddhism has been deeply intertwined for centuries, with Mongolian rulers historically playing a pivotal role in supporting and disseminating Tibetan Buddhism. From the Yuan Dynasty's patronage of Tibetan Buddhist institutions to the establishment of the Bogd Jebtsundamba lineage, Mongolian Buddhism has evolved in close association with Tibetan traditions. During later periods, particularly under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism and the Manchu Qing Dynasty, Mongolian Buddhism underwent significant transformations (Atwood 2004: 217). However, this relationship was significantly disrupted in the 20th century with the rise of communist regimes in both China and Mongolia, leading to the suppression and near destruction of Buddhist institutions in Mongolia. The historical trajectory of Buddhism in Mongolia demonstrates the complex interplay between religious, political, and cultural forces. As Buddhism spread, it assimilated various linguistic and cultural influences from earlier traditions, reflecting Mongolia's historical interactions with other civilisations. Over time, Mongolian Buddhism underwent substantial transformations, shaped by Tibetan influence, the Qing Dynasty, socialist suppression, and post-socialist revival. The resurgence of Buddhism in the post-1990 era illustrates the continuing negotiation between tradition and modernity, influenced by globalisation, secular ideologies, and transnational Buddhist networks.

Following Mongolia's democratic revolution, Buddhism re-emerged as both a spiritual force and a means of reclaiming national identity. From reviving the reincarnated lama "tulku" tradition to constructing a 26-metre-high statue of Avalokitesvara, officially designating the highest peaks as state sacred mountains with rituals performed by monks by law, inviting the Dalai Lama, and granting Mongolian citizenship to the later-found, Ninth Bogd Jebtsundamba, Mongolia has taken numerous steps to demonstrate that Buddhism is now an integral part of its identity. Tibetan Buddhist leaders and organisations played a crucial role in rebuilding monastic education and infrastructure while integrating Mongolia into global Buddhist networks. Mongolia now has the potential to establish itself as a significant centre for Tibetan Buddhist practice and leadership, reaffirming its historical role in the Buddhist world. Buddhism, as it existed during the socialist era, was reshaped by socialist ideologies when it was re-established in the 1990s. Monks were required to register their names, read specific texts, and pay fees, and some got married, practices that illustrate the unique characteristics of Mongolian Buddhism (Humphrey & Hurelbaatar 2013).

However, this revival has not been without challenges, as the adaptation of Buddhist institutions to contemporary Mongolian society requires balancing religious heritage with evolving social and economic realities. Mongolian Buddhism today can be broadly categorised into "old" and "new" forms. "Old" Buddhism is dedicated to restoring pre-socialist monastic traditions, including traditional training, monastic assemblies, and ritual practices. These revival efforts align with national discourses emphasising cultural continuity and historical identity.

Rather than treating contrasts such as cultural versus reformed or revival versus reform as rigid divisions, it

Figure 5. The abbot of the Gandantegchenlin Monastery bestowed the "Chin Bishrelt" medal – meaning "Devout Practitioner" on the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu Centre, the FPMT, and the Jampa Ling in recognition of their contributions to spreading and teaching Buddhism. 2019.12.10.
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is more useful to view them as analytical strategies that scholars employ to make sense of the complexity of Mongolian Buddhism. These categories draw attention to the multiple and sometimes competing currents of practice, identity, and authority that have taken shape in the post-socialist period, but they do not fully capture the lived reality on the ground. The terms "old" and "new" Buddhism, for example, reflect local discourse, emerging from practitioners themselves as they evaluate what counts as authentic, authoritative, or modern in a religious landscape shaped by both national heritage and transnational connections. Highlighting these emic distinctions allows us to see how Mongolian Buddhists actively negotiate their place within broader debates about tradition, reform, and religious renewal.

This evolving Buddhist landscape also reflects broader tensions between local traditions and external influences. Some Western Buddhists have criticised some religious practices, arguing that Mongolian practitioners do not fully adhere to Buddhist doctrine. Buddhist centres in Mongolia, however, emphasise the importance of qualified teachings, the study of Buddhist scriptures, and ethical conduct. These differences highlight the complex dialogue between indigenous religious practices and global Buddhist movements, raising important questions about the nature of authenticity and adaptation in contemporary Buddhist traditions. The contemporary development of Mongolian Buddhism is not a mere replication of Western Buddhist institutions or a simple restoration of pre-socialist monasticism. (Humphrey & Hurelbaatar 2013) Rather, it represents a unique synthesis shaped by Mongolia's socio-historical context and global Buddhist trends. As the country continues to redefine its Buddhist identity, it must navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity, national heritage and transnational influence, and spiritual practice and socio-political realities. In doing so, Mongolia's evolving Buddhist landscape reflects broader global patterns of religious transformation, illustrating how traditions adapt to new historical and cultural contexts while striving to retain their core spiritual and philosophical foundations.

On March 8, 2023, the Dalai Lama introduced the Tenth Bogd Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, Danjanjambalchoijinvanchig, in India, marking a significant moment in the religious and political landscape of Mongolia. This reincarnation carries potential influence not only within Mongolian Buddhism but also in broader international relations, as the Bogd lineage has historically served as a bridge between Mongolia and Tibetan Buddhist authorities abroad. The recognition and activities of the Tenth Bogd Jebtsundamba open new avenues for understanding Mongolia's evolving role in global Buddhist networks and its diplomatic engagements, suggesting an important area for future research.

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