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*Participants of the international conference on
“Mobility and Immobility in Mongolian Societies”, University of Bern,
Switzerland, September 11-13, 2018*

Introduction

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

From 11 to 13 September 2018, an international conference on “Mobility and Immobility in Mongolian Societies” was held at the Institute for the Science of Religion and Central Asian Studies at the University of Bern, Switzerland, bringing together scholars from numerous countries. The conference marked the conclusion of the same-named research cluster which consisted of scholars from the Rheinische Friedrich Wilhelms University of Bonn and the Georg August University of Göttingen, Germany, the Swiss University of Bern, and the National University in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Since November 2015, the cluster had been generously funded by the National Council for Mongolian Studies with a grant from the Mongolian Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (see the website of the cluster: <https://www.mongolistik-mobilitaet.uni-bonn.de>). The collaborative research cluster was founded in order to improve the scientific cooperation of the individual departments of Mongolian Studies in Germany, Switzerland, and Mongolia. Furthermore, the cluster aimed at the promotion of young scholars in Mongolian Studies, thus involving Ph.D. students. The participants met at an annual basis to present and discuss the results of their individual research projects. The 2018 conference officially concluded the funding period of the research network. On the one hand, the participants presented the results of the collaborative research to a broader academic and public audience. On the other hand, the conference served as a starting point for future research in this field and therefore invited established scholars as well as young researchers to contribute to this research area. In this way, it aimed at better understanding complex discourses and practices of mobility and immobility and the role they play in historical and contemporary Mongolian societies.

Mobility has always been a defining characteristic in the history of the Mongols. Mongolian studies has therefore focused on movement and different forms of migration long before the “mobilities turn” in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The thirteenth century in particular proved to be an extraordinarily mobile century for both Asia and Europe. At the heart of this mobility lay the Mongols and their policy of drafting people skilled in various arts and sciences into their service and relocating them across the Eurasian continent. The case of the Mongol Empire with its multiple trading routes, travelling people, and cultural flows embedded in immobile infrastructures emphasizes that seemingly dislocated places are tied into networks of connection that transcend fixed places and apparently solid boundaries.¹ Against this backdrop it comes as no surprise that since its very beginnings in the early nineteenth

¹ Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

century, Mongolian studies has focused on mobility and immobility, movement, and infrastructural nodes of the Mongols.²

Proceeding from the assumption that place and placelessness, “movement and spatial fixity”,³ are co-constituted, the conference was informed by a broad concept of mobility that encompasses both the embodied movement of people and commodities and their cultural representations and meanings. This approach includes a focus on materialities, spatialities, and temporalities. Firstly, material objects like transport vehicles, shoes, mobile phones or, to give an example from the period of the Mongol Empire, a *paiza* constitute mobile systems. Secondly, as John Urry asserts,⁴ the complex character of mobility systems derives from the fixed infrastructures that facilitate movements. Roads and caravanserais enable movements and mobilizations on a transregional or even global scale. Through these immobile systems social spaces (in the sense of Lefebvre)⁵ are re-arranged or even newly created. Thirdly, aspects of temporalities such as fastness or slowness determine the geography of movement and fixity. Moreover, in Urban studies, new mobile communication devices like the mobile phone constitute new temporal spatialities.

The new transdisciplinary field of *mobilities research* has drawn attention to the issues addressed here. Theoretically situated in this new research area, the conference focused on the relational dynamics of mobility and immobility in Mongolian societies from the late sixteenth century until today. Under the umbrella theme of (im)mobility it addressed the interplay of material objects, spatial fixities, and temporal aspects that constitute and shape past and present (im)mobilities in the Mongolian regions.

Our conference was opened with a keynote lecture by Ines Stolpe in which she presented some basic reflections on mobility and immobility in rural-urban networks in Mongolia and showed that mobility develops its analytical potential only when our theoretical concepts are “localized”. Her essay also opens this special issue of *Acta Mongolica* comprising some of the conference contributions. The articles collected in this volume include historical (Dittmar Schorkowitz), science-historical (Dorothea Heuschert-Laage), sociological (Tserenbazar Pioner), religion-related (Ekaterina Sobkovyak, Iuliia Liakhova), art-historical (Uranchimeg Tsultemin, Isabelle Charleux, Mungunchimeg Batmunkh), social-anthropological (Sendenjaviin Dulam, Elisa Kohl-Garrity), and folkloristic (Alevtina Solovyeva) case studies, all of which discussing the outlined fields of inquiry from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. This breadth of theoretical approaches contributed significantly to a fruitful academic exchange. Some colleagues whose papers substantially enriched the conference in Bern and contributed to our debate were unfortunately unable to

² See, for example, Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, *The End of Nomadism? Society, the State and the Environment in Inner Asia*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

³ Mimi Sheller, “Mobility,” *Sociopedia.isa* 2011:3 (Doi: 10.1177/205684601163).

⁴ John Urry, *Mobilities*. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007).

⁵ Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

make their papers available for publication for various reasons. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them all. The organizers of the conference would also like to thank the editor-in-chief, Prof. Dr. Zayabaatar Dalai, for his willingness to publish the results of the Bern conference as a special issue in *Acta Mongolica* and Dr. Lhagvademchig Jadamba.

Bern, June 22, 2020

Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, Anja Kirsch

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Recent publications include "Red Catechisms: Socialist Educational Literature and the Demarcation of Religion and Politics in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Religion* 48/1 (2018): 8–36 and the co-edited volumes *Socialist Imaginations*:

Utopias, Myths, and the Masses (with Stefan Arvidsson & Jakub Beneš, Routledge 2019) and *Narrative Cultures and the Aesthetics of Religion* (with Dirk Johannsen & Jens Kreinath, Brill 2020).

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Mobilities and Immobilities in Mongolia: A Short Essay on Potentials and Dilemmas

Ines Stolpe

Abstract

After summarizing the activities of our research cluster with references to its joint theoretical background, this short essay provides comparative perspectives on potentials and dilemmas of im/mobilities in Mongolia using some examples from my research topics with a focus on modernity and mobilization.

Keywords: im/mobility, mobilization, history marketing, nomad-mainstreaming, inequality, education, development, *nutag* councils, COVID-19

Our research cluster *Mobility and Immobility in Mongolia*¹ was launched during a workshop following the international conference *Mongolian Studies: Perspectives of Academic Cooperation*,² conceptualized and organized by Mongolian Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany, in 2015. Participants considered it important to promote academic cooperation and exchange between diverse facets of Mongolia-related research. We agreed on the overarching concept of mobility/immobility, because its relational dynamics facilitate the mobilization of collaborative research and also an inclusion and support of young scholars. Already during the kick-off workshop, held at the Göttingen State and University Library (Germany) in 2016, it became clear that all people involved enjoyed the fruitful dialogues between different approaches in a spirit of mutual learning and cooperation under the umbrella of mobilities research. Since then, our research cluster has developed, grown, and changed. The conference *Mobility and Immobility in Mongolian Societies*, organized by the Institute for the Science of Religion and Central Asian Studies at the University of Bern, Switzerland, was inspiring and promising for future collaboration that promotes synergies between different approaches within and beyond Mongolian Studies. When I was invited to hold the keynote presentation, I decided to explore potentials of the concept using examples from some of my research topics.

Mobilities studies with their ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry 2006) have generated fresh perspectives in social and cultural sciences. Resulting from a criticism-deserving underestimation of the impacts of movements, the concept has developed towards a more power-sensitive focus on conditions for mobilities as

¹ Supported by the National Council for Mongolian Studies with a grant from the Mongolian Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (Mongolia): <https://www.mongolistik-mobilitaet.uni-bonn.de>.

² Financed by DAAD. <https://www.ioa.uni-bonn.de/de/inst/mongtib/datei/flyer-mongolistik-tagung-2015>.

well as their constraints and, as a consequence, included dimensions of immobility. More recently scholars suggested to look at “im/mobilities as a blended concept” (Hackl et al. 2016, 23), since the paradigm has extended its scope on social relations, status, and inequality. What has not been focused sufficiently yet are dimensions of mobilization and temporal mobilities. In the case of Mongolia, I argue, it is especially an outstanding capacity to mobilize which facilitates modern forms of mobility in time and space beyond obvious regional movements such as nomadic pastoralism and migration. In this short essay, I will briefly touch upon a range of examples most of which were part of my research over the years.

While I am writing these lines, people worldwide share localized experiences with COVID-19-induced im/mobilities. Mongolia is one of the few states which so far curbed the pandemic successfully, because policymakers acted proactively and embarked on a strategy of preventive measures. At this time, when many countries still do not have a workable concept for continuing education under the conditions of the ongoing pandemic, Mongolia already looks back on six months of distance learning with advanced TV lessons and dedicated on-line coaching. Whether organizing festivities under the conditions of quarantine or dealing with pandemic-related constraints of public life, Mongolia was an early bird. Moreover, in contrast to other countries, such as Germany, where expecting immediate help from the state was a widespread common response, the attitude of Mongolia’s citizens as well as organizations and companies was much different: Most were thinking first and foremost how they themselves could contribute to overcoming the crisis (Erdene-Očir & Stolpe 2020). Insofar the country’s achievements were recognized by outsiders, they caused as much admiration as astonishment.³ Apparently, some did not think Mongolia would be capable of taking a pioneer role in dealing with challenges like this. Yet there are many aspects that predestine the country for a far-sighted management of crisis situations. Apart from obvious factors such as bordering China where this pandemic originated, Mongolians have always been outstandingly capable of dealing with unpredictability. Without culturalist overemphasis it appears reasonable to say that mobile pastoralism as the traditional way of life has contributed to a highly developed tolerance of ambiguity as well as capacities for mobilizing resources. Even though the last-mentioned might also be associated with ancient military campaigns, today’s forms of mobilization are based on modern progress aspirations.

Ever since my first visit to Mongolia in 1992 during the country’s first economic crisis in the post-socialist era when the lack of fuel and electricity invited free-roaming animals, including Altai wapiti (*maral*), to wander the streets of Ulaanbaatar, I was intrigued by the people’s flexibility and ingenuity in overcoming difficulties. Dynamic pragmatism might not be particularly Mongolian as such, yet it cannot be denied that there are ways of inventing, re-creating, converting, and remodelling that express unique characteristics arising from a socio-cultural and historical context

³ For a much-noticed example in English language see: <https://medium.com/@indica/covid-underdogs-mongolia-3b0c162427c2>.

that makes them recognisable. And even though I did not call it mental mobility (or Mongolization, for that matter) back then, it contributed significantly to my decision to embark on Mongolian Studies. A few years later, as a student, I spent my semester break working in an EU-funded project for street children in Ulaanbaatar in 1996. Through this, I got to know the city from below, and I learned a lot about how a social breakdown can trigger spatial mobility (children leaving their homes) and lead to social immobility (poverty and exclusion). Since then, relations and interdependencies of spatial, social, temporal and mental mobilities in Mongolia have been integral parts of my research, from which I will briefly give a few topic-related examples below.

Recognizing dimensions of inequality is expressed in the concept of “Bounded Mobilities” (Gutekunst et al. 2016). In the introduction to the book with the same title, it reads: “Looking at im/mobilities, with their simultaneities and interrelations, opens up a new perspective that takes different dimensions *within* one reality into account. Such a perspective also has political implications” (Hackl et al. 2016, 24). The same applies to potential roles area studies can play concerning mobilities research: “The magic word ‘mobility’”, Bachmann-Medick writes, is “powerless unless the theories and concepts we work with become ‘localized’”. Area studies, with its certain mode of cultural and social ‘groundedness,’ seems particularly suited to this task of localization.” (2014, 121). – Such ‘groundedness’ is, of course, largely based on language knowledge. However, the title of our very own research cluster *Mobility and Immobility in Mongolia* confronted us with challenges, not only regarding its translation. As Mongolists, we are concerned with emic perspectives, “consciously working through the limits of European thought” (Chakrabarty 2014, 67). Thus, we embarked on using the mobilities paradigm as a heuristic device in order to explore Mongolian notions and representations. Yet attempts at translation either ended up fairly vague (*öörchlögdömtgii chanar, uyan khatan baidal*) or covered primarily spatial dimensions of mobilities (*khödölgöönt ba togtongi ül yavts, nüüdel suudal*).

Concerning our regional focus, it is not surprising, that spatial mobility appears prominent. When discussing the evolution of world systems before European hegemony, Janet Abu-Lughod (1989) described the Mongol Empire as part of an archaic globalization, due to several forms and dimensions of mobility. Nowadays, hardly any other state across the globe is as associated with nomadism as Mongolia, a country that used the slogan “Nomadic by Nature” for its self-marketing at the world’s largest *International Tourism Trade Fair* in 2015. As the slogan indicates, spatial mobility has always been an integral part of cultural identity, yet became part of the national branding at a time when the majority of Mongolia’s population had settled down.

Even though distinctive features of the socialist era are rather not considered effective for history marketing⁴ vis-à-vis a global audience, they cannot be omitted

⁴ The term originates from public relations of companies, which use certain aspects of history for generating positive emotions. Concerning Mongolia, there are some historiographic approaches which mobilize the past as marketing strategies in global struggles for recognition.

when discussing modern forms and patterns of mobility. Until the late 1950s, a majority of the population was leading a mobile way of life, and the unique modernization of the then Mongolian People's Republic was decidedly based on a mutual integration of spatial and social mobility, the latter being more and more associated with ambition and progress. Given that state policy and institutions were from the outset oriented towards integrating mobile herders into projects of modernization, the MPR was a peerless example of what I call 'nomad mainstreaming' (Stolpe 2015a). Interesting examples for mobilizing state institutions were strategies used during the literacy-, and hygiene campaigns in order to reach the moving target groups in the steppe. Elements such as mobile music and theater troupes, peripatetic teachers, and members of the youth league as 'riding newspapers', mobile shops (*nüüdliin delgiür*) as well as mobile hygiene control commissions (*ariun tseveriin shalgaltyn kommiss*) proved highly effective. They can be seen as early forms of what today would be called outreach work, and their formula for success was to a large degree based on their focus on women who were (and are) pioneers when it comes to profound transformations of social spheres (Stolpe 2008b, 2008c).

Not 'nomadism' was associated with backwardness in the MPR, but illiteracy. In order to combine spatial with social mobility, schools were built further and further out in the grassland, and the new (co-)educational system was in many respects coordinated with needs of mobile animal husbandry (Stolpe 2008a, 2016). This is why internationally acknowledged accomplishments in education could be achieved: a country with a predominantly mobile population was the first state in Asia that reached nationwide alphabetization (for which it was awarded by the UNESCO in 1970). Another noteworthy feature is the so-called reverse gender gap: since parity was reached in the 1970s, female graduates have always been the majority in higher education.

Mongolian relations to im/mobility include critical dialogues about the relationships between past, present, and future.⁵ These dialogues are informed by images of temporal mobility. Whereas the MPR's 'Bypassing Capitalism'-narrative (*kapitalismyg algasaad/algasch*) pictured the country's development as a highly dynamic journey through history and, perhaps more important, as part of worldwide progression,⁶ the degradation into the so-called Third World after the end of socialism had far-reaching implications. Now, three decades later, disenchanted feelings of being stuck in transition are widespread. More often than not, Mongolia is pictured as 'between transition and modernity' (as if that could not be said for all states). Boris Buden aptly stated from a comparative perspective: "The belatedness of the East designates a cultural difference in time" (Buden 2014, 174). Mongolia's categorization as one of the 'developing countries' (*khögij baigaa ornuud*) in contrast to 'developed countries' (*khögjsön ornuud*) refers to what I would consider

⁵ On competing views of Mongolia's colonialism discourses see Stolpe & Jigmeddorj (2018).

⁶ An unforgettable manifestation was when the MPR became the 10th country to send an astronaut, J. Gurragechaa, into outer space in 1981. This highest possible social and spatial (if not spacial) mobility is considered one out of ten important events in Mongolia's 20th century history.

immobilities of translation, even more so as we can only hope that all countries keep developing.

Back in the 1990s, the so-called shock therapy included harsh cuts in education and the donor-driven essentialisation of herders as ‘nomads’ discursively turned them from a potential into a challenge of development. As a result of privatization, some pastoralist families stopped sending their children, particularly boys, to school because they were short of workforce in herding. Another – also unintended – reason for school drop-outs in the 1990s was the hasty attempt to re-introduce the Mongolian script (*mongol bichig*) as part of mobilizing traditions. But it was particularly the decline of rural infrastructure, including dormitories, which resulted in constraints of social mobility options for a considerable part of the youth. Ironically during the first *Education for All* decade, the young generation had less educational opportunities than their parents, which is why herder families with ambitions for social mobility often had to embark on rural-to-urban migration for education (Stolpe 2008a). At the same time, unemployment triggered a recourse to subsistence economy, but many of the so-called ‘new nomads’ could not make a living with “pre-modern means of subsistence” (Bruun 1996, 65), and the process of an apparent ‘re-nomadization’ went into reverse at the end of the 1990s when a continuous rural-to-urban migration turned the so-called nomads into a minority.

Today, more than half of Mongolia’s population resides in cities, and many citizens live abroad. The concentration in Ulaanbaatar is due to largely centralized opportunities for social mobility. One way of addressing challenges of the rural-to-urban migration was the emergence of *nutag* councils (*nutgiin zövlöl*), which have developed unique figurations of mobility and mobilization. Initially established in the 1990s when the countryside faced a sudden disintegration, these dynamic multilocal networks have become the most widespread feature of Mongolia’s civil society landscape operating independently of foreign aid. Thus, they allow insights into genuine knowledge cultures and structures of relevance that follow (socio-)logics characteristic for modern Mongolia. *Nutag* councils do not have a preconceived agenda, and their existence is mainly visible through initiatives. They represent a broad spectrum of civil society interests, and their activities are as diverse as the ideas, potentials, and capacities of their active members. However, all have in common that they contrive ways to (re-)integrate rural areas into processes of progress and development and to increase their visibility. In order to gain the greatest possible attention for projects, a number of influential members is usually recruited for the board. Whether living in a city or a foreign country, people are considered parts of their rural district and/or province (*nutgiin khün*). Calls to action happen by means of mobile phones, the internet (primarily via Facebook) and mass media, all of which have the potential for mobilizing people swiftly.⁷ Typical activities are emergency aid (for example at times of *zud*), the organization of *nutag*-related social and cultural

⁷ Paradoxically, some pastoralists have more recently become less mobile in order to have access to the mobile phone net.

events, and, more continuously, the support of public institutions, locally associated businesses and talented young people, tourism, historiography, community-management of natural and cultural heritage sites, and – mostly in mining areas – environmental protection. While the countryside benefits from networking of their urbanites who wish to give something back (*ach khariulakh*), the latter regularly visit their *nutag* to find social and spiritual support. Active and successful *nutag* mobilize a wide spectrum of knowledge cultures, councils work participatory and transparent and use their affiliation with heterogeneous worlds to open up and utilize opportunities, in Mongolian usually described as *bolomj*, a term that implies resources in the widest sense (Stolpe 2008a, 2014, 2015b, 2019, 2020).

One controversial issue in the context of mobilizing Mongolian *nutag*-concepts is the claim of multiple territorial affiliations during election campaigns (Byambabaatar 2017), a recent phenomenon which Munkherdene and Sneath (2018, 822) subsumed under “*nutagism*”.⁸ Yet behind this is the excessive politicization of administration that has paralyzed important aspects of social and political life in Mongolia since 1996. The large-scale exchange of public servants after each election (*khalaas elgee*) causes institutional instability, a high insecurity (*batalgaagüi*) for individual biographies and poisons the public climate when competence is less important than party membership. It is considered an unsustainable (*togtvorgüi*) ‘political disease’ (*uls töriin övchin*), unsustainable (*togtvorgüi*) and can be characterized as a serious immobilization of the society (Stolpe 2016).

Urban Mongolia, particularly Ulaanbaatar, suffers from immobilizations caused by congestion. Overcrowded city schools have for long been teaching in shifts (even before COVID-19), hopeless traffic jams, a lack of leisure space and playgrounds, and a hazardous air pollution (which even influences family planning) have affected life quality for all urbanites, and many well-off elites, no matter how much national pride they display, try to escape. New Mongolian forms of “bounded mobilities” emerge, and show that “Privilege, mobility and performance are closely connected” (Hackl et al. 2016, 27).

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⁸ Italics in original.

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Mobility and Immobility in the Mongol Empire

Dittmar Schorkowitz

Abstract

Mobility, and less so immobility, has always been in the focus of socio-cultural analysis of Mongolian societies given their nomadic way of live and the interconnectedness of its various communities scattered all over Eurasia, in particular in the apogee of the Mongol Empire during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Yet, what are the tangible manifestations and the limits of mobility, how can we measure them? This chapter will briefly readdress some well and perhaps lesser-known topics of the medieval Mongolian world generally related to mobility in a wider sense before attention is given to the epistemological arenas of culture transfer and long-distance trade. In the first part of this article, the dialectics of mobility is discussed as socio-cultural mobility, e.g., carrier making, loyalty, integration by difference, models of inclusive ethnicity and exclusive descent (the 'Chinggisid Principle'), invention of genealogies, marriage alliances, and religious tolerance (until Islamisation). The second part deals with spatial mobility, in particular in terms of tribute relations and military service, culture transfer and travelling ideas, movement control and population transfer, and the flow of goods and peoples.

Introduction

Mobility in Mongolian societies, and less so immobility, has always been in the focus of social and historical studies given the nomadic way of life and the political encroachment of the Mongols into various parts of Asia and Europe. The Mongol Empire in particular has continuously attracted attention as a result of its expansion speed and establishment of a *Pax Mongolica* (roughly 1270–1360) in a relatively short period of time.¹ During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Mongols not only launched an early Mongol state,² but within just a few decades had extended

¹ On the concept of *Pax Mongolica* and Mongolian world domination see Klaus Sagaster, "Herrschaftsideologie und Friedensgedanke bei den Mongolen," *Central Asiatic Journal* 17, no. 2-4 (1973): 223–42 and the references provided there. For a recent reevaluation of the concept see Nicola di Cosmo, "Black Sea Emporia and the Mongol Empire: A Reassessment of the Pax Mongolica," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 53 (2010): 83–108. I am grateful to Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz for pointing this out to me.

² Lawrence Krader, *Formation of the State* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968); idem, "Mongols: The Governed and the Governors," *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'Histoire Comparative des Institutions* 22 (1969): 512–26; idem, "The Origin of the State Among the Nomads of Asia," in *The Early State*, ed. Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 93–107; Herbert Franke, *From Tribal Chieftain to Universal Emperor and God: The Legitimation of the Yüan-Dynasty* (Munich: Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978); Anatolii Mikhailovich Khazanov, "The Early State Among the Eurasian Nomads," in *The Study of the State*, ed. Henri Claessen and Peter Skalnik (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 155–75; Nikolai Nikolaevich Kradin, "The Origins of the State Among the Pastoral Nomads," in *Ethnohistorische Wege und Lehrjahre eines Philosophen: Festschrift für Lawrence Krader zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Dittmar Schorkowitz

their hegemony into China, Central Asia, Persia, Caucasia, Eastern Europe, and Siberia – culturally very diverse areas that now became closely interconnected.³

If we may call this a success story in medieval empire building, then mobility – “the ability of people, ideas, and artifacts to move or be moved across both space and society”⁴ – surely played a decisive role. The question is, how can we measure mobility, and what are its concrete manifestations? In order to define the capacities and limitations of mobility, in this chapter I shall readdress several topics, both well-known and less familiar, from the medieval Mongolian world related to mobility in a wider sense before turning to the epistemological arenas of culture transfer and long-distance trade. In the first part the dialectics of mobility and immobility will be discussed as ‘social and cultural mobility’ in terms of career-making, loyalty, integration, ethnicity, descent, genealogies, marriage, and religion. The second part will focus on ‘spatial mobility’ in terms of tribute relations and military service, culture transfer and travelling ideas, movement control and population transfer, and the flow and restriction of goods.

Social and Cultural Mobility in the Mongol Empire

Social mobility can be defined as “the movement in time of individuals, families, or other social units between positions of varying advantage in the system of social stratification of a society”⁵ including class, status groups, kinship units, and social origins; it thus provides us with an analytical tool that can be applied not just to the present, but also to societies of the distant past. The relevance of social and spatial mobility for the late Middle Ages in Europe has been securely established,⁶ and it is

(Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1995), 163–77; idem, “The Transformation of Political Systems from Chiefdom to State: Mongolian Example, 1180(?)–1206,” in: *Alternative Pathways to Early State: International Symposium*, ed. Institut Istoriï, Arkheologii i Etnografii, Rossiiskaia Akademiia Nauk (Vladivostok: Dal’nauka, 1995), 136–43.

³ Rashīd al-Dīn, *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). Here I use the classic work of Boyle, although there is a new translation into English: Rashīd al-Dīn, *Rashiduddin Fazlullah’s Jami’u’l-tawarikh (Compendium of Chronicles): A History of the Mongols*, trans. Wheeler McIntosh Thackston (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ., Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 1998–1999); Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World Conqueror by ‘Ala-ad-Din ‘Ata-Malik Juvaini*, trans. John Andrew Boyle (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Bertold Spuler, *Die Goldene Horde. Die Mongolen in Rußland, 1223–1502* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1943); idem, *Die Mongolen in Iran: Politik, Verwaltung und Kultur der Ilchanzeit 1220–1350* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1985); Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Thomas T. Allsen, “Prelude to the Western Campaigns: Mongol Military Operations in the Volga-Ural Region, 1217–1237,” *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3 (1983): 5–24; idem, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Michael Weiers, *Geschichte der Mongolen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004); Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2005).

⁴ Michal Biran, “Mobility, Empire and Cross-Cultural Contacts in Mongol Eurasia (MONGOL),” *Medieval Worlds* 8 (2018): 136.

⁵ Walter Müller and Reinhard Pollack, “Mobility, Social,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 15, ed. James D. Wright (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 640.

⁶ David Herlihy, “Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 4 (1973): 625.

even more central for the expanding Mongol empire with its comparatively weaker institutional boundaries and its higher degree of cultural diversity.

An early well-known example of career-making and loyalty is reported in the *Secret History* for the year 1206 when Temüjin was proclaimed Khagan of all Mongols. With the Mongol Empire still at an early stage of state formation, Genghis Khan fundamentally reformed the military organization. When judging over his enemies and allies he said: “To those who sided with me when I was establishing *our* nation, I shall express my appreciation and, having formed units of a thousand, I shall appoint them commanders of a thousand.”⁷ Besides loyalty, other selection criteria were proficiency and leadership in matters of warfare, while ethnic belonging ranked further down, below even family and kinship ties.

Genghis Khan’s military reform included reorganizing his former favorites or bodyguards *khishigten* (*keshig*) into one *tümen* (i.e. 10,000 men) selected from 95 *mingqan* (i.e. 1,000 men) chosen from among the sons of his commanders and the common people based on their combat skills. And he was crystal-clear in his orders to his newly appointed commanders on how to choose men for military service: “When guards will be recruited for Us, and the sons of commanders of ten thousand, of a thousand and of a hundred, or the sons of ordinary people, will enter Our service, those shall be recruited who are able and of good appearance, and who are deemed suitable to serve by Our side.”⁸ The *khishigten* was a vanguard of multiethnic composition and ranked above normal troops; it was divided into three departments: the privileged night watch (*kebtægöl*, totaling one *mingqan*), the archers or quiver bearers (*qorčîn*, also one *mingqan*), and the day watch (*turqa’ut*, eight *mingqan*). The remarkable career of Chormaqan-Qorči, a high-ranking officer from the second department, is illustrative of the social mobility that was possible. Originating from the Sunud (Sonid, Sönid, Sünit) clan of the Ötegen (Oteget) Mongols, he was first decorated by Genghis Khan after the siege of Urgench in 1221. Subsequently Ögedei Khan sent him to Persia in 1229, where he became famous for conquering Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia in the 1230s, although he was not himself a member of the ruling Borjigid lineage.⁹

⁷ Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. with a historical and philological commentary (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 133–34.

⁸ Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 152–53.

⁹ Erich Haenisch, *Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1948), 33, 77–79, 104–11, 131–39; Paul Pelliot, *Notes critiques d’histoire kalmouke: *Texte / **Tableaux généalogiques* (Œuvres posthumes VI), publiées sous les auspices de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres et avec le concours du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1960), 31–32, 85–86; Klaus Hesse, *Abstammung, Weiderecht und Abgabe: Zum Problem der konsanguinal-politischen Organisation der Mongolen des 13. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Reimer, 1982), 113–16; Dittmar Schorkowitz, *Die soziale und politische Organisation bei den Kalmücken (Oiraten) und Prozesse der Akkulturation vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Ethnohistorische Untersuchungen über die mongolischen Völkerschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1992), 60–66; Christopher P. Atwood, “Military of the Mongol Empire,” in *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, ed. Christopher Atwood (New York: Facts On File, 2004), 348–54.

The same selection criteria were applied in the administrative and cultural hemispheres of the Mongol Empire, emphasizing the very same principles of ‘integration by difference.’ There are abundant examples of those ‘able and of good appearance’ who made their way to the upper echelon of the imperial elite irrespective of ethnic or class belonging. The famous judge (*yeke jarquči*) Šigi Qutuqu (1180–1260) responsible for the compilation of the Mongol Code ‘*Yasa*’ starting in 1206 was a Tatar child of noble origin who was adopted into Temüjin’s family around 1182–1183, becoming thus either a stepbrother (according to the *Secret History*) or, more likely, a stepson (*örgömel düü*) of Genghis Khan (according to Rashīd al-Dīn). Šigi Qutuqu, like many Tatar nobles, learned the Uighur script upon orders of Genghis Khan; he was most probably taught by T’a-t’a T’ung-a, a Naiman *daruqa* who entered the service of Genghis Khan and introduced the script for official purposes after the defeat of Uighurs, a Turkic-speaking (possibly mongolized) people, in 1204.¹⁰ Šigi Qutuqu’s biography is depicted in greater detail by yet another prominent, almost contemporary retainer of the empire, the great historian and statesman Rashīd al-Dīn (1247–1318) who is himself an example of the possibilities of social mobility. Born into a Jewish family of Hamadan in northwest Persia, he converted to Islam by the age of thirty and entered the court of the Ilkhanids as a physician, becoming an influential advisor to Abaqa Khan (1265–82) and later a vizier to Mahmud Ghazan (1295–1304) and Öljeitü (1304–16). Rashīd al-Dīn has been credited with designing and implementing the reforms of Ghazan Khan on the basis of “Iranian traditions of a centralized feudal form of government [and] the necessity for a just taxation policy.”¹¹

In spite of all this, it has often been said that the Mongols could conquer the world on horseback, but that “it cannot be ruled from a horse,”¹² as Ögedei Khan was told. This is suggestive of a revealing kind of immobility. The Mongols main strategy was in fact limited to the extraction of resources and taxes from peasants, urban dwellers, and merchants. However, to achieve this aim, their rulers were flexible enough to adapt to local experience, to integrate cultural techniques and governmental expertise from the region, and to change their official faith either to Christianity, Buddhism, or Islam when necessary. But by doing so, the Mongol elite underwent various forms of cultural change, too.

The dynamics of Mongol expansion and conquest followed a few simple rules, not invented but rather elaborated by Genghis Khan and his successors at a time when economic growth and infrastructure in Eurasia had reached levels unparalleled in earlier

¹⁰ Paul Ratchnevsky, “Šigi-Qutuqu, ein mongolischer Gefolgsmann im 12.–13. Jahrhundert,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 10, no. 2 (1965): 87–88, fn. 2, 90–91, 96; Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, XXXV–XXXVII, 58, 134–35.

¹¹ Ilya Pavlovich Petrushevsky, “Rashīd al-Dīn’s Conception of the State,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 14, no. 1–3 (1970): 151; cf. also the entry “Rashīd ad-Dīn,” in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*. Micropædia: Ready Reference, 15. ed., vol. 9 (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2010), 946.

¹² Bira Shagdar, “The Mongol Empire in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: East-West Relations,” in *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*, ed. Vadime Elisseeff (New York: Berghahn, 2000), 131.

empires, such as the Xiongnu or Rouran Khanate. As with preceding steppe empires, local rulers could either assent to his demand for surrender or face subjugation and destruction. Those who surrendered in good time were offered positions, while those who changed allegiance too late were often regarded as not reliable and deployed at the front lines of the battlefield. They then were the first to attack their neighbors when the Mongol command decided to move on, a situation which local rulers were generally anxious to avoid at any cost, offering an alliance instead. But even then, they were obliged to provide troops, horses, food, and services to the Mongol army and collect taxes for the Khan, a burden that was compensated only in part by plunder and the spoils of war (Mong. *sauqa*) they could gain for themselves. The effects of this snowball dynamic have often been cited as an explanation for the rapid drive of empire building from the Mongolian to the Hungarian plains within little more than three decades, and rightly so. Indeed, the conquest into ever-new territories and their subsequent exploitation by victorious auxiliary forces was a decisive factor in the empire's success as well as its eventual collapse. However, the origins of imperial overstretch cannot be attributed to territorial expansion alone. Accelerating contradictions between core and peripheries, between cultural continuity and change, as well as a weakening resilience of long-tested integration strategies produced limitations of their own.

These dynamics are very well documented in the historical records of the *Secret History*, the *Altan Tobči*, and *Erdeni-yin Tobči*. The Oirat people, for example, who in 1201 were still part of the opposing Jamukha camp, but were among the few who submitted in good time, are a case in point. They entered the services of the state in 1207, contributing significantly to early empire building, and received a privileged place among the tributary peoples. Rewarding the military merits of this cooperation, Genghis Khan made Quduka Beki, the most prominent Oirat noble, his kinsman. He gave Qoluiqan, the daughter of his eldest son Jochi, to Quduka Beki's eldest son Törölchi, whose younger brother Inalchi received his daughter Checheyigen.¹³ Thanks to these marriage alliances, which spread to other Borjigin lines in the following generations, the Oirats received a distinguished status. In the Mongol Empire they now formed the left or 'eastern wing,' *je'ün qar* (pronounced like *zun gar*, hence Zungharia), of the westernmost part of the empire. After the collapse of the Mongol-ruled Yuan dynasty in 1368, the Oirats were still an important player and among the first to engage in feudal warfare: following Elbeg Nigülesügchi khagan's death in 1399, Toghon tayishi (Tsoros) declared himself khagan of all Mongols and the Oirats formed an independent yet short-lived khanate (1401–04).

¹³ Rachewiltz, *Secret History*, 62–64, 163–65. See also Charles R. Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan Tobči: Text, Translation and Critical Notes* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1955); Sayang Sečen, *Erdeni-yin Tobči: Mongolian Chronicle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956); George Qingzhi Zhao, *Marriage as Political Strategy and Cultural Expression: Mongolian Royal Marriages from World Empire to Yuan Dynasty* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 39, 129–31; Biran, *Mobility*, 144.

While this account tells us much about the Mongol model of inclusive ethnicity and integration by difference (as opposed to the principle of ‘integration by sameness’ typical of the modern nationalizing state),¹⁴ it also highlights some of its limitations, such as exclusive descent and the politics of kinship. Though various groups and individuals could achieve high positions in the imperial hierarchy through merits and awards, the affiliation with a Chinggisid lineage – preferably by blood, otherwise through marriage – remained the essential condition for the acquisition of political power. This has been called the ‘Chinggisid Principle,’ which implied that “only male descendants of Chinggis khan were entitled to call themselves khans.”¹⁵ However, this ultimately led to fierce succession wars and resulted in a very ‘creative’ usage of genealogies. Hence, the ‘Chinggisid principle’ became dysfunctional over time and was gradually replaced by the ‘divine’ legitimation and authentication of the Dalai Lama following the late sixteenth-century re-invention of Tibetan Buddhism among the Western Mongols.¹⁶

Marriage alliances, fictive kinship (*andananar*), polygyny, adaptation, and the fusion or fission of clans were principles widely practiced in nomadic social organization in order to maintain social and political mobility. However, what worked well on a communal basis for providing asylum and shelter to widows, war orphans or refugees, often became counter-productive when applied to society as a whole in an imperial context. Polygyny resulted in unclear claims to power and spurred succession struggles among competing lineages. Marriage alliances, though frequently used as a device to reinforce bonds that bridged rivaling polities, often turned into a source of intrigue and conflict among the participating parties.¹⁷

Spatial and Economic Mobility in the Mongol Empire

If we turn now to spatial and economic mobility, the relations between expansion and conquest on the one hand and local governance and tribute collection on the other are quite obvious. In order to rule, the Mongols had to introduce check-and-balance-systems at their peripheries. In order to tax local populations, tax collectors and census takers were needed. And in order to communicate with foreign powers

¹⁴ Cf. Günther Schlee, *Ruling over Ethnic and religious Differences: A Comparative Essay on Empires* (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Working Paper No. 143). Halle/Saale: Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, 2013.

¹⁵ Junko Miyawaki, “The Chinggisid Principle in Russia,” *Russian History* 19, no. 1–4 (1992): 266. See also Denis Sinor, “The Acquisition, the Legitimation, the Confirmation and the Limitations of Political Power in Medieval Inner Asia,” in *Representing Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission and the Sacred*, ed. Isabelle Charleux, Grégory Delaplace, Robert Hamayon, and Scott Pearce (Bellingham: Western Washington University Press, 2010), 37–60.

¹⁶ Zahiruddin Ahmad, *Sino-Tibetan Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il medio ed estremo Oriente, 1970), 99; Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2008), 105–07, 120–21; Miyawaki, “The Chinggisid Principle,” 269–72.

¹⁷ Dittmar Schorkowitz, “Konsanguinal-politische Organisation und Grenzen der Souveränität bei den Kalmücken-Oiraten,” in *Altaica Berolinensia: The Concept of Sovereignty in the Altaic World*, ed. Barbara Kellner-Heinkele (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 229–39.

in Asia and Europe, expertise in foreign languages and diplomatic conventions was indispensable. To put it in a nutshell, the Mongols were able and flexible enough to combine and re-combine the principles of their own political organization with the institutions, practices, and inventions of the peoples they brought under their rule. They not only adapted to and learned from sedentary civilizations, but also hired foreign experts when needed and relocated populations and war prisoners for their own purposes, happened to farmers from Central Asia and China, German craftsmen from Transylvania, or carpenters and goldsmiths from Russia.¹⁸

As a result, the *Pax Mongolica* created a situation of intensified culture transfer, travelling ideas, and an enhanced flow of goods in which all parts of the empire could participate. The empire thus acted as a mediator of ‘cultural goods’ from China, Central Asia, and Persia for a highly ambitious elite, significantly shaping cultural identity in western Eurasia and the *Slavia Asiatica* in particular.¹⁹ The Ulus Jochi, for instance, known also as the Golden Horde and located northwest of the Chagatai khanate, designated the Qipchaq language as the *lingua franca* of its newly subdued subjects, as well as of Volga Bulgarians and to some degree the Rus’ as well. The Uighur script, introduced to imperial bureaucracy by Genghis Khan, was widespread until the Golden Horde’s Islamisation, when it was replaced by Arabic writing. Official correspondence and decrees, known as *yarlyks*, were translations from the Mongol into the Qipchaq language that were written down in Uighur script. The Mongols introduced the supply and postal system *jam* with a network of stations that enabled the Italian traveller Plano Carpini to cover 3,000 miles in 105 days, the *tarkhan* (*tarxanliq*) privileges that served as an award for princely services and a tool for elite group-building, and, last but not least, the offices of *basqaq* and *daruqa* in the Golden Horde, the first designating a governor of an administrative-territorial unit, the latter a tax collector or a commander.²⁰

¹⁸ Rashīd al-Dīn *Successors*, 69–70; *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV* (Sinica Franciscana 1), collegit, ad fidem codicum redegit et adnotavit Anastasius Van den Wyngaert (Quaracchhi-Firenze, Bonaventura, 1929), 224–25, 252–53; William of Rubruck, *The Mission of Friar William of Rubruck: His Journey to the Court of the Great Khan Möngke, 1253–1255*, trans. Peter Jackson (London: Hakluyt Society, 1990), 144–46, 182; Giovanni di Pian di Carpine, *Storia dei Mongoli*, edizione critica del testo latino a cura di Enrico Menestò, traduzione italiana a cura di Maria Christiana Lungarotti, e note di Paolo Daffinà, introduzione di Luciano Petech (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto medioevo, 1989), 305–12, 316–19, 324–25, 331; Johann de Plano Carpini, *Geschichte der Mongolen und Reisebericht, 1245–1247*, trans. Friedrich Risch (Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1930), 220–24, 229, 236, 239–40, 253–54, 262; David M. Robinson, *Empire’s Twilight: Northeast Asia Under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 31, 44, 50.

¹⁹ See Thomas T. Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 191; idem, “Mongols as Vectors for Cultural Transmission,” in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia: The Chinggisid Age*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, Allen Frank, and Peter Benjamin Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144–145; Dittmar Schorkowitz, “Cultural Contact and Cultural Transfer in Medieval Western Eurasia,” *Archaeology, Ethnology & Anthropology of Eurasia* 40, no. 3 (2012): 84–94; idem, “Akkulturation und Kulturtransfer in der Slavia Asiatica,” in *Akkulturation im Mittelalter*, ed. Reinhard Härtel (Sigmaringen: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2014), 137–63.

²⁰ István Vasary, “The Golden Horde Term *daruqa* and Its Survival in Russia,” *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 30 (1976): 187–97; idem, “The Origin of the Institution *basqaqs*,” *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 32

Based on these innovations and their transcontinental rule and integration strategies, the Mongols also determined the trading terms for ‘commercial goods’ along the ‘silk roads and spice routes’ for a long time. With territorial expansion coming to a close in the mid-thirteenth century, faltering incomes from heavily taxed populations, and the drain on financial reserves due to the continuous financing of the military retinue, long distance trade between Asia, Africa, and Europe became more and more important for the Chinggisid elites, who initially showed a great interest in the free flow of commodities and the skimming of profits. To this end, they guaranteed the safe movement of foreigners and caravans within their respective territories and the maintenance of communication and infrastructure, and thus considerably increased the conditions for mobility within the Mongolian Empire.²¹

However, by the fourteenth century the once symbiotic relationship between khan and merchant had turned into a mutually dependent relation in which the former granted protection and the latter financed the many skirmishes of the Chinggisid lineages, who were competing over Caucasian and Middle Asian trade revenues and trade control.²² Religious belonging now became a criteria for exclusion from privileged trade-offs and thus for higher tariffs on trade. This paved the way for the Islamisation of the Golden Horde, which expanded the silk road from Urgench to Sarai, to Tanais (Azov), and Kaffa (Feodosija). Jani Beg’s raids against Genovese and Venetian commercial settlements on the Crimea in 1343 as well as Tamerlane’s destruction of trade centers in Sarai, Astrakhan, and Tanais in 1395 are striking examples of these conflicts.²³ The loss of long-distance trade generally resulted in a rapid collapse of the central power – illuminating yet again the limitations of mobility in the *Pax Mongolica*.

(1978): 201–6; idem, “Bemerkungen zum uighurischen Schrifttum in der Goldenen Horde und bei den Timuriden,” *Ural-Altäische Jahrbücher* 7 (1987): 115–26; Colin Heywood, “Yarligh,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 9 (2002): 288–90; Peter Benjamin Golden, “Some Notes on the *comitatus* in Medieval Eurasia with Special Reference to the Khazars,” *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 28, no. 1 (2001): 153–70; Shagdar, “Mongol Empire,” 133.

²¹ On the intensifying commercial aspects of this transcontinental empire see particularly Thomas T. Allsen, *Commodity and Exchange in the Mongol Empire: A Cultural History of Islamic Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). My thanks go to Karenina Kollmar-Paulenz for reminding me on this eminent piece of literature.

²² Elizabeth Endicott-West, “Merchant Associations in Yüan China: The Ortoy,” *Asia Major* 3rd Series 2, no 2 (1989): 127–54; Virgil Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, trans. Samuel Willcocks (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

²³ For more entangled history aspects of the Italian Black Sea “emporia” and Mongol-controlled continental trade, see Di Cosmo, “Black Sea Emporia.”

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Mobility and the Origins of Mongolian Ethnography: Lobsangčoidan's *Understanding Mongolian Customs* (1918)

Dorothea Heuschert-Laage

Abstract

*Lobsangčoidan (ca. 1875–1928) was a native from Front Qaračin banner whose life was marked by the social and political upheavals of the late 19th and early 20th century. After travelling extensively in Eastern Mongolia in his capacity as a tax registrar, he passed the examination of the Lifanyuan and worked as a translator and Mongolian language instructor. In this capacity, he went to Japan in 1907 and stayed in Tokyo and Kyoto for altogether seven years. His famous work *Mongyol-un jang ayali-yin oyilaburi* (*Understanding Mongolian Customs*), an ethnographic study among the Mongols of Jirim, Josotu and Juu Uda leagues, was written after his return to China when he worked as a translator for the South Manchurian Railway Company. Over the course of his life, Lobsangčoidan crossed various boundaries and moved between different cultural worlds. The paper summarizes what is known about his life and how this relates to his literary and scientific achievements. It is argued that Lobsangčoidan's book greatly influenced Mongolian studies in China and provided a model for ethnographic inquiry that has been adopted by many subsequent scholars.*

The ethnographic account which is in the focus of this article was written exactly one hundred years ago, and is related to issues of mobility in several respects. Firstly, mobile lifestyle is defined as a key feature of Mongolian culture and pastoralism is argued to be an essential pillar of the Mongolian economy. Mobility was also a crucial factor in the biography of the author, Lobsangčoidan, who not only had travelled widely in Mongolian territories, but also spent several years in Beijing, Tokyo and Kyoto. His book is known under the Mongolian title *Mongyol-un jang ayali-yin oyilaburi*¹ (*Understanding Mongolian Customs*), and covers a wide range of phenomena as it includes sections on history, law and economics, as well as material culture, climate, vegetation, housing, clothes, weapons, medicine, folk tales, food, drink and burial practices.

In terms of reception, among Mongolian ethnographic literature *Understanding Mongolian customs* occupies a significant place. Lobsangčoidan wrote several different versions of this work, but in the decades following their completion, his manuscripts had been more or less forgotten. The first scholar to direct attention to the work of Lobsangčoidan was Walther Heissig, who came across a manuscript of the work in the library of the University of Foreign Languages in Tokyo and in

¹ The suffix *-buri* designates a noun deriving from the verb *oyila-* “to understand”. Some scholars transliterate *üilebüri*. On the different titles of the preserved manuscripts Manduqu and Dulayan, *Lobsangčoyidan-u sudulul* (Ulaanqada: Öbör Mongyol-un soyol-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 2000), 124–139.

1968 published an article on *Understanding Mongolian Customs* in *Zentralasiatische Studien*.² However, at that time the resonance to Heissig's article and Lobsangčoidan's work was rather limited. This changed in the year 1981 when the Inner Mongolian scholar Dambijalsan published an edited volume of Lobsangčoidan's work.³ His publication as well as its translation into Chinese, which was published in 1988⁴ have attracted much attention especially among scholars in China and Japan. The wealth of publications over the last couple of decades has even led to complaints that there has been an "outbreak of Lobsangčoidan fever".⁵

Lobsangčoidan's account has not only become an object of research, but has also stimulated scholars to edit follow-up books. For example, a couple of years after Dambijalsan's edition of Lobsangčoidan's work, the Inner Mongolian publishing house published a series of monographs devoted to the customs (*jang ayali*) of various Mongolian communities in China. Even though the headings and sections under which information is arranged in these ethnographic accounts are not identical with those used in Lobsangčoidan's composition, the authors likewise use the term *jang ayali* in order to present lifestyle, food, dress, belief system and so on as the characteristics which mark out certain communities.⁶

Moreover, Lobsangčoidan's work did not only become a model for scholarly inquiries, but was also important for the development of folklore studies as an academic discipline. Manduqu and Dulayan maintain that only after Dambijalsan's publication of *Understanding Mongolian Customs* in 1981, universities in Inner Mongolia and Beijing established courses on Mongolian folklore studies (*Mongyol jang üile-yin uqayan*) and encouraged students to go to the countryside during their holidays, where they were to live with herders and farmers in order to do research on daily practices and collect folk tales.⁷ In sum, even though there is no indication that Lobsangčoidan himself tried to establish a kind of academic discipline, his work evolved into an icon of Mongolian folklore studies.

***Understanding Mongolian Customs* as "Native" Ethnography**

It is often argued that Lobsangčoidan drew inspiration for writing *Understanding Mongolian Customs* during his stay in Japan,⁸ where as early as 1913 Kunio Yanagita

² Walther Heissig, "Lobsangčoidan's Darstellung des Ostmongolischen Brauchtums", *Zentralasiatische Studien* no. 2 (1968), 211–263.

³ Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongyol-un jang ayali-yin oyilaburi*, (Kökeqota: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1981).

⁴ Luobusangquedan, *Menggu fengsu jian*, (Shenyang: Liaoning minzu chubanshe, 1988).

⁵ Jun Xiao, "Guanyu Luobusangquedan zhuanxie <Menggu fengsu jian> dongji de yi kaocha", *Meng Zang xiankuang shuangyuebao* 15, no. 6 (2006): 50.

⁶ Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 248–249.

⁷ Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 250, 257.

⁸ Sereng, *Lobsangčoyidan*, (Kökeqota: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 2014), 17; Yin Se, "Menggu fengsu jian' de minsuxue jiazhi", *Zhongyang minzu xueyuan xuebao* 1 (1992): 72; Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 200–201.

(1875–1962) and Toshio Takaki (1876–1922) had founded a journal *Native Place Studies* (Kyôdo Kenkyû). Recently, it has been stressed that according to Yanagita and Takaki, experience in the field and namely travel was seen as a primary mode of knowledge acquisition.⁹ This article investigates how Lobsangchoidan tied in with this focus on travelling and mobility and in what way his work stands for a specific “Mongolian” research approach. These questions are closely related to debates on “native” ethnology and the contributions of researchers working in their home communities. By accepting “native” ethnography as a particular form of knowledge production, we assume that the accounts of “native” researchers emerge under distinctive conditions and their observations are based on a specific authority which distinguishes them from the writings of other authors. As early as 1993 Kirin Narayan critically examined the attribute “native” with regard to anthropological research. She pointed out the aspect of multiple identities and emphasized that other factors such as education, gender or social class may prevail over ethnic belonging.¹⁰ More recently, the question of what actually is “native” ethnography and how it differs from “non-native” ethnography has been raised by Abdelmajid Hannoum, who stresses that this issue has not received the attention it deserves.¹¹ As colonial power relationships are still operative in the production of anthropological knowledge and debates are still structured around opposing paradigms such as “here” and “there” or “self” and “other”, Hannoum concludes that anthropological research requires a “double belonging”.¹² However, while Hannoum investigates the role of the “native” ethnographer with regard to Morocco and Algeria, especially in Japan the concept of “native” research is understood differently. At this point, a remark on terminology is in order. In Japan, the formation of a discipline of *minzokugaku*, usually translated as native ethnology / folklore studies,¹³ goes back to the late nineteenth century and is marked by the search for Japan’s distinct, national culture. *Minzokugaku*, however, can be rendered by different characters, making the Japanese term somewhat ambiguous, in that it can mean both, a study of popular customs and a study of a group of people identifying with each other on the basis of common ancestry, language or history.¹⁴ Accordingly, Takami Kuwayama reminds his readers to distinguish between two “*minzokugaku*’s”, Japanese anthropology and folklore studies.¹⁵ Elsewhere, however, he stresses that in

⁹ Alan Christy, *A discipline on Foot: Inventing Japanese Native Ethnography, 1910–1945*. (Lanham Md. et al.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 45–47.

¹⁰ Narayan, Kirin, “How Native Is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?,” *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993): 671–686.

¹¹ Abdelmajid Hannoum, “The (Re)Turn of the Native: Ethnography, Anthropology, and Nativism,” in *The anthropologist and the native: essays for Gananath Obeyesekere*, ed. H.L. Seneviratne (London: Anthem Press, 2011), 424. <https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9780857289919.020>.

¹² Hannoum, “The (Re)Turn of the Native,” 423.

¹³ These translations for *minzokugaku* are suggested by Gerald Figal, “Review”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 76, no. 1 (2017): 226.

¹⁴ For discussions on this term see Christy, *A discipline*, 6.

¹⁵ Takami Kuwayama, “Japanese Anthropology and Folklore Studies”, in *Theories and Methods in Japanese Studies: Current State and Future Developments. Papers in Honor of Josef Kreiner*, ed. Hans Dieter Ölschleger (Bonn: V&R unipress, 2008), 31, 36.

Japan anthropology and folklore studies developed as twin disciplines and cannot be clearly separated from each other¹⁶ and it is this dual background which made him entitle his book *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*. Kuwayama argues that “native” academic production is defined by several aspects, such as the author’s point of reference being her “own culture” and her writing in her mother tongue for a domestic audience. Another aspect that Kuwayama brings to the fore concerns the “native” researchers’ identity and interests, which may be affected by the way the community under study is represented.¹⁷

At this point, I would like to come back to Lobsangčoidan and the agreement that the compilation of *Mongyol-un jang ayali-yin oyilaburi* was inspired by ideas of the Japanese folklore movement. Evidence for this is usually based on the way Lobsangčoidan classifies ethnographic data and works towards defining Mongols as an ethnic/national community. As Kuwayama maintains, however, Japanese research traditions are marked by a particular research approach, which “involves[s] natives as active agents”. How do the criteria defined by Kuwayama fit for Lobsangčoidan and his role as a “native” Mongolian ethnographer? In this context, it is necessary to take a closer look at Lobsangčoidan’s life history and his literary output.

Lobsangčoidan’s Biography and Work

Basically, all we know about Lobsangčoidan’s life is included in his afterword to *Understanding Mongolian Customs* where he relates that he came from a poor family in Kharachin left banner. At the early age of seventeen he was entrusted with an office in the local administration, but his entry into adulthood was overshadowed by an outbreak of violence targeting the Mongolian population, which in 1891 devastated Josotu league and the Southern part of the Juu Uda league.¹⁸ This was a formative experience for Lobsangčoidan, who in the subsequent famine lost his parents and refers to the year 1891 as the time when “he came to his senses” (*minu bey-e sergügsen*).¹⁹ After he was uprooted by the loss of his family, Lobsangčoidan left his home banner and worked as a tax registrar in neighboring Jirim league. According to his own account, it was in 1897, when he was in his early twenties, that he made the decision to become a lama. On the way to Baruyun Juu (Lhasa), he paused in Beijing intending to earn some money for his further trip. However, after

¹⁶ Kuwayama, *Native Anthropology: The Japanese Challenge to Western Academic Hegemony*, (Melbourne, Vic.: Trans Pacific Press, 2004), 151n4.

¹⁷ Takami Kuwayama, *Native Anthropology*, 19. He nevertheless concedes that in this respect the difference between “native” and “non-native” approaches is a question of degree only.

¹⁸ For the Jindandao pogrom see Christopher Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2004), 280 and Borjigin, Burensain, “The Complex Structure of Ethnic Conflict in the Frontier: Through the Debates around the ‘Jindandao Incident’ in 1891,” *Inner Asia* 6, no. 1 (2004), 41–60. For the pogrom one could more specifically cite Borjigin, Burensain. 2004. “The Complex Structure of Ethnic Conflict in the Frontier: Through the Debates around the ‘Jindandao Incident’ in 1891.” *Inner Asia* 6: 41–60.

¹⁹ Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongyol-un jang ayali-yin oyilaburi*, 366, Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u sudulul*, 29.

taking up residence in the Yonghe monastery in Beijing, he started to study there. Fluent in Manchu, Mongolian and Chinese since his childhood, in 1902 he passed the exam of the Lifanyuan becoming a “Master of four languages.” Subsequently, Lobsangčoidan worked as an instructor for Mongolian language, first in Beijing at a school affiliated to the Ministry of Education and then several years in Japan at the University for Foreign Languages in Tokyo (1907–11) and at the school of the Nishi Honganji Temple in Kyoto (1912–1914). After his return to China in late 1914, he took on a position at the South Manchurian Railway Company. It was in this time that he began to work on his famous book.

While in the decades following Dambijalsan’s publication, *Understanding Mongolian Customs* was primarily read as a cultural testimony, in recent years the political dimension of Lobsangčoidan’s work has been brought to the fore. In the archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Xiao Jun found evidence that Lobsangčoidan was engaged in the Mongolian independence movement. In between his posts in Tokyo and Kyoto, Lobsangčoidan returned to China where in 1911 he witnessed the fall of the Qing-dynasty and tried to convince members of the Inner Mongolian nobility to act in concert with the government of the Jibzundamba Khutugtu.²⁰ According to Xiao Jun, when Lobsangčoidan returned to China again in late 1914, he had to learn that the majority of the Inner Mongolian nobility had come to an arrangement with the government of Yuan Shikai (1859–1916) and the Kyakhta Trilateral Treaty of June 1915 made a pan-Mongolian solution impossible. For this reason, his criticism of Mongolian authorities, both the nobility and Buddhist dignitaries, who in his eyes were responsible for the vulnerable position of Mongols in China, can be explained with his disillusionment with the political developments.

Research on *Understanding Mongolian Customs* is complicated by the fact that Lobsangčoidan was working on his book for a longer period of time, correcting it over and over again and producing several different versions. The edition of Dambijalsan, on which also the present study is based, goes back to a Mongolian manuscript which is preserved in the Library of Liaoning province in Dalian and once belonged to the headquarters of the South Manchurian Railway Company. Two other (partly incomplete) Mongolian versions of the manuscript are preserved in the Library of the University of Foreign Languages in Tokyo.²¹ Interestingly, after the Mongolian versions were finished, Lobsangčoidan also produced a translation of his work in Chinese. According to Manduqu, he explains his translation with the spread of the Chinese language which is “the most common language in East Asia”.²² I will come back to this important aspect below when considering the prospect audience of his work.

²⁰ Jun Xiao, “Minzu zhuyi yu duoyuan wenhua lun zhi jian - lun Luobusangquedan zhuanxie <Menggu fengsu jian> de dongji”, *Jilin shifan daxue xuebao (renwen shehui kexue ban)* no. 4 (July 2017), 42.

²¹ For the differences in scope, content, titles, arrangement of chapters and the sequence in which the different versions are likely to be composed Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 124–139. On the question why several versions ended up in the Tokyo library Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 139–141.

²² The Chinese manuscript is quoted in Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 144.

Understanding Mongolian Customs and Japanese Folklore Studies

In the afterword of the Mongolian version published by Dambijalsan, Lobsangčoidan explains his motives for his account as follows:

(368) As I think about these issues now, they become matters of urgency, because the railway has already reached Darqan banner²³, which is like the heart of Mongolia, and how will my Mongols, who, despite their eloquence, were never good at doing business with the Chinese, stand up against the trading power of Japanese and Chinese?

I am worried that, once the legacy inherited from the holy Chinggis will be scattered, there will be no witness to the arrogance of noblemen and officials and to how they were spoken of; (369) I am concerned that you, Wang, Gong, Beile, Beise and Taiji,²⁴ and commoners such as Tabunang,²⁵ *tusalayči* and *jakiruyči* officials,²⁶ who are born with the fate of ruining your own roots, do not know about the time of your extinction; I wrote [this] as I am firmly determined to accurately reveal the truth about your life and all your doings.²⁷

This passage mirrors the scenario of loss and destruction which characterizes Lobsangčoidan's work. For him, Mongolian ways of life were not only changing, but, in an irreversible process, were going to be eliminated. As an ethnographer, Lobsangčoidan saw himself as the only person who was aware of this and for this reason had the important role of documenting practices and concepts, which were about to cease to exist. In the preface, he is even more explicit on the prospect audience who would benefit from knowledge on the Mongols:

Because in today's world, people's concerns are increasingly centered on civilization, I am alarmed [at the prospect of] the Mongols' (*mongyol udum*) achievements fall into oblivion and try to be fast and write a brief account in order to leave a little trace; I am confident that this will provide a small contribution for experts and scholars debating on issues of the human lineage and have little by little put together [my account] by carefully going through Tibetan and Mongolian historical records and investigating today's economic activities.²⁸

²³ Darqan banner is another name for the Qorčin left middle banner.

²⁴ These are honorary titles of the Mongolian nobility during the Qing period.

²⁵ This means commoners married to noble women.

²⁶ These are officials in the banner administration.

²⁷ (368) *edüge minu bey-e edeger-i bodoju yayaraq yabudal bolbasu . nigente temür jam mongyol-un jirüke metü darqan qosiyud yajar oroşsan tulada kelekü-eçe yadan-a kitad-luyar araljiy-a tululčaju kücürekü ügei bayışan mongyol minu . odo nw bwn . kitad qoyar araljiy-a-yin erke-yi yayakiju tululčamui-y-a:*

olan noyad tüsimeđ omorqay bardang aju iregsen ner-e boyda činggis-un jögeju üledegegsen köröngge udum činu . sarnışan qoyin-a gereči temdeg ügei bolyoji kemen jobanin (369) *köröngge-ben süidkekü buyantai törögsen vang güng beyile beyise tayiji qaračus tabunang tusalayči jakiruyči tüsimel tan-a mökögsen čay medekü-ber ügei-yi sanaju . tan-a olan bügüdeger amidu bayiqu üy-e yabuju bayiqu-yi činu ünen jiyaju tusqayilan sedkilčilen joriy nemeju bičiju beledkebei : Lobsangčoyidan, Mongyol-un, 368–369.*

²⁸ *önödegen yirtinčü-yin kümün üjel ulam udq-a gegen-yi sigümjilekü tula mongyol udum yabuju iregsen-i balallaqu-ača boljomjilaju silamayayilan dököm mör bolaju quriyangyui bičiju . kerbe merged bayı nar kümün-ü udum-i sigümjilekü kereg bayıqu čay öčöken nököbüri bolqu buyu kemen bodoju töbed mongyol-un üliger tuyuji-ača naribčilan abču edüge aju bayıqu tölöp-i bayıčayaju des daray-a-yi jıřayaju yarıabai : Lobsangčoyidan, Mongyol-un, 4.*

This passage is interesting in several respects. We may conclude that Lobsangčoidan was aware of the contested meaning of the term “civilization” and its significance in debates on education and modernization in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries’ Japan and China.²⁹ The addressees of his work were “experts and scholars”, who discuss the *kümüin-ü udum*, “people’s gene/stock/race” or “human lineage”.³⁰ From this it follows that Lobsangčoidan attempted to draw attention from academic circles and present the Mongol *udum* as a field of research.

Notably, for him both, written sources and daily practices were sites of knowledge production. It seems reasonable to suppose that Lobsangčoidan’s awareness of daily practices as fields of scholarly inquiry was sparked off while he was teaching in Japan. Because not much biographical information is available on Lobsangčoidan, we do not know exactly with whom he was in contact while in Japan. As already mentioned, it has been argued that Lobsangčoidan’s work may have been inspired by the ideas of the Japanese scholar Yanagita,³¹ whose publication of the “Tales of Tono” in 1912 had attracted much attention and aroused a new interest in local traditions. Just like Yanagita, Lobsangčoidan emphasizes the value of folk tales as manifestations of past practices.³²

At the center of Yanagita’s inquiries were the ordinary people and their daily life as a realm of experience that was unnoticed, unconscious or forgotten.³³ Lobsangčoidan seems to have taken up this focus on the common people when he puts the *qaraču arad*, “the common people”, in the center of his attention. When discussing issues like inheritance or marriage customs, he draws a line between practices of commoners and those of noblemen.³⁴ Likewise, he establishes a dichotomy between Mongols living as pastoral nomads and Mongols living as agriculturalists and uses the manner of economy as the most salient feature for grouping Mongolian communities. According to his understanding, originally all Mongols were pastoral nomads and only later some of them also practiced agriculture.³⁵ Lobsangčoidan’s preoccupation with origins and his little interest in cross-links are characteristics he shares with Japanese ethnographers of the time, for whom likewise traditions and authenticity were more important than the fluidity of contemporary practices. At the same time, Lobsangčoidan’s distinction between pastoral nomads and agriculturalists goes beyond the ideas of Yanagita, who sees the field of tension in Japanese culture rather

²⁹ On the translation of this term into Mongolian see Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, “Enlightenment in the Name of Chinggis Khan: The Founding of the Eastern Mongolian Publishing House in Mukden 1926/27,” *Asiatische Studien/ Études Asiatiques* no. 73/4 (2019), 683–711.

³⁰ According to Munkherdene Lhamsuren, the term *udum* is part of the Mongolian nationality lexicon and, often used analogous with the term *ündüsü* (root/lineage/nationality), is representative for the intertwining of genealogical and ethnic concepts as basic definers of (national) community. Lhamsuren Munkh-Erdene, “The Mongolian Nationality Lexicon: From the Chinggisid Lineage to Mongolian Nationality (From the seventeenth to the early twentieth century),” *Inner Asia* 8, no. 1 (2006): 72.

³¹ Se, “‘Menggu fengsu jian’ de minsuxue jiazhi”, 72 ; Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 200–201.

³² For an example see Heissig, „Lobsangčondans Darstellung“, 244–246.

³³ Christy, *A discipline*, 198, 206.

³⁴ Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 227, 238.

³⁵ Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongjol-un*, 231; Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 72.

in the opposition between country and city.³⁶ While there is much to suggest that Lobsangčoidan in Japan got in contact with ideas on the formation of ethnic identity, the concepts developed in *Understanding Mongolian Customs* cannot be understood as mere adaptations of Japanese models.

Ethnography and Travel in the Work of Lobsangčoidan

In the passage quoted above, Lobsangčoidan also gives information on the material he used, namely Tibetan and Mongolian historical documents and personal observation. Not much is known on the written sources. The Library of the South Manchurian Railway Company in Dalian, which Lobsangčoidan had access to, included Mongolian historical literature such as the *Erdeni-yin tobči*.³⁷ According to Heissig, it is very likely that Lobsangčoidan had access to the Qing-dynasty legal code and probably also relied on the Subud Erike (1835) of Fungčuyjab.³⁸ The question arises whether Lobsangčoidan's reference to "today's economic activities" can be understood as a commitment to traveling and everyday experience as the site of genuine knowledge as proposed by the practitioners of the Japanese folklore movement. When we read Lobsangčoidan's book against the background of folklore studies in Japan and especially the contributions of Yanagita, we have to keep in mind that Yanagita's theoretical treatises and his considerations on the art of fieldwork appeared only in the 1930ies, long after *Understanding Mongolian Customs* was written. When Lobsangčoidan was in Japan, Japanese anthropological and ethnographic studies were still in the process of formation. Nevertheless, Christy defines travelling as the "foundational ideal" of the discipline³⁹ and at first glance this is in accordance with Lobsangčoidan's stress on the importance of his travels in Jirim league as a registrar as a motivation for writing his book. Lobsangčoidan relates that "when I examined and got to know the places and locations I visited at regular intervals, I certainly was not under the impression that they were all the same."⁴⁰ It was the fact that he had been to remote places and personally experienced varieties of cultural practices, which enabled him to observe and classify Mongolian customs. However, there is no information on his personal experiences after his return from Japan. As he was travelling in Jirim league in the 1890ies, between his fieldwork and the writing of his book was a time gap of roughly twenty years. When Lobsangčoidan started to work on his opus, he had been living outside of Mongolia for almost twenty years. Accordingly, he does not relate his observations to specific encounters or events. The lesser importance attached to direct experience thus distinguishes Lobsangčoidan from the practitioners of native ethnography / folklore studies in Japan.

³⁶ Christy, *A discipline*, 98.

³⁷ Tatsuo Nakami, "A Forgotten Mongolian Manuscript of the *Erdeni-yin tobči*: Wang Guojin and Lobsangčoyidan," in *Unknown treasures of the Altaic world in libraries, archives and museums*, ed. Tatiana Pang, (Berlin: Schwarz, 2013), 52–57.

³⁸ Heissig, "Lobsangčondans Darstellung", 238.

³⁹ Christy, *A Discipline*, 45.

⁴⁰ ... *toyoriᠰan ᠶ᠋ᠭᠠᠷ ᠣᠷᠣᠨ-ᠢ ᠤᠵᠡᠵᠢ ᠮᠡᠳᠡᠭᠡᠳ ᠡᠭᠡᠯ ᠪᠠᠶᠢᠭᠤ ᠰᠠᠨᠠᠶ-ᠠ ᠤᠭᠡᠢ ᠪᠣᠯᠵᠢ ...* Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongᠭol-un*, 365.

At this point, I would like to come back to the criteria for “native” production defined by Kuwayama and presented earlier in this article. Lobsangčoidan wrote his account in his mother tongue but, after completing it, translated it into Chinese, which he considered to be the most common language in East Asia. This clearly shows that the audience he hoped to reach was not confined to readers of Mongolian. This is also indicated in the foreword of his book and his appeal to the scholarly world. It seems that for Lobsangčoidan, distance and the ability to adopt an outsider’s viewpoint were fundamental elements of ethnographic writing. When in the afterword informing his readers about his biography, he stresses that he had spent many years in Beijing, Tokyo and Kyoto. He seems to reinforce the accuracy of his account not by his being an insider, but rather by the fact that he had been to the outside. For him, his absence from the “field” was not a deficiency but rather what qualified him to write about Mongolian customs. In this context, mobility was a precondition for the creation of Lobsangčoidan’s *Understanding Mongolian Customs* in a twofold process. Firstly, through his travels in Eastern Mongolia he acquired knowledge on the practices of different Mongolian communities and thus travelling for him was a way of producing knowledge. It was only through his long-term stay in Japan, however, that he developed a new space for himself as a mediator who was able to produce knowledge both from personal experience and the collection of data in written sources.

In sum, it can be said that Lobsangčoidan’s gaze as an ethnographer was markedly different from that of Japanese native ethnographers / folklorists and likewise was his motivation. While Yanagita was determined to withstand Western hegemony over discourses on Japanese culture, Lobsangčoidan rather wrote out of a feeling of powerlessness. He saw himself as a last witness of a Mongolian culture on the verge of being extinguished and wished to give Mongolian issues a voice in scholarly debates. As regards the affinity between the researcher and his objects of study, an aspect also addressed by Kuwayama, in the case of Lobsangčoidan this rather seems to be a tragic coincidence. In his book, Lobsangčoidan criticizes both the nobility and Buddhist authorities, but likewise disapproves of the way common herders spend their lives in leisurely idleness which makes them unable to defy resistance to unfair trading practices.⁴¹ His book ends with his confession “I mourn about been born among the Mongols”.⁴² With this remark, Lobsangčoidan distances himself from his fellow Mongols.

Even though he corresponds with representatives of *minzokugaku* in that ethnic/national identity in its purest form is located in the past, what singles Lobsangčoidan out from Japanese writers, is his gloomy outlook and his harsh judgement on his compatriots.

The impact of Lobsangčoidan’s ideas on his contemporaries may have been limited, but the continued interest in his book shows that after one hundred years

⁴¹ Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongyol-un*, 240–241.

⁴² *mongyol-dur orojū törögsen-degen yomodamui*: Lobsangčoyidan, *Mongyol-un*, 369.

the issues he raised are still of high topicality. As Inner Mongolian authors argue, in China, the folklore movement is closely related to the New Culture Movement which only started around 1919. Lobsangčoidan, however, began to work on his book in 1915 and thus engaged in folklore studies earlier than his Chinese counterparts.⁴³ Moreover, his main sources of inspiration go back to Japan and his research cannot be seen as a by-product of the intellectual development in China. For this reason, Lobsangčoidan is a figure who stands for a “native” and at least not “China-dominated” research tradition.

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⁴³ Manduqu, *Lobsangčoyidan-u*, 2–3.

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Changes of Mongolian Young Adults' Social and Mental Spaces

Tserenbazar Pioner

Abstract

The purpose of studying young adults' values and their lifetime goals is to characterize their social and mental space in modern Mongolia after the political and economic transition period 30 years ago. Results from recent studies show that Mongolian young adults' social and mental spaces have been significantly changed and are still in the process to find their shapes. On the other hand, Mongolian young adults' values are very much parents- and family-based, and their lifetime goals tend towards improving their current living condition in all possible ways. Contemporary Mongolian young adults, thus, live in different periods of time by sharing their values with the previous generation. This is a common phenomenon for transitional periods and societies but in addition with cultural traditions and Mongolian national mentality, this causes several problems for further development.

Key words: social space, mental space, spiritual, social transition, identification, value, lifetime goal, self-expression, leisure, social activity

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the social transition brought many changes to Mongolians' lives, both at material and mental levels. Material changes are, however, more visible than mental changes since the depth and breadth of mental changes and their effects on human lives are much more difficult to assess and describe. In fact, mental changes are mostly defined through material changes, but they still cannot be defined entirely this way.

The study of Mongolian young adults' social and mental space changes link to the spiritual connection of society and individuals' communication, individuals' mental level study in sociology and philosophy.¹ Individuals' social space-building and spiritual or mental communication connect to their values and lifetime goals. From this point of view, to study the changes of Mongolian young adults' values and lifetime goals after the social transition period is very important. In the 1980s to the 1990s, a number of studies were young adults-related. Even in recent days, the population structure has not changed much. As the 2010 population census shows, 67 percent of the total population is between fifteen and thirty-four years old.² However,

¹ (Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology and Law Institute 2013).

² Solongo Alгаа. 2004. "The Perspectives on Population number of Ulaanbaatar City Central Districts, 2005–2020", *Mongolian Population Journal* (no. 3), 15. Based on the prepared quantitative survey, in 2016, I added interviews conducted among eight rural area participants. The interviews were conducted in 2012, so I took this survey as a supporting main population.

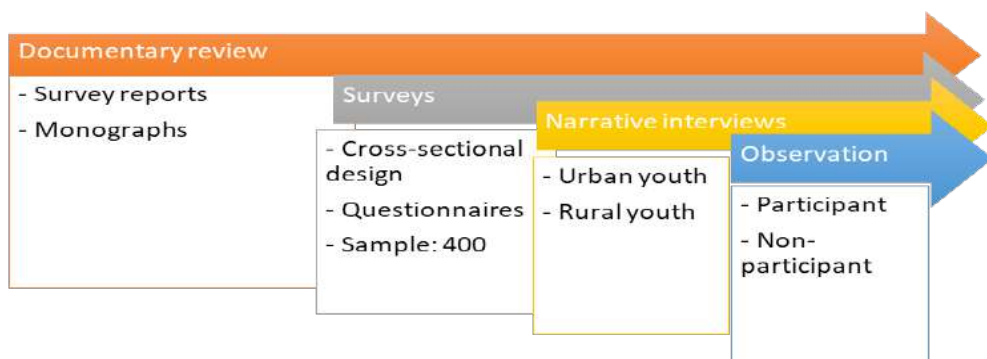
there are not enough studies to explain the effect of the transition period on changing understandings of young adults' values and on their changing lifestyles. There is still need to define the social transition effect on their social and mental space.

Against this backdrop, I conducted my study to identify key factors of changing social spaces of the Mongolian young adults that shed light on the change of people's beliefs, friendship relations, and family lifestyles, and give hints at the way how people select future partners and employees. Is there any specific national mentality or common sense among people living in the transition period?

Methodology

The study of Mongolian young adults' values and lifetime goals was conducted by mixed methods such as cross-sectional surveys, narrative interviews, and participant and non-participant observation among urban and rural young adults from 2012 to 2018. I conducted the quantitative survey on about 400 urban participants who were born between the 1980s and 1990s. In 2012, they were 20 to 30 years old and received their general education during the transition period. At the same time, a number of studies conducted before the 1990s was used to compare and identify the differences or changes of Mongolian young adults' values since the period of social transition.

Figure 1. Study design



In 2012, the cross-sectional survey was conducted among 400 Ulaanbaatar young adults, including students, workers from all economic sectors, and unemployed people. The research question of this survey was to figure out young adults' values by their lifetime goals, social activity and life satisfaction. 400 respondents, between 18 and 34 years old, lived in the urban and rural area, and belonged to different economic sectors. They participated in a face-to-face survey in which they were asked about their most important things, perspectives of their lives, and leisure activities.

Except from this survey, fifteen narrative interviews were conducted in Ulaanbaatar City, Tuv, Bulgan, Arkhangai, and Uvurkhangai aimags from 2012 to 2018 among young adults to compare urban and rural area differences in young

adults' values. Furthermore, participant and non-participant observations have been used. During the interview, I observed the participants' way of talking, their gestures, physical features, their living and working conditions and others.

The observation was carried out among young adults of the academic and business sector to further identify their social activities.

Young Adults' Values and Lifetime Goals

Every generation lives in special circumstances impacting on their age and social status, and these are a product of social, cultural, and historical processes. For instance, young adults plan to get married and have children in any society, but the concept of marriage, their age and the order of marriage is unique. Today, individual values and lifetime goals connect to material sources and power. Someone's plan for the future or his or her lifetime goals can no longer be planned and directed. Of course, the nature and characteristics of one's life were always affected by historical context and previous life experience. Therefore, it is impossible to evaluate young adults as per individuals, they are always affected by their social and historical context (Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology and Law Institute Mongol Ulsiin Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi 2012). The meaning of individual values and lifetime goals are becoming more open, wider, and more pluralist since the social transition in Mongolia. During the socialist era, individuals' minds were restricted and controlled concerning human rights, career, wealth, and power.

The study's findings show that young adults' 5-years objectives are to improve their education, to start a family, and to migrate to work and study in the city. In addition, people's future perspective on life focuses on ensuring their material needs and well-being, such as owning an apartment, starting a business, and promoting their careers. Fulfilling material needs during the next five years is the most important objective among the respondents which indicates that people must feel insecure about their economic situation. In particular, male interviewees feature a strong passion for promoting their career, for social and political activities, and starting a business. This seems to indicate that Mongolians are traditionally patriarchal, consequently having high expectations of men as providers for the family and for society. These high expectations of men could be a reason for many deviations in the current Mongolian society, such as the loss of the gender balance in a family, in education and economic sectors, and even for the high suicide rate of men³ in Mongolia compared to the Eastern Pacific region.

Traditional understandings of Mongolians' personal traits feature the following characteristics: respect for the household head/father, being patriotic, being polite with elders and relatives, worshipping heaven and earth, loving nature, being purposeful and self-confident while believing in supernatural powers, and respecting women for their guardian role at home.

³ <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.sdq.3-4-viz-2?lang=en>.

In our imagination, the traditional and national common traits were substantially suited in animal husbandry and nomadic culture, such as adaptability in nature, flexibility, tolerance, suppression of high emotion, creativity, and individual and special team working skills. Today, some significant traditional traits are considered modern again, such as gender equality, purposefulness, and passion for learning and education:

We are going to move to UB city when our children come to school. We have a school in the soum, but the teaching staff and materials are not so good. Now, we have about three years to prepare to move. My husband's and my best and highest purpose is to educate our children.⁴

Individual's value orientation defines one's motif for any decision and his or her worldview. Accordingly, the world of young adults can be divided into social groups. Additionally, the social transition after 1990 influenced the young adults. Furthermore, social change and individual value change can be controlled by the social spheres that are political, economical, social, and cultural. Each sphere has its own conflict with different characteristics. In my study, Mongolian young adults' values and lifetime goals can be identified by their sub-culture. Most critical aspects of young adults sub-cultures are always their clothing, music, movies and other social media usages. Even here belongs young adults' illegal beliefs and behaviour.

Surprisingly, the group most affected by the social transition period were the "conformists". The oldest young adults delegates are now mid-life parents, and they were very tolerant devotees. They did not hear any comments from elders on their music, movies, dressing and their social and political beliefs. This phenomenon can be explained by the socio-economic condition and loss of the socialist point of view:

I was a student from 1995 to 1999. My son did not recognize me on a photograph which was taken in my student years. He asked me if the woman on the photo is my older sister, but my older sister is 20 years older than me. It is because I usually wore my older sister's clothes, no make-up and no hair-dressing. Nowadays, it is a great time, we have several available options. Now, I look at things differently comparing to my studenthood.⁵

Number of behavioral economic research results prove; today's Mongolian young adults are living between multiple choices. These choices provoke many comments from the older generation. It is difficult to make a choice from 100s of opportunities. However, twenty years ago there was no choice, people only needed to survive.

Observations indicated that several young people of the sample were treated for various kinds of addiction such as drugs, computer games, and alcohol abuse etc. Young adults' groups differentiate and at the same time integrate by their social positions. Higher education, social group membership and social power come to individual young adults via wealth and money. In Mongolia, there were more

⁴ Interview with a female, 34-year old local governance officer in Tuv aimag, Lun soum, [August 2016].

⁵ Interview with a female, 42-year old company CEO, in Ulaanbaatar City [August, 2016].

volunteer groups and civil movements in 2018 compared to five years ago. Most of them were established by the highly educated and wealthy young adults. In fact, numerous scholarships require applicants to be socially active, and, as a result, students and young applicants pretend to be working as volunteers.

Another interesting result of the study is that many young people discuss their life decisions with their parents. In addition, some of the interviewees had already strong religious beliefs which, it can be assumed, may even become stronger when people become older. Here, I could also observe a correlation between people's belief system and their values. If their values derive from their parents and families, their religious beliefs are strong. I suppose that this is the case because one of the values of the Mongolian young adults is to respect their parents. Moreover, parents seem to be most influential on young adults. My hypothesis to be tested in further research is, thus, that the strong religious beliefs were related to the parent-young adults' relationships.

The Mongolian young adults tend to use money as a problem-solving tool. However, money is both a problem-solving tool and itself a problem for those who lack money. In this section, I considered that the Mongolian society is a traditional society that refers to the past not to the future, and that the Mongolian society has a strong nomadic tradition. According to my survey result, young adults' values are parents, family and their lifetime goals and they tend to improve their current living conditions in all possible ways. These characters are inherited from their previous generations or parents. In other words, social transition could not make a big change between generations of 80s and 90s young adults. Although, the next generation is rapidly changing from their previous ones. Also, young adults are ready to use money to solve their problems. This could be a basic mental and social environment of corruption in Mongolia. However, our next generation could become different because they have been educated more in Western ways. For instance, young parents became more serious about child well-being and effective ways of child development. Within this context, adolescents and teenagers are facing more opportunities in their future lives, and some of them are spoiling this prospect.

Young Adults' Use of Leisure Time

Leisure time is associated with the livelihood of people and this varies by gender, employment, and age groups. Leisure time variations are more related to different cultures, traditions, and ways of living⁶. In Mongolia, research on the use of leisure time after the social transition is conducted every four years by the National Statistics Office.

The Mongolian young adults spend their leisure time mostly by watching TV, meeting friends, being with their families and doing housework. Generally, only a few of them do sports, hiking, or promoting other hobbies. Comparing gender and age groups, men tend, however, to spend more time in outdoor activities than women,

⁶ Roberts, Kenneth. *Leisure in Contemporary Society*. (Oxfordshire: CABI, 2006).

for instance doing sports, visiting shows and going out with friends, and collecting things. In contrast, women go shopping, have cosmetic services and explore the internet. Membership in volunteer organizations is also more common for women, while men are involved in business-related or political memberships.

The hobby of collecting was not very common among the Mongolian young adults, which may relate to the Mongolian's nomadic lifestyle. During my research, I rarely met people who collected books, stamps, coins, perfumes, notebooks, journals, cigarette lighters, and key chains.

Leisure activity is a key indicator of the quality of life. As mentioned earlier, young adult's lifetime goals mostly tend towards *improving* their livelihood. Accordingly, only a small part of the respondents and interviewees have already lively leisure activities while half of them thinks that their leisure activity is ineffective, and only one fifth of them saw it as effective. 50 percent said that they would spend their leisure time mostly unplanned. Compared to the male respondents, the female respondents have less leisure activities and do not spend their leisure time on their own. Men have more leisure activities but still do not have appropriate places to spend their leisure time. Both men and women lack of ideas on how to spend their time, and financial opportunities. During the survey period, the most important thing is not only the financial difficulties, but also people's self-organization and time planning skills, probably. Finally, more public places for leisure activities are becoming available and several volunteer organizations can support the Mongolian young adults to spend their leisure time in fulfilling ways, today.

Young Adults' Political and Social Activities

During the socialist era, the young adults and highly-educated population had social duties to conduct and had to teach technical skills for workers, and impact on the social development by their own initiative⁷. After the social transition, there was no more official social responsibility. In this period of time, young adults were identified as a population group with special social and political activities.

As previously mentioned, the political culture and the social and political activities of the young adults influence their socio and political activities as much as their personal heritage and family discipline. Additionally, young adult's family discipline, maturity, and ideology influence their socio and political activities. In the socialist era, this tendency was not much considered, but the quantity of membership and social activity was more important⁸. Young adults were less interested in different types of news such as public or every day, science, and political and economic news

⁷ Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology and Law Institute Mongol Ulsiin Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi, *Social Portraits of Contemporary Intellectuals' [Unuugiin Sekheetmii Niigmiin Dur Turkh]*, 1987.

⁸ Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology and Law Institute Mongol Ulsiin Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi, *Mongolian Youths Social Portraits, on the edge of XX-XXI century [XX-XXI zuunii bosgon deerh Mongoliin zaluuchuudiin niigmiin dur torkh]* 2012.

and in political activities⁹. However, the organizations and party members were obliged to inform the public:

Every Monday, we had a morning meeting “Sonsgol” with all factory workers to inform people about the public news, to evaluate the execution of planning, and to inform the workers about some deviations of others. Sometimes this was a useful meeting for workers but sometimes it just seemed “killing time”. In most cases, it was less effective than today’s morning meeting in companies and entities. Back then, we did not criticize the content of the news, but or tried to find the reason or real nature of someone who made a mistake. Remembering today, that process was very inhuman.¹⁰

Although, in the socialist era Mongolians paid close attention to the political education of young people, the basics of sociological knowledge was taught in communist, dramatic, overconfident, and politicized ways. The consequences of these teaching methods are still prevailing. Today, some young adults have a lack of political knowledge and awareness so that they take their decisions or evaluations based on their emotions. For instance, some young adults are very conformist, tolerant, inactive and mindless in the social and political life¹¹. In another side, some of them are too radical, selfish, and risky to the political issues, both attitudes are harmful for the young adults and society.

Since the mid-1980s, young people’s social and political activism and awareness have been revived. Accordingly, young adults have a new perspective on life, society, and the environment. This new perspective enforced the social transition in Mongolia. After the transition, the social groups continued to form their own views and created new civil society units to express their needs and voices. In Mongolia, the UNDP conducted a civil society survey in the 2000s and found that almost half of the population (45,3 per cent) was a member of at least one civil society organization. The survey concluded that the membership of the party was relatively high, 41.5 per cent, trade union membership was 14.1 per cent, and membership in women’s NGOs was 4.4 per cent.¹² According to the official statistics of the National Statistical Office, the number of NGOs has tripled since 2005. In 2005, there were 3,491 units, in 2010, the number raised to 8,909.¹³

⁹ Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology, and Law Institute Mongol Ulsiin Shinjlekh Ukhaanii Akademi. *Research material of Youths Education and Social Activity [Zaluuchuudiin bolovsrol niigmiin idevkh]* 1989.

¹⁰ Interview with 54-year female, old former boot factory master in Ulaanbaatar City [August, 2016].

¹¹ Academy of Science Mongolia, Philosophy, Sociology and Law Institute Mongol Ulsiin Shinjlekh Ukhaany Akademi 2012Mongolian Youths Social Portraits, on the edge of XX-XXI century [XX-XXI zuunii bosgon deerh Mongoliin zaluuchuudiin niigmiin dur torch].

¹² A, Yundendorj, *Criteria of Democratic Governance* [Ardchilsan niigmiin tulguur zarchmuud], 2002.

¹³ https://www.1212.mn/tables.aspx?tbl_id=DT_NSO_2600_009V1&13999001_select_all=0&13999001SingleSelect=_5&01_select_all=0&01SingleSelect=_8&YearQ_select_all=0&YearQSingleSelect=_201804&viewtype=linechart.

The findings of the UNDP study show that young adults' membership in professional and voluntary organizations prevails membership in political parties. In terms of gender, men are more likely to be members of the professional and young adults' organizations, and women are more often involved in the religious, charitable, and women organizations. Unfortunately, there is a lack of information about the NGOs, the civil society organizations' activities and target population information. In 2012, the Mongolian Young adults Federation conducted a baseline survey among young adults to evaluate Mongolian Young adults Federation activities. However, in the baseline survey, 30.6 per cent of the participants said that it is impossible to count the membership numbers because of a lack of information.¹⁴

The classic classification of political sociology divides the social participation into active, moderate, and inactive levels.¹⁵ By these categories, Mongolian young adults are evaluated as one third active, one half moderate and the rest inactive in political participation. The political participation differs based on the education level; highly educated people tend to be more active in the political sphere. Moreover, urban, highly educated, and male young adults are more often involved in politics. Around 10 per cent of the survey participants assessed themselves as politically active, and around 26 per cent of men wanted to make a political career. By contrast, only 8 per cent of the women consider a political career.

There is a slight difference based on age groups among young adults to take their right to vote and to be elected: Young people under twenty-five years tend not to vote while people around twenty-five to thirty are more active voters.

Table 1. Political party membership, by gender

	Sex	
	Male	Female
Member	9.8%	7.1%
Non-member	75.5%	77.8%
Not a member of the political party, but support their activities	9.1%	7.6%
No interest in and support of the political party	5.6%	7.6%

In addition, the social and political activity of young adults did not change rapidly between 2003 and 2018. The proportions of those who were not interested in politics increased, to decrease active interest and to focus only on the issues related to them.

Young Adults' Satisfaction and Cultural Identification

More than half of the participants were dissatisfied with the society they live in. They criticized the social welfare policy, wanted more support of education

¹⁴ Mongolian Youth Organization Mongolyn Zaluuchuudiin Kholboo *XXI Century - Mongolian Youth [21-р зуunii Mongolyn Zалуучууд]*, 2011.

¹⁵ Gundsambuu Kh, Chuluunbaatar G Gundsambuu Kh, Chuluunbaatar G. Mongolian Youths in the Stage of XXI Century [Mongolyn zaluuchuid khoridugaar zuunii bosgon deer]

and better-paid jobs, and demanded a more flexible credit system. If there is an opportunity for young people to get an influential job for their country, they focus on their education to improve their performance. Young adults expect an increase of work places and salaries and an improvement of the educational sector. Young adults also want to reduce corruption and bribery in all levels of society and demand of protecting the environment. From the point of the participants' view, ten areas need improvement: increasing workplaces / job opportunities, raising salaries, improving and strengthening the educational sector, reducing corruption and bribery, protecting the environment, strengthening justice and equality, improving health sector treatments, promoting businesses, strengthening laws and regulations, developing child protection policy, and protecting and recovering tradition and customs.

According to the results of a survey, young adults' knowledge of tradition and customs is quite different. About 35 per cent have advanced knowledge of the Mongolian history, culture, traditions, and customs while 40 per cent have rather poor knowledge, but are interested in studying their culture. Nonetheless, 75 per cent of all respondents are trying to be aware of the Mongolian history, culture, traditions, and customs. Noteworthy are the differences between people living in the city and in the countryside as in 2018, over 60 per cent of the total population officially lived in Ulaanbaatar city.

Regarding gender-specific differences, men had a 10 per cent higher knowledge of the Mongolian history, culture, tradition, and customs than women. However, this result is based on the self-evaluation of the participants, so it can be a psychological phenomenon of male confidence. Furthermore, the specific age of the participants must be considered as an important factor of advanced knowledge.

Table 2. Young adults' knowledge of Mongolian history, tradition, culture and customs (by location)

	UB city	Rural	Small towns
Good knowledge	30.2%	41.9%	22.7%
Neither good nor bad knowledge but interest	40.3%	39.4%	45.5%
Poor knowledge	24.8%	16.9%	27.3%
No knowledge	4.7%	1.9%	4.5%

This result maintains two sociological broad approaches. The first is cultural globalization¹⁶, which entails cultural diversification, cultural convergence, and cultural hybridization. According to this theory, Mongolians are changing their lifestyles and are hybridizing some elements of everyday life. For example, urban and rural people's clothing, food, and customs are changing. On the other hand, people are trying to develop and differentiate traditional cultural elements, such as national celebrations and national clothing, and try to preserve their cultural heritage.

¹⁶ See Ritzer, George, and Douglas J. Goodman. *Sociological Theory*. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

The study reveals that people's knowledge of tradition, culture, and history depends on their personal ties and connectedness to the areas they live in. For those who live in their native areas, their knowledge of history, tradition, culture, and customs is twice higher. This difference in particular occurred in the smaller cities and towns (e.g., Darkhan and Erdenet) where people's knowledge of the Mongolian history, culture, tradition, and customs was comparatively low, which seems to be directly related to the gap between people's origin and their urban lives in the city. Here are two possible explanations: First, the young adults who had grown up in rural areas had much time to spend with their parents, relatives, and neighbors compared to those who grew up in small towns. Second, Mongolian traditions, customs, and cultural elements are more preserved in rural areas. In Ulaanbaatar and small towns, the interaction between people is more independent, the elders' customs and social duties disappeared and elders do not promote their heritage or teach and discuss customs and cultural elements to the next generation. For this reason, young adults' knowledge of tradition, culture, customs, and history is lower in urbanized settings.

The depicted situation emerged after a century-long period of transition of the nomadic culture to settled lifestyle. The citizens are just adapting and urbanizing. In my point of view, since Mongolia does not have a big social differentiation on age groups, education levels, urban and rural areas and others, answers across the surveyed groups were similar. Nevertheless, it was observed during the study that a person's ideology of life in the city is slowly absorbed in the young adults's consciousness. From this point of view, sociologist Gundsambuu's definition of society is applied again. Contemporary Mongolian society is divided into two big sections, nomadic and settled (one state and two civilization/cultures).¹⁷

Conclusion

Shaping young adults' values through their lifetime goals and social activities are made the following points: first, even if the social space changed 30 years ago, young adults' values are still the same as those of their previous generation. This means that most young adults' values are that of their parents, family, and their lifetime goals and these tend to improve their current living conditions in all possible ways. Social transition could not make a big change between young adults born in the 1980s and 1990s, but the next generation is rapidly changing from their previous ones. As well, young adults are ready to use money to solve their problems. This could be a basic mental and social environment of corruption in Mongolia. However, our next generation could become different because they have been educated in Western ways. For instance, young parents became more serious about child wellbeing and effective ways of child development. Within this context, adolescents and teenagers are facing more opportunities in their future lives, and some of them are spoiling this prospect.

¹⁷ Gundsambuu, Khayankhyarvaa. *Mongolyn niigmiin davkhraajil: Khögjil, khandlaga. [Social Stratification in Mongolia: Developments and Tendencies]. (Ulaanbaatar: Mongol Ulsyn Zasgiin Gazryn Kheregjüilegch Agentlag Udirdlagyn Akademi, 2002).*

Since the mid-1980s, young people's social and political activism and awareness have been revived. Accordingly, young adults have a new perspective on life, society, and the environment. This new perspective enforced the social transition in Mongolia. After the transition, the social groups continued to form their own views and created new civil society units to express their needs and voices. This result may lead us to the conclusion that mental change takes more time than social or material change. Moreover, the ability to change lies in the Mongolians' national mentality, but in today's world, how do we raise and create our physical, mental, and social space? As defined by Michel Foucault, space is "the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space ... we live inside a set of relations." Now, it is a common phenomenon that people live and study abroad. Subsequently, their family members are confronted with foreign cultures and lifestyles. After having conducted this study, I still have some questions, but the questions are more related to Mongolians' meaning of life. Now, I suppose that the social space is easier to define and possible to measure. On the other hand, the mental space is different. It is located inside of the social space meaning, and hard to define, change, and conduct investigation. The social space of Mongolian young adults has changed and found its shape. The mental space change is still in progress, the change is starting in the mind of young generations.

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Mongolian Buddhist Clergy and its Mobility: Restricted, Prohibited and Forced

Ekaterina Sobkovyak

Abstract

The adaptation of Buddhism significantly changed Mongolian society. The establishment of numerous Buddhist monasteries accommodating large monastic communities influenced, among others, the mode and range of mobility of the nomadic Mongolian people. Various types of legislation regulating the everyday life of the monasteries included rules which organised, restricted or forced the mobility of clergy in different ways. The present article provides examples of regulations regarding monastic mobility found in different normative legislative sources produced by the Mongolian Buddhist organisation itself, by the local Mongolian administration, and by the Qing and Russian imperial administration. It also juxtaposes this legislation with a letter written by the Buryat Bandido Khambo Lama to the abbot of the Atsagatskii datsan, in which some problems related to the monks' mobility are discussed. The latter document allows to assess the actual situation in the Mongolian Buddhist monasteries of Transbaikalia as regards the geographical movement of the clergy. It also demonstrates the ways in which the authorities tried to keep the order and make the people subordinate to them obey the law established by the legislation mentioned above.

Some Words on Mobility, Nomadism and Mongolian Coenobitic Monasticism

Over the previous two decades, the concept of mobility has attracted considerable scholarly attention and has been actively discussed, reconsidered and reintroduced to social studies in particular and humanities in general. Acknowledging the crucial role that mobility plays in the construction and maintenance of social networks and cultural forms, Urry stated that cultures “are themselves mobile as a result of the mobilities that sustain diverse patterns of sociality”.¹ Considering mobility “as socially produced motion” and defining it as both “part of the process of the social production of time and space” and itself “a necessary social production”, Cresswell noted that it is “more central to both the world and our understanding of it than ever before”.²

Investigating various aspects of the concept of mobility, scholars make extensive use of the terms nomad and nomadism, applying them metaphorically for mobility.³ Some note, however, that such metaphors are not quite adequate for the discussion of

¹ John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies. Mobilities for the Twenty-First Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 49.

² Tim Cresswell, *On the Move. Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2–3, 5, 22.

³ Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, 26–32.

those forms and aspects of mobility⁴ which many sociologists have enthusiastically engaged themselves in recent years in analysing. The fact is that this “mobility turn” in social studies has been developed by scholars whose main subject of observation is contemporary societies and the modern world, and who must confront its noticeable change “towards increasing levels of mobility”.⁵

Therefore, there is little justification for the nomadic metaphors for various forms of contemporary mobility because, as Bauman noted, “actual nomads in fact move from place to place in a strictly regular fashion”⁶ while currently studied mobilities of the modern and postmodern world may often be characterised as improvisational, opportunity-based, chaotic, occasional, accidental, or forced. Moreover, the physical mobility of actual nomads creates and firmly maintains the tradition, of which it is an inseparable part, in contrast to the so-called “postmodern nomads” whose lives are described as “anti-traditional and anti-conformist in character”.⁷ However, probably the most striking feature that should prevent the use of nomadic metaphors as references for the modern and postmodern forms of mobility is their social production, which in the case of the actual nomadic mobility is involved only to a rather moderate degree.

Many scholars agree that for the Mongols, whose Buddhist monastic culture is the focus of the present article, pastoral nomadism (or mobile pastoralism⁸) was the optimum adaptation to the natural conditions. Goldstein and Beal note that these were the characteristics of environment and the climate that determined the number of moves made by a nomad per year as well as their distance.⁹ Legrand defined Mongolian pastoralism as “an appropriation and management of natural conditions” which involves “the nomadization of small population groups living off herds which were also of limited size”.¹⁰ Thus, at least when referring to the mobility of the basic pastoral unit, i.e. a small herding group of one or a few families¹¹ (Khalkh-Mo. *ail*), the ecological determinants played the decisive role in the development of migration

⁴ Urry distinguishes the following five forms of mobility: physical travel of people, physical movement of objects, imaginative travel, virtual travel and communicative travel (Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies*, 50–76; Jonas Larsen, John Urry and Kay Axhausen, *Mobilities, Networks, Geographies* (Hampshire, Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 47–49.

⁵ Cresswell, *On the Move*, 43.

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 240.

⁷ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (Houndmills et al.: Macmillan Education LTD), 103.

⁸ Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, *The End of Nomadism? Society, State and the Environment in Inner Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 1.

⁹ Melvyn C. Goldstein and Cynthia M. Beal, *The Changing World of Mongolia's Nomads* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 18.

¹⁰ Jacques Legrand, “Mongol Nomadic Pastoralism: A Tradition between Nature and History”, in *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce*, ed. Vadime Elisseeff (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, UNESCO Publishing, 2000), 306.

¹¹ Humphrey and Sneath, *The End of Nomadism?*, 15.

patterns, while the current political-economic framework exerted only limited influence¹².

It is quite true, however, that social factors began to have immediate and strong effects on the mobility of Inner Asian nomads, including Mongolian ones, as soon as they themselves consolidated the formation of more complex socio-political institutions (for example, the so-called empires of the steppes) or became subjected to similar foreign institutions such as, for instance, the Russian or Qing empires.

Scholars have repeatedly emphasized the large scale of changes that Buddhism brought to the Mongolian society. From the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, Buddhist institutions rapidly spread among the Mongols and swiftly grew in both number and power. As the fundamental structural unit of the Buddhist organisation since the earliest days of its existence in ancient India was a community of monks, the spread of Buddhism has always been related to the organisation of such communities, which also presupposed the establishment of permanent constructions intended to accommodate their members. In other words, the establishment of stationary monasteries was an essential if not a paramount condition for the adoption and practice of Buddhism. Bold noted that “the Buddhist monastery stood from the start in stark contrast to the nomadic way of life” and that nomadic society “in theory could not assimilate Buddhism within its mobile way of life”.¹³ History, however, proved the opposite. Although initially the Mongols attempted to adjust the Buddhist tradition to their lifestyle by setting up mobile yurt temples, this format rapidly exhausted itself and gave way to fixed monasteries. The number of such sedentary settlements and their inhabitants, as was recorded by the first half of the twentieth century, is astonishing if one considers that we still refer to traditional nomadic society.¹⁴ Although all the statistical calculations concerning the percentage of monastics in the entire Mongolian population are very approximate, even the most moderate figures of around 40 percent of all males for both Inner and Outer Mongolia, of which most probably only one third permanently stayed in the monasteries,¹⁵ still leave us with many tens of thousands of Mongols living sedentary lives.

Being complex cultural institutions, Buddhist monasteries located on Mongolian territories under Qing rule and in the Transbaikalia region under Russian jurisdiction

¹² Bat-Ochir Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Reconstruction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 51.

¹³ Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, 135.

¹⁴ According to different sources, the number of Buddhist monasteries and temples in Outer Mongolia in the first half of the twentieth century equalled 583, 771, or even 937, see Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society*, 138; Larry William Moses, *The Political Role of Mongol Buddhism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 125. For Inner Mongolia, various estimations range from 678 to 1166 monasteries and temples, see Robert James Miller, *Monasteries and Culture Change in Inner Mongolia* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1959), 30.

¹⁵ Miller, *Monasteries and Culture Change*, 27–28; I.M. Maiskii, *Mongoliya Nakanune Revolyutsii* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Vostochnoi Literatury, 1959), 42–43, 247; A.D. Simukov, *Trudy o Mongolii i dlya Mongolii*, vol.1 (Osaka: The National Museum of Ethnology, 2007), 241–242.

required a fully-fledged administrative system regulating their internal everyday life and the relations with the outside world. This system came to be based on three main types of legislation: (a) internal, self-governing sets of the *Prātimokṣasūtra*'s canonical rules, monastic guidelines often patterned after Tibetan *bca' yigs* or the Tibetan originals themselves, and other internal organizational documents pertaining to particular cases; (b) external, local laws issued by the Mongolian secular administration, including customary law; and (c) the imperial (Russian and Manchu-Chinese) legislation.

The analysis of these three types of sources shows that, although the mobility of the monks seems to have been limited as a matter of course as soon as they joined the community and thereby agreed to live in a monastery, all types of documents listed above include regulations which further organise, restrict or force this mobility in different ways.

In the following part of the article I give examples of regulations regarding monastic mobility found in different normative legislative sources produced by the Mongolian Buddhist organisation itself, by the local Mongolian administration, and by the Qing and Russian imperial administration.¹⁶ I also juxtapose these regulations on mobility with a piece of “history from below” – a letter written by the Buryat Bandido Khambo Lama to the abbot of the Atsagatskii datsan, in which some problems related to the monks' mobility are discussed. This document provides the necessary basis for the assessment of the actual situation in the Mongolian Buddhist monasteries of Transbaikalia as regards the geographical movement of the clergy, simultaneously emphasizing the importance of such documents for the surveys which attempt to draw as complete a historical description as possible.

Self-Governing Regulations of the Buddhist Community

In Tibet and later in Mongolia, the Buddhist monastery became the major form of religious social institution, with hundreds established and maintained throughout the regions. Acting as religious, social, political, economic and educational organizations, Buddhist monasteries needed guidelines to specify concrete behavioural and organizational rules appropriate to the current time, place and circumstances. Such guidelines, often entitled with the term *bca' yig* (Tib.), are found in abundance among the works of Tibetan Buddhist scholars.¹⁷ Having borrowed this type of religious-

¹⁶ It should be specially emphasised that scholars have not yet fully answered the question of applicability and effectiveness of all the legislative documents I mention in this paper. The applicability of the *Qalqa jirum* code, for instance, is proved by the document called *Ulayan qačartu* which is a record of the precedent court cases decided according to the code (Bayanbaataryn Batbayar, Batsükhiin Bayarsaikhan and Baatarjavyn Lkhagvajav, *Mongolyn Shüün Taslakh Ajillagaany Tüükhen Survalj Bichigt Khiisen Suinjlgee: Ulaan Khatsart* (Ulaanbaatar, 2010)). On the other hand, we still lack any sources documenting the enforcement of, for example, the so-called “Eighteen steppe laws” collection.

¹⁷ The term *bca' yig* has not been reserved exclusively for naming monastic regulations. It has also been used in the titles of texts dealing with the aesthetics and punctuation of the Kanjur as well as in a secular context – naming law codes of various lay communities. On the other hand, the texts

legislative literature from Tibetans, Mongolian Buddhist authorities also introduced *bca'yigs* into the governing system of their monasteries, using original Tibetan texts or compiling their own guidelines in Tibetan or Mongolian.

The Collected Works of the third Mergen Gegen Blo bzang Bstan pa'i Rgyal mtshan (1717–1766), for example, include a *bca'yig*-like text entitled *Dotoy-a-du ey-e ber tökegerekü jüil üng sanay-a kemen dürimlekü bičig*¹⁸ intended for the monastic community of the Mergen monastery. According to this statute, a monk may not travel outside the monastery without authorisation. When it is necessary to leave the monastery for less than three days, a monk should get permission from the person in charge of his *ayimay*; for less than seven days, from the *siregen* lamas and for less than fifteen days, from the head lama.¹⁹ If a monk is late for the agreed term, the days of delay are counted and he is given as many fives of lashes, or obliged to make as many hundreds of bows, as the days of delay he had. If he happens to miss the *pošadha* ceremony, he has to make one thousand bows.²⁰ If a monk wants to travel not to attend communal matters but about his own business for more than fifteen days, he has to first announce this to his colleague-monks and offer them tea during one gathering, to close his personal account and then leave. After his return he should again treat the monks with a “communal tea” and report his comeback, then pay a price of five *qián* (Chin.)²¹ to the monastery treasury and register himself back.²²

In his monograph on his journeys in Mongolia, Pozdneev presents a full translation of the monastic regulations he obtained from the *gebgüi* lama of the *Erdeni juu* monastery. According to the legend, this statute was edited by the fourth Jebtsundamba Khutugtu and was put in use in most of the monasteries belonging to this hierarch. The document states that if a *bandi* leaves a monastery to visit somebody without the permission of his teacher and a *gebgüi*, he is to be punished

containing regulations for monastic communities and closely resembling *bca'yigs*, as regards the content, were not necessarily called by this term (Berthe Jansen, *The Monastery Rules. Buddhist Monastic Organization in Pre-Modern Tibet* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 6–7, 15–16).

¹⁸ Lubsangdalbijalsan, *Včir Dhara Mergen Diyanči Blam-a-yn Gegen-ü 'Bum Jarliḡ Kemegdekü Orosiba*, vol. 1, ed. Bayanbayatur (Öbör Mongyol-un Suryan Kümüjil-ün Keblel-ün Kuriy-e, 2006), 53–76.

¹⁹ Mong. *Kerbe yabuqu kereg yarbasu yurban qonoy-ača inaysi-yin soyurqal-i ayimay-un dayamal-ača abumui: doloḡan qonoy-ača inaysi-yin soyurqal-i siregen lamanar-ača abumui: arban tabun qonoy-ača inaysi-yin soyurqal-i teregün lama-ača abumui* (Lubsangdalbijalsan, *Včir Dhara Mergen*, 56r).

²⁰ Mong. *Ker be öggügßen bolčiyān-ača qoḡimdabasū: qonoy toḡolan tabun edlekü (sic) buyu tedün jaḡun mörgöl: öberemiče sobačong-un čaytur dutabasū mingyan mörgöl üiledkemüi* (Lubsangdalbijalsan, *Včir Dhara Mergen*, 56v).

²¹ A traditional Chinese measure of weight used also as a currency denomination. It equalled one tenth of a *liāng*, i.e. around 3.5 g, F.A. Brokgauz” and I.A. Efron”, *Entsiklopedičeskii Slovar'*, vol. XVIII (St. Petersburg: Tipo-Litografiya I.A. Efrona, 1896), 247.

²² Mong. *Neyite-yin kereg-dür jaruydaqu terigüten ča (sic) busu öberün kereg-iyer arban tabun qonoy ča (sic) ilegüi yabuqu bügesü nigen qural-un mangča ergüged quvaray-dur ayiladqaju nere dangsa-yi qayaju odumui: iregsen čaytur basa mangča ergüged ayiladqaju: tabun čin-u ün-e-yi yeke sang-dur ergüjü jiči bičigilümüi* (Lubsangdalbijalsan, *Včir Dhara Mergen*, 56v).

with twenty-five lashes. If his absence is permitted but he returns with a delay, he should be punished with as many fives lashes as the days of delay he had.²³

Continuing the tradition of Tibet and Mongolia proper, Buddhist monasteries located in the Transbaikalia region also used special internal regulations written in both Mongolian and Tibetan.²⁴ The *Religious statute of the Mongolian-Buryat clergy of Transbaikalia* (Russian: *Religioznyi ustav mongolo-buryatskogo dukhovenstva Zabaikal'ya*), also known as the “Kudunskii statute”, presents an interesting example of such a document. Its compilation was initiated in 1830 by the state official Schilling von Canstadt who requested for the task a gathering of senior monks of the Kudunskii datsan as well as members of local governing bodies.²⁵ Addressing the question of the mobility of monks studying at the monastic schools, the statute states that if there is a necessity to leave the monastery for the entire day, monks should ask their teachers for permission. If a monk does not return in time and his delay is justified by his own or somebody else's disease, death or similar issues, he should send a note signed by a person who caused the delay. If a monk is late without any serious reason, for the first offence he should be put under arrest without any meal for one day, for the second offence for two days, and for the third time for three days.²⁶

Local or Customary Law

As soon as Buddhist monasteries began to be actively established on Mongolian territories and the number of monastics among the Mongolian populations began to grow, notably in the seventeenth century (the second half of the eighteenth century for Transbaikalia), articles regarding the treatment of Buddhist clergy, shrines and relics by the laity, as well as the standards of monastic behaviour, appeared in the codes of law compiled by Mongolian nobility and political leaders.

The collection of laws known as ‘The eighteen steppe laws’, which was issued in Khalkha Mongolia at the end of the sixteenth to the first third of the seventeenth century, includes several articles aimed at the protection of the clergy and Buddhist shrines as well as the granting of certain privileges to the members of the monastic community. The code clearly supports the mobility of the monks, given the provisions of the 1604 order to provide a lama travelling upon invitation with three carts, and a *bandi* in the same situation with two carts. If the latter happens to spend a night on the road, he is to be provided with one ration of food. Another set of provisions, devoted

²³ A.M. Pozdnev, *Ocherki Byta Buddiiskikh Monastyrei i Buddiiskogo Dukhovenstva v Mongolii v Svyazi s Otnosheniyami Segi Poslednego k Narodu* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Imperatorskoi Akademii Nauk, 1887), 182–187.

²⁴ A.A. Bazarov, Ts.P. Vanchikova, M.V. Ayusheeva, E.O. Sobkovyak, *Realii Monastyrskoi Zhizni v Buddizme Mongolii i Buryatii: Istochnikovedcheskii Analiz* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buryatskogo Gosuniversiteta, 2017), 175–189.

²⁵ N.V. Tsyrempilov, *Buddizm i Imperiya. Buryatskaya Buddiiskaya Obshchina v Rossii (XVIII – nach. XX v.)* (Ulan-Ude: IMBT SO RAN, 2013), 107–108.

²⁶ Tsyrempilov, *Buddizm i Imperiya*, 251.

specially to the monastics, states that *toyins* are to be provided with two carts and two rations of food.²⁷

The content of the *Qalqa jirum* – a collection of laws issued at the assemblies of the Khalkha-Mongolian nobility between 1709 and 1770 – is much richer as regards the articles concerning Mongolian Buddhist organisation in Khalkha than the earlier local legislation. Regulating the mobility of monastics, the provision of 1726 states that a monk or a layman should not spend a night in a Chinese settlement, no matter from where he came. If he does so, he should be deprived of all the possessions he carries and his means of transport. He is also obliged to pay a fine.²⁸ The provision on the relations between the clergy and the laity of 1746 states that a person who has joined a monastery does not enjoy the right to abandon it by his own will. If a person abandons a monastery and breaks his vows, his original *noyon* will track him down and take him back. If a monk who came from the outside commits a serious transgression or a small misdeed, he will be sent back to where he came from.²⁹

Remarkably, the entire *Qalqa jirum* collection of laws opens with “The great statute of the three banners” of 1709, the first two articles of which are aimed at facilitating the mobility of the Jebtsundamba Khutugtu. The statute declares that wherever the Khutugtu travels, he should be provided with carts and victuals without limitation. The refusal to provide these things is punished severely by the confiscation of property or payment of high penalties.³⁰

The customary law of various Buryat groups, which was transcribed at the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century, contains numerous articles pertaining to Buddhist clergy and also addresses the question of their mobility. Thus, the Khorī Buryat code of 1823 states that the monastery monks and the students of the monastic schools should not study Buddhist doctrine in the countryside but should live in the monasteries at their own expenses. These monks must not abandon their monastery without informing their teacher, who may give them permission to leave if he considers it necessary. Another Khorī code of 1851 states that monks have to permanently live in the monasteries studying Buddhist theory and mastering practice. If lay persons invite them to perform any services, they can go only with permission from the *siregetū* lama or *čorji* lama, after obtaining a special ticket from the latter. If local officials meet monks of any monastery travelling without such ticket, they should stop them and immediately send them back to where they belong.³¹ The Selenga Buryat ordinance of 1841 states that if a monk travels to the family of

²⁷ A.D. Nasilov, *Vosemnadtsat' Stepnykh Zakonov. Pamyatnik Mongol'skogo Prava XVI-XVII vv.* (St. Petersburg: Peterburgskoe Vostokovedenie, 2002), 27, 33, 41–42, 45–46, 52.

²⁸ Ts. Zh. Zhamtsarano and S.D. Dilykov, *Khalkha-Dzhirum. Pamyatnik Mongol'skogo Feodal'nogo Prava XVIII Veka* (Moscow: Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoi Literatury, 1965), 90.

²⁹ Zhamtsarano and Dilykov, *Khalkha-Dzhirum*, 66–68.

³⁰ Zhamtsarano and Dilykov, *Khalkha-Dzhirum*, 16.

³¹ B.D. Tsibikov, *Obychnoe Pravo Khorinskikh Buryat. Pamyatniki Staromongol'skoi Pis'mennosti* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992), 61, 89.

a deceased person to perform a funeral ceremony, he has to return to his monastery by the term established by the head of the monastery. It also orders, that the monks, who broke their vows for the second time should be sent to a remote monastery. According to this document, *siregetü* lamas should not use public carts. If travelling on religious business, *čorji* lamas should obtain a special ticket allowing the use of the carts from the head *tayiša*. When the Khambo Lama travels to visit different Buddhist monasteries, he has to obtain a ticket allowing the use of the carts from the *noyon* of a banner.³²

Imperial Legislation for Buddhist Monks and Monasteries

Soon after the Khalkha nobility officially submitted to the Qing rule at the Dolonnuur assembly in 1691, the first official code of laws for the Mongols, the so-called *Mongyol-un čayašin-u bičig* was compiled by one of the Lifanyuan's departments. The code, comprised of the various laws issued in regard to the Mongols under Manchu and Qing jurisdiction between late 1620s and 1690s, was published in the last decade of the 17th century.³³ The entire range of its articles addresses the Buddhist monasteries' management and the regulation of an individual monastic's life. Thus, the code's eleventh section, which comprises laws regarding Buddhist clergy, includes an article stating that if a monk leaves a monastery without permission and spends a night in a layman's yurt, he will be fined and taken by the *jasay*. A monk is also forbidden to spend a night in the yurt of an unmarried woman. The violation of this law is punished by defrocking and a hundred of lash hits for the monk. For the woman, if she comes from the outer banners, the code establishes similar punishment of a hundred lash hits. The woman from the inner banners has to be brought to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and fined. The code states that all the monks of inner and outer banners who travel to Mukden, *Siregetü küriy-e* or Hohhot for whatever reason should first inform the administration of their monastery as well as the *vangs* and *noyons* of the appropriate banners about their plans, and only then depart on the agreed date.³⁴

Although the incorporation of Transbaikalia in the Russian Empire was officially confirmed by the Chinese-Russian treaty of Kyakhta in 1727 and the first stationary Buddhist shrines were built on the territories inhabited by the Buryats in the 1750s, the first official legislative document regulating the Buddhist affairs in Transbaikalia and approved on the highest level was not issued until 1853 when emperor Nicolas I ratified the Statute of the Buddhist clergy of Eastern Siberia (Russian: *Ustav dlya rukovodstva lamaiskomu dukhovenstvu Vostochnoi Sibiri*).³⁵ Dealing with various

³² B.D. Tsibikov, *Obychnoe Pravo Selenginskikh Buryat* (Ulan-Ude: Buryatskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel'stvo, 1970), 77–78, 81, 279.

³³ D. Heuschert, *Die Gesetzgebung der Qing für die Mongolen im 17. Jahrhundert anhand des Mongolischen Gesetzbuches aus der Kangxi-Zeit (1662-1722)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 46–50.

³⁴ B. Bayarsaikhan, *Mongyol Čayašin-u Bičig (Textological Study)*, vol. I (Ulaanbaatar, 2004), 226.

³⁵ Tsyrempilov, *Buddizm i Imperiya*, 43–44, 67–72.

aspects of the activities of the Buddhist monasteries in Transbaikalia, the statute also includes paragraphs regarding the mobility of the Buddhist clergy.

Thus, according to paragraphs 13 and 19, the Khambo Lama has the duty to assign *siregetü* lamas, *gečüls* and *gelings* to particular datsans, in which they have to live and serve. Paragraph 40 of the document states that the Khambo Lama and the abbots of the monasteries should not leave the borders of their parishes without valid reason. In such cases they have to ask the military governor of the Transbaikalia district for permission. The next paragraph states that lamas may leave their monasteries only if invited by the laity to perform some services. They may travel only within the boundaries of their parish and with the permission of the abbot. After doing their work, they have to immediately return to their monastery and not remain in the countryside unnecessarily. Paragraph 42 concludes the topic of mobility covered by the statute, stating that those who would violate the two previous regulations should be unfrocked.³⁶

Instead of a Conclusion: The Rules to Follow or the Rules to Break

Corporeal mobility without doubt constitutes an important part of a common identity shared by the members of any community or social organization. The normative rules regulating mobility – moral, practical and judicial – become one of the important instruments of the social identity construction and preservation.

The above-described legislative documents treat most of the rules on monastic mobility very seriously and prescribe severe punishment for their violation, including high fines, physical punishment and expulsion from the community. Following these rules has, obviously, been considered a crucial element of monastic identity and, possibly, of maintaining order within the monastic community as a social institution. Establishing norms, however, these documents do not provide us with an insight into the actual situation and leave unanswered multiple questions, such as: How often did the monks of Mongolian Buddhist monasteries have to travel and implement these rules? Was taking permission to leave from the monastery's administration just a mere formality or was the administration reluctant to issue such permission? How often did the monks violate the rules on mobility and were such cases officially registered in any documentation? Were the strongest punishments, such as flogging and expulsion, always applied according to the law? etc.

A document of another type – a letter from the Buryat Khambo Lama *Marq-a-yin* to the abbot of the Atsagatskii datsan³⁷ – represents the kind of source which may shed light on the reality of monastic life and the efficiency and applicability of the laws for the Buddhist clergy under Russian jurisdiction.

The letter is dated September 3, 1873. It regards six different questions, two of which are connected directly to the monks' mobility.

³⁶ V. Vashkevich, *Lamaity v "Vostochnoi Sibiri* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiya Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del, 1885), 133.

³⁷ GARB (The State Archive of The Republic of Buryatia), fonds 425, inventory 1, file 6, ff. 28-29.

As the second point of his message, the Khambo Lama discusses the problem of the distribution of monks between monasteries. He notes that, according to the Statute of the Buddhist clergy of Eastern Siberia, he is obliged to make decisions on sending monks to different monasteries, which has become troublesome for him as the lamas ask that they not be sent to the remote datsans and instead be allowed to stay and serve in their native places. He states that agreeing to this would mean breaking both the law of the Buddha and the Emperor, as the Buddha taught that a native place is like the jail of Mara and, according to the ordinance issued by the Emperor, the monks are useless in their native places and should serve in other regions determined for them. After that, the Khambo Lama strongly requires that the abbots properly explain these reasons to the monks and make them depart without regrets to any monastery immediately following the order to do so.³⁸

The next question raised by the Khambo Lama is the monastic school of the Gusinoozerskii datsan, in which, according to the imperial decree, the future monks have to live and study. He notes that the school stays almost empty. The students reject the happy possibility granted to them by the highest decree to stay in the Gusinoozersk monastic school and study Buddhist teachings. They return instead to their native places, where the local elders just like the abbots of the datsans disregard them, which is very upsetting. For this reason, he asks all the abbots to send those persons among their subjects, who have been selected to enter the school or have already been enrolled, back to school immediately. He mentions that in fact the students do not have the right to leave without permission from the Khambo Lama and the military governor, and should be expelled from the school and treated as legally faulty persons.³⁹

³⁸ Mong. *bandida mkhanpô anu blam-a-nar-un toytayal-un 19 doki jüil-ün yosuṣar blam-a-nar-i dačang-ud-tur jasaju selgükü ba yabuṣulqu uyaly-a-tai aṣsan büged. ene inu nadur masi tübek-tei bolbai: ilerkeyilebesü. jarim blam-a-nar sedkil-ün üge-ber qola-yin dačang-dur ülü ilegekü-yi yuyuna aṣuṣu. tere blam-a anu yambar učir-ača öber-ün törögsen oron-dayan bayiqu-yi küsedeg bolba. minu medeküi-dür biden-ü burqan ber öber-ün törögsen oron-i simnus-un gindan metü kemen mayusiyan nomlaysan ba. eṣen qayan anu štat-tur oroṣsan niṣur-ud-i öber-ün nutuṣ qabiy-a ügei. ali tere jiqaydaysan yaṣara alba kikü ber toytayal batulaysan bayinam. teyimü tula burqan qayan qoyaṣula-yin jarliy-i nige müsin uyuruṣad. erke bisi öber-ün nutuṣ-tur bayiralaqu-yi küseḡsen bolbasu ni tere kümün-ü sedkil-ün üge-yi ken ber kereglekü bui. teyimü-yin tula blam-a siregetü-ner-i kündü-tei ber yuyuqu minu. ene kü učir-i blam-a-nar-tur sayitur uqaṣulaṣu. ali dačang-dur odqu-yi jakiraydaysan čay-a yašilang-dur üfel ügeḡüi-e. darui morduqu boljaṣu qayirlasai:.*

³⁹ Mong. *tede yeke deḡedü-yin jarliy-iyar gölönḡ nayurun dačang-un dergede bayiqu yosutai blam-a-yin suryaṣuli anu qoyosun busu-yin tedüi bayinam. [...] tede yeke deḡedü ber erke bisi gölönḡ nayurun dačang-ača ködögelel ügei. öber-ün šasin-u nom surču bayiqu-yi jarliṣlan batulaysan ene yeke jol-i kele-ber tülikjü nutuṣ-du-tayan tenüjü yabuṣči tedeger-i. nada-yi uridlayči-nar bolon teden-ü bayiyṣan yaṣar-ud-un aqamad ba. ilangyui-a dačang-ud-un anu siregetü-ner ken tegsi orkiṣsan-du minu sedkil masi yomodoqu bolbai. teyimü-eče blam-a siregetü-ner-e yuyuqu minu. öber-ün dačang-un qariy-a-tu-nar-ača blam-a-yin suryaṣuli-dur oroṣulaydaysan ba. oroqu-yi kürgeḡdeḡed bayiyṣan niṣur-ud-i egün-i küliyeḡsen darui inaysi ileḡejü boloosai. suryaṣuli-yin šabi-nar anu bandida mkhanpô ba. čereḡ-ün ḡubernator-un jüg-eče jöbsiyel ügei bodqol-iyar ködögelebesü. suryaṣuli-ača yaṣaydayad. qauli-yin jim-e-dü oroṣulaydaqu aṣsan bolbaču ene bičilḡe-yin ür-e bolbasuraqu-yi aqur čay-a küliyemüi.*

Such documents demonstrate the actual state of affairs and the ways in which the authorities tried to keep the order and make the people subordinate to them obey the law. As my research revealed, they are preserved in abundance in the archives of Buryatia and call for a detailed analysis. Hopefully, the present paper will also inspire the search for similar sources in the Mongolian and Chinese archives as their discovery and examination would immensely enrich our vision of Mongolian Buddhist monasticism under the Qing rule.

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International Discourses on the Dorje Shugden Deity in Contemporary Mongolia

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Abstract

The article analyses the development of the Dorje Shugden controversy in Mongolia. The practice of the Dorje Shugden worship in Mongolia was interrupted during the communist rule but today, it is being revitalized. On the one hand, international discourses on and practices of the Dorje Shugden worship strongly influence the situation in Mongolia. On the other hand, new discourses on Dorje Shugden come to the fore and the deity is becoming an important factor in the processes of forming a Mongolian national identity. Based on data collected during fieldwork in 2018 and 2019, this article compares Mongolian discourses on Dorje Shugden with discourses from other regions where this deity is worshiped, in particular Ladakh, the Tibetan exile community, and Buddhist communities based in Europe and the USA.

Introduction

Dorje Shugden is a wrathful Tibetan deity whose worship has been opposed by the 14th Dalai Lama since the 1970s and was ultimately restricted by him in 1996. The restriction caused a split and polarization within the Tibetan Buddhist community.

The history of this deity goes back to 17th century Tibet, when an important political and religious figure, Gelugpa monk Tulku Dragpa Gyaltsen (1619–1656), was supposedly murdered by other monks. One of the first scholars who studied the history and development of the Dorje Shugden conflict, G. Dreyfus, writes that Dragpa Gyaltsen was a political rival of the 5th Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682). Some of Dragpa Gyaltsen's disciples blamed Lobsang Gyatso's supporters for killing him. After the death, Dragpa Gyaltsen reincarnated as an evil spirit, but “turned his anger from a personal revenge to a nobler task, the protection of the doctrinal purity of the Ge-luk tradition” (Dreyfus 1998, 231). To pacify this spirit, the 5th Dalai Lama ordered to build a small temple near Döl, a pond located in Southern Tibet. “He established the practice of worshiping this spirit under the name of Dorje Shugden and entrusted it to the Sakya school” (Dreyfus 1998, 229–232).

The tradition of the Shugden worship continued without any further major controversy until the 20th century, when popular and influential Tibetan lama Pabongka (1878–1941) using already prevalent Shugden practice (Bell n.d., 14) increased the importance of Shugden for the Gelugpa tradition. Using the deity in his exclusivist policy, he “made him into one of the main protectors” of Gelugpa school (Dreyfus 1998, 246). The 13th Dalai Lama (1876–1933), who was carrying out an inclusive policy on receiving teachings from monks of other Buddhist schools (Kay

1997, 279), put some restrictions on the Shugden oracle. This point can be considered as the beginning of the Shugden controversy.

In the first part of this article, I will shortly describe how the Dorje Shugden conflict develops in various regions relevant to Mongolia and what arguments are used to talk about the controversy there. In the second part, I will describe how international discourses and practices connected to Dorje Shugden correlate to the Mongolian ones. In the final part, I will analyse some features specific to the Mongolian situation regarding the Dorje Shugden deity and will show how Dorje Shugden is involved in Mongolian identity construction and connected to Mongolian state.

Methods and Sources of Data Collection

Most part of the data on the Dorje Shugden controversy in Mongolia was collected during my fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar and at Amarbayasgalant Monastery in July 2018 (together with Alia Solovieva) and in Ulaanbaatar and Delgeruun Choira Monastery in July and August 2019. Some additional information was collected during my trip to Rabten Choeling Monastery in Switzerland in spring 2019 where Mungunchimeg Batmunkh and I conducted interviews with two monks from Mongolia and Kalmykia and talked to other workers and monks.¹

During the fieldwork, I conducted semi-structured, biographical, and in-depth interviews with people from various social and religious groups, above all, monks from both Shugden monasteries as well as monasteries where Shugden is not worshiped; I also interviewed influential lay people venerating Dorje Shugden in Mongolia and other people involved in the controversy. In order to grasp the views on this issue among people not involved in the conflict, I conducted a series of short structured interviews with regular visitors of Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar.

My comparison of Mongolian and international discourses on the Shugden issue profited from former studies. For the comparison with the situation in Tibet, I used the classical work by G. Dreyfus *The Shuk-den Affair: History and Nature of a Quarrel* (Dreyfus 1998) and for Ladakh, M.A. Mills' article "Charting the Shugden Interdiction in the Western Himalaya" (Mills n.d.) was particularly helpful. To compare Mongolian coping strategies for dealing with this conflict to the coping strategies of western Buddhist organizations, I used the article by D. Kay "The New Kadampa Tradition and the continuity of Tibetan Buddhism in transition" (Kay 1997) and J.M. Chandler's PhD thesis on Tibetan Buddhism in America (Chandler 2009). In order to complement the fieldwork on the Shugden issue in Mongolia, M. King's article "Finding the Buddha hidden below the sand: youth, identity and narrative in the revival of Mongolian Buddhism" was used (King 2012), in which the author

¹ The fieldwork was conducted in order to collect material for my PhD project on the Shugden controversy in Mongolia. The thesis is part of the "Religion, politics and national identity: the rediscovery of the protector deity Dorje Shugden in Mongolia" project within the Interfaculty Research Cooperation "Religious Conflicts and Coping Strategies" at the University of Bern, Switzerland. The project leaders are Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann (LMU Munich/ Germany).

addressed the connection between Mongolian cultural and nationalist revivalism and religion. I also used K. Kollmar-Paulenz's "Negotiating the Buddhist Future: rDo rje shugs ldan in Mongolia" where she examines the history of Dorje Shugden in Mongolia and connects current Mongolian policies with the historical narrative about Mongolian Buddhism and the popularization of the Shugden practice in contemporary Mongolia (Kollmar-Paulenz 2020).

International Discourses on the Shugden Conflict: Tradition, Politics and Protest²

The 14th Dalai Lama worshiped Shugden until 1975 when the "Yellow Book" by Zimey Rinpoche appeared. The book contained stories of monks who invoked the wrath of Dorje Shugden by mixing practices from various schools. As the Dalai Lama maintained the anti-sectarian (rimé) position he took this book as a personal offence and "a rejection of his religious leadership by the Ge-luk establishment" (Dreyfus 1998, 257). This is when the conflict began to escalate. After the Dalai Lama's announcement in 1996, where he publicly restricted the Shugden veneration, the conflict entered a new phase, some monks in the Tibetan exile community had to break away from their monasteries and establish new ones where they could continue to worship this deity. The controversy was not constrained to the Tibetan exile community and after the Dalai Lama's restriction, it began spreading among Buddhists all over the world. Now I will shortly describe the situation with Dorje Shugden in different regions in order to compare it to the Mongolian case.

Western-based Buddhist organizations and communities involved in the conflict do not form a homogeneous movement. First, there are various branches and divisions of the organization called New Kadampa Tradition (NKT), the loudest propagators of Shugden in Western countries and tough opponents of the Dalai Lama (Chandler 2009, 18). Sometimes they influence the conflict in highly disputable ways, for example, by organizing protests against the Dalai Lama's visits (Kay 2004, 104) and singing petitions and requests to international non-governmental organisations to investigate the situation with Dorje Shugden and to initiate measures to stop the acts of oppression supposedly committed by the Dalai Lama³. In their rhetoric they use such concepts as human rights and religious freedom (Chandler 2009, 229; Kay 1997, 287). They apply to the conflict the concept of the separation of church and

² In this chapter, I will not discuss Chinese discourses and practices connected to Dorje Shugden in Mongolia since they merit a separate article. Here, suffice it to say that a paradoxical situation arises with regard to China: Shugden becomes an element used by some people in Mongolia for building their national identity, but this very fact aligns Mongolia with China because the Chinese support this deity as an opposition to the Dalai Lama. Thereby, China, the most important opponent of Mongolian nationalism, supports the deity promoted as a basis of Mongolian independence and nation-building process.

³ Amnesty International did not find the human rights violation against Shugden worshipers in documents provided by the Shugden Supporters Community (an organization founded by members of the New Kadampa Tradition (Chandler 2009, 281). <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA17/014/1998/en/>.

state while traditionally state power and religion in Tibet were not separated⁴, and protector deities – such as Shugden – were always important actors in state politics.

Members of NKT also build their argumentation on the discussion of the ontological nature of this deity: they claim him to be a supramundane deity⁵ (although frequently he is understood as a worldly god who can possess oracles and be involved in the mundane affairs) (Kay 2004, 101–102). That leads to the fact that “NKT intentionally began to distinguish itself from the Geluk tradition proper, choosing a nonsectarian identity of global Buddhism and focusing on devotion to the Buddha Dorjé Shukden” (Bell, 10) because “sectarian element to a protector practice [...] only makes sense if the deity is regarded as a mundane and therefore partial being” (Kay 2004: 101).

Furthermore, other monasteries in which Dorje Shugden is worshiped existed in Western countries even before the conflict escalated in 1996. In some of them monks kept worshiping this deity despite the Dalai Lama’s restriction. One of these monasteries, Rabten Choeling Monastery in Switzerland, is the place where several Mongolian monks (including the most prominent propagator of Shugden in contemporary Mongolia, Zava Damdin Rinpoche) received their education. Despite the fact that some monks in this monastery are concerned with the same issues and use the same rhetorical devices as NKT members⁶, the strategy of the monastery differs from the strategy of NKT. It currently aims at the peaceful coexistence of Shugden worshipers with the Dalai Lama rather than at forcing him to change his position. For example, during my stay in Rabten Choeling Monastery in spring 2019, I was told that in this monastery monks read prayers for the long life of the Dalai Lama (this idea faced opposition from one part of the monastic community, but the decision to read the prayer was made anyway). Also, photos of the 14th Dalai Lama can be found on the monastery’s property. A monk explained to me that those pictures were taken before the restriction of the Dorje Shugden practice (before 1996) and could therefore be placed in the monastery.

The background of Shugden worship in Ladakh and Mongolia has some features in common. Ladakh is a region located in Northern India. Like Mongolia, it is not

⁴ During the drafting of the Charter of the Tibetans-in-exile, the Tibetan equivalent of Constitution, the inclusion of the adjective “secular” to describe the Tibetan state was discussed. Even though the Dalai Lama was in favor of it, the Assembly of Tibetan People’s Deputies decided not to include this characteristic into the Charter (Ardley, 43–44).

⁵ “Protector deities fall into two categories: transcendental (supramundane) and worldly (mundane). Transcendental deities, usually high-level bodhisattvas, are considered to have transcended the world of samsara (suffering) by achieving a certain degree of enlightenment. Protector deities who are enlightened bodhisattvas have realized emptiness and belong to the Sangha, and may thus function as an object of refuge. [...] [W]orldly protector deities, still mired in the world of suffering, may be positive or negative in nature. They are most often co-opted by a school or monastery to provide protection, in return receiving ritual offerings” (Chandler 2009, 183–184).

⁶ E.g. a monk from Austria working in a book shop of this monastery sold me a book about human rights violations performed by the Dalai Lama against Shugden worshippers and sent me some additional information in this regard.

directly subordinated to the Dalai Lama who, however, has a considerable cultural and religious influence over this region. Dorje Shugden has been worshiped there long before the Dalai Lama's announcement in 1996, but the Shugden controversy reached this place later than it had spread in Tibet and among Western Buddhists. At first, people tried not to pay attention to the conflict hoping that it would not become a Ladakhi problem, but after it became impossible to avoid the controversy, Dorje Shugden statues were removed from many Ladakhi monasteries and the practice was changed or somewhere completely interrupted (Mills n.d.).

Mongolian Discourses on the Shugden Conflict in Comparison to International Discourses

Shugden in Mongolia

In Mongolia, Dorje Shugden had been an important protector deity before his worship was interrupted during Soviet times and was revived soon after the collapse of the Soviet system. The Shugden controversy reached Mongolia only in the early 2000s. After the democratic revolution, Guru Deva Rinpoche, an Inner Mongolian monk educated in Tibet, visited Amarbayasgalant, one of the oldest existing monasteries in Mongolia. He brought with him a considerable sum of money that he used for the reconstruction of the monastery and established the Dorje Shugden worship there. It is not by chance that he chose Amarbayasgalant to be the centre of the Shugden practice in Mongolia. There is evidence that this deity had been traditionally worshipped in this monastery since the early 19th century (Kollmar-Paulenz 2020). Guru Deva Rinpoche sponsored the reconstruction of the monastery and assembled a group of disciples including influential businessmen. At the same time, Dorje Shugden was worshipped in Gungaachoin datsan, one of the Gandan's monasteries and another historical place of the Shugden worship in Mongolia that was established by the 4th Jebtsundamba Khutuktu in 1809 (Kollmar-Paulenz 2020). In the 1990s and early 2000s, Dorje Shugden was worshipped in Mongolia alongside other protector deities. According to the information at my disposal, only few people close to the Dalai Lama and Tibetan exile community (or, probably, close to Guru Deva Rinpoche) knew about the conflict.

Mongolian ex-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lundeg Purevsuren, who during that time was already working at the Ministry, asserted that Mongolian businessmen and politicians did not know about the Shugden issue until the years 2005–2007:

The Dalai Lama didn't say anything. What is it about Dorje Shugden? We didn't know but probably a lot of people were visiting him [Guru Deva Rinpoche]. Really, many rich businessmen were visiting this place [Amarbayasgalant] and praying. And some time between 2005 and 2007, we realized that something was wrong because our guys noticed that the Chinese were strongly supporting Shugden. We asked the Dalai Lama, "What is this?" because the Dalai Lama frequently visited Mongolia. He explained that he had prohibited [Shugden].⁷

⁷ Interview with L. Purevsuren [Mongolian Ambassador to the Swiss Confederation and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the United Nations Office at Geneva in Bern, 2019].

Moreover, not only politicians, but also monks who worshipped Dorje Shugden did not know about the controversy until the beginning of the 2000s.

Here is an excerpt from an interview conducted in summer 2018 with the head of the Asral Buddhist Centre in Ulaanbaatar, Ueli Minder. He talks about the interruption of the Shugden practice in Gungaachoilin datsan in Gandan:

At that time, Gungachoilin was still practicing Shugden, it only happened later when [...] the Dalai Lama came to Mongolia, and he [the monk from Gungachoilin] was not invited to the teaching and he didn't know why, and then he asked to talk to the Dalai Lama, and then the Dalai Lama explained. Because he was translating for the Dalai Lama before many times, and then the Dalai Lama explained him about Dorje Shugden, and now in Gungaachoilin they do not worship Shugden anymore.⁸

The visit of the Dalai Lama to Mongolia coincided with the rise of interest towards Dorje Shugden from China, thus in the 2000s Dorje Shugden became the meeting point of interest of both politicians and monks. After the Shugden issue reached Mongolia, some monks continued worshipping him, trying not to attract too much attention to it, other abandoned the Shugden practice, some people for various reasons started joining Guru Deva Rinpoche and visiting the Shugden monasteries.

The next point to analyse is how Mongolian discourses on Shugden correlate to the international ones and how these discourses interact with each other.

Tibet

After reaching Mongolia, the Tibetan conflict was fundamentally transformed. First of all, the Tibetan internal affairs, the sectarian vs. anti-sectarian struggle and the related dogmatic issues, are not important to Mongolians. During the whole period of my fieldwork, only one person, a Tibetan monk Panchen Otrul Rinpoche residing in Mongolia, mentioned the sectarian nature of this conflict. None of the Mongolians were concerned about this aspect of the conflict. Moreover, a nun from the monastery Tögs Bayasgalant in Ulaanbaatar, where Dorje Shugden is venerated, didn't want to say to which school of Buddhism her monastery belongs because they read, as she said, both yellow (Gelug) and red (Nyingma) texts (*nom*), although among Tibetans it is believed that Shugden punishes people for mixing Gelug with other Buddhist schools:

Interviewer: There are red and yellow monasteries. This monastery, it is yellow or red?

Interviewee: We read here texts from various schools. We do not clearly differentiate it here. We read red prayers; we worship them all.⁹

Thus, despite the close relations with Tibet, the conflict in Mongolia is not evolving according to the Tibetan model. The concerns relevant for the Tibetans become unimportant when the conflict reaches Mongolia.

⁸ Interview with U. Minder, [head of the Asral Buddhist centre in Ulaanbaatar, 2018].

⁹ Interview with Dagimaa [nun in Tögs Bayasgalant monastery, Ulaanbaatar, 2018]

Western-Based Buddhists

Mongolian discourses on Dorje Shugden and the discourses of the Western-based Buddhist organisations overlap in a number of significant ways. Some organisations do not have any noticeable influence over the Mongolian situation while others closely collaborate and interact with Mongolian monasteries and Shugden worshipers.

NKT and its divisions, as well as their arguments in the discussion on the Shugden issue, are not well known in Mongolia. In the past, members of NKT contacted some Mongolian monasteries where Shugden is venerated but they do not directly collaborate with them. Here is a quotation from Zava Damdin Rinpoche, head of one of Mongolian Shugden monasteries:

Interviewee: This is Geshe Kelsang Gyatso. New Kadampa's head is Geshe Kelsang. Their way is very European. Most of them [are] English... British people. And then they make protest, yes? Protest against the DL's [Dalai Lama's] visits.

Interviewer: Do you support these protests?

Interviewee: I don't have any connection with them. It's not that [if] someone fights for Dorje Shugden, then we need to follow. No. We have [our] own way, they have [their] own way. Yes? Because we are Asian people, Mongolian people, our mentality is different, we [are] not like Europeans, such want to protest everywhere [...]. Of course, democratic countries need this kind of things, but our way is more an educational way; to protect ourselves. We need to study well, translate the old scripts to new Mongolian language and also spread our teaching, and then people will understand.¹⁰

This conversation shows that Zava Damdin emphasizes the difference between “Mongolian” and “western” understanding of the Shugden issue and believes that there are two ways of dealing with the situation. And he, as well as other Mongolian monks, consciously chooses not to follow the more aggressive way of the NKT. For example, when they suggested Zava Damdin should organize protests against the Dalai Lama's visit to Mongolia, he refused despite all his disagreements with the Dalai Lama's policies:

People suggested that, when the Dalai Lama arrived to Mongolia, we needed to protest at the airport. I said: We are living in our own country, they are visitors, why we need to...[protest]? [...] If [we need to] talk to him – we'll talk to him. Dialogue – yes. And face to face talk. But why do we need to stand up in the street? We are in our own country. [...] That's why I [do] not support [protests], although [I am] not against it, because they [the protestors] have their own way, their own centres.¹¹

Zava Damdin is seen as a loud Shugden propagator in Mongolia. Other Mongolian monks and Dorje Shugden supporters act and talk even more cautiously.

¹⁰ Interview with Zava Damdin [head of the Delgeruun Chaira Monastery, 2019].

¹¹ Interview with Zava Damdin [2019].

Therefore, NKT's rhetoric about human rights and freedom of religion does not take root in Mongolia. However, this is not because there is no ground for it (the same rhetoric as used by the Dalai Lama takes roots among the Mongolian clergy) but rather because most of the people simply do not know about the protests. Besides, the authority of the Dalai Lama remains very high in Mongolia and such strong accusations do not find support. And, most importantly, most people are not interested in the Dalai Lama's politics and the prohibition of Shugden in the exile. If they are interested in this deity, it is because of his connections to Mongolia, his role in Mongolian politics, Mongolian history, and religion.

Although the NKT's strategy in the Dorje Shugden issue radically differs from the Mongolian, there are other Shugden monasteries in Europe that share with the Mongolian monasteries similar strategies of dealing with the conflict. For example, Zava Damdin, who at this moment already has his own disciples in Mongolia, received training in the Rabten Choeling Monastery in Switzerland and took monastic vows in the Tashi Rabten Monastery in Austria (Schittich 2005: 57).¹² As mentioned before, the monks in Rabten Choeling read the Long-Life Sutra for the Dalai Lama and have his portraits in the monastery to minimize the conflict. The same attempts exist in the Mongolian Shugden monasteries. For example, I also saw a picture of the Dalai Lama on the premises of the women's Tögs Bayasgalant Monastery in Ulaanbaatar. The nuns of the monastery try not to make any judgements about the Dalai Lama's decisions and about the conflict.

Although this strategy of dealing with the problem and the whole understanding of the issue in Rabten Choeling is similar to the Mongolian ones, there is a difference that is important for the Mongolians. As Zava Damdin emphasized in our interview, it is important that, unlike in Europe, in Mongolia there is a more than a century old tradition of worshipping Dorje Shugden. The history of this deity and the fact that he was important for Mongolia long before the conflict arose, significantly influences the nature of this conflict in this region. It makes it completely different not only from how it develops in Tibet, but also from how it evolves in Western monasteries and Buddhist organizations.

Ladakh

In this regard Ladakh is an interesting region for comparing the strategies of coping with the Dorje Shugden issue there to the Mongolian ways of dealing with it. Just like in Mongolia, the conflict escalated in Ladakh a while later than it did among the Tibetans and in Western organizations. As in Mongolia today, and in contrast to the West, "the Dalai Lama's many statements against Shugden practice prior to 1996 were read by Ladakhis as specifically pertinent to those incorporated within

¹² This network of the Dorje Shugden supporters is transnational. Although Zava Damdin may not share all arguments about Dorje Shugden and the Dalai Lama with the monks abroad, he has spiritual connection with many Shugden monks regardless of their geographical location. E.g. his recognition as Zava Damdin happened with the participation of a monk located in Indiana, USA, and a geshe from a Dorje Shugden Society in India (Schittich 2005: 59-61).

the Tibetan cause, and therefore as not really applying to them” (Mills n.d.). As in Mongolia, the sectarian/anti-sectarian nature of the conflict is never discussed or is even completely absent in Ladakh (see Mills n.d.).

The strategy of coping with the conflict used by the non-Shugden monks in Mongolia is based on silencing the problem. Some of the monks denied that the conflict exists in their country, some refused to talk about Shugden, but most of the monks were just careful in giving statements. Some of my interviewees said that they did not understand why I am interested in the Shugden issue and that instead of attracting attention to it, I could find a more interesting topic to investigate.

According to Mills, the situation in Ladakh is similar: “There was a strong hope that ‘the ban would not come here’. A crucial part of this view was the wish not to attract attention on the matter” (Mills n.d.).

Mongolian Shugden monks, although some of them are fundamentally opposed to the Dalai Lama, also try not to escalate the conflict and attract more attention to it. This strategy is completely opposed to the NKT’s strategy of protest that I described earlier and similar to the Ladakhi one. The difference is, however, that in Ladakh, the conflict hardly extends local debate and interpretation¹³, whereas in Mongolia, the Dorje Shugden issue has transcended the national level and became an element of the nation-building process. This is the case, first and foremost, because after the crash of the Soviet system, revivalist and nationalist ideas appeared in Mongolia (as well as in other countries of the former socialist bloc). The rise of nationalism coincided with the restriction of Shugden in the Tibetan community, which allowed to construct the image of Shugden as a “traditionally Mongolian” deity independent of Tibet. Historical connections between Shugden and the Mongolian state¹⁴ together with mythological narratives linking this deity to Mongolia played an important role in this process. Therefore, political sectarian/non-sectarian Tibetan issues, western concepts of human rights etc. as discussed by the NKT, as well as the ontological nature of the deity as discussed in the West are not crucial for Mongolians. What is, then?

A New Conflict on the Old Basis

Having discussed the relevance of transnational debate for Mongolia and its influence on the development of the Shugden controversy in this country, I will now analyse the discourses and practices specific for the Mongolian case including their foundation in Mongolia and their correlation with the Buddhist tradition.

¹³ Some constitutional changes in the Ladakhi politics appeared though: “The replacement of Shugden with the Tibetan governmental protector Chamsring (and indeed the widespread purchase of the portrait of the Dalai Lama flanked by Nechung and Palden Lhamo), suggest not merely a religious and ceremonial change on the part of Ladakh’s Gelug monasteries, but a subtle constitutional one.” (Mills n.d.)

¹⁴ It is believed that Dorje Shugden took possession of the state oracle of Mongolia Choijin Lama Luvsankhaidav (1872–1918), brother of the 8th Jebtsundamba Khutuktu. His statue built in the 19th century is placed in the Choijin Lama Temple, the monastery of the state oracle, nowadays functioning as a museum (Kollmar-Paulenz 2020).

The historical importance of Dorje Shugden for Mongolians and the conflict with the Dalai Lama make Shugden something specifically Mongolian, independent of Russia, China and, most importantly, of Tibet. Shugden's importance for Mongolian politics is based on two significant facts. Firstly, protective deities have traditionally been playing a specific role in Tibetan politics, and Dorje Shugden is no exception.¹⁵ When brought to Mongolia, he retained his political importance. Secondly, deities and spirits in general have been traditionally involved in the Mongolian political process.¹⁶ Against the backdrop of rising nationalism and attempts to get rid of cultural and religious influence of the Tibetans and in the light of the traditional connection between local beliefs, politics, and the importance of protective deities, Dorje Shugden became pivotal for the nation-building process and an important instrument of international politics.

In order to illustrate how Shugden worshippers use this deity for the formation of a national Mongolian identity, I would like to use one case. In 2011, the statue of the "Father of Mongolia's Revolution", Damdin Sukhbaatar, was replaced on the Ulaanbaatar central square. The old statue was thrown away and then taken by Zava Damdin into his Delgeruun Choira Monastery. Now, this statue whose size appears to be gigantic compared to the size of the monastery, is placed right in front of the main building of Delgeruun Choira. Later, Zava Damdin, the head of the monastery, posted on his Facebook page a video where he, with a group of Buryat children, rehearsed a song about Sukhbaatar.

This example demonstrates that Zava Damdin not only promotes Dorje Shugden by emphasizing the historical connections of this deity and his previous incarnations with Mongolia, but also intentionally creates the image of independent Mongolia with its own pantheon of heroes in which the state power, in the person of Sukhbaatar, is united with the national religion, represented in Dorje Shugden.

Zava Damdin's Revivalist ideas were analysed by M. King using another interesting case, the organization of summer schools entitled "Buddhism for Young People"¹⁷ in Delgeruun Choira Monastery where young Mongolians learned the basics of Buddhism and Mongolian history.

¹⁵ On the concurrence between the protector deities Tsiu Marpo and Pehar in Samyé Monastery see: Bell, Christopher Paul. "Tibetan Deity Cults as Political Barometers". UVaCollab. University of Virginia. [https://collab.its.virginia.edu/wiki/renaissanceold/Tibetan Deity Cults as Political Barometers.html](https://collab.its.virginia.edu/wiki/renaissanceold/Tibetan%20Deity%20Cults%20as%20Political%20Barometers.html) (accessed December 1, 2019).

¹⁶ E.g., *ovo* ceremonies have always been very political in Mongolia. To denote local spirits, Mongolians used the same word as for chiefs (*khat*, *noiod*). David Sneath describes one typical case of interaction between shamans and politicians: "At the time of my visit [shaman] Sarangerel was engaged by the campaign team of a local parliamentary candidate to provide spiritual protection for him in a particularly bitter dispute with another candidate in the same party. The two men had nearly come to blows, and the rival candidate was said to have gone to a Darhan shaman (a *zairan*) to have a curse placed on his rival" (Sneath 2014, 466). In sum, Mongolian spirits, gods, and sacred mountains traditionally have close relations with political power.

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson notices that the importance of the youth was also a characteristic feature of "emerging nationalist intelligentsias in the colonies" (Anderson 2006, 118). "Almost invariably they were very young, and attached a complex political significance to their youth. [...] The rise of (modern/organized) Burmese nationalism is often dated to the founding in 1908 of the Young Men's Buddhist Association, in Rangoon; and of Malayan by the establishment in 1938 of the Kesatuan Melayu Muda (Union of Malay Youth)" (Anderson 2006, 119).

M. King who attended this school in August 2007, concludes: “For them learning Buddhism meant learning their history, ethnicity and a properly ‘Mongol’ social and cultural system. According to the program, by being Mongolian they were already Buddhist. [...] [T]his highly innovative camp [...] incorporated these youth into a narrative of a timeless, Buddhist and ‘historical’ Mongolian identity” (King 2012, 23–24). When I visited Delgeruun Choira Monastery in summer 2019, I also witnessed the organization of the summer camp for children in the monastery. Zava Damdin explained that the camp is dedicated to the “basic study of the Buddhist teaching” together with Mongolian history and “customs”. Thus, Dorje Shugden is only one detail in the revivalism (or creation) of an independent Mongolian Buddhism in post-socialist Mongolia.

Zava Damdin’s Dorje Shugden project can be compared to other ideas which people in Mongolia use to build their identity, for example, the image of Genghis Khan and “shamanism” with the first being generally based on the idea of state power and the second on traditional beliefs. Both are, again, involved in the creation of the Mongolian historical narrative. Like Zava Damdin, people emphasizing that shamanism was the religion of Genghis Khan also try to create a national identity based on historical narrative but use different material to connect state power and traditional beliefs.

Conclusion

I conclude with another historical narrative that the head of a Buddhist centre in Ulaanbaatar, where Dorje Shugden is worshiped, told me in summer 2019¹⁸:

Galdan Boshugtu Khan was a brilliant student in Lhasa and was about to become the first Mongolian head of Gelug tradition. But his brother was killed, and Galdan Boshugtu had to become the king of Western Mongolia. During that time, Zanabazar was the ruler of Central Mongolia. A conflict arose between them. Galdan Boshugtu was the emanation of Dorje Shugden and, in his previous life, he was also Duldzin Dragpa Gyaltsen [?]. In his previous life, Zanabazar was one of the nine students of Tsongkhapa. During Heruka initiation held by Tsongkhapa, they had a fight. The previous emanation of Galdan Boshugtu and the previous emanation of Zanabazar had a fight. The conflict between Zanabazar and Galdan Boshugtu brought about “a big war between Central Mongolia and Western Mongolia. As a result, Central Mongolia became fully attached to the Gelug tradition. The Nyingma and Sakya tradition monasteries were erased by Galdan Boshugtu”.¹⁹

When I asked my interlocutor where he had heard this legend, he answered that a “very old lama in Gandan Monastery” had told him that story. In this legend that differs significantly from the historical events, the idea about a Mongolian person being

¹⁸ This is a summary of the legend, not a direct transcription. Historical facts here are changed and history is reinterpreted by a narrator.

¹⁹ Interview with B. Battuldu [head of the Buddhist meditation centre Mahamudra, Ulaanbaatar, 2019].

close to become the head of the Gelug school, also existing in other legends of Dorje Shugden, is combined with the sectarian struggle in which Shugden is usually involved in the Tibetan context. But most importantly, this narrative unites state power with religion in the person of Dorje Shugden as is the case with the statue of Sukhbaatar in Zava Damdin's monastery. And this is not only the symbolical unification of religion and state, but also a physical incarnation of a military commander symbolizing the state in the religious image of Dorje Shugden. As has been shown, what is happening now in Mongolia is not the revival of Dorje Shugden practices but rather a constant creation and construction of something new.

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Tradition in Baasanjav's Art: Rethinking Buddhist Iconographies in Contemporary Mongolia

Uranchimeg Tsultemin

Abstract

The question of tradition is a key topic in contemporary works of Asian artists. This article focuses on selected artworks by the Mongolian artist Baasanjav Choijiljav (b. 1977) to analyze how some aspects of traditional Tibetan Buddhist iconography and motifs are appropriated and reused in contemporary art. Baasanjav was trained in the traditional style of Mongolian painting known as Mongol Zurag but has pioneered new trends in Mongolian contemporary art which contribute to the debate first instigated in the study of anthropologist Uradyn Bulag and historian Li Narangoa (2006). Bulag/Narangoa examined the transformation of Mongol culture as "alter/native modernity" in times of "divided urbanism–pastoralism." Baasanjav's sharp criticism of corrupt neoliberalism in Mongolia and the use of Buddhist iconography for political messages was unprecedented in Mongolia in 2009, yet common in the works of contemporary Tibetan artists such as Gonkar Gyatso and Tenzing Rigdol. Baasanjav's works inspired many Mongolian artists to use Buddhist motifs and iconographies in their paintings to point at the Mongolian state's cultural, social and environmental decline. The article discusses how Baasanjav creates new iconographies of Buddhist motifs and figures based on and inspired by his innovative interpretation of traditional motifs, style, and visual idioms for conceptual shift of Mongol Zurag imagery.

In the recent past, several scholars wrote about Mongolia's current issues of political and economic instability, which are affecting the society and culture at large. Li Narangoa calls our attention to the current state of "divided urbanism–pastoralism, in which both the new urban citizenry and the pastoral communities are under the complex rule of a new city-based elite, international institutions and the market."¹ Furthering and transforming Dilip Gaonkar's notion of "alternative modernities," Uradyn Bulag terms the transformation of native Mongol culture "alter/native modernity."² How do artists in Mongolia respond to the drastic changes

¹ Li Narangoa and Ole Bruun, "A New Moment in Mongol History: The Rise of the Cosmopolitan City" in Ole Bruun and Li Narangoa, eds., *Mongols From Country to City: Floating Boundaries, Pastoralism and City Life in the Mongol Lands* (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2006). See more in Uranchimeg Tsultemin, "Political Ecology in Baatarzorig's Art: Mongolia Is in Business" in Rebecca Empson and Hermione Spriggs, eds., *Five Heads (Tavan Tolgoi) Art, Anthropology and Mongol Futurism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 105–119.

² By taking on a new interpretation of Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar's "Alternative modernities," Uradyn Bulag offers a different approach especially in the case of Inner and Outer Mongolia, where native cultural values are superseded by new cultural import. As Bulag defines it, "alter/native modernity, that is, not just an alternative Chinese [or Western] modernity but one which hinges on altering the native Mongol cultural and political institutions and properties." See Uradyn Bulag in Li Narangoa

in contemporary Mongolia? How do the artists approach the environmental damage and changes that are happening due to the poor decisions of Mongolia's corrupt government? This article surveys some works by Ch. Baasanjav, commonly known as Baaska (b. 1977) who represents new developments in the style of painting that was named "Mongol Zurag" (literally: Mongolian painting) in the twentieth century.³

Specifically, what interests me here is how Baaska uses Buddhist motifs and how his approach reflects on the use of tradition in Mongolian contemporary art. He has been active in the Mongolian art scene since 2005, and since early in his career he has used Buddhist motifs and elements in his works. Consider, as an example, his *Universe* (2008), which follows the composition of Buddhist Bhavacakra (aka "Wheel of Life").



Figure 1. Ch. Baasanjav, *Universe*, gouache on cotton, 2008.
Courtesy of Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong.

and Ole Bruun, eds., *Mongols from Country to City: Floating Boundaries, Pastoralism and City Life in the Mongol Lands* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2006), Chapter 3. See also Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

³ See more about Mongol Zurag in Uranchimeg Tsultemin, "Mongol Zurag: Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem (1923–2001) and Traditional-style Painting in Mongolia" in *Orientations*, 48, no. 2 (March–April 2017), Hong Kong: 135–142. About Mongol Zurag Society, see Uranchimeg Tsultemin, *Mongolin orchin uyeiin dursleh urlagiin Eh Survalj, barimt bichguud* [Primary Documents of Mongolian Art Associations] (Ulaanbaatar: BCI Publishing, 2018).

Trained by the Mongol Zurag artist Ts. Narmandakh, Baaska was inspired to explore experimentation with references to the Mongol past without limiting his work to the ubiquitous images of Mongol warriors of nine hundred years ago. Narmandakh emphasized learning about the richness of Mongol traditional culture and nomadic heritage and history, all of which was heavily suppressed and largely limited prior to 1990. The teacher's aim through such education was to implicitly urge the artist to creatively think of the well-informed vision of "Mongolian-ness," of what it really means to be a Mongol (and a Mongolian) in the contemporary era.

Baaska's approach to rethinking the Buddhist teachings in a novel way gave birth to new iconographies and possibilities to interpret Buddhist motifs in relation to the modern concerns of troubled politics in contemporary Mongolia. In his first solo exhibition in 2006, Baaska exhibited large-scale works that show refined drawing and composite narratives reminiscent of B. Sharav's (1869–1939) paintings in the early decades of the twentieth century.



*Figure 2. Ch. Baasanjav, 13th Century, guoache on cotton, 2006.
Courtesy of the artist.*

In *Daily Events* and *Airag Feast*, Sharav builds the narrative with a composition of vignettes and scenes, such as felt-making, moving a *ger* (*yurt*), worship of mountains, making *airag* (aka *kumis*), which appear as separate at first glance, yet all are interconnected at close inspection. Baaska's large composition echoed this approach and consisted of numerous scenes pertaining to the imperial history of the thirteenth–fourteenth century Mongols. According to the artist, his aim is to understand what "tradition" is for the contemporary artist today and how to appropriate the knowledge and the tradition of Mongol Zurag, which was abandoned during the socialist regime due to the Soviet discouragement and, in some cases, taboo placed on the studies of the past.



Figure 3. B. Sharav, *Daily Events*, colors on cotton, early 20th c.
Courtesy of Zanabazar Museum of Fine Art, Ulaanbaatar.

Examples of Buddha Images in Contemporary Tibetan Works

The use of Buddha images and motifs in contemporary art is nothing new, as they appear even in the art of Western artists throughout the twentieth century, including Asian-American artists, such as Nam June Paik (1932–2006). In this century, Buddha images have become a common part of contemporary artworks by Tibetan artists in particular.

Gonkar Gyatso's *Red Buddha* or *Pokemon Buddha*, for instance, follows the basic shape of a seated Buddha image to target questions about Western commodification, whereas his *Angel* superimposes the shape of an Iraqi detainee tortured by US army soldiers at Abu Ghraib against the iconometrical grid of the proportions of Avalokiteśvara. In the latter case, Gyatso juxtaposes the system of knowledge presented by the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara, vis-à-vis the widely circulated image of the bleeding Iraqi detainee that visually testifies to the failure of the American dream and its rhetoric of democracy. Gyatso uses the form of the Buddha in these images to speak to the ills of humanity, where the West—the US in particular—takes the lead in shaping politics, culture, and economy. His countrymen, other contemporary Tibetan artists, often use Buddhist forms and motifs in a similar vein.



*Figure 4. Gonkar Gyatso, Angel, 2007.
Stickers and pencil on treated paper 152 x 121.5cm
The Kenneth and Yasuko Myer Collection of Contemporary Asian Art.
Purchased 2008 with funds from Michael Sidney Myer through the
Queensland Art Gallery Foundation*

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art

In fact, the use of Buddhist motifs for political statements has become one of the main approaches of contemporary Tibetan artists, among others, Tenzing Rigdol.



Figure 5. Tenzing Rigdol, *Autonomy*, 2011.
Collage, silk brocade and scripture, 200x200 cm, (78x78 in)
Courtesy of the Artist and Rossi&Rossi.

In his *Autonomy*, Rigdol follows a seventeenth-century Tibetan painting of Akṣobhya-vajra, made in new *khyenri* style, albeit only in its basic contours.⁴ Akin to Baaska, the Buddhist iconography here is also transformed to state a new message. The Buddha's form is created with the artist's close attention and is clearly recognizable; and yet beyond its basic shape, an artful selection of media and materiality ranging between paper, silk, brocade, and paint altogether produce a lushly textured work with nuanced layers of various meanings. The face and the body of the Tantric Buddha is entirely covered with Chinese money bills that show discernible images of Mao Zedong, whereas the female aspect, *yum*, who appears in a father-mother *yab-yum* embrace, is entirely built with Tibetan currency bills that were in circulation prior to the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1959. The Tantric bodies, typically two complementary aspects of one holistic entity, here are shown in a tight embrace, where the disparate and independent cultures are forced to join: the power of the male aspect, here representing

⁴ The seventeenth-century painting is part of the permanent collection of the Rubin Museum of Art and can be seen here: <https://rubinmuseum.org/collection/artwork/akshobhya-vajra>

PRC, dominates and holds the female aspect, which is representing Tibet, and which appears to be submerging in an agonistic cry. The two bodies are placed against the silken brocade *mandorla*, which, in turn, is juxtaposed against a golden background filled with numerous pages of Tibetan Buddhist sacred texts. The wisdom and the essence of Tibetan thought and culture here are painstakingly tied within the enforced embrace of two entities that do not belong to each other. While Buddhist images are used for meditation practices, here they have additional meanings and functions. Akin to Gyatso, for Rigdol, the figure of a Buddha is “a marker of Tibetan cultural identity”⁵ more than it is meant for a practitioner’s visualization praxis. Or, shall we say, the meditation, as Rigdol puts it here, is undeniably centered on the conflicting embrace of two disparate bodies as a ghostly one.

Tsherin Sherpa, a well-known contemporary artist from Nepal, takes a different approach to Buddhist images without any references to the political situation of Tibet. Making constant use of figures and motifs taken partially from buddhas and bodhisattvas, he aims to create a new form of meditation that is, in his case, focused on his own personal questions of belonging and (dis) placement in the contemporary world.



Figure 6. Tsherin Sherpa, *Blue spirit*, 2013.
Courtesy of the Artist and Rossi&Rossi.

In his work, *Blue Spirit* (2011), Tsherin Sherpa liberates the Buddhist form from any meanings and associations it usually has within its original context and iconography; he plays with the Buddhist form completely at his own will and in such attitude he is distinct from his fellow Himalayan artists. If for Rigdol and Gyatso—and for Baaska, for that matter—it is the clarity of form and its essential meaning for which the buddha or bodhisattva is known (i.e., Avalokiteśvara, Tantric deity, etc.) that is kept sacred and closely followed;

⁵ Clare Harris “Buddha Goes Global” in Clare Harris, *In the Image of Tibet: Tibetan Painting After 1959*. London, 1999, 243.

Tsherin Sherpa does not have any attachment to form. His *Blue Spirit* is intentionally free of any iconographic or historical connotations, and the robust juxtaposition against a golden background creates the sense of an unworldly realm akin to Byzantine icons and frescoes. According to the artist, the title here denotes his ideas and visions also inspired by the spirits of nature, whereas the tiny dark figures stand for those dark and negative energies that come to us on a daily basis through various channels, including real and fake news. The sacred and profane, in other words, are deliberately brought together and forms and shapes are devoid of their inherent meanings and original context; the displacement here is intentionally made into a seemingly unusual, new placement.⁶

Buddha Images for Auspicious Protection and Sacralization

Given these and many more examples of contemporary artists using Buddhist images in their works, Baaska's *Universe*, does not appear as a unique painting and shows a comparable effort to negotiate between the artist's views about today's world and the inherited tradition. Baaska uses a circular composition of Bvavacakra (Wheel of Life) (with the Buddha in the middle (*Figure 1. Universe*). Among the surrounding deities and divinities, semi-gods and *apsaras* (supernatural female beings), the viewer is also confronted with shocking images of "men in black" who represent the business corporate world and who are here to seek enlightenment with the Buddha. This image of "men in black" takes a centerpiece in Baaska's following works, the first of which is *The Taste of Money In-Between Clouds* (2009) (hereafter: *The Taste of Money*).



Figure 7. Ch. Baasanjav, *The Taste of Money In-Between Clouds*, 2009. gouache on cotton. Courtesy of Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong.

⁶ Uranchimeg Tsultemin "Tsherin Sherpa: Meditation on Art and Life as Metamorphosis" in Uranchimeg ed., *Metamorphosis: Recent Painting and Sculpture by Tsherin Sherpa*. Heron School of Art and Design, IUPUI, 2020, 6-8.

Here Baaska divides the composition into two unequal parts: the dominating, crowded, main upper part and the minor low register with very few images. Baaska's "man in black" resurfaces here as the central domineering image, now multi-armed and equipped with several heads. He is wearing a hat made of newspapers and the letters on it read in modern Mongolian, "Truth," "Today." His hands clutch an axe and dollar bills as well as the Mongolian seal that reads "Mongol State." He is backed by rows of men in suits who appear as half-human, half-animal hybrids with demon-like appearances, whereas another demon-like angry creature wearing a suit-and-tie, is at yelp right next to the main figure. The man in black is confronted with gods, spirits and goddesses of nature to his right (viewer's left) who are unfolding a scroll with an appeal written in Mongolian traditional script. The appeal reads, "Please leave to us, those who belong to mountains and rivers, our virgin land and our flowing rivers!" In the bottom register, an eerie scene with the men in black takes place where they fight with each other and have been transformed into hybrid creatures.

The political statement of this painting is very clear, since it speaks directly to the ongoing heated debates surrounding mining, corruption, destruction of nature and competition over its illegal gains by the corporate world. This is the one of the first cases in which a contemporary artist has voiced so blatantly and vividly the concern over environmental destruction, the lack of protection and rehabilitation of nature, and the corrupted government that allies with the equally corrupt corporate world for personal gain. While in some other artists' works, such as Orkhontuul's *Esprit* (2014), Ya. Bulgan's *Degenerate Times* (1999), or B. Nandin-Erdene's *Swings* (2012), there is a sharp critique of social welfare, political issues, and other forms of the failure of neoliberalism in Mongolia, Baaska was the first to specifically address the environmental issues.⁷ Without resorting to multi-media or mixed-media art forms which dominate the contemporary art world today, Baaska's aim is to *understand* what constitutes "tradition" in the modern world of Mongolia, where rapid changes are transforming the culture and society.

The environmental, destructive damage began with the intensification of the mining business in Mongolia since the late 1990s, when Mongolia—a newly opened country to the world and Asia's new democratic government—legalized privatization of land, livestock, and mining in 1997.⁸ The law was formulated and approved by the parliament as illegal mining activities rapidly increased in the country since 1994. When the democratic party gained the majority of seats in 1996 and their then leader, M. Enkhsaikhan, became Prime Minister, they made a first notable effort to regulate the viciously growing mining sector and organize the private and public use of the land for mining purposes.⁹ The boom of mining with prospects of high-

⁷ See more discussion about the work of these artists in Uranchimeg Tsultemin, *Mobile Homes and Modern Nomads: Contemporary Art of Mongolia* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, forthcoming).

⁸ Julian Dierkes "Introduction" in Julian Dierkes, ed., *Change in Democratic Mongolia: Social Relations, Health, Mobile Pastoralism, and Mining* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 7.

⁹ See more on these issues here: <http://uclalum.blogspot.com>

profit mineral wealth was conducted by Mongolian companies and was spread over several locales in the country, among which the major ones are currently Oyu Tolgoi and Tavan Tolgoi. Mining was among those new areas of the capitalist world that were totally unknown to Mongolia, neither to its policy makers and the governmental authorities, nor to local businessmen. Mining also opened a new promising window into the global world for a very isolated nation that proclaimed democracy in 1992, and the corporate world made fast strides to take advantage of what appeared to be a highly profitable bid. The law in 1997 gave the freedom of utilizing so-called “licenses” for land to conduct mining business in Mongolia. Thus, the number of companies aiming for mining understandably increased, although none of them knew exactly how to properly run the mining businesses and save the environment in the process; neither did the governmental agencies. Many provinces suffered tremendous loss of pasture lands; rivers and riverbanks were irreversibly damaged to the extent that rivers dried up, for instance, in Onggi, Zaamar, Selenge *aimag* (province). The newly formed Ministry for Mining also organized a new agency for Mining and Oil that hypothetically was responsible for proper conduct of business, environmental protection and repair, as well as legal taxation and fees that the companies were now obliged to pay to the government. Many *nouveau riches* of Mongolia were able to establish themselves due to this new business, which proved to be lucrative, since the buyers and the markets were not too far away: rapidly growing industrial China needed new suppliers of copper, coal, and other deposits. These *nouveau riches* did not shy away from personal gain, and corrupt methods allowed the authorities to pass over the disastrous conditions they left in the mines. Once the deposits were deemed to be depleted, the companies quickly sold their licenses to local “ninja” companies or newer businesses and left without any responsibilities for environmental repair.¹⁰

While several provinces suffered from mining and lost their land and water resources to the wrongfully conducted mining businesses, the government did not take—and still has not taken—any measures to repair the damaged natural environment. Only a few activists, among them, the most prominent Ts. Munkhbayar, and A. Bayarjargal, stood against the environmental destruction.¹¹ Among the artists, it was also a handful, such as Baaska and Orkhontuul, who spoke up strongly against

¹⁰ There are certain Mongolian mining companies, such as Erel, which did poor or no work for protection of the environment and caused much damage to the site they conducted mining.

¹¹ Ts. Munkhbayar is known for his longtime work to protect his native land and the Onggi River, which dried up due to the mining activities. Munkhbayar co-founded the Onggi River Movement as well as the Mongolian Nature Protection Coalition to protect the shrinking of rivers and waterways. In 2006, the government passed a new Law on Minerals that protects natural water basins and regulates mining. See more on Munkhbayar’s successful efforts for environment protection at <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/tsetsegee-munkhbayar/>. However, there were also recent controversies surrounding Munkhbayar’s work, questioning his efforts, and subsequently sentencing him to 21 years in prison in 2013. This incident, according to T. Enkhbat and quoted by numerous media, reveals the desperation of Mongolian herders and their fight against environmental damage due to mining. See more at <http://world.time.com/2014/01/28/award-winning-mongolian-environmentalist-gets-21-years-for-terrorism/>. About A. Bayarjargal, see here: <https://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/bayarjargal-agvaantseren/>

the mining and the corruption that ensued from the new business developments. For these and other artists, the negative outcome of neoliberalism in Mongolia were the main subject matter, and they took art as a critique of the government and the society. Baaska set up to take on environmental damage as the key message of his art, and thus it can indeed be seen as one of the very first works of political ecology intentionally created as a critical voice of a contemporary Mongolian artist.

Baaska continued his explorations and his ideas with a series of new works, such as *Checkmate* (2011), *Composition I* (2010-11), *Existence* (2017), and *Congress*, completed in 2011. While *Congress* was made separately, its subject matter and style relates closely to the *Taste of Money* as it makes a similar statement with similar motifs.



Figure 8. Ch. Baasanjav, *Checkmate*, 2011, gouache on cotton.
Courtesy of Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong.



Figure 9. Ch. Baasanjav, *Existence*, acrylic on canvas, 2017.
Courtesy of Sapar Contemporary Gallery+Incubator, New York City.

Here the female wrathful deity Palden Lhamo has taken the form of a polycephalic rider whose Buddhist iconography is now transformed to obtain new and different meanings. Baaska's *Congress* shows a goddess who has three wrathful faces with the frontal one painted in two colors, red and blue. She has six arms clutching various 'attributes' and is riding a polycephalic green horse amidst an assembly of numerous creatures all depicted as skeletons. Palden Lhamo, who is mostly a Dharma protector (*dharmapala*), is a widely known deity popular in Vajrayāna Buddhism, and particularly in Tibet is worshipped across various schools. Here, Baaska's "goddess" is mostly based on Palden Lhamo's four-armed form known as Dudsolma, and in choosing her, the artist has also considered her essential meaning of an important Wisdom Protector.

Palden Lhamo Dudsolma is typically depicted with two arms, one holding a vajra scepter and the other one a ritual skullcup (*kapala*). When adopting this form for a modern context, completely unrelated to Buddhist ideas, Baaska made deliberate changes to the iconography: Baaska's "Wisdom Protector" has now four arms, which hold a flaming sword, an empty throne, and a gate of hell with flames of fire, and she is riding a two-headed green horse. The idea of a green horse came directly from the

ritual of Maitreya Procession in Mongolia, where a statue of the Buddha of the future, Maitreya, is taken in a chariot with a green horse in a day-long circumambulation of the monastery carried out by monks and attended by the local lay communities.



*Figure 10. Ch. Baasanjav, Congress, 2011.
Courtesy of Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong.*

In the Maitreya Procession, the green horse heralds the future, and this meaning is carried onto Baaska's use of a green horse. In the latter's case, however, the future is not a straightforward single path since the polycephalic rider can be taken in any of the two directions. As the face of the goddess is in half-red and half-blue, clearly pointing at the two major parties, the reformed People's Party (red) and the Democratic Party (blue), the divided directions are driven by these two dominant powers in Mongolia. The artist's critique of, and the work's political connotations about the wrongful Parliament are apparent in the assembly under the rider, which represents a dysfunctional meeting of its seventy-six members, here shown as skeletons. The goddess is essentially riding over an assembly of the dead. This Parliament is leaderless: an empty throne tops the assembly. The Buddhist Lord of Death, Yama, is seated right underneath the goddess, thereby also suggesting that these Parliament members will eventually be judged by the Lord of Death in their final destination of hell. A dried, barren tree, its dry roots tied with a string of human skulls, reminds us of the equally disastrous perishing of nature caused by the wrongful decisions and deeds of humans: a strong statement indeed.

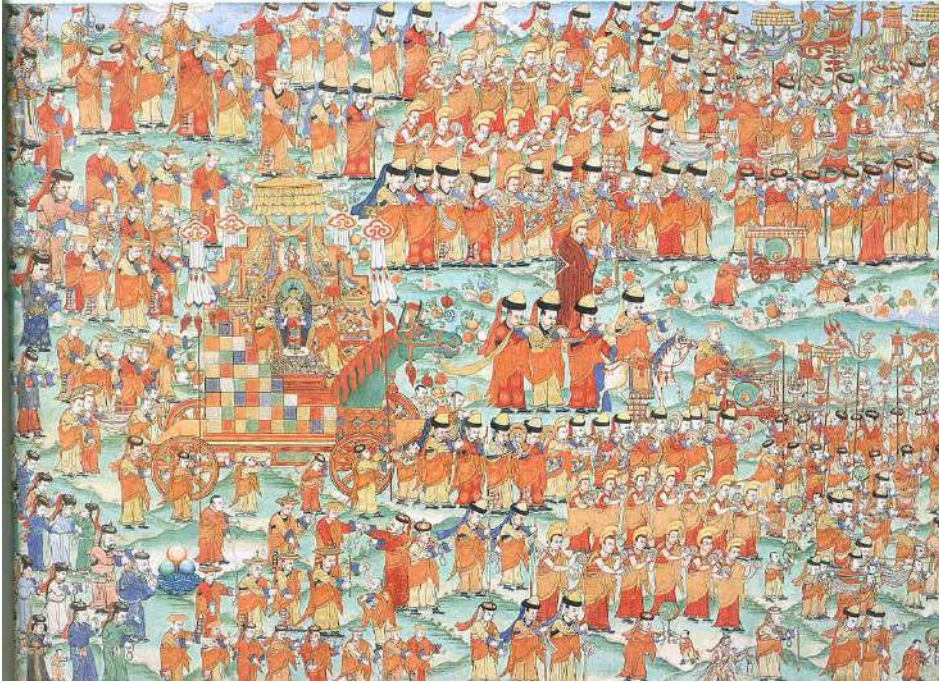


Figure 11. G.Dorj, *Maitreya Procession*. early 20th c.
Courtesy of Zanabazar Museum of Fine Art.

Political connotations in the use of Buddhist iconography is apparent in Baaska's work. Unlike Rigdol, however, he does not refer to the Buddhist form in relation to his identity. Rather, he relies on his own knowledge of the deity—here in the *Congress*, Palden Lhamo—in revealing the evils of human wrongful deeds and subduing the ills of modern-day troubles. The benign form of wrathful deity here, in Baaska's view, should assist in turning things for the better and bringing long-awaited justice to the community, which has lacked a ruling head and fair government. If, in the *Taste of Money*, the words on the central figure were in Mongolian, now the public words are turned into English. The apparent contrast and juxtaposition of Western and Buddhist forms, made evident in their visual and linguistic manifestations, points at that eerie cultural symbiosis about which Baaska is also critical. His innovative approach echoes the works of his fellow contemporary artists, such as Baatarzorig in particular. In Baatarzorig's *Mickey Polo* (2016) and *Analogue* (2015), the Western pop icon, Mickey Mouse, takes the center stage to illustrate the forced import of Western popular culture into a disorganized mix of cultural orientations in modern-day Mongolia. Baatarzorig's Mickey is a gruesome simulacrum of the original Mickey of Walt Disney, designed to be jolly, light, and funny. Wearing Mongolian traditional boots and garb, Baatarzorig's Mickey is riding a horse against a backdrop of fire flames and brandishing a polo mallet. He is surrounded by numerous smaller figures of polo gamer Mickeys who also wear Mongolian garb and similarly appear, curiously, of mixed cultures: he is a Mongolianized version of

Disney's Mickey. In his *Analogue*, the naked Mickeys, wearing nothing but underwear, are all engaged in odd, bizarre activities, which include jumping a rope, bathing in a tiny tub, riding a goat, jumping up and down, lying in leisure poses or other deeds that do not make any sense. The composition is in the shape of a mathematical infinity symbol, and the title, *Analogue*, suggests a likening of the Mickey proliferation—a metaphor for the superficial process of Westernization—as non-stop and indefinite. In other words, as the artist maintains, the fast process of neoliberalism is empty in its purpose and organization as well as devastating and meaningless in its socio-cultural impact.



Figure 12. B. Baatarzorig, *Mickey Polo*, acrylic on canvas, 2016.
Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 13. B. Baatarzorig, *Analogue*, gouache on cotton, 2015.
Courtesy of the artist.

In creating compositions with images, motifs, and certain elements borrowed from Buddhist images, both Baaska and Baatarzorig follow the precedent established by Mongolian artists in the twentieth century, such as Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem (1923–2001). In his well-known painting, *Appeal* (1972), Tsultem depicts a revolutionary hero in the center of a composition filled with flames of fire. The flat decorative quality of the picture and elements of the painting, such as a horse, fire flames, and the orientation of the main figure, are all based on the *thangka* painting tradition. Due to the taboo placed on Buddhism during socialist period in Mongolia, the artist used Buddhist elements and teachings disguised in the form of a revolutionary soldier who is blowing his conch to herald victory.

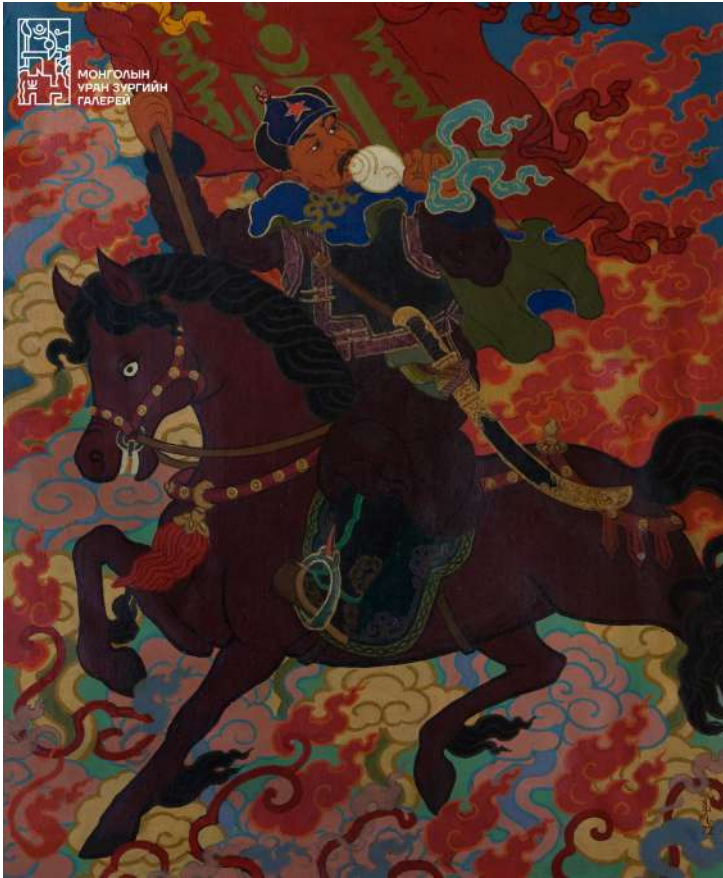


Figure 14. N-O.Tsultem, *Appeal*, 1972.
Courtesy of National Modern Art Gallery, Ulaanbaatar.

If Baaska's *Congress* and *Universe* incorporate Buddhist images directly from the *thangka* paintings that are clearly recognizable even within the new composition, with a new modern construct and meaning, Tsultem's borrowing from Buddhist images was subtle, mostly distinct in its treatment of the visual quality and overall texture of the composition as flat and devoid of linear perspective.

Conclusion: On Form and Identity in Contemporary Buddhist Art

Baaska is not alone in his efforts to address the wrongdoing of the corrupt neoliberal Mongolian government and the corporate world. As art historian T. J. Demos puts it, international artists such as Baaska “address new aesthetic strategies through which current ecological emergencies have found resonance and creative response in artistic practice.”¹² Although, from his art, his critique is clear, his works also pose inevitable questions about the importance and the use of tradition in modern-day culture, his belonging and relation to the past and to his present-day heritage. Akin to some Tibetan artists, Baaska weaves his queries of authenticity and identity with his strong critique of political and ecological issues. For him, Buddhist forms are part of his tradition and heritage akin to Mongolian scripts, belief in natural spirits, and the painting style and composition. For him, the Mongol Zurag traditional style, as employed in his images, is based on Sharav’s models of busy compositions with a storytelling narrative arrangement. He also follows Sharav in weaving seamlessly important Buddhist ideas with very mundane subject matter and motifs. He thus views the close following of Buddhist iconography as important, and in such following, his own understanding of Buddhist form and iconography grows as a continuous learning process. As the artist was nurtured and matured during the era of freedom of faith and religious practices in Mongolia, such effort for learning is logical, and is both inevitable and inseparable from his identity and from the cultural present of Mongolia today. Through their reliance on Buddhist form and iconography as part of the tradition, he and his fellow Mongolian and Tibetan artists reveal their angst for the loss of their land: for Baaska, as he is witnessing the destruction on both physical, spiritual, and cultural levels. As his countryman Baatarzorig has stated, “a question of whether Mongolia is really Mongolia nowadays [...] how Mongolia retains its identity is my question.”¹³ That—what Narangoa and Bruun have described as “cultural disintegration” due to radical disparities between the growing city and the countryside—is also the concern for Baaska. Driven by his worries about the irretrievable loss of culture and for his land, his images are based on buddhas and bodhisattvas to secure protection against the destructive stride of neoliberalism that has resulted in the marketization and commodification of nature.¹⁴

¹² T. J. Demos “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction” in *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (January, 2013): 1–9.

¹³ Interview with Baatarzorig in December 2017. See Uranchimeg Tsultemin “Political Ecology in Baatarzorig’s Art: Mongolia Is in Business” in Rebecca Empson and Hermione Spriggs eds., *Five Heads (Tavan Tolgoi) Art, Anthropology and Mongol Futurism* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 105–119.

¹⁴ Neil Smith “Nature as Accumulation Strategy” in Leo Panitch and Colin Leys eds., *Coming to Terms with Nature*. Socialist Register 2007 Series. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006).

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Walking to Sacred Sites: Mongols' Long-Distance Pilgrimages in the Qing Period

Isabelle Charleux

Abstract

In the Manchu period, Mongol herders were attached to their 'banner'—the basic territorial, administrative and military unit of Qing Mongolia. Their circuits of nomadization were reduced, and they were fined when found to cross its frontiers. While princes, great reincarnate lamas and long-distance traders (as well as some marginal categories such as badarchi/itinerant lamas and bandits) had many opportunities to travel within Mongolia and even abroad, it is generally assumed that commoners had no choice but stay in their pastures. Yet they had a main reason for undertaking long-distance travel: pilgrimage. This paper investigates the various modes of travel of these pilgrims, their equipment, organization and funding, and highlights the importance of a mode of locomotion which is rarely seen in Mongolia nowadays: walking.

Introduction

Mongol herders of the Qing Manchu empire (seventeenth century–1911) were attached to their 'banner' (*khoshuu*¹)—the basic territorial, administrative and military unit of Inner and Outer Mongolia. Their circuits of nomadization were reduced, and they were fined when found to cross its borders. While princes, great reincarnate lamas and long-distance traders (as well as some marginal categories such as beggars and bandits) had many opportunities to travel within Mongolia and even outside of Mongol territories, it is generally assumed that commoners had no choice but stay in their pastures.² Yet they had a main reason for undertaking long-distance travel: pilgrimage. I propose to investigate the various modes of travel of Mongol pilgrims who journeyed to distant sacred places in the modern period, up to the beginning of the twentieth century. I will particularly focus on a mode of locomotion which is rarely seen in Mongolia nowadays: walking. Traditional leather boots are very uncomfortable

¹ I used Christopher P. Atwood's system for phonetically rendering classical Mongolian terms and names in the text. Id., *Young Mongols and Vigilantes in Inner Mongolia's Interregnum Decades, 1911-1931*, xv–xviii. (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 2002, 2 vol.). When citing authors and book titles, I used Antoine Mostaert's system to transcribe the traditional Uyghur-Mongolian script, but I replaced 'č' and 'j' with plain 'c' and 'j'. Place names of the Republic of Mongolia are transcribed from Khalkha-Mongolian.

² On how in the early period the Qing power implemented a policy to restrict Mongols' mobility, and the techniques developed by Mongol to make use of the *Pax Manjurica* and move freely across the internal borders of the empire: Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, "Globalisation or Isolation: Regulating Mobility of Mongols during the Qing period (1636–1911)," in *Mongolian Responses to Globalisation Processes*, ed. Ines Stolpe, Judith Nordby, and Ulrike Gonzales, 21–42. (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2017).

for walking. Nineteenth-century Russian geographer and explorer Nikolai Prejevalsky (Przhevalskii) wrote about the Mongol: “His contempt for pedestrians is so great that he considers it beneath his dignity to walk even as far as the next yurt.”³ Anyone who spent some time in the Mongolian countryside observed that even for a hundred meters, herders prefer riding their horses or motorcycles rather than walking.⁴ Yet in the past, many Mongols crossed the country on foot, such as pilgrims, peddlers, itinerant artisans, *badarchi* lamas begging on their way, troubadours and bards.

I will focus here on the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a period during which pilgrimages are documented by a variety of sources such as guidebooks, biographies of great lamas, folk songs and tales, as well as stone inscriptions and certificates of donation.⁵ But these sources do not give practical details on how the pilgrims actually traveled, prepared for their journey and reached the sacred site—their means of transportation, their equipment, the route they took and the places they stopped at along the way. This is why my main sources here are Mongol pilgrimage accounts, as well as travelogues written by Western, Russian and Chinese travelers. One of the most informative travelogues is that of the Buryat scholar Gombojab Tsybikov (Mo. Tsevegiin Gombojab, 1873–1930) who undertook the pilgrimage to Lhasa in the guise of a monk in a group of Buryat and Kalmyk pilgrims from 1899 to 1902.⁶ Other pilgrims who left accounts of their travels include the famous Buryat diplomat-monk Agvan Dorzhiev (1854–1938) who studied in Lhasa for many years⁷ and the Kalmyk lama Bazar-bakshi who travelled from Kalmykia to Lhasa from 1891 to 1894.⁸ Many other less famous Kalmyk and Buryat pilgrims

³ Nicholas Prejevalsky, *Mongolia: The Tangut Country, and the Solitudes of Northern Tibet, being a Narrative of Three Years' Travel in Eastern High Asia* (London: S. Low, 1876), vol. I, 60.

⁴ Though nowadays walking becomes fashionable among citizens of Ulaanbaatar, who enjoy hiking on Bogd Khaan Mountain during week-ends.

⁵ Isabelle Charleux, *Nomads on Pilgrimage: Mongols on Wutaishan (China), 1800–1940* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), 6–17.

⁶ Gonbochjab T. Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin bouddhiste au Tibet* (Paris: Peuples du Monde, 1992). This Russian-Buryat Tibetologist (raised as a Buddhist, and a Russian citizen) spent one year in Lhasa in 1900–1901, disguised as a Buryat lama, funded by the Imperial Geographical Society. His aim was to collect information on Tibetan monasteries, daily life, and geography. His travelogue (published in 1919) tells us with great ethnographic detail the organization of his journey to Lhasa, including the daily routine of the caravan, price of horses and sheep, taxes, itinerary and kilometers per day, explanation of toponyms, and so on. He brought back the first photos of Tibet, and 300 volumes of Tibetan texts. He also wrote a report for the Russian Geographical Society, which was published in 1903, “On Central Tibet” (see Ihor Pidhainy, “Tibet through the Eyes of a Buryat: Gombojab Tsybikov and his Tibetan relations,” *ASIANetwork Exchange* (Spring 2013), volume 20/2: 1–15).

⁷ Dorzhiev became adviser of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and an intermediary between Russia and Tibet. See his biography: Dan Martin and Thupten J. Norbu, “Dorjiev: Memoirs of a Tibetan Diplomat,” *Hokke bunka kenkyū* 法華文化研究 17 (1991): 12–13, 29, 48–51.

⁸ His journal was studied and translated into Russian by A.M. Pozdnev: *Skazanie o khozhdenii v' Tibetskuiu stranu malo-dörböt'skago Baaza-bakshi* [Narrative of the travel to Tibet by the Maloderbet Baaza-Bakshi] (Saint Petersburg: Imperatorskoi akademii nauk', 1897). I thank Ekaterina Sobkovyak for having sent to me a copy of this book. There are few practical details in this diary, and this is the reason why Pozdnev encouraged Tsybikov, a trained native scholar, to travel to Tibet (Anya Bernstein, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 40.

such as Namsaraev Badma-Bazar (1882–1968)⁹ also left accounts and manuscript diaries which are preserved in the Russian archives.¹⁰ Other precious descriptions of the pilgrims' itineraries and practices in Amdo (A mdo) are given by the Buryat scholar Baradin, who also travelled as a pilgrim and stayed one year in the Labrang (Bla brang) Monastery.¹¹ Other accounts have recently been published in China, such as that of Duke Migwachir (1893–1958), a writer, traveler, artist, poet and pious Buddhist from Alashan Banner, who describes his five-month long journey with his younger brother to Tibet in 1937–1938, followed by his visit to the sacred Chinese mountain of Wutaishan.¹²

Pilgrimage as a Kinesthetic Ritual: Remarks on the Current State of Research

A conventional, restricted definition of pilgrimage would be “a journey to a sanctified place, undertaken with the expectation of future spiritual and/or worldly benefit,” distinct from regular worship in time (long journeys) and space (separation from home).¹³ The possibility of encountering novelty makes the pilgrimage distinct from other forms of ritual. Walking also allows to encounter “the landscape visually and materially” and engage “with it kinetically, sensually and imaginatively, both seeing and becoming part of the picture.”¹⁴ In their edited book *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion*, Simon Coleman and John Eade were the first to emphasize pilgrimage as a kinesthetic ritual: the pilgrims travel between two static poles, home—the mundane, human, familiar, social, imperfect—, and the pilgrimage site—the mysterious, divine, ideal, perfect, miraculous.¹⁵ Their book criticizes Victor and Edith Turner's famous theory according to which the time of pilgrimage is an extra-ordinary moment, a great liminal experience breaking with

⁹ Namsaraev Badma-Bazar, “Khudagsha Batyn usharalta yavadalnuudhaa orolto üge” [Master of water divining of the clan of the Bata clan and his lifestory], *Namsarain Badma-Bazar Namsaraevich, Namsaraev Vladimir Badmabazarovich. Minii shüleg – bodoloim khüleg, Minii nyutag – nahanaim tüsheg* (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buriatskogo gosuniversiteta, 2012, n. p.). I thank Sayana Namsaraeva for having sent me her grandfather's journal.

¹⁰ See Arash Bormanshinov, “Kalmyk Pilgrims to Tibet and Mongolia,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 42 (1998), 10, n. 43 and 44, 13, 16–17 and n. 71, 19; Alexander Andreyev, “Russian Buddhists in Tibet, from the End of the Nineteenth Century-1930,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, 11/3 (2001), 349, n. 1; Bernstein, *Religious Bodies Politic*, 64, note 10.

¹¹ His full diary was published in 2002: B.B. Baradin, *Zhizn' v tangutskom monastyre Lavran: Dnevnik buddiiskogo palomnika (1906–1907)* [Life in the Tibetan monastery of Labrang: A diary of the Buddhist pilgrim] (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel'stvo Buriatskogo nauchnogo centra, 2002). On the contrast between the positivist Tsybikov, who criticizes the corrupted and ignorant Tibetan clergy, the business-oriented monasteries, and the poverty and superstition of the populace, and Baradin's more sympathetic views of Buddhist practices: Bernstein, *Religious Bodies Politic*, 40–50.

¹² Miyvacir, *Mergen-i bayasqayci cayan teike: Alaša qosiyun-u barayun güng-ün iledkel šastir* [White history that rejoices the sages: Report of the Western Duke of Alashan Banner] (Höhhhot: Öbör Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriya, 2008 [1942]), Part III. His aim was to purchase a copy of the *Kanjur* in Lhasa.

¹³ Alex McKay, ed., *Pilgrimage in Tibet* (Richmond (Surrey) and Leiden: Curzon Press, 1998), 1.

¹⁴ Avril Maddrell, “Praying the Keeills’: Rhythm, Meaning and Experience on Pilgrimage Journeys in the Isle of Man,” *Landabréfid*, vol. 25 (2011), 17.

¹⁵ Simon Coleman and John Eade, eds., *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

everyday life, during which pilgrims undergo a transformative experience freed from the structure of ordinary society, and during which the rules and constraints of daily life are temporarily suspended.¹⁶ *Reframing pilgrimage* shows that in a world where mobility is common and even banal, such as in the contemporary Western world, kinesthetic pilgrimage leaves the shackles of the exceptional and is closer to everyday life.

Another important dimension of pilgrimages all around the world is that of penance, danger, personal sacrifice, and suffering of the body. By voluntarily enduring pain, pilgrims increase their merits and accumulate guarantees that their request would be granted. To the hardship of walking can be added multiple forms of penance such as acts of contrition, auto-flagellation, purification, crawling on one's knees with chains, carrying stones, fasting etc. which sometimes provoke convulsions, fainting, or trance (besides, dying during a pilgrimage was generally believed to ensure eternal life or a good reincarnation). Penance aims at transforming the body, which leads to the inner transformation of the soul. Penance is also increased by topography and weather, many pilgrimage sites being located in mountainous areas with difficult passes and high altitude.¹⁷ In *Contesting the Sacred*, John Eade and Michael Sallnow studied the dialectic between the suffering which is voluntarily endured and the miraculous healing, which is found in many religious traditions: sufferings, sins and grace are intimately connected.¹⁸

Several scholars such as Luigi Tomasi ("*Homo Viator*") argue that the dimension of penance declined since medieval times, eroded by modern means of transportation, facilities of travelling, modern comfort, and reduced time on the pilgrimage site because of the short duration of holydays. Consequently, the pilgrim appears to be closer than before to the tourist.¹⁹ Ian Reader, who studied pilgrimages to the eighty-eight temples of Shikoku in Japan, argues that modern means of transportation and organization would allow a more complete pilgrimage.²⁰ Yet since the 1970s, walking over long distances has become fashionable again on the Camino to Compostela, and these pilgrim-hikers or hiker-pilgrims generally acknowledge that they live a liminal experience: after about fifteen days of walking, their body is transformed, they look like filthy, exhausted, suffering beggars whose main concern is curing their feet and wounds. Many of them acknowledge that the arrival at Santiago is disappointing and "anticlimactic," and chose to undertake the pilgrimage several times.

¹⁶ Victor and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

¹⁷ See James J. Preston's scale of spiritual magnetism, "Spiritual Magnetism: An Organizing Principle for the Study of Pilgrimage," in *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*, ed. A. Morinis (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992), 31–46.

¹⁸ John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow, *Contesting the Sacred. The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁹ Luigi Tomasi, "*Homo Viator: From Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism via the Journey*," in *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*, ed. William H. Swatos, Jr. and Luigi Tomasi (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), 1–24.

²⁰ Ian Reader, *Making Pilgrimages: Meaning and Practice in Shikoku* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 36.

Were long-distance pilgrimages extra-ordinary moments and liminal experiences, breaking with everyday life, for Mongols—people who have generally been characterized by mobility and “nomadism”? Or on the contrary, was not pilgrimage quite close to everyday life for nomadic herders? Did they perform acts of auto-contrition to enhance their penance?

Terminology and Types of Mongols’ Pilgrimages

Mongolian language distinguishes ‘pilgrimage’ from ordinary worship, called *mörgöl*, by referring to its ‘size,’ plus adding a verb denoting departure, movement or travel: *yekhe mörgöl-dür yabu-* (or *khi-, üiled-, ayala-*), literally ‘to go on/to make a big bow/prayer.’ *Yekhe*, meaning ‘big’ or ‘large,’ evokes the adventure and emotional intensity inherent in long-distance pilgrimages. *Mörgö-*, ‘pray, bow, prostrate’ etymologically means ‘to butt, to hit, knock one’s forehead against something, to gore,’ and Mongols commonly say: “I pray until my forehead is pierced.” The Mongolian terminology of pilgrimage therefore uses a term of body language. By contrast, the Tibetan vocabulary of pilgrimage emphasizes circumambulation of the sacred site, generally in a clockwise direction (*gnas bskor*: ‘circuiting, going around a place’).²¹ The main actions of Mongol pilgrimages were prostrations and circumambulations, along with constant praying (*Om maṇi padme huṃ!* and other mantras or dharanis of various buddhas, bodhisattvas and protective deities) while counting prayer beads.

Local pilgrimages (within one’s *nutug*, homeland) and pilgrimages in Mongol territory where it was possible to stop in the yurts of acquaintances or hospitable Mongols, were quite distinct from pilgrimages abroad, where pilgrims had to rely on their own. In the Qing period and the early twentieth century, Mongols used to make pilgrimages within Mongolia (the most important being Urga/Yekhe Khüriye, to worship the Jebtsündamba Khutugtu,²² and Erdeni juu in Khalkha Mongolia, and Badgar Choiling Süme (Ch. Wudangzhao 五當召) in Inner Mongolia. Many other monasteries drew pilgrims from surrounding banners at the local level, especially at major festivals.²³ The main season for pilgrimages within Mongolia was summer (especially mid-July) and autumn. July was (and still is) the time when *naadum*, the ‘three manly games’—horse racing, wrestling and archery—were organized throughout the country. Great monastic festivals also took place in summer and generally speaking, most sacred sites were especially visited on festival days because religious activities performed on major holy days yielded greater merit than those done at another time.

Mongols also undertook pilgrimages to four main destinations abroad: Wutaishan (over 300 kilometers from Hohhot), Kumbum (sKu ’bum) Monastery in Amdo, Lhasa

²¹ Charleux, *Nomads*, 22–25.

²² Örgöö (transcribed as “Urga” in Russian), the great monastery-residence of the Jebtsündamba Khutugtu, had settled in the Tuul Valley in 1855, on the site of present-day Ulaanbaatar.

²³ Charleux, *Nomads*, 44–52. The term pilgrimage must not be restricted to the great Buddhist sites but can be extended to natural sites such as caves, trees, strange rocks, springs, lakes, etc., of the Mongol countryside, to the great mountains that are worshipped on a local or supra-local level, as well as, after the nineteenth century, to the ancestral shrines of the Chinggisid imperial family in Ordos.

(more than 3,000 km from Hohhot) and Beijing (to worship the Sandalwood Buddha). Some went further, to Tashilhunpo (bKra shis lhun po) and monasteries of Central Tibet, and to Bodnāth Stūpa in Nepal. Only a few pilgrims, mostly lamas, went as far as India, especially to visit places linked to the life of the Buddha.²⁴ Most pilgrims to Lhasa stopped for two months in Kumbum and Labrang in Amdo, and pilgrims to Wutaishan often combined their pilgrimage with Kumbum. 'Going to Utai-Gümbüm (or Gümbüm-Utai)' is one of the modern expressions used to designate a pilgrimage abroad.

If monks, princes, traders, and beggars could travel all year round, how could herders leave their flocks and herds for long-distance pilgrimages? As I showed in a book, Wutaishan was frequented by Mongol pilgrims almost all year round: the Mongols who had left their cattle and sheep in Mongolia probably preferred going on pilgrimage during the low season for herding in winter, while the pilgrim-cum-traders who nomadized with their cattle and sheep to Wutaishan went in summer and fall in order to sell their animals on the mountain.²⁵

The most massive movements of pilgrims aimed at worshipping the Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas when they travelled to Mongolia. The two-year sojourn in Urga of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama Thub bstan rgya mtsho (1876–1933), from 1904 to 1906, attracted an especially large number of pilgrims and notably Buryats; many Mongols also visited him on Wutaishan or in Kumbum in 1908. The Ninth Panchen Lama, Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma dge legs rnam rgyal (1883–1937) traveled in Inner Mongolia between 1927 and 1935 where he performed Kālacakra initiations, each time gathering between 30 000 to more than 300 000 devotees from near and far—which are very impressive figures compared to a population of less than two million inhabitants. The Mongol princes competed with each other to invite him. He traveled from one banner to the next with seven to fifteen motor cars and an escort of more than 200 people. Processions of princes carrying incense led the way, followed by hundreds of devotees in prostration.²⁶

In the twentieth century, long-distance pilgrimages developed with motorized transportation. Beginning in 1918, a bus company offered a regular service between Urga and Kalgan.²⁷ Pilgrims went to India and travelled back home by boat. In 1937–1938, Mongol duke Migwachir and his brother worshipped at many monasteries of Lhasa, crossed the Himalayas in a group of ten Mongol pilgrims and visited the main Buddhist pilgrimage sites of India; they went back to Beijing and Inner Mongolia by boat (via Singapore, Saigon, and Hong Kong) and train.²⁸ In 1894, Bazar-bakshi left Lhasa and took a boat back from China to Odessa through the Canal of Suez.²⁹

²⁴ Charleux, *Nomads*, 30–40.

²⁵ Charleux, *Nomads*, 262–263.

²⁶ Charleux, *Nomads*, 40–44.

²⁷ Charleux, *Nomads*, 263.

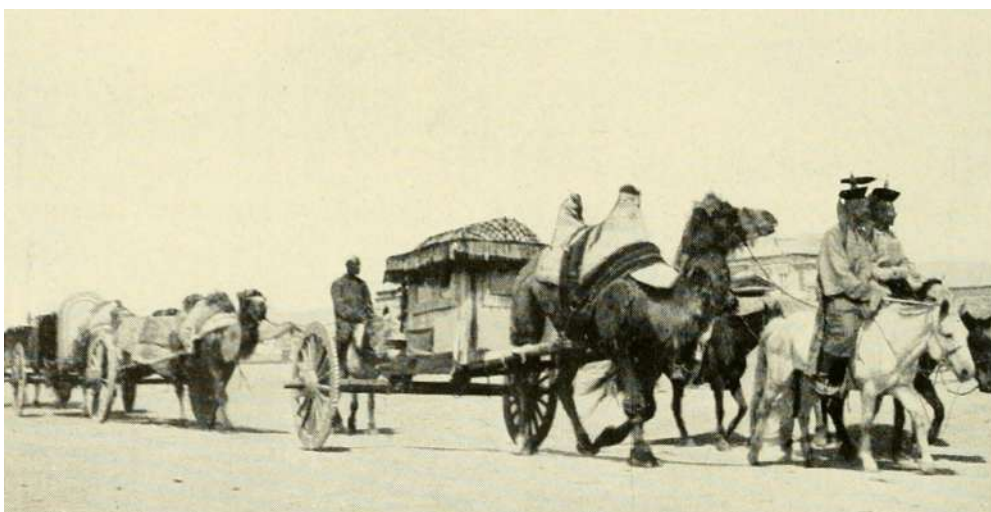
²⁸ Miyvacir, *Mergen-i bayasqayci*, 126–289.

²⁹ Bazar-bakshi, *Skazanie*, 119, 249–250.

Different Categories of Pilgrims

The Mongol pilgrims had a variety of expectations, interests and preoccupations, ranging from penance to tourism and trade. I propose to distinguish at least six categories of pilgrims:

1. Noblemen and noblewomen, officials and high lamas travelled in caravans with their suite and family members (Fig. 1). Their motivations were as much religious as political. They went to Beijing (on official visit), Wutaishan, and a few of them, notably Western Mongols, to Lhasa. To pay for their pilgrimages, princes raised special taxes among their subjects. They traveled on camels, horses and ox-carts, with large retinues of attendants, guards and servants, carrying yurts or *maikhan* (velum tents, Fig. 2), followed by those in charge of driving carts or leading a train of several hundred sheep to supply them with provisions on the road. A small retinue would consist of less than a hundred people. In the 1910s, caravans of Mongol pilgrims with fifty or a hundred camels and sedan chairs were a common sight on Wutaishan.³⁰ In 1839–1841 the Fifth Jebtsündamba Lubsang Tsültem Jigmed (Blo bzang tshul khrims 'jigs med, 1815–1842) traveled to Beijing and then to Wutaishan with a retinue of three thousand monks.³¹



*Figure 1. A high lama dignitary on his travels, free from the gaze of the curious, and escorted by mounted lamas of the middle class
(Harry A. Franck 1923)*

³⁰ Emil S. Fischer, *The Sacred Wu Tai Shan in Connection with Modern Travel from Tai yuan fu via Mount Wu Tai to the Mongolian Border* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1923), 93.

³¹ Aleksei M. Pozdnev, *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in Late 19th-century Mongolia* (Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, [1887] 1978), 352.



Figure 2. Traveling tent of a wealthy Mongol pilgrim near Urga
(A.S.Kent 1919)

2. Pilgrims-cum-traders. As in other pilgrimage places of the world, trade was a main component of Mongol pilgrimages. Pilgrims followed the trade routes that crossed Mongolia from north to south (Buryatia-Urga-Höhhöt) or from east to west.³² Those going to Lhasa joined the two large yearly caravans which departed in autumn or in spring to bring monastic trade missions from Urga to Lhasa. Khalkha and Buryat pilgrims converged to Lake Kükünor and joined Mongols of Eastern Tibet. They travelled by camels, horses or yak; travelling with yaks was much slower, but those on camels had to leave them behind at ‘Napchu’ (probably Nag chu, see note 68) because of the steepness of the mountains, and continue on yaks.³³ Many lay and monk pilgrims purchased a dozen mules and female hinnies in Amdo and sold them in Lhasa; they could recoup all their travel expenses and even sometimes make a profit.³⁴ They also carried Chinese goods in Lhasa and brought back Tibetan goods to Mongolia. But they usually spent all their money in Lhasa and their budget was in deficit when they left Tibet.³⁵

³² On pilgrim parties of Oirad Mongol to Urga that doubled as trade caravans: Jonathan Schlesinger, “The Qing Invention of Nature: Environment and Identity in Northeast China and Mongolia, 1750–1850” (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2012), 167.

³³ Prejevalsky, *Mongolia*, II, 184.

³⁴ Tsybikov himself bought four horses (at 18 to 50 taels apiece) and ten mules (25 to 40 taels apiece) to be sold in Lhasa (*Un Pèlerin*, 48–51, 76).

³⁵ Tsybikov recounts the “superstition” according to which travelers who bring back money will incur misfortune, because local spirits are greedy and do not like stingy people; they even take revenge on reincarnated lamas (*Un Pèlerin*, 264).

Trade was also a main component of the pilgrimage to Beijing³⁶ and Wutaishan. Many pilgrims traveled to Wutaishan with their own yurts and herds to sell animals at the great ‘Mule and Horse Fair’ and offer some others to the monasteries. They often went every year to Wutaishan and for them, pilgrimage may not have been so different from a nomadization, with all its propitiatory rituals.³⁷ The percentage of pilgrims-cum-traders was quite high in pilgrimages to Lhasa and Wutaishan. These pilgrimages abroad created the transfer of goods and wealth from the Mongol areas to China and Tibet, and appeared to have brought a substantial contribution to the economic wealth of Central Tibet in particular. Within Mongolia, trade also contributed to moving pilgrims, since great fairs gathering Chinese and Mongol peddlers were held on the main festival days of the largest monasteries.³⁸

3. Solitary commoners or small group of pilgrims—monks and laypersons—traveling on foot, some of them performing full-length prostrations (see below).
4. *Badarchi* lamas. The term *badarchi* (lit. one with an alms bowl³⁹) designates several kinds of itinerant monks who travelled on foot only; only the first one can be called ‘pilgrim’:
 - a. monk-pilgrims and novice-pilgrims—usually young ones, men only, travelling alone or in small parties—, going from monastery to monastery, in Mongolia or abroad, to worship pilgrimage sites and great masters. A sub-category of these monk-pilgrims travelled to Labrang and Kumbum monasteries and to Central Tibet to further their religious training, receive teachings, and encounter great masters. They traveled entirely without means and lived of alms received on the way (Fig. 3). They spent several years touring the great Tibetan centers, staying from two months to a year in each monastery.⁴⁰ Many of them studied in the great colleges of Drépung (‘Bras spungs) (especially in Gomang [sGo mang] College) and Séra (Se ra), and for a minority, passed the highest academic degrees. Many of these monks never returned to Mongolia. Even the monks trained in the academic colleges of Mongolia had to travel to continue their education, since they could only obtain the highest academic degrees of *rdo rams pa* and *lha rams pa* in Tibet.
 - b. monks (usually *getsüls* or *bandis*, i.e. novices and monks who had not taken the full ordination) who lived a peripatetic life begging on their way, wandering

³⁶ See James Gilmour, *Among the Mongols* (New York: Praeger, [1883] 1970), 357–358.

³⁷ Of course, Mongol herders of the Qing empire had to nomadize inside their banner, on relatively short distances compared to pilgrimages abroad. On Mongol trade at Wutaishan: Charleux, *Nomads*, 234–237.

³⁸ Charleux, *Nomads*, 50.

³⁹ *Badar*, Skt. *pātra*, alms bowl, donation, alms, contribution; *badar barikhu-* ask for alms, donations; *badarchila-*, to collect contributions for a religious purpose.

⁴⁰ Pozdneev, *Religion*, 275.

for months or years from monastery to monastery (Fig. 4).⁴¹ They often were Nyingmapa (rNying ma pa) practitioners. When a *badarchi* requested overnight lodging in a lay household, he was often asked to recite or read some sacred text. Some of them were attached to a monastery and settled there in the winter months.

- c. monks officially sent by their monastery on alms rounds to collect donations, for instance to rebuild a temple. They went alone or two or three together, from yurt to yurt, spending about three months collecting alms, in spring and autumn. They carried a notice explaining the reason of the solicitation. When the economic conditions of their monastery worsened in the late nineteenth century, such activities became more frequent, and appeared to be like begging alms.

Badarchis played an important role in propagating news and stories in the Mongol countryside. In Mongolian folk tales, they are often humorously depicted as clever tricksters who use skilful and often unorthodox means to bring awareness into people's lives. These monk-pilgrims participated in the life and general economy of cities like Urga, which had a very poor district consisting of yurts and tents. Northeast of this district was the 'Stüpa [That One] Crawls Under' (Shirgaadag suburga, Khalkh-Mo. Shurgadag suvraga, built over an archway); *badarchi* lamas used to pass under it when they left on their pilgrimage.⁴² We may assume it was a ritual of blessing and purification.



Figure 3. A lama student



Figure 4. A wandering lama

(Ladislav Forbath 1936)

⁴¹ Pozdneev, *Religion*, 242.

⁴² Krisztina Teleki, *Monasteries and Temples of Bogdiin Khüree* (Ulaanbaatar: Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, 2011), 211, quoting Pürev, *Mongolyn uls töriin töv* [The center of the Mongolian state] (Ulaanbaatar, 1994), 45.

5. At last, Mongols also combined pilgrimages to other motivations to journey abroad, such as searching for the reincarnation of a *khutugtu*, or carrying the ashes of their relatives to bury them in Wutaishan.⁴³

Pilgrims to Lhasa were not the same as pilgrims to Wutaishan and Beijing in terms of geographic origin, gender, motivations, status, and mode of travel. While short-distance pilgrimage concerned all Mongols, few of them could undertake the long and perilous trip to Tibet. Most of the pilgrims to Lhasa were either wealthy laypeople or lamas, notably *badarchis*; the great majority were men.⁴⁴ They went either on foot (especially the lamas) or on horse or camel back with trade caravans. The majority were Buryats, Kalmyks from the Volga and Torguts from Xinjiang (Eastern Turkestan),⁴⁵ as well as Khalkhas. While Buryat pilgrims first went to Urga, Kalmyks and Torguts traveled directly to Tibet by crossing Jungaria (north Xinjiang) and west Gansu. By contrast, Wutaishan attracted more ordinary pilgrims on a more frequent basis, women included⁴⁶ (Fig. 5). While many lay and cleric men went alone by foot or in great prostrations, there were also many families mounted on horses and camels, and the majority of them were Inner Mongols.



*Figure 5. Khalkha pilgrims
(John Blofeld 1959)*

⁴³ Charleux, *Nomads*, 245–255.

⁴⁴ Prejevalsky, *Mongolia*, I, 72.

⁴⁵ On Kalmyk pilgrimages and failed attempts to reach Tibet: Bormanshinov, “Kalmyk Pilgrims,” 1–23.

⁴⁶ Women were also prominent travelers in Torguud pilgrim’s parties to Urga in the nineteenth century, see Schlesinger, “The Qing Invention of Nature,” 167.

The Pilgrims' Journey

Practical Matters

We have very few information on how pilgrims prepared for their journey, but like for any other travel, present-day Mongols ask a lama astrologist or check in an almanac whether the day of departure is auspicious for traveling and whether the journey will be safe.⁴⁷ They go to the nearest monastery to ask for blessings and obtain names of monks or relatives who could help and lodge them on their way. In the past, lay and monk pilgrims often respected certain vows such as fasting or abstinence from meat,⁴⁸ and hunting was generally prohibited. But some pilgrims to Lhasa carried a weapon and hunted, including lamas who temporarily broke their vows to face the difficulties of the journey.⁴⁹

En route, like during a nomadization, the pilgrims made offerings, especially to the master-spirits of the land—to ask for a safe passage and avoid high-altitude sickness—and avoided pronouncing the true names of mountains.⁵⁰ Most of them traveled in groups of persons of the same family, encampment or monastery, often led by a lama, or in different groups who pooled their energies to help each other.⁵¹ Others walked alone, but, when approaching their goal, they often joined other groups.

Like caravanners, pilgrims probably oriented themselves with the stars. They asked their way to locals, and in Tibet, they hired local guides to show them dangerous places.⁵² Some sources mention the use of itinerary maps (from one point to another, with indications of mountains, rivers, springs and wells) but these do not seem to have been common and none of them seems to have been preserved.⁵³ Caravans and pilgrims travelling alone or in small groups did not take the same roads: while small groups of pilgrims and *badarchi* lamas looked for yurts and other inhabited areas for

⁴⁷ The medium of Labrang Monastery fixed the day of departure of Tsybikov's caravan: Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 48.

⁴⁸ Mo. *batsag*, *matsag*, *batsag-un sanwar*, Tib. *bsnyen gnas*, Skt. *upavāsatha*. Such vows were also taken by devotees on the eighth, fifteenth and thirtieth day of every lunar month and on major holy days: Pozdneev, *Religion*, 574–578.

⁴⁹ While some hunted, others tried to save the animals' lives, see Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 30, 67. Prejevalsky (*Mongolia*, I, 72) writes that every man in his caravan, including pilgrims, carried weapons. But according to law, nobles were explicitly forbidden to carry weapons when going on pilgrimage, see Heuschert-Laage "Globalisation or Isolation," 33. On pilgrims carrying weapons: Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature," 167 note 23, 168, 172.

⁵⁰ Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 52, 70.

⁵¹ The study of the stone inscriptions of Wutaishan shows that many pilgrims traveled in groups. Some inscriptions bear only one name, whereas others have up to thirty, but the average group size is seven or eight names, see Charleux, *Nomads*, 215. The passports confirm that the majority of pilgrims came in groups mixing men and women, lamas and laypersons. For instance, a passport issued by the ruler prince of the Alashan Banner in 1836 gives eight people the authorization to cross the border, make a pilgrimage to Wutaishan and go back to their banner: five men (lamas and commoners) and three 'women and children'—along with eleven camels to carry people and belongings, see digitized archives of Alashan Banner, n°101-05-0098-011-0016-01.

⁵² Namsaraev Badma-Bazar. "Khudagsha Batyn usharalta."

⁵³ Malcom Rosholt, "To the Edsin Gol: A Wisconsinite's Journey in Inner Mongolia, 1935," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 60/3 (Spring 1977), 219.

board and lodging, caravanners each had their own route and tended to stay away from habitations, preferring roads which provided sufficient pasture.

Long-distance pilgrimages required money and time. Some pilgrims spent a half or a third of their entire belongings to get to a distant pilgrimage place, or even everything they owned. In the early twentieth century, the Mongol economy was still partially based on pastoral products, and the pilgrims needed cash money to undertake their pilgrimage abroad. Pilgrims sold horses and sheep in exchange for silver money before leaving, or on the way.⁵⁴ They carried money, grain, tea, precious metals and stones, brocades, etc. to sell or offer to monasteries. Others survived by begging. Many Mongols going to Lhasa were recruited as servants in caravans.⁵⁵ Once in Lhasa, some poor Khalkha pilgrims survived by begging and did not come back home, but generally speaking they were able to travel and live with a very small amount of money.⁵⁶



Figure 6. Mongol pilgrims to Tibet
(SeM/UiG)



Figure 7. Mongolians in Lhasa
(Edmund Candler 1905)

⁵⁴ Charleux, *Nomads*, 226–227, about the pilgrimage to Wutaishan.

⁵⁵ Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 264.

⁵⁶ Pozdneev, *Religion*, 276.

Khalkha and Inner Mongol pilgrims had to obtain a travel permit or passport from the administration of their banner.⁵⁷ Buddhist high-ranking monks seemed to have travelled very freely across banner boundaries through inter-monastery networks,⁵⁸ but nobles and officials could not travel outside their banner without imperial authorization;⁵⁹ otherwise they incurred heavy fines. Many passports (*jam yabukhu temdeg*) for authorizing pilgrims to cross their banners' boundaries were preserved in Inner Mongolia⁶⁰. Groups of pilgrims requested a group passport from the civil authorities: on these were written the number of people, their names, their banner, their rank (if applicable), the number of riding and pack animals, the number of weapons such as muskets and guns, and the time, destination and purpose of travel. Generally speaking, pilgrims' passports for monks and commoners were easily obtained, but the procedure was longer for members of the nobility, whose mobility was strictly controlled: one had to request permission well in advance to make a pilgrimage to places such as Urga, Wutaishan, or Lhasa to the head of the league, who sent a report to the Lifanyuan (the Board of Government of the Outer Regions). "If the *Lifanyuan* had no objection, the matter was transferred to the Board of War and, finally, it was up to the Board of War to issue a permit. . . . If the original itinerary was changed, both the *Lifanyuan* and the Board of War had to be informed."⁶¹ Quoting a Manchu document, Schlesinger adds that "while requests were never denied, they had to be made nonetheless – and the emperor had to be informed of these movements."⁶² After the demise of the Qing dynasty, Inner and Outer Mongol pilgrims seem to have been able to cross borders relatively easily: according to Owen Lattimore, in 1941 "pilgrims and casual travelers move without hindrance across banner frontiers."⁶³

From the second half of the eighteenth century on, the Buryats and Kalmyks, being subjects of the Russian empire, were forbidden to enter Tibet.⁶⁴ Incurring exclusion as foreigners and severe punishment, they nevertheless made secret pilgrimages as late as the 1920s (when they were not sent back at the border), concealing their identity by saying they were Khalkha. Both Agvan Dorzhiev in 1878 and Tsybikov in 1899–1900 called themselves Khalkha to enter the forbidden country.

⁵⁷ On special formalities for Oirat Mongols: Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature," 166, note 20.

⁵⁸ Monks had to obtain a passport from their monastery. The Shabi office (the office of the Jebtsündamba Khutugtu's estate) readily delivered free travel permits to go to Wutaishan and Tibet to lamas belonging to the Shabi estate, see Alexander Andreyev, "Indian Pundits and the Russian Exploration of Tibet: An Unknown Story of the Great Game Era," *Central Asiatic Journal* 451 (2001), 171.

⁵⁹ Officials, even princes and dukes, had to ask for a leave of absence (*chilüü gyuu*).

⁶⁰ Notably in the archives of Alashan. See also examples cited by Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature," 165–168.

⁶¹ Heuschert-Laage, "Globalisation or Isolation," 33.

⁶² Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature," 165.

⁶³ Owen Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys* (London: The Travel Book Club, 1942), 189.

⁶⁴ On the refusal of the Russian government to issue passports and the obstacles placed in their way by Chinese authorities: Bormanshinov, "Kalmyk Pilgrims," 2, 20; Alexander Andreyev, "An Unknown Russian Memoir by Agvan Dorzhiev," *Inner Asia* 3/1–2 (2001), 27–40.

Difficulties

Travelers' accounts show a major difference between journeys in the Mongolian-speaking world and those abroad. Buryat pilgrims still felt almost at home when they arrived in Urga. What made the difference was hospitality: in Mongolia, walking pilgrims could travel with no other means than their backpack; they enjoyed the hospitality in yurts of other Mongols and received food and offerings en route from alms-givers.⁶⁵ Monks who could prove their status stayed in the guest quarters of larger monasteries as long as they followed the strict rules; they were immediately integrated into the monastic activities for the duration of their visit and participated in rituals and chanting.⁶⁶ In Outer Mongolia, the highest officials, the *ambans* in Urga and the military governor in Uliyasutai, were responsible for making the roads safe.⁶⁷ When traveling in Tibet, pilgrims enjoyed hospitality in some Mongol-populated areas,⁶⁸ notably in Kumbum Monastery where they often had relatives. After the Tsaidam Basin, they really were in a foreign land. But before arriving in Lhasa they were greeted by Mongol lamas sent by the Khalkha monks of Drépung, who organized their lodging.⁶⁹

Traveling through Chinese territory to reach Wutaishan or Beijing entailed great hardship for Mongols, who were afraid of being cheated by Chinese. Although many traveled with their own tent and herds, they could not live completely self-sufficiently. These had to buy fodder and fuel and even pay to water their animals, as well as pay taxes. But many Shanxi traders and shopkeepers learned to speak Mongolian and tried to facilitate their travels by running inns every 20 kilometers to Wutaishan, and also welcomed pilgrims in poor farmhouses. As for princes and officials, they were welcomed at the foot of the mountain by monks who led them to their Wutaishan monastery: these monks, called *ombo lama* (fund-raising monk) arranged their sleeping in inns and served as translators in case of problems.⁷⁰

The dangers of the road, the physical hardship and the financial cost were limiting factors for Mongols travelling to Lhasa. This was a main reason why pilgrims often travelled in groups and with trade caravans, or converged and agglutinated on the main roads with other pilgrims. Noblemen and wealthy reincarnations, loaded with alms, were frequently attacked or ransomed by brigands on the way, and frightening tales from their returning compatriots circulated about the rarefied air, or the attacks of the Goloks and the Black Tanguts (Amdo Tibetans).⁷¹ Prejevalsky wrote that "In February

⁶⁵ "Foot-travelers, for the most part, trust to the hospitality of the inhabitants of the districts through which they pass for lodgings", see Gilmour, *Among the Mongols*, 121.

⁶⁶ Pozdneev, *Religion*, 275–276.

⁶⁷ Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature," 167.

⁶⁸ Tsybikov's caravan lodged in yurts of acquaintances at Nagchu, 275 kilometers from Lhasa. Those who planned to return from Lhasa following the same route left there some of their animals and provisions, see Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 71.

⁶⁹ Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 75.

⁷⁰ Charleux, *Nomads*, 257, 273–274.

⁷¹ Tsybikov recounts of the numerous swindles, thefts of animals, attacks and other misadventures, notably on his way back, see *Un Pèlerin*, 51, 268–273.

1870, a caravan which left Lhasa 300 strong, with 1,000 beasts of burden, in a violent snow-storm, followed by severe cold, lost all the animals and fifty men besides. One of the survivors related to us how, when they found that their beasts were dying by the score every day . . . only three men were kept alive . . .”⁷² While crossing the Tsaidam, Tsybikov’s caravan was ransomed by a local brigand, who levied a tax of two sapeques per pilgrim to ‘protect them.’⁷³ In the mid-1920s, Chinese scholar politician Ma Hetian met two Mongol lamas in Ejin Gol returning from a pilgrimage to India, part of a group of seventeen men and a number of camels and horses. Carrying heavy loads, they had crossed Kukunor and Tibet; three of them had died of malaria. It took them a total of seven years, chiefly on foot, except for a short train ride.⁷⁴

On the road pilgrims were usually in a hurry. They visited main monasteries along the way and stopped only if needed. Pilgrims travelled between 30 and 50 kilometers a day, but travelling with flocks and herds took much more time. Tsybikov’s caravan had covered the 1,850 kilometers from Kumbum to Lhasa in about a hundred days (including 15 full days’ rest and 17 stops of one day each—walking or riding between 15 and 70 kilometers a day).⁷⁵ Agvan Dorzhiev made the journey from Urga to Lhasa in 90 days.⁷⁶ The Mongols stayed two or three months in Lhasa, and one or two months in Wutaishan; they usually made the vow to come back in this lifetime or a future one. As in many pilgrimages all around the world, the return journey was generally made in a hurry.⁷⁷

On their return from a pilgrimage, nobles were greeted by a congratulatory speech that became a genre of oral literature.⁷⁸ Long-distance pilgrimages were also seen as dangerous because pilgrims were not protected by the local deities of their homeland. The Buryat pilgrim Namsaraev Badma-Bazar returning home from a three-year pilgrimage in Tibet, did not directly arrive at his family yurt. He stayed at a distance of it and made a fire for three days, to purify himself from the pollution of travelling, and become familiar again to his *nutug* and with the deities of the land and water.⁷⁹

Walking Pilgrims

Whatever the means of transportation, pilgrimage is a physical adventure. The significance and merit of the journey varied according to the mode of transportation. The pilgrimage was probably less significant for mounted pilgrims than for penitents

⁷² Prejevalsky, *Mongolia*, vol. II, 185–186.

⁷³ Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 51.

⁷⁴ Ma, Ho-t’ien *Chinese Agent in Mongolia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1949), 14–15.

⁷⁵ On the road to Lhasa, the caravans stopped for two weeks in the Tsaidam so the animals could regain their strength, see Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 64.

⁷⁶ Martin and Norbu, “Dorjiev,” 70 n. 180.

⁷⁷ Tsybikov’s is one of the rare travelogues that details the journey back from Tibet. He tells how pilgrims make prostrations and incense offerings in the direction of Lhasa to say goodbye and vow to come back, see *Un Pèlerin*, 266.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Henry Serruys, “A Genre of Oral Literature in Mongolia: The Addresses,” *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1977): 555–613.

⁷⁹ Namsaraev Badma-Bazar. “Khudagsha Batyn usharalta”, n.p.

performing great prostrations and for pilgrims traveling on foot for months and years, enduring the hardships of the road and sometimes falling ill, getting robbed or even dying along the way. Since traveling in a caravan is well-documented,⁸⁰ I will here focus on pilgrims who went on foot or in great prostrations.

Pilgrims made a vow to walk or prostrate, in order to fulfill an aim (cure their father or mother for instance). Although traveling alone on foot over a long distance was generally seen by outsiders as a sign of poverty,⁸¹ in Buddhism it was first and foremost a form of penance and a way to obtain greater merit, or fulfill a vow.⁸² We can assume that traveling on foot was seen as particularly praiseworthy for this horse-riding people.

In Mongolia, monasteries had a stele or a sign requiring anyone to dismount one's horse, sometimes as far as one kilometer from their entrance.⁸³ Still today, as a sign of piety, modern Mongol devotees going to a temple fair usually walk for at least the last few hundred meters.

On average, Mongol pilgrims to Wutaishan walked 30 or 35 to 45 kilometers a day; it could take more than a year for Buryats and Khalkha pilgrims to reach Lhasa. Walking pilgrims were generally commoners, but some high clerics chose to walk too. For instance around 1878, the head lama (*jasag lama*) of Wutaishan went on foot to Tibet, in spite of his old age, because Buryat lama Jangchup Tsültrim Pelzangpo (Agvan Dorzhiev's main tutor) told him that "To make pilgrimage to Tibet sitting in a sedan chair held up by men would be meaningless."⁸⁴ Even princes could take the robe of a penitent.⁸⁵ Mounted pilgrims also dismounted at some places: in the 'celestial sands' of Alashan, pilgrims to Lhasa dismounted their camels because they believed that crossing that part of the Gobi on foot gave merit equal to the recitation of the eight thousand verses of the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*.⁸⁶

Western travelers' accounts have plenty of examples of encounters with walking pilgrims. Pozdneev met in Khalkha Mongolia several *badarchi* lamas with a *duldui* (staff, cane), either on their way to worship at Amarbayasgalant kheid or coming from it, loudly

⁸⁰ On Mongol journeying in caravans: Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys*, 137–163, and "Caravan Routes of Inner Asia: The Third 'Asian Lecture,'" *The Geographical Journal* 72(6) (December 1928): 497–528; Martha Avery, *The Tea Road: China and Russia Meet Across the Steppe* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2003). On the equipment of caravans (tools, kitchen utensils, bowls and containers, sacks, bags and pockets for foodstuffs and medicine for animals, fire transporters, hammers, cords etc.): Christel Braae, *Among Herders of Inner Mongolia: The Haslund-Christensen Collection at the National Museum of Denmark* (Lancaster and Oakville, CT: The Carlsberg Foundation's Nomad Research Project and Aarhus University Press, Aarhus), 2017, 364–367, 403, 435–437.

⁸¹ Gilmour remarks that "a vast amount of foot travelling is done. A large proportion of the travelling on foot is that of poor men who go on religious pilgrimages", see *Among the Mongols*, 121.

⁸² In Tibetan pilgrimages in general, walking or progressing in great prostrations is the norm, but in the pilgrimage to Amnye Machen, many Gologs make the pilgrimage on horseback, see Katia Buffetrille, "The Great Pilgrimage of A-myes rma-chen: Written Traditions, Living Realities," in *Mandala and Landscape*, 75–132, ed. Alexander W. Macdonald (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997).

⁸³ Pozdneev insists that in Mongolia pilgrims must approach a monastery on foot, see *Religion*, 58–59.

⁸⁴ Martin and Norbu, "Dorjiev," 12–13, quoting Agvan Dorzhiev's 1923 autobiography.

⁸⁵ Haslund-Christensen, *Men and Gods in Mongolia (Zayagan)* (London: Trench, Trubner & Co 1935), 308.

⁸⁶ Tsybikov, *Un Pèlerin*, 29.

intoning Tibetan prayers; in the Khangai he met with two pilgrims, a man and a woman, on their way to Beijing to worship the Sandalwood Buddha.⁸⁷ Westerners often made note of the great exhaustion of the pitiable pilgrims. Buddhist scholar John Blofeld met an old Mongol who had walked all the way from northern Manchuria, spending over two years on the road.⁸⁸ Swiss traveler Walter Bosshard wanted to help a pitiable monk-pilgrim in Dörben Kheükhed Banner (Ulaanchab League) on the way to Wutaishan; he had walked for five months from a monastery in Manchuria. He was lying on the road, his back leant against a bundle to protect him from wind and rain; his robe and shoes were in tatters and his monk's hat so worn that one could not distinguish its color. But he refused to ride in Bosshard's car: "I want to do my pilgrimage on foot. How could I let myself be driven in such a car and give up all the virtues I have accumulated up to this day? . . . Your devil's car cannot increase the number of my virtues!"⁸⁹

Pilgrims on foot were often described as poor mendicants. Some walked in a state of stupor. Haslund-Christensen met a pilgrim going to Urga who seemed to walk and sleep at the same time.⁹⁰ He mentions "emaciated wanderers who spent years of their lives in penitential journeys from one Buddhist holy place to another":

Alone or in small groups they crawled along across steppes and deserts, over mountains and rivers, overcoming all obstacles that met them on their way. When the route lay through unpopulated and barren country its length was doubled, for food and water had to be carried with them, and every time the pilgrim had measured out a few hundred yards he had to return over the same stretch to fetch the indispensable provisions. . . . Such pilgrimages often take years and frequently the frail body does not reach its goal. The thought that Death may meet them on the way has no terror for the faithful, for the soul that is set free on such a journey rises to a higher plane than that on which he lived during his time on earth and the ultimate goal draws nearer. . . . Many times in dismal and Godforsaken regions I have come upon such dying pilgrims. And I have tried to still the hungry conscience of the well fed by filling them up with my superfluity of material goods. They have accepted them with friendly but impersonal gratitude. They have sat by my fireside, covered in rags but which a soul made whole. I have listened to their words and understood that these expressed what was for them a deep and sincere truth. And I have sat there and watched them resume their agonizing course towards that enticing distant goal, followed their tardy disappearance.⁹¹

Stories of bodhisattvas or saints appearing on the road to help miserable pilgrims were common. Modern Inner Mongols say that Mañjuśrī sometimes appears to

⁸⁷ Aleksei M. Pozdnev, *Mongolia and the Mongols*, vol. I (Bloomington: Mouton & Co., [1896] 1971), 33, 399.

⁸⁸ John Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life: The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist* (London: Rider & Co., 1959), 88.

⁸⁹ Bosshard, Walter, *Sous la yourte mongole: À travers les steppes de l'Asie Centrale* (Paris: Amiot-Dumont [1950] 1954), 199–201.

⁹⁰ Henning Haslund-Christensen, *Tents in Mongolia: Adventures and Experiences among the Nomads of Central Asia* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner [1932] 1954), 172.

⁹¹ Haslund-Christensen, *Men and Gods*, 28.

accompany and protect the exhausted and sick,⁹² which recalls the many stories about encounters with apparitions of Kōbō Daishi on the Japanese Shikoku pilgrimage or encounters with Santiago on Europe's Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage.⁹³

Full-Length Prostrations

Many lay and monk pilgrims chose to go on pilgrimage making full prostrations every third step (*unaju morgü-*, lit. 'to fall down and bow') without interruption until reaching their destination (Fig. 8).⁹⁴ They dropped to the ground with arms stretched out in front, and marked the place their body had reached. After rising, they walked three steps, with the third step reaching the previously drawn line; from here they made a bow, stretched out flat on the ground, and so on. The Scottish missionary James Gilmour (1843–1891), who travelled in Mongolia in the manner of a *badarchi* lama in the 1870s, describes the technique of a Mongol lama:

He had a piece of wood in his hand, and with it marked the ground as far forward he could reach, then got up and walked forward to the mark, taking care, however, to keep a good way inside it. He was constantly muttering something or other, both when upright and then prostrate.⁹⁵



Mongolian pilgrims on their toilsome way to Bogdo Kure (the Cloister of God)

⁹² Information from U. Hurelbaatar and U. Ujeed, repeated by other pilgrims. Chinese Chan master Xuyun who reached Wutaishan in great prostrations in 1882–1883, was saved by a beggar who was none other than Mañjuśrī when he was almost dying of cold (Charleux, *Nomads*, 268).

⁹³ Reader, *Making Pilgrimages*, 10–11.

⁹⁴ According to Ekaterina Sobkovyak, prostrations also were legal punishments: “Mongolian Buddhist Monasteries – the isles of sedentariness in the nomadic world and their administration,” paper held at the international conference “Mobility and immobility in Mongolian societies,” September 11–13, 2018 at the University of Bern – published in this volume (as in the European Middle-Ages, pilgrimage was also an afflictive sentence imposed by the courts).

⁹⁵ James Gilmour, *More About the Mongols* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1893), 102.

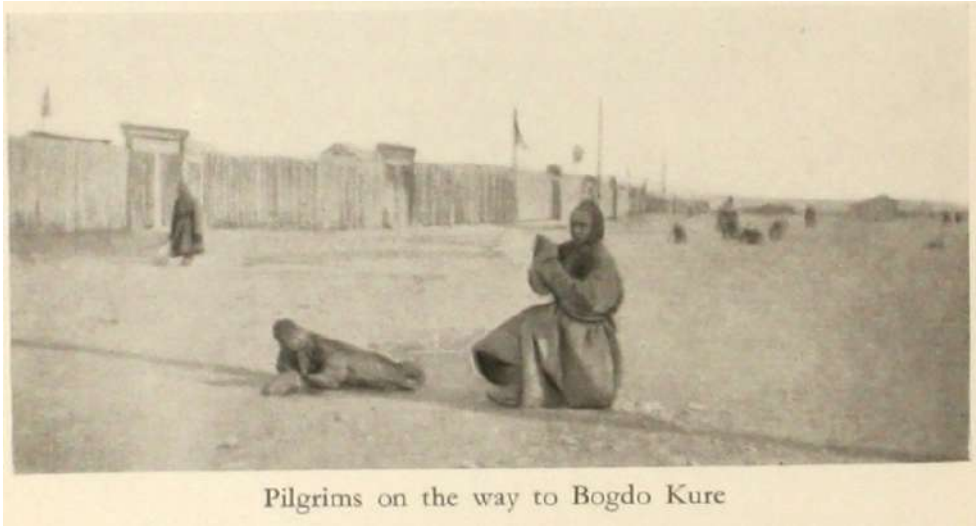


Figure 8. Mongol pilgrims on their way to Urga
(Haslund-Christensen 1934)

It is said that they measured the whole distance with their body. According to American diplomat and Tibetologist William W. Rockhill, “Months are frequently taken in performing this highly meritorious deed, for three or four miles a day when gone over in this fashion are enough to exhaust the strongest man.”⁹⁶ Even more so than walking, the journey performed in great prostrations takes on as much spiritual significance as the destination itself. Full-length prostrations not only were performed to increase one’s merit but also to connect the whole body with the sacred ground, get into physical contact with the energy or blessing (*adistid*, from Sanskrit *adīṣṭhāna*, Tib. *byin rlabs*) of the sacred place and absorb its power, and cleanse the pollutions and defilements. According to Christian missionary Joseph Edkins:

[A]long the road [from Beijing to Wutaishan] may occasionally be seen more than usually devout pilgrims prostrating themselves on the ground all the way to (their destination)... To bow down and fall at full length before the images is meritorious. To do this all along the road must be far more meritorious. The pilgrim says to himself: - “I will make a vow. I will therefore prostrate myself at every third step. Though the distance is long, I shall arrive in a month, two months, or three, and I can walk back without prostrations on my return.”⁹⁷

According to Swallow in 1903:

We heard many wonderful tales about the pilgrims; men had come on foot from three thousand miles away, knocking their heads on the ground—some one, and some even three times for every step they walked. Most of

⁹⁶ William W. Rockhill, “An American in Tibet: An Account of a Journey through an Unknown Land,” *The Century Magazine* (November) 41 (1890), 10.

⁹⁷ Rev. Joseph Edkins, *Religion in China; Containing a Brief Account of the Three Religions of the Chinese: With Observations on the Prospects of Christian Conversion Amongst that People* (London: Trübner & Co. [1878] 1893) 211.

them came begging their way, and had been known to die from hunger and fatigue when within sight of their Mecca.⁹⁸

These pilgrims protected their hands with pieces of wood tied on with leather thongs, and their elbows and knees with pieces of cloth, and they wore a kerchief round their heads in order to prevent injury to their foreheads.

When arrived at their destination, they continued full-length prostrations to circumambulate monasteries and stupas. For instance, they made the vow to prostrate one hundred thousand times on the circumambulation path surrounding Kumbum monastery or Urga's Eastern Monastery and Gandan (Fig. 9).



*Figure 9. Pilgrims in prostrations in front of the gate of the Summer Palace
(B.Sharav, early 20th century)*

Nowadays, a few pilgrims still travel this way; they can be accompanied by a young boy who carries a begging bowl and cares for their belongings, or travel alone, with a backpack or a small cart to carry all their necessities. The latter first cover the distance they plan to walk for the day, leave their cart, then walk back to their starting point and make prostrations up to the cart. If they find a place to sleep overnight, the next day they return to the spot where they made their last prostration and start again from there. A few years ago, an old woman traveling this way to Wutaishan from Naiman Banner

⁹⁸ R.W. Swallow, "A journey to Wu Tai Shan, one of the Meccas of Buddhism," *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* (1903), 182.

in eastern Inner Mongolia had her cart stolen on the way close to her destination; she then had to go back home. She made the pilgrimage again one year later, starting the prostrations afresh from home, and this time made it to the mountain.⁹⁹

The Walking Pilgrims' Equipment

The pedestrian pilgrims' equipment was similar to that of the *badarchi* lamas. It includes a heavy 'backpack' with a wooden frame to carry their luggage.¹⁰⁰ The equipment carried by the *badarchi* lamas has been described by Gochoo as "equivalent to a whole family in movement."¹⁰¹ The average set of gear included fifty-four objects (Fig. 10):



Figure 10. Equipment of the *badarchi* lama
(Gochoo 1970)

⁹⁹ Information from U. Ujeed, 2010.

¹⁰⁰ According to Braae (*Among Herders*, 579), the backpack had the advantage of leaving them free to perform prostrations; yet as mentioned *supra* and according to old photos, they performed full prostrations without their backpack (either because they had left it somewhere or because an attendant carried their luggage).

¹⁰¹ C. Gochoo, "Le Badarçi mongol," *Études Mongoles* 1 (1970), 70–77; also, Heissig, *Geschichte*, 743–744.

- the ‘backpack’ (*yandag*): a tall bag with a two-part wooden frame made of curved willow sticks (83x79 cm.);
- a tent (2x2 m.) with ten stakes;
- a ‘Tibetan cauldron’ (*Tanggud togoo*) the lid of which is used as plate and cup (23.5 cm. in diameter), and a leather bag for the cauldron, in which are stored tea, salt, a spoon, etc.;
- a felt mattress or carpet with cotton-lining (158x74 cm.) and its cover, and a goatskin to protect the mattress from dampness;
- a cotton strap with two brass rings—a rope to tighten the backpack and hold the tent in place;
- an aluminum flask for water;
- 5 kg. of food: (wheat?) flour (1 kg.), barley flour (1 kg.), meat dried for five years (1 kg.),¹⁰² dry cheese (1 kg.) in individual bags; salt (in a bamboo case or goat leather bag), one or two goat leather bags for tea (1 kg.),¹⁰³ designed to withstand heat and humidity, and 8 empty bags (1 kg.);
- small individual bags containing herbs from Lhasa (for fumigations), herbs from Erdeni Juu Monastery, juniper from Otkhon Tngri Mountain, incense sticks, *khadag*, herbs to burn against enraged dogs and three divination dice;
- a dark-colored *deel* (robe-coat), black Mongol boots, a *joshoo* hat, a belt, underwear, rosary beads, a wide red scarf on the left shoulder, an amulet box with representation of deities, a knife,
- two staffs—to shoo away dogs when the *badarchi lama* approaches a yurt and to pitch his tent.¹⁰⁴ When dogs attacked him, he would let them bite onto one stick while crushing their noses with the other (Fig. 11–14).



Figure 11. *Badarchi shooing away dogs*
(B.Sharav, circa 1915)

¹⁰² *Bortsa*: dried beef, mutton or camel meat cut into strips or put into powder and dried. It was eaten raw, mixed with hot water, or cooked into noodle soup.

¹⁰³ When short of tea, Mongols use substitutes such as thyme (*ganga*) and *terelji* (a kind of rhododendron), which also have medicinal properties.

¹⁰⁴ Gochoo, “Le Badarci.”



*Figure 12. An old pilgrim and troubadour
(Henning Haslund-Christensen 1939)*



*Figure 13. An old pilgrim makes tea
(Sven A.Hedin 1931)*



*Figure 14. Pilgrims eating and sleeping
(B.Sharav, circa 1915)*

Destitute travelers had a smaller backpack with no tent. The catalogue of the Haslund-Christensen collection on the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen includes a small travel tent (*jodgar*) with a square plan and seven poles for traveling

monks and pilgrims; these can also have a single pole.¹⁰⁵ In the same collection are two pilgrims' backpacks (respectively 66 and 70 centimeters high, with a frame of horseshoe-shaped wickerwork and cross-bars held tightly together with skin straps), and a tiny one with symbolic and ritual value. According to the collector's notes, the latter was made by families who wished to have a boy and "promise the Gods that the expected child will become a lama and pilgrim. As soon as the child walks, the urek [*üürge*, Khalkh-Mo. *üüreg*] is tied to his back and the family members will lead him daily on small 'pilgrimages' around the fireplace; each such pilgrimage ends in front of the altar."¹⁰⁶

Judging from ancient pictures, it seems that Mongol pilgrims did not wear any special clothing for the pilgrimage, but another source writes that pilgrims to Erdeni Juu used special headgear, robe-coats (*deel*) and gloves.¹⁰⁷ Present-day elderly Khalkha pilgrims wear their best *deel* to undertake a pilgrimage.

Badarchi lamas also carried a begging bowl, a breviary and various ritual texts—such as *Ariun sang* (a prayer for incense offerings for purification), the *Vajracchedikā*, and *Gürim* (Tib. *Sku rim*, rites to avert, repel or exorcise misfortune)—and sometimes a small portable altar. Some pilgrims carried a weapon.

What visually distinguished pilgrims from ordinary devotees were their backpacks and the multiple amulets (Mo. *buu*, < Ch. *fu* 符) they carried over their robe-coats to protect them against robbers and against the dangers of the roads and the bad weather at the mountain passes. Even the poorest pilgrims wore amulets (Fig. 6).¹⁰⁸ They prayed along the way with rosary beads and prayer wheels. Describing Mongol pilgrims, Chinese agent Ma Ho-t'ien wrote:

[E]ach wore at his neck a bronze box about an inch square with a bronze Buddha inside. The face of the image was made of gold and the body was wrapped in red and yellow silk and satin. Along with this hung another box of glass and tin with a painting of Tsong-kha-pa inside. The little bronze Buddha had been presented to them by the Dalai Lama when they went through Tibet, and hence was of special value.¹⁰⁹

Amulet boxes (*guu* < Tib. *ga'u*) can be quite big (up to 12–13 centimeters) and heavy. They contained a miniature painted or sculpted image of a protective deity, as well as written charms and all kinds of small protective objects: a scrap of ritual scarf

¹⁰⁵ Braae, *Among Herders*, 232–233, cat. 5 and 10. The equipment of the *badarchi* is also displayed in the National Museum of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.

¹⁰⁶ Braae, *Among Herders*, 579–580, cat. 778–780. This catalogue also gives a wealth of information on the equipment of travelers: goat of dog skin for isolation against damp and cold (248, cat. 25), sheepskin coat, medicine bags etc.

¹⁰⁷ Lham, Pürevjav, "Erdene-Zuu Monastery as a Major Pilgrimage Center of Khalkh Mongol," in *The International Conference on "Erdene-Zuu: Past, Present and Future,"* ed. Matsukawa Takashi and Ayudai Ochir (Ulaanbaatar: The "Erdene-Zuu Project" and the International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations, 2011), 51–53.

¹⁰⁸ The following information comes from Mongol friends, from observation on the field and from the literature on amulets and amulet boxes in the Tibeto-Mongol world, see Charleux, *Nomads*, 260–262.

¹⁰⁹ Ma, *Chinese Agent*, 14–15.

that had covered a famous icon, any object worn by a revered figure (a bit of clothing, of *khatag*), leaves of sacred trees and so forth. Small ones were worn on a strap around the neck against the chest (for men and women), and larger ones were worn across the shoulder, on the right side under the arm (for men), fixed to the belt (for men) and sometimes at the back to prevent dangers coming from behind. A pilgrim could carry up to twelve boxes on his body. Those who traveled in a caravan fixed an amulet box around the neck of the leading animal. The amulet box itself, when inlaid with precious or semi-precious stones having specific qualities, and decorated with the Eight Auspicious Symbols or the wish-granting jewel (Skt. *cintāmaṇi*), also had protective properties. Worn on the outside of the coat, they were also visible symbols of wealth and status. At the completion of the journey, the largest boxes were kept on the household altar.

All the pilgrims also carried a rosary (*erikhe*) around the wrist or, more frequently, hanging from their neck.¹¹⁰ When walking they prayed while counting beads, in order to be protected against misfortune and difficulties on the road. They also prayed with hand prayer wheels, which are not used anymore (Fig. 6).

Conclusion

For commoners bounded to their territory, making a long-distance pilgrimage once in a lifetime was certainly an exotic journey that allowed them to cross boundaries, at least the physical ones. The walking pilgrims, especially those progressing in great prostrations, may have indeed had some kind of liminal experience according to Turner's theory. They certainly experienced, by the end of their journey, some degree of transformation through exhausting practices of prostrating and circumambulating. They could get a glimpse of Chinese or Tibetan lifestyle, eat Chinese or Tibetan food, and purchase various Chinese commodities in market towns along the way. Hence the fact that Mongols were nomad pastoralists do not mean that for them pilgrimage was close to everyday life.

The pilgrimage to Lhasa was a tremendous adventure; it was risky, dangerous and expensive, and the majority of pilgrims were men, with a great proportion of lamas. By contrast, Wutaishan attracted more ordinary pilgrims on a more frequent basis, women included. It was not a perilous adventure, and was accessible to families. The pilgrimage of commoners who traveled with their herds and flocks, and especially those who went every year and sold their beasts at the market at Wutaishan, was probably not "a great liminal experience breaking from everyday life." Similarly, the pilgrimage of princes and Buddhist dignitaries was not very different from other kinds of journey abroad. Yet any travel, including nomadization within one's *nutug*, required special precautions, rituals and taboos because the dangers were many, notably the risk of offending the *genii loci*. Travelling was also a polluting activity and pilgrims needed to be purified when back to their homeland.

¹¹⁰ Rosaries were personal objects, and one was not supposed to use someone else's, see Pozdneev, *Religion*, 220–221.

As in other pilgrimages all around the world, pilgrimage was often combined with long-distance trade. As Dorothea Heuschert-Lange points out, being the “generally accepted reason for travelling and inter-regional mobility,” pilgrimage may often have been a pretext for travelling for other reasons.¹¹¹ Many pilgrims survived on begging, and the impoverishment of entire regions in the nineteenth century caused the increase of vagrancy and notably of begging monks who could pretend to be pilgrims.¹¹² The pilgrim clothing and equipment was also a perfect disguise for spies and scholars such as Agvan Dorzhiev and Tsybikov, as well as for Christian missionaries and explorers, such as Sven Hedin.

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¹¹¹ Heuschert-Lange, citing nineteenth-century archives about low-ranking officials who intended to go to Urga and Wutaishan, see “Globalisation or Isolation,” 34.

¹¹² Walther Heissig, *Geschichte der mongolischen Literatur, Band 2: 20. Jahrhundert bis zum Einfluss moderner Ideen* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972), 743–744.

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Illustrations

- Fig. 1. "A high lama dignitary on his travels, free from the gaze of the curious, and escorted by mounted lamas of the middle class." Harry A. Franck, *Wandering in Northern China* (New York; London: The Century Co., 1923), face p. 145.
- Fig. 2. "Traveling tent of a wealthy Mongol pilgrim near Urga." A.S. Kent, *Old Tartar Trails* (Shanghai 1919), face p. 86.
- Fig. 3. A lama student traveling from one monastery to another. Ladislaus Forbath, *The New Mongolia*, as related by Joseph Geleta; translated from the Hungarian by Lawrence Wolfe (London and Toronto: W. Heinemann, 1936), between p. 103–104.

- Fig. 4. A wandering lama. Forbath, *The New Mongolia*, between p. 103–104
- Fig. 5. Khalkha pilgrims, ca. 1935-1936. John Blofeld, *The Wheel of Life. The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist* (London: Rider & co., 1959), between p. 97–98.
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- Fig. 13. “An old pilgrim makes tea – Shande-miao.” Sven A. Hedin, *Across the Gobi Desert*, translated from German by Herbert J. Cant (London: G. Routledge and sons, 1931), face p. 125.
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How Mongolian Tsam Dance Has Become Mobile Through Natsag Gankhuyag

Mungunchimeg Batmunkh

Abstract

Since the early 2000s, the Mongolian Buddhist masked ritual dance, in the Khalkh-Mongolian language called Tsam, has been re-introduced into the Mongolian religious field. Nowadays, a couple of Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia perform the Tsam once a year. Based on narrative interview material, this article examines the revival of the cultural Mongolian mask dance Tsam by the artist N. Gankhuyag. Theoretically drawing on performance theory as developed by Richard Schechner, it aims to contribute to an understanding of “Gankhuyag’s Tsam” as a mobile cultural artefact that contributes to a revival of a cultural tradition outside the monastic context in today’s Mongolia.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Mongolian Buddhist masked ritual dance, called Tsam in Mongolia,¹ has been re-introduced to the religious life of the Mongolian people. Nowadays a couple of Buddhist monasteries in Mongolia performs the Tsam once a year. The historical and contemporary aspects of the Mongolian masked dance include a special focus on a religious ritual theatre (Forbath 1936, 115, 267; Bleichsteiner 1937, 199; Heissig 1979, 271; Khürelbaatar 2002, 308; Batmunkh 2010, 44, 59, 93, 127; Baasansüren 2011, 82; Kollmar-Paulenz and Batmunkh 2015, 638 ff). The religious aspect of the ritual dance is represented by the Monks (Forbath 1936; Bleichsteiner 1937, 200 ff, 114; Pozdnev 1978, 505 ff; Ayako 1997, 20; Khürelbaatar 1999, 74–88; Batmunkh 2010, 62–63, 94; Bareja-Starzynska 2012, 153, 156; Kollmar-Paulenz and Batmunkh 2015, 652 ff), but the work of the Mongolian artist Gankhuyag (b. 1961) is focused on the artistic performance. He has been making Tsam-masks since 1988, starting during the Communist time. In this period, religion, traditions, culture and of course the dance were shunned topics (Bawden 1989, 377, 433; Weatherford 2012; Teleki 2015, 318).

I still wonder, how he has learned during this hard time to build the Tsam masks in the traditional Mongolian style from papier mâché (Tsultem 1989). Is this the only way to revive the Mongolian Tsam mask dance? How can Schechner’s ritual theory

¹ This mask dance, which has been in Tibet for about a millennium, is widespread in Buddhist schools and the Bon religion. In its centre stands the cult of the Dharmapālas, the Buddhist “protectors of the teachings”. It is a ritual of banishment and destruction of evil forces. Mongolian Tsam is derived from the Tibetan word cham (chams, i.e. dance). Both variants cham and chams are used. In Mongolia, the dance is called “Tsam”.

be applied to Gankhuyag's Tsam performance? Did the Tsam Dance become mobile through the founding of the Khan-Bogd² Ensemble by Gankhuyag?

In order to open these issues, I use the narrative interview as an approach. The method was developed by Fritz Schütze in the late 1970s (Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984, 1987). It has retained to be a basis method in biographical research (Lehmann/Kurth 2011, 137). Therefore, this research starts with the life story of the artist Gankhuyag.

I conducted several interviews with the artist in the form of the "Stegreiferzählung". (Lehmann/Kurth 2011, 137). In connection with the *Stegreiferzählung*, Gankhuyag's elaborated and detailed descriptions unfolded an interesting narrative about how it could come to the revival of a lost cultural tradition. In addition to situations of early childhood, coincidental events, and an awakening interest in the forbidden Tsam, he reintroduced the traditional method of making Tsam masks (Rintschen 1967, 45; Heissig 1989, 178, 240), dating back to Zanabazar (1635–1723) (Tsultem 1989; Corner 2006, 4; Uranchimeg 2016, 60).

Later on, he also stitched the corresponding costumes and in conversation with old monks he even reactivated the choreography of the Tsam performance (Galli 2009, 81). The ensemble Khan-Bogd, which was founded by him, presented the Tsam. Such dances are not performed on a religious-ritual level, therefore this Tsam dance is pure performance.

Performance theory was developed by Richard Schechner. On the one hand, the pair of terms "effectiveness and ritual" aims to change the participants, on the other hand the concept of "entertainment theatre" aims just to entertain the participants (Schechner 1990, 68 ff). Schechner is concerned with the experience of collective celebration, using processes that lead back and forth from the ritual to the theatre. In the movement from ritual to theatre, the ensemble of performers and viewers break apart and turn into a crowd of individual observers. With the motivation of Performance Studies as an independent academic discipline, Schechner extended the field of investigation of theatre studies to all kinds of performances, making his findings adaptable in, for example, anthropology or musicology and, besides these disciplines, other areas of responsibility just as rites in social life or politics (Schechner 1990, 97; Erika-Fischer 2009, ii; Bräunlein 2012, 100).

In this article, I apply Schechner's performance theory (Schechner 2003, xvii, 290) to the "Gankhuyag-Tsam" to see if it applies not only to historically evolved structures, but also to the attempt to revive a culture or tradition. Finally, it will be examined what the performance theory at the mobile level of "Gankhuyag's-Tsam" can contribute to a concept how to revive a cultural tradition.

² See <http://news.gogo.mn/r/214997>: "Хан богд" чуулгыг 1997 онд байгуулж дэлхийг тойрон 40 гаруй улсад аялан тоглолт хийж, Монголынхоо соёлыг сурталчилсан. <http://bi-bid.com/khanbogd.htm>: "The ensemble was founded by Natsag Gankhuyag in 1997. Since then, the Khan Bogd Ensemble has travelled to various destinations in the world, delivering the taste and experience of Mongolian music, art and culture to the wider audiences of France, Germany Belgium, Denmark, Luxemburg, Switzerland, and the United States."

Interview in the Form of the “Stegreiferzählung”

Gankhuyag was born and raised in Mongolia, where he has lived until 2002. His parents are both Mongolian artists with a strong passion for visual, iron, and wooden arts. Early in his childhood his parents introduced him to the fine arts of traditional handcrafting and many great artists have tutored him since then. When he was working at the Union of Mongolian artists, he earned acclaim as a painter and papier mâché artist, creating objects for traditional performing art groups. Furthermore, he learned to become a specialist of the traditional Mongolian style of sculpture,³ called “mongol uran barimal” (Tsultem 1989). Gankhuyags mother Scham Khand (1934–1987) was a master of appliqué and art embroidery. His father Baasan Natsag (1924–1972) was a master of sculptures and jewellery art. Khand and Natsag often worked together as a team by developing images first sketched by the husband and then appliquéd by his wife on a textile product.⁴ In this way, the couple followed a traditional creative process in everyday life. A master artist would produce a first design, which would be further developed by a second artist, resulting in monumental all-day items (Tsultem 1989) and clothes for children and created out a productive teamwork. During the time of the socialist regime Khand and Natsag collaborated in this traditional way, producing images with themes, that were acceptable for socialist censorship (Galli 2009, 83). In 1972, his father Natsag died and so Gankhuyag and his elder siblings took over their father’s role⁵.

Gankhuyag’s choice of a life path was guided by his passion for traditional art and Tsam dance. The making of masks was deeply influenced by his family background. Gankhuyag’s passion manifested itself after his graduation from a sculpture building class at the College of Fine Arts. During the study at this College, he visited the Museum of Chojjin-Lama⁶ (Bawden 1997, 9 ff; Teleki 2011, 43 and 2015, 192) and

³ Mongolian sculpture is based on Önder Gegeen Zanabazar (1635–1723). His self-made sculptures show the characteristics of a deified human being, with particularly beautiful faces, in deep contemplation with great bliss and peace. Tsultem mentions Strikethrough in the introduction part of his 1989 book, and Gankhuyag confirmed it too.

⁴ Interview with Gankhuyag, 21 January, 2018; see also: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/could-a-mask-makers-quest-to-see-the-dalai-lama-bring-about-world-peace/2015/04/27/>

⁵ Interview with Gankhuyag on 21 January, 2018: “Unfortunately, my father died during this time. As alone parent my mother was responsible for several children. We helped her to earn a living. 4.” (M.B: Did you learn sewing and carving when you were a 10-year-old boy?) (N.G: “Yes, it’s like this: In the beginning, there was only sewing and sewing my mother around at home. My father earned his living with carpenters, but he died very early. Though we children helped our mother to continue earning a living. I have three elder siblings. They learned tailoring from my mother and sewed clothes for the younger siblings. We did not buy our clothes in the shop, because my mother made them for us, and the big ones learned that from my mother. Then it was my turn. Though we have taught ourselves sewing and tailoring with the help of my mother and the siblings.”)

⁶ Werner Forman and Bjamba Rintschen (1967, 129): Rintschen described the masks in this museum: “Die Masken stammen aus einem Kloster der westlichen Mongolei. Dieser Adsar hat die Kulte der Götter und ihrer Abbilder überlebt: Stoisch ruht er aus im zum Museum gewordenen Tempel des Staatsorakels.” (The masks come from a monastery in western Mongolia. This Adsar has survived the cults of the gods and their replicas: he rests stoic in the temple of the State Oracle, which has become a museum.)

the Fine Arts Museum Zanabazar in Ulaanbaatar, which has been putting up the Tsam masks and costumes and had a special place for this type of sculptures of Mongolian art (Tsultem 1989) as Gankhuyag further comments:

As I was a student, it was a duty to visit this museum and the Zanabazar Museum. But photographing was forbidden at that time. Though I knew that these Tsam masks are made of papier mâché and came from the last century. That impressed me very much. At that time, I secretly wished to try to make such a mask someday. I became an independent artist in 1986 because I can provide for myself this way. I tried this during the evening study. The following year, I founded "Bi and Bid" as my own studio in the Bogd Museum. In the Bogd Museum I rented a room with two colleagues and a brother of mine. In this museum many tourists came and so I sold my art.⁷

When he rented a room in this Bogd Museum in 1988, Монгол Кино⁸ started to produce the film “Цам” there. The Venerables Sereeter and Danzan (1916–2004) (Charleux 2007; Altankhuu 2007; Majer 2008) and Daschzeveg⁹ took part in producing this movie as eyewitnesses of the year 1937, when they had danced this Tsam dance. Gankhuyag was there, and he had renovated these old masks for this film and had learned¹⁰ more from these venerable monks. Therefore, Gankhuyag’s work is very important to preserve the old traditional Mongolian Tsam dance. It is interesting to note, that he completed the whole cycle of creation of the dance: He not only made the Tsam dance masks, but also produced the costumes and was responsible for the choreography of the dance.¹¹

⁷ Interview on 21 January, 2018.

⁸ <http://news.gogo.mn/r/214997> [accessed 21 March, 2018]

⁹ Gankhuyag had spoken about this monk. He was Gankhuyag’s Guru and he had learned from him the original religious Tsam text. Furthermore, this monk appeared in this documentary film (see the interview from January 21, 2018 and the 1988 or 1989 film (Gangaa 2003, 28).

¹⁰ Interview on 21 January, 2018: BM: “When exactly did you make your first Tsam masks? During the difficult time?” Gankhuyag: “Unfortunately, in 1987 my mother died. Therefore, I visited the lama, who came from the province, where my parents come from, to have a Sudur read for my mother. This lama was called Dashzeveg. He studied medicine and lived in Ger district in Ulaanbaatar. This is how I first learned from him that there is an old book with Tsam instructions. Through this book, I understood how to make religious masks. This book was written by a Mongolian scholar named Agwaankhaidav (1779–1838) in Tibetan. My Guru-Lama Daschzeveg had tried to explain everything to me in Mongolian. In 1988, I started my studio in the museum and in the same year the recording of a Tsam film started. This is how I learned from the old monks, who in their youth in 1937 witnessed the Tsam or worked in it or helped to restore the masks. The masks were in the museum. It was a dream to touch the museum pieces with my hand. The threads are made of real gold. I met the monk Sereeter and the famous artist Danzan as well as my Bagsch Daschzeveg. I learned a lot about the Tsam from them. Some dancers from the Tumen Ekh ensemble participated in the process.

¹¹ Interview with Gankhuyag, 16 February, 2018: “In 1997 six artists presented the Tsam dance.” Over the years 1997–2007, he completed 108 Tsam masks and costumes. “At the Sukhbaatar Square in Ulaanbaatar a Tsam Performance took place. In 2002, I emigrated to the USA. I teach young artists and represent the Tsam dance. To this end, as an artist abroad, I present paintings and sculpture of the Mongolian Tsam dance.”

Schechner's Performance Theory Applied to the "Gankhuyag-Tsam"

Richard Schechner has been increasingly dedicated to the processual aspect of the performance since the 1980s. He distinguishes seven phases: training, workshop, rehearsals, "warm-up", the actual performance, fading out, post-processing (Schechner 1990, 26; Balme 2009, 177). These performance phases derived from the study of the theatre commune "Squat" (Schechner 1978, 24–25). This theory is not applicable to the current western theatre industry (Balme 2008, 177).

However, the performance of the annual Tsam ritual in front of a monastery in Mongolian Buddhism corresponds to Schechner's "small society" (Balme 2009, 177). It is always the monks of this monastery who prepare meditatively and practicing their roles (Ayako 1997, 20; Khürelbaatar 1999, 74–88; Altankhuu 2007; Galli 2009, 81–99; Batmunkh 2010, 62, 63, 94; Bareja-Starzynska 2012, 153, 156), similarly to the "walking stage" (Kotte 2005, 283) and also the "Khan-Bogd"¹² corresponds to this type.

This ensemble was founded by Gankhuyag in 1997 and eight artists presented the Tsam dance. Gankhuyag always depicts the Tsagaan-Üvgün, the "White Old" (Rintschen 1967, 91; Khürelbaatar 1999, 81; Gangaa 2003, 33; Charleux 2007, 46; Batmunkh 2010, 13; Birtalan 2013). He said that, in 1992, he and his group (Bi and Bid) spent some time in Eastern Europe and went to Switzerland in 1997 where he had organized a Tsam-exhibition. As part of the exhibition tour, six artist colleagues from the "Chinggis Khan-Variety" presented in the Khan-Bogd Ensemble the Tsam dance. And he had danced the "Tsagaan Övgön". After that, they were again in France in 1999 where Mongolian monks from the Gandan Monastery portrayed the Tsam dance¹³ (Charleux 2007, 46–47; Galli 2009, 84). He completed many Tsam masks for foreign museums¹⁴ (Galli 2009, 84).

Ganhuyag was very fortunate to have been taught by the honored Lamas Sereeter, Danzan, and Dashzeveg about the art of Tsam masks made of papier-mâché and the choreography of the dance rituals of the Khüree Tsam. This dance includes an elaborate three-day ritual with prayer, chanting, meditation, mudras, costumes, masks, and stylized fighting movements. The ritual is performed to battle evil spirits, drive them away and clean mind and soul.

Gankhuyag also played in various mystery plays and cult dances. Play and ritual are seen as opposing ends of performance, but they are still similar. According to Schechner, play is intrinsically motivated while ritual is extrinsically motivated (Schechner 2003, ix). The role of freedom in a performance is described in positive and negative terms. For Gankhuyag, it is very positive.

¹² <http://bi-bid.com/khanbogd.htm> [accessed 21 March, 2018]

¹³ Interview with Gankhuyag on 21 January, 2018

¹⁴ For a list of the tour see: <http://bi-bid.com/khanbogd.htm> [accessed 21 March, 2018]

In 2007, Arjia Rinpoche¹⁵ (Thubten Lobsang Jigme Gyatso) was appointed by H.H. Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso to head the Tibet Center in Bloomington, Indiana.¹⁶ After taking over the leadership of the center into a Tibetan-Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Centre [TMBCC] in Bloomington (Arjia Rinpoche 2010, v), Gankuyag exhibited his 108 Tsam masks. Arjia Rinpoche asked him to perform a Tsam dance. Gankhuyag agreed and, in this performance by the Khan Bogd-Esemble Gankhuyag, presented the “White Old [man]”.

How this freedom is actually applied can be illustrated by the meeting between Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, and Gankhuyag. Usually, people get a blessing from the Dalai Lama, but in this case, it was the other way around. The Dalai Lama received a blessing from Gankhuyag.¹⁷ There are different rules in a performance, but in the center, there is always some sort of freedom. Gankhuyag illustrates this point of theatre performance, where an actor is first confined by the physical space, then by the conventions of theatre, but finally, underneath all of that, the actor has freedom and fan (Schechner 2012, 18).

Tsam Dance Has Become Mobile

To understand what “mobility” really is depends on one’s perspective (Sheller Mimi 2011, 1). This means that the concept of mobility brings together technical, planning, and social factors as well as the interaction between the artists, the dance, and the culture. Between “staying at home” and “travelling around” there is a huge range of overlapping lifestyles. The central idea of social mobility is that a person moves from one social position to another (Pollak 2001, 1). Applied to the religious context of the Tsam dance. A religious Tsam performance begins with the rehearsals of selected monks and non-public rituals at the monastery to activate the Linga (Kollmar-Paulenz and Batmunkh 2015, 643 ff). The performers of the monastic Tsam are high-ranking monks who memorize the Dhāranis according to the individual deity and participate in the preparatory rituals of the wrathful guardian deities. The preparatory phases are followed by a public performance in front of the monastery yard. Therefore, this Tsam is immobile. This religious status changes with the performance in Gankhuyag’s Tsam. Because under his guidance the performance takes place in a non-monastic place.

Therefore, the work of Gankhuyag has made the Tsam-dance mobile.¹⁸ In 2007, Gankhuyag completed 108 Tsam masks and costumes. In the summer of 2007, for the first time since 1937, a Tsam performance with all 108 Tsam figures took place in

¹⁵ Arjia Rinpoche, Lobsang Tubten Jigme Gyatso was born 1950 in Dolon Nor or Amdo. When he was two years old, he lived as abbot of the Kumbum Monastery, see <https://www.tmbcc.org/> [accessed 23 March, 2018]

¹⁶ See <https://www.tmbcc.org/> [accessed 23 March, 2018]

¹⁷ See <http://news.gogo.mn/r/214997>: there is a picture with His Holiness, the Dalai-Lama (Tenzin Gyatso), and Gankhuyag [accessed 21 March, 2018].

¹⁸ See <http://bi-bid.com/khanbogd.htm>.

Ulaanbaatar.¹⁹ The performers were professional Mongolian dancers, some of whom had already participated in the 1988 documentary on Tsam. In October 2007, during the visit of the fourteenth Dalai Lama at the TMBCC of Bloomington, Gankhuyag had another performance of the 108 Tsam dance, but there were only 30 professional Mongolian dancers, including dancer Enkhgerel and Dolgorsuren. They represented the important protector deities of Tsam, the other Tsam figures, such as the Raven and the two heroes, were performed by civil American friends of Gankhuyag. He had brought all 108 masks to the US from Mongolia with a container. Since 2007, he has been presenting the 108 Tsam masks in America and Europe, along with Tsam performances. For financial reasons, a return of these masks to Mongolia has not been possible, but in the meantime, Gankhuyag created a second collection of 108 Tsam masks and costumes. They are located in his Mask Museum in Mongolia.²⁰ In the twenty-first century, the mobile Tsam dance moves between different places in the globalized world.

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¹⁹ Interviews with Gankhuyag on 22 October, 2018 and 19 February, 2019.

²⁰ See <http://news.gogo.mn/i/8068> [accessed 23 October, 2018].

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Mongol Nüüdel: 'Tradition', Changes, and Memory

S. Dulam

Abstract

Based on the memory and experience of some local elderly herders and a case of some current seasonal nüüdel (travels) in the west of Mongolia, this article provides a comparative illustration on how practices of nüüdel from one pasture to another differ from those conducted in socialist times. Using the reconstruction of a 'traditional' nüüdel and following some existing literature on nomadism and pastoralism, this article intends to show that nomads are not barbarian wanderers who constantly move around in the 'free' and/or 'unoccupied' landscape. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, it provides a detailed illustration of indigenous experience and knowledge on the pasture, landscape, climate and the environment; techniques to pack, unpack and to safely lead a caravan; love and care for herd animals; division of labor in the household and interaction and collaboration of local people; and customs and treatments to the local spirit masters.

Key words: nomadism; pastoralism; seasonal travel; caravan and human-animal relations

Introduction

In *The End of Nomadism?* Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath (1999) pose two questions. The first question asks if the so-called nomadic way of life in Inner Asia, in Russia, Mongolia and China will end in the changes of urbanisation and globalization. The second question asks if the misunderstanding of nomads as barbarian, backward and low tech will end. Their response to the first question suggests that mobility is essential in preserving the environment and not ending the nomadic culture. Therefore, policies providing more and more mobility instead of restricting, by fencing and privatising pasture such as in China, can help nomadism not to end. To respond the second question, they attempt to show that pastoralists in Inner Asia are not barbarians, and their way of life is not backward, and their technology is not low but the nomadic pastoralism is a sophisticated way of life based on their ecological knowledge and experience instead. To end the negative supposition of the term 'nomad' and 'nomadism' they suggest using the term 'mobile pastoralism', and appealed not to use the term nomad to end its negative connotations. Following their appeal, Bumochir Dulam's 18 years later published paper *Afterlife of Nomadism* Bumochir Dulam (2017) examines the use of the term 'pastoralism' and 'pastoralists' by focusing on the concept 'unsustainable pastoralism'. According

to him, after the end of the term nomadism, the term pastoralism which depicts its afterlife faced a similar fate by gaining a different kind of negative connotations. In the afterlife, due to the increasing amount of critique to the lack of the mobility Mongolian pastoralists in Mongolia and China accused for degrading pasture and the environment, and mobile pastoralism blamed for having an unsustainable nature. For instance, about Mongol herder in China, Dee Mack Williams writes that Chinese officials and scientists contemplate that ‘Mongols never learned to look beyond their sheep to the soil, so today they have no regard for the land that farmers have cherished’ (2000: 508). Similarly, in Mongolia an international expert Ian Hannam writes that “Mongolian rangeland is degraded because herders are unable to apply sustainable grazing practices. Mongolian grassland is not valued so its regulation and management have been avoided in the past. Herders continue to graze their livestock on public land unrestrained, where there is high competition for good pasture. They use public pasture and water free of charge and without initiative to protect and properly use it” (2012: 418). According to Bumochir, these accusations contribute to shaping the supposition of pastoralism as harmful and destructive and pastoralist as greedy and unsympathetic.

This article intends to follow discussions on the derogatory suppositions of the term ‘nomadism’ and ‘pastoralism’ as developed in the work of Humphrey and Sneath and continued in Bumochir’s paper. I will first demonstrate the complexity of Mongol herders’ indigenous ecological knowledge, considerations of the environment, care to the pasture, love to herd animals, division of labour in the household, techniques in packing and unpacking, and safely leading a caravan, and finally the symbolic system, customs and taboos herders often follow in the *nüüdel* from one pasture to another. Second, to escape from different accusations, pejorative implications, and misunderstandings about nomadic culture and mobile pastoralism in Inner Asia, I suggest using the indigenous Mongolian term *nüüdel* which indicates the seasonal travel and mobility of pastoralists. More precisely, to accurately understand and present Mongol herders and their culture without Eurocentric or any other alien biases that can be embodied in the popular terms such as ‘nomadism’ and ‘pastoralism’, I suggest to use the term *nüüdelchin* (*nüüdelchid* in the plural) for nomads and *nüüdel* to depict their travels.

In the following, I will present a brief overview of a *nüüdel* that I had the chance to witness in Khovd in 2018. To compare those aspects that changed (see also Rossabi and Rossabi 2006; Sonompel 2012; Yembuu 2016) in the practice of *nüüdel*, I will reconstruct some *nüüdel*s from the socialist past on the memory of some local elderly herders.

A *Nüüdel* in Post-Socialist Mongolia

In April 2018, during my fieldwork in Khovd *aimag* in the west of Mongolia, I had the chance to observe a *nüüdel* (pastoralist’s travel from pasture to another) and compare it to elderly people’s description of *nüüdel* prior to the 1990s. The one I

witnessed was a *nüüdel* of a young couple from Bayangol *bag*, Mankhan *sum*, known as the region (*nutag*) where Zakhchin Mongols inhabit. Baatarsuren Batnasan is the father of the family, and he was 28 years old when I met him in 2018. Oyuntulkhuur is the mother of the family, originally from the neighbouring Takhilt *bag*. They married in 2015 and have now three children. The eldest is five years old, the second child is three years old, and the youngest is eleven months old. For about a year he and his family worked as watchmen (*manaach*) at the Bayangol *bag* and received about 30 goat kids as payment. To support his living, The World Vision International donor organization additionally gave his family three cows. When I met him and his family, they were at the spring pasture at the place called Khudgiin Tokhoi and about to move to a place called Angist which is about 30 kilometers away. They were moving to Angist to work as assistant herders (*tuslakh malchin*) for one year. For the salary, they were planning to receive one hundred goats. The person who employed him and his wife in Angist was Khayankhyarvaa Khasuu¹ from Takhilt *bag*. Khayankhyarvaa is an *Ulsyn Avarga Malchin* (State Honoured Herder) and he has a large number of livestock. Two small trucks called *porter* (портр) in Mongolian came to help them to move (see also Yembuu 2016). Baatarsuren's brother had one truck. Munkhdavaa Khasuu from the Khasuu family came with another truck. When I saw them, one of the trucks already had two cows on its carriage.

When I arrived, Baatarsuren's *ger* was empty and all of their belongings were packed except the stove and smoke pipe. After Oyuntulkhuur made us tea, the last piece to pack in the *ger* was the stove and the smoke pipe. She dumped ashes in the stove far from the *ger*. Then finally, they dismantled the *ger*. The *ger* was small and fit on the carriage of the truck with two cows. Baatarsuren cleaned the truck carriage and loaded carpets (*shirdeg*), felt walls (*tuurga*), and felt roof (*deever*) in the bottom of the carriage. Then he loaded wooden roof poles (*uni*), then the walls (*khana*), column (*bagana*) and the roof ring (*toono*) on the top. He put the door (*khaalga*) upright behind the truck cabin. The roof ring was on the top of the loaded carriage on the felt roof ring cover (*örkh*) which is reminiscent of the way how to load a roof ring on the camel. This is because the roof ring and its felt cover objects that preserve the fortune of the family (*geriin süld*). Baatarsuren put chests and other furniture along the two sides of the carriage to enclose what is loaded in the middle. After having finished loading, ropes were used to bind the loads on the carriage. The two cows were still on the carriage all the time while the *ger* was loaded, which made it a lot more difficult to load. The two cows were pushed to the small space left at the end of the carriage. The last bit to be loaded on this truck was a motorcycle (see also Fraser 2018) with no petrol. Since there was too little space at the carriage with two cows, the family decided to put the motorcycle on the top of the *ger* where the roof ring was. They removed the roof ring, and four men put the motorcycle on the top of the *ger*. The second truck carried all of the goats including one man who had to watch the goats.

¹ Khayankhyarvaa was born in 1964. He is a herder in the Takhilt *bag*. His *elken* (clan) is Tavint.

The mother of the family with her three children and a baby goat sat in the cabin of the truck. The father of the family put three stones on the mark where their *ger* was and burned juniper – which is a common custom among different Mongol groups. On the paved road, they quickly and safely arrived at Angist.

When we reached Angist, Khayankhyarvaa's wife Shurentsetseg Tserendorj² welcomed us outside her *ger* with tea and food. The weather was very pleasant with no wind. The pile of hay in the newly built stone fence (*chuluun khoroo*) indicates that Khayankhyarvaa and his family members are hardworking people. First, they started to let the goats and cows to get off the truck and immediately started to feed them with the hay. The animals looked hungry and weak after the harsh winter. Then, the family unloaded the *ger* from the truck carriage and started to erect it.

To me as an elderly person who grew up in a herding family and a scholar who studied Mongolian culture and *nüüdel*, the choice of the date in the lunar calendar to move and dismantle and erect the *ger* was not so different from other Mongols' choice and from how relocations were done in the past. But the use of trucks to transport the *ger* and other baggage were obviously different from how people moved in the past. Baatarsuren's use of trucks to transport people, animals, and the *ger* is not unique but, in fact, common across Mongolia.

This article is an ethnographic depiction of the Mongol *nüüdel* tradition. It will elucidate on how people used to move in the past and how they remember *nüüdel* today to explain the perceived contrast and the difference between past and present relocations. To this aim, they endorse the so-called *ulamjlalt* which means "traditional" *nüüdel*.

Many Zakhchin Mongols in the far west of Mongolia still move to their traditional summer pasture, but in a different way using trucks on a different route. In this article as an example of an *ulamjlalt nüüdel*, I will introduce two different destinations of *nüüdel* to a summer pasture: one is in the Altai mountain known as *Altai davdag nüüdel* which means a "*nüüdel* to pass the Altai mountain" in Mankhan *sum*; people call the other *ers öndriin nüüdel* which means the "extreme height or altitude *nüüdel*" in Zereg *sum*.

In the following, I will show how what Mongolian herders call *nüüdel* is different from its English translation of nomad, nomadic and nomadism. The interviews that I conducted during my fieldwork reveal that the Mongolian term *nüüdel*, which can be translated into "nomadic trip" or "travel", has a much broader meaning than the English nomad, nomadic, and nomadism. *Nüüdel* is not about "wandering nomads" but is rather to be understood as a complexity of pastoralists' knowledge and practice (Tomorjav and Khurelbaatar 2017). First, *nüüdel* was pastoralists' cognitive knowledge of the environment, geography, animals, and the natural world

² Shurentsetseg was born in 1964. She is from Ulaan Khüree *bag* and her *elken* (clan) is Khovog. She says her ancestors are Torguud Mongols who migrated from the current region of Kalmykia to Xinjiang. They were led by Uvsh Khan.

(Tomorjav and Khurelbaatar 2017). Second, it was about an ethical symbolic code of conduct to treat people, animals, spiritual beings, the environment, and nature (Dulam 2013). Third, *nüüdel* in spring, summer, and autumn was a herding technique to prepare for winter by training to make animals strong and healthy to survive long harsh winter conditions which helps herders to increase their economic benefits from mobile pastoralism (Rossabi and Rossabi 2006; Tomorjav and Khurelbaatar 2017). Fourth, *nüüdel* is a communal practice to build trust between people, pass and preserve customs, generate knowledge, and teach and train the young people and young animals. The interview material to be presented in this paper reveals that herders share their memories about how their ancestors and elderly family members conducted *nüüdel* in the past and how elders taught them *nüüdel* and explained to them what *nüüdel* does to animals. To reconstruct the past and reflect on changes, my interview partners also compare the so-called traditional with modern *nüüdel*. For comparison, I will present now two *nüüdel*s from the past that are based on the memory of some elders.

A *Nüüdel* in the Altai Mountain in Mankhan, Khovd

The purpose of this *nüüdel* known as *Altain nüüdel* (*Nüüdel* of Altai) is to move to a cooler place in the high mountain area to escape the summer heat and the mosquitoes and flies bothering humans and animals. People stay there during summer and early autumn and return when the weather cools down in the first morning frosts. The Zakhchins claim that this *nüüdel* has some old historical roots. An elderly Khayankhyarvaa explained the *nüüdel* as follows:

Our Zakhchin people (pl. zakhchid) used to spend the cold winter in the warmer place with less wind. From the beginning of spring, in the old words to bring herds to the new year (ond oruulakh) people made otor. In the otor, herders constantly move following places with nutritious grass to help animals to gain khar makhan targa (black flesh strength). They stay in such areas until around 15 to 20 June. Then the summer heat with mosquitoes and flies starts. To escape from heat and flies, not all families or whole families but the ones in otor moved to the Altai mountain. Our zakhchin people used not to leave any animals including the sick and lost ones. It was a principle of a herder. Second, herders used to carry as little luggage as possible to keep the baggage small and light.³

Choosing the day to relocate is also important. It is considered not good to start the *nüüdel* on someone's bad day (*jas ödör*) or dog day (*nokhoi ödör*), but rather to choose a good day in the calendar with good fortunes. Zakhchins consider dog day the worst day for those with livestock. There is a phrase "No walls that can be untied on the dog day" (*Nokhoi ödör termiin am salgadaggüi*). People believe that moving on the dog day opens the gate of misfortune (*garzyn üüd*) resulting to the loss of men and animals. In the case of such a misfortune, monks need to conduct rituals

³ Interview with Khayankhyarvaa Khasuu, Mankhan *sum*, Khovd *aimag*, April 2018.

and read prayers to close the gate of misfortune. Also, the untying of the walls of the felt tent on the wrong day provokes the opening of the gate of misfortune (Baumann 2008). This has to do with the custom to take out the dead by untying the *ger* walls on the side to the direction where the corps of the dead supposed to be buried on the funeral day. This funeral custom has been practiced until recently. It is common among Mongolians to consider that god (*burkhan*) looks through the holes where the wall and the door meets on the right side of the door (*baruun khataavch*) while the demons (*chötgör*) look through holes where the wall and door meets on the left side (*zүүн khataavch*). Therefore, when setting up a *ger*, the left wall and the door should be tied tightly while the right side can be left loose.

During the *nüüdel*, the *geriin ezen* (the master of the family) instructs all other family members who should do what and when, for example, when to move, pack, unpack, and stop etc. The *geriin ezegetei* (the mistress of the family) organises and packs food and other things inside the *ger*. Besides these, there is no strict division of labour between *geriin ezen* and *ezegetei*. The route of the *nüüdel* starts from Takhilt (or Angis), and there is a place to spend the night 25 kilometres from Takhilt. In between, there is one break for lunch. It is usually the *geriin ezegetei* who is in charge of packing food and facilities to cook lunch. Shurentsetseg Tserendorj from Ulaan Khuree bag, Mankhan sum, Khovd aimag, said the following about the role of the *geriin ezegetei*:

Geriin ezegetei is in charge of packing cooking facilities such as dishes and soup pans etc. and makes sure that they do not make noise and break during the travel. She has to think where to pack what and how to pack etc. For example, she cannot put the ash pan of the stove somewhere that it can make lots of noise. So, she has to figure out how to make it not noisy and where to pack it. She prepares food and dairy products for the travel four or five days before the travel starts. It can be too heavy to load lots of food, so she has to take what is necessary to produce dairy products and food on the way. For example, those are sources to produce kumis and vodka from milk. There are *ovoos*, passes, and mountains on the way and necessary offerings need to be prepared and ready to offer during the trip. As soon as the caravan stops, junipers to burn and food milk to offer to the mountain should be ready with her. If she made a kumis or vodka beforehand in spring, then she is supposed to have the first bit of those to offer for spirit masters on the way. She also should take small bits of animal ears cut-off to make marks, which should be left on the mountain to ask for the protection of the mountain spirit masters. On the way of the travel herders, she leaves the animal ear pieces left from marking on the *ovoo*. Also, because the travel starts early in the morning, every night she should make sure young children sleep early, usually in the box for dung (*arag*). When the caravan stops in the evening, young children can be still sleeping in the box, while their mothers can do other works.⁴

⁴ Interview with Shurentsetseg, Mankhan sum, Khovd aimag, April 2018.

To expand on some of her above points, daughters in law are supposed to help their mothers in law. But there is a difference between the number of children daughters in law gave birth to. After giving birth to three sons, daughters in law become *darkhan ber* which means a “sacred daughter in law.” Those with three sons can help to pack chests and those with five sons are allowed to pack images of deities and other ritual objects on the chest. Those who have less than three sons or no sons can help to pack food and kitchenette.

Also, to add on her mention of customs regarding animal markings in her talk, remains of markings from animal ears are often put together like prayer beads. They cannot be thrown away in impure places but in the mountains or *ovoos* to prevent from loss and misfortune of animals. This is a form of respect to animals, and people believe that not following those customs can cause illness, decrease in number and all sorts of other livestock misfortunes.

Some households move thirteen to fourteen times a year, and camels are the main form of transport to carry baggage. For this purpose, people are used to train camels from an early age. Names of camel ages starts from *botogo* for one year old and goes to *torom* for two years old, *guna gunj* for three years old, *shüdden* and *khizaalan* for four and five. Trainings used to start from the age of *torom* which is the age of two, by riding and then teaching to sit and stand up with baggage. Camels that do not spit or fall down are commonly trained for *nüüdel*. Before *nüüdel*, the camels need some preparation according to the time of the year. In the summer time, they need to be fed less for three to five days. When starting to move to the summer pasture, they require one night of rest. In the autumn after the camels increased in weight, they cannot be fed too much for about two days. For this purpose, two camels can be tied together. The rope goes on the back of one camel and the other end of the rope can be tied by the thigh of the other camel.

On the night before the day to move, the *geriin ezen* prepares all of the livestock, organises the household members and their tasks, and catches and keeps horses and camels for riding and loading. It is better to have as many people as possible for long distance travels. Khayankhyarvaa says the following about this:

Imagine five households. We decide on the day to start the travel. Everything should be planned ahead, for example, Dorj will bring the cattle, Dulmaa will make this and that to prepare etc. Nothing should be left unplanned. In doing this, everyone helps everyone. If an animal is missing, then, others should offer help by saying “I can have a look at the animal when I get there for this purpose”, or by saying “your cattle were there and horses were there” etc. One helps another to locate and find their missing livestock. Also, there is a custom not to leave any man or animal on the black mark (*khar buir*) in the old place where people lived. If they are a few horses or camels to travel, then, we are expected to share what we have. *Nüüdel*s may sometimes include people who do not have a horse to ride. It does not matter if they are rich or poor, the principle is not to leave them on the place where a black mark remains after moving. Some stubborn people refuse

to move and stay behind. They do not feel good when they stay. When those who refused to travel together move separately, they could encounter different troubles, one of the camels can go angry, bad weather such as rain and storm, anything that could require manpower. Second, it is a way to overcome difficulties with the help of each other. Even animals search for company when they are on a trip. They become confident when they are in a large number. Or, maybe wind blows down the tent. Something bad always happens to those who move separately.⁵

According to the *nüüdel* customs, Mongolians consider leaving someone on the black mark the worst thing. Khalkh people talk about an evil pale-faced spirit (*chötgör*) in White with big sharp fangs called *Zan* who visits remaining people. Zakhchin people do not directly talk about such evil spirits but rather talk about ‘bad fortunes’. For example, a Khayankhyarvaa told me that “in the mountain gap called Tsenkher, a family was left behind on the black mark and moved separately afterwards. Then, wind blew their tent, while there is normally not much wind in June. Therefore, maybe some evil spirits bothered them.” Anyway people think something happens that can be called a curse or harm of a bad spirit.

To dismantle a *ger*, its ropes should be untied anticlockwise, and clockwise when building it. In other words, clockwise works in erecting and anticlockwise in dismantling. To dismantle its walls, one has to start from the west. The roof ring (*toono*) should be taken down in the direction of the place moving next. The cover of the roof ring (*örkh*) has to be removed in the direction of the *geriin ezen*’s fortune, its dust has to be cleaned to that direction, and to this aim footprints are made in that direction.

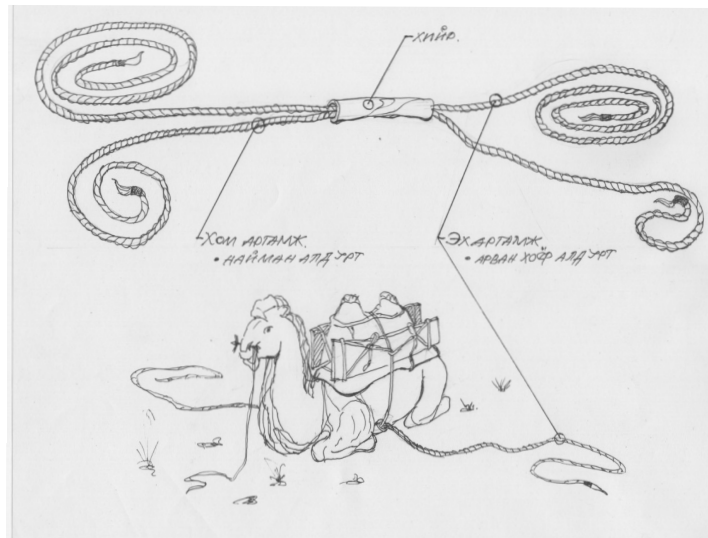


Figure One: The parallel ropes
(Illustration credit to D. Gantulga, Khovd University)

⁵ Interview with Khayankhyarvaa Khasuu, Mankhan *sum*, Khovd *aimag*, April 2018.

There are different techniques to load different parts of a *ger*, furniture, and other belongings on camels. For example, by using roof poles (*uni*), two camels can be loaded. The parts of a *ger* are split, and the poles of one *ger* can be divided into four parts, two of which will be loaded onto each camel. A camel loaded with roof poles (*uni*) also carries the felt roofs (*deever*) and columns (*bagana*) of the *ger*, and food such as flour, rice, salt, meat etc. The camel that carries the column always has to be the last camel in the caravan, because the long column can hit the camel in the front. Another way is to use a *ger*'s walls to load. Camels loaded with walls are suitable to take on chests, cabinets, and all other wooden furniture. The tying of the loads on the camel also has a special technique. *Tenjee argamj* is a rope that binds the chest, *arag* (basket for animal dung) etc. Besides *tenjee*, there are two long parallel ropes to be joined under a camel's belly. One of them is eight *ald* (length of eight spread arms) long, called *khom argamj*, while the other one is twelve *ald* long called *ikh argamj*. More precisely, the parallel joint part goes under the belly and felt has to be placed to protect the belly from the parallel parts of the ropes. The four ends of these two ropes are for fixing the weight on the camel (see figure one). In this way, binding loads on the back does not hurt the camel. My interview partner Shurentsetseg said the following about how to bind loads using the two ropes:

If the rope is on the sternum, then, camels cannot stand up when the loading has finished. This is because the rope is pressing the sternum of the camel which hurts. Those who are loading obviously tighten the ropes very well when such a tight rope surely hurts the camel. Elderly people they check the tightness of a rope by using two fingers. If they find the binding to be too loose, then, they require to tighten it again. It should be tight enough that a camel halter barely fits.⁶

Ropes and techniques to load and tighten the rope are actually a test. There is a phrase in case the rope is too short at the end of the knot. The phrase says *ald dutakhaar avgain muu, delem dutakhaar deesnii muu, uya dutaval (erkhii dutaval) eriin muu* which means "If the rope left is short about a size of one spread arm, then, it is the wife's fault; if the rope left is short about a size of half a spread arm, then, it is the rope's fault; if it is a knot size [thumb size] short, then, it is the man's fault." Since everyone's participation in the *nüüdel* was understood as a sort of test, everyone tries their best. Shurentsetseg says the following:

A strong man finds a way to knot the rope if the rope is a little short. The wife who made the rope without considering the size of the camel and the load is a bad wife. People say the size of the *ikh argamj* is usually about eleven *ald* of a woman, and the *khom argamj* is about six *ald* and a half. I have not noticed the length of *tenjee argamj*. I cannot figure out why I have not noticed its length. I guess it should be different according to the size of chests etc. [...] All of the knots should be *khövördög* (the one that is easy to untie by pulling from the end of the knotted rope), not the *ükhliüt* one (the one that does not untie by pulling from the end of the knotted rope).

⁶ Interview with Shurentsetseg, Mankhan sum, Khovd aimag, April 2018.

By just pulling from the end of the rope, the knot unties [see figure two]. If one makes an *ükhliüt* knot then he/she will be blamed badly. Imagine if the rope needs to be urgently untied to tighten or the load needs to be fixed on the road, then, the *ükhliüt* knot does not release but will take so much time to untie it. Here, we call the *ükhliüt* knot *alan uyaa*. If the knot cannot be quickly released, then, it will have to be cut off. Therefore, every man in the *nüüdel* carries a knife. In the urgency, the *ikh argaj* and *khom argamj* need to be cut off near the sternum of the camel. Cutting here can immediate free the camel from the load.⁷

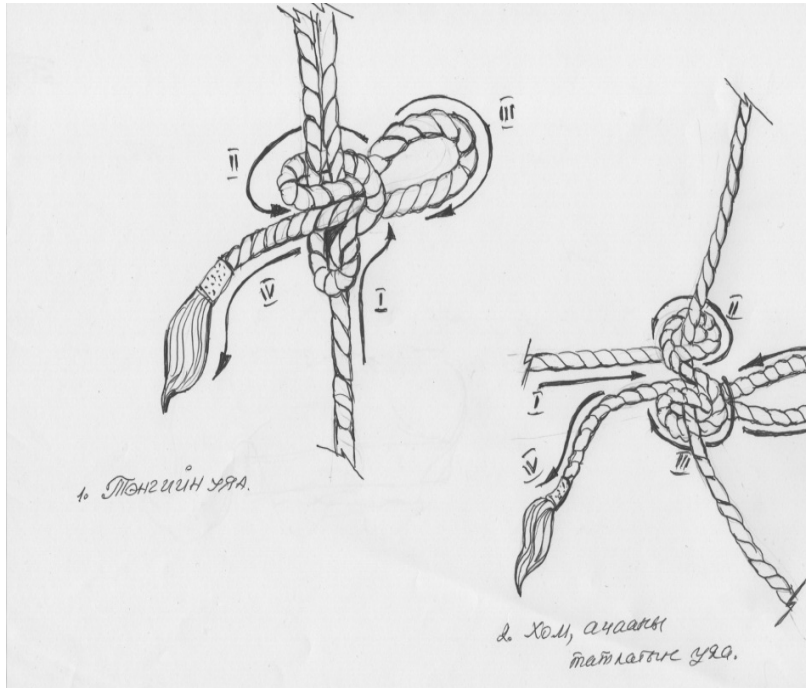


Figure Two. 1. *Ten* rope knot 2. *Khom* rope knot
(Illustration credit to D. Gantulga, Khovd University)

The above picture depicts how to fasten and knot the *nüüdel* ropes. Here, the *ükhliüt* or *alan* literally means “dead without a loose end to release by pulling”. This is something that travellers should consider seriously. About the loading pans, dishes, and kitchenettes, Shurentsetseg says the following:

Pans need to be cleaned and wrapped. A pan with a soot can never be loaded on the camel. It is almost a law here; elderly people will get very angry. These need to be loaded on a gentle and well-tamed camel. We usually put the pan upside down in between the humps. Then, the two packs of loads on the two sides of the camel make a flat top to put the pan and other things. This way the pan is blocked from four sides to prevent it from falling down,

⁷ Interview with Shurentsetseg, Mankhan sum, Khovd aimag, April 2018.

with two humps and two side loads. Nowadays, we also have a stove to carry. What can I say about these artefacts? They are things that annoy camels.⁸

Costumes, ornaments, and colours of the horses during the *nüüdel* show that the Mongol *nüüdel* is a ground where one can find a complexity of symbols. The *geriin ezegetei* who leads the caravan often prepares clothes to wear to lead a caravan. Many people make a new *deel* (a Mongolian robe) to lead a caravan. After packing and before departing, the *geriin ezegetei* used to change her old *deel* to a new one and ride her fully dressed (*büren tonogtoi*) *önchtei mori* (a horse she owns). In the past, it was common to wear a ceremonial female costume called *avgai deel* to lead a caravan. Also, the ridden horses wore *shigshregs* on their bridles which make a noise when walking. People believed that the noise of the *shigshreg* prevented from misfortunes.

Horses are very important. The *önchtei mori* (a horse she owns) is given to every bride when bringing her to her husband's family. The horse should have a full ornament and trappings with silver decorations. This horse is often ridden to lead a caravan. It must be solid-coloured (*büten züstei*) and should not be piebald or spotty, but it may have a white spot on its forehead. White hooves are interpreted as a good omen for safe travels. Such a horse should be trained to lead a caravan at the age of two. When the horse grew old, a new horse was trained to replace it. The horses learn not to be frightened, to be able to walk next to a camel and trotting evenly. When the lead horse is too fast, the loads became loose but if it is too slow, the camels become lazy. A caravan must have a uniform speed for camels not to get tired and to keep the speed. Therefore, to have a fully trained horse to lead the caravan was understood as a security measure for having a safe and pleasant trip.

It is common among Zakhchin to have a ritual prayer within fifteen days after the first day of the new year to protect from misfortunes in the coming year. The annual prayer also secures all of the *nüüdel*s of the family throughout the year. Furthermore, before departing on a *nüüdel*, people burn a juniper on the mark where the *ger* was and leave dung and further means to make fire for other people. The idea behind this is to leave the place that can be used again by other people. All of these are the tasks of the women. It is common not to let men clean the places and ashes in the stoves. After women have cleaned up the places, the *geriin ezen* puts incense on three stones and burns it, as Baatarsuren did in the start of this paper. Ankle bones cannot be left behind. Zakhchin people say that an ankle bone left in the old place can cause some misfortunes and problems on the way of a *nüüdel*. They say the ankle bone that is left behind thinks that this family does not have children to play with ankle bones and looks out for the caravan until it passes two mountains, which is not good for children's fortunes. For this reason, all of the ankle bones should be picked up and collected. All of the spikes and posts need to be removed. They cannot be left stack in the ground, and holes have to be concealed to relieve earth.

⁸ Interview with Shurentsetseg, Mankhan sum, Khovd aimag, April 2018.

Loading camels needs to start early in the morning before it gets too hot. Different camels carry different baggage, for example, religious and ritual objects, children, chests etc. The loads on the two sides of a camel must have equal weights. Baatarsuren says the following:

The weight of the two loads has to be the same. If one of the chests is 20 kg and the other one is 15 kg, then, the lighter luggage should be put on the side where the camel humps bent. Bent humps give extra weight on the luggage. We need to start packing early in the morning since flies and mosquitoes do not let camels keep sitting while loading. Last year in Tsenkher pass, at three o'clock in the morning, the car helping to move finally came. We loaded the camels and as soon as we finished loading where the camels were resting, flies started to bother. We had just managed to load on time. This year, this place has lots of flies as well. Since the grass is not good there, we will not move there this year.

Because of such reasons, the caravan should be on the road early in the morning. The exact time and date of departure is not announced. Children get exited during the *nüüdel*. Two or three children sit in one big *arag* (a dung collection box). The camel to transport children is the last one to be loaded and the first one to be unloaded. The camel with the children also carries food and drinks for immediate use. This camel is the first of the caravan, and the next camel is the one with the chest and the roof ring (*toono*). Young camels should be in the middle of the caravan and old ones at the end. While some people still load the camels, those who know the route already start departing with the livestock. Also, children who can ride horses help adults to herd on the way of the *nüüdel*. When the caravan passes other herding families, they bring tea and food to show their welcome. People often consider the *nüüdel* as something pure (*ariun*). Drunken or angry people on the way are therefore considered a bad sign.

About the route, the obstacles, and the dates of a *nüüdel*, an 85-year-old Zakhchin man whose name is Khasuu Tooroi⁹ from Mankhan *sum*, Khovd *aimag* says the following:

In our *sum*, to reach the summer pasture it takes three nights and three days. The spring pasture is in Zereg river. From Zereg river it is about 20 to 25 km to the *sum* settlement. From the *sum* settlement Botgono pass and Tsenkher pass it is about 35 kilometres. The summer pasture is near Baga Ulaan mountain which is another 18 to 20 kilometres. In the summer pasture, there are no flies and the grass is nutritious which is suitable for livestock to gain fat and strength. Basically, a good place to stay away from the heat and the flies. We usually stay there from 25 June to 15 August. From around 10 to 15 August, we move back to Tsenkher. It is not so hot and there are not many flies around this time of the year in Tsenkher.¹⁰

As most Zakhchin people told me, the most difficult route to travel on the Altai mountain is the Khorj Khodood mountain. Also, the West Mountain in Zereg is a very

⁹ He was born in 1933 in Khovd near the Tsenkher river in the old Zakhchin Banner. His *elken* (clan) is Tavin.

¹⁰ Interview with Khasuu Tooroi, Mankhan, Khovd, April 2018.

high mountain which is difficult to pass. To travel to such places, the weight of loads on camels should be low, and those travelling should not take much luggage. To pass the mountain, the caravan must stop near the mountain to rest for one night. If there are many *nüüdel*s passing the mountain, people have to make a plan which caravan should pass when and who can help them. If there is someone who has high blood pressure, altitude sickness, is injured, or too old and weak, someone needs to take that person on his horse and help him or her to pass the mountain. Not only man but also animals have altitude sickness. It is called *uulyn süir tsokhikh* which means “mountain height hit.” According to Khayankhyarvaa, usually animals that have never been in the altitude or are sick get hit by a mountain’s height. An interview partner said the following about this:

When, for example, horses or camels are hit by a mountain height, they suddenly stop walking. We call this *süir kharvakh*, or “shooting of a height”. In 1978, some young people went to the mountain to collect gooseberry (*toshil*). Suddenly, one of the horses collapsed and died on the spot. An elderly man who had been travelling with them explained them that it is the shooting of the mountain height.¹¹

But they do stop walking. In this case, an old experienced camel should lead those having altitude sickness. Camels follow the ones in front of them. Families always have a camel that leads. Things considered to be impure cannot be loaded on leading camels. They have to be kept pure with good fortunes.

The main purpose of this travel is to let livestock gain *makhan targa* which means a “flesh weight”. Livestock fat that has not been consumed from the past winter turns into flesh, and this process is called the “flesh weight”. Gaining of a good flesh weight (*makhan targa*) helps livestock to have enough strength to pass the next winter. When new grass grows around May, animals start transforming their remaining fat (*öök*) to flesh (*makh*). In December, all of the nutrition gained during the summer and autumn transforms into flesh (*makh*). Therefore, in the summer pasture, animals should gain as much fat weight (*öök*) as possible. The fat turns into muscle meat after a while. Economic profit increases when animals gain enough flesh weight, and their capacity to survive harsh winters and springs increases. For these reasons, Zakhchins embark on long and difficult *nüüdel*s, by camels in the past and by trucks in the present. Also, another reason to travel so far for so long is to let animals be fed with various wild and organic herbs. For example, *vansemerüü* (*Saussurea dorogostaiskii* Palib) is a nutritious flower; animals do not eat all of it but only the root of the plant. Khayankhyarvaa says the following about this plant *vansemerüü*:

But they do stop walking. In this case, an old experienced camel should lead those having altitude sickness. Camels follow the ones in front of them. Families always have a camel that leads. Things considered to be impure cannot be loaded on leading camels. They have to be kept pure with good fortunes.

¹¹ Interview with Khayankhyarvaa Khasuu, Mankhan *sum*, Khovd *aimag*, April 2018.

In this westward mountain, there are lots of *vanseemberüü*. In the past, animals ate them and man ate them when eating their animals' meat. Nowadays, animals do not eat such plants. They eat what they find where I stay. Animals are now fed with what we give them, similar to farm animals. Our herding is transforming to something like farming. As a result, we no longer obtain as much nutrition as we used to from our animals we consume. So, we should be lacking some nutrition. In the past, elderly people used to burn bones in the pasture after animals gained weight in the summer. Then, animals ate the bone ashes to obtain calcium. Nowadays, people use grinded bones to feed animals. We now tend to substitute herbal and organic nutrition with medications (*em taria*) and chemicals. This is so wrong. Then, we consume the animal meat that still contains these medicine and chemicals. The worst is this ivomec (or ivermectin) and that Chinese *kerlin* (sanitization chemical). Animals get lice again only after three weeks since having been washed with the Chinese *kerlin*. Or we use dung ashes to get rid of lice. Also, *maaguur*, animal sickness, is a problem. Mostly those that gained enough weight get *maaguur*. When they get *maaguur*, their back wool turns dark and become fluffy. Many people simply use ivomec to cure *maaguur*. But ashes are much less poisonous. Ashes is very good to remove *khüird khorhoi*, a certain type of parasite, with a black head and a white bottom. Here, we have something called *shigüür* which comes from grass. People say *shigüür* becomes *khüird khorhoi*. This parasite sucks animal blood and the animals may die because of it. For these reasons, to cure, we still use some established customs to take care of livestock and keep animals as mobile as possible. The sole purpose of the *nüüdel* is letting animals obtain spring flesh weight, summer fat weight, and spring flesh weight to keep animals strong and healthy. These *nüüdel*s also help animals to survive harsh winters. When we have such *nüüdel*s, we do not need to prepare hay for winter. Animals that were well-fed on a *nüüdel* survive the winter without hay. Helping animals to survive the winter with their own capacity. This is the *ulamjalal* (tradition) we had. Now, people tend not to have many *nüüdel*s, instead they prepare as much hay and other fodder as possible.

The *nüüdel* in the Altai mountain first of all forbids consumption of alcohol and parties. Secondly, it requires team work and collaboration and teaches those travelling how to care about each other and about the animals by helping and not leaving anybody behind. In the *nüüdel*, both human beings and animals become unified with life to move forward and survive. The principle is to find the accurate speed of travel by synchronizing with everyone's foot (*khöld taaruulakh*) including the weak, sick, old, injured, and lost.

A *Nüüdel* in the Extreme Altitude in Zereg, Khovd

During the same field trip, I had the chance to interview several people about a different *nüüdel* called *ers öndöriin nüüdel* which means "a *nüüdel* in the extreme height in Zereg *sum*". My interview partners were Gantulga Damdin, a lecturer at

Khovd University from Zereg *sum*, his mother Shuuraa Munkh (born in 1931), and her younger sister Baast Munkh (born in 1947).

Herders in Burgasan *bag*, Khöndlön *bag*, and Buraa *bag* located at the side of the Sutai mountain all move to a high mountain called Baataryn Nuruu for summer pasture. There are two ways in this *nüüdel*, *ööd nüükh* to move upwards and *uruu nüükh* to move downwards. The purpose of the upwards *nüüdel* is to come as high as possible in the mountain to escape from the summer heat, to let animals put on weight, to hunt, and to collect herbs for humans and animals. Herders start preparing to move three or four days in advance. They erect the *nüüdliin ger* which is the travel *ger* to check, fix and replace missing or broken parts and pieces to prepare for the strong wind. Their *ger* for travelling to the mountain is usually small and has four walls. Before the use of trucks after the 1990s, most people used to have five camels for this trip each of which with not too heavy baggage. The four walls, two by two, can be loaded on two camels and they were used to load other baggage. The two other camels did not use walls to load but used *khom bambai* to carry loads. *Khom bambai* had two short ladder-shaped wooden frames with felt mattresses called *bambai* which means “a shield to protect camels from rubbing”. The fifth camel had another *khom*, a felt mattress that goes around the camel hump and its two ends meet at the camel bottom. The fifth camel was a spare camel to load remaining luggage from the other four camels. The Mongol *ger* has two large pieces of felt for the roofing called *deever*, and three pieces to cover the wooden walls called *tuurga*. Each of the three *tuurga* can be loaded on three different camels, and the two *deever* on the two other camels. Another important piece for loading luggage are ropes made with yak wool called *tatlaga* which means to pull, or *argamj* which means to tie or to bind. Each camel needs two *tatlaga* for binding baggage on the camel’s back. The camels should be kept in a dry place. For safety reasons, all *tatalaga* have to be checked before the *nüüdel*.

One or two days before departing, those used for traveling have to be caught and tied outside the *ger*. If it is spring, the camels can get diarrhoea from eating new grass. If this is the case, they need to be fed less for one or two days to cure their stomach and to prepare them to travel to the mountain. To travel down from the mountain ridge, camels have to be fed less for seven to ten days. Most caravans used to travel for about one hundred kilometres to get the summer pasture in the mountain. Each trip lasted for about 20 to 30 kilometres, depending on the routes, heights, and obstacles. Before climbing the mountain, herders often spent the night on the bottom of the mountain. The routes to climb the mountain were always shorter than the routes in the steppe. Women did not lead camels to climb the mountain, but usually experienced elderly man led camels one by one or two at the same time. If two were walking simultaneously, the elderly experienced camel should be the first one to lead the line. To climb the mountain, camels should not get too tired. When they start breathing heavily and their nose begins twitching, they need a short rest.

On the way to climb the mountain, one has to mind *tülkhets* which means “a push” and *devkhets* which means “to jump”. *Tülkhets* is a rock that can push camels off the path way down to the mountain or cliff. Based on their memories of the previous trips, travellers should consider the number of *tülkhets* and their shapes and positions. When loading camels, size, weight, and shape of baggage should be appropriate to pass safely those *tülkhets*. Experienced, elderly, and strong men help camels to pass the *tülkhets*. They fix the pathway by placing stones on the lower side and camels pass one by one. Men stand on the lower side of the mountain to prop up camels in case they are pushed by a *tülkhets* rock and moved into a leaning position. *Devkhets* is the way to pass rocks, stones, and other material that blocks the pathway. When camels climb up to pass a blockage, the load moves down to the camel bottom. Therefore, some of the men push the camel load from the back when a camel climbs over the blockage, while some other men pull the camel and its load from the front. Camels sometimes also need to be unloaded to pass the blockage. On such a difficult route, animals trust humans. When humans lead animals and move forward, the animals become brave and follow them.

When the caravan reaches the mountain ridge, the *geriin ezegeti* takes the lead again, while men check the herd. There are big *ovoo* (or *oboo*) stone cairns on the ridge. Women burn juniper and offer milk to the *ovoo* and leave small pieces of animal ears cut off from marking animals. Also, to beckon good fortune, people talk about the nutrition of the pasture, pleasance of the summer, and scrutinise the weather and the year as well as the blessing of the mountain spirit and its protection of the *nüüdel*. Once arrived at the mountain ridge, all of the families and their caravans split up and head to their individual summer pastures.

After reaching the summer pasture, all humans and animals take a good rest for two days. Loaded camels would not be fed for one or two days. In autumn, they would not be fed for three or four days. Elderly people explain that this is because camels can get sick with *jilben güikh* or *jilbentekh* when they are fed nutritious mountain grass and herbs after spending lots of energy during the days of the *nüüdel*. In this case, the camel skin swallows as if it has water underneath the skin. It is a big difference of pasture and grass between the steppe and the mountain. For this reason, sheep will be kept nearby and all other animals have to start eating only small pieces of the mountain grass until their physiology adapts to the new pasture and environment. It is the same in the case of humans being close to dying of thirst; in this case, they cannot immediately drink too much water.

After spending a few days together, the women and children stay with the young animals and their mothers in the main summer camp, while the men take the rest of the herd to travel further. This is called *khosh*¹² *nüükh* or *tsaram nüükh*, or commonly

¹² In paragraph 169 in the *Secret History of the Mongols* from the thirteenth century, *qoş* denotes “travel tent” (de Rachewiltz 2004, Vol. II: 613). According to Igor de Rachewiltz, in the 13th century, the term *qoş* designated a “small tent suitable for casual use by one or two individuals” (613). Also, in the paragraph 80, *qoşiliq* means “tent” (Vol. I: 23, 374). While in the paragraph 245, *qoşiliq* is a tent used during funeral rites (Vol. II: 885).

known as *otor* in contemporary Mongolia. This is also where we can see different types of dwellings used for a very short period of time. *Urts* is a *ger* without a roof ring (*toono*) with two or three walls (*khana*) and three or four roof poles (*uni*). Some of such *khosh nüüidels* go to places where camels cannot travel, but horses and cattle can. In those *nüüidels* with horses and cattle, a much more simplified form of a *ger* called *khatguur* is suitable. *Khatguur* does not have walls (*khana*), it uses about 30 to 40 roof poles (*uni*) like a *tepee*. But a *khatguur* has a small roof ring (*toono*) about 50 to 60 cm diameter. This roof ring has a small hole where the flue pipe goes in. There are horses especially trained to load a *khatguur ger*. All of the 30 to 40 roof poles can be loaded on three horses. These poles also help to load and pack other things such as the felt for building the walls (*deever*) and roofs (*tuurga*) on the horse. The travellers in the *khosh nüüidel* also ride horses. In those places where riding is impossible, they walk, and they also carry the *khatguur* if the horses cannot carry it.

On the mountain, different animals go to different pastures. For example, horses, sheep, and goat graze in the area called *khöö*. *Khöö* is a place near the glacial region. It is also a good place to collect herbs and to hunt. *Vamsemeruu* popular is for its medicinal purposes, and the snow cock (*khoilog*) is a popular game bird. People dry snow cock meat in the *urts* or *khatguur*. Dried snow cock meat is considered the main medicine to cure wounds. Another animal frequently hunted by people and used for medicinal purposes is the marmot. People take the marmot stomach without opening it and dry it with herbs eaten by the marmot. Besides using dried marmot stomach for medicinal purposes, in spring, when the animals are weak, herders use such dried marmot stomachs to provide nutrition. One marmot stomach can be mixed with other fodder or grass and can feed many animals. In the mountain, people normally move to two to three *khöö*/s and spend about two months in the summer pasture.

After spending about two months from around 10 June to 10 August in the summer pasture, people start moving down to the steppe from the mountain. In the mountain, in the first month, people used to travel further to the mountain region called *khöö*, while in the second month, they used to prepare for the *nüüidel* to return to the steppe. It is the time when animals have gained enough weight (*öökhön targa*). Also the camels have gained the weight they need to transport the loads on the move backwards. Camels gain their appropriate flesh weight until November. For the returning *nüüidel* it is therefore important to preserve the fat weight of the animals rather than to burn it. To preserve their fat, camels need to be restrained and trained carefully (*soikh*). This can be done by examining, for instance, camel dung for changes from flat to droppings. The same applies to horses. Then animals become thinner and lose their stomachs. This makes them stronger and faster. When animals get ready to move, many families depart in the night. Some say maybe this is due to the historical past and memories of times of war and conflict when moving during the night was less risky.

To move back down from the mountain, an alternative route that may be shorter and quicker may be chosen. To go down a steep mountain slope, the load on the camel back should be tied from the camel's upper thigh to prevent letting the load slide down to the camel's neck and head. About such short cuts, Gantulga Damdin¹³ says the following:

Once I made a short cut to *Khamar Shand*. It is not easy to go down the mountain through a steep path. To go down through a steep route, we have to tie the camel load in a different way, called *tsavichilakh*. The word comes from *tsavi* [which is the upper inner thigh]. We tie the loads on the two sides of the camel from the upper end of the camel thighs. Camels do not feel comfortable when we tie around their inner thigh, it probably tickles them. Therefore, camels need to be trained and get used to such fastening. To train camels and make them get used to the fastening, the camel needs to be fastened around the upper thigh to slide down from a steep hill slope. In such a striking situation, camels do not feel the tickles from the fastening around the upper thigh but are scared instead and try to slide down safely. On the steppe, camels would not let one fasten around their upper thigh. In the condition of sliding down by sitting like a dog on the bottom, camels probably understand that the fastening of the load around their upper thigh is the best.

Therefore, short-cutting the number of ropes in the *tsavichilakh* style will have to be prepared in advance. When sliding down to a steep mountain slope, the loads will have to be tied from the upper end of the camel thighs. The distance to slide down is about a kilometre. On the way to slide down, there are places called *tavits*, small flat places where camels can rest and loads can be re-fastened. When camels slide down one by one, they cannot be tied from one another. Gantulga shares his story how some camels slid down:

When I was sixteen years old, because we were short of manpower, I had to lead the camels to slide down the steep slope of *Khamar Shand*. There was a storm in the mountain and we urgently had to move back. When I looked back when I was sliding down, the camel's head looked in the sky and I could not see the mountain at all. The camel's chest was hitting and pressing on my shoulders. Below in the bottom of the slope, a few elderly people were smoking and waiting for me. They were also watching, instructing and encouraging me by shouting "that is right" (*zūitei*) and "keep going" (*yavaad bai*). Both I and the camel were sweating and when I finally got down on the bottom of the slope, I was covered with so much camel wool. This is the moment that makes young men, horses, and camels lose courage. It was basically loose flat blue stones that slid down as soon as I and the camels step on them. This is really what happens. *Khamar Shand* and *Ekhen Bosgo* are very steep. Also, *Böörgiin Gol* is very steep. Also, that *Aguutyn Denj* is steep, and that really tests the courage of men, horses, and camels. Today, a sixteen-year-old kids would never do such a thing.

¹³ Gantulga is from *Zereg sum* and his *elken* (clan) is *Buurlynkhan*. He is a lecturer at *Khovd University*.

Zakhchin herders try not to scare camels too much during these extreme travels. By keeping loads light, not forcing too much, letting them rest to calm down, and by escorting to encourage them etc. The best way is to be with a camel in situations where they may lose courage. If that happens, animals can never make it. Therefore, herders' encouragement is an essential task, and to kill the courage of a young camel would be a complete waste of it. These camels would have no use except becoming food. Some young men say that horses are very clever (*ukhaantai*). They can slide down such steep slopes on horse by sitting not on the saddle but on the back of the horse behind the saddle while the horse sits on the two back legs to slide down. They also say both camels and horses have an ability to sense or understand what man is trying to do in extreme and urgent circumstances. In such circumstances, humans and animals share the hardships and survive together. They live together and suffer together in the extreme environment of a high mountain. Therefore, they say "livestock are not animals to eat, but they are knowledge to love" (*mal bol idekh yostoi animan bish harin khairlakh yostoi erdem*). Elderly Zakhchin people complain that the young people of our time consider animals no more than food that should be eaten, or a ride that should be mounted. Before the 1990s, when Zakhchin people travelled by using camels, they used to have a human-animal relationship. But with the extensive use of automobiles, people started to use trucks to move and stopped using camels and horses to move (Chatty 1986). Those few who still use camels to move do not pass the Altai mountain. Those old *nüüdel* that passed the Altai mountain and the *nüüdel* in the extreme high altitude were heroic shared experiences of humans and animals.

Conclusion

Nüüdel in Mongolian culture is a symbolic complex of human existence and practice within time and space. Herders' consideration of almost everything in the *nüüdel* and symbolic practices that imply those considerations make Mongol herder's *nüüdel* a pure and tolerant trip. In the imagined complex setting of *nüüdel*, man, animal and the natural environment recognise each other's existence, understand each other without words, and live in harmony and respect. The *nüüdel* in the Altai mountain and the ones in the extreme altitude are the testing ground where men and animals bond, develop a close relationship, and build trust which shapes human-animal relations.

Also, the *nüüdel* in the Altai mountain and the ones in the extreme altitude is a testing ground of Mongol herders' bravery, compassion, technique and knowledge. The use of trucks, technology, and other inevitable advancements, however, hastens the vanishing of the conventional practices and knowledge of *nüüdel* inherited from the past.

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Mobility and Immobility of Values: Understanding Knowledge as Salvation

Elisa Kohl-Garrity

Abstract

“Mobility and Immobility of Values: Understanding Knowledge as Salvation” explores how the value of salvific knowledge traverses and shifts between different constellations of narrative time, space, political/religious agenda and a variety of human (political) relations. The author starts out with her interlocutors’ descriptions of knowledge as transformative in a moral and economic sense and links these to the more recent popularity of Mongolian self-help literature. In Mongolia, this genre draws on a framework of compassion, self-love and salvific knowledge. The article discusses the entanglement of self-help ideas of a US-Christian origin with historically localized Mongolian Buddhist narratives of self-cultivation and of becoming a bodhisattva. The controversy over moral guidance through conceptions of the future versus the past has had to be navigated carefully by different political agendas throughout time, for specific political projects and has had to be aligned with pre-existing ideological frameworks. These shifts in perspectives on knowledge are mirrored in viewing them as mobile or immobile.

The way knowledge is or has been perceived as salvific comprises shifts and continuities, which can also be looked at from the vantage point of mobility and immobilities. Mobility and immobility is not only intended to describe the conceptual traverse and shifts through time and locale, but also the social mobility and immobility that these shifts entailed. I will limit myself to the discussion of some references to knowledge, which have come up in conversations with my interlocutors and explore these over space and time.

One aspect which seemed to be apposite in references to knowledge was the way in which my interlocutors were convinced that education and profession had to be “mastered.” A sixty-year-old Democratic Party member said:

We had the most traditions [during socialist times]. They were the most prolific – customs used to be the most beautiful. In this day and age people say they are lost somewhat. However, even if that is so, it will become beautiful [in the future] we try to make them understood. It will be tremendously beautiful. Everything will be understood, how the beautiful internet came, beautiful education will be mastered [*saikhan bolovsrol ezemshij*], beautiful school, beautiful reconstruction, we have to make it understood now, we understand it.¹

¹ Emee, “Mastering Education,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, November 9, 2013).

In her account she focusses on “mastering knowledge” within the framework of a beautiful future and past customs. In her account it is a prospect. Delgerzaya, woman in her 40s, highlighted “mastering” one’s profession as related to both value in the sense of dignity *üne tsene*, but also social status.

Generally, to master your profession, when you don’t have the chance to master or have not mastered your professional labor, value becomes scarce. People themselves have to learn to respect themselves and one another, right? They have to explain their own thought, but if a person can take responsibility for their own deeds, they will attain more value. Nowadays people will attain more intellect, education and value than others.²

Her account contains the insight, that some people don’t have the chance and therefore lack “value,” while on the other hand referring to the capability to bear responsibility for one’s actions. Inherent seems to be a negotiation between the not only neoliberal, but also Buddhist understanding of self-determination and the limitations operating on it.

Another woman, whom I will call Soyolmaa, who had experienced social mobility through marriage, and had come from a previously poverty-stricken background, portrayed the quest for knowledge as a form of social capital:

How we lived didn’t seem very important to me, but lately I have started to think that society has vanished, it has changed, one has to work, educate and live like the others, right? Even if one has mastered one’s education it doesn’t become obvious what kind of (partial/private) person this person has become. Yes, when you are born and grow up – I think I have come to do things. [...] To say it clearly, when you have set and reached your own goal, having reached your goal you continue, right? Thus, that life has not become [what you thought it would be]. It is not that life, it is not just me, the persons who had to reach the goal and [...] at last having reached it parallel to one another, holding on to it one shouldn’t lose oneself and one’s humanity.

Then one loses [the sense of] living, [...], now precisely money will become my goal, now I will graduate from a great school and learn many languages people will respect me, that makes you dependent on others, right? It has come to the degree where how a stranger speaks to me is dependent on my outer appearance. This seems very strange to me, right? Because other people are already able to do it, I think I should also be able to do it. I have only come to think like this recently; at first, I was far removed from everything, as a person from the socialist era I am starting to despise money very much. I don’t value money and in not valuing it I wish the environment, also the outer environment to become pleasant, tidy, also that my children don’t lack anything, and when I think I don’t want my children to lack anything, then inside myself I have a conflict, right?³

² Delgerzaya. “Mastering your Profession,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, March 19, 2014.

³ Soyolmaa, “Mastering Education,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, July 13, 2014.

The examples show how mastering knowledge is connected to knowledge as an investment in the future both in the sense of (social) capital and self-cultivation. In the sense of self-cultivation, it can also embody a moral choice. Hence, it may take the shape of a confluence of more economic preoccupations and Buddhist related notions of “karma” – the scholar on Buddhist Ethics Damien Keown writes:

According to Buddhism, human beings have free will, and in the exercise of free choice they engage in self-determination. In a very real sense, individuals create themselves through their moral choices. By freely and repeatedly choosing certain sorts of things, individuals shape their characters, and through their characters their futures.⁴

Hence, acquisition of knowledge becomes transformative in both a moral and economic sense. These associations of mastering knowledge, while not solely neoliberal, emphasize “personal” *khuvin* (also: private, partial) responsibility and capability.

A cursory review over socialist literature on education and the term of *ezemshikh* seems to suggest that these ideas of mastering knowledge are not new, however, moral guidance was more accentuated in the recent past.

The over estimation of knowledge is the cause of a loss of morality and it will poison education severely. However, if the goodness/aesthetics of a person has been improved, the immoral person, who values knowledge less and becomes poisoned to a great amount will not be able to uphold and master any kind of knowledge. [...] Because humans possess consciousness, their character, work and deeds – propaganda and definite directions are all of quality. Whatever a person does, he/she first needs to abstract and then it becomes practical work. The requirement to abstract will directly guide knowledge, interest, desires grounded in the conscious objective and direct the character traits of people.⁵

Today “mastering knowledge/education” participates in narratives on “rights” in particular human and children’s rights on the one hand. At the same time these rights to education are seen as beneficial for individuals to master their lives, appropriate or conquer private goods being self-dependent and sustainable, that is different practices to secure one’s fortune. The right to knowledge encompasses both progressive and reversive⁶ knowledge/education. An internet platform run by the Mongolian government and specifically by the Chairman of the Democratic party S. Erdene proposed to collect citizen’s suggestions on children’s rights (to no avail). It read:

⁴ Damien Keown, *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics: A Very Short Introduction*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

⁵ Nyamaa, A. *Shinjlekh Ukhaani Kommunizmin Onol Ekhlen Suraltsakh Bichig*, ed. L. Bat-Ochir and S. Purev, (Ulaanbaatar: Ulsin Khevreliin Gazar, 1972), 279–281.

⁶ Christopher Atwood, “Explaining Rituals and Writing History: Tactics Against The Intermediate Class,” in *Representing Power in Ancient Inner Asia: Legitimacy, Transmission and the Sacred*, ed. Gregory Delaplace, Isabelle Charleux, Roberte Hamayon and Scott Pearce. (Bellingham: Center for East Asian Studies, Western Washington University, 2010), 95–129.

Children's Right to education/development

6.1. Children have the right to master elementary education free of cost.

6.2. Children have the right to master their mother language, script, customs, and the inherited historical and cultural traditions.⁷

As the scholar Louiza Odysseos has observed, there is a tacit link between human rights and (neo)liberal governments' agenda regarding the rule of maximum economy "i.e. achieving maximum ends with cost-effective and minimal action." This rule also includes "[...] claims to assess government action in strictly economic and market terms."⁸

The enshrining of human rights into positive law (performative ontogenesis) and the creation and management of a human rights legal framework (structural ontogenesis) ensure that responsibility for making claims of social discontent and for social change rests with individuals.⁹

She goes on to say that "they remain abstractions in the absence of societal change [...]."¹⁰

Odysseos argues that this language of rights displaces earlier linguistic and action horizons. To put Mongolian experience in her words:¹¹ more socialist claims to redistribution of land [use] and wealth, pastoral justice and radical political reform are supplanted by the fight for rights of cultural self-determination – the rights to exist as cultural Mongolians. This emphasis on "culture" can also be seen in the orientation towards history and the national identity it hopes to create.

This discussion of rights and freedom was criticized by many of my interlocutors for having a negative impact on the consciousness of a child and leading to carelessness and chaos. For them, it was the embodiment of a loss of (senior) guidance.

Lately, during what they called globalism, the cities are becoming overly inhabited because the villagers have become unable to make decisions. Watching TV, surfing the Internet all these things having flooded in, every person has obtained equal rights, and people are also using this in an exceedingly wrong way.

Now, Elisa, it they have become like this – children come in here and say father, you shouldn't do this, mother you shouldn't this, we let [our daughter] because if we excluded [her] they would say we infringed her right. This right will affect the children negatively. When we were small and did something wrong, we would receive a spanking. This is what I needed; a child will understand that this happens when I do that. If I didn't do my work correctly, having brought together the cows, uniting them with their

⁷ Erdene, S., "Khüükhed Khamgallin Tukhai Khuuli." VIP 76 Very Important Person, accessed April 19, 2019, <http://vip76.mn/law/project/59>.

⁸ Louiza Odysseos, "Human Rights, Liberal Ontogenesis and Freedom Producing a Subject for Neoliberalism?" *Millenium: Journal of International Studies* no. 38, 3 (2010): 753.

⁹ Odysseos, "Human Rights," 763.

¹⁰ Odysseos, "Human Rights," 764.

¹¹ Odysseos, "Human Rights," 763.

calves and falling asleep or playing I would receive some you know what from my dad. You can hear with your ear and you taste through the hand. This is also beneficial to the children in return. Now if you did so it would be forbidden, it is a person's equal right. Nowadays a person may not shout at their own and strange children. This is also in a way correct, but it should also not be exaggerated.

Now if I shout at my child, you will scold me, it has almost gotten to the degree where you'd take me to court for that. I occasionally hear things like that when watching TV. Now it is correct that children's conscience and a person's own conscience should receive proper education. When I was little and played carelessly in front of my parents and their friends and I did something wrong, my mother's friend would scold me and say, go back, you go! If it got dark here and I was playing they would say 'go home'! If the cows and animals were over there, they would say – why are you here? Run, hurry up! Now people don't do this anymore, it's none of your business? Yes, it's none of your business. [...] These are all examples; it also pertains a bit to the cities. More and more people are drawn in to settle here. I wouldn't have come if it had been for myself. Sarnai was that small and had to go to school and needed to become knowledgeable. There was no kindergarten. Was there a hospital when you were ill? These were such bad conditions, so we came here and stayed [in the city].¹²

What this man in his sixties also negotiates is that knowledge is not a quality in itself; it needs to be subjected to and transmitted by a senior teacher, who directs it morally and shapes the consciousness of a child. The reference to *uqamsar* “consciousness” seems to be that of an understanding which supervises how knowledge is embodied and forms the character of a person. It is located both within Buddhist and socialist conceptions of how morality and character are formed. This is its moral aspect. However, it becomes evident that this morality is also shaped by governmental agendas, which this man sees as being in discord with the educational paradigm he holds. And yet it is not quite as straight forward as that. Caroline Humphrey had noted as early as 2002 that there was a sense of moral uncertainty prevailing that she witnessed in the 1980s:

The issue for my respondents, however, was not how much was inherited but the perception that modern city life had brought about a decline in filial respect and the emergence of individualist attitudes. For religious people these were both indices of the calamitous time' (*tsöviin tsag*) in which we live. The *tsöviin tsag* is a Buddhist concept, the declining era of ever-increasing impurity of minds before the emergence of the next Buddha, the Maitreya.¹³

¹² Togoonyam, “Children's Rights,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, April 2, 2014.

¹³ Caroline Humphrey, “Rituals of Death as a Context for Understanding Personal Property in Socialist Mongolia,” *Royal Anthropological Institute* no. 8 (2002): 73.

This seems to point then to more long-term narratives perpetuated beyond specific political agendas. And moral guidance is prescribed ex-post facto to the socialist past.

Space is also evaluated on the basis of and imbued by notions of time and knowledge. Political agendas play a role here. The countryside is perceived as the locale for historically transmitted customs and hence participates in a reified notion of “culture,” and the reverence for historical knowledge. Something, which Humphrey has called “the moral authority of the past”¹⁴ while knowledge in the city is cast in civilizational and progressive terms as what I would call the “moral superiority of the future.” Salvific knowledge of both is not exclusive, for reversive knowledge projects the past into a better future. Consider this teenager’s understanding of the countryside:

Generally, I think the most important is the Secret History, there are movies about it. Mongolians didn’t make the movies about Chinggis Khaan themselves, but they are very important and they truly did a good job, in them you can see exactly what this period was like. And then there are movies about e.g. this old beautiful [tale] of the intelligent Queen Mandukhai and so, right? But there are many movies, and they generally played an important role. And what else is there? Of course, there is the use of the Mongolian *ger* [Mongolian felt tent], but the city is of course not like this, when you go and see the country side, it is exactly like in the Mongolian old period? In the country side you can see this trait directly.¹⁵

The embodiment of progressive/reversive knowledge by the rural-urban divide is also a product of the Khrushchev era, in which Mongolian scholars were engaged in a movement to legitimize Mongolian history as high culture by studying customs of the rural population as I have shown elsewhere.¹⁶ However, it is also important to note that publications of the socialist era drew on historical reverence in a way. Notions of progress were promoted in various guises of “history” such as books called *The History of the Mongolian People’s Republic* or *The History of the Revolutionary Party*, arguably short histories. A variety of Mongolian short stories, culminated thematically in the promotion of secular scientific knowledge which guided a way out of the perceived “backwardness” of a class system and into an equal society, in which Mongolia looked up to their “older brother” (Russia) as role model. This type of progressive knowledge had to be encouraged and legitimized by usually old male characters of the story.

It was Ines Stolpe who first mentioned the appropriation of religious Buddhist terms for knowledge *gegeerel* “enlightenment” for socialist ideals of knowledge,

¹⁴ Caroline Humphrey, “The Moral Authority of the Past in Post-Socialist Mongolia.” *Religion, State and Society* no. 20,3,4 (1992): 375–389.

¹⁵ Oyutan, “The Secret History of the Mongols,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity. Ulaanbaatar, November 3, 2013.

¹⁶ Elisa Kohl-Garrity, “Contextualising Global Processes in Negotiating the ‘Custom of Respect’ in Ulaanbaatar,” in *Mongolian Responses to Globalisation Processes*, ed. Ines Stolpe, Judith Nordby and Ulrike Gonzales. (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2017), 105–128.

which contributed to their legitimacy and facilitated the transformation of one notion of knowledge to another.¹⁷ I would argue it was also the salvific aspect of knowledge which was retained, only, with a shift in political valuation of time. It was no longer the ancestral, religious genealogy, which transferred knowledge and experience and which “preserved” order or was the basis for informing the future. Progressive secular knowledge, which emphasized novelty, was now deemed salvific. A kind of reverence for the future, however was not novel either as the bodhisattva Maitreya (maidar) transported this sense of enlightenment into the future.¹⁸

Let me give an example of how the present salvific quest for knowledge might build on Buddhist notions of salvific knowledge and moral guidance. Just as historiographical literature has been immensely popular in the wake of the post socialist era, so have self-help books stacked shelves in bookstores in recent times. The translation of Samuel Smile’s *Self-Help* from Japanese, was particularly encouraged by a preface of the then president Bagabandi in 2001. The translation of self-help literature into Mongolian is no novelty as Dorothea Heuschert-Laage has shown for the nineteenth-century Qing dynasty.¹⁹ The self-help literature then as today seems to have been mediated first by a translation into Japanese.²⁰ Currently, this quest for salvific knowledge seems to be particularly gendered in that it is primarily directed at female consumers. Parallel to that there is an idea of the “self-made man” projected on to Chinggis Khaan with the abilities to ruggedly appropriate, successfully master and manage, excel and demonstrate (physical/mental) strength and independence. These associations complement the self-help discourse in speaking to the Mongolian businessman as the new Chinggis Khaan, portrayed in a neoliberal fashion.

Heidi-Marie Rimke noted about the political impact of self-help:

The self-help genre presents individual ‘development’ and ‘personal growth’ as a free moral and ethical decision and as a ‘natural’ undertaking embraced by well-meaning citizens. [...] the appropriation and application of self-help psychological discourses holds a key position in advanced liberal democratic society, and [...] these discourses and technologies contribute to the invention and scripting of selves – citizens who are psychologically ‘healthy’ inasmuch as they are governable, predictable,

¹⁷ Stolpe, Ines, “Schule versus Nomadismus? Interdependenzen von Bildung und Migration in der modernen Mongolei” (PhD dissertation, Humboldt-University, 2008), 68.

¹⁸ Ines Stolpe, “Mongolia’s Golden Ages: A Brisk Gallop through Changing Respresentations,” *Asien The German Journal on Contemporary Asia* 129 (2013): 143.

¹⁹ Heuschert-Laage, Dorothea, “Enlightenment in the Name of Chinggis Khan: The Founding of the Eastern Mongolian Publishing House in Mukden 1926/27.” *Asiatische Studien/ Études Asiatiques* 73/4 (2019), 683–711.

²⁰ See also Xia Xiaohong for an example of self-help literature during the late Qing dynasty and its translation into Chinese via Japanese. Xia Xiaohong, “Western Heroines in Late Qing Women’s Journals: Meiji-Era Writings on ‘Women’s Self-Help’ in China,” in *Women and the Periodical Press in China’s Long Twentieth Century: A Space of Their Own?*, ed. Michel Hockx, Joan Judge and Barbara Mittler. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 236–254.

calculable, classifiable, self-conscious, responsible, self-regulating and self-determined. Constructed and acted upon as such, individuals are rendered entirely responsible for their failures as well as their successes, their despair as well as their happiness. Indeed, this is the social subject of a liberal governance.²¹

The popularity of self-help books in Mongolia as well as the popularity of network marketing like Herbalife (referring to the consumer's "independence" and "self-reliance" once again) and Oriflame obviously does not feed on Calvinist inspired notions of success as sign of having been chosen by God, as they have in the US. Rather, they draw on Buddhist notions of self-cultivation and enlightenment, paired with notions of fortune as an expression of the grace of divine abundance. The latter has its legacy in governmental agendas of the Qing dynasty²² as a succession of a different grace discourse from the Yuan dynasty and more general present-day spiritual practices.²³ These ideas of enlightenment and fortune lead to the more general notion that one may improve morally and thereby "progress" through the acquisition of knowledge. Consider this young monk's explanation of the Buddhist process of knowledge acquisition.

When you speak about the impact [of Buddhist religion], a person has to instruct the Buddhist religion, teachings and doctrine from within. A person will search for enlightenment from within themselves. [...] They think in this way they want to further develop their knowledge, education, respect, culture and arts. If you don't think in this way you can't just embody them like this.²⁴

Self-help books, in particular those targeting women have capitalized on the notion of "loving yourself." They speak to salvific knowledge in that they seem to provide information and show how to invest in oneself to improve one's personal fortune. Companies such as Monos and Nivea and a range of others have created sales in Ulaanbaatar on the basis of "loving yourself." These enterprises then build on notions of (self-) enlightenment and investment and are primarily occupied with what Michel Foucault called moral subjectivation "setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object."²⁵ A manager at a cosmetic company in Ulaanbaatar poured a dietary product into her cup and explained:

²¹ Rimke, Heidi-Marie, "Governing Citizens through Self-help Literature" *Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2000): 63.

²² Atwood, Christopher, "Worshipping Grace: The Language of Loyalty in Qing Mongolia," *Late Imperial China* 21,2 (2000): 86–139.

²³ Empson, Rebecca, *Harnessing Fortune: Personhood, Memory and Place in Mongolia*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁴ Lam, "Enlightenment," interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, June 14, 2014.

²⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol 2, *The Use of Pleasure*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 29.

I am very zealous when it comes to work [...] my parents said: my child when you work‘add salt until it dissolves, work until you are finished’ do your work very well! Your mind will reflect in your work and you will receive a beautiful reply. [...] Precisely in being so zealous in my work I abandoned my family, my life and everything. [...] Why I did this? Because I have a very good salary and improved my life, I really worked zealously to perform my work truly. One day, looking back on my family I realized [...] I had changed into a bit of a careless woman. After the birth of my son [...] I looked into the mirror ‘it was you yourself who made yourself become bad, and fat, you shouldn’t eat that much and at last [I realized] I have to love myself first, if you do, then you respect [yourself], a person who hasn’t experienced love themselves cannot love/be compassionate to another. [...] I paid little attention to my husband because I am exactly like a man, I ascended everything myself.²⁶

Another opinion on “loving yourself” voiced by the blogger Baigalmaa on *sugar.mn* was that “self-love” had a positive impact on one’s karma – “A person can charge up his energy through self-love, which directs his life and environment”²⁷. It is important to note that the way self-love is depicted is as something one has to learn. Self-love is also directly related to fortune in that a lack of “energy” i.e. tiredness literally means “poverty.” Outer appearance, which is a sign of “self-love” becomes crucial as it reflects the state of energy a person has. This outer appearance in turn is often referred to as “cultivation” *soyoltoi* and also comments on a person’s education in a progressive sense (and carries a likewise socialist ideal of cultivation until today).

Interestingly, too “loving kindness,” which is not distinguished lexically from “love” *khair* has a longer historical governmental agenda it seems – and with it salvific knowledge. The common phrase of *kesig qairlaqu* became popular to extract goods from superiors particularly during the end of the Qing dynasty in times of poverty; however, it had been primarily used by the Qing emperor, who compassionately and loving kindly awarded grace. I carefully propose that the use of the term *qairlaqu* referring to the quality of loving kindness may be one of the terms used to refer to the nature of bodhisattvahood²⁸. It was definitely part of a “language of patronage” as Heuschert-Laage or “tutelage” as Di Cosmo called it. Moreover, it was no doubt also associated with filial piety as Atwood²⁹ seems to suggest. Farquhar’s seminal work

²⁶ Shürentsetseg, “Love Yourself,” interview by Elisa Kohl-Garrity, *unpublished interview*. Ulaanbaatar, July 26, 2014.

²⁷ Baigalmaa, “Ööriigöö Khairlakh Surakh ni, ‘Karma’-g Öörchildög,” *last modified February 12, 2017* <https://sugar.mn/view/oriyg-khayrlazh-surakh-n-karma-g-rchildg>.

²⁸ Thanks goes to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz for pointing out that *nigülesküi* translates into “compassion” and *asaraqui/qayiralaqui* denotes “loving kindness” in Classical Mongolian Buddhist texts. De Rachewiltz (2013, 102) differentiates the meanings of “favor, grace” from “to love, feel pity, begrudge” and argues for a pre-classical *qaira-* (*qayira-*) having later been replaced by *qairala-* (*qayirala-*). General dictionaries like that of Hans-Peter Vietze (2006) or Ferdinand Lessing (1960) feature a more general translation including love, grace, mercy and compassion.

²⁹ Atwood, “Worshipping Grace,” 105.

identified the Qing emperor as bodhisattva,³⁰ in specific the bodhisattva Manjusri. Elverskog³¹ and Kollmar-Paulenz³² both identify compassion as the main trait or motivation for a bodhisattva. The bodhisattva is an enlightened being, which has left the cycle of rebirths. He becomes a moral guide. In this sense the knowledge he holds is salvific. We may then also discern a crucial political master-disciple relation not only through the “two orders” *khoyer yos* of worldly ruler and spiritual master or preceptor-officiant and donor relationship³³, but also in this emperor as bodhisattva relation vis à vis his subjects. Moreover, as Kollmar-Paulenz³⁴ has shown there is a politico-spacial dimension to the master-disciple relation: Tibet with the Dalai Lama as emanation of Avalokitesvara and Mongolia with Chinggis as emanation of Vajrapani and the Russian Tsar as emanation of the bodhisattva White Tara, were constructions of a political order in the nineteenth century. This is one way of using “salvific knowledge” in political relations. Let me take a leap in time.

Obviously, the socialist government did not rely on the notion of a compassionate bodhisattva ruler. The strong promotion of salvific knowledge remained – even if its reference to history coated the promotion of progress. The political master-disciple relation also remained crucial – it was Lenin *bagsh* [teacher], who (ideally) became the object of reverence and guidance. Conceptually (rather than factually), it was the people, who ruled. However, they were morally and conceptually guided – instructions and teaching came from the party:

The historically significant resolution by the Central Committee of the MPR should be realized and fulfilled. It is always important to take measures to protect socialist property, to improve and responsibly supervise the process of basic registration. Regarding the setting of examples, the leading role of party members has to be further enhanced and communicated during the party meetings and punitive measures introduced. To increase, strengthen, love and protect socialist property the party's ideology, propaganda and the people's public activities have to be implemented stronger and one should direct one's attention mainly to the communist education of workers.³⁵

³⁰ David Farquhar, “Emperor as Bodhisattva in the Governance of the Ch'ing Empire,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 38, no.1 (1978): 5–34.

³¹ Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism, And the State in Late Imperial China*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), 186.

³² Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “Zwischen Machtpolitik und unermesslichem Mitgefühl: Die Dalai Lamas.” In *Tibetischer Buddhismus im Westen*. <https://info-buddhismus.de/Dalai-Lamas-zwischen-Machtpolitik-Mitgefuehl.html> (accessed April 1st, 2019), 3.

³³ David Seyfort Ruegg, “Mchod yon, yon mchod and mchod gnas/yon gnas: On the Historiography and Semantics of a Tibetan Religio-social and Religio-political Concept,” in *Tibetan History and Language: Studies Dedicated to Uray Géza on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Ernst Steinkeller. (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1991), 448.

³⁴ Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, “Systematically Ordering the World: The Encounter of Buriyat-Mongolian, Tibetan and Russian Knowledge Cultures in the 19th Century,” *Etudes de Lettres* no. 296,2,3(2014): 123–146.

³⁵ Jamiyan, J., “Sotsialist Ömchiig Khairlan Khamgaalakh Zorilt. [Goal to (Love and) Protect Socialist Property],” *Namin Amidral* no. 3, (1967): 15–16.

Affectionate rhetoric, which Dorothea Heuschert-Laage identifies as “language of patronage”³⁶ and Nicola Di Cosmo associates with “tutelage”³⁷ during the Qing dynasty was not precisely absent. “Love” or “compassion” was now rendered by the citizens of the USSR to the Mongolian citizens.³⁸ It pertained among others to socialist property possibly reminiscent of the way Qing (and the Bogd Khan who adopted this rhetoric) “shares” had been compassionately bestowed/allotted. However, I propose that the pair word “love and protect” is not really understood in this manner and is just rendered nowadays as a composite with the primary meaning of “protect.” During the Qing dynasty, divine abundance was distributed by the shares the Qing emperor bestowed as grace, who was chosen Tngri (eternal heaven) as Elverskog³⁹ elaborated. Socialist property on the other hand now had to be “loved and protected” by the people, who in turn had to be instructed by the party.

The value of salvific knowledge traverses and shifts between different constellations of narrative time, space, political/religious agenda and a variety of human (political) relations. To what degree we see mobility or rather immobility at work here will also be determined by our theoretical stance and to what extent we favor such rather broad trajectories of comparison. The questions we ask are also shaped by our intellectual history, such as the old debate between Heraclitus and Parmenides, as David Graeber⁴⁰ has indicated for value. “Heraclitus saw the apparent fixity of objects of ordinary perception as largely an illusion; their ultimate reality was one of constant flux and trans-formation.” He goes on to explain how Parmenides “[...] held that it was change that was illusion. For objects to be comprehensible, they must exist to some degree outside of time and change. There is a level of reality, perhaps one that we humans can never fully perceive, at which forms are fixed and perfect.”⁴¹ Moreover, if we think of historical periods as distinct, we might opt for seeing more mobility within a period and less between or across periods and vice versa. We could also look at the relations between mobility and immobilities as well as their overlaps and borders. Another way out of this binary opposition, and probably a more fruitful one, would be to look at the intellectual history of *khödölgöön* “mobility” (and its opposite *khödölgööngüi baidal*) in relation to *erdem* “knowledge, wisdom,” a concept, which seems to contain this aspect of “salvation.”

³⁶ Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, “From Personal Network to Institution Building: The Lifanyuan, Gift Exchange and the Formalization of Manchu–Mongol Relations,” *History and Anthropology* no. 25,5 (2014): 648–669.

³⁷ Nicola Di Cosmo, “From Alliance to Tutelage: A Historical Analysis of Manchu-Mongol Relations before the Qing Conquest,” *Frontiers of History in China* 7, no. 2 (2012): 191.

³⁸ Tsedenbal, Yumjaagin, Yu. Tsedenbal Ilgel Ügüüel Khelsen Üg. (Ulaanbaatar: Ulsin Khevreliin Khereg Erkhlekh Khoroo, 1967), 10.

³⁹ Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*, 18.

⁴⁰ David Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value*. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 50.

⁴¹ Graeber, *Value*, 50.

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**‘A miracle walking tree’:
The supernatural in the landscape mythology and social space of
contemporary Mongolia**

Alevtina Solovyeva

Abstract

This article examines a peculiar case in contemporary Mongolian landscape mythology – a tree with the supernatural ability to move. The tree features as a character in contemporary folk narratives and is the object of worship practices shared by various communities. This article investigates the basis of Mongolian folk traditions from which the conception of this unusual tree grew, the cultural concepts the legend transmits, and the roles and functions it performs in contemporary vernacular beliefs and social interactions. This article is based on both fieldwork materials and internet sources.

Key words: Mongolian folklore, landscape mythology, mobility and immobility of the supernatural, vernacular beliefs, social practices

Introduction

This article¹ is devoted to an unusual case of contemporary Mongolian place lore: a sacred tree, whose supernatural ability to move around features as a core motif both in narratives and ritual practices. This motif is connected to local traditions, mostly found in the neighbouring provinces of Bayankhongor and Arkhangai (in the central part of Mongolia), where I first became acquainted with the notion of a miraculous walking tree during summer fieldwork in 2015 and 2016. All attempts to find examples of “walking” trees in other contemporary traditions in Mongolia (and related regions: Inner Mongolia, Buryatia, Kalmykia, and the close Turkic and Altaic traditions), as well as in previous written sources failed to give any satisfactory results. Meanwhile, in the space of Mongolian internet and social media, the unusual tree of Bayankhongor and Arkhangai began to appear from 2011 on, and the internet forms of its existence continue to provide valuable data for research into this case.

Despite its extraordinariness, this supernatural tree does not exist in a cultural vacuum in present-day Mongolia. The investigation of this case reveals a diversity of folk traditions and important cultural concepts that melted together to produce a breeding ground of beliefs, images and motifs with regard to the “walking tree”. In this article, besides introducing the supernatural ‘walking’ tree, Bökh Mod, I shall discuss its image, motifs, and rites in vernacular beliefs and practices, and explain its roles and functions in the life of contemporary Mongolian communities.

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The “walking tree” in contemporary folk beliefs, narratives and rituals

Beliefs about the unusual tree are represented in various discursive and ritual forms, which vindicate and complement one other. In this article, in order to analyze some manifestations of those beliefs, I use multiple sources, encompassing oral materials (interviews conducted during my fieldwork), written materials (web materials found in internet sources) and visual materials (the observation of ritual practices during my fieldwork, photo and video materials from internet sources). Oral materials contain folk narratives of various genres and other discursive forms, including descriptions of rituals and rites (some of them exist only in a discursive form and never are performed in reality, others represent ritual practices that are realized). Internet space embodies folk beliefs in a written form, not only representing oral narratives, but also supplying it with other genres that are specific to social media, and which impact upon the development of the image and abilities of the miracle tree. The use of visual materials allows us to investigate rituals devoted to the tree, and the boundaries and links between discursive and ritual practices. They also allow us to touch upon the realm of concrete items (particular locations, real trees, the physical objects included in rituals, etc.) involved in this case of landscape mythology.

“*Tim gaikhaltai id shidiin bökh mod bii...*” / “Such a wondrous miracle tree is the Bökh Mod”: these tones of mystery and surprise often determine the mode of storytelling about the tree. And, indeed, it does have many enigmatic features and semantic twists, starting from the name of this unusual tree itself. “*Bökh mod*” might be translated in a variety of ways: ‘large/solid/strong tree’ (*‘bökh*’), “leaning tree” (from *‘bökh*’-*‘bökhih*’), “wrestler-tree” (*‘bökh*’), in both senses, a tree of wrestlers and a tree-wrestler) (Pjurbeev 2001). Each of these meanings supplies an element of the image and abilities of the tree and refers to different folk beliefs.

In narratives, Bökh Mod is usually presented as a huge strong tree with a peculiar shape: the figure of a wrestler (“with an appearance like a human, [as] a wrestler standing in struggle” / “*khünii dürstei ijil, zodog shuudagtai bökh khün örööd*” [D.Ch., 1939, Khalkha, Bayan Ovoo sum, Bayankhongor, 2015]²), or two wrestlers (“seems like two wrestlers enfolding each other while fighting”) / “*khoyor bökh bariad zogsoj baigaa met kharagddag yum*” [B.T., 1965, Khalkha, Bayan Ovoo sum, Bayankhongor, 2015]). It might also be described as a living tree or as a dry tree, and the only stable feature of its image, that it is a pine tree.

Additionally, ‘leaning’ refers to one of the supernatural abilities the tree has, namely its ability to move. Leaning in one or other direction between two provinces, the Bökh Mod predicts and determines where a wrestler-champion will be born.³ It

² Here and further, metadata given in square brackets refer to fieldwork materials and provided in the following format: the interviewee’s initials, year of birth, their Mongolian community (e.g. Khalkha, Olot, Buryat, etc Mongolian peoples), the interview location and year.

³ Mongolian traditional wrestling is regarded as an important piece of national culture and heritage, deriving from the times of Genghis Khan, and continues to be highly respected and popular in con-

can also predict which province the wrestler destined to win in the next festival's (*naadam*) competitions will come from (Pic. 1).

[According to what people say], which one of those two provinces this tree falls towards, there good strong wrestlers will be born.

Ter mod khoyor aimgiin al' ruu n' kharj unana ter nutgaas khar'shgüi khüchtei bökhchüüd törnө geј yar'dag baijee [B.S., 1973, khalkha, Jargalant sum, Bayankhongor, 2015].

[The tree] predicts and determines the birth of famous strong wrestlers in the neighbouring provinces. Besides this, it also predicts who will win at the competitions at the big [state] festival Naadam.

Zaag orchimd aimagt aldartai khüchtei bökh khünii törliig mergelj, nölöölөh, tüünees gadna tom naadamd khen yalah geј mergeldeg [M.D., khalkha, 1943, Zag sum, Bayankhongor, 2015].

Moreover, the tree might even “walk” around the area between bordering provinces. The motif of the tree shifting location is accompanied in oral and written (internet) narratives with specific locations. The most frequent of these are Bulgan sum in Arkhangai province, Jargalant sum in Bayankhongor, and the border between Bulgan sum of Arkhangai and Erdenetsogt sum of Bayankhongor. The significance of the strolls of the Bökh Mod between the two provinces is once again to indicate which one the winning wrestler will come from.

The cause of such unusual behavior is another popular topic of narration. Some versions refer to the unclear and miraculous origin of the tree, testifying that it was planted by no-one simply appearing by itself [B.B., b.1973, khalkha, Ölziit sum, Bayankhongor, 2015]. Other accounts attempt to approach the mystery from ‘scientific’ and ‘natural’ perspectives. According to one such explanation, the supernatural abilities of the tree derive from the specific place it grows: an area where there is supposed to have been ancient human habitation formerly.

At that place, remains of hearth, weapons, tools, utensils, urban ruins, and bone carvings were discovered, which belong to ancient people, who lived 200 000 years ago along the rivers Orkhon, Tamir, Hanui, Hunui, and Chuluut.

Ter nutagt Orkhon, Tamir, Khanui, Khünüi, Chuluut golyn nutgaas 200 000 jiliin üed nutaglaj baisan ertnii khünii gal golomtyn üldegdel oromj, khereglej, baisan zevseg bagaj heregsel, cav suulga, khot suuriny tuur', yas chuluun siilmel zereg oldjee [G.M., 1961, Khalkha, Tsetserleg sum, Arkhangai, 2016].

temporary Mongolian communities. Traditional wrestling is one of the “Three manly skills” that also include horse racing and archery, and all together they are included in regular competitions on the national festival *Naadam*. These competitions, like the festivals, can be found at different levels starting from smaller administrative units (district *sum*, province *aimag*) and reaching up to the national state (*ulsyn*) level.

According to another version people from neighboring districts of Bayankhongor, Arkhangai and sometimes Övörkhongai provinces, steal the magical tree from the border (or the territory of neighbors to their own area) and carry it off to ensure that the winning wrestlers will come from their province. Some narratives of this kind even provide a convincing explanation of why the tree sometimes looks dry and damaged after such walks, or, on the contrary, remains green and keeps on demonstrating its supernatural qualities.

There is such a tree, Bökh Mod, in Arkhangai province. It was located on the border of Bayanhongor and Arkhangai. People from Arkhangai moved the tree closer to them, and it is still green and growing, after they took it out and put in another place. Now there are good wrestlers in Arkhangai [H., 1944, Khalkha, Bayan Ovoo, Bayankhongor].

Arkhangai aimagt baidag Bökh Mod n' Arkhangai bolon Bayanhongor aimgiin khil zaaglan orshdog bilee. Arkhangain nutgiin хүмүүс enekhүү modyg sugalj зөж авчирсны дараа ч ногоон кheveeree urgasaar baidag ajee. Odoo kharin Arkhangai aimagt sain бөхчүүд baidag.

The tree Bökh Mod with its supernatural abilities to move around and to predict champion wrestlers is a very popular element in contemporary narrative tradition, and occupies a prominent place in local landscape mythology and occupational folklore (that of wrestlers). Stories about it refer to both the past and the present and are retold by a variety of people, old and young, people directly related to the traditional Mongolian wrestling and those who are not.

In oral and written narratives, these motifs appear in various genres – legends devoted to local landscape items and the neighborhood or to wrestlers of former and modern times, rumors, belief narratives, and life stories where the ways of people, both outstanding and ordinary, are entwined with the fate and will of the miracle tree:

Old people used to say that wherever this tree falls, whether towards Arkhangai [or] Bayankhongor, in that area good wrestlers will be born. And the tree fell towards Arkhangai just before the ‘Lion’⁴ began to shine in Bulgan sum⁵. [So] the words of our old people were proved to be true – soon in Bulgan sum of Arkhangai province the national [champion with the rank] ‘Lion’ Munkherdene was born. That is why this [champion] ‘Lion’ is sometimes called “the wrestler of the tree-wrestler” [the Bökh mod]. This tree connected not only to that ‘Lion’ [Munkherdene], but also to other wrestlers [-champions], who appeared after him. At the end of the period when good wrestlers were not been born in Bulgan, soon after the ‘Lion’ Munkherdene, the state [champion] wrestlers ‘Elephant’ Ragchaa [and] ‘Hawk’ Batjargal were born.

⁴ Traditional Mongolian wrestling includes a range of titles, indicating the level of competitions, ranks and number of wins a wrestler has. The main corpus of titles includes such figures as (in ascending order from the lowest to the highest): ‘Falcon’, ‘Elephant’, ‘Lion’, ‘Hawk’, ‘Garuda’, ‘Giant’.

⁵ Sum is an administrative unit, a district of a province (aimag).

Ene mod Arkhangai, Bayankhongoryn khashaa n' harj unana ter nutgaas sain Bökḥ törnö geḥ humuus khüürnedeg baij. Getel Bulgan sumyn nutag dakh 'terkhuu mod arslangiin id gyalalzaj ekhlekhees döngöj ömnö Arkhangai tiish kharj unajee. Nutgiin övgödiin yaria ch ünenii khuv 'tai baisan n' notlogdoj, udalgüi Arkhangai Bulgan sumaas ulsyn arslan tsoltoi törsön n' Mönkherdene baiv. Tiimees ch arslang 'Bökḥ modny Bökḥ' geḥ nerleh n' bii. Ene mod zövkḥön arsland bus tüünii araas zalgaj garsan Bökḥchüüded ch bas khamaardag. Bulgan sumaas sain Bökḥ törölgüi kheseg khugatsaa bolsny etsest Mönkherdene arslangiin araas ulsyn zaan Ragchaa, ulsyn khartsaga Batjargal naryn bökḥchüüd ter darui törsön garsan yum [Ch.G., 1954, Olot, Bulgan sum, Arkhangai, 2016].

Stories also mention and describe practices connected to the Bökḥ Mod. Some of these only have a textual existence (this is most likely the case for the idea of stealing and removing the tree, for instance). However, the real-life existence of others is confirmed from other sources (surveys, visual materials and observations). These include a range of actions common in Mongolian tradition to express respect toward a sacred object: circling around an object, tying ritual scarfs (*hadag*) to an object, sprinkling an object with vodka/tea/milk, leaving small offerings of food, tobacco, etc. Praying and wishing are also a part of these worship practices, and in addition to random requests about well-being, they make mention of health “strong as the tree”, physical strength, and, of course, victory in the competitions. So, besides requests about one’s own wellbeing, practices include strong “as the tree” health, physical strength, and, of course, a win in the wrestling competitions. These rituals and rites are performed by local people from neighboring areas, both wrestlers and non-wrestlers, as well as travelers from other parts of Mongolia: “Many people come to pay respect to this Bökḥ Mod, which is in Bulgan sum of Arkhangai province” / “*Arkhangai aimgiin Bulgan sumand baikh enekhüü Bökḥ modyg olon tumen süslen khündelseer irjee*” (FB, Aryn saikhan Khangai)⁶.

Besides such common practices, the Bökḥ Mod is also associated with some quite particular rites, which are to be performed by wrestlers who “take energy (*energi*) from the tree, standing embracing it” [D.Kh., 1944, Khalkha, Bayan Ovoo sum, Bayankhongor, 2015], “put on the tree wrestling clothes”, “perform wrestling dance” [B.B., 1970, Khalkha, Jargalant sum, Bayankhongor, 2015], the ceremonial “dance of eagle”, *bürgeḍiin develt* (Pic. 3).

As well as the written form of narratives, internet and media sources provide additional contexts for folklore phenomena to live in. The motifs we have mentioned can also be found on Facebook and Twitter, in blogs, on news and sports portals together with other materials including visuals (photos) related to Bökḥ Mod. One of most typical contexts for the miracle tree on the internet today are websites of Mongolian towns and settlements. On these sites the tree is represented as a material and spiritual treasure, natural and local heritage, specific to Bayanhongor and Arhangai (<http://jargalant.khongor.gov.mn/>; <http://archive.bayankhongor.gov.mn/>

⁶ <https://tinyurl.com/tkwkw6j>.

jargalant; <http://tseegiineemi.blogspot.com/p/dm-mi-ts.html>). These materials often are reposted by private individual users who also make their own contribution by adding photos, comments, and versions of narratives. Traces of Bök Mod also might be found in sport and professional wrestling blogs, news blogs, observing local Mongolian sensations and events (fact.mn, dnn.mn, tod.hiimori.mn). The internet, besides carrying folk narratives in a written form, also provides the support by which this can evolve. For example, the conditions of communication in the internet space noticeably impact on the “anthropomorphization” of the miracle tree that already exists in oral traditions. This humanizing of the tree results from its specific appearance and supposed mobility, and is found in remarks about its current state that contain an emotional component. One such example can be found in a report about the broken hand of the tree: “Bök Mod lost its hand, [by which it was] waving and looking as a wrestler, so badly one its hand is broken :('” / “*Bök Mod garaa aldlaad devj baigaa bök shig kharagddag baisan gesen, daanch neg gar n' khugarchikhsan* :('” (Pic. 2) (<http://saixan.blogspot.com/2016/01/blog-post.html>).

Internet sources also ascribe a great age to the Bök Mod making it older, even older than than it is in (?) oral narrative tradition. This emphasis on the antiquity of tradition serves to enhance the authenticity and reliability of the reported phenomenon:

Bök Mod is located northeast of the center of Jargalant sum, in Bayankhongor province, on the territory of the 3rd bag⁷ of Khöndlön Bulag. Before the People's Revolution,⁸ wrestlers of the khoshuu⁹ used to go there to pray and worship [to the tree].

Bök Mod n' Bayanhongor aimagiin Jargalt sumyn tövөөс зүүн khoish Khöndlön bulagiin 3-r bagiin nutagt orshikh ba Ardyn khuv'sgalaas ömnö khoshuuny bökchuid ochij khündetgel үзүүilen mörgөj tah'dag baisan (<http://archive.bayankhongor.gov.mn/jargalant/single/49>).

Internet data does however also reflect doubts about the miracle tree and its supposed abilities, and the testing of trust as in this excerpt of an interview with the wrestler:

- There is the ‘Böh Mod’ in Bulgan sum of Arhangai province. You probably know the legend about this tree. Do you believe it's true?
- Almost everyone knows about the ‘Böh Mod’. If the ‘Böh Mod’ falls on Arkhangai's side, then a good wrestler will be born there. If it falls in Bayankhongor's direction, then a good wrestler will be born in that area, such the saying used to be. Probably, it is true as many say.
- *Arhangai aimgiin Bulgan sumand ‘Böh Mod’ gej бii. El modny domgiig ta meddeg l bailgii. Üünd kher itgedeg ve?*
- *‘Bök Mod’-ny talaar meddegгii hün barag baidaggii biz dee. ‘Bök Mod’ Arhangai tal ruu unaval tendees sain böh törnö. Tsashaa Bayanhongor зүгtee unaval ter chigiin nutgaas sain bök törnö khemeen yar'dag baisan yum bilee.*

⁷ Bag is an administrative unit of a district (*sum*).

⁸ People's Revolution of 1921.

⁹ *Khoshuu* – a unit of administrative system in Mongolia till 1935.

Olны ug ortoi gedeg shig ünэн baidag bailgüi dee (<http://www.fact.mn/81854.html>).

The internet is a special space where folk beliefs can manifest, and it can contribute additional surprises and discoveries that reveal material ‘evidences’ for the tree’s mobility and flexibility.

This data relates to the appearances and location of this tree in the form of photos, selfies with the tree(s), and short videos.¹⁰ Although they seem at times to be images of different trees, this does not create any debate or questioning among users who ‘like’ and comment on those posts as normal. Thus, the needs of narrative tradition that thrive around the core motif of supernatural mobility triumph over the ritual tradition (which usually implies some stability of sacred objects to be worshipped), and pull different landscape items together into a combined image of a wondrous tree.

The unusual and exciting story about the Bökh Mod, nevertheless, touches upon topics significant for folk culture relating to the human and the natural, the natural and the supernatural, past and contemporary images of neighborhood relations, the ties and connections between different communities, habits and values, which are in turn constructed upon important living concepts, traditional Mongolian beliefs and universal motifs. To reveal some of these basic ideas, we need to make a closer observation of the cultural ground and mythological roots of the miracle tree.

It should be mentioned that Mongolian vernacular beliefs provide a very “tree friendly” cultural environment in terms of everyday routines and attitudes toward nature. These beliefs are embodied in a general rule: a prohibition (*tseer*) on cutting trees, and narratives illustrating this near-taboo. In Mongolian traditions, the cutting of trees (together with hunting and fishing) is regarded as a grievous sin,¹¹ which dramatically affects the fate of those who do it, their family and all those who are somehow related to this deed. Numerous narratives tell about a sinful (*nügelt*) woodsman who dies in agony after cutting down trees. His family members die one after another or suffer from horrible diseases (FM 2006–2017, Damdinsüren 1991, Tsermaa 2006), and even random people, who later simply come to the deserted camp and occupy a wooden hut made from those sinfully-taken trees, fall sick and die, if they do not grasp fast enough the unluckiness of the place, and move away (Tsermaa 2006, 12).

¹⁰ There are also photographs of sacred trees in Arkhangai and Bayankhongor aimaks available in the article written by Alena Oberfalzerova, which apparently might be some of the same trees which are now associated with the image of Bökh Mod, but probably in 2010–2011, when the fieldwork of the author was conducted, this image at least was not so popular, and the trees were simply labelled “*Zuun salaa mod*, ‘a tree with a hundred branches’ (Arkhangai)” (Oberfalzerova 2012, 33, Figure 5) and “Double tree, an object of worship (Bayan-Hongor)” (Oberfalzerova 2012, 35, Figure 6).

¹¹ Restricting regulations concerning hunting and fishing in Mongolia are most certainly influenced by Buddhism, including customs such as “sealing the lands and the water” in Tibetan (and Mongolian) Buddhism, which is attested as early as the 12th century (Huber/Pedersen 1997).

Such narratives might be told about any tree (or group of trees) at any location, due to the traditional conceptualization in which they belong to local nature spirits (*lus-savdag*, *gazaryn ezen*), the patrons of Mongolian land, and very powerful and influential figures of folk authorities. The misfortunes that follow the cutting down of trees are the revenge of nature spirits, and the only counter-measure that someone who has done this can take is a (correctly-performed) special ritual of asking permission and forgiveness from the spirits.

Orphan tree

Besides this general respectful framing attitude towards all trees, there are particular kinds of trees, which require very special treatment and worship. They might be represented by groups of trees (often called *Zuun/olon modnii bayan burd* – “Oasis of hundred/many trees”). Or they might be more commonly (and more relevantly here) be a solitary tree (*önchin mod*, “orphan tree”). Typologically, the Bök Mod is one of these. While the particular species of sacred trees varies according to district, local and communal traditions (Gongorjav 2011; Lkhagvasüren 2012, 46–47), the most popular species are poplar, willow and, of course, the larch, with its symbolism of being “always green – always alive”, as is the case in many other cultures.

In Mongolian traditions, other features of such trees seem particularly significant. Solitary trees come in a variety of types, distinguished by one of their semantically important features which relates to their appearance, location and so on: a branchy tree (*zun salaa mod*, “a tree with hundred branches”), a tree growing on the top of a mountain, a tree growing on the side of the river, a tree struck by lightning, a crooked tree. The unusual shapes and locations of these trees (together with their proud solitude) can be taken as markers of their special status. This means they possess a stronger degree of supernatural patronage on one hand, and on the other that their own special abilities are greater. Such trees are often regarded as wrathful (“*dokshit*”), which obliges people to behave more cautiously when in their vicinity, and to follow special rules, including restrictions on climbing the tree, coming too close to it, stepping on its roots (or even on its shadow), making a noise, sleeping next to a tree, etc. (Oberfalzerova 2012; Gruntov 2018; Lkhagvasuren 2012).

In former times, the worship of such trees had both an occasional and a regular (seasonal) dimension, which nowadays is undergoing somewhat of a revival in the modified forms of annual festivals (Heichieva 2017). Today, occasional forms of worship are more popular, and in general they are similar with those discussed above, representing a basic complex of rites quite common for sacred places and objects in general. These are, for example, offerings with food, sprinkling, binding *hadak*, circling around the trees.¹² Usually such trees do not have any strict “professional”

¹² The worship of this kind of trees among Mongolian peoples has a long history and traces of it are found in various sources including “The secret history of Mongols” (*Mongyol-un niyuca tobca'an*, a chronicle written in the 13th century, the most important and oldest medieval Mongolian text): “nine sprinklings for the branchy tree” (Mongolyn 1957, 117).

specializations in the way the wrestling tree does, and become instead the addressees of common prayers for wellbeing, good luck, and fertility (especially those trees with “hundred branches”) and of wishing. Together with other sacred natural objects, including rocks and springs, such places are regarded as healing places. In contemporary local folklore, such trees are popular figures associated with travel, belief narrative, local landscape mythology (all genres which now are found in cyberspace), and also of more ‘conservative’ genres such as old legends of communal origins and ritual poetry (Dampilova 2012).

These solitary trees also have another united name in Mongolian culture which applies in other ritual and mythological contexts, “*udagan mod*”¹³ (‘a tree of a female shaman’): “Shamans worship to *udagan mod*. A branchy tree growing alone is called “*udagan mod*” / “*Böö nar udagan mod shütdeg. Ontsgoi uragsan saglagar modyg udagan mod gedeg*” [J.P., 1922, Khalkha, Bulgan (town), Bulgan, 2007]. In both earlier and contemporary traditions, this name might be used in two senses. Firstly, it could be used as a category term for all solitary sacred trees, and secondly, it could be used as a specific concept which involves the tree as a symbolic mythological image and as a material ritual object (Dampilova 2012, 203–204). In the second sense, the tree is linked to various kinds of practices,¹⁴ including invocatory rituals, where it is represented as a part of the equipment that a shaman(ess) needs for travelling between worlds. In this context, solitary trees are regarded to be “spots of the connection between earth and sky” (Dampilova 2012, 116), the human and other worlds, of supreme deities, spirits and demons (Dampilova 2012, 134). Thus, it is that orphan trees reveal themselves to be forms of the world tree (or the tree of life), one of the most widespread mythological figures (Honko 1986).¹⁵

World tree

These models of the world tree, sacred kin and ritual tree in Mongolian actual and ritual mythology retain traces of some substantial influence from and close

¹³ The term ‘*udagan mod*’ has synonymous names in Mongolian traditions: ‘*eej mod*’, popular among Buryats (Dampilova 2012, 104), ‘*gurban tiviin böö mod*’, ‘*böö mod*’ among Darkhads, the last one is recognized as a late term (Lkhagvasuren 2012, 48), which recently started to spread more widely. The long debate on the origin and semantical ties of ‘*udagan mod*’ still continues (Dampilova 2012, 161–162). According to some interpretations, ‘*udagan*’/‘*idurjan*’ is connected with the Turkic *ot/ut* ‘fire’ (Tsybikov 1981, 167) or old Turkic *ıduq* ‘sacred’ (Rassadin 2007, 64–65). However one of the most popular previous and contemporary opinions (such as Banzarov 1955, Mihailov 1996, Lkhagvasuren 2012, Oberfalzerova 2012) proposes a connection with *etiügen*, the old name for ‘earth’ (mentioned in the “Secret History of the Mongols”), which is involved in various mythological and religious texts, and which correlates with the semantically important ties between images of the sacred tree and the mythological ancestress – earth, mother-*eej*, emphasizing their feminine nature and fertility.

¹⁴ There are various ritual and rites mostly connected to shamanic practices including traditions of initiations [Galdanova 1996], invocations (Dampilova 2012) and funerals (Hangalov 1959, 270).

¹⁵ It seems to be no accident that in the modern tradition, the combination ‘*böh mod*’ is consistently used to translate the Christian concept associated with the image of a mighty tree growing by the water side (for the possible prototype see Jeremiah 17:8), which also correlates with the regarding image, see <https://tinyurl.com/yxyn8to8>.

ties with other mythological and genre traditions. This concerns motifs of the world tree, which arrived together with Buddhist cosmology and cosmography (Kovalevskii 1837). These concepts were also widely adopted in Mongolian epic traditions,¹⁶ which were closely connected to local beliefs and apparently had a strong impact upon the interactions of the motifs from Buddhist mythology and local autochthonous traditions. Such motifs include mythological trees, which are grown in isolation, sometimes at the side (or in the middle) of the mythological world ocean (or sea), growing at the line where sky and earth meet. They permeate several levels of the universe and cover 75 heavens, possess leaves which emit beautiful music, and are endowed with miraculous abilities to fulfill desires, drive away evil spirits and demons, heal sickness and revive the dead (Neklyudov 1980; Mitirov 1980; Basangova 2015). Among these trees are *Galbar zandan* (also *Damba Zuli*, *Dalai Damba*, *Zamba*), the fiery-red sandalwood tree (which has healing leaves and grows up from the lower world); *Galbirragsha* (*kalpavrksa*), the tree which exists for as long as the entire kalpa (aeon); the giant king-of-trees called ‘Sala’ (compare with *zuun sala mod*), which grows on *Jambudvīpa*; the giant tree, that grows on the other side of the outer ocean and which holds the nest of the highly-beloved Buddhist deity Khan Garuda (the king of birds) (Neklyudov 1980, 101). The fairytale tradition draws more intensively upon the image of a miracle tree, giving it specific generic features, evoking the images of “a solitary tree, hiding at its roots a miracle talisman”, or “a faraway tree with sixty (seventy) branches, belonging to people who speak sixty (seventy) languages” (Neklyudov 1980, 101).

Thus, our miracle walking tree is an orphan tree, a ‘shamanic’ tree, and a world tree. The narrative tradition devoted to this tree includes motifs referring to the past, present and future. It unites different times, as, according to the stories, it spread its rootedness in the camp of ancient mankind, it nourishes contemporary people with healing ‘energy’ and by listening to their wishes and prayers, and it predicts the birth and fame of a special kind of people: traditional wrestlers.

Heroic tree

Besides these images of the world tree, various traditional narrative genres reveal some other important ties and contexts regarding the Bök Mod. These share a number of common images, characters and motifs, concerning natural objects, especially stones and trees. Such motifs display the intricate relations pertaining between representatives of the (super-)human and the (super-)natural. Fairy-tale narratives give vivid examples of such unity, embodied in various international manifestations of ‘the living tree’ (as found in tale-types ATU 720 *The Juniper Tree*, and ATU 780 *The Singing Bone*) as a receptacle for the soul of the positive human character, whose life was cruelly interrupted by the antagonist; or as an analogue of the human body

¹⁶ In epic tradition, besides functional images, the world tree is often included at the formal beginning of a story, which mentions the epic time when the world tree was ‘a tender sprout’ and when the world ocean was ‘a small puddle’ (Neklyudov 1980, 101).

which starts to bleed with ‘real’ blood when felled;¹⁷ or as partial soul of the human character, reflecting his or her life conditions: blossoming while happy, and becoming parched when the character is close to death. This motif typically features in narratives about several brothers (or friends) who separate to search for their fate and fortune, such as in the following fieldwork example:

- So, seven sons had to go for seven years. So, they planted seven trees.
 - If someone is in trouble, his tree will grow weak and collapse, [they] said.
 Then seven years passed, the tree of the fool [brother] grew weak and collapsed.
 [They] asked the magician [brother], and he said:
 - [The fool brother] is lying pressed under a flat black rock.

Ingeed doloон hүү doloон jil yavakh boljee.

Ingeed ted doloон mod bosgojee.

- *Khen neg n' muu yavbal түүний мод хөсрий болж хугарсан байна гэж.*

Tegeed doloон jil bolood irtel tenegiin мод хөсрий болood хугарсан байв гэж.

Ilbechnees asuutal:

- *Khavtgai khar khadni door daraastai байна гэж.*

[J.Ts., 1926, Khalkha, Khujirt sum, Övörkhangaï, 2006].

While both ‘high’ mythology and fairy-tale traditions form a solid background of hidden semantics and expressive images, epic and legend traditions also make their own significant contributions to Mongolian landscape mythology, which is more closely related to the communal everyday life beliefs and practices. In the epic tradition, the hero often might be born from (or found in) a rock or at the roots of a giant tree (Basangova 2015, Khan Kharangui туул’ 2016). Sometimes the hero himself is metaphorically described as a solitary sprout, a lonely branch meaning a lonely soul (Basangova 2015). In legends, the motif of kinship with a tree is represented in genealogical narratives devoted to the origin of particular Mongolian groups (Lkhagvasüren 2012, 46–47, 50; Dampilova 2012, 118, 213–214), and supported by ritual practices (taboos and worship prescriptions towards the totemic tree) (Gongorjav 2011, Lkhagvasüren 2012, Gruntov 2016).

A reversed account of the relations between heroes and natural objects can be found where features in the landscape owe their existence, location and peculiar shapes to superhuman characters and their deeds. A large number of such examples includes mountains which were the pillows of epic heroes or tethering post for their horses, large solitary stones in the steppe, which were the tops of mountains and rocks brought by heroes (*baatarchuud* or *bökhchүүд*) in order to defeat a giant snake (*avarga mogoi* and *Taikhar chuluu*), to block enemies or curses (*kharaal*), and large trees of peculiar shape, which were split and twisted by heroes, etc. [FM 2015–2016].

A noteworthy trait of landscape narratives is that the heroic character might be represented synonymously by various figures believed to have “superhuman”

¹⁷ This motif is popular in legends and in the contemporary ‘new age’ narrative traditions.

abilities: mythological ancestors, epic heroes, religious specialists, and traditional wrestlers. In contemporary landscape mythology, though from different genres these characters carry the same determining roles, i.e. to be protectors and benefactors of the home land (*nutag*), to defenders of the area and its inhabitants against various kinds of evil and malevolence, and provider of fame and well-being.¹⁸

While the presence of heroes is mostly referred to in various narrated forms of the past (myth, epic, or recent historical time), natural objects serve as their ‘here and now’ representations. They are material proofs of their abilities and receptacles of their sacred power. The notion of intimate, interpenetrating ties existing between a person and his or her material objects (Humphrey 2002) is also one of the widespread motifs found around the world (perhaps a cultural universal), represented in various spheres of traditional and modern life, folklore, religion (starting from beliefs, from black magic to saints’ relics). In Mongolian traditions, the situation of sacred patronage and positive influence transmitted from superhuman figures to material objects (or even through material objects to the community of presently living people) is often described and interpreted by the emic concept *khiimor*.¹⁹

In this context, the term has a spectrum of meanings including vital power and spiritual strength. According to Mongolian vernacular beliefs, the level of *khiimor* determines the quality of life, well-being, fortune and happiness, and also individual abilities. For ordinary people, a (normal) medium level is indicated by good health and life conditions, while a low level is shown by the occurrence of diseases, failure, and misfortune (Tsermaa 2006, 21; Damdinsüren 1991, 18). Extraordinary people are supposed to have a high level of *khiimor*, the higher and the more outstanding abilities they have, and to spread their excess of blessing upon the land and people around them [D.Kh., 1944, Khalkha, Bayan Ovoo sum, Bayankhongor, 2015].

Traditional wrestlers are one of the most popular categories of people who are believed to have such very high *khiimor*, together with a high social and spiritual status. This is due to the special abilities and benefits they bring to their local home-communities: protecting, glorifying, raising the prestige of the area (settlement,

¹⁸ Concurrent narrative and ritual traditions suggest that sacred natural objects often are found under the double jurisdiction and protection of contemporary nature spirits *lus-savdag* and now-deceased heroes.

¹⁹ *Khiimor* is a highly complex term with multiple semantics and functions in Mongolian vernacular traditions as well as oral and ritual practices. It encompasses the mythological and Buddhist religious symbol of ‘the horse-wind’, ‘vital energy’, ‘strengths’, ‘happiness’ (*az hiimor*), ‘good luck’, etc. It might be also applied to humans (personally and collectively), supernatural entities, animate creatures (for example, wolves who are believed to have high *hiimor*), and inanimate natural objects (such as sacred mountains, trees, and springs), manufactured items (*morin khuur*), and personal belongings. In different contexts, it might refer to various dimensions including religious, traditional medical, social (in particular, gender, when *khiimor* is regarded as a symbol of masculinity), and mythological. According to one of popular motifs specific for the folklore of wrestlers, the wolf gives birth and lives in the chest of a great deceased wrestler, which is also a sign of high *khiimor* and the superhuman nature of the hero [FM 2009-2016]. On *khiimor* see also the research of Katherine Swancutt (2012).

sum, aimag), *nutag*, where they were born.²⁰ In the Mongolian world, the cult of wrestlers has deeper traditional features and sacred meanings as is reflected in beliefs, narratives, and ritual practices. Traditional wrestlers (*bökhchüüd*) are regarded as the heroes of contemporary times, modern descendants of the epic heroes (*baatarчууд*). This belief is represented in various motifs, including the notion that the body of epic heroes and wrestlers share common features, such as ribs that have no spaces between them. This is a symbol of supernatural nature and strength (the same feature sometimes is spread upon the best friend of the hero – his horse):

“[...] then people came back and [saw that] inside the chest [the skeleton of the deceased wrestler] a wolf gave birth to its cubs [and made a shelter for them there]. That person [a wrestler] had a physical peculiarity: there are ribs, his ribs lacked any spaces in-between. Some flesh should be here [the interviewee is pointing on his own ribs], there was no flesh, it was just solid bone, monolithic bone /

“[...] *tegeed ter khümüüs ergeed ochikhod tseejniikhen khöndii hödnii dotor chono gölölösön baisan gej yar'dag, tegeer ter khünii biein ontslog yuu ve gekheer khavirga baina shüü dee, khavirganüüd n' khoorondoo zai baikhgüi, end n' makh baidag te, makh baikhgüi, tsul yas baisan bitüü yas* [B., 1973, Khalkha, Ölziit sum, Bayankhomgor, 2015].

Besides their outstanding physical strength and super-human power as represented in various motifs in legends, they also have peculiar spiritual abilities, such as being able to “sanctify” the space where they present, to scare away all bad and malevolent influences, and to fight and crush evil spirits and demons [N.S, 1926, Khalkha, Bömbögör sum, Bayankhomgor, 2015]. This last motif (and some other related motifs) are similar to ideas about the abilities of religious specialists, and in some narratives, wrestlers even combine these duties, being at one and the same time a wrestler and a shaman or lama [B., 1973, Khalkha, Ölziit sum, Bayankhomgor, 2015].

Portions of ‘excess’ *khiimor*’ and positive power are believed to be contained in various items related to a great wrestler. Besides the aforementioned pieces of landscape, such items include a wrestler’s clothes, his hat and belt,²¹ and also his physical remains: the bones of a deceased wrestler.²² All these objects are regarded as

²⁰ The pair *böh – nutag* is a vivid representation of traditional concept of the spiritual unity between the human and the territorial, which has different forms and objectifications in rituals, such as the practice of burying the umbilical cord after the birth in the house space, to give one example. In the folklore of wrestlers, the idea of this connection is reflected in practices addressing the spirits (*lus-savdag*) and patrons (*sakhius*) of the birthplace for the help and support before the battle. In return, after the competition the winner perform the ceremonial dance facing (offering it) the direction of motherland [FM 2014-2016].

²¹ Both objects are believed to be closely connected to a person, accumulating the *hiimor*’ and *sul’d* of the owner. This especially concerns the belt which, as a masculine attribute, scares away demons and all evil.

²² Beliefs about the special ability of bones to contain the features and abilities of their owners are widespread and found in various cultures. In Mongolian traditions, these beliefs are connected to various motifs and figures, both demonic (the demon *chötgör* and “bad soul” *muu süns* are believed to be connected to the pelvic and skull bones) and sacred. The most important sacred figure is the guarantor and patron of the entire Mongolian land, Genghis Khan. This is reflected in repeating declamations and rumors about the discovery of the secret burial place (together with multiple folk locations of the place of birth) of the great khan in different places both inside and outside of Mongolia (on the mythic

sacred, valuable and desirable, as long as they keep spreading their salutary influence upon the people and the place where they are situated (Gruntov 2016). In addition to a generally positive effect, such objects also have a specialized ability to provide new good wrestlers.

While natural objects usually represent immovable sacred goods (large rocks, trees, etc – only a hero can move them and thus can define his strength and willpower), a wrestler himself, and his belongings represent a mobile sacred good. This understanding is richly reflected in narrative traditions and embodied in various motifs. One of the more popular narratives tells of the wrestler who is offended by people from his home-community, and, despite close ties with the mother-land, has to leave it. Following this, wrestlers are no longer born in that place, but start to be born in the area the wrestler moves to [O.B., 1963, Myangad, Kshovd, 2014]. In legends and descriptions of real practices, wrestlers' clothes might be passed on by the owner himself to another person so as to share *khiimor*, the strength and luck in competitions (for example, from the wrestler-teacher to his disciple). They might also be stolen by others who want to get their own wrestler-winners. A similar situation concerns the remains of deceased great wrestlers – their location determines the place where good wrestlers will be born. The theft of the bones of a great wrestler is a very popular motif known all over Mongolia, and it seems to be difficult to say whether the practice is real or not. Below one of many examples of this plot, connected to the name of a famous and very respected wrestler of former time, Vandan from Ikh tamir sum:

About 70-80 kilometres below Ikh Tamir sum, if one goes directly following the river, there will be a sum called Bettengel, a 'Giant' [champion wrestler] called Vandan was from there. When he died, Mongolian people put him, as it is supposed to be done, on the ground, on the [top of] mountain.²³ Until today this tradition [of funerals] exists, [and] according to the rules, the place [where the body of deceased will be left] should be chosen by consulting Buddhist books. People from his area put [his body there], then 21 or 49 days later, after the death on the 21st or 49th day, people usually return [to the place of funerals]. [They come] to check, what is happening to [the body of deceased] person: is it taken by sky animals, vultures, or by wolves, for this purpose [they] come

area of Chingissid, which includes, for example, Kazakhstan). Another group of motifs about sacred bones includes relics of famous wrestlers and also bones of fast horses, which are also believed to bring *hiimor* to their owners and land.

²³ The most widespread form of traditional funeral was 'leaving in the steppe', which meant that the body of the deceased would be left in the steppe at a place prescribed by a lama through divination. In some special cases, the remains were supposed to be left in a high place, such as the top of a mountain, hill, etc. In contemporary traditions, these special cases typically include the remains of famous wrestlers-champions and the skulls of speedy horses who have won races (the skulls of such horses are often located on tops of *oboo*, rocks and even trees). According to folk beliefs, doing this pays respect to the significant figures of the community and provides them with the possibility of being reborn in the same area again: "The skull of a good fast horse, racing champion should be located at a good high place, facing the area, where it was born and lived, so it would reborn here, at its motherland again" / *Sain moriig nutaghuuldag zanshil yosoor khurdan khülgiin tolgoig gavlyn yasyg törj össön nutag ruu n' kharuulj tav'snaar törsön nutagtaа dakhin törnö geј belegsheedeg бilee [Kh.B., 1963, Khalkha, Ölziit sum, Bayankhomgor, 2015].*

to check after 21 days.²⁴ So, [they] came on the 21st day – [there were only] bones left, [they] came on the 49th day – the bones had vanished. Finally, it was discovered why those [bones] disappeared: they were moved to another place, people from another province took bones of the wrestler and buried it once again [at their area]. [...]. The reason why they did it is that their province was very poor in wrestlers, ‘Giants’ [champions] were not born there, [that is why they] took bones of Vandan ‘Giant’ to their place, worshipped it, buried it again on the high place on the top of the mountain. They did not tell anything to people from [Vandan’s] area, they [just] came back secretly. [...]. After they worshipped the [stolen] bones of that wrestler, three ‘giants’ were born in their province, one after another.

Ikh tamir sumaas 70-80 kilometr orchim door yag goloo dagaad yavkhaar Bettsengel gej bii, ter sumyn khar'yat Vandan gedeg avarga khün baisan. Tegeed ter nas baraad, tegeed तरीг монголчууд чини гazar il tavchikhdag uulan deer zagtai odoo ch gesen baigaa shüü dee, tiim yos bol kheveree burkhany nom khardaad il tav'gevel il l tavchikhna. Ter nutgiinkhan il tav'san tegeed yaakhav odoo esvel 21 esvel 49 khonood odoo nas barsnaas khoish 21 khonono 49 khonog deer n' ochij ergedeg baigüi yuu? Nögөө khün chin' yamarkhuu baina khir zereg yaaj tengeriin am'tan tas shuvuu तरीг avch yavj uu ügüi yuu esvel chono avch uu ügüi yuu gesen, tiim badlaar ochij khardag 21 ödriin daraa. Tegeed 21 khonog deer n' ochikhod yas n' baisan aa, 49 khonog deer n' ochikhod baikhgüi boloson baisan, an tegsen chin'süild n' ingeed ter yaagad alga bolchikhov geed survaljlaad baisan chin' öör gazar luu shiljүүлсen baisan öör aimgiin khümüüs bökhiiin yasyg avaad akhiad orshuulsan baisan. [...]. Ted yaagaad ve gekheer ted nar bökh muutai aimag avarga tördөггüi aimag tegeed ter Vandan avargyn yasyg tiish n' avaachaad shüteed öндөр uulyn oroi deer dakhiad orshuulsan baihgüi yuu, tegeed terniigee khümüüst khelekhgüi nuutsaar ochij ergedeg baisan. [...]. Tegeed ter böhiin yasyg dahin shütsenees khoish ter aimag zövhöñ neg golyn daguu 3 avarga törsön [B., 1973, Khalkha, Ölziit sum, Bayankhomgor, 2015].

The worship of traditional wrestlers is another essential facet of the Bökh Mod, but in comparison with usual items of landscape mythology, even from the same provinces, it has a different position and role. It is not a receptacle of the heroic extended blessing in narratives and practices, it is a mobile sacred good with its own will; in a way it gives birth to good wrestlers, like an epic tree, and determines the winners. It is an independent character with strong ‘personal’ features, behaving more like a wrestler, than a tree of wrestlers.

In this context, the significant textual and ritual humanization of the miracle tree becomes more meaningful, semantically justified and functional. During the aforementioned special rites performed by worshipping wrestlers, the tree is ‘dressed’ in wrestling clothes, as if one of them, in order to share the blessing with the other

²⁴ According to the interviewees, the vanishing of the body, which is part of the funeral, is a sign of the soul leaving this world, and the way it happens shows how the process is going. If the flesh of the body disappears quickly, then the soul will be reborn more easily and sooner, whereas if it stays untouched for a long time, then the soul cannot leave, and there is a problem that requires help from a religious specialist.

wrestlers (like a wrestler-teacher and his disciple), or is pulled into the ceremonial wrestlers' dance, as an equal (but still a bit superior) partner of wrestlers. The tree walks around and its 'body' (alive, or dry like the bones of deceased wrestler that is believed to be stolen and carried between the neighboring areas) brings sacral power and good luck, as well as new protectors and providers of the well-being for the land: wrestler-champions.

Thus, the miracle tree Bökh mod combines traditional motifs both of femininity and fertility (the world tree, the tree of a shamaness), on the one hand, and of masculinity and heroics, on the other.

Conclusion: The miracle tree in a social dimension of landscape mythology

The Bökh Mod, rooted in a diverse ground of mythology, folklore, and vernacular beliefs, is also thriving successfully in the social dimension, reflecting some important features of contemporary Mongolian communities and their life. It indicates non-obvious connections and relations (*kharltsaa*) within and between various groups based on the continuity and transformation of concepts, and referring to important traditional values, like *khiimor*' and *nutag*. Through motifs of an expanded spiritual good (*khiimor*') and the forms of its transmission, this case also reveals the ties between the individual, the collective and the territorial (heroic figure – community – small mother land, *nutag*), the human and the nonhuman (wrestlers – objects), the natural and the supernatural (landscape items – venerated locus), and the spiritual and the material (sacred objects).

The miracle tree is a significant figure in the local landscape mythology of several provinces and represents a particular case of the shared, mobile spiritual treasure, migrating around the boundaries of these areas. In particular this fact of folklore indicates closely-related and continuous interactions over the long term and also the unity of these traditions despite their administrative division into different provinces, as reflected in their shared sacral images and motifs.

In Mongolian culture, the natural sacred locus (together with *oboo*) serves multiple roles, being markers of areal, social, ethnic, religious, professional communities, and material representations of certain folk beliefs, memories and values. Nowadays they are also actively implicated in the construction of local identity and the building up of the brand image of a particular area (*nutag*) and community. In the relevant region, the cult of wrestlers is one of defining leitmotifs, revealing the social nature of the traditional concept *khiimor*', turning in this context into a form of collective prestige.

The miraculous walking tree detects Mongolian folk perceptions of a unity between individual and collective, human and environmental, natural and supernatural, determined by belonging to the same home area (*nutag*). Bökh Mod is a case of 'landscape mythology', a term which allows to analyze this unity, bringing together perspectives of social relations, place-lore and mythic imagination, involved in the actual life of nowadays communities.

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Illustrations



1. Bökh Mod in Arkhangai province

Photo by Bat Erdene

https://twitter.com/tsbat_IT/status/513656079259938816/photo/1



2. Bök Mod with a broken hand
<http://saixan.blogspot.com/2016/01/blog-post.html>



3. A traditional Mongolian wrestler performing the ceremonial "dance of eagle"
<https://www.facebook.com/MGLNationalWrestling/>

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