

## Research Article

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### Introduction

In 1990 Mongolia turned from a communist country highly dependent, economically as well as ideologically, on the Soviet Union, into a democratic country.(1) Free elections took place for the first time ever, and the country managed the transition to a democracy patterned after the Western model comparatively well. In 1992 the Mongols confirmed this historic turn by giving themselves a democratic constitution.(2) The shaking off of communist rulership brought about a resurgence of Mongolian religious traditions, Buddhism and the *autochthonous* Mongolian religion alike.(3) In northern Mongolia, the revival of the indigenous religious traditions of the Mongols, including *owō*-worship, the mountain-cult and, of course, shamanism, seem to be predominant. But in the rest of Mongolia, Buddhism has experienced a massive renaissance. "Buddhism" in the Mongolian context denotes Tibetan

Buddhism in its Mongolian form. Tibetan Buddhism underwent distinctive changes and adaptations in the Mongolian cultural context, from the late sixteenth century on. In the early twentieth century Mongolia belonged to a Tibetan Buddhist world which stretched from Ladakh to the lower Wolga regions. Up to 600 monasteries and temples spread over the country, with up to one third of the male population leading a monastic life.(4) In 1990, however, there existed but one functioning Buddhist monastery, Gandantegchinlin in Ulānbātar, the capital of Mongolia. This monastery was more or less a state-dependent establishment, with only a few carefully chosen monks deemed "trustworthy" by the communist government. Choibalsan, the "Mongolian Stalin," ensured that these monks and lamas were puppets under communist rulership. The establishment of Gandantegchinlin as the only functioning monastery in the country and the state protection of the monasteries of Kharkhorin and Erdeni dzuu was initially forced upon Choibalsan by Stalin himself, who was pressured by a delegation sent to the Soviet Union by President Roosevelt in 1944. In 1990 approximately one hundred lamas studied at Gandantegchinlin, forty of whom were destined to teach in the few functioning monasteries of the Soviet Union. A traditional Buddhist education, however, was not possible, as it was forbidden to study Buddhist philosophy and dialectics, the core subjects of higher Tibetan Buddhist education. Today nearly 200 monasteries and temples have been restored throughout the country. More than 3000 monks are registered (the number of nuns is not ascertained), and there is ongoing teaching activity, mostly carried out by Tibetan teachers from the Tibetan exile community in India. In this brief article, I will concentrate on the situation after 1990, without however, referring any more than necessary to the history of Buddhism in Mongolia.(5)

The Revival of Buddhism

When communist rule in Mongolia broke down, the country looked back at the ultimately fruitless attempt to erase all religion from the Mongolian landscape, the indigenous religion as well as Buddhism. During the 1930s nearly all the monasteries and temples were destroyed or secularized; the monks were either killed or forced to marry. Laymen and monks succeeded in hiding some of the religious books and cult objects from the government and its catchpole, but most of the Buddhist literature and religious objects were destroyed during the years of the communist purges.

The sudden revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after 1990 is only astonishing at first glance. Religion never ceased to exist in Mongolia. Even in the communist era many Mongolians found a way to practice religion secretly. Today even former party leaders admit to having practiced Buddhist rites or to consulting astrologers during the time when the practice of religion was officially forbidden. Since 1992 freedom of religion has been guaranteed in the constitution, and the separation of religious and secular institutions has been established.<sup>(6)</sup> This new freedom of religion is observable everywhere in the country. People flock to the monasteries, making circumambulations, giving offering to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas whose statues are either being restored or built anew. In 1996 a huge statue of the Bodhisattva Nidüger üjegci (Avalokiteshvara) in the Maitreya temple in Ulānbātar was installed. The yearly Mayidari festival, first introduced in 1657 at the Erdeni dzuu monastery by the first Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu Zanabazar, was held again at Ulānbātar, in May of 2000 at the Gandanthechhinlin monastery.<sup>(7)</sup> This monastery recently opened new colleges, structuring the monastic institution after the Tibetan dGe-lugs-pa model. In order to also make Buddhist teachings available for smaller monasteries in the countryside, lamas are sent to these establishments. In 1998 the number of monks at the Gandanthechhinlin monastery was over 300 and is still

growing. The abbot of the monastery is considered by other clerics to be the head abbot of all of Mongolia's monastic establishments.(8) His prominent position could, at least theoretically, be threatened by the Ninth Khalkha Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu, who has already visited Mongolia one time. The Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu, also called Bogdo Gegen or Bogdo Khan, was the highest Buddhist dignitary in Khalkha Mongolia up to 1924, when the eighth Jebtsundampa died. Upon the death of this Buddhist incarnation, who from the time of the third Jebtsundampa was always an ethnic Tibetan, the communist government decided *per decree* against his further incarnation. Even so, his reincarnation was recognized in 1932 in a boy of four by the Reting Rinpoche in Tibet, but due to the political circumstances his existence remained hidden but for a few insiders. He later fled to India with the Dalai Lama and lived quietly at Darjeeling and Mysore with his family. (9) In 1991 Mongolian lamas requested the Dalai Lama's information regarding the Ninth Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu, and only then was he officially acknowledged as the ninth incarnation of this Buddhist lineage that goes back to the famous Taranatha, a Tibetan Buddhist historian of the sixteenth century. In the same year the Jebtsundampa Khutukhtu moved to Dharamsala where he was officially enthroned. In 1999 he visited Mongolia, where he was acknowledged as the head of Mongolian Buddhism. The visit, however, met with political obstacles due to the Jebtsundampa's strong ties to the Tibetan exile government and the Dalai Lama. The Chinese government was opposed to his visit, and therefore the ties between this most important Mongolian Buddhist incarnation and his spiritual homeland were not further strengthened by it.

### The Renaissance of Monasticism

The revival of Buddhism in Mongolia brought about a strong interest in

monastic life, for women as well as men. Whereas in the early 1990s the majority of monks were old, today the young monks outnumber the old ones. It is not only religious devotion that leads to the rapid increase of clerics among the population. Being a monk or nun is considered a job, and the clergy receive a small income. This may well be strong motivation to join a monastery, in view of the bleak prospect of unemployment for a large part of the population.

The demographic factor, however, causes problems concerning the education of the monks and nuns. Knowledge of the holy scriptures, the liturgy, and the offering of ceremonies and rituals in general, is scarce. The old generation of monks is rapidly dying out. Thus, well educated Buddhist teachers are rarely to be found among the Mongolian clergy. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that from the beginning of the period of religious freedom in Mongolia, the Tibetan exile community and the Dalai Lama took a keen interest in the renaissance of Mongolian Buddhism. Throughout the last seven centuries, Tibet and Mongolia have maintained strong cultural, political, and religious ties, and from the late sixteenth century onward, lamas of the dGe-lugs-pa school of Tibetan Buddhism managed to convert the entire population of Mongolia (with the exception of the Buryat Mongols) to Buddhism in less than fifty years. Since the early seventeenth century, Tibet and Mongolia have shared a common religious identity within the broader religio-cultural context of the Asian countries dominated by Mahayana Buddhism. Thus, in the early 1990s Tibetan lamas started to come to Mongolia in order to instruct the Mongolian clergy and to develop a programme of higher education for them. The former Indian ambassador to Mongolia (from 1989 to 2000), Bakula Rinpoche, a native of Ladakh, played a central role in this influx of Tibetan Buddhist knowledge. He tried to reestablish Mongolian Buddhism on the basis of dGe-lugs-pa monasticism. This aim implied the enforcement of celibacy among

Mongolian monks and nuns. Bakula Rinpoche himself ordained quite a number of young monks and nuns.(10) Bakula Rinpoche's modelling of Mongolian Buddhism on the dGe-lugs-pa tradition was, however, contested. Mongolians consider the fact that the majority of monks turn their backs on their monastery and live life as pastoral herdsmen to be a distinctively Mongolian Buddhist way of life. Today the pattern of leading a religious *cum* secular life in Mongolia is forming. Young people, after having performed their work and/or domestic duties, during the afternoon drop by the monastery with which they are affiliated and carry out their religious obligations, either by reciting texts or by performing religious ceremonies. Half of their day is thus spent in pursuit of a spiritual life although they are not properly ordained.

Due to a lack of knowledge of the philosophical and ritual differences of the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the monks and nuns often cannot determine with certainty the order of Tibetan Buddhism to which they belong. Since the late sixteenth century the dGe-lugs-pa has been dominant, but schools like the bKa'-brgyud-pa, the Sa-skyapa, and the rNying-ma-pa have also been active in Mongolia. (11)

Who Pays for it all?

The rebuilding of monasteries destroyed in the communist era and the erection of new ones costs money. Who pays for these buildings? On one hand, Mongolian Buddhism, since the beginning of the twentieth century, has been connected in many ways to the international Buddhist world. It is not only Tibetan Buddhist institutions that are providing a knowledge transfer to Mongolia, which has suffered such a severe loss of its traditional Buddhist culture. International Buddhist institutions have also helped establish the necessary financial support to revive the Buddhist traditions. This international connection has been dealt with in

the forthcoming article by Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, therefore I need not dwell on it here. On the other hand, the Mongolian people constantly donate money to restore old monasteries, temples, and stupas, and to establish new ones. "All things here are donated by local people. And even the building was erected with their help," says a twenty-three year-old monk of the Shankh monastery, which was built in the seventeenth century by Zanabazar.(12) Sometimes only a *ger*, a felt tent, is erected, which serves as the temple where monks and lamas perform religious services. In view of the economic difficulties the country is facing after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, and the transition to a free market economy, it is noteworthy that Mongolians still find the means to finance the building of Buddhist temples and monasteries.(13) Once established, the monasteries depend on the continuous financial support of lay people, as is customary in Buddhist societies throughout Asia.

#### Creating a new Mongolian Cultural Identity: The Role of Buddhism — and of Chinggis Qan

The fact that the Mongolian government also financially supports the restoration of Buddhist monuments brings me to an intriguing question to be asked in the context of the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia: what role does Buddhism play in the process of creating a new collective cultural identity for the Mongols?(14)

Considering the fact that the whole of the rather lengthy article twelve of the Mongolian Constitution deals solely with the emblems of national identity, and that these national emblems, which consist of the State Emblem, the Banner, the Flag, and the Seal, are described in terms that refer both to the traditional religion and to Buddhism, it is obvious that Buddhism is considered of prime importance in the constitution of



Mongolian identity. The State Emblem, the *sülde*, an *autochthonous* religious symbol into which the vital energy of the ruler is incorporated and which is deeply grounded in Mongolian indigenous ideas of the soul, is rooted in the white lotus, one of the most important symbols of Buddhism, which serves as its base.(15) Furthermore, in this article the *keyimori* (the "wind-horse"), the *cindamani* (the "precious jewel"), and the *ghurban cagh* (the "three times" of past, present, and future), all of which play such a prominent part in Buddhist mythology and philosophy, are pointed out as vital parts of the "symbols of the independence and sovereignty of Mongolia."(16) Since the early seventeenth century Buddhism has played a vital role for the construction of Mongolian religious and cultural identity. Since the conversion of the Altan Qaghan of the Tumed Mongols and other Mongol rulers and nobles, the dGe-lugs-pa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism has become dominant in the whole of Mongolia (including Outer and Inner Mongolia). The unique conversion technique of Buddhism, used as early as the seventh century, during the first introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, was also employed in the Mongolian context: the indigenous deities were incorporated into the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon as "guardian deities," all of them, of course, operating on the level of "conventional truth." Toward the end of the seventeenth century, Cinggis Qan, who was worshipped throughout Mongolia as a powerful ancestral deity, was already incorporated into the Tibetan pantheon as the Bodhisattva Vajrapani.(17) The Mongols were thus integrated into the Tibetan-Buddhist universe, which in the symbolic representation of the three Bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri and Vajrapani, included Tibet, China and Mongolia as the three poles of the Tibetan-Buddhist world. Since the seventeenth century, Mongolian religious and cultural identity has been constituted by two separate factors, indigenous religion and Tibetan Buddhism.

Thus the cultural identity of the Mongols is founded in religious syncretism, defined from the point of view of the religious actor. (18) Since the seventeenth century, the growing number of the Buddhist clergy led to an increasing asymmetry between the indigenous religion and the Buddhist foundation of Mongolian religio-cultural identity. At the turn of the twenty-first century we can detect a reverse motion. Whereas since the eighteenth century the religious language of the Mongols was Tibetan, today the language problem is an open question, which in the long term seems to have been decided in favor of the Mongolian language. Buddhist treatises and prayers for everyday use are increasingly being translated into Modern Khalkh Mongolian, abandoning Classical Tibetan as the language of the religious.(19) The increasing self-consciousness of the Mongols is obvious in the symbolic meaning they attach to the use of the language. The translation of Buddhist texts into the Mongolian language may be interpreted as an indication that Mongolian Buddhism in the twentieth century is determined to adapt to the challenges of a modern, secularized society, seeking its own way apart from the pressure of the traditional, conservative Tibetan dGe-lugs-pa clergy.(20)

I wish to conclude this short article about contemporary Buddhism in Mongolia with the following observations: whereas in the country itself the impact of the Buddhist renaissance is obvious in many different respects, the representation of Mongolia and its religious culture in the modern medium of worldwide communication, the internet, is not as unanimously Buddhist. Two tendencies can be stressed. If Buddhism is considered an important part of the national heritage of the Mongols, a tendency toward glorification of the Buddhist past can be observed. This is obvious in the representation of the eighth Bogdo Gegen as a pious and deeply religious Buddhist, painstakingly observing his Buddhist vows.(21) Most of the websites on Mongolia, however, stress the

importance of Chinggis Qan for the revival of a distinct Mongolian culture. Besides Mongolian Buddhism, Chinggis Qan plays the most important role for the re-construction of Mongolian cultural and religious identity at the turn of the twenty-first century. In the wake of this Chinggis Qan renaissance the indigenous religion of the Mongols will surely have its comeback, as is already obvious in Buryatia, where the indigenous religious beliefs now play a much more important role than Buddhism.(22)

### Endnotes

(1) "Mongolia" in the following article refers to the territory of the former "Mongolian People's Republic," with its capitol Ulaanbaatar. It does not include the Mongolian Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China, also commonly known as "Inner Mongolia." The processes of religious transformation and the ongoing renaissance of Mongolian Buddhism as described in this paper do not pertain to Inner Mongolia. Over the years very little research about Buddhism in Inner Mongolia has been carried out. An indication that there is some interest in Buddhism among the Inner Mongolian populace (who are highly Sinicized and often do not speak the native language any more, at least in Huhhot, the capitol) are the many publications on Buddhist topics, as well as an interest in Mongolian Buddhism, on the part of both Chinese and Mongolian scholars. Recently Isabelle Charleux, a French art historian, has done some research on the revival of Mongolian Buddhist monasticism in her unpublished paper "The Reconstruction of Buddhist Monasteries in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia: Between Sanctuary and Museum" (paper presented at the International Seminar *Revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after 1990* in Warsaw, November 24-28, 1999). In recent years there has been a distinct

relaxation in the politics of practising religion in China. As far as I could observe during my recent stay in China (August 2002), worship in Buddhist temples is now part of the everyday life of ordinary, pious Chinese. Practising Buddhism is no longer forbidden.

(2) *MongGol ulus-un undusun xauli* (Constitution of Mongolia). The Constitution was created with the help of German political scientists and law professors during a conference held at Ulānbātar, September 9-13, 1991. A representative of Amnesty International was also present. See documentation in the World Wide Web at:

[http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/corff/im/Gesetze/Verfassung\\_und\\_Demokratie.html](http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/corff/im/Gesetze/Verfassung_und_Demokratie.html).

(3) I avoid using the term "shamanism" as a descriptive term for Mongolian indigenous religion because, although the shaman and shamanizing are distinctive features of this religious tradition, they are not necessarily the most decisive ones.

(4) According to L.W. Moses (*The Political Role of Mongol Buddhism*, Bloomington, 1977, p. 125), at the beginning of the twentieth century, in Outer Mongolia (Khalkha territory) there were; "583 temple complexes, plus an additional 260 religious meeting places of various kinds." According to him, not one third of the male population, but nearly 40 percent allegedly joined the clergy, a number which seems to me extremely high. Perhaps this number has to be understood in a Mongolian Buddhist context. Only a minority of monks stayed in the monastic complexes; most of them returned, after having finished their monastic education, to their families and led the traditional life of a nomadic herdsman. The vows of celibacy, in the Tibetan Buddhist context an important aspect of the dGe-lugs-pa tradition, were often not kept by Mongolian monks.

(5) For a general survey of Mongolian history see C. R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, which, although in part outdated, is still the most thorough account of Mongolian history up to the twentieth century. More recent works include: B. Baabar, *History of Mongolia*, Cambridge, White Horse Press, 1999; and B. O. Bold, *Mongolian Nomadic Society: A Reconstruction of the 'Medieval' History of Mongolia*. Richmond, Curzon, 2001 (NIAS monographs; no. 83). A concise account of the history of Mongolian Buddhism that relies on the wealth of Mongolian sources edited and translated since the early twentieth century still needs to be written. B. Siklos, "Mongolian Buddhism: A defensive account," in: S. Akiner (ed.), *Mongolia Today*, London/New York, Kegan Paul, 1991, pp. 155-182, at least provides a fresh outlook on the history of Buddhism in Mongolia. For general information about the revival of Buddhism in Central Asia, including Buryatia and Kalmykia, see L. Belka/M. Slobodnik, "The Revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Asia: A Comparative Perspective," in: *Asian and African Studies* 11, 1, 2002, pp. 15-36.

(6) See the Constitution of Mongolia, *MongGol ulus-un undusun xauñ*, article 9: "1. The State shall respect the Church and the Church shall honor the State. 2. State institutions shall not engage in religious activities and the Church shall not pursue political activities. 3. The relationship between the State and the Church shall be regulated by law." (Mongolian text: 1. *mongGol ulus-du toru ni shasin-iyān kundudgezu, shasin ni toru-ben degedulen-e. 2. toru-yin bayiGululG-a shasin-u, sum-e keyid ulus toru-yin uile azillaG-a erkilen yabuGulzu bolxu ugei. 3. toru, sum-e keyid-un xoGurundu-yin xarilcaG-a-yi xauli-bar zokicaGulun-a.*) Interestingly, the Mongolian terms used for "religion" here are "*shasin*," which traditionally is used to denote "religion" in the broadest sense, and then "*sum-e keyid*," two terms

which literally mean "Buddhist temple and monastery." The second and third paragraph of article 9 therefore deal specifically with Mongolian Buddhism and not just any religion.

(7) Compare "The Revival," in *Mongolia Today*, issue no. 6, an online magazine ([www.mongoliatoday.com](http://www.mongoliatoday.com)).

(8) The leaders of Erdeni dzuu and the Shankh keyid provided this information during an interview conducted by Agata Bareja-Starzynska and Hanna Havnevik in August 1998. Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik are researchers in the joint Polish-Norwegian research project *The Revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after 1990*. See the forthcoming article by Bareja-Starzynska and Havnevik, "A Preliminary Survey of Buddhism in Present-Day Mongolia," in *Proceedings of the International Seminar Revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after 1990*, held in Warsaw, Poland, November 24-27, 1999.

(9) He abandoned his monastic vows at the age of twenty-five. This is not uncommon among high Tibetan Buddhist dignitaries. The renunciation of the monastic vows is criticized by lay people, but an incarnation is generally considered to be outside the realm of human criticism, because he or she is supposed to have such a deep spiritual insight that they alone know what is right for them and their fulfillment of the Bodhisattva vow (personal communication of Ani Chodolma, Kagyupa monastery, Amdo Colony, U.P., India).

(10) There is virtually no data regarding the presence of nuns in pre-communist Mongolia. The researchers of the nineteenth century, like Pozdneev (see his famous *Ocherki byta buddijskikh monastyrej i buddijskogo dukhovenstva*, St. Peterburg 1880) and others do not give us any data as to the existence of nuns or nunneries. But, as in every Buddhist country, there must have been at least a few women

contemplating leading the religious life of a nun. One of the most striking aspects of contemporary Mongolian Buddhism is the emergence of a strong nuns' order. In the late 1990s, at least three nunneries have been founded in Ulaanbaatar and the vicinity.

(11) In the thirteenth century, rNying-ma-pa lamas were already present at the Qans' court. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Karma-bka'-brgyud-pa maintained strong ties to some Mongolian tribes, as is evident from Tibetan sources like the *Deb-ther-sngon-po*, written in 1478 by `Gos-lo-tsa-ba gZhon-nu-dpal. The *Erdeni-yin erike*, written by Isibaldan in 1835, tells of dGe-lugs-pa, Sa-skya-pa, Kar-ma-pa, rNying-ma-pa and Jo-nang-pa lamas being active in Khalkha Mongolia. See fol. 35v11-12 of *Erdeni-yin erike*. (I used W. Heissig's edition. See W. Heissig, *Erdeni-yin erike. Mongolische Chronik der lamaistischen Klosterbauten der Mongolei von Isibaldan, 1835, in Faksimile mit Einleitung und Namensverzeichnis herausgegeben*, von W.H., Kopenhagen, 1961).

(12) "The Revival," in: *Mongolia Today*, online magazine, issue no. 6, 12.10.2002.

(13) The processes of economic transformation brought about a marked increase in individual poverty. Today Mongolia faces many problems typical of Third World countries, like rapid urbanization, energy production difficulties, lack of skilled labour resources, and so on. See O. Bruun/ O. Odgaard (eds.), *Mongolia in Transition. Old Patterns, New Challenges*, Richmond, Curzon Press, 1996. For an overview of the current economic situation and strategies to cope with it see L. Dorj and D. Yavuukhulan, "Mongolian Economic Development Strategy," in *The Mongolian Journal of International Affairs* 8-9, 2002, pp. 67-73.

Compare also O. Bruun/ P. Ronnas, L. Narangoa, "Mongolia: Transition

from the Second to the Third World?," Copenhagen, NIAS, 2000.

(14) This question has also been dealt with by K. Sagaster in, "Religion and Group Identity in Present Mongolia," in K. Fülberg-Stolberg/ P. Heidrich/ E. Schöne (eds.), *Dissociation and Appropriation — Responses to Globalization in Asia and Africa*, Berlin: Verlag das Arabische Buch, 1999, pp. 185-193.

(15) See T. D. Skrynnikova, "Sülde — the Basic Idea of the Chinggis-Khan Cult," in: *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* XLVI, 1992-1993, pp. 51-59, and Erkesecen, "Yisün költü caghan tugh-un tuqai jöblelge," ("Advice on the white, nine-tailed flag") in: *Öbör mongghol-un neyigem-ün sinjilekü uqaghan*, vol. 3, 1989, pp. 43-53.

(16) Mong. MongGol ulus-un tusaGar toGtanil burin erketu bayidal-un belge temdeg ni, in: *MongGol ulus-un undusun xauli*, arban xoyaduGar zuil.

(17) In 1690 the first ICang-skya Khutukhtu Ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-chos-ldan had already written a Buddhist prayer to Chinggis Qan. The prayer to Chinggis Qan, composed by the famous Mergen diyanci lama in the eighteenth century, was popular throughout Mongolia, up to the 1930s. Today Chinggis Qan is the outstanding symbol of Mongolian cultural identity. The literature about him is enormous, here I quote but a few important contributions: C. Zamcarano, "Kul't Cingisa v Ordose. Iz puteshestviya v Yuzhnyu Mongoliyu v 1910g.," in *Central Asiatic Journal* 6, 1961, pp. 194-324; H. Serruys, "The Cult of Chinggis-Qan: A Mongol Manuscript from Ordos," in: *Zentralasiatische Studien* 17, 1984, pp. 29-62. Among noteworthy Mongolian publications is the work of Qurcabaghatu and Üjüm-e, *Mongghol-un böge mörgöl-ün tayilgh-a-yin soyol*, Külün Buyir, 1991, (*Öbör mongghol-un soyol-un keblel-ün qoriya*), which in the third chapter deals extensively with the cult of Chinggis



Qan.

(18) The contested term "syncretism" can be used as a descriptive category for Mongolian Buddhism. "Syncretism from the point of view of the religious actor" delineates the religious performances of an individual who, dependent on time and situation, draws upon indigenous as well as Buddhist patterns of meaning, thus, respectively establishing a specific normative framework in two socially and religiously different contexts.

(19) When the Buddhist conversion of Mongolia was actively promoted in the late sixteenth century, the complete Tibetan Buddhist canon, Kanjur as well as Tanjur, was translated into Mongolian, the Kanjur as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century. See K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Transmission of the Mongolian Kanjur: A preliminary Report," in H. Eimer/ D. Germano (eds.), *The Many Canons of Tibetan Buddhism*, PIATS 2000: Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden, 2000, Brill: Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2002, pp. 151-176. The liturgical language in these early times of Buddhist conversion was Mongolian. In the eighteenth century, however, the situation changed completely: the clergy started to use the Tibetan language as the language of liturgy. Prayers and so forth were only recited in Tibetan, even the historical works were written largely in the Tibetan language. The reasons for this rather swift language change have so far not been determined, and will be a topic for further research into the socio-cultural patterns that shaped traditional Mongolia. In recent times, however, the trend has again reversed, so that Mongolian is once again the preferred language. For example, some works of the present Dalai Lama have been translated into Mongolian. The language question is, however, not yet settled. Sometimes, Tibetan prayers in Mongolian Cyrillic transcription are

printed, which lay people and lamas alike are supposed to recite. These texts are unique and very difficult to re-transcribe into Tibetan script (in order to understand their content). Mongolian lay people will rarely understand the contents of these texts. Many monks, who today often get a rudimentary education in the Tibetan language, will fare at least a bit better.

(20) The Republic of Kalmykia is following a different language policy: Kalmykia is the first Central Asian state to declare Buddhism the state religion. Today, in primary schools elementary courses in the Tibetan language are offered to the students, because the language of the clergy is Tibetan and not Kalmyk (personal communication from Delia N. Muzraeva, Elista, summer, 1998).

(21) Compare *Mongolia Today*, online magazine, issue no. 6, 12.10.2002. One article is even dedicated to Genepil, one of the consorts of the Bogdo Gegen. The Bogdo Gegen, as a high dignitary of the dGe-lugs-pa tradition, was, of course, not allowed to take a female partner. His lax morals were the target of open criticism in early twentieth century Mongolia.

(22) Buddhism in Buryatia was, however, never as deeply rooted as in Mongolia, due to the rather late conversion of the Buryats to Buddhism (in the early eighteenth century) and the pressure of the Russian Orthodox church.