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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

KARÉNINA KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, Bern University, Switzerland

The Workshop “Traveling to the Heart of Asia: A History of Western Encounters with Mongolia”, organised by Luboš Bělka from the Department for the Study of Religions at Masaryk University in Brno, engaged with the history of travel to Mongolia, from early contacts during the Mongolian Empire up to the middle of the twentieth century. The scope of the papers was broad and reached from early travel accounts of medieval European travellers up to very recent travels. In the context of the workshop Mongolia was not defined by state borders shifting over the centuries, but understood as the space populated by Mongolian-speaking peoples, covering the territories of today’s Mongolia, Inner Mongolia (PRC), as well as Kalmykia and the Buryat Republic.

The papers dealt with written as well as visual sources and, apart from the travel writings themselves, they engaged with the travellers, people (mostly men) who for various purposes undertook the journey to Mongolia. In these introductory remarks I will comment on the three inter-related issues of the traveller, travel and travel writing that in different ways contributed to the often conflicting representations of Mongolia and the Mongols through the ages. As this collection of essays concentrates on “Western” encounters with Mongolia, it will by necessity leave out the rich amount of travel literature about Mongolia written by Asian travellers of various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> The term “Western” itself is a contested term, simply for the reason that it lumps together

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1) I wish to thank my colleagues Jana Valtrová, Stefan Krist and Martin Slobodník for their constructive comments and valuable suggestions in the discussion about the typology of the traveller.

2) See, for example, the travels of Ch’ang-ch’ün in the thirteenth century (Waley 1931), or the inspection tour of the Manchu official Tulisen during the Kangxi era (Staunton 1821; Perdue 2005, pp. 425–427).

different countries and individuals with diverse linguistic, cultural and political backgrounds.

Considering this context, we need to distinguish between the various nationalities and their specific relationship, be it political or only imaginary, to the Mongolian regions and the Mongols. While the Russians, and also the British, had imperial and colonialist interests, for French, Germans, Polish and others who did not have any colonial presence in the region, “a different set of constraints operated and revealed themselves at work in their accounts of travel and exploration” (Bishop 1989, p. 6). Still, there are some shared discourses that made their imprint and shaped trans-national notions about Asia and the Mongols. This is particularly pertinent to the discourse about the “perennial nomad” that is encountered within different national frameworks (compare Montesquieu 1964, pp. 634–636; Hegel 1997, p. 150, p. 252; Kozlov 1947, p. 45).

Beyond national and individual differences, such shared discursive models worked to produce a particular representation of Mongolia. Enforcing communalities in the representations reflected a similar social background on the part of the travellers. The European traveller was mostly male and belonged to the upper classes of society.

In recent decades, travel as a cultural technique and travel writing as a literary genre have been intensively researched. Interestingly, this research interest did not include the analytical exploration of the traveller, with a few notable exceptions (Elsner/ Rubiés 1999; Behdad 1999; Torma 2011; Green 2014). Despite the fact that narrative subjectivity is considered to be of vital importance for the creation and affirmation of auctorial authenticity in travel writing, the travel account appears curiously author-less. In this volume the traveller takes centre-stage in the cultural encounters between Europe and the Mongolian regions, and for this reason alone it appears necessary to start this introduction with a few theoretical reflections about travel and travellers.

Following and modifying the definition the social anthropologist James Clifford provided (Clifford 1997, p. 197), “travel” will be understood here in its most basic sense as a term including a whole range of practices of leaving one place<sup>3</sup> to go to some other place. The movement is motivated

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3) Clifford limits his definition to the movement of leaving one’s “home” to go to



by specific purposes of gain, be they social, spiritual, material or scientific. Taking this heuristic definition as a starting point, I understand the “traveller”, again in the most basic sense, to be the agent of such practices. Furthermore, I consider travellers to be “global subjects” (Herren 2005) in the sense that they lead lives of multiple territorial transgressions that often lead to national, political or social transgressions as well. Their biographies attest their multiple identities in different cultural settings. This transgressional specificity of the traveller makes it difficult to develop a typology of travellers. However, for analytical purposes, I suggest distinguishing particular types of traveller, based on their wider political and economic contexts, their social and intellectual backgrounds, and their purposes of gain (compare Green 2014, pp. 4–7; Burke 1999, p. 124).

Drawing on Nile Green (2014, pp. 3–4), but slightly modifying his typology, eight types of traveller<sup>4</sup> can be distinguished: the religious, the mercantile, the diplomatic, the scientific,<sup>5</sup> the political, the scholarly, the professional<sup>6</sup> and the involuntary traveller. It is, however, necessary to stress that there is no such thing as a “pure” type, and no traveller embodies just one type, but rather two or more types usually overlap in one and the same person. Therefore these proposed types should be considered contingent and relational categories. In the remainder of this introduction I will take a closer look at these different types of traveller.

The possibility of distinguishing different types of traveller depends on our knowledge about the traveller and his (or, rarely, her) historical ‘situatedness’. One way of locating the travellers in their specific historical contexts is to look at the type of knowledge they seek to obtain, and

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another place. Travel, however, may also occur from a place other than one’s home to a third place.

- 4) There are, of course, many other types possible. Thus, Peter Burke in his essay about François Bernier identifies a “philosophical traveller” (Burke 1999, p. 124), Elsner/Rubiés (1999, p. 35) speak of the “traveller as adventurer”, and, thinking of writers like John de Mandeville, we may also distinguish the type of the “fictional traveller”, or “genuine and bogus travellers” (Jackson 2005, p. 330).
- 5) Elsner/Rubiés (1999, p. 37) call this type the “empirical traveller”.
- 6) We may add the “touristic traveller” that in the Near East had already emerged in the nineteenth century (Behdad 1999, pp. 35–52), and in Mongolia in the early twentieth century.

at the way they present this knowledge in their writings. Studying travel accounts from antiquity to the twentieth century, we encounter different modes of obtaining and presenting knowledge. One of the earliest Greek historians, Herodotus, was also an ardent traveller. His *Histories* (Fehling 1994) relies in part on his own observations and shows a distinct quality of empirically gained local knowledge. A rational and empirical approach characterized the works of early travel writers in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D., yet this same period saw, in the early Christian context, the development of a “pilgrimage model” (Elsner/ Rubiés 1999, p. 15) in which travel was considered a spiritual journey with no worldly goal. Christian travellers who put their experiences into writing, transformed their actual journey into allegories of spiritual achievements. This model of travel as pilgrimage was still the most pervasive paradigm at the time of the first journeys undertaken to the Mongols. Yet, although the medieval travel writings of the Franciscan friars and others were still framed in religious terms, their reports show a remarkable shift to the empirical, to a detailed ethnographic description of people, their practices and their material surroundings (Elsner/Rubiés 1999, p. 31). Classifying the medieval travellers to the Mongols as both “religious” and “diplomatic” travellers, their specific way of gaining and presenting knowledge marked travellers like Johannes de Plano Carpini or Wilhelm Rubruk as newly realistic, “empirical travellers”.

Furthermore, as Peter Jackson (2005, p. 313) asserts, travellers like Marco Polo combined the roles of the “mercantile” and the “diplomatic” traveller. It is important to note that the knowledge the medieval travel reports of Marco Polo or Odoric of Pordenone (Reichert 1987; Jackson 2005, pp. 335–337) presented to their readers is not just the result of the travellers’ own discursive models they carried with them. As Jackson maintains, they “often took on board, unconsciously no doubt, the mental frontier of others, which played a crucial role in defining the regions Europeans did not penetrate” (Jackson 2005, p. 338). The process of “intercultural mimesis” which Charles Hallisey (1995, p. 33) has described for the British colonial encounter in India is already at work in the medieval travel reports from the Mongolian occupied territories.

Marco Polo’s travel report, written in the vernacular of his time, addressed a general public and appealed to curiosity and the wish for

knowledge. Elsner/Rubiés maintain that the new territorial discoveries of the sixteenth century that saw a substantial increase of travellers and travel reports transformed the Venetian traveller into a “pioneer for a new authoritative discourse of human geography” (1999, p. 37). Furthermore, in the early modern world the authority of the traveller replaced that of the text. The empirical traveller promised the reader the reliability of knowledge through his being witness to the narratives he recounts. Authority and authenticity were no longer relegated to the text, but guaranteed in the person of the traveller. The traveller is the source of authoritative knowledge, he is witness to a truth which he alone is able to tell. This shift of authority is enforced through a style of writing which is at once modest and plain. It suggests that nothing the traveller sees and describes is invented or born in the imagination of the author. Perhaps even more importantly, the use of the first person, the auctorial “I”, testifies to the personal experience and provides authenticity and legitimacy to his report.

In the Middle Ages long-distance travel generally was an endeavour for which not only were significant financial resources needed, but also a strong personal commitment, because of the hardships encountered during a journey to the Mongolian regions. The Asian journey, if undertaken voluntarily, was an exclusive enterprise for the privileged few. Later periods saw changing forms of travel infrastructure that had a strong impact on the modes of travelling. Travel was increasingly made easier by merchant companies and learned societies like the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences. The period of early modernity also saw the emergence of new types of travellers. Beyond the founding of new learned societies, the imperial states established efficient bureaucracies and were eager to promote knowledge of physical and human geography that could be used to realise imperial aims. The “scientific traveller”<sup>7</sup> emerged, who used “deliberately observational and quantifiable methods of knowledge collection” (Green 2014, p. 6). The travel and ethnographic reports written by Germans in the Russian imperial service provide illuminating examples of this kind of traveller (Georgi 1776–1780; Pallas 1771–1776). These two new types of traveller are closely connected to empire and the exploration of new territories in the East.

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7) Coined the “empirical traveller” by Elsner/Rubiés 1999, p. 37.

The medieval travellers to the courts of the khans encountered expatriates from different European territories, like the woman called “Pascha” from Metz or the famous Parisian goldsmith William Buchier who had been enslaved by the Mongols (Jackson 2009, p. 49). In the fourteenth century we hear of Venetians from Acre who had lived nearly their whole lives in the territories of the Great Khan, and only returned to Venice at an advanced age (Jackson 2005, p. 315). In later centuries Siberia, the colonial backyard of the Russian Empire, served as a repository of political prisoners and other exiled people, nearly all of them involuntarily deported to these regions. Many lived out their lives among the Buryats, and some of them even left reports in the form of diaries, letters etc. The Swedish prisoner of war Johan Gustav Renat stood in the service of the Dzungar ruler Galdantsering for whom he worked as military adviser, cannoneer and cartographer. When he returned to Sweden around 1733/1734 he brought with him the first Mongolian maps known in Europe (Krook 1948; Kollmar-Paulenz 2006, pp. 361–362).

Captives, political prisoners, prisoners of war, or refugees, they all make up the type of the “involuntary traveller” who at first glance does not seem to fit well into our classificatory scheme which is based on a heuristic definition stressing voluntariness. Yet, many of these involuntary travellers voluntarily stayed on in these regions which they had not chosen themselves. Once they settled among the Mongols, they often turned into scientific, political, diplomatic, or professional travellers, further blurring the lines between these different types. The accounts and, in more recent times, the photographs they left behind provide important information about little known aspects of Mongolian life.

From 1850 onwards the type of “political traveller” appeared in the political context later coined the “Great Game” between the Russian and the British Empire. Surveyors of as yet unknown territories and spies of empire like Sarat Chandra Das who carried out surveyance for the British in the Himalayas, not only filled the role of “political traveller”, but often were simultaneously “scholarly travellers”, exploring the rich cultural history of the Tibetan and Mongolian peoples. The Russian imperial interest in Mongolia led to political travel reports, but also to “new genres of exploratory, ethnographic and archaeological travel writings”

(Green 2014, p. 7).<sup>8</sup> As imperial citizens the travellers saw their objects through “imperial eyes” (Pratt 2008). But not all travellers of the period were imperial citizens. For many the imperial context just provided easier access to the Mongolian regions.

The end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century also saw the emergence of the “professional” or “journalistic traveller”, and, in his, rarely her, wake, the “touristic traveller”. In the politically unstable times of the early twentieth century these travellers were often tasked with writing informative reports. This, however, was nothing new in the history of the traveller: the medieval Franciscan friars had already been given similar tasks.

Our knowledge of the travellers is closely linked to either their own writings or writings about them and, in more recent times, the photographs they have taken. Travel writing itself served as a cultural technology that helped shape the many varied representations of Mongolia. The travellers not only discovered respectively visited to the Mongolian regions, but in their writings also created them as a “textual space” (Green 2014: 3) that was read along the lines of the different discourses prevalent “at home”. Therefore, travel reports may be seen as an important link between “home” and the distant regions far away. In her seminal work about travel writing and transculturation, Mary Louise Pratt asserts that travel reports, written by Europeans about Non-European parts of the world, created the imperial order for the people who stayed at home. Travel reports were one means to give order to the world and find for Europeans their place in it. Furthermore, imperial expansion was made meaningful by travel reports (Pratt 2008, pp. 3–4).

It is important to keep in mind that travel and travel writing are never innocent endeavours, but always, willingly or unwillingly, serve purposes beyond the individual journey and the individual traveller. This applies on one hand to the modes of representation that in the imperial settings of the nineteenth century were embedded in orientalist representations of the Asian “Other” (Said 1978), denigrating the “travelees” (Pratt 2008) as objects of the imperial gaze. As Said maintains, the relation between the European subject of knowledge and the Other as the object of his or

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8) See Pozdnev 1880, 1896–1898; Potanin 1881–1883, 1893.

her study is a “relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said 1995, p. 5). In the imperial context travel narratives mirror the asymmetrical power relations of domination and subordination. On the other hand, they also fulfil important functions in their “home” contexts. Already Wilhelm Rubruk used the travel report as a tool to criticize his own society (Kollmar-Paulenz 2003, p. 258). In travel reports of Mongolia and the Mongols this critical function of the travel report is often combined with a romantic desire for the different which is found in the “simple life of the Mongolian nomads”.

A common thread in the history of European travel is imperialism. In this context, the travel writings “gave European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized” (Pratt 2008, p. 3). But not all travellers were citizens of empire. This applied often to travellers in the Mongolian regions. How then, to make sense of travellers and travel writing beyond imperial interests? What codes did these travellers beyond or outside empire employ to help discursively produce “the rest of the world” for a European readership that was not part of a colonial project? How did the travel reports produce and contribute to European self-perceptions in relation to the “rest of the world”? And how did the people, subordinated as others in travel reports, shape the travellers’ constructions of them and the places they inhabited? How did European travellers codify Mongolian social realities? These and other questions are explored in the individual contributions to this volume. A common starting-point is the person of the traveller in whom disparate cultures meet and interact, and who in his bodily presence may even be understood as a “contact zone”, a social space where cultures meet.<sup>9</sup>

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9) According to Pratt, a “contact zone” denotes the space of imperial encounters, “the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 2008, p. 8). I do not, however, subscribe to this limitation of the term, but employ the term to include encounters beyond empire.

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# Travels of Christian Friars to the Mongols: Social Setting and Mission in the 13<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>

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**Summary:** The paper deals with several travel accounts of Christian friars in the early phase of contacts between the Western world and the Mongols, during the period from the 1230s until the establishment of a permanent mission around 1300 in Khanbaliq. The paper is focused on the social and practical aspects of these travels, namely those of John of Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck. Far from being an exhaustive treatment, this paper brings an overview of several important issues arising from the social situation of the missionaries during their travels and revolves around the following topics: social contacts; means of communication with local inhabitants and intermediaries; and target groups of mission.

## Introduction

Medieval Christian envoys and missionaries were the first Europeans who travelled across the vast area of the Mongol empire and left us detailed accounts of their experience.<sup>2</sup> The era of Christian diplomatic and missionary attempts, which can be dated approximately between the 1230s and the 1360s, is sometimes called “the Mongol mission” (Dawson 1955), although Christian missions expanded also to other Asian regions, not

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1) The preparation of this article was kindly supported by the grant "Internationalization of Research in the Study of Religions" (INTERVYR), investigated by the Department for the Study of Religions, Masaryk University, in 2017.

2) Surveys of the history of medieval Christian mission to the Mongols include Richard 1998; de Rachewiltz 1971. Specific issues were treated mainly by Jackson (1994, 2005 etc.) and Ryan (1997, 1998). For a study of the narrative form of these accounts see Guéret-Laferté 1994.

only those under the rule of the Mongols.<sup>3</sup> The direct results of missionary activities in social, cultural, economic and religious landscape of the empire were only temporary. However, the encounter between European friars and local inhabitants certainly left a deep impact, at least in European thinking.<sup>4</sup> Accounts of their travels offer a vivid picture of Mongolian culture which is presented in a surprisingly balanced manner. Taking into account the diplomatic goals of the first journeys to the Mongols, striving for a detailed and correct report seems obvious. The development of Christian missionary stations and church structure in Asia with regard to political history has been thoroughly studied (de Rachewiltz 1971, Richard 1998, Jackson 2005, Gillman – Klimkeit 2005 etc.), recently important studies were also made in the context of history of ethnography (Khanmohamadi 2014). However, the many aspects of everyday interactions of the missionaries with their hosts and local inhabitants have attracted, so far, less attention in the form of rather shorter studies (Ruottisala 2001, Watson 2011, Ryan 1998).

While acknowledging the importance of political and diplomatic setting for these travels, in this paper I am focusing particularly on their social and practical aspects, during the initial phase of the establishment of contacts between the court of the Great Khan and Europe during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its specific character and type of sources, the study is concerned with the period from the first Christian missions starting as early as the 1230s until the establishment of a permanent mission by John of Montecorvino around the year 1300. The following text is limited not only chronologically to the period of initial travels there and back, but also regionally. Given the detailed accounts which are available about this period, it was not possible to deal with other important sources referring to the situation in the region of the Golden Horde,

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3) For mission of a Dominican friar Jordan of Catala, who became a bishop of Kollam see Gadrat 2005.

4) For importance of the Mongol expansion for Christian crusading ideology and also its eschatological associations, see Schmiieder 2000. An encounter with religious pluralism among the Mongols was an exceptional experience for the missionaries. For its impact on theological debates and discourses on “religion” see Gadrat 2013, Valtrová 2016.

which already reflect the rise of Islam by around 1300 (Moule 1923, 1924, Hautala 2016).<sup>5</sup>

I understand missions as specific types of intercultural encounter, as ongoing processes of social interaction, when certain values, meanings and practices are exchanged and negotiated. As friars' reports clearly show, evangelization included, besides communication of a certain knowledge and practice identified as specifically Christian, also a number of issues connected with everyday life, which had to be dealt with if the mission were to be successful. Without attempting to offer a complete micro-historical view of the situation, it is the aim of this paper to point out several important issues which shaped the missionary experience and its outcomes in the selected period. Certainly there will be many more, which still remain to be explored to more depth, namely the material and economic aspects of these travels, which deserve special attention elsewhere. The aim of this paper is to map various issues which arose during the first missionary travels and revolve around the following topics: the social situation of the missionaries; means of communication with local inhabitants and intermediaries; the type of audience and target groups of mission. Finally, the results of these first missions are considered with respect to the above-mentioned topics.

As sources for this analysis accounts of several missionaries were used – letters of Dominican friars travelling in the 1230s in search of Great Hungary, detailed accounts of the Franciscans John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252),<sup>6</sup> William of Rubruck (1215–1270)<sup>7</sup> and letters of John of Montecorvino (1247–1328).<sup>8</sup>

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5) The most recent study of the impact of Islam in different parts and social levels of the Mongol empire is the comprehensive work of Peter Jackson (Jackson 2017).

6) For a Latin edition of his report see van der Wyngaert 1929, pp. 27–130. An English translation is contained in Dawson 1956, pp. 3–72, for German translation with comments see von Plano Carpini 1997.

7) For a Latin edition of his report see van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 164–332. For the most recent Latin edition of his report see Chiesa 2014, which also has an Italian translation. In this paper I am using the English edition of Rubruck's report done by Peter Jackson (1990), which also contains valuable commentaries.

8) For an edition of his letters see van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 340–355. An English translation is contained in Dawson 1955, pp. 224–231.

## On the way into “some other world”

Early thirteenth century Christian missions on the territories north of the Black sea are connected with the activities of the Hungarian Franciscans and Dominicans. These missionary activities resulted in the creation of the diocese of Cumania in 1227 which, however, was focused not only on the evangelization of Cumans but also on local Christians not affiliated to Rome (Tănase 2003, p. 118). The fact that the Christian friars were targeting people from very different religious backgrounds, both Christian and non-Christian, remained typical for the whole period of the medieval Asian mission. The wide ethnic and religious diversity and mobility within the Mongolian empire<sup>9</sup> was certainly a challenge for the missionaries, both in terms of defining their own target groups and goals, as well as for the development of missionary strategies.

During the 1230s several journeys were made by the Dominicans who searched for the old homeland of the Hungarians (Dienes 1937). The focus of these missions was clearly on the ancestors of Hungarians, who are reported to “live like beasts” (Dörrie 1956, p. 157) and their evangelization is presented as a desirable goal (Dörrie 1956, p. 151). One of the important aspects of these contacts was certainly the fact that due to their common origin, they could understand each other (Dörrie 1956, p. 157). This situation was, however, rather unusual, because spoken language and communication with locals became a serious obstacle to the Christian medieval mission in Asia, as will be shown later.

Further missions in the Mongolian empire continued after the Mongolian campaign to Europe in the 1240s. Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) dispatched four groups of monks to the khan during 1245 in order to establish diplomatic ties and explore the possibilities for Christianization (Richard 1998). Unfortunately, no reports of the first mission, led by the Franciscan friar Lawrence of Portugal, have been preserved and it remains unclear whether the mission took place at all (Guzman 1971, p. 234). The next mission led by John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252), accompanied by Benedict the Pole arrived in Karakorum after the death of Ögedei Khan and witnessed the enthronement of his son Güyük. After his return in 1247,

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9) More on the issue of captives and migration among the Mongols see Biran 2015.

Carpini produced a detailed report (van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 27–130), complemented by another written account attributed to his companion Benedict (de Bridia 1967).<sup>10</sup> No direct records produced by missionaries of the two other embassies are available, one led by Andrew of Longjumeau and the other by his fellow Dominican friar Ascelin of Lombardy. Only excerpts from their accounts have been preserved in the work of other medieval authors.<sup>11</sup>

John of Plano Carpini's account is the first detailed report about the Mongols written by a European friar<sup>12</sup>, although it does not record a single attempt to evangelize. This may be explained by Carpini's diplomatic commitment. His main goal was to deliver a letter from pope Innocent IV to the Mongolian khan, and to find out as much about the Mongols as he could. Besides that, he also focused on communication with representatives of the Russian Orthodox church.

Considering his personal experience as the first European travelling as far as the court of the Great khan, the emotional aspects of his journey should be taken into account too. Although European imagination about the geography of the East had a long tradition (Reichert 1992), uncertainty and fear, which stemmed from the unpredictable development of his journey, are evident in his report:

“And although we feared we might be killed by the Tartars or other people, or imprisoned for life, or afflicted with hunger, thirst, cold, heat, injuries and exceeding great trials almost beyond our powers

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10) For more about the text of Carpini's account and its versions see Ostrowski 1990.

11) Indirect accounts of these missions are contained in the encyclopaedia *Speculum Historiale* by Vincent of Beauvais and in *Chronica Majora* by Matthew Paris (Guzman 1971, pp. 236–249). *Speculum Historiale* draws on Carpini's account and on a now lost report by Simon of St. Quentin. Chapters which Vincent of Beauvais recorded as coming from the report of Simon of St Quentin were published separately by Jean Richard in Latin and also in French translation (Richard 1965). Two interesting testimonies to the mission conducted by Andrew of Longjumeau are letters written by Rabban-ata to European rulers. These were edited and commented upon by Pierre-Vincent Claverie (2000).

12) For an English translation of his report see Dawson, *The Mongol Mission* 19, pp. 3–76.

of endurance all of which, with the exception of death and imprisonment for life, fell to our lot in various ways in a much greater degree than we had conceived beforehand nevertheless we did not spare ourselves in order to carry out the will of God as laid down in the Lord Pope's mandate... ” (Dawson 1955, p. 3).

Carpini recorded in great detail various customs and taboos which were important for successful social interaction – among these were prohibition from stepping onto the thresholds of yurts, genuflection in front of khans, purification by fire and other customs. Obviously, Carpini's journey was a lesson in cultural learning, understanding of local habits and adopting rules of social contact (for more on this see Ruottisala 2001). Although the Mongols to a certain extent pardoned those who were not acquainted with their habits (Dawson 1955, pp. 14, 164–168), a deliberate breaking of their rules was connected with significant risk.<sup>13</sup> William of Rubruck (1215–1270), whose travel to the Mongols lasted from 1253 to 1255 (Jackson 1990, Chiesa 2014) behaved with less anxiety among the Mongols, possibly thanks to Carpini's experience.<sup>14</sup>

One of the very important aspects of these first journeys, which influenced any potential evangelization, was the organization of travel. From the borders of the Mongolian Empire the friars were completely controlled by their Mongolian guides. Carpini and also Rubruck had to proceed according to their guides' instructions, not according to their own needs or wishes. Regardless of his own physical condition, or the prospect of finding promising areas for missionary work Rubruck had to follow a prescribed route. In a kind of apology he explains that he was unable to visit a settlement of German slaves on either of his journeys. While during his outward journey he was unaware of this settlement, he adds that he “could not have made a detour from the route even had I known” (Jackson 1990, p. 146). This had a severe impact on his missionary ambitions,

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13) The case of Ascelin of Lombardy, who was sentenced to death due to his impudent behaviour, is well known. It was only by chance that he was finally released (Richard 1965, p. 94–113).

14) Although there is no exact evidence that Rubruck had read Carpini's report (Jackson 1994, p. 57), it is possible.

because he could not plan any catechism of potential converts<sup>15</sup> and often had just one chance to communicate his message.<sup>16</sup>

### Interpreters, guides, and other companions

In a situation where missionaries were stepping “into some other world” as Rubruck had put it (Jackson 1990, p. 71), we must acknowledge the role of their guides, companions and interpreters. Their role may be considered as twofold – one is their ability to communicate in foreign languages and properly translate a message, the second is their social, religious and political background, which certainly shaped also the missionary perspective.

Rubruck’s account offers a detailed insight into one of the most serious problems of Christian medieval missions in Asia, that is the overcoming of the language barrier. Although by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century we may observe a certain improvement in this respect, lack of language knowledge remained the main obstacle to missions in Asia for the whole medieval period.<sup>17</sup>

During his hasty travels Rubruck attempted to learn some Mongolian, but mostly had to rely on interpreters. With interpreters he was hardly

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15) These circumstances might explain why Rubruck so hastily prepared himself to baptize one Muslim, even without proper catechism (Jackson 1990, p. 104).

16) An interesting evangelizing attempt is recorded in Rubruck’s account of his passage through a dangerous pass in the Tarbagatai range. This pass was considered as a place where demons operate, kidnap and kill people. When Rubruck was asked to pray, he chanted *Credo in Unum Deum* and the whole company passed through with no harm. Local guides asked him to write down this ‘auspicious prayer’ on a piece of paper, which they could keep with them all the time. Rubruck had done so, although he was not able to communicate either the content or meaning of this prayer (Jackson 1990, pp. 166–167).

17) For more on the knowledge of Oriental languages in medieval Europe see Bischoff 1961, Richard 1978. Certainly this problem of language knowledge was complex, and there were attempts to learn local languages by the friars. One of those, who were able to communicate was Pascal of Vittoria in the 1330s (van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 501–506). In this context the existence of *Codex Cumanicus* also has to be mentioned (about the Codex see Schmieder – Schreiner 2005).

ever content, except when interpreters of European origin, such as a goldsmith William Buchier or his son, were available. Many times Rubruck complained about the lack of language knowledge of local interpreters, especially concerning discussions on religious topics (Jackson 1990, p. 228 etc.). Another obstacle to successful communication was the consumption of alcohol which was a regular part of meetings and audiences. Several times Rubruck complained that his interpreter was so drunk that he was unable to translate (Jackson 1990, pp. 179, 180 etc.).

With the establishment of a permanent Christian mission in Khanbaliq by the end of the thirteenth century, some Franciscans were already able to preach in Mongolian, such as John of Montecorvino, who recorded that he also made translation of the New Testament and Psalter (Dawson 1955, p. 227). However, among his fellow friars in the realm of the Great Khan there were still many who were not capable of that. As Montecorvino's fellow friar, Peregrin of Castello, testifies in his letter from 1318, that is five years after his arrival to Khanbaliq:

“Truly we believe that if only we possessed their languages, God would show forth his wonders. Truly the harvest of souls is great and the labourers are few and they have no sickle. For we brethren are few and quite aged and unskilled in the learning of languages.” (Dawson 1955, p. 233, Latin text of his letter in van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 365–368).

For Rubruck and his fellow friars an important part of communication consisted of non-verbal means, that is to say outer appearance, gestures, and behaviour. In light of the scholarship of Jean-Claude Schmidt, who described medieval European culture as a “civilization of gesture” (Schmidt 1990), this has to be considered as a unique way of communication, not only as a “substitute” for, or a “supplement” to, lacking the means of verbal communication. The outer appearance of friars and their behaviour with respect to the Mongolian khans were arranged in such a way as to communicate a certain message, or with the aim of avoiding certain unwanted signals, such as inferiority. The fact that this system of communication was not universally understandable to the Mongols became clear only due to various misunderstandings. One such occasion occurred



during Rubruck's audience with the Möngke Khan, when Rubruck decided to go barefoot, as was usual for Franciscans in Europe. Because it was winter, local people considered him foolish until one Hungarian recognized it as a sign of the Franciscan order (Jackson 1990, p. 173).

Not only for their language knowledge, but also for their knowledge of European culture and Christianity, were Europeans living among the Mongols considered to be best interpreters for the friars. Here we may observe also their role in the process of socialization of the friars during their journeys. Comparing the social milieu of Carpini and Rubruck travelling through the Mongolian empire reveals a significant difference. Already during his stay in Poland, Carpini established close contacts with the members of Russian church thanks to negotiations about a union between the Russian church and Rome (de Rachewiltz 1971, p. 92). Through all his journey he was heavily relying on information provided by Russian clerics (Dawson 1955, pp. 23, 31) and, besides other European captives living at the khan's court, a certain Russian goldsmith name Cosmas became his chief informant (Dawson 1955, p. 66). He also had a Russian interpreter there (Dawson 1955, p. 70). Carpini's knowledge about the Mongols was therefore significantly shaped by a Russian perspective. This is reflected in his account describing the damages caused by the Mongolian army on Russian cities and various acts humiliating Russian dukes (Dawson 1955, pp. 10–11). Rubruck was travelling six years later, but he does not seem to be interested in these events, so extensively described by Carpini, anymore.

Connections with local Christians of various denominations formed a crucial part of the medieval mission. Local Christians were certainly important informants of the friars coming from the West, although the attitudes toward them varied widely, as will be shown later. While Russians played an important role in the account of Carpini, Rubruck collected his knowledge from a large variety of people. He found the most important informants among European captives of French origin living under the Mongols – a French goldsmith, master William Buchier and his family (Jackson 1990, p. 183), and a French woman, who provided him not only with information but occasionally also with food (Jackson 1990, p. 182). We may assume that these relations were built upon the common language that Rubruck and these captives could mutually

understand. Rubruck was of Flemish origin and since he had spent a long time in France, he spoke French as well as Latin (Connel 2000, p. 646). Another contact he made concerned German and Hungarian captives, who seem to have received his spiritual services with great appreciation (Jackson 1990, p. 135). Besides that, he was in close contact with the guides and interpreters provided by the Mongols. Among them was his interpreter named *Homo Dei*. Although the origin of this man is not quite clear (see Jackson 1990, p. 279), he was also another source of knowledge for Rubruck, with a possibly Syrian background.

Social contacts on the part of the friars also had an impact at the practical level of their travels such as supplies of food and other necessities. Lack of food, drinks and starvation affected both Carpini and Rubruck, although each of them decided for a different dietary strategy. One of the controversial issues concerning food was the consumption of mare's milk and kumis. Carpini, who was closely connected with the Russian Christians and occasionally also depended on their hospitality,<sup>18</sup> adopted their eating habits in this respect. That is, he refused to drink kumis (Dawson 1955, p. 62), which was one of the most important and accessible sources of energy during travels in the steppe. One common opinion among Eastern Christians was that kumis is forbidden to Christians because it is a 'food offered to idols' as mentioned in Acts (XV, 20, 29)<sup>19</sup> and First letter to the Corinthians (VIII) (Jackson 1990, pp. 102, 31). This opinion was based

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18) Carpini mentions that during his stay at the Mongolian court he suffered great hunger and thirst, being provided with only very few supplies: "If the Lord had not sent us a certain Russian, by name Cosmas, a goldsmith and a great favourite of the Emperor, who supported us to some extent, we would, I believe, have died, unless the Lord had helped us in some other way." (Dawson 1956, p. 66).

19) Acts XV, 19–20: "Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood". Acts XV, 28–29: "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well."

upon the common practice of libation of mare's milk and kumis, which were performed by the Mongols on various occasions.

Carpini, most probably due to his connections to Russian Orthodox Christians, refused to consume kumis and replaced it with mead, if available (Dawson 1955, p. 62). Rubruck, on the contrary, considered this attitude to kumis unsound. Rubruck quickly understood the nutritious value of kumis among nomadic people. Although he considered its taste unusual (Jackson 1990, pp. 81–82, 99), he eventually reported it as a drink preferable to wine, because it “does more to satisfy a man who is hungry” (Jackson 1990, p. 264).

Although the question of drinking kumis might seem to be only an issue of one item providing nutrition to the friars, the widely spread opinion about its religious significance affected attempts at evangelization. One such example can be found in Rubruck's account, where drinking kumis became an obstacle to the conversion of a certain Muslim. This man, after some hesitation, decided not to become Christian, because he was convinced that he would have to abstain from drinking kumis and thus he would starve. Rubruck was unable to refute this opinion (Jackson 1990, p. 104).

This little episode demonstrates what kind of practical issues influenced the potential success of Christian missions. Besides food, of course, another important aspect of the social interactions of the missionaries was the exchange of gifts, for which they were not well provided, especially as Rubruck travelled not as an envoy, but a friar. How Rubruck's social status changed with respect to the practice of gift giving during his journey has been explored in detail by A. J. Watson (Watson 2011), so I will not treat this issue in detail here. Gift giving, or rather lack of gifts in the case of the friars, should be studied in relation to the overall economic aspects of missions, which concern also supplies of food and other necessities. Disregarding what the friars had received from various people, which is certainly an issue worth attention in another text, I will focus on what they could offer – that is to say spiritual service.

## Target groups of the Christian mission

Christian friars encountered a large variety of people with different religious and social backgrounds. Their situation during their journeys through the Mongolian Empire may be also viewed from the perspective of local inhabitants. What did the Christian friars bring to them? Besides their diplomatic role, which was certainly reflected among the Mongolian nobility, spiritual service was the only capital that they could offer. In this respect, however, their help was clearly linked to their own physical presence, as they were not able to provide material support for local Christians in form of books or liturgical equipment. Rubruck mentions with regret that he was unable to provide Hungarian Christians with the books for which they asked him (Jackson 1990, p. 135).

A first-choice target group of friars was certainly captives living among the Mongols, who lacked any spiritual guidance and service, since they had been taken from their homelands. Rubruck described his service to “Hungarians, Alans, Russians, Georgians and Armenians – none of whom had set eyes on the sacrament since their capture, as the Nestorians would not admit them into their church...” (Jackson 1990, p. 213). While Carpini makes no mention of his spiritual service to these Christians, Rubruck claimed that the German slaves were a chief reason for his journey (Jackson 1990, p. 226). Along with his work for Hungarian captives (Jackson 1990, p. 135), this was certainly also the social group which greatly appreciated his presence. European captives were certainly the most important group to appreciate missionary work in the Mongolian Empire during the decades following the Mongolian invasion of Europe.<sup>20</sup>

Besides that, friars were active also among Oriental Christians, which in this period must be viewed in the context of the policy of the Roman curia. During the pontificate of Innocent IV (1243–1254) significant efforts were made to negotiate a union with the Eastern churches, but differences concerning liturgy and doctrine remained unsolved (Richard 1996, p. 61). Knowledge of Eastern Christians, their doctrines and liturgy, among Western Christians affiliated to Rome was very vague and it is doubtful

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20) For more on the situation of captives see Power 2015.

that the friars were able to clearly understand theological differences (von den Brincken 1971, p. 7).

While various Orthodox Christians were tolerated by the friars and the attitudes toward them ranged from neutral to moderately positive (Dawson 1955, pp. 232, 236 etc.), preconceptions about the so called ‘Nestorians’ caused severe problems.<sup>21</sup> The idea of Nestorians as ignorant, heretical, given to simony and otherwise morally corrupt people (e.g. Jackson 1990, pp. 163–164) heavily influenced the attitudes of particular friars towards them. Hostility toward Nestorians is reflected in the account of Rubruck, as well as in the letters of John of Montecorvino and his fellow friars (Dawson 1955, p. 224–232).<sup>22</sup>

As I have shown elsewhere (Valtrová 2011, pp. 202–208), it was most probably the concept of ‘Nestorianism as a heresy’, which shaped the attitudes of the friars towards them. One of the problems of the missionary discourse of ‘Nestorians’ was their influence at the court of khans and their potential role in the process of conversion of the khans to Christianity. One of the narrative strategies, which may be observed in missionary accounts, is the usage of the label ‘Nestorian’. When European missionaries wanted to record their own relations and cooperation with ‘Nestorians’ in a positive or neutral way, the label ‘Nestorian’ was often omitted, and replaced with a simple reference to ‘these Christians’. Thus Rubruck in his account acknowledges a certain degree of education on the part of a priest called Jonas, without explicitly indicating that he was a ‘Nestorian’ (Jackson 1990, pp. 206, 218).

In the account of John of Plano Carpini, we can seldom find explicit mention of ‘Nestorians’, such as on a list of “nations” living under the Mongolian rule (Dawson 1955, p. 41). When describing the Christians living at the court of the Güyük Khan, he makes no mention about them

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21) There has been a discussion among scholars about this term designating followers of the Church of the East and its image in the medieval West. A concise overview pointing out, that the doctrine of the so called ‘Nestorians’ was never fully understood in the medieval West, and thus arguments against them are based upon misunderstanding, can be found e.g. in Brock 1996.

22) Interestingly, hostility towards Nestorians seems to have declined with time – the last letter of the Franciscan mission sent in 1326 from Zaitun does not mention them anymore (Dawson 1955, pp. 235–237).

being explicitly ‘Nestorians’. This may reflect Carpini’s silent acknowledgement of their role in the potential conversion of the khan to Christianity (Dawson 1955, p. 68). Certainly the relationships towards ‘Nestorians’ were ambiguous – on the one hand, they were Christians and might have some influence on the khans, on the other hand, they were considered heretics and rivals to the Latin Christian mission.

Missionary records concerning the Jews and the Muslims do not seem to change much between Rubruck’s journey and the 1320s. While Rubruck recorded an isolated unsuccessful attempt to convert a certain Muslim, Andrew of Perugia, a fellow friar of John of Montecorvino, reported in a letter from 1326 quite frankly:

“And we can preach freely and securely, but of the Jews and the Saracens, none is converted. Of the idolaters exceedingly many are baptized: but when they are baptized they do not adhere strictly to Christian ways.” (Dawson 1955, p. 237)

While Jews and Muslims did not become prospective target groups of these missions,<sup>23</sup> “idolaters”<sup>24</sup> seem to struggle with a different problem, namely Christian exclusivism. Christian beliefs and practices could not replace existing cultural and religious structures entirely. Only selected, functional parts of Christian practice could be added to these pre-existing structures. Such is the case with local guides, who happily adopted a Christian prayer as an effective protection against local spirits but could not understand its content (Jackson 1990, pp. 166–167, see above note 13).

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23) There are records in the sources concerning missionary attempts among Jews and Muslims, however, there are almost no results reported in the Latin sources. One of the most detailed accounts of a mission among Muslims in medieval Central Asia is a letter of a Franciscan, Pascal of Vittoria (van den Wyngaert 1929, pp. 501–506).

24) The term, as used in Latin sources, may refer to a large variety of religious traditions, which however often weren't distinguished by the missionaries. In this paper I use the term “idolater/idolator” as an emic term denoting the friars’ concept of local beliefs and practices that might be now classified as Shamanism, Buddhism or Daoism. For medieval European conceptualization of Asian religions see Valtrová 2016.

In spite of their tendencies to religious syncretism, “idolaters” were sometimes considered morally better than the Christians in Europe. John of Montecorvino pointed out in his letter from 1306:

“In this country there are many sects of idolators who have different beliefs, and there are many kinds of monks with different habits, and they are much more austere and strict in their observance than are the Latin religious.” (Dawson 1955, p. 230).

Such statements possibly also reflect an idea that was well established in European thinking about the East – that is the idea of the “noble savage” (Friedman 1981, pp. 163–177). Such a view might have been also nurtured by reports which claimed that these “idolaters” believe in one God (Dawson 1955, p. 8) and thus might be easily converted to Christianity.

## **Results of Christian Missions**

The effects of Christian missions especially at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, are sometimes considered an impressive success (Gillman – Klimkeit 1999, pp. 300–301). Such a perspective is supported by the large number of baptisms that are reported by John of Montecorvino and his fellow friars (Dawson 1955, pp. 225, 230, 232–233). In his letter from 1305, John of Montecorvino claims that he had baptized around six thousand people and there could be even thirty thousand of them, if only he did not have to face obstacles caused by Nestorians (van den Wyngaert 1929, p. 225).

However, considering the audience and target groups of the mission, a question arises. Who were these baptized people? As the account of Rubruck shows, the friars were most successful among the various groups of Christians living in the region of the Mongolian empire – namely European captives and merchants living in various cities, but also Armenians, Alans and also ‘Nestorians’. In spite of the fact that ‘Nestorians’ were described as the biggest opponents of the Latin mission, they also formed an important part of the converts. The largest portion of Montecorvino’s flock consisted of people of the so-called “King George”, an Öngüt leader, who is reported to have converted from ‘Nestorianism’.

Another large group were the Alans and Armenians, who are recorded as providers of significant material support for Montecorvino's mission (Dawson 1955, pp. 233, 236).

On the other hand, the missionary accounts provide us only with vague information about "idolaters" being easily converted to Christianity. Interestingly, there is hardly any record about a *specific* conversion of an individual 'idolater' or a group of 'idolaters'.

When focusing on the recipients of Catholic missions in the region of the Great Khan, we may observe a certain paradox. On the one hand, it seems that most of the alleged baptized 'converts' actually already were Christians, though of other denominations. On the other hand, many *baptisms* are recorded. How could this situation be interpreted? Does this mean that Montecorvino was *re-baptising* Christians of other denominations – Alans, 'Nestorians' or Armenians? Such a practice of rebaptism of heretics, discussed since the early Middle Ages, was forbidden in the Catholic church from as early as the first millennium AD (Stocking 2014, p. 251).

An explanation of this paradox may be found in the personal situation of the Eastern Churches. From Rubruck's account we know that some regions were visited by 'Nestorian' bishops only once in fifty years (Jackson 1990, p. 163). Although he might be exaggerating (cf. Dauvillier 1957), periods without spiritual guidance would cause serious troubles with administering the sacraments, including baptisms. Viewed from this perspective, the main success of medieval Latin Christian missions in the Mongolian Empire would be based on providing spiritual services and sacraments to people who already were Christians (although not baptized), rather than in converting people of other religious backgrounds. This interpretation is also supported by the case of Alans, who, in the 1230s, were asking the Papal curia for a bishop (Emler 1882, p. 496).

## Conclusion

The history of European medieval Christian missions among the Mongols is often narrated as a history of particular missionaries – persons, their achievements, numbers of converts and establishment of ecclesiastical structure (cf. Robson 2006, p. 115). In this paper I attempt to enrich and



broaden this perspective by pointing out issues which arise from the conceptualization of missions as processes of communication and exchange. Medieval friars views of the Mongols, their culture and religion were shaped by both their European cultural background and current issues stemming from the natural and social environment. With regard to the wide scope of issues it is also possible to better understand what kind of results these missions had, and what were their major limitations. As the sources prove, European friars in the region of the Great Khan were successful mainly as providers of spiritual service to people who were lacking it – European captives, displaced, already Christian groups and churches which were not being cared for.

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# The Inner Mongol City of Hohhot/Guihuacheng in the Eyes of Western Travellers

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**Summary:** This paper explores several Western travellers' accounts of their travels to Hohhot (Kökeqota), capital city of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, which in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a cosmopolitan trading town and a religious centre. It argues that although Western travellers generally stayed in Hohhot to prepare their expeditions in Mongolia or Xinjiang and were rarely interested in the city itself, they nevertheless described the city's urban layout, markets and temples, and provided information on its population, government, cemeteries etc.

## 0. Introduction

This paper proposes to explore a few Western travellers' accounts of Hohhot (Kökeqota, the “Blue City,” Ch. Huhehaote 呼和浩特), capital city of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (China). Officially known as Guihuacheng 歸化城 (the City Returned to Chinese Civilization) in the Qing period (1644–1911), Hohhot developed as a political and monastic centre around the palace of the Mongol king Altan Khan (1507/8–1582) and the temples he founded in the sixteenth century. In the eighteenth century the Qing built a garrison named Suiyuan 綏遠 (City for the Pacification of Remote [Areas]) at three kilometres northeast of the city. In the nineteenth century, Hohhot became a cosmopolitan trading town, with Han Chinese, Mongols and Central Asians living together.

The history and architecture of Hohhot are documented by a variety of sources, from Altan Khan's biography (*Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur orosiba*) to official local gazetteers, Chinese military histories, maps,

Chinese travellers' accounts,<sup>1</sup> and archival documents in Mongolian (Altanorgil/Jin Feng 1988–1989), Chinese and Manchu languages. Given the very wide range of emic and Chinese sources that are available to us in the twenty-first century, what can we learn about Hohhot from Western travellers' accounts? How did they view the city, and do they provide otherwise unknown information on its urbanism, architecture, population, markets, religious and daily life, and the cohabitation of Han, Mongols, and Muslim Hui? Are Western travellers' descriptions of the Blue City as detailed as their descriptions of Uрга?<sup>2</sup> Do they give us a picture of Hohhot which is different from that of the historical sources, and if there are differences, are these due to their “Western eyes,” their ignorance, prejudices and stereotypes, or to voluntary distortions and misrepresentations aiming at criticizing their own country in mirror-like descriptions?

## 1. Who Were the Western Travellers Who Visited Hohhot?

Coming from Beijing, Mongolia and Russia, from Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang), Gansu or from other parts of China, many Western travellers were to visit Hohhot in the Qing dynasty and Republican period (1912–1949). By “Western” travellers, I here mean Europeans and Americans who did not reside in Mongolia (Table 1).<sup>3</sup> The missionaries and other residents who stayed in Mongolia for years were not properly speaking travellers, though the frontiers between travellers and residents are often blurred.<sup>4</sup>

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1) Such as General Zhang Penghe (1649–1725) and Qian Liangze (1645–1710), in the retinue of Emperor Kangxi (r. 1662–1723) (Zhang 1688); and Chen Kangya (Chen 1936).

2) On descriptions of Uрга Yeke Kүriye's palaces, temples, prisons, and cemeteries, daily life and religious festivals by foreign travellers see Charleux 2012.

3) I only used the travellers' accounts that were available to me. Many more could certainly be found.

4) Although he had lived in Mongolia for years and spoke fluent Mongolian, Henning Haslund-Christensen can nevertheless be included in the category of travellers. He had first come in contact with the Mongols in 1923; after his participation in the Sven Hedin expedition (1927–1929), he mounted his own expeditions with Kaare Grønbech to collect manuscripts and ethnographic artefacts

Western travellers were motivated by very different aims but for that period most of them can be called “explorers” and wore more than one hat. Some travellers were scientists: “orientalists,” archaeologists, anthropologists, musicologists, philologists, palaeontologists, botanists.<sup>5</sup> The best documented description of Hohhot and its Buddhist culture, including Mongols’ petitions to the emperor, an inventory of monasteries, descriptions of urbanism, workshops, shops and caravanserais, and translations of steles, is provided by Aleksei M. Pozdneev who journeyed in Hohhot in 1892.<sup>6</sup> Some travelled to make an economic inventory of resources and trade possibilities with the hope of expanding markets. Others were politicians, diplomats, ambassadors, businessmen, missionaries,<sup>7</sup> spies,<sup>8</sup> journalists, tourist-travellers, adventurers, and so on. Western travellers also tried to obtain in Hohhot passports and letters of recommendation in time of trouble (Lesdain 1904, p. 16). Another motivation for Western expatriates in China to go to Hohhot was to use it as a base to organize hunting trips in the Daqing mountains 大清山 north of the city.<sup>9</sup>

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(1936–1937 and 1938–1939). He lived among the Buryats, the Khalkhas and the Torguts (Braae 2007).

- 5) Scientific works on Hohhot and its surroundings also include materials on language, oral and written literature, history, customs etc. collected by Scheut missionaries such as Henry Serruys or Joseph van Oost.
- 6) I will not repeat here Pozdneev’s detailed description of Hohhot and its monasteries (1977 [1896–1898], pp. 35–77).
- 7) As Joseph Gabet explains in a letter to Pope Pius IX, Hohhot is “one of the main centers of Buddhism in Mongolia; I went there with the intention of attempting to open up Christianity among the numerous lamas therein, or at least to obtain whatever information I could get on their religion and customs...” (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 189, 25 August, 1847 (G54)).
- 8) Mannerheim, for instance, was a secret intelligence officer disguised as an ethnographic collector, sent to China to collect political information about the population, the degree of Japanese influence, the system of defense, the state of the roads, and so on (Gorshenina 2003, pp. 178–182).
- 9) “Kueihua is a good starting point for a big-game shooting trip into the mountains further north, where remarkably fine sheep, a sort of *ovis argali*, and wapiti can be secured, as well as the roe-deer and a goral common in North China. With the Kalgan railway extension pushing on towards Kueihua, this is one of the best and most accessible big game grounds in China nowadays” (Teichman 1921, p. 194).

With their “strange foreign dress and inability to talk the language,” “suspicious packages, queer writing and the habit of asking questions,” the presence of Western travellers in Hohhot arouses surprise and suspicion (Morgan 1971, p. 59); they were often mistaken for Russian spies or gold-seekers (David 1867–1868, Part 1, p. 92). The British explorer Ney Elias, for instance, “had a constant struggle against the spies, trickery and obstructionism instigated by Chinese officials who suspected he had a secret understanding with the Moslems” (Morgan 1971, p. 59).

Why did Western explorers especially journey to Hohhot? Located at the edge of the Mongol plateau at about 400 kilometres west of Beijing,<sup>10</sup> Hohhot connected China with Uliasutai and Kobdo, and with Baotou 包頭 (Buyutu), the Yellow River, Alashan and Xinjiang.<sup>11</sup> For Haslund-Christensen, “The broad valley, through which the snow-water runs from the tableland of Mongolia on its way to the Yellow River, forms a natural terminus for the caravan traffic that maintains communication between China and all the states which lie outside the Wall” (1949, pp. 111–112). Its “resources in grain and other supplies make it a natural centre of Mongol trade and a nodal point of caravan traffic” (Lattimore 1928, p. 505).<sup>12</sup> Hohhot was therefore a gate to the Mongol plateau: from the seventeenth century on, it served as headquarters for all kinds of expeditions, from Manchu emperors’ western wars to caravans of trade and travellers’ expeditions. Many of the travellers thus visited Hohhot to prepare their expeditions to the “land of grass,” or on their way to Beijing or inner China.

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10) Hohhot is a border city between two worlds—pastoralists and farmers. It has a long history of contacts between Han Chinese and pastoralists. The region was occupied at times by nomadic empires (Xiongnu, Xianbi, Toba Wei, Turks, Kitan-Liao, Mongols), at times by Han Chinese (in the Han and Tang periods). It was a strategic military point with a long history of settlements (Hyer 1982; Huang Lisheng 1995).

11) The Gobi route to Xinjiang avoided going through the Gansu corridor: “trade came and went more cheaply with the camel caravans than along the congested roads through China proper” (Lattimore 1929, p. 23). On the different routes from Hohhot see Lattimore 1928, pp. 498–499.

12) Hohhot is located in a well-watered fertile plain (named Fengzhou Plain 豐州灘, “Abundant/Fertile Prefecture Plain”) and enjoys a mild climate favourable for agriculture.



Those who prepared an expedition hired or bought camels and horses, hired a caravan guide, and bought in Hohhot everything they needed to organize their caravan for their long trip crossing the Gobi desert. Some travelled in small groups (with a guide/interpreter, a servant, a caravan driver and a few camels and/or ponies,<sup>13</sup> pack mules, or cars), others went on well-organized and well-funded expeditions (such as Sven Hedin's).<sup>14</sup> For instance in 1904, the Count Jacques de Lesdain, diplomat and explorer, bought fat camels to cross the Ordos (1908, p. 18). In 1910, British soldier George Pereira engaged here Peking carts (1911, p. 260). Expeditions were organized in Hohhot even in the years of political unrest of the Republican period. In 1926, the famous scholar of China and Central Asia Owen Lattimore organized in Hohhot a caravan of nine camels for three men (1928, p. 505), and in 1935, the American sinologist DeFrancis departed Hohhot with four camels and a camel driver (1993, p. 29). In 1933 a petrol caravan of 40 camels was sent in advance from Hohhot to the Ejin ʏool to supply gasoline for the 1933–1935 Hedin expedition (Hedin 1944, p. 3).<sup>15</sup>

Many travellers were too busy with organising their expedition, and were in a hurry to encounter the “real Mongols” in the grassland; besides, they quickly judged Hohhot as being “just a Chinese city,” and wrote no more than one or two lines on it (Commandant d’Ollone in 1908, George Pereira in 1910, Eric Teichman in 1917, Harry Franck in 1923; Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in 1923). Others, such as Lazarist abbot Armand David, sent by the French Museum of Natural History (1867–1868, Part I, p. 86) and Emile Licent (in 1923) had such a focused interest in geology, orography, botany, anthropometry, paleontology, or zoology, that they recorded almost nothing about the city itself in their accounts.

Many of them visited Hohhot in passing, staying only a few days; however, some of them spent several months in Hohhot, voluntarily or

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13) Western explorers such as Elias in 1872 sometimes had difficulties finding caravan drivers and camels, because the Mongols did not like travelling in small caravans (Morgan 1971, p. 59).

14) For a list of the car journeys to Inner Asia (including the famous Citroën expedition “La Croisière Jaune”) and several attempts of inaugurating a car traffic between Hohhot and Central Asia in the 1930s: Hedin 1944, pp. 5–6.

15) The expedition was “financed by the central government in Nanking to seek out a possible motor route across the desert” (DeFrancis 1993, p. 64).

not. Owen Lattimore and his wife were forbidden to leave Hohhot for six months because of banditry in the countryside in 1926.<sup>16</sup> The train service was suspended for months and the city was cut off from inner China. He nevertheless managed to secretly leave the city (1929, p. 16). In 1938 the Danish expedition led by Henning Haslund-Christensen stayed three months in Hohhot; in the meantime, it collected manuscripts and religious and ethnographic objects.

Many travellers who crossed Mongolia did not go through Hohhot: they took the much frequented trade route (for tea notably) crossing the Caqar country and linking Beijing and Kalgan (Zhangjiakou 張家口) to Urga, Kyakhta and Siberia. For example this route was used by Scottish doctor and ambassador John Bell (1691–1780) and Lorenz Lange who travelled from Saint Petersburg to Beijing from 1719 to 1722 with a Russian embassy; Egor F. Timkowski (1790–1875)'s embassy in the service of the Tsar in 1820–1821, and Catherine de Bourboulon (1827–1865), the first female European who travelled in Mongolia, with her husband in 1862.

Others avoided going through Hohhot for various reasons. Prjevalski travelled in Inner Mongolia during the Dungan rebellion, in 1870–1871 but did not go through Hohhot, which was “entirely blockaded from the side of Mongols, whilst raids were frequently made into its suburbs.”<sup>17</sup> Although Roy Chapman Andrews's caravan was following the main road to Guihuacheng in 1918, he had no intention of going there (Andrews 1921, p. 193). In 1932, Citroën's *Croisière Jaune* followed the Yellow River from Ningxia 寧夏 (present-day Yingchuan 銀川) to Baotou, then Batu qayalya süme to Kalgan and Beijing, avoiding going through Hohhot. When the railway was extended to Baotou in 1923, this trade city and its camel market almost replaced Hohhot as a base for preparing expeditions.<sup>18</sup> In 1927 Sven Hedin set out on an expedition to Xinjiang with

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16) He suspected that the real reason was that the “Christian” warlord Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882–1948), who held the province, did not want his foreign missionary supporters to learn about his commitments to Soviet Russia.

17) Yule's introduction to Prejevalsky 1968 [1880], p. xxii.

18) Van Oost 1922, p. 33. Hedin's 1927 expedition departed from Baotou (Haslund-Christensen 1935, p. 10).

300 camels and 70 men starting in Western Baotou, a starting-point that they reached by train from Beijing.

Western travellers' accounts were generally published as books, or as reports in bulletins of geographical societies or other learned societies, and are often illustrated with their photographs. Travel literature forms a well-known literary genre destined for a Western audience back home.<sup>19</sup> The degree of details, of credibility, of selected or omitted material varies considerably from one account to the other.<sup>20</sup> Some novelized accounts are full of anecdotes, while others are matter-of-fact travel diaries (such as John Bell's), or scientific diaries (such as Rockhill's). Scholars' studies and scientific accounts cannot be included in the category of "travelogues," but a few scientists such as Sven Hedin also wrote travelogues for a wider audience. Future research will certainly find interesting material in the unpublished diaries and journals, fieldwork notebooks, letters and other archives, and in the important collections of photographs and films which are kept in museums and private collections.<sup>21</sup>

During the period studied here, travel accounts were an invaluable source of knowledge, and were carefully read and studied by scholars who tried to identify, notably, toponyms. In his 1871 translation of Marco Polo's *Book of the Marvels of the World*, the Scottish orientalist Colonel Henry Yule proposes to identify Marco Polo's "Tenduc," capital of Prester John, as being "Kuku-Khotan itself, now called by the Chinese Kwei-hwa

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19) Mannerheim, for instance, travelled with a Kodak, 2,000 glass plaques and chemical products, and brought back more than 1,500 photos of his journey through Central Asia and China (Gorshenina 2003, p. 178–182).

20) On the hybrid nature of the travel writing genre, between the literary and the factual, between fact and fiction, its directness, claimed neutrality, and objectivity: Kerr and Kuehn 2007, pp. 6–7; Clifford 2001; Hulme and Youngs 2002; Campbell 2002.

21) The National Museum of Copenhagen preserves many photographs from the Danish travellers in Inner Mongolia, notably Haslund-Christensen and the members of his expeditions, Kaare Grønbech (philologist), Werner Jacobson (archeologist) and Georg Söderbom, as well as the very detailed diary of Grønbech. I would like to thank Christel Braae, researcher at the museum, who opened for me the boxes and albums of photographs of the expedition (see Braae 2017 and Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

Cheng” (Hohhot); but Henri Cordier, who revised Yule’s translation, discusses the possible identification of Tenduc with the ruined city of Toyto<sup>22</sup> or with Hohhot by quoting the writings of Rockhill, Gerbillon, Potanin and Bonin (Yule, ed., 1993 [1871], Vol. I, pp. 286–287, note 1).

## 2. Descriptions of Hohhot City by Western Travellers

Western travellers gave different explanations of the name “Blue City.”<sup>23</sup> For some of them, it comes from the glazed tiles of monasteries. Haslund-Christensen speaks of the “blue-gleaming beauty of all the curved roofs and slender pagodas” that gave it the name Khukhu Khoto.”<sup>24</sup> For Lesdain, it was called Blue City because from afar it appears as a green oasis, “half concealed behind the dark mass of a wood that surrounds it” (1903, p. 92). A third explanation would be the presence of mist. For the French Jesuit palaeontologist and philosopher Teilhard de Chardin in 1923:

The blue city has nothing that legitimates the poetry of its name, except, perhaps, the light mist which bathes the rocky crests arranged in a circus around its horizon (1956, p. 37).<sup>25</sup>

Lesdain also noticed that “Everything, fortification, trees, villages, dances in a blue mist, of an intense blue, almost purple on the horizon over there, where the Yellow River flows” (1903, p. 92). When he went hiking in the

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22) Tuotuo Cheng 托托/脫脫城. Modern scholars discuss whether the ruined city located in Tuoketuo District 托克托縣 is the city of the late Yuan minister Toqto’a (1314–1356) or that of Altan Khan’s adopted son Toyto. Bonin visited the ruined city (1904, p. 116).

23) The first occurrence of the name “Hohhot” is in the seventeenth century biography of Altan Khan, which describes the foundation of his palace in 1572. Historical sources do not explain why it is named “blue”—a sacred colour for the Mongols.

24) Haslund-Christensen 1949, p. 112; this is also the modern explanation, see “Guihuacheng”.

25) All the translations from French are mine.

Daqing Mountains, DeFrancis understood that the blue color of the hills gave its name to the Blue City “1993, p. 31).

Although the city’s official name was Guihua, the Mongolian name of Hohhot was also known to Western travellers under different transcriptions such as “Quey wha chin, Hùhù hotun” (Gerbillon, in Du Halde, Vol II, p. 278), or “Kou-Kou-Hute (Blue Town), called in Chinese Kouï-Hoa-Tchen” (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 119).<sup>26</sup> They all noticed that it was a “twin city”: the nearby Qing dynasty garrison of Suiyuan, built on Emperor Qianlong (r. 1736–1796)’s order from 1735 to 1739, was commonly known as Xincheng 新城, the New City, and the town of Altan Khan was then known as the Old City (Jiucheng 舊城):

There are two towns of the same name, five lis [about 2.3 kilometers] distant from one another. The people distinguish them by calling the one ‘Old Town,’ and the other ‘New Town,’ or ‘Commercial Town,’ and ‘Military Town.’ (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 119).

## 2.1. SEVENTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STREETS AND CITY LIFE

The Old City followed a Chinese building scheme<sup>27</sup>: an old Chinese map shows a small town with four gates at the points of the compass.<sup>28</sup> North of the town, the old fortress rebuilt under Emperor Yongzheng (1723–1736) forms an inner city. It was the seat of the government; it

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26) In 1936, Guihua’s name was changed into Hohhot again.

27) The city was rebuilt after having been pillaged by Ligdan khan (r. 1604–1634) of the Caqar in 1632, and became a main military basis for the Manchus’ conquest of China. On the history and urban development of the city in the Qing period: Hyer 1982; Huang Lisheng 1995; Gaubatz 1996; Charleux 2006a, chapters 1 and 2, CD-rom: “Bannières Tümed de Kökeqota”; Charleux 2007; Bao 2005.

28) Liu and Xu 1897. Although the gazetteer’s date is 1897, the map is probably earlier.

enclosed the *yamen* of the *dutong* 都統 (Manchu governor)<sup>29</sup> (rebuilt in 1720), storehouses and an arsenal.<sup>30</sup> Like most of the cities of China, Hohhot had a defensive wall, observation towers and four tower-gates. Two watercourses or moats crossed the city laterally (only the western one, the Zhadahe 扎達河, is still visible today). A great north-south axis crossed the city: the Great South Street, Dananjie 大南街. The three main Mongol monasteries were located west (Yeke juu) and east (Siregetü juu, Baya juu) of this axis. Hohhot was populated by Han Chinese and Mongols: in contrast to many Chinese commercial cities (usually known as Maimaicheng 買賣城) that settled near Mongol monasteries, separated by a few kilometres, Chinese traders and Mongol monks lived together in Hohhot; it was not an ethnically segregated double city.<sup>31</sup> The *yamen*, monasteries and temples, officials' residences, administrative buildings, caravanserais and houses were packed without order inside the narrow walls, contrasting with the splendid Mongol monasteries. Except for the main monasteries, these buildings have been largely destroyed in the course of the twentieth century, especially during the Cultural Revolution (for the religious buildings) and in the 2000s (for the houses, shops and caravanserais) (Charleux 2004).

Western and Chinese travellers visiting Hohhot between the late seventeenth and nineteenth century described the Old City as a large village with earth houses overlooked by the big Tibeto-Mongol monasteries. One of the earliest descriptions is Theodor Isakovich Baikoff (Baikov)'s, in his notes of his embassy to China in 1653–1657. Baikoff admired the fortified wall—but Hohhot was the first “Chinese”-style city he visited—and showed a specific interest in the defence system:

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29) After the Manchu conquest, Hohhot was ruled by a Manchu governor.

30) See the descriptions by Pozdneev 1977 [1896–1898], p. 47. The first *yamen* was built in 1640 on the ruins of the old palace of Altan Khan.

31) Ollone is the only traveller who wrongly writes that the city is divided into four parts: “The four cities it contains today, that of the Mongols, the Manchus, the Chinese and the Muslims, suffice to show the extent to which Mongolia has been invaded, wherever there is some good land” (1911, p. 352).

The town Kokokotan is of earth [i.e. has earthen walls]: the towers of bricks, burnt bricks; the gate towers very large, two gates in each tower. The passage-way through those towers is sixteen arm-lengths broad; and in the towers are two gates; and the gates are of oak, sheathed in iron; and there are six entrance towers; and they have no fire-arms, neither cannon nor muskets; but there are many temples in the town and outside it, the temples of bricks, with the roofs made Russian-fashion, and covered with glazed pan-tiles.<sup>32</sup>

He also showed particular interest in its economy, notably its currency, trade, and crops:

They have much iron and copper [? brass]; and hay and firewood are brought here in carts. Their fields are like the Russian, and of grains they grow millet, wheat, barley, oats, flax and hemp. Also fruits and vegetables: garlic, turnips, walnuts, and plenty of oil-seeds. Timber, too, of all kinds—oak, birch, pine, cedar, lime and spruce... (Ibid., p. 142).<sup>33</sup>

Father Gerbillon, who travelled in “Tartary” in Kangxi’s retinue in 1688, was not impressed by the city; its walls were in ruins, houses were modest but temples were magnificent:

a small city, which we were informed was once a Place of great Trade, and very populous, whilst the Western *Tartars* were Masters of *China*, but at present it is very inconsiderable. The Walls are built with Brick, and pretty entire on the Out-side, but the Rampart within is come to nothing; nor is the City remarkable for any thing but Lamas and Pagods, several of which are better built, finer, and more decorated than most of those I have seen in China. Almost all the houses are but Cabbins of Earth, but the Suburbs

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32) “Relation ablegationis. Tabolsk, Kalmucks, Bogd han,” in Baddeley 1919, vol. 2, pp. 141–142; see also Potanin 1893, pp. 46–47.

33) For descriptions of the fertile Tümed countryside and rural life: Rockhill 1894, p. 16; Mei and Alley 1937.

are somewhat better built and peopled. The Western *Tartars* [i.e. the Mongols] and *Chinese* live promiscuously in this Quarter ... (Du Halde 1741, vol. II, p. 279).<sup>34</sup>

Father Huc's truculent writings have been criticized, notably by Henri Yule in his introduction to Prjevalski's famous book, *Mongolia, the Tangut country, and the solitudes of Northern Tibet*, as "pieces of pretentious and untrustworthy bookmaking"; "imaginative fabrications"; and even "half fiction." Yet Yule believes that Father Gabet may have been the chief author of the *Souvenirs* (Yule 1968, p. xi), and this account is still full of interesting details. In addition, the letters Huc and Gabet wrote to their hierarchy confirm most of the information found in the *Souvenirs* (Gabet and Huc 2005). Huc and Gabet give a very lively description of the city, in which they sojourned in 1844:

With the exception of the Lamaseries, which rise above the other buildings, you see before you merely an immense mass of houses and shops huddled confusedly together, without any order or arrangement whatever. The ramparts of the old town still exist in all their integrity; but the increase of the population has compelled the people by degrees to pass this barrier. Houses have risen outside the walls one after another until large suburbs have been formed, and now the extra-mural city is larger than the intra-mural (1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 133).

Hohhot was so messy that it was difficult to circulate:

(...) It was with the utmost difficulty that our little caravan could get out of the town. The streets were encumbered with men, cars, animals, stalls in which the traders displayed their goods; we could only advance step by step, and at times we were obliged to come

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34) Father Gerbillon described the emperor receiving the homage of processions of laypersons and lamas (Du Halde 1741, vol. II, p. 278). The description is worth comparing with the notes of Zhang Penghe (p. 263a) and Qian Liangze who also travelled in the retinue of Kangxi.



to a halt, and wait for some minutes until the way became a little cleared. It was near noon before we reached the last houses of the town, outside the western gate (1928 [1924], Vol I, p. 159.

The streets were organized according to Han Chinese, Muslim Chinese and Mongol corporations (Lesdain 1903, p. 100),<sup>35</sup> and the inns were attached to corporations:

In the great towns of Northern China and Tartary each inn is devoted to a particular class of travellers, and will receive no other. “The Corndealeters’ Arms” inn, for example, will not admit a horse dealer, and so on (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 134).

The streets are described as filthy and poor,<sup>36</sup> with small houses, shops (tea, cloth, sheep skins), commercial transportation firms (run by Hui Chinese, Mongols and Turkestanese), workshops, warehouses, tea-shops and theaters.<sup>37</sup> The Russian ethnographer Potanin counted 200 tea-shops and five theaters (1893, p. 37).

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35) There were thirty-three corporations, of tailors, paper-makers, wool-makers, etc., often lodged inside Chinese temples, in the early twentieth century (Himahori 1955). On the location of guild shops in the old City: Bao 2005, p. 78, ill. 19.

36) Huc and Gabet describe how in a narrow lane they found themselves “in a liquid slough of mud and filth, black, and of suffocating stench—we had got into the Street of the Tanners,” and later they stumbled on a stone and sank into a hole (1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 133). Searching for a decent hotel, they met a Chinese who proposed to guide them to “an excellent, a superexcellent hotel.” (...). They then devote several pages to explaining “How ingenuous visitors are kidnapped by Chinese” (*ibid.*, pp. 135–140).

37) The trade shops, workshops, corporations’ buildings and vernacular architecture of Hohhot were studied by Bao (2005, pp. 101–148; chapter 2, esp. pp. 165–189) and Bao (2006, pp. 220–221, 224–233).

## 2.2. HOHHOT IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE QING DYNASTY

In the late nineteenth century, Chinese immigration to Hohhot and its surroundings intensified,<sup>38</sup> and the city was on the brink of economic collapse. Travellers collected information about the size of Hohhot's population. According to Lieutenant-General of the Russian army Carl Mannerheim, in 1908,

the population of the town is said to be about (5,300) 7–10,000 tja (taxable households?), of which about (2000) 3000 are Dungans, according to another source 10,000 and 20–30,000, which seems greatly exaggerated (1960 [1940], p. 707).

A Chinese census in 1908 counted 3,117 families in the 81 streets of the Old City, which makes about 20,000 inhabitants, and the same number in Suiyuan (Zheng & Zheng 1934, p. 184). Dr. Steward of the China Inland mission told the American diplomat and scholar Rockhill that Hohhot contained 100,000 to 120,000 inhabitants in 1892 (Rockhill 1894, p. 14). These may be figures for Hohhot and its surroundings, while Mannerheim's figures would be that of the Old City. George Pereira, who counted 70,000 to 80,000 inhabitants in 1910, writes:

The Chinese immigrants are constantly arriving, some only staying for the season to work in the fields, attracted by higher wages (1911, p. 260).

The urban monasteries lived on the rent of the land and buildings they rented to traders. For Rockhill, who travelled there in 1891, the Old City “is entirely Chinese, the ground being, however, rented from the Tumed Mongols who are paid annually sums varying from ten to fifty cash a *mou* (1/6 acre)” (1894, p. 13).

Count Jacques de Lesdain describes the Old City—that he calls “Chinese city”—as “without apparent plan, and very dirty” (1908, p. 21), with “Children swarming on all sides, in the midst of mangy dogs and unnameable

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38) An office of colonization was created in 1880.

filth” (1903, pp. 99–100). The city walls were dilapidated, in contrast with the remarkable walls of Suiyuan, surrounded by high and dense trees (ibid., p. 101). Mannerheim writes that in 1908, it was easy not to notice the wall, which did not attract attention: only the gates betrayed its presence. The wall was

no longer intended for defence, being compressed between buildings that have grown of it... There are no barracks inside the town and even the yamens of the official, such as the Taotai’s,<sup>39</sup> are outside. The part N of the town is particularly charming with a very convex old stone bridge, a small river, many shady trees and open grassy meadows. The S part is more townlike, houses close to each other, narrow, dusty streets and crooked lanes (1960 [1940], p. 707).

Travelling in 1898, Bonin did not even noticed that the Old City was walled:

“By an exception almost unique in China, [it] is not surrounded by walls” (1904, p. 116). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, people used the bricks of the ruined old wall and of Hohhot’s fortress to build their houses.<sup>40</sup> But the city “holds on in the movement of progress,” and had oil street lamps and even “very primitive” public urinals which actually were barrels (Lesdain 1903, p. 106).

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39) *Daotai* 道臺, circuit intendant, official in charge of a circuit. Rockhill gives details on the system of government: “There is a Tao-t’ai here, also a Chiang-chün [*jiangjun* 將軍] or General, and a Tu-t’ung [*dutong*] who rules the Yo-mu [*yomu* 游牧] or Herdmen tribes of Mongols, comprising all the Chahar, Bargu and Tumed tribes of the adjacent region” (1894, p. 14). Mannerheim mentions a “Taotai” and an “Ehrfu” (*erfu* 貳府, vice prefect) residing in Guihua (1960 [1940], p. 111). Elias writes that in Suiyuan “lives the Kiang-Chün (*jiangjun*), military governor of the two cities and of the adjoining Mongolian districts, whilst the Foo, or civil governor, resides in the old city” (1873, p. 113).

40) Pozdneev 1977 [1896–1898], p. 48; Lesdain 1903, pp. 94, 99; Mannerheim 1960 [1940], p. 706.

Descriptions of houses are rare. Elias is one of the few travellers who mentions the architecture of Hohhot, and, persuaded of the historical importance of Muslims there, attributes its architectural peculiarities to their presence:

instead of the open wooden front, the houses are built all round of stone or clay bricks, having narrow doors and long slits for windows placed high up from the ground, whilst the roof, instead of being of the usual form—high pitched, and of tiles—is flat and surrounded by a low castellated parapet. Most of such buildings are in court-yards, though this is not always the case, but when it is so there are generally little gardens of creepers and flowers in pots before the entrance to the chief buildings, which at first sight suggests the possibility of confirming the identification of the place with Rashid-Uddin's town, as quoted by Colonel Yule, to the west or north-west of Peking, "where the inhabitants have planted a number of gardens in the Samarcand-style." The name of "Tenduc," or "Tanduc," or any approximation to it, none of my interlocutors could recognize, though in two cases these were men who knew something of the history of the place (Elias 1873, pp. 114–115).

Lesdain was invited for lunch by a general in the Manchu city; he had lunch not in the dwelling-house but in "a blue tent pitched between the dwelling-house and the garden" (1908, p. 21).<sup>41</sup>

Hohhot suffered from the same evils as other Chinese cities, among which were opium and syphilis. In 1908, an outbreak of the bubonic plague hit Hohhot, killing over ten thousand people. According to Rockhill:

Syphilis is terribly prevalent here.... The Chinese women are quite as inveterate opium smokers as the men, and the whole population... is about as depraved a lot as can be found in China (1894, p. 13).

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41) Mongol houses often had a yurt in their courtyard. On the style, decoration and use of Chinese and Mongol houses of Hohhot: Gaubatz 1996: 245–246; Bao 2005.

Mannerheim explained that although the government tried to restrict the growing of opium and taxes on sale were high, opium was now permitted in a dozen private shops, and the percentage of smokers was said not to exceed 20–30%. There was a private home for curing smokers (1960 [1940], p. 111).

Outside of Hohhot were cemeteries, notably the cemetery of Suiyuan (David 1867–1868, Part I, p. 86) and “two Mahommedan burial grounds, one for good Moslems, the other for “backsliders whose repute has been soiled with wine and tobacco and evil dealing” (Lattimore 1929, p. 17).<sup>42</sup>

### 2.3. THE SINO-MANCHU GARRISON OF SUIYUAN

The Sino-Manchu city was populated by bannermen (of the Manchu military and administrative organization); it was a 6.5 square kilometre city surrounded by a 10-metre high wall, on the model of an ideal symmetric Chinese layout. It had administrative buildings, officials’ residences, and temples dedicated to Chinese deities worshipped by bannermen families, such as the Deity of Horses and Guandi 關帝. According to Rockhill, Suiyuan was inhabited by five thousand bannermen who received

a small monthly stipend from the government—the foot soldiers (*pu-ping*) 3.0 taels a month, the mounted men (*ma-ping*) 9 taels. They do nothing but smoke opium, gamble, hawk, and raise a few greyhounds, and are of no conceivable use” (1894, p. 13).

With its large avenues shaded by trees, its order and regularity that contrasted with the messy Old City, Suiyuan appeared to Western travellers as a modern, even a European city. According to Huc and Gabet:

The town has a beautiful, noble appearance, which might be admired in Europe itself. We refer, however, only to its circuit of embattled walls, made of brick; for inside, the low houses, built

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42) Photographs of a Muslim cemetery near Hohhot, taken by Grønbech of the Danish expedition, are kept in the National Museum of Copenhagen.

in the Chinese style, are little in unison with the lofty, huge ramparts that surround them. The interior of the town offers nothing remarkable but its regularity, and a large and beautiful street, which runs through it from east to west. A Kiang-Kian [*jiangjun*], or military commandant, resides here with 10,000 soldiers, who are drilled every day; so that the town may be regarded as a garrison town. The soldiers of the New Town of Koukou Khoton are Mantchou Tartars; but if you did not previously know the fact, you would scarcely suspect it from hearing them speak. Amongst them there is perhaps not a single man who understands the language of his own country (1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 119–120).<sup>43</sup>

Lesdain describes Suiyuan in 1904 as “well-ventilated by avenues of great trees, under which the homes of the poorest seem less wretched than elsewhere; (it) contains some large *yamens*, and is inhabited by the Manchu aristocracy” (Lesdain 1908, p. 21); an “admirable city, regular and pierced with wide and healthy arteries, true boulevards planted of admirable trees that more than one of our big cities would envy” (Lesdain 1903, pp. 99–100). In its centre was the *yamen* of the “the Tartar marshal” with a beautiful wooden triumphal arch (*ibid.*, p. 102). According to Mannerheim, who gives a precise description of the wall and buttresses, Suiyuan was

embedded among shady trees growing on either sides of the small ditch that surrounds the fortress; its wall was about 47 feet high, with turret-like buildings at the corners and buttresses of the gates. Buildings were small and neglected, with a few poor shops (1960 [1940], p. 710).

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43) See also Huc’s letter to Jean-Baptiste Étienne dated December, 20, 1846 (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 325). In Jesuits’ writings and other European sources from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, the Manchus were called “eastern Tartars” and the Mongols, “western Tartars.”

#### 2.4. HOHHOT IN THE REPUBLICAN PERIOD

As in cities all over China, the young Republic of China undertook “modern” urban planning in Hohhot after chaotic years of wars:<sup>44</sup> the Bell tower was destroyed in 1919, the outer wall in 1922 with the exception of the North Gate, which was eventually destroyed in 1958 (Zheng & Zheng 1934, p. 135) (Fig. 1, Fig. 2). Lattimore writes that the walls of the Old City have been demolished except at the North Gate “to make way for light, air, and the Advance of progress” (1929, p. 26). The modern city developed in the empty space between Hohhot’s historical core and Suiyuan.<sup>45</sup> Yet Western travellers’ descriptions of the Old City are similar to the ones of the previous period; it continued to crumble:

If you come from the north with one of the caravans bound for the “blue city”... impressed by the splendor of the place, then you go straight through the noisy bazaars till you come to the crumbling buildings which once were the heart of the Golden Khan [Altan Khan]’s proud city” (Haslund-Christensen 1949, p. 117).

American journalist Verne Dyson describes the Old City in the 1920s with its “dilapidated walls (and) narrow winding streets, each devoted to some particular trade, and swarming with people, children and dogs” (1947, p. 35, cited by Gaubatz 1996, p. 69).

Haslund-Christensen describes Suiyuan as a “city with stately dwelling-houses and temples, surrounded by a massive crenelated wall” (1949, p. 113). In his journal, Haslund-Christensen’s colleague Kaare Grønbech remarked that the Manchus of Suiyuan speak Chinese but many are conscious of their Manchurian origins;

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44) In 1913 the government of the new Republic of China unified Guihua and Suiyuan as Guisui 歸綏.

45) In the Tongzhi (1862–1875) era a new wall was built to circle the two cities with a perimeter of 15 kilometres (Zhang Dingyi 1920, *juan* 8, p. 23), but the two cities kept their distinct identity.



Fig. 1. View of the Old City. Photo: Kaare Grønbech 1938. Courtesy of The National Museum of Denmark.



Fig. 2. Gate of Suiyuan. Photo: Kaare Grønbech 1938. Courtesy of The National Museum of Denmark.



The [Old] city consists of decayed properties, all in one storey, surrounded by clay walls, while Suiyuan proper is a real Chinese city with private residences along narrow lanes with nothing but gates out to the lane and with business streets, where shop follows shop in long rows.<sup>46</sup>

A particular detail is worth mentioning: many travellers were impressed by the abundance of trees within and outside of the Old and New cities (Lesdain 1903, pp. 101–102): Hohhot is “hidden among shady trees” (Mannerheim 1960 [1940], p. 706), with “(p)oplar-shaded streets lined with bustling restaurants, tea-houses, groceries, caravansarais, factories, bath-houses and shops” (Peck 1940, pp. 40–41). Haslund-Christensen describes in 1936:

The narrow glittering alleys of the bazaars run into an absolutely straight street bounded by high walls. Huge acacias lean over them and throw dark shadows on the yellow dust of the street (1949, p. 115).

The abundance of trees is all the more remarkable given that the region then suffered severe deforestation (Charleux 2006a, pp. 135–136).

The inauguration of the railroad in 1921 (along with electricity and telephones) resulted in rapid Chinese colonization (before the construction of the railway, it took about fifteen days to journey from Beijing to Hohhot; see for instance Rockhill 1894, pp. 1–12). Chinese people migrated from Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Hebei, overrunning the local Mongol population. DeFrancis counted in 1935 a total of 120,000 inhabitants, most of them Chinese (1993, p. 27). Yet there were still Mongols living in the city,<sup>47</sup> but few Mongols in traditional costume were seen: the Tümed were sinicized and dressed like Chinese.<sup>48</sup>

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46) Braae 2017, p. 139.

47) They were mostly monks (who probably lived near the monasteries) and nobles (who had residences north and southwest of the walled city). Most Mongols actually lived in yurts around the city (Bao 2006, pp. 224–225 and Figure 8).

48) On the sinicization of the Tümed, the surprising great wealth of the Tümed

All the administrative officials, from the judge in the Yamen to the gendarmes in the streets, are Mongols, but they are swallowed up in the overwhelming Chinese street life that seethes around them (Haslund-Christensen 1949, p. 115).

American writer Graham Peck describes the atmosphere of the city in 1936:

Also in Kweihwa lived many Mongol princes from the surrounding mountains and deserts, degenerate nobles reluctant to tear themselves from Kweihwa's tepid fleshpots or from its dim but screeching cinema... their influence among their subjects was still immense (1940, p. 38).

The princes had cars and motorcycles: Peck describes the "opium-ridden young prince of Dalat [Dalad banner in Ordos] pattering up the street on a motor-bike" and "the old prince of Durbet [Dörbed banner] who drives a shiny Ford" (ibid.). Mongols also had their encampment just outside of the city: the "Mongols have pitched their tents in the shade of the trees that surround it," and De Wang (Prince Demcuydonrub, 1902–1966), the "country's new master" occasionally resided there (Haslund-Christensen 1949, pp. 117–118). The American journalist and photographer Malcom Rosholt recounts that he

was caught between the casual life-style of the Chinese in this border city, and the still more casual life-style of the Mongols just outside the city (1935, p. 201).

Peck also remarks that "visiting Mongols were still common," they were

hulking creatures with dark, wind-creased faces, dressed in soiled, multi-colored robes, they stood out with a vividly exotic effect against the background of the neat blue-clad Chinese multitude" (Peck 1940, p. 39).

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farmers, and the superiority of Chinese agriculture over nomadic pastoralism: Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 118–119.

### 3. Trade, Caravans and Camel Markets

From the period of its foundation, Hohhot was an economic centre: thanks to the peace treaty that Altan Khan signed with the Ming in 1571, it centralized the Chinese goods that were redistributed to the other Mongol regions. In 1653–1657 Baikoff, who was particularly interested in Hohhot's economy—the Russians had strong economic interests in Mongolia in the following period—, writes:

... and the shop rows there are great; the shops of stone, with courtyards behind them; and the shops built Russian-way with signs; and a lan [*liang* 兩, or tael] with them weighs in their scale ten zolotniks; but in our weight nine zolotnicks. Petty articles they buy with tea, which costs fourteen bakchas the lan. And the goods in their shops are damasks, and baazi, in all their Chinese colours; silk, too, in plenty, of all colours. They have much iron and copper [? brass]; and hay and firewood are brought here in carts.<sup>49</sup>

The number of shops is about 500. Approximately 40 stock goods from Eastern China and from abroad, the rest of the trade consists in the sale of local products. 17 or 18 moneychangers seem to find enough business to keep them alive. About a dozen Chinese agents of business houses (mostly foreign) in Eastern China had settled here to keep an eye on the transport of their goods.<sup>50</sup> About ten large sarais for storing transit goods are owned by citizens of Tientsin. ... Local trade is considerable in comparison with other places in Northern Shansi and the town is a storehouse for

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49) "Relation ablegationis. Tabolsk, Kalmucks, Bogd han," in Baddeley 1919, vol. 2, p. 142.

50) The main firms such as Dashengkui 大盛魁, formed a chain from production to distribution; they ran caravans to Uliasutai and Khobdo, and had branch offices all over Mongolia. The shops and handicraft workshops of Hohhot relied on Dashengkui and other firms for their supply and distribution (on how the needs of trade reshaped the urban space of Hohhot: Bao 2006, pp. 217–221). Every year more than a million sheep, 200,000 horses were sold in Hohhot ("Guihuacheng").

goods intended for the surrounding parts of Mongolia, but the actual importance of Kweihwa ting lies in the large transit traffic between Beiping and Tientsin on the one hand and Northern Kan su and Sinkiang on the other, especially Kucheng (Mannerheim 1960 [1940], p. 707).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hohhot was a hub of caravan trade with Outer Mongolia and China's western regions.<sup>51</sup>

*Kweihwaching*, the ancient *Kuku-Koto* is now an entirely Chinese city, and is said to be very large, and the seat of an extremely lively commerce. The Chinese merchants themselves have in their hands the great trade roads from there to Uliasutai and Kobdo, to Hami and Ili, and to Ninghiafu, all of which places are other centres of Chinese trade, while the Mongols repair to Kweihwaching by many other routes of minor importance. Of late years the trade of those great roads has diminished, on account of troubles connected with the Mahomedan rebellion of the Northwest. Yet, the commerce of Kweihwaching is large, because it commands a very extensive portion of Mongolia (Richthofen 1903, p. 122)

The city of Kwei-hwa-tcheng ... is the most important market of North China with Mongolia. Wool, hides and leather form the main part of the traffic. To give an idea of it, suffice it to say that in two days I met from Kwei-hwa-cheng three caravans comprising together about 150 camels and 75 cars with two mules, all loaded with wool which represents a stock of nearly 70,000 Chinese pounds (at about 60 grams per pound) (Bonin 1904, p. 116).

The outdoor markets developed inside the Old City as well as between the two cities:

From the Mantchou town to the Old Blue Town is not more than half an hour's walk, along a broad road, constructed through the

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51) On trade and caravans in Mongolia: Avery 2003.

large market, which narrowed the town (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 133).

The little market gardens that fringe the mile road between Old City and New bloomed with the noble splendor of opium poppies (Lattimore 1929, p. 25).

Nineteenth and early twentieth century travellers all noticed the impressive variety of goods exchanged.

The Mongols bring hither large herds of oxen, camels, horses, sheep, and loads of furs, mushrooms, and salt, the only produce of the deserts of Tartary. They receive, in return, brick-tea, linen, saddlery, odoriferous sticks to burn before their idols, oatmeal, millet, and kitchen utensils (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 148).

There is, by comparison, a large export trade at Kuei-Hwa-cheng in tea, flour, millet, and all manufactured articles used by the Mongols, such as cotton-cloth, knives, saddles, pipes, &c., and from Mongolia are brought live stock and skins, in what I conceived to be about equal value, for as the Mongols have but little silver amongst them, the trade is almost entirely one of barter (Elias 1873, pp. 113–114)

The trade in this place consists in camels, sheep, sheepskin goods, goatskins and tallow. The quantity of the last article shipped to Peking for making candles is very great. I was told that some 3,000 or 4,000 sheep are killed here daily (in winter I suppose) principally for their tallow (Rockhill 1894, p. 15).

... Buryat and Khalkha Mongols with their long-haired Bactrian camels laden with furs and scented musk; Sarts and Kirgises, their long-legged dromedaries bearing precious metals, Khotan jade and glittering stones; and Tungans whose beasts of burden were hardly visible under huge bales of the finest Sining wool. And when the caravans had rested, they set out again on their long journeys

through Mongolia to Siberia, Turkestan, Tibet and still more distant countries with valuable cargoes of silk, tea, tobacco, spices and other delicious Chinese products (Haslund-Christensen 1949, p. 113)

A major export from this area was sheep intestines. These were carried to Guihua by camel caravans from Xinjiang and intervening grazing areas. From here they were shipped to Tientsin and then abroad, chiefly to the United States and Europe, where they were used as sausage skins or casing (DeFrancis 1993, p. 28).

Lesdain noticed Western ceramics, petrol lamps and other European objects at the “bazar” (1903, pp. 106–107). In a table, Mannerheim gives the annual quantity of goods passing through Guihua. He writes that local industry included a small weaving plant established “about a year ago,” with a small output, and mentions the manufacture of Chinese and Mongol saddles, boots, carpets, Buddha images of coarse and simple craftsmanship (1960 [1940], p. 708). Lattimore noticed a market of birds in the early morning, where larks are sold to Chinese coming from afar (1929, p. 47).

With the coming of the railway from Beijing, Hohhot was linked to the sea and foreign countries: the railroad connected merchants and residents to trade routes and information, allowing it to “empty its [Hohhot’s] markets as much as the caravans filled them” (Lattimore 1929, p. 23). It was the place where “the caravans and freight trains exchange their cargoes” (Lattimore 1929, p. 27).<sup>52</sup> In 1934, Malcom Rosholt noticed:

Although the population is overwhelmingly Chinese, their business was mostly with the Mongols and the caravan traffic operating between Kueihua and Central Asia. Here is where most of the camel caravans were made up, preparatory to leaving for Hami or Urumchi, and here is where they returned (1977, p. 201).

To protect caravans from the attacks of bandits, in 1917 the “Kuei-hua Chamber of Commerce raised a body of men called the Pao Shang T’uan

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52) On the caravan business, see Lattimore 1929, pp. 26–27.

[*baoshangtuan* 保商團], or Mercantile Guard” financed by taxes on caravans (Lattimore 1929, pp. 40–41). Part of this corps of about four hundred men (most of them being Mongols, and former bandits themselves) was stationed in Guihua:

they are paid only a few dollars a month and have to bring their own ponies. Some of them made a little extra money by smuggling opium into Kuei-hua—a safe game, since no tax collector would dare stop a man in uniform.... One or two troopers accompany the caravans when no special danger is to be feared, but larger detachments go out if the bandits are active (Lattimore 1929, pp. 40–41).

### 3.1. THE CAMEL MARKET

For Lattimore, the fact that the mountains north of the city are “ideal grazing grounds for the annual ‘conditioning’ of camels during the period when they shed their hair, in proximity to cheap food supplies for men, explains the natural importance of Kweihwa as a caravan centre” (1928, p. 505). Hohhot was especially renowned for its trade in camels:

The camel market is a large square in the centre of the town;<sup>53</sup> the animals are ranged here in long rows, their front feet raised upon a mud elevation constructed for that purpose, the object being to show off the size and height of the creatures. It is impossible to describe the uproar and confusion of this market, what with the incessant bawling of the buyers and sellers as they dispute, their noisy chattering after they have agreed, and the horrible shrieking of the camels at having their noses pulled, for the purpose of making them show their agility in kneeling and rising. In order to test the strength of the camel, and the burden it is capable of bearing, they make it kneel, and then pile one thing after another upon its back,

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53) Bao (2006, p. 228 fig. 5) locates a camel market north of the Old City on the site of the old fortress and a second one west of the Old City in the 1940s.

causing it to rise under each addition, until it can rise no longer. They sometimes use the following expedient: While the camel is kneeling, a man gets upon its hind heels, and holds on by the long hair of its hump; if the camel can rise then, it is considered an animal of superior power (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 148–149).

Huc and Gabet explain how camel trade was organized by professional proxys:

The trade in camels is entirely conducted by proxy: the seller and the buyer never settle the matter between themselves. They select indifferent persons to sell their goods, who propose, discuss, and fix the price; the one looking to the interests of the seller, the other to those of the purchaser. These “sale-speakers” exercise no other trade; they go from market to market to promote business, as they say. They have generally a great knowledge of cattle, have much fluency of tongue, and are, above all, endowed with a knavery beyond all shame. They dispute, by turns, furiously and argumentatively, as to the merits and defects of the animal; but as soon as it comes to a question of price, the tongue is laid aside as a medium, and the conversation proceeds altogether in signs. They seize each other by the wrist, and beneath the long wide sleeve of their jackets, indicate with their fingers the progress of the bargain. After the affair is concluded they partake of the dinner, which is always given by the purchaser, and then receive a certain number of sapeks, according to the custom of different places (1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 149).<sup>54</sup>

Dyson describes the markets in the 1920s:

A large main-place, to which the principal streets of the town lead, is filled with the camels which are for sale. They are lined up side by side. The noise and confusion of these markets is almost indescribable. To the shouts of the buyers and sellers, who quarrel and

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54) On the camel markets of Hohhot, and the great differences between the camel traders of Baotou and Hohhot, see also Lattimore 1929, pp. 132–133.



vociferate as though a popular rising were in progress, is added the long moaning cry of the camels being pulled by the nose to persuade them to kneel and rise, their skill in which action is a measure of their value” (1927, p. 36, cited by Gaubatz 1996, p. 108).

In the 1930s the market counted some 7,500 camels owned by Guihua firms: the caravan trade was controlled by the Chinese. The camel market shut down in summer: when the hot weather started the camels were sent out to pasture (DeFrancis 1993, p. 27)—but “August is the month of the great fair of oxen and horses” (Lesdain 1903, p. 116).

### 3.2. CUNNING CHINESE AND NAÏVE MONGOLS

Foreign observers depict Mongols as naïve and often cheated in trade relations.<sup>55</sup> In trade, “Mongols and Chinese fraternize, the first cheating the second, who do not notice it” (Lesdain 1903, p. 116). Huc and Gabet recount that

The commercial intercourse between the Tartars and the Chinese is revoltingly iniquitous on the part of the latter... So soon as Mongols, simple, ingenuous men, if such there be at all in the world, arrive in a trading town, they are snapped up by some Chinese, who carry them off, as it were, by main force, to their houses, give them tea for themselves and forage for their animals, and cajole them in every conceivable way. The Mongols, themselves without guile and incapable of conceiving guile in others, take all they hear to be perfectly genuine, and congratulate themselves, conscious as they are of their inaptitude for business, upon their good fortune in thus meeting with brothers, *a-ha-tu* [*aka-de'ü*, i.e., *aga degü*], as they say, in whom they can place full confidence, and who will undertake to manage their whole business for them... so plausible is the Chinese, and so simple is the Tartar, that the latter invariably

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55) For details on the Sino-Mongolian trade and how the Chinese used to cheat the Mongols: Van Oost 1922, pp. 28–33.

departs with the most entire conviction of the immense philanthropy of the former... (Vol. I, pp. 139–140).

When buying winter clothing, Huc and Gabet give details on currency and how money changers made a profit by cheating the Mongol:

When they come to reduce the silver into sapeks, they do indeed reduce it, making the most flagrant miscalculations, which the Tartars, who can count nothing beyond their beads, are quite incapable of detecting (Huc et Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 141) ... In the ordinary course of things, they are everywhere, and always, and in every way, the dupes of their neighbours who by dint of cunning and unprincipled machinations, reduce them to poverty (ibid., p. 145).

In Huc and Gabet's words, even a Chinese will praise the Mongols for their honesty:

“Ah ! I know the Tartars well ! excellent people, right-hearted souls! We Chinese are altogether different – rascals, rogues. Not one Chinaman in ten thousand heeds conscience. Here, in this Blue City, everybody, with the merest exceptions, makes it his business to cheat the worthy Tartars, and rob them of their goods. Oh! it's shameful !” And the excellent creature threw up his eyes as he denounced the knavery of his townsmen. ... we were accosted by another Chinese, (...) meagre and lanky, with thin, pinched lips and little black eyes, half buried in the head, that gave to the whole physiognomy a character of the most thorough knavery (1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 134–136).

For Baron Richthofen, the comportment of Mongol consumers is emotional and irrational:

The Mongol is not endowed with any commercial spirit. He loves money, and likes, too, to spend it liberally. In purchasing, he is not so much directed by the value of the thing as by the fancy he

has for it. Such people are, of course, easily duped by their shrewd neighbours, to whom commerce is essence of life; and the Shansi merchants who have monopolized the Mongolian trade are enriching themselves with the spoils (1903, p. 121).

Travellers also give information on prices:

At Kwei-hua-cheng good camels in the market, 40–50 taels (Lesdain 1908, p. 17).

Camels are quite cheap here ranging from 16 to 40 taels a head. A curious custom obtains here in buying these animals, which consists in counting 8.5 as 10 taels; thus a camel sold for 20 taels only costs in reality 17 taels (Rockhill 1894, p. 15).

Lattimore, who gives detailed figures of prices of travel across the Gobi, explains that during the civil war,

(f)or many months not a single goods train had entered Kuei-hua... prices came tumbling down... When I came to Kuei-hua [in 1926] the regular price for freight was forty-four taels (more than five pounds) a load, and sometime more; by the time I left, eighteen taels was a good price” (1929, p. 30).

Business dealings were based on actual silver dollars, and travellers had to carry cash, especially “in many unsettled areas, where many people simply refused the various kinds of paper currency that warlords of dubious fiscal solvency attempted to foist on them” (DeFrancis 1993, p. 29). The 1929 economic depression had repercussions in Hohhot, notably on the fur market. The furs were

stockpiled in Guihua for shipment abroad. The depression in the United States was a major factor in the depressed state of the market (DeFrancis 1993, p. 28).

#### 4. The Religious Life of the Old City

In the Old City, Chinese and Mongols lived side by side but each had their own temples. The density of religious buildings was impressive, hence the name “city of temples” in Chinese sources (Zhaocheng 召城–*zhao* being the transcription of Mo. *juu*, “temple, monastery”). The variety of religious buildings<sup>56</sup> reflected the multicultural character of the city. Some authors, such as Potanin, had a special interest in recording the Mongol Buddhist monasteries, Chinese temples (1893, pp. 37–41) and Catholic settlements (ibid., pp. 48–50),<sup>57</sup> but most travellers mentioned temples and mosques as curiosities.

##### 4.1. THE “LAMASERIES”

The Old City, or “city of the lamas” (David 1867–1868, Part I, p. 86), was famous in the Mongol world for its great Mongol Buddhist monasteries, which travellers described as being magnificent compared with the surrounding buildings. In a letter to Pope Pie IX, 25 August, 1847, Joseph Gabet counts four main “lamaseries” inhabited by two to three thousand lamas each, about 10,000 for the four lamaseries.

Besides the main lamaseries there are several less important ones, both in the town and in the environs, each containing one hundred or two hundred lamas; so that the total sum of the lamas of

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56) In the early twentieth century, Hohhot’s Old City counted 11 Mongol monasteries (intra-muros) of which 7 were big complexes with several hundreds of lamas each (Zheng & Zheng 1934, pp. 304–306; Yigu & Gao 1908, 6.9a), and a total of 4,000 ordained monks. There were also 13 to 20 Chinese temples and one Chinese Buddhist monastery. North of the Old City were 6 mosques, one Catholic church and 5 Protestant churches. Suiyuan had several Chinese temples, a Catholic church outside the western gate and 3 Protestant churches (Zheng & Zheng 1934, pp. 222–228). See the *Guihuacheng ting zhi*’s map of Hohhot (Liu and Xu 1897).

57) As said above, the most complete survey of Hohhot monasteries is Pozdneeв’s (1977 [1896–1898], pp. 37–46).

the Blue City amounted to nearly fifteen thousand...” (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 189).<sup>58</sup>

In 1688 Gerbillon gives a detailed description of a Tibetan-style assembly hall with a skylight, which may be that of the Siregetü juu:

This Pagod is about 45 Foot square, in the middle is an Oblong of about 20 Foot by 12 or 13, with a very high Cieling: This Place is very lightsome. Around the Oblong are small Squares, with very low and coarse Cielings. There are five Rows of Pillars, which are interrupted by the Oblong Square: the Cielings, Walls, and Pillars are painted in a plain manner, without Gilding. You see no Statues [Images] in it, as in other Pagods, only Pictures of their Deities painted on the Walls. At the inmost Part of the Pagod is a Throne, or Altar, upon which the Living Idol is seated under a Canopy of Yellow Silk, where he receives the Adoration of the People. Going out of the Pagod we ascended to a pitiful Gallery, that encompasses the Oblong Square, and has Chambers round it (Du Halde 1741, vol. II, p. 279).

Rockhill qualifies the “Ta chao” (Dazhao [si] 大召 [寺], Mo. Yeke juu, the main Mongol monastery of Hohhot) as “a fine specimen of Sinico-Tibetan work, and which has just been restored.” He explains that:

The word *chao* [Ch. *zhao*] is used on the Chinese frontier for “temple,” though it is only the Tibetan word *jo* [*jo bo*] meaning “lord,”

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58) The corresponding passage in the *Souvenirs* shows a tendency of exaggeration which is found in many passages of the book: “The Blue Town enjoys considerable commercial importance, which it has acquired chiefly through its Lamaeries, the reputation of which attracts thither Mongols from the most distant parts of the empire.... In the Blue Town there exist five great Lamaeries, each inhabited by more than 2,000 Lamas; besides these, they reckon fifteen less considerable establishments—branches, as it were, of the former. The number of regular Lamas resident in this city may fairly be stated as 20,000. As to those who inhabit the different quarters of the town, engaged in commerce and horse-dealing, they are innumerable” (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 148, 150).

and refers to the images of the Buddha said to have been made during the life time of the Buddha by sculptors who had seen his divine person (1894, p. 15).<sup>59</sup>

Mannerheim visited five Mongol monasteries out of a dozen. He notices that “With the exception of a couple, all are built in Chinese style and might easily be mistaken for Chinese miao [廟, Chinese popular temple] groups of buildings,” but woodcarving was different; temples had a semi-circular entrance door and Tibetan-style *stūpas*. He compares them to the Tibetan monasteries of Wutaishan 五臺山 (Five-terraced Mountain in Shanxi Province): “the temple hall is deep, considerably deeper than at Yutai shan [Wutaishan],” “Main idols are placed against the back wall, as in Tibetan temples, and not in the middle of the room as at Yutai Shan and in Chinese temples.” He also describes Ma and Niu wang, the protectors of horses and cattle, and details the decoration, furniture, urns for incense, Buddhist banners and cylinders (Mannerheim 1960 [1940], pp. 712–713). Monasteries he visited include the “Ning Chi sui” (Ningqisi 寧祺寺, or Taibang juu), an “old little neglected temple distinguished by two suburgan [*stūpa*] towers standing behind it”; the Tsung fu si (= Chongfusi 崇福寺, Baya juu?) which “seems to resemble a mosque built in Chinese style”; the “Ta Chow” (Dazhao, Yeke juu), with a figure of Shagditu (Śākyamuni) in the middle; the “Singchow” (see below); and the “Shöli tu chow [Siregetü juu], the most magnificent temple, with gilding, light blue and yellow glazed roof tiles, beautiful marble suburgan,” and a main building in “pure Tibetan style.”<sup>60</sup> He also mentions the Puhoy sy (Puhuisi 普會寺, a.k.a. Sira mören juu/Zhaohe 召河, 75 kilometres north of Hohhot). The monasteries of Hohhot and the countryside “are all subordinated to the foy [(*huo*活)fo 佛, the reincarnated lama] in the Shöli tu chow” (Mannerheim 1960 [1940], pp. 713–714).

59) The main Buddha icon of the Yeke juu is said to be a copy of the Lhasa Jo bo Śākyamuni: Charleux 2006, pp. 45–48.

60) The Siregetü juu’s assembly hall has a Tibetan structure (square layout, Tibetan framework, and a skylight) but the decoration of the façade, the construction materials (bricks) and the Chinese roofs are not inspired by Tibetan architecture (Charleux 2006a, CD-rom: “Bannières Tümed de Kökeqota,” [2] “Siregetü juu”).

Lesdain (1903, p. 106) visited a “very old lamasery” located south-east of Hohhot, where monks live in miserable houses, the residence of lamas of higher rank being “of an ugly antiquity and almost absolute destitution” (ibid. p. 109).<sup>61</sup> The monastery was “swarming with lamas in infinite number”; the main hall was dark and dusty. He then describes what may be a *dharmapāla* hall with skulls, bones and human hides painted on the door’s uprights, and about three hundred paintings of “obscene” demons forming a “pornographic collection of the most complete” (ibid.).

#### 4.2. THE “LAMASERY OF THE FIVE TOWERS”

For foreigners, the most remarkable and unusual religious building of the city was the “Lamasery of the Five Towers”—the *stūpa* of the Tabun suburyan-u süme or Wutasi 五塔寺. Potanin (1893, p. 41) noticed in 1889: “Among its sights are the Buddhist convent of Utassa with its five pinnacles and bas-reliefs....”. Huc and Gabet describe it as the most important “lamasery” of the city:

... the large Lamasery, (is) called, in common with the more celebrated establishment in the province of Chan-Si [Shanxi], the Lamasery of the Five Towers.<sup>62</sup> It derives this appellation from a handsome square tower with five turrets, one, very lofty, in the centre and one at each angle (1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 150).... The Lamasery of the Five Towers is the finest and the most famous: here it is that the Hobilgan [*qubilyan*] lives (ibid. p. 133).

61) The great Tibeto-Mongol monasteries, that had previously enjoyed imperial patronage, experienced economic difficulties when the imperial subsidies were almost ended in the nineteenth century, and were on the decline in the early twentieth century. Van Oost (1922, p. 14) counted no more than a hundred lamas and two main Mongol monasteries in early twentieth century Hohhot.

62) Huc and Gabet confused the Wuta *stūpa* of Hohhot with Mount Wutai. In Mannerheim’s book, the photo of the same *stūpa* is mislabelled as “The temple tower in the Sydza liang pass in the neighborhood of Yutai Shan [Wutaishan]” (Mannerheim 1960 [1940], p. 696) (Fig. 3).

In a letter Gabet wrote to Pope Pius IX on August 25, 1847: this monastery

... has a large tower quite similar to the towers of the churches of Europe; the main tower is surmounted by five small Gothic turrets ... (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 189).

Indeed, the *stūpa* of the Tabun suburyan-u sūme is a unique form of architecture in Mongolia, and does not look like a Chinese pagoda.<sup>63</sup> Mannerheim calls the monastery “Singchow” (Xinzhao 新召, new monastery?); he describes its “rounded entrance doors and a couple of small suburgans towers,” and a rather “unusual temple, the five closely placed low towers of which attract the traveller’s notice. Its outer wall consists in brownish-yellow glazed tiles with small images in bas relief.” “Inside there is only one small idol” (1960 [1940], p. 713). Haslund-Christensen, who “ascended the five-spired tower of the temple city” with Prince De, wrongly attributes its foundation to Altan Khan: “This, the Golden Khan’s proudest work, still rises above the Mohammedan minarets, Chinese temples and thousands of grey shop roofs” (1949, p. 118). The *stūpa* of the Tabun suburyan-u sūme was one of the most photographed buildings of Hohhot.<sup>64</sup>

In the Tabun suburyan-u sūme “resides the incarnated Buddha of the Blue City” (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 189). Huc and Gabet tell the story of Emperor Kangxi’s imperial guard who killed the reincarnated lama, the “Gison-Tamba” (Jebtsündamba) because he did not bow to the emperor; the emperor then managed to escape, dressed as an ordinary soldier, pursued by a furious mob. Protected by this disguise, and in the general confusion, he was enabled to rejoin his army while his retinue was murdered (1928 [1924], Vol. I, pp. 150–151). The story (also recounted in Chinese

63) It is a copy of the Beijing Wuta *stūpa*, which takes as a model the Mahābodhi temple of Bodhgayā in India (Charleux 2006b).

64) Of the about 300 photographs taken in Hohhot by members of the Danish expeditions and preserved in the National Museum of Copenhagen, the majority are photos of monasteries (including the Tabun suburyan-u sūme and its sky map), as well as some great rituals such as *cham* dances, stone inscriptions and inscriptions of large incense-burners. Only five or six photos show the city itself.





Fig. 3. Tabun suburyan-u süme, Old City of Hohhot, labelled as: “The temple tower in the Sydza liang pass in the neighborhood of Yutai Shan [Wutaishan]” Mannerheim 1960 [1940], pp. 696

sources) was told to several foreigners who visited Hohhot.<sup>65</sup> Lattimore recounts it and adds that

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65) Such as Pozdneev, Waddell, Lattimore, Van Oost (1922, pp. 73–74) and others (see also Baddeley 1919, vol. 2, p. 166). In Pozdneev’s version, Kangxi was saved by the miracle of a tree that spread its branches into a grove (1977 [1896–1898], p. 44). Father Gerbillon did not report the legend in his accounts.

... an image of him [the imperial guard, named Bai] was placed in a temple beyond the walls, here it still stands. It is said that the successors of the Living Buddha ... have never dared return to Guihua, but live afar in Mongolia. Were one to return, a baleful emanation from the image of Pai [Bai], now himself an immortal, would surely cause him to die (1929, pp. 21–22).<sup>66</sup>

The Jebtsündamba qutuytu, being the head reincarnation of the Khalkha Mongols, never resided in a Hohhot monastery (the legend, as we can see, also explains why he resides in Khalkha Mongolia). As Pozdnev demonstrated, he was mistaken for the Second Ilayuysan qutuytu, who was appointed in 1685 administrator (*jasay da blama*) of the religious affairs of Hohhot, and probably resided in the Pungsuy juu (1977 [1896–1898], p. 44). The story of his murder in the Tabun suburyan-u süme may have been invented to cover up his disgrace and execution for treason in 1697 (see Charleux 2011, pp. 14–15).

### 4.3. THE MONGOL CLERGY AND THE DECADENCE OF THE MONGOL “RACE”

Gabet and Huc were curious about the lamas of Hohhot:

The Lamas who flock from all the districts of Tartary to the Lamaseries of the Blue Town, rarely remain there permanently. After taking their degrees, as it were, in these quasi universities, they return, one class of them, to their own countries, where they either settle in the small Lamaseries, wherein they can be more independent, or live at home with their families; retaining of their order little

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66) Noticing that the “living Buddha” of Hohhot resided “beyond the hills of the plateau” (he probably means here the Siregetü qutuytu, who often resided in his summer residence of Sira mören juu), Lattimore (1929, p. 22) wonders if he is the same incarnation as in the legend, and proposes that “his temple so far from the city explains the belief of the uninstructed Chinese that he dare not return.”

more than its red and yellow habit (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 152).

Most of them are Thibetan; Thibetan, with Mongolian, are the usual languages for ordinary things, but for religious discussions and liturgical ceremonies, the Tibetan language is the only one allowed (Gabet and Huc 2005, p. 189: letter from Joseph Gabet to Pope Pius IX, 25 August, 1847 (G54)).<sup>67</sup>

Many of these accounts condemned “Lamaism” as being a degenerated religion,<sup>68</sup> responsible for the loss of Mongols’ warrior spirits (a strong anticlericalism which must be seen in the context of contemporary European history, and of the development of scholarly studies on “original Buddhism” as preached by the Buddha). “Lamaism” was found to present many similarities with Catholicism, notably concerning its decorum, rituals (blessings, prayers, confession, penance), cult objects (icons, rosaries, bells), and adorations of icons: the “lamanesque religion” imitated the Christian one according to David, a lazarist priest (1867–1868, Part I, p. 11). “Lamaism” “is the most frightful curse on the country” and “exactly suits their indolent character” (Prejevalsky 1968 [1880], pp. 62, 74–80). The worst of the Mongols are the “lamaist priests,” who are described as ignorant, crude, depraved and immoral (Lesdain 1903, p. 67); and live a “miserable existence,” “abject and defiled by innominate vices” (ibid. p. 107). “Not merely do the lamas live in filth and sloth... they are notorious libertine, moralless panderers, in many cases beggars of the lowest type” (Franck 1923, p. 145). The institution of reincarnate lamas was particularly targeted as being an imposture. Gerbillon describes in Hohhot a ceremony of “adoration” of the “living Buddha” whom he qualifies as a “counterfeit Immortal,” “living Idol,” “one of those who, as these Cheats pretend, never die ... The Reverence which the *Tartars* have for these Impostors, whom they worship as Gods upon Earth, is incredible” (Du

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67) Huc and Gabet may have met one or two Tibetan lamas but are certainly wrong in asserting that “Most of them are Thibetan.”

68) On the Western trope of “Lamaism” as a “degenerate religion”: Lopez 1998, pp. 16–23.

Halde 1741, vol. II, p. 279). In Hohhot, young and old lamas read Tibetan books “which for them are unintelligible” and “mumble the same words”; and very young monks live a miserable existence and can “never think and live by themselves” (Lesdain 1903, p. 107). Lesdain adds that the narrow-minded and obstinate character of the Mongols, and their faith (or even fanaticism) in Buddhism explain their opposition to conversion to Christianity, and “there is no vice (...) they do not practice daily with a perfect carelessness” (ibid. p. 120).

Western travellers lament the decadence of the Mongol “race” since the medieval Golden Age and predict their total disappearance:

The Golden Khan and his Tumet Mongols who once built the “blue city” – and all the nomads whose tented camps, studs of horses and herds of cattle dotted the surrounded country in still earlier days – what has become to them? Are no trace of their time of greatness to be found? (Haslund-Christensen 1949, p. 117).

The Manchus are also thought to be responsible for the loss of the Mongols’ warrior spirit and for the decrease of the Mongol population because they encouraged people to become lamas (Huc and Gabet 1928 [1924], Vol. I, p. 155).

The degeneration in which the grandsons of Ghingis-Khan fell... the warrior spirit of this race gradually declined. The Manchu emperors cleverly took possession of these peoples. By flattering them, by paying them, they made their former wild adversaries their subjects, if not docile, at least completely tamed...” (Lesdain 1903, p. 50).

Western travellers’ remarks on “Lamaism” in Hohhot do not differ from their observations in other parts of Mongolia.

#### 4.4. A CHINESE BUDDHIST TEMPLE

Lesdain also visited a “very strange temple” in the north western part of the Old City “on a plateau of greenery in the shade of a forest,” with a triumphal arch in sculpted wood. On both sides of the main hall are two dark rooms with depictions of hells, and near the main gate, plaster statues “(m)uch larger than life [size], covered with military insignia, standing, holding the reins of their horses in their hands, an enormous horse with a mane of floating black horsehair”; “They pictured the couriers always ready to leave their rest for the service of temple” (Lesdain 1903, pp. 102–105). We can here identify a Chinese temple of the City God (Chenghuangmiao 城隍廟). Along with Potanin’s account, this is one of the very few mentions of Chinese cults in Hohhot.<sup>69</sup>

#### 4.5. THE MUSLIMS OF HOHHOT

For Elias, who showed special interest in the “Mahomedans”:

The chief characteristic of the old city and open quarter, as well as to a great extent of its inhabitants, is its Western-Asiatic air, and this is not only noticeable amongst the Mahomedan population and their mosques and dwellings, but it pervades as a general characteristic of the whole town. Nor is it surprising that this should be the case, as for hundreds of years it has been the eastern gate of the desert, as Kia-Yü-Kuan [Jiyuguan 嘉峪關] was the western one—caravans from the western Mahomedan nations coming and going, leaving here traces of their distinctive peculiarities of their countries which form the marked contrast to neighbouring portions of China at present observable, and which a further passage into the country would have easily destroyed. A large proportion of the inhabitants, including many of the most influential townspeople, is still Mahomedan (Elias 1873, p. 114).

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69) On the contrary, Zhang Penghe (1688, p. 263a) mentions a Guandi Temple but none of the famous Mongol monasteries.

Their physiognomy “stamps them as of undoubted Chinese origin, though in language, as to all other intents and purposes, they are Chinamen in every sense identical with the Dungens or Tunganis of the Tian Shan settlements” (ibid.). He also remarked that “though a Mahomedan war of extermination is supposed to be raging in the neighbouring province of Kansu [a.k.a. the Dungan revolt, 1862–1877], no animosity is shown towards these people here, and they appear to be just as loyal and peaceable Chinamen as the rest of their fellow-citizens.”

The Muslim trade district<sup>70</sup> located north of the Old City stretched in the direction of Suiyuan:

Between the two twin cities,..., in the course of time a whole new town sprang up: a town with bazaars fringed with *serais* for travelers, and with shops representing many of the great trading houses of Asia. As time passed the two neighboring cities were swallowed up by this ever-growing merchant city, which had neither emperor or Khan as its founder, but where Chinese, Muscovites and Central Asiatics, representing many races and religions, added house to house and street to street” (Haslund-Christensen 1949, pp. 113–114).

Neither women or children are to be seen, only bearded men all hurrying in the same direction without their tall figures losing dignity for a moment. At the end of the street a shining white minaret rises from the soft outlines of an acacia grove” (ibid. pp. 115–116). (Fig. 4)

#### 4.6. THE CHRISTIANS AND WESTERNERS OF HOHHOT

Hohhot was also a centre of the Belgian Catholic mission of Mongolia (Lesdain 1903, p. 117; Teilhard de Chardin 1956, p. 37). Western travellers often met with local missionaries to get information on the countries they planned to cross. In 1894, Rockhill visited the China Inland Mission and its medical philanthropic work (1894, p. 13). Mannerheim mentions the

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70) See Bao 2006, pp. 225–228.



Fig. 4. The main mosque, Old City of Hohhot. Lattimore 1929.

Swedish mission and the Roman Catholic mission (Scheut) (1960 [1940], p. 715). Lattimore describes the small foreign community in 1926: a Swedish mission (the Söderbom brothers, sons of Gustaf Söderbom, a missionary based in Kalgan, and born in Mongolia);<sup>71</sup> the Catholic mission with

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71) One of the two brothers, named Georg, ran a camel ranch near Batu qayalya sūme; he had joined the 1933–1935 Hedin expedition. The main centre of the Swedish mission was in the Caqar country.

its hospital and two Belgian doctors with their family; a British firm dealing in Mongol sheep; and Haslund-Christensen (Lattimore 1929, p. 25). In 1935, there was also a Swede couple named Opberg living in Hohhot (DeFrancis 1993, pp. 22–23). Other missionaries such as Van Oost (1877–1939, in Inner Mongolia from 1915 to 1921) resided in Christian villages of the Tümed plain.

## 5. Conclusion

Travellers were conditioned by their own times, social and intellectual milieus; they “carried with them the same baggage of conceptions, racial and social outlooks, images and memories drawn from earlier readings” (Clifford 2001, p. 7). In this high period of European imperialism, and the cultural self-confidence of a West they saw as being more “developed,” “modern” and “advanced” than the East, a West that had “marked out the path of historical progress that others were destined to follow” (Clifford 2001, p. 3), travellers’ accounts show a number of ‘essentializations’ and binary oppositions—the contrast between modernity (the regular and “healthy arteries” or Suiyuan, the urban policy of the Republican period) and backwardness (the crumbling Old City), ethnographical and historical generalizations (cunning Chinese versus childish Mongols), arrogance and racism... The perceptions that the Chinese had of Hohhot and its Mongol population was more or less comparable.

Travels were often prepared long time in advance: travellers carefully studied previous travellers’ itineraries and maps in order to prepare their journey or complement information on a place, and read everything they could find on their destination. Hence the same stories are often repeated from one account to the other. The accounts of Huc and Gabet are very often cited or even literally repeated, sometimes without mentioning the source. About Hohhot, Potanin quotes Baikoff, Gerbillon, Huc, David, Elias, and M.V. Pevtsov, a Russian military leader who travelled from Urga to Uliastai in 1879 (Potanin 1893, pp. 46–48).

The same stereotypes, prejudices and false views are found in the travelogues of our corpus: in addition to being devotees of a degenerated religion, Mongols were said to be filthy and never wash themselves, indolent



and lazy, crude, narrow-minded and obstinate—but, also, innocent, childish and carefree. Those living near the Chinese border are said to have “indolent habits” and be characterized by their cowardice, sloth, obtuseness, and decay of martial spirit (Prejevalsky 1968 [1880], pp. 58–63). Yet their prejudices against Chinese are often even worse: they had many vices, especially opium, were cunning and used many tricks to cheat and rob the Mongols, were duplicitous, dishonest, and hypocrites (Lesdain 1908; Lesdain 1903, p. 43).

Once we have put aside these repetitions, stereotypes, and generalizations, it appears that travellers’ accounts contain valuable ethnographic and iconographic information, and help restore the visual aspects and the atmosphere of a city. They bring some interesting descriptions, notably of the “modern” urbanism of Suiyuan and the abundance of trees, and on cohabitation of different ethnicities (including a few Europeans), except for the substantial Hui population in its own enclave. They also give information on history, legends and anecdotes that they were told, on the prosperity and decline of trade, on negotiations, prices, as well as on temperatures, botanic, local (Chinese) dialect... and practical details on the organization of expeditions.<sup>72</sup> They naturally have a tendency to focus on what seemed unusual to them, either exotic, or, on the contrary, very distinct from what they were accustomed to see in China and Mongolia, such as the “Gothic turrets” of the Tabun suburb. Curiously, Chinese Buddhism and Chinese popular religion went almost unnoticed. Travel accounts also raise many issues such as the sinicization of the Tümed, and the relations between Mongols and Chinese. Their photographs document buildings, streets and monasteries that have been destroyed.

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72) For instance, Rockhill (1894, p. 1) details the preparation of his journey in 1891: “I have two drafts on a Shan-his bank at Kui-hua Ch’eng for 1103.31 taels, and I carry 172.56 taels in sycee [silver ingot]. I will draw an additional 700 taels on reaching Lan-chou in Kan-su. This and the goods I carry with me will have to do for the journey—a year or more”.

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**Table 1: List of Western travellers to Hohhot according to chronological order**

Main travellers to Hohhot	Who they are	Nationality	Dates of their travel	Reference
Theodor Isakovich Baikoff	Russian ambassador to China 1653–1657	Russian	1655–1656	Baddeley 1919
Father Jean-François Gerbillon (1654–1707)	Jesuit priest, missionary, astronomer, mathematician at the court of Emperor Kangxi	French	1688, 1696	Du Halde, <i>A Description of the Empire of China</i> , 1741
Régis Evariste Huc (1813–1860) and Joseph Gabet (1808–1853)	Lazarist priests	French	1844	<i>Travels in Tartary</i> , 1928 [1924]; <i>Lettres de Chine et d'ailleurs</i> , 2005
Abbot Armand David (1826–1900)	Lazarist priest, member of the Lazarist mission school of Beijing, 1862–1874, sent by the Museum of Natural History, naturalist, guided by Huc and Gabet's guide Samdachiemba	French	1866	<i>Journal</i> , 1867–1868
Ney Elias (1844–1897)	Explorer and amateur geographer; went on to become diplomat	British	1872	“Narrative of a journey through Western Mongolia,” 1873
Grigory N. Potanin (1835–1920)	Ethnographer and natural historian	Russian	1884	<i>Tangutsko-Tibetskaja okraina Kitaia i Central'noi Mongolii</i>
Aleksei M. Pozdneevev (1851–1920)	Scholar in Mongol studies	Russian	1892	<i>Mongolia and the Mongols</i> , 1977 [1896–1898]
William W. Rockhill (1854–1914)	US diplomat and scholar	American	1891	<i>Diary of a Journey</i> , 1894
Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929)	Diplomat, scholar and traveller, member of the Geographical Society of Paris	French	1899	“Voyage de Pékin au Turkestan russe,” 1904
Count Jacques de Lesdain (1880–1975)	Diplomat, member of the légation de France in 1902	French	1902 1904	<i>En Mongolie</i> , 1903 <i>From Peking</i> , 1908

<b>Main travellers to Hohhot</b>	<b>Who they are</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Dates of their travel</b>	<b>Reference</b>
Commandant Henri d'Ollone (1868–1945)	Serviceman and explorer	French	1908	<i>Les derniers barbares</i> , 1911
Carl G.E. Man- nerheim (1867–1951)	Lieutenant-General of the Russian army. In 1906–1908, secret intelligence officer disguised as an ethnographic collector	Russian of Finnish origin	1908	<i>Across Asia</i> , 1960 [1940]
George Pereira (1865–1923)	Brigadier-General	British	1910	“A journey across the Ordos,” 1911
Eric Teichman (1884–1944)	Consular officer of His Britannic Majesty in China, diplomat and orientalist	British	1917	<i>Travels of a Consular Officer in North-West China</i> , 1921
Harry Franck (1881–1962)	Travel writer	American	1923	<i>Wandering in Northern China</i> , 1923
Verne Dyson (1879–1971)	Journalist	American	1920?	<i>Manuscript</i> , 1927
Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955)	Jesuit priest, palaeontologist, theologian and philosopher	French	1923	<i>Lettres de voyage</i> , 1956
Owen Lattimore (1900–1989)	Scholar of China and Central Asia	American	1926	“Caravan Routes of Inner Asia,” 1928; <i>The Desert Road</i> , 1929
Malcom Rosholt (1907–2007)	Journalist, historian, photographer	American	1934	“To the Edsin Gol,” 1935
George DeFrancis (1911–2009) (travels with Desmond Martin)	Linguist and sinologist	American	1935	<i>In the Footsteps of Genghis Khan</i> , 1993
Henning Haslund-Christensen (1896–1948)	Explorer and writer	Danish	1936, 1937, 1938 (3 months), 1939	<i>A Mongolian Journey</i> , 1949
Graham Peck (1914–1970)	Artist and writer	American	1936	<i>Through China's Wall</i> , 1940



# Perceptions of an Austrian research traveller in the Mongolian Steppe. An approach on detours<sup>1</sup>

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**Summary:** This article deals with the Austrian research traveller Hans Leder (1843–1921) and tries to get closer to the personality and character of this versatile traveller. Leder became one of the most important collectors of Mongolian-Buddhist art during his four travels to Mongolia and created one of the largest collections of Mongolian ethnographica. Leder's travelogues and collections are not only important as historical primary sources, they also offer opportunities for current scientific-artistic interactions and confrontation.

## 0. Introduction

“We always had a lot of visits from the Mongols, because for most of them I was certainly the first bearded European whom they saw. They were very naively curious and did not hide it at all, but they never were obtrusive or insolent. In respectful distance they sat and stood in a half-circle and fixed me following all my movements.”(Leder 1895, p. 48).<sup>2</sup>

It was on detours that the research traveller Hans Leder approached the heart of Asia, Mongolia. Hans Leder (1843–1921) who was born near Troppau,<sup>3</sup> the capital of Austrian-Silesia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian

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1) This paper was written within the research project *Dispersed and Connected* (Austrian Science Fund: PEEK-AR394-G24); <https://dispersedandconnected.net>.

2) Translations of all quotations from the German original by the author and David Westacott.

3) Today Opava in Czech Republic.

Empire, decided at an early age to leave Europe. His interests since childhood had been the natural sciences, but due to the lack of support from his father (his mother died when he was eight years old) it was not possible for him to complete his studies at the Mountain Academy in Schemnitz (Bergakademie von Schemnitz; today Banská Štiavnica in Slovakia) as he had wished. In 1867 he travelled to North-Western Africa, following his entomological and language studies there. Already well known as a collector of entomologica, he left Europe in 1875 for several years to visit the Caucasus region, later living in the German settlement Helenendorf with his newly built family from 1882–1888.

In the mid 1870s, he had met the young Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich Romanov (1859–1919) in Borjomi. He was one of the sons of Grand Duke Michael Nikolaievich of Russia, the Viceroy of the Caucasus (1862 to 1882). There, as a young boy, Nikolai Mikhailovich had developed his passion for butterflies. In his preface to volume one of his ten-volume work entitled *Mémoires sur les Lépidoptères* (Romanoff 1884) he thanks Leder for his collecting endeavours and several specimens collected by Leder are published in this work.<sup>4</sup> Later in 1891, as the president of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich Romanov assigned Leder to travel to East Southern Siberia to research new insect and butterfly species. Here, Leder spent his time mainly in the Sayan mountains and on his own.

“I have spent the entire summer of 1891 almost exclusively in the forest and soon pitched my tent in a glade at the bottom of a valley, then in the dense forests of the middle mountainsides or on the alps above the tree line and on the shores of the iced lakes of the upper tundra. Sometimes I found it rather lonesome, sad and dull. But this was not the fault of the at times indeed unfriendly and harsh, but even then and maybe just therefore, magnificent and overwhelming countryside. These were simply just moods, not surprising for anyone trying to understand just for an instant my isolated situation at that time. And in these cases each time

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4) The entomologica discovered and collected by Leder bear the denomination “Lederi”.

it was just the selection and observation of the life surrounding me that distracted me again from dark thoughts and elevated and delighted me. [...] Anyone who observes his surroundings carefully and closely will always still find something that completely escapes the unpractised eye of someone used to more crude and obvious appearances.” (Leder 1894, p. 152f).

But it was not solely nature and naturalia that caught his attention. In Southern Siberia, Leder had already visited in 1891 Buddhist monasteries and temples and had come into contact with Buddhist monks and believers – Buryats and Mongols – for the first time. His wish to travel to “the mystical land of the Mongols” (Leder 1893, p. 319) grew, even more so as he was not locating many new entomological specimens on site.

In April 1892 he left Irkutsk, after having spent most of his time in the area of the Sayan Mountains, with a Russian post troika, traversing the frozen Lake Baikal by sledge, to cross the border to Mongolia using the Chinese express post from Kyakhta to Urga (today Ulaanbaatar) on the caravan road. His two attendants (one of them a translator) and Leder himself were “transported” by up to 30 horses and 12–15 companions. This tour took nearly one month, due to obstacles along the route and multiple travel preparations (Leder 1893); the route from Kyakhta to Urga three days (Leder 1894b, p. 409).

## 1. First encounter with Mongolia

Approaching the Mongolian capital *Ikh Khuree* (Urga) he was guest in a *ger* (yurt) for the first time.

“At the entrance, a young, well-dressed, friendly-looking man with sympathetic features received me. [...] He greeted me kindly but with a certain reserve. We joined hands and he led me inside. There, facing the lower entrance, the place of honor was prepared for me, covered with felt blankets, mattresses, and cushions. In the middle, in a basket-like iron frame, burned a small fire, which was maintained as needed only with applied Argol (dry dung); on the same

stood a tall copper jug of peculiar form, from which I was offered tea mixed with milk in a wooden bowl.” (Leder 1893, p. 345).

Leder’s first summer journey in Mongolia lasted four months. In Urga, where he stayed one week, he organised a small caravan consisting of six rented camels and seven rented horses. Two Mongolian men, both monks, named “Dshamsa” and “Sokto”, would serve as guards and guides for five months – altogether he paid 700 rubles (Leder 1894b, p. 415). Additionally, two Russians who had accompanied him from Siberia onwards were part of the group. In contrast to his Russian assistants he was highly satisfied with his Mongolian guides and praised their character. Generally, he describes his encounters, experiences and relations with the Mongolian people in a very positive way. In Urga, the Russian Consul Yakov Parfenievich Shishmaryov (1833–1915), supported and advised Leder and also organised his correspondence to be sent forward to him by mounted post carriers during his travels in the countryside. The caravan brought him to the west, to Erdene Zuu, Khara Balgas, Zayin Gegeen Monastery further south to the Ongiin river and back via Erdene Zuu to Urga. Three further journeys followed in the years 1899/1900, 1902, 1904/1905; Leder spent two winters in Urga, an ideal place for him to collect Buddhist ritual items.

## 2. The Traveller

“But one only travels to work, observe and learn. Those who want to live comfortably must not travel at all, least of all in uncultivated countries.” (Leder 1895, p. 48).

Hans Leder travelled, observed, perceived and wrote about his travels, especially about his first trip of four months in 1892, in a holistic, encompassing mode – in this way following the Humboldtian model integrating the arts and sciences with research and viewing the humanities and natural sciences as complementary to each other (cf. Osterhammel 2002, p. 133f.). His articles embrace observation of the landscape (including sacred landscape), fauna, flora, art, architecture and ethnographic descriptions. He used different types of transport and therefore travelled at different speeds:

horseback, horse coach, sledge, boat and train. Each type of transportation offered different perspectives, journey times, as well as experiences of time and space. He would later apply his trained gaze for the microcosmic to his ethnographic collecting activities.

Leder defined himself as an *österreichischer Forschungsreisender* (Austrian research traveller). An expression that permits interdisciplinarity and cannot be reduced to one specific field of research – which corresponds to the actual nature of his agencies in Mongolia and beyond. This definition comes close to the category of “scientific traveller” (see Kollmar-Paulenz 2017, p. 9–11; Bunzl and Penny 2003, p. 4f); even so, it does not directly express or include one of Leder’s main activities. In this case, the category of “traveller-collector” seems very useful. Leder travelled from the start as a person driven by his endeavour to collect, be it entomologica, lepidoptera or other naturalia or ethnographica.

Most European/Western travellers in Leder’s time were male and I might add, judging from their portraits, that most of them were “bearded men”. The majority of them came from upper class backgrounds and often were supported by institutions. Leder, for his part, was financially not well equipped, neither from his family nor permanently from any institution. He belonged to the category of maverick travellers or researchers. He travelled, researched and collected in the realm of the Habsburg Empire, with no direct colonial interests but with cosmopolitan, more liberal-humanistic interests.<sup>5</sup>

“I have always been in close contact with the ordinary people and with the priests or lamas, low and high ranking. So it was just natural that I was primarily interested, yes indeed had to be interested in their religious life, as I could only gain an understanding for the thousands of things associated with ritual that I was collecting by insistent questioning and getting explanations. In this I was supported by one of the outstanding characteristics of Buddhists – the complete lack of any kind of intolerance and fanaticism towards people of other religions.” (Leder 1909, p. V).

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5) Cf. Gingrich 2007.

Though he states that he always was close to the Mongols, he kept a respectful distance. As he writes, he was befriended by Agvan Dorzhiev (1854–1938), the eminent Buryat lama and mentor of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, but with no intention to become a Buddhist. His encounter with the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama he describes as follows:

“Introducing myself to the Grand-Lama simply alone was impossible. But to throw myself down before him with the other visitors, the pilgrims demanding a blessing, seemed again to me either a profanation or an unworthy comedy. But yet, it was well known to all that I did not feel hostile to their faith, but after all that I was far from being a follower of it. I decided on a middle course, entered the reception room with the believers, but then stopped quietly, and yes, even went into the spiritual environment to see everything, and then left as well, after exchanging glances with the Dalai Lama. Nobody hindered me because everyone knew me, and the Dalai Lama knew exactly who I was.” (Leder 1909, p. 75).

### 3. The Collector

Hans Leder’s focus on collecting entomologica and naturalia increasingly expanded to his role as a collector of ethnographica, mainly Buddhist ritual art. This change in his collecting mode was also in step with the growing demand for ethnographic collections in order to fill the newly established ethnology museums in Europe (Penny 2002).

Leder was described by his contemporaries as a humble, diligent and pleasant personality (Hetschko 1922, Köhler 1925). Though at times Eurocentric, his scientific intention was led by a comparative approach and respect for other cultures rather than finding or focusing on the differences between cultures which often (later) would lead to racist scientific methods.

The Finnish linguist Gustav Ramstedt (1873–1950) whom Leder met as one of the very few Europeans staying in Urga in 1900, apparently had a less positive attitude towards him. In his travel writings he mentions a “very corpulent person, advanced in years” who collected using rather dubious methods, without mentioning him by name.

“We also were often visited by the Russian priest and by an Austrian collector who came to Urga to get ethnographic items. The Austrian took full room and board with the Smirnovs. He was a very corpulent person, advanced in years. He had most recently been in Ethiopia to collect butterflies and before that had been making collections in many other countries. The collection of Mongolian objects went on simply, in that Smirnov hired a Mongol, known as handy at thievery, who in the evenings came to the collector with something wrapped up in his coat and as a rule he got one ruble per day. In this fashion he “collected” from house and yard oddments and bridles, caps, shirts, underclothing etc., and books and sacred images in the temples. The fellow was himself a lama in the monastery. Regarding books the collector often came to me for advice, since he understood nothing of them. In all the collection cost about 300 rubles, but after a year when the collection, first via Peking and then overseas, arrived at the museum of its destination, it was valued at from fifty to sixty thousand guilders.” (Ramstedt/ Krueger (ed) 1978, p. 74).

And at a later point he again mentions “the Austrian collector”, interestingly again not using his name:

“Among the Buryats who came to Urga I found a man who undertook to convey my wife and daughter with all their baggage to the border. The Austrian collector requested to go via the same outfit. Thus my wife and our little girl travelled with the corpulent gentleman in the same uncomfortable conveyance, while the baggage followed in another. I myself took our best horse and followed them riding it. Spring was already at the door. At this time of the year tremendous tornados which can last one or two whole days may come to Mongolia. The sky is covered with a dark sand cloud, the sun is unseen even in the middle of the day, and the force of the storm is awe-inspiring. We ran into such a storm, and for almost an entire day and night had to seek shelter in a ravine. On the fourth day we arrived at the Russian border where I had to part from my wife and child.” (Ramstedt/ Krueger (ed) 1978, p. 76).

According to Leder, who confirmed it was March, they continued from the Russian border after Ramstedt requested that they accompany his family to Irkutsk.

However, we do not know Ramstedt's personal reasons for writing in a rather uncomplimentary, not to say disrespectful manner – keeping in mind that all travel writing is above all a subjective selection of experiences.

#### 4. Sources and Legacy

Unfortunately, Hans Leder's diaries and travel notes are not available to us as a primary source. According to the Czechoslovak archaeologist Lumír Jisl (1963) they were destroyed during World War II. All the more important are the map of his travel route from 1892, the items in his collections, his hand-written object lists, correspondence, obituaries, a few articles, one book manuscript and his small book *Das Geheimnisvolle Tibet. Reisefrüchte aus dem geistlichen Reiche des Dalai-Lama* published in 1909. Having the natural and ethnographic collections as a legacy is an especially rich additional source for studies. We have documented, digitalised and analysed the ethnographic collections, dispersed mainly to ethnography museums in Budapest, Prague, Stuttgart, Hamburg, Heidelberg and Leipzig in research projects following Jisl's preliminary work in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> As a next step, they have been re-contextualised and enriched by newly documented narrations (Lang 2016; Lang and Baatarnaran 2017; [www.nomadicartefacts.net](http://www.nomadicartefacts.net)).

#### 5. Continuations

For Lumír Jisl (and later for myself as well) Leder's legacy has been a source of inspiration or starting point to re-travel his paths, and to visit places described by Leder and develop our own research projects. Jisl dedicated his book *Mongolian Journey* from 1960 to "H. Leder, that great traveller of the nineteenth century, today alas forgotten, who has given us fresh

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6) See also [www.moncol.net](http://www.moncol.net) and publications by the author.



insight into Mongolian Lamaism and ethnography, and in whose steps I have often followed during my own journey.” (Jisl 1960, p. 6).

When I first visited the storage room of the ethnographic museum in Vienna in 1994, today known as the Weltmuseum Wien, I was confronted with the craze for collecting; an intangible tangible heritage brought from all over the world made me aware of the responsibility towards these things, their genealogical places and creators. Hans Leder’s ethnographic collections in the drawers faced me as objects without history. These objects need to move, was my thought, and I began researching the collection histories as well as the artefacts’ biographies (Lang 2010; 2010a; 2013). By returning them to their places of origin and using them as links to document memories of the past, including the interaction with objects during political repressions, new layers have been added to their histories. They have now been moved out of their museum drawers to exhibitions in the Theseus Temple in Vienna and ethnographic museums in Hamburg and Heidelberg. There and in the Bogd Khan Palace Museum in Ulaanbaatar we have told their histories related to Mongolia, to Hans Leder and their lives as museum objects. And by adding documented narrations to them, they have begun to speak – to tell their own stories.

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Fig. 1. Hans Leder at the age of 61 (Jisl 1963)



Fig. 2. Map of Hans Leder's Journey in 1892 (Jisl 1963)

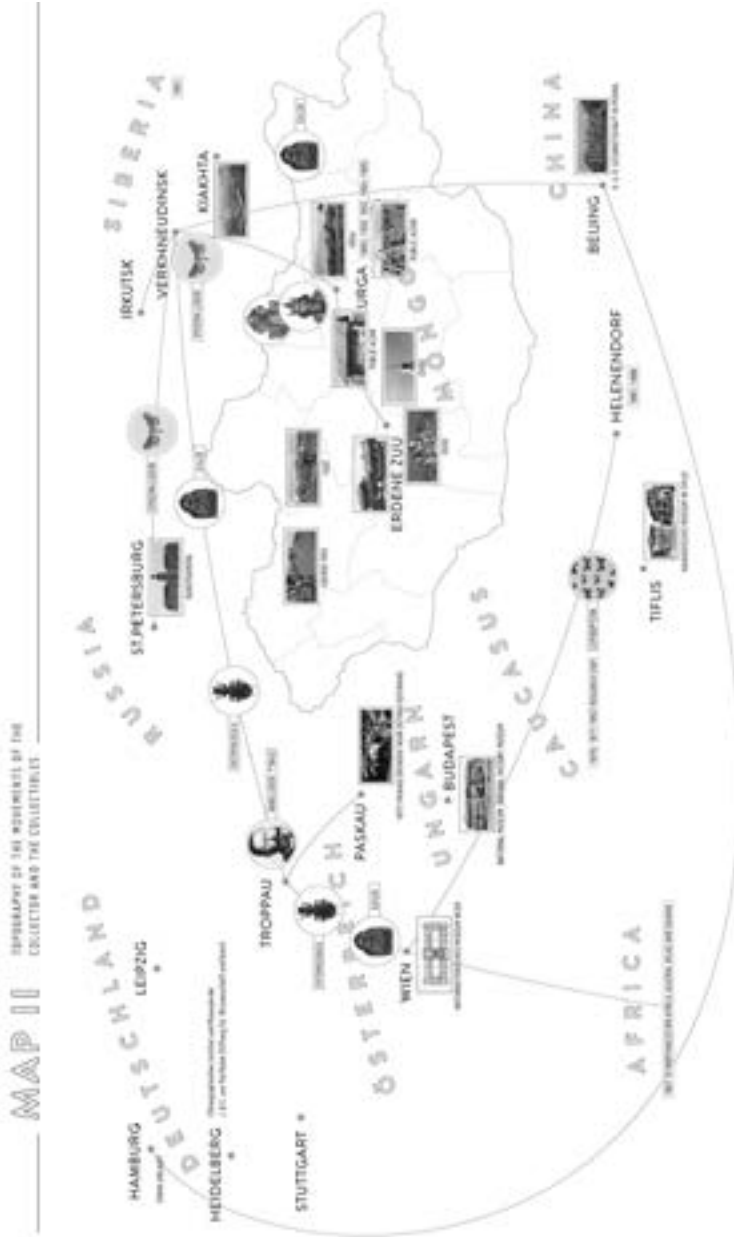


Fig. 3. Topography of the Movements of the Collector and the Collectables (copyright M.-K. Lang)



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