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Demographic Conditions of Mongolia in the Early Twentieth Century¹

URANGUA KHEREID JAMSRAN, National University of Mongolia

Summary: To date, the historical demographic conditions of Mongolia have been the subject of only very little analysis. Even less information is available about the demography of Mongolia prior to 1918, the year in which the first national census was performed. Nevertheless, certain Russian and Soviet officials made pronouncements that Mongolia in the 1910s was on the verge of extinction, and only thanks to the Soviet influence did the Mongolian population increase. The present research aims to overturn this common misunderstanding through drawing upon the primary source materials of Sergei Andreevich Kozin's 1915 expedition to Mongolia, retrieved from Russian and Mongolian archives. By applying estimation techniques and cross-comparisons, the key demographic indicators are reconstructed to show the existence of demonstrable population growth. The number yielded by the 1918 census, which is still considered to be the official number and is widely used for reconstruction purposes, is thus established as flawed, demanding a reconsideration. The key demographic indicators reconstructed by this research exhibit slow but steady growth of the population and a reasonable fertility rate and age-sex ratio, showing that Mongolia's existence was not threatened with demographic catastrophe, as many have suggested.

1. Introduction

Surrounded by the territories of two of the most powerful nations in the modern world, Russia and China, Mongolia has a rich history of war and conquest, defeat and struggle, socialism and democracy. In each of these stages, the events of the past were relayed differently – sometimes with exaggeration, sometimes with a twist, but mainly by according to the perceptions and preferences of the governing rulers.²

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- 1) This paper was supported by Grant from Russian Foundation for basic research and Ministry of Education and Science Mongolia 20–59–4408 “World and Russian Mongolian studies: national schools, concepts, personalities”.
 - 2) For an overview of the main ideologies involved see e.g. Morozova (2009, pp. 11–24).

The democratic revolution of 1990 opened the door for pluralism and provided an opportunity for historians, such as myself, to revisit Mongolian history from an objective standpoint. One of the historical issues that call for reconsideration is the demography of Mongolia in the early twentieth century, immediately before Mongolia adopted the path of socialism.

For nearly a century, the narrative of the disastrous state of Mongolia's economy and demography at the beginning of the 20th century has been repeated by many scholars. How did this narrative emerge? Similarly to other socialist countries, the Mongolian official discourse about history was constructed to allow it to fit into the explanation that the Communist³ revolution led to an inevitable improvement of living conditions. One usual way to make this argument was through emphasizing the problems of the pre-revolutionary society. In the case of Mongolia, the official version of history used available historical sources to show that the Mongolians were on the brink of extinction before the revolution of 1921, which was aided by Communist Russia. A small population with a low growth rate, high infant mortality, and isolation from the outside world under Qing dynasty rule were the explanations for this assertion.

1.1. THE DEVELOPMENTS IN MONGOLIA BETWEEN 1636 AND THE REVOLUTION OF 1921

After the submission of the lineage of the Chakhar khans, the *de iure* rulers of the Mongols, to the Manchus in 1635, the area of today's Inner Mongolia became part of the Manchu empire. Over a half-century later, in 1691, Khalkha (later Outer Mongolia,⁴ roughly corresponding to the

3) By "Communist" I refer to matters pertaining to a one-party state whose politics is/was guided by Marxist-Leninist ideology and was mostly shaped on the model of the Soviet Union.

4) The term "Outer Mongolia" was used differently at different times. Initially, Outer Mongolia was synonymous to the Four aimags of Khalkha. During the end of the Qing Dynasty rule, Outer Mongolia was applied to the Four Khalkha aimags and the area of Khovd (hence approximately the territory of present-day Mongolia) in addition to Tannu-Urianghai. This territorial span is also what was understood under Outer Mongolia until 1944, when Tannu Urianghai became

territory of present-day Mongolia) became subject to the Manchu Qing dynasty, and the Manchu conquest of the Mongol areas was completed another half-century later (1755–1756) by the annexation of the Western Mongolian Dzungar empire in present-day Xinjiang. However, during the Qing Dynasty,⁵ the three areas (Inner Mongolia, Outer Mongolia and Xinjiang) were administered in different ways and with different goals (see, for example, di Cosmo 1998). Outer Mongolia was responsible for guarding the country's northern and northwestern borders, or, in other words, was used by the Qing government as a buffer against Russia (e.g. Sneath 2010, p. 155). An important aim of the policy of the Qing Dynasty was to keep Outer Mongolia isolated from foreign countries (Sneath, *ibid.*).⁶ Bans on Chinese settlement in Mongolian territory, Chinese – Mongolian intermarriage and cultivation on the Mongolian pasturelands were part of this policy. However, towards the end of the 19th century the Qing dynasty found itself facing a serious threat from the European powers. As a response, in 1901 the Qing Dynasty began to implement the so-called “New Policies”, a complex modernization program which involved, among other actions, opening the previously protected Mongolian pasturelands for cultivation and encouragement of Chinese settlement in the Mongol territories (Atwood 2001, p. 402). For Outer Mongolia, the New Policies meant direct Chinese colonization of its territory. The previous ban with regard to Chinese-Mongolian intermarriage was repealed in 1906. The New Policies provoked an immediate response in all Mongolian areas affected. The Outer Mongolians launched an initiative against the policy which ultimately led to a declaration of independence from the Qing Dynasty on December 29, 1911. In the words of Charles Bawden:

“At the end of 1911 Mongolia proclaimed her independence from China as a monarchy under the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu, and so for the first time for over two hundred years re-entered the main stream of history. She was one of the first nations in modern times, outside Europe, to escape successfully from subjection to an alien power.” (Bawden 1986, p. 187)

part of the USSR. Throughout this text, the term “Outer Mongolia” refers specifically to the territory of present-day Mongolia.

5) Refers to the 17th–pre-20th century Manchu Qing Dynasty.

6) For a description of the situation of Outer Mongolia in the 18th century see Bawden (1989, pp. 81–134).

Consequently, in the 1911–1914 period, Outer Mongolia was in the process of developing as an independent state, seeking international recognition, yet in 1915, the Trilateral Treaty of Kyakhta was signed by Russia, China and Mongolia, which transformed Outer Mongolia from an independent state into an autonomous province under Chinese rule.⁷ Following the change of power in Russia after 1917, the Chinese government strengthened its intervention into Mongolian affairs and abolished Outer Mongolian autonomy in 1919. This action eventually led to the Soviet-aided Mongolian Revolution of 1921, establishing Mongolia as a state *de facto* independent of China but under the suzerainty of the Soviet Union. The period between 1915–1919, which is the main focus of this article, is known as the period of Outer Mongolian autonomy (e.g. Bawden 1986, p. 201).

From the point of view of economics and living conditions, the situation in Outer Mongolia between 1900 and 1921 has been usually portrayed in particularly gloomy colours. For example, for the late Qing period Charles Bawden notes the excessive taxes and other payments imposed on the Mongolian population by its hereditary aristocracy, by this point not only under financial obligations towards the Qing court, but also caught in a spiral of debts to Chinese merchants. The exaction of taxes from the herders for payment of these debts is described as an unbearable burden for the Mongolian population and a major obstacle to any form of progress, including demographic growth. (Bawden 1986, pp.148–149). Bawden further argues that in the periods of Mongolian independence (1911–1914) and autonomy (1915–1919), the economic situation of the Mongols did not improve: debts to Chinese trade companies were increasing and the living conditions, in particular in the poorer parts of Outer Mongolia, continued to be unfavourable (Bawden 1986, pp. 203–204).

7) For a detailed documentation of the negotiations at Kyakhta see Батсайхан 2013.

1.2. THE CONTEXT OF THE GENERALLY ACCEPTED VIEW OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION IN EARLY 20th CENTURY MONGOLIA

Andrei Pavlovich Boloban, a representative of the Trade and Industry Ministry of Tsarist Russia in Mongolia between 1912–1913, reported back to Russia that population of Mongolia was dropping and was going to be extinct. His claim was that this state had arisen due to economic hardship and the practice of celibacy in Mongolian monasteries, adding that this view was allegedly shared among the Mongolian population.⁸ Boloban's report was influential towards shaping a consensus shared and believed for many years. Mongolian senior historian B. Shirendev (1969) also wrote, "The population was extremely poor, and the death rate was high and the birth rate was low due to disease". Was such a general statement about population really accurate?

In her historiography overview, Irina Morozova shows how the information provided by the Russian travellers and writers from the late 19th and early 20th centuries⁹ was manipulated by Soviet and Mongolian scholars to create a picture of decline only remedied later by the socialist policies after 1921. An example of this approach is the important collective work by Soviet and Mongolian historians, the *History of the Mongolian People's Republic*. Co-authored by famous Mongolian scholars such as Sh. Bira, Sh. Natsagdorj or H. Perlee (Morozova 2009, p. 15), this work also shaped later works of Mongolian historiography. Morozova (2009, p. 18) goes further to show that even famous Western historians of Mongolia such as Charles Bawden adopted some of the argumentation, including the idea of grave demographic problems. In his famous *Modern History of Mongolia*, Bawden quotes narratives by former revolutionaries¹⁰ to show

8) Болобан 1914, p. 52.

9) An example of contemporary works which described the demographic situation of Mongolia as unfavourable and were used as sources for official argumentation was the report by Boloban (see below).

10) Publishing narratives by fighters on the side of the Communist revolution, which featured the difficult life before, and the auspicious changes after the revolution, were a common strategy of propaganda in the socialist countries, and used,

the difficult life of the poor herders, the high frequency of venereal diseases, or the low quality of medical services (Bawden 1989, pp. 146–150).

In consequence, the view that the demographic situation in Mongolia at the beginning of the 20th century was extremely grave and the very existence of the Outer Mongolian people was under threat was held by many socialist historians of Mongolia and USSR and shared by some Western historians. However, there are no direct documents to substantiate it. The answer to our main question – whether the Outer Mongolians would have become extinct without the Revolution of 1921 – can only be given by close study of the demographic information that is available.

In the present study, I aim to reassess the population numbers that have been usually taken for granted by historians of the 20th century Mongolia. In doing so, I use historical sources from 1915–1918 regarding the Mongolians who resided within the territory of modern Mongolia. Applying modern statistical methods to the data available in these sources, I aim to determine whether the claims about the national extinction of Mongolians at the beginning of the 1900s are accurate and scientifically supported.

While being aware of the limited nature of historical sources, I still conclude that the re-estimated numbers do not support the claims about the Mongolian population being threatened by extinction. This study shows that the demographic conditions of Mongolia in the 1900s and 1910s were not as alarming as has been asserted by most historiographic publications of the 20th century. Given the known methods of manipulation of historical sources, I suggest that the claim about the threat of extinction was motivated by the necessity to legitimize the Communist rule rather than derived from the actual numbers.

among other ends, to legitimize several unpopular practices of the Communist governments.

1.3 HISTORY OF MONGOLIAN DEMOGRAPHICS

In European countries, the history of keeping records of births, deaths and other relevant details goes back to the Church parish registers. By the 19th century, a certain type of population census became common in many countries of the world. In contrast, no census of the overall population of Outer Mongolia was ever taken by the Qing court, with accurate numbers only being provided for soldiers. In 1861, a Russian consulate opened in Urga, after which Russian nationals, mainly merchants and researchers, started frequenting Outer Mongolia. The first available estimations of the Mongolian population were carried out between 1912 and 1914 by these visitors: Count A.P. Bennigsen (Беннигсен 1912) traveled through Mongolia between 1909 and 1911 and described the state of the country. Yurii Kushelev (Кушелев 1912), an officer of the Hussar Life Guard Regiment, was dispatched for a five-months' mission in 1911 with the aim of gathering intelligence in "military-scientific goals" (Бойкова 2016). Władysław Kotwicz, an Orientalist and professor at the St. Petersburg University (Котвич 1914), headed a scientific expedition to Northern Mongolia in 1912, which, among other findings, brought valuable information about the contemporary Mongolian economy (Bareja-Starzynska 2014). Additionally, Andrei Boloban (1914), who served in Mongolia in 1912–1913, and G.K. Gins in his work of 1932, made statements about the population of Mongolia. The estimations by these authors differ widely from one another, ranging from 400,000 to 1,400,000. As Ewing (1978) has noted, these authors had, among their immediate aims, variously urging the Tsarist government to take a more decisive action in support of Mongolia's independence, or emphasizing the deterioration of the economy and living conditions under the New Policies of China. Assumptions about the decrease in population were part of the gloomy picture of the life of the Mongols drawn by these authors. With the change of government in October 1917, the (Soviet) Russian state involvement in Mongolia's affairs became more active. As Morozova (2009, pp. 11–24) notes, in this period the works of the abovementioned authors were used by Soviet officials and political advisors to advocate, and later justify, the socialist revolution in Mongolia.

The first dedicated studies of Outer Mongolia's population were carried out by Kozin and Maiskii. Sergei Andreevich Kozin (1879–1956), an

Orientalist with experience from administration in the Mongolian-speaking areas in Russia, served as a special financial advisor¹¹ from Imperial Russia, working for the Mongolian government in 1913–1916 with his assistant P. A. Witte. Kozin introduced financial innovations such as ground rents and forestry licenses. Importantly, he organized an expedition for the purpose of researching Mongolia's economy. More than 350 thousand square miles of Mongolia, in other words more than 25% of the country's area, were covered in their expedition research in 1915. The first headcount of the Mongolian population was performed in 1918. While the original documentation was lost (Holzman 1957, p. 222), the data are preserved in the work of Ivan Mikhailovich Maiskii. A Russian diplomat and economist, as well as a Menshevik politician and ardent anti-bolshevik, Maiskii spent part of the Russian Civil (1919–1923) war in Mongolia. In 1919–1920, he was assigned by the Russian Siberian Centrosoyuz (a business cooperative organization) office to organize an expedition to Mongolia. The main task of the expedition was to perform an exhaustive study of the quality and availability of Mongolian meat to determine whether it could be imported from Mongolia, and what other commodities and livestock could be sold from Russia to Mongolia. Maiskii could complete his demographic study since, in the year before he came to Mongolia in 1919, the country began to count livestock towards development of its own tax policy.

1.4. METHODS AND SOURCES OF THE STUDY

In this study, I examine the state of the general demographic situation during the period of Mongolian autonomy based on two primary sources. Provided below is a description of the sources and an evaluation of their advantages and limitations.

11) During the Manchu period, the Mongolian economy was part of the economic structure of China, therefore after separation from China, the Mongolian government had virtually no resources of its own. During the period of autonomy, the greatest part of the government revenues came from indirect taxes, especially customs duties (Holzmann 1957, pp. 222–224). Kozin's task as an advisor was to help the new state with fiscal affairs.

- (1) The demographic portion of the research performed by Kozin's expedition of 1915. As of today, these expedition materials are stored in the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, and the Archive of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation.
- (2) The results of the 1918 population census of Autonomous Mongolia, in other words Mongolia's first population headcount. Unfortunately, part of the census documents were lost from the Central National Archives of Mongolia, hence the key source for assembling the 1918 census was the book *Mongolia on the Eve of the Revolution*, published by I. M. Maiskii in 1920 based on his study of the 1918 census materials. Within the framework of this work, in order to study the capacity of the Mongolian market, I made use of the the livestock and population census of 1918 as described in his book.

The cited research and census materials have both advantages and disadvantages for use as sources for a demographic study. The existence of detailed classification of the populations of *aimags* (the largest administrative and territorial units of Mongolia; at the time, there were six *aimags*, of which the expedition covered only three) by their ages and genders in Kozin's study made it easier to analyse the key factors of demography, such as age and sex structures, birth rates and reproductive age. Unfortunately, the study did not cover the entire population of every *khoshuu*¹² that the expedition passed. Due to the nomadic lifestyle, the small population and the large territory of each *khoshuu*, Kozin's recordings were limited to those families that his team visited along the expedition route, resulting in the assessment of slightly more than 10% of the population of a given *khoshuu*.

The 1918 census is far more comprehensive and thus significantly more advantageous for this study. In the census, Mongolia enumerated its human population as well as its livestock. Although foreign persons

12) *Khoshuu* is an administrative and territorial unit of Autonomous Mongolia within an *aimag*; at the time, there were 112 *khoshuus* within 6 *aimags*.

(mostly Russians and Chinese) in some distant territories and individuals residing in the religious territories of Bogd Khan were not accounted for, the census covered almost 88% of the Mongolian population. As a result, it is defensible to claim that the 1918 census should be treated as a sufficient core statistical source for making assumptions about the whole nation. Unfortunately, the 1918 census failed to adhere to many international census standards. In particular, there was no official programme or method approved by the Mongolian government for the census. Additionally, according to A. I. Gozulov, “the 1918 population census of Mongolia was held without controlled time [e.g. with no monitoring time]” (Гозулов 1970, p. 138); in other words, the census was not performed simultaneously in the different parts of the country or within a particular timeframe, which would have minimized the margin of error.

Nevertheless, due to the lack of any additional sources, the data contained in Kozin’s expedition and 1918 census will be used for the reconstruction of the key demographic indicators of Mongolia in the early twentieth century.

2. Population Conditions of Mongolia in 1915–1918

This section presents the reconstruction of the head count, population birth and growth, fertility factors, age and gender structure, dependency ratio and sex ratio based on the described sources. For each of the indicators, I provide the relevant historical and socio-cultural context and discuss the details of my estimation.

2.1 HEAD COUNT

As of today, contradictory views still persist on Mongolia’s population size in the 1910s. Historical sources, data from the National Statistical Office of Mongolia and data and reports by researchers have yielded significant discrepancies.

Prior to the Qing dynasty, Outer Mongolia only kept accurate records for the number of men serving in the army, the stations, and as guards.

However, the Manchu government did not pay much attention to the numbers of the regular populace or of monks. The nobles who ruled the counties generally knew the population of their regions, but there was no census in their specific regions, and no census of the country as a whole. Towards the end of the Qing Dynasty, an attempt was made to estimate the total population of Outer Mongolia within the framework of the above-mentioned “New Policies” in 1904–1906, but the Mongolian nobles refrained from participation in the endeavour.

Consequently, the first census of the population of Mongolia was that of 1918. According to it, Mongolia’s population was 647,504, including 542,500 Mongolians, 100,000 Chinese and 5,000 Russians.¹³ These data, however, did not include the residents of the western region, certain minorities in Khalkha (or Eastern) Mongolia, and other smaller groups residing in religious areas. Maiskii’s research suggested that the 1918 census countered only 75% of the entire total number of residents of the country, and only 88% of its Mongolians (Майский 1959, p. 30). Additionally, the absence of a registration system for foreign nationals made the enumeration of foreign nationals residing in Mongolia challenging. Thus, the 1918 census left researchers with the puzzle of determining the total number of residents of the country by considering the population that was not covered by the 1918 census.

The National Statistical Office of Mongolia determined the population of Mongolia in 1911 to be 643,300,¹⁴ in this case using the average annual growth of the population between 1918 and 1929 to reconstruct the number for 1911. However, the National Statistical Office did not bring into consideration the flaws of the 1918 census and simply used as fact the number yielded by this census, which represented only 88% of the population (including foreign nationals). To date, the calculation of the National Statistical Office and the data from the 1918 census are considered to be the official numbers for 1911 and 1918.¹⁵

13) Census materials of 19186 National Central Archive of Mongolia (Fund A1–32, Ac.1, Fond-A3).

14) Монгол Улсын хүн ам XX зуунд 2001.

15) Хүн ам орон сууцны 2010 оны улсын тооллого: Нэгдсэн дүн 2011, pp. 10–11.

Mongolian historian O. Purev calculated the number of people not covered by the 1918 census to be approximately 68,300 (Пүрэв 2004, pp. 50–52), though offering no specific details on the methods of determining this number. According to Purev, the total population in 1918 was 729,654 (Пүрэв 2004, p. 52).

According to my estimation, if only 88% of the Mongolians participated in the 1918 census, to assume the figure proposed by Maiskii, the remaining 12% would number 73,900 people. Thus, the total population of Mongolia would be 721,400 people, including 616,500 Mongolians and 105,000 Chinese and Russians in 1918.

The numerical difference between my study and Purev's is the figure of 8,200 people, which is an acceptable margin of error given the timing and sources. As such, it should not be considered incorrect to assume that the total number of Mongolians in 1918 exceeded 610,000 and the total population numbered at over 720,000.

2.2 POPULATION BIRTH AND GROWTH

Not only the discrepancies between numbers given in various sources, but also the lack of written records, combined with peculiarities of Mongolian culture and tradition (see below), pose a series of challenges in determining the birth and growth rates. In European countries, the population registration history started with the registration of births and deaths in Catholic churches, also known as parish registers, as early as the fourteenth century. In Mongolia, in spite of the prevalence of Buddhist religious rituals connected to birth and death, including naming a newborn baby, divining one's destiny, determining the right time and place for a funeral, etc., no written records, unfortunately, were maintained of these exclusively oral rituals. As a result, to determine the population growth rate, a further requirement is to provide a feasible determination of the approximate birth rate as one of the most notable factors in population growth.

As the purposes of Kozin's expedition in 1915 were multi-faceted and mainly aimed at economic goals, it is difficult to derive comprehensive demographic findings on the basis of the data collected by Kozin. Nevertheless, the collected materials and Kozin's classification of forty-two

khoshuu's population by age groups, including children aged zero to five,¹⁶ provide us with some opportunities to create an overview of at least several indicators related to growth.

Due to the lack of any growth-related data among the research documents, we attempted to calculate the approximate number of annual births, based on the number of children between the ages of zero and five as recorded by Kozin.¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that several tradition-related factors must be considered in working with these data. For instance, Mongolians traditionally count one's age not from birth but from the development of the foetus in the mother's womb; as a result, a newborn baby is considered to be one year old at birth. Additionally, there were only three infants younger than one year old after birth in all forty-two *khoshuus*' populations, as registered by the expedition team.¹⁸ This finding might be associated with the Mongolian tradition of hiding newborns and infants from the public (and strangers) until they are of a certain age. However, the records of children between the ages of one and five appear to be reasonable, and the number of children was recorded by gender and age.¹⁹

According to demographic studies, the birth rate serves as the main indicator of the overall conditions of birth and growth, calculated as the number of live births per thousand people per year.

Based on the number of one-year-old children, it was determined that one out of five newborns died before reaching the first full year after birth. Considering the international standards of decreasing infant mortality, we attempted to estimate the mortality rate. Per these calculations, in 1911–1915, one out of every 10–13 children died by the age of five. Maiskii's statement that "before the 1921 revolution, the infant mortality was enormous" does not align with my calculation: actual infant mortality rates were not as high as Maiskii (1959, p. 44) concluded.

16) Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915, Kozin, S. A., 1914–1916. Collection of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg Branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Science, St. Petersburg, Russian Federation (henceforth ARAS, COS).

17) ARAS, COS, Kozin, S. A., 1914–1916.

18) Ibid.

19) Ibid.

Table 1. Birth Rate

Aimags	Number of live births per 1,000	
	1915	Average of 1911–1915
Tusheet Khan	9.16	15.09
Sain Noyon Khan	15.99	19.63
Zasagt Khan	11.7	17.18
Total	12.64	17.06

Sources: 1. “Population of Mongolia in the Twentieth Century” statistical summary. 2001; 2. Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915.

The low birth rate is connected to Mongolia’s social conditions in the period under study, which can be explained by several factors such as the large celibate population of Buddhist clergy, or conditions of backward and insufficient medical care and lack of hospitals.

The efforts undertaken by the Mongols of Mongolia to pursue an independent development path after the fall of Qing dynasty rule in 1911 influenced the expansion of monetary-commercial relations and domestic trade. The population of the cities of Niislel Khuree (now Ulaanbaatar), Khiagt (now Kyakhta on the Russian side of the border), Uliastai and Khovd increased as these settlements grew into significant administrative and religious centres. In turn, these towns influenced the neighbouring *khoshuus* with market development, so that taxes could be raised for projects such as schools, printing presses, and the like. Yet while administrators searched for new sources of taxes, the lack of financial capability prevented the new government from paying sufficient attention to social issues, especially health care. As a result, there were no opportunities to bring about a population increase through increasing the birth rate and reducing mortality, primarily child mortality. At the same time, the ethnically Manchu Qing dynasty’s harsh long-term policy of restricting the Mongolian population included incentivizing Mongolian males to pursue monasticism. According to C. R. Bawden (1989, p. 14), “This [pursuit of monasticism] change of status brought a welcome relief from civil taxation, and so appealed principally to the richer classes.” While the lowered tax burden and higher status were great benefits of being a monk, the ascetic lifestyle of monks and enforced celibacy also directly slowed down the population growth.

A generally accepted idea regarding Mongolia in this period is of pervasive high infant mortality due to the entire population's quite weak health and the abundance of various infectious diseases, including venereal diseases and acute infections causing infant deaths (e.g. Майский 1959). However, it is inaccurate to believe that more than half of newborns died before their first birthdays. Statistically speaking, if this mortality rate were true, 80–90% of infants would die before the age of 5, causing negative population growth. However, judging from our calculations, we see that, although low, the population growth nonetheless remained positive.

2.3 FERTILITY FACTORS

In demographic studies, female reproductive age is considered to be between fifteen and forty-nine, and active reproductive age is between twenty and twenty-nine.

Kozin's expedition presented the age profile of the population by recording five-year age groups.²⁰ Using his records, we can determine the number of women of reproductive age, which we selected as between seventeen and fifty years of age. At the time, early marriage between the ages of seventeen and twenty was common, and it was assumed that a girl or woman within that age range was biologically able to bear a child. Therefore, ages between 17 and 30 should be considered active reproduction ages.

During this period, it was common for women to bear illegitimate children because Buddhist lamas or clergy were not allowed to marry. Moreover, due to the spread of various infectious diseases, infertility among women formed a definite factor. In contrast, however, young families did not take any steps to restrict births, so ordinary families could have many children.

20) ARAS, COS, Kozin, S. A., 1914–1916.

Table 2. Women of Reproductive Age

Aimags	Women per age groups			Total women	% of '17–50' of '17–30'	% of total of '17–50'
	17–30	31–50	17–50			
Tusheet Khan	1,087	1,503	2,590	5,184	50.0	42.0
Sain Noyon Khan	1,455	1,794	3,249	6,263	51.9	44.8
Zasagt Khan	356	325	681	1,377	49.5	52.3
Total	2,898	3,622	6,520	12,824	50.0	44.4

Source: Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915.

As the research materials show, demographic factors influencing fertility were positive during 1915–1916 because more than 44% of female Mongolians were in the reproductive age group, and 50.8% were in the active reproductive age group.

2.4 AGE AND GENDER STRUCTURE

Age and gender pyramids are common indices of a population's age structure. The overall picture of age and gender, along with fertility and mortality rates, is shown in the gender pyramid of the Tusheet Khan, Sain Noyon Khan, and Zasagt Khan *aimags* of 1915–1916.

According to Figure 1, the top part of the pyramid is correctly shaped, suggesting that the birth rate, the mortality rate, and the sex ratio adhered to normal distributions for the thirty years preceding 1915.

However, in the years between 1886 and 1898, there was a sharp decline in fertility in the territories of Kozin's expedition because the '17–20' age population registered as smaller than any other age group. The potential reasons for this decrease could be attributable to social or natural factors, such as migration, drought or heavy snowfall afflicting these territories, or an epidemic spread of infectious diseases during the 1895–1898 period, consequentially causing the fertility rate to decrease or the child mortality rate to increase. All the same, no written records are currently known that could provide an exact explanation.

The following table shows a slightly different age structure during

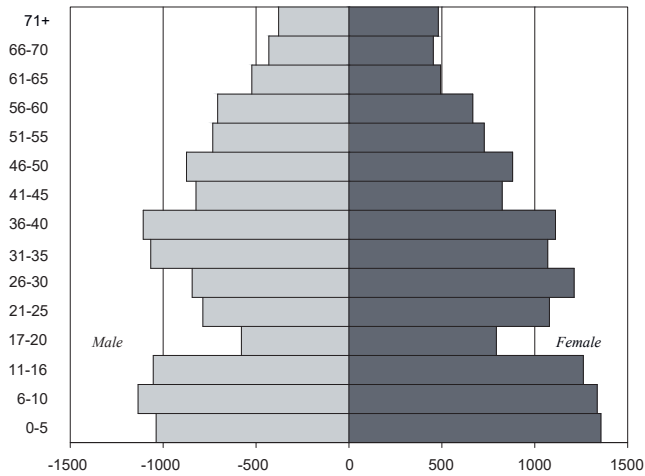
1915–1916. If a country's population consists of 25% or more youths, it is considered a favourable factor for population growth.

Table 3. Age Structure in 1915 by Aimag

Aimags	Persons per age group				% of total of each group		
	0–16	17–65	66+	Total	0–16	17–65	66+
Tusheet Khan	2,470	6,543	807	9,820	25.2	66.6	8.2
Sain Noyon Khan	3,355	7,284	619	11,258	29.8	64.7	5.5
Zasagt Khan	1,196	2,415	286	3,897	30.7	62.0	7.3
Total	7,021	16,242	1,712	24,975	28.1	65.0	6.9

Source: Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915

Figure 1. Age and Gender Pyramid in 1915 in Three Aimags



Source: Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915.

2.5 DEPENDENCY RATIO

The dependency ratio, which is the ratio of the sum of the young and elderly populations to the population in the labour force, is an indicator used to measure the pressure on the productive or economically active population. The international standard determines the dependency ratio using the ratio of ages 0–14 and 65+ to ages of 15–64. In our case, the dependency ratio of the three provinces can be defined as shown below, considering the age differences provided by Kozin’s research materials.²¹ This indicator is calculated per 1 person or per 100 people. Table 4 shows the demographics outside the labour force by separating them into children and elderly people per 100 of working age population.

As mentioned above, since achieving independence from the Qing dynasty, Mongolia experienced a number of positive changes for its economic and social development. Kozin’s research, conducted during this time, covered a wide range of issues. Yet though economic aspects were dominant, not much focus was paid to different economic sectors or labour distribution studies due to a lack of financial resources. If, at the time, Kozin had more funding to study other sectors, such as factories, mining, transportation and trade, in addition to the traditional economic basis of livestock herds, the results of the dependency ratio could have been slightly different.

Table 4. Dependency Ratio in 1915

<i>Aimags</i>	Persons per age group				% per 100 people		
	0–16	66+	Children and Elderly	17–65	Children	Elderly	Total
Tusheet Khan	2,470	807	3,277	6,543	37.8	12.3	50.1
Sain Noyon Khan	3,355	619	3,974	7,284	46.1	8.5	54.6
Zasagt Khan	1,196	286	1,482	2,415	49.5	11.8	61.4
Total	7,021	1,712	8,733	16,242	43.2	10.5	53.8

Source: Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915.

21) ARAS, COS, Kozin, S. A., 1914–1916.

According to Table 4, 46 out of 100 people were within the working-age population, and the remainder, 54%, consisted of children and elders. This structure had positive impacts on economic development. If the dependency ratio was 65–70%, it would have had negative impacts on economic development. Additionally, both children and the elderly made their contributions to the traditional Mongolian nomadic livestock industry, and no one was truly ‘unemployed’. As such, a conclusion can be drawn that, during the given period, this fact could have provided positive demographic effects for the development of industry and services. However, at the time, there was no possibility for the country to develop industrial sectors for economic reasons. Although the required labour force existed, the country was under foreign rule and the society was feudal, with no class structure similar to capitalist societies.

2.6 SEX RATIO

In demography, the sex ratio is yet another indicator that must be addressed in determining the healthy growth of a population. In this study, we calculated the sex ratio by the number of males per 100 females. Although, sex ratio can be represented by many indicators, two main factors are commonly used. These are the following:

- *Sex ratio at birth.* Sex ratio at birth is determined by the number of boys per 100 girls. An average sex ratio at birth is commonly thought to be 105–107 boys to 100 girls (in Mongolia, the current sex ratio at birth is 105 boys to 100 girls).²² Because boys exceed girls in terms of the infant mortality rate, eventually at the ages of 10–14 years, the sex ratio reaches the same level. As discussed previously, it is not possible to determine the exact sex ratio in the early 20th century in Mongolia due to a shortage of information about newborns in the provinces involved in Kozin’s study.

22) The World Factbook: MONGOLIA, 2017, May 01. On: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mg.html> (Accessed on 3 June 2017).

- *General sex ratio.* The sex ratio of any population is related to numerous factors, including social and economic situations, health, age and social communication, as well as labour occupation. For accurate determination of the sex ratio for the entire population, there must be sufficient information concerning the population in general. Therefore, we mainly used the 1918 census for this purpose. Based on the numbers supplied by the 1918 census, most *khoshuus* had above-average disparities between males and females. Only Baatar Van *khoshuu* of Tusheet Khan *aimag*²³ had an equal number of men and women out of 91 Khalkha *khoshuus* and religious areas. Although each *khoshuu* showed gender disparities, the overall sex ratio, at least in Khalkha Mongolia, appeared to be normal, as shown in Table 5 below. Thus, the disparity in individual *khoshuus* could be attributed to the uneven distribution of population and population scarcity within Mongolia's vast territory. Current Mongolia occupies a territory of 1,566,000 square kilometres, which has not changed since 1915.

Table 5. Sex Ratio in 1918

Province	Male	Female	Number of males to 100 females	% of total of males
Tusheet Khan	49,401	50,731	97.4	49.34
Sain Noyon Khan	73,178	60,370	121.2	54.80
Zasagt Khan	37,148	33,003	112.5	38.09
Setsen Khan	47,300	54,376	86.9	46.52
Total	207,027	198,480	104.3	51.05

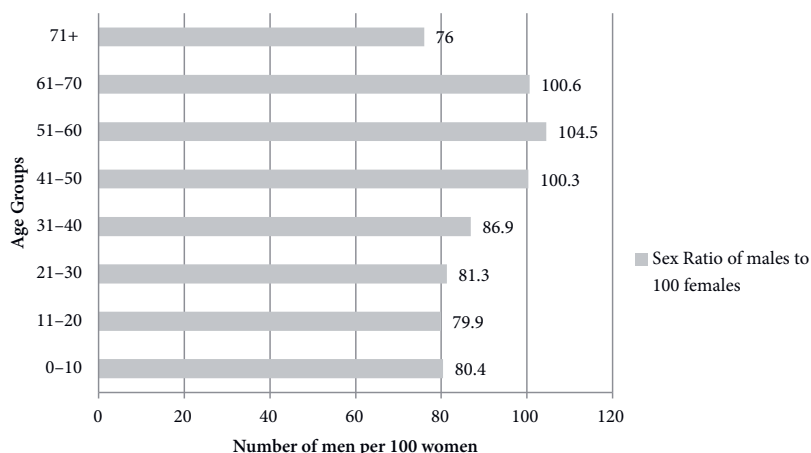
Source: 1918 Mongolian population census.

The average sex ratio for Khalkha Mongolia, which covered 4 *aimags* with 91 *khoshuus*, did not display any significant gender imbalance, resulting

23) Currently, it is the northern part of Tuv *aimag* and the southern part of Selenge *aimag*.

in 51%, or for every 100 people, 51 were male, and 49 were female, which was not significantly different from the worldwide gender ratio.

Figure 2. Sex Ratio in 1915



Source: *Expedition materials of S. A. Kozin of 1915.*

Based on Kozin's collected data on age and population, the above graph can be created, showing the sex ratio of men per 100 women within different age groups.²⁴ As indicated in the graph above, a disparity can be seen between men and women until the age of 41, at which point the average ratio is 82.1 males to 100 females. The imbalance decreases in the population aged 41–70 years old. The reason for such a decrease may be associated with cultural and social lifestyles. During the given time period, a significant number²⁵ of the male population were monks, residing in monasteries without engaging in manual labour, and consequently

24) ARAS, COS, Kozin, S. A., 1914–1916.

25) Numerous sources state that nearly 40% of the adult male population consisted of Buddhist monks or clergy. Although there is no evidence to support this number, this estimate might be accurate given that Mongolia had 2,752 active monasteries and temples in 1921 (see Зүмбэрэлхам 2009, p. 16).

healthier than women working in the livestock sector. The decrease in male population after the age of 70 is likely to be a natural phenomenon that can be observed throughout history and across the globe.

Based on the mentioned findings, it can be concluded that the sex ratio in Mongolia in the given period did not pose any significant threat to the future population growth of the nation.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

This study questions the long-held beliefs about Mongolia's demography in the early 20th century, and opens a path for further specialized research. To date, it has been generally accepted that the Mongolians were on the verge of extinction prior to the revolution of 1921, a belief that was supported by the conversion of 40% of the male population into Buddhist lamas, the widespread infections of venereal diseases, and the limited access to health care. Although these factors had negative impacts on population growth, population growth was never completely brought to a halt.

Despite the lack of historical sources related to the demography of Mongolia in the 1910s, some key demographic indicators were reconstructed by cross-examining the only two source materials: the 1918 population census and Kozin's 1915 expedition materials. Although the purpose of both the 1918 population census and the Kozin expedition was to pay closer attention to economic studies and to collect data on the numbers and structures of the population, using modern statistical methods, the key demographic indicators were estimated to show a stable growth of the Mongolian population.

No evidence could be provided to indicate an annual population decline during the given period. Instead, the age structure demonstrated a stable growth of population. Moreover, the average family size of 4.3 additionally predicted healthy growth. No decline in the reproduction of the population can be inferred from the available data, because more than 50% of women were in their reproductive ages (ages 17–49), and 44.4% of women were of active reproductive ages.

Another factor that has been considered only tangentially by scholars is the National Liberation of 1911 by the Mongolians from Chinese Qing

dynasty rule. The liberation opened new advantages for Mongolia, and the initial steps for socio-economic development were undertaken by the government, creating appropriate conditions for future population growth. Provided that the dependency ratio remained within the normal limits, there was no imminent threat of economic collapse that could sabotage population growth.

Based on the cross-examination of available sources, this study argues that the image of an unfavourable demographic situation, drawn in particular by Maiskii and repeated almost unchanged until present the, was to a certain degree distorted. The distortion was partly to the result of errors and methodological issues, but, no less importantly, it suited the aims of Soviet propaganda by contrasting the poor living conditions before, and the auspicious changes after, the socialist revolution of 1921.

Maiskii's statement that 'The involvement of such a stagnant nation in direct relations with more developed nations leads to a more dangerous situation' (Майский 1959, p. 23) was likely based on the history of western Europe at the beginning of the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. However, according to this research, population growth in Mongolia was never in a stagnant condition.

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A Letter Sent by Il-khan Arghun to Pope Nicholas IV (1290). Translation into Modern Mongolian and Interpretation

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Summary: This paper re-examines the text of Il-khan Arghun's letter to the Pope Nicholas IV (1290). This letter, one of the earliest surviving texts in traditional Mongolian script, is kept in the Vatican Secret Archives. Along with re-considering previous transliterations, new interpretations of certain key expressions are provided and placed within the general context of the Mongols' society and world view in the 13th century. Finally, the new version of transliteration of the letter together with its translation into both modern Khalkha Mongolian and English are suggested.

0. Introduction

The Mongolian original of this letter¹ is said to be preserved in the Vatican Secret Archives. Its photograph, transcription, and translation into French with commentary was published by both Antoine Mos-taert – F. W. Cleaves (1952, pp. 445–467); another transcription was completed by Louis Ligeti (1972, pp. 248–249). Sh. Biraa² published the text as transcribed into modern Khalkha Mongolian; in addition, a new Russian translation of this letter was recently published.³

- 1) I have seen the original of this letter in Mongolian script displayed as part of the exhibition “Dschingis khan und seine Erben: Das Weltreich der Mongolen” held in Munich from October 2005 to January 2006; the information provided by the museum claimed it was a letter sent by the Il-khan Ghazan to Pope Boniface VIII (Brief Il-khans Ghazan an Papst Bonifaz VIII). Attributing this letter to Ghazan khan was most likely an error.
- 2) Бира 2006–2007, pp. 5–67.
- 3) Шаймарданова 2012, pp. 35–39.

The letter's author, Arghun khan, was the fourth khan of the descendants of the Mongolian Il-khan Hulegu (Ulegu), who established the Ilkhanid dynasty in Iran, and the oldest son of Abaqa khan. He dispatched letters to the Pope in Europe on at least four occasions: in 1285, 1287, 1289 and in 1290. Among these letters, the letter sent in 1290 deserves special attention from a historical point of view, especially in relation to Chinggis Khan studies. It is a document of special importance as it contains the response to the Pope's insistence that the Mongolian khans should accept the Christian faith. As a result, almost all famous Mongolists have studied this letter, greatly enriching its research bibliography.

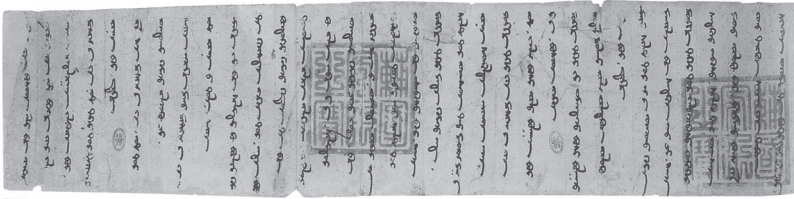
The letter of Arghun Khan provides answers to many important questions. I list only a few here:

- What was the religion professed by Chinggis Khan?
- What was the attitude of the Mongols towards religion?
- What were the actual reasons behind the Mongols' religious tolerance?
- Why did the Mongols not accept the idea of assuming Christianity?

Even though there exists a text in classical Mongolian (Uyghur-Mongolian) script which has been transliterated, I would not state that the interpretations of this text, let alone the French and Mongolian translations, are correct. Moreover, the French translations, containing truly serious factual errors, still serve as a prominent source of quotations used by historians and politicians worldwide. Consequently, the question as to whether the main ideas and conclusions of these subsequent works have themselves been correct is eminently worthy of scrutiny.

Achieving a correct understanding and well-grounded conclusions concerning the historical events of the Mongolian past is only possible if there exists a precise transcription accompanied by a correct translation of the available source documents.

With this in mind, I have transcribed this letter into present-day Mongolian (Khalkha dialect). In this paper, I present it together with necessary commentary on specific misinterpreted words and phrases. I believe this analysis can serve as a basis for correct explanations and solutions to many questions, such as who Chinggis Khan truly was, what were the main ideas and aims of his great wars and incursions, and why did the Mongols make their way to Eastern Europe.



1. Roman transliteration⁴

1. [da][a]i-yin. busud ali be irgen
2. öber-ün nom biçig-iyer jal[bariqun]
3. aran qudalçıyan jalbarin bui.
4. Misiq-a-in nom tengri-tür tayiyçi
5. ünen bei. Edüge
6. Il qan Misiq-a-in nom-dur
7. oratuyai kemejü ilejüğü či.
8. Sayin eçige manu Misiq-a-in
9. nom ünen-ü tula. sayin
10. emege-yi ba silamtai kü büleyi keme[n]
11. ta kiristan irgen-dür. ada buu
12. kürtügei kemejü kedün-te ba
13. duyulyan ilçin ileged [ü]g[ü]leçi
14. kü ilen aba j-e. Silamdur
15. oratuyai kemekü činü job. Ba
16. Činggis qan-u. uruyud öber-ün
17. Mongyoljin durabar aju silam-tur
18. orabasu ba esebesü ber. yağça
19. mongke tngri mede kemejü ad.
20. Silam-dur oraysad tanu metüs may-a
21. ünen sedkilten ariyun aran.
22. mongke tngri-yin Misiq-a-yin
23. nom. jrly busi ülü bolyan bui
24. j-e. Busud irgen

4) This transliteration is as given in Mostaert – Cleaves 1952.

25. mongke tngri-yi umartaju busi bolyaju
26. qudal qulyai uiles uiledkün ülүgү.
27. [o]lan bui. Edүge
28. namayi silam-dur es-e orajuyu kemen
29. mayuilan ba sedkin aqu či. Гауца
30. mongke tngri-dür jalbaribasü jügiger
31. sedkijü abasu. silam-dur oraysan
32. metü ülүgү bei. Bičigmanu bars jil
33. junu terigün sara-yin tabun
34. sinede Urumi-da бүкүi-dür bičibei.

2. The explanation of some words

[da]l[a]i (line 1): This word is usually read as *dalai* / (Khal.) далай ‘sea’, but I consider this word to be *delei* / (Khal.) дэлхий ‘world’, originating from the eastern dialect of medieval Mongolian or Middle Mongolian. The primary meaning of this word was *өргөн, уудам, дэлгэр* ‘wide, vast, broad’, while its figurative meaning became *дэлхий* ‘world’, *ертөнц* ‘universe’.

The word *delei* soon became forgotten in the northern and southern Mongolian dialects, and therefore is usually interpreted as *dalai* when it occurs in early texts written in the Mongolian script: ‘The phrase *далай хаан* means the most all-embracing ruler’.⁵

The correct transcription of the phrase on the seal of Guyuk Khan (in fact Ögedei Khan), usually reads as *Yeke Mongyol Ulus-un Dalay-in Qan*, should in fact be read as *Yeke Mongyol Ulus-un Deley-in Qan*; the literal meaning is *Их Монгол Улсын Дэлхийн Хаан* (Ru. ‘Хан Мира Великого Монгольского Улуса’) ‘The Khan of the World of the Great Mongol Ulus or Empire’, which in turn can be translated into Modern Mongolian as *Их Монгол Улсын Эзэн Хаан* ‘The Emperor of the Great Mongolian Empire’. Therefore, I assert that the correct reading and transcription of the phrase *dalai-yin qayan* that appears in §280 of the Secret History of the Mongols (MNT) is *delei-yin qayan* / (Khal.) дэлхийн хаан ‘the khan/ruler of the world’ and should be translated as *эзэн хаан* (Ru. ‘император’) ‘emperor’.

5) Дамдинсүрэн 1957, p. 35.

Delei / (Khal.) *дэлхий* ‘world’, as it occurs in the letter of Arghun khan, is an abbreviation of the term *Yeke Mongyol Ulus-un Deley* ‘World of the Great Mongol Empire’. It does not carry the meaning of *бүх дэлхий* ‘whole world’ or *манай дэлхий* ‘our world’; the interpretation of this word as *univers* in the French translation and *вселенная* in the Russian translation are therefore incorrect.

Irgen (lines 1 and 24): The word *иргэн* has many meanings in Middle Mongolian, as is evident in the Secret History of the Mongols. The main meaning is *хүн* ‘man’, *хүмүүс* ‘people’. It also contains a wide range of figurative meanings (including synecdochal meanings) such as a) *овог аймаг* ‘tribe’, b) *ард түмэн* ‘people’, c) *улс орон* ‘state’, d) [*дайсагнагч бусад улсын*] *хан ноён / хаад ноёд* (pl.) ‘ruler(s) and noble(s)’, *хаан угсаатан* ‘ruling nobility’ [of a warring state].⁶ The precise meaning of this word is dictated by the context of its immediate linguistic surroundings. In the first line of Arghun khan’s letter, the phrase *dalai-yin busud ali be irgen* has the following meaning: [*Их Монгол Улсын*] *дэлхийн [христэнээс] бусад бүх хүмүүс* ‘all the other people of the world [of the Great Mongol Empire], except for the [Christians]’.

The phrase *busud irgen* in line 24 conveys the meaning of ‘people other than yours [the Pope’s] (in contrast to people such as yourself, line 20)’. The synecdochical meaning of the word *irgen* in Middle Mongolian is [*дайсагнагч бусад улсын*] *хаад ноёд* ‘rulers and nobles [of other warring states]’ and therefore the correct contextual reading of *busud irgen* is ‘other rulers and nobles of states under Papal supremacy’. Arghun khan is, at this juncture, informing the Pope that the Christian kings and nobles ‘have forgotten Eternal Heaven, [they have] estranged it and committed lies and thievery’.⁷ As the French and Russian translators failed to

6) For more details see Ж. Лувсандорж, *МНТ-ны синекдоха (төлөөлүүлэл)-ийн орчуулгын шүүмжлэл* [Criticism of the Translations of Synecdoches in the Secret History of the Mongols], presented at the 11th International Congress of Mongolists, August 2016, Ulaanbaatar.

7) Before Arghun Khan, this message was sent to the Pope by the third Mongolian emperor Guyuk Khan (1246), via the famous letter delivered to the Vatican by Johannes de Plano Carpini. To the Pope’s reproachful words that “You have conquered all the lands of the Hungarians and other Christians”, Guyuk khan’s

чи when addressing one's father. Before setting out to bury Chingis Khan, Gilgudei Baatar of Sunid, in his confessional verses, addresses Chingis Khan as *či* 'you' (sg.).⁹ The fire deity in the text *Гал тахих ёсон* 'Ritual of Fire-Worship' is also addressed as *či* 'you' (sg.).¹⁰ These examples serve as definite evidence that the word *či* conveyed respect and honour. It should not be assumed that Arghun Khan was positioning the Pope at the same level by using *či*,¹¹ but should instead be seen as an expression of respect and friendly relationship. For this reason, in this context I have written (*Či* 'You') with a capital letter. *Ta* 'you' occurs twice in the text of the letter in lines 11 and 20 as the second-person plural pronoun 'you' (pl.), 'you all'. The conclusion of the authors in their commentaries to the French and Russian translations of this letter that "there was no precise rule for using the second-person pronoun at the Ilkhan's chancellery" is therefore rather ill-considered.

Lines 8–14:

8. Sayin ečige manu Misiq-a-in
9. nom ünen-ü tula. sayin
10. emege-yi ba silamtai kü büleyi keme[n]
11. ta kiristan irgen-dür. ada buu
12. kürtügei kemejü kedün-te ba
13. duyulyan ilčün ileged [ü]g[ü]leči
14. kü ilen aba j-e. Silamdur

These lines are Arghun Khan's words. It is said that although Arghun Khan himself was not Christian, he was friendly and well-disposed towards them. His sympathy to Christianity is explained by two reasons: 1) the

9) *Халих харцгайн жигүүр болон одов уу Чи эзэн минь, Хангинах тэргэний тээш болон одов уу Чи эзэн минь...* 'My Lord, You have left like the wing of a flitting swallow, My Lord, You have left like the load of a clinging cart...' (Damdinsürüng 1959, p. 45b).

10) *Шил сайт хөвүүнтэй болгох Чи, Шивэргэл сайт бэртэй болгох Чи, Шулуун сайн охинтой болгох Чи...* 'You, who will give a son of handsome appearance, You, who will give a daughter-in-law of beautiful tresses, You, who will give a honest daughter...' (Damdinsürüng 1959, p. 113a).

11) Бира 2006–2007, p. 29.

‘good father of ours believed that the Christian teaching was true’, and 2) the ‘good grandmother of ours was a Christian’. Not only are these words attributed to the Pope in the French and Russian translations, but both versions also misrepresent *sayin eĭige* / (Khal.) *сайн эцэг* ‘good father’, i.e. Abaqa, as Christian. While Abaqa, as is known, was friendly to Christianity, he himself was not Christian. The Mongolian translator omitted these lines. Moreover, it should be noted that in Ancient and Middle Mongolian the word *сайн* lit. ‘good’ in phrases such as *sayin eĭige*, *sayin emege*, *sayin aq-a* / (Khal.) *сайн эцэг*, *сайн эмэгэ*, *сайн ах*, etc. has the figurative meaning of ‘divine’, ‘noble, nobility’.

Silam / (Khal.) *шила́м / шала́м* (line 10): It is clear that the meaning of this word refers to the Christian religion, but the etymology and the precise meaning are unclear. According to Kowalewski and Pelliot, the word *silam* / (Khal.) *сила́м* means ‘to swim in water’, with the commentary that it might be a Mongolian translation of Greek *baptizein* ‘to dip into water’ (Бира 2006–2007, p. 63). However, it is worth bearing in mind that the standard Christian ritual of submersion in water when christening either adults or children was not particularly suited to the nomadic way of life; it can therefore be presumed that the christening rite was performed simply as a blessing with the Book of Psalms with an image of the Holy Crucifix and the sprinkling of holy water. The word psalm might have generated *сила́м / шила́м / зала́м / зэлэм* > *заламгай / загалмай*.¹² There are also explanations connecting the word *шила́м* to Mongolian word *шилэмдэх* ‘to make wet’ or to Ramadan, but these are rather improbable.

[ü]g[ü]leĭi (line 13): This word, unreadable in the original, has been deciphered as *ügüleĭi* / (Khal.) *үгүүлэгч / өгүүлэгч* ‘narrator’ and rendered as *messages verbaux* ‘oral letters’ in the French translation. However, as the tradition of exchanging letters with the leaders of the Christian Church was already extant, having been established by the Mongols long previously, the correct understanding is *бичиг захидал* ‘letter’.

12) Лувсандорж 2014, p. 362 (com. §174.9–10), p. 289 (com. §128.1).

Mongyoljin dura (line 17): The phrase *монголжин дур* (Ru. ‘монгольская воля’) ‘the will of the Mongols’ contains a religious inflection, in my view. It previously contained a wide range of meanings which can be expressed as ‘the will of the Mongols in regard to religion, the will or freedom of the Mongols’. The main meaning of this phrase is applied to such terms as *веротерпимость* ‘religious tolerance [of European faiths]’. The suffix *-жин* in the word *монголжин* is the ancient Mongolian feminine suffix and words such as *дур* ‘will’ or *сэтгэл* ‘mind, emotion, spirit’ might have been feminine nouns.

Ad / (Class. Mo.) *amui* / (Khal.) *байдаг* (line 19): This word is formed from the stem of the extinct copula *a-* with the help of the future tense suffix *-d*. Although this suffix is not notably frequent in Middle Mongolian, it does occasionally occur, as, for example, in the Edict of Buyant Khan (1314): [38] ... Энэ бас Сунь жэнь рэнь ийн эл (Khal. *дарга*) хэмээгдэв хэмээж ёс ү- [39] гүй үйлс бүү үйлдтүгэй. Үйлдвээс [40] биднээ өчигтүн. Хэр бээр хэмээрүүн (Khal. *хэрхэн яахыг*) [41] бид ухад зэ (Khal. *бид ухна* = *бид мэднэ /шийдвэрлэнэ*) ‘Having become chiefs of Sun, the Holy One, it does not justify [their] performing improper actions. If [they] do, let us know. We will decide what to do.’ (Жанчив 2002, p. 61, lines 38–41).

May-a ünēn sedkilten (lines 20–21): Ligeti transcribed the word *may-a* as *тау-а*, but in my view the correct transcription should be *таḡ-а* / (Khal.) *мах* ‘meat’. If translated into Khalkha literally, it reads as *мах үнэн сэтгэлтэн* ‘orthodox believers to the backbone’, though the metaphorical meaning is (Khal.) *чухам /жинхэнэ үнэн сэтгэлтэн* ‘true believers’. The forms fixed in the original version of the SHM of the Mongols provides evidence that in Middle Mongolian, both the consonants *q* and *γ* were commonly written with the letter ḡēth with two dots. In later documents, the form with two dots was preserved in some important cases, as seen here. The word *мах* is written as *miqa* in its literary meaning, but as *taqa* in its figurative meaning of ‘real, true’ in the SHM. From the form *taqa* with the plural suffix attached, there emerged present-day Mongolian *магад* ‘probable, possible’.¹³

13) For more details concerning the word *taqa* see Лувсандорж 2019, pp. 10–11.

Mongke tngri-yin Misiq-a / (Khal.) **Мөнх тэнгэрийн Мишиха** (line 22): This is an extremely significant phrase in the letter sent to the Pope by Arghun Khan. The meaning of the phrase *Мөнх тэнгэр* ‘Eternal Heaven’, with the genitive suffix appended, must be deciphered accurately. The phrase contains the idea of (Khal.) *Мөнх тэнгэрийн [хөвүүн] Христос* ‘[Jesus] Christ, [son] of Eternal Heaven’ and therefore the main idea of Arghun Khan is as follows: (Khal.) *Христосын ном зарлиг, Мөнх тэнгэрийн ном зарлиг хоёр бол адил юм. Папа Чи энэ [Мөнх тэнгэрийн Христийн] ном зарлигийг бус үл болгон байгаа биз ээ.* ‘The religion of [Jesus] Christ and that of Eternal Heaven are the same. Pope, You did not infringe on this religion of [Jesus Christ of Eternal Heaven], did you?’

The translators of Arghun Khan’s letter, both into French and Russian, translated the above-mentioned genitive suffix-*yin* as the conjunction **ба**,¹⁴ thus inadvertently occluding the main point Arghun Khan is trying to make.

This idea of Arghun Khan also represents the viewpoint of Chinggis Khan. Instead of *Misiq-a* / (Khal.) *Мишиха* ‘Messiah’ in the phrase *tongke tngri-yin Misiq-a* / (Khal.) *Мөнх тэнгэрийн Мишиха* ‘Messiah of Eternal Heaven’ the name of any god or deity of any other religion could be inserted. In the view of Chinggis Khan, the heads of all the great religions had been granted by Eternal Heaven, meaning that infringement of the precepts of Eternal Heaven were grave offenses. For example: the King (Sultan) of Sartuul infringed on the teachings of Muhammad of Eternal Heaven and therefore was punished by Chinggis Khan. In Mongolia, the Great Shaman Dev Tenger disregarded the rules of the Shamans of Eternal Heaven and was executed by Chinggis Khan. Khan Burkhan of the Tanguts disregarded the precepts of the Buddha of Eternal Heaven and so Chinggis Khan annihilated the descendants of this Khan.

Qudal qulyai uiles / (Khal.) **худал хулгай үйлс** (line 26): The pair-word *qudal qulyai* / (Khal.) *худал хулгай* (lit.) ‘lies and thievery’ displays many meanings here. (Khal.) *Мөнх тэнгэрийн тогтоосон ёсны эсрэг бүх муу*

14) The Mongolian original: *tongke tngri-yin Misiq-a*, French translation (Mosaert – Cleaves 1952, pp. 445–452): *Ciel éternel et du Misiqa* ‘Eternal Heaven and of Mishiqā’.

хэрэг явдал ‘all the wrong affairs that are in conflict with the established order of Eternal Heaven’: this refers to unfair deeds, falseness, lies, fraud, malfeasant actions, and so forth, and is equivalent to the religious term *нүгэл* ‘sin’.

Ülügü [o]lan bui / (Khal.) *илүү* ‘more’, *олон байна* (i.e. *үлэмж их байна* ‘an extreme amount [of something]’) (lines 26–27): The word *ülügü* is the version of the classical written *ilegüü* (Khal. *илүү*) ‘more’ in the Eastern Mongolian dialect and means *үлэмж* ‘extremely, excessive(ly)’, *агуу* ‘great, grand, superb, gigantic’, *их* ‘many, much’. This is preserved in modern Buriat as *үлүү*. The translators into French took this word to be the negative particle *ülii-gü* and thus erroneously translated the given sentence as a negative interrogative statement.

Jügiger sedkijü abasu / (Khal.) *Зүгээр сэтгэж аваас* (i.e. [*Мөнх тэнгэрийн тогтоосон*] *ёсыг сэтгэж /сахиж /дагаж байвал*) ‘if you follow the rules established by Eternal Heaven’ (lines 30–31):

The structure of the word *jügiger* is *jüg* + *-iger* (Class. Mo. *jüg* + *-iyer*) with the instrumental suffix appended to the word *jüg* (Khal. *зүг*) ‘direction’. The basic meaning of the word *зүг* is *арван зүг* ‘ten directions’ (*дөрвөн зүг, найман зовхис* + *дээд ба доод зүг* ‘four cardinal points, eight intercardinal points + upper and down points’). Divinity is ascribed to the upper point (Khal. *дээд зүг*): it is the direction of the high (Eternal) Heaven. The term *дээд зүг* later developed multiple meanings such as *Тэнгэрийн тогтоосон ёс /журам /хууль /цааз /зүй тогтол /шударга журам* = *Тэнгэрийн ивээл /өришөөл* ‘rules/law/order = favor/protection/auspice of Heaven’, and so on. I would argue that these meanings have been condensed into the single word *jüg* / (Khal.) *зүг*.¹⁵ Therefore Arghun Khan’s message is: *Бид Мөнх тэнгэрт залбирч байвал, түүний тогтоосон ёсоор сэтгэж [ёсыг сахиж дагаж] байвал бид Загалмайд орсон мэт жишигдэх буй* ‘If we pray to Eternal Heaven and follow the order established by Him, it is the same as if we have become Christians’.

15) In some places in Khalkha (for example in Jongoort, in Tsetserleg sum of Arkhangai aimag) the phrase ‘*Бурхан зүг!*’ is still widely heard. Its meaning is the same as *Бурхан өришөө!*, *Бурханы аврал!* ‘God bless!, God save!’

2.1. ADDITIONAL REMARKS:

1) *Jüg* / (Khal.) *зүг* ‘direction’: the religious meaning of this word appears three times in the SHM:

- §223: *Jadaran-aca mulqalqu jük-iyer [sedkijü] nököcelüge* ‘Mukhalai [of] Jadaran [and of us], joined [us] as a companion’. This is Chinggis Khan’s laudation of Mukhalai who left Jadaran, the clan that became his enemy under Jamukha’s leadership.
- §265: *Möngke tenggeri-de ibe’egdejü sarta’ul irgen-i jük-tür oro’ulju* (lit.) ‘Under the auspices of Eternal Heaven [we] turned the Sartuuls to a manner befitting [of Eternal Heaven]’, (met.) ‘Under the auspices of the Eternal Heaven [we] subdued the Sartuul kingdom to the Mongol empire’. These words, sent by Chinggis Khan to the Khan of the Tanguts through an emissary, encapsulated his main religio-political idea, which is that *the Mongolian khans are the descendants of Börte Chino (Grey Wolf) – the one destined by the Highest Heaven – and therefore this is the most befitting order of a reign*.
- §275: *Orosut irgen-i dawuliju harban nigen qarin irgen-i jük-tür oro’ulju* (lit.) [Бид] *Орос улсыг байлдан дагуулж арван нэгэн харь улсыг [Мөнх тэнгэрийн] журамд оруулж* ‘[We] annexed Russia and subdued eleven foreign peoples under the auspices of [Eternal Heaven]’, (met.) [Бид] *Орос улсыг эзлэн авч арван нэгэн харь улсыг монгол хаанчлалд оруулж* ‘[We] annexed Russia and subdued eleven foreign peoples to the Mongol empire’. This was the message sent by Batu Khan to Ögedei Khan by the emissary.

The expression *jük-tür oro’ulju* as seen in the last two examples represents Chinggis Khan’s primary view on religion. This expression also testifies as to what the idea of ‘following the rules established by Eternal Heaven’ (*jügiger sedkijü abasu*) must have looked like in practice. It indicates the main goal of Chinggis Khan’s incursions and his ideology and should be considered thoroughly.

The main reason underlying Chinggis Khan’s incursions into Asia and Europe was indeed the conquest of other peoples. The leaders of those kingdoms who opposed ‘Eternal Heaven’ were killed, their descendants were annihilated. Wherever they fled, kings were deposed, princes

and members of the royal family were found, and any rulers who dared to protect them and allowed them into their kingdoms were invaded and subdued to the Mongolian khan, ‘predestinated by Eternal Heaven’. The Khitan empire that sheltered the Merged and Naiman princes was destroyed, as well as the Khwarazmian Empire of the Sartuuls that defied Chinggis Khan’s policy toward foreign states (the Golden Tether, *Altan argamj*) by killing the Mongolian envoys. After invading the Sartuuls, the Mongols also conquered the Russians and Hungarians who had helped the Kipchak royal family in their flight. All these incursions were the embodiment of the idea of subduing, i.e. *jük-tür oro’ulju*. In other words, Chinggis Khan’s invasions in Asia and Europe were not intrinsically motivated by the idea of colonization in order to gain wealth or by a deliberate policy of plundering and looting.

The word *jük* in this text is stated as *recht, richtig* ‘right, correct’ (Haenisch 1962, p. 94) in the Chinese glosses, and the expression *jük-tür oro’ul* is given as *in das richtige (Untertanenverhältnis) einführen* (Ibid.) in the abridged Chinese translation. The interpretation of the word *jük* by Igor de Rachewiltz as ‘being the ‘right’ order of things sanctioned by Eternal Heaven’ can be assumed to be correct.¹⁶

2) The word *jüg-iyer* appears often in the Phags-pa script monuments written as *ju-ki-yer* with the meaning ‘according to the rule of other religions’. For instance, two examples can be found in the edict of Buyantu Khan dated 1314:

- *Та олон сэншинүүд энэ Сүнь жэнь рэний үг Тай шан лао жуний ёсон бус үл болгон зүгээр явагтун.* ‘All of you Daoists, [must] live in exact compliance with the words of this Sun, the Holy one, [and] according to the order established by Laozi.’¹⁷
- *Бас сэншинүүд өөр зуураа тэмцэлдэхүүн үйлс бөгөөс Сүнь жэнь рэний түшигдэгсэд өтгөс ёсоор зүгээр хагалж өгтүгэй.* ‘And also, let the fights between the Daoists be solved [by] the elders not entrusted with an office according to the [established] order.’¹⁸

16) de Rachewiltz 2006, vol. 2, p. 969.

17) Жанчив 2002, p. 61, lines 30–31.

18) Жанчив 2002, p. 61, lines 33–34.

The words *ёсоор зүгээр* ‘according to order, rule’ form a lexical pair in this sentence, proving that these two words bear the same meaning. Another example can be found in the edict of Yisüntemür Khan (Жанчив 2002, p. 87, lines 5–7):

- [*Ламын шашинтан*] *Та бээр Одсэржалцаны үгээр аливаа [...]* *үйлсийг зүгээр гүйцээн явагтун.* ‘You, [the Muslims], accomplish all the deeds of [...] as said by Odserjalsan according to the [established] order (*jüg-iyer*).’

3) The main meaning of the expression *jüg-iyer* in the Yüan sources – ‘the rule established by Heaven’ – was suppressed and it became a synonym meaning ‘faithfully, loyally’. Presumably, this shift was the result of introduction of Buddhism by the Mongolian rulers and their abandonment of the belief in Heaven. Some examples can be found in 14th-century inscriptions, such as in the following inscription in memory of Chan Ying-Jui (1335):

... *basa urida-ča jüg-iyer kücü ögügsed sayid aran-i songyuju keregleküi-dür.*¹⁹

‘... again, when he selected and employed good men, who from former times had rendered service in a befitting manner, ...’

- from the inscription in memory of Jigüntei (1338):

[23] *jigüntei. (24) degedüs-e jüg-iyer belgetei-e kücü ögügsenü tula* (...) ‘As Jigüntei had honestly and in a significant manner rendered service to [24] the Emperor (...)’²⁰

- from the inscription in memory of Prince Hindu (1362):

... [27] *tariyan-u üile-yi erkilejü jub jügiyer-iyen aman qoyulai tejiġen...* ‘[you] feed yourselves in the most befitting manner by practicing agriculture...’²¹

19) Cleaves 1950, pp. 71, 94.

20) Cleaves 1951, pp. 55, 70.

21) Cleaves 1949, p. 65.

31–32: *silam-tur oraysan metü ülügü bei* ‘it is the same as converting to Christianity’

The orthography of the word *ülügü* which corresponds to *ülikü* in Classical Mongolian (in modern Khalkha pronounced as *γлих* ‘to be equal, to be same as something, to match’) matches the Eastern Mongolian pronunciation of *γлүхү*. The homographs *ülügü* (Khal. *γлүү*) and *ülikü* (Khal. *γлих*) in the imperial letter were both mistranscribed as *ülügü* (Khal. *γлүү* / *илүү*), leading to the erroneous conclusion by some researchers that Arghun khan’s wording is an admonition that “it is senseless to convert to Christianity.”²² In fact, from the idea of the two final sentences of this letter it is clear that Arghun khan addressed the Pope in a polite and respectful way.

33–34: *junu terigün sara-yin tabun sinede* ‘the fifth day (of the first decade) of the first summer month’

In the old Mongolian calendar, a month was divided into three decades: the first was called *sined* (Khal. *шинэд*; lit. ‘new, waxing moon’), the second *tergel* (Khal. *тэргэл*; lit. ‘full’) and the last one *qayučid* (Khal. *хуучид*; lit. ‘old, waning moon’).

The renowned Mongolists Erich Haenisch, Władysław Kotwicz and Gerhard Doerfer, who translated the letters of the Il-khans into various European languages, rendered the expression *junu terigün sara-yin naiman qayučid-ta* ‘on the eighth day of the last decade of the first summer month’ correctly as *am 8 Tage der letzten (dritten) Dekade (der Monats) des ersten Sommermonats = am 28* (Haenisch 1949, p. 230, Kotwicz (1950) 1953, p. 393).

22) Бира 2006/2007, p. 29.

3. My new transliteration and translation into Khalkha Mongolian, with a new translation into English²³

1. Delei-yin. Busud ali-ba irgen	[Их Монгол Улсын] дэлхийн [Христэнээс] бусад бүх хүмүүс,
2. öber-ün nom bičig-iyer jalbariqun	өөр өөрийн ном бичгээр залбирагч
3. aran qudalčiqan jalbarin bui.	[тэдгээр] хүн ард худал [ном бичгээр] залбирцгааж байна.
4. Misiq-a-in nom tngri-dür tayiүči	Тэнгэрт тахигдагч Христийн ном
5. ünén bei. Edüge	үнэн юм. Одоо
6. Il-qan Misiq-a-in nom-dur	Ил-хаан, Христийн шашинд
7. oratuγai kemejü ilejügü či.	ортугай гэж [элч] илгээжээ Чи.

23) I provide here the French and Russian translations of the letter for the sake of comparison:

a) French translation (Mostaert – Cleaves 1952, pp. 451–452): Tu as envoyé [un message] disant: "... Les autres peuples de l'univers, quells qu'ils soient, [étant des] gens qui prient selon leurs propres religion et écritures, prient mensongèrement. La religion du Misiqa adore le Ciel et est vraie. Que maintenant l'ilkhan entre dans la religion du Misiqa." Disant que notre bon père—parce que la religion du Misiqa est la vraie—ainsi que [notre] bonne aïcule avaient [eux] aussi le *silam* (= étaient chrétiens), vous avez aussi à plusieurs reprises, nous faisant des communications, envoyé des ambassadeurs et dépêché des porteurs de messages verbaux disant: "Que du mat ne soit pas fait aux peuples chrétiens!"

Ton dire: "Que [l'ilkhan] entre dans le *silam* (= se fasse chrétien) est juste. Nous autres, descendants de Činggis-qan, nous disons: "[Quant à] nos propres Mongols (= nos sujets mongols), soit que de plein gré ils entrent dans le *silam*, soit que [de plein gré] ils ne le fassent pas, que seul le Ciel éternel en connaisse!" Les gens entrés dans le *silam* et qui, comme vous, ou tun coeur vraiment sincère et sont purs, ne contreviennent pas à la religion et aux ordres du Ciel éternel et du Misiqa. Quant aux autres peuples, ceux qui, oubliant le Ciel éternel et lui désobéissant, font des oeuvres de mensonge et de vol, ne sont-ils pas nombreux? Maintenant, disant que je ne suis pas entré dans le *silam*, tu t'offenses et te livres à des pensées [de mécontentement]. [Mais] si uniquement on prie le Ciel éternel et si l'on pense comme il sied de le faire, n'est-ce pas comme si l'on était entré dans le *silam*?

Notre lettre, nous [l']avons écrite l'année du tigre, le cinq de la nouvelle lune du premier mois de l'été (14 mai 1290), quand nous étions à Urumi.

‘[The envoy has passed a message that] You said that all the people of the Great Mongol Empire, apart from the Christians who pray according to their own books and texts, pray according to wrong and false books. The Christian religion that prays to Heaven is the right one. Now, Il-khan, convert to Christianity.’

8. Sayin ečige manu Misiq-a-in	Сайн эцэг маань Христийн
9. nom үнэн-ү tula. Sayin	ном үнэн [гэж үзсэн]ий тул, Сайн
10. emege-yi ba silamtai-kü büleyi kemen	эмэг эхийгээ бид загалмайтан байсан билээ гэж,
11. ta kristen irgen-dür. Ad büü	Христэн хүмүүс та бүхэнд ад бүү
12. kürtügei kemejü kedün-te ba	хүртүгэй гэж хэдэнтэй бид
13. duyuḷan ilčün ileged ögüleči	[ерөөл] дуулган элч илгээж захидал бичиг хүргүүлж
14. -kü ilen aba-j-e. Silam-dur	байсан билээ. Загалмайд

b) Russian translation (Шаймарданова 2012, pp. 35–36):

«Ты отправил [послание] сказав: «...Другие народы вселенной, какими бы они не были [были] людьми, которые молятся в соответствии с их собственной религией и Священным писанием, молятся лживо. Христианская религия поклоняется Небу и это правда. Говоря, что наш отец (Отец Аргуна – ильхан Абага) – потому что христианская религия настоящая – также как [наш] близкий родственник был / и [они] тоже христианами (=), вы предприняли много попыток, ставя нас в известность, направляя послов и спешно отправляя носильщиков словесных посланий, говоря: «Чтобы не сделали зла христианскому народу!».

Ты сказал: «Чтобы [ильхан] стал христианином это правильно. Мы, преемники Чингиз-хана, мы говорим: «[Что касается] нас монголов (= наших монгольских тем), они принимают христианство либо по собственному желанию, либо [по собственному желанию] не делают этого, чтобы вечно и праведное небо знали это!». Люди, принявшие христианство и у которых, как у вас, поистине верные и чистые сердца, не противоречат религии и порядкам вечного Неба и христианства. Что касается других народов, те, кто, забывая вечное Небо и не подчиняясь ему, обманывает и совершает кражи, не есть ли они многочисленны? Теперь, говоря, что я не принял христианской веры, ты обижаешься и ты предаешься мыслям [недовольства]. [Но] если действительно просят вечное Небо и если думают, как полагается это сделать (принять христианство – З. Ш.), не правда ли кажется, что приняли христианство?

Наше письмо, мы написали [его] в год тигра, 5 числа новолуния первого месяца лета (14 мая 1290), когда мы были в Уруми».

15. oratuyai kemekü činü jöb. Ba ортугай гэх чинь зөв. Бид
As the divine father of ours believed that the Christian books are true, as the divine grandmother of ours was a Christian, when sending messengers and envoys, we order that no harm be done to the Christian people. You are right [that you] insist [I must] convert to Christianity. We,
16. Činggis-qan-u. Uray-ud öber-ün Чингис хааны урагууд өөрийн
17. Mongyoljin durabar aju silam-dur Монголжин дураар байж, Загалмайд
18. orabasu ba esebesü-ber. Гауца орох уу, эс орох уу гэдгийг гагцхүү
19. Möngke tngri med kemejü ad. Мөнх тэнгэр мэд гэж байдаг.
the descendants of Chinggis Khan will [decide] our own way, only Eternal Heaven knows [if we should] convert to Christianity or not.
20. Silam-dur oraysad tanu metüs maq-a Загалмайд орсон та нарын мэт мах
21. ünen sedkilten ariyun aran. үнэн сэтгэлтэн ариун хүмүүс
22. Möngke tngri-yin Misiq-a-yin Мөнх тэнгэрийн Христийн
23. nom. Jrlы busi ülü bolyan bui ном зарлигийг бус үл болгон байгаа
24. j-e. Busud irgen биз ээ. [Та нараас] бусад [танай] хаад ноёд
25. Möngke tngri-yi umurtaju busi bolyaju Мөнх тэнгэрийг умартаж бус болгож,
26. qudal quljai üiles üiledkün ülügü. худал хулгай үйлэс үйлдэгчид үлэмж
27. Olan bui. Edüge олон байна. Одоо
Holy and pure believers, Christians like you, do not break the order of Christ of Eternal Heaven, do you? [Not you, but] a great many of your kings and nobles forgot Eternal Heaven and commit lies and thievery. Now,
28. namayi silam-dur ese orajuуу kemen намайг Загалмайд эс оржээ гээд
29. mayuilan ba sedkin aqu či. Гауца муугаар бодон байгаа аа Чи. [Бид] Ганц
You blame me for not having converted to Christianity. If [we]
30. Möngke tngri-dür jalbaribusu жүгигер Мөнх тэнгэрт залбирч байвал, [түүний] ёс журмыг
31. sedkijü abasu. Silam-dur oraysan сахиж байвал Загалмайд орсонтой
pray only to Eternal Heaven and follow [His] rule and order, it is the same as if [we] have converted to Christianity.
32. metü ülükü bei. Bičig manu bars jil адил юм аа. Бичиг маань Барс жилийн
33. junu terigün sara-yin tabun Зуны тэргүүн сарын таван
34. sinede Urumi-da бүкүй-дүр бицйеи. шинэдэд Урумид байхад бичвээ.
This letter was executed on the fifth day of the first summer month of the Year of the Tiger in Urumi.

Abbreviations

Class. Mo.	Classical Mongolian
Khal.	Khalkha Mongolian
Fr.	French
met.	metaphorical meaning
Rus.	Russian
SHM	The Secret History of the Mongols

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Interpreting Future Histories: Prophetic Thinking in the Oral Tradition of the Bulgan River Basin in Western Mongolia¹

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Summary: This contribution, based on field research of the Altai Uriankhai ethnic subgroup in Western Mongolia and the neighbouring groups of the Zakhchin and Torguud, addresses the role of prophetic thinking in Mongolian oral tradition and oral history. The perception of time and the chronology of oral tradition is marked by strong prophetic or predictive thinking. Through four thematic examples from oral sources, I investigate the significance of prophetic narratives in oral tradition

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Note about transcription: For transcribing the modern colloquial Oirat dialect of Mongolian, I use a simple phonetic transcription based on the graphics of N. Poppe's transcription of the Classical Mongolian script (i.e., the basic pairs against the Mongolian Cyrillic *ǰ - ж, č - ч, š - ш* etc.). Although I try to render the dialectal specifics of the Altai Uriankhai, or Zakhchin, respectively, the transcription does not aim to reflect minor phonological distinctions and naturally frequently follows the standardized orthography of Modern Mongolian written in Cyrillic. When referring to terms or quotation from the Classical Mongolian, N. Poppe's transcription is used. In order to improve the readability of the text, generally known and often repeated ethnonyms and geographical names (namely: Uriankhai, Zakhchin, Oirat, Dzungar, Khovd) are written in the form usual in English texts. For other Mongolian and Oirat names, the abovementioned transcription is preserved. Abbreviations: Mo. Mongolian, Ma. Manchu, Chin. Chinese, Tib. Tibetan, ClMo. Classical Mongolian, MoMo. Modern (Standard) Mongolian.

from the point of view of its narrators. It is possible to recognize three temporally different utterances of prophecy in the oral narratives: prophecies considered as fulfilled in the past, prophecies yet to be fulfilled in the future, and prophecies said to be fulfilled in the present.

(0.) Introduction

Since 2010, I have repeatedly done fieldwork among the Western Mongolian ethnic subgroup of the Altai Uriankhai living in the rural regions of Khovd and Bayan-Ölgii aimags, in particular the Mongolian speaking part of the historical Altai Uriankhai.² The main intent of my fieldwork was to understand how the present-day members of the Altai Uriankhai (and the partially neighbouring Zakhchin) countryside community understand their own past, in an environment where written historical records were unusual (at least until very recently). In the course of my efforts to describe the orally transmitted knowledge of the past my attention was captured by a specific concept of 'history' (Mongolian: *tüüh*). While, in the discourse of scientific, academic, and educational writing in Mongolia, *tüüh* is equivalent to the international concept of 'history' and thus understood as concerning the past, the concept of *tüüh* for my information providers (further: "narrators") frequently involved prophecies and predictions for the future as a crucial component. In this study, I show how the oral narratives of the Altai Uriankhai work with time in terms of the linear conceptions of "past, present and future."

2) Not including the Tuvan speaking people of Cengel sum, who historically also belonged to the Altai Uriankhai.

Object of study – the Altai Uriankhai

The Altai Uriankhai, a community of ca. 20–30 thousand people,³ currently⁴ inhabit parts of the Khovd and Bayan-Ölgii aimags of Mongolia and parts of the Altay Prefecture in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in the UAR Xinjiang (PRC); they are speakers of an Oirat⁵ Mongol variety. Together with the Dörvöd, Zakhchin, Bayad, Ööld and Hoton, they constitute the Oirat community of Western Mongolia. Additionally, a group of speakers of a Tuvan (Turkic) variety, living in Cengel sum of Khovd aimag, formed part of the Altai Uriankhai as an administrative unit from 1762 to 1929. The Tuvan of Western Mongolia only recently became classified as a separate group. The Altai Uriankhai share most of the cultural aspects that have been regarded as typical for Oirat,⁶ such as a common language variety (cf. Birtalan 2003), social organization,

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- 3) The exact statistic numbers are not available, because the population census results published in Mongolia (e.g., 26 654 Uriankhai according to *Тооллого* 2011, p. 54) include only the larger ethnic category Uriankhai, which covers also Arig Uriankhai traditionally living in Hövsgöl aimag and eventually other Mongols self-identifying as Uriankhai but not belonging to Altai Uriankhai. For Xinjiang, the census of 1982 counted 4475 citizens of Mongol ethnicity (all of them Altai Uriankhai, except 10 Čahar and 50 Ööld; Tonā 2004, p. 707) and 5327 in 1995 (*Aletai diqu zhi* 2004, p. 158) – these two figures include also Tuvans, while in Mongolia the Tuvans are currently considered a separate ethnicity.
 - 4) In historical records the ethnonym Uriankhai, in different variants, has been attested in several areas of North-Eastern Asia, such as Manchuria, eastern Mongolia, southern Siberia or Yakutia. The mutual relationship of these groups is unclear and the ethnogenesis of the current Altai Uriankhai group seems to be rather complicated. For the modern Altai Uriankhai and the perspective on history reflected in their oral tradition, a connection to the Dzungar Khanate seems to be the most relevant. In general, the Mongolian-speaking Altai Uriankhai now belong to the Oirat subgroup of Mongols (sometimes called Western Mongols).
 - 5) For the description and classification of Oirat within the Mongolic Languages see Birtalan 2003.
 - 6) Concerning the extensive literature published in Mongolia in which the Altai Uriankhai are listed among Oirat groups, the work of Баасанхүү – Батмөнх 2010 and Сүхбаатар 2018 may be mentioned.

subsistence methods (the important secondary role of hunting and agriculture; cf. Баасанхүү – Батмөнх 2011), professional epic traditions including the ritual role of bards (cf. Катруу 2001, pp. 5–9, Таяа 2010, Таяа 2015), and legends relating the individual Oirat groups to a common identity of the former Dzungar Khanate (1634–1755) the last independent Mongolian khanate for the most part (but not exclusively) composed of Oirat groups (Srba 2019, pp. 72–74). Shared Dzungar heritage is manifested as well in the use of Literary Oirat recorded in Clear script (*todo bičiq*) (Srba 2015, 2019), a phonetically adapted system based on classical Mongolian script, introduced by the head of Dzungar Buddhist sangha, Zaya Paṇḍita (1599–1662).

In addition to the Altai Uriankhai, the Dzungar heritage is shared by the Ööld and Zakhchin groups currently living, for the most part, in Khovd aimag, Bayad (Uvs aimag), and the larger group of Dörvöd (living in Khovd, Uvs and Bayan-Ölgii aimags). The other close neighbours of the Altai Uriankhai, the Torguud and Hošuud (in Mongolia, limited to Bulgan sum in Khovd aimag) are, on the contrary, descendants of another important Oirat state, the Kalmyk Khanate, which at the time of their migration to the current site (1771–1772) was gradually being incorporated into Imperial Russia.

Beyond the Torguud and Hošuud, all the abovementioned Oirat groups settled in the areas presently occupied by them in the 1750s and early 1760s, following their gradual surrender to the Qing Empire and its subsequent resettlement projects (Оюунжаргал 2009).

In the case of the Altai Uriankhai, the Qing resettlement project divided the earlier groups of Uriankhai dwelling in the large area of the Mongolian Altai, Altay and partially Western Sayan Mountains into two groups. The first group was named *Altan nayur-un Uriangqai* (Uriankhai of Altan Lake, now Lake Teletskoye) remaining in the area of the present-day Altai Republic and manageable by the Qing court only with difficulties. This enabled the emergence of a parallel allegiance (Rus. *dvoyedanstvo*) to both the Qing and Russian Empires. The second group was named *Altai-yin Uriangqai* (Altai Uriankhai) who were granted land on both sides of the Mongolian Altai and who were incontestably subject to the Qing Empire.

An intriguing issue in the history of the Altai Uriankhai is the relationship of the Turkic and Mongolic speakers among the Altai Uriankhai.

Already prior to the conquest of the Uriankhai by the Qing Empire, Uriankhai subjects of the Dzungar Khanate included a mixture of Mongolian and Turkic speaking groups whose mutual relation has not yet been satisfactorily explained, but which must have led to a high degree of common, integrated cultural and spiritual tradition. A part of these Uriankhai, who around 1760 were organized into seven banners (ClMo. *qosiyun* / MoMo. *hošuuun*) – an originally Manchu semi-military type of administrative unit, clearly following, roughly speaking, the former division into *otoy* / *otog*-units of the Dzungar period – were allocated to the large area of the Mongolian Altai, hence its name Altai Uriankhai.⁷ The reorganization admitted earlier noble clans as hereditary leaders of these new units, the most powerful among them obtaining the function of chiefs of the left and the right sections (ClMo. *yar* / MoMo. *gar* lit. “hand”), including 4 and 3 banners respectively. The banners lacked official distinctive names until 1912 (each banner being referred to according to the currently acting administrator), when official titles were bestowed by the government of Bogd Khan.

Among the Qing era Altai Uriankhai, four banners were essentially composed of Mongolian (Oirat)-speaking populations, while three banners were composed of Turkic dialect speakers (currently considered as dialects of Tuvan). In the 19th century, particularly since the 1860s, the hitherto rather sparsely populated territory was exposed to gradual yet massive migratory waves of Kazakhs moving from the west to the east due to the rivalry between the Russian and Qing empires for border territories;⁸ in the 1920s and 1930s, they constituted a majority in Altai Uriankhai regions. In addition, the Altai Uriankhai suffered considerably from the official separation of their banners by the drawing of a new border line between

7) Some Mongolian scholars argue that the attribute “Altai” was used also to designate earlier Uriankhai (Гантулга 2014, pp. 91–92).

8) Reasons for the Kazakh migration are multiple and complex, but it was mostly caused by increasing Russian control of the Kazakh population. In 1820s, the title of khan was formally abolished and in 1830s heirs of the Kazakh khan Ablai actively opposed the expanding Russian power. The frontier between the Qing and Russian empires populated by Kazakhs remained largely blurred until the Protocol of Tarbagatay in 1864, which caused that many Kazakhs became Qing subjects (Benson & Svanberg 1998, pp. 40–41).

Autonomous Mongolia and Xinjiang in 1913, their leaders' oscillations between the Mongolian and Chinese authorities, and finally unrest and local resistance due to dissatisfaction with the increasing Sovietization of Mongolia, itself resulting in repeated migratory waves. From the 1980s onward, a mass migration of Altai Uriankhai from Western Mongolia to the central regions of Mongolia further reduced the percentage representation of the Altai Uriankhai against Kazakhs particularly in Bayan-Ölgii aimag (founded in 1940 especially for the Altai Uriankhai and Kazakhs) and resulted in further marginalization of the Uriankhai.

As a result of these tendencies, the current population in the countryside of Mongolian-speaking Altai Uriankhai in Mongolia comprises two geographically isolated areas: 1. Bulgan – Mönhhairhan – Duut; 2. Buyant – Altai – Altancögc. The Uriankhai of the first group have turned out to be culturally more narrowly related to their neighbouring ethnical subgroups of the Bulgan Torguud and Üyenč Zakhchin than to the Uriankhai of the latter group.

My attention was especially attracted by the Uriankhai of the first group mentioned in the preceding paragraph who reside in the upper reaches of the river Bulgan and their neighbours in Mönhhairhan sum.⁹ Originally, they formed one common banner in the administrative system of the Qing period. The banner's historical name assigned by the Mongolian Autonomous (Bogd Khan's) Government in 1912 was *Darqan güng-ün qosiyu* "Banner of the Darhan Duke" and its common folk name is *Baruun ambanii hošuu* "Banner of the Right Governor" – the Right Governor was the supreme local chief of three "right" or south-eastern banners); further, I use the Mongolian version of the popular term *Baruun Amban*¹⁰ Banner.

9) My reason for the selection of this group was partially circumstantial (during my first trip in 2010, I followed another colleague motivated by the tradition of Altai Uriankhai epic story-tellers), partly subjective (in 2014, when deciding at which household I could spend a longer period of participant observation, one family in Bulgan sum agreed and provided me with a fascinating research opportunity), but also historical (this group was almost entirely involved in cross-border migration in the early 1930s).

10) *Amban* is a title of Manchu origin (from Manchu *amba* "great") used for ministers, vassal rulers and many other levels of administrative representatives; in

Previous studies on the Altai Uriankhai

As the Altai Uriankhai lived in difficult terrain outside the main commercial and administrative routes, they were only rarely visited by Western travellers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Beginning in the 1950s, the Altai Uriankhai became justly renowned in the Mongolian academic sphere for their tradition of heroic epics (Каруу 2001, 2011). Scholarly research of the history of the Altai Uriankhai began only in the late 20th century (Гантулга 2014). Oral tradition referencing history has been recorded since the 1980s uniquely by M. Ganbold of Khovd University with emphasis placed on ethnographic aspects, religion, and customs (Ганболд 2017). More recently, the issue of transborder migrations within the former greater Altai Uriankhai area was addressed from a comparative approach of local (oral) and central/governmental (written) interpretations (Камимур 2015). My own research brings an effort to systematically describe the contents of local oral tradition and its interpretative role for the local community and its identity, in the context of a thorough understanding of meagrely preserved archive sources.

Methodology

In the quest for the internal past memories of the Altai Uriankhai, my research varied between two kinds of narratives. The first featured information and narratives related to the telling of events from one's own lifespan and the narrators' lived experience (commonly known as "oral history"). The second kind of narrative featured information and narratives transmitted "from mouth to mouth" (*am damjсан*); such narratives originated in the past from a local who might have had a direct experience with the respective historical event or personality and were further related to a present-day narrator who did not have this personal

Mongolian, it is particularly known as a simplified title of imperial incumbents in Ih Hüree, Uliastai and Khovd during the Qing period. In case of the Altai Uriankhai, the title *amban* is also a simplified form of Ma./Mo. *sula amban*, Mo. also *sula sayid* (Chin. *sanzhi dachen* 散秩大臣, lit. "great minister without rank", Hucker 1985, p. 396).

experience himself. The transmission process might have gone either through several generations, or merely from father to son (this type of oral source is known as “oral tradition”). In my own research, oral tradition prevails over oral history, but the exact boundaries are sometimes difficult to establish, and they are of a minor importance for the narrators themselves.

Oral tradition as a source of history (I use this term in accordance with Vansina 1985) deals mainly with issues, stories and information which are naturally selected by subsequent narrators as transmitting values considered by the local community as positive or favourable. In addition, narratives containing a prophecy or a message predicting the future are consciously transmitted to subsequent generations.

My field research among the Altai Uriankhai completed in the course of a decade (2010–2020, mostly carried out one to two months per year in various seasons), started with structured interviews during first encounters with individual narrators and faced many problems of understanding on both sides. Over time, I found myself returning to individual narrators, learned to use partial phraseological expressions common in the local dialect, began to identify topics that narrators liked to talk about, and gradually learned to ask questions in an appropriate way. After several one-week stays with certain narrators, in 2015 I decided to stay for two months in one household, with whom I later stayed for about one month each year (2016–2020). This approach enabled me to pass from controlled prearranged interviews to being a participant observer engaged in daily work during which it was possible to talk to the chief narrator and other members of the household without any time pressure and the formalities of a standard interview. Movement in space (during grazing or seasonal relocations) made it possible to better address the geographical links embodied in oral memory. The stay also made it possible to follow ordinary conversations with neighbours, many of whom turned to historical topics in response to my interest in history.

Premodern Mongolian concepts of history and the oral tradition and its relation to time

The traditional Mongolian approach to descriptions of past events was structured along genealogies (Балдаев 1970). We can observe this approach beginning with the Secret History of the Mongols through the chronicles of the 17th century to the chronicles of the Qing period, including the genealogical tables composed by the imperial court. This linear narrative approach became more complex upon the introduction to Mongolia of the Tibetan genre of texts concerning the origin of the Dharma and its spread (*chos 'byung*). These texts placed the successions and actions of the Mongol rulers in the broader framework of Buddhist temporal cosmology based on the idea of alternately improving and deteriorating conditions for the spread of the Buddha's teaching, eventually supplementing genealogically linear chronicles with cyclical biographies of subsequent births of representatives of reincarnation lineages. It was most likely a consequence of the influence of these Buddhist texts that the Mongols became fascinated with prophecies and predictions. However, Mongolian chronicles of both types are strongly centrally focused on the major political and religious centres of Qing Mongolia. In contrast, the identities mirrored in the oral tradition tended to refer to the particular administrative units (*aimags/leagues* and banners) producing individual decentralized local historical narratives around local ruling clans and the local monastic communities they patronized with significantly less interest in imperial supraregional or international events.

The current narrators who are part of my research have been influenced by standardized education, and more recently intentional ethnic identity building. They tend to incorporate temporally and geographically distant narratives concerning medieval Uriankhai tribes into their understanding of their own history and they interpret local history according to usual established approaches to historical periods (e.g., the Qing Dynasty period seen as one-sided oppression).

As I am unaware of any previous research regarding the topic of temporality in regional Mongolian oral history and oral tradition, I rely upon my own fieldwork experience in the following description of the aspects of the understanding of history per se among rural Oirat groups.

Based on my research among the Altai Uriankhai and Zakhchin, common understanding only vaguely distinguishes between history as narrative dealing with real past events and fictional storytelling. However, in certain individual cases, it was still possible to register a trace of the notion that “history” relates primarily to events directly related to us and our community (i.e., the rather recent past), while storytelling (including heroic epics) dates back to a distant past without direct relationship to one's own community today. This distinction is partially pushed back by recent ethnic identity building and its emphasis on storytelling as a distinctive intangible cultural heritage of the Altai Uriankhai.

Concerning the general aspects of relating “history,” I observed several tendencies among my narrators, such as that dating and chronology play a secondary role in historical oral tradition.¹¹ They are primarily expressed through chronological order and correlation – as in genealogies, where a sequence of generations is important, or in the narration of more complex historical events that contain a cause-and-effect relationship that is particularly important in terms of interpretation. In this respect, prophecy and prediction have a prominent place in historical narratives.

In my quest about how Uriankhai narrators conceive the term “history” (*tüüh* in Mongolian), it came as a surprise to me to see that this term was often used to refer to events of the present and the future. Narratives referring to prophecies clearly show this diffusive temporality of the Uriankhai understanding of history. In this regard, “history” refers to a complex evolution of events (extending through the past, present, and future) externally determined by temporal cosmology and the multiple karmic influences of human actions; this can be seen as a kind of vector sum of forces, or the net force, in physics. Given this context, prophecy and prediction (free from any divine insight or agency) only reveal the given course of actions in order to warn, instruct or grant the possibility of a personal right decision, but not to stop the course of events.

11) I employ the term “historical oral tradition” as an abbreviation for the arbitrary part of these narratives and information from the oral tradition not obviously fictional but related to past events mostly of the respective community and its historical experience. All narrative matters which the narrators themselves term as *tüüh* are included in this concept of “historical oral tradition”.

Forms of oral tradition of the Altai Uriankhai and Zakhchin

History-related oral tradition of the Western Mongolian ethnic subgroups was not generated “professionally.” The local community – in the pre-modern period, as in the present – lacked professional “bearers” of their oral memory, although the same groups held in high esteem the professional storytellers of heroic epic cycles (*tuulč*; who also partially passed down knowledge within their families). According to information provided by the respondents, traditional society did not actively create suitable conditions for passing on the oral memory of local history from the older to the younger generation, apart from the required knowledge of simple personal genealogies, ideally seven generations of one’s ancestors. Nevertheless, the coexistence of household members in a small area in a yurt and the frequent social communication within the community have created a suitable natural environment for the spontaneous transmission of oral memory between generations.

Unlike the professional singing of heroic epics, the narratives of the history-related oral traditions are usually simple narratives, often accumulated around mnemonic versified nuclei, sayings and maintaining a relatively fixed formulative character in the narrator’s memory. In addition to genealogical links, particular narratives are also fixed and updated by setting them within a familiar space and references to well-known places and local names.

Research question

In this paper I will go through selected examples of oral narratives containing predictions of the future. The collected oral narratives show frequent use of the motif of prediction, which can however be placed in different ways, whereas the coupling of prediction and its fulfilment may be variously situated in the temporal schema of the narrative. Given the frequency of predictions in the historical narratives of the Altai Uriankhai, the question arises of the significance of these predictions and prophecies for the Uriankhai concept of history. Concerning narratives that I have analysed and classified, I will assess what these examples relate concerning oral tradition, as well as the ideas of oral tradition expressed by the use.

Historical context

Prior to approaching the narratives, it is necessary to provide a short introduction concerning the area's historical background. Following the subjugation of various groups bearing the ethnonym Uriankhai residing in the larger area of the Mongolian Altai in 1754 and 1755, the Qing military administration created a group of seven Uriankhai chiefs and transformed them into banners, in 1762 constituting the Seven banners of Altai Uriankhai. To the southwest of the Altai Uriankhai were situated the Zakhchin, a part of earlier three Zakhchin three *otogs* (semi-military administrative units), who were granted an area roughly corresponding to the today's sums Üyenč, Altai, Möst, Zereg and Manhan (Khovd aimag) already, in 1756, ruled by *güng* ("duke") Jamcan, son of the famous Zakhchin chief Mamud, who surrendered to the Qing in 1754. In 1777, the majority of Zakhchin was separated from the hereditary dominium of Mamud's descendants, reorganized into a separate banner presided over by an elective general director (*bügüde-yin daruy-a*, Ma. *uheri da*); all Zakhchin were subordinated to the Grand Minister Consultant (*qobdu-du sayuju kereg-i sidkegči quubi-yin sayid*, Ma. *kobdo de tefi baita icihiyara hebei amban*, Chinese *Kebuduo canzan dachen* 科布多參贊大臣) in Khovd. In 1771, a group of Torguud subordinates of the ruler Šeren arrived as part of the famous migration¹² of the Torguud and Hošuid from the Volga river to Dzungaria; this group was assigned to the lower part of the Bulgan river and Cagaan Tohoi (also called Cagaan Gol, later in 1783 adding the area of Havtag and Baitag). Previously, Šeren had moved from Dzungaria to the Volga only after the defeat of Amarsanaa's uprising in 1758; his dominium was therefore later called "New Torguud" (*Sin-e Toryud*). The arrival of the Torguud to the Bulgan river and Cagaan Tohoi required the Altai Uriankhai to cede part of their territory, in exchange for which they were given the territory of the Gurvan Senher rivers (present day Mönhhairhan and Duut sums in Khovd aimag; Srba 2018, pp. 44–46). In 1775, the New Torguud were subordinated to the Grand Minister Consultant in Khovd (Оюунжаргал 2009, p. 184).

12) See, e.g. Atwood 2001, p. 180

The ethnically and culturally rather unified character of the Bulgan river basin was altered by the Kazakhs who entered the area around the 1860s. The Kazakhs were received with the permission of the Altai Uriankhai banner rulers to whom they had to pay a grazing tax (*ebüsün-ü kölüsü*) and a household tax, further being limited and controlled in their mobility and burial sites distribution. In 1910s, the Kazakhs managed to gain official recognition from the government of autonomous Mongolia. They created their own administrative units within the hitherto territorially continuous Altai Uriankhai banners, stopped paying taxes to the Uriankhai, and soon outnumbered them.

The original ties of the Altai Uriankhai, Zakhchin and Torguud to the Qing authorities in northern Mongolia (the Grand Minister Consultant in Khovd) began to gradually weaken in favour of an orientation to Xinjiang province in the late 19th century; this government, however, by no means continued the policy of privileging the nomadic population, preferring to establish settled centres in order to secure the strategically important area from the interests of Imperial Russia. In 1907, the establishment of the so-called Altai Borderland (Mo. *Altain hyazgaar*) marked an official discontinuance of ties with Northern Mongolia,¹³ but after the proclamation of Northern Mongolia's autonomy, the Altai Uriankhai, Torguud and Zakhchin proclaimed their allegiance to the Mongolian government. However, the decisions of international agreements in 1913 and 1915 brought virtually all the Altai Uriankhai, Bulgan Torguud and Zakhchin back within the competence of the Senior Administrative Office of Altai (*Aertai banshi zhangguang* 阿爾泰辦事長官) situated in Chenghuasi (Sir-a süm-e, present day Altay city) on the southwestern slopes of Altai Range; in practice, they set a new frontier line between Mongolia and China leading through the peaks of the Mongolian Altai. After the reestablishment of the Mongolian government in 1921 under the leadership of the Mongolian People's Party, several cross-border waves of migration both from Xinjiang to Mongolia and from Mongolia to Xinjiang took place. In case of the Bulgan river basin, these migrations affected all the ethnic groups. The Altai Uriankhai of Baruun Amban Banner (already

13) Zhang Rong – Wang Xilong 2002, p. 32, Bao Bin 2013, p. 43, Нямдорж 2015, p. 39.

named Mönhhairhan sum in 1929) crossed the border in 1930 to the Čingel river basin, which had been, prior to 1913, the centre of their own banner. A majority of them (excluding the ruling clan and a part of nobility and their closest servants) returned in two waves in 1932 and 1934.

The migration of the Zakhchin of Üyenč (previously Güng-ün qosiyu, lit. “Duke’s banner”) took place in two waves. The first migration, in 1927–1928, was led by the last duke Gombo-očir (Гомбуwčир), a persona non grata to the Mongolian people’s government due to his former support for Ĵa lama Dambiiĵalcan. The second wave in 1930 was instigated by the local chairman of the Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party who obviously became disappointed in the extreme leftist turn and the post-1928 anti-religious campaign. This migration took place under the same circumstances as those affecting the Altai Uriankhai of the Baruun Amban Banner. According to the prevailing narrative of local narrators, the Zakhchin who crossed the border during the second wave returned within one year; the remaining families should have returned in September 1933 after being impoverished by a Kazakh raid (Цолоо 2010, p. 44, Батбаяр 2014, pp. 126–128). Zakhchin who migrated away as part of the first wave and some individuals from the second wave later found a new home in Har-Uс (Qara Usu) on the northern slopes of Tianshan Mountains in Xinjiang.

The migration of various groups of Bulgan Torguud¹⁴ has not yet been satisfactorily described. The group most affected by forced migration were the Wangiin Torguud (*Wangiin hošuу*, lit. “The Prince’s Banner”), who lived farthest to the west of the river Cagaan Gol. A part of the Wangiin Torguud moved in 1925 to the interior of Xinjiang; the remaining inhabitants experienced the incursions of the Muslim fighters of Ma Zhongying’s 馬仲英 troops in 1932 and 1933 (*Aletai diqu zhi* 2004, p. 21). Trying to reenter Mongolia in 1934, they were forced back by Kazakh incursions, fleeing into the interior of Xinjiang (Jimisair, Santai, Haršaar) in 1935. A part of the Wangiin Torguud found their new home among the Hošuud (now Heshuo xian 和碩县). In 1944, a smaller group of Wangiin

14) Internally consisting of three main banners: *Wangiin hošuу* (The Prince’s Banner), *Beiliin hošuу* (Banner headed by rulers of the title of *beil* [Ma. *beile* “third-rank prince”]), and *Taiĵiin hošuу* (Banner headed by rulers of the title of *taiĵi*).

Torguud, including monks of the banner monastery (Mo. Dašpandelin hüree, Tib. bkra shis phan bde gling) crossed the Mongolian frontier and was incorporated into Bulgan sum (Лхагвасүрэн et al. 2015, p. 770).

(1.) Prophecies in the Mongolian cultural area

In Mongolia, especially in Khalkha in the second half of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries, various written prophecies were commonly circulated among the public, as documented by countless manuscript copies. These prophecies have been called *jarliy* (“decree, command”), *bošuy* (“decree of heaven; prediction”), *lündüng* (< Tib. *lung bstan*, “prophecy, revelation”) or *iregedüi-yin esi üjegülügsen* (“prediction of the future”). These terms were very often interchangeable. In Western scholarship, they became known as “political prophecies” or “pastoral letters” (Sárközi 1992). They were formulated by specialist monks and attributed to or authorized by generally revered religious representatives (Jebsundamba Khutugtu of Khalkha, Tibetan Panchen Lamas or Dalai Lamas. Other prophecies claimed celestial or divine origin (prophecies of Erlig nomun qan (Yamarāja), Mila burqan (Milarepa), *čilayun-u bičig* the “stone text”, which claimed descent from Heaven).¹⁵

These prophecies share many common patterns: 1.) They predict the coming of a time of calamities (*čay-un čöb-ün čay*), 2.) They define the reasons for the coming events and propose partial solutions, how an individual or a community can avoid the disaster, usually by moral behaviour, religious acts of merit, copying and distributing the text of the prophecy, and so on. 3.) Nonetheless, the forthcoming disasters cannot be entirely averted, only avoided by certain individuals or individual communities.

The prophecies are composed in a widely comprehensible style of literary Mongolian, only exceptionally corrupted by multiple and repeated copying. Some of the texts have been even blockprinted (Srba 2020). The simple fact of copying (or even multiplying) and worshiping these prophecy manuscripts was considered in practice to be more useful, and productive of more merit, than reading the texts themselves. But these texts

15) An example of a “stone text” was published by Lubsangdorji – Vacek 1997.

have been also read aloud for those who could not read them by themselves and so they have partially penetrated into oral memory.

Some of the texts are of Chinese origin, but in their Mongolian renderings they frequently express anti-Chinese sentiment (Srba 2013); in the early 20th century, Mongolia generally considered the Chinese as enemies threatening the Mongolian way of life and the Buddhadharma, as well as Mongolian political autonomy. Even Mongolian texts predicting (and praying for) the destruction of the Chinese are known (Srba 2017, p. 220).

In Western Mongolia, the same prophecies as could be found in Khalkha versions circulated in Oirat clear script (*todo bičiq*) renderings. Among the Altai Uriankhai and Zakhchin, I came across several manuscript copies of common prophetic texts (Srba 2015, pp. 44–45; Srba 2020).

(2.) Temporal patterns of prophetic narratives

The oral tradition helps the Altai Uriankhai and their neighbouring groups find continuity between the past, present, and future by means of a prophetic interpretation of history. It results from the Mongolian apprehension of causal correlations between righteous and erroneous behaviour and the consequences of both not only within this lifetime, but for the subsequent rebirths of an individual, and the future generations of his descendants (*üil ür, üiliin ür*). A similar correlation is perceived as existing between the negative and positive influences of nature (the actions of deities, spirits etc.) and the fortune or misfortune of an individual and a community. Above this fundamental level, there are effects of the flow of time (*cagiin erh*), understood as predetermined and bringing irreversible changes which must be consciously accepted so as not to bring harm to oneself or one's community. The future as determined by influences and factors stemming from past deeds and lives is termed "coming history" (*irdeg tüüh, ireedüin tüüh*). The oral tradition of the Altai Uriankhai adopted various eschatological expectations popular in Mongolian Buddhism of the early 20th century, reinterpreted them and partially applied them to contemporary events and social changes.

Having collected several examples of oral narratives from the oral tradition of the Altai Uriankhai and Zakhchin dealing with prophecies or

future-predicting, I realized that the Oirat use prophecies when talking about past, present, and future events. Every prophecy in the recorded Oirat narratives specifies the time of its fulfilment – sometimes by relatively precise temporal definitions (e.g. 100 years from now, beginning in the year of the Mouse, and so on) or by defining signs which will imminently anticipate the predicted action.

Accordingly, I have divided the exemplary narratives into three temporal patterns: prophecies fulfilled in the past, prophecies whose fulfilment is expected in the future, and prophecies considered to be in the process of fulfilment in the present time.

(2.1.) PROPHECY FULFILLED IN THE PAST: A PROPHECY ABOUT THE MONASTERY OF THE BULGAN TORGUUD

The first type of prophecy in the oral tradition refers to events that have already occurred. A story about the unsuccessful wedding of the local ruler ǰamiyanjav¹⁶ (1908–1969) of Baruun Amban Banner of the Altai Uriankhai with a princess, the daughter of Namǰaa *wang*¹⁷ (according to some versions, Čagdaa *wang*) of Wangiin Torguud,¹⁸ is a narrative from the collectively shared oral tradition of a large part of Western Mongolia. It can be found among the Altai Uriankhai in Bulgan (Bayan-Ölgii), Mönhhairhan, the Torguud in Bulgan (Khovd), the Zakhchin in Üyenč and the Altai Uriankhai in Xinjiang – both current centres of Mongolian speaking Altai Uriankhai, i.e. Čingel and Handgait.¹⁹ The wedding itself

16) In some versions, ǰamiyanjav is replaced by other characters. The main storyline, however, remains the same.

17) Cl. Mong. *wang* “prince” < Chin. *wang* 王, a higher degree title in the hierarchy of Mongolian hereditary local rulers during the Qing Dynasty.

18) Although we do not have any information about the origin of wives of the Uriankhai banner representatives prior to the beginning of the 20th century, oral tradition suggests that it was customary to choose brides from among daughters of neighbouring hereditary banner representatives.

19) For variants of this narrative see Srba 2016 (transcribed with an English translation), Srba – Schwarz 2017 (in Mongolian script). I made a systematic comparison of the whole corpus of narratives in the attachments of my

took place in the early 1920s. The wedding is confirmed as a historical fact by an undated letter of Ĵamiyanĵav's uncle Čültem *da lam* supposedly to the *güng* (duke) Badai (of Yost Banner of the Altai Uriankhai, commonly known as Kök Mončag Banner).²⁰

Here I confine myself to a single version of the narrative, which I recorded in August 2015 in Hošuud County (Heshuo xian 和碩县) in Xinjiang from a descendant of 1930's Torguud refugees from Bulgan.²¹ It is a significantly extended version which incorporates the story of the Torguud-Uriankhai wedding into a far longer historical narrative about the fate of Bulgan Torguud. Although this version is somewhat distant in content from the versions usual among the Altai Uriankhai (Ĵamiyanĵav is not even mentioned in it), I choose it here because it is particularly illustrative in terms of the use of time patterns and the expression of the role of prediction.

The narrative starts with founding of a Torguud monastery on the river Bulgan,²² sometime around the turn of the 19th century, probably just

unpublished Ph.D. thesis (<https://is.cuni.cz/webapps/zzp/detail/147127/?lang=cs>, pp. 228–248). The Ph.D. thesis includes also exact transcripts of the narratives.

20) National Archives of Mongolia, fond and signature: XM-170, Д-1, ХН-664, Н-9. Edited and translated in Srba 2016, pp. 181–183.

21) Regarding the current situation in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, I present the narrative here without referring to the name of its narrator. The narrator is a local livestock breeder and farmer of approximately 60 years of age living a semi-settled way of life in a farmhouse a few kilometres from the county centre.

22) The oral tradition does not specify which monastery is concerned. The monastery of the Wangiin Torguud named Dašpandelin was established only in 1870, but as the main banner it had certainly a monastery established directly after the arrival from the Volga (<https://www.mongoliantemples.org/en/component/domm/1753?view=oldtempleen>, accessed 30 December 2021). However, materials concerning monasteries collected by the Department of Home Affairs (*Dotood yaam*) and preserved in the Archives of the General Intelligence Agency of Mongolia record earlier founding dates in the case of other Torguud monasteries in the Bulgan river basin: Dečingünsenlin monastery, also known as Taijiin hüree (Taijiin Monastery) in 1774, Beeliin hüree (Monastery of the Beel Banner) 1769, Gendenšadarpiljeelin 1762, Šadrapviljeelin 1771 (although it must be mentioned that many of the “European-style” data in the printed

few years after the Torguud arrival from Volga River (1771). Wise lamas founding the monastery conducted geomantic observations of the place (*gazar šinjih*) and concluded that the Torguud banner would flourish at that place for one hundred years, but after one hundred years they would have to move on; otherwise, they would encounter disaster. But after one hundred years, people forgot this prediction.²³

After one hundred years, a young lord of the Šardag (the Tuvan-speaking Kök Mončag Banner of Altai Uriankhai),²⁴ known for his cruelty and shamanic abilities, demanded and obtained a Torguud princess. But the princess suffered due to her husband's harsh treatment and returned to her father's house.²⁵ Kök Mončag people sent a *haraal* ("curse") against the Torguud banner. The curse was ritually restrained by a lama but still managed to defile the place to such a degree that the Bulgan river ceased to be propitious for further settlement there. Lamas advised that the banner should promptly move to a new auspicious land, but an officer who was sent to inspect new localities discouraged the Torguud ruler from moving. The Torguud renounced the voluntary move to a new, more auspicious land. The aftermath occurred exactly according to the old prediction – the Torguud experienced a harsh time of war and were forced to

edition of this source do not agree with correlated data given during the ruling era of Qing emperors or the Tibetan calendrical system *rab byung*) (Эрдэнэбилэг 2012, pp. 228–233).

- 23) Here I present the recorded version of the oral tradition. If the prediction has been forgotten, the logical question arises how the creators of the narrative could have known about this "forgotten" prediction. However, the aim of this article is not a historical verification of the oral tradition, but to show its exposure and reasoning.
- 24) One of the noyons (governors) of the banner was called Šar da (Yellow director) according to the oral tradition. The Mongolian speaking Uriankhai usually call this banner Banner of Kök Mončags. In 1912 the banner governor Wčirjab was awarded the honorary title Yosutu and the rank of *güng* ("duke"). At the time of the wedding, the title was awarded to Wčirjab's son Badai.
- 25) In most versions of the oral tradition, the Torguud princess marries Ĵamiyanjav of the Baruun Amban Banner of the Altai Uriankhai and the "Šardag" (Kök Mončag) ruler plays the role of a matchmaker or another claimant to the bride. However, in this version Šardag stands for the Altai Uriankhai (including both the Kök Mončags and the Baruun Amban Banner Uriankhai) as a whole.

flee at short notice to the southern part of the Dzungar Basin, where they lived as refugees and from where many of them never returned.

The temporal schema of the narrative can be recapitulated in two stages:

- (i) Prediction = about 1800 (Torguud entered a temporally conditioned place auspicious for the limited period of one hundred years)
- (ii) Fulfilment of the prediction = after 1900 (1920s)
 - a) Immediate cause of disaster – Curse from Šardag following his unsuccessful marriage to a Torguud princess;
 - b) Time for apprehending and escaping coming disasters squandered;
 - c) Final result: the banner population expelled from Bulgan and dispersed.²⁶

A similar utterance of a prophecy can be seen in a case of the oral tradition concerning Čültem *da lam* (1886–1940?).²⁷ According to a shared local tradition, Čültem was inclined to accept revolutionary ideas and the people's government, but was forced by his subordinated local leaders to leave the area under the Mongolian jurisdiction (Bulgan river basin) and conduct a migration of his subjects from Mongolia to China. According to one local oral version, Čültem lamented for the foolishness of his subjects who had decided to leave the Mongolian revolutionary government and

26) An officer of the Torguud prince (*wang*), banner administrator named Kök hamar *güzdei* 'Blue nosed *guzdei*' (Manchu *gusai da* 'banner leader'), is sent to inspect two prospective destinations of the planned migration identified by divination as propitious. But Kök hamar and other officials are not willing to migrate, and so they discourage the Torguud prince, mystifying him by referring to gigantic spiders living there. The prince decides not to migrate, disregarding the prophecy of an irreversible disaster coming to afflict the Torguud banner.

27) Čültem *da lam* was originally a principal lama (*da lam*) of a local monastery in the Altai Uriankhai Banner of Baruun Amban. In 1916, after the death of his brother Baldandorj, Čültem was charged to govern the banner on behalf of his less competent nephew (Baldandorj's son) Ĵamiyanjav (1908–1969). In 1927, Čültem was elected and appointed chairman by the newly formed people's democratic order. In 1930, he moved from Mongolia to Xinjiang followed by the majority of his banner population.

predicted that if they crossed the border to China, the Uriankhai would meet misfortune lasting three generations. The oral account concludes that in the present, now that three generations have passed, the fortune of the Uriankhai is gradually becoming more positive.

The following passage shows the prediction made by Čültem:

*...minii ard түмөнд neg uhaa dohio yaagaad baidgüi hoitgoo yaagaad boddoggüi či hoyraas gурvan үyedee мууг үзнэч medejbainč? ...*²⁸

...”Why my people cannot see the sense of it. Why don’t they think about their future? You [my people], you will suffer for two, three generations, I tell you.”...

Similarly to the narrative about the Torguud prediction and its subsequent fulfilment which speaks to the refugees directly, explaining the reason for their suffering, this short prediction is also embedded in a past event, addressing current listeners so as to explain the logic of cause and effect in the history of their community.

(2.2.) FULFILMENT EXPECTED IN THE FUTURE: THE PROPHECY OF CAGAAN GEGEEN

The Oirat Mongols, to whom the Altai Uriankhai, Torguud and Zakhchin belong, experienced many sufferings and setbacks during the last three hundred years. In the 1750s, when the Qing dynasty conquered the Oirat Dzungar Khanate (1635/1676–1755/1758; its political centre was located in the northern part of present day Xinjiang), the majority of Oirat were killed, expelled, or forcibly relocated (Perdue 2005, p. 286, Златкин 1983, p. 303). Starting in the 19th century and up till the present day, a large part of the Oirat population has been forced off from their pasturelands, heavily populated by Kazakhs. In case of the Altai Uriankhai, while until the mid-19 century, they enjoyed an unusually large and naturally diversified area; beginning in the second half of the 19th century, they gradually ended up becoming a minority in their original territory. All three Mongolian ethnic groups of the Mongolian Altai Range (Altai Uriankhai, Torguud, Zakhchin) also suffered severely during the Muslim raids which occurred

28) From a longer narrative recorded from Baldaa 16. 6. 2013 WS560925 11:00–16:15.

during the Hui Uprising (Dungan Revolt, 1862–1877; Kim 2004).²⁹ The consequences of the Dungan Revolt military raids on the populations of northern Mongolia have not yet been described in detail, but it is assumed that the population of the Oirat banners were significantly impoverished.

In this context of decline and with reference to their glorious past, the Oirat developed several forms of prophetic expectations. The most famous has been the expectation of the second coming of Amarsanaa, the last khan of the Dzungars, whose reincarnation was claimed by ǰa lama Dambijalcan (1862?–1922), adventurer and warlord in Western Mongolia (Znamenski 2014).

Another of these prophecies, which is very popular among the Altai Uriankhai, concerns a Buddhist reincarnated lama known as Cagaan gegeen. The prophecy of the second coming of Cagaan gegeen still awaits its fulfilment in a future time. The awareness of Cagaan gegeen is shared by the Altai Uriankhai, Zakhchin and Bulgan Torguud.³⁰ The belief in Cagaan gegeen has not created any forms of worship, but some correspondences to the Ak-jang religious movement in Altay may be worth considering (cf. the leading role of the White Burkhan in the Altaian pantheon after 1904, Шерстова 2010, p. 176).

The historical Cagaan gegeen (“White Holiness” in Mongolian, Tib. *bla ma dkar po*) Gūngajalcan (Tib. *kun dga’ rgyal mtshan*,³¹ 1835–1895) came from the Tibetan area of Tsone in the present-day province of Gansu. An

29) Exact data on the Hui incursions into Uriankhai and Zakhchin banners are hard to find, but the events are well reflected in the local oral tradition. A reliable contemporary source from the Zakhchin banner mentions year the 1867 (Birtalan 1985, pp. 180, 186); the year of Hui incursion which destroyed the monastery of Altai Uriankhai Baruun Amban Banner (in Čingel) is also mentioned as 1874 with somewhat less reliability (Эрдэнэбилэг 2012, p. 246).

30) My research of the oral tradition concerning Cagaan gegeen is based mostly on material collected from the Altai Uriankhai. Recording of oral tradition among the Zakhchin and Torguud – allowing us to determine if there is any significant difference in the stories and beliefs concerning Cagaan gegeen between the ethnic groups – has yet to be carried out.

31) The complete name with title in Tibetan transcription is *tsha gan hu tog thu e rte ni paṇḍi ta rje btsun byams pa mthu stobs kun dga’ rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po* (Gasanglexie 2002, p. 9).

ordinary monk, he eventually found himself among the Oirat in Tarbagatai, where he became known for his medical skills. The earlier tradition (Sükei 2004) considered that he was venerated as a reincarnation of a high lama (*huvilgaan*)³² by Ööld Mongols living in Har-Uus (now Wusu, Xinjiang) soon after his arrival among the Oirat. However, his Tibetan biography explains that it was not until the Muslim (Dungan) rebellion that Gūngajalcan distinguished himself (Yongdan 2019, p. 75). He became renowned by defending Manchu positions in Tarbagatai and Qorgas (Ghulja), but in 1866 he was forced to withdraw with his army formed mainly of Ööld Mongols to the north to Altai, where he pacified a local rebellion of Chinese settlers. In 1871, he was granted imperial permission to establish a new monastery on the river Kiran called Šar süm (Chin. Chenghuasi), which soon turned into a regional centre (in present-day Altay City). Grigory Nikolayevich Potanin who visited Bulun tohoi and Šar süm in 1876 was accused of showing disrespect to lamas, including Gūngajalcan. Consequent diplomatic complaints led to the partial degradation of Gūngajalcan, his final retirement from Altai to Har-Uus and then later to Gansu.³³

In the oral tradition, the historical image of Gūngajalcan is transformed into a prophetic expectation of his second coming. The perspective of Cagaan geegen's future return was based on the frame experience of the Altai Uriankhai with the historical Gūngajalcan of the 19th century. Cagaan geegen, with whom the Uriankhai had rather an indirect experience was known as a supporter of the Buddhist Manchu-Mongol civilization

32) Not confirmed by the imperial court.

33) For the conflict with Potanin, see Sükei 2004 in *Ili-in soyol tüükiin materiialiin mongyol ündüsüteni tusxai emkidkel* 2004, pp. 738–743 and Zhao Tonghua 2014, pp. 125–126. Gūngajalcan's Tibetan biography composed by Skal bzang legs bshad (whose biography and function is not known) in 1905 (*rje btsun byams pa mthu stobs kun dga' rgyal mtshan gyi rnam thar* "The life-story of Rje btsun Byams pa mthu stobs Kun dga' rgyal mtshan") was also translated into Chinese (Gasanglexie 2002). Comparatively extensive research on Gūngajalcan as an active supporter of the Qing regime is being conducted in China based on Chinese sources in the First Historical Archives of China; see the monograph by Zhao Tonghua 2014.

against its heretic Muslim³⁴ opponents. For the Altai Uriankhai, Muslims were associated more with Kazakhs than with sedentary Uyghurs and Hui (Dungans), whose rebellion Gūngajalcan fought against.³⁵ Kazakhs, migrating in ever larger numbers to the Altai Uriankhai areas from the 1860s onward, and sometimes laying a violent hand on the Uriankhai, were generally apprehended by the Western Mongols as enemies.

The further rebirths of Cagaan geegen did not have any contacts with the Altai Uriankhai. Therefore, the personality of Cagaan geegen underwent a total process of mythization. The Uriankhai re-narrated their memories of the historical Cagaan geegen as a fighter against the Kazakhs. According to the oral tradition, since his previous fight with the Kazakhs was unsuccessful, he should manifest once again to take revenge on them. It was normally understood that Cagaan geegen will appear in one of his future rebirths. But as the memory of the historical Cagaan geegen faded, especially in the Mongolian state, people began to consider Cagaan geegen as a *burhan* – a godlike being who acted in the human realm only in the very ancient past, and not as a current reincarnation.

Among the Altai Uriankhai in Mongolia, narratives about Cagaan geegen share some common motifs with legends of other famous *tulku* (Mo. *huvilgaan* “reincarnation”) lineages, as well as Amarsanaa or even Chinggis Khan. For example, in the telling of S. Baldaa from Bulgan, Cagaan geegen is described as having tried to separate milk mixed with water in his childhood. At his mother’s admonition, he explains that, similarly to milk and water, as an adult he must separate the Mongols from the Kazakhs. The miraculous separation of water and milk, based on a folk etymology, is more commonly attributed to the *tulku* lineage Yalguusan geegen (“The Victorious Holiness”) in Zavhan, whose representatives are popularly called Yalgasan geegen (“The Holiness Who Separated”), but

34) The Tibetan (*kla klo*) and Mongolian (*lal*) terms were used to denote both heretics in general who did not share the same civilizational principles, and Muslims specifically.

35) Gūngajalcan actually helped the Kazakhs. In the 1860s, after the Qing-Russian Treaty of Tarbagatai, they fled their original territories ceded to Russia and found a new territory in Altai. Zhang Rong – Wang Xilong 2002, pp. 29–30.

the actualization of relating the sense of the miracle to the holy man's life mission is present only in the Uriankhai version.

neg töröldөө cagaan geegen eejteigeen baigaad eejii garaad üker saagaad üs gert oruulaad üher tavičhaad tuglaa tavij kokuulaad orood irtel ter üs usruu kiičihsen tegeed ilgaј baiј gene. eejii uurlaad yaaј baidagči. eejee namaig bičkee uurlatan bi delhei horvoodeer ergeј irehed ene halh hasag hoyor negdeј odson baih. tüüniig yaaјil baina. tüüniig salgaј baina bi. ene üsiig čini ilgaad üs us hoyariig ilgaad baihaar ter üyed bi ilgaј čidna. tüüniig bi ilgaј čidahgüi bol čidahgüi. bitgee uurla. ene cag čini döhöј yavna.

In one of his previous births, Cagaan geegen [as a child] was with his mother. The mother went out to milk cows. She brought milk to the yurt and went out again to untie the calves. In the meanwhile [Cagaan geegen] poured the milk into water and tried to separate them. His mother got angry at him, “What are you doing?” – “When I am reborn, Khalhas and Kazakhs will be mixed together. I'm trying to see how to separate them. If I can separate milk from water now, I will be able to separate them. If I cannot separate [milk from water], I will not be able to separate [Kazakhs from Khalhas]. Don't be angry at me.” This time [of Cagaan geegen] is now coming.

S. Baldaa also recounted a story about how Cagaan geegen was captured by a Kazakh leader who forced Cagaan geegen to pronounce a “vow of will” or benediction (*yerööļ*)³⁶ for him, but immediately after that betrayed him. Cagaan geegen then cursed the surrounding landscape:

modon čini humhairј odaad

usun čini tasarј odtha

Let the trees wither

and the water stream dry up!

Then Cagaan geegen raised a vow (*yerööļ*) that he will come again and take revenge when

ја dahiad modon čini huučin kebt očij urgaad

usun čini gold očij niileed

coohor morinii süül gazart hüreed

tavilhai dörööd hüreed tavilhai geј modon baina mayaan iš hiideg

36) Concerning the use of the “vow of will” (*irügel/yerööļ*) in the temporal settings of local Buddhist monastical identities, see Humphrey – Hürelbaatar 2013, pp. 22–24 (mentioned several times throughout the book).

*ter cagt bi ergej irne*³⁷

the trees grow to their former height,
 when the spring water reaches the river again,
 when the dappled horse's tail touches the ground,
 when the *Filipendula* shrub grows to stirrup's height.

This narrative clearly shares the motif of a cursed landscape present in the famous legend about Amarsanaa, the last ruler of the Dzungar Khanate.³⁸ Amarsanaa was defeated and forced to escape when the Manchu emperor is said to have cursed the river and mountain Bürgedtei where the battle had taken place in which Amarsanaa was defeated, but not seized, by the Manchu army. The legend ends with a prediction that Amarsanaa will come again and rescue the Oirat, descendants of the Dzungar Khanate, from Manchu subjection. In the early 20th century, this millenarianist expectation was used by the above-mentioned Ĵa lama Dambiiĵalcan (Бурдуков 1969, p. 67–68). However, in the Altai Uriankhai oral tradition, Dambiiĵalcan is mostly represented as an inhumane and cruel person bravely opposed by certain Uriankhai governors (Srba 2019, pp. 42–43). The role of Amarsanaa is therefore not attributed to him, and apparently transferred to Cagaan gegeen.

As mentioned in the preceding narrative, the Altai Uriankhai associate the second coming of Cagaan gegeen with a number of symbolic signs according to which people will recognize the time of his coming. The wording of these signs is quite variable, but most of them reference the symbolic colour white. Altai Uriankhai traditionally preferred to substitute the word *cagaan* (“white”) – a taboo word – by *gileen* (Khalkha *gyalaan* “shining, gleaming”). The Altai Uriankhai mention several reasons for this substitution, but one of the explanations stems from respect for Cagaan gegeen (lit. “The White Holiness”).

Balĵaa himself mentioned the two most common signs indicating the coming of Cagaan gegeen:

37) Balĵaa 16. 6. 2013 WS560925 29:43.

38) Баттогтох 1991, pp. 112–114. Баттулĵа 2006, pp. 550–553. Баттулĵа 2013, pp. 281–282.

hasgiin ger cagaan bolaad

hoi ni cagaan bolaad iim cagt ergej irne iim tüühte

When the Kazakh ger turns white

and the Kazakh sheep turn white. In such a time, he will return. Such is his history. (=Thus it must be.)

Considering the individual signs, the Altai Uriankhai have frequently reached the conclusion that the time of Cagaan gegeen's coming is close at hand. Many dappled horse's tails have reached the ground. Kazakhs have started using the same white covers on their yurts as do the Mongols. They breed white sheep, keep black dogs and so on. Both Kazakhs and Mongols have reached a time of a relative prosperity. The general sufficiency or even surplus of the items people need for everyday living recently experienced by most herders even in the traditionally impoverished Altai region is interpreted by the older generations as a time of turn – a turn which might indicate the coming of Cagaan gegeen.

But some people observed even more elusive signs indicating that the future foretold was close at hand. S. Baldaa, once when hunting in the mountains, noticed a leashed horse. While looking for the owner, the horse itself vanished, an illusion. Baldaa considered this vision to be a sign of Cagaan gegeen's coming.

*cagaan gegeen čini irehed manuusd üzegdehgüi, ceregtei irdeggüi, manuusd üzegdeh neg yum baina, ter yuu üzegdene geheer odoo barag önöödör či ene uuliin oroid an hööj baridiim uu? mal haij yavdiimuu tend yavj baihaar činii deed tald emeeltei haz-aartai haliu morin uyaatai baina, küm baidiimjig. bi ter kümünd očij hargalzna geheer kümün baihgüi, ergej ireed morin baihgüi, gertee ireed bi ene ar nurgand yavba, tend minii deed neg uyaatai haliu morin üzegdsen, küm odhaar baidgüi, temdgii ter.*³⁹

When Cagaan gegeen arrives, it will not be shown to us [clearly that he is coming], he will not come with an army, but there will be something we will see. What we will see can be compared to, for example, when you go hunting or looking for a [disappeared] cattle at the top of this mountain, and as you go there, a saddled and bridled isabelle horse is leashed above you [higher up in the hillslope]. And there will be a man. [When I personally encountered this scenery], I went to the man to meet him, but he suddenly disappeared. So I turned and the horse disappeared [too]. I came [home] and said, I was walking here on the back slope

39) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013. WS560925 33:47.

and I saw a leashed isabelle horse above me. When I went to that man, he disappeared. That is his [Cagaan gegeen's] sign.

According to a common tradition, at the time of his second coming, Cagaan gegeen will take revenge only on Kazakhs; Mongols will remain untouched. Cagaan gegeen will recognize Uriankhai households by the sign of three plain stones stacked one atop another, placed in front of the ger entrance and used for juniper incense offerings.

*cagaan gegeen es baina uu? ireed hasagiig l avniiš medejbainč. hasagaas angi amitand gar hürehgüi. oros kitad urianhai zahčın torguud gar hürehgüi. eniig l avdag nomtoi tüüih baina.*⁴⁰

As concerns Cagaan gegeen, he will strike only Kazakhs, when he comes. He will not affect any other people than Kazakhs. He will not affect Russians, Chinese, Uriankhai, Zakhchin, Torguud. In principle he will take only Kazakhs.

Batnasan (Altai sum, Bayan-Ölgii aimag), described, in a metaphorical manner, how Cagaan gegeen “grows as a stone” to be reborn in this world. Presently, his height is equal to the height of the three *sangiin čuluu* – stones for incense offerings symbolizing the protection of Uriankhai from the destruction that will be wrought by Cagaan gegeen on the Kazakhs. When Cagaan gegeen attains human height, his coming will become certain and manifest as he carries out his mission.

Čadraabal (Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii aimag) who in the 1990s frequently travelled through the Yarant-Taikeshken border checkpoint to Čingel in Xinjiang, related a tradition he learned from Uriankhai elders in Čingel. They told him that Cagaan gegeen announced his double return, once to take revenge on the Chinese, and the second time to take revenge on the Kazakhs. According to this prophecy, Cagaan gegeen came to take a revenge on Chinese who harmed him during his life; he “let them all eat from a single kettle”. This is a reference to the introduction of collective meals during the Cultural Revolution and explains the association, by the Uriankhai, of the second coming of Cagaan gegeen with Mao Zedong and his regime.

40) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013. WS560925 29:43

*yag tüünšig urid neg töröldöö čadsan cagaan gegeeniig kitad, kitad bas čadsan cagaan gegeeniig urid bas neg töröld, tegeed, čamaaig neg togoonaas hoolluulhuu neg töröldöö gej neg togoonoos hoolluulhu büh kitadiig yeröösöö gej odoo amalsan, kitadtaas öšöögöö avsan, jaraad onii üyed čini kitad yer ni neg togoonoos hoollodog baisan bišüü. ... tegeed yuu neg togoonoos hoolluulj čadsan kitadiig. mao cetun ter baisan cagaan gegeen.*⁴¹

[Similarly to the Kazakhs, also] the Chinese defeated Cagaan gegeen in one of his previous lives. He warned [the Chinese]: “In one of my future lives I will force you to eat from a single kettle.” He swore like this. And [later] he took revenge on the Chinese. In the 1960s, the Chinese used to eat from one common kettle, didn’t they? So he humiliated the Chinese by compelling them to eat from a single kettle. That Cagaan gegeen was Mao Zedong.

Among the Altai Uriankhai in Xinjiang, a song about Cagaan gegeen is known and commonly sung. The song can be interpreted ambiguously as a recollection of the historical Cagaan gegeen – it mentions Šar süm Monastery, which was historically established by Güngajalcan – as well as an expression of a belief in his second coming; it mentions:

manai eh nutagt / cagaan gegeen zalarna

To our homeland / Cagaan gegeen will come.⁴²

As seen from the quotations of the oral tradition, the highly symbolical and metaphorical perception of Cagaan gegeen in the oral tradition is significantly different from his life story as presented in the written sources (both Tibetan biographical and archive sources). The written sources related to Cagaan gegeen are numerous, but only analysed in part thus far. Nevertheless, it is clear that the historical Güngajalcan inspired the oral image of Cagaan gegeen. The Cagaan gegeen of the oral tradition, however, tends to embody the historical experience of the Altai Uriankhai,

41) Čadraabal 15. 6. 2013 WS560920 4:30–07:20.

42) Sung by Tütgiin Ĵulja (Xinjiang, Altai, Čingel) 18. 8. 2008, recorded by Buyan. The Song of Cagaan gegeen is currently unknown on the north-eastern slopes of Altai Range in Mongolia. A frequently sung song *Motley strong dun horse* (*Ereen bülcintei šarhal*) mentions the “subjects of Cagaan gegeen” (*Cagaan gegeenii šavi nar*) alongside the unusual names of unknown rulers Buji wang or Ĵji wang, which may be the forgotten sobriquets of local noyons.

Zakhchin and Torguud, and not the political decisions and military deeds of Gūngajalcan. In this context, progress in the study of written sources concerning Gūngajalcan cannot be expected to cast light onto the genesis of the oral tradition of Cagaan geegen. This is also confirmed by the fact that the oral tradition of Cagaan geegen is extremely vital up until the present day. Even today, Altai Uriankhai herders project their daily experience with neighbouring ethnic Kazakhs and their partly subconscious prospects for their community's future onto this tradition. The oral tradition of Cagaan geegen is, after all, not about the past, but about the time to come.

(2.3.) PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN THE PRESENT: PROPHECIES OF AN OLD HUNTER

Interviewing individuals who were known by the local community as good narrators, I have frequently come across explicitly formulated prophetic ideas intertwined into their personal oral histories. This use of prophetic thinking relates the time level of fulfilment of the prediction to the time period of the narrators' own lives, i.e. the present, which is the third and the last temporal pattern concerning prophetic matters in oral tradition.

As an example, I will mention the statements of S. Baldaa (1932–2015), an Altai Uriankhai herder and hunter who lived his whole life in Bulgan sum, Bayan-Ölgii aimag, and whom I had the unforgettable opportunity to visit on several occasions in 2012 and 2014. Baldaa spent his entire life as hunter and herder, did not attend school in childhood, and during his whole life stayed out of the realm of public affairs, and yet he learned to read, write, and count. In the oral tradition of his recounting, he reflected the views of people on the periphery of society, living far from and with great respect for the life of the nobility, as well as in the closest connection to the natural world around him. Baldaa's stance was one of pious respect for both the landscape with its invisible but omnipresent divine beings and the ruling circles in human society whether traditional local hereditary nobles, party chairmen or democratically elected governmental representatives.

S. Baldaa experienced a difficult childhood. His father, Sodnom, died when Baldaa was 14, and shortly thereafter all his family's livestock was captured by Kazakhs. Baldaa had to feed his family from his childhood

onward, continuing with the family tradition of professional hunting, allegedly handed down for seven generations. Sometime at the beginning of the 1940s, he encountered a prophetic text. Supposedly it was one of prophecies originally transmitted in the written form, either one attributed to Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, or a prophecy of the genre known as “stone writings” (*čilayun-u bičig*). Shortly after that, Baldaa was confronted with the militant movement of the Kazakh nationalist leader Ospan Batyr, whose marginal brigades made occasional incursions into the Bulgan river area. Based on his own life’s experiences, Baldaa formulated an idea of a temporal cosmology of irregularly but irreversibly alternating regimes and social systems.

Baldaa would begin his recounting by briefly characterizing his own life. He experienced three different socio-political regimes: in his childhood, Buddhist religion was still dominant, then he lived through the period of the people’s rule (Communism), and in his old age he witnessed democracy. Baldaa does not evaluate the relative virtues, or lack thereof, of these varying regimes. For every period, he attributed a sacral authority to state power. He considered that under every regime it was necessary to follow the protective vital energy of the state (*ulsin süld süteh*).

*dain baildaand oroogüi, gurban töröön nüür üzej baina. burhan süteen saihan serüün saihan cagt garlaa. ardiin erhtei zasag garaad erhtei zasgiig ködölmöröör tuulla. ardii odoo ardčilal garhaar odo ene tetgevert garaad ardčilalig bi üzej baina, albagüi, nam odoo ööriineen erkeer kökširj baigaa bi. jaran kürtelee allaa. odoo horin gurban jil bolj baina. ang alalgüi. ang amitai yamar č yum alalgüi.*⁴³

I’ve never been involved in a war. I have experienced three political establishments. (Literally: I saw the faces of three governments.) I was born at a time when the worship of buddhas and deities was alive. Then the people’s rule came. I passed the people’s rule [period] by labour. Finally, when the democracy came, I retired and now I observe democracy. [No longer] I have any duties; I am just aging spontaneously. By the age of sixty, I used to kill [animals while hunting]. It’s been twenty-three years since I stopped hunting. I’ve killed neither wildlife nor anything alive.

Baldaa’s view has been influenced by Buddhist eschatology which sees in the flow of time a gradual degeneration of human society. Baldaa observes indications of these future events in increasing requirements of

43) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013 video recording No. 1 03:15.

administrative control. He speaks of “examinations.” The first “examination” came in 1940s when Mongols and Kazakhs should have been legally distinguished as two nationalities. The second examination came in 1990s when the old clan names returned into use, in the case of the Uriankhai, together with the names of old banners and *sum*-units. The last impending examination will bring a war and allegedly the end of the present world.

odoo neg yumonii eeljin baina. gурvan yumonii šalgalt bolna gesen. ter dōčīn on. ter gурvan yumonii šalgalt bolna yamar yum gesen yamar yasan gedgiimči anhnii šalgalt. ter yasan үnen болна. орос, hasag, hasag bolvol hasag. mongol geheer mongol. anhnii पासपोर्ट тер. за түүний дараа šalgalt irne. yamar elknii yamar sumnii күмүүс гэж ирне. аа тер ирлээ. би хорихон elkin оorcog sumne күмүн гэж иигэж ирлээ. одоо neg šalgalt irne. за тер нариин šalgalt болна. тун нариин болна. ee yas ... ter одоо дөхөж yavna көvүүд. ene delkeed одоо дайн baildaan болhaar horвоогиин yertenč gančan мөхөж odna тер čini түүх namtaraan болhaar tegdeg болниš. ...⁴⁴

There are certain periods. It was said that three examinations would come. In that year [19]40... they asked, what is your nationality (*yasan*)? That was the first test.⁴⁵ [Since then] nationality became true [ie. everyone adhered to the nationality he claimed to be.] – Russian, Kazakh, Kazakh was proclaimed Kazakh, Mongol as Mongol, it was the first “passport” (= identification) [we got]. Then the next examination took place. To which clan (*elken*) do you belong, which “sum”? [This exam] came too.⁴⁶ I said I’m from the sum Oorcog, elken Horihon.⁴⁷ And now another examination is coming. This will be a very detailed examination,

44) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013 video recording No. 1 13:21.

45) In the Qing period, the population was recorded for tax purposes, forced labour and military levies. In the 1920s, the census was repeatedly postponed due to popular concerns about the new regime. The first official census among the Altai Uriankhai was carried out after the main migration waves in 1933 settled down. Only in 1938 were the administrative units for the Altai Uriankhai and Kazakhs in the Bulgan river basin united. That was probably the intention of Baldaa’s statement when he remarks that in early socialist Mongolia people in the countryside became more intensively familiar with other nationalities and had contacts with them.

46) In the socialist period, clan names (*urgiin ovog*) were not officially used; official use was permitted in 1997.

47) S. Baldaa is referring to the 1990s, when original family names began to be publicly used again, in the case of the Altai Uriankhai together with the family affiliation to one of the seven banners and to one of its *sum*-units.

very rigorous. It is coming, my children. When a war occurs in the world, the world will disappear in one moment. This will happen just according to its proper “life-story” [= things will happen exactly as they are predetermined to happen].

Baldaa means that the duration of every social regime has been predefined. The changing of regimes cannot be prevented. However, whilst a policy which governs its subjects carefully and responsibly can endure its assigned time, a hard and cruel policy will result into an untimely change of regime. The people’s rule, meaning the socialist regime, persisted – according to Baldaa – sixty years. Sixty years was quite a long span thanks to the “good government” which the socialist regime embodied. The time span of the democratic government and the prospective theocratic regime will be much shorter due to their harsher treatment of its citizens.

odoo ene ardčilal 35 jiliin hugacaatai odoo. 22 jil bolčaad bosoo šajin šajin garna ter tör barih nomtoi. odoo ter 30 jiliin hugacaatai. aa ter hatuu amargüi hatuu. manai ene erhtei zasag 60 jiliin hugacaatai. ene bolhaar öncin geј asraad kokšin geј asraad. ene küm hooson geј asraad. dandaa ene tetgevertei yavaad geј asarsnaas bolaad ene 80 nas хүрч байж ni ene. hatuu baisan ter töрдөөн күрдеггүй болниш. odoo 22 jil bolaad өөрчлөгдөне. odoo bosaa šajin irj barina. odoo ene ardčilal bolhaar šaraan šajin ter анги nomaar irj barina. šaraan šajin өөрснө. burhan šüteen. bosoo šajin. ter 30 jiliin hugacaatai. арчилал 35 jiliin hugacaatai. арчилал manai sain örgөөд баивал. bas ene tör kebtei bas nas urt удаад байна. atgaad өгвөөл ter 35 jiliin hugacaand хүрөхгүй болниш odoo yag bosoo šajin aa hatuu amargüi hatuu tör irne.⁴⁸

Today’s democracy will last 35 years. After 22 years a “standing religion” will appear and take over the rule. That regime will last thirty years. Oh, it will be hard, extremely hard. Our people’s rule lasted sixty years. As the regime cared for orphans, old people, poor people, it gave pensions to everyone, there are now many old people eighty years of age. If the rule was harsh, we would not reach that age. And now [democracy] will change after 22 years. The “standing religion” will come to the government. The current democracy [follows] the “yellow religion”, another [regime] will rule us through another doctrine (another religion). The “yellow religion” and buddhas will disappear. The “standing religion” will last 30 years, democracy will last 35 years. If democracy treats us well, its time will extend [similarly] as human lifespan increases. If [the regime] grasps people

48) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013 WS560925 32:15.

firmly, it will not even reach 35 years. Then the “standing religion” will come.⁴⁹ Oh, it will be a hard, extremely hard regime.

Baldaa also referred to prophetic visions he had encountered in his childhood. According to a prophecy he had heard in 1940, a comet prophesied to appear in the year of the Mouse would fall in China and bring destruction to Chinese Muslims. Baldaa recounted how he observed a comet in 1948 and that in the next year, there was a definite end to Kazakh incursions in the Mongol areas. However, the prophecy did not only predict the extinction of enemies, but also illnesses which would beset the elders. Predictions in Mongolian prophecies employ the twelve year cycle. As the twelve year cycle repeats, the predictions can be interpreted again and again to be relevant to the actual situation. This was also the case of Baldaa’s prophecy; he ascribed his own recent illness to its prediction.

bi odoo neg tüük baigaliin tüük neg keleyaa. ene cagiin cövүүн cag гэж cag baidag cagiin cövүүн cag. түүнийг би дөчин дөрвөн онд сонссон дөчин онд теgeed odoo lam nar baysan бүтүүцүүд ih baysan cagiin cövүүн cag irhed hoit үр sad yaaj amidarna гэж baysan. ter түük odoo ireh гэж baigaa ni ene. hoit үрс sadan gedeg čini hoit үр sadan hamaa boldiim yaaj meddiim ve. minii aav hariu өгч baysan бүh delhiin dayaar samragdna. ene түük delhiin dayaar bolna. hulgan жил еkilne. gesen. hulgan жил сүүлт одон garna urdaas yavaad yavaad baij kitadiin gazar сүүлт ni tasraad unah yostoi.

cagaan malhaatiig horaana, horogduulna gesen barag. ene hoyor үher өnggөрч baina, arvan dolaan жил ter үher жил ter hulgan жил ter ene odoo kokšчуудaa barna hamaa gazriin, yaaj barna, saa өvчeer barna, saa өvчин yamar өvчин geheer odaagiin daralt enүүgeer odaa kokšчуудaa barna. hamaa gazriin гэж. ter hulgan жил ter huuli түүh-iin nom deer huučin nom deer. za ternees ehileed doloон jiliin дотор коščүүд čilsen. hamaa gazriin көкšin. tegeed dan daraltaar. za ter. tehed ter hulgan жил ter сүүлт одон манai endees odoo mičin одон күрч baihad гараad bi ter cagt залуу cagt dандаа сөө аngд yavdag, ард одаад үүр caital baij. tegj baigaad өvөлjin baigaad namar arvan sard garsan одон havar гурван sard jiliij odva. hulgan жил garsan одон үher жил hitad cagaan malhaat huihu ih allaa. ter odaa ter nom baysan baihgüi yuu. ter худal биši. ter huučnii nom deer худal yum baidgüi yum sanj. odoo hoin жил болov көh nom гэж nom baij, huučna nom ter nom deer одoo dандаа saa өvчнөөр avna. gesen baina. odoo dangdaa ene arab өvчин saihan залуу залуу улсууд үheed baina үheed baina.

49) I could not find out to what the term *bosoo šašin* “standing, vertical religion” refers.

*nad хүртел ene elgenii övчин irsen baina. hoyor жил болж байна. одоо ene em ууј байна. чам шиг хүүхдүүд nadad ene уутаар авчирј байна. чам шиг neg хүүхед enиig түрh baitan геј авчирј байна. түүний ач гавијаагаар bi amid yavј байна bi. tegeed одоо ene honin жил ekileed ene arab öвчин ehilsen арван жил болж байна.*⁵⁰

Now I will tell a history, a general history.⁵¹ There is the so-called time of disasters. I heard about it in [19]44 – in [19]40, when we still had lamas, when there were a lot of old people. They worried: “When the time of disasters comes, how will [our] descendants live?” And this “history” is now coming. Then I asked how those descendants would recognise that [the time of calamities] was coming? My father replied that chaos would occur all over the world. This “history” would be fulfilled all over the world. It will start in the year of the Mouse. A comet will appear in the year of the Mouse. It will fly from south to north and in the Chinese land, its tail will break and it will fall down. It will kill many people with white caps [ie. Muslims, Hui, or Chinese]. [Calculates:] Two years of the Cow have passed, 17 years, a year of the Cow, a year of the Mouse – now old people all over the world will die. How will they die? By the disease *saa*; *saa* is the present [high] pressure.⁵² This will put an end to all old people. In the year of the Mouse – [so it stood] in those old history books. Since then (since the year of the Mouse), within seven years, old people have all died out. Old people everywhere. And all of them because of the [high] pressure. In the year of the Mouse (1948) a comet appeared in the Pleiades – at that time I was always hunting at night when I was young – [the comet] was shifting northwards and was visible until dawn. It was seen all winter. The comet appeared in autumn in October and disappeared in spring in March.⁵³ The comet appeared in the year the of the Mouse and in the year of the Cow a large number of people with white caps – Huihu – were killed. That was [exactly] what the book had predicted. It wasn’t a lie. There are no lies in the old books. Then came the year of the Sheep (2003?). There was a book called the Blue Book. In this old book it was written that everyone would die of

50) Baldaa 16. 6. 2013 video recording No. 1 09:32.

51) Baldaa understands *baigal* “nature” as including everything surrounding a human, the whole world. *Baigal* does not mean a contrast to the environment transformed by people. To avoid an erroneous understanding of the term “natural history” in English, I prefer a free translation “general history”; i.e. “history of the whole world”.

52) Paralysis. Tib. *gza’* corresponds to Mongolian *garig öвчин (garay ebedчин)* – disfunctions of various organs. For its characteristics in traditional Mongolian medicine, see Баавгай – Болдсайхан 1990, p. 158.

53) Perhaps the Eclipse Comet C/1948 V1.

saa. And now pretty young people are dying of *arab*⁵⁴ disease. Even I have suffered from a liver disease since the last two years. Now I take these pills. They're brought [to me] by children like you. One child like you brought me this [ointment] to smear on it. Thanks to that I am still alive. Since the year of Sheep (2003), the disease *arab* has started, it is already ten years [in 2013]. ...⁵⁵

Baldae's favourite prophecy was the famous story of Seventy-liar, widely present in the Oirat oral literature. Usually understood as a mere entertaining story, Baldae reinterpreted *Dalan hudalčiin tūūh* ("A Story about a Seventy-liar") as a prediction of the future – a prophecy about the time of great calamities (*цагийн цөвүүн цаг*). Some of the predictions are obviously referring to the future in the sense of the basic Buddhist eschatological expectancies: the time of great calamities will be marked by famine, droughts and everything will diverge from the normal order. However, some of the interpretations based on the lies of Seventy-Liar does not so much predict the future but instead foretell a present reality (Ardener 1989 cited by Empson 2006, p. 153). The famous opening sentence that Seventy-Liar was born earlier than his father and set off the very next day was explained by Baldae as a metaphor for the contemporary experience of children knowing more and orientating themselves better in the modern world than their parents. Also, the scene in the telling of Seventy-Liar of a cuckoo appearing on the snow attracted the attention of the hunter Baldae, as he was carefully and with great anxiety observing irregularities in nature. Baldae's interpretation of Seventy-Liar's "lies" thus include a large variety of up-to-date predictive warnings concerning climatic threats including drought, unpredictable weather patterns, and resulting phenomena such as famine, or even the precipitous state of knowledge in this context.

54) Supposedly a corrupted form of the Russian loanword *рак* "cancer".

55) Baldae 16. 6. 2013 video recording No. 1 09:32.

(2.4.) A PROPHECY ABOUT FUTURE AS AN APPEAL TO THE PRESENT

A final example is a complex and elaborate prophetic vision of the future development of the world which I encountered in views of N. Böhsuuri, a Zakhchin herder living in Üyenč sum. His predictions of the coming future differ from the previous examples not through its temporal patterns but through its urgency with which it seeks to speak to the minds and consciences of contemporaries and to influence their decisions.

Böhsuuri, born in 1964, has passed his whole life living in a remote valley, Uliast, but his deep thoughts have always made him significantly different from his neighbours. The experience of the change of social conditions in the early 1990s led him to the necessity of “examining history and enquiring about the essence of religion and the origin of the world.” At the age of 44, he wrote and printed a concise book entitled “Method for humanity on how to collectively attain the fate of eternal life” (*Delhiin бүх хүн төрөлхтөн бид hamtdaa mönh nasnii zayaand хүрөх арга зам*), rewritten in 2017 as a more detailed and systematic treatise entitled “The Truth of This World” (*Ene delhiin үнэн*) (Бөхсүүр 2008, Бөхсүүр 2017). In addition to his detailed theories about the origin of the world, the origin of some of its principal nationalities (Mongols, Chinese, Kazakhs, Russians and Americans), their languages and writing systems, based on a syncretic mixture of Oirat folklore, local legends, parts of heroic epic cycles, popular Buddhist knowledge and miscellaneous elements from Kazakh Islam and Christian concepts, Böhsuuri concluded with a prophetic prediction of the future.

odo ene arvan hoyor on delhii melhii öөрлөгднө barina geј yariad baigaaštee. ter bolvol oдаa bi bolvol sudalgaagaas čamd helhed öөрлөгдөhgүйi šiidverlegdne. одoo күн öөree ene түүhees šiidverlegdne. yaagaad irehdeer одoo bid nart hoyor zuun dolaan jiliin hugacaa baina, hoyor zuun dolaan jil. hoyor zuun dolaan jil gedeg bol či bid hoyriin hүүhed, caaš ni hүүhdiin hүүhed, түүnii hүүhed geed dolaan үye zamnah hugacaa baina. ene dolaan үye zamnah hugacaand bid ene delhiig kapitalismaas tailna. kapitalizm gedeg niigem одoo delhiin бүх улs oron köтлөгдсөн. одoo socialism č baihgүйi, peodalism č baihgүйi болson. ene niigem bol одoo yamar negen baigaliig ih hemjeegeer uulgalan ašigladag, benzeen gargaј avdag, нүүrs gargaј avdag, alt gargaј avdag, mašin hiideg, oncoc hiideg, tengert gargadag, hort utaa бүteedeg,

aatmiin ayuul, nitronii ayuul, cömiin ayuul, ih olon ayuul nüürlesen niigem. negdügeert. hoyordugaart küniig šunald kölčihsen. möngö gesen iim bodol. önöödör mongol č baig, hasag č baig, emeerik č baig, bügd l adilhan, negen üzeltei bolčihson, bid adilhan negen zayaatai, negen jargaltai, bas adilhan jargaltai. eniig arilgadag niigem bol ter yertenciig tögs tailsnii daraa kün törlöhtön maš öndör högüleer tailna. arviŋgiin niigem gedeg yumaar. odoo möngö tögrög geŋ huvcas hunar ene bügd ünegüi bolna, ünegüi niigmeer tailagdna, tegŋ tailagdah tiim cag irne. bid odoo hoyor zuun jiliin hugacaa baigaa. hoyor zuun jiliin daraa bid nariig hün gedeg zayaatniig čötgör šig mönkiin zayaagaas hashuu? deešee gargahuu gedgeen ezen šiidne. bid önöödör hariuclagatai baijeeŋ ter jargalt hürne, hariuclaggüi bol bid bas jargal baihgüi yum baina.⁵⁶

... Now people frequently tell that the world will change in [20]12 or like that. As far as my own exploration is concerned, the [world] will not change, but it will be judged. Now, man will be judged by this history, because now we have a 207-year probation time. These 207 years are the time for our children and their children's children and their children to pass through seven generations. After these seven generations, this world gets out of capitalism. Every country in the world is now managed by the so-called capitalist society. Now we have neither socialism nor feudalism. This society is largely exploiting nature – exploiting oil, mining coal, mining gold, producing cars, producing planes, sending spacecrafts, producing toxic smoke, it is a society facing many threats – nuclear threat, neutron [bomb] threat, nuclear threat, this is the first. The second is that people are bound by desire. The main idea is – money. Whether Mongol, Kazakh or American, everyone has become supporters of one opinion. We have a similar social destiny, only one happiness, we all have similar luck. Society that can purify it will come only when this world will be completely rid of [capitalism]. It will get rid of it by the way of great progress. It will be the so-called abundance society. Then what is today for money, clothes and food, everything will be for free. The [present problems] will be solved by this free society. Until we are liberated, we have 207 years of history ahead of us. After 207 years, the Lord (Ezen) will decide whether to exclude us who were born as human beings – from an eternal destiny as devils (*čötgör*), or whether he will let us move higher. If we are responsible today, we will achieve this happiness, if we are irresponsible, there will certainly be no happiness.

Böhsuuri's way of thinking is firmly rooted in Oirat oral tradition, its temporal patterns, and the perception of correlations, including the cosmological connection of man, nature, and other forms of existence. His thinking, however, breaks away from the notion of the immutability of

56) Böhsuuri 29. 7. 2011 WS560481 19:50–22:11.

general development given by temporal cosmology,⁵⁷ reflected in his urgent call for human ethical, social and environmental responsibility; among other things, this call consciously and confidently rationalizes the importance of maintaining pastoral and agricultural lifestyles as the most responsible livelihood for mankind in the long term.

(3.) Conclusion

History (*tüüh*) in the understanding of local nomads does not only refer to the past, but also to the present and to future. Narrators of the local oral tradition express their belief that historical events experienced, for example, during the 20th century, as well as in the present and future do not depend only on the decisions and acts of individuals, but are similarly affected by ancestors' past positive or negative deeds, the meritorious acts of wise lamas and local holy men, the geomantic characteristics (*gazriin šinj*) of the landscape inhabited by the community, the course of events in the parallel world of local deities and spirits (*Altain ezen, lus savdag*), or by the flow of time itself (*cagiin erh*); all of these are difficult to understand but potentially knowable from sacred scriptures (both canonical or apocryphal), which are, in turn, trusted as infallible because "in old books there are no lies" (*huučnii nomd hudal baihöii*).

The aforementioned examples from oral tradition and its recent application in the current life of people in the Bulgan river valley show that history is understood as a predetermined program according to which the flow of events continues. Narratives concerning predictions for the future in the local oral tradition exemplify several temporal patterns of using prophecy:

1. Past prophecies can be used when a local community tries to understand the reasons for its historical experiences. Thus, the geomantic prediction concerning disasters taking place one hundred years after the

57) The temporal cosmology of popular narrative texts common in Mongolia of the late premodern period with references to the oral tradition is subject of my article "A History for the Common People: Chronological concepts in popular Mongolian texts of the 18th and 19th centuries," currently under preparation.

coming of Torguud to the Bulgan River was interpreted as the hidden imminent cause of the migratory movements of the chaotic 1930s.

2. A prophecy can express a historical injustice felt by a community or the grievance issuing from its historical experience. The prophecy of the second coming of Cagaan geegen reflects the desire to resolve ongoing tensions between the Mongols and Kazakhs.

3. Political and social developments in the 20th century were reflected in the background of popular Buddhist temporal cosmology. The prophetic imaginations of the hunter Baldaa represent popular reinterpretations of written prophecies, as well as an attempt to bring new perspectives to the present based on careful observation of changes in society and the world.

4. Zakhchin Böhsuuri's predictions of the end of capitalism and judgment of the world demonstrate the recent hybridism of religious ideas, but more importantly, they reflect the fears of a responsible and highly conscious nomad concerning further social and ecological developments.

According to these examples, I conclude that it is possible to recognize several temporally differentiated utterances of prophecy in the oral narratives: prophecies considered as fulfilled in the past, prophecies expected to be fulfilled in the future, and prophecies said to be fulfilled in the present. *Tüüh* – “history”, a process which can be predicted – encompasses the past, present, and future. The significance of prophecies can be accordingly interpreted as an attempt to explain the important historical events and experiences of the local community, resolve problematic relations between different ethnic and religious groups, or to find one's way in a changing society. A prophetic view of the future in Oirat nomadic society can even lead to a responsible self-appreciation of environmentally sustainable and community-oriented nomadic pastoralism.

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Transmission and Spreading of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* to China, Tibet and Mongolia

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SUMMARY: The Buddhist sacred text known as the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* (Skr. *Mahāmokṣa sūtra*) has spread over a wide geographical area as an essential text in East Asian Buddhist countries. The collections of local monasteries and libraries, as well as international collections, preserve different versions of this three-chaptered sacred text. Though it has not yet been translated into English, it is often referenced especially in the studies of after-death rites. The present article is a brief introduction to the content of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, a short description of the means and routes of its spread to China, Tibet, and Mongolia,¹ a clarification of its originality, translations and commentaries, and old and current practices. The research was based on philological investigation and fieldwork.

0. Introduction

The complete name of the *sutra*, known in brief as the *Great Liberation*, is the *Holy Great Liberation Mahāyāna Sūtra, Which Spread in all Directions for Beings to Attain Buddhahood through the Way of Cleansing Defilements through Repentance*.² Mongolians and Tibetans have traditionally termed it in an abbreviated fashion as *Tarva Chenpo*³ or *Tarva*. Its Sanskrit

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- 1) Mongolia, in this case, refers to the Mongolian cultural area including present-day Mongolia as well as the areas inhabited by the Mongols in China and Russia.
 - 2) Tib. 'Phags pa thar pa chen po phyogs su rgyas pa 'gyod tshangs kyis sdig sbyangs te sangs rgyas su 'grub par rnam par bkod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo, Mong. *Qutuy-tu yekede tonilyayči jüg-üü-tür delgeregsen yasiyudan gemsiküiber kilinčes-i arilyayad burqan bolyan bütügeküy-e teyin böged jokiyaysan neretü yeke kölgen sudur.*
 - 3) Tib. *Thar pa chen po.*

title is *Mahāmokṣa sūtra*, while in English it is generally known as the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*.

According to East Asian Buddhist tradition, mentioned for instance in the Mongolian Kanjur, the Buddha Śākyamuni (CE 560–480) delivered the teaching of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* during his journey when approaching the Śāla tree before his *parinirvāṇa*.⁴ Later, his words were noted down as a *sūtra* in Sanskrit, and from India, the cradle of Buddhism, the *sūtra* spread to China, Tibet, Mongolia, Japan, and other East Asian countries.

In the West, its Mongolian translation was first transcribed and published by a group of Hungarian scholars in the 1960s,⁵ which has been studied or quoted by a handful of scholars ever since.⁶

The *Sūtra of Great Liberation* consists of three chapters. Their contents elaborate upon the Three Jewels, the Three Vehicles, the Way of the Bodhisattva, Emptiness, the purification of defilements, and several other essential teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The *sūtra* clearly reflects the Mahāyāna views on liberation through explaining the causes and conditions that allow for the release from worldly pleasures that cause suffering and from *samsāra*, the continuous cycle of life, death, and reincarnation, to attain *nirvāṇa*. It is likely that the Buddhist doctrinal teachings and philosophical viewpoints of the *sūtra* lay behind its spread and popularity.

1. Transmission of the *Sūtra* to China

As will be detailed below, translations from various Sanskrit versions of the original text appeared in China, where Chinese authors further expanded and modified its content.

In Chinese, the *sūtra* was originally called *Da tong fang guang huaihui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing* 大通方广忏悔灭罪庄严成佛经 (“*The Sūtra of Supreme Penetration and Diffusion to Attain Buddhahood through the Way of Cleansing Defilements through Repentance*”) with no mention

4) Mongolian Kanjur, Eldeb, Vol. 23, fol. 251a.

5) Róna-Tas 1967.

6) For instance A. Bareja-Starzyńska, O. Kápolnás, Zs. Majer, D. Wojahn.

of the the words “Great Liberation”. The abbreviated Chinese translation of the title, *Sheng da jietuo jing* (圣大解脱经 “*The Sacred Sūtra of Great Liberation / Deliverance*”) appeared only recently, after 2000.

Apart from the Golden Light Sūtra (Skr. *Suvarṇaprabhā sūtra*, Tib. *Gser 'od*, Mong. *Altangerel*),⁷ the *Sūtra of the Great Liberation* was the most powerful *sūtra* of repentance in the 6th century China. Emperor Wendi⁸ of the Chen dynasty composed a *sūtra* entitled *The Repentance of the Great Liberation*⁹ in the mid-6th century which has remained in religious use up to today. Moreover, a Chinese-language version of the *sūtra* written in 590 was discovered in one of the caves in Dunhuang in the early 20th century.

Toward the end of the 7th century, when Buddhism became the subject of repression in China during which the so-called “false *sūtras*” were all burnt, the tradition of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* ceased. As Feichangfang (费长房) of the Sui Dynasty remarked in his *Notes on the Three Jewels*¹⁰ as early as in 597, “People of the world suspect that the title of the “*The Sūtra of Supreme Penetration and Diffusion to attain Buddhahood through the way of Cleansing Defilements through Repentance*” is false.”¹¹ The Tang Dynasty master Dao Xuan (道宣, 596–667) mentioned in his compilation in 664 that “*the Book Index of the Great Tang* stated that “*The Sūtra of Supreme Penetration and Diffusion to attain Buddhahood through the way of Cleansing Defilements through Repentance*” was a false *sūtra*.”¹² Subsequently, Mingquan 明佺 in his *Index of Sūtras compiled by the Wu-Zhou Dynasty*¹³ listed the *sūtra* as one of the false or apocryphal *sūtras* during the reigning period of Empress Wu Zetian.¹⁴ Consequently, the tradition of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* came to an end.

7) In the early volume entitled *Guang hong ming ji* 广弘明集.

8) Chen Wen Di 陈文帝; the name of this emperor was Chen Qian 陈蒨 (522–566; reigned 559–566).

9) The *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was rendered as *Da tong fang guang jing* 大通方广经 in Chinese. The repentance *sūtra* was called *Da tong fang guang chan* 大通方广忏.

10) *Li dai san bao ji* 历代三宝记.

11) *Shi ren wei yi* 世人为疑.

12) In the volume *Datang neidian lu* 大唐内典录.

13) *Wu Zhou kan zhong jing mulu* 武周勘定众经目录, dating from the year 695.

14) Wu Ze Tian 武则天 (624–705) – Chinese empress, reigned in 690–705.

However, the *sūtra* did not disappear entirely, as it remained hidden in the caves of Dunhuang. Roughly two decades after its discovery at the beginning of the 20th century, it was reprinted in Japan as part of the 85th volume of the *Taishō Revised Tripiṭaka*.¹⁵ According to the information provided in its second or middle chapter, the *sūtra* was written in the 10th year of the Kaihuang era of the Yandi Emperor of the Sui Dynasty, in other words in 590. Furthermore, a revised version of the *sūtra* was published in 2000 in Beijing as in-house material, along with additions and corrections.¹⁶ As three folios were missing from the second chapter of the original manuscript, they were reconstructed from the *sūtras* preserved in stone in the walls of the Fang Shang caves in Beijing, more precisely from three sections of a stone monument that contained the *sūtra*, as well as sections drawn from a xylographic Tibetan version of the *sūtra* printed in Labrang Monastery.¹⁷

Although this *sūtra* was not used in China for several centuries, its translations continued to live in the neighboring countries. A Chinese version of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* reached Japan. While the practise of the *sūtra* did not become widespread there, the monk Yong Zhao 永超 mentioned the existence of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* with a commentary in 1754 in his book entitled *Index of Spreading of Religion in the East*.¹⁸

All sections of the early Chinese translation of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* can truly be considered as a remarkable and melodic verbal creation: it is a significant achievement of early Chinese translated verbal art. Unfortunately, the name of the translator and the date of the translation are unclear.

15) *Da zheng xin xiu da zang jing / Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, dating from 1924–1934.

16) *Da tong fang guang chanhui miezui zhuang yan chengfo jing* 大通方广忏悔灭罪庄严成佛经, in brief, *The Sūtra of Great Liberation, Sheng da jie tuo jing* 圣大解脱经.

17) Interestingly, the three sections of the *sūtra* carved into stone in the Fang Shang caves precisely match the sections that were missing from the version of the cave in Dunhuang. In this case, these two caves have become justly renowned throughout the world for their preservation of the spiritual heritage of Buddhism.

18) *Dong yu chuan deng mulu* 东域传灯目录, No. 2183 in the Japanese Canon.

If one scrutinizes and compares the Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chinese versions of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, there are almost no differences in their meaning. However, attention should be drawn to the verse in the middle section of the last chapter of the Chinese original, which contains an extra verse:

我等今者 稽首过去 未来现在 三世诸佛
Wo deng jin zhe/ qi shou guo qu/ wei lai xian zai/ san shi zhu fo/
 亦复归命 释迦文佛 稽首八万 四千法藏
Yi fu gui ming/ shi jia wen fo/ qi shou ba wan/ si qian fa zang/
 亦复归命 诸经法 稽首过去 维摩文殊
Yi fu gui ming/ zhu yu jing fa/ qi shou guo qu/ wei mo wen shu/
 亦复归命 多闻大智 阿难舍利 稽首无学
Yi fu gui ming/ duo wen da zhi/ a nan she li/ qi shou wu xue/
 五分法身 亦复归命 始学初因 稽首已讫¹⁹
Wu fen fa shen/ yi fu gui ming/ shi xue chu yin/ qi shou yi qi/

The translation of this verse reads as follows:

We pay homage to, and take refuge in all the Buddhas of the three times:

Past, future, and present.

We vow allegiance to Buddha Śākyamuni.

We prostrate to the 84,000 *sūtras*.

We vow allegiance to all the other sacred *sūtras*.

We prostrate to Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī.

We vow allegiance to Ānanda and Śāriputra of great erudition and wisdom,

We vow allegiance to “those no longer in learning” (*aśaikṣa*) and to the five Dharmakāyas.

We again vow allegiance [to the Buddha] as we learned as the first cause.

Hereby, the veneration is completed.

19) *Da tong fang guang chanhui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing* 大通方广忏悔灭罪庄严成佛经, Beijing 2000, Vol. 3, p. 27.

In other words, an extra stanza is present in the Chinese version that does not exist in the Mongolian and Tibetan versions, which would seem to have been added by the Chinese translators. (It seems that it was omitted by Jinamitra and subsequent translators, see details below, as a result of the comparison with the Sanskrit original.)

After 2000, when the Chinese-language *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was reprinted, it intensively spread in China, both as an object of religious veneration and a subject for scholarly discussions. In 2005, the Buddhist master Zhi Miao 智妙 gave teachings based on the *sūtra* with commentaries which, being filmed live, reached many people. The Buddhist master Chang Kong 常空 performed the same in 2010.

2. Transmission of the *Sūtra* to Tibet

The translator and the date of translation of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* into Tibetan are unknown. The Tibetan Kangyur, however, state that “Jinamitra (Tib. Dzi na mi tra, 9th century), who was a senior abbot in India, and interpreter Yeshe De *paṇḍita* (Tib. Ye shes sde, 9th century) inscribed and edited the text.”²⁰ The written records state that Yeshe De compared the text with the Sanskrit original. However, Jinamitra and Yeshe De likely may not have been the actual translators. It can well be presumed that the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was translated before Jinamitra arrived in Tibet, in the period starting with the reign of Songtsen Gampo (Tib. Srong btsan sgam po, 617–650) to the reign of Ralpacan (Tib. Khri Ral pa can, 815–838).

Following the tradition, the Tibetan versions of every *sūtra* translated from Sanskrit begin with the words *rgya gar skad du* (‘in the language of India’), followed by the title of the given *sūtra* in Sanskrit, then followed by the phrase *bod skad du* (‘in the Tibetan language’), after which the Tibetan title of the *sūtra* is given. In the case of the Tibetan Kangyur, this tradition can be regarded as offering confirmation that most of the Tibetan *sūtras* were translated from Sanskrit. In the very few cases when

20) Tib. *rgya gar gyi mkhan po dzi na mi tra dang zhus chen gyi lo tsa ba ba ye shes sdes zhus te gtan la phab pa'o.*

the *sūtras* were translated from Chinese, we find at the beginning the phrase *rgya nag skad du* ('in the Chinese language'), followed by the title of the *sūtra* in Chinese, then followed by the title of the *sūtra* in Tibetan. Interestingly, the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, which is part of the Tibetan Kangyur, mentions only the Tibetan name of the *sūtra* at the head of the text, giving us no evidence towards the language of its original.

If we, however, examine different handwritten versions of the Tibetan *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, it is possible to determine clearly that they were translated from Chinese. Examining the xylographic editions of the Kangyur published in the monasteries of Narthang, Chone, Derge, and Lhasa, we find in the colophons of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* the wording: "A Chinese translation of seven hundred and twelve *ślokas*; two sections and hundred and twelve *ślokas*."²¹ The colophon contains a similar phrase in the separate xylographic edition of Labrang Monastery. This evidence demonstrates that the *Tibetan Sūtra of Great Liberation* was translated from a Chinese original.

If we compare the Tibetan manuscript versions of the *sūtra*, we do not encounter discernible differences, hence it can be assumed that they were all translated from the same Chinese original. In this way, we may state that the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was translated from Chinese to Tibetan at an earlier date, and Jinamitra and Yeshe De, comparing the translation with the Sanskrit original, simply edited and verified the text. In a few instances involving different Tibetan versions, as well as at the beginning of the Mongolian translation, the name of the *sūtra* is written in Sanskrit, which might be the result of a later edition.

The *Sūtra of the Great Liberation* spread widely in Tibet and became established as one of the three great *sūtras* of liberation of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.²² In both the Nyingma and Gelug traditions, many lamas revered this *sūtra*: they studied and taught it, and even meditated upon it. Lay Tibetans venerated the *sūtra* and recited it as a *khandai* (Tib.

21) Tib. *rgya nag gi 'gyur sho lo ka bdun brgya rtsa bcu gnyis ta bam po gnyis dang sho lo ka brgya bcu gnyis*.

22) The Tibetan Book of the Dead or *Bardo Thödol* (Tib. *bar do thos grol*, 'Liberation in the Intermediate State Through Hearing') is the work best known by Western scholars.

kha 'don), often even turning prayer wheels which contained the *dhāraṇīs* (*mantras*) of the *sūtra*.

Several different manuscripts of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* existed in Tibet. In terms of the xylographic editions, the Narthang Kangyur printed in 1320, the Derge Kangyur from 1737, the Chone Kangyur from 1753, and the Lhasa Kangyur printed in 1933 all contain versions of the *sūtra*.

In Tibet, certain Panchen Lamas and other Buddhist scholars composed and compiled *sūtras* related to the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, and the subtle and deep teachings of the *sūtra* were diffused far and wide in the Tibetan lands. According to our present knowledge, the following *sūtras* were composed based on the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* in Tibet:

1. The 6th reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, Lobzang Palden Yeshe (Tib. Blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes, 1738–1780) wrote a ritualistic compilation entitled *Method for Reading the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.²³ It was included in his collected works (Tib. *gsung 'bum*) as an addendum to the xylographic edition of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* of Kumbum Monastery.

2. The 9th reincarnation of the Panchen Lama, Lobzang Thubten Chökyi Nyima (Tib. Blo bzang thub bstan chos kyi nyi ma, 1883–1937) composed the *sūtra* entitled *Words of Supplication on Composing the Precious Discourses to the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.²⁴

3. The Third Gungtang, Konchok Tenpai Dronme (Tib. Dkon mchog bstan pa'i sgron me, 1762–1823) composed a commentary entitled *A Detailed Account on the Method of Recitation of the Great Sūtra of Liberation*.²⁵

4. The Third Tukwan, Lobsang Chokyi Nyima (Tib. Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, 1737–1802) wrote a text entitled *Detailed Commentary on the Elimination of Errors for Foolish Mouths when Invoking the Sūtra of Great Liberation*,²⁶ which is a part of his collected works.

23) Tib. *Mdo sde thar pa chen po bklags thabs bzhugs so*.

24) Tib. *Mdo sde thar pa chen po'i glegs lam rin po che bzhengs dus kyi smon tshig*.

25) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i 'don thabs mdo nyid kyi dgongs pa ji ltar ba bzhin du rgyas bar bkod pa bzhugs so*.

26) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i mdo 'don pa'i cho ga'i 'khrul sel blun po'i kha la rgyas 'debs zhes bya ba bzhugs so*.

5. Karma Chakme (Tib. Kar ma chags med, 1613–1678) wrote the Counsel for *the Sūtra of Great Liberation, Small Notations by Means of Blissful Prayer*.²⁷

6. Namkha Sengge (Tib. Nam mkha' seng ge, 1712–1780) composed the work *Simplified and Arranged Symbols of the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.²⁸

7. Lobsang Trinley Tenpa Gyatso (Tib. Blo bzang 'phrin las bstan pa rgya mtsho, 1849–1904) composed the work *Method for Reciting the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.²⁹

8. Ngawang Yontan Zangpo (Tib. Ngag dbang yon tan bzang po, 1929–2002) composed the work entitled *Words of Supplication for the Colophon of the Sūtra of Great Liberation of the Basket of True Meaning*.³⁰

9. Jampa Jugney (Tib. Byams pa 'byung gnas, 19th century) wrote the work entitled *Summary of Symbols and Meanings of the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.³¹

10. Namkha Jigme (Tib. Nam mkha' 'jigs med, 1597–1650) wrote the work entitled *Manner of the Unfathomable Sūtra of Great Liberation*.³²

11. Lobsang Choejor Lhundrub (Tib. Blo bzang chos 'byor lhun grub, 1857–1900) composed the work entitled the *Transcendent Vehicle of Brahma, Summarized Precious Recitation and Ritual of the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.³³

12. Khachö Wangpo (Tib. Mkha' spyod dbang po, 1350–1405) wrote the work entitled *Ritual for Generation of Mind for Supreme Enlightenment of the Guru, the Unfathomable Sūtra of Great Liberation*.³⁴

13. Lobsang Damchoi Gyatso (Tib. Blo bzang dam chos rgya mtsho, 1865–1917) composed the work entitled *Instructions in Performing the*

27) Tib. *Bde smon gyis zin bris nyung nga thar pa chen po'i lam ston.*

28) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i mtshan phyogs gcig tu bsgrigs ba zhes bya ba bzhugs so.*

29) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i klog thabs.*

30) Tib. *Nges don sde snod thar pa chen po'i par byang smon tshig.*

31) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i mdo'i mtshan dang don bsdus pa gyi yang zhun.*

32) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i gzhal med du bzhugs pa'i tshul.*

33) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i mdo sde rin po che bklag cho ga mdor bsdus nges legs tshangs pa'i shing rta.*

34) Tib. *Byang chub kyi mchog du sems bskyed pa'i cho ga bla ma thar pa chen po'i gzhal med.*

*Ritual for Glorious Sūtra of Great Liberation, the Universal Medicine of the Clearing of One Hundred Misdeeds and Failings.*³⁵

3. Transmission of the Sūtra to Mongolia

Among the Mongols, the *Yeke-de tonilyayči sudur* or *Tarba čenbo* served as the subject of veneration, study and meditation across several generations. This text emerged as one of the most widespread Mahāyāna sūtras in Mongolia, absorbed and assimilated into the culture, the life and the after-death beliefs of the Mongols. Several rites and rituals became associated with this sūtra's teachings such as the *Tarva* assembly (Khal. *Tarva khurakh*); the Passing through the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva tuuluulakh*), the Recitation of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva khandanlakh*); the Veneration of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva shütekh*); the Turning of the Prayer Wheel of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarviin khüрд ergüülekh*); and the Translation, copying, and printing of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva orchuulakh, khuulakh, barluulakh*), etc. What follows here is a brief explanation of these practices:

Tarva Assembly (Khal. *Tarva khurakh*): Ceremonies are held regularly in Mongolian temples to chant the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*. The recitation belongs to the greatest events of the year, lasting for seven days and nights without interruption.

Passing through the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva tuuluulakh*): the recitation of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* in its full length. Since the *Tarva* is mainly recited for the favourable rebirth of the deceased ones, Mongolians traditionally recite it during the 49-day period after death.

Permanent Recitation of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva khandanlakh*): several monks recite the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* as their permanent prayer invocation (Khal. *aman unshlaga*, 'mouth recitation'). Certain laypersons, predominantly in the older generation, occasionally term it 'Overcoming Hell via Recitation of the *Tarva*'.

Veneration of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarva shütekh*): the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* is ritually brought to someone's home (Mong. *jala-* literally 'to

35) Tib. *Dpal ldan thar pa chen po'i cho ga ji ltar bya ba'i tshul sdig ltung nad brgya sel pa'i sman gcig.*

invite') and is invoked and venerated as a sacred object. Some well-to-do practitioners ordered manuscripts of the *sūtra* written in gold or with the powder of the 'nine precious jewels' (a mixture of powdered pearls, coral, turquoise, lasurite, gold, silver, iron, copper and nacre) and venerated them at their homes. Versions of the *sūtra* written in gold or with the nine precious jewels form a unique part of Mongolian cultural heritage, demonstrating the intensity of veneration of Mongolian people towards Buddhism.

Turning the Prayer Wheel of the *Tarva* (Khal. *Tarviin khüird ergüülekh*): the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, or at least its root *mantra*, is frequently placed inside prayer wheels. Often, the *mantra* is also placed in small hand-held prayer wheels (Khal. *gar khüird, gar khorol*). When the prayer wheel is turned, it is said to bring the same benefit as if the whole *sūtra* is recited. Prayer wheels with the *mantra* of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* are especially popular among the elderly Mongols.

In addition, a noteworthy body of intriguing habitual expressions, stemming from the doctrine and teachings of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, as well as from a profound comprehension of its meaning, have over time emerged in the Mongolian language. Examples of such phrases include, e.g., 'the dry hell of the Great Liberation,' 'the 500 *burqans* [deities] of the Great Liberation,' 'to overcome hell by reciting the *Tarva*,' 'thousand *moloms* [prayers], thousand *Tarvas*,' as well as the saying 'If you ride a fat horse, you won't suffer on the way / If you venerate the *Tarva Chenbo*, you won't suffer in hell'. Many Mongolians bear the first name of *Tarva*, as well as many Buddhist temples including the name of the *sūtra* in such designations as *Tarvalin Temple* and *Tarvachenbolin Monastery* (Tib. *thar pa chen po gling*).³⁶

Five Mongolian translations of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* are known at the present state of research. However, it is currently impossible to provide an exact figure regarding its manuscript and xylographic versions. Studying the colophons of different ritual texts and versions of the *sūtra*, it is obvious that mainly the Mongols sponsored translations, printing, and creation of commentaries concerning the *sūtra*.

36) E.g. a famous monastery of the Khalkha noble Lu gün, bearing the name *Tarvachembuulin*, once existed in Battsengel district, Arkhangai province.

Clerical figures who translated the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* into Mongolian include Ayushi *güüshi* (16th–17th centuries) of the Kharchins; Gungaa Odser *paṇḍita* (early 17th century); the Khalkha translator Altangerel *upāsaka* (a layman who took religious vows) (early 17th century); the Oirat monk scholar Zaya Paṇḍita Namkhajamts (1599–1662), and others. As for the latest version in the Mongolian language, the translation of Gungaa Odser *paṇḍita* was edited and re-translated in 1992 by the *shavran* master (Tib. *zhabs drung*) Jamyan Danpel Nyam (Tib. 'Jam dbyangs bstan 'phel nyi ma, 1925–1999) at the Green Tārā Temple in Alasha district, Inner Mongolia.

Although the translation of Ayushi *güüshi* (16th century, creator of letters for Sanskrit transcription in the Mongolian script) does not mention the Tibetan original, the statement ‘With the Abbot (*Shireet güüshi*), I translated the Tibetan Kangyur into Mongolian’³⁷ provides a historical indication that the original version of the *sūtra* was Tibetan. Furthermore, in the colophon of the translation by Gungaa Odser, the statement ‘A Chinese translation of seven hundred and twelve *ślokas*, two sections and hundred and twelve *ślokas*’³⁸ closely resembles the statement found in the Tibetan Kangyur, thus confirming that both these translations were made from the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* available in the Tibetan Kangyur. In the biography (Khal. *namtar*, Tib. *rnam thar*) of Zaya Paṇḍita entitled *Moonlight* (Khal. *Sarnii gerel*), there are many references to his translating Tibetan *sūtras* into Mongolian. It is also clear that Altangerel *upāsaka* translated the *sūtras* from Tibetan originals, as confirmed by the following verse in the colophon: ‘Altangerel *upāsaka* of many languages (Mong. *tel kele-tü*) has redacted and comprehended many Tibetan manuscripts as far as he could, rendering them in Mongolian dialect.’³⁹ Therefore, we can state that all the four Mongolian masters who translated the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* into Mongolian made their translations from Tibetan manuscripts.

The version of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* translated by Gungaa Odser *paṇḍita* was produced as a xylographic print. The Mongolian printed

37) Жамбадорж 2006.

38) Mongolian Kanjur, Eldeb, Vol. 24, fol. 314b.

39) *Tel keletü Altan gerel ubasi: töbed-ün olan eke bičig-üd-i tokiyalduyulju: tusalaju medegsen-iyen činege-ber mongyol-un ayalyu-dur: tegüsken orčiyulbai bi:*

Kanjur includes this translation. It was later produced as xylograph as a single *sūtra*-blockprint even in 1650, 1708, 1711, 1715, 1725, 1729, as well as in 1925 and 1926. The monasteries where the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was printed included Songzhusi 嵩祝寺 in Beijing, the Beijing Commission of Mongolian Writing, Erdene Zuu Monastery in Mongolia, Agiin Datsan Monastery in Buryatia, as well as many other temples and monastic institutions.

Copies of the Mongolian *Sūtra of Great Liberation* are referenced in the following archival catalogues: *A General Index of the Early Books of China*,⁴⁰ *Bibliography of Mongolian Manuscripts and Blockprints*,⁴¹ *Account of Mongolian Manuscripts and Printed Books in the Mongolian Institute of Language and Literature*,⁴² *Mongolian Books in the Ts. Damdinsüren Home Museum*,⁴³ *A Brief Account of Old Mongolian Manuscripts in the Beijing Library*,⁴⁴ *A Catalogue of Mongolian Manuscripts and Blockprints*,⁴⁵ *The Mongol and Manchu Manuscripts and Blockprints in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*,⁴⁶ and so on. These references indicate that this sacred text has been successfully preserved in different collections in Mongolia, China, Russia, Hungary, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Denmark.

The Tibetan and Mongolian versions of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* spread quickly through Mongolia both in manuscript form and in xylographic editions. Additionally, the Tibetan version of the *sūtra* was printed numerous times in Mongolia. The records of the old Lamiin Gegeen Monastery in Bayankhongor Province, Mongolia, confirm the printing within the institution of a 126-page Tibetan version of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*. A 182-page version of the *sūtra* was printed in Tibetan in Sain Noyon Khanii Khüree Monastery in Uyanga District, Övörkhangai Province, as well as in the banner of Dalai gün. The *sūtra* was also printed in Tibetan

40) Sečenbilig 1999, pp. 94–101.

41) Тунгалаг, Дуламсүрэн 2011, pp. 142, 283.

42) Няммягмар 2012, pp. 15–30.

43) Билгүүдэй 1998, pp. 134–138.

44) Мөнггүндalai Боржигин 2005, pp. 66–67.

45) Сазыкин 2001, pp. 94–102.

46) Kara 2000, pp. 27–29, pp. 112–113, p. 214, pp. 217–218, pp. 226–227, pp. 275–276, pp. 374–376.

in 143 pages in Tsugol Datsan Monastery in Buryatia. In addition, many Tibetan-language commentaries and ritual texts related to the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* were written by eminent polymaths of the vast Mongol land, for instance:

1. Changkya Khutukhtu Rolpai Dorje (Tib. Rol pa'i rdo rje, 1716–1786) composed a work entitled *The Sūtra of Great Liberation and its General Spread, a Guide Composed to the Gathered Set of Discourses*,⁴⁷ the purpose of which was to dedicate merit to one's own father and mother. The *sūtra* was written with golden ink.

2. The first incarnation of Chin Süjigt Nomun Khan Luvsannorovsharav (Tib. Blo bzang nor bu shes rab, 1701–1768) composed a work entitled *The Great Rain of the Nectar of the Recitation and Ritual of the Sūtra of Great Liberation, the Highest Cleansing of Evils and Obscurations*,⁴⁸ which contained the *sūtra*, the method of reciting its *mantra*, a set of commentaries as well as a ritual text. It became very widespread in Mongolian; even today it is used for recitation in the temples of Mongolia or Inner Mongolia.

3. Mergen Gegeen Luvsandambijaltsan of Urad (Tib. Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1717–1766) created the composition in Mongolian script entitled *Ritual Reading of the Sūtra of Great Liberation*. It is now included in the fourth volume of his collected writings.

4. Ariya Janlün Paṇḍita Agvanluvsandanbijaltsan (Tib. Ngag dbang blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan, 1770–1845) composed the commentary entitled *A Detailed Exposition of the Mind of the Sūtra, Method for Reciting the Sūtra of Great Liberation*,⁴⁹ which is in the seventh volume of his collected works.⁵⁰

5. Bragri Yonzin Damtsigdorj (Tib. Dam tshig rdo rje, 1781–1855), the tutor of the Bogd Jebtsündamba Khutagt composed the ritual text entitled *An Ocean of Benefit of Arrangements of Ritual and Recitation of the Deep*

47) Tib. *Thar pa chen po phyogs yongs su rgyas pa'i mdo sde bzhengs pa'i kha byang du sbyar ba zhes bya ba bzhugs so.*

48) Tib. *'Phags pa thar pa chen po phyogs su rgyas pa'i mdo sde 'don pa'i cho ga sdig sgrib thams cad rab tu 'khrü bar byed pa'i bdud rtsi'i char chen zhes bya ba bzhugs so.*

49) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i 'don thabs mdo nyid kyi dgongs pa ji ltar ba bzhin du rgyas bar bkod pa bzhugs so.*

50) Бямбаа 2004, vol. 3, p. 1060.

Sūtra /Spread in All Directions/, the Sūtra of Great Liberation,⁵¹ which is contained in the second volume of his complete works.

6. In the tenth volume of the complete works of Bragri Yonzin Damtsigdorj, there is a work entitled *An Introductory Supplication to the Sūtra of Great Liberation*.

Conclusion

The precious teachings of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*, reflecting the view of liberation contained in Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy, became widely spread in China, Tibet, and Mongolia. It is difficult to determine for how many centuries this *sūtra* was only transmitted orally, and the actual extent to which it influenced living religious culture. Nonetheless, it is possible, from the existing source material, to figure out parts of its traditional transmission and the reflections of its impact. We can state that the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* was translated from Sanskrit to Chinese, then from Chinese to Tibetan, and finally from Tibetan to Mongolian.

In the Mongol land, the four great translators of the *sūtra* – Ayushi *güüshi*, Gungaa Odser *paṇḍita*, Altangerel *upāsaka*, and Zaya Paṇḍita Namkhajamts–handed down the tradition of four different translations. Additionally, Changkya Khutukhtu Rolpai Dorje, Chin Süjigt Nomun Khan Luvsannorovsharav, Mergen Gegeen Luvsandambijaltsan, Ariya Janlün Paṇḍita Agvanluvsandanbijaltsan, Bragri Yonzin Damtsigdorj and others composed works associated with the *Sūtra of Great Liberation*. In parallel, versions of the *sūtra* in Tibetan, as well as commentaries on the *sūtra* by Tibetan masters, were widely diffused in Mongolia, too. In this way, the spreading of the *Sūtra of Great Liberation* shows a genuine historical insight into how the Mongolian nation understood and appropriated the religious doctrine and the philosophical view contained in this Mahāyāna *sūtra* and how both monastic and lay readers made use of the text in their life and culture through veneration, study and meditation.

51) Tib. *Thar pa chen po'i spar byang smon tshig bzhugs so*.

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