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The Invention of “Shamanism” in 18th Century Mongolian Elite Discourse

Abstract

The paper concentrates on the transformation of the religious field in 17th and 18th century Mongolia, focusing on the discourse formations which accompanied the missionary strategies the Tibetan Buddhist monks employed to win over the Mongols to Buddhism. By drawing on a variety of Mongolian sources, from biographies and chronicles up to legal documents and terminological dictionaries, the author argues that the encounter between shamanic and Buddhist religious specialists led to the creation of a religious “other” and the reification of a *böge-ner-ün sasin*, a “teaching of the shamans”, most likely influencing European Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment constructions of so called “shamanism”.

Keywords: Shamanism, Mongolia, Buddhism, Buddhist proselytism

Introduction

In recent years, as a consequence of the debate on “Orientalism”¹ and in the wake of Postcolonial Studies,² “Shamanism” as the “original religion” of the peoples of Northern

¹ Edward Said, *Orientalism. Western Conceptions of the Orient*, London 1978. Critical evaluations of Said’s thesis are numerous. His monolithic distinction between “the West” and “the East” has drawn sharp criticism, see, among others, Jürgen Osterhammel, “Wissen als Macht. Deutungen interkulturellen Nichtverstehens bei Tzvetan Todorov und Edward Said”. In: J. Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaates. Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich*, Göttingen 2001, pp. 240–265. For a critical evaluation of Said’s conceptual polarity of “religious” and “secular” culture see William D. Hart, *Edward Said and the Religious Effects of Culture*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 62–87.

² Compare Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism. An historical introduction*, Malden and Oxford 2010, pp. 337–394.

Eurasia and the Mongols has been deconstructed as a European invention, which has its origins in the 18th century Enlightenment discourse. Scholars like Ronald Hutton³ and Andrei Znamenski⁴ have analysed the historical and intellectual origins and respective discourse formations of the European construction of “Shamanism”. Kocku von Stuckrad has aptly summarized the present state of research concerning “Shamanism”: “Of special importance [...] is the statement that Shamanism as *a distinctive type of religion* owes its existence to the appropriation by western observers.”⁵ The authors mentioned here discuss the discursive field of “Shamanism” to be solely constructed on the basis of European knowledge formations. According to them the “distinctive type of religion” called “Shamanism” owes its existence to the hegemonic dominance of the European protestant model of religion which in the wake of European imperialism and colonialism has been exported and led to the standardization of indigenous religious and cultural traditions after this model.

It is certainly true that early Mongolian sources before the late 16th century⁶ do not name a “religion” or “teaching” called shamanism, but only mention the *böge* and *iduyan*, that is, certain specialists shamanizing. Since the late 16th century, however, with the advent of Buddhism in the Mongolian regions, these descriptive modes changed, and as early as the 17th century the texts start talking about a “teaching” or “view” of the shamans. The assertion that “Shamanism” as a distinctive discourse formation and in consequence as a distinctive type of religion is a European “invention” ignores emic Asian discourses. Based on an analysis of the Mongolian elite discourses on “religion” of the 17th to 19th centuries, which deal with so-called “Shamanism”, I argue that in early modern Mongolia the transformation of the religious field on the discourse level led to the reification of a “teaching of the shamans” which in turn probably influenced the formation of the European discourse on “Shamanism”.

³ *Shamans. Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination*, Hambledon and London 2001.

⁴ *The Beauty and the Primitive. Shamanism and the Western Imagination*, Oxford 2007.

⁵ *Schamanismus und Esoterik. Kultur- und wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*, Leuven 2003, p. 56 (my translation from the German).

⁶ Most notably the *Secret History of the Mongols* from the 13th century, see Paragraphs 181 and 272, which contain the only occurrences of the word *bö'e* (mong. *böge*). For the text of the *Secret History* see Erich Haenisch, *Manghol un niuca tobca'an (Yüan-cha'o pi-shi). Die geheime Geschichte der Mongolen aus der chinesischen Transkription (Ausgabe Ye Têh-hui) im mongolischen Wortlaut wiederhergestellt. Teil I: Text*. Wiesbaden 1962. The best annotated translation gives Igor de Rachewiltz, *The Secret History of the Mongols. A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century. Translated with a historical and philological commentary*. 2 vols. Leiden/Boston 2004. About the shamans in the *Secret History* see vol. 2, pp. 652–654.

I. The Advent of Tibetan Buddhism in the Mongolian Steppes

When in 1578 Altan Qayan of the Tümed Mongols and bSod nams rgya mtsho,⁷ the then abbot of 'Bras spungs monastery, met at the temple of Čabčiyal at Köke nor lake, their meeting marked the beginning of the Buddhist conversion of the Mongol regions.⁸ Soon after the meeting of Altan Qayan and bSod nams rgya mtsho, Tibetan lamas began to spread the *Dharma* among the different Mongolian tribes, and within a time span of not much more than forty years the Mongols had taken over Tibetan Buddhist concepts and practices.⁹ The reasons why the Mongolian nobility so willingly adopted Tibetan Buddhism and pressured their subjects into doing likewise, can only be speculated about. Scholars of Mongolian Studies often assume that Altan Qayan needed an ideological backing for his position as the then most powerful ruler in the Mongolian territories, and Tibetan Buddhism with its religio-political concept of universal ruler, *cakravartin*, provided him with just such an ideology.¹⁰ Be that as it may, the subsequent measures taken to spread Buddhism among the Mongols aptly demonstrate that the persons in power, the rulers and the nobility, took an active interest in implementing the new religion among their subjects. From the beginning the encounter was not so much a contest of different world views, but a struggle about power between two opposing groups of religious specialists, the male and female shamans and the lamas. The local rulers in late 16th century Mongolia issued laws that prohibited shamanizing and the indigenous religious practices that were connected with it. These practices included the worship of the *ongyod*,¹¹ the powerful ancestor spirits and spiritual helpers of the shamans, both

⁷ For a biographical sketch of bSod nams rgya mtsho see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Third Dalai Lama Sönam Gyatso and the Fourth Dalai Lama Yönten Gyatso", in: Martin Brauen (ed.), *The Dalai Lamas. A Visual History*. Chicago 2005, pp. 52–59.

⁸ For a historical evaluation of this meeting in the context of the religio-political relations between Tibetans and Mongolians see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur. Die Biographie des Altan qayan der Tümed-Mongolen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der religionspolitischen Beziehungen zwischen der Mongolei und Tibet im ausgehenden 16. Jahrhundert*. Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 112–147.

⁹ Buddhism was well known among the Mongols since the 13th century and its practice was widespread among the Mongolian elites during the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). After the fall of the Yuan dynasty it retained its presence in the Mongolian regions. Tibetan chronicles of the 15th and 16th centuries comment on the frequent visits of Buddhist dignitaries to Mongolian nobles, see for example 'Gos lo tsa ba gZhon nu dpal's report about the journey of the 4th Zva dmar pa Cod pan 'dzin pa in the year 1470 to the Mongols and his preaching activities there, in the *Deb ther sngon po* of 1478 (reprint, Chengdu 1984, p. 651). See also Henry Serruys, "Early Lamaism in Mongolia", *Oriens Extremus* 10 (1963), pp. 181–216, and his "Additional Note on the Origin of Lamaism in Mongolia", *Oriens Extremus* 13 (1966), pp. 165–173, as well as Klaus Sagaster, "The History of Buddhism among the Mongols", in: Ann Heirman/Stephan Peter Bumbacher (eds.), *The Spread of Buddhism*. Leiden/Boston 2007, pp. 397–399.

¹⁰ See, for example, Charles R. Bawden, *The Modern History of the Mongols*, London and New York 1968, p. 30, and Liu Jin Süe, *Mongyol-un quriyangyui teüke*, Kökeqota 1998, p. 149.

¹¹ Uno Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen der altaischen Völker*, Helsinki (without year), 371ff., provides detailed information about the *Ongyod*, and Walther Heissig, *Die Religionen der Mongolei*. In: G. Tucci; W. Heissig, *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, Stuttgart 1970, pp. 312–314, gives an overview about their function and ritual use. The Mongolian shamanic chronicle *ongyod qara sakiyusun teüke sudur bičig orosiba*, written by an

male and female, and blood sacrifices.¹² Most other indigenous religious practices, for example the *obo* cult,¹³ the cult of the mountain¹⁴ or the worship of the deity of the hearth,¹⁵ were neither forbidden nor prosecuted.

The juridical measures taken to assert the preference of Buddhism focussed on the select group of the *böge*, the male shamans, and the *iduyan*, the female shamans. The local rulers did not only prohibit the practice of shamanizing, but actively persecuted the male and female shamans, as the *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*, composed around the year 1607¹⁶ states:

After they had set on fire the outer¹⁷ *ongyod*-images, they weakened and eliminated the ecstatic and ignorant male and female shamans.¹⁸

unknown author and preserved in the Royal Library at Copenhagen (Mong. 41; I wish to thank research librarian Bent Lerbæk Pedersen from the Oriental and Judaica Collections for his help to make the text available to me), deals extensively with the *ongyod* and even offers an explanation for the origin of the *ongyod* who according to this source originally have been the souls of powerful male and female shamans. A part of the text is given in Roman transcription in Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism", *Anthropos* 48 (1953), pp. 501–503.

¹² Blood sacrifices were forbidden because they violate the first of the five Buddhist precepts which are binding for lay-people as well as for monks and nuns. One of the most important topics of the Tibetan Buddhist discourse on the cultural and religious "other" was the reproach of these being people "who eat the flesh and drink the blood of living beings", see Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, "'Religionslos ist dieses Land': Das Mongolenbild der Tibeter", *Asiatische Studien/ Etudes asiatiques* LIV/4, 2000, pp. 875–905, and "Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics: Tibetan Images of the Mongols in the 19th and 20th Centuries". In: Monica Esposito (ed.), *Images of Tibet in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Vol. II, Paris 2008, pp. 707–724.

¹³ A detailed description of the *obo*-cult, including both shamanic and Buddhist practices, give L. Qurčabayatur/ Č. Üjüm-e, *Mongyol-un böge mörgül-ün tayily-a takily-a-yin soyol*, 1991, pp. 263–283. See also Charles R. Bawden, "Two Mongolian Texts Concerning Obo-worship", *Oriens Extremus* 5/1 (1958), pp. 57–61.

¹⁴ Magdalena Tatár, "Two Mongol Texts Concerning the Cult of the Mountains", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 30 (1), 1976, pp. 1–58.

¹⁵ For the cult of the fire and the hearth deities see Dominique Dumas, *Aspekte und Wandlungen der Verehrung des Herdfeuers bei den Mongolen. Eine Analyse der mongolischen "Feuergebete"*, Bonn 1987, and Nima, *Mongyolčud-un yal*, Kökeqota 2003.

¹⁶ The *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*, "Sütra called the jewel translucent one", a verse biography of Altan Qayan of the Tümed, is one of the earliest known Mongolian historiographical sources. There exists only one manuscript of the chronicle that is preserved in the library of the Institute for History and Literature of the Inner Mongolian Academy of Social Sciences. I use a Xerox copy of the original manuscript. The text is made available in a modern Uiguro-Mongolian edition alongside the facsimile in Jorungγ-a, *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur orosiba*, Beijing 1984. In the meantime translations into Japanese (T. Morikawa, *Study of the Biography of Altan Khan*, Kyushu University, Fukuoka 1987), Chinese (Zhu rong ga, *A-le-tan han zhuan*, Hohot 1991), German (Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, *Erdeni tunumal* 2001) and English (Johan Elverskog, *The Jewel Translucent Sütra. Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century*, Leiden 2003) have been published.

¹⁷ The term „outer“ points to the Tibetan differentiation between “inner ones” (tib. *nang pa*), i.e. Buddhists, and “outer ones” (tib. *phyi pa*), i.e. Non-Buddhists.

¹⁸ Fol. 29r12-15.

The burning of the *ongyod* is reported in Mongolian,¹⁹ and also Tibetan,²⁰ sources. Besides trying to stop the activities of the shamans by these purges and by law, the secular authorities provided material incentives to employ Buddhist rituals, thereby undermining the power of the shamans. Vivid descriptions of such incentives are given in the *Čindamani erike*,²¹ the biography of the famous monk Neyiči Toyin, a Torγud Mongol from Western Mongolia who in the first half of the 17th century was mainly active in Eastern Mongolia, among the Ongniγud and Qorčın Mongols. But not only the secular authorities, also the monks themselves took to bribery in order to win the people over, as the *Čindamani erike* reports:

From all different kinds of jewels, gold and silver, and from different kinds of things like silk and sable, which had been presented [to him] by many donors, princes as well as great and petty nobles, [Neyiči Toyin] gave in all directions and everywhere one ounce of gold to everybody who could memorize the Yamandaga, and one ounce of gold and silver each to everybody who could memorize the *sādhana* and the *bīja-mantra* of Guhyasamāja, and to the poor people, according to their wishes, goods and cattle. Thereupon there were generally very many [people] who memorized the Yamandaga and the Guhyasamāja.²²

This look at the juridical measures and the economic incentives gives us a vital clue to the nature of the initial interaction between the indigenous religious specialists and the newly arrived Tibetan lamas and monks. The interaction was very much characterised by economic competition for the limited material resources of the lay population available to both groups. In this competition the Tibetans were on

¹⁹ The most dramatic report is given in the *Boγda neyiči toyin dalai mañjusryi-yin domoγ-i todorqai-a geyigülügči čindamani erike kemegdekü orosiba*, the biography of the monk Neyiči Toyin, written in 1739 by Prajñāsagara. I have at my disposal a copy of the xylograph preserved in the Royal Library at Copenhagen (Mong. 506), and wish to thank Dr. Helmut Eimer for his help in obtaining the copy. The passage is found on fol. 54r5-13. A German translation is given by Walther Heissig, „Neyiči Toyin. Das Leben eines lamaistischen Mönches (1557–1653). Aus seiner mongolischen Biographie übersetzt und mit einer Einleitung“, in *Sinologica*, III, (1953), 42, and Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, „Der Buddhismus als Garant von ‘Frieden und Ruhe’. Zu religiösen Legitimationsstrategien von Gewalt am Beispiel der tibetisch-buddhistischen Missionierung der Mongolei im späten 16. Jahrhundert“, *Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft*, 11, 2003, p. 186. See also Isibaldan, *Erdeni-yin erike* (1835), fol. 28v8 (Walther Heissig (ed.), *Erdeni-yin erike. Mongolische Chronik der lamaistischen Klosterbauten der Mongolei von Isibaldan* (1835). In *Faksimile mit Einleitung und Namensverzeichnis herausgegeben*, Kopenhagen 1961).

²⁰ For example in the biography of the 3rd Dalai Lama, *rJe btsun thams cad mkhyen pa bsod nams rgya mtsho'i rnam thar dngos grub rgya mtsho'i shing rta zhes bya ba bzhuγs so*, composed by the 5th Dalai Lama, reproduced in *'Phags pa 'jig rten dbang phyug gi rnam sprul rim byon gyi 'khrungs rabs deb ther nor bu'i 'phreng ba*, Vol. 2, Dharamsala 1984, p. 150, 2–5.

²¹ See note 19.

²² *Čindamani erike*, fol. 74r16-74v5.

the winning side, because they had been able to secure the support of the secular authorities.

II. Tibetan Buddhist Strategies to win over the Mongols

However, juridical measures and economic incentives alone do not explain the rapid success of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols. The success is due to the specific missionary strategies, employed by the Tibetan Buddhist monks, which directly affected religious practices. What did it mean “to spread the dharma” (*nom-i delgerekü*)? It first and foremost meant to **practice** Buddhist rituals, to **perform** the dharma. The monks’ strategies proved to be successful because the Mongols and the Tibetans shared a similar socio-religious *habitus* in a common religious field.²³ Conditioned by society and history, the *habitus* is constituted by individual and collective experiences, and in this sense it may be characterized as “embodied history”. Social meaning is tied to the human body, and the body in turn is shaped by the habitual schemes which are acted out implicitly, on an unconscious level.²⁴ By **performing the dharma** the Buddhist monks were able gradually to incorporate Buddhist world concepts into indigenous ones, which thus infiltrated the indigenous religious field and became an essential part of Mongolian religious life. This was achieved mainly by ritual performance, which very much focused on bodily performed patterns of behaviour. This focus is mirrored in some of the terms applied to “Buddhism” and “Shamanism” in our sources. In Mongolian texts from the 17th century onwards the terms (among others, as we shall see) *šasin mörgül* for “Buddhism” and *böge mörgül*²⁵ for “Shamanism” were used. Mongolian *mörgül* literally denotes “the act of bowing”, stressing the bodily performance of venerating the Dharma or, respectively, the shamans. Both terms emphasize the visible and performative aspects of the Mongolian discursive and embodied construction of “religion”. In early modern Mongolian societies the acting out of embodied socio-religious norms and roles proved to be of crucial importance. Therefore, rather than bluntly attempting to exchange existing religious concepts and practices, the Buddhist monks put considerable effort into giving new or additional meaning to the bodily engrained patterns of behaviour, thereby slowly transforming these practices and rituals.

²³ According to Pierre Bourdieu, forms of *habitus* are “systems of enduring *dispositions*, structured structures, which are suitable to operate as structuring structures, in other words: as generating and structuring principles of practice forms and representations” (Pierre Bourdieu, *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyliischen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1976, p. 165; my own translation).

²⁴ This is further elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu in his *Sozialer Sinn. Kritik der theoretischen Vernunft*, Frankfurt am Main 1987, especially in the chapter „Glaube und Leib“ (“Belief and Body”), pp. 122–146.

²⁵ See for example *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*, composed by Tuγultur Toboev in 1863, p. 17.

III. Mongolian Buddhist self-descriptions: The terms *nom* and *šasin* in 16th/17th century Mongolian sources

The competitive encounter between the newly arrived Tibetan Buddhist monks and the Mongolian religious specialists, the male and female shamans, gradually led to the categorisation of the religious opponents on the discourse level. As is well known, the shamans did not adhere to a world-view different from the community they belonged to. Moreover the shamanizing practices and rituals were only part of a multitude of traditional Mongolian religious concepts and practices. Ritual practices like the mountain cult, the fire cult and the veneration of the hearth deity, the cult of *Čayan ebiügen*, *Geser Qan* etc., as well as the various groups of gods, demons and spirits believed to enliven the world played an important role in everyday religious life. These practices and beliefs were not persecuted, but gradually transformed or simply incorporated into Buddhist practices and beliefs.

The – nearly complete – illiteracy of the male and female shamans gave the Buddhist monks an advantage on the discourse level. They brought with them a well differentiated analytical terminology, that had been developed in inner Buddhist polemical debates and which provided a terminological instrument that could also be used comparatively. In the Mongolian Buddhist texts of the time a standardized terminology (in part going as far back as to the early Uighur translations of Buddhist texts) is used regarding Buddhism. Two terms are omnipresent, *nom* (from Greek *nomos*) and *šasin/sasin* (from Sanskrit *śāsana*). Both translate Tibetan *chos* and *bstan pa*.²⁶ They are often used together with the attributive *burqan-u*, “of the Buddha”: *burqan-u nom/burqan-u šasin*, “Dharma of the Buddha, teaching of the Buddha”. Apart from these meanings, in the *Erdeni-yin tobči* from 1662 the term *nom* is also used in the meaning of “rule, norm”, and in this connotation we find the term for the two great rules of the spiritual and secular orders: *burqan-u nom* and *kümiün-ü nom*²⁷ or *sansar-un nom*. Although the earlier *Čayan teüke* also uses *šasin* to denote the two rules, in this text²⁸

²⁶ Whereas the early *Ganjur* translations and early chronicles often indiscriminately translate *chos* and *bstan pa* as *nom* or *šasin*, in the 18th century a standardisation process sets in. According to the Tibeto-Mongolian dictionary *Dag yig mkhas pa'i byung gnas/ Merged yarqu-yin oron*, compiled in 1741/42 by a translation committee under the direction of the 2nd ICang skya Qutuytu Rol pa'i rdo je, *bstan pa* is to be translated by *šasin*, *chos* by *nom*, see chapter *ka*, fol. 6v2, 7r1, 10r2. I used the Beijing block print in the possession of Professor Richard Ernst to whom I convey my sincere gratitude.

²⁷ This latter term probably translates the Tibetan *mi chos*.

²⁸ See *Arban buyantu nom-un čayan teüke* (I consulted the facsimile reproduction of a manuscript in Walther Heissig, *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen*. I. 16.–18. Jahrhundert. Wiesbaden 1959, pp. 1–24), where *nom* is used in a variety of combinations, for example *nom-un ejen* (3v3/4, 6v7), *nom-un jasaγ*, *nom-un törö* (6v3, 7r7), *nom-un yosun* (6v5), *nom-un jerge* (7r12/13), *ünen nom* (15v1), *ünen nom-un jasaγ* (20r1). *Nom* is also used in concrete sense as teaching, in the phrase *qamuy nom-ud* (fol. 7r2), “all teachings”. In contrast to the ubiquitous use of *nom* in its various meanings, ranging from “rule, norm” over “teaching” to “religion”,

and the *Erdeni-yin tobči*²⁹ the use of the term *nom* (in the narrow sense of *dharma*) prevails. Interestingly, one of our oldest sources, the *Erdeni tunumal neretü sudur*, mostly uses *sasin* to denote Buddhism (either simply called *sasin* or often also *burqan-u sasin*),³⁰ whereas *nom* is mostly used in its meaning as either “scripture”/“book”,³¹ “dharma”,³² in the triad of “Buddha, Dharma, Sangha”,³³ or in composite terms like *nom-un qayan*, “Dharmarāja”.³⁴ The *Altan tobči anonymus*³⁵ speaks of *šajin*, denoting Buddhism, and sometimes also of *Čongkaba-yin sajin*,³⁶ as also the slightly later *Asarayči neretü-yin teüke* does.³⁷

Taking into account the colophons of the hand-written *Ganjur* preserved in St. Petersburg,³⁸ in these early translations dating back to 1628/29, but partly drawing on even earlier translations, we mostly find the term *šasin* and the combination *šasin nom*.³⁹ *Nom* alone is sparingly used.

i.e. Buddhism, *šasin* in the *Čayan teüke* is only used sparingly, either denoting Buddhism (see for example fol. 3v3: *degedü šasin*) or in the term *qoyar šasin* (see fol. 15v4 and 15v6) the “two teachings” of the spiritual and temporal orders. For a translation and thorough investigation of this important source see Klaus Sagaster, *Die Weisse Geschichte (Čayan teüke). Eine mongolische Quelle zur Lehre von den Beiden Ordnungen Religion und Staat in Tibet und der Mongolei*, Wiesbaden 1976.

²⁹ In the *Erdeni-yin tobči* the term *nom* is used 42 times against *šasin* which is used 24 times. I used the Urga-manuscript, see Erich Haenisch, *Eine Urga-Handschrift des mongolischen Geschichtswerks von Secen Sagang (alias Sanang Secen)*, Berlin 1955.

³⁰ For example in fol. 20v2, 20v8/9, 20v18, 21v11, 21v15/16, 21v23, 22r1, 22v22, 25r10/11, 25v5, 25v18. Only once *burqan nom* (fol. 23r20) is used.

³¹ In fol. 2r22, 30v8, 31v8.

³² For example fol. 21r2, 23r20.

³³ For example fol. 17v13.

³⁴ For example fol. 29r10.

³⁵ Charles R. Bawden, *The Mongol Chronicle Altan tobči. Text, translation and critical notes*. Wiesbaden 1955, p. 13.

³⁶ See *Qad-un iündiüsün quriyangyui altan tobči*, Kökeqota 1980, p. 121 and p. 122.

³⁷ Written by the Qalqa noble Byamba erke dayičing in 1677. For the relevant text passages see Pringlai (ed.), *Byamba. Asarayči neretü-yin teüke*, Ulan-Bator 1960, pp. 67ff. There also exists an Inner-Mongolian edition of this chronicle with an extensive commentary, see B. Baγan-a (ed.), *Asarayči neretü-yin teüke*, Beijing 1984. A description and translation of the chronicle provides Hans-Rainer Kämpfe, *Das Asarayči neretü-yin teüke des Byamba Erke Daičing alias Šamba Jasaγ. (Eine mongolische Chronik des 17. Jahrhunderts)*. Wiesbaden 1983.

³⁸ Zoya K. Kas’yanenko, *Katalog peterburgskogo rukopisnogo “Ganzhura”*. Sostavlenie, vvedenie, transliteraciya i ukazateli. Moskva 1993.

³⁹ For example in the colophon of the *Bilig-iin činadu kürügsen jayγun mingyan toy-a-tu*, see Kas’yanenko, *Katalog*, No. 524, 136–138. The redaction committee of the Kangxi era who prepared the print edition of 1718–1720 did not change the terminology of either *šasin* or *nom*, compare the same colophon in Louis Ligeti, *Catalogue du Kanjur mongol imprimé*, Vol. 1, Catalogue, Budapest 1942, No. 746, pp. 166–168. Compare also the colophons of Nos. 510, 539, 545, 599, 616, 669, 727 in the handwritten *Ganjur*.

The 18th and 19th century sources tend to favour the term *sasin/šasin*, as an exemplification of the terminology used in the *Altan kürdün mingyan kegesütü bičig*,⁴⁰ the *Bolor erike*⁴¹ and the *Bolor toli*⁴² brought about.

IV. Speaking about the religious “Other”

Mongolian sources of the 17th – 19th centuries rarely deal with the shamanic adversaries of the Buddhist monks.⁴³ Still, in the few texts that mention the shamans and their activities we note the formation of a discourse about the “true teaching”, namely Buddhism, and the “wrong view/doctrine”, which the shamans possess. In Mongolian Buddhist writings of the time the activities of the shamans were gradually turned into a homogenous entity that first received the standard appellation *buruyu üjel*, “wrong view”, or *buruyu nom*, “wrong dharma”. In a text fragment about the turning back of bad omens found in Xarbuxyn Balgas and dating to the early 17th century,⁴⁴ I found the first mention of the appellation *buruyu üjel-tü böge [idu]*⁴⁵*yan*, the “male and female shamans possessing a wrong view”. This term is often used in opposition to *burqan-u šasin*, the “teaching of the Buddha”, as can be noticed in the statement: “In this way the wrong view was brought to an end and the teaching of the Buddha turned out to be immaculate.” (*Čindamani erike*, fol. 54r11-13). Our source, however, is vague about what particular doctrines, practices and rituals the term *buruyu üjel* refers to. *Buruyu üjel* translates the Tibetan term *lta*

⁴⁰ This chronicle was composed in 1739 by Siregetü guosi dharma, see Heissig, *Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*, I, pp. 134–159. I used the manuscript in Walther Heissig (ed.), *Altan kürdün mingyan kegesütü bičig. Eine mongolische Chronik von Siregetü Guosi Dharma (1739). Herausgegeben und mit Einleitung und Namensverzeichnis versehen*. Kopenhagen 1958. Siregetü guosi dharma almost exclusively writes *šasin*, see III, fol. 4r9 and 10, IV, fol. 14v5 and 6, 20v1, or V, fol. 2v8 and 13r2. Buddhism in Mongolia is further often specified as *bConggaba-yin šasin* (in the 4th and 5th *bölög*), demonstrating the dominant dGe lugs pa-discourse.

⁴¹ Written by the nobleman Rasipungsuy in 1774/75, see the monograph by Walther Heissig, *Bolor Erike “Eine Kette aus Bergkristallen.” Eine mongolische Chronik der Kienlung-Zeit von Rasipungsuy (1774/75). Literaturhistorisch untersucht*. Peiping 1946, and Walther Heissig, *Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung*, op. cit., pp. 198–200. I consulted the edition of Mostaert/Cleaves, see Antoine Mostaert/ Francis W. Cleaves (eds.), *Bolor Erike. Mongolian Chronicle by Rasipungsuy*. 5 vols, Cambridge/Mass., 1959. Rasipungsuy mostly speaks of *burqan-u šašin*, *bCongkaba-yin degedü šašin*, or simply *šasin/ sajın*, for example book V, p. 684,7.

⁴² Composed between 1834 and 1837 by the Buddhist monk Jimbadorji, see Walther Heissig (ed.), *Bolor Toli “Spiegel aus Bergkristall” von Jimbadorji (1834–1837)*. Buch III: *Geschichte der Mongolen*, Kopenhagen 1962. Jimbadorji treats the conversion of the Mongols to Buddhism similarly to Saŋang Sečen (Urga-Ms., fol. 76v14ff.), compare fol. 54-58 of Book III.

⁴³ This fact was already noted by Walther Heissig, „A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism“, *Anthropos*, 48, 1953, p. 518.

⁴⁴ Text XBM 150, published in Elisabetta Chiodo, *The Mongolian Manuscripts on Birch Bark from Xarbuxyn Balgas in the Collection of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences*, Part 2, Wiesbaden 2009, 182.

⁴⁵ Chiodo, 2009, op. cit., *Manuscripts*, p. 182, note 11, suggests to read *iduyan* for the missing part of the word. The variant *udayan*, of course, is also possible. The *Čindamani erike*, fol. 46r26/27, for example, reads *buruyu üjel-tü böge udayan*.

log and in this way is closely connected to the Tibetan-Buddhist polemical discourse. Tibetan *lta log*, respectively *chos log*, is used in Buddhist polemics to denounce the doctrinal adversaries. The terms *chos* and *chos log* are closely related to each other and are commonly applied in Inner-Buddhist discourse. Apart from *buruyu üjel* we also find the terms *buruyu nom*⁴⁶ and *qayucin ba buruyu üjel*.⁴⁷ The *buruyu üjel-tü böge iduyan* are also described as adherents of the *γadayadu ongyod*, the “outer *ongyod*”. As mentioned before, Mongolian *γadayadu* translates the Tibetan *phyi pa*, “outer”, in opposition to *nang pa*, “inner”, denoting somebody who is positioned within the Dharma, e.g. a Buddhist.⁴⁸ The “outer – inner” dichotomy refers to collective social identities in the respective societies.

The use of the terms *nom*, *šasin* and *buruyu üjel* (translating the respective Tibetan terms) attest to an Inner-Buddhist polemic discourse about the religious “other”. Their first appearance on the one hand illustrates the reifying processes in the Buddhist intellectual discourse of the time, on the other hand they testify to the fact that the idea of a plurality of different religious teachings during that period was not yet present. The practices of the shamans were looked upon from a normative and exclusivist Buddhist viewpoint. “Religion” in this intellectual context was synonymous to “Buddhism”, and the shamanic practices were judged to be wrong from the only standpoint imaginable, they were “Buddhism turned wrong”.

V. Reifying the religious opponents

The collective term *buruyu üjel* testifies to the fact that in the course of the Buddhist encounter with the Mongolian shamans the loosely connected and extremely localized shamanic ritual practices which centred on the male and female shamans as ritual actors were viewed as a single system and thus reified. Further evidence of this development is provided by the employment of the term *qara šasin*, “black teaching”, which derives from the self-descriptive *sira šasin*, “yellow teaching”, as the dGe lugs pa-tradition described itself in the Mongol regions. Already in the colophon of an early Mongolian translation of the ‘*Dzangs blun*’⁴⁹, which was not included in the *Ganjur*, the term *qara jüg* occurs. The term is also used in the colophon of the *Čoγ-tu/ulayan/erlig-ün dayisan-u qayan*

⁴⁶ See *Bolor erike*, book V, 683,10, and *Erdeni-yin erike*, fol. 28r11.

⁴⁷ *Čindamani erike*, fol. 13v24-25.

⁴⁸ The term *dotoyadu nom-tan-u üjel*, “view of the adherents to the inner teaching”, is also found in Sayang Sečen’s *Erdeni-yin tobči*, see Urga-Ms., fol. 34r19-21.

⁴⁹ Commonly known under the title *Ütiger-ün dalai*, as it is called in the printed *Ganjur*-edition (Ligeti, *Catalogue*, No. 1103). The original title of Siregetü güsi čorji’s translation was *Siluyun onul-tu kemegdekü sudur*, see Kas’yanenko, *Katalog*, No. 839. The translation referred to here, however, was prepared by Toyin guosi under the title *Siluyun budayun üye onoqui neretü sudur* sometime between 1578 and 1612. The colophon is given in Roman transcription with a German translation by Walther Heissig, “Toyin guosi ~ Guisi alias Čortu guisi: Versuch einer Identifizierung”, *Zentralasiatische Studien* 9, 1975, pp. 361–446, especially pp. 391–408. For *qara jüg* see p. 398.

neretü included in the hand-written *Ganjur*, but not in the printed edition.⁵⁰ The use of these diverse terms marks the birth-hour of the invention of “Shamanism” as a reified system in 18th century Mongolia.

Qara jüig as well as *qara šasin* were at first clearly derogatory terms used by the Tibetan Buddhists to belittle their religious opponents. They were dependent on the juxtaposition *sira* – *qara*, and still mirror the Buddhist discourse on shamans as heretics. Interestingly, very soon the shamans used the polemic term *qara šasin* as a self-descriptive term.

Further evidence of the ongoing reification process can be found in the first law code for the Mongols to be commissioned by the Qing which was published sometime after 1694.⁵¹ This law code of all in all 152 articles contains one article on the community of the Buddhist lamas and the community of the male and female shamans, entitled *lam-a-nar-yin ayimay. Böge iduyan-u ayimay* (Fol. 39v-41r). The article gives instructions how to deal with lamas or shamans who do not follow the prescribed rules (*yosun*) of their respective communities.⁵² The Qing administration thus dealt with the indigenous religious specialists of the Mongols in the same way as they dealt with the Tibetan-Buddhist lamas. They acknowledged both groups as juridical bodies.

The article in the Kangxi law code reveals the extent of the reification process the indigenous Mongolian religious practices centered on the shamans had undergone already at the end of the 17th century. Furthermore, the use of *šasin* and also *surtayun*⁵³ together with a defining attribute led to the development from an exclusivist to a comparative terminology. From the 18th century onwards *šasin* was no longer used exclusively to denote Buddhism, but emerged as a comparative term, signifying concepts which were deemed to be equivalent to the Buddhist teaching and thus denoting “religion” as a general concept. Our sources now speak of *böge-ner-ün šasin*, the “teaching of the shamans”, to denote the practices (and concepts) of the male and female shamans.⁵⁴ Still later examples of the comparative use of *šasin* are *keristos-ün šasin*⁵⁵ for “Christianity” or *Lalu*⁵⁶-*yin šasin* for Islam. Still, however, other distinctions, also purely Buddhist ones, like *dotoyadu šasin* and *γadayadu šasin*, were used alongside this emerging comparative terminology.

⁵⁰ See Kas’yanenko, *Katalog*, No. 106, pp. 51–52.

⁵¹ This collection of individual laws is kept in the State Library in Ulan Bator under the title *Γadayadu mongyol-un törö-yin jasaqu yabudal-un yamun-un engke amuyulang-un üy-e-dii 1693 on-du keblegsen, dotor-a 1629 on-ača ekileged uday-a daray-a qayad-un üy-e-dii jarlaysan čayaja-du-i jasamjilaysan mongyol-un čayajan-u bičig*, compare Dorothea Heuschert, *Die Gesetzgebung der Qing für die Mongolen im 17. Jahrhundert anhand des Mongolischen Gesetzbuches aus der Kangxi-Zeit (1662–1722)*, Wiesbaden 1998, 47. As Heuschert points out, the publication date 1693 mentioned in the title cannot be correct, because the last article of the collection dates from the year 1694.

⁵² Heuschert, *Gesetzgebung*, 136. The Mongolian text is given on pp. 215–216, accompanied by a German translation.

⁵³ *Ongyod qar-a sakiyus-un teitke sudur bičig orosiba*, p. 4.

⁵⁴ For example, to quote just one chronicle, in the *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijayur-un tuyuji*, p. 92ff. The chronicle was composed in 1875 by Vandan Yumsunov.

⁵⁵ Thus in *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*, p. 15.

⁵⁶ From the Tibetan *kla klo*, which translates Sanskrit *mleccha*. In early Tibetan Buddhist texts like the *Kālacakra-tantrarāja* and the *Vimalaprabhā* the term denotes Muslims.

VI. The “teaching of the shamans”

The terms *üjel* and *nom* suggest a bundle of concepts, especially when used in binary opposition to *burqan-u šasin*. Yet none of the texts from the 17th and 18th centuries elaborate which concepts or which practices can be subsumed under the term *buruyu üjell/ yadayadu nom*, or even *böge-ner-ün šasin*. In the end these labels are decidedly unspecific as to their contents. From the texts we only get to know that the “wrong view of the male and female shamans” denotes the actors of this “wrong view” and their activities. They act mainly as healers and as exorcists, and the *ongyod*, the helpers of the shamans, are likewise often mentioned. The first texts to give a definition of a shaman and an overview of shamanic practices date to the second half of the 19th century. The Buryad-Mongolian chronicles *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijayur-un tuyuji* and *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu* provide us with a systematic overview of shamanic practices.⁵⁷ They enumerate healing techniques, including the prevention of death, and exorcism of evil spirits (*qourlaju cidkiür*) as characteristic activities. In the latter case the shaman bans the *cidkiür* into a substitute (*joliγ*) which is burnt, or into a living animal which is slaughtered. Furthermore, according to these sources shamans are adept in divination from the shoulder blades of a sheep. This divination method is already well attested in the 13th century when the Franciscan brothers at the court of the great Qans at Karakorum reported this custom. Expulsion (*γaryayul*) of an evil spirit who is responsible for harm to one’s material possessions (*ed tavar*) is also performed by the shaman. Finally, the male and female shamans invoke spells, blessings and formulas to protect the family, the children, the cattle etc. against evil spirits and contagious diseases and to bring blessings and luck to them.

The systematic enumeration and description of different religious doctrines and practices is well known in Tibetan Buddhist doxographical literature which had its heyday in the 19th century. Therefore the definitions and detailed descriptions of shamanic concepts and activities point to a Tibetan Buddhist influence. The “religion of the shamans” is treated in these chronicles as the Bon-religion is treated in the Tibetan doxographies.⁵⁸ The Buryad chronicles, however, also show Russian influence.

⁵⁷ Both chronicles devote whole chapters to the description of the *böge-ner-ün mörgül*, see *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*, pp. 16–21, and *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijayur-un tuyuji*, pp. 58–68.

⁵⁸ Compare the *Grub mtha’ shel gyi me lon*, composed in 1802 by the Mongolian author Thu’u bkvan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, which devotes chapter nine to the Bon-religion and chapter ten to the philosophical systems of China. For a description of this work see Andrei I. Vostrikov, *Tibetskaya istoricheskaya literatura*, Moskva 1962, pp. 97–100. This work was well known in Mongolia, and chapter twelve, dealing with the history of Buddhism in Mongolia, was translated into Mongolian. In Buryatia a block print under the title *Degedü šasin erdeni ber mongyol oron-i tügegülügsen uy-i üjegülügsen irayu kelen-ü kürkirel neretü* was prepared, which led to its wide circulation, compare Boris Ya. Vladimircov, “Nadpisi na skalakh khalkhaskogo Coktu-taidzhi”, *I. Izvestiya Akademii Nauk SSSR*, 1926, pp. 1272–1273.

VII. Emic discourses and the “shamanism” of the early ethnographers

In 1846 the Buryad scholar Dorji Banzarov published a work entitled “The Black Faith or Shamanism among the Mongols”,⁵⁹ thus introducing the emic term *qara šasin* to a wider scholarly audience. Dorji Banzarov was the first scholar to write a monograph about the so-called “shamanism,” although in the early 19th century “shamanism” already was a well established construct in European intellectual discourse. When tracing the origin of “shamanism” back to “the external world, nature, and the internal world, the soul of man”, Banzarov was deeply influenced by the European Romantic movement. But his explanation of “shamanism” as arising out of man’s attachment to the surrounding landscape is also found in the Buryad-Mongolian chronicles of the time. According to the already quoted chronicle *Qori-yin arban nigen ecige-yin jun-u uy ijaγur-un tuγuji*, the shamanic powers originate in the transformation of the souls of the male and female shamans into “the masters, onγyod and demons of these mountains, streams, brooks, lakes and forests etc.” (p. 95).

In the debate about the European construction of “shamanism”, the question whether the European discursive construct could have been influenced by Inner Asian discourses has not yet been raised. Taking a closer look at the ethnographic accounts from which the European thinkers of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment romantic renaissance drew their knowledge about “native religiosity” we should reconsider our assumptions about the European origins of the reification of “shamanism”. Ethnographers like Johan Gottlieb Georgi show in their reports that they were acquainted with the resentment the Buddhist monks nurtured against the shamans. Peter Simon Pallas even mentions the persecution of the shamans:

“They still have secret sorcerers of both sexes among themselves, who, despite being persecuted and cursed by the lamas, trifle with the superstitious mob”.⁶⁰

The Russian and German ethnographers who travelled among the Mongols in the late 18th and early 19th centuries have been well aware of the Buddhist attitude towards the shamans and their treatment as a homogenous religious group and teaching opposed to Buddhism. Moreover, they also took over the Buddhist self-perception of having a “civilizing” influence on the “barbarian natives”, as the following statement by Pallas shows:

⁵⁹ Dorji Banzarov, *Chernaya vera ili shamanstvo u Mongolov*, Kazan 1846.

⁶⁰ Peter Simon Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften*, 2 Theile. *Um eine Einführung vermehrer Nachdruck der 1776 und 1801 bei der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in St. Petersburg erschienenen Ausgabe. Mit einer Einführung von S. Hummel*, Graz 1980, pp. 341. The English translation is my own.

“Still one notices among the Kalmucks and more so among the Mongols who confess to the lamaist religion, that their customs, partly through the community with the Chinese, partly through the Tangut clergy, have become immeasurably softer than those one even now finds among the Buräts who adhere to the shamanic superstition and who are, as it were, the exact likeness of that which their brothers used to be”.⁶¹

VIII. Conclusion

To sum up: A close reading of the available Mongolian sources of the 17th to 19th centuries reveals an ongoing reification process of a “teaching of the shamans”. This process unfolds in several steps. First, the Mongolian indigenous religious specialists were described as possessing a “wrong view”, compared to the “true” Buddhist teaching. The discourse on the shamanic adversaries of the Buddhist monks was thus situated within the well known Inner-Buddhist culture of polemic debate. In later texts we note an increasing use of objectifying vocabulary to characterise the shamans. They are no longer those who possess an “old and wrong [world]view”, but are described as adhering to a “teaching” different from Buddhism, without judging this to be inferior. The emergence of a “neutral” descriptive mode that described different religious teachings with a comparative terminology also brought about the need to define and classify these teachings. The Buryad-Mongolian chronicles of the late 19th century testify to this. The reification processes described here should, however, not be understood as a singular and monolithic discourse. Even as late as the 19th century derogatory terms to denote the shamans were still in use. The discourse on the “teaching of the shamans” is thus a polyphonic discourse.

The analysis of the Buddhist way into Mongolia leads us to some general conclusions. The emergence of an analytical vocabulary to categorize the religious opponents demonstrates that “religions” as entities often emerge out of confrontational situations and in their wake of polemics, and that religious practices and concepts are given names and treated as reified entities when cultural boundaries are crossed and rival traditions are encountered. Abstract terms that bundle up practices, rituals, ideas, concepts and persons in one “teaching” are created in situations, when differences are encountered and negotiated. An encounter situation within a social-religious field can thus lead to the distinction of an autonomous field of “religion” on the discourse level and the development of a respective analytical terminology. As a result of our examination of the Mongolian sources from the late 16th up to the 19th century we can sum up that a religion called “shamanism” was invented in 17th/18th century Mongolia. What implications does this result have on

⁶¹ Pallas, *Sammlungen*, pp. 103. See also Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, „Zur europäischen Rezeption der mongolischen autochthonen Religion und des Buddhismus in der Mongolei“. In: Peter Schalk et al. (eds.). *Religion im Spiegelkabinett. Asiatische Religionsgeschichte im Spannungsfeld zwischen Orientalismus und Okzidentalismus*, Uppsala 2003, pp. 243–288, especially pp. 267–275.

the European discourse on “shamanism”? The assumption of Kocku von Stuckrad and other scholars that “Shamanism as a distinct type of religion owes its existence to the appropriation by western observers” needs to be modified. In the light of the Mongolian evidence we can reformulate Stuckrad’s statement thus: “Shamanism as a distinctive type of religion owes its existence to the appropriation by Buddhist observers.”

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