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History Writing and the Making of Mongolian Buddhism

Abstract: When in the late sixteenth century the third Dalai Lama travelled to the Mongolian regions, he was accompanied by Buddhist monks of different Tibetan schools, Gelugpa, Sakyapa, Kagyüpa and others. Many of them built monasteries and temples in Mongolia, funded by Mongolian nobles. Although Gelugpa Buddhism quickly became dominant in Mongolia, the other schools remained present and active in the country until today. From the start, however, most Mongolian historians described the spread and development of Buddhism in the Mongolian lands as the endeavor of just one school, the ‘glorious Gelugpa’, ignoring the plurality of the Tibetan-Buddhist schools in the Mongolian religious field. This paper aims to analyze how and to what aims Mongolian historians created a uniform Gelugpa Buddhism, which taxonomies they used and which narratives they employed to present Gelugpa Buddhism as the religion of the Mongolian peoples. Moreover, the paper explores which impact Mongolian historiography had (and has) on modern scholarship and its narrative of Mongolian religious history. I argue that modern scholarship helps to perpetuate the ‘master narrative’ of Mongolian Buddhist historiography, presenting Mongolian Buddhism as a ‘pure’, exclusive Gelugpa Buddhism.

1 Introduction

‘From Sümer Mergen Tayiji [...] was born, as a son, the rebirth of the Dalai Lama¹ Sodnam Jamsu. His name was Yöndan Jamsu, rebirth of the Dalai Lama. He was born finding his birth in the golden lineage of Dayan Qayan. Now he has much spread the teaching of Tsongkhapa² (mo. *tsongkhapa-yin šasin*) like the sun among the Mongol peoples.’ (Anonymous 1980, 121–122)

Thus the unknown author of the Mongolian chronicle *Altan tobči*, writing in the middle of the seventeenth century, describes the propagation of the Tibetan form of Bud-

1 For better readability, I provide a phonetical transcription of the most important Tibetan names and terms, giving the exact Tibetan transliteration in brackets. The classical Mongolian is rendered according to Rachewiltz 1996, with the exception of the letter *j* which is given without the haček. For well-known Tibetan and Mongolian terms, however, I use the popular spellings, thus ‘Dalai Lama’ instead of ‘Dalai Blama’, with the exception of the Mongolian ruler known as ‘Genghis Khan’: I use ‘Chinggis Qan’, the historically correct spelling which is very much preferred by the Mongols themselves. The Khalkha-Mongolian is transliterated according to Vietze 1978. Sanskrit is transliterated according to the internationally accepted rules.

2 Mongolian rendering for the Tibetan *bTsong kha pa* (1357–1419), a reformer of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism who is considered the founding father of the religious school of the Gelugpa (*dge lugs pa*).

dhism into the Mongolian regions which had started with the famous meeting of the Mongolian ruler Altan Qayan and the Tibetan Gelugpa hierarch Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rgya mtsho), the later Third Dalai Lama, in the late sixteenth century. The phrasing of his sentence tells us much about sectarian preferences in mid-seventeenth century Mongolia. Instead of writing ‘teaching of the Buddha/Buddhism’, (mo.) *burqan-u šasin*, the author prefers the phrase ‘teaching of Tsongkhapa’, ascribing the Buddhist promulgation to the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, to the exclusion of other schools. So far, the *Altan tobči* is the earliest historical source promulgating this exclusivist Gelugpa view of the Buddhist transformation in Mongolia. Later sources from the eighteenth century onwards continue in the same vein. However, a careful look at other historical works of the seventeenth century like the *Sira tuyuji* (Shastina 1957), the *Erdeni-yin tobči* (Haenisch 1955) or the many extant colophons the Buddhist canonical texts provide (Kas’yanenko 1993; Kollmar-Paulenz et al. 2012a), tells us a slightly different story. These sources stress the dominant agency of the Gelugpa lamas, yet they frequently mention Sakyapa (Sa skya pa), Nyingmapa (rNying ma pa) and Kagyupa (bKa’ brgyud pa) monks who came to Mongolia together with the Gelugpa, mostly in the entourage of the Third Dalai Lama. These non-Gelugpa voices were, however, effectively silenced in later Mongolian historical works and, subsequently, in the scholarly works of modern historians of Mongolia who rely on these works and often adopt their accounts as ‘historical facts’. Therefore, this paper follows a twofold aim. Firstly, I will critically engage with Mongolian historiography and ask how Mongolian historians constructed a homogenous Mongolian Gelugpa Buddhist tradition, which taxonomies they used and which narratives they employed to present Gelugpa Buddhism as the religion of all Mongolian peoples. To this aim, I will provide a short summary of the main interests that inform historical writing in the Mongolian cultural environment and then proceed to a case study. Secondly, I will examine which impact Mongolian historiography had (and has) on modern scholarship and its narrative of Mongolian religious history. I argue that modern scholarship helps to perpetuate the ‘master narrative’ of Mongolian Buddhist historiography, presenting Mongolian Buddhism as a ‘pure’, exclusive Gelugpa Buddhism.

2 Mongolian historiography: lineage as a means of creating a collective identity

The Mongolian chronicle *Erten-ü mongyol-un qad-un ündüsün-ü yeke sira tuyuji*, ‘Great yellow history of the origin of the Mongolian rulers of old’ (Shastina 1957), written by an unknown author in the middle of the seventeenth century, begins its narrative with a citation from the famous chronicle of the Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Chokyi Gyatso (Ngag dbang blo bzang chos kyi rgya mtsho) (1617–1682), the *gZhon nu’i dga’ ston*, ‘Joyous Feast of the Young’ (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1985):

‘In the chronicle called “Joyous Feast of the Young”, taught by the Dalai Lama, it is said:
 “If a man does not know his own origin,
 He is like a monkey which has been lost in the woods;
 He who does not know his own descent group (*oboy*),
 Is like a dragon made of turquoise;
 He who does not see the scriptures which tell this and that about his forefathers,
 Is like a *Mon*,³ whose child has been carelessly lost.” (Shastina 1957, 15)

In Mongolian Studies this citation is usually seen as the starting point of the Tibetan influence on Mongolian historiographical writing. Indeed, the works of the Fifth Dalai Lama had a strong impact on Mongolian historiography since the seventeenth century,⁴ but the citation tells us much more. In poetic words it stresses the significance of genealogy, the most important paradigm of Mongolian historiography. Even today, for many Mongols descent is (ideally) the most important identity marker, knowledge of the past being first and foremost knowledge of the genealogical lineage of one’s ancestors. Mongolian historiography since the thirteenth century has been written in this vein. Mongolian historiographers composed genealogical lineages of different descent groups,⁵ and along these lines they wrote the history of the great persons, the Qans (rulers) and the nobles. The few Mongolian historical sources before the seventeenth century stress the importance of genealogical descent. In the Mongols’ eyes their most important historical text is the *Mongyol-un niyuca tobča’an*, the ‘Secret History of the Mongols’,⁶ which was written in the years 1228 and 1240.⁷ This epic chronicle contains a so-called ‘historical master narrative’ (Middell, Gibas, Hadler 2000) which tells us about the origin of the Mongolian people, the ascent of Chinggis Qan from a detested outsider to world emperor, his death and the rule of his son and successor (Kradin, Skrynnikova 2006). Historical master narratives present a comprehensive form of the self-representation of a given community. They point out an order and a meaning of the world which claims universal validity, representing a particular world as ‘structure of the world as a whole, as cosmic order’ (Rüsen 1998, 24). In the *Secret History* the narrative about Chinggis Qan is given cosmological relevance through its foundation in an origin myth that constitutes the (mo.) *oboy* (kinship group)-related collective identity of the Mongols. This myth is told in the *Secret History* as follows:

3 The *Mon* who live on the southern slopes of the Himalayas are considered wild and uncouth by the Tibetans.

4 Mainly his chronicle and the biography of his famous predecessor, the Third Dalai Lama (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1984).

5 There are different Mongolian terms for descent groups which tend to be overlapping, with contextually differing meanings, see Sneath 2007, 108–110. Compare also Rykin 2004. Mo. *oboy*, often translated as ‘clan’, is perhaps the most prominent of these terms.

6 For this work see the ‘ultimate’ study by Rachewiltz 2004. I use the Middle-Mongolian text reconstructed from the Chinese transcription by Haenisch 1962.

7 For the date of its compilation see Rachewiltz 2004, XXIX-XXXIV.

The origins of Chinggis Qa'an. At the beginning there was a blue-grey wolf, born with his destiny ordained by Heaven Above. His wife was a fallow doe. They came crossing the Tenggis. After they had settled at the source of the Onan river on Mount Burqan Qaldun, Bataciqan was born to them. (Rachewiltz 2004, 1)

The myth is followed by a detailed genealogical account of the origins of the Mongols up to Chinggis Qan. Genealogy is used to stress a collective social-political identity of the early Mongols. It is important to note that the descent lineages which establish and confirm social and political belonging, could be entirely fictitious, as will be seen in the later reconciliation of the descent lineages of Mongolian nobles with the lineage of the Buddha.

Moreover, Mongolian historiography is usually based within a religious framework. This is not to say that Mongolian historiography is itself religious historiography, but rather that most of the Mongolian historians adhered to a religious worldview which served as the referential frame of their narration. In the *Secret History* this religious framework is set up in two ways: On the one hand the ancestors of the ruling descent group are divine beings. On the other hand the rule of the Qan is based on the affirmation of *Heaven Above* (mo. *deger-e tngri*), a transcendent divine principle that is always evoked in politically valid contexts (Atwood 2004).

Since the seventeenth century Mongolian historiography has been deeply influenced by Chinese historiography as well as Tibetan Buddhist historiography. Chinese historical works were first consulted in their Manchu translations. In 1639 an abridged version of the *Yuanshi*, the Annals of the Yuan dynasty, was translated into Manchu, to be printed in 1646. In the same year 1639, this Manchu version was translated into Mongolian. The influence of Chinese historiography is obvious in the detailed description of the political and military history as well as its chronological presentation. Interestingly, the didactic prerogative⁸ of the Chinese historians is not picked up by the Mongols. Tibetan influence is much stronger, and also earlier. It can be traced for the first time in a Sino-Mongolian inscription of 1346.⁹ Tibetan historiography was influential in two aspects: First, the description and interpretation of the political relations between Tibet and the Mongols since the thirteenth century was built along the lines of Tibetan politico-philosophical models. Secondly, Mongolian history was re-written as part of a Buddhist 'world history', 'world' here including India, Tibet, Mongolia and China. Along with this Buddhist reconfiguration of Mongolian history, a new order of historical time was established (Middell, Gibas, Hadler 2000, 25). 'Time' as historical category was conceptualized in relation to religion. The narrative of Mongolian Buddhism speaks about a 'first conversion' of the Mongols, dating back

8 In order to provide precedents for the 'art of ruling', Chinese history writing followed a didactic principle that stressed continuity and useful reference. Facts should be reported truthfully, but, in contrast to neutral reporting, 'reasonable non-mentioning', as well as praise and blame, had to be applied (see Yang 1965).

9 For details see Cleaves 1952, 1–123, particularly 81.

to the thirteenth century during the Mongol Empire, a so-called ‘dark period’ from the end of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 up to 1578, the year of the meeting of Altan Qayan with Sonam Gyatso, and the ‘second conversion’ that started in 1578. The point of departure for this temporal structure of history is Buddhism, either its presence in the ‘first’ and ‘second conversion’, or its absence in the ‘dark period’. Anyone familiar with the Tibetan periodization of time will acknowledge the model of this scheme being Tibetan Buddhist historiography as it is elaborated by Tibetan historians (Bretfeld 2010). How much this Mongolian periodization of historical time influenced later Western scholarship will be explored later.

3 Turning Mongolian historiography into Mongolian Buddhist historiography: The case of the *Erdeni-yin tobči*

Although historiography claims to present the past as a history of *facts*, it composes the past as a history of *meaning*, arranging and narrating past events in a meaningful and plausible order (Rüsen 2002). In this way historiography is an important means to shape the self-perception of a group or society in the present. How Mongolian historiography reconciled and converged the two narratives of the Mongols as the people of Chinggis Qan and of the Mongols as Buddhists, I will show by examining the Mongolian chronicle *Erdeni-yin tobči*.

The *Erdeni-yin tobči*, written in 1662 by the Ordos noble Sayang Sečen, is an early example of Mongolian historiography modelled after Tibetan Buddhist historiography. Mongolian chronicles address either a particular noble family that belongs to the descent group the deeds of its individual members the chronicles report (and glorify), or a broader elite strata of Mongolian society, including the Buddhist *saṅgha*. The *Erdeni-yin tobči*, with its full title¹⁰ *Qad-un ündüsün-ü erdeni-yin tobči*, ‘Precious summary of the origin of the rulers’, has been immensely successful among the Mongols. Up to now more than twenty-four manuscripts are known. The work received the rare honor to be translated, at the request of the Qianlong emperor (reigned 1736–1796), first into Manchu, and then, based on the Manchu version, into Chinese.¹¹ In 1777 the Mongolian, Manchu and Chinese versions of the work were put into print. The print is also an exception to the rule that historical chronicles were usually transmitted in manuscript form, bound in the form of Chinese double-leaved books

¹⁰ The work is, typical for Mongolian historical chronicles, known under a variety of titles. I quote here the most widely used title.

¹¹ Manchu title: *Monggo han sai da sekien*, Chinese title: *Meng-ku Yüan-liu*, see Doerfer 1958, 449.

whereas Buddhist books (in loose-leaf, rectangle-sized *poṭhi*-format) were preferably printed.¹²

The *Erdeni-yin tobči* is also the first Mongolian historical work to become known in Europe. In 1829 Isaac Jacob Schmidt published a German translation of the chronicle (Schmidt 1829). Before this date, Mongolian historiography was unheard of in Europe.

Sayang Sečen (born in 1604) came from a well-known family: His great-grandfather was the famous Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji (1540 – 1586), the nephew of Altan Qayan of the Tumed Mongols. In his extensive colophon to the *Erdeni-yin tobči*,¹³ Sayang Sečen provides us with some details of his life. At the early age of eleven he took hold of the title of his great-grandfather, and only a few years later he was appointed head of the jurisdiction of the Ordos people (mo. *ulus*) by the Ordos ruler Bosoytu Jinong (1565 – 1624) (Haenisch 1955, fol. 86v). Although surrounded by many legends, Sayang Sečen's exact date of death is not known. Even in the twentieth century people in the Ordos region asserted that he had been opposed to Manchu rule and was executed by the Manchus (Mostaert 1957, 499), a tale which is not corroborated by written sources. However, in his colophon he tells us that he wrote the history of the Mongols 'from the earliest times up to the present, deeply quarrelsome (*temečeküi*) times' (Haenisch 1955, fol. 96v19). The choice of the verbal noun *temečeküi* may suggest a general discontentedness at the political situation of his own time.

Sayang Sečen wrote a universal history of the world as it was known to him, more precisely a history of the Buddhist world regions (mo. *yajar*), narrating the history of each region as the history of its rulers. His work starts with the narrative of the origin of the universe and is thus embedded in a Buddhist cosmological frame. He divides his chronicle into three parts:

1. The origin of the universe and the Indian rulers (folios 1v-7r19);
2. The Tibetan rulers (folios 7r20 – 24r24);
3. The Mongolian rulers (folios 24r25 – 96v13). This third part is by far the lengthiest, comprising all in all seventy folios against the mere twenty-four folios of the first two parts.

As a historian, Sayang Sečen tells us which sources he used for his chronicle.¹⁴ He lists seven Mongolian titles in the colophon, some of which nowadays are no longer

¹² This divide between printed religious books and hand-written secular writings is grounded in the doctrine of (Skt.) *puṇya*, 'merit'. Book printing allowed for multiple copies and reached wider audiences, thus generating considerably more merit for the sponsor of a print edition than the sponsor of a manuscript, which could not be copied quickly and at random and had a very limited reach.

¹³ I use the Urga manuscript which up to now is the oldest version of the work (Haenisch 1955). Other manuscripts and xylographs of the work do not contain a colophon.

¹⁴ Mongolian and Tibetan historians, as a rule, not only quoted the sources they used, but often source-critically evaluated them, in Tibet since at least the fifteenth century, in Mongolia since

known. A source analysis has brought to light that in fact he relied on more than these seven sources for his compilation, for example the *Altan tobči* which is not mentioned by him. In chronological order he focuses on the deeds of the politically most important men and, rarely, women of the different historical periods. In the third part of his chronicle in which he deals with Mongolian history, the account is structured according to the protagonists' belonging to different Mongolian descent groups. Mongolian historiography as represented in Sayang Sečen's work is thus on the one hand mainly interested in the 'great figures'. On the other hand, although history in the Mongolian historiographer's eye denotes the deeds of the exceptional individual, these deeds acquire meaning and sense through the individual's belonging to a larger social group connected by descent.

In his presentation of the events of Mongolian history Sayang Sečen succeeds in reconciling the Mongols' non-Buddhist past with their Buddhist present. He does so by transforming the origin myth of the *Borjigin*¹⁵ descent group into an origin myth grounded in Buddhist cosmology. The origin myth of the Mongols, which has been given above in the version of the *Secret History*, reads in the *Erdeni-yin tobči* as follows:

When seven generations from Seger sandali-tu qayan tügen ejen, the Tibetan king of former times, had passed away, and the minister called Longnam had killed the Dalai sobin aru altan siregetü qayan and usurped the throne, his three sons Boyači, Sibayuču and Börte činu-a fled to other countries. The youngest, Börte činu-a, went to the country Gongbo. He did not trust the people of Gongbo, took as his wife the [woman] named Goo-a maral, crossed the lake called Tenggis, went to the northern region and reached the shores of the Bayiqal. He came to the mountain named Burqan qaldun. (Haenisch 1955, fol. 24r-v)

The grey wolf (mo. *börte činu-a*) and the fallow doe (mo. *goo-a maral*), the mythical ancestors of the *Borjigin oboy*, are transformed into the son of a Tibetan king and his wife, whose genealogy can be followed down to the royal lineage of the Śākyas, the lineage of the Buddha himself.¹⁶ Thus the Chinggisids, having their origins in the lineage of the Buddha, obtain soteriological relevance in a Buddhist world view. Chinggis Qan himself turns into a *cakravartin*, a Buddhist world ruler. From the second half of the seventeenth century this Buddhist reconfiguration of the Mongolian historical master narrative has been standardized in Mongolian historiography. The genealogical lineage no longer starts with the mythical ancestors, but with the Buddha,

around the eighteenth century. Historiography in Tibet and Mongolia is thus a science in the sense that it relies on methodologically controlled reflection and respective approaches towards its subjects of study.

¹⁵ The *oboy* of Chinggis Qan.

¹⁶ Tibetan chronicles often propose a genealogical link of the Tibetan kings to the lineage of the Śākyas, see Haahr 1969, 168–198. In his discussion of the Tibetan sources Haahr also includes the Mongolian *Erdeni-yin tobči*.

leading over the Tibetan *dharmarājas* who had promulgated the *dharma* in Tibet to the ancestors of Chinggis Qan.

The transformed origin tale of the Mongolian people sets the Buddhist undertone of the chronicle which comes to the fore when the author describes the Buddhist conversion of the Mongols. Generally, Mongolian historiography makes extensive use of narrative elements. The narration often includes performative aspects, evoking or remembering concrete situations that have a direct relation to human experience and evoke emotions. Mongolian historiography thus stresses the ‘experientiality’ of the narrative (Fludernik 1996). To this aim, the authors often employ direct speech and use expressive metaphors. The speech of Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji, the nephew of Altan Qayan, who allegedly convinced his uncle to invite the Third Dalai Lama to Mongolia, represents such a dramatic experientiality. When Altan Qayan and the Third Dalai Lama met, Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji

held the following speech: “[...] Then, from the time of the Uqayatu Sečen Qayan¹⁷ till the present time, religion and worldly order have been in decline (mo. *čölöyidiüysen*). Therefore, we performed bad deeds and crimes, and we ate the meat and indulged in the blood [of living beings]. Now, [...] beginning with this auspicious good day, the great river of churning waves of blood will be turned into a clear sea of milk. If we enter the white path of the aforementioned *dharma* which has been entered by the holy ones of old, it will be to our benefit that we have relied on the ruler and the lama.” (Haenisch 1955, fol. 76v-77r)

The wording of the first sentence evokes the memory of a well-known epic poem, the ‘lament of Toyon Temür’, in which he mourned the loss of his beloved Beijing after his flight from the city (Okada 1967). The educated Mongolian reader is immediately reminded by the choice of words of this famous epic poem which has been preserved in oral transmission among the Mongols. With this literary device Sayang Sečen connects the imperial past of the Mongols to the Buddhist present, charging the Buddhist conversion of the Mongols with an emotionally positive response of his readers who live in ‘difficult’ times, on the verge of war and submission to the Manchus. Imperial decline is connected with the absence of Buddhism, and the Buddhist conversion is presented as the possibility to regain the lost imperial glory.

The sentences following this opening are taken nearly verbatim from the Tibetan account of the meeting of Altan Qayan and Sonam Gyatso, as described in the Tibetan biography of the Third Dalai Lama, written in 1646 by the great Fifth.¹⁸ Sayang

¹⁷ The last Mongolian emperor of the Yuan dynasty, Toyon Temür.

¹⁸ Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1984, 147: ‘When we were united in the *mchod yon* relation with the Sakyapa, the *dharma* flourished. Later the *dharma* was destroyed by the king of the *me mur* [hell]. [Our country] was like an island in the ocean of darkness and blood because nothing but evil as deeds and flesh and blood as food were enjoyed. Out of the grace of the union of priest and donor, like the sun and the moon, the way of the pure *dharma* was shown. The sea of blood has been turned into milk, which is a great grace. Therefore it is necessary that all the Chinese, Tibetans and Mongols living in this region shall remain in the law of the ten virtues.’

Sečen who wrote his chronicle nearly a century after the events, uses the speech of his great-grandfather to immortalize him as the central figure of the Mongolian conversion tale. Yet, in the biography of Altan Qaγan titled *Erdeni tunumal*, a much earlier Mongolian work, the speech of Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji is not even mentioned. The anonymous author states in the colophon that he relied on an eyewitness account of the events. Composed around 1607, his work is the only Mongolian chronicle not influenced by the oeuvre of the Fifth Dalai Lama.

4 Mongolian historiography meets modern scholarship

The speech played an unexpected role in later scholarly accounts of the Buddhist conversion of the Mongols. Saγang Sečen lets his illustrious ancestor Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji refer to the *qoyar yosun*, the ‘two orders’ of ‘religion’ (mo. *nom* or *šasin*, here identical with Buddhism) and worldly rule (mo. *törö*), as developed in the *Čaγan teüke*, the ‘White History’, a work of Buddhist state theory probably composed in the sixteenth century but drawing on older sources.¹⁹ Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji is known as the compiler of this work which envisions the ideal system of Buddhist government on the basis of the mutually harmonious relation between the two fundamental orders of society, that is the Buddhist monks as ‘offering-sites’ (mo. *takil-un oron*) for the lay householders, the alms-givers (mo. *öglige-yin ejen*).²⁰ This micro-model of the ideal Buddhist community is projected on the macro-level of the state. The *Čaγan teüke* opts for a comprehensive system of government in which the ruler and the high lamas are related through Tantric initiation. In Mongolian historiography the system of *qoyar yosun* was projected back to the Yuan emperor Qubilai Qaγan and his favorite lama Phagpa (‘Phags pa) from the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism. In his chronicle Saγang Sečen identifies Altan Qaγan as the rebirth of Qubilai Qaγan, and the Third Dalai Lama as the rebirth of Phagpa Lama (Haenisch 1955, fol. 76r). From the later seventeenth century onwards, Mongolian historiography described the history of the Yuan dynasty-relations to Tibet according to this interpretative model. Western scholarship followed along. In his influential *Modern History of Mongolia*, published for the first time in 1968 and to this day one of the best introductions to modern Mongolian history, the British mongolist Charles Bawden quotes the speech of Qutuγtai Sečen Qung Tayiji at length and comments:

¹⁹ Sagaster 1976; Vanchikova 2001. I use the manuscript preserved in the library of the Institute for Mongolian, Buddhist and Tibetan Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMBT SO RAN), dating probably from the late sixteenth century (Vanchikova 2001, 10).

²⁰ In the Tibetan language this relation is called *yon mchod* or *mchod yon*.

[...] we see the Khungtaiji making a conscious appeal to an unforgotten Mongol tradition of the alliance of the Buddhist church with the secular power, which ran like a thread through Mongol political thought at the time of the Yüan dynasty. He was seeking the sanction of the imperial past for the political innovations he had in view. This tradition of the “Two Principles” had been formally laid down in Khubilai’s time [...] (Bawden 1989, 29–30)

Although we do not possess a single document from the thirteenth century confirming the alleged ‘alliance of the Buddhist church with the secular power’, the speech and the role Sayang Sečen attributed to Qutuytai Sečen Qung Tayiji was taken at face value by scholars of Mongolian Studies,²¹ with the sole exception of Henry Serruys. In Western scholarship, Qutuytai Sečen Qung Tayji became the main hero of the Mongolian conversion narrative. Only recently, doubt was cast on the historical value of Sayang Sečen’s account (Kollmar-Paulenz 2001, 125–129), and more attention was paid to the fictional aspects and ideological assumptions of his chronicle (Elverskog 2006, 40–42). Yet even today, the scholarly narrative of the Mongolian Buddhist conversion tale follows closely in the footpath of Mongolian historiography and reproduces the ‘emic’ view, in this case the view of the one Mongolian historian whose chronicle has first become known to a European readership, ignoring a whole range of sources providing alternative views that are nowadays at our disposal.²²

5 The construction of a religious tradition: Mongolian Buddhism through the Mongolian historiographer’s eyes

In his narration Sayang Sečen stresses the dominant role of the Third Dalai Lama and his Gelugpa school, yet his tale of the Mongolian conversion includes other Tibetan Buddhist schools as well. Thus he informs us that the first Mayidari Qutuytu Gendun Pelsang Gyatso (dGe ‘dun dpal bzang rgya mtsho), one of the highest Bud-

²¹ Bawden 1991; Rossabi 1995; Kaschewsky 1986, 89; Franke 1981, 306–310; Morgan 2007, 110; Weiers 2004, 142–143, 175; Sagaster 1976, 29–30; Sagaster 1989, 236. Recently, Sagaster has produced a much more nuanced description, modifying his earlier view, see Sagaster 2007.

²² For example Anonymous 1607, translation Kollmar-Paulenz 2001, Elverskog 2003; Lubsandanjin 1655, translation Shastina 1973; Anonymous 1980, translation Bawden 1955; Anonymous 1651–1662, translation Shastina 1957; Byamba Erke Dayičing 1667, translation Kämpfe 1983; Gombojab 1725; Lomi 1732–1735; Guosi Dharma 1739; Rasipungsuḡ 1774/75; Isibaldan 1835; Jimbadorji 1834–1837; Galdan 1859. These chronicles are not only available in manuscript form, but have been reprinted in the Mongolian Republic as well as in Inner Mongolia. Furthermore, biographies of important Buddhist personalities like the Jibtsundamba Khutukhtus (Bawden 1961; Kämpfe 1979a, Kämpfe 1979b) or the Changkya Khutukhtus (Sagaster 1967; Kämpfe 1976a, Kämpfe 1976b, Kämpfe 1977), and monastic histories like the history of the monastery Erdeni Zuu (Tsendina 1999) add to our knowledge of Mongolian religious history.

dhist dignitaries in Mongolia, was also the reincarnation of the Nyingmapa Jampa Gyatso (Byams pa rgya mtsho) (Haenisch 1955, fol. 85v) who was a disciple of Padmasambhava, the Tantric master who had been invited to Tibet by king Khri srong lde'u btsan (755–797) and who plays a prominent role in the narration of the Tibetan conversion to Buddhism (Kapstein 2000, 155–162). Sayang Sečen already makes use of the term *tsongkhaba-yin śasin*, ‘teaching of Tsongkhapa’, identifying Buddhism with the Gelugpa school. More often, however, he uses the term *śasin* neutrally, without a defining attribute. At that time and in that context *śasin* denoted ‘Buddhist teaching’, without any sectarian undertone. Thus, Sayang Sečen’s narration mirrors the complex and heterogeneous religious situation that marked the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century in Mongolia. His praise of the Gelugpa school and his use of terms like *tsongkhaba-yin śasin* show a certain preference or bias for the Buddhist school dominant in the Buddhist transformation of the Mongols, but many aspects of the Buddhist oecumene so typical of Tibet itself are present. His account not yet presents Mongolian Buddhism as a reified, dense and stable Gelugpa entity with sharply defined boundaries.

Only a few years later, the nuanced and mostly non-sectarian description of Sayang Sečen has been condensed into the narration of the Mongolian religious field as a unified and monolithic Gelugpa entity, to the exclusion of the other Tibetan Buddhist schools active in Mongolia. The endeavor to re-write Mongolian religious history in favor of an exclusivist Gelugpa view seems to have commenced in the late seventeenth century. New religious taxonomies extant in the sources point to a new exclusivist politics of identity of the Gelugpa. To understand the extent of the changes the discourse on religion underwent in the course of the seventeenth century, we have to return to the beginnings of the Tibeto-Mongolian religious relations in the late sixteenth century. When the Third Dalai Lama travelled to Mongolia to meet the Tumed ruler Altan Qayan, his large entourage consisted of Gelugpa monks and monks of various other schools, including Sakyapa, Taglungpa,²³ and Nyingmapa. The early sources do not comment on any rivalry between the different schools at that time. The above mentioned *Erdeni tunumal* tells us about the year 1591:

Later, in the *qubilyan*-month of the White-Hare-Year, the yellow and red capped *sangha* assembled at the river Buqa, presided over by the reverend Sdaylung Čorji. (Anonymous 1607, fol. 46v-47r)

The Taglung Choje was by school affiliation a Kagyupa monk, and still he was the leader of his fellow monks of different school affiliations. The term *ulayan malayai* comprises all Tibetan Buddhist schools with the exception of the Gelugpa. Thus, Mongolian sources rarely differentiate into Nyingmapa, Sakyapa, Kagyupa, Jonangpa etc., but usually summarize them under the umbrella term ‘red hat’. The ‘yellow

23 A sub-school of the Kagyupa.

hats', on the other hand, consist only of the Gelugpa. In the first decades of the spread of Buddhism the Mongolian rulers and nobles seldom preferred a particular Tibetan Buddhist school, but maintained personal relations with lamas of different school affiliations. In most cases the charisma of the individual lama, and not his sectarian affiliation, was responsible for him being chosen by a lay donor. The early Mongolian historiographies attest to this personal, non-sectarian approach the Mongolian rulers adopted. The afore-mentioned Altan Qayan did not limit the establishment of a personal *yon mchod*-relationship to the Third Dalai Lama, but also established such a relationship with the abbot of Taglung (sTag lung)-monastery. The nominal great Qayan, Tümen Jasaytu Qayan (reigned 1557/58–1592), who had his pasture grounds in Eastern Inner Mongolia, patronized the Karmapa, Sakyapa and Nyingmapa rather than the Gelugpa. Having been converted by a Karmapa lama around 1576, he nonetheless tried to invite the Dalai Lama. The colophons of the Mongolian *Ganjuur* disclose that three lamas at his court, Manjusri Bandida, the Sharba Qutuytu and Biligtü Nangso were in all likelihood Sakyapa.²⁴ They continued their career under Tümen Jasaytu Qayan's successor, the last great Qayan Ligdan. In 1586, Sakyapa monks consecrated the famous monastery of Erdeni Zuu in the Khal-kha territories, at the request of Abadai Qayan who was first brought into the Buddhist fold by the Third Dalai Lama (Anonymous 1607, fol. 43v; Galdan 1859, fol. 88v). Abadai Qayan was recognized by the Third Dalai Lama as an emanation of the bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, yet his monastery Erdeni Zuu remained under Sakyapa patronage for a long period (Tsendina 1999). As late as 1776 the second Changkya Khutukhtu (lĉang skya Qutuytu) Rolpe Dorje (Rol pa'i rdo rje) sent monks from this monastery to the Sakya monastery in western Central Tibet to bring back religious texts.

The close association between the Gelugpa and the other schools during that early period has not gone unnoticed by Western scholars of the early twentieth century. The Russian scholar Boris Vladimirtsov pointed out that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, 'yellow hats' and 'red hats' often lived in the same monasteries (Vladimirtsov 1927, 231). It is not surprising that monks affiliated to different schools lived in the same monastery, as all monastic schools in Tibet follow the monastic code of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya*. The sharing of monastic space has been a widespread practice in Mongolia up to today (Pegg 2001, 146–147).

Another prominent Buddhist personage of the time was the already mentioned Mayidari Qutuytu. In the *Erdeni tunumal* (Anonymous 1607, fol. 30r) we are told that the Mongolian nobles, led by Altan Qayan, bestowed on one lama, who is called the 'emanation lama of Sonam Dragpa' (bSod nams grags pa), the title Mayidari Qu-

²⁴ Colophon of vol. *ka* of the 'dul ba (gelmeli) (Vinaya) section of the Mongolian handwritten *Ganjuur* of 1628/29, preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (Kas'yanenko 1993, 183; Kollmar-Paulenz 2013, 11–12).

tuytu.²⁵ According to tradition, the Mayidari Qutuytu is simultaneously the reincarnation of the Nyingmapa scholar Jampa Gyatso and the reincarnation of the Gelugpa scholar Panchen Sonam Dragpa (1478–1554), one of the personal teachers of the Third Dalai Lama who took his upāsaka-vows from him (Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho 1984, 36). Visual sources confirm the Nyingmapa affiliation of the Mayidari Qutuytu who had been sent to Mongolia to substitute for the loss of the young Fourth Dalai Lama who in 1602 departed for Tibet. In the Mayidari-yin süme, a fortified temple erected 1606 some seventy kilometers west of today's Hohot, the capital of Inner Mongolia, the murals depict him with a beard, a red gown and a red hat, surrounded by protector deities belonging to Nyingmapa Tantric cycles (Charleux 2002, 208). The Mayidari Qutuytu became the personal spiritual teacher of the Namudai Sečen Qayan, the famous (and notorious) Noyanču Jönggen Qatun (Serruys 1974; Kollmar-Paulenz 2000) and the Onbo Qung Tayiji.

Contrary to these well attested relations and fluid boundaries between the individual Tibetan Buddhist schools in the Mongolian territories, since the late seventeenth century Mongolian Buddhist history has been written as Gelugpa history by Mongolian historians. In their accounts historians coined the terms *sira šasin*, 'yellow teaching' (sometimes also *burqan-u sira šasin*, 'yellow teaching of the Buddha') or *Tsongkhapa-yin šasin*, 'teaching of Tsongkhapa', to denote the Tibetan form of Buddhism. These terms more and more replaced the general term *burqan-u šasin*, 'teaching of the Buddha' (Byamba Erke Dayičing 1667, 60, et passim). The new terminology led to a readjustment of inner-Buddhist boundaries. The exclusivist term suggests that the non-Gelugpa schools hold 'wrong views' (tib. *lta log*). Furthermore, new boundaries were drawn: instead of acknowledging the great variety of Tibetan Buddhist schools, all non-Gelugpa schools were bundled together as 'red hats' that were opposed to the 'yellow hats'. This polarity was well established in eighteenth century Mongolian religious-political discourse. The Gelugpa now openly pressed their claim to be the sole preservers of the correct and pure understanding of the *dharma*. As Prajñasagara (Sanskrit. Prajñāsāgara) in his biography *Čindamani-yin erike* ('Rosary of wish-fulfilling gems') of the Mongolian Gelugpa monk Neyiči Toyin asserts:

Further, he [Neyiči Toyin] relied with unshakable belief solely on the teaching of the Buddha which has not been defiled by dirt, like the *Bon-po*, the old and wrong views; [he relied] on the spotless central teaching of the holy Tsongkhapa. (Prajñasagara 1739, fol. 13v-14r)

The term 'old' (mo. *qayučin*) often denotes the 'red hats', whereas 'wrong' (mo. *buruyu*) targets the male and female shamans.

The discrepancy between historical discourse and social reality in the Mongolian religious field should remind us of the fallacy to read discourses as representations

²⁵ This is quite puzzling, because Gendun Pelsang Gyatso, commonly acknowledged as the first Mayidari Qutuytu, was born in Tibet in 1592 (he died in 1635), some fourteen years after the alleged bestowal of this title.

of social reality. The actors themselves, whose religious identities were fluid, who simultaneously belonged to ‘yellow’ and ‘red’ communities and engaged in ‘yellow’ and ‘red’ practices and rituals, constantly undermined the discursively created, sharply defined religious entities. Despite the rhetoric of our sources, in Mongolian (and also Tibetan) social history it is difficult to distinguish clear-cut and stable religious identities over longer time-periods.

The divide into ‘yellow hats’ and ‘red hats’ does not only suggest the homogeneity of the older Tibetan Buddhist schools, but also a homogeneity of the Gelugpa school that did not exist. The institution of the Dalai Lama, as it exists today, has been established and consolidated in the seventeenth century, backed by the military power of the Mongolian Qošot ruler Gušri Qan’s army. The institutionalized charisma of the Dalai Lama considerably increased his political influence as well as the religious *cum* political weight of the Gelugpa school in the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world. But the *Ganden Phodrang* (dga’ ldan pho brang)-government²⁶ and thus the institution of the Dalai Lama was not unanimously supported by all Gelugpa institutions. The ‘three seats’²⁷ followed their own policy, often in opposition to the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama himself occupies a rather weak structural position in the Gelugpa hierarchy, because formally he is not the head of the school.²⁸ In earlier centuries, his spiritually exalted position in Inner Asia relied to a great part on the veneration this incarnation lineage enjoyed among the Mongols. On the personal level of the *yon mchod*-relationship the Dalai Lama was the most highly revered incarnation among the Mongols. Thus he did not only play a vital role in the Tibeto-Mongolian religious and political relations, but also held a key position for the newly established Qing-government in Beijing. In their endeavor to create a collective Manchu identity in the early years of their reign, the Manchus took the Mongols and their imperial past as their role model. The Mongolian influence at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Qing state in Manchuria under Nurhaci took shape, was pervasive (Crossley 1997, 97–101). When the Shunzhi emperor (1644–1661, the first emperor of the Qing dynasty) in 1648 invited the Fifth Dalai Lama to Beijing, his invitation was not so much a continuation of the policy of the preceding Ming dynasty towards Tibet, but an acknowledgement of the importance the Mongols attested to this incarnation. With their focus on the Dalai Lama and thus on the Gelugpa, the Manchus shifted their religious alliance which in former years had been with the Sa-

26 The title ‘dGa’ ldan’ palace for the Tibetan central government stems from the residence in Drepung (‘Bras spungs) monastery which the ruler of Ne’u dong had bequeathed on the Second Dalai Lama Gendun Gyatso (dGe ‘dun rgya mtsho) in 1518 and which had been the administrative residence of this incarnation line up to the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama. In the late 1640s, the Fifth Dalai Lama transferred the administration of his government to the newly erected Potala palace.

27 The three Gelugpa monasteries near Lhasa: Sera, Drepung and Ganden (Goldstein 1989, 24–35).

28 The head is the ‘throne holder of Ganden’ (tib. *dga’ ldan khri pa*), who is elected on the basis of seniority and merit for a period of six years by his peers and confirmed in his office by the Dalai Lama.

kyapa. The following decades saw the emergence of a strong alliance of the Qing with the new religio-political rulers of Tibet. Due to the Qing support of the Gelugpa, in the early eighteenth century the older Buddhist schools in the Mongolian regions partly came under political pressure. Furthermore, in the eighteenth century a strong sectarian streak in some Mongol groups, notably the Dzungars, led to the persecution of the Nyingmapa in Central and Eastern Tibet. The aggression was also fostered by an imperial edict of the Yongzheng emperor of 1726 that aimed at the suppression of the non-Gelugpa schools (Petech 1972, 106–107). The discourse of Gelugpa supremacy, fostered by Qing politics and becoming ever more prominent in the course of the eighteenth century, contributed to the final disappearance of the non-Gelugpa schools from most²⁹ Mongolian historical accounts.

In the Mongolian territories the inner heterogeneity of the Gelugpa so obvious in Tibet was compensated by a strong ‘identity politics’ of the Mongolian Gelugpa that was realized through strategies of demarcating the religious ‘other’. The ‘other’ was no longer the shaman (Kollmar-Paulenz 2012b), who had been socially and politically marginalized since the late sixteenth century, but the ‘red hats’, Buddhist monks and lay-people that did not belong to the dominant Gelugpa school. In the story of Dugar Jayisang, a legendary warrior, we encounter perhaps the most popular narrative of the inner-religious ‘other’ (Humphrey 2007). He is said to have travelled to Tibet in order to purify the country by force of arms from the Nyingmapa and to re-establish the dominance of the Gelugpa. This goal he achieved by supernatural forces that in the legend are symbolized by his ability to subdue a tiger with his mere hands. His image still holds iconic status in Mongolia and the Buryat Republic.

6 Mongolian Buddhism through the scholar’s eyes

For more than a century scholars of Mongolian Studies followed, with rare exceptions, in the footsteps of the Mongolian Buddhist historiographers. They wrote the Buddhist history of the Mongols as a linear narrative within a Buddhist time frame, starting with the ‘first conversion’ of the Mongols during the period of the Mongolian empire and its successor state in China, the Mongolian Yuan dynasty. This period was followed by a ‘dark period’, when Buddhism declined and the ‘old religion’ of Shamanism took over once more. As the German scholar Rudolf Kaschewsky asserts:

Therefore it is not astonishing that with the end of the Yüan-dynasty (1368) and the ensuing disintegration of the ethnic unity of the Mongols, Buddhism did not have a chance of survival. [...] Not before the middle of the sixteenth century we get to know more about Mongolian Buddhism, and this period is called the “Second conversion” of the Mongols. (Kaschewsky 1986, 90)

²⁹ No discourse is entirely monolithic, and we still find traces of ‘red hat’ presence in nineteenth century Mongolian historical sources.

According to the scholarly narrative, in the late sixteenth century, the ‘second conversion’ started and the Mongols wholeheartedly adopted Tibetan Buddhism in its Gelugpa form, transforming the whole of Mongolia into a territory where only one Buddhist school prevailed (Meinert 2011). Divergent views like the important contributions by Henry Serruys,³⁰ who presented conclusive evidence that Buddhism did not vanish from Mongolian soil during the ‘dark period’, did not have a strong impact in the field. Despite the Mongolian historians’ denial of the presence of Buddhism in the ‘dark’ period from the late fourteenth to the late sixteenth centuries, we find ample evidence in Chinese and especially Tibetan sources that speak of a continuing presence of Buddhism and Buddhist monks in the Mongolian regions after the breakdown of the Beijing-based Yuan dynasty. Among the Mongols of the ‘Four Oyrad’, Buddhism was very much alive, as Chinese sources of the time attest (Serruys 1963, 187 ff.). Tibetan historians mention in their chronicles repeated visits of high ranking lamas, mostly of the Karma Kagyupa-school, at some local Mongolian noble’s court (‘Gos lo tsa ba gZhon nu dpal 1478, 651). In 1431 a collection of *Dhāraṇīs* was printed in Beijing in four languages, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese. Furthermore, the discovery of a diversity of Mongolian Buddhist ritual texts, concentrating on every-day lay Buddhist issues, in the stūpas of Olon Süme in Inner Mongolia and Xarbuxyn Balgas near Karakorum (Heissig 1976; Chiodo 2000, 2009), dating around the year 1600, attests to a living Buddhist tradition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries among the Mongols.

Although scholars have begun to re-evaluate the alleged ‘dark period’ of Buddhism in Mongolia, even in recent accounts Mongolian history is structured according to the Tibetan-Buddhist threefold temporal scheme (Weiers 2004, 5–6, 175; Humphrey, Ujeed 2013, 43).

Like Mongolian Buddhist historiography, the scholarly narrative produces sharply defined religious groups like ‘Shamanism’, ‘red hats’ and ‘yellow hats’. It follows the emic chronology of events, emic codes and categories. It takes the Mongolian representations at face value. In this narrative, Mongolian Buddhism appears as a monolithic Gelugpa Buddhism, silencing other, divergent voices. Scholarly findings that offered different perspectives, like Vladimirtsov’s observations mentioned above, were largely ignored. Indeed, in a way one can say that Western scholars have taken the place of the Mongolian historians and continue their project of discursively creating and maintaining the homogeneous, stable Gelugpa religious field in Mongolia. This construction denies the polyphony of voices of different religious schools and actors, the blurred and often non-existent boundaries with regard to practices and performances between different groups labelled as ‘red’ or ‘yellow’ or even ‘black’, in the case of the shamans.

30 Serruys 1963 and 1966; only recently his work starts to be reconsidered, compare Kollmar-Paulenz 2001, 5–6; Dumas 2005; Sagaster 2007, 396–398.

7 Conclusion

As I have tried to show, textual evidence undermines the powerful accepted discourse of both Mongolian historiography and Western scholarship. Early Mongolian chronicles, *Ganjuur* colophons as well as the colophons of non-canonical texts translated during the early period of Buddhist activities in the Mongolian regions, the large amount of non-Gelugpa Mongolian Buddhist texts, archival documents, iconographical and architectural evidence account not only for the mostly peaceful coexistence of Sakyapa, Nyingmapa and Kagyupa monks alongside the Gelugpa. They also attest to the fact that different religious schools shaped Mongolian Buddhism in its formative and later period and coexisted along the much more prominent Gelugpa. Sectarian rhetoric in Gelugpa sources paints a different picture, often denying the very existence of the ‘red hats’, but then we have to ask for what reasons and to what aims do later historians construct the past? The Mongolian case should make us aware to which degree historical narratives of distinct groups shape the scholarly understanding and representation of the history of religions.

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