

REZENSIONEN – COMPTES RENDUS – REVIEWS

Johan ELVERSKOG: *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006. ISBN 0-8248-2021-0 (hardback). US\$ 52.00.

The book under review presents the last three hundred years of Mongolian history as the history of the transformation from various independent *ulus* into a homogenous Mongol *ulus* within the Qing Empire. Johan Elverskog aims at providing an insight into the identity formation of the Mongols under Qing political control, or, in the author's words, "on how various Mongolian sources represent communal identity in relation to the state" (p. 7). It is the author's merit to concentrate on the Mongol side of things instead of once again telling us the Qing viewpoint. In his introduction Elverskog claims to narrow down his focus on the Khorchin *ulus*, aiming at providing a microhistory of how the Khorchin came to identify with the Qing. In particular his study, in his own words, "investigates the long process through which the politically independent 'shamanists' of the Khorchin *ulus* came to be Mongol Buddhist bannermen willing to fight and die for 'Our Great Qing' (*Manu Yeke Cing*)" (p. 6).

This focus, however, is not followed through. Elverskog rather presents a full-fledged narrative how all the Mongols came to accept Qing rule and identify with *Our Great Qing*. On p. 10 of his introduction this shift of focus becomes obvious when he says that his study is focused on Inner Mongolia and the Inner Mongols. The Mongols of Inner Mongolia, however, comprise more *ulus* than just the Khorchin.

The author leads us in five chapters through four centuries of Mongol history. In the first chapter he explores the conceptual framework of the story he narrates. Elverskog discusses in length the Mongolian concepts of *ulus* and *törö*, or "state" and "community", showing the dynamics of these two terms the meanings of which have changed over the centuries. The relationship between state and community was flexible and changing, thus allowing for different political alliances within the *ulus/törö* system. Elverskog then shows how the Manchus used the conceptualizations of *ulus* and *törö* to define their interaction with the Mongols, and how in turn the Mongols themselves started to redefine the system within the new Manchu state.

The second chapter deals with the legitimization of the political authority both within the *ulus* and the *törö*. Elverskog points out that political authority

was created by drawing on indigenous religious as well as Buddhist concepts. This second chapter does not give any new insights into the legitimisation of Mongolian political authority, but sums up nicely what is the current state of the art. Reading the chapter this reviewer was, however, startled by the author's indiscriminate use of the term "God" to translate the Mongolian *möngke tngri / deger-e tngri*. By giving this translation he tries to avoid "Western presuppositions in the study of religion", but does so without reflecting on the theoretical implications of this translation. In European theological discourse the term "God" has complex layers of meaning which do not at all correspond to the Mongolian concept of *möngke tngri*. Thus the translation of the Mongolian term as "God" misleads the reader in assuming that the Mongols venerated a supreme transcendent personal being.

The third chapter expounds on the Chinggis Khan cult and its significance for the Qing conceptualization of the Mongol *ulus*. The transformation of the Chinggis Khan cult is brought into the broader perspective of Qing "ornamentalism", the use of rhetoric and ritual elements to enforce the idea of a unified Mongol *ulus* of the Qing. The fourth chapter stresses the rhetoric and ritual elements which helped transform the Mongols' particular collective identity into the universal flux of a Buddhist identity. To prove his point the author examines a variety of Mongol historical works and their widely used tropes in creating the "Qing Buddhism" the Mongols subscribed to.

The rather narrow presentation of Mongol self-representations in the 18th century broadens in the fifth chapter towards a multi-sided narrative of the yet again shifting identity of the Mongols in the 19th century. The author shows how Mongol identity in the 19th century was determined by two different strands of identity discourse, a transethnic Buddhist discourse favored by the Qing, and by the localized geopolitical entity of the banner.

In the epilogue the author once again explains what he has tried to do: to "provide a counternarrative, or at least a more nuanced interpretation of Qing Inner Mongolia" (p. 168). He has set out to write the intellectual history of Mongol self-representations, showing in the process that the Mongols have not been passive victims of the Manchus, but active participants in creating the Qing universe.

The author has indeed succeeded in presenting a fresh outlook on the history of Mongol-Manchu relations. On the other hand, the study suffers from the preconceived ideas the author tries to prove and which seem to determine the choice and interpretation of his sources. A closer look at the sources presented

through the course of the narrative reveals many inaccuracies¹ and one-sided interpretations. This flaw becomes particularly evident in the fourth chapter, where Elverskog discusses at length the forming of a Mongol Buddhist identity within the framework of an orthodox Gelugpa identity forged by the Qing. The arguments brought forth to confirm his thesis do not withstand closer scrutiny. This pertains especially to his assertion that the “transformation in the origins of Mongol Buddhist history was historically tied to the discourse of the Buddhist Qing” (p. 101). The author argues that the origin of the narrative that binds together the Indians, Tibetans and Mongols genealogically is not clear. Although he concedes that this narrative draws on the Tibetan historical tradition, he maintains at the same time that in Tibetan historiography the three Buddhist groups are not presented genealogically but only consecutively. To support his argument he draws exclusively on the *Shes bya rab gsal*, which he takes for a work belonging to the “Tibetan historical tradition” (p. 100). He is right in so far as the *Shes bya rab gsal*, which, by the way, is a doxographical work, does not contain the genealogical narrative of the Tibetan kings being descendents of the Shakya-clan. He is wrong, however, in his assertion that Tibetan works before the Qing generally do not elaborate on a genealogical connection between the Indians and the Tibetans. On the contrary: in Tibetan historiography the genealogical descent of the Tibetan kings from the Indian Shakya lineage is a standard topic, already found in the 1322 *Chos 'byung* of Bu ston, and elaborated in subsequent historical works like the *Deb ther dmar po gsar ma* and the *mKhas pa'i dga' ston*, among others. The first Mongolian work to draw the line further and include the Mongol rulers in this genealogical narrative is the *Altan tobci* of Lubsangdandjin. Moreover Tibetan sources of the 14th century, for example the *Hu lan deb ther*, composed between 1346 and 1363 by the 'Tshal pa Kun dga' rdo rje, already expound on the Mongol ruler Chinggis Khan as a *cakravartin*. The transformation of Mongol history into a Buddhist narrative is much earlier than the Qing.²

- 1 A major flaw, at least in my eyes, is the presentation of the material by relying on translations. This applies particularly to the Tibetan sources. Elverskog, for example, does not cite the Biography of the Fifth Dalai Lama in its Tibetan original, but in a Chinese translation (see p. 171–2, under “DL5”). Also, the English translation of Dharmatala's chronicle is far from reliable.
- 2 Compare also Dieter SCHUH, *Erlasse und Sendschreiben mongolischer Herrscher für tibetische Geistliche. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der Urkunden des tibetischen Mittelalters und ihrer Diplomatie*. St. Augustin 1977 (Monumenta Tibetica Historica, Abt. III,1), p. 61ff.

The rather bold statement that “All Qing-period works assert that [...] the Mongols have been loyal followers of the Gelugpa tradition; all other traditions are entirely excluded” (p. 102) is contradicted by the evidence given in the *Erdeni-yin erike* of Isibaldan which even as late as 1835 confirms the coexistence of the Sakyapa, Gelugpa, Karmapa, Nyingmapa and even the Jonangpa in the Qalqa territory (fol. 35v11–12). The author’s fixation on an absolute Gelugpa supremacy during the Qing leads him to generalisations, blending out the polyphonic voices of this era of Mongol history. Later Elverskog argues that none of the lengthy episodes in Sayang Secen’s *Precious Summary*, confirming the religious power of the third Dalai Lama, are found in earlier sources and thus draws the conclusion that “they are not simply part of the standard conversion narrative, whereby the power of the Dalai Lama confirms that the Mongols made the right choice. Rather, it is an affirmation of the larger narrative of Gelukpa orthodoxy that defines the Buddhist Qing” (p. 108). The lengthy episodes are, however, all taken (nearly verbatim) from the Tibetan biography of the third Dalai Lama. Both Sayang Secen and Lubsangdandjin relied heavily on this work. (The story of Begtse, for example, is found on p. 145 of the Indian edition of the biography of the third Dalai Lama.) The fifth Dalai Lama has been one of the most influential writers in the course of Mongolian historiography. I would therefore argue that the Tibetan Buddhist discourse as presented by the highly influential writings of the fifth Dalai Lama very much defined Mongolian Buddhist discourse of the 18th century.

How far the author bends his arguments to his preconceived ideas can be seen from the minor errors that have crept into his own narrative. Thus, on p. 107 he strengthens his argument of the fifth Dalai Lama’s glorification attempt of his office by mentioning in passing that the fifth Dalai Lama wrote the biographies of his predecessors while enroute to meet with the Manchu emperor. This statement is not correct. The fifth Dalai Lama wrote the biography of the third in the year 1646. The date of the compilation of the fourth Dalai Lama’s biography cannot be established without doubt because the colophon does not give a date. The fifth Dalai Lama set out on his journey to the Shunzhi emperor as late as 1652, arriving at Beijing in 1653. Furthermore Elverskog asserts that in the *Erdeni tunumal* the Dalai Lama is described as only one of various Buddhist leaders, and partly only as holder of religious authority at Ganden monastery (p. 107). (“Ganden monastery” has of course to be corrected to Drepung monastery,

as Elverskog himself writes.³) The *Erdeni tunumal*, however, is very explicit about the exalted position the Dalai Lama holds, and throughout its narrative highlights “the unique glory of the Dalai Lama” (p. 107).

In his sub-chapter “Buddhism and History” the author argues that the whole Buddhist conversion is minimized in 18th century Mongolian historiography. He tries to prove his point by citing a passage from the *Altan kürdün mingyan kegesütü bicig*, where in a few dry words the Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism is told. The same, however, has to be said for the much earlier *Altan tobci anonymus*, where the whole conversion story is also compressed into a few lines.

These few remarks may suffice to prove my point. Through the fixation on one supposedly dominant discourse the fourth chapter creates a one-sided and one-dimensional picture of Mongolian self-representations in the 18th century. This is a very unwelcome side effect, contrary to the aim of the author who wants to present a multi-layered narrative, stressing the dynamics of Mongolian identity formations.

To sum up: The work under review leaves an ambivalent impression. On the one hand it has its serious drawbacks, as noticed above. It also conveys the impression of having been written in a hurry. Some mistakes⁴ and inconsistencies⁵ surely could have been avoided. On the other hand it has a big advantage compared to other works on Mongol history. The present study is important simply because it applies theory to Mongol studies. The discipline is, to say it bluntly, in decay: Most scholars follow the traditional lines of historical-philological research in the wake of 19th century historicism. Modern theoretical approaches are very rarely reflected in the study of Mongol history, conceptual frameworks are equally rare. Therefore a work like *Our Great Qing* is very much appreciated. It is perhaps the bane of most academic disciplines which are in dire need

3 Johan ELVERSKOG, *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra. Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003, p. 136–137.

4 For example, calling Huber’s study on Tibetan pilgrimage a “study of the Tibetan state” (p.173, n. 5) which it is certainly not.

5 On p. 24 the author maintains that the term “banner” is “found only once in the Mongol histories of the seventeenth century”, on p. 32 he tells us that it is Saghang Sechen who uses the term, and on p. 38 he says that “none of the Mongol histories of the seventeenth century even mention the banners.” The reader is confused. Perhaps the author wants to make a distinction between the term ‘banner’ and the social reality of the banners?

of reinvention that the first attempts to do so are often highly polemical and pointedly one-sided.

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Antje RICHTER / Helmolt VITTINGHOFF (Hgg.): *China und die Wahrnehmung der Welt*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007. (*Jahrbuch der Deutschen Vereinigung für Chinastudien*; 3). viii + 355 pp. ISSN 1860-8531; ISBN 978-3-447-05539-0. EUR 58,00.

Als die Deutsche Vereinigung für Chinastudien (DVCS) im Jahre 1990 gegründet wurde, geschah dies mit dem ausgesprochenen Ziel, die gewachsene Kluft zwischen den Chinawissenschaften der beiden deutschen Staaten zu überbrücken und die persönlichen Kontakte und den fachlichen Austausch über ein gemeinsames Forum wieder zu beleben. Mittlerweile hat die Vereinigung ihre Zielgruppe auf alle an China interessierten in- und ausländischen Wissenschaftler aus sämtlichen Spezialdisziplinen wie auch den wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchs ausgedehnt und gehört – nicht zuletzt wegen ihrer hohen Mitgliederzahl – zu den wichtigsten asienwissenschaftlichen Vereinigungen im deutschsprachigen Raum. Seit 1995 veröffentlicht die DVCS die Beiträge ihrer jährlich stattfindenden Tagungen in Form von Tagungsbänden. Diese haben mittlerweile als eigens eingerichtete Jahrbuch-Reihe eine würdige Heimat im Harrassowitz-Verlag gefunden. Der hier zu besprechende 3. Band der Reihe vereinigt 19 von insgesamt zwei Dutzend Beiträgen der 15. Jahrestagung, die vom 12. zum 14. November 2004 in Leipzig stattfand.

Das mehrdeutige Thema der Tagung, “China und die Wahrnehmung der Welt”, kann verstanden werden als Wahrnehmung Chinas durch die übrige Welt oder aber als chinesische Wahrnehmung der Außenwelt im Sinne der sinnlich erfahrbaren eigenen Umgebung bzw. als Wahrnehmungen des Fremden (im speziellen Fall auch des “Anderen” innerhalb der eigenen Landesgrenzen). Die Beiträge, die im Folgenden lediglich in ihren wesentlichen Inhalten angerissen werden können, sind durchgängig von hohem Standard und lesen sich mitunter sogar recht kurzweilig.

Im ersten Beitrag (“Die Wahrnehmung von Armut im Alten China”, 1–19) beleuchtet Antje Richter, gleichzeitig Mitherausgeberin, verschiedene Sichtweisen des Phänomens Armut im Spannungsfeld von Legalismus, konfuzianisch