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SYSTEMATICALLY ORDERING THE WORLD: THE ENCOUNTER OF BURIYAD-MONGOLIAN, TIBETAN AND RUSSIAN KNOWLEDGE CULTURES IN THE 19TH CENTURY*

Since the early 18th century, the Buriyad-Mongols of the Transbaikalian regions moved between two worlds: they were part of the Russian Empire and at the same time part of the greater Tibetan Buddhist world. As a consequence, Buriyad-Mongolian intellectual culture developed and thrived in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural setting, simultaneously drawing on Tibetan, Mongolian and Russian taxonomies. Based on a contextual analysis of select Buriyad-Mongolian historical chronicles, this paper tries to disentangle the “mess of encounters” (Peter van der Veer) that took place in the Buriyad regions and was reflected and shaped in their literary production. By exploring the multiple origins and composite nature of the Buriyad knowledge cultures and their impact on the emerging Buriyad political elites, the study aims to add to our knowledge of the role Non-European knowledge cultures played in the formation of a global modernity.

Introduction

In 1690 the first Jebtsundamba Qutuγtu Zanabazar¹, the highest Buddhist dignitary of the Qalq-a Mongolian territories, when asked for advice by the Mongolian nobles concerning their submission either to

* I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers whose thoughtful suggestions helped sharpen my argument.

1. The Mongolian transcription follows the system introduced by I. de Rachewiltz, *The Mongolian Tanjur Version of the Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and the Tibetan is transliterated according to the extended Wylie system. The Sanskrit transliteration follows the internationally accepted rules.

the Qing Emperor or to the Russian Tsar, allegedly gave the following answer:

The realm of the Emperor of the Yellow Kitad who are called the Russians of the north, is a peaceful and great country, but the Teaching [of the Buddha] has not flourished there, [...] therefore he is impossible. The realm of the Emperor of the Black Kitad in the south is firmly established and peaceful and moreover the Teaching of the Buddha has spread there, [...] since he is such a great and virtuous emperor as this, if we go in that direction our realm will be consolidated and all living beings will rejoice in peace².

For my purposes it is irrelevant what “choice” the Qalq-a Mongols really did have at this particular historical junction³, but I rather want to draw attention to the underlying religious-cultural implications of this alleged statement. Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhists at that time shared a clear and very specific religious-political understanding of ideal rulership. An emperor preferably had to be a *dharmarāja*, a “king of [Buddhist] religion”, and in this position he had to provide favourable circumstances for his subjects to follow the *dharma*⁴. One of his primary tasks was to support the *saṅgha*, the Buddhist community of monks/nuns and lay-people. A civilised realm, the ideal empire, in the eyes of a Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist was a Buddhist Empire, and this religio-political option the Russian Tsar simply did not offer. For the Buddhist Buriyad-Mongols along the shores of Lake Baikal, however, life in a Non-Buddhist realm, far from the civilising effects of Buddhism, was reality⁵. Moreover, contrary to their own self-perception as civilised people, the Russian imperial authorities treated their Buddhist subjects not

2. Ch. R. Bawden, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtus of Urga*, p. 10.

3. For a historical evaluation see V. Veit, *Die vier Qane von Qalqa*, I, p. 26 sq.; an overall historical-political assessment in the context of the Dzungar challenge to Qing authority given by P. C. Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 174-176.

4. For this concept and its realisation in the system of “two rules” (Mong. *qoyar yosun*, Tib. *lugs gnyis*), see D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l’Inde et du Tibet*.

5. For the history of the religious policy of the Russian state against its Buddhist population in the Buriyad regions see D. Schorkowitz, “The Orthodox Church, Lamaism and Shamanism among the Buryats and Kalmyks, 1825-1925”. See also K. M. Gerasimova, *Lamaizm i natsional’no-kolonial’naia politika tsarizma v Zabaikal’e v XIX – nachale XX vekov*.

only as representatives of an “inferior religion”, but also as inferior in terms of culture. When during the 19th century the local elites of the Transbaikal Buriyads, who were literate in the Mongolian (and often also Tibetan) languages⁶, began to enter the Russian educational systems, for the emerging Russian buddhology⁷ they advanced to “native informants”⁸. As has already been investigated, mainly drawing on South Asian material⁹, these “native informants” made important contributions to our knowledge of Asian cultures and religions and thus significantly shaped our perception of them. For Inner Asia, the case of the Buriyads, who in Russian buddhology often became scholars in their own right, is well explored through the work of Vera Tolz, who did an in-depth study of the Buriyad intellectuals’ contribution to the formation of Russian Buddhist Studies in the first decades of the 20th century, and the research of Anya Bernstein¹⁰. In my paper I will also concentrate on the Buriyads, but I will focus on a slightly earlier period, the second half of the 19th century, and will turn the attention away from a predominantly Russian setting with Russian language and Russian institutions. Instead I will explore the Buriyad intellectual culture in a Buriyad context, that is a multi-lingual Buriyad, Uiguro-Mongolian and Tibetan setting and Buriyad Buddhist institutions. I will do this because I feel uncomfortable with one particular aspect of postorientalist scholarship, the strong focus on Non-European knowledge forms solely in their relation to European knowledge forms. Non-European knowledge cultures seem to emerge out of their obscurantism and come into existence only in their relation to and response to the challenge of Europe, in the process losing their own historical legacy.

6. This paper does not include the Cisbaikal Buriyads, whose religious and cultural environment differed considerably from the Transbaikal Buriyads. Thus, the conclusions drawn here are only applicable to the Transbaikal Buriyads.

7. On Russian Buddhology see T. V. Ermakova, *Buddiiskii mir glasami rossiiskikh issledovatelei XIX–XX vv.*, and K. Kollmar-Paulenz, J. S. Barlow (eds), *Otto Ottonovich Rosenberg and his Contribution to Buddhism in Russia*.

8. V. Tolz, “Imperial Scholars and Minority Nationalisms in Late Imperial and Early Soviet Russia”, p. 271–274.

9. See, for example, R. Burghart, “Ethnographers and their Local Counterparts in India”; N. Dirks, “Colonial Histories and Native Informants”; P. van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*.

10. V. Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient*; A. Bernstein, “Pilgrims, Fieldworkers, and Secret Agents”, p. 25–29, and *Religious Bodies Politic*, p. 53–65.

This observation touches on the question of the relationship between imperial and local (indigenous) knowledge production, a question still open to controversial debates. Scholarly opinion has shifted from the assertion of the complete silence of “native” voices to what Charles Hallisey has called the “intercultural mimesis”, that is “aspects of a culture of a subjectified people influenced the investigator to represent that culture in a certain manner”¹¹. In this way the “natives” are given back their voice and their agency. Up to now the question of the conditions of knowledge production has already been explored for the Indian colonial context, but it has been rather neglected for the Mongolian peoples who since the 17th century were either subjects of the Qing Empire or the Russian Empire. And yet the Mongols offer us a unique opportunity to study knowledge formations simultaneously in and beyond imperial settings. The Mongols, including the Buriyads, moved between two worlds: they were respectively part of the Qing and the Russian Empire, and at the same time they were part of the greater Buddhist world, constantly defying state borders imposed on them. In the following I want to take a closer look at the formation and development of the Buriyad knowledge cultures in the 19th century, mainly through a part of their literary production, the historical chronicles. I am particularly interested in how and to what aim their learned authors made use of and dynamically adjusted their needs to the different epistemic cultures they were familiar with or encountered anew. Proceeding from the assumption of a principal “co-equality” of European and Non-European epistemic cultures, I will show that the Buriyad-Mongolian intellectual elites did not simply react to Western – here Russian – notions of ordering the world, but drew on many concepts from different intellectual environments that were centred in “Greater” Mongolia, Tibet, Russia and, possibly, China¹², challenging the common notion of the West that acts and the East that reacts. Based on an in-depth analysis of the composite nature of Buriyad knowledge formations in the 19th century, I argue that only a sound knowledge of Non-European knowledge cultures will

11. Ch. Hallisey, “Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Theravāda Buddhism”, p. 33. Vera Tolz (*Russia's Own Orient*, p. 113) distinguishes three different ways of theorising the role of local informants in colonial settings. Hallisey's “intercultural mimesis” would meet the second way.

12. Due to my limited language expertise, I am not able to comment on possible Chinese influences.

enable us to write the history of our own European knowledge cultures, because their formation is not a one-way path, but deeply informed by and entangled with their Non-European counterparts whose impact is, however, at the moment still relatively opaque to us¹³.

*1. The Transbaikial Buriyad Mongols as Buddhist subjects
in the Russian Empire*

Speaking in cultural terms, the Buriyads of the Transbaikial regions belonged and belong to the greater Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist cultural sphere, stretching from the Himalayas over Tibet to Mongolia, Transbaikalia, Tyva and as far as the lower Volga to the territories inhabited by the Torgud, a Western Mongol group called Kalmyk by the Russians. Over most of this vast area, since at least the 13th century, the period of the Mongolian Empire, Tibetan Buddhist lamas had built religious networks that centred around certain places (monasteries), people (important lamas and their disciples), and roads (pilgrimage routes)¹⁴. These networks that were upheld and continuously extended through travelling monks and lay-people, often merchants, generally were not limited to state borders. They were multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural and also multi-centred. Since the 17th century, Lhasa in Central Tibet was the sacred heart¹⁵ of these networks, but other places

13. Thus, the genealogy of the 18th and 19th century European “shamanism”-discourse has been written without the inclusion on Non-Western intellectual discourses on the term and the concept, notwithstanding the fact that “Shamanism” as a homogenous religious system has been part of the Mongolian epistemic cultures since the 18th centuries. The Russian and German ethnographers of the time have been well aware of the Mongolian conceptualisations, as can be shown in their writings. Compare, for instance, J. G. Georgi, *Beschreibung aller Nationen des russischen Reichs, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten*, p. 416; P. S. Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften*, p. 341. For an analysis of the discursive creation of “shamanism” as part of Mongolian taxonomies see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, “A Method that Helps Living Beings”.

14. The idea of a religious network of Tibetan Buddhism was first put forward by G. Samuel, “Tibetan Buddhism as a World Religion”.

15. See the collection of essays edited by F. Pommaret, *Lhasa in the Seventeenth Century*, that highlight different aspects of this important centre of the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world.

like Kumbum and Labrang in Northeastern Tibet or Swayambunath in Nepal also played important roles. Travelling lamas established dependencies of their home monasteries in other regions, and the monks and lay-supporters of these monasteries felt themselves equally attached to the mother monastery that was often financially supported by them. Since around 1700 the Transbaikal regions were included in these ever-growing networks of places and people¹⁶. At the same time, these regions were separated from the greater Buddhist world by a political divide. The treaty of Kiakhtha in 1727 had finally fixed the boundaries between the Russian and the Qing Empires and had drawn an artificial border between the Mongols on each side¹⁷. Whereas in the Qing Empire Buddhism (among other religions) enjoyed state patronage from the Qing emperors, who acted as “protectors of the *dharma*” towards their Buddhist subjects and actively used Buddhism as a means to consolidate and legitimise their power¹⁸, the Russian Empire favoured the Christian Orthodox Church, and the Buddhists of the empire were subjected to a marginal position¹⁹. They invested considerable energy to uphold the formerly established, now cross-border ties to the greater Buddhist world. In the case of the Transbaikal regions, some Qori and Selenga Buriyad groups upheld their active links with Mongolian monasteries, and many monks decided to pursue their higher monastic education in one of the famous Tibetan monasteries, preferably Gomang (*sGo mang*) college of Drepung (*Bras spungs*) monastery near Lhasa²⁰. State borders and politics from both sides tried to prevent this; after 1793, the formal

16. A short historical survey about Buddhism in Buryatia provides L. L. Abaeva, “Istoriiia rasprostraneniia buddizma v Buriatii”; for the continuing ties of Qalqa Mongolian monasteries with their “offspring” in Transbaikalia see N. Tsyrempilov, “‘Alien’ Lamas”, p. 247 sq.

17. See P. C. Perdue, *China Marches West*, p. 161-173.

18. The Qing emperors’ political use of religion was, however, not limited to Buddhism, but included Confucianism, Daoism, and shamanic practices as well, as it is illustrated in the Qing emperor Qianlong’s travels through his realm, see M. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong*, p. 68-85.

19. For an examination of the religious identity politics of the Russian Empire towards its Non-Christian subjects see M. Khodarkovsky, “‘Ignoble Savages and Unfaithful Subjects’”.

20. An account about Drepung provides N. Dakpa, “The Hours and Days of a Great Monastery”; S. P. Nesterkin, “Obrazovanie v buddiiskikh monastyriakh”, p. 416-431, deals with intellectual life in Buriyad monasteries of the 19th century.

administrative integration of Central Tibet into the Qing Empire, the Qing government prohibited Buriyad monks to study in Lhasa, on the grounds of them being subjects of the Russian Empire. But there was always a way around such regulations: Buriyad monks often told the Manchu authorities that they came from the Qalq-a Mongolian territories. Mongolian and Tibetan lamas faced even more difficulties when travelling to the Transbaikal regions. In 1727 the Russian authorities had issued an order prohibiting the further entry of “foreign lamas”. At the same time they limited the number of monks in newly built monasteries. Still, in 1741, Empress Elisabeth of Russia allegedly issued a decree officially recognising Buddhism²¹. During Empress Catherine II’s reign the Buddhist *saṅgha* was re-structured based on the model of the Russian Orthodox Church, with one selected religious figure (who had to be confirmed through the emperor) at the head of a centralised religious bureaucracy. This was the Pandita Khambo Lama (“Learned Abbot Guru”)²², who is still today the official head of the Buriyad Buddhist *saṅgha*. The 19th century saw the most severe restrictions with regard to Buddhism. In the 1853 *Legislation for Lamaist Clericals of Eastern Siberia*, the state regulated the affairs of the Buddhist *saṅgha*, like for example freedom of movement of the monks or the building of new temples and monasteries²³. In this way, the Russian authorities made continuing efforts to discipline the Buddhist institutions.

On the whole, in the 18th and well into the 19th century, the Russian Empire’s attitude towards Buddhism was ambivalent: on the one hand it was considered a “superstition” and “idolatry”. On the other hand, the imperial government that tried to exploit the religions of the empire for their own purposes, sought the active support of the Buddhist lamas. Moreover, Buddhism was attested a “civilising” potential in the dealings with the “wild”, “nomadic” border-peoples²⁴. This is actually a very old Buddhist trope which Tibetan Buddhist lamas used as early as the

21. This is historically doubtful, as the decree that the Empress signed has never been found.

22. The title derives from the Sanskrit-Tibetan *pandita mkhan po bla ma*.

23. A detailed account of the Russian state’s “Buddhist politics” in the 18th and 19th centuries is given by N. Tsyrempilov, “Za sviatuiu Dkharmu i Belago Tsaria”.

24. The notion of “wildness” and “unruliness” was especially pertinent in 18th century Russia, and fused religion with civilisation. See M. Khodarkovsky, *Russia’s Steppe Frontier*, p. 185 sq.

13th century in the Mongolian Empire²⁵, and which was also exploited by the Qing emperors²⁶. Here Buddhist and imperial discourse met.

2. *Visual and literary knowledge forms*

2.1. Thangkas and historical writings

Inclusion in the greater Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist ecumene and simultaneously the Russian Empire made the Transbaikalian regions a complex amalgam of different and composite cultural influences that were mirrored in the visual and textual knowledge forms employed by its people. The two colliding worlds of the Buddhist realm and the Russian Empire were negotiated in visual representations, reaching out to a population which to a high degree was illiterate. Broadening the traditional three-fold scheme of the realm of the *Rigs gsum mgon po*, the “masters of the three realms”, including China (with the emperor as emanation of Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom and knowledge), Tibet (with the Dalai Lama as emanation of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of infinite compassion), and Mongolia, the realm of Činggis Qan (considered to be the emanation of Vajrapāṇi, the bodhisattva of martial strength), Russia was visually integrated into this symbolic world order by addressing the Russian Tsar as the emanation of the female bodhisattva White Tārā, who traditionally has a strong relationship to Avalokiteśvara, thus symbolically joining Tibet and Russia. The inclusion of the Russian emperor allowed for the strong loyalty expressed to the Tsar. In Buddhist performative practices, in prayers and ritual evocations, the Russian emperor was addressed as *dharmarāja* and *cakravartin* (wheel-turning

25. K. Kollmar-Paulenz, “Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics”, p. 713-715.

26. See, for example, the famous *Lama Shuo*, the “Pronouncements on Lamas”, composed in 1792 by the Qing emperor Qianlong, in which he maintains that through patronising the “Yellow hats” (the Tibetan-Buddhist *dGe lugs pa*-school) he maintains peace among the Mongols (F. Lessing, *Yung-ho-kung*, p. 58). For an examination of the influence of the Tibetan and Qing discourse on the European trope of the civilising force of Buddhism see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, “Zur europäischen Rezeption der mongolischen autochthonen Religion und des Buddhismus in der Mongolei”, p. 267-275.

ruler)²⁷. Thangkas, prayers and rituals secured the attention of the illiterate population in this re-inscription of empire, whereas the production of historical writings served the self-representations of their intellectual elites. History writing, in its function as cultural self-assertion of one's origin and genealogical descent, played a vital role in the Mongolian cultural regions since the 13th century. The first Buriyad historical chronicles date back to the early 18th century, the majority of them were written in the later half of the 19th century²⁸. These chronicles circulated, mostly as manuscripts, among the Buriyads in numerous copies. Their authors discursively created a Buriyad Buddhist realm which they sought to preserve and even expand. The expansion of a Buddhist realm is a Buddhist prerogative in the "dark borderlands". Its rhetoric of alterity having been successfully applied by Tibetan lamas in the Mongolian case²⁹, was now expanded to Russia by Buriyad Buddhist lamas and intellectuals.

2.2. Creating a worldview:

Two Buriyad chronicles of the 19th century

In the following I will describe and analyse in more detail two chronicles that were written in the second half of the 19th century. At first glance, these works are histories, more specifically historical genealogies and are thus part of the Mongolian tradition of historiography³⁰. To know one's origins, to memorise and reiterate the genealogical succession of one's ancestors, that is the patrilineal descent groups (Mong. *oboy*), is the driving force behind all Mongolian historical writings. Therefore, not surprisingly, both chronicles start with detailed genealogical accounts of the powerful patrilineal descent groups of the Qori and Aga Buriyads. The first chronicle, entitled "What happened in the

27. Mongolian-language prayers and ritual texts that address the Russian Tsar in this way are preserved in the Centre of Oriental Manuscripts and Xylographs of the Institute of Mongolian, Buddhist, and Tibetan Studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences at Ulaan Ude, see N. Tsyrempilov, "Buddhist Minority in a Christian Empire".

28. Š. B. Chimitdorzhiev, "Buriatskie letopistsy".

29. K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "Uncivilized Nomads and Buddhist Clerics", p. 715 *sq.*

30. An analysis of Mongolian historiography is given by K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "Mongolische Geschichtsschreibung im Kontext der Globalgeschichte", p. 251-257.

past of the Qori- and Aga-Buriyads” (*Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*) was composed in 1863 by the ruling *taisha* of the Aga Buriyads, Tügülder Toboyin (Toboev)³¹. Being familiar with the rich genealogical tradition of the Mongols and the learned Buddhist literature, his office as *taisha* brought him in close and constant contact with the Russian culture. Toboyin’s chronicle is not explicitly divided into different chapters, but provides a more or less continuous narration. Its opening paragraphs draw on the two master tales that even today dominate Mongolian self-perception. First Toboyin establishes the genealogical origin of the Buriyads. Despite a complete absence of the Činggisid ruling lineage among the Buriyad nobility, he skilfully connects the Buriyad genealogical lineages with the lineage of the Borjigid, the descent group of Mongolia’s great ancestor hero, Činggis Qan, referring on the one hand nearly verbatim to the origin tale of the “Secret History of the Mongols” (Mong. *Mongyol-un niyuča tobča’an*)³² and thus evoking the glorious Mongolian past. On the other hand skilfully introducing the Qori Buriyad genealogical lineage by assigning a second wife to Qoridai (Qoriltai)-mergen, one of the mythical forefathers of the Borjigid. Thus, Toboyin simultaneously stresses the regional identities of the Aga and Qori Buriyads and a collective identity of belonging to the greater Mongol realm. The next paragraph³³ recounts the second master tale, the Buddhist conversion of the Mongols under Altan Qaγan of the Tümed, and sets the Buddhist undertone of the narrative. The content of the chronicle is mainly historical, including long genealogical lists. But the chronicle also contains a long section³⁴ that deals in detail with the so called *böge-ner-ün mörgöl*, the “teaching of the shamans”, and this section is well ordered into ten separate paragraphs that

31. On him see Š. B. Chimitdorzhiev, “Buriatskie letopistsy”, p. 259 sq.

32. Toboyin writes (p. 5,3): *qoridai mergen-ü nigedüger gergei baryučing γoo-a-ača törögsen alung γoo-a kemekü γaγča ökin*; compare to the *Secret History*: *Horilartai-mergan no Barhujin-ho’a ca toreksen Alan-ho’a neretai okin tere* (*Manghol un niuca tobča’an*, 8), in the Uiguro-Mongolian version as included in the Mongolian chronicle *Altan tobči*, composed in 1655 by Lubsandanjin: *Qoriltai mergen-ü baryučin γoo-a-dača törögsen alan γoo-a tere ačuyu* (*Altan tobči*, p. 8,8-9). The *Qoriltai mergen* of the *Secret History* turned to *Qoridai mergen* in Toboyin’s chronicle. Most possibly, this origin tale was known to him through the *Altan tobči*, into which a significant part of the *Secret History* was included.

33. T. Toboev, *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*, p. 5 sq.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 17-21.

include topics like the shaman's initiation, dress and armour, practices (like divination), helper spirits, worldview, the origin of shamans, and lastly a comparison with Buddhism. Upon conclusion of this section, the text resumes its narrative stance and continues with the history of the introduction and spread of Buddhism. There are no further divisions in the chronicle.

The second chronicle, Wangdan Yum čüng's (Iumsunov) "Tale of the origin of the lineage of the people of the eleven fathers of the Qori" (*Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijaγur-un tuγuji*) was written in 1875. This is the most extensive chronicle we possess. Its author was born in 1823 in Aga, and attended a school founded by Anglican missionaries³⁵, where he studied arithmetic, algebra, geometrics, Latin, English, Tibetan and the classical Mongolian language³⁶. He served as an official in the chancellery of the Qori steppe Duma. The chronicle of Yum čüng is divided into 12 chapters that are subdivided into very short sections that are numbered. They include a wide variety of topics, among them the origin of the Qori Buriyads, detailed chapters on Buddhism and again the "teaching of the shamans", chapters on administration, land rights, but also about the character traits of the Buriyads, public health, duties and obligations to the state. The author evokes the Indian homeland of Buddhism and the snow-covered peaks of Buddhist Tibet, placing the origin of the Mongolian khans in the lineage of the Buddha, the Śākya-clan³⁷, describes in detail the establishment of numerous monasteries and temples in the Buriyad regions, and finally includes the Russian emperor and his laws in the evolving Buddhist society, appropriating the Non-Buddhist Russian state by evoking the two orders (*mo. qoyar yosun*), the religious (= Buddhist) order and the worldly order of Tibetan political philosophy:

35. Ch. R. Bawden (*Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals*, p. 250-278) gives a short historical overview of the Mission schools of the Anglican missionaries. The introduction of Tibetan into the curriculum was much discussed, but in 1828 a Tibetan class was successfully installed, see *ibid.*, p. 272.

36. Š. B. Chimitdorzhiev, "Buriatskie letopistsy", p. 258.

37. V. Iumsunov, *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijaγur-un tuγuji*, p. 54. Yum čüng follows here the narrative of the *Erdeni-yin tobči*, fol. 24v sq.

Then Mongolian and Tibetan schools were opened. There they sent their sons and let them study. When some of them became lamas, they became well versed in the laws of the Buddha's teaching. The lamas acquainted them with the differences between virtue and non-virtue, and the worldly powers taught them the laws of our Qayan, and everything went its way³⁸.

Yum čüng shows himself well acquainted with Mongolian shamanic concepts and the Buddhist polemical discourse about the "teaching of the shamans". By explaining the life souls (Mong. *sünesün*) of the male and female shamans turning into the master spirits of earth, water and the mountains³⁹, he draws on older Mongolian textual sources like the shamanic chronicle "Tale about the Black Ongyod Protector" (Mong. *Ongyod qara sakiyusun teüke sudur bičig orosiba*)⁴⁰. When he calls the "teaching of the shamans" a distorted system (Mong. *qačayai yosun*) and the shamans "charlatans, cheat" (Mong. *mekeči*), he merely repeats the well established anti-shamanic rhetoric going back to the early days of the Buddhist-shamanic encounter in the 1600s⁴¹.

Both authors heavily rely on Mongolian historical works, first of all the famous *Erdeni-yin tobči*, "Precious summary", written in 1662 by the Ordos noble Sayang sečen⁴². This work was very popular in Outer and Inner Mongolia, and in the Qianlong era received the rare honour to be translated into Manchu and Chinese. Qianlong also ordered a print edition of the work. By closely following the *Erdeni-yin tobči*, both authors firmly place themselves in the Mongolian historiographical tradition.

38. V. Iumsunov, *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uγ ijaγur-un tuγuji*, p. 142.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

40. Manuscript from the 18th century, preserved in the Royal Library of Copenhagen. The first monograph on *Shamanism*, written by the Buriyad Mongolian scholar Dorji Banzarov who relied heavily on Mongolian language sources, elaborates on the relation between the shamans and the master spirits of nature in the same way, see his *Chernaia vera ili shamanstvo u mongolov*.

41. See the biography of the Mongolian monk Neyiči toyin, composed by Prajñasagara in 1739, which deals extensively with the encounter situation between shamans and Buddhist lamas, *Boyda neyiči toyin dalai mañjusryi-yin domoy-i todorqai-a geyigülügči čindamani erike kemegedekü orosiba*, fol. 37v sq.

42. For an analysis of this work in the context of Mongolian historiography see K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "Mongolische Geschichtsschreibung im Kontext der Globalgeschichte", p. 258-264.

3. *The model of Tibetan doxography*

However Toboyin's and Yum čüng's works are more than histories. They provide information on topics that are usually not found in Mongolian historical works, like the detailed description of the "teaching of the shamans". In structure and topic they follow yet another epistemic culture, this time Tibetan-Buddhist. The Tibetan-Buddhist literary genre to present a comprehensive worldview is the so-called "presentation of tenets" (Tib. *Grub mtha'i rnam bzhag*). In texts of this genre religious-philosophical schools, both Non-Buddhist and Buddhist, are presented in a systematic way (including their historical development), that allows the Buddhist scholar to compare them with respect to their soteriological quality. The genre had been already popular in India⁴³ and was further developed in Tibet since at least the 11th century⁴⁴. It became very popular in the context of scholarly debate as the primary mode of monastic intellectual education, and was widely used by Tibetan and Mongolian scholars. In the 19th century one doxography was particularly popular in the Buriyad regions. It was written in the Tibetan language in 1802, by the Mongolian Buddhist scholar Thu'u bkvan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802), a resident of the Gonlung (*dGon lungs*) monastery in Northeastern Tibet (Amdo). In this medium-length doxography, which bears the title "Crystal Mirror of Good explanations, showing the sources and assertions of all systems of tenets" (Tib. *Grub mtha' thams cad kyi khungs dang 'dod tshul ston pa legs bshad shel gyi me long*), in short called "Crystal mirror of tenets" (Tib. *Grub mtha' shel gyi me long*), the author organises his material in twelve chapters according to three broad topics: (1) historical origins, (2) philosophical teachings, (3) examination of these teachings in the light of the orthodox *dGe lugs pa* dialectic⁴⁵. In this way he deals with the Indian philosophical schools, the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the Bon religion and the philosophical systems of China. The last chapter focuses, among other

43. Under the name of *siddhāntavyavasthāpana*.

44. A comprehensive overview is provided by J. Hopkins, "The Tibetan Genre of Doxography".

45. I follow here E. G. Smith, "Philosophical, Biographical, and Historical Works of Th'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma", p. 147-149.

subjects, on Mongolian Buddhism⁴⁶. In this chapter Thu'u bkvan first deals with the origin of the Buddhist teaching in the Mongolian regions (fol. 2v1-5r3), then he turns to the spread of the *dGe lugs pa*-teaching (fol. 5r3-9r3), in which he gives a detailed account of the development of the "yellow hat" (Tib. *zhva gser*) – teaching in the different Mongolian regions, including the Kalmyks⁴⁷, and shortly comments on the various teachings the *dGe lugs pa* introduced to the Mongols. According to the Russian scholar Boris Vladimirtsov⁴⁸, this chapter was translated into Mongolian and printed in a Buriyad printing house under the title "Roar of the melodious speech that shows how the supreme jewel-like teaching has been spread in the Mongolian lands" (*Degedü šasin erdeni ber mongyol oron-i tügegülgösen uy-i üjegülgösen irayū kelen-ü kürkirel neretü*).

Thu'u bkvan's chapter on the Bon religion provides an example how in a doxography the subject matter is treated: after a short introduction (1), in which the author, drawing on Bon sources, informs his readers about the origin of the Bon religion, the founder figure, his disciples and the spread of Bon to various countries, he commences to tell the spread of Bon in Tibet (2). This second section includes important historical details of Bon in Tibet. The next section (3) contains an overview about Bon literature, divided into works about philosophy, meditation, sacrifice, ritual, tantra and cycles of the guardian deities. The following paragraph (4) deals with the main teachings of Bon in comparison to Buddhism, followed by a section on meditation (5). Then Thu'u bkvan lists the nine vehicles of Bon (6), and in a conclusion (7) informs about the most important Bon monasteries and the persecution of the Bon by the Buddhists. Finally he gives a personal evaluation of Bon in comparison to Buddhism.

46. Entitled *Hor li shambha la rnams su grub mtha' byung tshul grub don bshad pas mjug bsdu ba dang bcas pa*.

47. He states that "when they [the Torgud] came under the power of the Russians, the spread [of the *dharma*] did no longer increase" (fol. 6r1).

48. B. I. Vladimirtsov, "Nadpisi na skalakh khalkhaskogo Tsoktu-taidzhi", p. 1272. A work of the same title is mentioned as the work of the famous Buriyad Buddhist scholar Sumatiratna by Kh. Zh. Garmaeva, "Knigopechatanie v datsanakh", p. 448. I have not seen this work and therefore cannot judge the accuracy of both Vladimirtsov's and Garmaeva's assertions.

A comparison of the chapter on the Bon religion, the most serious competitor of the Buddhists in the Tibetan religious field, with the chapters about the shamans, who had been the most serious competitors of the Buddhists in the Mongolian religious field, in the two Buriyad chronicles shows striking similarities in structure. Both authors give a short account of the origin of the shamans and then proceed to describe their so-called “teaching” (Mong. *šasin*). In 52 short entries⁴⁹ Yum čüng gives a concise description of the “teaching of the shamans”. He deals with the literature of their teaching in one short sentence, stating that they do not have books, and then proceeds to their pantheon. A short entry deals with their protective deities, after which he comments in detail on the master spirits of earth, water, mountains etc. The remaining entries are dedicated to a very detailed account on how to become a shaman, the shaman’s clothes, his trance, a shamanic seance etc. The last entries deal with the benefit of shamanising and, in the very end, a moral evaluation by the author, comparing the shamanic teaching to Buddhism. Toboyin proceeds in a similar way. He concentrates even more on the person of the shaman, and only shortly comments on the *ongyod*, the helper-spirits, of the shaman and the shamanic worldview. In his last entry entitled “Concerning its usefulness or uselessness”⁵⁰, he passes judgement upon the shamans, again from a Buddhist viewpoint.

In their presentation of the indigenous religious worldviews of the Buriyads, the “teaching of the shamans”, our two chronicles draw on the structure of the *Grub mtha’ rnam bzhag* genre as employed in the Tibetan doxographical works like the *Grub mtha’ shel gyi me long*, with one major adjustment: whereas *Grub mtha’ rnam bzhag* texts focus almost exclusively on worldviews, both chronicles deal rather shortly with the worldview of the shamans, but give much more attention to his person, including his initiation, attire and practices. This focus on the agents of religious doctrines is highly unusual for works of the *Grub mtha’i rnam bzhag* genre, but bears marked resemblance to 18th and 19th century Russian and German ethnographic accounts about North

49. V. Iumsunov, *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jun-u uy ijayur-un tuyuji*, p. 91-115.

50. T. Toboev, *Qori kiged ayuyin buriyad-nar-un urida-dayan boluysan anu*, p. 20: *tusa-tai ba ügei inu*.

Asian “shamanism”⁵¹, including the Buriyad scholar Dorji Banzarov’s famous work on the “Black Faith”. In the last paragraphs of the sections on the shamans, however, our authors switch back to the traditional content matter: they scrutinise the “teaching of the shamans” with regard to its soteriological value, from a Buddhist point of view, of course.

Conclusion: historical writing as identity politics

The Buriyad chronicles draw on different epistemic models: they are genealogical accounts, which is typical for Mongolian historiography; in their systematic taxonomy of different religious doctrines and practices they take as their model Tibetan Buddhist doxographical literature, and in their descriptive treatment of these doctrines they show strong Russian influence. For the Indian colonial context Peter van der Veer has asserted, addressing the question of modernity: “Origins of modernity cannot be neatly located in Western civilisation; they must be sought in the mess of encounters in which Indian begums, Hindu converts, and later theosophical Universalists are all present”⁵². The same holds true for the Buriyads who belonged to two competing cultural-political and religious spheres, the Russian Empire and, beyond the borders of the empire, the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world. In the Buriyad chronicles the mutual interaction and influence of various epistemic cultures as well as their complex entanglement is exemplified. The study of the Buriyad epistemic cultures may well lead us away from the dichotomies inherent in much of postorientalist discourse that focuses on the relationship between local and imperial knowledge production. I do not intend to deny that knowledge production in any social-political setting is always shaped by hierarchical structures, but these are not as fixed as we often suppose them to be. The Buriyad case provides an example of how a careful historical genealogy of knowledge formations opens up a space to rediscover individual agency which all too often is subsumed under a hegemonic agenda.

51. Compared, for instance, with Pallas’ account about the “Shamanic superstition”, in P. S. Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften*, p. 341-355.

52. P. van der Veer, *Imperial Encounters*, p. 160.

The Buriyad chronicles present a comprehensive worldview; they aim to convey a sense of uniqueness to the Transbaikial Buriyads as people belonging simultaneously to the greater Buddhist universe and the Russian Empire. In the chronicles these two diverging realities, the religious-cultural and the political, are reconciled in an ultimately Buddhist narrative, using and transforming Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist and Russian knowledge forms alike. The Buriyad historical chronicles built part of the textual-cultural resources that provided the intellectual background of the newly emerging Buriyad intelligentsia. It would be worthwhile to seek out the legacy of the indigenous knowledge forms in the religious and political visions of later prominent Buriyad personalities like Agvan Dorzhiev or Tsyben Zhamtsarano. Reading two of Dorzhiev's numerous works, the *Sine qayučin üsüg-üd-ün ilyal terigüten-i bičigsen debter orosibai*, "Manual in which the differences etc. of the old and new letters have been written down", of 1905, and his autobiography, entitled *Delekei-yin ergijü bitügsen domoy sonirqal-un bičig tedüi kemekü orošiba*, "A Book of interest: the account about travels around the world", both reveal that he was deeply rooted in the Tibeto-Mongolian epistemic traditions. He starts his booklet about the new Buriyad writing system with the traditional origin narrative of the writing system among the Mongols, thus situating his work in the tradition of the Tibetan and Mongolian formalised treatises on language and grammar⁵³. His Mongolian autobiography is a literary masterpiece written entirely in alliterative verse, grounded in the Tibetan literary genre of autobiography (tib. *rang rnam*) that was established in Tibet as early as the 12th century. In the presentation of his autobiographical self, Dorzhiev bows to the Tibetan and Mongolian convention on how one should talk about oneself, exhibiting self-deprecation and modesty⁵⁴. In short, the examination of just

53. This is brought to light through a comparison of well known grammars by Mongolian writers, like the *Jirüken-ü tolta-yin tayilburi*, composed sometime after 1727 by sMon lam rab 'byams pa bsTan 'dzin grags pa, see W. Heissig, *Die Familien- und Kirchengeschichtsschreibung der Mongolen*, p. 119. In the Tibetan knowledge cultures, language belongs to the "five forms of knowledge" that built part of higher monastic education. For Dorzhiev's Buriat alphabet see Y.-K. Dugarova-Montgomery, R. Montgomery, "The Buriat Alphabet of Agvan Dorzhiev".

54. A thorough examination of the Tibetan autobiographical genre provides J. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, p. 101-123, lying to rest the common assumption that autobiography is not to be found outside of Europe.

these two writings of Dorzhiev's oeuvre firmly positions him as a Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist scholar and intellectual. Therefore it should come as no surprise that "his own vision for the Buriyads of Russia within a pan-Mongolian Buddhist theocratic state with its centre in Tibet"⁵⁵ was informed by the Tibetan political philosophy of the "two orders" (tib. *lugs gnyis*, mong. *qoyar yosun*) of worldly power and religious power⁵⁶. Most probably the self-proclaimed representatives of the Transbaikalian Buriyads like Dorzhiev and Zhamcarano did not consider themselves at the margins of empire, but, saturated in Buddhist aspirations to a higher civilised state, right in its centre. Their visions that, unknown to the Russian bolsheviks, were fuelled by Tibetan Buddhist political philosophy, had, for some time at least, a deep impact on the new rulers of the emerging Soviet state who tried to use them for their own aims⁵⁷.

To give due right to the Tibetan and Mongolian epistemic cultures in which the Buriyad scholars' intellectual formation was grounded, it is, however, important to pay more attention to the Buriyad-language discourse (and the specific knowledge forms transported within) of which these scholar-politicians were part and which they actively shaped. My final remark therefore concerns the politics of language in postorientalist scholarship. Reading the chronicles in translation⁵⁸, there is the danger of effectively silencing the "natives". In the translation process the Buddhist and at times indigenous religious epistemic vocabulary has all too often been transformed into a Christian vocabulary, and in its wake the chronicles appear to present a strongly russified Buriyad worldview, an appearance that in the end may mislead the scholar. In line with André Lefevre's assertion, "Translation needs to be studied in connection with power and patronage, ideology and poetics, with emphasis

55. V. Tolz, *Russia's Own Orient*, p. 118.

56. See D. Seyfort Ruegg, *Ordre spirituel et ordre temporel dans la pensée bouddhique de l'Inde et du Tibet*. This is not to deny the significant influence the Russian scholars of Oriental Studies had on the Buriyad intelligentsia in the creation of a nationalist vision. It is, however, time to uncover its unexplored indigenous roots.

57. As recent research has shown, the Buriyads played a key role in the Soviet-Tibetan relations at that time, as Soviet leaders harboured the hope to use them in order to extend Soviet influence to the Buddhist peoples of Mongolia and Tibet, see A. I. Andreev, *Tibet v politike tsarskoi, sovetskoi i postsouetskoi Rossii*, especially chapter 4, and Ch. P. Atwood, *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, p. 66 sq.

58. T. P. Vanchikova et al. (eds), *Buriatskie letopisi*, p. 8-27, 32-75.

on the various attempts to shore up or undermine an existing ideology or an existing poetics”⁵⁹, the scholar of global history may need to re-evaluate the power of language in translation and opt for a first reading of the sources in the vernacular languages.

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59. A. Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture*, p. 10.

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