

Edited by VESNA A. WALLACE

# Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society



BUDDHISM IN MONGOLIAN HISTORY,  
CULTURE, AND SOCIETY





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## Contents

*Acknowledgments* vii

*Notes on Transliteration* ix

*Contributors* xi

*Introduction* xv

*Vesna A. Wallace*

### PART I |

1. *Whatever Happened to Queen Jönggen?* 3

*Johan Elverskog*

2. *The Western Mongolian Clear Script and the Making of a Buddhist State* 23

*Richard Taupier*

3. *Shakur Lama: The Last Attempt to Build the Buddhist State* 37

*Baatr Kitinov*

4. *Modernities, Sense Making, and the Inscription of Mongolian Buddhist Place* 53

*Matthew King*

5. *Envisioning a Mongolian Buddhist Identity Through Chinggis Khan* 70

*Vesna A. Wallace*

### PART II |

6. *Establishment of the Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism* 95

*Uranchimeg B. Ujeed*

7. *Zanabazar (1635–1723): Vajrayāna Art and the State in Medieval Mongolia* 116

*Uranchimeg Tsultemin*

8. *The Power and Authority of Maitreya in Mongolia Examined Through Mongolian Art* 137  
*Uranchimeg Tsultemin*
9. *A Literary History of Buddhism in Mongolia* 160  
*Simon Wickham-Smith*
10. *How Vajrapāṇi Became a Mongol* 179  
*Vesna A. Wallace*
11. *What Do Protective Deities, Mongolian Heroes, and Fast Steeds Have in Common?* 202  
*Vesna A. Wallace*
12. *Buddhist Sacred Mountains, Auspicious Landscapes, and Their Agency* 221  
*Vesna A. Wallace*
- PART III |
13. *Criminal Lamas: Court Cases Against Buddhist Monks in Early Socialist Mongolia* 243  
*Christopher Kaplonski*
14. *Transition and Transformation: Buddhist Women of Buryatia* 261  
*Karma Lekshe Tsomo*
15. *The Social and Cultural Practices of Buddhism: The Local Context of Inner Mongolia in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* 280  
*Hürelbaatar Ujeed*

BIBLIOGRAPHY 295

INDEX 321

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## *Notes on Transliteration*



FOR CLASSICAL TIBETAN we have followed the Wiley transliteration. For Classical Mongolian we have followed the spelling style employed in Lessing's *Mongolian-English Dictionary*, using the symbol “γ” for “r.” In the spelling of Classical Mongolian words, we retained the letter “ll,” but in Modern Mongolian words, we followed a standard Modern Mongolian transliteration, which renders it as “ch.” For the sake of simplicity, we used the letter “kh” in all Modern Mongolian words—disregarding whether it is followed by Mongolian front vowels or by back vowels. To make it more accessible to the reader unfamiliar with Mongolian spelling, in all cases where the word “Khaan” occurs to designate a Mongolian emperor, we have changed it to “Khan.” For the same reason, we spelled the Classical Mongolian word “Qutuγtu” as Khutugtu in all cases except in Chapter 6, dedicated to the Inner Mongolian Mergen tradition, where the author preferred to retain her transliteration. Chapters 2 and 3, dedicated to Buddhism among Oirats and Kalmyks, retained the Oirat-Mongol spelling. With regard to Modern Mongolian, the contributors have preserved the spelling differences between the dialects of Khalkha, Inner Mongolia, and Buryatia, especially in personal names.



## Contributors

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**Matthew King** received his Ph.D. from the Department for the Study of Religion at the University of Toronto. His dissertation examines Buddhist responses to the “crisis” of the Qing imperial collapse and the embrace of nationalism, science, and socialism in revolutionary Mongolia (1911–1937). He has published research on Buddhist–missionary encounters, Buddhist revival in postsocialist Mongolia, and the impact of Buddhist Modernism on

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**Simon Wickham-Smith** received his Ph.D. from the University of Washington with a dissertation on the contemporary Mongolian poet G. Mend-Ooyo. He is currently the Ts. Damdinsüren fellow in the Department of Mongolian Language and Literature at the Mongolian National University in Ulaanbaatar. His publications include the *Perfect Qualities*, which is a translation of Danzanravjaa's poetry; *The Secret Life of the Sixth Dalai Lama*; and *The Interrelationship of Humans and the Mongol Landscape in G. Mend-Oyoo's Altan Ovoo: A Study of the Nomadic Culture of Mongolia* (currently in press).



## *Introduction*

Vesna A. Wallace



FOLLOWING THE INCREMENTAL appropriation of Tibetan Buddhism, initiated in the thirteenth<sup>1</sup> and in the late sixteenth centuries, Mongolians adapted Buddhist deities, symbols, and practices to their nomadic and pastoral lifestyle, pre-Buddhist beliefs and customs, and artistic and intellectual pursuits. In so doing, they created a variant of Buddhism, which, in part, facilitated a reformulation of Mongolian cultural and religious identities, and state policies. The intricately woven connection between Buddhist esoteric ideas and practices and Mongolian folk and shamanic cultural matrices gave rise to the complex religious and cultural phenomenon we call “Mongolian Buddhism.”<sup>2</sup>

In academic practice and in public discourse, especially among contemporary Tibetan lamas and even in some Mongolian circles, it is most common to speak about Mongols as practicing Tibetan Buddhism or some variant thereof. Equating the essential character of Mongolian Buddhism with Tibetan Buddhism, the tendency has been to overlook the cultural uniqueness of the Mongolian Buddhist tradition with its abundance of distinctively Mongolian cultural elements. Tibetan missionaries who participated in the revitalization of Buddhism in Mongolia in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century and witnessed the reemergence of traditional Mongolian beliefs and customs in Mongolian Buddhism often publicly criticized Mongolian Buddhists for confusing a refuge in the Buddha Dharma for refuge in their traditional culture.<sup>3</sup>

In response to these appraisals of Mongolian Buddhism, the Mongolian Buddhist scholar Khürelbaatar Lkhamsürengiin, in his 2002 book *Wisdom of Sūtras and Śāstras (Sudar Shastiryn Bilig)*, sought to demonstrate that Mongolian Buddhism is neither a mere replica of Tibetan Buddhism nor essentially non-Buddhist. He likened Buddhist

teachings to the flow of a river that adapts itself to the contours of its banks. In his view, Buddhist teachings become attractive and give rise to faith only after those teachings establish a strong connection with the lifestyle, customs, beliefs, and intellectual life of a country.<sup>4</sup> Arguing against the longstanding conception of Mongolian Buddhism as a mere replica of Tibetan Buddhism, Khürelbaatar states:

Nowadays, we should not talk about this cultural link from the point of view of the mere influence of an alien culture, but from the point of view of assessing a creative experience of this country in developing its own, independent culture by transplanting all the beneficial [elements] of the foreign culture onto new soil.<sup>5</sup>

Khürelbaatar's argument is applicable not only to those interpretations of Mongolian Buddhism that overemphasize its Tibeto-centrism, but also to the scholastic tendency to overstate the policies of the Qing to the detriment of exploring the Mongols' own ingenuity in the process of acculturating Tibetan Buddhism. The Mongols often defied Manchu influence, rejected Chinese Confucian culture, and cultivated a uniquely Mongolian Buddhist culture as a strategy for counteracting their own marginalization and the Manchu Qing's attempts at imposing cultural hegemony. While the ruling Qing was increasingly coming under the influence of Confucianism and becoming assimilated into the predominantly sedentary culture of China, Mongols were progressively becoming more Buddhist. In the interactive network of relations among the Qing, Tibetan Gelugpa tradition, and Mongolian indigenous culture, neither the Qing nor the Tibetan tradition can be taken as a self-contained model of interpreting the heterogeneous facets of Mongolian Buddhism. Unlike European colonial powers in Asia, the Qing was neither indifferent nor disdainful of Mongolian cultural sensibilities and was supportive of the prevalence of Buddhism among the Mongols. Although this stance on the part of the Qing was largely politically motivated, it also resulted from the affinity of the Manchus, who themselves were originally a seminomadic people, toward the Mongolian pastoral and nomadic culture.

The aims of this volume are to show some of the effects of the interaction between the Mongolian indigenous culture and Buddhism, to illuminate the features that Buddhism acquired through the processes of its appropriation and adaptation to the Mongolian cultural sphere, and to demonstrate the ways in which the Mongols have been constructing their Mongolian Buddhist identity. It is the editor's hope that the volume will contribute to a better understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts within which Buddhism has operated as a major social and cultural force among the Mongols. Although the field of Mongolian studies has been in existence since the early twentieth century in Europe and somewhat later in America, the Buddhist tradition in Mongolia has remained mostly unexamined. The profound sociopolitical, cultural, and religious impact that Buddhism has had over the past eight hundred years on the lives of the Mongolian people still awaits an in-depth analysis. This volume is a small window onto the

vast expanse of Buddhist heritage in Mongolia that sketches a portion of the richness of Mongolian Buddhism. It draws attention to historical figures and events that have in part shaped the course of development of Buddhism among Mongols, but have not been given adequate attention in Western scholarship. Engaging with a variety of topics related to Buddhism among the Khalkhas, Kalmyks, Buryats, and Inner Mongols, the volume also brings to light the interrelation between Buddhism and political or state powers that determined the course of development of Buddhism in Mongolia. Therefore, the reader will often find multiple arguments at play within a single chapter.

Aware of the absence of a single and uniform Mongolian Buddhist identity, contributors approach this subject in terms of the processes by which these identities have taken shape and their functions in Mongolian social and religious contexts. Several chapters pay attention to the processes that have involved the invoking of cultural and state heritage, the creation of imaginative histories that superimpose Buddhist symbols and their meanings onto the past and provide a sense of their shared origins, and the demarcations of national and cultural boundaries. They reveal that, despite the Qing's imposition of the political hierarchical structure in the triangular interrelationship between the Qing, Tibet, and Mongolia, and regardless of the increasing dominance of the Tibetan language in Mongolian Buddhist scholasticism, Mongolian cultural and artistic diversity did not vanish and Mongolian language-centered Buddhist practices were not absent. Owing to its versatility and different historical developments among various Mongolian ethnic groups and regions, Mongolian Buddhism evades a single and ready-made interpretative template. Hence, contributors to the volume have taken diverse methodological approaches in their respective studies, including historical, anthropological, ethnographic, textual, art historical, and literary criticism.

Given the breadth of the topics of this volume, it is impossible to address all relevant themes in a single book. The influence of the political and religious agendas of the Qing dynasty and Tibetan establishments on the development of Buddhism among different Mongolian ethnic groups has been fairly well studied. Likewise, the influence of the Mongol Empire on the political and religious conditions of Buddhism in Tibet has been in some respects well examined by scholars of Tibetan Buddhism. But the extent of the Mongols' contribution to scholastic knowledge of the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition prior to and during the Qing period has been hardly explored. A comprehensive study of the Mongolian influence on Tibetan Buddhism requires further research into the abundance of available material. Likewise, a balanced approach to the study of Mongolian Buddhism that does not exclude Mongolian indigenous knowledge and culture from contributing factors in a mutual, cross-cultural pollination among these three socially, economically, and culturally interconnected geopolitical realms calls for more research. Each of these understudied areas deserves a separate treatment that goes beyond the scope of the present volume.

The volume has three parts consisting of fifteen chapters in total. Chapters included in Part One are centered on Mongolian Buddhist personages of the prerevolutionary period,

whose religious and political activities reflect the social conditions of their times that called for the reinforcement of the Buddhist and national or ethnic identities. They also point out the participation of certain Mongolian figures in the important matters of Gelugpa Buddhism in Tibet. Chapter 1, by Elverskog, addresses the Mongolian Queen Jönggen's (1551–1612) involvement in bringing the remains of the Third Dalai Lama from China to Tibet and in the selection of the Fourth Dalai Lama. His chapter also provides insight into the influence of Buddhism on the transformation of Mongolian familial culture that terminated the custom of levirate marriage, which produced strong women and shaped familial norms of the Mongolian pre-Buddhist society. Taupier, in Chapter 2, introduces the seventeenth-century Oirat Lama, Zaya Pandita Namkhai Jamtsu, who officially participated in the ordination of the Fifth Dalai Lama in 1638, and whose creation of the so-called Clear Script (*Todu bičig*<sup>6</sup>) was to be a key factor in building Oiratia as a Buddhist state. Even after the Oirat state of the early seventeenth century dissipated, the Clear Script remained in use not only among the Oirats but also among other Mongolian ethnic groups, thus testifying to the Mongolian Buddhists' uninterrupted practice of writing in the Mongolian language despite the dominance of the Tibetan language in Mongolian Buddhist scholastic institutions.

Kitinov dedicates his chapter (Chapter 3) to the religious and political activities of Shakur Lama, a prominent figure of the Kalmyk Khanate in the early eighteenth century. He sheds light on this Kalmyk figure as one of the close confidants of the Sixth Dalai Lama and as a rector of Shakhor College of Drepung Monastery in Lhasa, who sought to establish a Buddhist state founded on the principle of “two laws” (the laws of Dharma and state) in eighteenth-century Züngharia. His attempt was in good part motivated by the Christianization of Kalmyks living in Russia and by a growing influence of Islam on Kalmyks living in the Xinjiang province of China.

Chapter 4, by King, shows that, at the time when the power of the Qing began to fade in 1911 and the Autonomous Bogd Khan State was emerging, Mongolian and Buryat intellectuals living in Mongolia, China, and tsarist Russia already had begun to envision pan-Mongolian identity, language, and political heritage. Focusing on Mongolian language and literature, folk traditions, and indigenous knowledge and customs, they sought to create a new, heightened awareness of Mongolian identity that could factor in the creation of a pan-Mongolian ethnic family, sheltered in Buddhism. A central theme of King's chapter is the Mongolian Buddhists' encounter with European and Russian secular views and scientific discoveries in the post-Qing era, which challenged the Buddhist cosmology and caused anxiety to Mongolian Buddhist scholastics. King pays special attention to the sections of Zawa Damdin's *Golden Book* (*Altan Dever*, 1931) that illustrate how this scholastic hierarch perceived the new scientific knowledge and emerging political ideologies of revolutionaries as a threat and an insult to the Buddhist tradition.

The editor's chapter on Chinggis Khan and Buddhism (Chapter 5) examines the contemporary, dominant discourses on Mongolian Buddhist identity as relating to

Chinggis Khan, based on the historical writings of the Mongolian and Tibetan scholars dating from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. It illustrates the attempts of the traditional Mongolian chronicles and contemporary Mongolian Buddhists to recontextualize Chinggis Khan within a Buddhist framework and thereby indigenize Tibetan Buddhism and authenticate the Mongolian Buddhist identity.

Part Two deals primarily with the Mongols' strategies of indigenizing and popularizing Buddhism among the masses, involving the religious, cultural, and artistic practices. The authors also bring to light the ways in which the cultivation of unique elements of Mongolian Buddhism and its broad dissemination factored in the efforts of constructing a Mongolian Buddhist identity and building a Buddhist state. Uranchimeg Ujeed delineates in Chapter 6 a project of the indigenization of Tibetan Buddhism in Inner Mongolia that resulted in the new Mergen Tradition of Mongolian Buddhism, which was based in the Mongolian language. Developed in the eighteenth century from the earlier lineage of Mongolian Buddhist popular practices and centered in Mergen Monastery and in the considerable number of its affiliated monasteries, the Mergen Tradition was neither a Manchu-centered nor entirely Tibet-oriented tradition, but a locally sponsored network of monks and laypeople. Its founder, Mergen Gegeen, promoted the composition of liturgies in the Mongolian language with Mongolian melodies and the writing of original Mongolian-language works. He harmonized Buddhist practices with Mongolian indigenous customs and resisted Tibetan Buddhist cultural hegemony among Inner Mongols. Owing to its unique Mongolian features, the influence of the tradition spread beyond Inner Mongolia to Khalkha and has endured to the present.

Chapters 7 and 8, contributed by Tsultemin, are dedicated to the artistic creations of Zanabazar, the First Jebtsundamba Khutugtu, who sought to promote Buddhism among all layers of Khalkha Mongols by means of his art in order to unify the Khalkhas and establish a Buddhist state at the time of social and political turmoil in Mongolia. His creation of a new Mongolian script was related to the same mission. Tsultemin's study of Zanabazar's earlier statues shows that through them he intentionally emphasized his imperial heritage and promoted a nonsectarian form of Vajrayāna Buddhism rather than replicating the deities central to both the Gelug and Jonang traditions. Agwaankhaidav's painting and statue of a seated Maitreya served Gelugpa ideology of a cakravartin ruler who endorses Gelugpa dominance in later Buddhist Mongolia.

Wickham-Smith's chapter (Chapter 9) illustrates that Mongolian poets of the eighteenth through the early twentieth century moved away from the influence of Tibetan culture while appropriating new literary themes and poetical forms from Tibetan Buddhist literature. Wickham-Smith argues that the thematic scope and genre of Mongolian Buddhist literature testify to this fact even in the case of Mongolian authors who were writing in the Tibetan language. One such a genre is the so-called *üge*, which developed from the popular oral tradition in the eighteenth century by Agwaankhaidav (T. Ngag dbang mKhas grub) and further expanded in the nineteenth century by Sandag.

Characterized by the combination of the advice and social criticism expressed through the words of animals and inanimate objects, the *üge* genre was closely related to the indigenous literature of pastoral Mongols.

Chapter 10, the editor's chapter dedicated to the Mongols' adoption of Vajrapāṇi as a tutelary deity of the Mongolian state, illustrates the ways in which this Buddhist deity became acculturated, naturalized, and politicized in Mongolian cultural and political realms. The chapter also shows how the reinstallment of Vajrapāṇi in democratic Mongolia expressed the state's affirmation of the inseparability of the Mongolian national and Buddhist identities. Her two other chapters—one dedicated to the analyses of the convergence of the Mongolian heroic culture and Buddhism (Chapter 11), and the other delving into the Mongolian Buddhist practices related to the natural world (Chapter 12)—reveal the manner in which the dynamics of the pastoral-nomadic and heroic culture of the Mongols gave a specific character to Buddhism in Mongolia.

Part Three consists of three chapters, two delving into the issues pertinent to the revitalization of Buddhism in contemporary Inner Mongolia and Buryatia, and one dealing with the court practices of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary government involving lamas during the communist purges of religion. As is well known, the emergent political ideology of Mongolian People's Revolutionary government did not merely deride Buddhist modes of knowledge and practices, but, under Stalin's influence, it also actively engaged in secularization campaigns, legal persecutions, mass killings of lamas, and the destruction of Buddhist monasteries, seen as hotbeds of the counterrevolution.

Chapter 13, by Kaplonski, demonstrates that the creation of new legal practices and a new criminal code was just one of many strategies of political violence deployed by the People's Revolutionary government against Buddhist monks and institutions during that tumultuous period. During 1936 and 1937, the government conducted court trials against high-ranking lamas who were accused of being counter-revolutionaries, intent upon overthrowing the people's government and restoring a feudal-theocratic regime. Kaplonski analyzes a set of mock court trials against lamas. Being scripted or having predetermined outcomes, these "show trials" were designed to justify the violent assertion of the legitimacy and sovereignty of the Mongolian communist state during the revolutionary period.

Although systematic and aggressive antireligious campaigns of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary government succeeded in abolishing Buddhist institutions and destroying Buddhist education and heritage, they were ineffective in eliminating the faith of many Mongolians. As Ven. Chojamts, the Abbot of Gandantengchileng Monastery, stated in his lecture at the University of Oxford in the spring of 2010: "The regime was able to control our bodies and speech, but it could not control our minds." Thus, as soon as democratic changes in Mongolia allowed for greater freedom of religious expression in the late 1980s, a resurgence of Buddhist religious and artistic expression began. Soon a restoration of Buddhist monastic education; a reconstruction of old Buddhist temples, monasteries, and *stūpas*; and the building of new temples were under way. Buddhist TV

and radio programs, popular and academic publications on Buddhism, and other Buddhist projects were also undertaken. At present, among the many religions in Mongolia, Buddhism once again holds a central position in society and seems to be favored by the state. A similar comeback of Buddhism has taken place in Russian republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia and in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia. Due to the sociopolitical and economic circumstances of the Mongols living in the territories belonging to Russia and China, the revitalization of Buddhism in these regions does not appear equal to that in Mongolia, where 95 percent of the population is Mongols.

Throughout all the regions populated by Mongolian ethnic groups, the preservation of popular Buddhist practices and the revitalization of Buddhism in the postsocialist period have been also carried out by Buddhist laywomen. Tsomo's chapter (Chapter 14) delineates the position and contribution of laywomen in post-Soviet Buryatia, as she re-evaluates women's role in Buddhist institutions and practices. Her study shows that in Buryatia, as in Mongolia and Kalmykia, the increase in secondary education opportunities for women brought about by the Soviet educational policies made it possible for the activities of contemporary Buddhist women to be no longer limited to devotional and ritual practices. In contemporary Buryatia, women's projects extend to the dissemination of Buddhist knowledge, the betterment of women's lives, and monastic training. Nevertheless, as Tsomo discovered, when it comes to the recognition of Tibetan lamas in their Buryat incarnations, the birth mother is invariably a Tibetan woman.

The editor has found a similar practice in contemporary Mongolia. Whenever the search and recognition of new reincarnations of the famous Mongolian lamas of the past are initiated—be it by individual Mongolian monks, monastic institutions, nonprofit Buddhist organizations, and the like—Tibetan lamas and institutions are invariably involved, even when a new incarnation is Mongolian born from the Mongolian mother. For the most part, this is due to the lack of a centralized authority and unity among Mongolian Buddhists in the current phase of the revitalization of Mongolian Buddhism.<sup>7</sup>

Hürelbaatar Ujeed demonstrates in Chapter 15 that, similar to the conditions in Mongolia and Buryatia, 90 percent of the monasteries in Inner Mongolia were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Nevertheless, as was the case in Mongolia and Buryatia, some lamas continued to practice Buddhism in secret, and the rural population maintained the Buddhist ceremonial practices such as the house-warming, the first hair-cutting, and the veneration of sacred landscape until the institution of religious freedom in 1980. Taking as examples the life of Khulustai Monastery and the diversity of gift exchanges between lamas and laity, Ujeed also reveals that characterizations of Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia put forward by twentieth-century scholars must be corrected. He repudiates the validity of the rigid classification of Buddhist monasteries in Inner Mongolia into academic and ritualistic types and demonstrates the flaws of the twentieth-century scholars' preconceived notion of lamas as an unproductive force responsible for the economic stagnation of society, which justified the harsh measures implemented by the Cultural Revolution.

The findings presented by the contributors to this volume carry broader implications in understanding that the heterogeneous history of Mongolian Buddhism, its various representations among different Mongolian groups, and a wide array of popular indigenous beliefs and practices that it encompasses point to the phenomenon of “Mongolian Buddhism” as an overarching category open to different interpretations and contextualizations. Therefore, it would be nearly impossible to write a general history of Buddhism among the Mongols: The question “A history of *which* Mongolian Buddhism?” would inevitably arise at the very start.

## NOTES

1. The link of the Mongol empire with Tibetan Buddhism began in 1247, when Köten, Möngke Khan’s second son, who lived in Tangut territory, was sent on expedition to central Tibet to renew Tangut’s tie with Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, which was established in the twelfth century. Köten’s meeting with Sakya Pandita facilitated Phag pa’s (‘Phags pa) visit to Qubilai Khan’s camp and the initiation of Qubilai into the *Hevajra Tantra* in 1253.

2. One such connection between Buddhism and Mongolian shamanic practices is exemplified in various Mongolian Buddhist beliefs and practices. One such example is Chakhar Geshe Lubsang Tsültim’s (1740–1810) work titled *The Offering of Mare’s Milk in Mongolia*, which in detail describes the manner in which the old, shamanic tradition of the spring *kumis* festival and the offering of mare’s milk became closely associated with Buddhist purification ceremonies of incense offering.

3. This observation is based on my multiyear ethnographic research, during which I witnessed such criticisms and evaluations of Mongolian Buddhism as “superficially Buddhist” expressed in public forums and teachings and in private interviews with Tibetan lamas who lived and worked in Mongolia during that period.

4. Lkhamsürengiin, 2002, 31.

5. Ibid., 33.

6. Whenever an Oirat word or phrase appears in the text, the Oirat Clear Script spelling from the text in which it was found is used, transliterated into Latin script. However, it is important to note that spelling of even common terms varied significantly over time and among various Oirat groups.

7. I owe this observation to Mr. Lhakhvademchig Jadamba, a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the Mongolian National University, whose research involves a history of the *tulku* institution in Mongolia.

## PART I





# 1

## Whatever Happened to Queen Jönggen?

*Johan Elverskog*



ONE OF THE most important and powerful individuals in sixteenth-century East Asia was, without a doubt, Queen Jönggen (1551–1612). In fact, during the period from 1570 to 1612, she is mentioned “more often than any other in Chinese records dealing with Mongol affairs as wielding great power in Mongolia.”<sup>1</sup> And invariably it was not only Chinese officials and court chroniclers who documented her power and status, but also the Mongols themselves, as is amply attested in the 1607 history of Altan Khan and his descendants, the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*.<sup>2</sup> Yet, curiously, this fame and stature did not last. In later Mongol histories of the Qing period (1644–1911), Queen Jönggen is completely absent, which raises a host of questions. What follows is therefore an exploration of these issues focusing in particular on why this historical erasure happened, and what it tells us about Mongol Buddhist history.

### QUEEN JÖNGGEN

To elucidate these later developments, however, it is necessary to begin with a short sketch of Queen Jönggen’s life, which, as we know it from contemporary Chinese sources, began in a convoluted family drama that was to shape subsequent Sino-Mongol history. In particular, what set everything in motion is that Altan Khan wanted to take the future Queen Jönggen as his third wife.<sup>3</sup> But the Khan had previously promised to give her in marriage to his elder brother’s son, Noyandara Jinong. Thus the Jinong became outraged when Altan Khan took her back for himself. So to placate Noyandara the Khan took another woman, whom he had promised to one of his grandsons, and

gave her to his nephew. Such a move may have placated Noyandara, but it infuriated the grandson, Daiching Ejei, who had been orphaned as a child and raised by Altan Khan's first wife. Yet, even though the grandson had such close relations with Altan Khan, when the Khan took his wife and gave her to another relative, Daiching Ejen was so angered that he abandoned his grandfather's Mongol realm and submitted to the Ming dynasty. In turn, it was this defection and the subsequent attempts to resolve it—as well as the long-running trade disputes along the border—that ushered in the famous Sino-Mongol peace accord of 1571, an event that was to shape a great deal of subsequent East Asian history, including the life of Queen Jönggen.<sup>4</sup>

Much of this had to do with the title Shunyi Wang 順義王 (“Obedient and Righteous Prince”), which the Ming court bestowed on Altan Khan during these 1571 proceedings, since it was this title and the person who held it—and the accompanying seal to be used on official correspondence—that controlled the lucrative Sino-Mongol border trade.<sup>5</sup> As it was, during the last years of Altan Khan's life, it turned out that Queen Jönggen actually became the key figure controlling this seal and the trade it made possible. This gave her a great deal of power, since if any Mongol prince crossed her—or the Ming court, for that matter—she could retaliate with a financially devastating boycott on account of the control she exerted over access to the Chinese market. Thus, over the course of the 1570s, Queen Jönggen's influence increased dramatically, which, invariably, did not please everyone. Most outraged was Altan Khan's eldest son, Sengge Dүүreng, who was incensed not only by her growing financial and political clout, but also quite simply by how Altan Khan had treated his own mother after marrying the younger Jönggen. Sengge Dүүreng, therefore, had a long-running feud with both his father and his younger wife and even moved with his retainers away from the family's traditional territory.

Yet, when Altan Khan passed away in 1578, Sengge returned from his self-imposed exile in order to reclaim his father's territory and, more importantly, his Shunyi Wang title and seal that enabled legal trade with the Ming. When he returned, however, Queen Jönggen had taken the seal and the tablets of military authority and set herself up independently. At first she planned on remaining outside the control of the other Mongol princes, which could have been feasible since, with the Ming seal and the Chinese court's support, she controlled tribute relations. However, she also wanted Budashiri, her eldest son and Altan Khan's seventh son, to be recognized by the Ming court as Shunyi Wang, which meant that the rightful heir in primogeniture, Sengge Dүүreng, would be disenfranchised. Doing so would have been politically explosive and the Ming court therefore hesitated, and when they received a petition from seventy-nine Mongol noblemen to maintain the status quo, the Ming decided to grant the title and seal to Sengge. One stipulation of this recognition, however, was that he had to marry Queen Jönggen, whom the Ming perceived as being “pro-Chinese” and therefore tempering any possible future problems.

They married in October-November 1582. Matrimonial bliss did not, alas, ensue. Instead, Queen Jönggen continued her struggle for ascendancy and control. Taking

advantage of Sengge's ineptitude resulting from drunkenness, she took control of his best troops and installed herself independently of him to the west of Altan Khan's capital. Furthermore, to consolidate her power, she wanted her son Budashiri, who had been denied the title Shunyi Wang, to marry Bagha Beiji, who had inherited control of the capital after her husband Daiching Ejei's death. However, Dayan Khiya—Altan Khan's adopted son and true powerbroker in the capital—opposed her actions. As a result, Namudai Sechen, Sengge's son, married Bagha Beiji in 1584, thwarting Jönggen's plan again.

Thus after Sengge's death in 1586, the struggle for control of the Shunyi Wang title and Altan Khan's domains continued between Jönggen and Namudai. Jönggen promoted her son to the Ming court; however, after 280 Mongol noblemen wrote a petition in favor of Namudai Sechen the Chinese acquiesced. Yet, once again they demanded that the prince in question marry Queen Jönggen, which he did. Thus, on May 3, 1587, the court bestowed on him the title Shunyi Wang and the privilege of controlling trade and tribute relations that the title entailed. But in the course of marrying Jönggen, Namudai had divorced Bagha Beiji, and thus, as the Queen had long desired, Bagha then married her son Budashiri. They had a son named Sodnam.

On account of being Queen Jönggen's grandson, over the course of time Sodnam came to wield a great deal of power. In fact, when Namudai Sechen passed away in 1607 it was actually Sodnam who was the most powerful prince in the Ordos. As a result, he felt that the title Shunyi Wang and its control of tribute and trade relations belonged rightfully to him. The Ming court did not agree. Yet they were hesitant to bestow the title of Shunyi Wang on Namudai Sechen's son and heir, Boshugtu Khong Taiji. However, as several Mongol noblemen requested yet again that the title be granted to Altan Khan's legitimate heir through primogeniture, the Ming finally agreed. But, once again, they demanded that Altan Khan's great-grandson Boshugtu marry his wife, Queen Jönggen, Sodnam's grandmother. At first she refused to be married a fourth time; however, she eventually acquiesced. Thus, in 1612, five years after Namudai's death, his son Boshugtu Khong Taiji married Jönggen and received the title Shunyi Wang.

Queen Jönggen died shortly thereafter. Nevertheless, it is clear that during her life Jönggen had been a pivotal figure in the high-stakes political and economic world of Sino-Mongol relations, as is amply evidenced in the Chinese sources that focus on her purported "pro-Chinese" sentiments and therefore highlight her role in resolving tensions on the border. Yet, as we also know from Mongol sources, that is not all she did. Rather, although she is certainly presented as a powerful presence during the reigns of Altan Khan and his two successors, she is not portrayed as the ultimate arbiter of Sino-Mongol power relations, as the Chinese sources claim. Instead, what comes to the fore in the Mongol presentation of Queen Jönggen is that she was always by the side of the ruler at the pivotal moments of early Mongol Buddhist history. And although she is not given credit specifically for driving these events, it is certainly evident from the historical account found in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra* and other Mongol sources that she was a strong supporter of the Buddhist conversion.

For example, when the Amdo monk Asing Lama first came to Altan Khan's court and expounded the Dharma, he did so specifically to the Khan and Queen Jönggen.<sup>6</sup> They in turn sent envoys to Tibet with an invitation to the Dalai Lama. And when they all met in 1578 on the shores of Lake Kōkenuur, the Dalai Lama gave them both titles and a tantric initiation. Subsequently, when Altan Khan passed away, it was Queen Jönggen who had Manjusri Khutugtu give Buddhist teachings on impermanence in order to help deal with the grief. It was also she who sent envoys to inform the Dalai Lama of her husband's death. Thus when the Dalai Lama came to Mongolia in 1585 it was Queen Jönggen and Sengge Diiüreng who met him and presented a large number of gifts not only to him, but also to the Juu Śākyamuni temple that Altan Khan had built before his passing.<sup>7</sup> And it was during this event that the Dalai Lama praised her Buddhist devotion and had her commission a Nepalese artist to make a diadem for the temple's Jowo statue. Shortly thereafter, the Dalai Lama convinced Queen Jönggen and Namudai Sechen, who had succeeded his father the previous year, to exhume Altan Khan and cremate his body according to Buddhist custom, which they did.

The following year, however, the Dalai Lama passed away. It was therefore Namudai and Jönggen who not only brought his remains back to Tibet—an ordeal that took almost three years—but also played the key role in finding the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso (Yon tan rGya mtsho, 1589–1617). And although they wanted the child, who was born to a grandson of Altan Khan, to stay in Mongolia, they were eventually persuaded by the Tibetans to allow him to go to Lhasa, whereupon Namudai and Queen Jönggen turned their devotion toward Maitreya Khutugtu, the Dalai Lama's representative in Mongolia. Most remarkably, at this time they also launched a project to have the entire Ganjuur (T. Bka 'gyur) translated into Mongolian.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, at this point the historical narrative of the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra* comes to an end. Thus, we do not know—from the Mongol perspective—what Queen Jönggen did during the last five years of her life; however, based on Chinese records we know that she continued to shape Sino-Mongol relations. And based on her life as found in other Mongol sources we also know that she continued her strong support of the Dharma.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of what she actually did, however, all of it was about to become moot. Instead of being heralded as a key figure in supporting Sino-Mongol peace and mutual trade agreements for almost forty years, or a pivotal figure in Mongol Buddhist history, Queen Jönggen and all she stood for was about to be erased from the historical record.

#### REWRITING HISTORY

Sagang Sechen (Saryang Sečen), the author of the famous 1662 *Precious Summary* (*Erdeni-yin tobči*), was the main historian who transformed Queen Jönggen's role in Mongol history. He did this in two ways. The first was to simply exclude her from his history. Thus, although Sagang Sechen has the longest section devoted to the Buddhist

conversion of any seventeenth-century Mongol source, he shifts the focus wholly away from Queen Jönggen. In his presentation, she therefore plays absolutely no role either in the conversion to Buddhism or in the larger historical context of Sino-Mongol relations. In fact, Sagang Sechen mentions her only once, in a list of people who went with Altan Khan to Lake Kökenuur to meet the Dalai Lama.<sup>10</sup> Queen Jönggen is never mentioned again. Unlike in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*, she does not receive a tantric initiation, nor does she receive her illustrious title: “Ārya Tārā, the incarnation of Bodhisattva Tārā.”<sup>11</sup> Rather, according to Sagang Sechen, Queen Jönggen’s role in shaping sixteenth-century history, including her important role in establishing the Dharma among the Mongols, was minimal, if not largely irrelevant.

As a result, we can rightfully wonder why Sagang Sechen made the editorial choices that he did, especially since his historical elision effectively erased Queen Jönggen from all subsequent Mongol histories. In fact, on account of Sagang Sechen’s work becoming the authoritative historical presentation that was to shape not only later Mongol historiography but also much Western scholarship, this historical rewriting needs to be addressed. And in both cases it seems as if little thought has been given to the possible historical biases or interpretive moves that may have shaped Sagang Sechen’s narrative. However, one need not read too much against the grain in order to come to the conclusion that much of his presentation was aimed to glorify the actions of his family and its web of aristocratic allies. This narrative strategy was used not simply to promote his lineage, but also to make it clear to the new Manchu ruling elite that they were the true local powerbrokers and thus should rightfully be granted the appropriate seals and titles of nobility within the new Qing state.<sup>12</sup> Thus, highlighting Queen Jönggen and the long-running feud between the competing lineages of Altan Khan was probably not in his, or his family’s, best interest. Indeed, rather than dwelling on these historical realities and their implications he simply ignores them and elevates instead the history of his uncle, Khutugtu Sechen Khung Taiji, and Namudai Sechen Khan’s son, Boshogtu Khung Taiji, who upon Sodnam’s death in 1625 had married his widow, annexed his land and wealth, and been appointed the last Shunyi Wang.

On one level, it is therefore rather clear why Sagang Sechen wrote his history as he did: family honor and the tandem benefits of political and economic power enabled through Manchu recognition. Yet there are other elements in his narrative that point to different forces at work as well. For example, his work also reflects the growing Buddhist persecution and legal disenfranchisement of “shamanism” that occurred over the course of the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> And it is in many ways this anti-shamanist discourse that plays a role in Sagang Sechen’s transformation of a pivotal episode in the history of the Mongols’ Buddhist conversion: the exhumation and cremation of Altan Khan by the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso (bSod nams rGya mtsho, 1534–1588). In particular, it confirms that earlier Mongol funerary practices were fundamentally wrong and that the Dharma and its ritual practices were inherently correct.

Of course, such a “relapse” to preconversion religious practices is a common trope of many conversion narratives. To Wit, the lapse back to earlier practices reveals fully how egregiously wrong they are in relation to the new religion and thereby solidifies both the righteousness of the conversion and the faith of those newly converted.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely within just such a framework that the story operates in the *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*; namely, when Altan Khan dies, the Mongols follow earlier customs and thereby summon Chinese *feng shui* masters and Buddhist lamas to find a proper burial site, and then bury him in “Buddho-shamanic” fashion on the south side of the Daqing 大青 Mountains.<sup>15</sup> In turn, however, when the Dalai Lama comes to Mongolia he invariably informs them that this “ecumenical” religious service, and especially the burial of Altan Khan, was a mistake. He therefore recommends that a new Buddhist ceremony and cremation be performed:

To the Khan, Queen, and the greater and lesser lords of the Twelve Tümed,  
 The All-knowing Dalai Lama personally said,  
 “Our Lord, the wonderful Holy Brahmā Great Mighty Cakravartin Altan  
 Khan,  
 By the power of collected heaps of merit and wisdom in each and every birth,

Was born as a mighty powerful sovereign.  
 He peacefully held the Jewel Buddha’s religion and the worldly state,  
 And greatly helped all beings in this direction.  
 By the power of the ripening of this supreme merit’s fruit,

And being compassionate towards the decline of Buddha’s religion at that time,  
 Bodhisattva Altan Khan took birth among the Mongols in order to help.  
 In his vigor of youth he prudently put the hard and fierce ones under his power.  
 Through the holy blessings, he met me, the Offering-Site,

And newly established in this direction the powerful Buddha’s religion.  
 If we bury in the golden earth this great holy shining corpse, that is like the  
 Cakravartins who conquered the ancient four continents,  
 And thus treat him like an ordinary sovereign, how can we see the signs?

If we cremate his shining corpse, we shall see the signs.  
 And if we erect a *stūpa*, like that of the Magisterial Liberator Buddha,  
 The recompense will be immeasurably great!”  
 Speaking together, [Namudai Sechen] Khan, Queen [Jönggen] and the greater  
 and lesser lords agreed.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the third month in the Pig Year [1587] the Vajradhara Dalai Lama  
 Made a *maṇḍala* as was done with the previous Tathāgatas’ majestic remains.

When he cremated him as an offering by the principle of the Dharma,  
The color of the sky became spotless, clear, and majestic.

Then a five-colored rainbow appeared and it rained flowers.  
Marvelous and wonderful signs were seen by everyone.  
The seed syllables of the five Sugatas appeared,  
And the entire Great Nation praised and wondered greatly.

Afterwards they opened the vase with [the ashes] of the majestic remains.  
And when they collected and placed [the ashes] with a bejeweled spoon into the  
golden vessel,  
From the Holy Khan's majestic remains, Peaceful, Expansive, Powerful and  
Fearsome Buddhas,  
Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara's white seed syllable, *hrīḥ*,

And other worship objects of body, speech, and mind were repeatedly and rapidly  
produced.  
Immediately the Sugatas' seed syllables,  
The unparalleled syllables, *om hūṃ traṃ hrīḥ āḥ*,  
Distinctly appeared strung as a five-colored pearl rosary.

When an unfathomable variety of relics including a relic like a wishing jewel,  
A white conch shell with whorls turning to the right,  
And other uncountable five-colored relics, were seen by everyone,  
Together with innumerable signs, they venerated in faith.

The Five-Colored Nations, each individually, took them as a site of worship.  
Then the wonderful shining remains were inhumed in a great  
[*stūpa*], made by a Nepalese craftsman of jewels, gold and silver,  
In the fashion of the ancient Sugata's reliquary *stūpa*, named Bodhicitta.

On the west side of Juu Śākyamuni monastery,  
A magnificent blue palace was constructed,  
And appropriately the incarnation of Vajrapāṇi, Jedrung Khutugtu, and  
The four-fold *saṅgha* sprinkled barley and consecrated it.

On that occasion the Alms-masters and lords of the Twelve Tümed, each  
individually,  
Invited the famous splendid Vajradhara Dalai Lama,  
And presented an immeasurable amount of merit.  
Thus they entered simultaneously into the Pure Buddha's religion.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, as noted above, this particular story fulfills perfectly the structural mandates of a conversion narrative. By recognizing the lapse into earlier practices the story not only identifies these traditions as being wrong, but also powerfully confirms the righteousness of the Mongols' subsequent return to the Buddhist fold.

Similar narrative processes are also found in Sagang Sechen's telling of this event, but his presentation is also radically different. In particular, he minimizes the actual burial of Altan Khan and shifts the focus instead to another funeral with even more monstrous practices. This narrative turn not only amplifies the horrors of non-Buddhist traditions but also enhances the power of the Dalai Lama, since he is able to rectify the situation by means of a powerful tantric exorcism:

Thereupon, when [the Dalai Lama] headed northwards, many benefactors and princes on the way invited him and made grand offerings. Arriving outside Boshogtu Sechen Jinong's place, they indicated [to him] the place of the Temple of the Three Times, and whilst they were at Kökebür, the three persons, Boshogtu Sechen Jinong, Sechen Khong Taiji and Sechen Daiching, received the totally-perfected four initiations (Skt. *abhiṣeka*) of the Splendid Hevajra from the Vajradhara Dalai Lama, and they took an oath saying, "Do not calumniate one another." He established the Two Realms in accord with yore, and made the Sun of Religion to flourish in the Dark Continent.

Then proceeding and arriving at the Twelve Tümed, he criticized their having buried in *onggon*-fashion the corpse of Altan Khan, saying, "How can you bury in the earth such a beloved and inestimable jewel?" Thus, when they exhumed it and brought it forth and [ceremoniously] burned it, it distinctly came to be [replete with] marvelous tokens and incalculably numerous relics, and so on; all the peoples and populace marveled jointly.

Then further, Altan Khan, after his late father had gone to heaven, married Queen Molan, the third of the three wives of [Bodi] Alag Jinong, his father. From this there was only the single son, called Töbed Taiji. When he died, the queen, heedless of the sin, said:

"Slaying the children of a hundred persons,  
One will make [them] accompany [the deceased];  
Slaying the offspring of a hundred female-camels,  
One will cause [them] to bellow [likewise]."

When more than forty children had been slain, the great folk were on the point of an uprising, and the son of Sinikei Örlüg of the Monggoljin, named Jugantulai Kiya Taiji, said:

"In the place of a stranger [i.e., the queen],  
Making children suffer, I shall go.  
Let her [just try to] kill me and make [me]  
Accompany [her dead son]."

Because there were no possibilities of slaying him, one left off, and henceforth they abandoned the killing.

Thus when that queen died, her corpse was buried in *onggon*-fashion. Now that queen, owing to her sin[s], Erlig [Yama, the Lord of Death] did not separate her from her body, so that she [could] rise upwards and advance to be an unfettered spirit. [Therefore] the Holy Dalai Lama deigned to pacify [her spirit]. So as to make a fire *maṇḍala* of the fierce deeds of Yamāntaka, performer of frightening [things], the splendid Vajra-one, [the Dalai Lama] prepared in proper fashion the opening of a triangular gusset and so on; and inside this, he placed the queen's robe which had been [folded] seven times, and at once great truth uttered from the lama's mouth. He assembled the Lords of Death through the four *dhāraṇīs* and four *mudrā*-gestures, and at the time when they were made to enter the gusset, a lizard came and crept into the left sleeve of the robe, and stuck out its head through the yoke.

Then, when the Holy Lama had preached well about the benefit of salvation, and the harm of perpetual reincarnation, and the doctrine about the truth of dying in general and so on, that lizard turned about three-times as if bowing its head, straight-way dying, [and of course] it was indeed that one [i.e., it was the queen all the time].

Then he introduced fire through meditative concentration (Skt. *samādhi*), and when he proffered the goods of sacrifice to the mundane and supramundane guests, and when that robe and lizard were burned, there was perceived [i.e., smelled] an unendurably severe and foul odor. Some fainted, and some grew hysterical, and some awoke and came to themselves, and as they looked, there arose upwards a white column with the smoke of the *maṇḍala*, and on top of it, there was a Son of Heaven in the shape of Vajrasattva. And when everyone who was there saw how he went they marveled and they acquired an excessively firm faith. Just as the dawn lights up the dark night, the Precious Religion, as if grown illumining the gleaming sun broadly, greatly expanded.<sup>17</sup>

As noted above, Sagang Sechen clearly changed the story quite markedly from the earlier *Jewel Translucent Sūtra*. And on one level it is possible to argue that he has simply amplified the narrative tropes of conversion; namely, the lapse back to earlier practices was not simply a “shamanic” burial, but actually the performance of ritual sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> His act of artistic license, then, clearly made Buddhism and its ritual practices seem all the more righteous. Yet, is that all that is going on in Sagang Sechen's narrative transformation? Indeed, what are we to make of Sagang Sechen's elaborations of this particular historical episode? Moreover, what does it possibly tell us about the historical fate of Queen Jönggen?

#### BUDDHISM AND MONGOL CULTURE

To begin to answer these questions, it is possible to look at several aspects of the story that seem to shed light on the larger cultural transformations taking place in Mongol

society at the time. The first of these is how Sagang Sechen shifts the focus completely from Altan Khan's burial—and its implications—to Queen Molan's mournful and murderous funeral for her son Töbed Taiji. This narrative transformation invariably raises many questions, ranging from why Sagang Sechen focused on her story to, quite simply, who Queen Molan was.

In terms of the latter, the truth is that we know very little. In fact, Queen Molan is not mentioned in any other Mongol or Chinese source.<sup>19</sup> We do know, however, that Altan Khan was twelve when his father died, and thus it is possible he took his father's third wife as his own according to Mongol custom. Yet that would mean that he had already married his first wife, Yeke Qatun, before he was twelve, which is certainly possible. Even so, Queen Molan or her existence is still not found in any other source. We do know, however, that Altan Khan's third son was in fact called Töbed Taiji, and thus it is apparently his mother who is being presented in this story. And in this regard, Sagang Sechen's description of a bereaved mother may contain a kernel of truth, since we do know that Töbed Taiji did pass away as a young man. Of course, whether his mother, whoever she was, actually carried out his funeral as Sagang Sechen narrates is another question entirely. Regardless of this point, however, a further element that Sagang Sechen does not include in his telling is that when Töbed Taiji passed away as a young man he left behind a three-year-old son, Daiching Ejei, who, as noted above, would eventually flee to Ming China on account of the spousal imbroglio surrounding Altan Khan's love of Queen Jönggen. What should we make of all this?

On one level, of course, Sagang Sechen's choice of Queen Molan makes sense since it fits the temporal and narrative frames. Her actions clearly confirmed the perfidy of "shamanism." Moreover, if Töbed Taiji had passed away around 1550, it would make temporal sense that when his mother passed away sometime thereafter she could thus become the evil spirit that the Dalai Lama would exorcise in 1586. But even so, one can still wonder: Why her story? And why did it have to be included above and beyond—in fact, eclipsing—the initial ritual transgression of Altan Khan's funeral and burial? Indeed, what kind of narrative work did Sagang Sechen intend by including this dramatic episode in his history of the Mongols' Buddhist conversion?

Of course, these are questions that may at this point be unanswerable. However, a clue of sorts seems to be reflected in how Queen Molan is introduced and described by Sagang Sechen. In particular, she is described as having been the third wife of Bodi Alag Khan, and, after his death, as having married and had a child with his son, Altan Khan. Whether this actually happened is unclear; it is certainly the case, however, that levirate marriage was a long-established custom on the steppe. Chinese sources from the early Han dynasty, for example, note with disapproval that it was a custom among the Xiongnu.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, all the European travelers to the Mongol court during the imperial period disparagingly took note of the custom as well.<sup>21</sup> William of Rubruck, for example, notes that "[w]idows among them do not marry, on the grounds of their belief that all who serve them in this life will do so in the one to come; and so in the case of a widow

they think that after death she will always revert to her first husband. Consequently, there is to be found among them the shameful practice whereby a son sometimes marries all his father's wives except his mother."<sup>22</sup> And as we have seen, this practice continued as a well-established custom among the Mongols up through the sixteenth century, most famously in the case of Queen Jönggen, who married four generations of fathers and sons. An interesting question, therefore, is: How long did this tradition continue? Indeed, is it possible to conjecture that Queen Molan's true sin was not her "shamanism," but rather what many cultures and the Buddhist tradition would identify as her "incestuous" relationship with Altan Khan.

#### MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM?

In the study of Buddhism a longstanding topic has been the dynamic of accommodation and acculturation—how the Buddhist tradition not only transformed and adapted itself to new cultural worlds, but also how this dynamic shaped the new host society in the process. In many ways the study of Mongolian Buddhism has been no different, at least in the sense that many scholars have framed their discussion of the Dharma among the Mongols as one of a common process of interaction between local pre-Buddhist practices and those of Tantric Buddhism. Yet, on account of various factors, the nature of this dynamic in the Mongol world has also resulted in Mongolian Buddhism often being presented as something inauthentic. To a certain degree it is understood that Mongolian Buddhism neither is really authentic Tibetan Buddhism, nor is it fully its own tradition.

While there are numerous reasons for this discourse to have developed, ranging from Victorian constructions of Buddhism and the Humean "two-tier" model of religion to the romantic and antimodern tendencies of Western Mongolists,<sup>23</sup> the result has been that Mongolian Buddhism has often been represented by means of two opposite, although not mutually exclusive, paradigms. One builds on the anticolonial model and sees Tibetan Buddhism as largely a vehicle of imperial control, and thus Mongolian Buddhism is simply no different from Tibetan Buddhism, or else it is an inferior version. The second, on the other hand, turns this framework around and presents the imposition of Buddhism, especially on account of its origins among the political elite, as being superficial, and thus Buddhism among the Mongols is only a veneer covering lightly the eternal "shamanic" nature of the Mongols. Regardless of the frame, however, the underlying implication of all these models is the same: For various historical reasons there never really did develop a distinctive and deeply culturally engrained "Mongolian Buddhism" as happened in China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, or anywhere else the Dharma took root. Thus, still today it is common academic practice to speak about the Mongols as practicing Tibetan Buddhism,<sup>24</sup> or some syncretistic bastardization thereof.<sup>25</sup>