
Building on Ruins, Memories and Persistence: Revival and Survival of Buddhism in the Mongolian Countryside

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During the three-month survey organized by the Arts Council of Mongolia in summer 2007, our team documented 190 monastic sites in Övörkhangai, Dundgov' and Töv provinces,¹ and recorded 74 interviews, 35 of them with old monks or old ex-monks.² Searching for ruins and informants in the countryside is not easy, as in Mongolia there are large, scarcely inhabited provinces, and moving to distant pastures due to droughts or harsh winter is frequent. Thus, local people today are sometimes not descendants of the original local families who lived in the area in the 1930s. During the fieldwork a threefold problem was experienced which is relevant for the whole country: the remnants of the old monastic sites are exposed to pillage; there is no guarantee that the fading memories of the old monks will be preserved; and once the old masters have passed away, almost half of the monasteries they had revived have ceased operation, due to the lack of effective recruitment of new monks.

Ruins

The administrative divisions of Mongolia at the beginning of the 20th century were totally different from that of today's Mongolia. The old *aimag* ('province') divisions were divided into smaller units (*khoshuu*, 'banner, battalion, administrative unit'), the center of which was the monastic city (*khüree*) mostly occupied by nobles (*khan*, *beil*, *beis*, *gün*, etc.). While today a monastery (*khiid*) means mostly only one temple building, in the old times various types of monastic sites existed: monastic cities with numerous buildings and about 800-2000 monks, and a lay population living in quarters outside the monastic area; monasteries (*khiid*) with some temple buildings housing 50-500 monks; temples (*süm* or *dugan*) with some dozens of monks; and assemblies (*khural* or *jas*) operating mainly in gers (yurts) with a couple of monks, or guarded by only one monk. Moreover, small assemblies were formed next to the relay stations (*örtöö*) on the commercial routes, established about 30 km from each other. Connections between monasteries



Fig. 1. Remains of Ilden beil's monastic city, Övörkhangai aimag, Ölziit sum. Unless otherwise indicated, all photographs are copyright © 2009 Krisztina Teleki and Zsuzsa Majer.

situated near each other were close: monks visited each other's monastery, went for special ceremonies or studied there for a period. In every *khoshuu*, there was a central monastery which was the biggest of the area.

While buildings of some large monasteries partly survived the destruction, were renovated and are currently used as temples (e.g. Erdene zuu, Amarbayasgalant, Gandan, Baruun khüree), today there is not much evidence of the vivid religious life of the past [Fig. 1]. What was not completely destroyed in the 1930s disappeared during the 70 years that have elapsed, as the remnants are exposed not only to the weather but also to 'resourceful passers-by.' The few buildings which remain but were not revived are in an extremely bad state of repair. All of these buildings deserve protection and renovation, which could only be achieved with local, national, monastic, and probably foreign funding.

Except for assemblies which once operated in gers there are visible remains on each monastic site: foundations, scattered stones and bricks [Fig. 2, facing page]. The current condition of the remains depends considerably on the construction material.³ Obviously more remained of the stone buildings (usually not



Fig. 2. Bragri lama's monastery in Dundgov' aimag, Saikhan-Ovoo sum.

Sometimes they 'move into' the remains, and use a still standing monastic dwelling or walls as winter quarters or as a shelter after making the required repairs or changes. When a family spends a season nearby, they may use the ruins, if only foundations remained, as waste disposal places. Even in such situations, it seems that people do not know or do not care that they use and damage old monastic sites, which is officially prohibited. The main reasons for this misuse of historic sites are poverty and lack of information.

more than the foundations, but these are easy to discern) and of the brick buildings (some walls or wall remnants still standing) than of the wooden structures.⁴ Except for some cases when the metal lock and nails that did not burn in the fire remained, nothing is left of these; even the exact sites where they stood within a complex is impossible to determine.

The usefulness of the materials also determines the present condition of the remains. During the socialist period, most of them were used for different purposes such as buildings, party offices or warehouses of agricultural cooperatives. Sometimes the so-called *brigad* (workshops inside the agricultural cooperative, in 1960-1990) and *bag* ('village') centers were put up on old monastery sites with the purpose of utilizing the buildings. From sites situated near inhabited areas, the materials were taken away later to erect other buildings such as clubs, hospitals, and museums. In socialist times this happened by an order from the Communist Party; since then families living nearby remove and use the building materials (mainly bricks) to construct shelters for their livestock.

Moreover, traces of unauthorized digging can be observed at several sites. They are abandoned and thus exposed to treasure hunters. Treasure hunting is not influenced by the location of a site: it can be either near or distant from inhabited centers. Although the most valuable gold and silver artifacts were collected, destroyed or stolen during the purges, it seems that there are still enough antique articles worth finding [Fig. 3]. It is said that monks hid artifacts in

Fig. 3. Remains from a stupa, Dundgov' aimag, Ölzit sum.



boxes under temples' floors prior to the purges; also it can be supposed that when the temple walls were pulled down, precious objects were buried by the ruins. Those who dig 'innocently' primarily for bricks that can be reused also take away (and keep or sell) all the ritual objects they happen to find. Less innocent are searches carried out with metal detectors or systematic excavations involving the digging of dozens of holes and leaving spades on site to be used next time.⁵ Of the 150 old sites visited, not more than 3–4 had signs indicating that they are old monastic sites under state or aimag protection. Only in a few cases had monuments or stupas been erected as memorials drawing attention to the historical heritage.

At almost every site there are fragments of various, mainly metal, articles for personal use, such as vessels and bows, scissors, horseshoes, etc. Furthermore, on some sites there remain generally damaged or broken fragments of Buddhist sculptures, terracotta figures, ornamental friezes, roof tiles and bricks, offering cups and other objects of worship, together with leaves of Tibetan language holy scripts and pages of foxed newspapers from the 1930s [Fig. 4]. Sometimes fragments found by



Fig. 4. Fragments of a sculpted relief, Dundgov' aimag, Gurvan-Saikhan sum.

local people were arranged as memorials, while others, brought to the surface by rain or erosion or thrown away by treasure hunters, still cover the ground. These findings should be collected and given to local museums, monasteries, or the authorities.

All in all, the phenomenon of illegal digging is supposed to have increased after the democratic change, or shortly before it, when the consequences became less serious. It is a growing concern of today's Mongolia that old books, artifacts and antique ritual objects are sold in art and souvenir shops at every corner in Ulaanbaatar. It is possible to sell what is found without any risk, mainly to foreigners who do not ask (or are not informed) about the objects' origins. It seems that unearthing and selling precious objects to gain some capital and stealing bricks to build shelters for livestock are presently more vital for the personal survival of Mongols than fear of any punishment or the anger of Buddhist wrathful deities. Thus, effective protection can hardly be achieved, given the fact that most of the sites are situated afar, making it impossible to monitor them. Also, it is clear that any protection could be realized only through the close co-operation of the local governments. A competent archaeological team should excavate several of the sites in order to avert their being pillaged by organized gangs.

Memories

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the revival, one has to be aware of the monastic life of the past. Aleksei M. Pozdneev and Charles R. Bawden provide an overview of Buddhism in Mongolia at the turn of the 20th century, and the number and religious activities of monasteries and small assemblies as they developed further under the reign of the Bogd khaan (1911–1921).⁶ There are almost no written sources about the majority of monasteries, monastic life, the morality of monks and ceremonies that were once observed. The collection of the National Central Archives in Ulaanbaatar includes sources about the operation and finance of the most important rural monasteries, and some old photos are kept in the Film Archives. Therefore, reminiscences by old monks or ex-monks have great significance as a unique source concerning the arrangement of temple buildings and the active life of a given monastery. Apart from the clerics, a very few elderly local people can give basic information (the younger generations can at best point out

some of the ruins). Local authorities in the sub-province centers can explain the approximate location of the old sites, but usually they do not know all these sites in their own area. In some sub-provinces (*sum*), a book was published for some anniversaries which might contain scattered data on monasteries. If the sub-province has an active monastery (which is rare) its monks can also provide information. However, in monasteries which no longer have any old monks, the young monks usually know about these sites only if they had some personal experience of them (e.g., they were shown them by their master).

A considerable number of old (ex-)monks of all provinces have moved to the capital and aimag centers following their families; so a lot fewer of them live still in the countryside. Finding old (ex-)monks in the capital city who do not belong to any monasteries is very difficult, although advertisement could probably help. We estimate that about 250 old monks, born in the 1910s–1920s, are still alive.⁷ Some of them are in very bad health, and many are hard of hearing or seeing, but all of them have clear minds and remember the past. Generally, these monks started to learn Tibetan prayers at 5–7 years of age, then became monks in the community of a monastery. Sometimes they joined another one for further studies. The monks were forcibly de-frocked in the 1930s (mainly in 1937) and fulfilled military service for 5–10 years. After disarmament they usually became shepherds and married. However, almost all of them participated in the revival ceremony of their former monastery or for a new temple in the *sum* center.

These valuable informants have provided a wide range of data for our project: the name of the monastery and its monastic schools, temples, buildings and stupas; the exact location of the monastic site in accordance with the old and new administrative system; the geographic name of the area, mountains, sacred stone or wood heaps (*ovoo*), and springs that were worshipped; the main protectors of the monastery; the approximate number of monks; famous monks, saints and incarnations

if there were any; ranks in the monastery, names of some of the ranked monks, and names of tantric practitioners (*zoch*) living nearby; building material of the temples and other buildings; the handbook of the particular philosophical monastic school; the main ceremonies and events in the monastery; and the closing of the monastery, names of high-ranking monks who were arrested, and names of old monks still alive. They also mentioned whether lay people or the poor had lived nearby, and whether there were Chinese merchants, their stores, and Chinese workers in the area. They were able to help draft a map of the old monastery site. Since the events of the purges were a sensitive topic, monks were not asked about executions in detail, but some old monks shared their experiences unasked.

The interviews confirmed that as in other areas of Mongolia, the Gelukpa Sect was dominant in the region of our survey. Only a couple of Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, and Kagyüpa Sect temples existed in the rural areas. There were very few Muslim, Catholic, and Chinese temples or temples with services in Mongolian in the countryside, and it seems that nunneries were non-existent, even though women practitioners belonged to *zod* tantric assemblies. Ceremonies were based on Tibetan texts. The most important annual festivals were the *Tsam* religious dance [Fig. 5], the

Fig. 5. *Tsam* ceremony in Ikh khüree, painting by Dulamjav Damdinsüren, 1966. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.

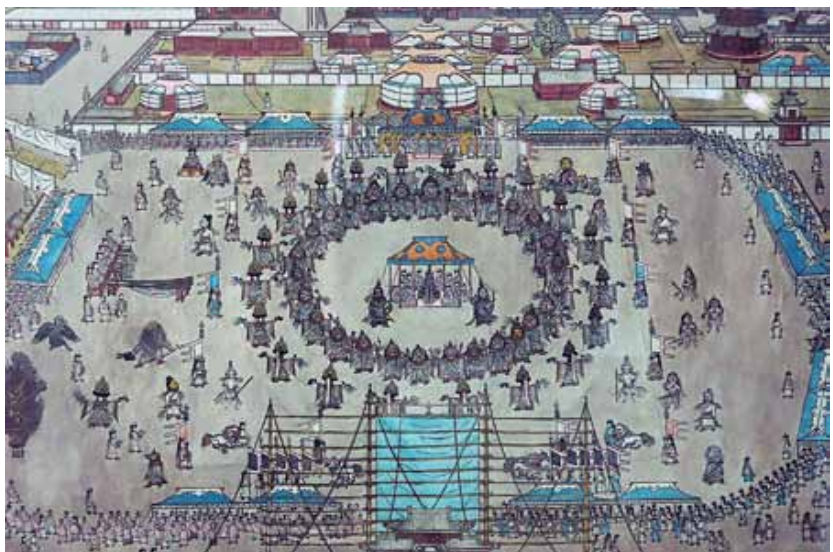




Fig. 6. The circumambulation of the sculpture of Maitreya at Ikh khüree, painting by Dulamjav Damdinsüren, 1964. Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.

circumambulation of the sculpture of the future Buddha Maitreya [Fig. 6] and the volumes of the Kanjur, the summer retreat lasting for 45 days, the commemoration days of Buddha, and the New Year Festival. The lay population did not reside in the monastic area, and monks kept their vows strictly. Believers often visited the monasteries for pilgrimage and worship, or visiting their sons, brothers or other relatives who belonged there, and the monasteries were sustained by their donations — brick tea, dairy products, livestock, silk, juniper, flour, wheat, etc. Monasteries had livestock herds on remote pastures. According to the informants, monks occasionally came for some days from Tibet or mainly from Ikh khüree, the monastic capital city, to give initiations and teachings to the monks of the countryside. Tibetan monks lived only in very few monasteries as separate individuals, not in a group. Itinerant monks wandered over extensive areas for pilgrimage collecting alms. *Zoch* tantric masters also wandered in the countryside to meditate and engage in their practices. At certain times, they would also stop at monastic complexes and hold their ceremonies there or nearby, or study with the local *zoch*.

This heyday of Mongolian monasticism ended in the 1930s. The decline began with political and economic sanctions introduced during 1924–1937 and ended with the total confiscation of all monastic property and destruction of the monasteries. The informants claimed that the majority of the monasteries were destroyed in 1937–1938, but some

way. Old Tibetan books, sacred sculptures and images, and ceremonial accessories that they had hidden saw the light of day. With the support of devotees who provided catering and alms, the old monks started to hold ceremonies again for the benefit of all sentient beings and to educate a new generation of young new monks. This monastic education happened in the same way as in the old times, i.e., after the proper formalities the novices began to learn the Tibetan alphabet and basic prayers, then they were introduced to the meaning of the texts and learned how to recite special melodies and ceremonies.

Funds for reconstruction of a temple building were obtained locally mainly from individuals, from the local party officials or other authorities in the previous system, and in some cases from Gandan, the Mongolian state, or foreign foundations. Old monks either reconstructed a



Fig. 7. A model of the main temple at the Amarbayasgalant Monastery. Collection of the National Museum of Mongolian History, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2004 Daniel C. Waugh.

Fig. 8. Temple at the Erdene Zuu Monastery. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.

temple in their own ruined monastery or joined with all the old monks from different nearby monasteries to establish a single new temple in the provincial or sub-provincial center. Aware that their days were numbered, they moved quickly to take advantage of the strengths such combined efforts afforded. Thanks to such efforts, the traditions of a few famous monasteries and monastic cities that once had housed hundreds and thousand of monks (e.g. Amarbayasgalant, Erdene zuu, Daichin vangiin khüree, Sain noyon khanii khüree) became active again along with some small assemblies of no particular renown [Fig. 7, facing page; Fig. 8]. In the case of some old sites which had had the larger populations it was not rare that 40–50 old monks participated in the re-openings, whilst in isolated places sometimes only one or two monks tried to revive the faded belief. The old monks became the high-ranking monks of the new assemblies, fulfilling such duties as abbot, lord of religion, master, disciplinary master, chanting master, and offering preparer. Their disciples became more or less familiar with Buddhist views and practices not only at the ceremonies but during their services, as they lived together with one of the old monks running his kitchen and helping him in other ways in return for receiving his knowledge. This system had worked perfectly in former times, too.

The ceremonial system of the revived temples has been following the old traditions. Where it was known, the old protective deity became the protector of the new assembly, and the preserved artifacts were placed on the altars again. Ceremonies were held and offerings were prepared in the old way as the old monks remembered it. These old monks had been at most teenagers and at different levels of monastic training when they disrobed. Hence only a few of them acquired



deeper tantric practices, such as the rules of the *Tsam* masked dance [Fig. 9]. Thus, it seems that the 50 years of total repression was too long a period for a complete revival to take place after 1990. The broadly knowledgeable high-ranking masters were executed in 1937–1938, and those who were also experienced but not executed have been passing away during the intervening decades. This is the reason why some ceremonies, such as everyday chanting (*Tsogchin*) and the monthly worship of the wrathful deities (*Sakhius*) could easily be revived, while complicated ceremonies could be revived only in very few places (for example the *Tsam* dance was revived only in Amarbayasgalant in Selenge Province,

Fig. 9. The *Tsam* ceremony.



Dashchoinkhorlin in Bulgan Province, and Züün Khüree Dashchoilin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar). However, we can state that thanks to the active role of the relatively high number of surviving monks and the support of the local communities, the revival was successful in the given circumstances.

Persistence

In the past monasteries were the only centers of education and culture among the numerous gers scattered throughout the country, while nowadays they are merely religious institutions. Apart from the very few partly preserved or reconstructed monasteries, real monasteries with more than one functioning building and a monastic community are to be found almost nowhere. As the temples today are not self-supporting, their operation cannot be maintained without donations. Buddhism is said to have been reborn in Mongolia, which in reality means that it has retained its original roots but with new sprouts. Although the old monks did and still do their best, the young monks are not able to follow the old lifestyle in the present society; thus today maintaining the monastic community is the most challenging task.

During the survey 40 operating temples were identified in the three provinces (21 in Övörkhangai, 17 in Dundgov', and two in the south part of Töv). Considering that there are 150 sites of former monasteries in the area, this number is not so bad. Although in the past Dundgov' had twice as many temples as Övörkhangai, today there are fewer temples, as its area is more sparsely populated. Some 90% of the currently operating temples are revived former ones, but these are now situated mostly

in the sub-province centers, not on their old sites [Fig. 10]. Old monks can gather in these centers, which have a permanent population and devotee communities to ensure regular donations, and people from the rural gers visit the sum center from time to time and can participate in ceremonies. A sum center is also good for enabling youth (young monks) to keep connected with modern life. All in all, the sum centers and even the aimag centers, and, above all, Ulaanbaatar are more favorable places for the operation of a monastic community than are remote and isolated places.

Some 5–6 of the 40 current temples turned out to be newly founded temples with no proven connections with old monasteries, though sometimes old monks participated in their establishment as well. After 2000, new private temples also opened in aimag centers, headed by monks who had previously studied in Ulaanbaatar. For example, in Arvaikheer is the only Red Sect (Nyingmapa) temple of the area, headed by a young monk who studied under Kh. Banzar (1914–2009), the famous *zoch* master of Namdoldechenlin monastery in Ulaanbaatar. Another temple in Arvaikheer was founded to honour the Khalkha khan ancestors. Apart from these two, the heir to the old Arvaikheeriin khüree is also very active with its 40 monks.

The ability of Arvaikheer to support three temples may be exceptional for a regional center. A very sad fact is that almost half of all temples founded after the democratic change are now inactive. In these cases the temple buildings are allowed to decay, their ritual objects removed or stolen. Of the surveyed 40 temples, 9 are totally inactive, without monks, and 14 are only partly active, with only monthly or annual ceremonies for which monks may return from Ulaanbaatar. The time elapsed since the democratic change has not been long enough for the old monks in rural areas to educate and form a stable local community of recruits and devotees. As the old monks pass away, their pupils who moved to the capital to learn and deepen their faith (mainly



Fig. 10. A temple which survived and has now been revived, Dundgov' aimag, Erdenedalai sum.

to Gandan and its Buddhist University) almost never return permanently. They may remain in the city either for permanent salaries or higher donations. Thus, only 17 of the 40 rural temples are active in that they have the required minimum of least four monks and everyday chanting. The biggest of them have 20-40 monks, but most have considerably fewer.

So the main reason for the closure of the temples is the lack of recruitment. Typical are the examples of the monk who by himself was not able to renovate a small ger-shaped temple building due to lack of money; three not yet adult novices who cannot operate a beautifully decorated small temple now that their teacher has passed away; two monks who are so old that they were forced to close their temple years ago. Such examples may be multiplied for the country as a whole. Due to the lack of teachers and donations, the revived small temples are not able to survive after their masters pass away. It would be a pity for these revived sites to be neglected now, but without immediate funding and new generations of monks this is going to happen.

Since the time of Buddha Shakyamuni donors have had a very important role in the maintenance of the monastic community. Today, places situated far away from devotees or other financial sources cannot survive. Only very few temples were revived on the old sites and in still fewer cases do they remain active, mainly in very famous historic sites that attract local pilgrims and tourists (e.g.: Erdene zuu founded as the first monastery in Mongolia in 1586, Baruun khüree founded by Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar in 1654, Amarbayasgalant, the summer monastery of the Bogds), or if they are situated in easily available places with good transport connections. In some cases a monastery was revived at its former distant site, and later moved to the sum centre. Only some small shrines that were reconstructed on distant old sites are still working, mainly isolated hermitages (e.g. Yargait), pilgrimage sites (e.g. Tövkhön) or sites in spectacular places (e.g. Bragri lamiin khiid in Dundgov', that has three or four tourist ger camps nearby).

After the democratic change, the construction of several new temples was nationally supported. Gandan and other main monasteries (e.g. Erdene zuu, Delgeriin Choir) have played a significant role in the revival of the spiritual lives of several rural monasteries. Teachers

and graduates of the Mongolian Buddhist University have also contributed to the revival: for example in Dundgov' aimag Sh. Soninbayar, a master of Gandan monastery, participated in several opening ceremonies. Some old monks of Gandan, among them D. Danzan (1916–2005), had significant roles in the reconstruction of several temple buildings, and also in the revival of the Tsam dance in Dündkhör datsan of Gandan, Amarbayasgalant Monastery, and Dashchoinkhorlin Monastery in Bulgan aimag where he belonged before the purges. Thanks to the distinction of this master, his disciples, the young monks of these three monasteries, still keep in touch and contribute to each other's dance every year. In Ulaanbaatar, Züün Khüree Dashchoilin Monastery also managed to revive the traditions of Tsam thanks to the reminiscences of its talented masters such as D. Dashdorj (born 1908). Thus, the practices of Tsam could be preserved and go on in three places in the country. The reputation of Gandan and Züün Khüree Dashchoilin monasteries is nation-wide; thus, their monks' visits can increase the faith of local people and develop the religious practices of local temples.

Certain heads of rural temples are making efforts locally to preserve the traditions left by the old masters. The young head of Erdene zuu and the heads of the temple in Khujirt, Bragri lamiin khiid, Delgeriin Choir and a few other places are trying to develop their monasteries and educate novices. In the countryside though, where fully-ordained monks are few in number, it is mainly the old monks who observe the strict regulations. Some monks, even of the younger generation, take their calling seriously and try at least on an individual basis to observe their vows and set an example. An example is a monk (born in 1979), who, after his master passed away and the other monks returned to lay life, lives alone in a dreary place called Yargait in a ger near the reconstructed temple. He received full ordination from the Dalai Lama recently. A fifty-year-old monk without special vows has been living alone in Tövkhön for 15 years looking after the hermitage and supplying a retreat for some novices in summer. These somewhat exceptional cases show that some monks have enough faith to attempt to make Buddhism flourish again.

However, due to the lack of finances many monks give up and even leave their calling for higher-paid professions. Therefore, the majority

of present-day monks are not very eminent, nor are they as virtuous as they should be. Rural monks educated by old monks often did not enrol in school and studied Cyrillic only in the past few years, leaving them almost incapable of writing a sentence without assistance. Meanwhile, although they are good at recitation they do not know the correct spelling and meaning of Tibetan words. Oral transmission of texts and rituals is still more common than written. For many monks it is difficult to observe the ethical standards prescribed in the Vinaya. While in the old times the monastic calling meant prestige and a continuous supply of food, by now it has been degraded into a meanly paid job. Spiritual substance has almost disappeared, replaced by only a lazy way of getting money. Some young monks are not motivated enough to achieve goals due to the typically Mongolian slow pace of life or lack of interest.

In the face of these challenges, Buddhist organizations outside of Mongolia have undertaken significant efforts to strengthen Mongolian Buddhism. Among the most important of these initiatives are The Mongolian Buddhism Revival Project of Kunzang Palyul Chöiling (KPC), an American Nyingmapa organization, and the Canadian Gaden Relief Project. They have supported foreign study for Mongolian monks (male and female), both in Tibetan monasteries in India and in monasteries such as Rabten Choeling in Switzerland. Thus, several monks of Amarbayasgalant and Delgeriin Choir have studied in the latter institution and then returned as fully ordained monks committed to observing the Vinaya strictly. The Gaden Relief Project has also contributed to restoration and rebuilding, so that now Delgeriin Choir is decorated with expensive silken scrolls and valuable sculptures, beautiful silk covers the temple walls, glass screens protect the sculptures of the most honoured deities, just like in European museums, and a 'modern' infrastructure (water and energy supply) make the community's life easier. In similar fashion, the Mongolian Buddhism Revival Project has sponsored foreign study by young lamas and women from Khamriin khiid (Dornogov'). This revived monastery of Danzanravjaa (1803-1856) has now become a famous Red Sect monastery, enjoying a location near meditational caves and areas with natural beauty

that attract foreign tourists. The revival of these rural monasteries has also benefited by visits from the few Tibetan teachers and respected monks who live in Ulaanbaatar and bring to the localities invaluable experience and knowledge that contributes to the education of local monks and devotees.

Acknowledging monks as reincarnations of eminent monks of the past is one manifestation of the present need for religious dignitaries to lead other monks and devotees in religious affairs. Three reincarnations have been identified in the survey area; all of them met with the survey participants. One is N. Davaa (1913-), an old monk known as Naidan lam, who was a monk in Bragri lamiin khiid and participated in its revival. He has been recognized as the reincarnation of master Minjüür Yonzon from that monastery, who was arrested and disappeared in 1925. Currently Davaa belongs to the revived temple built on its ruins, but, being very old and ill, rarely participates in ceremonies. Batmönkh (born in 1942, known by his monastic name Batnyam), was recognized in 2002 as the 5th reincarnation of Lovon khuvilgaan of Baruun Choir (Borjignii Baruun Janjin choir khiid). He formally belongs to the new temple, but he visits there very rarely because he lives in the countryside. The 30-year-old Luvsandarjaaperenlainamjil, head of Delgeriin Choir Monastery, was recognized in 2000 as the reincarnation of Zava lam Damdin (1867-1937), the eminent polymath [Fig. 11]. He is widely known throughout the

Fig. 7. The reincarnation of Zava lam Damdin, Dundgov' aimag, Delgertsogt sum.



country, and leads an active monastery with good connections with India and Switzerland. He moved to Delgeriin Choir Monastery in 2005 and started to reform religious life there and in other nearby places; so he has a very significant role in the religious life of the province. At present he is on a three-year meditation retreat. Approximately 20 young monks live in his monastery, forming a very learned community. Apart from these three there are other reincarnations in the country, such as the famous Luvsandanzanpüljinjigmed (born 1972, recognized in 1989), the 15th reincarnation of the Khalkha Zaya Pandita. These reincarnations are acknowledged by the Dalai Lama; an indication of the ever closer connection with Tibetan Buddhism.

Summary

Although apparently the monastic ruins and old monks' reminiscences belong to the past, they have to be preserved as cultural heritage and the basis for the revived local Buddhism. The new temples' development effectively depends on the calling and education of their monks and the generosity of donors who provide the financial background of the monastic community. Apart from the revival of Buddhism based on earlier tradition, nowadays new waves of Buddhist conversion can be observed coming from Tibetan monasteries of India, Europe, and U.S.A., etc. and supporting the (re)formation of Buddhist centers in the countryside. Yet the smaller temples are left abandoned, due to the lack of financial support. While the preservation of the sites that remain should be the task of the government, the education of monks should be the responsibility of Gandan and local religious centers. The maintenance of living temples is still the task of devotees. As we observed in Övörkhongai and Dundgov', only very few Christian churches exist, yet their missionary activity often is more effective than the efforts undertaken by the Buddhist communities. The education and efforts of the lay and monastic communities are essential if Buddhism is to hold its own and gain ground in the Mongolian countryside.

Notes

1. The survey documented the present condition of a total of 150 old monastic sites (49 in Övörkhongai, 77 in Dundgov', 24 in the south part of Töv) and 40 present-day temples (21 in Övörkhongai, 17 in Dundgov', and 2 in

the south part of Töv).

2. An additional 16 interviews were recorded with other elderly people living in the vicinity of old sites or knowledgeable about the old sites, while 23 were recorded concerning currently working or revived temples with their young heads or other ranked monks. In addition 19 old monks living presently in Ulaanbaatar were interviewed (in 2006 and 2007) about their former and present-day monasteries that are situated in the area of the three provinces surveyed.

3. In the Gov' area almost every building was made of brick and mud, while in the northern areas with extensive forests wood was dominant. However, there are some legends about how high-ranking monks delivered wood on ox-carts or camel-carts from the north to construct temples in the Gov'.

4. Brick was fired in a kiln (*baayuu*) situated near the monastery site, mainly by the Chinese. Chinese workers often took part in monastery construction, carving, and the decoration of the temples; so there were often Chinese settlements near larger monastery sites.

5. Smaller sites which consisted of only a few buildings and have almost no visible remnants or ones where the buildings were made of wood tend not to be dug up, as there are no useful materials and in any event they are not so well known by people. At other sites though, even the surveyors caught people digging.

6. In particular, for the situation in the late 19th century, see Aleksei M. Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in Late 19th-century Mongolia*, tr. Alo and Linda Raun; ed. John R. Krueger (Bloomington, IN: The Mongolia Society, 1978, originally published in Russian in 1887). See also his *Mongolia and the Mongols*, tr. John R. Shaw and Dale Plank; ed. John R. Krueger (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1971) and his *Urginskii khutukhty. Istoricheskii ocherk ikh proshlago i sovremennago byta*, Travaux de la Troisième Session du Congrès International des Orientalistes, St. Petersburg, 1880 (repr. 1980). Charles R. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968; rev. edition: KPI, London 1989) contains data about the period of the Bogd khan.

7. The exact number (as of 2007) will be clear from the conclusion drawn by ACM based on the interviews conducted by the six teams.