
Continuation or Disjuncture with the Past and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition

Zsuzsa Majer

As it spread to different countries, Buddhism always had the ability to adapt to their cultures by integrating its teachings with local practices and beliefs and veneration of local deities. In Mongolia, local Mongolian conditions and customs dissolved into the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Even though it developed special characteristics, the basis of the religion remained the same. All the 'rules' of Tibetan Buddhism, contained in Vinaya (*Dulvaa / Vinai*, Tibetan '*dul-ba*'), and in the volumes of Kanjur (*Ganjuur*, Tibetan '*bka'-gyur*'), considered to be the words of Buddha himself, are deemed valid for Mongolian Buddhism and to be followed by it invariably. The ceremonies, monastic rules and even the ceremonial language remain the same, just as they are for Western Buddhist monasteries and lamas.

Yet there are differences between the Tibetan tradition and that in Mongolia which have been interpreted as 'deficiencies' of the latter. No matter what historical occurrences or social conditions account for them, they cannot be considered as special features of the Mongolian form within the Tibetan tradition, but rather must be seen as deviations in what some call a 'degenerate' Mongolian Buddhism if measured by the standard of its original form in the Tibetan tradition. The extent of these 'degenerations' or deficiencies is greater now than it was in the Mongolian Buddhist past, a development which has, of course, roots in the recent history of Mongolia and in the way the revival was executed as well as in the modern social setting. In spite of the persecutions and tragic events of the 1950's Tibetan Buddhism managed to be preserved intact in exile. In contrast, Mongolian Buddhist traditions and lineages were completely broken for 50 years, with the few survivors forced into secular life (including getting married) for decades and religion restricted to secret meetings. When revival became possible, the only way to realize it was through the efforts of these mostly already married old lamas. Even had it been possible to rely on lamas coming from outside,

for example from Indian monasteries and institutions of the Tibetan tradition, this would not have been 'revival' but only a new wave of converting the Mongols to Buddhism. The temptations of modern life and the attractions of modern consumer society are the same for Tibetan Buddhist monks or Western ones and thus cannot be used as an excuse for the failure in Mongolia to observe traditional monastic discipline. What makes the situation more difficult in Mongolia though is the still almost complete lack of residential facilities, without which the lamas still do not live a monastic life. Moreover, there are still very few highly educated lamas available to carry on the tradition. There is as yet no high-level monastic education in Mongolia, and so far only a very few Mongolian lamas have been able to study in monastic schools of India and return to share their knowledge.

Among the challenges for Mongolian Buddhism are those concerning leadership of the faith. The 9th *Jevtsündamba khutagt*, Jambal namdol choiji jaltsan (1932-), a Tibetan lama living in Dharamsala, is considered to be the reincarnation of the first Jevtsündamba khutagt, and the leader of Mongolian Buddhists. However, he has visited Mongolia only once, in 1999, at which time there were serious issues concerning his visa. The Jevtsündamba khutagt, also called *Bogd gegeen*, Tibetan Buddhism's third highest incarnation after the Dalai and Panchen lamas, was the highest Buddhist dignitary in Mongolia up to 1924. The 9th incarnation was officially recognized in Mongolia in 1991, though Reting Rinpoche, at the time Regent of Tibet, originally recognized him in 1936. On the other hand, the abbot of Gandan Monastery, the main monastery located in Ulaanbaatar, is currently referred to as the head abbot of the whole of Mongolia, and of Mongolian monastic establishments. Historically, this 'duality' also existed. The Bogd was the religious leader of the country, and on the other hand, the old monastic capital had a head abbot (*khamba nomon khan*), the most important of the seven highest ranking lamas, all of whom were appointed by the Jevtsündamba khutagt himself. The khamba nomon khan was the highest religious office

holder in Ikh khüree (the capital), the most significant cleric apart from the Bogd. So having a head abbot besides the Jevtsündamba khutagt follows the old pattern. This is more necessary at present, where he has to serve as leader of all Mongolian Buddhists in the circumstance where the political situation with China prevents the present Bogd from living in Mongolia. However, as there is no organized system of monasticism in the classical sense in present-day Mongolia, the leadership of the Gandan abbot is partly nominal. Nonetheless, he is completely accepted and well respected in all the temples countrywide. In earlier times hundreds, if not thousands of *khutagts* ('saints') and *khuvilgaans* ('reincarnations') were worshipped in different areas and monasteries in Mongolia. Several of them, related to certain monasteries or lineages, have been searched for and some have been identified by now. But in most cases their recognition is controversial, or they are recognized by only a small group.

Our survey of the active monasteries and temples in the Ulaanbaatar area reveals that monastic life in Buddhist temples is quite vigorous in the capital (though in some aspects within peculiar circumstances). There are many active temples and assemblies of different sizes [Figs. 1, 2]. Three of the temples were opened in 2007, signaling that the revival and dissemination of religion is still in progress, in

them from their ruins and revive ceremonies in them, from the very beginning this could not be achieved in the capital, given the fact that there were scarcely any ruins that could be used. Almost all old temples and monasteries had been completely destroyed.¹ In the event only three of the some 36 current temples in Ulaanbaatar — Gandantegchenlin Monastery, Dambadarjaa Monastery and Züün khüree Dashchoilin khiid (which operates in two remaining wooden ger [yurt] temples) — are revived old temples on the same site, where part of the earlier buildings remained. In some other cases, the earlier temples or institutions have been revived, but on new sites. Several new temples have the same name as an old temple and even claim to be the revivals of the old ones, but there is no proven connection between them and the old ones. Some old temple buildings have been used for establishing new communities of lamas, such as Gandan's Badamyogo datsan, established in some of the remaining buildings in the old Western Geser Temple, and the Dar' Ekh khiid / Dulmalin khiid in the old Tara Temple. These and all the rest are completely new foundations, established by individuals after the democratic change, often with connections to the pre-1937–39 Ikh khüree or provincial monastic foundations through the traditions of their founding old lamas.

Since Mongolian Buddhism derives from Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhist sects of the latter are found today and have been present historically in Mongolia. The most widespread of them after



Fig. 1 (left). One of the middle-sized Ulaanbaatar monasteries. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are copyright © 2009 Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki.

Fig. 2 (below). A yurt (ger) temple in Ulaanbaatar.

contrast to the situation in the countryside.

Most Ulaanbaatar temples are completely new foundations, i.e., established by individuals after the democratic change, and only a few are revived old temples on the same site or on new sites (in the countryside most temples are revived ones even if not on the original site but in the *sum* centers). Even though it had been the intention to revive old temples, rebuild



Fig. 3. A statue of Tsongkhapa. Collection of the Chojjin Lama Museum, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2008 Daniel C. Waugh.

the 17th century is the Gelukpa or reformed Yellow Sect, founded by Tsongkhapa (Zonkhow, 1357–1419) [Fig. 3]. Red Sects playing an important role in the early history of Buddhism in Mongolia included the Sakyapa, since the Sakya pandita and Phagwa lama established strong connections with Mongolian khaans in the 13th century, and the Kagyüpa (also from the 13th century). A subset of the latter, the Karmapa, was widespread until the Manchus came to power in 1644 and until the time of Öndör Gegeen (1625–1723) [Fig. 4]. There were also followers of the Nyingmapa sect. In Ikh khüree, Öndör Gegeen created separate *aimags* (lama residential districts with temples) for these sects, because they had been established in earlier times. These sects were represented in the capital to some extent even later during the time of the 8th Bogd, and in the countryside there were also important Red Sect centers. All big monastic towns were Gelukpa ones, but small Red Sect temples and places of the tantric *Zod*² practitioners were scattered throughout the country, albeit outnumbered by small Yellow Sect temples.

The majority (25), of the Ulaanbaatar monasteries / temples, belong to the Gelukpa or Yellow Sect (this includes one nunnery and two women's centers and a Mongolian reading temple). Eleven temples are Red Sect, mostly Nyingmapa temples, including one women's center. However, despite considerable investigation, this categorization is relative. For example: Badamyogo datsan of Gandan, Tögs bayasgalant khiid and Baldankhajidlin were all described by our informants as Gelukpa temples, although they also manifest some Nyingmapa (Red Sect) features and could be called mixed temples. In fact, as both Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism embody



a mixture of the sutra and tantra traditions (*sudriin yos*, *tarniin yos*), tantric rituals are parts of the ceremonies in all Gelukpa temples, though some are especially characteristic in Nyingmapa ones. It would appear that all the Red Sect monasteries in Ulaanbaatar belong to the Nyingmapa sect, worshipping Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche. There is currently only one Kagyüpa temple in the capital, Garma garjid Ürjin perenlailin monastery, which operates in an office building.

While Red Sect temples are a significant proportion of all temples in the capital (almost one-third), in the countryside these are rather rare. Their strong presence in the capital, however, is not due to strong proselytizing activity on the part of Nyingmapa here. Rather, it simply happens that many Nyingmapa lamas also founded their own private temple alongside those Red Sect temples such as Namdoldechenlin khiid, Ürjin Shaddüvlin khiid, Dechinchoinkhorlin khiid or Puntsoglin khiid, which have a considerably longer history and from which these lamas often have come.

As it was throughout Buddhist history in the country, the ceremonial language in almost all Mongolian monasteries is Tibetan: Tibetan language texts are recited during the ceremonies, training is conducted by use and study of different Tibetan ceremonial and philosophical texts, and all religious terminology is based on Tibetan. This important feature of Mongolian Buddhism did not change even after fifty years of suppression and leaves it a local 'variant' of Tibetan Buddhism, even though there have been attempts from time to time in certain monasteries, especially in today's Inner Mongolia, to conduct the ceremonies in Mongolian.



Fig. 4. A statue of Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar. Collection of the Chojjin Lama Museum, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.

Because of this, devotees do not understand the ceremonies, and the language barrier makes it less easy for them to improve their knowledge and understanding of their religion. Traditionally, it is not the duty of Buddhist lamas to educate people in religion, especially in the tantric Buddhism, as tantric practices should be kept secret. However, in the past few years basic Buddhist texts, ranging from basic prayers to complete philosophical treatises, have been translated into modern Mongolian and published so that interested people could have a better understanding of Buddhist teachings. Until now there is only one Mongolian reading temple (Buyan arvijikhui khiid) in Ulaanbaatar (there existed another one, but that closed down in 2006). Here the daily ceremony, special ceremonies and the readings requested by the believers are all recited in modern Mongolian (with the texts themselves written in Classical Mongolian). This community feels that this enables the people attending the ceremonies to understand and follow the meaning of the readings. Still, only some part of the chanting is understandable to the believers: the texts are chanted in a very elaborate literary language far from the vernacular, and also the devotees should know religious vocabulary in order to comprehend the texts in full. Moreover, special tantric texts which can be heard only by those who have received initiations on them are chanted in such a way as to prevent listeners from understanding them and thus prevent any harmful consequences.

There are several temples for Buddhist women (though as yet none in the countryside), but the only authentic nunnery in the country is Dar' Ekh khiid / Dulmalin khiid in Ulaanbaatar where female lamas have taken the *getselmaa* (female novice) vows, wear traditional nuns' robes and are permanently resident. The nunnery is supported by the Foundation of the Preservation of Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), Söpa Rinpoche's center, and has connections with a nunnery in Nepal, which makes it possible for some of their nuns to study there. This is a great improvement compared to earlier times, since historically no nunneries existed in the country. Most of the women in the other temples can only be termed lay practitioners. They have lay vows and therefore do not wear traditional religious robes, though some wear a type of uniform that differentiates them from laywomen. However, they are effectively laywomen and, as such, can and do marry,

have children, have long hair and wear make-up. (See below regarding the different vows in the present system of Mongolian Buddhism.)

There are also numerous religious associations or centers mostly led by an individual lama (Mongolian or Tibetan) who gives Buddhist talks, readings and ceremonies with the aim of providing basic religious education for lay people. These are not temples, but similar to western Dharma centers, having no real assemblies and no daily chantings but only occasional or weekly gatherings. They carry out rather different though very useful tasks. Monastic schools of Gandan and Betöv monasteries also organize lessons for devotees led by their residing Tibetan masters or one of their Mongolian teachers.

For lay people participating in the rituals, these centers usually distribute in Cyrillic transcriptions the Tibetan texts of the prayers being chanted, so that people can join in the chanting even though they cannot read Tibetan.³ This method is used likewise in western Buddhist assemblies. Most devotees participating regularly learn these by heart together with the appropriate melodies so that some of them can chant like a lama even texts of longer ceremonies, not just basic prayers. Complementing this are detailed explanations of the meaning during the lessons or in some publications providing translations and added explanations. However, absolute faith still characterizes most Mongolian Buddhists. Only a very few have ever heard of any of the basic Buddhist teachings, even though masses of devotees were and are still active in accumulating virtues by making prostrations, offerings and giving donations.

Main problem areas surrounding the re-establishment of the Buddhist temples

Registration of temples / permission for operation, and criteria for founding a temple

After the democratic change, the authorities decided that all religious institutions and organizations (Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim etc.) were to be registered with the Ministry of Law and Interior (*Khuul' züi, dotood khergiin yaam*). Although it was not dated, the first permit on the register was given to Gandan, the main monastery, and the third was issued to Züün khüree Dashchoilin Monastery in 1994 (the second permit is for another religious community). However, to date only about half

of all active Buddhist temples in Ulaanbaatar have registered (not to mention many active countryside temples, very few of which have been registered). Somewhat strangely, some of the biggest and best known temples have yet to register. Even among the registered temples, the registration date is some years later than the temples' actual foundation date. It is important to mention here that the main monastery, also known currently as the Center of Mongolian Buddhists, Gandan does not have any authority to grant permission for the foundation / operation of Buddhist temples in Mongolia, i.e., it does not register temples or give permissions for temples to operate. Despite this, Gandan does attempt to keep a list of active Mongolian Buddhist temples, which is overseen by the *da lam*, Byambajav (in office since autumn 2005). Strangely this list is the same as that for registered temples found in the Justice Ministry. Given that frequently the date of registry of some temples is more recent than the date of their foundation, it is likely that sooner or later other now active but still unregistered temples will register, this seeming to be only a question of time and money.

There seems to be no intention here to restore the very strong and well refined organization that once characterized the Mongolian Buddhist establishment. All in all, buddhist temples today are totally independent of each other (though branch temples do exist). At present, any man (lama) can establish a monastery and be its head, if he is able to find other lamas who accept him as head, and if he can find a place for the regular chantings, even if this is a ger. A new temple's survival effectively depends on its having donors who provide financial support. In the countryside, the situation is similar, but since there survival is much more difficult, most new temples are founded only in aimag centers.

The number of lamas in the communities

Historically, the types of monasteries differed, depending on the way they had been established, the date of founding, size, and location. They ranged from monastic complexes founded by Manchu decree and monastic cities with a thousand monks to monasteries with about 50–500 monks, temples with some dozens of monks, and assemblies with only a few monks or having only temporary ceremonies. However, this was in a time when almost one-third of



Fig. 5. Migjid Janraisig Temple, Gandan Monastery, Ulaanbaatar. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.

the male population belonged to one of the approximately 1000 monasteries and temples, i.e., some 110,000 lamas in all.

Today there is great variation in the number of lamas in the different temples in the Ulaanbaatar area. Gandan Monastery [Figs. 5, 6], the modern center of Mongolian Buddhism, has more than 500 lamas. In Züün khüree Dashchoilin Monastery there are 150 lamas. All the other larger temples — still a small proportion of the total of 36 temples — have about 10–20 lamas, which seems to be the maximum for countryside temples as well. However, in many newer and smaller temples there are only one or two adult lamas and one or two very young novices. Note that these data count all members of the assembly, not only ordained lamas and especially not only the fully ordained ones (see the problem of the vows below). From the Buddhist point of view,

Fig. 6. One of numerous temples on the way leading to the Gandan Monastery, Ulaanbaatar.



four *gelen* or fully-ordained lamas would be necessary to form a *Sangha* (community). It is shocking to learn that this criterion is fulfilled only in 3 of the 36 Ulaanbaatar monasteries. Thus, strictly speaking, all the others could not be called 'temples.'

The number of lamas and the lack of fully-ordained ones affects all aspects of the monastic life of these temples, as this has to be adapted to the small number of lamas. It is estimated that today there are about 2000 (at most 3000) lamas in Mongolia, of which about 1000 are affiliated with one of the Ulaanbaatar temples. (This is in the context of a population in Mongolia of 2.5–2.7 million, of which about one million resides in the capital and many of the rest in the aimag centers.) Of the 1000 lamas in Ulaanbaatar about 660 belong to the two largest monasteries, just as in the countryside there is a concentration of lamas in the temples in the aimag centers.

Finance, survival, mobility and relocation

Before the purges, economic units of the temples were called *jas* (public accumulation / reserves), with all monasteries having several such units, while smaller temples had only one. Monasteries were maintained by locals in the area (the subordinates) and by taxes. Also devotees' donations (herds, flocks, brick tea, meat, dairy products, flour, fat, silk scarves [*khadag*], silk, juniper, grains and fruits, and, later, money) contributed to the income of these units. Everyday affairs, such as performing ceremonies, making offerings to the deities, preparation of lamas' meals and bigger expenses like repairing the temples were all paid from the assets of these units. Today's situation cannot be compared to that of the old monastic system: now temples rely entirely on donations from individuals or in fortunate cases on donations coming from different foreign or local organizations.

As almost all the temples were either totally destroyed or, in Ulaanbaatar, had only partial remains; most new temples have been set up in newly-constructed buildings. The common pattern for new communities even today and even in the capital is to set up their 'temple' activities in a ger and erect the temple building later according to their means (i.e. financial support from their supporters). Indeed, when the survey was being carried out, six Ulaanbaatar temples were operating in gers, namely

Jüd datsan, Gandangejeelin khiid, Agrim datsan, Choin dechin dashsünbrellin, Dechin choilin tavshi sünbrellin datsan, and Mongol Unshlagat Buyan arvijikhui khiid. The community carrying out the daily chantings and readings thus creates a temple not in a permanent building, even in modern times. This practice, common both in Ulaanbaatar and countrywide, has its roots in the nomadic Mongolian tradition — mobile ger temples also existed in the old times, though only complementing the very detailed system of monastic cities, larger and smaller monasteries — and as well is a consequence of financial factors. In the last few years many small temples have been erected in the capital. At the time of the survey, most of the suburbs (ger districts) of the capital have their own temples, usually housed in a ger or a small wooden building. In many of these newly established private temples there are only one or two adult lamas who serve devotees in reading texts on their request as a means of earning some income and who endeavor to teach young novices, i.e., to educate the next generation.

Another common occurrence of late is that several monasteries located in the countryside are setting up small branch temples in Ulaanbaatar with a number of their lamas residing there. For example, there are a temple with lamas from Zavkhan aimag, a temple with lamas from Sükhbaatar aimag and two temples founded by lamas of Arkhangai aimag.

New communities of lamas and temples still appear all the time, mainly in the capital. On the other hand, long-term survival, which is even more difficult than establishment of a temple, is not easy for many of the small communities that have tried to establish themselves. Problems of all kinds arise, among them financial ones. Closing down and relocation is a common occurrence: indeed one of the temples whose head was interviewed in September 2005 during the survey in Ulaanbaatar disbanded a month later, and its lamas scattered. One assembly (Baldankhajilin) was temporarily not working due to its relocating during the time of the survey, while two others were able to continue their ceremonies while relocating (Mongol Unshlagat Buyan arvijikhui khiid and Agrim datsan). In summer 2007 some new temples were found that had opened since the time of the earlier survey (further changes were found in a survey in the summer of 2009). Thus it is clear that

new temples are still being established. Today, except for Gandan, the center of Mongolian Buddhism, there is no state funding; so temples operate as private 'enterprises' wherever they depend on donations of devotees visiting (and requesting recitations) on a daily basis or on great ceremonial days, and on donations from companies and various organizations.

The problem of purity of vows or the 'different interpretation of vows' in Mongolia

Lamas can take different levels of religious vows. All new lamas or female lamas on entering a temple or monastery (usually young boys at any age from 3–6 and upwards) take the basic *genen* lay vows for males or *genenmaa* for females, which are five precepts that any Buddhist believer can take. These five precepts can be 'strengthened' for young lamas by taking the *barmaravjin* / *barmaravjün*, that is, the pre-novice, renunciate or 'intermediate' vows, at which time the novice is given a new, monastic name. This includes the same five precepts and in addition a few outer signs prescribed for monastic life such as wearing monastic robes and shaving one's head [Fig. 7]. In Mongolia, however, the term *genen* is often used for members of assemblies with *barmaravjin* vows. After this and an interval of some years, the lama can take the next step by becoming a *getsel* and a female lama a *getselmaa*, which involves keeping ten precepts. A lama becomes



Fig. 7. A monk in full monastic robes.

fully ordained when he becomes a *gelen*, whereby he agrees to live by 253 precepts. The equivalent of this *gelen* level of vows for women is the *gelenmaa* vow of the fully ordained female lama with 364 precepts, but the lineage of *gelenmaa* has never existed in Mongolia nor in Tibet (although some claim it existed in Tibet before the lineage was lost). Thus currently there is no full official women's ordination in the Tibetan Buddhist lineages; so consequently there are no *gelenmaa* in Mongolia today.

Historically, there was a large number of lamas in Mongolia who had taken monastic vows, spent some time in one of the monasteries, but then lived with their families, herded animals, etc., while remaining lamas. The majority belonged to and lived in and around the monasteries, where celibacy was strictly upheld. However, there were married lamas who always had their assemblies outside, though in many cases right beside the big monastic complexes. In most cases, these married lamas belonged to different Red Sect assemblies (the rules of which, though, are exactly the same as those of the Vinaya). It was also possible that a married lama living in the countryside with his family gathered regularly or on great festival days in the monastery he belonged to originally. It was not rare for Mongolian lamas of the beginning of the 20th century to have a family. In this way families developed where father, son and by now, after the revival, grandchildren became lamas, and where being a lama is said to be a tradition in the family. Such families (as well as married lamas) can be met now even among the highest ranked lamas of the main monastery.

The present situation in the monasteries was also influenced by the political history of Mongolia after the purges and by the manner of revival. The handful of lamas of Gandan after 1944 were carefully chosen by the authorities and not based on their knowledge: lamas who had been lamas before the purges were not accepted. During the 1970's the number of lamas increased gradually, but most of the new ones accepted to Gandan were middle-aged men already married, and still not the old ex-lamas. Married men were offered by the authorities the right to become lamas. Later, the main drivers of the revival were the old lamas, who were lamas before the purges, with the majority of them by now married, mainly under compulsion. It must be admitted that revival would not have been possible at all without

them, nor would it be possible to solve or to prevent this problem to say to the new young novices that while their teachers are married they cannot do the same. The only way rules of monastic celibacy could have been enforced or might be in the future would be through serious education in the Vinaya rules.

Today the failure to observe the purity of vows is heavily and rightly criticized by lamas of the Tibetan and Western Buddhist traditions. Young Mongolian lamas and even many of their masters are not able to follow the traditional monastic lifestyle in the present society and after such a long break in religious practice. Thus today, maintaining the lama community and upholding purity are the focus of the greatest concern.

In Mongolian the term *lam* (T. *bla-ma*), 'lama' is used for all members of the monastic assembly be they *gelen*, *getsel* (even for married lamas who do not keep the Vinaya rules purely) and *genen* or *barmaravjin*. The same applies to the word *emegtei lam* ('female lama'), or to the more honorific *ane* (T. *a-ne*) for female lamas (members of nunneries / women assemblies), though *genenmaas* are often called *khandmaas* (T. *mkha'-gro-ma*, *ḍākinī* / *yoginī* or female sky-goer, used for female practitioners). It must also be emphasized that in Mongolia for many being a *barmaravjin* is not the first step on the way to becoming ordained (which usually can be done at the age of 7–8) and later fully ordained (traditionally around age 20 or

above), but a position they will remain in all their monastic life while being still considered full members of the assembly [Fig. 8].

The present situation in Ulaanbaatar's monasteries is that *gelen* are found in the required number (at least four) only in the monastic schools of Gandan, in Betöv and in Züün khüree Dashchoilin monasteries, all of which have close connections with Tibetan monastic schools in India where many of their lamas are studying. It is also the case that discipline is stricter in the above monastic schools and Betöv partly due to this and partly due to the resident Tibetan teachers. Of the countryside temples only a few are in so fortunate a position that their lamas have the same possibilities to study in India (these maintain stricter discipline, too, and have *gelen* lamas in adequate number). In other Ulaanbaatar and countryside temples there may be often only one or two *gelen* or none, and most typically in many of the smaller there are neither *gelen* nor *getsel*. The latter tend to have only *genen* or *barmaravjin* lamas. This seems to be the case especially in the Nyingmapa (Red Sect) temples in Mongolia.

The women's assemblies in Ulaanbaatar include only one residential nunnery, all of whose female lamas take the *getselmaa* vow requiring the observance of celibacy, a vow which is strictly observed. In addition, there are three women's centers, where there are only a few female lamas observing the *getselmaa* vow (one is at the Tögs bayasgalant Center). Most of their members observe only the *genenmaa* ('laywomen') or *barmaravjun* vows and thus effectively live a lay life and can marry.

In the current situation, unlike their female counterparts, Mongolian *getsel* lamas do not necessarily observe the vow of celibacy as it is prescribed in the Vinaya and followed in Tibetan Buddhism. That vow is kept here only by the *gelens*. Despite the monastic precepts, many Mongolian *getsel* lamas have a wife or a girlfriend. The *getsel* vow, excluding as it does



Fig. 8. Masters and novices, Dundgov' aimag, Mandalgov' city.

the possibility of marriage, is still adhered to in Tibetan monasteries, but it is currently kept in Mongolia only in a very few strict monasteries (those mentioned above). In all other temples the getsel lamas 'decide' for themselves. Married getsel 'lamas' are so common that it is often said marriage does not constitute breaking the vows. However, Tibetan and other Buddhist lamas do not accept the Mongols' assertion of a different interpretation of the monastic rules, saying this is a serious and continuous breach of the rules laid down in the Vinaya by Buddha himself. They say the Mongolian lamas not keeping celibacy are simply not following the Vinaya purely and, therefore, they should not be called lamas, be considered full members of the assembly, or wear the lama robes. There is also a prevalent misconception today in Mongolia that Red Sect traditions have different regulations. According to this interpretation, these allow for behavior not permitted in the Gelukpa Sect, and, therefore, it is especially in these Red Sect temples that almost no lamas live a celibate life.

There is a strong interest in monastic life today. For many young men, true devotion motivates the decision to join a monastery or temple, but for others the chief consideration may be that in the biggest temples lamas receive a modest income, not to mention food that is provided in all temples in addition to the donations from the devotees. In this way, being a lama or female lama is tantamount to a job in the eyes of many, not to mention that it also means social recognition. On the other hand, some who may really have a true desire to become lamas lack proper education in the Vinaya and thus have no real understanding of what it means to be a lama even when they are already ordained. Considering this, it is not surprising that young lamas, having changed their lama robes for lay clothing after finishing 'work' in the monastery in the afternoon, are involved in exactly the same activities as other Mongolian teenagers or adolescents.

Indeed the vast proportion of lamas in Mongolia do not reside in the monasteries, but live with their families and therefore share in the problems of everyday life with all its temptations. Without proper monastic facilities, lamas are not given the chance to dwell apart from the distractions of everyday living. In Ulaanbaatar, even in Gandan only a small number of lamas reside in the monastery, but

this is not possible in other monasteries and temples. The only fully residential monastery is Betöv. In 2006 the residence building for its lamas was opened at the behest of Bakula Rinpoche, who encouraged a return to the original discipline in his teachings and visits throughout the country and also emphasized that a proper residential environment enhances purity among lamas. We have also found only two monasteries in the countryside to be residential. All the other temples, most having only one temple building and very few lamas and lacking financial resources, have no lamas' residences. Their lamas live in their own accommodations in different districts throughout the city of Ulaanbaatar (or in the area of their temples in the countryside).

In these circumstances, there is a movement to ensure that more lamas have appropriate vows including full ordination, and also observe the purity of those vows. Upon his frequent visits to Mongolia the Dalai Lama administers ordinations, as do various visiting Tibetan rinpoches. They all are encouraging Mongolian lamas in this matter both in words and by their personal examples. On his last visit in summer 2006 the Dalai Lama administered full ordination to about 100 Mongolian lamas, a remarkable number considering the Mongolian conditions, and an indication that there is some hope for a future restoration of proper observance of Buddhist precepts.

'Quality' of religious education and training

In earlier times Mongolian monasteries produced outstanding scholars who contributed significantly to the different branches of Buddhist knowledge with their Tibetan language works. There were high education standards throughout the several hundred monastic complexes and their specialized monastic schools (*datsan*) where lamas were able to acquire high degrees. However, all highly educated lamas with deep understanding of Buddhism and its philosophy were executed in the purges, and also all Mongolian lineages were broken. The training of the new generation of lamas had to be restarted from the basics again with higher Buddhist education becoming possible only later with help from India or Tibetan Buddhist institutions.

Today, as was the case in the original system, apart from being educated in ritual practice by taking part in the daily chanting, novice lamas

receive further training from their tutor lamas. First, they study the Tibetan alphabet and learn short and long eulogies and prayers by heart together with their proper style of recitation. Then they master longer ceremonial texts and the practice of their performance. There is as well some instruction in the deeper meaning of the texts and in Buddhist philosophy. Today only larger monasteries may have resident Tibetan masters or properly trained Mongolian lama teachers who have completed their studies in Tibetan institutions. Notwithstanding their limited resources, all the temples try to provide basic religious education.

Additional levels of traditional education — on subjects such as philosophy, traditional Buddhist medicine and astrology and tantra — which once had been found in monastic colleges of all bigger monasteries countrywide, are today offered only in the monastic colleges in the greater

Fig. 9. Monks and novices in front of Idgaachoinzinlin Datsan, Gandan Monastery. Photo copyright © 2005 Daniel C. Waugh.



Gandan complex [Fig. 9]. These are the datsans Dashchoimbel, Güngaachoinlin, Idgaachoinzinlin, Dechingalav, Jüd(iin), Mamba and Badamyogo. In some of them, however, this instruction is still incomplete and far from being authentic. Only three of the schools (Dashchoimbel, Güngaachoinlin, Idgaachoinzinlin) focus on the old curriculum of philosophical studies; only one of these, Dashchoimbel, offers all 14 monastic classes (zindaa) of the earlier curriculum.

The 14 classes are grouped into elementary, intermediate and higher classes, each of which, following tradition, requires 1–5 years of study. In Dashchoimbel Monastic College, the highest philosophical exams, such as *gavjiin damjaa* (meaning 'ten hardships'), were re-commenced in 1990, allowing students now to attain the highest philosophical qualification.

Larger monasteries such as Gandan, Züün khüree Dashchoilin and Betöv have their own schools, colleges or classes that operate in a modernized form reflecting new necessities and requirements of the changing times. Since 1990 Gandan Monastery has had an officially recognized secondary school, where for lamas aged 12–16 the curriculum includes both Buddhist subjects and regular academic ones in line with the national curriculum. In Züün khüree Dashchoilin, apart from religious training, school-aged renunciates and novices receive instruction in regular school subjects. This makes it possible for the schools to be certified by the Ministry of Education.

On the higher level, the monastic colleges also provide a complete educational opportunity to young lamas without compromising on their monastic studies. The oldest and most famous of the higher institutions of Buddhist learning is Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandan, started originally in 1970 in the limited form authorities approved at that time. The university combines the modern education system with traditional Buddhist teaching methods. Four years' study in one of the two departments leads to a Bachelor's Degree. The Department of Internal Sciences includes majors in

Buddhist philosophy and chanting, and the Department of Common Knowledge includes Tibetan, Sanskrit and English language majors, traditional medicine, and astrology majors. While the students are mainly lamas, laymen have been admitted since 2001. Furthermore, starting in September 2002, the university opened a class for the Buddhist female lamas in the Tögs Bayasgalant women's center; its first class has now graduated. Another

of the institutions of higher learning is the Züün Khüree Monastic College of Dashchoilin Monastery, founded in 1998, where 'modern' subjects taught in the four year course include English, management, computer skills, History of Mongolian Buddhism, and Mongolian History. Traditional Buddhist subjects include recitation, Buddhist philosophy, *Lamrim* (The Gradual Path, the main work of Tsongkhapa), Tibetan grammar and translation, and traditional Tibetan medicine. In Betüv Monastery the religious school was started in 1991 by Bakula Rinpoche himself, well before the founding of the monastery (the monastery was opened in 1999). In addition to the study of Buddhist texts, Mongolian and Tibetan languages, lamas are taught modern school subjects such as science, mathematics, social studies or English.

In addition to the provision for education made by the large monasteries, from the beginning of the revival many lamas from these communities, mainly from the monastic schools of Gandan, have been sent to study all aspects of Buddhism to a very high level in the Tibetan monastic colleges and institutions in India. This is important not only for studying the Tibetan language and a variety of texts, but for receiving the proper written guidance and training in ritual practice and also for having a chance to experience the hardships of real monastic life. There are exchange programs with a number of monastic universities in India — notably, Drepung (South India, Mundgod, Karnataka state), Sera (South India, Bylakuppe, Mysore district, Karnataka state), Ganden (Mundgod) and Namdroling (Bylakuppe) — which have enrolled some hundreds of Mongolian lamas over a period of years. A few lamas have also been educated in Kumbum (Gumbum) and Labrang (Lavran) in China. Such foreign study is limited though by the fact that lamas usually can be sent for no more than one year, which is inadequate in a system originally containing about 20 years of study. This is far from enough to ensure that when they return to Mongolia they can effectively enhance the knowledge of a younger generation of Mongolian lamas and female lamas, nor is such a short term of study sufficient to improve ethics and morals among young lamas. Those completing as much as ten years of study and returning to teach are still rare.

Another way in which the revival of Buddhist traditions has been supported is by visits of

Tibetan teachers and esteemed lamas, such as Rinpoches, who are invited to the largest monasteries to offer teachings and initiations mostly to the lamahood but also to a wider audience. For the most part though, it is the lamas of the larger Ulaanbaatar temples (where there are also resident Tibetan teachers) who can take advantage of these opportunities for higher Buddhist education. A very few are fortunate enough to be sponsored by one of the foreign projects supporting the Buddhist revival and education of lamas.

Such efforts notwithstanding then, the average knowledge of Mongolian lamas is still rather poor. Even basic Buddhist education of a high standard is still lacking in everyday life at most of the smaller temples. Many lamas still recite the Tibetan texts without understanding their meaning, and few indeed speak and write Tibetan on a high level, some being even unable to write down words in Tibetan. Also, one can meet lamas in their 20s who can hardly read and write in their mother tongue, given that in their primary school years at the start of the revival they were made lamas before they had even begun to attend state schools. They learned from a Tibetan master, in some cases living with him and helping him with the household chores. Thus they learned Cyrillic letters only later and did not have the opportunity to master written Mongolian. Even today this problem continues, except for those who can attend the schools of the larger Ulaanbaatar monasteries that offer modern education in addition to religious subjects.

Fig. 10. Participants in the Khailen ceremony, now performed only at some of the larger monasteries.



Summary

The Buddhist revival has been successful in Mongolia. There are ceremonies being held in many monasteries and temples, even if the more complex rituals could be revived only in a few places [Fig. 10, previous page; Fig. 11], and many specialized rituals once performed in particular temples have been discontinued for



Fig. 11. One of the larger ceremonies involving special musical instruments.

lack of facilities, financing and, most importantly, well-trained and determined lamas. This last problem, together with the need to maintain the purity of the vows, is the greatest challenge for Mongolian Buddhism today. Those who care

about its future can only hope that the current deficit in well-trained younger monks who can assume the places of the older generation as it passes away will be short-lived and that once again there will be sufficiently large body of well-educated monks dedicated to observing the purity of their vows and passing these time-honored traditions on to the next generation of monastic leaders.

Notes

1. No monasteries or temples survived completely intact. There are partial remains of 8 temples/monasteries in varying states of repair and used for different purposes now, but no remains from any of the other temples/monasteries. See the results of our survey: Zsuzsa Majer and Krisztina Teleki, *Monasteries and Temples of Bogdiin Khüree, Ikh Khüree or Urga, the Old Capital City of Mongolia in the First Part of the Twentieth Century*, Ulaanbaatar 2006 (on-line at: www.mongoliantemples.net).

2. *Zod* or *Chö*, 'cutting through' — a system of practices for the purpose of cutting through the four Maras (demonic forces or influences that create obstacles for enlightenment) and ego-clinging.

3. Modern Mongolian is written in the Cyrillic alphabet, which officially replaced the Uighur script in 1941.
