Stupas and their Consecration in Contemporary Kalmykia

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Contents

Foreword.....................................................................................................................................4

Introduction............................................................................................................................... 5

Chapter 1. The Historical Background of Kalmykia.........................................................10
The Oirats – ancestors of the Kalmyks.................................................................................10
The Oirat exodus to the Russian Empire. The formation of the Kalmyk nationality......12
The Kalmyk khanate................................................................................................................14
Kalmykia in the 20th century...............................................................................................16

Chapter 2. The History of Buddhism in Kalmykia.........................................................18
Localization of Buddhism among the Oirat Mongols .....................................................18
The development of Buddhism in the Kalmyk khanate ..................................................21
Buddhism in Kalmykia from 1771 to the beginning of the 20th century.....................24
Kalmyk khuruls and the organization of Buddhist clergy before the Soviet period......25
The “non-religious” period in Kalmykia...........................................................................27
Religious revival in Kalmykia after 1988........................................................................28

The restoration of institutionalized Buddhism.................................................................28

The revival of folk Buddhism..............................................................................................32

The revitalization of Kalmyk oral epic tradition ..............................................................33

Concluding considerations on the character of the religious situation in Kalmykia....35

Chapter 3. The Origin and Functions of the Stupa, its Position in Kalmyk Religious Life.........................................................................................................................36

The meaning of the word stupa, mchod rten, and suburgan.......................................36

The earliest Buddhist stupas...............................................................................................37

The types and structural elements of Mongolian and Kalmyk suburgans..............40

Suburgans in Kalmykia before the Soviet period.........................................................43

The revival of the tradition of suburgan construction in contemporary Kalmykia....46

Chapter 4. The concept of relics and the content of stupas in contemporary Kalmykia .................................................................................................................................52

The concept of relics in Tibetan Buddhism.................................................................52
The content of stupas built in Kalmykia after the Soviet period........................56

The first level of the installation of relics ..................................................58
The second level of the installation of relics..............................................60
The third level of the installation of relics................................................63
Concluding considerations on the concept of relics in present day Kalmykia..........70

Chapter 5. The practice of depositing Tibetan religious texts in stupas and images in Kalmykia and its Indo-Tibetan origin...............................72

The Mahayana cult of the book inherited by the Kalmyk Mongols.........................72
The deposition of texts in suburgans in present day Kalmykia........................74
Buddhist books that are most frequently installed in Kalmyk suburgans.............75
The texts written on the ‘tree of life’ (srog shing).........................................77
Mantras and dharanis deposited in stupas and statues in Kalmykia.....................80

Chapter 6. Main rituals performed in modern Kalmykia in connection with the construction of suburgans..................................................86

The ‘ground ritual’: sa blang........................................................................86
The empowerment of dharanis or gzungs sgrub ........................................90
The final consecration: rab gnas ...............................................................93

Conclusion .................................................................................................99

Bibliography ...............................................................................................101

Summary .....................................................................................................106
Foreword

This work is the result of my interest in Buddhism over the last five or more years and the completion of my fieldwork in Kalmykia. The thesis would not have been written if it had not been for the help of people I met in the process of working on this topic.

First of all I want to thank my supervisor, Per Kvaerne, for constant inspiration, for encouraging me to realize my project and to do this fieldwork, and for helping me with Tibetan. I am very grateful to his valuable comments on my research during the time I had the honour of studying with him.

I express my thanks to Hanna Havnevik for interesting lectures and for creating an atmosphere conducive to research.

I would like to give my gratitude to the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture for granting me money without which my fieldwork would not have been possible.

I also want to thank all the people I met in Kalmykia for their friendship and hospitality, especially the monks from the central khurul in Kalmykia for giving me the necessary information and letting me observe their rituals. I am deeply grateful to the abbot of the central khurul in Elista, Andzha-gelong; to Tupten Shakya and Geshe Dugda, the main ritual experts in Kalmykia who explained the rituals of consecration to me; to the emchi working in the central khurul, Sanal Kukuev; to the abbot of the khurul in Iki-Burul, Padma Sherab and his wife Larisa; to Baatr Mangaev, the head of the Kalmyk Buddhist centre Tilopa; and to Mingyan, a Kalmyk gelong. Without the help of all these people this project would not have been completed.
Introduction

The thesis is devoted to the revival of Tibetan Buddhism in Kalmykia beginning from the early 1990s. The main aim of the thesis is to describe the practice of relic deposition and the consecration of stupas in contemporary Kalmykia, as well as to discuss the position of the stupa in Kalmyk religious life.

The stupa (Tib. *mchod rten*) is a Buddhist religious monument of a definite structure, containing relics of different types; it is one of the main visual representations of Buddhist culture.\(^1\) In Kalmykia stupas are usually referred to by the Mongolian word *suburgan*. In present day Kalmykia there is a widespread construction of stupas by members of different Tibetan Buddhist sects. The construction and consecration of stupas is a vivid manifestation of religious revival in the republic.

Along with Buryatia and Tuva Kalmykia is one of the three Buddhist republics of the Russian Federation. It is situated in the southeast of the European part of Russia, bordering on the Astrakhan region to in the east, the republic of Dagestan to in the south, the Stavropol territory in the southwest, and the Rostov and Volgograd regions in the west and northwest respectively.

The territory of contemporary Kalmykia, also known as the Kalmyk steppe, is about 76,000 square kilometers. In the south-east it is washed by the Caspian Sea. The greater part of the territory of Kalmykia is steppe and semi-desert. The westernmost area is characterized by fertile soil, being suitable not only for stock-breeding but also for agriculture.

Due to the fact that Kalmykia is situated far from oceans, the climate is continental. Summers are hot with the average temperature of 25 – 30 °C. Winter temperature is generally minus 10°C, though it can often drop to minus 30 °C.

The population of Kalmykia is about 330,000. Of these Kalmyks comprise 45.4%, Russians 37.7%, Dargins 4.8%, and other minorities constitute the remainder.

The Kalmyks became the first ethnic Buddhist community in Europe. Even today, in spite of the westward expansion of Buddhism, Kalmykia remains the only Buddhist republic in Europe and at the same time it is a federal republic of Russia, where Orthodox Christianity is the main religion. Therefore, the unique culture of contemporary Kalmykia is the result of two major influences: Tibeto-Mongolian and Russian.

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Ethnically the Kalmyks are of Mongolian origin; their language belongs to the Mongolian group of languages. In 1992 both Kalmyk and Russian were stated to be the official languages of Kalmykia. However, at the present moment a substantial part of the Kalmyk population does not speak their native language; the Kalmyks communicate primarily in Russian. Nevertheless, there is an attempt to revive the Kalmyk language: local media is in Kalmyk, a number of schools have been opened with tuition in Kalmyk, and moreover, the year 2008 was announced the year of the Kalmyk language by the president of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. The ritual language of Buddhism in Kalmykia is Tibetan. Kalmyk Buddhist terminology comes from Indian and Tibetan Buddhism; it also comprises Classical Mongolian terms and Russian words.

After almost seventy years of severe persecution of Buddhism and rupture with other Buddhist centers, religious institutions and practices are being restored in Kalmykia. This process of reconstruction of the national identity in Kalmykia deserves attention. Few studies have been devoted to the revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia including the Kalmyk tradition of suburgan building and consecration.

The thesis is mainly based on data collected through fieldwork, carried out in June and July 2008 in Elista (the capital of Kalmykia) and settlements around the capital. Three khuruls in different settlements were visited: the largest khural, Burkhn Bagshin Altn Syume (The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni) in Elista, Syakyusn Syume khural in the village of Arshan; and the khural in Iki-Burul, a small settlement 75 kilometers south of Elista.

During the time of my fieldwork fifteen interviews were made; of these six are structured and the rest are open. In order to get a full picture of the contemporary religious situation in Kalmykia ordained monks, ritual experts as well as lay people and folk religious practitioners were interviewed. Kalmyks are quite open in expressing their opinion about the present day religious situation in the republic. Not all Kalmyks are Buddhists; nevertheless none of them will deny that Buddhism is a constituent part of their national culture and identity.

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2 Khural is a Kalmyk word for monasteries as well as for temples and prayer houses.
3 Buddha Shakyamuni in the Kalmyk language is Burkhn Bagshi.
Most of the monks in Kalmykia I talked to belong to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and work in the central *khurul* in Elista. However, monks from the central *khurul* can perform religious services in other *khuruls* in different settlements throughout Kalmykia.

Much information about the practice of the stupa construction, the deposition of relics, the preparation of texts for the installation, and the consecration of stupas was obtained from interviews with the abbot of the central *khurul*, Andzha-gelong, a Kalmyk monk who received his monastic education in the reconstructed Drepung Gomang monastery in Karnataka State in India.

Of special importance for the project are interviews with the main ritual experts from the central *khurul*: a Tibetan monk Tupten Shakya and Geshe Dugda, the oldest Tibetan monk with the degree of *lha ram pa* (the highest degree in monastic education) who has been living in Kalmykia for more than thirteen years. Since I do not speak Tibetan, the interviews with Tibetan monks were conducted with the help of an interpreter, a Kalmyk Master student in Buddhist studies, Chakdyr Sangzhiev.

I was honoured to have a conversation with the Shadzhin Lama of Kalmykia (the head of the Kalmyk Buddhists) Telo Tulku Rinpoche, a reincarnation of Tilopa, the 11th century outstanding Indian yogi and the precursor of the Tibetan Kagyu tradition.

Useful and interesting information was provided by the head of the Buddhist center Tilopa, Baatr Mangaev, a lay believer who organizes the construction of stupas throughout Kalmykia.

Though Gelugpa is the most widespread and important tradition in Kalmykia, other schools of Tibetan Buddhism are popular as well. I had an interview with a Kalmyk lama, Padma Sherab, the abbot of the Nyingma *khurul* in Iki-Burul.

I also had the opportunity to observe the deposition of relics within a stupa. At the time of my fieldwork The Stupa of Harmony and Accord was constructed in Elista, therefore I was able to witness the process of relic installation of the second and third levels of the stupa. A separate chapter (chapter 4) is devoted to the description of this process. This observation helped me to define the concept of relics in contemporary Kalmykia, which is of primary importance for the thesis.

The thesis begins with a presentation of the historical background of Kalmykia. The first chapter describes the formation of the Kalmyk people and the crucial events in their history. The second chapter discusses how the canonical Buddhist tradition was embedded in the local context of Kalmykia. It shows the main stages of the integration of Buddhism in the
Kalmyk society, and discloses the development and main peculiarities of Kalmyk Buddhism before the Soviet period.

The main part of the thesis (chapters 3-5) discusses the peculiarities of the structure, symbolic meaning and content of Buddhist sacred receptacles constructed in present day Kalmykia. The tradition of Kalmyk suburgan building before the Soviet epoch is compared with the types of stupas built after the 1980s.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the role of Tibetan religious scriptures in the relic cult and the stupa consecration in contemporary Kalmykia. This chapter surveys the particular texts installed, analyses the importance of these Tibetan texts for Kalmyk Buddhism, and describes the process of their installation. The final chapter presents the description and analysis of the major consecration rituals that accompany the construction of a stupa in Kalmykia.

It should be mentioned that up to the present time almost all literature on Kalmykia and the Kalmyks has been written mainly in Russian by Kalmyk and Russian scholars. Thus the first substantial study of the Mongol monasteries was published by Aleksey Pozdneev in 1887, it was republished more than a hundred years later in 1993. The first fundamental work on the general history, ethnography and traditional culture of the Kalmyks (from the 11th up to the beginning of the 20th century) was written by Uryubdzhur Erdniev. This book was first published in 1970 and then republished three times.

A contemporary Kalmyk ethnographer and anthropologist, Elza Bakaeva, has published several works on Buddhism in Kalmykia, touching upon the contemporary religious situation, as well as discussing pre-Buddhist indigenous traditions and beliefs. Her book Буддизм в Калмыкии (Buddhism in Kalmykia) published in 1994 in Elista is the most detailed presentation so far of the development of Kalmyk Buddhism before the Soviet period. In her study, she deals extensively with Buddhist cults, rituals and festivals in pre-revolutionary Kalmykia.

Important contributions to the study of Kalmyk architecture and art have been made by such contemporary scholars as Jangar Pyurveev and Svetlana Batyreva. The work of

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4 Pozdneev, Aleksey. 1887. Очерки быта буддийских монастырей и буддийского духовенства в Монголии в связи с отношениями его последнего к народу [Essays on the way of life in Buddhist monasteries and the Buddhist sangha in Mongolia]. St Petersburg.
Pyurveev, Архитектура Калмыкии (The Architecture of Kalmykia), is a fundamental account of the development of Kalmyk architecture from the nomad period up to the middle of the 20th century; a chapter in this book is devoted to the Buddhist cultic constructions in Kalmykia before the Soviet epoch.

None of the works mentioned above have been translated from Russian. In fact, very few works on the Kalmyks have been published in other languages than Russian. Until recently the most fundamental and perhaps the only study of the Kalmyk culture and society written in English was The Kalmyk Mongols: a study in continuity and change by Paula G. Rubel, which was published in 1967. The most recent and detailed account in English of present day Kalmykia and its cultural heritage is to be found in a monograph, The Kalmyks by Elza-Bair Guchinova. It was translated by David C. Lewis and published in 2006. The author provides an overview of Kalmyk history, ethnical background, traditional economy and culture.

Although consecration rituals and the concept of relics in Kalmykia have not been studied so far, a few works have been devoted to the Tibetan perception of relics. Of great importance are the works of Yael Bentor. Her book Consecration of Images and Stupas in Indo-Tibetan Tantric Buddhism is a comprehensive and thorough presentation of the essence, structure and types of Tibetan Buddhist consecration rituals. To a large extent Bentor’s study has determined the direction of my research, providing a source of comparison, as the same questions and theoretical categories that she deals with can be studied in the Kalmyk form of Tibetan Buddhism.

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Chapter 1

The Historical Background of Kalmykia

The Oirats – ancestors of the Kalmyks

In the 11th – 12th centuries A.D. the ethnonym Kalmyk did not exist. The direct ancestors of the Kalmyks were known as Oirats (Oyrats) and comprised several West Mongol tribes that lived in the south part of Siberia.

The earliest period of Oirat history described in historical literature is the 12th century AD. The oldest written sources that include information on the West Mongols date to the 13th – 14th centuries. The most widely studied sources are two historical works. The first one is the Secret History of the Mongols compiled in 1240.11

The second major source is Compendium of Histories written by a Persian administrator, physician and historian Rashid-ad-Din Fadl’ Allah (1247-1318). This work is a very valuable account of the early history of the Mongols. Until the middle of the 20th century there was no complete translation of Rashid-ad-Din’s text in any western language. The exception was the translation of some parts of the history of the tribes and the career of Chingis by I. N. Berezin into Russian in 1858-68.12 However, in the middle of the 20th century a new translation of Rashid-ad-Din was published, it comprises three volumes.13

According to these sources, in the 11th century the Oirats populated the lands of the upper Yenisei River and around the west side of Lake Baikal. At the beginning of the 13th century the Oirats occupied a larger territory, having moved westward to the Altai Mountains.14

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12 Berezin, Ilya. 1958. Сборник летописей, история монголов, сочинение Рашид-Эддин [Collection of chronicles, the history of the Mongols, the work of Rashid-ad-Din], v.5. St. Petersburg.
13 Rashid-ad-din, Сборник летописей [Rashid-ad-Din, Collection of Chronicles], v.1. Translated by Khetagurov and Smirnova. Moscow, Leningrad 1952.
Рашид-ад-дин, Сборник летописей [Rashid-ad-Din, Collection of Chronicles], v. 2. Translated by Verkhovskiy. Moscow Leningrad, 1952. The third volume was translated in 1939 by Arends and published only in 1946, see Рашид-ад-дин Сборник летописей [Rashid-ad-Din, Collection of Chronicles] v. 3. Moscow, Leningrad, 1946.
The ethnic composition of the Oirats is a complicated and debatable question among the Mongolists. As has already been mentioned, in the 12th – 13th centuries the Oirats consisted of several ethnically and linguistically related tribes and clans.15

The question of the term “Oirat” is another important issue in the history of the West Mongols. Why were these tribes referred to as “Oirat tribes”? Erdniev argues that the existence of the term “Oirat” indicates that in the alliance of the West Mongols had been an ancient core, i.e. some powerful and superior tribe or clan that united other ethnically and linguistically related tribes and became the main body.16 Therefore, some ancient historians could refer to all the tribes in this alliance as the Oirats. In Central Asia in the period of transition from the primitive-communal system to the society of feudal relations it was fairly common to give the name of the superior aristocratic clan to the tribes or peoples in its dependence.

The Oirats differed from other Mongolian tribes in culture and language. These distinctions were determined by geographical conditions. Forest, mountains, valleys isolated the Oirats from the rest of the Mongols. Rashid-ad-Din often referred to the Oirats as “forest people” or “forest Mongols” in contrast to the eastern or “steppe Mongols”. This territorial isolation led to the administrative and partly economic independence of the Oirat tribes. Living on the periphery of the Mongol empire, the Oirats were also in constant cultural interaction and trade contacts with Turkic-speaking and Tungusic-speaking tribes of eastern Siberia. Thus the Oirat Mongolian language absorbed many Turkic and Tungusic linguistic elements.17

After the Oirats had been subdued by Chinggis Khan during 1207 – 1218, they became the subjects of his empire and formed the right wing (barungar) in the Mongol army. They took active part in the Mongol campaigns in the Middle East, i.e. in Iran, Syria, Palestine, etc.18

In the empire of Chinggis Khan the Oirats had a relative independence from the central authority. They were governed by their own khans, whose power was hereditary.19

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15 Erdniev makes the assumption that the ancient Oirats comprised the following tribes: the Tboroses, Sharyads, Shurtuts, Zamuts, Khurtuts, Batuts, Baguts, Khoits, Choroses, Kharyuts, Elets, Khosheuts, Torguts, Jungars, Tuktuts, Zets (Ibid: 30).
16 Ibid: 30-32.
17 Ibid: 33-34.
19 Guchinova 2006: 5-6.
At the end of the 14th century a union of four Oirat tribes or the “Union of Four Allies” was formed; this union is often termed the “Derben Oirats” in historical literature. According to a well-established view, the four ethnic components were the Derbets, Khosheuts, Torguts and Jungars or northern Elets.

In the epoch of the disintegration of the Chingisid Empire and feudal fragmentation of Mongolia (14th century), the “union of four Oirats” rose against the eastern Mongols. In contrast to the east Mongolian clans, who were at that time in a constant struggle for power, Oirats were consolidated, better militarily organized and economically stronger. And in the first half of the 15th century the Oirats managed to establish their supremacy throughout all of Mongolia. By 1434 the Western and Eastern Mongolia were united under the power of the Oirat noyon (‘feudal lord’) Togon-taishi.

The authority of the Oirats over all Mongolia reached its climax in the reign of Togon-taishi’s son Esen, who proclaimed himself the supreme Mongolian Khan in 1451. He also had great success in a military campaign in China against the Ming dynasty in 1449; the Chinese Emperor Pinyin was even taken his prisoner. Esen Khan was killed in 1455 in the struggle with the mutinous Mongol noyons who were opposed to his centralized authority. After his death the process of disintegration of Mongolia continued, and by the beginning of the 16th century Mongolia consisted of several larger and smaller independent polities (khanates).

The Oirat exodus to the Russian Empire. The formation of the Kalmyk nationality

At the beginning of the 17th century the main part of the Torgut Oirat tribe under Ho-Orluk Khan and some of the Derbets led by their ruler Dalai-Baatyr went north-west along the banks of the Irtysh River and reached the Russian border.

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20 Rubel 1967: 12.
21 See Guchinova 2006: 9-10. However, medieval chronicles mention more tribes, therefore in contemporary academic circles opinions vary with regard to the particular four tribes that served as the basis of the “union of four Oirats” (see Kitinov 1996: 35; Rubel 1967: 12).
22 Erdniev 2007: 35.
26 Erdniev 2007: 43.
There were several reasons for the Oirat exodus to Russia. The beginning of the 17th century was a period of economic and political crisis for the majority of the Oirats. One of the main motives of the exodus was a shortage of pasture land created by continuous subdivision of the feudal domains (ulus). A contemporary ethnographer Guchinova, following the opinion of a prominent researcher of this period in Oirat-Kalmyk history, Kichikov, explains that this splitting of the Oirat ulus was caused by an “increase in the number of members of the families of feudal lords”.

Feudal lords or noyon divided their hereditary estates between their sons; thus the extent of pasture land was diminishing, but the number of livestock in herds continued to increase.

Another important reason for the Oirat migration to Russia was the unstable political situation among the Mongol tribes at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. The shortage of pastureland led to numerous conflicts. Not only were the West Mongolian clans struggling for power and lands with one another, but they were also in a constant strife with the neighboring Kazakh khanate and the Kyrgyz. The need for new pastures and military defeats forced some Oirat noyons to search for new areas. The West of the Urals and the Volga region appeared to be a very suitable territory for nomadizing. The sparse population density of that area and the opportunity of stable trade with the Russians attracted the West Mongol nomads.

The official date of the Oirat-Russian relationship is considered to be September 20, 1606 when the envoys of Ho-Orluk Khan came to the Russian town of Taru for the legal permission to nomadize and trade within the upper reaches of Irtyskh and the environs of the Ishim and Tobol rivers. Three years later on the 20th of August, 1609 a legal contract (charter) between the representatives of the Russian Tsar Vasiliy Shuyskiy and the Oirat Khans (Ho-Orluk and Dalai-Baatyr) was signed, and the Oirats became subjects of the Russian Empire.

At that time the Oirats that had migrated to the Russian Empire were called Kalmyks. The term kalmyk is found in Russian historical sources as well as in all the legal documents of that period. Kalmyk is a word of Turkish origin and means ‘remnant’, ‘remainder’,

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27 Guchinova 2006: 12.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Kichikov 1966: 40-75.
31 Erdniev 2007: 45.
32 Ibid: 46.
‘piece’ or ‘rest’. However, there are different interpretations of the semantics of this term. Thus, Bergman, a researcher of the Kalmyk folklore, gave the following explanation: initially the Tatars and Mongols were shamanists, but when some Mongols adopted Buddhism the Tatars began to call them kalmyks or ‘apostates’.34

A number of Mongolists, such as Bartol, Nomihanov, and Guchinova, connect this term with the process of Islamization of the Golden Horde in the 14th century. According to their opinion, kalmyk was the name given by the Muslim Turks to the tribes who did not adopt Islam and remained loyal to their indigenous religion.35

There is another hypothesis that the word kalmyk is of Mongolian origin and means ‘impetuous’, reflecting the nomadic way of life of the Kalmyk tribes.36

A. Pozdneev believed that the term kalmyk originated from the Tatar word kalmak, which means ‘separated’, ‘remnant’, ‘remaining’. This name was applied to the western Mongols who left their original lands in the South Siberia and moved to the steppes between the Volga and the Don rivers.37 Erdniev supports this view and points out that only the Oirats that had become the subjects of Russia were called Kalmyks; the Oirats in Jungaria have never been referred to by this name. Erdniev also suggests that this name was given to the Oirats in Russia by their Turkish-speaking neighbors.38 Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the Kalmyk nationality was formed by the Oirats who had moved to the lower reaches of the Volga and the Don at the very beginning of the 17th century.

The Kalmyk khanate

It took the Kalmyks about half a century to settle in the location of present day Kalmykia. By the charters of 1655, 1657 and 1661 the northern Caspian steppes on both sides of the Volga near Astrakhan to Samara and Tsaritsyno and the steppes near the Don River were officially allotted to the Kalmyks.39 The Kalmyks received Russian citizenship,
they were allowed to nomadize within this area and conduct a tax-free trade.\textsuperscript{40} In 1664 this territory received the status of the autonomous Kalmyk khanate.\textsuperscript{41}

Russia was interested economically and politically in the Kalmyk entry.\textsuperscript{42} Firstly, trade with the Kalmyks provided the Russian army with horses. The peasant and manorial economy benefitted from the supply of natural resources: livestock and draught animals\textsuperscript{43}. Secondly, the Russian state needed additional military forces in its southern areas. In the 17\textsuperscript{th} century the international situation to the south of the Russian Empire was very unstable due to contacts, unfavorable for Russia, with Turkey and the Crimea khanate. Moreover, at the beginning of the 1650s Russia was preparing for war with Poland over the Ukraine and Belorussia.\textsuperscript{44}

After becoming the subjects of Russia the Kalmyks were obliged to provide military service, i.e. to protect the southern borders of the Russian Empire and to participate in military campaigns on behalf of Russia. The Russian state in its turn guaranteed protection and relative autonomy of the Kalmyk khanate;\textsuperscript{45} and did not object to the entry of new Oirat groups from Jungaria.\textsuperscript{46}

Until the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century the Kalmyk khanate remained practically autonomous in Tsarist Russia, and had strong cultural and political connections with Tibet.\textsuperscript{47} Buddhism in its Gelugpa variant was the official religion of the Kalmyk khanate. The Kalmyk khanate existed for about 100 years, from 1664 to 1771.\textsuperscript{48} However, due to a serious economic crisis and famine in the khanate in the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{49} some Kalmyk rulers wanted to abandon the Volga steppe and return to Western Mongolia. And in 1771 most of the Torguts (more that 30,000 tents with their wagons) led by the governor-general Ubashi, the son of Khan Donduk-Dashi, set off for Jungaria. This exodus had tragic results for the Kalmyks who had left with Ubashi, as well as for the Kalmyk khanate in general.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid: 57.
\textsuperscript{41} Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 42.
\textsuperscript{42} See Erdniev 2007: 46-53.
\textsuperscript{43} Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 40-41.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid: 42; see also Erdniev 2007: 46-53.
\textsuperscript{45} Erdniev 2007: 50.
\textsuperscript{46} Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 42.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Guchinova 2006: 13.
\textsuperscript{49} In winter 1767-1768 murrain began in the Kalmyk khanate (Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 98). Moreover, in 1768 the Russian government prohibited nomadizing on the left side of the Volga, which led to the exhaustion of pastureland in the khanate and, consequently, to the aggravation of famine (ibid).
\textsuperscript{50} Erdniev 2007: 153-156.
The Russian tsarist government was afraid that more Kalmyks would follow the example of Ubashi and leave Russia for Jungaria. And on the 19th of October 1771 the Russian Queen Catherine the Great (Ekaterina II) issued a decree on the abolishment of the independence of the Kalmyk khanate.\textsuperscript{51} According to this decree, the titles of “khan” and “governor-general” were abolished. All the \textit{noyons} became subordinate to the governor of Astrakhan. Russian police-officers were appointed to every Kalmyk \textit{ulus}. Thus, the Kalmyk khanate as an autonomous subject of the Russian Empire came to an end.\textsuperscript{52} Moreover, Catherine the Great prohibited any relations between the Kalmyks and Tibet.\textsuperscript{53} The abolition of the Kalmyk khanate and the imposed rupture with Buddhist centers (Tibet and Mongolia) had a great influence on the development of the Kalmyk culture, society and religion.

During the 19th century the Kalmyks underwent a gradual transition to a more settled way of life under the influence of the tsarist policy.\textsuperscript{54} By a number of Homestead Acts the Russian government restricted the usage of pastureland for the Kalmyks.\textsuperscript{55}

\textbf{Kalmykia in the 20th century}

The 20th century was the most difficult and dramatic period in the history of the Kalmyk nation. After the revolution of 1917 Kalmykia became the Kalmyk People’s Autonomous Region, but in 1935 it was redefined as an autonomous republic with the city of Elista being its capital.\textsuperscript{56}

The pre-war years (the 1920s-1930s) are characterized by the forced transition of the Kalmyks to a settled way of life. The Communist Party aimed to reorganize the Kalmyk traditional economy and way of life. By the beginning of the 20th century some Kalmyks had adopted a semi-nomadic way of life, but the Soviet policy made all Kalmyks live in stationary dwellings in fixed settlements.\textsuperscript{57}

The 1920s and 1930s also witnessed a severe repression of the Buddhist sangha. According to the resolution of the 22nd Congress of the Communist party in 1923, there was

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid: 156.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid; also see Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 101-102.
\textsuperscript{53} Kitinov 1996: 40.
\textsuperscript{54} Rubel 1967: 16.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid
\textsuperscript{56} Guchinova 2006: 16.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid: 16-17.
no place for any religion in a communist society. The epic tradition of Kalmykia, however, received support from the Soviet authorities; in 1940 the Kalmyks celebrated the 500th anniversary of their folk epic Jangar.59

When the Soviet Union entered the Second World War, the Special Kalmyk Cavalry Division was formed; it participated in the battles on the Don, in northern Caucasus and in Stalingrad.60

Oppression in Kalmykia was especially severe towards the end of the WWII. During the Nazi occupation of Kalmykia (1942 – 1943) several Buddhist monasteries began to function again.61 Moreover, when the Germans retreated from Kalmykia, about five thousand Kalmyks joined the retreat: some went voluntarily; others were forced by the Germans.62 These facts led to the suspicion that the Kalmyks supported the Nazis. As a result, in 1943 after the Soviet liberation of Kalmykia its entire population was exiled to Siberia.63 By a decree of the Supreme Soviet the Kalmyk autonomous republic ceased to exist on the 27th of December, 1943.64 This deportation of 1943 was the most tragic event in the history of the Kalmyk people, the nation suffered great cultural losses as well.

Only in 1957 did the Kalmyks get the right to return to their original home on the steppes of the Volga and the Don. And in 1958 Kalmykia was again recognized as an autonomous republic within the USSR.65

At the present time Kalmykia has a status of a republic with a presidential form of government within the Russian Federation. The republic has its own state flag, hymn and emblem. Along with the Constitution of the Russian Federation the basic law of Kalmykia is the Code of the Steppe. The head of the republic is its president K. Ilyumzhinov, who has occupied this post since 1990, having been reelected three times. The highest legislative and representative organ of authority in Kalmykia is the People’s Khural or Parliament, which consists of 27 deputies.

58 Bělka 2002: 18.
60 Ibid: 18.
Chapter 2

The History of Buddhism in Kalmykia

The Kalmyks adhere to the Tibetan variant of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism arose in the 1st – 2nd centuries A.D. in Northern India and was introduced in Tibet in the middle of the 7th century. The theory and practice of Tibetan Buddhism is embodied in the Kangyur.\(^66\) Now there are four main schools of Buddhism in Tibet: Nyingma, Kagyu, Gelug and Sakya. Though these four traditions differ in some doctrines and spiritual practices, all of them venerate the canon.

Historically the Kalmyks belong to the Gelugpa school. The Gelugpa (dge lugs pa) tradition or the order of the ‘model of virtue’ is also known in the West as the ‘Yellow Hat’ sect. It arose in the late 14th century based on the teachings of the Tibetan monk Blo bzang Grags pa, better known by the name of his place of birth, Tsongkhapa (Tsong kha pa).\(^67\) However, at the present moment other schools of Tibetan Buddhism are represented in contemporary Kalmykia, though on a lesser scale.

Any religious tradition is in a state of constant evolving and transformation. Thus the development of Kalmyk Buddhism is closely connected with the political history of Kalmykia.

Localization of Buddhism among the Oirat Mongols

According to one school of thought, the spread of Buddhism among the Mongols has had two principal stages.\(^68\) Thus the Mongols including the Oirats became acquainted with Buddhism for the first time at the beginning of the 13th century during the epoch of Chingis Khan, who was rather tolerant to all religions.\(^69\) The second stage of the spread of Buddhism in Mongolian communities was at the end of the 16th century.\(^70\)

\(^66\) The Kangyur or the Tibetan canon includes: the Hinayana sutras, corresponding to the Pali canon; the Mahayana sutras, which are much more numerous, and Tantras. The Tanguyr consists of the commentaries, explaining sutras and \textit{vinaya} texts.

\(^67\) Snellgrove, Richardson 1980:175-176.


\(^69\) Dordzhieva 1972: 5. According to one Mongol chronicle, Chingis Khan during his military campaign in the northern China took two Chinese Buddhist monks prisoners. These monks taught Buddhist doctrines to the future emperor Kublai (Bakaeva 1994: 11).

\(^70\) Bakaeva 1994: 12.
However, there is another well-established opinion that the Oirats came into contact with Buddhism as early as the end of the 8th or the middle of the 9th century through the neighbouring Turkic peoples, the Sogdians and Uighurs, who at that time were influenced by the missionary activities of Indian monks.\footnote{See Batyreva 2005: 31; Kitinov 1996: 35-36.} Therefore, there could be three waves of Buddhism in Mongolian communities.

The successors of Chingis Khan added to the spread of Buddhism among the Mongols.\footnote{Thus Godan Khan (years of reign 1229 – 1241) supported the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism and built several monasteries in Mongolia (Bakaeva 1994: 11).} The position of Buddhism was considerably strengthened during the reign of the emperor Kublai Khan (1260 – 1294), the founder of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China. At that time Buddhism was proclaimed the state religion of Mongolia.\footnote{It was mainly the Sakya tradition that was spread in Mongolia at that time, though the Kagyu school was also known there (ibid: 11-12).}

In spite of the governmental support of Buddhism in the 13th century, shamanism was deeply rooted among the Mongols.\footnote{Bakaeva 2005: 126.} After the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 the prestige of Buddhism weakened considerably, though it remained the dominant religion for the Mongol khans and feudal authorities.\footnote{Dordzhieva 1972: 6.}

The second wave of Buddhist penetration in Mongolian society began at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century.\footnote{Bakaeva 1994: 12-13.} The crucial event took place in 1576 when Altan Khan, the chief of the Tumed branch of the Mongols, invited the high Tibetan lama Sodnam Gyamtsho (Bsod nams Rgya mtsho) to visit Mongolia; they met in 1578 near Kokonor.\footnote{See Snellgrove, Richardson 1980:183-184 or Bakaeva 1994: 12.} This meeting can be regarded as the renewal of contact between Tibet and Mongolia and the revitalization of Buddhism in Mongolia.

At the meeting, Sodnam Gyamtsho received the title of Dalai (\textit{Tale})\footnote{The word \textit{Tale} means ‘ocean’, as does the Tibetan word \textit{rgya mtsho} (Snellgrove, Richardson 1980:184; Kapstein 2006: 133).} from the Tumed Khan. Thus Sodnam Gyamtsho became the third Dalai Lama, because he was the third reincarnation in his line.\footnote{The first in this line was Dge ‘dun grub (1391-1475), a follower of Tsongkhapa; his successor and reincarnation was Dge ‘dun Rgya mtsho (1475-1543) (see ibid: 182-183; Kapstein 2006: 129-131).} Though in fact, he was the first to receive this title.\footnote{Snellgrove, Richardson 1980:184.} After the death of the third Dalai Lama in 1588 his reincarnation was found in Yondon Gyamtsho.
(Yon tan Rgya mtsho), a great-grandson of Altan Khan. As a result of this recognition, the ties between Mongolia and Tibet grew stronger, and the Gelugpa order gained the support of the Mongol authorities.

The first Buddhist teachers among the Mongols were Oirat lamas, the greatest contribution to the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia being made by a Torgut, Neyiji Toyin (1557 – 1653) and a Khoshut, Zaya Pandita (1599 – 1662).

Zaya Pandita was especially popular among the Kalmyks, because he added tremendously to Oirat-Kalmyk culture. Zaya Pandita’s greatest achievement and gift to the Kalmyks was the creation of the script called Todo bichig (‘clear writing’) for the Oirat language in 1648. With the advent of the Oirat writing and the translation activity of monks, Buddhist scriptures became known to a wider audience in the Oirat-Kalmyk communities. By the middle of the 17th century most Oirat tribes including the Kalmyks in the Volga steppe had become staunch adherents of the Gelugpa doctrine.

In Tibet the first half of the 17th century was a period of feudal constant struggles between different religious orders. These conflicts resulted in the war between the Gelug and Karmapa school. By the 1630s the Gelugpa side was experiencing a series of defeats, because the Kagyu had a strong support from the Khalkha and Chadar tribes. Therefore, in 1637 the leaders of Gelugpas sent envoys to the Oirats asking for help. During the following three years the Oirats under the leadership of Gushri Khan defeated the enemies of the fifth Dalai Lama. In 1642 Gushri Khan proclaimed the Dalai Lama the supreme religious leader and the highest secular ruler of the whole of Tibet.

The military campaign of Gushri Khan in Tibet had tremendous influence on the political history of Tibet and on the history of Buddhism in Mongolia. This victory asserted the dominance of the Gelugpa order in Tibet and Mongolia, and maintained the power of the

82 At that time blood sacrifices and the worship of ancestors was forbidden for the first time in Mongolia (Snellgrove, Richardson 1980: 184).
84 Dordzhieva 1972: 7.
85 Bakaeva 1994: 14. The ‘Clear script’ (Todo bichig) was used in Kalmykia until 1924, and then it was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet (Baskhaev 2007: 64).
86 Mainly from Tibetan and Sanskrit (ibid: 49-50).
87 Zaya Pandita translated from Tibetan into Todo bichig more that 180 works of classical Buddhist literature (ibid: 49-50).
89 Kapstein 2006: 136-137.
90 Ibid.
Dalai Lama both as spiritual and governmental leader of Tibet. Closer cultural and political connections were established between Tibet and the Mongolian world.91

**The development of Buddhism in the Kalmyk khanate**

Now I present a brief description of the development of Buddhism in the Kalmyk khanate. Of special importance for my discussion are the peculiarities of Kalmyk Buddhism that had been formed under the influence of shamanism.

When the Kalmyks became subjects of the Russian Empire, they brought Buddhism as their main spiritual tradition. Thus the Kalmyks became the first Buddhist community in Europe.

In 1640 a meeting of the Mongol and Oirat noyons took place in Jungaria. The Kalmyk khan Ho-Urulk participated in this important event where Buddhism was proclaimed the official religion of the Oirats, Mongols, and Kalmyks.92 Buddhism in its Gelugpa variant became the overall religion of the Kalmyk khanate.93

Until the second half of the 18th century the Kalmyks had very close ties with Buddhist centers: Tibet, Mongolia, and Jungaria. Religious policy of the khanate was conducted under the leadership of Tibet; Lhasa was the spiritual center for the Kalmyks. Moreover, the Kalmyk khans were appointed by the Dalai Lama from 1690 until the abolition of the Kalmyk khanate.94

The 17th – 18th centuries witnessed the formation of the main religious institutions in Kalmykia.95 This stage was also characterized by an intensive struggle with shamanism, which was still widespread among the Kalmyks. At the Mongol meeting of 1640 legal measures to fight shamanism were adopted. This political decision is reflected in the corpus of laws known as the ‘Great Code’ (Iki Tsaazhin Bichig).96 According to this code, heavy

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91 Tibetan lamas were encouraged to spread Dharma among the Mongols, because the Chinese believed that Mongol militancy could be softened by Buddhism. The Mongol and Oirat students went to Tibetan monasteries to study; most frequently they came to ‘Bras spungs (Drepung), the center of the Gelugpa school (Snellgrove, Richardson 1980: 199).
93 Bakaeva 1994: 18
94 The first Kalmyk khan who received his title from the Dalai Lama in 1690 was Ayuka Khan (Dordzhieva 1972: 11).
95 Guchinova 2006: 165.
punishments and fines were imposed not only on shamans, but also on lay people who resorted to the services of shamans.97

As a result of this persecution shamanism in Kalmykia acquired new forms of existence.98 There developed a level of “folk” or popular Buddhism, which was a combination of Buddhist doctrines and pre-Buddhist practices.99 Moreover, some cults and practices of the Kalmyk bö (‘male shamans’) and udugun (female shamans) were absorbed into the institutionalized form of Kalmyk Buddhism.100 These developments formed the basic distinguishing characteristics of Kalmyk Buddhism.

One peculiarity of Buddhism in the Kalmyk khanate consisted in the fact that various protective rituals101 of pre-Buddhist shamanic origin and the ancient Mongol annual ceremonies102 were conducted not only by folk religious practitioners but also by monks in khuruls on a regular basis.

The most important festivals of Kalmykia, Zul (New Year),103 Tsagan Sar (‘the White Month’, spring festival)104 and the summer festival of Urus Sar,105 also presented the combination of Buddhist and pre-Buddhist folk-religious beliefs.106

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97 For instance, a horse could be taken away both from a shaman and his lay client (ibid: 10).
99 Ibid.
100 For example, until the beginning of the 20th century one of the main functions of shamans, i.e. the magic influence on weather, was performed in Kalmykia by a special type of khurvak called zadch. These monks, in contrast to shamans were treated with great respect (Bakaeva 2005: 126).
101 Examples of Kalmyk protective rituals are ‘the redemption of life force’ (amin dzolikh), ‘cutting off the evil tongue’ (khar kel utlk), ‘calling back the life-force’ (syums duudulkh) (see Bakaeva 1994: 113-115). According to Bakaeva, protective rituals or “magic ceremonies” are intended to defend a person from supernatural evil forces and to bring good fortune or health (ibid: 109).
102 The main annual ceremonies in Kalmykia were gal tjalgn or ‘the offering to the fire’, usn arshan or ‘water consecration’, and usn tjalgn or ‘sacrifice to the water’ were conducted both by monks in khuruls and by folk religious practitioners. Even animal sacrifice could be performed during these ceremonies as the main offering (ibid: 84 – 87).
103 Zul is the traditional Kalmyk New Year, celebrated on the twenty-fifth day of the first winter month (November). There is a custom of lighting altar lamps (called zul in Kalmyk) on this day. A similar holiday exists in Tibet, Mongolia and Buryatia, but only in Kalmykia it is the traditional New Year (ibid: 53-60).
104 Tsagan Sar (the ‘White Month’) begins on the first day of the first spring month in accordance with the traditional Kalmyk calendar (which is approximately in February) and lasts the whole month. Tsagan Sar is a traditional festival for the New Year in Mongolia and Buryatia; in Kalmykia, however, the traditional New Year is Zul. Before the adoption of Buddhism in the nomadic societies of the Mongols Tsagan Sar symbolized the welcoming of spring and indicated the beginning of migration into new pastures (Bakaeva 1994: 57; Guchinova 2006: 175). After the establishment of Buddhism Tsagan Sar continued to be the main event among the Mongols, but acquired new religious meanings. It became associated with the Tibetan Great Prayer Festival (Smon lam) introduced in 1409 by Tsongkhapa. For a detailed description of this festival see Bakaeva 1994: 60-64.
105 Urus Sar starts on the day of the full moon in the first summer month (May) and lasts for a month. Before Buddhism it was a celebration of the renewal of nature and the movement from spring to summer pastures. The time of Urus Sar coincided with the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment and his entering parinirvana (ibid: 81-84).
An important characteristic feature of Kalmyk and Mongolian Buddhism is the incorporation of the main pre-Buddhist deities into the Buddhist pantheon. The principal deity for the Oirats and later for the Kalmyks was the White Old Man (Tsagan aav or Tsagan ovgen). The Oirats believed in the existence of numerous spirits: the owners of land, water, mountains, etc. However, in course of time their individual names were forgotten, and the cults of various local deities merged into one cult of the White Old Man, the owner of the land and water. The White Old Man was perceived by the Kalmyks not only as the protector of animals and nature, but also as the Master of time and the universe.

In the 18th century Tsagan aav was included in the Buddhist pantheon in Kalmykia with the function of a dharmapala, a defender of the Buddhist faith, who rewards people for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. This characteristic of Tsagan aav is reflected in text called the Sutra of the White Old Man (Tsagan-ebugen sudur), narrating about his encounter with the Buddha. For folk-religious practitioners in Kalmykia, the White Old Man has always been the principal deity bestowing magical powers. In pre-revolutionary khuruls the image of this deity was placed on the wall by the entrance, but never inside (ibid.).

Another important pre-Buddhist deity that was incorporated in the Buddhist pantheon of Kalmykia, Buryatia and Mongolia is Okon Tengri (the ‘Sky Maiden’), the ancient goddess of fire and fertility. In Kalmyk Buddhism Okon Tengri acquired the characteristics of the Tibetan female deity Palden Lhamo (Dpal ldan lha mo).

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107 Bakaeva 1997a. The cult of the White Old Man is popular among the Mongols and the Buryats; a similar deity with the same functions is present in Tibet (Sgam po dkar po) (Heissig 1980: 76).
110 Ibid.
111 It is a short text in the form of a sutra; there is a Russian translation of this text in Pozdneev 1993: 84-84, note 1. There exist the Mongol and the Oirat variants of this text, but the characteristics and the image of the White Old Man are analogous (see Bakaeva 1997a: 78-79).
113 Guchinova 2006: 172.
114 For a detailed discussion of Palden Lhamo see Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975: 22-37.
Buddhism in Kalmykia from 1771 to the beginning of the 20th century

After the abolition of the Kalmyk khanate, the Tsarist government imposed administrative control over the Kalmyk steppe. A number of measures to limit the influence of Buddhism in Kalmykia were implemented. Contact with other Buddhist centers was prohibited. The Russian government feared that close ties between Kalmykia and Tibet could weaken the ties with Russia. Since 1690 the head of the Kalmyk Buddhist sangha had been appointed by the Dalai Lama, but after 1771 this practice was interrupted. Catherine the Great established the post of “Chief of Kalmyk Buddhists”, appointed directly by the Tsarist government.

During this period the process of Christianization increased. Nevertheless, the majority of Kalmyks remained loyal to Buddhism. Even baptized Kalmyks continued to follow the Dharma, recited mantras and had Buddhist altars at home.

In the beginning of the 19th century the Russian administration attempted to reduce the number of Buddhist monasteries and monks in Kalmykia. In spite of the efforts of the Russian government to weaken the ideological and political power of Buddhism in Kalmykia, the number of khuruls from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th century increased leading to a considerable growth of the sangha. At the beginning of the 20th century there were 105 khuruls in Kalmykia with 5,270 residents. It should be mentioned that Buddhist nunneries had never existed in Kalmykia.

Isolated from other Buddhist centers, Kalmyk Buddhism developed a number of characteristic features, one of its main peculiarities being the absence of the institute of tulkus until the end of the 20th century. Another distinguishing feature of Kalmyk

116 Ibid: 36.
117 Kitinov 1996: 40.
118 Christian missionary activity had been imposed on the Kalmyks by the Tsarist government since the second half of the 17th century. A number of measures to interest the Kalmyks in Orthodox Christianity were used: money was offered, liberation from serfdom was promised, debts were forgiven, and even release from imprisonment was guaranteed. Mostly the Don and Orenburg Kalmyks were converted to Christianity (Baskhaev 2007: 86-88).
123 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
124 Bakaeva 1994: 45.
Buddhism of the 18th and 19th centuries is the popularity of the institute of shabiners or serf monks dependent on a particular khurul.125

A very important event for Kalmyk Buddhism is the foundation of Buddhist philosophical schools Tsannid Chyorya, in 1907-1908.126 Choyrya schools had departments of philosophy and medicine, the course of studies lasted 13 years.127

The first two decades of the 20th century witnessed the renewal of Buddhism in Kalmykia. Moreover, contacts with Buryatia and Mongolia were resumed.128

Kalmyk khuruls and the organization of Buddhist clergy before the Soviet period

The Oirats had movable as well as stationary temples. The earliest Oirat stationary monastery was built in 1616 on the eastern side of the Irtysh. It was called Sem Palat, which means ‘seven chambers’, due to the number of buildings in this architectural complex.129 Other well-known early Oirat stationary monasteries included Ablain-kit (1654) and Boshoktukhan-kit (1670).

The Kalmyks had only mobile monasteries until the end of the 18th century. A Kalmyk mobile temple, called khurla ger, was accommodated in a tent or kibitka (yurt). Architecturally such worship kibitkas were distinguished by a ganjir, a Buddhist symbol in the form of a spire on top of the tent. Nomadic monasteries were circular in design. The tents of the monks formed the outer circle. In the middle a few prayer kibitkas and a tent of a senior lama were situated.130

In Kalmykia both monasteries and temples are called khuruls. However, the exact meaning of the word khurul is ‘assembly’.131 But by the end of the 18th century in various documents the word khurul began to be used in reference to Kalmyk temples, monasteries and prayer houses. At the same time the term ‘small khurul’ was introduced to distinguish

125 Ibid: 46.
126 These schools were established in two uluses, Maloderbetovskiy and Ikitsohirovsky (ibid: 43).
127 Ibid
130 Bakaeva 1994: 24. By the end of the 18th century there were approximately 14 monasteries in Kalmykia (ibid).
131 A monastery in Kalmyk is kit or kyurya. Prayer houses and temples can be also called syume (ibid: 24-25).
prayer houses from monasteries. Almost all ‘small khuruls’ were devoted to a particular deity or practice. In the 1850s there existed 77 big and small khuruls.\(^{132}\)

The first Kalmyk stationary khurul was built in 1798, and by the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century there were 11 stone and 151 wooden khuruls on the territory of Kalmykia.\(^{133}\) Kalmyk Buddhist architecture was based on nomadic principles. First stationary khuruls resembled kibitkas, because they were symmetrical and had eight sides.\(^{134}\) A typical khurul was a two or three-tier building in a shape of a stepped pyramid. Lower levels were monumental in contrast to lighter and brightly decorated upper levels. The corners of the roof were slightly lifted.\(^{135}\) The main peculiarity of Kalmyk Buddhist architecture is the decorating of khurul roof with suburgans (stupas).\(^{136}\)

After the rupture with other Buddhist centers Buddhist architecture in Kalmykia changed under the influence of Russian Orthodox style. Thus the curvilinear contour of roofs gradually disappeared. Also some necessary components of Mongolian Buddhist temples (ganjur, prayer wheels, etc) were no longer constructed by the end of the 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^{137}\) Moreover, elements typical of Russian orthodox churches, such as porches with circular arches, were added to khuruls.\(^{138}\)

The organization of Kalmyk Buddhist clergy conformed to the Tibetan Gelugpa tradition, though there were some peculiarities. Only the head of Kalmyk Buddhists had the title of “Lama”,\(^{139}\) all other monks were called khuvarak.\(^{140}\) In Kalmyk monasteries monks differed according to their ranking and according to their allotted duties. The monastic hierarchy included three ranks; therefore, monastic education consisted of three stages. Only in Kalmykia the monks of the lowest rank were called manji (‘students’).\(^{141}\) After studying for five years manji received the vows of getsul (‘novice’). The second stage of monastic education lasted for eight years, and then after a serious examination the ordination of

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\(^{132}\) The majority was semi-nomadic i.e. roaming in summer with mobile prayer tents and stationary in winter (ibid: 27).

\(^{133}\) Ibid.

\(^{134}\) Pyurveev 1975: 59-61.

\(^{135}\) Ibid

\(^{136}\) The number of suburgans was either one or five (one big in the centre and four smaller stupas on each corner of the gallery or roof). See Batyreva 2005: 67 or Pyurveev 1975: 62.

\(^{137}\) Pyurveev 1975: 69


\(^{139}\) Terentyev 1996: 60.

\(^{140}\) In Mongolia the term khuvarak was applied only to the monks of low degree of ordination (Bakaeva 1994: 40).

\(^{141}\) Manji were boys from the age of seven or nine studying in monasteries (ibid: 41).
gelong could be received. Then gelong had to study for five or seven more years. Later the institute of surgulin kevyud or ‘khurul students’ was introduced, because the Tsarist administration prohibited children under 16 to live in monasteries.\textsuperscript{142}

In Kalmyk monasteries monks had specialized duties: for example, the nirva managed the financial matters of the monastery, the zama was responsible for the monks’ food and diet, the gunzud started the recitation of each prayer, the emchi was a doctor of Tibetan medicine, the gonir was in charge of ritual objects necessary for the services, the zurachi or artist painted the images of deities and decorated khuruls, the zyrkhachi worked as astrologer, etc. The abbot was called baksha, it was the highest administrative rank in a monastery. Another very important post was that of a tsorzhi who conducted ceremonies, supervised the study of ritual texts, and appointed monks to perform different rituals.\textsuperscript{143}

The “non-religious” period in Kalmykia

The period from 1930s to 1980s is called “non-religious” in the history of Kalmykia, because during this time Buddhism was persecuted by the Soviet government, and not a single khurul functioned in Kalmykia.\textsuperscript{144}

According to the resolution of the 22\textsuperscript{nd} Congress of the Communist party in 1923, there was no place for religion in a communist society. In this way Buddhism was prohibited in Kalmykia, the majority of monks were arrested, some even murdered, and monastic property was confiscated and destroyed.\textsuperscript{145} Any activities connected with Buddhism, including academic studies, were forbidden. By the beginning of the Second World War all the khuruls in Kalmykia had ceased to exist. During the Soviet epoch Buddhism could be practiced only in Buryatia.\textsuperscript{146}

The repression of Kalmyk Buddhism was especially strong during the years of deportation (1943 – 1957). But even after the Kalmyks were permitted to return to the Volga steppe and the republic was officially restored, the question of religious revival was not

\begin{footnotes}
\item[142] Ibid: 41-42.
\item[144] See Bakaeva 1994: 38.
\item[145] Ibid: 19.
\item[146] Kitinov 1996: 41.
\end{footnotes}
However, unofficial Buddhist centers were formed in the places of residence of former monks. During the years of 1957 – 1988 not a single khurul was built in Kalmykia, and new generations of monks were not trained. There arose a serious threat to the continuity of the Kalmyk religious tradition.

Religious revival in Kalmykia after 1988

The restoration of institutionalized Buddhism

On 25 October 1990 the Russian Federal Law on “The freedom of consciousness and religious organizations” was passed, opening the way to the revival of official religious structures. After the new law had been passed, the president of the Kalmyk republic declared Buddhism and Christianity to be the state religions of Kalmykia.

The first Kalmyk Buddhist community was registered in October 1988 in Elista, and the first prayer house was opened in 1989. Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a boom of religious revival in the republic: khuruls have been opened in almost every town and Dharma centers have been established in many settlements. The first khurul (Syaksyun Syume) was built in Arshan village outside Elista in 1996. The biggest khurul in Kalmykia, which is also the biggest Buddhist temple in Europe, was constructed in nine

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147 Guchinova 2006: 166.
148 The most important center was the village of Tsagan Aman, where lama Dordzhiev lived until 1980 (Bakaeva 1994: 20).
149 Ibid.
150 Bēlka 2002.
153 Guchinova 2006: 166.
months of 2005. This temple received the name Burkhn Bagshi Altn Syume (The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni).  

Religious calendar events and festivals are also reestablished. Nowadays the Kalmyks officially celebrate Zul, Tsagan Sar, and Urus Sar. An important Kalmyk Buddhist tradition of matsg days has been restored. According to this tradition, the 8th, the 16th and the 30th days in every month are the days of fast or matsg. In khuruls special rituals for matsg days are conducted. These rituals are connected with the cult of the most popular Buddhist deities in Kalmykia. Thus on the 8th day of a month the rituals for Green and White Taras are performed, while the 30th day is associated with Okon Tengri. Ritual prayers are primarily in Tibetan, but there are also prayers in Kalmyk.

The revival of Buddhism in Kalmykia, as well as in other Russian Buddhist republics, is much influenced by the Tibetan government in exile. The 14th Dalai Lama himself visited Kalmykia for the first time in 1991. As the head of the Kalmyk Buddhists Telo Tulku Rinpoche said, “One of the main reasons why the revival is taking place in Kalmykia is

154 Interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the head of the Kalmyk Buddhists, June 2008, Elista.
155 On these days it is prohibited to eat meat (interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista).
156 Other important deities in Kalmykia are Buddha Shakyamuni, Yamantaka. Of especial influence in Kalmykia is the cult of White Mahakala, the defender of faith and of the purity of teaching. It’s believed that Mahakala can help in spreading success on the Kalmyk land (ibid).
because of the inspiration of the Dalai Lama. His first visit was the opening door for people to come out and say that they are Buddhists and not afraid of it". 157 So far His Holiness has been to the republic three times. During his second visit in 1992 the Dalai Lama donated money for the building of Laganskyi Khurul and consecrated the area for the future temple. The Dalai Lama’s third visit was in 2004. 158

There is a need for trained monks in Kalmykia. In the period between 1940 and 1988 there were neither functioning khuruls, nor legally practicing monks. At the present moment in the centralized Kalmyk Buddhist monastery Gede Shedduo Choi Corling 22 monks are working, 159 most of them are Tibetans. However, new generations of Kalmyks receive their monastic education abroad. The usual place for the training of Kalmyk monks is Drepung Gomang Dratsang monastery in India. 160 Thus in the 1990s about 25 young men from Kalmykia were sent to be educated there, and there is a group of students receiving their religious education there now.

A prominent change in religious authority is the establishment of the institute of tulku (a recognized reincarnation of an important religious personality or bodhisattva). The Shadzhin Lama or the head of Kalmyk Buddhists Telo Tulku Rinpoche was recognized as an incarnation of Tilopa by the 14th Dalai Lama. 161 Before the Bolshevik revolution the institute of tulku did not exist in Kalmykia. 162 The establishment of tulku indicates a significant change in religious authority in Kalmykia under the influence of Tibetan Buddhism. Shadzhin Lama TeloTulku Rinpoche 163 was born in the USA and educated in India. Now he is the president of the Kalmyk Buddhist Union (KBU). This organization comprises all Kalmyk Buddhist communities. As a result of the introduction of the institute of tulku, the head lama acquired additional power in the eyes of all the believers. 164

Apart from the Gelugpa order, other schools of Tibetan Buddhism (Kagyu, Sakya, and Nyingma) are present in contemporary Kalmykia. Thus in 1995 a branch of the Karmapa

157 Interview with Telo Tulku Rinpoche, June 2008, Elista.
158 Ibid.
159 Most Kalmyk monks live in khurul precincts. However some of them, especially those of higher ranks, live in separate apartments or houses due to the lack of room in monasteries.
160 Ibid.
161 Telo Tulku Rinpoche was elected to be the Shandzhin Lama of Kalmykia in 1992.
162 The tradition of recognized reincarnations was lost in Kalmykia already in the 17th century (Bakayeva 1994: 45).
163 His surname is Ambadykov.
164 Guchinova 2006: 166.
The Kagyu school was founded in Elista.\textsuperscript{165} The Western Karma Kagyu branch of Ole Nydahl is also functioning in the republic. After the “non-religious” period the first stupa in Kalmykia (The Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista) was erected under the supervision of the Karma Kagyu school of Ole Nydahl in July 1999.\textsuperscript{166} Ole Nydahl has visited Kalmykia several times; his last visit was in summer 2008. The Kalmyk Nyingma center is the \textit{khurul} in Iki-Burul. The head of this \textit{khurul} is a Kalmyk married lama, Padma Sherab (Pad ma Shes Rab). In 2004 on the territory of Iki-Burulskyi \textit{khurul} the highest stupa in Europe was constructed.\textsuperscript{167}

The revival of traditional spiritual institutions has brought changes in domestic religiosity. In recent years in many Kalmyk houses one can see the images of the Buddha and photographs of the 14\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama. Some families even have home altars. Many lay believers, especially members of older generation, visit \textit{khuruls} regularly and perform special rites for all members of their families. The most pious lay Buddhists observe matsg days fast. Circumambulation of stupas and \textit{khuruls} is a constant practice for the Kalmyk laity of every generation. Most Kalmyks wear protective amulets (\textit{bu}) and multicolored threads with “knots of happiness”. Interest in Buddhist philosophy has also increased. Lay

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid
\textsuperscript{166} Izvestiya Kalmykii, 28 July 1999.
\textsuperscript{167} Interview with Padma Sherab, July 2008, Iki-Burul.
people of all ages attend lectures given regularly by high lamas in *khuruls*. Some lay people even study Tibetan.\(^{168}\)

**The revival of folk Buddhism**

Popular or folk Buddhism\(^ {169}\) is also reviving among the Kalmyks. In the Soviet period folk religious practices were not heavily persecuted. Due to their unofficial character folk Buddhist specialists were not regarded as dangerous as *khurul* Buddhism.\(^ {170}\)

Folk Buddhism is combined with the elements of Kalmyk pre-Buddhist spiritual traditions,\(^ {171}\) and is represented by religious experts who perform various rituals for the benefit of lay people.\(^ {172}\) Now there are several terms used to refer to folk Buddhist specialists. The most common are *medlgchi*, a Kalmyk word meaning ‘knowledgeable, wise, sage’, and *sakusta* or *sakusta kun*, which means ‘having the patronage of a guardian deity’. The old words *bö* and *udagan* are sometimes also used. All these terms are interchangeable in modern Kalmykia.\(^ {173}\)

Folk religious specialists consider themselves to be Buddhists and do not distinguish the elements of ancient spiritual traditions in their activity.\(^ {174}\) They recite Buddhist mantras and prayers and have Buddhist altars and scriptures.\(^ {175}\) However, *medlgchi* or *sakusta* do not have monastic education, but receive their knowledge and power from their guardian deities of Buddhist\(^ {176}\) as well as pre-Buddhist origin.\(^ {177}\) Some *sakusta* may have only one guardian deity, others have several. There exist certain taboos: thus the names of some deities and

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\(^ {168}\) In the central *khurul* there is a free course of Tibetan, the teacher is a young Kalmyk monk, Mingyanggelong.

\(^ {169}\) Bakaeva uses the expressions бытовой буддизм or народный буддизм (see Bakaeva 2001 or Bakaeva 1997b).

\(^ {170}\) Guchinova 2006: 163.

\(^ {171}\) According to a well-established opinion before adopting Buddhism the Oirats had two main religious traditions: shamanism and tengerism (Bakaeva 2005: 126). Some scholars don’t separate these traditions due to numerous similarities in cosmological views, but refer to the Oirat-Kalmyk pre-Buddhist cults and beliefs as “the black faith” without distinguishing individual systems (Bicheev 2004: 6).

\(^ {172}\) Bakaeva 2001.

\(^ {173}\) Ibid: 175. According to Bakaeva, the word *sakusta kun* can be applied to all types of folk religious specialists (ibid.). However, my fieldwork showed that the term *medlgchi* is more popular. From the emic point of view, no difference is made between these two terms and categories of practitioners.

\(^ {174}\) Ibid: 176.

\(^ {175}\) Interview with Ulanova, a Kalmyk *medlgchi*, June 2008 Elista.

\(^ {176}\) The most common Buddhist guardian deities are White and Green Taras, Avalokiteshvara, Manjusri, Mahakala, Amitayus, Vajrapani, and even Tsongkhapa functions in this role (Bakaeva 2003: 178).

\(^ {177}\) The principal pre-Buddhist deities are the White Old Man and Okon Tengri (ibid.).
spirits cannot be pronounced. *Sakusta* communicate with deities, but never invite spirits into their bodies as shamans did.\(^{178}\)

A very important element in Kalmyk folk Buddhism is the vocation of ritual specialists. *Sakusta* have to apprehend that they are chosen by gods, and then they have to receive initiation and start practicing.\(^{179}\)

Folk Buddhist specialists tell fortune, remove curses, carry out love magic rites and calendar rituals,\(^{180}\) and heal illnesses with the help of prayers and Buddhist mantras. They perform some rituals that are also conducted by monks in *khuruls*.\(^{181}\)

*Medlgchi* have to follow an ethical code: not to eat pork and chicken, not to drink alcohol or smoke. They are not supposed to ask for money or demand rewards for their ritual services, but accept what people offer them.\(^{182}\)

It is difficult to state the exact number of folk Buddhist practitioners in contemporary Kalmykia because of their unofficial status.\(^{183}\) According to Guchinova, there are at least several dozens of *medlgchi*.\(^{184}\)

**The revitalization of Kalmyk oral epic tradition**

The Kalmyk sense of ethnic identity is inseparable from oral folklore, the culmination of which is the *Jangar* epic. *Jangar* is a cycle of songs about the great deeds of Khan Jangar, the glorious ruler of Bumba, an ideal country of justice, harmony, eternal youth and immortality.\(^{185}\) Other principal characters in the epic are the 12 foremost warriors in Jangar’s army, who obey him unquestioningly and protect holy Bumba.\(^{186}\)

In many respects *Jangar* is similar to Tibetan *Gesar* epic. The main idea in both cycles is the unification of all kingdoms under one universal ruler. Jangar Khan is of heavenly

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\(^{178}\) Bakaeva 2001: 175-176.


\(^{180}\) For example, *gal tjalg* or ‘the offering to the fire’, *usn arshan* or ‘water consecration’, and *usn tjalg* or ‘sacrifice to the water’ (Bakaeva 2001: 177).

\(^{181}\) For example, *nasan uttilkh* or ‘the prolongation of life’, the ritual of ‘opening the way’ and of ‘removal of impediments’ (fieldwork research).

\(^{182}\) Interview with Ulanova, a Kalmyk *medlgchi*, June 2008 Elista.

\(^{183}\) During my fieldwork I met three *medlgchi*, all live in Elista.

\(^{184}\) Guchinova 2006: 163.

\(^{185}\) There are different national versions of *Jangar*. Apart from the Kalmyk variant there are Mongolian and Xinjiang Oirat versions, as well as Altai and Buryat tales about Jangar khan (ibid: 190).

\(^{186}\) Khan Jangar has an army of 6012 warriors or *batyrs* (*Jangar* 1989).
origin; he possesses magic powers and is predestined by gods to be the universal sovereign.\textsuperscript{187}

The \textit{Jangar} epic was brought to the Kalmyk steppe by the Oirats. It is difficult to state the exact date when the first songs were created. Erdniev, basing his opinion on archaeological evidence, states that the first episodes of \textit{Jangar} were composed as early as the second half the first millennium AD during the heroic epoch of Central Asia and Southern Siberia. The final formation of the epic cycle was completed at the end of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{188}

It is also difficult to estimate the exact number of \textit{Jangar} songs. The bards mainly perform ten or twelve; however, in 1978 two volumes with 25 songs were published by Kichikov.\textsuperscript{189} And according to Mikhailov, there are about thirty songs of the \textit{Jangariad} (Erdniev 2007: 336).

\textit{Jangar} is sung to the accompaniment of Kalmyk folk string instruments, the \textit{dombra} or the \textit{tovshur}. In Kalmykia there always existed special singers of \textit{Jangar} called \textit{jangarchi}.\textsuperscript{190} Similar to the Tibetan epic tradition is the idea of a bard in an altered state of consciousness. \textit{Jangarchi} were thought to be in trance or possessed by spirits that imparted the songs to them.\textsuperscript{191} Thus, in the performance some shamanic elements can be distinguished. However, with the spread of Buddhism many Buddhist elements were added to \textit{Jangar}.\textsuperscript{192}

\textsuperscript{187} The idea of universal ruler is reflected in the semantics of Jangar’s name. According to Vladimirtsov, ‘jangar’ is short from ‘\textit{jakhangir}’, which means ‘the conqueror of the world’. Jangar is also called \textit{ezen} (‘lord’, ‘sovereign’) and \textit{bogdo}, which means ‘holy’ (Erdniev 2007: 336).

\textsuperscript{188} Erdniev connects this date with the period when all the West Mongols were united under one ruler (ibid: 337-338).

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid: 336.

\textsuperscript{190} See Erdniev: 334-335; Guchinova: 190.

\textsuperscript{191} Guchinova 2006: 191.

\textsuperscript{192} Thus, Buddhist lamas with magic powers are constant characters; the names of Buddhist deities are also frequently mentioned. For example, Tara is portrayed in the epic as the bride of the \textit{batyr}, and she presents to her bridegroom the volumes of the Kangyur and the Tanguyr (Bordzhanova 1999: 116).
In the Soviet period Jangar was not forbidden; however, it was popularized as a literary text but not as oral epic, and the Russian translation was much better known than the original Kalmyk version. In the present epoch of spiritual revival the art of jangarchi is also being restored. In 1990 the 550th anniversary of the Jangar epic cycle was celebrated in the republic. And for the first time after many decades guests from Kalmyk diasporas in the USA, France and Germany came to attend this event.

What is more important for the restoration of the national epic is Jangariada festival held annually in Elista since 1997. This event is devoted to folk arts and ethnic sports (such as archery, horse racing, Kalmyk wrestling, etc.) described in Jangar. Musicians, bards (jangarchi) and sportsmen from every district of the republic take part in this festival. One of the most popular young jangarchi nowadays is Tsagan Khaalg.

Concluding considerations on the character of the religious situation in Kalmykia

The religious situation in contemporary Kalmykia is characterized by the revival of two separate levels of Buddhism. The first level is institutionalized or “khurul” Buddhism; it is represented by a community of monks. The Shadzhin Lama of Kalmykia supports the tendency of unification of spiritual practice and orientation towards Tibet. This level overcomes ethnic borders.

The other level is popular or folk Buddhism, which existed before the “non-religious” period and is revitalizing nowadays. This level is not institutionalized. The history of Buddhism in Kalmykia shows that religion can exist outside monasteries and hierarchical organization of sangha. Kalmyk folk Buddhism is ethnic in its origin, because it preserves ethnic peculiarities of Kalmyk spiritual traditions.

The two levels of Buddhism are separated and do not interpenetrate. The laity is in between these two religious layers. Very often from the emic side of lay Kalmyk believers the distinction between institutionalized and popular Buddhism is not made. Some lay people go only to khuruls, others resort to the services of medlgchi, and some go to both. For contemporary Kalmyks Buddhism in all its dimensions has become the focus of national identity.

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193 In 1940 the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Jangar epic was held with the support of the Party (Guchinova 2006: 192).
194 Ibid: 199.
195 The choice depends on family traditions; some Kalmyks have “family” medlgchi.
Chapter 3

The Origin and Functions of the Stupa, its Position in Kalmyk Religious Life

The construction of stupas in contemporary Kalmykia is a vivid manifestation of the revival of Buddhism in the republic. In all Buddhist communities a stupa (Tib. mchod rten; Mon., Kalm. suburgan\(^{196}\)) is a cultic architectural construction, the object of deep religious veneration. It is one of the main symbolic representations of Buddhism\(^{197}\) and an essential element of Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhist monasteries.

However, stupas have not always been exclusively Buddhist monuments. Thus there existed stupas in the Jain tradition.\(^{198}\) Stupas or aidukas are also described and referred to in Mahabharata.\(^{199}\) Nevertheless, it is in Buddhism that stupas acquired additional functions and a complexity of symbolic meanings.

The meaning of the word stupa, mchod rten, and suburgan

As Chandra writes, Tibetan ‘mchod rten’ is based on “a folk etymology of the word stupa”: mchod means ‘offering’ and rten\(^{200}\) is ‘support, hold, receptacle’.\(^{201}\) There is an opinion, according to which, the Sanskrit word stupa consists of stu, which means ‘to pray, to worship’ and pa meaning ‘guarding, protecting’.\(^{202}\) The fact that the Tibetans translated the term “stupa” implying the meaning of ‘a holder of offerings’ reflects the primary function that stupas have in Tibetan Buddhism, i.e. that of a relic-shrine, a receptacle of sacred objects.

However, the word stupa had several other meanings.\(^{203}\) In its earlier Vedic usage the term stupa meant ‘a tuft or topknot of hair, top, summit’,\(^{204}\) later it began to imply a hairdo

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\(^{196}\) In contemporary Kalmykia the words stupa and suburgan are widely used, whereas the Tibetan word mchod rten is not as commonly used.


\(^{198}\) Thus Goswamy recounts a popular Jain story about King Kanishka who had paid homage to a heretical stupa by mistake (Goswamy 1980: 2).

\(^{199}\) Ibid: 2-7.

\(^{200}\) In Tibetan-English dictionary by H.A. Jäschke the following meanings of the word rten are given: ‘support, hold’, ‘receptacle’, ‘seat abode, shrine’ and also “a statue or figure of Buddha or other divine beings, which the pious may take hold of, and to which their devotions are more immediately directed”. The latter meaning was probably added later and is connected with the tradition of relic installation in stupas and statues.


\(^{202}\) Ibid.


\(^{204}\) Ibid.
of a sovereign, a crown. Thus stupa came to symbolize authority and supremacy of the order.\textsuperscript{205} The second usage is ‘heap or pile of earth’; ‘heaped up, piled up’, suggesting the notion of monument.\textsuperscript{206} It also means ‘stem, tree, pillar, post’ as the symbol of stability.\textsuperscript{207} Consequently, in earlier times stupas symbolized the supremacy and stability of the order, both royal and religious. Scholars draw attention to the links between stupa worship and the kingship cult.\textsuperscript{208} Supremacy and stability are the characteristics of Cakravartin (a universal sovereign); therefore, stupa “asserts the dominion of Cakravartin”.

**The earliest Buddhist stupas**

Various historical sources depict the Buddha as a cakravartin.\textsuperscript{209} A cakravartin is the one “who sets the wheel in motion”,\textsuperscript{210} the wheel was the first of the seventh jewels of a universal monarch. The Buddha became the conqueror of the spiritual real. The expression “the Buddha set in motion the Wheel of Dharma” is a metaphor frequently used to refer to the Buddha’s first sermon.\textsuperscript{211}

The Buddha told his disciple Ananda to treat his (the Buddha’s) physical remains according to the custom appropriate for an emperor,\textsuperscript{212} i.e. to construct a stupa at the four crossroads.\textsuperscript{213} The Buddha gave further instructions concerning the structure of a stupa and funeral rites.\textsuperscript{214} However, it is the lay people who were supposed to construct and venerate stupas, because they manifest their faith and devotion through the worship of relics. Therefore, relic worship and stupa construction should not be the concern of the sangha.\textsuperscript{215}

\textsuperscript{205} Chandra 1988: xiii.
\textsuperscript{206} Goswamy 1980:1.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{208} Trainor 1997: 32-34; Chandra 1988: xxiii-xxvi.
\textsuperscript{209} For example, it is written that the Buddha was born with 32 special signs of the superman, cakravartin; see Bu-ston History of Buddhism. Part II The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet. Translated from Tibetan by Dr. E. Obermiller 1932: 14.
\textsuperscript{210} Trainor 1997: 33; Chandra 1988: xxv.
\textsuperscript{211} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{212} “Like those of a universal monarch”. This quotation is taken from Bu-ston 1932: 59.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} According to the History of Buddhism in India and Tibet by Bu-ston, the Buddha’s body had to be wrapped in a cotton-wool cloth and put in an iron coffin filled with oil; fire should be quenched with milk; the bones and ashes should be collected in a golden urn; a monument should be erected at the four crossroads and then people should worship and feast (ibid).
\textsuperscript{215} The Pali tradition vinaya does not even include sections on stupa construction and consecration (Roth 1980: 183-186).
Chandra narrates about two Buddhist stupas erected during the life-time of the Buddha.\textsuperscript{216} According to one story, the Buddha gave eight hairs from his head to be placed in a stupa in the city of Asitanjana. The other story is about the Buddha giving his hair and nail cuttings as the objects of religious worship to two merchants, showing them the model for the relic receptacle (i.e. a stupa).\textsuperscript{217}

After the Buddha’s death (i.e. his entering \textit{parinirvana}) his body was cremated according to his own instructions. The ashes were divided by the Brahmin priest Drona\textsuperscript{218} between the eight kings who had been fighting over the possession of the Buddha’s relics. Each king constructed a stupa\textsuperscript{219} in his country to enshrine a portion of the Buddha’s ashes; the ninth monument was built by Drona to enclose the golden urn in which the ashes had been kept; one more receptacle was built for the embers of the cremation fire.\textsuperscript{220} Thus at that time there were ten Buddhist relic stupas.\textsuperscript{221}

A very important figure in the history of Buddhism is the Indian emperor Ashoka (years of reign 273-231 BC). After several military campaigns Ashoka conquered most of present-day India; his empire stretched from Afghanistan in the west to the Ganges delta in the east.\textsuperscript{222} Ashoka added greatly to the propagation of Buddhism across Asia, transforming Buddhism into a world religion.\textsuperscript{223}

A number of Pali sources, for instance the \textit{Dipawamsa} and the \textit{Mahavamsa}, narrate that Ashoka built 84,000 stupas all over his vast domain.\textsuperscript{224} According to Buddhism, stupas are not merely reliquary monuments, but are identified with the Buddha and his teaching (i.e. the Dharma).\textsuperscript{225} Stupas are perceived as the architectural embodiment of the Dharma, i.e. as \textit{dharma-kaya} or ‘the body of the Law’.\textsuperscript{226} Thus 84,000 is the number of sections in the \textit{Tripitaka} (the Pali canon), consequently, each stupa built on the orders of Ashoka contained...
one of the chapters of the Pali Canon. These stupas were intended to propagate Buddhism and to indicate the legitimization of the spiritual order. One of the main functions of a Buddhist stupa is to assert the doctrine of the Buddha. As Tucci wrote, “to build a stupa (mchod rtên) would mean to renew the preaching of the Law”.

The relics enshrined in the 84,000 stupas were used to localize Buddhism and to secure political authority.

In Tibet, stupas began to be erected with the introduction of Buddhism in the 7th century AD; Tibetan stupas retained their reliquary character, containing various sacred objects (corporeal relics of prominent Buddhist figures, religious scriptures, images, mandalas, etc.). However, Tucci argues that most Tibetan stupas generally “have no funerary character” but function as commemorative and votive architectural structures.

Snodgrass distinguishes three primary functions of Buddhist stupas: that of a receptacle with the remains of great lamas and other sacred objects representing the Buddhist faith; the function of creating merit for all the sentient beings; and the function of a memorial monument commemorating great events in the history of Buddhism.

According to Tucci, Tibetan stupas are all based on the principles and techniques developed in India. In Tibet stupas are classified into eight types, each type being associated with one of the eight glorious events from the Buddha’s life. These eight Indian stupas were accepted as the models for the stupas in Tibetan. Tucci points out that these eight stupas commemorating the events from the Buddha’s life should not be confused with the first eight stupas built to contain the Buddha’s relics.

Thus Chandra lists the following eight types of Tibetan stupas: the stupa of “descent from heaven” (lha babs mchod rtên) commemorating the Buddha’s descent from the Tushita Heaven after preaching to his mother; “of many doors” (sgo mang mchod rtên) devoted to the first Buddhist sermon in Varanasi; “of the conquest of Mara” (bdud ’dul mchod rtên);

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229 Snellgrove, Richardson 1980: 80.
230 Ibid.
234 The crucial events are the Buddha’s birth, his attainment of Enlightenment, his preaching the first sermon, his entry into parinirvana. In the Mahaparinibanna Sutta the Buddha indicates the places where these events happened and says that stupas should be built there to commemorate those (Snodgrass 1985: 357). Later the four sites of great miracles performed by the Buddha were added, thus the eight types were defined. See Tucci 1988: 21-24; Chandra Buddhist Iconography vol. 2, 1987: 397-398; Snodgrass 1985: 357.
“of enlightenment” or “grand illumination” (byang chub mchod rten); “of heaped lotuses” (pad spungs mchod rten) symbolizing the birth of Shakyamuni; “of great miracles” (cho ‘phrul mchod rten); “of complete victory” (rnam rgyal mchod rten) commemorating the Buddha’s prolongation of his life for the good of sentient beings; “of nirvana” (myang ‘das mchod rten) built in honour of the Buddha’s entry into parinirvana.236

Tucci gives two lists of the eight types of Tibetan stupas, drawn from the text of Blo gros bzang po and from that of the Vaidurya g.yah sel.237 In Tucci’s work the stupa “of the conquest of Mara”238 is not mentioned, but he lists the stupa “of reconciliation or brilliant”, which commemorates the unification of the Buddhist sangha after the difficulties caused by the Buddha’s cousin Devadatta, and the stupa “of preaching” built in Varanasi by Brahmadatta.239

The types and structural elements of Mongolian and Kalmyk suburgans

The tradition of stupa building came to the Mongols together with Buddhism from Tibet. In the Mongolian languages a stupa is called suburgan. Pozdneev240 wrote that Mongolian suburgans were smaller images of Indian stupas; they were usually made of bronze and erected on the northern side of temples.241 The functions, structure and symbolism of suburgans in Mongolia was in accordance with the Tibetan tradition.242

Pozdneev emphasized repeatedly the common character of Buddhism (its doctrinal, ritual and architectural sides) in Mongolia, Siberia and in the Kalmyk steppe at the end of the 19th century. Hence the Mongols, the Kalmyks and the Buryats shared similar principles regarding the form, functions and types of the stupa at least until the end of the 19th century.243

238This stupa is said to have been built by Kiing Bimbisara to commemorate the Buddha’s victory over the hordes of Mara under the Bodhi tree. According to Terentyev, this type is often combined with that “of enlightenment”, then the stupa “of reconciliation” commemorating the agreement in the sangha becomes the eighth type (Terentyev 2004: 128).
240Aleksey Pozdneev (1851-1920) was a Russian anthropologist, a researcher of Buddhism in Mongolia and ethnic Mongolian republics on the territory of the Russian state.
241Pozdneev 1993: 58.
242See Bakaeva 2000.
243Pozdneev 1993: xiii.
Mongolian suburgans, being quite similar in form, differ with regard to names and historical significance attached to them. In the tradition of Mongolian Buddhism there existed several types of suburgans. In the pre-revolutionary period scholars distinguish from 8 to 10 types, corresponding to the types of stupas in Tibet.

Thus according to Pozdneev, the main types of Mongolian suburgans were “of many doors”, “of the holy bodhi”, “of death or nirvana”, “of disagreeing khuvraks”, “of miraculous transformation” (or “of grand miracles”), “of the absolute victory”, “of the descent from heaven”, “of preaching” built for the first time in Varanasi by the Indian king Sambo when the Buddha was preaching in Varanasi. Pozdneev does not mention “the lotus stupa” type, which symbolizes the Buddha’s birth, though he writes about the suburgan “of the taming of the Mara”, which corresponds to that “of the conquest of Mara”. Bakaeva gives similar list of suburgan types in pre-revolutionary Kalmykia, though she does not mention the suburgan “of the taming of Mara”. Suburgans of all these types can be found in the Erdeni Dzu monastery in Mongolia. It should be noted that the stupa “of nirvana” is never built separately, but only together with all the other types.

Pozdneev noticed that Mongolian as well as Kalmyk suburgans were practically identical in form, though there were some slight architectural peculiarities of each type mentioned above. Mongolian suburgans were built according to the Tibetan manuals; consequently, the structure and symbolism attached to it corresponded to that of Tibetan mchod rten. Kalmyk suburgans were also built according to the canon, though as a rule they were smaller in size than suburgans in big Mongolian monasteries. A stupa is a canonical monument; therefore contemporary suburgans built during the process of religious

244 Ibid: 58; Bakaeva 2000: 118.
245 Bakaeva mentions 8 types (Bakaeva 2000: 118-119), whereas Pozdneev describes 10 (Pozdneev 1993: 60-61).
246 Pozdneev 1993: 60-61.
247 Pozdneev explains that this stupa was built for the first time in Magadha to commemorate the Buddha’s conquest over Mara and becoming enlightened (ibid: 60).
248 This type corresponds to the stupa “of reconciliation”, according to Tucci (Tucci 1988:22).
249 This type of stupa is listed by Tucci (ibid: 22).
250 Bakaeva 2000: 118.
251 Ibid: 119.
252 Interview with Andzha-gelon, the abbot of Altn Syume khurul in Elista, July 2008.
revival in Mongolia and Buddhist republics on the territory of the Russian Federation include exactly the same architectural elements as pre-revolutionary Mongolian suburgans.

Tibeto-Mongolian stupas consist of a rectangular pedestal, which in its turn can be divided into the base, the lion’s throne, the cornice and the support of the ‘pot’; the ‘pot’ or ‘treasure vase’ known in Kalmykia and Mongolia by the Tibetan term *bum pa*; and the upper part or the spire. The upper part includes the turret (*harmika*), thirteen wheels of the spire, the umbrella crowned with an emblem consisting of the sun, the moon and the jewel (or as it is also called the flaming fire of wisdom).²⁵⁶ In pre-revolutionary Kalmykia the treasure vase could have the form of a bell; this type of suburgan was called *khonkho*, which in Kalmyk means ‘bell’. *Bum pa* could also be in the shape of a vessel or pot; in Kalmyk it was called *bombo*, which is the same as *bum pa*.²⁵⁷ Pyurveev in *The Architecture of Kalmykia* includes the pictures of these two structural types of pre-revolutionary Kalmyk suburgans.²⁵⁸ In contemporary Kalmykia only the *bombo* type suburgans have been constructed so far.

The architectonic structure of a suburgan reflects the religious beliefs, with each of its elements possessing symbolic meanings. All the communities that have Tibetan Buddhism as their main spiritual tradition share the ideas of the symbolism of stupas. The symbolism of the Kalmyk suburgan is complex²⁵⁹, as it is in accordance with the Tibetan tradition. In Kalmyk Buddhism the structure of a suburgan symbolizes, first of all, the Buddhist path to enlightenment: from the moral praxis and fundamental virtues to the miraculous powers and coefficients of supreme illumination.²⁶⁰ Thus the pedestal symbolizes moral virtues and Buddhist precepts, the treasure vase embodies the seven

²⁵⁶ This description of the structure of Mongolian suburgans is taken from Pozdneev 1993: 59-60. See also Batyreva 2005: 67-68.
²⁵⁸ Pyurveev 1975: 78.
elements of enlightenment, and the turret (harmika) symbolizes the eightfold path.\(^{261}\) The upper part of a suburgan embodies the effects achieved through the precepts, virtues and practices of the path: the wheels symbolize the Buddha’s powers; the umbrella symbolizes compassion; the moon, boddhichitta;\(^{262}\) the sun, wisdom (prajna); while the jewel stands for the enlightenment.\(^{263}\)

As in Tibet,\(^{264}\) in Kalmykia the stupa is also perceived as a representation of the universe.\(^{265}\) In Tibetan Buddhism there is a strict correspondence between “the macrocosm and the microcosm”, therefore the stupa also symbolizes the human body, i.e. of the Buddha.\(^{266}\) Each of the main elements of a suburgan correlates with one of the five elements, a geometrical figure, a part of the Buddha’s body, a mystical center in the human body (cakra), and a colour.\(^{267}\) Thus the pedestal corresponds to a square, the earth, the yellow colour and the Buddha’s legs; the treasure vase – to a circle, the water, white, the torso; the turret together with the wheels correlate with a triangle, the fire, the red colour, the head and the crown (ushnisha); the umbrella – with a half-circle, the wind, black, the cakra above eyelash; and the gandjur (the moon-sun emblem) – with the space, half-circle\(^{268}\) or no form,\(^{269}\) multicolor, the cakra on the head.\(^{270}\)

### Suburgans in Kalmykia before the Soviet period

In pre-revolutionary Kalmykia suburgans were not as numerous as in Mongolia or Tibet.\(^{271}\) According to Pyurveev, suburgans in Kalmykia were used mainly as architectural elements i.e. as turrets or pinnacles of syume (‘temples’).\(^{272}\) Decorating of the upper levels and roofs of khuruls with suburgans was a distinguishing peculiarity of Kalmyk Buddhist

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\(^{260}\) Batyreva 2005: 68. The same symbolism is attributed to stupas in Tibet (see Tucci 1988: 40-48 or Snodgrass 1985).

\(^{261}\) Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{262}\) *Boddhichitta* (Tib. byang chub sems) is an aspiration to reach Enlightenment for the benefit of sentient beings (Samuel 1993: 233).

\(^{263}\) Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{264}\) Snodgrass 1985: 360.

\(^{265}\) Snodgrass 1985: 360-362.


\(^{267}\) This interpretation is found in Tucci (Tucci 1988: 49).

\(^{268}\) Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{269}\) Ibid. Also see Tucci 1988: 49.

\(^{270}\) See Pyurveev 1975: 74 or Batyreva 2005: 67.

\(^{271}\) Pyurveev 1975: 74.
architecture.273 The number of suburgan turrets was either one in the middle of the roof, or most usually five, with one bigger suburgan274 in the centre and four smaller turrets on each corner of the gallery or roof.275 Such pinnacle suburgans were hollow inside and filled with relics.276 The most popular pre-revolutionary Kalmyk syume with five stupa pinnacles were the wooden syume of Bagachonovskiy khurul277 and the main wooden syume of Dundu khurul278.

The idea of a stupa as a pinnacle of a temple is rooted in Buddhist cosmology, according to which, the abode of deities i.e. the three-storied palace (kutagara) atop the Sumeru Mountain279 is crowned with a stupa.280 Moreover, one of the meanings of the word “stupa” is “top”, “pinnacle”.281

Using stupas as pinnacles of Buddhist temples is not an exclusively Kalmyk tradition. This architectural peculiarity is characteristic of Thai monasteries,282 though it is not typical of Tibet, Mongolia, or Buryatia. There existed several suburgans as separate monuments in the Kalmyk steppe and on the territory of khuruls. In Kalmyk nomad temples, there were smaller movable suburgans, which were rather miniatures of Indian stupas.283 Bakaeva describes a famous suburgan from the nomad mobile monastery called The Dalai Lama Khurul.284 This small wooden suburgan was decorated with carvings of Buddhist motives;285 and it was believed that this suburgan contained the Buddha’s relics.286

Some Kalmyk stationary khuruls had suburgans as part of the khurul complex. Most suburgans in Kalmykia had a commemorative character, having been built in honour of

274 The central suburgan turret was twice as big as the other four (Pyurveev 1975: 62).
276 Ibid.
277 Pyurveev gives a detailed description of its structure (ibid: 62-63).
279 In Tibetan Buddhism Sumeru mountain (also called Mount Meru) is considered to be the centre of the universe, with its summit being the heaven and the abode of gods (kutagara); all the planets are believed to revolve around it (Chandra 1988: xvii). The visualization of Mount Sumeru and the generation of kutagara is a very important Tantric practice, used in consecration rituals and mandala construction (ibid: xxi-xxii).
280 Ibid: xxii.
281 Ibid; Goswamy 1980: 1
283 Bakaeva 2000: 120.
284 Its Tibetan name was Bkra shis lhun po; according to a half-legendary account, this khurul was founded in 1681 in Tibet and brought to Kalmykia by Ayuka Khan (Bakaeva 2000: 120-121).
285 Bakaeva writes that such technique was typical of the old Indian tradition of stupa making (Bakaeva 2000: 120).
286 Ibid.
some prominent *gelong* or *baksha*, some were erected above the grave or burial place of the person it was devoted to. Thus around the main *syume* of the first Kalmyk stationary monastery *khurul* Lam rim lin in Tsagan-Aman\(^{287}\) five suburgans were erected, the most venerable being the suburgan built in honour of Orchi Lama\(^{288}\) (the builder of the first *khurul*) and that of the Shadzhin Lama of the Kalmyks Zodbo Samtanov (1873-1885).\(^{289}\)

Before the Soviet period Kalmyk (as well as Mongolian) suburgans had never lost their reliquary function, and most of them enshrined corporeal relics. Of great interest is the old stone suburgan with the relics of Bakshi Tsyuryum Arba, the abbot of Sera-ratsan Khurul built in 1871. Bakshi Tsyuryum Arba died in 1855 and was buried “in the air”,\(^{290}\) above his dead body a chapel with an inspection window was built. Eventually it appeared that the body did not undergo decay, therefore a suburgan was constructed to enshrine this imperishable relic.\(^{291}\)

Suburgans also existed among the Don Kalmyks, one of the most popular being that of the Bakshi-Lama of the Don Kalmyks (i.e. the religious leader of the Don Kalmyks) Arkada Chubanov, who died in 1894. This suburgan contained a small pyramid or *tsha-tsha* made of the *baksha’s* ashes mixed with clay.\(^{292}\)

In Kalmykia, in order to enshrine relics not only suburgans but also movable temples in *kibitkas* could be put up and even stationary *syume* were constructed.\(^{293}\) Corporeal remains of lay people could also be enclosed in suburgans in Kalmykia,\(^{294}\) for example in the popular Erdnievskiy Khurul founded by Anddzatan-*gelong*\(^{295}\) in 1696 a chapel was constructed above the grave of the *noyon* (lay Kalmyk feudal lords or landowners)

\(^{287}\) Its main wooden *syume* built in 1798 by Orchi Lama, was the first stationary temple in Kalmykia (Bakaeva 2000: 121)

\(^{288}\) Orchi Lama was the builder of the first *syume* in Kalmykia (ibid).

\(^{289}\) Ibid.

\(^{290}\) It means that his dead body was placed on a special wooden platform without having been previously embalmed. Until the beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Kalmyks, following the Tibetan tradition, left corpses in the steppe to be eaten by wild animals. Cremation was used for deceased monks and Kalmyk nobility, burial in water was also practiced (Guchinova 2006: 127). From the 1930s the Kalmyks began to bury their dead (Sharaeva 2005: 206).

\(^{291}\) Bakaeva 2000: 122.

\(^{292}\) Ibid.

\(^{293}\) Ibid.

\(^{294}\) Ibid.

\(^{295}\) In Tibet it was also a custom to deposit the ashes or some other corporeal remains of lay relatives or friends (Snellgrove, Richardson 1980: 80).

\(^{296}\) Anddzatan *gelong* studied in Tibet for 27 years; he brought from Tibet to Kalmykia sacred relics (a *tangkha* of the Buddha and eight paintings) presented to him by the Fifth Dalai-Lama (Bakaeva 2000: 121).
In 1902 a suburgan was erected on the grave of the zaisang (lower-level nobility) Dondukov.297

In Kalmykia, as in Tibetan communities,298 it was believed that construction of suburgans added greatly to the spiritual well-being of the builder of suburgans and all his relatives. Suburgans in Kalmykia were often erected for the protection and well-being of the local population: thus in 1914 in the Don khurul Bkra shis lhun po a suburgan to ward off wars and other misfortunes was erected; financial support for its construction was provided by the Don kozaks.299

Suburgans have always been revered in Kalmykia, and circumambulating stupas and making offerings were usual practices among the Kalmyk laity.300 However, some suburgans were of special religious importance. One of such sacred monuments was the Suburgan of Baaza-bakshi, built in 1903 in Oran Buluk on the grave of Baaza-bakshi.301

It is the only Buddhist monument in Kalmykia that partially survived the Soviet period.302 The only existing photographs of this suburgan and of Baaza-bakshi are the ones published by a Scandinavian anthropologist G. J. Ramstedt in 1944.303

The revival of the tradition of suburgan construction in contemporary Kalmykia

In contemporary Kalmykia, which is in the process of vigorous religious revitalization, the tradition of suburgan building is also being revived. Since the end of the

296 Ibid.
299 Bakaeva 2000: 123.
300 The most common offerings were coins, sweets, milk, butter, flowers, etc (interview with Baatr Mangaev, July 2008, Elista).
301 Baaza-bakshi (bakshi means ‘teacher’) (1846-1893) was the abbot of Dundu khurul; In 1891-1893 he made a pilgrimage trip to Tibet, during his journey he wrote a diary in todo bichig (‘clear writing’, the old Kalmyk script created by Zaya Pandita). Three years later A. Pozdneev during one of his fieldwork expeditions to Kalmykia was able to obtain this diary from Baaza-bakshi. In 1897 it was translated into Russian and published by Pozdneev (Aleekseeva, “Известия Калмыки” [Kalmykia news]) 18 December 2007).
302 Batyreva 2005: 67. I was told a story about an attempt to destroy this monument: after the revolution it was planned to demolish the Suburgan of Baaza-bakshi, but when the tractor driver was trying to level the monument, he was killed by lightning. In this way some part of the suburgan survived. This half-destroyed pre-revolutionary Buddhist monument is the most popular pilgrimage site in contemporary Kalmykia (interview with Baatr Mangaev, a lay builder of suburgans, July 2008, Elista).
303 Ramstedt Seitsemän retkeä itäään (‘Seven Trips to the Orient’), Helsinki-Porvoo: W. Söderström Co 1944.
1990s stupas have been erected in most settlements of the republic. At the present moment there are at least 40 stupas in Kalmykia.\footnote{According to the official site of the monastery Gede Sheddup Choi Corling www.buddhisminkalmykia.ru, 12 October 2008.}

The first suburgan in post-Soviet Kalmykia, i.e. The Stupa of Enlightenment, which is also the first stupa on the territory of the Russian Federation after the Soviet period, was built in 1999 in Elista.\footnote{Izvestiya Kalmykii, 28 июля 1999.} It was constructed on the initiative of the Karma Kagyu center, which had been established in Elista in 1993. The main sponsors of this project were Shamar Rinpoche, the leader of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism, and Ole Nydal.\footnote{Ibid.} The architectural scheme of the stupa was designed by a German architect V. Kosovskiy.\footnote{Kosovskiy also made drafts for stupas in Germany, Spain and Poland. A Kalmyk architect V. Gilyandikov also took part in the projecting of the monument (ibid).} The main peculiarity of this 11-meter suburgan is an altar room with a prayer drum inside its lower level.

The suburgans erected in Kalmykia after the Soviet period conform in structure to the Tibetan tradition of stupa building. As has been pointed out in the second chapter, the Shadzhin Lama of Kalmykia supports the tendency of unification of spiritual practice and orientation towards Tibet. Thus the architecture of contemporary Kalmyk stupas is practically identical to that of the pre-revolutionary Mongolian or Kalmyk suburgans, the main elements being a rectangular pedestal, a round treasure vase or \textit{bumba}, and a spire consisting of thirteen wheels crowned with \textit{naran sar} or \textit{gandjur}.\footnote{The terms \textit{naran sar} and \textit{gandjur} are used in Kalmykia to refer to the sun, the moon and the jewel construction on top of a stupa (interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista).} Architecturally all
contemporary suburgans in Kalmykia are similar, though the height varies from four to twelve meters. The highest stupa in Kalmykia (12 m), The Stupa of Enlightenment and Suppression of Negative Energy was constructed in Iki-Burul in 2004.\textsuperscript{309} This monument differs from other Kalmyk stupas because it is built in accordance with the Nepalese Nyingma tradition with the eyes painted on each side of the harmika.\textsuperscript{310}

All the stupas in Kalmykia have a small statue of a Buddhist deity (as a rule Buddha Shakyamuni) placed in the opening of the bum pa on the southern side.\textsuperscript{311} Some suburgans have a statue of a different deity on each side of the bum pa.\textsuperscript{312}

Some Kalmyk suburgans function as shrines, having an altar room inside, examples of such constructions being the Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista and the suburgan in Yuzhniy. A few stupas, for example The Stupa of Victory in the village of Shin-Mer and the Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista, even contain prayer wheels (kurde) in the altar room.\textsuperscript{313}

The stupas built in the republic before 2008 do not have any ornament; the pedestals and treasure vases of these monuments are plastered and painted white. As was explained by the abbot of the central khurul The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni, there were no

\textsuperscript{309} The khurul in Iki-Burul (this settlement is in three-hour drive south from the capital of Kalmykia) is the center of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism in Kalmykia. Interview with Padma Sherab (Pad ma Shes rab) the abbot of the khurul in Iki-Burul (July 2008, Iki-Burul).

\textsuperscript{310} According to Padma Sherab, the eyes painted on the stupa represent the Buddha of compassion Avalokiteshvara (Spyan ras gzigs) (ibid). Snodgrass wrote that these eyes symbolize the eyes of the Adi Buddha (Snodgrass 1985: 361).

\textsuperscript{311} According to the Mongolian cosmological views, the front entrance to prayer houses as well as the front gate of monasteries is also always in the south (Pyurveev 1975: 60).

\textsuperscript{312} For example the suburgan in the settlement Yuzhnyi has the statues of Buddha Shakyamuni, Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani and Manjusri (Borisenko 1994).

\textsuperscript{313} Fieldwork observation.
specialists in Kalmykia who could decorate stupas with ornament in accordance with the canonical tradition.\textsuperscript{314} However, the latest suburgans (i.e. those erected in the second half of 2008) have brightly decorated pedestals,\textsuperscript{315} as the artists from India have been invited to Kalmykia to decorate these monuments.

As has been mentioned above, the architectural peculiarities of suburgans depend on which type they represent. The most common type in contemporary Kalmykia is the stupa “of enlightenment” or “of Bodhi”. Tucci mentioned that this type (in his work he calls it the stupa of the “great illumination”) is the most wide-spread one in Western Tibet and in Ladakh.\textsuperscript{316} However, some types are also present in Kalmykia; thus in June 2007 The Stupa of Victory (Rnam rgyal mchod rten) was built in the settlement of Shin-Mer.\textsuperscript{317} In November 2008 The Stupa of Many Doors (Sgo mang mchod rten) was opened in the settlement Komsomolskiy.\textsuperscript{318} This stupa differs from other suburgans in Kalmykia, being characterized by the image of small doors on each of the four steps of the \textit{bum pa} base.\textsuperscript{319}

The revival of the traditional Kalmyk Buddhist architecture is embodied in the design of the largest \textit{khurul} complex The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni (Burkhn Bagshi Altn Syume) built in 2005 in Elista. Following the principles of pre-revolutionary Kalmyk Buddhist architecture, stupas are used as constituent parts of the \textit{khurul}. The territory of the \textit{khurul} complex is surrounded by a rectangular fence decorated with \textit{108}\textsuperscript{320} small suburgans each about one metre high. These small suburgans are of three types: of “the descent from the god realm” (\textit{lha babs mchod rten}), of “accumulated lotuses” (\textit{pad spungs mchod rten}), and of “great miracles” (\textit{cho ‘phrul mchod rten}). Each type has structural peculiarities, thus the

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\textsuperscript{314} Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{315} For example The Stupa of Harmony and Accord in Elista, The Stupa of Many Doors in Komsomolskiy (a settlement in the south-west of Kalmykia).
\textsuperscript{316} Tucci 1988: 51.
\textsuperscript{317} Izvestiya Kalmykii, 15 June 2007.
\textsuperscript{318} Izvestiya Kalmykii, 27 November 2008.
\textsuperscript{319} Terentyev 2004: 128.
\textsuperscript{320} There are 108 beads in a rosary; a mantra should be repeated 108 times in order to be efficient, the Tangyur includes ritualistic treatises for the construction of 108 stupas, therefore in Western Tibet in ancient centers there are lines of 108 stupas (Tucci 1988: 50). Tucci connects the sacred character of the number 108 with
stupa of “descent from heaven” has central projection with steps, the lotus-stupa is characterized by circular lotus-shaped steps of the *bumba* base, and that of “great miracles” has projecting central sections of the *bum pa* steps. 321 These suburgans are not ornamented, but just painted white. The two fence stupas on each side of the central gate have small statues of Buddha Shakyamuni in the opening of the *bum pa*.

The main *syume* of the *khurul* complex is the biggest Buddhist temple in Europe. It is a seven-level building, the fourth level of which is an open gallery decorated with four suburgans, one on each corner. The old Kalmyk tradition of decorating *khuruls* and *syume* with suburgans has been resumed; nevertheless, The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni is the only temple decorated with suburgans in contemporary Kalmykia.

The four pinnacle suburgans have images of four Buddhist deities on each side of the *bum pa*. The same deities are portrayed on all the four stupas: Buddha Shakyamuni and three deities of longevity (*tshe ring lha rnam gsum*). The image of Buddha Shakyamuni is on the southern side facing the front gate of the *khurul*. On the northern side, the three-faced and eight-armed goddess of Supreme Victory Ushnishavijaya (*Rnam rgyal ma*) is depicted. The images of White Tara (*Sgrol dkar*) and Amitayus (*Tshe dpag med*) face the East and the West respectively.

These four stupas on the gallery of the *khurul* are devoted to the four Oirat-Kalmyk clans, i.e. the “union of four Oirats”. Therefore on each side of the suburgans above the images of the deities there is an emblem “of four Oirat tribes”: four interlocking circles. The four stupas are consecrated and contain relics (mainly weapons and scriptures). The

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321 The conclusions are drawn from the fieldwork observation. See also Terentyev 2004: 128-129.
portrayal of the three Buddhas of longevity is believed to grant long and prosperous life to the Kalmyk nation.  

Some present day Kalmyk stupas are built in honour of a Buddhist deity or teacher. Thus the suburgan in Baga-Burul is devoted to the goddess of Victory and long life Ushnishavijaya (Rnam rgyal ma); in the village Priyutnoe a stupa for the longevity of the 14th Dalai-Lama was constructed. The Stupa of Victory in Shin-Mer in Western Kalmykia was erected to immortalize the name of Geshe Vangyal, a Kalmyk lama, one of the founders of the first Buddhist monastery in the USA.

A few stupas are erected to commemorate some noble Kalmyk family clan (arvan), for example, in the northern part of the republic on the border with the Volgograd region a suburgan in honour of the Tundutovs clan is being built. The construction of a stupa is regarded in Kalmykia as an act of great merit. Moreover, in the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism the building of stupas is believed to transmit merit to all the creatures that come in contact with the stupa. Suburgans are believed to fill the world with spiritual well-being and peace and to protect from misfortunes, illnesses and conflicts.

In 2008 The Stupa of Harmony and Accord was constructed in Elista in order to stop constant fights between criminal teenage gangs.

The cult of stupa defines the focus of Kalmyk religious and national identity, because, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter, in contemporary Kalmykia national identity is created through religious ideology.

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322 Interview with the emchi of the central khurul, Sanal Kukuev, June 2008, Elista.
323 Ibid. See also Borisenko 1994.
325 Interview with a Kalmyk medlgchi Ulanova, July 2008, Elista.
Chapter 4

The concept of relics and the content of stupas (built since the 1990s) in Kalmykia

The concept of relics in Tibetan Buddhism

In Tibetan Buddhism a stupa receives its sacred character only after it has been consecrated. The consecration consists of the deposition of relics and the final consecration (rab gnas). Only after the completion of these two stages the presence of Buddhas and yi dam (tutelary deity) is believed to be active in a receptacle. Since a statue is a representation of the Buddha’s body, and stupas are also identified with the Buddha’s body, the consecration of statues includes the same two stages; moreover, the same objects are deposited in them and the same consecration rituals are performed.

Relics are items which possess great religious importance by being connected with the Buddha or some important religious character; relics locate the Buddha in this world, providing the possibility of interaction with the enlightened mind. Relics are traditionally subdivided into relics of the Buddha’s body (images, statues, physical remains), of the Buddha’s speech (religious texts), and of the Buddha’s mind (miniature stupas and tsha tsha). The entire space of Tibetan stupas is filled with relics of different types; the place of relics in a receptacle and the order of their deposition show the hierarchical order of religious value attached to the relics.

In Buddhism the notion of relics was based on the cult of the physical remains of Buddha Shakyamuni. In the earliest Buddhist period in India the cult of bodily relics predominated. However, different opinions existed regarding the cult of bodily relics and the presence of the Buddha in samsara. Thus according to one school of thought, the

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328 Bentor 2003: 22.
329 Ibid.
330 Interview with the abbot of the central khurul in Elista Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
332 See Bentor 2003: 28. Tsha tshas are miniature stupas, usually made of clay. The term tsha tsha will be discussed further in the chapter.
333 Bentor 2003.
334 As has been mentioned in the previous chapter, the first Buddhist stupas were built to enshrine the Buddha’s corporeal remains and the objects that had been used by the Buddha (see Snodgrass 1985: 354; Bu-ston The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet. Translated from Tibetan by Dr. E. Obermiller 1932: 59; Chandra 1988: xxvi-xxvii).
335 The corporeal remains of other prominent Buddhist characters, e.g. the Buddha’s disciples, were also worshiped as relics (Bentor 2003: 22).
Buddha, having passed into nirvana, left nothing behind; others stated that the Buddha was present in his corporeal remains. These contradictory views were reconciled by the theory of the multiple bodies of the Buddha, according to which the Buddha’s physical body was distinguished from his body of teaching, i.e. the Dharma.

Religious scriptures in the form of sutras and dhāranis were also enclosed in stupas in the early Buddhist period, because according to certain doctrinal precepts, the presence of the Buddha is regarded as being located in his teachings. Therefore, Mahayana Buddhism is characterized by the cult of book.341

The Tibetan concept of relics was derived from the Indian Buddhist tradition. However, in Tibet this concept was further developed. According to Yael Bentor, Tibetan written sources give threefold, fourfold, and fivefold classifications of relics.

The most frequently used Tibetan term for the notion of ‘relics’ is ring bsrel. Jäschke translates ring bsrel as “things which are to be preserved for a long time”, “relics of a Buddha or a saint”, “small, hard particles, the remnants of burnt bones”. Thus the expression ring bsrel has general and specific meanings. In its general meaning, ring bsrel is a collective name for all types of relics; in its narrower specific usage it is short for yungs ‘bru lta bu’i ring bsrel or ‘relics which are like mustard seeds’, these constitute a separate category. ‘Mustard-seeds-like’ relics are small round substances, which are said to appear

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336 For a more detailed discussion see Bentor 1995: 249-250.
337 The doctrine of three main bodies of the Buddha, according to which the Buddha has the Dharma-body (dharmakaya), the Glorious Body (sambhogakaya) “in which Buddhas teach in pure Buddha realms”, and the Transformation Body (nirmanakaya), i.e. the assumed physical form (Snellgrove 1987: 116).
338 Dharanis (gzungs) are longer mantras used in different rituals, meditation practices and relic cults etc. (Snellgrove 87: 122). The practice of the installation of dharani and its role in stupa consecration is discussed in the next chapter.
339 Thus according to some Buddhist sutras, for e.g. the Suvarnaprabhasottama Sutra, the true nature of the Buddha is the body of his teachings, i.e. dharmakaya (Bentor 2003: 25).
341 See Schopen 1975. The cult of book and the role of Buddhist scriptures in consecration rituals will be discussed in the following chapter.
343 Bentor 2003: 35. There are not many discrepancies in the concept of relics and in the practices of their insertion between different schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, similar practices of depositing relics in stupas are found in other Buddhist countries (e.g. in China, Korea, Japan), see ibid: 26.
344 A threefold classification of relics was given by Mkhas grub rje (1385-1438) (Bentor 1994: 16-17).
345 This classification is more common in Tibetan literature since the 13th century, for instance in the works of the Fifth Dalai Lama, the First Panchen Lama, etc (ibid).
346 For a detailed description and comparison of these classifications see Bentor 1994 or Bentor 2003: 24-26.
on other relics or sacred objects. These substances are characterized by the capacity to multiply, and therefore there is a possibility to enshrine the relics of late teachers in receptacles constructed nowadays. This type of relics must be deposited in the upper part of the stupa. Bentor assumes that this category of relics did not have precedents in India.

‘Relics which are like mustard seeds’ are distinguished from the category of bodily relics (sku gdung), which comprises the physical remains of the Buddha and of other important Buddhist personages.

Another type is ‘relics of contact and association’ (sku bal gyi ring bsrel), which include hair, nails, teeth, objects that came in contact or were used by a holy person (e.g. clothes, towels, sitting cushions, handprints, etc.) and blessed substances (such as pill or pellets blessed by superior lamas). The relics of contact are installed in accordance with the parts of the body they came in contact with.

Among the relics of association are stones, wood, earth, and water from the holy Buddhist places (e.g. in India, Tibet, and Mongolia). Parts or ruins of sacred stupas, temples, statues as well as destroyed scriptures are also enshrined in receptacles as relics of association. Bentor includes statues, images, thangkas, and mandalas in this category.

A very important category are the Dharma-relics (chos kyi ring bsrel). This includes scriptures of Sutras and Tantras, commentaries by Indian and Tibetan teachers, dharanis (gzungs), mantras (sngags), the verse of Interdependent Origination, and ‘name mantras’ (mtshan sngags) rendering the essence of Buddhas and lamas. Most of the
interior space of Tibetan stupas and statues is filled with these relics. In Tibetan stupas, the scriptures are placed according to their canonical hierarchy. Moreover, damaged religious books should not be thrown away, but installed in receptacles.

Another category of relics distinguished in the fivefold classifications includes smaller stupas and tsha tshas. This category is called ‘relics of the dharmakaya’ (chos kyi sku’i ring bsrel), because stupas and tsha tsha symbolize the dharmakaya.

Jäschke translated the word tsha tsha as “little images of Buddha, and conical figures, moulded of clay and used at sacrifices”. Bentor defines tsha tshas as “miniature stupas made of clay with the help of a mould”. Tucci quotes several definitions of this term. According to Tucci, tsha tshas are small images made of earth and water, which can be mixed with barley or wheat for the purpose of good harvest or simply because these grains are used in consecration of these images. Tsha tsha can have the form of a stupa or can be of a roundish shape with a seal pressed of it, as a rule this seal has an image of a stupa or a Buddhist deity. Sometimes physical remains are mixed with clay and made into tsha tsha, in this case tsha tsha is also a reliquary of bodily relics. Moreover, tsha tsha is also a receptacle of the Dharma-relics, because mantras are either impressed on them with a seal or attached to them.

The practice of installation of tsha tshas in receptacles began about the seventh century in India and was adopted in Tibet (ibid: 26). Tucci, following Foucher, connects the spread of tsha tsha with the Buddhist tradition of pilgrimage to sacred places, assuming that tsha tshas were made as souvenirs for pilgrims in remembrance of holy places or the sacred Buddhist monuments. However, Tucci suggests other possible origins of tsha tsha in

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363 Thus Tantras and commentaries of the Highest Yoga Tantra are deposited above the heart in the upper part of stupas, the Lower Tantras are placed below the heart, Sutras and Vinaya scriptures are placed in the crossed legs part. Dharanis and mantras are placed in bum pa (‘the treasure vase’) according to their function and the ranking of the teaching to which they belong (ibid: 31-32).
364 Ibid.
368 Bentor 2003: 25.
370 Ibid.
373 Tucci 1988: 57.
Tibet: they could be made to create merit if there was no possibility and means for monuments of larger size. 375

In Tibetan literature relics are ranked as high, middle and low. 377 The most important relics are considered to be the bodily relics and the Dharma-relics. 378 However, Mkhas grub rje, the author of the threefold classification of relics and the Gelugpa authors ranked the relics of the Dharma as the highest. 379 In some cases the Tibetan word *gzungs* is used to refer to all types of relics. 380 This usage reflects the significance that *dharanis* or *gzungs* possess in the Tibetan tradition of relic cult and stupa consecration.

All the above-mentioned categories of relics are installed in the *bum pa* (‘the vase’) or in the upper part of a receptacle. The lower part of stupas, i.e. the pedestals, also contains deposits: various substances, such as herbs, stones, grains, food, wool, etc. Being necessary elements of the stupa content, the deposits of the pedestals are not considered to be relics, but function as offerings to deities and spirits or as ‘omens’ for pragmatic benefits. 382

**The content of stupas built in Kalmykia after the Soviet period**

Nowadays the Kalmyks are actively indulged in extensive construction of stupas and statues, which have become so popular in contemporary Kalmykia that even some lay people erect stupas in their yards. Since the Gelugpa is the most important school of Buddhism in Kalmykia, most suburgans are built under the Gelugpa supervision. Nevertheless, other schools of Tibetan Buddhism also construct suburgans. Though the present analysis is mainly based on the Gelugpa suburgans, the sacred monuments of other Tibetan Buddhist schools are also discussed.

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375 Ibid: 57. It is also believed that merit can be created even by drawing a stupa or making its miniature copy (ibid: 32).
376 For example, in the *Byang chub Snying po Rgyan*, which is regarded as the main authority for relic classifications in Tibet (Bentor 1994: 20-23)
377 Ibid: 16.
378 Ibid: 20. In the early Buddhist period Indian receptacles contained these types of relics (see also Bentor 1995: 258).
379 See Bentor 1994: 16, 19. Tucci, having investigated hundreds of stupas in Tibet, came to the conclusion that Tibetan stupas “have no funerary character”, because he did not find stupas constructed on the bodily relics (Tucci 1988: 26).
380 In its specific meaning *gzungs* means the same as *dharani*, i.e. “spells, magic sentences; they are for the most part short, and always end in a string of Sanskrit syllables” (*Tibetan-English Dictionary* by Jäschke 1934: 495).
381 The examples of this usage can be seen in the names of some rituals such as *gzungs gzhug* ‘the insertion of relics’ (Bentor 1994: 19) or *gzungs sgrub* ‘the empowerment of relics’ (interviews with ritual experts in Kalmykia, June-July 2008).
The concept of relics and the content of suburgans in contemporary Kalmykia are modeled on the Tibetan Buddhist tradition however, there are some minor peculiarities.

The construction of a suburgan consists of three stages, each stage being accompanied by the installation of items: hence there are three levels of relic installation. The ingredients deposited in the first two levels are not considered to be relics, but regarded as offerings to various landscape deities, such as earth deities (sa yi lha), serpent deities (naga, klu), and wealth deities (nor lha). The deposits of the pedestals are perceived as ‘omens’ for mundane purposes, such as wealth, good health and harvest, communal luck or fortune, etc.

The content of suburgans in present day Kalmykia and the process of relic deposition will be described and analyzed on the example of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord, which was built in Elista in 2008 with the aim to stop constant fights between the city gangs. This suburgan is a typical example of contemporary Kalmyk Buddhist architecture. It belongs to “the stupa of enlightenment” type; it is about 6.5 m high; the pedestal is decorated with the traditional ornament.

The construction of the suburgan began in May 2008; the final consecration (rab gnas) and the opening of the monument took place on October 12, 2008. During the time of my fieldwork in Kalmykia (June-July 2008), I was able to observe the process of relics installation of the first and the second levels. The deposition of relics (gzungs gzhug or

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383 For a detailed classification of landscape deities see Samuel 1993: 176.
384 Bentor 2003: 33-34.
gzungs 'bul) was performed by the Gelugpa monks from the central khurul, The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni in Elista. The ritual master in charge of this suburgan was Tupten Shakya (Thub bstan Shakya), a Tibetan monk working in the central khurul in Elista.

I will follow the construction of this stupa level by level, describing the items for installation, the ceremony, and providing the explanation of the functions of the deposited items.386

The first level of the installation of relics

The installation of relics in the first level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord in Elista took place in May; consequently I was not able to observe this ceremony. However, from the interviews with Tupten Shakya, with Baatr Mangaev, the head of the Kalmyk Buddhist center “Tilopa”, who assisted in the construction of the suburgan and with Dordzhinov, one of the sponsors of the construction, I learned that in the first level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord the following items were deposited: three ‘treasure vases’ (g.yang bum) with earth, sand and pebbles from the Erdeni Dzu monastery in Mongolia and from Dharamsala; weapons (a bow, arrows, a saber, and a rifle); farming tools (a spade and a rake); five jars with five types of wool (of horse, dog, cow, sheep, and goat); five types of grains (rice, lentil, sunflower seeds, barley and peas) and incense.

The first level of the suburgan comprises the foundation of the monument and the first base up to the ‘lion throne’.387 At the base of the suburgan three ‘treasure vases’ (g.yang bum) are deposited.388 The ingredients of these vases are meant to subdue the local deities.389 Thus in The Stupa of Harmony and Accord these vases of the first level are filled with soil, sand, and pebbles from the Erdeni Dzu monastery in Mongolia and from Dharamsala, because these places are viewed as holy.

The first level of most Kalmyk suburgans contains weapons. As a rule these are traditional weapons that had been used among the Mongols, such as bows, arrows, spears, and sabres. Thus in the four pinnacle suburgans on the gallery of The Golden Abode of

385 This picture was taken from the site www.buddhisminkalmykia.ru
386 Most information with regard to the symbolism and functions of the deposited items was given to me by the ritual expert in charge of the stupa, Tupten (Thub bstan) Shakya and the abbot of The Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni Khurul, Andzha-gelong during several interviews in June-July 2008.
388 Similar practice is observed in Tibet; see Bentor 2003: 33.
Buddha Shakyamuni Khurul there are Mongolian and Dagestan sabres decorated with precious stones presented by the president of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov. 390 In Kalmykia, the weapons installed in suburgans are perceived as offering to the warriors of Bumba. 391 Sometimes contemporary guns and rifles are deposited. Thus the first level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord contains a rifle. The weapons placed under the suburgans are perceived as omens for peace, protecting from wars and conflicts. 392 Bentor also mentions the practice of depositing weapons under stupas in Tibet, explaining that the use of weapons is “neutralized under the weight of the stupa”. 393

Farming tools and implements, such as spades, shovels, rakes, hoes, etc. are usually deposited in the first level for obtaining good harvest. 394

According to an old Kalmyk custom, the first level of a suburgan must contain five jars with five types of wool: of horse, dog, cow, sheep, and goat. Kalmykia is a steppe, and a person is considered to be wealthy if he has all these five kinds of animals. Therefore, five types of wool are installed as offerings to the local deities and as omens for prosperity and healthy livestock. 395 Though Kalmykia has always been famous for camel breeding, the camel wool is not deposited in suburgans. 396

Five types of groats are obligatory deposits for the Kalmyk suburgans. The usual grains for deposition in Kalmykia are wheat, barley, mustard, rye, rice, buckwheat, dried peas, sunflower seeds, or lentil, of which only five are selected for deposition. In Kalmyk stupas grain can be placed either in the first or the second level. Grain is believed to be an omen of good harvest and fertility, it is meant to ward off crop failure and famine. 397 In the first level of a suburgan groats can also function as offerings to the local deities, mainly ‘earth-owner’ spirits (sa bdag). 398

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390 Interview with Sanal Kukuev, the emchi of the central khurul, June 2008, Elista.
391 Bumba is the legendary country in the Kalmyk epos, the Kalmyk variant of Shambhala (ibid.).
392 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
393 Bentor 2003: 34.
394 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista. Bentor also mentions about the installation of “farming utensils for increasing crops” in Tibet (see Bentor 2003: 34).
395 Interview with Baatr Mangaev, June, 2008, Elista.
396 Ibid.
397 According to the observation of the second level of relic installation and an interview with Dorzhinov, one of the lay sponsors of the project, July 2008, Elista.
398 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
As I was told, each level is usually strewn with herbs, herbal incense is believed to pacify the local deities and to purify and bless the interior space of the stupa.

The second level of the installation of relics

Fieldwork observation of the installation of relics within the second level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord, June 19, 2008

The relics installation in the second level in The Stupa of Harmony and Accord took place on June 19, 2008. The ceremony began at 10 am. Three monks performed the ritual of depositing the relics; and about ten lay people assisted in the process, among them was the sponsor of the construction, Dordzhinov. Lay believers also gathered at the site of the construction.

Each stage of the installation of ingredients in a stupa receives lively attention from the local media, being treated as a big festive event in the republic. Thus journalists from local radio stations, newspapers and television arrived to observe the relic deposition. The same evening a report about the ceremony was broadcasted on the local TV channel.

The president of Kalmykia, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, also attended this event and even participated in the process of the relic installation. The president of Kalmykia takes active part in important religious events of Kalmykia.

A wooden table was put on the pedestal of the future stupa, it was covered with a red cloth and the ingredients for deposition were placed on the table. These ingredients included: five ‘treasure vases’ (g.yang bum) filled with precious substances (pearls, turquoise, copper,

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399 Interview with Baatr Mangaev, June 2008, Elista.
400 In Kalmykia this herbal incense is called sangin idan.
silver and aluminium), several glass jars with food (salt, sugar, honey, dried fruit, and sunflower seeds), fresh fruit (bananas, pineapples), and a plastic bag with herbs (a mixture of quitch grass, kusha grass, and wormwood grass). Dordzhinov showed me a fragment of the ‘lotus seat’ from the destroyed suburgan in Erdeni Dzu monastery, this item was also brought for installation.

When all the ingredients were ready on the table, the monks sat on the cornice around the opening in the stupa in which the deposits should be put. Lay assistants were passing objects to the monks and the monks were placing the items inside the stupa. After each category of objects (jars with food, ‘treasure vases’, etc) was inserted, the monks chanted; each chanting lasted approximately twenty minutes.

Dordzhinov passed a glass jar in which lay believers put money; this jar was also deposited in the lotus seat the same day. Some people even gave jewellery to be placed in the stupa. Among lay Kalmyks there is a belief that if a person puts some money or any item of his belongings in the ‘lion throne’ of a suburgan, the ‘refund’ will be tenfold.

When all the items for the second level were deposited, the monks, still sitting on the cornice, chanted for about twenty minutes. The whole process of installation occupied about three hours.

At the end of the ceremony a table with refreshments was laid for all who were present. Girls in traditional Kalmyk costumes served Kalmyk tea (boiled in milk with butter, salt and pepper) and borts (small buns fried in fat).

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401 Interview with Dordzhinov, June 2008, Elista.
402 Though as the abbot of the central khurul, Andzha-gelong said, such selfish intentions of laity are wrong, because when assisting in stupa construction people should think about the benefit for all sentient beings on the
Explanation

The second level of suburgans includes the ‘lion throne’ and the cornice up to the support of the bum pa. All the ingredients of the second level are meant to bring prosperity through the increase in all of these deposited items for the builders and sponsors of the stupa as well as for all the worshippers and the entire community.

Five ‘treasure vases’ (g.yang bum) with five precious substances (rin po che lnga) should be installed at this stage. The five precious substances (gold, silver, turquoise, pearls, and copper; sometimes aluminium instead of gold or silver) are deposited in the ‘lion throne’ as offerings to the deities of wealth (nor lha) in order to bring well-being and prosperity to the whole community. The number five is not accidental; scholars of Tibetan Buddhism described the practice of depositing five kinds of five different substances (Inga tshan lnga) in Tibetan stupas: five kinds of precious gems, metals, herbs, grains, scents. In Kalmykia, though, it does not necessarily have to be five times five. As a rule several jars with salt, sugar, honey, dried fruit, and spices are placed at the second level. Herbs are also added to this level, placed either in glass jars or powdered on top of the other ingredients. As a rule these are the Kalmyk steppe herbs, as well as quitch grass and kusha grass.

The second level of Kalmyk suburgans can contain not only items functioning as offerings and omens, but the relics proper. Usually these are the relics of contact and association. Thus the ‘lion throne’ of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord contains the ‘lotus seat’ fragment of the destroyed suburgan from Erdeni Dzu monastery. However, the
deposition of relics in pedestals contradicts Tibetan tradition, according to which the relics proper should be separated from the content of the pedestals.411

The third level of the installation of relics

Fieldwork observation of the installation of relics within the third level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord, July 3, 2008

The installation of relics in the third level of The Stupa of Harmony and Accord took place on July 3, 2008, i.e. two weeks after the second level had been filled. The ceremony began at 10 am. As usually, reporters from the local television arrived at the construction site. This time the president did not attend the ceremony, however, the president’s twenty-year-old son was assisting in the process. The ritual of relics deposition was performed by four monks with Tupten Shakya in charge.

The items for deposition were placed on the table in front of the suburgan. Among the objects for installation I could see a pile of books in Tibetan style (dpe cha), i.e. made of long unbound strips of paper in imitation of Indian and Tibetan manuscripts. I was allowed to see these books; they included about ten copies of the *Diamond sutra* in Old Kalmyk, Modern Kalmyk and Russian and several copies of the *Refuge vow* in Old Kalmyk. I also saw western type volumes of the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* (*Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa in Russian. Several CDs with commentaries on the *Refuge vow* by Shalva Gegan were prepared for the deposition. A great number of plastic bags and carton boxes with paper scrolls wrapped in yellow cloth were brought; these were the *dharanis* for the installation.

The ceremony began with the preparation of the ‘tree of life’ or *srog shing*: a thin wooden pole about three meters long; it has four sides narrowing towards the top; its summit is pointed. The tree was painted dark red and covered with inscriptions in golden paint and pictures of stupas. Before its deposition the ‘tree of life’ was

411 Bentor 2003: 33.
wrapped in red material, the threads of five colours (red, green, white, blue, and yellow) were wound around the tree, and two long blades of grass (ku sha and ram pa) were attached to it from two different sides. During the preparation some lay people paid homage to the srog shing by bowing and saying the six-syllable mantra (Om ma ni pad me hum). Then several scrolls with mantras were taped in ten rows around the ‘life-tree’ from the middle upwards. A white silk offering scarf (kha bdags) was tied on the ‘life-tree’ above the scrolls. Then the monks chanted, blessing the srog shing.

The first items deposited in the third level were paper circles (about 1m in diameter each) with various depictions. In Kalmykia these round drawings are called mandalas or ‘wheels’ (’khor lo). The first ‘wheel’ had crossed vajras drawn on it, the second had the depiction of the eight auspicious signs, and the third had the image of Ganesha (Tshogs bdag). The paper circles put on top were glued together; consequently it was impossible to see the images portrayed on them. As I was told, these were the mandalas of Vaishravana (Gnod sbyin pho) and his consort (Gnod spyin mo) smeared with honey and fixed together in such a way that the deities face each other.

The ‘tree of life’ was placed on the wheels in the center of the receptacle from the ‘lotus seat’ up to the umbrella.

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412 According to Tupten Shakya, the tree must be “dressed” in the same colour as the clothes of the monks (interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista).
413 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
The monks, sitting on the *bum pa* base, chanted for about 15 minutes over the *srog shing*. After the tree had been installed, the texts were placed inside the *bum pa* base in accordance with the proper order.\(^{414}\) When all texts were installed, the monks chanted for 15 minutes.

Then 5 000 *tsha tshas* with the stamped depiction of Tsongkhapa painted in red were deposited. The same suburgan contains 5 000 *tsha tshas* in the shape of stupa. Dordzhinov gave me one of these stupa shaped *tsha tshas* as a souvenir; therefore it is possible to give its detailed description. It is about ten centimeters high; on the sides of the *tsha tsha* there are 108 small images of all the eight fundamental types of stupas, placed along the four lines. Hence, there are 32 small stupas depicted in the first line from the bottom, 30 in the second, 26 in the third, and 20 in the fourth. On the top there are eight bigger figures of stupas of the eight types. At the bottom there is an inscription in Tibetan. This description coincides with the description of the *tsha tshas* from Western Tibet given by Tucci.\(^{415}\) Hence, the *tshas tsha* deposited in Kalmyk suburgans are moulded in accordance with the Tibetan tradition of *tsha tsha* making.

The stupa shaped *tsha tshas* were of five colours: red, blue, green, yellow, and white, the same colours as those of the threads wound around the ‘tree of life’. All the white *tsha tshas* were placed in the middle, the *tsha tshas* of other colours were put on the sides, each colour occupying a particular side. All the space left after the deposition of relics was filled with herbs powdered on top of *tsha tshas*. This was followed by the monks chanting.

At the end of the ceremony it began to drizzle, which was treated by the ritual master, Tupten Shakya, as a very auspicious sign. After the process of relic deposition was over,

\(^{414}\) The order of the texts within a receptacle is discussed in the next chapter.

\(^{415}\) Tucci 1988: 106, No. 148, Pl. XLI.
traditional Kalmyk tea and pastry was served as usually. The whole ceremony lasted for about four hours.

**Explanation**

The third level consists of the base of the *bum pa*, the *bum pa* and the uppermost part of the stupa. It is the level where the relics proper are deposited in accordance with the tradition of Tantric Buddhism. As has been observed, the relic installation of the third level begins with the deposition of the ‘wheels’ or mandalas (*khor lo*) in the ‘lotus throne’. These ‘wheels’ function as auspicious omens for mundane purposes, increasing that which is desired and warding off whatever is inauspicious and undesired. The ‘wheels’ are inserted in every stupa and statue regardless of the size of a receptacle. In Kalmyk stupas constructed under the supervision of the Gelugpa monks, five ‘wheels’ drawn on paper are placed under the ‘tree of life’.  

Firstly, the ‘wheel’ of crossed *vajras* (*rdo rje rgya gram ’khor*) is placed. Double or cross-formed *vajra* is perceived in Kalmykia as the symbol of firmness and indestructibility, therefore having been installed in a receptacle, the wheel of crossed *vajras* transmits its indestructibility to the receptacle.  

Secondly, the ‘wheel’ of the eight auspicious signs (*bkra shis rtags brgyad*) is inserted, on top of which the ‘wheel’ of Ganesha (*Tshogs bdag ’khor lo*) is placed. Ganesha performs several functions in the pantheon of Tibetan Buddhism, acting as a worldly deity of
wealth and prosperity (in this function Tshogs bdag is similar to Vaishravana) and also as a deity of wisdom destroying obstacles on the path to Enlightenment.  

Finally, the wheel of Vaishravana (Gnod sbyin pho 'khor lo) glued together with the wheel of Vaishravana’s consort (Gnod spyin mo) is put on top of the other wheels. Vaishravana, known in the three divine variants as Vaishravana, Kubera, and Jambhala, is a Buddhist god of wealth, who is believed to guard and bestow treasures and prosperity (Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975: 68). The front sides of the male and female ‘wheels’ are glued together with honey. Often all the ‘wheels’ are smeared with honey and tied with five threads of different colours (white, red, blue, yellow, and green).

The most important element of the stupas, statues, and prayer drums is the ‘tree of life’ (srog shing). It is installed in the centre of a receptacle from the lotus seat up to the umbrella. The length of the ‘tree of life’ depends on the height of a receptacle, but even very small stupas must have a srog shing. All the ‘life force’ (srog) and sacred power of the stupa is believed to be concentrated in the ‘tree of life’. According to Tibetan views, a person consists of five factors: srog or the ‘life essence’, bla or the ‘spirit essence’, lus or the body, dbang tang or the ‘power of destiny’ and luck or rlung rta; death is understood as the destruction of the ‘life force’ or srog. Hence the srog shing can be compared to the heart of the stupa. The stupa structure is equated with the Buddhist path to Enlightenment and the enlightened mind of the Buddha. Hence, the ‘tree of life’ symbolizes “the ten knowledges” that constitute the essence of the enlightened mind.

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422 The symbolism of these five colours will be discussed further in this chapter.
423 Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
424 See Mumford 1989: 156. According to the Kalmyk folk-religious views, a person consists of three elements: the ‘life force’ (amn), the body and the consciousness (sumsn) (see Bakaeva 2003).
427 The ten knowledges are “knowledge of law, of others’ thought, of connection, empiric knowledge, knowledge of suffering, of its origin, of its cessation, of the way conducive to such a cessation, knowledge of things doomed to disappearance, knowledge of non-production of things” (Tucci 1988: 42).
The *srog shing* is made of coniferous wood, which must be dried and painted one colour (as a rule the colour is either brown or dark red). Each side of the ‘tree of life’ corresponds to one of the four directions of space; that is why it is necessary to mark the eastern side when a tree is felled. Each side of the *srog shing* is covered with texts written in gold paint or golden, depending on the sponsors. Moreover, different texts are inscribed on each of the four sides, because the texts should correspond with the direction they face, i.e. there are particular texts for the North, the South, the East, and the West. At the bottom of each side a *vajra* as a symbol of indestructibility is depicted; at the top of each side the stupa of Rnam rgyal ma (Ushnishavijaya) is drawn.

As has already been mentioned, in Tantric Buddhism the stupa can be indentified, on the one hand, with the body of the universe, and on the other hand, the stupa is identified with the Buddha’s body (and also with the human body). Thus microcosmically, the ‘tree of life’ and the two blades of grass (*ku sha* and *ram pa*) tied to it from different sides correspond to the three channels or nerves (Tib. *rtsa*) in the body. The *srog shing* stands for the central channel or the pneumatic spine of a person. In Tibetan the central channel or vein is called *rtsa dbu ma*, it is believed to be light blue. The left channel is called *rkyang ma*, it is white (male); and the right-side vein is *ro ma*, which is red (female).

Macrococsmically, the tree of life symbolizes Mount Meru. According to Buddhist cosmology, the ‘wheels’ (*’khor lo*) under the ‘tree of life’ symbolize the plane of earth, which explains why the ‘wheels’ serve mainly mundane purposes, while the sun on the summit of the stupa is perceived as the pure realms.

Of special importance for the consecration of the Buddhist receptacles in contemporary Kalmykia are the Dharma-relics, i.e. religious scriptures and *gzungs* (mantras,

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428 The sides of the *srog shing* should coincide with the directions that the conifer had before it was cut down (interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista).
429 Ibid. The discussion of the texts inscribed on the ‘tree of life’ is included in the following chapter.
430 Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
431 See Dasgupta 1974: 153-158.
432 Snodgrass 1985: 179. For a detailed discussion of the symbolism of the center pillar see Snodgrass 1985: 163-188.
433 Microcosmically, the ‘wheels’ (*’khor lo*) are identified with the lowest cakra (Snodgrass 1985: 179).
The texts are deposited together with the srog shing; a very strict order of text installation must be observed.\textsuperscript{436}

The relics of the dharmakaya are always deposited in Kalmyk Buddhist receptacles. In contemporary Kalmykia tsha tshas of two types are installed: in the shape of stupa and of a roundish shape impressed with an image of a Buddhist deity. The latter type is sometimes called mird or mirde, though in the Kalmyk language mird originally means ‘amulet’ or ‘talisman’.\textsuperscript{437} The number of the installed tsha tshas depends on the size of a receptacle, because all the space of the third level left after the deposition of other relics must be filled with tsha tshas. In the Kalmyk Gelugpa tradition tsha tshas with the impressed images of Tsongkhapa and Tara are the most common.

As has been observed at the site of the relic installation, before being installed, the tsha tshas are painted in five colours (red, blue, white, yellow, and green). The colour symbolism is connected with the Five Tathagatas. The stupas built by the schools of Tibetan Buddhism are identified with a mandala, i.e. they express the mandala of the Five Supreme Buddhas.\textsuperscript{438} The Five Tathagatas emanate from the five kinds of knowledge of Vajrasattva.\textsuperscript{439} These five Supreme Buddhas are described in the Tantras with their consorts.\textsuperscript{440} Each Tathagata Buddha presides over one of the five aggregates; each has a particular colour, a particular Bodhisattva, a human Buddha, a mantra; each is associated with one of the five sense-organs; each rules over a particular direction, etc.\textsuperscript{441}

Thus Vairocana (‘the Brilliant’)\textsuperscript{442} is in the centre and has the white colour; Akshobhya (‘the Unshakable’) rules over the East and has the blue colour; Ratnasambhava (‘Jewel Birth’) is yellow and is in the South; Amitabha (‘Infinite Light’) is red and presides in the West; and Amoghasiddhi (‘Attainment that is not Void’) is green and rules in the North.\textsuperscript{443}

\textsuperscript{435} Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{436} The next chapter is devoted to a detailed discussion of the religious texts deposited in contemporary Kalmyk stupas.
\textsuperscript{438} Snodgrass 1985: 135. The five Tathagatas are also called the Jina Buddhas (‘the Buddhas of Victory’) (ibid).
\textsuperscript{439} Dasgupta 1974: 84-85.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid: 86.
\textsuperscript{441} This associative list is rather long and complicated. See the table of correspondences in Dasgupta 1974: 87.
\textsuperscript{442} The translation of the names of the five deities is taken from Snodgrass 1985: 135.
\textsuperscript{443} See Dasgupta 1974: 87; Snodgrass 1985: 135.
In correspondence with the Supreme Buddhas, the red *tsha tsha* are placed in the West, the green in the North, the yellow in the South, the blue in the East, and the white are deposited in the centre of the receptacles. In this way the presence of the Tathagatas is located in the stupa.

**Concluding considerations on the concept of relics in present day Kalmykia**

We can assume that the same relic categories distinguished by Bentor in the Tibetan tradition can be found in Kalmykia. However, the content of the Kalmyk receptacles varies from monument to monument, depending on the possibilities of the community. The more money is invested in the stupa building project, the more relics can be obtained.\(^{444}\)

Some stupas in Kalmykia enshrine all categories of relics. Thus The Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista\(^{445}\) constructed in 1999 by the Karma Kagyu branch contains some mustard-seed like relics (*yungs 'bru lta bu'i ring bsrel*) of Buddha Kasyapa.\(^{446}\) This suburgan also enshrines many valuable relics of contact and association, such as a piece of material in which the *Prajnaparamita* texts brought to people by Nagarjuna from the land of *nagas* had been wrapped; a bead from the rosary of the 14th Karma-pa; a hair of the 15th Karma-pa; a piece of the garment of the 16th Karma-pa; some soil from Lumbini.\(^{447}\) This construction project had several foreign sponsors\(^{448}\) who provided the possibility to obtain all these valuable relics.

The Stupa of Enlightenment and Suppression of Negative Energy in Iki-Burul built in 2004 by the Kalmyk branch of the Nyingma school also contains bodily relics, even the mustard-seed-like relics of Buddha Shakyamuni from the stupa in Vaisali.\(^{449}\) These relics were brought to Kalmykia from Japan and presented to the abbot of Iki-Burul *khurul* to be

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\(^{444}\) It is mainly the laity who is responsible for the financial side (interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista).
\(^{445}\) It is the first stupa erected on the territory of the Russian Federation after the “non-religious” period.
\(^{446}\) Interview with Baatr Mangaev, July 2008, Elista.
\(^{447}\) Lumbini is the Buddha’s birthplace, situated at the foothills of the Himalayas in modern Nepal. The information about the content of the Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista was obtained from the interview with Baatr Mangaev, the head of the Buddhist centre “Tilopa” in Elista, July 2008.
\(^{448}\) Among the sponsors of the construction of this suburgan were Ole Nydal and Shamar Rinpoche (*Izvestiya Kalmykii* 28 July 1999.)
\(^{449}\) This stupa is one of the eight stupas with the corporeal remains of the Buddha.
enclosed in a suburgan.⁴⁵⁰ The stupa in Iki-Burul contains the bodily relics of other important Buddhist personages: e.g. the mustard-seed-like relics of Buddha Kashyapa and of ‘Phags-pa Lama.⁴⁵¹

Many contemporary Kalmyk suburgans (i.e. built after the 1990s) do not contain bodily relics, as they are difficult to acquire. Therefore, the most important relics in the stupa consecration in Kalmykia are religious scriptures and mantras. However, if a suburgan does not enclose all types of relics, it is not regarded as less powerful or less sacred. All Kalmyk Buddhist monuments are viewed as objects of deep veneration and the focus of worship.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ According to the account given by the khurul abbot Padma Sherab, the stupa in Vaisali was partially destroyed during the Arab invasion in India; nevertheless, the shariram was saved by the descendants of the Shakya clan and presented to a Japanese monk. Thus the relics came to Japan (interview with Padma Sherab, July 2008, Iki-Burul).
⁴⁵¹ The Sakya master ‘Phags-pa Lama (1235-80) was the Mongol’s vassal ruler of Tibet under Kublai Khan (Snellgrove, Richardson 1980: 148-149).
⁴⁵² Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
Chapter 5

The practice of depositing Tibetan religious texts in stupas and images in contemporary Kalmykia and its Indo-Tibetan origin

The Mahayana cult of the book inherited by the Kalmyk Mongols

The veneration of scriptures as relics is rooted in Mahayana Buddhism. Though this chapter is primarily devoted to the practice of depositing religious texts in stupas and statues in Kalmykia after the Soviet period, it seems necessary to give a brief overview of the Mahayana cult of the book.

In the early Buddhist period the cult of bodily relics dominated; however, Mahayana brought important cultic innovations based on the corpus of Mahayana literature. Gregory Schopen has analyzed a number of the early and middle Mahayana sutras and noticed that all these texts consist for the most part of self-praise, describing their own sacred power and the great benefit gained by reciting, writing, copying and venerating them.

These sutras proclaim their own significance by locating the presence of the Buddha in the text of his teachings. The scriptures are regarded as the true body of the Buddha, because the Buddha attained Enlightenment through his teachings. Thus the Lotus Sutra equates its text with the presence of “the entire Tathagata-body” and recommends enshrining copies of the sutra in stupas. Moreover, according to the Lotus Sutra, bodily relics are not necessarily to be deposited in the stupa if it contains a copy the sutra, as it is the equivalent of corporeal relics. In some Mahayana sutras the cult of the book is presented as being superior to the cult of bodily relics and the merit gained from the worship of scriptures is

453 Bentor 2003: 22; Schopen 2005: 42.
454 Ibid. See also Gombrich 1990: 29; Lopez 1995: 41.
455 Of special importance for his analysis are Vajracchedika or the Diamond Sutra; Saddharmapundarika or the Lotus Sutra; Astasahasrika (see Schopen 2005).
456 Ibid: 35.
458 For a detailed analysis of the quotations from the sutra see Schopen 2005: 38-42.
460 Schopen bases the idea of the superiority of the cult of the book on the example of the Astasahasrika-Prajnaparamita Sutra. He points out that the Mahayana cult of the book was modeled on the cult of bodily relics, the activities commended for the book worship being the same as those prescribed for the worship of the physical remains (Schopen 2005: 44).
said to be much greater than that accruing from the veneration of corporeal remains installed in stupas.\textsuperscript{461}

This idea is especially prominent in the \textit{dharani} sutras,\textsuperscript{462} according to which the deposition of either the entire text of a \textit{dharani} sutra or of the mantras taught in it creates the presence of the Buddha, because mantras are believed to encapsulate the entire teaching and are thus a substitute for bodily relics.\textsuperscript{463}

Schopen states that the Mahayana cult of the book had two stages: during the first stage (reflected in \textit{Vajracchedika}) the emphasis was on the oral transmission of sutras, whereas the second stage (reflected in \textit{Astrasahasrika} and \textit{Saddharmapundarika}) puts stress on the book in written form.\textsuperscript{464} So eventually it was the book as a physical object that should be worshipped with incense, perfumes, offerings, etc.\textsuperscript{465}

Consequently, religious scriptures began to be used in consecration rituals; and it is the physical presence of a sacred volume that sanctifies a receptacle, monument, or building.

The treatment of scriptures as the source of sacred power in Tibetan Buddhism was adopted by the Kalmyks.\textsuperscript{466}

With the creation of the Old Kalmyk script \textit{Todo bichig} (‘clear writing’) by Zaya Pandita in 1648\textsuperscript{467} the Kalmyks were able to get acquainted with Indo-Tibetan Buddhist literature, and Oirat and Kalmyk monks translated sutras, mainly from Tibetan.\textsuperscript{468} The Kalmyk Buddhist literary heritage is substantial. In the archives of the St. Petersburg branch of the Institute of Oriental studies there are some 400 manuscripts translated into the Kalmyk language.\textsuperscript{469} In Germany about 150 Kalmyk manuscripts of the 17\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries are to be found.\textsuperscript{470}

For the Mongols, writing, copying, learning by heart and reciting the Buddhist sutras was considered highly meritorious.\textsuperscript{471} Different texts were copied by the Mongol and

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid: 43.
\textsuperscript{462} It is the genre of Buddhist Mahayana literature dating the middle of the 1\textsuperscript{st} millennium C.E. The examples of such texts are the \textit{Guhyadhatu}, the \textit{Vimaloshnisha}, etc (see Bentor 1995: 252).
\textsuperscript{463} Ibid: 252-253.
\textsuperscript{464} Schopen 2005: 42.
\textsuperscript{465} Ibid: 35.
\textsuperscript{466} Muzraeva 2006: 153-155.
\textsuperscript{467} Erdniev 2007: 327.
\textsuperscript{468} Thus Zaya Pandita translated into \textit{Todo bichig} more than 180 volumes of Buddhist literature (Baskhaev, Dyakieva 2007: 50).
\textsuperscript{469} Erdniev 2007: 327-328.
\textsuperscript{470} Ibid: 328.
\textsuperscript{471} Muzraeva 2006: 153.
Kalmyk monks; some texts were up to 300 or 400 pages.\(^{472}\) It was even believed that copying and studying the sutras (for example the *Diamond Sutra*) could prevent a person from being reborn in the three lower realms.\(^{473}\)

Thus Pozdneev was surprised to find hundreds of copies of the same religious text in some Mongolian and Kalmyk monasteries in the 19\(^{th}\) century.\(^{474}\) The reason for this multitude of copies was the fact that it was written in the sutra that he who copied it would be reborn in the heavenly realm.\(^{475}\) The merit was believed to be equally gained by having somebody else write the text, therefore almost every well-to-do Mongol commissioned monks to copy the sacred text on his behalf.\(^{476}\)

The deposition of religious texts and mantras in suburgans was also practiced in pre-revolutionary Kalmykia. Even the pinnacle suburgans in *khuruls* contained sutras and mantras; especially frequent was the mantra *Om ma ni pad me hum.*\(^{477}\)

### The deposition of texts in suburgans in present day Kalmykia

The Buddhist canonical scriptures\(^{478}\) constitute the most important and numerous deposits in modern Kalmyk suburgans and statues. Different types of canonical texts can be installed: sutras (*mdo*),\(^{479}\) tantras (*rgyud*),\(^{480}\) commentaries, verses of auspiciousness, mantras (*sngags*),\(^{481}\) *dharanis* (*gzungs*),\(^{482}\) etc.

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\(^{472}\) Pozdneev 1993: 177.

\(^{473}\) This belief is reflected in the Kalmyk legends (*Семь звезд: калмыцкие легенды и пренадения* [Seven stars: the Kalmyk legends] 2007: 56-58).

\(^{474}\) Pozdneev 1993: 16.

\(^{475}\) Ibid: 16-17.

\(^{476}\) Ibid: 17. Though Pozdneev did not state what sutra it was, it may be assumed that it was either the *Diamond Sutra* or the *Golden Light Sutra*, as these two texts were the most widely diffused among Mongol Buddhists.

\(^{477}\) Pyurveev 1975: 62.

\(^{478}\) The Kalmyk Buddhist canon is the Tibetan *bKa’* ’gyur and *bsTan* ’gyur (commentaries and treatises of Indian and Tibetan monks and lamas). For a discussion of the contents and history of the Tibetan Buddhist canon see Harrison 1996; Cabezon, Jackson 1996: 22-28.

\(^{479}\) *Sutras* (*mdo*) are discourses delivered by the Buddha or his disciples; these texts are usually in the form of a dialogue between the Buddha and his disciples (such as Ananda, Subhuti, Shariputra) (Harrison 1996: 70).

\(^{480}\) *Tantras* (*rgyud*) are religious texts describing methods and practices for the realization of the supreme goal of enlightenment (Dasgupta 1974: 8).

\(^{481}\) Mantra is a common term covering a wide range of short pronouncements and ejaculations which from the emic point of view produce particular effect in proper ritual context (Snellgrove 1987: 122). Some of mantras can be translated; some present a string of unintelligible words and syllables. The use of mantras is based on the belief in the power of sounds, signs, and words beyond the conventional semantics (Dasgupta 1974: 54-55). It is the form, the correct pronunciation of sounds and the correct writing of the signs that is the most significant (ibid). For a detailed discussion of the nature of mantras see Dasgupta 1974: 54-62.

\(^{482}\) *Dharanis* (*gzungs*) are longer mantras used in rituals and meditation practices etc. (Snellgrove 1987: 122). According to Dasgupta, *dharani* literally means “that by which something is sustained or kept up (*dharyate anaya iti*)” (Dasgupta 1974: 56).
In the Mongolian languages including Kalmyk all Buddhist literature is called *nom*.\textsuperscript{483} This word is used in contemporary Kalmykia in reference to any type of religious text; serious attention to the theoretical distinction between the terms “mantra”, “dharani”, and “prayer” is not paid in Kalmykia.\textsuperscript{484}

**Buddhist books that are most frequently installed in Kalmyk suburgans**

Buddhist sutras and canonical treatises are always installed in stupas in Kalmykia, whereas prayer wheels contain only mantras and dharanis.

It is considered especially auspicious if all 108 volumes of the *bKa’ ‘gyur* are deposited. However, very few stupas in Kalmykia contain the whole canon, because due to various financial reasons the possibility to obtain and prepare 108 volumes is quite rare.\textsuperscript{485}

There are Buddhist texts that have been traditionally worshiped and honoured by the sangha and laity in Kalmykia, consequently, these books are very popular for installation in contemporary stupas.

One of the most revered Buddhist texts in Kalmykia is the *Diamond Sutra* or *Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra*. The Kalmyks got acquainted with this text in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, when it was translated from Tibetan into the Old Kalmyk script by Zaya-Pandita.\textsuperscript{486} By the 19\textsuperscript{th} century the *Diamond Sutra* had become so popular in Kalmykia that a copy of this text could be found in every house. Though very few people could read *Todo bichig* or Tibetan, the sutra was worshipped as the embodiment of the Buddha’s word.\textsuperscript{487}

In 1993 with the advent of religious revival the *Diamond Sutra* was published in Kalmykia in three languages: Old Kalmyk, Modern Kalmyk, and Russian. Several copies of the 1993 edition\textsuperscript{488} are deposited in almost every suburgan on the territory of the republic, especially in the receptacles built under the auspices of the Gelugpa school. Thus in the Stupa of Harmony and Accord about ten copies of the *Diamond Sutra* have been installed.

Another very popular Buddhist sutra in Kalmykia is the *Golden Light Sutra* or *Suvarnaprabhasottama sutra*. This text was also introduced among the Kalmyks in the 17\textsuperscript{th}

\textsuperscript{483} See Pozdneev 1993: 16.
\textsuperscript{484} In this thesis the terms mantra and dharani are for the most part interchangeable.
\textsuperscript{485} As far as I was informed, the stupa in Iki-Burul has all the 108 volumes of the *bKa’ ‘gyur* (interview with the abbot of Iki-Burul *khurul* Padma Sherab, July 2008, Iki-Burul).
\textsuperscript{486} *Izvestiya Kalmykii*, 16 October 1993.
\textsuperscript{487} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{488} This edition is in the Tibetan book style (*dpe cha*) and includes all three translations.
century, after it had been translated from Tibetan by Zaya-Pandita. The *Golden Light Sutra* is deposited in Tibetan and Russian versions in many Kalmyk stupas.

From an interview with Baatr Mongaev I learned that the *Heart Sutra* (the *Prajnaparamita Hrdaya*) is soon to be published in Kalmyk and Russian, which means that it will be available for the deposition in suburgans.

The text of the *Refuge vow* is also very often put in Kalmyk receptacles. Refuge wording is believed to be the first text translated into the Kalmyk language by Zaya-Pandita. A hand copy of this translation used to be in the house of every Kalmyk Buddhist before the persecution of religion in the Soviet period. In contemporary Kalmykia this text symbolizes the essence of Buddhism. As a rule it is put into a receptacle in the old Kalmyk script, sometimes Russian translation is also installed.

Since the Gelugpa school is very influential in Kalmykia, a very important Buddhist text is considered to be the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lam rim chen mo)* by Tsongkhapa. This work was published in five volumes in Russian in the 1990s. These volumes are frequently installed in stupas and placed on the *khurul* altars as the representation of the Buddha’s word. In Kalmykia *Lam rim chen mo* is believed to possess great power. Thus I was told by monks that this text should be learned by heart in order to improve one’s karma; moreover, if at the moment of death this text is put on the head of a dying person, this person is said to be reborn in the pure realms. Therefore, it is highly recommended to worship this scripture and even to make offerings to it; and it is considered very inauspicious to put it on the floor or under any other objects even if it is a statue of the Buddha.

The above-mentioned texts are at the same time the ones that are the most easily available in Kalmykia, which is another reason why they are so frequently installed in suburgans.

As was explained to me by Andzha-gelong, any Buddhist text can be deposited in a stupa; and it does not have to be paper book. CDs, memory sticks and similar devices with

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489 Interview with Baatr Mangaev, June 2008, Elista.
490 However, The Stupa of Harmony and Accord does not contain this text.
491 Interview with Baatr Mangaev, July 2008, Elista.
493 In The Stupa of Harmony and Accord several copies of the *Refuge in Todo bichig* were installed.
494 Interview with Arshi Chongonov, a monk from the central *khurul*, June 2008.
recorded canonical texts can be put in stupas with an equal degree of religious reverence. What matters most is the motivation of the people participating in stupa construction; it is the belief in the sacred nature of the text that plays a crucial role. A memory stick with 108 volumes of the Tibetan bKa’gyur is regarded as efficient and merit producing as all the 108 paper volumes of the canon. This approach can be an indication of a broadening of the concept of relics prompted by the overall technological development. It should be pointed out that mantras and dharanis require special installation, which will be discussed below.

According to my fieldwork observation, all the texts are placed in the bum pa and the upper part of the stupa together with the ‘tree of life’ (srog shing). Books are usually wrapped in yellow cotton material and placed in the ‘lotus seat’ or in the ‘vase’. The location within a receptacle and the way of depositing mantras and dharani is different; however mantras occupy most of the upper part of a receptacle: some mantras are rolled around the ‘life-tree’, some are deposited in the ‘vase’, and some in the ‘lotus seat’. What is more, the whole surface of the ‘life-tree’ is covered by painted inscriptions in Tibetan. The texts written on the ‘tree of life’ are distinguished from those deposited inside.

The texts written on the ‘tree of life’ (srog shing)

The texts painted on the tree of life are indispensable for the stupa consecration. I had an opportunity to see the texts painted on the ‘life-tree’. The inscriptions on the ‘life-tree’ must be written in gold or yellow (as the imitation of gold) paint, because gold paint functions as the offering to the deities so that they will abide in the stupa. Each side of the tree is divided into five sections by the syllables O, Ā, HŪ, TRA, and HR in Tibetan script. In Tantric Buddhism the stupa is identified with the body consequently, the ‘tree of life’ represents the spinal cord and the five syllables on the tree are the mantras representing the five chakras or ‘wheels’ in the body. These wheels are described as lotuses, each has different number of petals, different colour, each is represented by a syllable, etc. Concerning the theory of chakras in Tantric Buddhism, the number, description, location in the body, etc vary according to different sources. Thus Dasgupta,
referring to the *Heruka-Sri-samputa-and Hevajra-tantra*, states that there are four chakras in the body.\(^{501}\) However, in other texts the number of chakras in the body can vary; sometimes five and even six ‘wheels’ are distinguished.\(^{502}\)

The *khurul* ritual specialists in Kalmykia\(^{503}\) adhere to the theory of five chakras in the body: the highest one is the head chakra, situated on the crown of the head and represented by the syllable *O*; the next is the throat chakra with the mantra *Ā*; the third is the heart chakra represented by *HŪ*; the fourth is in the navel region, its syllable being *TRA*; and the lowest chakra is situated at the perineum and is represented by *HR*.\(^{504}\)

The mantras on each side of the ‘life-tree’ must correspond to the direction that this side faces. Therefore, particular mantras must be written under each of the five syllable-mantras on every side of the ‘life-tree’, though sometimes all four sides of the tree require the same inscriptions.\(^{505}\)

Under the head chakra syllable *O* the mantra of Great knowledge, *O sarvavidyā svāhā*, is written on each side of the ‘life-tree’. According to Tibetan ritual texts,\(^{506}\) this mantra must be written or inserted in the upper part or the ‘head’ of the stupa.

For the throat the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet in Tibetan transliteration are inscribed. These letters represent the sacred sounds of speech and the sacred letters, because the Sanskrit alphabet is considered to be of divine origin.\(^{507}\) The letters function as mantras.\(^{508}\)

\(^{501}\) According to this theory, the lowest chakra is situated in the navel region, the next is in the heart, the third chakra is below the neck, and the last one, which is the most important, called *Ushnisha-kamala* (‘the head lotus’) is in the head (Dasgupta1974: 147). The three chakras below the ‘head lotus’ represent the three bodies of the Buddha; thus the lowest chakra is identified with the *Nirmana-kaya* or the Transformation body, the heart chakra is considered to be the *Dharma-kaya*, and the throat chakra represents the *Sambhoga-kaya* or the Body of Great Bliss (see Dasgupta 1974: 148; Snellgrove 1987: 251).

\(^{502}\) See Snellgrove 1987: 251. Tucci also mentions five chakras, drawing the parallels between the chakras in the body and the elements of the stupa (Tucci 1988: 49). According to Hindu Tantric tradition, there are seven chakras (see Dasgupta 1974: 147-148).

\(^{503}\) Nowadays the best tantric specialists in Kalmykia are Tibetan monks (mainly the Gelugpa school of Buddhism) who live and work there on the permanent basis.

\(^{504}\) Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{505}\) Interview with the abbot of the central *khurul*, July 2008 Elista.

\(^{506}\) For example *Arga'i Cho ga Dang Rab tu Gnas Don Gsal ba* (Bentor 1995: 256).

\(^{507}\) Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{508}\) Dasgupta discusses the cases of the transformation of letters into mantras (Dasgupta 1974: 60-61). The practice of placing the vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet as relics is also mentioned in Bentor 2003: 32.
Below the Sanskrit alphabet O vajra áyu e sváhâ is written. It is the mantra of a firm ‘life-tree’, which must be inscribed on the four sides of the tree. This mantra is said to bestow longevity and good health to the body of the stupa and to the worshippers.

For the heart chakra under the syllable HŪ different dharanis are written on each side of the srog shing. In the East the dharani called Gtsug tor rnam rgyal gzungs is written; Gtsug tor dri med is inscribed on the southern side; on the northern side of the tree Byang chub rgyan ’bum gzungs is written; and Gsang ba ring bsrel gzungs must be on the western side. These four dharanis are classified by the Tibetan tradition as the Five Great Dharanis (gzungs chen sde lnga); they come from the dharanisutras, which prescribe that these texts should be placed in receptacles. According to Bentor, these dharanis are very frequently deposited in stupas and inscribed on stone tablets in different Buddhist communities.

Under the syllable TRA on the four sides of the ‘life-tree’, the verse of Interdependent Origination (Rten ‘brel snying po) is written. In Kalmykia only the Tibetan translation of the verse is inscribed on the srog shing and inserted in stupas. The Tibetan translation was obtained from Mingyan-gelong, a Kalmyk monk from the central khurul. The Tibetan variant is:

chos rnams thams cad rgyu las byung/
de rgyu de bzhin gshegs pas gsungs/
rgyu la dgog pa gang yin pa/
dge sbyong chen pos ‘di skad gsungs

This stanza is the hrdaya of the Pratityasamutpada Sutra; scholars usually refer to this verse as the Ye dharma by its first words. The verse is said to contain the entire Buddhist teachings and is regarded as the essence of the Dharma and the Buddha.
Therefore, the *Pratityasamutpada Sutra* prescribes depositing this verse in stupas not only as an equivalent of bodily relics, but also as an alternative to the insertion of corporeal remains.\(^{517}\) The verse of Interdependent Origination was the most common Buddhist text installed in Indian stupas, which rarely contained entire scriptures.\(^ {518}\)

All the space under the lowest syllable down to the image of *vajra* is filled with the consecration mantra *O su pra tishatha vajra ye svāhā*, taken from the text of consecration *Rab gnas mdor bsdus* (‘Brief consecration’). This consecration prayer is included in the collection of ritual texts, *Chos spyod rab gnas*, used by the monks of the central *khurul*.

### Mantras and dhāranis deposited in stupas and statues in Kalmykia

In contemporary Kalmyk Gelugpa *khuruls* 28 Tibetan mantras are used as relics, being installed in stupas, statues and other cult constructions. All these mantras are numbered, so each text has a particular number “1” through “28”, and the monks remember the texts by these names and numbers.\(^ {519}\) The list of mantras was obtained from the abbot of the central *khurul* in Elista.

1. *dbu gzungs* – the head mantra
2. *mgrin gzungs* – the throat mantra
3. *thugs gzungs* – the heart mantra
4. *bla med* – the dhārani-mantra of the Highest Yoga Tantra
5. *gong sa mchog* – the Dalai lama glorification mantra
6. *yongs ’dzin rnam gnyis* – the glorification of the lineage of teachers\(^ {520}\)
7. *thub mtshan* – the Buddha name mantra
8. *rje’i mtshan* – Tsongkhapa name mantra or the mantra praising Tsongkhapa’s name\(^ {521}\)
9. *badzra gu ru* – the root mantra of Padmasambhava
10. *mani mantra* (*om ma ni pad me hum*) – the most popular mantra, the root mantra of Avalokiteshvara
11. *rnal spyod rgyud* – the dhārani-mantra of the Performance Tantra (Carya Tantra)

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519 Interview with the abbot of the central *khurul*, July 2008, Elista. According to the abbot, in Tibetan Buddhist practice 34 mantras are used.
520 This refers to the two teachers of the Dalai Lama.
521 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
The preparation of scrolls

All the mantras are printed on paper in the Tibetan script and book style (dpe cha). The khuruls order the texts to be printed in printing houses. Then the pages are tightly rolled up on a stick and wrapped in yellow cotton. The yellow colour is symbolic: originally it

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522 This mantra addresses Tsongkhapa as the embodiment of all deities (ibid).
523 The information about the preparation of mantras for installation was obtained from an interview with Andzha-gelong in July 2008 in Elista.
represented the colour of bhikshu; the colour of the Buddha. However, later this colour acquired new meanings, being now immediately associated with the Gelugpa tradition.\textsuperscript{524} The size of the scrolls depends on the place in the stupa to which they belong. The number of scrolls with one mantra depends on the size of a receptacle and the ‘life-wood’. Lay volunteers can also participate in text rolling.

Scrolls with mantras must be inserted in a vertical position; they are pressed against one another and should never be placed upside down. That is why the top of each scroll is always marked with the number of the mantra.

In spite of their intrinsic sacred character the scrolls with mantras as well as any other text or item for deposition must be consecrated separately before being installed.\textsuperscript{525}

The order in which mantras are installed\textsuperscript{526}

All the mantras are deposited in different parts of the stupa, in strict accordance with their ranking or significance. The monks divide mantras and dharanis according to their place in the stupa into the lotus texts (mantras installed in the ‘lotus seat’), the srog shing mantras (the mantras tied around the ‘life-tree’) and the bum pa texts which are installed in the dome above the ‘lotus seat’\textsuperscript{.527} In the upper part of the stupa are placed the texts of higher hierarchy.

\textsuperscript{524} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{525} This consecration ritual is called gzungs sgrub or the ‘empowerment of dharanis’, it will be discussed in the following chapter. Also see Bentor 2003: 34-35.
\textsuperscript{526} The information about the order in which mantras are deposited in stupas was provided to me by Tupten Shakya, the ritual specialist in charge of the stupa consecration (interview, July 2008, Elista).
\textsuperscript{527} Ibid.
The deposition of texts begins with the preparation of the stupa, because certain mantras should be tied around the ‘tree of life’.\textsuperscript{528} The first three mantras are ‘the head mantra’, ‘the throat mantra’, and ‘the heart mantra’ are rolled around the corresponding chakra syllables drawn on the tree. Then the ‘name mantras’ and the ‘Tantra mantras’ are tied to the stupa in the upper part of the stupa. The ‘name mantra’ or the root mantra embodies the essence of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and lamas.\textsuperscript{529} The Buddha name mantra and the dharani-mantra of the Highest Yoga Tantra are fixed above the throat chakra.

The ‘name mantras’ of the lineage lamas are tied between the throat and the heart mantras. This section includes the Dalai Lama glorification mantra, the glorification of the lineage of teachers, Tsongkhapa name mantra, the root mantra of Padmasambhava. Consequently, the first ten mantras from the list above are tied to the stupa.

The root mantras of Bodhisattvas and Buddhas: the root mantra of Avalokiteshvara (om ma ni pad me hum), the mantra for the White and Green Taras (sgrol ma dkar ljang), the root mantra of the three deities of longevity (tshe lha rnam gsum), etc. are placed in the ‘vase’, and do not have to be fixed on the ‘tree’.

Below the heart are the mantras of the other Tantras (rnal spyod rgyud, bya rgyud), the Five Great dharanis (sde lnga) and the verse of Interdependent Origination (rten snying).

The ‘lotus seat’ contains the Sutra mantras (mdo gzungs), the mantras of the Dharma protectors (chos skyong), the mantras of wealth deities (nor lha), mantras and verses of auspiciousness (shis brjod, bkra shis), aspiration mantras for the fulfillment of wishes (‘dod gsal), the mantra removing disorders (‘khrugs sel), and the lotus mantra pad gzungs.

In different receptacles different mantras from the list above can be installed. I was told by monks and lamas that the choice of texts (mantras in scrolls as well as Buddhist

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\textsuperscript{528} All the stupa in Iki-Burul khurul is covered with scrolls (interview with Padma Sherab, July 2008, Iki-Burul).
sacred texts) for deposition depends on the function of a stupa, on the deity or lama to which it is devoted, and on the school of Buddhism in charge of the construction.

If a stupa is dedicated to a particular Buddha or deity, scrolls with the root mantras of this deity are numerous. If a stupa is built in honour of a lama, then most of the upper part will be filled with the ‘name mantras’ of this lama and the ‘name mantras’ of his lineage of teachers.

The ‘name mantras’ of Tsongkhapa and the Dalai Lama are essential for the Gelugpa suburgans; whereas the suburgans built under the directorship of the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions must contain the mantra of Guru Rinpoche. The abbot of the Nyingma khurul said that the suburgan in his khurul does not enshrine the name mantras of the Dalai Lama and Tsongkhapa.

Nevertheless, it is considered especially auspicious if all the 28 mantras are installed. For example, in The Stupa of Harmony and Accord all the 28 mantras (500 copies each) were installed.

As was explained to me by the abbot of the central khurul, in the Gelug tradition there are mantras and dharanis that must be deposited in every stupa or statue no matter what Buddha or lama it is built for. Among these obligatory textual deposits are the first three chakra dharanis (dbu gzungs, mgrin gzungs and thugs gzungs) tied around the corresponding syllables on the ‘life-tree’; the five great dharanis (sde lnga), the verse of Interdependent Origination (rten snying).530 As for the lotus mantras, special attention is paid to the mantra removing disorders (’khrugs sel), the dharani of the Dharma protectors (chos skyong), the hundred syllable mantra (yig brgya), and the lotus mantra (pad gzungs).531

The installed texts and the place these texts occupy in a stupa reflect the peculiarities of the religious tradition in a community. Thus bla med (the dharani-mantra of the Highest Yoga Tantra) and the name mantras of lineage teachers are considered of the highest rank in Kalmykia, which is in complete accordance with the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Of special importance for the stupa consecration is the five great dharanis (sde lnga): these texts are written on the tree of life and deposited inside in scrolls. Bentor writes that most Tibetan stupas contain a great number of the five great dharanis.532

529 See Bentor 2003: 31.
530 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
531 Ibid.
532 Bentor 2003: 32.
As I was told by Andzha-gelong, there are mantras or *nom* that are particularly significant in Kalmykia, and consequently, they are most frequently installed in suburgans and statues. Among these are the root mantra for the White and Green Taras (*sgrol ma dkar ljang*) and the root mantra of the three deities of longevity (*tshe lha rnam gsum*). Moreover, these mantras can be placed in any part of a suburgan and are believed to correct any installation mistakes (if any scroll was put in a wrong place). The cult of the White and Green Taras and the longevity Bodhisattvas (the White Tara, Namgyalma and Amitayus) is very prominent in Kalmykia as these deities are especially popular among the Kalmyks.
Chapter 6

Main rituals performed in modern Kalmykia in connection with the construction of suburgans

The construction of a suburgan as well as of any other Buddhist monument or building is accompanied by a number of rituals of consecration. Consecration rituals aim at empowering and blessing the construction by locating the presence of the Buddha in it.\(^{533}\) These rituals are indispensable, because through them a monument receives its sacred character. In contemporary Kalmykia the following rituals accompany the construction of a suburgan: the preliminary ‘ground ritual’ (sa blang) for obtaining and blessing the site, the empowerment of the items to be installed in the receptacle (gzungs sgrub), the ‘offering bath’ (khrus gsol) and the final consecration (rab gnas).\(^{534}\) All the information about the rituals of consecration was collected from interviews with ritual specialists working in Kalmyk khuruls.

The ‘ground ritual’: sa blang

According to the Buddhist view in contemporary Kalmykia, before building a stupa or undertaking any other construction project (religious as well as secular) it is necessary to perform the ground ritual called sa blang.\(^{535}\) The Tibetan expression sa blang literally means ‘to receive or to obtain land’. Hence, sa blang is the ritual of ‘obtaining the ground’ from the local spirits and gods.

This ritual is based on the belief in innumerable spirits and gods: the owners of the land, rivers, mountains and other geographical features. This belief is widespread in Kalmykia, in Tibet, and in Mongolia. As I was told by Geshe Dugda, the oldest Tibetan lama working in Kalmykia, every square meter of land or water is inhabited by some spirit or god.\(^{536}\) These landscape deities are inferior to Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and the gods of the Buddhist heaven.\(^{537}\) Local gods are believed to protect their domains, preventing cataclysms and misfortunes. However, they can be very malevolent, causing illnesses and calamities to

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533 Bentor 1996: 5; Bentor 2003: 34-35.
535 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
536 Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
537 Samuel 1993: 166.
those who pollute, damage or intrude on their territory. Nevertheless, local deities may be subdued and even made helpful through certain rituals.

Landscape gods are of pre-Buddhist origin but were incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism. Some even received the status of protectors of the Buddhist faith. There exist various classifications of local gods and spirits in Tibet, the most popular being that of the ‘eight classes’. Philippe Cornu has described ten types of regional gods known in Tibet.

In the Mongolian pre-Buddhist religious system multiple spirits were believed to exist in the three levels of the universe: the upper level was the sphere of tengri, i.e. ‘the residents of the sky’; the middle zone was believed to be inhabited not only by people and animals but also by numerous landscape deities and spirits lower in rank than tengri; and the subterranean level was regarded as the world of the dead. In Kalmyk folk religion, there existed the cult of the owners or ezen of land; they were divided into the Lords of the Earth (khazar ezen or yajar ezen) and the Lords of the Water (usun ezen). These deities correspond with regard to their functions to the Tibetan folk religious landscape gods.

Nowadays the Kalmyk word ezen is not used for local spirits. Since the main ritual experts in contemporary Kalmykia are Tibetan monks (or Kalmyk monks who have received their education in Tibetan monasteries in India), the Tibetan and Indian names for landscape gods are in use. The ‘owners of water’ are usually called nagas (water serpent deities) and the ‘owners of land’ are referred to by the Tibetan word sa bdag (‘land owner’). Sometimes the Kalmyk term sakyusn meaning ‘protective guardian spirits’ can be applied to landscape spirits. Most often, however, all the local spirits and gods of Kalmykia are referred to by the Russian expression хозяева земли (‘land owners’) without distinguishing any particular types.

538 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
544 Bicheev 2004: 10
545 Bakaeva 2003.
546 Ibid.
547 Naga is a Sanskrit term; the Tibetan word for serpent deities is klu. However, in Kalmykia the Sanskrit word is in use.
The ritual of *sa blang* is intended to pacify the ‘landowners’ and to obtain their permission to build a Buddhist monument or construction on their territory.\(^{549}\) This ritual is conducted by a group of several monks, usually four; the ritual master in charge of the ceremony must be a monk of high rank. In Kalmykia the ritual master is usually Telo Tulkun Rinpoche, the head of the Kalmyk Buddhist, or Geshe Dudga, the oldest Tibetan lama who has been working in Kalmykia for 14 years.

The permission from the ‘land owners’ is requested through offerings and chanting mantras. Offerings are placed on an altar made of a small wooden table covered with cloth and *kha btags*, silk ritual scarves. The offerings are put in seven silver, copper or brass bowls. The sequence of offerings is very important. Thus, the first bowl contains drinking water, the second has the water for washing up, the third contains flowers, the fourth has incense, the fifth is an altar lamp (Kalmyk *zul*), the sixth bowl is filled with perfumed water, and the seventh contains food (usually fruit, sweets, bread, but never meat products).\(^{550}\) Sometimes the eighth cup with a shell as the offering of music is also used.\(^{551}\) This way of giving offerings to deities was practiced in Mongolia and Kalmykia before the Soviet revolution.\(^{552}\) The origin of these offerings is rooted in ancient India, where kings and honorary guests were greeted with these seven items: first they were given water to drink, then water to wash their face, then flowers were brought and incense lighted, perfumed water was offered for the body and food was served.\(^{553}\) A very important offering used in *sa blang* in Kalmykia as well as in many other ceremonies of Tibetan Buddhism is *gtor ma* or sacrificial cakes made of dough.\(^{554}\) The design and coloring of these cakes depends on the character of the deity or spirit it is devoted to.\(^{555}\)

I was told that in the ground foundation of a future monument in Kalmykia, vases (*sa chu bum pa* or ‘earth and water vases’) with offerings to ‘landowners’ and subterranean deities are buried.\(^{556}\) These vases may contain precious stones and substances, such as gold,

\(^{549}\) Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{550}\) Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{551}\) Ibid.

\(^{552}\) See Pozdneev 1993: 89-91. However, Pozdneev gives a different interpretation of the waters in the first two cups. The first cup, according to Pozdneev, contained water for washing feet (he gives the Tibetan expression *zhabs sel* meaning ‘to clean feet’). The second bowl was filled with water for washing face (*zhal sel*) (ibid: 90).

\(^{553}\) Ibid: 89-90; Chongonov 2008: 17.

\(^{554}\) Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.

\(^{555}\) Nebesky-Wojkowitz 1975: 347.

\(^{556}\) Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
silver, turquoise, pearls, copper, etc. Sometimes nine such offering vases are buried under stupas, with one vase being situated in the center and the others in the eight directions (the four cardinal and four intermediate directions) around the center. Thus according to the abbot of Iki-Burul khurul, nine vases are buried three meters down under the stupa on the territory of his khurul.

This ritual is open for the laity; therefore, many people usually attend the ceremony. It is believed in Kalmykia that a lay person who has strong ties with the territory on which the stupa is about to be built must be present at sa blang. It is considered especially auspicious if both parents of this person are alive. Thus, I was told a story about the problems with the black nagini (klu mo nag po) during the construction of the first stupa built in Kalmykia after the “non-religious period”, The Stupa of Enlightenment in Elista. When the foundation of the stupa was laid, strong sandstorms and hurricanes began in that region. Sangye-gelong, a Tibetan monk from Nepal who was in charge of the stupa, said that the storms were caused by the black nagini (klu mo ng po), the Owner of that territory. The nagini was enraged when her pond was drained for the construction of the stupa. The gelong had a dream, in which the nagini, having assumed the appearance of a Kalmyk middle-aged man from that district, told the gelong: “Look! All these sandstorms! I will destroy your stupa! I will turn it upside down.” The gelong found the man he had seen in the dream, because only this man, whose ties with that land were strong, could pacify the black nagini. When this man began to read the mantra to Vajrasattva, the yig brgya, the sandstorm gradually ceased.

The ritual of procuring the land is a public festive event. The construction of a suburgan is regarded in Kalmykia as a very meritorious deed for the whole community, so when the foundation for a future suburgan is laid, people celebrate it. The ritual lasts for about an hour. After the ritual is finished, a table with food and tea is laid for the monks and the lay guests of the ceremony.
The empowerment of dharanis or gzungs sgrub

Before all the items are deposited in a receptacle, the ritual gzungs sgrub 564 (‘empowerment of dharanis’) must be performed. 565 It is the ritual of consecration and blessing the ingredients to be installed. 566 Though religious texts are sacred by their nature, this empowerment ritual is obligatory. As I was told by Geshe Dugda, the texts are sacred, but this ritual makes them produce more benefit for sentient beings. 567 Tupten Shakya explained that the aim of this ritual is to locate the essence in the relics. 568 Hence the ingredients for deposition are viewed after this ritual as receptacles of the sacred power of the Buddhas.

Gzungs sgrub is based on the Tantric ritual of sadhana. Sadhana (sgrub thabs) or ‘means of achievement’ is the central practice in Tantra. 569 It consists in the visualization of a Tantric deity and the transformation of the practitioner into this chosen deity or the yi dam. 570 The notion of yi dam is crucial for Tantric meditation. The yi dam are Tantric tutelary deities, “forms that the meditator learns to assume deliberately and consciously in ritual”. 571 The yi dam most commonly visualized in sadhanas are Vajrasattva (Rdo rje sems dpa’), Yamantaka (Gshin rje gshed), Vajrabhairava (a form of Yamantaka, Rdo rje ‘jigs byed), Hevajra (Kye rdo rje). 572

In the process of the sadhana, the practitioner’s body, speech and mind are transformed into the enlightened body, speech and mind of the visualized yi dam. 573 Thus the practitioner generates himself (bskyed pa) as the yi dam and then employs the powers of this tutelary deity. 574

There are numerous sadhanas in Tibetan Buddhism; however, the basic elements of the sadhana are the opening recitation of Refuge and the arousing bodhicitta, 575 the

564 The Tibetan word sgrub pa means ‘to complete, to perform, to achieve’ (Jäschke Tibetan-English Dictionary: 121).
566 The entire content of a stupa, including scriptures, the tree of life, etc must be consecrated through this ritual (ibid).
567 Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
568 Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
570 See Bentor 1996: 1; Samuel 1993: 233.
571 Samuel 1993: 164.
572 Bentor 1996: 54-55.
573 Ibid: 1.
574 Ibid: xviii; 85.
575 Bodhicitta is the aspiration to reach Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sadhanas and consecrations in Tibetan Buddhism are based on the bodhisattva ideal of compassion. The main motivation for
visualization of a tutelary deity, the transformation of the practitioner into this deity, the
dissolving of the entire visualization into emptiness (stong pa nyid) and the dedication of
merit to all beings by reciting the verse of merit dedication.\textsuperscript{576} The recitation of the mantra
of the tutelary deity is the crucial component of the \textit{sadhana}, since the mantra generates the
presence of the chosen deity.\textsuperscript{577} The consecration rituals employ the \textit{sadhana} practice with
regard to stupas, statues, scriptures and so forth.\textsuperscript{578}

Information about the ritual \textit{gzungs sgrub} as it is performed in Kalmykia was
obtained in a number of interviews with the abbot of the central \textit{khurul}, Andzha-gelong, and
the ritual masters Geshe Dugda and Tupten Shakya.\textsuperscript{579}

As it was described to me by the abbot, this ritual is carried out in the main assembly
hall in \textit{khuruls}.\textsuperscript{580} Thus in the \textit{khurul} the Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni, the monks,
numbering about fifteen, sit in two rows. The higher status the monk has, the closer he is to
the altar. The master of the ritual, also called the \textit{vajra} holder or the \textit{vajra} master (\textit{rdo rje slob dpon}) is the closest to the altar; his seat is higher then those of other monks. In
Kalmykia the ritual master in all major rituals is Telo Tulku Rinpoche. If he is away, then
the role of the ritual master is performed either by Geshe Dugda or Tupten Shakya.

All the ingredients for deposition (vases, texts, scrolls with mantras, the ‘tree of life’,
smaller statues, \textit{tsha tsha}, etc) are put on the platform in front of the altar. A five-color
thread is tied to the \textit{vajra} and then this thread is stretched so as to connect all the items that
have to be consecrated.\textsuperscript{581} The colours of the thread are red, green, blue, white and yellow,
i.e. the same as the colours of \textit{tsha tsha} for installation, each colour corresponding to a
direction and to one of the Five Supreme Buddhas presiding over this direction.\textsuperscript{582} This

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{576} \textbf{See Samuel 1993: 233-235. Bentor describes the scheme of the fourfold generation (bskyed pa) process of the \textit{sadhana} (see Bentor 1996: 1-3).}
\item \textsuperscript{577} \textbf{Samuel 1993: 234.}
\item \textsuperscript{578} \textbf{Bentor 1996: 22.}
\item \textsuperscript{579} \textbf{The setting for the ritual was described to me by the abbot of the central \textit{khurul} in Elista Andzha-gelong; the method of visualization was explained by Geshe Dugda and Tupten Shakya.}
\item \textsuperscript{580} \textbf{Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.}
\item \textsuperscript{581} \textbf{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{582} \textbf{The correspondence between the five Tathagatas, the directions they preside over, and the five colours was described in the fourth chapter. For a more detailed description of the five Tathagatas see Dasgupta 1974: 84-87; see also the table of correspondences (ibid: 87).}
\end{itemize}
thread transmits the powers of the mantra from the ritual master to each of the items for consecration.\textsuperscript{583}

The ritual begins with the recitation of the verse of taking refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha (the Refuge vow), and then the verse of arousing bodhicitta is recited. After that the visualization begins. I was told that the most commonly visualized yi dam in the ritual of gzungs sgrub is Yamantaka (Gshin rje gshed).\textsuperscript{584} The text for Yamantaka\textsuperscript{585} is chanted and the ritual master visualizes himself as Yamantaka by transforming his body, speech and mind into the body, speech and mind of the deity. The generating of the practitioner as Yamantaka is the core of this ritual.\textsuperscript{586} All the monks who are present at the ritual must visualize the same; the number of monks participating can be different, but everybody should be visualizing.\textsuperscript{587} Then the power and essence of Yamantaka is transmitted from the vajra master (rdo rje slob dpon) through the dharani thread to all the ingredients and absorbed in them; in this way the ingredients are empowered.\textsuperscript{588} The whole ceremony lasts from one to two hours.\textsuperscript{589}

Sometimes several yi dam can be visualized; in this case, the statues and tsha tsha must be visualized as Yamantaka, the texts and dharanis as Amitabha (‘Od dpag med) and the tree of life as Vairocana (Rnam par snang mdzad).\textsuperscript{590}

Thus through the ritual gzungs sgrub, the presence of the yi dam is located in the ingredients for the deposition in stupas and statues; the consecrated objects are perceived as the containers of the divine power of the yi dam.
The final consecration (rab gnas)

The final ritual of consecration of a stupa is called rab gnas, which in Tibetan means ‘to make firm or permanent’. Rab gnas is performed after all the levels of the stupa have been filled with relics and the construction completed; only then the stupa receives its final consecration. Rab gnas is indispensable, because only after this ritual does the stupa become a sacred monument.

Rab gnas takes place outside on the site of the stupa. As a rule four monks participate in the consecration. The ritual master in charge of the ceremony is a lama of high status, in Kalmykia it is usually Telo Tulku Rinpoche, or if he is absent, Geshe Dugda. This ritual is also a ceremony of opening the monument to the public. A great number of lay believers gather on the site; it is believed that the empowerment from the consecration is also transmitted to all who are present at the ceremony.

Rab gnas is also the name for the texts of consecration, according to which the ritual is performed. Rab gnas texts can be in a brief concise form (rab gnas mdor bsdus pa), middle (rab gnas ‘bring po) and extensive variant (rab gnas rgyas pa). These texts can be used for the consecration of khuruls or any other monument or building. In Kalmykia most often the concise text is used.

I did not have the chance to see the ceremony of final consecration. However, from a number of interviews with ritual specialists who work in Kalmyk khuruls I could learn about the setting and procedures of this ritual. I was also given two texts of consecration: Rab gnas bsdus pa (‘Short consecration’) from the collection of texts Chos spyod kyi rim pa Thar lam rab gsal and Rab gnas mdor bsdus (‘Condensed consecration’) from the collection of ritual texts called Chos spyod rab gsal. The first text includes the directions for visualization, the mantras of consecration and the supplication to deities. The latter was

591 Bentor 2003: 35.
592 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
593 Ibid. See also Bentor 1996: 68.
594 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
596 Chos spyod kyi rim pa Thar lam rab gsal by Smin gling Lo chen Dharma shri. 1970. Solu, Nepal. This text was given to me by the abbot of Iki-Burul khurul.
given to me by the abbot of the central *khurul* in Elista, who referred to this text as the prayer of consecration.598

The ritual *rab gnas* is analyzed in this chapter on the basis of the text *Rab gnas bsdus pa*599 (from the collection of ritual texts *Chos spyod kyi rim pa Thar lam rab gsal*) and interviews with ritual experts. The ritual may be divided into three parts: the preliminary rituals, the main part or the generation of the sacred power within the stupa, and the final requests to the deities thus located within the stupa.

The preliminary ritual: *khrus gsol*

Before the ceremony a low wooden platform for the monks to sit on is placed in front of the stupa. The monks sit in one row, or sometimes in two if they are many. The seat of the ritual master Telo Tulku Rinpoche is higher then those of other monks.600

The ritual begins with the ‘removal of obstacles’ (*bgegs bsal*) with the help of the seed syllable $HŪ$. After the elimination of obstacles, the ‘offering bath’ (*khrus gsol*) must be performed. *Khrus gsol* is a ritual bath or water purification offered to religious objects and deities.601 The texts of brief consecration usually do not give precise directions as to how to perform the ‘offering bath’, only the bath offering mantra ($O\text{ sarva tathāgata abishekata samaya shriye }HŪ$) is given. The information about this ritual was obtained from interviews with ritual specialists, Geshe Dugda and Tupten Shakya. I was told that the ritual bath can be a separate ritual, and is also included in the ceremony of ‘stupa opening’ as a preliminary ritual in the final consecration (*rab gnas*).602 In any case the bathing or purification with water is done when the construction is completed.603

The objects of ritual bathing (Buddhas, Bodhisattvas as well as relics inside the stupa) do not require any cleansing, because they are pure. As was explained to me by Tupten Shakya, though the body, speech and mind of the Buddha are stainless, ritual bathing is offered to the Buddha in order to create merit for those who have flaws, i.e. for all sentient

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598 The whole text consists mainly in the supplication to the deities to enter the stupa and to remain there forever for the sake of all beings. It also includes the requests to grant longevity, prosperity, happiness, etc to the whole community (see *Rab gnas mdor bsdus* 1990: 286-289).
600 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
601 Bentor 1996: 45.
602 Interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista.
603 Ibid.
beings.\textsuperscript{604} The bathing is also meant to remove the impurities from the site of the consecration ritual, from all those who are present at the ceremony, and from the performers of the ritual.\textsuperscript{605}

During this preliminary ritual a bath is offered in a particular sequence to the ‘glorious lamas’ (dpal ldan bla ma), to the yi dam, to Buddhas, to Bodhisattvas, to the Dakinis, to the Heroes (dpa’ bo), to the Dharma protectors, and to the ‘land owners’ (gzhi bdag).\textsuperscript{606} Ritual bathing can be performed in a contracted form for all types of revered beings simultaneously, or it can be offered separately to Buddhas, to yi dam, and so forth.\textsuperscript{607} As a preliminary element of the final consecration (rab gnas), the offering bath is usually done for all revered beings simultaneously.\textsuperscript{608}

It is not the receptacle itself that is actually washed but its reflection in a mirror, i.e. the water is applied to a bathing mirror (khrus long) in which the receptacles of the Buddha’s body, speech and mind are reflected.\textsuperscript{609} A mirror is used in this ritual, because it captures the reflection of the stupa, of the deities and of the whole universe.\textsuperscript{610}

Before a bath is offered, a scheme must be drawn on a bathing mirror. These drawings on a mirror can be various. According to the ritual experts working in the central khurul, the Golden Abode of Buddha Shakyamuni, a mirror should be divided with straight lines into nine square sections; in each section a dot is drawn.\textsuperscript{611} As was explained to me, these nine sections are the seats for deities, the places where the reflection of the deities must be projected.\textsuperscript{612} This sketch represents the mandala of the nine lha (‘gods’): the Five Tathagatas (one is in the center and the others are situated at the four cardinal directions), and the four goddesses situated in the four intermediate directions.\textsuperscript{613} Thus Vairocana is in the center, Amitabha is in the West, Amoghasiddhi is in the North, Akshobhya is in the East, and Ratnasambhava is in the South. The four goddesses of the intermediate directions are Locana in the South-West, Mamaki in the North-West, Pandarvasini in the North-East, and

\textsuperscript{604} Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{605} Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{606} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{607} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{608} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{609} Ibid. Bentor also mentioned that in Tibetan ritual bathing (khrus gsol) the water or cleansing substances (’dag rdzas) are hardly ever poured or sprinkled on stupas or statues (Bentor 1996: 167).
\textsuperscript{610} Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{611} Interviews with Geshe Dugda and Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{612} Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
Tara in the South-East.\textsuperscript{614} The mandala of the nine Buddhas represents the whole universe: the center and the eight directions of space. Consequently, when this mandala is drawn on a mirror, the whole universe is believed to be reflected in this mirror.

The \textit{khrus gsol} is performed on several levels: the level of ritual action (actions done during the ritual), the level of speech (the mantras and texts that must be recited) and on the level of visualization (what should be envisaged by the practitioners while carrying out the ritual actions and chanting texts).\textsuperscript{615}

The mirror with the sketch drawn on it is raised and shown to the receptacle, so that the reflection of the stupa is captured in the mirror. The water is poured from the ‘bathing vase’ (\textit{khrus bum}) on the mirror.\textsuperscript{616} While doing this, the mantra \textit{O sarva tathāgata abishekata samaya shriye HŪ} is recited; this mantra is prescribed for purification by the ritual text of brief consecration.\textsuperscript{617} At the same time the monks performing the ritual should visualize the mirror as the representation of the universe. When performing the ritual bathing, the practitioner envisages that the whole universe is offered to all those who receive the ‘bath’, i.e. to the lamas, yi dam, Buddhas, etc.\textsuperscript{618}

I was told by Geshe Dugda that Mount Kailash\textsuperscript{619} must be envisaged in the middle; descending from it, four great rivers flow in the four cardinal directions, and four stairways lead down to the water where the bathing is visualized.\textsuperscript{620}

In the end, the mirror is wiped with the ritual silk scarf (\textit{kha btags}), during which the monks envisage that they dry the Buddha’s body.\textsuperscript{621}

\textbf{The generation of sacred power within a receptacle}

The core of the ritual of consecration is the establishing of the presence (the body, speech and mind) of the \textit{yi dam} within a receptacle. This part of the final consecration \textit{rab}

\textsuperscript{614} For a picture of this mandala see Snellgrove 1987: 211.
\textsuperscript{615} Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{616} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{617} See \textit{Rab gnas bdus pa} 1970: 301. Bentor mentions about this mantra when describing ‘offering bath’, she says that it is an initiation mantra, because the bathing is regarded as a type of water-initiation (Bentor 1996: 181).
\textsuperscript{618} Interview with Tupten Shakya, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{619} Kapstein writes that Kailash is perceived in Tibet as Himavat or the legendary mountain of ancient Buddhist cosmology. Just like four great rivers are believed to descend from Himavat, four rivers originate in the area around Kailash (Kapstein 2006: 8).
\textsuperscript{620} Interview with Geshe Dugda, July 2008, Elista.
\textsuperscript{621} Ibid.
gnas will be analyzed on the basis of the text *Rab gnas bsdus pa* (‘Short consecration’),\(^{622}\) which is frequently used in contemporary Kalmykia.

Just like the *gzungs sgrub*, a *sadhana* is performed for the final consecration. It begins with the visualization of Vairocana as the aspect of the body, Amitabha as the support of the speech and Akshobhya as the aspect of the mind appearing from the emptiness; the three deities invite the ‘wisdom being’ (*ye shes pa*).\(^{623}\) While visualizing this, the monks chant the mantra *Vajra sa ma dza*, evoking the *ye shes pa*.\(^{624}\) Then this evocation is dissolved (*bstim*) into emptiness.\(^{625}\)

The next step includes the visualization of the three seed syllables *O*, *Ā*, *HŪ* on the head, throat and heart chakras respectively of the stupa; rays of light come from the syllables and the deities of the three vajras (*rdo rje gsum gyi lha tshogs*) are seen to enter the three chakras, thus becoming inseparable from the body, mind and speech of the stupa.\(^{626}\) Thus the initial stage here is the visualization of chakras as deities.

Then the empowerment deity (*dbang lha*) is invited to bestow the empowerment. Five impurities are washed away and five wisdoms are manifested.\(^{627}\) Thereafter the Five Tathagata families with the five Supreme Buddhas appear and adorn the receptacle, which is also visualized as a deity after it has received the empowerment.\(^{628}\)

Finally the generated deities are completely transformed and assume the form of their receptacles, merging with the stupa.\(^{629}\) Afterwards, the consecration mantra is chanted, followed by the recitation of the verse of Interdependent origination in Sanskrit.\(^{630}\) While reciting it, the monks are prescribed by the text to throw around flowers of blessing (*me tog byin*).\(^{631}\)

This four-step visualization procedure locates the presence of the Buddhas and *yi dam* within the stupa.

\(^{623}\) Ibid: 301.
\(^{624}\) Ibid.
\(^{625}\) Ibid.
\(^{626}\) Ibid.
\(^{627}\) *dri ma lnga sbyangs te ye shes lnga mngon du byas* (ibid).
\(^{628}\) Ibid.
\(^{629}\) *bskyed pa’i lha yongs su gyur pa rten so so’i rnam par gyur par* (ibid: 302).
\(^{630}\) In the texts in is written in Sanskrit with the Tibetan script (ibid).
\(^{631}\) In Kalmykia in most cases rice is thrown (interview with Andzha-gelong, July 2008, Elista).
The final part: requests to the deities

The last part of the ritual consists in the supplications and requests to the deities already inside the stupa. The practitioners address the three jewels (dkon mchog gsum), the lineage teachers (dpal ldan bla ma), the yi dam deities, the protectors and guardians of the Dharma (chos skyong srang ma), and the ‘land-owners’ (gzhi bdag) requesting them to stay there together with the receptacle for the sake of all sentient beings and to bestow health, longevity, power, prosperity and happiness on the community.632

Then the practitioner addresses the local spirits of the earth and of the sky, ordering them to treat all living beings with loving kindness and to practice the Dharma. Thus the final consecration includes the subduing of the local spirits. Finally all the people who are present at the ceremony are blessed and freed from fears by the ritual prayer.

At the end of the ceremony a celebration begins, because the final consecration is regarded as a festive event in Kalmykia. Right after the consecration is performed the people who have been observing the consecration process, circumambulate the newly consecrated receptacle. Tables with food and tea are laid for everybody. Very often concerts take place: traditional Kalmyk music is played and traditional dances are performed. This event is always reported in the local newspapers, and the local TV channels broadcast the concerts that accompany the opening of the suburgan.
Conclusion

Kalmyks are actively indulged in the construction of stupas. Before the Soviet period suburgans were not numerous in Kalmykia, but functioned mainly as architectural elements, decorating of the upper levels of Buddhist temples. However, with the advent of religious revival the situation changed, since 1999 more than forty suburgans have been erected throughout Kalmykia. This widespread activity is driven by the motivation of the laity in Kalmykia. For Kalmyks the stupa is the embodiment of the Buddha and his teachings; moreover, the stupa is a representation of the restoration of the Kalmyk spiritual tradition. At the present moment the Kalmyk national identity is in the process of reorientation. Buddhism is a constituent element of the Kalmyk national pride, because it distinguishes the Kalmyks from neighbouring ethnic groups.

A prominent feature of Buddhism that is being revived in contemporary Kalmykia is its traditional character and orientation towards Tibet as the spiritual centre. Thus Buddhist rituals and practices with regard to the stupa construction and consecration are entirely traditional. The architectural structure, symbolic meaning and functions of Kalmyk suburgans are analogous to that of Tibetan mchod rten. Both in Tibet and in Kalmykia the stupa is first and foremost a commemorative religious monument, which is believed to locate the presence of the Buddha in the world and to create merit and spiritual well-being. No funerary function is attached to the position of the stupa in Kalmyk religious life.

Though the content of the Kalmyk suburgans can vary, the concept of relics in Kalmykia reflects the Tibetan concept of relics, which comprises corporeal remains (parts of the body and ashes) of important religious characters, objects associated with holy persons and places, religious scriptures, miniature stupas, tsha tsha and so forth.

Buddhist books and mantras play a crucial part in the stupa consecration in Kalmykia. Therefore, most of the interior space of Kalmyk suburgans is filled with Buddhist texts. The practice of depositing religious scriptures as relics is based on the doctrinal precepts of Tibetan Buddhism. The cult of the book is propagated in present day Kalmykia by the sangha; lay Kalmyks also believe in the sacred power of Buddhist scriptures. On the other hand, for Buddhist texts to be the most numerous components within Kalmyk suburgans is partially dictated by the possibilities of the community, because bodily relics are quite difficult to obtain in Kalmykia.
In spite of the overall traditional character of Kalmyk Buddhism, the concept of relics in Kalmykia is gradually broadening. New items (such as tapes, compact disks, memory sticks with Buddhist texts recorded, etc) are installed in suburgans and statues built nowadays in Kalmykia.

Though religious texts and other categories of relics are regarded as sacred by their own nature, the entire content of the stupa receives its consecration through special rituals twice: firstly, through the ritual of the ‘empowerment of dharanis’ (gzungs sgrub) and secondly, through the final consecration ritual rab gnas. All the consecration rituals that accompany the construction of suburgans in contemporary Kalmykia are performed in accordance with the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.
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Summary

The thesis focuses on the consecration of stupas in contemporary Kalmykia and discusses the position of the stupa in Kalmyk religious life.

The Kalmyks became acquainted with Buddhism around the 13th century A.D. At that time they inhabited the south part of Siberia and were known as Oirats. The name Kalmyk was applied to the Oirats in the 17th century, when a substantial part of the Oirat tribes migrated to the Volga steppe in Russia and became a subject of the Russian Empire. Until the beginning of the 20th century the Kalmyks followed the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism; however, after the Bolshevik revolution Buddhism was prohibited in Russia, including the Kalmyk republic. Since the end of the 1980s religious institutions and practices are being restored in Kalmykia. The construction of stupas is a conspicuous manifestation of the reestablishment of Buddhism in Kalmykia.

A stupa (Tib. mchod rten, Mon. suburgan) is a Buddhist commemorative monument, containing relics. Being perceived as the reminder of the Buddha’s enlightenment and the symbol of the Dharma, a stupa became the object of deep religious veneration. In Tibetan Buddhism a stupa receives its sacred character after it has been consecrated. The consecration consists of the deposition of relics and the final consecration (rab gnas). The thesis discusses the concept of relics and their deposition within a receptacle in contemporary Kalmykia. Special attention is paid to the role of Tibetan religious scriptures in the consecration of stupas and statues. In Tibetan Buddhism the concept of relics comprises not only parts of body and ashes of saints or objects associated with holy persons and places, but also books. The installation of Tibetan religious texts serves as the main means of sacralizing stupas and statues in Kalmykia. The thesis surveys the particular texts installed, analyses the importance of these Tibetan texts for Kalmyk Buddhism and describes the process of their installation. The final chapter discusses the main consecration rituals that accompany the construction of a stupa in Kalmykia. These rituals are the preliminary ‘ground ritual’ (sa blang) for obtaining and blessing the site, the empowerment of the items to be installed in the receptacle (gzungs sgrub), the ‘offering bath’ (khrus gsol) and the final consecration (rab gnas).

The thesis is mainly based on data collected through fieldwork, carried out in June and July 2008 in Elista (the capital of Kalmykia) and smaller settlements around the capital.