

Teaching the Living through the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: Exploration into the Context and Content of an 18th-century Mongolian Block Print

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 In the final year of my MA studies at Leipzig University, I came across a small collection of manuscripts that my Mongolian language teacher Klaus Koppe acquired during the 1980s in Mongolia. Among them was a translation of the so-called *Tibetan Book of the Dead* or “The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State” (Tib. *Bar do thos grol chen mo*). After only reading a few sentences, it became apparent that it was written in an artificial style with cryptic formulations, which were only possible to understand by comparing it against a Tibetan version of the text.

Intrigued, I traced the history of the Mongolian translation of the *Bar do thos grol chen mo* and found its earliest edition among the Beijing block prints sponsored by the emperors of the “Great Qing” (Da Qing 大清, 1636–1912) dynasty with the title “The Sutra of Liberation Through Hearing” (Mong. *Sonusuyad tonilyayči-yin sudur ene bui*; hereafter BTG). This article seeks to construct the history of this particular block print¹ and offers a few observations for understanding the peculiarities of its translation process. This means

bringing to light the complex network of cultural exchanges between people, cultures and civilizations through the ages. [...] It means finding out why their sponsors (kings, aristocrats, patrons, high-ranking clergy, etc.) asked them to translate a given work.²

In this way, political, historical, and religious circumstances all weigh into the history of the BTG’s translation. Shedding light on these various aspects will enable us to do three things. Firstly, it will allow us to see “the larger picture stereoscopically with the smaller.”³ Secondly, it will also help us to untangle the complex web of alliances,

¹ The block print is preserved as BM-MON49 in the British Library.

² Delisle *et al.* 2012: XXI.

³ Breckenridge *et al.* 2002: 11.

animosities, and political struggles that shaped Mongol-Chinese-Tibetan relations that defined Qing policies up until the beginning of the 20th century. And thirdly, it gives us a glimpse into the mindset and decisions that have gone into the translation of this particular ritual text.

This article discusses the following three motives, which were outlined in Natalia Yampolskaya's seminal study, and were involved in the translation of the BTG into Mongolian. From a political view, texts (and rituals) can become symbols of power. Further, translations have devotional aspects, that is to say, they were done for the sake of merit production. Finally, a scholarly interest was taken in these texts, primarily due to the absence of a previous translation.⁴

Moreover, I argue that a fourth reason, *viz.* didactic purposes, was a fundamental motivation as well. Based on a textual analysis of the Mongolian BTG block print, the second part of this article aims to explore the translation techniques employed by the Mongolian translators for making this ritual text accessible to Mongolian readers, students and Buddhist adherents alike. Although previous scholarship has either stressed the political ramifications of Tibetan Buddhist patronage of the Mongolian groups⁵ or concluded that the Mongolian translations were not intended to be read, but rather served as vehicles of merit production and monuments of state power,⁶ the discussion below will highlight further levels of meaning involved in the production of this particular translation of the BTG.

1. Historical Background

To fully appreciate the political dimension of the Mongolian translation of the BTG, we need to revisit some of the historical developments starting with the 1577 conference in today's capital of Inner Mongolia, Hohhot (Mong. Kökeqota; Chin. Huhehaote 呼和浩特). The meeting of Altan Khan (1507–1582) of the Mongolian Tümed and the 3rd Dalai Lama Bsod nams rgya mtsho (1543–1588) of the Tibetan Dge lugs school inaugurated a renaissance in the history of Mongolian Buddhism when the two leaders formed a so-called patron-priest relationship (*yon mchod*).⁷ On the occasion of the Hohhot

⁴ Yampolskaya 2015: 754. See also footnote 66 below.

⁵ See, e.g., Farquhar 1978, Hevia 1993, and Rawski 1998.

⁶ See, e.g., Elverskog 2016: 31 and Sobkovyak 2018: 215.

⁷ Its antecedent can be found in the first official *yon [bdag] mchod [gnas]* relationship between the Mongolian emperor of the Yuan dynasty Khubilai Khan (1260–1294) and his Tibetan counterpart 'Gro mgon chos rgyal 'phags pa (1235–1280) marking

meeting Altan Khan made a speech which is recorded in the 18th-century *Religious History of Mongolia* (Tib. *Hor chos 'byung*). He proclaimed that after the fall of the Yuan dynasty, Buddhism ceased to exist. Only through the blessing of this “new” *yon mchod* tie,

the path of the holy religion opened up; the sea of blood was transformed into milk: this was a great blessing. Therefore, all who dwell in this land, Chinese, Tibetans, Hor, and Sog, they shall all abide by the Law of the Ten Virtues. [Therefore, from now on, every] action in this country [i.e., Mongolia] should be like in the Tibetan areas of Dbus and Gtsang.⁸

The ties were further strengthened when the reincarnation of the 3rd Dalai Lama was found in the great-grandson of Altan Khan, who became known as the 4th Dalai Lama Yon tan rgya mtsho (1589–1617). He also received part of his religious education in Hohhot, which was thereby established as an important hub of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia at the beginning of the 17th century. Thus, the Mongols were finally integrated into a “multi-ethnic and multi-centered Buddhist network,”⁹ that soon stretched all the way from the Himalayas to Tibet and the Mongol regions. The installment of a Dalai Lama of Mongolian descent was a strategic act of proselytization that helped in the orientation of Mongolian Buddhists toward Tibet and, in the process, reiterated the Mongolian self-understanding that state and religion must form a joint-venture.

After the Manchus successfully conquered the Chinese throne in 1644, it became paramount to form a political Qing identity through geo-cultural affiliations. According to Sabine Dabringhaus, the Manchu governmental structure was based on the traditional Chinese precept “to control the peoples of the empire by utilizing their own cultural characteristics” (Chin. *yin su er zhi* 因俗而治). Cooperation and collaboration with local elites were essential for the unification of their new empire.¹⁰

the first wave of conversion of the Mongols to Tibetan-style Buddhism. The duality of religious and secular rule, “the two rules,” is expressed in Mongolian as *qoyar yosun* and in Tibetan as *lugs gnyis*. The specifics have been described, for example, in the 16th century work *The White History of the Dharma with Ten Virtues* (Mong. *Arban buyantu nom-un çayan teiike*). See, e.g., Sagaster 1976.

⁸ *slar tho gan the mur rgyal po* [r.1333–1368] *nas chos chad/ [...]* *mchod yon nyi zla zung gcig gi bka' drin las/ dam pa'i chos kyi lam btod/ khrag mtsho 'o mar bsgyur ba 'di bka' drin che bas/ phyogs 'di na yod pa'i rgya bod hor sog kun gyis kyang dge ba bcu'i khrims la gnas pa dgos/ [...]* *mdor na bod yul dbus gtsang ji ltar bya ba ltar/ yul phyogs 'dir yang bya dgos zhes [...]* (*Hor chos 'byung* in 'Jigs med rig pa'i rdo rje 1892: 137.19–139.3).

⁹ Kollmar-Paulenz 2011: 83.

¹⁰ Dabringhaus 1997: 130–131.

However, the initial integration of the various independent Mongolian groups¹¹ into a unified Qing domain was complicated largely by the Dga' ldan pho brang government's policies under the leadership of the 5th Dalai Lama (1617–1683) who—with the help of the Western Mongolian leader Gushri Khan (1582–1655) of the Khoshut—established Lhasa as the capital of Central Tibet in 1642. The Dga' ldan pho brang officials pursued the creation of a theocratic empire which would incorporate all peoples of the Tibetan Buddhist faith. The greatest threat to their plans came from the newly emerging Qing Empire, which tried to seize the eastern, northern, and western Mongolian territories. Such an expansion would not only have made the formation of a theocratic domain impossible, but could even have endangered the independence of Tibet itself.¹²

With the support of the 5th Dalai Lama and his regent Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho (1653–1705), the attacks of another faction of the Western Mongolians or Oirats under the leadership of Galdan Boshugtu Khan (1644–1697) against the northern Mongolian Khalkha territories were seen as an act of resistance against the Qing rule. However, for Galdan Khan it was more of a personal matter since he intended to take revenge for the killing of his younger brother, in which the Khalkha Mongol lama Zanabazar¹³ was implicated.

But Zanabazar sought the support and protection of the Qing Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) instead. In 1689, the Kangxi Emperor tried to stop further bloodshed and wrote a series of letters to various dignitaries. He appealed to the Tibetan government to intervene and further explained his support of Zanabazar and the Khalkha as follows:

We are the lord of the Empire (*tianxia zhu* 天下主). If We do not grant asylum to, and nourish, those who come to Us, then who will give asylum to them and nourish them? If the Khalkhas had sought refuge with you, O Lama, certainly you could not have tolerated their death and destruction. [...] Our wish is that the O-lu-t'e [i.e., the Oirat] and the Khalkhas completely get rid of their previous hatred, and live in

¹¹ James Hevia concluded that we cannot simply speak of unified national entities during the Qing rulership, but need to “reconceptualize sovereignty in terms other than those which map ethnicity and culture over territory” (Hevia 1993: 268). Therefore, I refer to the various factions that trace their lineage to one of the eight Mongolian clans and speak a variant of the Mongolian language as “Mongolian groups.”

¹² Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 84–85.

¹³ Blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1635–1723) who was the first in the reincarnation lineage of the Khal kha Rje btsun dam pa Hu thog thu-s.

peace, as formerly. Let each keep his own territory, and stop the war, and cease hostilities.¹⁴

Only two years later, in 1691, a total of 550 Khalkha princes led by Zanabazar officially submitted to the Qing Emperor in the so-called Dolonnur convention in southern Mongolia. On this occasion, the Emperor welcomed them with many gifts and bestowed upon them various titles and established the Blue Temple (Mong. *Köke Süme*; Chin. *Huizong Si* 彙宗寺) in the Dolonnur area. Subsequently, this became a center of refuge for many Tibetan Buddhists living in Beijing, and a central hub¹⁵ for over 3,000 Mongolian monks in the 18th and 19th centuries which provided an alternative to Lhasa as an important center of Tibetan Buddhism, this time within Mongolia.¹⁶

After the successful expulsion of the last remnant troops of Galdan Khan in 1696 from the northern Qing borders, future danger from the northeast of the empire was contained so far. The emperor planned to maintain control over the administrative and social structures without committing large numbers of troops or spending large sums of money.¹⁷ After he secured the loyalty of Zanabazar as the highest Buddhist authority of the Khalkha, the emperor was thus faced with the difficult task of creating a religious institution for the Inner Mongolian groups, and even more importantly, it was necessary to establish it in the imperial capital.¹⁸ Accordingly, he summoned Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan (1642–1714), who became the first representative of the reincarnation line of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu (Mong. *Janggiy-a qutuy-tu*) to Beijing.¹⁹ The emperor saw the possibility of a more direct political influence upon the Mongolian groups and thus averting their gaze away from Tibet and towards a Mongolian clerical elite within the expanding Qing Empire, or as the Kangxi Emperor put it: “Building one monastery equals to keeping a hundred thousand soldiers.”²⁰

¹⁴ Ahmad 1970: 276. It should be noted here that the 5th Dalai Lama already died in 1683 but his death was kept secret by Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho.

¹⁵ It was extended by the Shanyin Temple (Mong. *Shira Süme*; Chin. *Shanyin Si* 善因寺) in 1731.

¹⁶ Wu 2015: 113.

¹⁷ Di Cosmo 1998: 291–292.

¹⁸ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 85.

¹⁹ From Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan's *rnam thar* Brenton Sullivan translates an edict that an imperial envoy delivered him in 1693, “At this time there has arisen the need for a great lama of superior virtue. Since the Lama Rinpoché [i.e. the Dalai Lama] and Pañchen Rinpoché are both advanced in age, they are not being invited. You are a good lama who has great virtue [...]. You must by all means come” (Sullivan 2013: 140).

²⁰ Ujeed 2009: 54.

[But behind] the policies for the restabilization of Buddhist Inner Asian society established by the Pax Manjurica lay a fundamental conception of Buddhist monarchy, one of the constitutional features of which was close cooperation of crown and clergy. Its interpreters exhorted the emperor to promote publication and study of the sutras, and encouraged his devotion and that of his family and officials to the Dharma as the basis for preserving the state against natural calamities, public disorders and foreign invasions.²¹

This not only followed the precedents set in the past—that is to say, the various *yon mchod* relationships starting with Khubilai Khan and 'Phags pa bla ma during the Yuan dynasty which established a familiar cultural vocabulary—but also helped to stylize the Chinese emperor as the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, establishing both religious and secular rule. According to Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, the role of an emperor granting protection and support also included the sponsorship of Buddhist translations and printings and qualified the Manchu ruler as “protecting, beneficent, kind and forgiving” in order to provide “an interpretative framework for future representations of the position of the emperor vis-à-vis his Mongol subjects.”²² This can best be illustrated by an imperial edict on the occasion of Kangxi's 70th birthday, which summarizes the rise to power of the Manchus, pointing out the pacification of Mongolia by him and calling the Mongols the first of all his subjects.²³

Following Johan Elverskog's argumentation for a Qing cosmopolitanism, the projection of the Qing emperors as both Buddhists and the righteous rulers of the region became a fundamental element of Qing imperial discourse. To achieve this project, the Qing court produced and reconfirmed the new reality “in a torrent of textual, visual, and various performative media” in order “to establish a shared reality with those incorporated into the empire.”²⁴ Elverskog further argues that the Manchus were creating communities by using language and rituals to “engender an interrelated process of becoming both Buddhist and an imperial subject.”²⁵

This enterprise further extended the support for the various members of the Buddhist clergy, and more than 100 monasteries were founded of in the southern Mongolian corridor and the printing of religious texts was advanced. In particular, the Qing court patronage

²¹ Grupper 1984: 49.

²² Heuschert-Laage 2014: 651.

²³ *Mongγol-un γajar-i ariγudqan toytayγasan anu [...]* wang : sayid : tūsimed : čirig irgen *mongγol ud-ača ekilen* (Heissig & Bawden 1971: 115).

²⁴ Elverskog 2006: 8.

²⁵ Elverskog 2006: 8.

for Buddhist translations played a direct and leading role in the development of non-Han book culture, which was integral to the multicultural policies promoted by the emperors.²⁶ It triggered a renaissance of print culture and generated large-scale translation activities, as one can see in the vast outcome of a total of 554²⁷ works which were translated into Mongolian and printed in Beijing alone.

2. Beijing as a Printing Hub

From 1650, in addition to the 108 volumes of the Bka' 'gyur and the 226 volumes of the Bstan 'gyur in the Mongolian language, another 220 religious works in Mongolian were printed in Beijing until the fall of the dynasty in 1912.

The printing workshops (Chin. *jing chang* 經廠) for Mongolian and Tibetan texts were located next to various temples built by the Qing administration, all situated around the Western Gate or Andingmen 安定門 of the Imperial City. In 1652, the construction of the Lha khang ser po or Yellow Temple (Chin. Xihuang Si 西黃寺) was finished. Initially, it was intended as the residency of the 5th Dalai Lama in Beijing, but it later served as the residence of high Tibetan and Mongolian lamas such as Zanabazar when they visited the emperor.²⁸ Then, in 1706, the Mahākāla Temple (Chin. Pudu Si 普渡寺) was built, which was also the seat of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu-s, the Tibetan Buddhist reincarnation lineage established in Inner Mongolia and Beijing.

Walther Heissig identified seven individual woodblock carvers that were active in the Imperial City.²⁹ The carver Fu Dalai (Chin. Fu hai 傅海) "who dwells outside the Anding Gate,"³⁰ cut the blocks for the print of the Mongolian BTG and was active from 1707 to 1721. His workshop was presumably succeeded by a printing house opened in the Mahākāla Temple since the monasteries were not only the recipients of books but also served as centers for the production and sale of religious texts in Mongolian and Tibetan.³¹

²⁶ Rawski 2005: 305.

²⁷ For a detailed list, see Heissig 1954: 3–4.

²⁸ Charleux 2010: 110.

²⁹ Heissig 1954: 4.

³⁰ *an ding men qayalyan-u yadan-a sayuysan : fu dalai seyilgejü yarayabai* (BTG: 64a25–26).

³¹ Naquin 2000: 587.

Since the *Pax Manjurica*,³² regular tribute missions (Chin. *chao gong* 朝貢) to Beijing were expected from the Mongolian nobility and reincarnated lamas. The Mongolian princes often traveled together with local traders who took the opportunity to spend two to three months in Beijing during the winter months to sell their livestock. For example, according to the Lifanyuan 理藩院 records of 1694, more than 10,000 tribute-bearing Mongolians had to be provided with lodging in Beijing. When they usually started their return journey the following spring, in addition to silk and tea, they brought back new books. Many of them had summer residences set up, and a Mongolian community of up to 150,000 residents was formed in Beijing. They visited the temples and bookstores in the Qing capital, and their demand for religious texts encouraged the commercial printing business.³³

So far, the article has shed light on the historical context that facilitated the creation process of the BTG translation. In the following sections, the content of the BTG will be examined in more detail.

3. *The Ritual Manual*

The earliest publications sponsored by the Qing were reprints of previous Mongolian translations or redactions of the Tibetan *Bka' gyur* under the patronage of the Chakhar Mongol leader Ligdan Khan (1592–1634).³⁴ It was only at the beginning of the 18th century that new translations were commissioned and printed. The Mongolian BTG translation was part of this new development. It bears the title “The Sutra of Liberation through Hearing” (Mong. *Sonusuyad tonilyayči-yin sudur ene bui*), and “was completed on an auspicious day of the last month of autumn in the 54th year [of the reign of Emperor Kangxi, i.e., 1715] of the Qing dynasty.”³⁵

The Tibetan source text is a *gter ma* or “treasure text” believed to have been retrieved by the Gter ston Karma gling pa (1326–1386), and thus most likely dates from the 14th century. It belongs to a bigger cycle of teachings, *The Profound Teachings of Self-Liberation through the Intention of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones* (Tib. *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*) and provides information about a millennia-old riddle: what happens to us in the course of dying?

³² The *Pax Manjurica* refers to a period of peace from the early 1680s to the 1830s in China under the rulers who were ethnic Manchus (Newby 2011: 557).

³³ Charleux 2014: 10 and Rawski 2007: 201–202.

³⁴ Alekseev & Turanskaya 2013: 755–757.

³⁵ *daičing ulus-un engke amuyulang-un tabin dörbedüger on-u namur-un segiil sar-a-yin sayin ediir tegiiskebei* (BTG: 64a27–28).

On a ritual and ideological as well as social and economic level, death plays a central role in Buddhist culture and contributed to the development and spread of Buddhist teachings. If a religion wanted to establish itself in other countries, as was the case with Buddhism, it had to be able to provide answers to essential human concerns such as illness and death. The Buddhist teachings not only were able to inform practitioners what exactly happens at the time of death and how it relates to each and everyone's way of life but also laid out the processes needed to ensure a successful rebirth.³⁶

The BTG is such a manual which explains *en détail* the different intermediate states that the deceased will experience over the course of 49 days until the next rebirth. The text is structured around four invocation prayers, which are embedded in prose that forms a commentary on these prayers. When a person dies, the lama reads aloud these explanations to the deceased, thus guiding him or her through a total of six stages or intermediate states. The format of the text is a step-by-step approach to liberation from *saṃsāra*. Each state offers the opportunity for liberation of the deceased—or rather his or her consciousness—through various prayers or practices.

In the ground-breaking study by Bryan Cuevas on *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, he pointed out that the standardization of the *Bar do thos grol* in Tibet in terms of structure and content was only completed in the 18th century.³⁷ The individual prayers were probably already in circulation in Central Tibet from the late 11th century onwards.

A similar trend can also be observed in Mongolia, where a set of the four core invocation prayers from the *Bar do thos grol* in Mongolian was found in Xarboxyn Balgas written on birchbark dating from the early 17th century. Similar fragments were also excavated at the southern Mongolian monastery of Olon Süme.³⁸

Around the same time, a reference to Buddhist funeral practices in Mongolia is found in the biography of Altan Khan which records his hour of death:

³⁶ Ladwig & Williams 2012: 1.

³⁷ Cuevas 2003: 24, 39.

³⁸ Chiodo 2000: 244–260 and Chiodo 2009: 127–129. Xarboxyn Balgas is located 240km west of Ulaanbaatar to the south of Bulgan Aimag. Olon Süme is an archaeological site in Inner Mongolia, Baotou (Mong. Buyutu qota, Chin. 包头市) prefecture.

At that time, Mañjuśri Qutuγtu was [responsible] for the remains [of Altan Khan] and to help his radiant, pure soul gain the best rebirth or [at best] guide and lead him to liberation.³⁹

But until 1715, which marks the publication date of the BTG block print, there is no evidence of an actual ritual manual based on the BTG teachings.

The BTG's immediate popularity among Mongolian Buddhists can be fathomed by the many Beijing block prints and manuscripts that are preserved in libraries all around the world.⁴⁰ Moreover, a few lines have even been reprinted as a sample of a xylograph of the 17th century in N. Poppe's *Grammar of Written Mongolian*.⁴¹

Furthermore, the BTG was still in use when the Hungarian linguist Bálint Gábor at the end of the 19th century and the Russian explorer Aleksei Pozdnev at the beginning of the 20th century traveled around Mongolia.⁴²

4. Symbols of Power

The translation of the first Tibetan texts into Mongolian in the mid-13th century was followed by a period of stagnation at the end of Yuan rule in China. It was not until 200 years later that the translation activity was revived, many old translations were revised, and other texts newly translated into Mongolian.

This can also be interpreted as a sign of the populist nature of the second wave of Mongolian Buddhist conversion under the newly

³⁹ *tere cay-tur manjusiri qutuγtu über-ün bey-e-ber gegen sünesiin-i inu : degedü törül-ün tonilqui töb-tür udurid-un jalaju* (Kollmar-Paulenz 2001: 196. 37a20–23; translation is mine).

⁴⁰ *Cod. mongol. 23* and *Cod. mongol. 124* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek); *M.8* (University Library of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium); *BM-MON49*, *BM-66a* (British Museum London, Mongolici); *Libr. Mong 55* (Westdeutsche Bibliothek Marburg, Libri Mongolici), *SCH 3593* (Institut de France, Paris, Schilling von Canstadt Collection), *L 298* and *L 528* (Far Eastern Library, University of Chicago, Laufer Collection), *Div. O. M227* (Division of Orientalia of the Library of Congress), *TB 28* (Manchu-Mongol section of the Tōyō Bunko), *Mong. 466* (Det Kongelige Bibliotek København, Denmark), *M II.321* (IMBTS SB RAS, Ulaan-Ude), *Mong. B4* and *Mong. D28* (St. Petersburg State University Library) as well as a block print from Dr. Lokesh Chandra held by the Buddhist Digital Resource Center (BDRC) *W2EE6*. Handwritten copies are also preserved under *j-314/91* (Far East Department of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague), *Mong. 72* (The Mongolian Collection in Berkeley, California), *Cod. mongol. 27* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek), *Mong. E37* (St. Petersburg State University Library), and the Leipzig manuscript (no shelf-mark).

⁴¹ Poppe 1964: 37.

⁴² See Majer 2019 for a detailed study.

established Qing rule. The Manchu rulers sought to strengthen the ties between Mongolian monasteries and Beijing and considered the various Mongolian Buddhist dignitaries as a tool for the expansion of their authority. On the other hand, "the emperor had to rely on those outside the official system to spread the idea among the Mongols, and this meant the lamas and the lay nobles, the chief beneficiaries of the *Pax Manjurica*."⁴³

In 1705, the construction of the monastery in Dolonnur was completed under the supervision of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu and was not only intended as a mere memorial. Kangxi had realized that the Buddhist institutions in Beijing could not exert the same influence on the Mongols as a religious center located in Mongolia itself. According to the will of the emperor, the monastery "was built for the benefit of the eight Tsakhar banners [a Chinese administrative system; *baqi* 八旗], the forty-nine southern and fifty-seven northern banners, and the Oirat."⁴⁴

For now, the emperor had achieved his goal. He bestowed the Lcang skya Ho thog thu with various honorary titles and a seal, and soon enough, the emerging influence of the new monastery attracted the southern and eastern Mongols who came to Dolonnur in great numbers. The reputation of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu quickly became so wide-spread that even pilgrims from Amdo and scholars from India, as well as the Chinese monks who worked as constructors, came to pay their respects.⁴⁵ The Lcang skya Ho thog thu made extensive use of his new privileges and promoted the spread of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols in Beijing and the Qing border regions. For instance, in 1709, a Mongolian delegation was sent to Tibet to copy all the publications held in the Potala and 'Bras spungs Monastery. The Lcang skya Ho thog thu wanted to provide the rich treasures of these monasteries to the local Mongolian monasteries and, thereby, created the Inner Mongolian sphere of the Buddhist faith.⁴⁶

Another key element in the consolidation of their Mongolian subjects was to deal with shamanistic remnants. Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz observed a multi-level process, "whereby the Mongolian indigenous religious specialists were described as possessing a 'wrong view,' compared to the 'true' Buddhist teaching."⁴⁷ Only in the 19th century, through the reification and "invention of shamanism," would

⁴³ Farquhar 1978: 28.

⁴⁴ *Čaqar-un naiman qošiγun ba : öber döčün yisiin qošiγu : aru tabin doluyan qošiγu kiged : ögeled neyite büikiin-ü tusa-dur [...]* (Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 124).

⁴⁵ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 127.

⁴⁶ Ngag dbang chos ldan & Sagaster 1967: 133, 170.

⁴⁷ Kollmar-Paulenz 2012: 103.

it finally be integrated into a Mongolian holistic world-view without any pejorative judgment.

In the 17th century, the ban of all shamanistic beliefs was radically pursued and is most evident in the instructions of Zanabazar, who became an ardent opponent of shamanism. He instructed his lay followers and disciples that whoever observed someone making offerings to *ongγod* (i.e., felt dolls inhabited by spirits; plural form of *ongγon*) should burn them.⁴⁸

Since shamanism is intrinsically tied to healing and funerary rites, the religious specialist was either in charge of capturing the soul (*sünesiin*) of a sick person and reintegrating it into the body or leading it into an *ongγon* in the case of death. The structure of the BTG employs similar features and will be demonstrated by a comparison between the Mongolian and Tibetan versions:

⁴⁸ *Boγda zaya bandida : basa busu gelung : gečül : bandi : ubasi : ubasangja-du nige edür-ün bačay abisig uduriyulsun nuγud-i ögbei : ken ujeγsen kümiin : onγod takiγsan-i anu onγod-i tülin* (Transliteration follows Bawden 1962: 82; translation is mine). Johan Elverskog demonstrates that Mongolian culture needed to be “fully reengineered within the Buddhist structure” for the Qing to employ their Buddhist rhetoric. He gives a graphic example of Norbusangbu of the Khorchin, “who rounded up all the shamans in the ten banners of the Jirim League [Inner Mongolia] and burned them alive on a wooden pyre,” and rather than being punished for it, he was lauded by the Qing authorities. (Elverskog 2006: 118–119).

BTG: 2a6–24

The Great Liberation through Hearing [consists of] these three parts: the preceding [practices], one's own clear belief, and the exertion.

First, through the preceding [practices], virtuous beings are liberated by this. Those with the highest intellect will certainly be freed by following these instructions. If someone has not been liberated [yet], they [should practice] the *Self-Liberation by Remembering the Soul* in the intermediate state at the time of death. Through this, the yogin of middle intellect will certainly be liberated.⁴⁹

KGP: 2a1–2b2⁵⁰

This Great Liberation by Hearing has three parts, namely: the preliminary [practices], the main subject matter [of the text] and the conclusion.

Regarding liberation, at the beginning, [all aspirants] should practice the steps of the instruction. Those of highest acumen will definitely be liberated through [the application of these] instructions. Those who are not liberated by these [instructions] should recall [the practice of] *Self-Liberation through Transference of Consciousness* during the intermediate state at the time of death. Yogins of average intellect should certainly be liberated by that.⁵¹

The Mongolian phrase *sünesiün-i sedkin*, “to remember the soul,” which renders the Tibetan *'pho ba dran ba* “remember [the practice] of the transference [of consciousness],” translates the well-known Buddhist meditation practice of transmigrating the consciousness from the physical body in order to escape the intermediate state and enter nirvana. In the ritual practice, one often sees that the corpse is covered with a white cloth and must not be touched under any circumstances until the lama arrives. This is done for the *'pho ba* practice, as the consciousness tries to come out at the place where you first touch the person after his or her death.⁵²

⁴⁹ *yekede somusuyad tonilyayçi : egiün-dür yurban jüil udq-a bui : urida yabuyulaqui ile sittiigen degen orulduqui luy-a yutayar boluyu : neng terigiün urida yabuyulaqui-bar : sayin jayay-a-tan toniluyçid-bar : neng terigiün uduriyulsun⁴⁹-i jerge-ber tegsi abuysan qurça oyutan uduriyulsun-iyar mayad tonilumu : tegiün düir ese tonilbasu ükiil-iin jayur-a-du-dür : sünesiün-i sedkin öbesiiben tonilqu-yi tegsi abuysan tegiün-iyer büged dumdadu yögaçaris mayad-iyar tonilumu* (BTG: 2a6–24).

⁵⁰ Karma gling pa (1326–1386). n.d. *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol las: Chos nyid bar do'i gsal 'debs thos grol chen mo* [From the Profound Dharma of Self-Liberation through the Intention of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones: The Elucidation of the Great Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State of the Quintessential Reality].

⁵¹ *thos grol chen mo 'di la don gsum stel sngon 'gro dngos gzhi rjes dang gsum yin no/ dang po sngon 'gro'i dus [sic] can grol ba ni/ khrid kyi rim pa thog mar nyams su blangs/ dbang po rab rnam khrid kyis nges par grol/ des ma grol na 'chi kha'i bar do la/ 'pho ba dran pa rang grol nyams su blangs/ des ni rnal 'byor 'bring rnam nges par grol* (KGP: 2a1–2b2).

⁵² Gouin 2012: 17.

The Mongolian translators chose the term *siinesiin* to describe this practice, which is of particular interest. In the Mongolian folk belief, a person has three souls, an idea that has shamanistic roots and predates Buddhism. The first soul, *amin*, resides in the bones and leaves the body after death. It can be summoned by a shaman and revered as an *ongyon*. The second soul, *siilde* or “protecting genius,” is a spirit that guarantees life. And the third soul, *siinesiin*, resides in the blood and is thought of as immortal and independent of the material body. It has become a frequent motif in Mongolian folk tales known as “The Wandering Soul” since it can leave the body in the form of a wasp or bee through the nose or mouth. Usually, this *siinesiin* can cause great trouble and needs to be pacified by the shaman.⁵³

Furthermore, the above-mentioned excerpt indicates a change in agency. In shamanism, the ritual specialist was the main actor responsible for the soul, whereas the deceased was only of secondary importance. In the BTG, the deceased is the most important person for the success of the *'pho ba* practice to find a good area for rebirth or even leave the cycle of *samsāra*.

Only later, from the mid-18th century onwards, we find a more refined definition of *siinesiin*. In the *Collected Works* of the Lcang skya Ho thog thu a small text is preserved—*The Manual of Instructions to Transmigrating the Consciousness Swiftly into Celestial Realms* (Tib. *Rnam shes gong du 'pho ba'i khrid yig mkha' spyod myur lam*; Mong. *Siinesiin-i degegsi yegüdkegdekü-yin kötelbüri biçig udiyan-a-yin türgen mör*). The text was written originally in Tibetan and later translated into Mongolian. Here, *siinesiin* is paired with *rnam shes*, “consciousness,” which is its prevalent use nowadays, and *'pho ba* with *yegüdkegdekü*, “to transmigrate.”

Another example is *yadayadu amin* translating the Tibetan *phyi dbugs* or “outer breathing.” In the process of dying, the person goes through several stages, including a cessation of vital functions of the body.⁵⁴ Gyurme Dorje describes this process as:

The period following the cessation of the coarse outer breath (*phyi dbugs*) and before the cessation of the subtle inner breath (*nang dbugs*) [...] is that during which the vital energy and mind are drawn together into the central channel, causing ordinary beings to lapse into unconsciousness.⁵⁵

⁵³ Sárközi 2008: 468 and Bawden 1962: 82.

⁵⁴ *yasun bui bügesü yadayadu amin tasuraqu-yin jabsar-du* [...] (BTG: 2b20–21) and the corresponding Tibetan: *ro yod na phyi dbugs chad pa'i tshams su* [...] (KGP: 3a4–3b1).

⁵⁵ Gyurme Dorje 2006: 418n44.

In their choice of words, the Mongolian translators again linked it to a familiar (shamanistic) concept of the life-giving “soul,” *amin*, whereas (*γadayadu*) *amisqal/amisqul*, “breath” or “respiration,” is well attested as an equivalent for Tibetan (*phyi*) *dbugs*.⁵⁶

In the translation of the Mongolian BTG block print, the translators appeal to the shamanistic idea of a soul, which was familiar to most Mongols. In the wake of the new translations of ritual texts, the cultural vocabulary became then linked to Tibetan Buddhist death-rite literature.⁵⁷ This can also be observed from the Mongolian ritual text for *Summoning a Person's Soul* (Mong. *Kümiin-ü siinesü-yi dalalaqui sudur*).⁵⁸ According to Charles Bawden, death in the Mongolian folk religion was attributed to the removal of life or the soul (*amin* and *siinesüin*) by demons. These rituals

form an interesting illustration of the process of adaptation of shamanism to lamaism resulting from lamaist missionary activities studied already by Walther Heissig [who] show[ed] how contemporary lamaism set up a system of satisfying the desires of the Mongol nobility to promote prayers emanating from an early animistic form of religion.⁵⁹

Although this is not necessarily a unique feature of the Mongolian translation alone, but can be observed in translation processes all over the world, I argue that the translators' choice in their wording used the ambiguity to highlight familiarity with the *new* Buddhism and *old* shamanistic practices and reoccupied contested concepts and terminology. Therefore, the Mongolian BTG may have served as an important tool for the Buddhist missionary work among the Mongols, partly due to its resemblance to the shamanistic vocabulary they were already familiar with.

5. Language Matters

At the beginning of the re-ignited interest in Buddhism, the Mongols used Tibetan as their liturgical or sacred language. But the Qing dynasty's first ruler Huang Taiji 皇太極 (r. 1636–1643) was critical to this development. In his view, it meant that the Mongolian princes

⁵⁶ Nomtoev & Sárközi 2018: 957 and Terbish 2018: 1143.

⁵⁷ Tomka 1965: 161–162. This practice became also known as *siimsü zal*, “to deliver the soul [to the realm of the dead]” in the Kalmyk language, as *p'uwa dat'a*, “pulling the spirit,” or *siines dat'a*, “pulling the soul,” in the Ordos dialect.

⁵⁸ I am indebted to Olaf Czaja who first made me aware of these ritual texts.

⁵⁹ Bawden 1962: 84. See also Bawden 1970 for another manuscript on the *Kümiin-ü siinesü-yi dalalaqui sudur*.

would eventually abandon their Mongolian language; their names became imitations of Tibetan titles and, ultimately, this would entail a decline in the prosperity of the state. Therefore, from the middle of the 17th century onwards, a predominantly Buddhist literature production in Mongolian was encouraged and labeled as “original Mongolian language” (*uur mongyol kele*) and “ear jewelry” (*čikin-ü čimeg*).⁶⁰

This led to an increased translation activity from Tibetan into Mongolian. But how was this large-scale translation project achieved? And what techniques were employed by the translators? Not only did they need to reproduce the embedded ideas from a foreign language and cultural context but also render them *relevant* to their own culture to be fully understood.⁶¹

As early as the 14th century, Mongolian translators tried to come to terms with this task which has been outlined in an early 14th grammatical textbook, the *Artery*⁶² of the Heart (Mong. *žiriiken-ü tolta*) ascribed to Choiji Odser:

As writing is the support of Buddha’s word, the scribes should imagine themselves being the Buddha Amitābha. They should write thinking the brush is a jar of ambrosia. The patrons, too, should think that the scribes are the Buddha Amitābha, and there are many ways to make them objects of honor and respect. Both of them should strive with pure thought.⁶³

In the development of Mongolian Buddhist translations, an increasingly high degree of *translationese*, or artificial language, can be observed that would be mostly incomprehensible for the uninitiated reader. This has a variety of reasons. Translation studies have drawn the distinction between foreignization and domestication of a given text and describe the degree to which the translators make a text conform to the target culture.⁶⁴

An example would be the German sentence “Der Zug ist abgefahren.” When translated into English, there are two ways of translating: as “The train has departed,” which preserves the literal

⁶⁰ Faquhar 1978: 21 and Kara 2005: 180.

⁶¹ The Tibetan translators of the 8th and 9th were faced with similar problems which is reflected in the introduction of the *Two-Volume Lexicon* (Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*) and discussed in brief below.

⁶² The translation of *tolta* as artery or aorta has become the standard although not entirely clear. Klaus Sagaster provides “Hülle des Herzens” as an alternative translation (Sagaster 2007a: 1253).

⁶³ *burqan-u jarliy-un sitügen üsüg бүкii-yin tula : bičigeči-ner beye-ben Abida burqan kemen bisily-a : bigiri rasiyan-u qumuq-a kemen sedkijü bičikü : öglige-yin ežen-ber bičigeči-ner-i Abida burqan kemen sedkijü : ergün kündülekü-yin oron bolyaqui yosun : olan bui : üy-e qoyar biiri ariyun sedkil-i egusken joriydaqui* (Kara 2011: 50).

⁶⁴ See Venuti 2008.

meaning (foreignization) of the source language or with an idiomatic phrase available in the target language as “The ship has already sailed.” In the latter, the idiomatic meaning—an opportunity has passed—is preserved, but the wording is altered (domestication). The challenge here is the requirement of *a priori* knowledge of German idioms.

Mongolians chose to translate Buddhist texts from Tibetan and applied a mix of foreignization and domestication, yet they were facing numerous problems during this process. First, they had to find a way to translate the religious and philosophical terminology and the peculiarities of literary Tibetan into their own language, without distorting the meaning or intentions of the text.

Second, they were faced with the problem that meaning does not have a fixed and unchanging inherent essence but rather represented a multi-layered and mutually influencing relationship. Therefore, despite their best efforts, it proved impossible to translate exclusively through a semantic and syntactic one-to-one correspondence.

An example would be the Mongolian translation of Tibetan *sprul sku* (“emanation body”), which is represented as *burqan qubilyan bey-e* (“Buddha transformation body”). Here, we can see that the syntactic function is not translated 1:1, in the sense of *qubilyan* = *sprul* and *bey-e* = *sku*, but rather the concept behind it—the Buddha (*burqan*) transforming (*qubilyan*) into the body (*bey-e*) of a human being.

In terms of sentence structure, the Mongolian BTG would, according to Natalia Yampolskaya’s classification, be a so-called restructured verbatim translation, which is “characterized by a high level of fidelity to the original, allowing minor changes in the structure of the sentence.”⁶⁵ However, even a *foreignizing translation*—staying as close as possible to the source text—cannot give a transparent and essential representation of the foreign text but is a strategic construct whose value depends on the respective recipient.⁶⁶ Therefore, Yampolskaya demonstrates that during the translation of Buddhist texts from Tibetan, a highly specialized Mongolian terminology was developed:

All translation techniques, including verbatim translation, involve a high degree of interpretation. Differences in the grammar of the Tibetan and Mongolian languages are significant, and the target

⁶⁵ Yampolskaya 2015: 761. In her comparative study, she analyzed eight translations of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* [The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines] and established a system classifying Mongolian Buddhist texts in relation to their closeness towards the Tibetan source texts.

⁶⁶ Venuti 2008: 15.

language cannot provide vocabulary and grammatical structures fully equivalent to the original.⁶⁷

This is a phenomenon that is not limited to the Mongolian-speaking world, but is also found in, for instance, Turkish Buddhist literature. The Turkologist and Tibetologist Wolfgang Scharlipp noted that, especially in the death-rite literature, no one could even read and understand a sentence if he or she was not familiar with the philosophical-religious background since almost every word has a specific meaning within a fixed philosophical construct.⁶⁸

The problem with the translation of texts from a language that is both complex in content and terminologically defined was further complicated by the fact that the source and target languages belonged to different language families: Mongolian to the Altaic, Tibetan to the Sino-Tibetan language family.

However, these challenges were not limited to the Mongolian speaking world. Already in the 8th century, the Tibetan translators had to grapple with similar issues when they started their translation project from Sanskrit into Tibetan. In the process, various works were compiled to help to translate in a standardized fashion, such as the *Two-Volume Lexicon* (Tib. *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa*), which can be dated to the very end of Khri lde srong btsan Sad na legs' (r. 799–815) reign. It contains, among other things, an edict ascribed to him outlining translation rules and other practical advice.⁶⁹ Eventually, with the compilation of the Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon *Mahāvvyutpatti*, the translators were equipped with the necessary tools for the large-scale translation project that rendered the Indian sutras into Tibetan.

While the bilingual dictionary itself contains a fair amount of foreign and technical terminology that would not have been immediately accessible to an untrained readership, it should be noted that the authors of the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* opted for a more nuanced and assimilating approach. They not only recommended being as close to the original as possible but also emphasized that a translator should produce “good Tibetan,” which might require some linguistic and terminological adaptations.

Prior to the creation of a standardized Mongolian translation terminology, the translators had no point of reference, which led to inconsistent results:

⁶⁷ Yampolskaya 2015: 765. See also Sobkovyak (2018: 214) who argues for the term “grammatical interpretation” and not for “translation into Mongolian,” since the employed language is not “Mongolian proper.”

⁶⁸ Scharlipp 1996: 259–260.

⁶⁹ Scherrer-Schaub 1999: 68.

Since the languages of the various parts of Greater Mongolia are basically the same but show many differences in some details, and since there was no established uniformity of expression, especially concerning the names and words to be used for the translation of religious texts, many translators had created many different expressions at their own discretion.⁷⁰

Only from the mid-18th century, with the creation of various Tibetan-Mongolian terminological dictionaries such as *The Tibetan Word-Book, Easy to Understand* (Mong. *Töbed üge kilbar surqu bičig*; Tib. *Bod kyi brda yig rtogs par sla ba*) compiled in 1737 and *The Established Orthography Called: The Source of Wisdom* (Mong. *Merged yarqu-yin oron neretüi toytayaysan dagyig*; Tib. *Dag yig mkhas pa'i byung gnas*) compiled in 1741–1742, the codification efforts of the Mongols were well attested.⁷¹

In the case of ritual texts, however, another aspect comes into play: the effectiveness of the ritual. “Church” or liturgical language, which is used in rituals and ceremonies, is hardly ever employed elsewhere in daily life. The scholar of Buddhism Jan Nattier, for instance, argues that “church language” is intentionally separated from the vernacular and reserved only for ritual specialists who, through appropriate initiations and special training, can understand the content and interpret it for the majority of followers. She mentions the linguistic boundaries that face the translators with a dilemma:

[W]hat is the relative importance of form, on the one hand, and of content on the other? [I]f the message is taken out of the form in which a divine power originally revealed it and cast in another language (with all the attendant possibilities of misinterpretation), who is to say that human error has not crept in to alter the message?⁷²

The following chapter is trying to find further possible answers to these questions.

6. Educational Resource

Even though several monasteries in the south of Mongolia and the Mahākāla Monastery of Beijing introduced the custom of reading prayers in the Mongolian language on all occasions from the late 17th

⁷⁰ *chen po hor gyi yul gru so so'i skad kyi byings 'dra yang/ zur cung zad re mi 'dra ba mang zhing/ khyad par du chos bsgyur ba'i ming brda' 'dogs tshul bkas bcad 'dra ba zhig mi 'dug pas/ lo tsā ba du mas so sor rang rang gi 'dod pas tha snyad mi mthun pa sna tshogs sbyar tse thos bsam byed pa rnam kyis rtogs dka' ba sogs nyes pa du ma'i gzhir 'gyur bas/* (‘Jigs med rig pa'i rdo rje 1892: 184.11–15). See also Ruegg 1974: 250–253.

⁷¹ Sárközi 2010: 101–104.

⁷² Nattier 1990: 198–199.

century onwards, the Tibetan influence became authoritative. Many Mongolian monks were sent to Tibetan monasteries for their education, in particular, the Bkra shis sgo mang grwa tshang of 'Bras spungs Monastery.

Higher dignitaries such as the aforementioned Lcang skya Ho thog thu Ngag dbang blo bzang chos ldan and Zanabazar were educated in Tibetan monasteries and composed works in Tibetan, but most monks in Mongolia began their education by merely memorizing the pronunciation of Tibetan prayers without actually learning the language, and often left the monastery after a few years without receiving training in either the Tibetan or the Mongolian script.⁷³ The implementation of monastic didactics found fertile ground in Mongolia and was facilitated by already existing concepts. Rote learning long predated the Buddhist era as all the classic genres of literature were transmitted orally from generation to generation over many centuries.⁷⁴ Uranchimeg Ujeed remarks that nevertheless

most Mongols did not become so proficient in Tibetan that they were able to fully understand the Buddhist teachings nor in Tibetan, nor were they so superstitious that nearly one-third of the male population became monks without understanding the essential meaning of the teachings. Why have Mongols been so keen on translating the Buddhist texts into Mongolian if Tibetan was officially and popularly accepted as the predominant religious language all over Mongolia?⁷⁵

According to Aleksei Pozdnev's ethnographical research, a teacher would start to practice the translations of what had to be read and learned with a young disciple only after he had memorized the entire cycle of requisite prayers. Here, the word "translation" should be understood in a loose sense, as paraphrasing and explaining the meaning of the Tibetan prayer texts in Mongolian, which means Mongolian was being used in teaching and learning in Mongolian monasteries. For doing so, we can assume, the monks who were qualified to teach a disciple not only had to grasp a basic reading and writing knowledge of Mongolian but also to accumulate sufficiently profound terminology for an explanation in Mongolian.⁷⁶

Cha har Dge bshes Blo bzang tshul khriims (1740–1810), for instance, went to Dolonnur Monastery at the age of 16 to study the Mongolian and Tibetan languages as well as translation. In his late forties, he translated a massive corpus of Tibetan works into Mongolian, such as *Instruction of the Two Forms of Ruling: The Pearl Garland* (Tib. *Lugs zung*

⁷³ Atwood 2004: 538.

⁷⁴ Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe 2006: 29.

⁷⁵ Ujeed 2009: 49.

⁷⁶ Ujeed 2009: 50.

gi bslab bya mu thi la'i phreng ba) by the 5th Dalai Lama or *The Secret Biography [and] The Secret Prophecies of the Panchen [Lama]* (Tib. *Paṅ chen gyi gsang rnam gsang ba'i lung*) which were printed at Dolonnur and Beijing and “provided a space for Buddhist knowledge to be created and circulated, and thus extended into other areas on the Mongol Steppe.”⁷⁷

The biography of the 5th Kanjurwa Khutugtu (1914–1978) also explains that it was their custom to debate in the Mongolian language but also to use many technical Sanskrit or Tibetan terms.⁷⁸ But how were these specialized language skills acquired?

For our study of scripture and texts, and for various rituals and ceremonies, we depend mainly on the Kanjur, the Tibetan collection of sacred texts. The Kanjur itself has been translated into Mongolian, but many other texts have not yet been translated and thus we must depend considerably on the original Tibetan texts.⁷⁹

Uranchimeg Ujeed elaborates further that this would imply that the monks tended to use Mongolian texts as far as they were available.⁸⁰ As the previous examples tried to show, the proximity to the Tibetan and the resulting artificial language of the Mongolian BTG block print can be an indication for such a bilingual teaching approach but also for picking up specialized Mongolian terminology from Sanskrit.

In the title of the Mongolian BTG, the block print is classified as a sutra (*sudur*), and it closed in the colophon with the formula *maṅgalaṃ*, “may it be auspicious!” Further, the Mongolian term *dumdadu yōgačaris* (“yogin of middle intellect”) is a combination of the Tibetan *rnal 'byor* ‘bring *rnams* and the Sanskrit *yogācārin* or, as a final example, *ubadis* (“religious instruction”), stems from the Sanskrit *upadeśa*. The inclusion of many Sanskrit terms in the Mongolian translations was also facilitated by the availability of Sanskrit word lists of the Uyghur Buddhist tradition.⁸¹

The following example from the Mongolian BTG block print shows that the Mongolian translation follows the Tibetan equivalent very closely in content. While the titles of the prayers themselves remain very close to the Tibetan syntax and terminology, the instructions intended for the ritual specialist follow a fairly natural Mongolian grammar since no exact pretense of authenticity had to be maintained.

⁷⁷ Mi nyag mgon po *et al.* 1996: 556, 559 and Wu 2015: 120.

⁷⁸ Hyer & Jagchid 1983: 73.

⁷⁹ Hyer & Jagchid 1983: 88.

⁸⁰ Ujeed 2009: 50.

⁸¹ Raghu Vira 1959: 11–14.

BTG: 2b26–3a12

Now, as for the main explanation of Liberation through Hearing: [if available], make abundant and varied offerings to the Three Jewels. If nothing is available, make an offering to them by multiplying the gifts in the mind infinitely.

Then recite three or seven times *The Aspiration Prayer Calling on the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Help*. From the Great Liberation by Hearing, depending on the circumstances seven or three times, this should be recited: *The Aspiration Prayer [Called] The Protector from the Horrors of the Intermediate State in the Moment of Dying*, *The Aspiration Prayer [Called] The Protector from the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State*,⁸² and *The Root Verses* with a firm voice.⁸³

KGP: 3b2–5

Now for the actual explanation of the Liberation [through] Hearing: make extensive offerings to the Three Jewels. If [those offerings] cannot be obtained, make offerings with innumerable emanations of whatever [offerings] you have created and arranged mentally.

Then, *The Aspiration Prayer of Calling to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for Assistance* should be recited three or seven times. Further, *The Aspiration Prayer Which Protects from the Dangers of the Intermediate State*, *The Aspiration Prayer for Escaping the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State* and the *Root Verses* should be directed into the ears [of the deceased] in a melodious tone.⁸⁴

⁸² The title of second aspiration prayer also permits further speculation when the edition of BTG started since it is most likely the translation of a text composed by the 1st Panchen Lama Blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan (1570–1662), viz. *Bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi gsol 'debs 'jigs sgröl gyi dpa' bo zhes bya ba* [The Aspiration Prayer which Protects from the Dangerous Pathways of the Intermediate State]. See also Chiodo 2009: 127n5. She provides the Mongolian title *ᠵᠠᠶᠤᠷᠠᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠭᠠᠳᠤ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠭᠡᠲᠢᠯᠭᠡᠭᠦᠴᠢ ᠵᠠᠪᠠᠷᠢᠯ ᠠᠶᠤᠯ-ᠢ ᠠᠪᠤᠷᠠᠭᠴᠢ ᠪᠠᠶᠠᠲᠤᠷ ᠬᠡᠮᠡᠬᠡᠭᠡ*. Pavel Poucha published a Tibetan-Mongolian edition of the text (Poucha 1974: 99–106).

⁸³ *tegiin-diir sonusuyad tonilyaychi-yi ilede nomlaqui inu : yurban erdeni-diir ayuu yeke nayirayuluysan takil ergügdeküü : ese beledügsen bügesü alimad joriysan takil-ün ed-i ilede beledüged : sedkil-iyer çaylasi ügei takil-i qubilyaçu dakiyad : tendeçe burqan kiged bodisung nar-un nekegül boluysan iinen irüger doluyan-ta ba yurban-ta ungsiju buyu : tendeçe yekede sonusuyad tonilyaychi egüini doluyan-ta ba : yutayar jabsar luy-a barilduyul-un ungsiqui inu : iikül-ün ᠵᠠᠶᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠳᠤᠷ ᠭᠡᠭᠡᠭᠡᠨ ᠭᠡᠷᠡᠯ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠵᠠᠶᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠶᠤᠯ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠢᠷᠢᠭᠡᠷ ᠬᠡᠭᠡᠳ : ᠵᠠᠶᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ-ᠶᠢᠨ ᠠᠭᠠᠳᠤ-ᠠᠴᠠ ᠭᠡᠲᠢᠯᠭᠡᠭᠦᠴᠢ ᠢᠷᠢᠭᠡᠷ ᠪᠠ : ᠵᠠᠶᠤᠷ-ᠠ-ᠳᠤ ᠢᠨᠳᠢᠰᠢᠨ ᠢᠭᠡᠳᠬᠡᠳ-ᠢ ᠡᠭᠡᠰᠢᠭ ᠰᠡᠯᠲᠡ ᠤᠷᠢᠬᠢ-ᠳᠤᠷ [...] (BTG: 2b26–3a12).*

⁸⁴ *de la thos grol dngos bshad pa ni/ dkon mchog gsum la mchod pa rgya chen po 'bul/ ma 'byor na dmigs pa'i rten gang 'byor bshams la/ yid kyes dpag tu med pa sprul la mchod/ de nas sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam la ra mda' sbran pa'i smon lam 'di lan gsum mam bdun du 'don / de nas bar do 'jigs skyob ma'i smon lan dang/ bar do 'phrang sgröl gyi smon lan dang/ bar do'i rtsa tshig rnam dbyangs dang bcas te rna bar btob (KGP: 3b2–5).*

Although the various Tibetan editions of the text include these prayers in an appendix, none of the prayers mentioned are included in the Mongolian block print of the BTG used for this study. They must either have been contained in a separate work or recited from memory by the ritual specialists.

Moreover, a new vocabulary was created by adding suffixes to existing Mongolian words and assembling them to represent technical terms and mimicked in a *calque* translation. This is illustrated by the example of *sayin jayay-a-tan*—literally “with good fortune”—which translates the Tibetan term *las can*. Here *las* means “karma” or “fortune” and *can* indicates that someone or something has or is endowed with the preceding verb or noun. Again, there is a more natural Mongolian phrase, *jayayaysan barilduly-a*,⁸⁵ “concatenation of circumstances conditioned by karma,” which is used in other Buddhist texts, but the translators chose to paraphrase the Tibetan instead. The result of the technique used here is ultimately a language that could not be understood by an untrained Mongolian reader, insofar as he would not have been familiar with the vocabulary of this specialized language. A text like this enabled the teacher to explain distinct Tibetan grammatical features and the Tibetan concepts of the BTG in Mongolian.⁸⁶

From Pozdneev’s observations, we can conclude that the text and its application in the ritual itself would have served as an *aide-mémoire* written for a ritual specialist who knew the processes of the ritual. He explains that the BTG ritual is so popular in Mongolia [that] “no one dies without a lama being present [and] most lamas know this work by heart, and read it to the dying person in Mongolian.”⁸⁷

7. Conclusion

With the second spread of Buddhism among the Mongolian groups since the beginning of the 17th century, the *Bar do thos grol chen mo* ritual text was made available to the Mongols in the advent of the translation and printing activities around the beginning of the 18th century.

The Mongols were encouraged by the Qing rulers to spread the Buddhist teachings, with the imperial court supporting the Buddhist

⁸⁵ Terbish 2018: 1791.

⁸⁶ The manuscript from the private collection of Klaus Koppe mentioned at the beginning of the article which can be dated to the end of the 19th century seems to confirm this. Many folios are provided with notes and addenda which indicate the practical and regular use of the text.

⁸⁷ Pozdneev 1978: 594.

monasteries and the clergy through funding and bestowing authority on their leaders. Buddhism was seen as a unifying force within the ethnically diverse Qing Empire. By establishing the Lcang skya Ho thog thu lineage, a powerful representative of Tibetan Buddhism was invited to Beijing, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Qing imperial capital as a religious center, which served as an instrument for influencing the entire Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world.

Therefore, the aim of the Qing policy was that by the end of the 18th century, the Mongols were able to express and develop themselves in Mongolian. The same applied to the Manchus and the Chinese.⁸⁸

One of the results was the printing of numerous religious writings, which were mainly produced in Beijing. On the one hand, the Qing rulers' patronage provided a basis for their empire to become a spiritual and political center within Asia. On the other hand, it is important to point out that, in addition to gaining religious merit, the translation activities were also inspired by the lay Buddhist Mongolian's wish to learn and understand Buddhism in their mother tongue.⁸⁹ The translation of religious scriptures provided further means for converting the Mongolian groups and helped advance Tibetan Buddhism to the position of a state religion in the Mongolian territories.

Even though the Mongolian BTG text is not representative of the entirety of the extensive translation activities, it demonstrates the state of mind of the translators at the beginning of the 18th century. While some elements of the translation show signs of the developing standardization process, the terminology remains mainly idiosyncratic.

The intended ritual use of the Mongolian BTG might have affected the way of translating too, which mirrors the translation approaches of that period. The process itself was not merely mechanical, but instead, the Mongolian scholars created their own translation language, which encouraged the creation of new Mongolian linguistic features and cultural vocabulary.

Although the translation can take on a somewhat esoteric quality because of its incomprehensibility to the majority of lay practitioners, a growing number of expert interpreters were trained in the newly established monasteries in Inner Mongolia and Beijing to perform the last rites for the deceased. This probably helped to adapt and promote Buddhist teachings within the previously shamanistic communities.

⁸⁸ Jagou 2013: 42.

⁸⁹ Bareja-Starzyńska 2015: 7.

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