

# Female Temple Founders, Ritualists, and Clairvoyants in Post-Socialist Mongolian Buddhism<sup>1</sup>

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**I**n the nineteenth century, Mongolia was perhaps the country in the world with the highest percentage of its male population serving as Buddhist monks. But during the 1920s and 1930s, the religious tradition that had dominated Mongolian life for centuries almost became extinct because of the purges of Stalin and his Mongolian henchmen. In 1937 all monasteries but a handful were destroyed, and in 1958 official figures listed a total of five functioning monasteries with only 200 monks.<sup>2</sup> In a short period of time, Mongolia went through dramatic and forced changes from being a pre-modern Buddhist society to one dominated by Soviet Communism. Totally unprepared, the population faced socialist modernity accompanied by religious persecution, centrally planned economy, and secular education.

When in 1990 the peaceful revolution ended 70 years of religious repression in Mongolia, multinational capitalism and “late” or “post-modernity”—including globalisation and mediatisation—swept the country. During these last 25 years, Mongolian society and culture have once again changed dramatically. While most of the high Mongolian religious masters perished during the purges in the 1930s and ordinary monks were laicised, there were still many ex-monks alive when democratisation started in 1990. They had kept their religious sentiment alive during the Communist era, passing on teachings to

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on data collected by a Polish-Mongolian-Norwegian research group studying the revival of Buddhism since 1990 headed by Mongolist Dr Agata Bareja-Starzyńska. I thank Ganzorig Davaa-Ochir for his research assistance while collecting data for this paper in 2013 and 2014 and Bareja-Starzyńska for valuable comments.

<sup>2</sup> It is estimated that the monk population in Mongolia in 1924 was approximately 110,000, while in 1930 it had decreased to 75,000 monks. The final and hardest blow to the Mongolian *saṅgha* was initiated in 1939, when the number was reduced to 15,000 (Moses 1977: 217). Official figures of the Mongolian government in 1958 listed five functioning monasteries with a total of 200 monks, 80 of whom lived in Ulaanbaatar (*ibid.*: 262).

family members and performing rituals in secret. Many young monks, who are today the spearheads of the Buddhist revival, had grandfathers or relatives who were monks in pre-Communist times. After a steady growth of Buddhist institutions and increase in the number of clerics during the first decade or so of democratisation, the number of monks and temples stabilised, and even declined—particularly in the countryside. In April 2013, Geshe Luvsanjamts Davaanyam of the Gandantegchenlin (abbr. Gandan) registration office stated that there were around 2,000 monks and 160 monasteries and temples in Mongolia, while in 1998, the office reported that the numbers had increased to 3,000 monks and 200 monasteries and temples.<sup>3</sup> No reliable statistics have been published, however, because of the difficulties in deciding precisely what constitutes a monastery and how to define a monk. I use the terms “monastery” and “temple” in a wide sense since they are, apart from a few institutions, staffed by both celibate and non-celibate part-time clerics who officiate at fixed hours and for set salaries. As a rule clerics do not live in the Buddhist institutions in Ulaanbaatar.<sup>4</sup>

Partly because the Buddhist heritage of Mongolia was largely destroyed, Mongol women aspiring to lead religious lives in the post-Communist era were left with hardly any role models to emulate. This article discusses how contemporary Buddhist women are able to create a new space for their religious activities in the rapidly changing city of Ulaanbaatar, where more than one-third of the country’s population now lives. Although there were individual female religious specialists and practitioners in Mongolia’s past, there were no Buddhist nunneries or nuns, and women interested in pursuing religious careers in modern Mongolia have to find innovative ways for their religious activities by following the examples of old female religious specialists or by adopting impulses from global Buddhism, Tibetan exile Buddhist communities in India, or New Age religions.<sup>5</sup>

### *1. Female religious specialists in Mongolia’s past*

Although they were not ordained as novice nuns, we find scattered historical evidence of a few Mongol women locally recognised as reincarnations of Tārā, for example in the Dambi Ööld Banner, but

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Geshe Luvsanjamts Davaanyam, April 2013. See also Bareja-Starzyńska & Havnevik 2006: 219, Sagaster 2007, Teleki 2011 and Even 2012.

<sup>4</sup> The exceptions are Phetub Monastery (dPe thub bstan rgyas chos ’khor gling) founded in 1999 by Bakula Rinpoche and Dolma Ling Nunnery founded by FPMT.

<sup>5</sup> See also Humphrey & Ujeed 2013: 363-366.

they had no temples or regular incarnation succession of their own.<sup>6</sup> The Russian Mongolist Aleksei M. Pozdneyev writes that the reincarnations of the White and Green Tārās (the Tsagaan and the Nogoon Dara Ekh) were the patrons of the Dörbed tribe, and two girls were recognised in the Dörbed Wang Banner (*khoshuun*) for the first time in the mid- or late 1860s.<sup>7</sup> The Swedish missionary Frans August Larson (1870–1957), who spent forty-six years in Mongolia, writes about four female reincarnations, and says that the first wife of the Eighth Jebtsundampa, Tsediin Dondogdulam (1874–1923), was named a reincarnation of the White Tārā.<sup>8</sup> Upon her death, the king took a new consort named Geninpil from the Banner of Daichin Jonon Wang. She is reported to have wanted to become an oracle (Mong. *choijin*, Tib. *chos skyong*) and knew *luijin* (Tib. *lus sbyin* or *gcod*) texts well.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Gelugpa (Tib. dGe lugs pa) School was dominant, the meditational and ritual practice of the Red Tradition (Mong. *ulaan shashin*),<sup>10</sup> particularly *luijin* (or *gcod*), was popular in pre-Communist Mongolia and has resurfaced after democratisation. A number of women practised *luijin* in a few Red Tradition temples in Urga or as independent practitioners. Some continued their practices in secret during Communism together with their partners or husbands. For example, Dashdorzh (1919-2004) performed *luijin* in the lineage of Tangtong Gyalpo (Thang stong rgyal po, fourteenth-fifteenth centuries) that was brought to Mongolia by Jagar Monlam<sup>11</sup> and transmitted by teachers such as Bavuu Jorvon (late nineteenth century).<sup>12</sup> Tovvudorj (b. around 1905), a devout *luijin* practitioner from Khentii Province, continued *luijin* meditation until she passed away in 2011 at the age of 106.<sup>13</sup> Some monks lived with their families in the coun-

<sup>6</sup> Diluv Khutagt [1983] 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Pozdneyev [1889] 1978: 648-650. This tradition is still alive in western Mongolia today as there are some women recognized as Tārā Ekh in Uvs and Khovd provinces.

<sup>8</sup> Larson (1930: 109, 110, 127-128), see also Bawden 1997: 23-26, 40 and Batsaikhan 2009: 144-145.

<sup>9</sup> Batsaikhan 2009: 222-223. For *luijin* in Mongolia, see Bareja-Starzyńska, Ragchaa, and Havnevik 2007.

<sup>10</sup> *Ulaan shashin* refers to non-Gelugpa traditions, see Havnevik, Ragchaa & Bareja-Starzyńska 2007: 226.

<sup>11</sup> Contemporary Mongols use Jagar Monlam as the name of a person. Jagar is apparently a Mongol phonetic form of rGya gar which refers to India, while the second part of his name is the Tibetan *smon lam*, which means “prayer” or “supplication”. Tibetan terms were pronounced differently in Mongolia, and 70 years of religious repression resulted in the distortion of names and terms.

<sup>12</sup> Bareja-Starzyńska & Havnevik 2006.

<sup>13</sup> This *luijin* practitioner was given different names by different informants. For photos, see <http://sakyadhita.org/conferences/10th-si-con.html>, photo gallery

tryside but joined religious ceremonies during important Buddhist days. These married “monks” usually carried out normal family life and held only lay vows. They were called *khodoonii lam* or “country lama”, while their female partners were usually called *togoony hun* “kitchen maid” or *geriin hun* “tent [ger] maid”. In a Buddhisised country like pre-modern Mongolia, it is likely that women assisted their “monk” partners and participated in religious life in various ways. Also religiously inclined women, who after their childrearing and household duties were done, dressed in religious colours, sheared their heads, and spent time reciting prayers and worshipping at Buddhist temples. They were named *chavants*, and some carry out the tradition today.

## 2. The founding of “traditional temples” and female religious specialists

After democratisation in Mongolia in 1990, elderly monks who had been laicised in the 1930s were eager to revitalise Buddhism. As they passed on their religious knowledge to young Mongols, “traditional” institutions—that is, temples and monasteries where clerics dressed in Buddhist robes perform rituals for the public—were rebuilt. Baku-la Rinpoche (1917–2003), a high reincarnation from Ladakh who served as Indian ambassador to Mongolia from 1990 to 2000, started to offer novice (Tib. *dge btsul ma*) ordination to Mongolian women. The only other high reincarnation in Mongolia at that time, Gurudeva Rinpoche (1910–2009) from Inner Mongolia, followed suit. While nunneries belonging to the four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism are scattered over the Tibetan plateau and in the Himalayas, only since 1990 were religious institutions for Buddhist women established in Mongolia.

Women were also active in the founding of new temples both in the countryside and in the city. Namdoldechenlin in Bayan Khoshuu, a *ger*<sup>14</sup> district north of Ulaanbaatar, was jointly established by four men and three women in 1989.<sup>15</sup> During the charismatic Banzar’s (1912–2010) abbotship, up to five women performed *luijin* rituals together with the monks. The temple still welcomes female ritualists, but finds it hard to recruit women today. About ten temples have

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(accessed June 2014) and [http://danzanravjaa.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2008/10/index.html](http://danzanravjaa.typepad.com/my_weblog/2008/10/index.html) (see 17 October 2008, accessed June 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Name of the Mongolian tent.

<sup>15</sup> The founders of the temple were Banzar, Orolmeg, Zunduikhui, the brother and sister Darisuren and Dulamjav, and the brother and sister Purevsuren and Suren (interview with Dulamjav, June 2014).

been started by women in Mongolia, but only three of them are exclusively for female practitioners.<sup>16</sup> According to the disciplinarian Monkhsaikhan in Namdoldechenlin, more than ten *luijin* temples have branched from Banzar's temple. One of them, Janchiv Dechenlin khiid, was established by Dulamjav (b. 1952), and is the only *luijin* temple started by a woman in Mongolia.<sup>17</sup> The temple, which was founded in 2005, is a family enterprise where Dulamjav's son serves as a director. The temple had 18 monks in 2014. Although started by a woman *luijin* specialist, female ritualists are not recruited.



Fig. 1. Some of the founders of Namdoldechenlin with Bakula Rinpoche in 1989.  
Photo: Courtesy of Dulamjav.

Female religious specialists in Mongolia are addressed as *khandamaa* (Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma*), and according to Gantomor, one of the founders of Togsbayasgalant in 1988, Gurudeva Rinpoche chose to address the

<sup>16</sup> The temples established by women are as follows, with *M* indicating male ritualists and *F* indicating female ritualists (if known): Dara ekh, founded by Badamkhand and later renamed Dolma Ling (F); Togsbayasgalant (F); Namdoldechenlin (M & F); Janchiv Dechenlin khiid (M); Dash-khaan, founded by Badamdari (M); Gandan Danjaallin, founded by Enkhsaikhan (M); Tavan khani khiid, founded by Dawa (M); Dechin Jambalin in Khovd, founded by Megjin (M); Khongo Khan, founded by Davaakhuu; Dejid Choinkhorlin, founded by Bumgarav; and Baldan Khajodlin, founded by Khajidmaa.

<sup>17</sup> The temples that have branched off from Banzar's Namdoldechenlin are as follows, according to an interview with Monkhsaikhan in June 2014: Thegchenchokhorlin, Phuntsoglin, Urjinshadublin, Dechen Choeyin devshsunberlin, Tharpalin, late Gaadan's temple, Namdol Dedlin (Ovorkhangai Province), Namdol Chokhorlin (Bayankhongor Province), Urjinkhajodlin, one in Khentii Province, one in Zuunkhuraa town (Selenge Province), Janchiv Dechenlin, Barunn Saler, and Sonom's temple Tashi Chokhorlin.

lay female ritualists as *khandamaa*, a title which is still in use. Bakula Rinpoche, on his side, advised them to wear white Mongolian caftans (*deel*) with red edges and not the monastic robe used by celibate novice nuns in the Tibetan tradition. Presently, Mongol female lay ritualists wear red, maroon, orange, yellow, or pink *deel* made from fabrics such as wool, brocade, or cotton according to season and ritual occasion. Many carry a band (*tashuur orkhimj*), often white with red edges, across their chest. Only Mongol novice nuns wear Tibetan style robes.



Fig. 2. Khandamaas from Togsbayasgalant. Photo: Hanna Havnevik, 2005.

Likewise, the majority of the men entitled *lam* or “monks” in Mongolia today have only taken lay vows (Tib. *dge bsnyen*). They have committed themselves to follow some codes but not celibacy. Even though the law issued in 1934 allowing clerics to marry was abolished in 1994,<sup>18</sup> the tradition of married “monks” continues. When the English terms “monk” and “nun” are used for Mongolian religious specialists, these categories mainly refer to non-celibates.

The only celibate nunnery in Mongolia, Dolma Ling (Tib. sGrol ma gling), was initially named Dara Ekh Temple when Badamkhand, a Mongol former journalist, established it for orphaned girls in 1994. In 2001 it was taken over by Zopa Rinpoche and the global organisation Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) and turned into a celibate nunnery based on the Tibetan model. The attempts to establish a female *saṅgha* in Mongolia after 1990 was supported by Tibetans as well as Western Buddhists, and

<sup>18</sup> Bareja-Starzyńska & Havnevik 2006: 220.

the FPMT brought nuns from Kopan Nunnery in Kathmandu to Dolma Ling to teach Buddhism and to serve as examples of celibate living. Despite the incessant work of the international organisation Sakyadhita to encourage Buddhist women to take full ordination, several of the Mongol nuns sent to India for training disrobed when they returned to Mongolia.<sup>19</sup> In June 2014 there were only three resident nuns in Dolma Ling. Currently Zopa Rinpoche hopes to enlarge Dolma Ling to make space for a hundred celibate nuns.<sup>20</sup>

### *3. Divination, astrology, and New Age practices*

While the number of celibate Buddhist monastics seems to be decreasing worldwide, the rebuilding of Buddhist institutional life in Mongolia is also facing challenges. The destabilising of the economy during the early 1990s and the transition to a capitalist market economy led to a proliferation of non-normative Buddhist practices where diviners, astrologers, and soothsayers established small businesses, either independently or in newly opened monasteries and temples all over the country. Since the introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia, the cosmology has been shaped by local as well as Tibetan beliefs in spirits as well as by normative Tibetan Buddhism. From the sixteenth century, local shamanistic deities were replaced by Buddhist ones and many of the shamanistic cults were lost. Moreover, like Tibetans, Mongols believe that benevolent and malevolent spirits inhabit a sacred landscape, and through worship and offerings all religious specialists negotiate with these numina in order to obtain benefits such as prosperity and good health and to avert accidents, crises, and natural disasters.<sup>21</sup> At the eastern gate of Gandan Monastery we find a number of booths where specialists of various kinds offer their services. One sign announces that the diviner's abilities include rituals to dispel black magic, obtain good luck, cure untreatable skin problems, open the gate to business, secure a good rebirth, remove addictions, and expel evil spirits.

<sup>19</sup> See Karma Lekshe Tsomo 2013, and also Berkwitz 2012: 35-38.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Ani Tsenla (Director of Dolma Ling), April 2013, and with Ani Gyalmo (Director of FPMT's Centre in Ulaanbaatar), June 2014. In 2013 there were 74 female temple ritualists in Ulaanbaatar, including 18 celibate nuns. See also <http://www.fpmtmongolia.org/dolma-ling-nunnery> (accessed June 2014).

<sup>21</sup> See e.g. Davaa-Ochir 2008.



Fig. 3. Diviners' booths at eastern gate of Gandantegchenlin Monastery.  
Photo: Hanna Havnevik, 2014.

Norov (in the second booth to the left), a retired math and physics teacher, specialises in helping divorced clients and those grieving a dead spouse to find new life companions. Norov uses palmistry and numerology as divination techniques, which she believes are scientific methods of prognostication, while Narantsetseg, who moved from western Mongolia to Ulaanbaatar in 1991, claims that her clairvoyance and healing abilities are inherited from forefathers in nine generations. Until she became a pensioner, she worked as a mechanical engineer. 26 years ago she became a gatekeeper at Gandan Monastery, where she now serves as a diviner. She usually has a few customers per day, and clients pay up to 5,000 Togrog (USD 2.74) for a consultation.

#### 4. Innovative female religious entrepreneurship

##### *Enkhsaikhan*

While divination remains a marginal activity at the “traditional” temples in Ulaanbaatar, three female religious entrepreneurs, each in their way, have experienced great economic success in recent years. In the *ger* district Bayan Khoshuu, we find the new Gandan Danjaallin Temple built in 2013 by Enkhsaikhan. The woman, who is in her 30s, dresses like a fashion model wearing a *deel*-like skirt, high heels and fancily decorated nails. The new building combines Mongolian temple and Christian church architecture. In the fenced compound are rooms for monks to make rituals, a food shop, a small canteen, and toilets. The gate has a video camera surveilling visitors, and a poster saying that clients must come between 08:00 to 08:30 in the morning to get a queue number; the first 30 clients are the lucky ones



who will be allowed access to Enkhsaikhan later the same day.

Enkhsaikhan, whose family came to Ulaanbaatar from Ovorkhangai Province in the 1990s, performs card divination for 5,000 Togrog, during which clients may ask three questions. She also offers ritual protection for a family for one year for 80,000 Togrog (c. USD 44), whereas ritual insurance for private companies costs 274,000 Togrog (USD 150). Since so many demand her services, Enkhsaikhan receives only 30 to 40 visitors per day. Her enterprise is effectively organised by a female assistant who carefully instructs customers to behave well and keep money ready in hand. Clients asking questions about health are transferred to five monks performing dice divinations. In a recent article about Enkhsaikhan's temple, the journalist estimates that her various divinatory activities may give her an income of 5.6 million Togrog (USD 3067) per day.<sup>22</sup>

#### *Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir*

In Khailaast, another *ger* suburb north of Ulaanbaatar, we find the Mongol Aura and Energy Centre. In the entrance hall a statue of Chinggis Khan meets the visitor, flanked by four great leaders and 36 great kings of the Mongol Empire, along with Chinggis Khan's consorts.



Fig. 4. Chinggis Khan, in the Mongol Aura and Energy Centre.  
Photo: Hanna Havnevik, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.grandnews.mn/content/read/50309.htm>, published 16 May 2014, accessed 11 June 2014.



Fig. 5. One of Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir's diplomas. Photo: Hanna Havnevik, 2014.

The founder, Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir, entitles herself PhD, ScD, and President of the Mongolian Academy of Meditation, Animism, Astrology and Psychology. Sarandavaa explains religion from the point of science and energy.<sup>23</sup> The centre has a number of rooms designed for “energy healing”: a room for water oblation; an oxygen room, where customers can evade air pollution, take oxygen cocktails to dispel tiredness, and get energised from stretching on a mattress with “energy stones”; a room for aura healing, where sand and stones have been collected from every corner of Mongolia, and where sound healing of the seven *chakras* is achieved by hitting metal bowls; a protective deity room, which has the portraits of ten Tibetan deities (Tib. *chos skyong*) along with the King of Water Spirits, and the portrait of a female shaman under a stuffed deer's head. The room has altars with the South Korean, American, and Canadian flags, where customers may pray to obtain visas to foreign countries. Massage benches and healing equipment fill other rooms, and in one of them, the centre's astrologer has her office together with a female therapist performing tantric healing.

In Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir's inner sanctuary, the central image is the Buddhist deity Namsrai (Skt. Kubera), the God of Wealth, and from here she monitors the healing activities in each therapy room on closed-circuit television. Sarandavaa has composed 30 works, she explains, and her qualifications are attested on walls full of diplomas. Since Sarandavaa started her activities in 1993, more than 250,000 customers have consulted her. At present her centre has 20 employees, including three monks; she has made three trips around the entire country and gives five lectures per year. Several photo albums show Sarandavaa performing the ritual Summoning Money (Mongolian *Dallaga*) in large congregation halls where several hundred customers stretch their hands above their heads with paper slips “calling

<sup>23</sup> See Bat-Ochir 2009.

back money”, séances reminiscent of sermons given by Evangelical revivalist preachers. The tenth anniversary of Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir’s centre in 2012 was celebrated with 3,300 people attending.



Fig. 6. The Mongol Aura and Energy Centre’s astrologer.  
Photo: Hanna Havnevik 2014.

The next-door building is a temple constructed in a post-modern style, and the sign announces in Tibetan and Mongolian that it is a Tārā temple. On the ground floor is a three-dimensional Twenty-one Tārā mandala. The first floor contains a large labyrinth said to remove the sins of those who pass through it and make childless women fertile. The second floor has statues of the Twenty-one Tārās carved by skilled artists, and on the third floor, in a glass canopy, an enormous statue of Green Tārā is displayed. In an adjacent room, the ceiling is decorated with planetary constellations. According to the guide, the Tārā temple, which was completed in 2013, cost five million US dollars.

### *Khulan Bagsh*

Khulan Bagsh, a woman in her forties claiming clairvoyance and healing power, has for several years counselled 40 to 50 clients per day in her office in Ulaanbaatar. She is a devout Buddhist with strong faith in her deceased monk teacher from northern Mongolia. Her daily religious practice is based on the teaching of the Mahāyāna text *Vajracchedikā* “The Diamond Cutter,” and Tsongkhapa’s (Tsong kha pa, 1357–1419) teaching on the *Stages of the Path* (*Lam rim*). Khulan Bagsh says she follows the spiritual guidance of Tibetan masters such as the Dalai Lama and Jhado Rinpoche, the present head of Gyudtoe (rGyud stod) Tantric Monastery near Dharamsala.

In 2014 Khulan Bagsh reduced her counselling activity to 20 to 25 customers three times a week. Each session has a fixed price, but now she offers deep guidance for life. The NGO she has recently founded has four main activities: publishing Buddhist books and Buddhist comics for children; manufacturing health products for sale; building a counselling centre for students and the business community; and building a nursing home for old people. Khulan Bagsh also plans to establish a Mahāyāna Buddhist centre in South Africa, which she thinks will be completed within the next two years. She does not worry about the finances, saying that the God of Wealth, Namsrai, will take care of that. A young girl with a BA in marketing helps her run the NGO, which wealthy patrons help finance.

### *5. Female religious leaders between rationalism and re-mystification*

After democratisation in 1990, Mongols quickly started to revive their Buddhist tradition in order to create a new national identity. At the same time, many were taken aback by the rapid religious pluralisation brought about by religious freedom stipulated in the new constitution of 1992. After a decade with open borders, the Mongolian Evangelical Alliance reported that its churches in Mongolia were among the fastest growing in the world, and the International Religious Freedom Report estimated in 2010 that there might be more than 100,000 Mongolian Christians. The Mongolian Buddhists, therefore, were faced with stark competition in their revivalist efforts.<sup>24</sup>

While elements of what may be labelled Mongolian “traditional” Buddhism appeared during the first phase of the revival, innovative organisational measures were needed to compete for customers in a religious market where Christians, shamans, clairvoyants, adherents of New Age religions, and others promised gratification. Although present also during pre-Communist time, soothsaying and various divination methods became a highly visible part of Buddhism during the religious revival after 1990. Although women did not, as a rule, serve as religious specialists in old Mongolia, the spiritual vacuum that surfaced after 70 years of religious repression created a market where they, too, seized the opportunity for professional careers. In the modern city of Ulaanbaatar, religious businesswomen started to combine traditional Buddhist elements with private entrepreneurship. They use modern information technology, marketing models, and publicity strategies and hire assistants, including monks, and marketing agents to make their undertakings efficient.

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<sup>24</sup> Wazgird 2011.

Mongolian women have not, however, embraced monastic living like many Tibetan women did after political relaxations started in the mid-1980s in Tibetan areas of the People's Republic of China. Although monasticism is strictly controlled by the government, many Tibetan women from the countryside, some with a rudimentary educational background, chose to become celibate nuns.<sup>25</sup> Female Buddhist practitioners in Ulaanbaatar, however, have grown up in a highly secular society, received education in a school system built during the socialist time, and served in professional jobs as educators, journalists, and engineers. Though there is strong pressure in Mongolian society on women to marry, they want professional religious lives as well as families; they embrace feminine codes of dress and makeup, and they want to support themselves and their children. As Mongolian Buddhism has no central religious authority to control religious development, women, as well as men, are free to fashion their own religious professional roles. As long as a religious institution is registered and religious tax is paid, there is no governmental interference.

Some of these new female religious entrepreneurs legitimise their activities by referring to Buddhist teachers of the past, displaying their photos in their temples and counselling rooms along with images of Tibetan and Mongol Buddhist deities and ritual objects. In their selective approach to religion, they also act like followers of New Age religions by using, recycling, combining, and adapting existing religious ideas and practices according to their needs.<sup>26</sup> Although both celebrated and disparaged by Buddhist norms, Mongol women, in pursuit of their religious and secular aims, are not passively adjusting to a cultural framework and institutional Buddhism that relegates them to the margin of monastic life, but are tackling challenges in remarkable ways to create job opportunities for themselves and others in a society where rapid social and economic changes have made life insecure. For segments of urban Mongols, praying for the well-being of clients and generating economic profit in the name of Namsrai, the God of Wealth, are seen as legitimate goals.

In the rapidly changing religious life of Mongolia several influential Buddhist masters attempt to influence religious development in a normative and modernist direction. Even though some of them try to include women in their visions for a Buddhist future in Mongolia, organised religious life for Mongol women has been neglected. Leaders such as the Dalai Lama and Jhado Rinpoche emphasise the scholastic training of monks and the enforcement of the *Vinaya* and are

<sup>25</sup> Particularly in religious encampments (*sgar*) in eastern Tibet, see Jacoby & Terro-ne 2012: 95-98, Joseph 2012: 38-48, and Cho 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Hanegraaff [2001] 2009: 352.

supported by representatives of Zopa Rinpoche's organisation, the FPMT, and the Tibetan exile Panchen Oetrul Rinpoche and his Ashral Centre in Ulaanbaatar. In the Dalai Lama's promotion of the new Grand Maitreya Project, with its plan to build a 54-meter-high Maitreya statue and a 108-meter-high stupa surrounded by an ecological city to the south of Ulaanbaatar, he expresses his wish: "We should make efforts to become 21st century Buddhists, eliminating hindrances like superstition. ... Anyone interested should be able to receive a modern and Buddhist education, founded on Buddhist philosophy and science."<sup>27</sup>

While many educated clerics in the major Gelugpa monasteries in Mongolia support the Dalai Lama's vision of Buddhist modernism, which has features influenced by Western ideological developments such as individualism, scientific rationalism, romanticism, Protestantism, psychology, and modern social ideals and ideas of human rights,<sup>28</sup> they still attempt to maintain what they see as Buddhism's Mongolian tradition and customary practices.<sup>29</sup> Other local lay ritual specialists, some of them self-made, charismatic female figures like Enkhsaikhan, Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir, and Khulan Bagsh, have responded to post-socialist modernity by emphasising occultism, ritualism, and healing to meet the this-worldly and immediate needs of their clients, many of whom belong to families that have lately migrated from the steppe to *ger* towns at the outskirts of the capital.<sup>30</sup> Rapid urbanisation, modest living in *ger* suburbs, without running water and modern sanitation, and jobs in the mining industry and the commercial sector have left segments of the population in insecure and sometimes miserable conditions. In recent years, after Mongolia became one of the most rapidly growing economies in the world, the income increased also in the *ger* towns. Still, many feel disappointed because of failed expectations of upward social and

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ikhmaidar.mn>, accessed 23 June 2014.

<sup>28</sup> See e.g., McMahan 2008: 6.

<sup>29</sup> The Mongol cleric Nyamsambuu emphasises modern teaching techniques, mindfulness training, and engaged Buddhism in his Jebtsundampa Centre in Ulaanbaatar, and north of the capital, the famous artist Purevbat has built the meditation centre Aglagiin khiid, combining Buddhist pilgrimage and tourism. A substantial undertaking is presently made at the Kalacakra Centre, established by the Mongolian monk Buyandelger, where the entire Tibetan canon will be transliterated from classical Mongolian into the Cyrillic script and carefully modernized by 2016, making the canonical texts available for educated laypeople. See <http://www.chakra.mn> (accessed June 2014).

<sup>30</sup> A this-worldly orientation has been an integrated part of Buddhism since its beginning. Likewise, when faced with economic destabilisation and rapid social change, Tambiah (1984) reported the growth of the cult of amulets in Thailand and Gombrich & Obeyesekere (1988) the rapid increase in self-appointed female mediums and occultism in Sri Lanka.

economic mobility and because of the loss of their traditional lifestyles on the steppe. Wealth, success, happy family life, high education for their children, and good health promised by the new female religious specialists, most openly expressed in Sarandavaa Bat-Ochir's ritual for "Summoning Money", make them rush to their temples and centres.

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