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► To cite this version:

Isabelle Charleux. The reconstruction of Buddhist monasteries in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia: Between Sanctuary and Museum?. 2016. halshs-01377313

HAL Id: halshs-01377313

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01377313>

Preprint submitted on 6 Oct 2016

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The reconstruction of Buddhist monasteries in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia: Between Sanctuary and Museum? ¹

Paper presented at the International Seminar
“Revival of Buddhism in Mongolia after 199
(Warsaw, 24-28th November 1999).

Isabelle Charleux (Paris)

Since the partial authorisation of worship and other religious activities at the end of the seventies as a result of the post-Cultural Revolution open-door policy of Deng Xiaoping, numerous scholarly books and articles on the history of Buddhism in the Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia (IMAR) have been published, both in Chinese and in Mongolian.² These works focus on historical issues and eschew the question of the current situation. On the other hand, the ethnic identity of the Inner Mongols (or Southern Mongols as they call themselves)—who are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity to assert it—is the subject of many anthropological studies in the Western world.³ However, none of these publications deals with the present Buddhist revival.⁴

¹ I would like to thank Françoise Aubin and Gaëlle Lacaze for their insight and suggestions.

² See for instance Kürelsa 1996; Qiao Ji (=Coyiji, Normal University of Inner Mongolia—Nei Menggu shifan daxue) 1994; Yang Jizeng (ed.) 1997; Delege (=Deleg ~ Delger, former director of the Religious Affairs Bureau of Inner Mongolia—Nei Menggu zongjiao ju) 1998; also the writings of Wang De'en (Institute of Religions of the Academy of Social Sciences—Shehui kexueyuan zongjiao shi); Jia Lasen (Jalsang) and Chang Ge (Language Research Institute of the University of Inner Mongolia—Nei Menggu daxue yuyuan yanjiusuo). Publications on the religious life of all the minorities have seen a tremendous increase during this period.

³ To quote only the most recent publications: Jankowiak 1993; Khan 1995 and 1996; Borchigud 1995 and

Although I am no specialist of modern Buddhism in Inner Mongolia, the extensive fieldwork on Buddhist architecture which I conducted between 1993 and 1998 has allowed me to observe some of the outward manifestations of its revival. I will attempt to sketch here the evolution in the restoration and rebuilding of monasteries during this period.⁵ As Donald MacInnis has pointed out, “the monks themselves know little more than what is happening in their own immediate religious community,” (MacInnis 1989: XVII) and it is difficult to gain a global view of today’s religious life from scattered information. A serious study on the question of religious revival in Inner Mongolia taking into account the official documents on the national and local governments’ current policy deserves to be made.

History of the monasteries’ destruction in IMAR

According to estimations based on Mongol, Chinese and Japanese sources at the beginning of the twentieth century (1911), there were around one thousand three hundred monasteries and temples in an area that counted less than two million inhabitants, hence an average of twenty monasteries per banner. (Charleux 1998: 218-222) Sixty of them (5%) sheltered more than five hundred monks. In spite of the destruction of religious sites between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the early twentieth century witnessed an increase in the number of monasteries. The persecution of Mongol Buddhism continued under the successive Chinese governments in the period that followed. The Nanking regime was relatively benign since minorities were spared from its anticlerical policies. The Manchukuo regime (1933-47) tried to reform Mongol Buddhism and limited the number of monasteries. In the nineteen-thirties and forties, only two of the large academic monasteries remained in activity: Badyar coyiling süme (Wudangzhao) and Bandida gegeen süme (Beizimiao). Yet in the same period, several monasteries were built in Sili-yin youl League to welcome the Sixth Panchen Lama during his sojourn between 1929 and 1932, and the festivities organised in his honour attracted some 30,000 pilgrims. These were the last large-scale religious celebrations that took place in Inner Mongolia.

The destruction of monasteries and persecution of Buddhism under Communist rule took on a different form in Inner Mongolia than in Northern Mongolia (i.e. the Mongolian People’s Republic). Indeed, in Inner Mongolia anti-religious policies were also colonialist in aim: Buddhism in general was regarded as a superstition and more specifically as an integral part of Mongol culture. As the subject is well-known, I shall not relate in detail here China’s policy towards its minorities which is based on forced assimilation and sedentarisation. Massive waves of Han immigrants forced the Mongols into their inhospitable hinterlands.⁶ Most of Inner Mongolia’s cultural heritage was

1996; Williams 1996; Tomoche 1996; Bilik 1998; Bulag 1998 and 1999.

⁴ Most of them avoid the question altogether. For instance Bilik writes: “The Chinese Mongols as a whole have long since lost their tradition of Shamanism and Buddhism.” (1998: 57)

⁵ I will not discuss here the present state of beliefs and family practices of Buddhist origin among Southern Mongols.

⁶ According to official estimations, around 1,1 million Han settlers moved into the region in 1960 alone.

destroyed by the Cultural Revolution and the majority of its adult population were greatly affected by the political purges that occurred between 1968 and 1969.⁷

From the early twentieth century onwards, as a result of exponential Han immigration (especially after the completion of the Beijing-Hohhot railway), Mongols found themselves increasingly alienated in their own homeland. Today they account for only 15% of the population of the Autonomous Region (against 24% in 1953),⁸ and their culture and identity are seriously endangered. Most urban Mongols no longer speak Mongolian. (Jankowiak 1993)⁹ Their land has been impoverished by deforestation and desertification, and the region's economy now faces serious difficulties in both the agricultural and industrial sectors.¹⁰ As a result, the way of life and aspirations of Southern Mongols differ from those of Northern (Qalqa) Mongols. Half of them are farmers or employed by Chinese or Mongol farmers. Many are forced to give up herding because of the decrease or loss of their pastureland¹¹ and at present only 18% live in pastoral areas. (Khan 1996: 130-131)

With regard to the persecution of Buddhism, like elsewhere in China, religion, cults and festivals were prohibited from 1958-60 onwards.¹² Monks were forced to disrobe and even to marry, and monastic lands and property were nationalized and distributed among groups of ex-monks and civilians in 1951. Only the three main monasteries of Hohhot (Mo. Kökeqota, Ch. Huhehaote) remained open (although they were gradually converted into factories or administrative buildings), while all the Chinese temples of Hohhot were closed. However, prior to the Cultural Revolution which brought massive destruction (1966-76), five hundred monasteries were still listed as active. (Delege 1998: 777) During the Cultural Revolution the monasteries that had survived until then were ransacked; their statues and relics were either destroyed or stolen, while their painted scrolls and manuscripts were burned.

The present situation is not reliably documented in any published source. According to my fieldwork and documentary research, among the sixty largest monasteries (5% of the total):

- 40% were razed to the ground;
- 28% were damaged but have preserved their central halls;

(Khan 1996: 139)

⁷ According to official documents, between 16,000 and 50,000 Mongols were killed and between 100,000 and 340,000 Mongols were arrested and tortured during the 1968-1969 political purges against the so-called Inner Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. (Jankowiak 1993; Sneath 1994)

⁸ The IMAR is the third largest region of China, with an area of 1.18 million square kilometres and 22.84 million inhabitants (January 1996), 3.6 million of whom are Mongols. There are other groups of Mongols living in Qinghai, Xinjiang, Hebei etc., and even in Yunnan. Officially registered Mongols in the IMAR include many half-breeds (15% of Mongols with spouses were married to non-Mongols in 1982) and 310,000 people who changed their "ethnic group" (*minzu*) to Mongol in 1982. (Khan 1996: 142, 145, n. 35)

⁹ More than 36% of the IMAR population live in urban areas.

¹⁰ The region's natural resources were exploited at the expense of the local population in order to supply the dynamic coastal regions. (Tomoche 1996: 51-58)

¹¹ Between 1947 and 1982, about 45 million *mu* of grasslands were "opened up" for agriculture. (Khan 1996: 140)

¹² Monks still accounted for 13.5% of the population in several banners in 1956. (Mackerras 1995: 112) On the (anti-)religious policy of the 1950s in Inner Mongolia: Sneath 2000: 67-70.

- 17% have been preserved with the exception of the monks' living quarters and other secondary buildings
- 15%: unknown.

Despite large-scale destruction, more religious sites have been preserved in Inner Mongolia than in certain areas of China proper (perhaps owing to the remote location of many monasteries)¹³ and in the Mongolian People's Republic.¹⁴

The revival of Buddhism under state control

Measures adopted by the authorities

The official authorisation of religious worship in China under Deng Xiaoping (1978)¹⁵ was followed by the rehabilitation of numerous victims of the Cultural Revolution. After thirteen years of total interdiction of religious practice and destruction of religious sites, the state sought to repair the damage suffered by monasteries and their communities.

The state's religious policy towards minorities since 1978 differs from that towards Han Chinese for it has recognised that "the majority (of minority people) believe in religion," and that "the questions of religion and ethnicity are frequently intermingled." (MacInnis 1989: 21) A workshop on religions in the IMAR was held in November 1981 to evaluate the correct policies, as well as the mistakes of the past, to define "orthodoxy" ("normal religious activities") as opposed to "heterodoxy," to regulate religious practice and establish a control over religious activities. A second workshop on "Lamaism" (*lamajiao*) was held in the IMAR in March 1985 in order to define the national policy of religion in a socialist country and, as a result, greater religious freedom was granted. Following are the seven points of the "Report of the workshop on 'Lamaism' in All-China" (*Quanguo lamajiao gongzuo huiyi jiyao*):

1. Monks and laymen may ask for the restitution of Buddhist monuments that were preserved for religious activities;
2. Monasteries that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution will receive indemnities, and treasures, estate, etc. must be handed back to them;
3. Confiscated livestock must be returned to the monasteries;
4. Monks will receive compensation for the destruction of their houses and the confiscation of their properties;

¹³ In China as a whole, about 3 to 5% of the religious monuments have survived since 1948. ("Document 19" in MacInnis 1989: 15)

¹⁴ Officially, only five Buddhist monasteries were preserved out of a total of 749 monasteries and temples listed by Mairdar (1970: 91) in the nineteen thirties (or 941 according to the *Mongol ard Ulsyn ugsaatny sudlal, khelnii shinjileiin atlas* 1979, II: 43-69). However in some supposedly destroyed monasteries I visited in Mongolia, at least one or two buildings were still standing.

¹⁵ The Third Plenum of the XIst Congress stated the freedom of religious belief for the citizens of the People's Republic of China. It was confirmed by the new Constitution of 1982 (article 36) and by "Document 19." (MacInnis 1989: 10-26)

5. Old monks will receive state allowances;
6. Measures will be taken to protect the main monasteries and to restore religious activities;
7. Local Buddhist Associations will be restored and the Buddhist Association of Inner Mongolia will open a Buddhist school. (Delege 1998: 776-777)

In September 1983, the Buddhist representatives held their third meeting and reinstated the Buddhist Association of the IMAR (Nei Menggu zizhiqu fojiao xiehui).¹⁶ That same year, the local Buddhist associations of Hohhot County, Sili-yin youl and Ordos Leagues were re-established, and from 1987 to 1990, other Buddhist Associations were recreated together with the opening of monasteries in Alaša, Bayan nayur, Ulayancab, Kingyan, Kōlün Buir leagues, Baotou (Boyou) and Chifeng Counties. The role of these “patriotic” Buddhist Associations is not only to “promote the official religious policy and normalise religious activities,” but also to “help people raise their patriotic and socialist consciousness.” (Pas 1989: 6; MacInnis 1989: 19) The local Buddhist Associations are branches of the IMAR Buddhist Association which is subordinated to the Religious Affairs Bureau (Zongjiao shiwuju),¹⁷ a government agency (with provincial and local branches) under the direct leadership of the state Council which has the overall control of religious matters throughout the country. “Public Security Bureaus are on the lookout for illegal activities, including unregistered associations and unauthorised temple building.” (Feuchtwang 1999: 168) The Buddhist associations include a number of Party members who ensure that policies and directives follow the official guidelines.

The renaissance of monastic communities

Although the Buddhist revival was strong in the nineteen-eighties it has been more cautious in the last decade and has always remained under tight state control. The would-be monk¹⁸ must receive a religious education and pass an examination before being ordained and obtaining a certificate of ordination. A monk is then usually sent to a monastery near his birthplace and receives a monthly government pay. There is a fixed quota of monks per monastery. In theory, the minimum age to become a monk is eighteen years (and twenty to be fully ordained) but, as in Tibet, there is a tolerance for younger novices. In Siregetü juu (Xilituzhao) and Yeke juu (Dazhao) of Hohhot for instance, the youngest novices are twelve to thirteen years old.¹⁹ In the poorest areas, their status is enviable: novices receive a salary of 300 RMB per month while ordained monks receive

¹⁶ It must be stressed that ever since the first National and Local Religious Associations were founded in the early years of the Republic, there is no separate Buddhist association for Chinese Buddhism and Tibeto-Mongol Buddhism.

¹⁷ “All places of worship are under the administration of the Religious Affairs Bureau, but the religious organizations are responsible for their management.” (“Document 19” in MacInnis 1989: 18) On the hierarchy of Chinese religious organs, see MacInnis 1989; Stockwell 1993.

¹⁸ The clergy remains exclusively male. I have never heard of the existence of nuns living in communities in Southern Mongolia.

¹⁹ In 1999. In Aršan süme (Aershan miao, Left Banner of New Baryu, Kōlün Buir), there is a 15 year-old monk and a 17 year-old one. This information was given to me by French ethnologist Alexandra Marois. In Beijing’s Yonghegong, one can enrol in the religious school at the age of 14 if one has completed junior high school. (Stockwell 1993: 104)

900 RMB per month.²⁰ With the exception of the Siregetü qutuγtu who is married, the monks seem to respect the vow of celibacy.²¹

According to a census taken in 1984, there were more than 5,000 monks, 3,854 of whom were aged monks who were defrocked during the Cultural Revolution and who had renewed their vows (generally to retire in a monastery). The majority of monks live in areas where there are no longer any monasteries or Buddhist Associations. From 1984 onwards, regional and local governments paid 900,000 RMB per year as back salaries to the wronged clergy—a total of five million RMB were paid to individual monks in compensation. (Delege 1998: 779)²²

There is only one official Buddhist school for the whole of the IMAR and thus most of the young monks receive a minimum “traditional education” from an elderly monk (“tutorial system”). The Buddhist school, located in Caqar blama juu (Üsütü juu, near Hohhot), trains only thirty pupils at a time over a period of three years. The school was first founded in Badγar coyiling süme in 1987 under the supervision of the Buddhist Association of the IMAR, and was known as “group of instruction” (*peixunban*) (ten monks were formerly instructed in the Buddhist Association of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region). The three-year curriculum includes lectures on patriotism, socialism, basic knowledge in Buddhism, a general background and notions of management. In 1990 the first graduate monks were dispatched to the monasteries of Hohhot, Baotou and Chifeng Counties and Sili-yin γoul League. The following year, the *peixunban* became a proper school (with the same program) and was moved to the Caqar blama juu.²³ In thirteen years, only one hundred and twenty monks were trained. (Delege 1998: 780-781)²⁴

Many more monks are educated and ordained in the “pan-Chinese” monasteries of Wutaishan, Beijing²⁵ and also in Kumbum Monastery (Qinghai), thus revitalizing the old links with Eastern Tibet. They are free to give up their vows whenever they want or to return to the monastery of their homeland after completing their studies. Unfortunately, ordinations are not documented in any published source.²⁶ Occasionally Tibetan monks are sent (often as a punishment) to monasteries in Inner Mongolia (to Siregetü juu for instance). However, it is impossible for a Mongol monk to go to the Buddhist Institute of Lhasa which since 1985 delivers the *gesi* (<Tib. *dge-bshes*) degree at the end of a ten-year curriculum.

²⁰ Ibid. The two managers of Aršan süme are “ancient Communists disguised as monks.” Three years ago in Siregetü juu, the ordinary monk’s salary was 100 RMB per month.

²¹ Although according to a Tibetan monk at Siregetü juu, monks in Hohhot are depraved and are in the habit of meeting women at night (oral information, 1997).

²² Mackerras (1994: 445) gives the same figure of 5,000 monks for 1992.

²³ The common difference between a *peixunban* and a school or an institute is the duration of studies. In this case, the duration is the same and the change of terminology is not clear. On Buddhist schools and institutes in China, see Wang-Toutain 1997: 65-68.

²⁴ About the curriculum: Mackerras 1994: 447.

²⁵ Beijing’s Yonghegong is mainly staffed by Mongol monks from Inner Mongolia, Liaoning and Qinghai. Courses are mainly in Mongolian. To enter a monastery located in a big city is not easy because migration to towns is restricted. (Stockwell 1993: 104-106)

²⁶ In China, local Buddhist associations can independently organise an ordination ceremony. Moreover, there is a distinction between the ordination of young monks and the re-ordination of old monks.

Alongside the revival of the Buddhist clergy, there is also a number of *sibayanca*—elderly women who take religious vows, shave their heads and wear brown robes like those of a lama. They continue living with their families and have no institutional status. (Sneath 2000: 244)

The qubilyans

Another aspect of the religious revival alongside the restoration of state-controlled monasteries and schools is the resurgence of purely local traditions and religious life. One example is the tradition of reincarnate lamas. In the nineteenth century, most of the Southern Mongol monasteries had one or several *qubilyans*: in addition to the one hundred and fifty-seven official reincarnations recognised by the Lifanyuan (Board of Colonial Affairs), there were many others who were not registered. What has become of this institution? Patriotic *qubilyans* who were pro-communist in the nineteen-forties now occupy important positions in the national or the provincial Buddhist associations, in monasteries in Beijing, or have political functions in the local administration,²⁷ and are thus able to persuade the government to reopen and repair temples.²⁸ Old *qubilyans* generally maintain close links with their former monasteries, for example the *qutuγtu* of Sira mören süme (Dörben keüked) who lives and works as a physician in town or the *qubilyan* of Barayun keyid (Helanshan nansi, Alaša) who lives in Hohhot, both of whom attend the religious festivals of their respective monasteries.

Although the Chinese authorities declared in 1985 that they would not recognise any new reincarnations in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, they changed their policy a few years later, following the death of the Panchen Lama in 1989, when they decided to authorise the recognition of new reincarnations in order “to respect the customs of the Tibetan people.” (Wang-Toutain 1997: 77) So far, however, no young *qubilyan* has been officially recognised in Inner Mongolia, although I heard on several occasions during my fieldwork that new *qubilyans* were being searched for and identified, like the new *qubilyan* of Bayanqota’s Yamun süme (Yanfusi, Alaša, 1995). There was no Mongol reincarnation two years ago in the Western Yellow Temple of Beijing (Xi Huangsi), where new officially recognised reincarnations are sent for training. Whether the Chinese state will again authorise new reincarnations in the IMAR remains an open question.²⁹

²⁷ *Nei Menggu lamajiao jili* (1997) is a compilation of biographies of these reincarnations (autobiography of the Eleventh Siregetü qutuγtu, of the Fifth Yangsong gegeen of Arqorcin...). For instance the Fifth reincarnation of Bayan qosiyun keyid was the head of the Mongol section of the Buddhist Association of China (Zhongguo fojiao xiehui, based in Beijing’s Guangjisi) in 1954; the Galzang gegeen directed the Nei Menggu fojiao xiehui (Buddhist Association of Inner Mongolia) in 1965 and was the abbot of Yonghegong in Beijing in 1954; the Cayan gegeen directed the Zhongguo fojiao xiehui; the Sixth Sira mören gegeen is the vice-director of Siziwang government; the Fifth Yangsong gegeen is vice-president of Arqorcin Banner...

²⁸ On the political and social status as well as the responsibilities of reincarnations in the Qinghai region, see the interview with Ajia Rinpoche in Bulag 1996: 27 sq.

²⁹ Mackerras (1994: 445), according to the Head of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Hohhot, writes that there were 54 *qubilyans* in Inner Mongolia in 1992, but he does not specify if any new ones were recently recognised.

On the other hand, some decidedly anti-communist *qubilyans* have been recognised abroad. The reincarnation of the Sixth ICang-skya (Jangjia) qutuγtu (who fled to Taiwan in 1948 and died there in 1957) was recently recognised by the Dalai Lama in the person of a Caqar Mongol living in a monastery in South India. Other reincarnations who took refuge in Taiwan or the United states, like the Kanjurva qutuγtu, are also likely to be recognised abroad. The ICang-skya qutuγtu, who was traditionally a Tibetan from Amdo, was never a central figure for Southern Mongols as was the Boyda gegeen for Qalqa Mongols, and it is unlikely that Southern Mongols will choose to regard him as a religious leader in the future.

Festivals and cults

The more intense manifestations of religious life are seen during the great annual festivals. The monasteries are free to decide the frequency and dates of their festivals but are required to report them to the authorities. Larger monasteries like Yeke juu, Siregetü juu, Badyar coyiling süme, Mergen juu, organise one or two festivals a year, for the New Year (*cayan sara*, with *cam* dances) and during the fifth month of the lunar calendar. (**Fig. 1**) These dates are traditional but the number of “great” festivals (*yeke qural*) has been reduced from three, four or five (and even thirteen for Yeke juu) to one or two a year. I will briefly describe here the festivals in three monasteries located in rural and in urban areas—Lobunchinbu süme, Aršan süme and Siregetü juu—in order to give an idea of the depth and intensity of the revival.

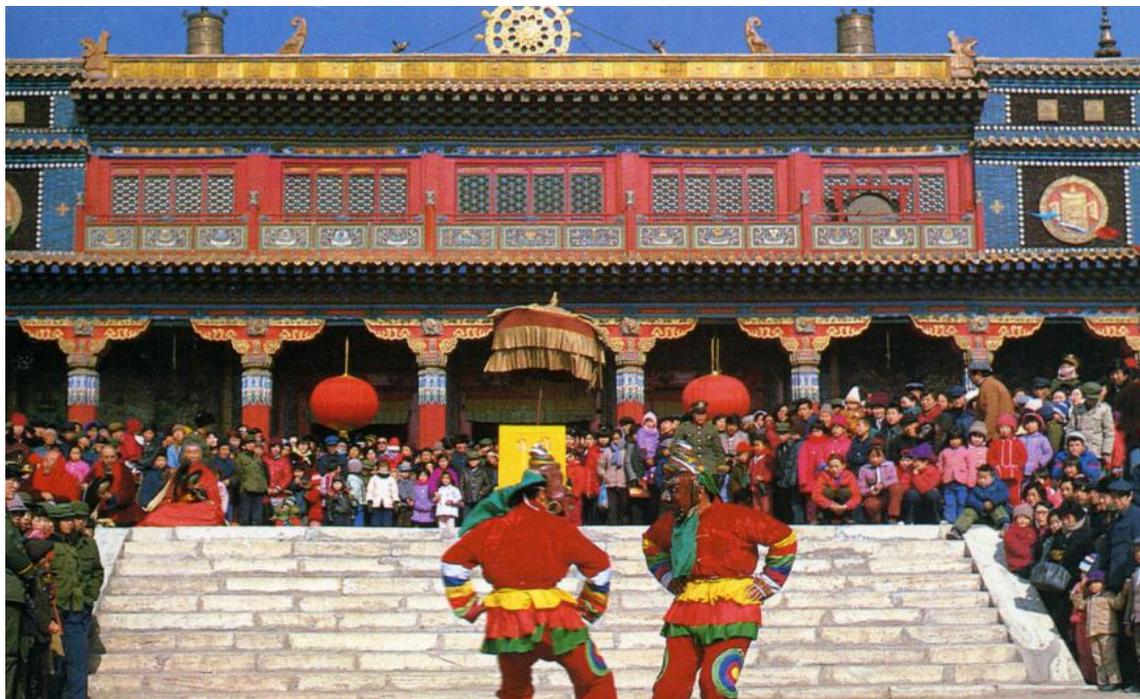


Fig. 1. Cam festival in Siregetü juu, 1990s

Religious festivals still determine the pattern of rural life. The biennial festival of Lobunchinbu sūme (or Ayui-yin sūme, Dengkou District)³⁰ attracts hundreds of devotees from Dengkou and neighbouring areas. Jeeps, cars and buses full of Mongols and Han cross the narrow mountain pass and park right in front of the assembly hall. **(Fig. 3)** Chinese Buddhist lay associations and various Qigong associations³¹ also attend the festival. After having made their offerings and paid homage to the monks, they visit the five sacred caves where Padmasambhava is believed to have meditated in 774.



³⁰ The 10th of the 7th month and the 25th of the 9th month (lunar calendar). I attended the 1995 summer festival.

³¹ These associations are very important in China today: they reflect the secularisation of religious practices.



Fig. 2. Festival in Siregetü juu, summer 1995, with Chinese heshang and lay believers, summer 1995.
(© Isabelle Charleux)

The five-day festival of Aršan sūme attracts herdsmen from all the surrounding countryside. According to Alexandra Marois, a French anthropologist who attended the festival from September 19th-24th, 1999, the monks insist on the importance of walking the last few kilometres to the monastery (it is the first question they ask visitors upon their arrival). Most visitors come for just one day. No Chinese attends the festival. The pilgrims circumambulate the monastic complex turning their prayer-wheels, prostrating and making libations with *baijiu* (Chinese distilled sorghum alcohol), some bearing sacred books on their backs. They offer hand-sewn coloured *nom-un debel* (cloth-covers

for sacred books) and food, and in return receive blessings, sacred water and herbal remedies. They buy wind-horse flags which they hang on the northwest side of their yurts.³² Private consultations also take place inside the monks' cells. In the courtyard of the monastery itself, the monks were selling the gifts they had just received (prayer rugs, *debel*)! An unusual feature is the presence of meat offerings (mutton) on the altar of a lateral shrine.



Fig. 3. Festival in Lobunchinbu süme, summer 1995 (© Isabelle Charleux)

Today, the urban monasteries are sponsored by Mongols and Chinese alike—Mongols account for only 5% of the population of Hohhot, only 20% of which still speaks Mongolian. (Jankowiak 1993; Bilik 1998: 47) As there are very few Chinese temples, Chinese frequently visit the Tibeto-Mongol monasteries to worship Shakyamuni, the Medicine Buddha, etc. As in Inner China, Han Chinese and urban Mongols are “religious tourists” or “tourist worshippers” and their faith does not appear to be as strong as that of rural Mongols. The festivals of Siregetü juu in Hohhot not only attract many Mongols, but also Chinese monks, Chinese Buddhist lay associations, and even Daoist priests (*daoshi*) in the pure Chinese tradition of *Sanjiao heyi* (“three religions working together,” although Confucianism is no longer present). (Fig. 2) One of the *daoshi* often gives teachings in Siregetü juu. The Chinese local Jushelin (a Buddhist lay association)³³ has rented a small chapel in Siregetü juu and has transformed it into a shrine dedicated to Guanyin after miracles occurred there (an image of Guanyin produced a miraculous light and a butterfly appeared in the middle of winter).

Pilgrimages are very popular, especially to Wutaishan, a sacred mountain in China, which has become a major pilgrimage site and which currently receives the largest amount of donations of all Chinese religious sites. Local Buddhist and non-Buddhist

³² On the domestic level, Buddha images and photographs of the Panchen Lama, who is especially popular in Inner Mongolia, have reappeared on family altars. On lay devotees, offerings, devotions and private altars: Sneath 2000: 240, 244

³³ I do not know any Mongol Buddhist lay association similar to the extremely active Chinese Jushelin.

pilgrimages and cults (for example that of *Boγda ayula*, a mountain located south of Hailar, Left Banner of New Baryu, Kōlün Buir), and worship of *oboγa* and sacred springs are still very much alive throughout all of Inner Mongolia.

New forms of worship, including the cult of Chinggis Khan promoted by the state, may now be seen inside the main temples of several monasteries, for instance Huifusi (Bayarin, Right Banner) and Gilubar juu (Houzhaomiao, Bayarin, Left Banner). Local cults are now also officially recognised. For instance, the Jade source (Yuquan) in front of Yeke juu of Hohhot—nine springs which, according to legend, formed under the hoof of Kangxi's horse. The source is protected by a wall and enclosed within a small shrine dedicated to a Naga king. Although the water is now polluted, the visitor may drink tea made with spring water (entrance fee: 2 RMB, plus the tea).

Chinese protection of Mongol cultural heritage: museums and monasteries

Reopening of temples and monasteries

Although local cults and pilgrimages are now freely practised, the revival of institutional Buddhism in Inner Mongolia is still largely determined by the Chinese government's policy. The life of monasteries, both as spiritual centres and as monuments embodying Mongol Buddhist identity are governed by the state's policy regarding the preservation of cultural heritage. This heritage is largely understood as an architectural one. The contradiction between the state's policy of limited religious freedom on the one hand and the Party's anti-religious ideology on the other has given rise to a peculiar situation: monasteries are allowed to reopen but are considered as cultural and historical buildings and thus depend on both the Bureau of Cultural Heritage (Wenwuju) and the Religious Affairs Bureau. The authorities gave priority to "valuable" cultural heritage (*wenwu*) of "main historical significance" and "sources of national pride," favouring the "minority areas." The main criteria of selection were the fame, historical interest and current state of the buildings. Destroyed and badly damaged monasteries were not listed, neither were temples that were occupied by a school, an administration, or a factory. which could not be relocated, or whose architecture had been irremediably modified (new doors and windows, partitions, contiguous buildings; one example is Emci-yin sūme in Hohhot which was transformed into a glass factory). (**Fig. 4**) At the time of my fieldwork I counted around fifty temples that were not completely destroyed which were either occupied or left in a state of dilapidation. Such sites are doomed to disappear: buildings which are no longer functional are promptly demolished.

During the nineteen-eighties, between one and three monasteries were reopened and reoccupied by monks in every banner or county. Most were previously occupied by a work unit (*danwei*) of some sort. One of the main tasks of the Religious Affairs Bureau



Fig. 4. Balcirud süme (Arqorcin Banner, Chifeng League): an example of temple transformed into housing. The porch has been closed on the ground floor. (© Isabelle Charleux)

has been to negotiate the right of use with the occupying administration, school, factory, warehouse, prison, families, etc., which must be relocated. The rehabilitation of religious sites initiated by the authorities and limited to the main historic and scenic monasteries was soon followed by a growing demand from local communities to reopen smaller temples and monasteries. These demands are granted on a certain number of conditions: local religious leaders may reopen an existing temple or monastery, but not establish a new one (in theory)³⁴; they must constitute a Democratic Management Committee with elected members³⁵; the monastery (or temple) must be economically self-sufficient, located at a famous historical site, in areas where there is a concentration of religious believers and the opening must be approved by the local authorities.³⁶ The local community is responsible for the buildings' maintenance³⁷ but is nevertheless required to follow the directives of the Department of Cultural Heritage, Urban Planning and other administrations, and any renovation, reconstruction or extension must be approved beforehand by the aforementioned administrations. Existing structures cannot be demolished. Authorisations are required to set up a business, a restaurant, a shop, or a publishing office.³⁸ Locally rebuilt monasteries are registered as "cultural heritage."

In the process of reopening and restoring a temple, several state and Party organs (Religious Affairs Bureau, Party's United Front Work Department) interact with religious organs (Buddhist Associations and other religious groups) and administrations in charge of the protection of cultural heritage (a museum's department of archaeology, a

³⁴ I know no example of new foundations in Inner Mongolia.

³⁵ Places of religious activity "should form a supervisory body consisting of both religious professionals and religious believers to implement democratic supervision." (MacInnis 1989: 46)

³⁶ They must apply for registration with the department in charge of religious affairs. ("Documents 19" and other articles in MacInnis 1989: 17 sq., 46 sq.)

³⁷ "Responsible religious organizations [...] should be charged with making painstaking efforts to safeguard them [major temples] by seeing that these monuments are kept in good repair, and the environment fully protected so that the surroundings are clean, peaceful and quiet, suitable for tourism." ("Document 19" in MacInnis 1989: 18)

³⁸ "The income derived from alms and donations received by these temples can be used mainly for maintenance." ("Document 19" in MacInnis 1989: 18)

“unit of protection” [*baohu danwei*]). The involvement of these different groups is a potential source of conflict over the control of the sites and their purpose. For instance, in 1987 a conflict opposed the monks of Yeke juu and the curators of the Provincial Museum (Nei Menggu bowuguan) in Hohhot. The monks had decided to repaint the murals in the assembly hall without informing the authorities. The department of archaeology (Kaogusuo) of the museum managed to save parts of the original paintings before their destruction by removing square sections of the painted surface from the wall.³⁹

In 1995, a total of seventy-four reopened Mongol temples and monasteries were listed by the state Council as “cultural heritage” and received national or provincial protection.⁴⁰ One monastery in activity (Badyar coyiling süme) and one temple-museum (Mayidari-yin juu) are protected on the national level; twenty-two monasteries and one museum (Wutasi / Tabun suburya pagoda) are protected on the provincial level (IMAR and Liaoning Province) and regarded as “first-class historical cultural heritage.”⁴¹ Forty-nine “less important” monasteries (“second-class historical cultural heritage”) are protected on the provincial and local levels. (Delege 1998: 777-779) Twenty-seven of the protected monasteries were severely damaged and some even razed to the ground during the Cultural Revolution. However monasteries that somehow survived were added, and since 1982 the list has been steadily growing.⁴²

Although in Han China the policy regarding the protection of “cultural heritage” does not emphasise Buddhist architecture, Inner Mongolia took advantage of the softening of Chinese policy towards minorities in the nineteen-eighties, and its Buddhist monuments dating from the sixteenth⁴³ to the twentieth centuries account for a quarter of “cultural heritage” of “historical significance” under national or regional protection. Other protected sites include cave-paintings, the ruins of old cities and parts of the Great Wall, tombs, pagodas of the Kitan (Liao) and Jürchen (Jin) periods, as well as buildings and memorials of the revolutionary period. The so-called Chinggis Khan Mausoleum is also qualified by the state Council as one of the “key units of cultural heritage of nation-wide historical significance to be protected by the state.” (Khan 1995: 276, n. 35)

³⁹ They were stored in bad condition in the Historical Museum of Hohhot (Lishi bowuguan, located in the Princess' residence (Gongzhu fu).

⁴⁰ They are labelled *baohu danwei* (“unit of protection,” protected sites). In 1993, 9,000 temples and monasteries were opened in the whole of China. (Wang-Toutain 1997: 62) See also Charleux 2003.

⁴¹ Monasteries previously located in Eastern Mongol banners are now situated in Liaoning Province.

⁴² Eleven monasteries were protected at the provincial level in 1986. *Nei Menggu zizhi qu zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei jieshao*, 1988: *Chifeng fengqing, yuan Zhaowuda meng* 1987.

⁴³ Hohhot County preserved four monasteries with buildings dating back to the sixteenth century.

Classification of temples and monasteries

Surviving monasteries and temples may be classified as follows:

I- The seventy-four state-protected religious buildings

All these buildings are considered as museums and fall under the administration of the Bureau of Cultural Heritage. Generally visitors must pay an entrance fee (even those who come solely to worship). Among these buildings may be distinguished:

I.1. Seventy-two reopened temples and monasteries, including:

I.1.1. Abandoned buildings

I.1.2. Museum-temples. As elsewhere in China, there is no clear-cut distinction between tourist and worshipper, and most visitors are both: they take photographs, burn incense, give donations and worship the Buddhas. Incense is usually available in a small shop and large transparent donation boxes are placed before the altars. These sites may become monasteries again if monks obtain the authorisation to live in them.

I.1.3. Registered monasteries. All official monasteries, even those which have been entirely rebuilt, are considered as “cultural heritage.” Generally speaking, the easiest way to differentiate a museum from a monastery in activity is that the museum is kept by a layman, very often an old defrocked monk, while an active monastery is kept and inhabited by official monks.

I.1.3.a. Monasteries reinstalled in preserved edifices

I.1.3.b. Monasteries rebuilt on the ruins of former sites.

I.2. Two museums listed above (Mayidari-yin juu, Wutasi); these sites are mere tourist attractions with no religious activity whatsoever.

II- Monasteries built without reporting to the authorities. As Thomas Hahn stresses, “large parts of the manifestations of Buddhism are not in accordance with the law,” and cases of “first build, then report” are numerous. (Hahn 1989: 88) The situation varies from one banner or county to another.

II.1. Monasteries rebuilt on ancient, vandalised sites

(II. 2. Entirely new monasteries).

III- Buildings used as “places of activity” (*huodong changsuo*), awaiting official recognition.

As shown above there is no clear-cut distinction between museum, temple and monastery. Reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, and in most cases, even the Buddhist Associations do not know the exact figures.⁴⁴ In my opinion there are at least fifty state-protected monasteries and an additional thirty to fifty unofficial monasteries and temples housing small groups of monks. The monastic communities are very small compared to the situation at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ There are probably larger numbers of unofficial monks in the remoter areas. The largest monasteries (which previously housed five hundred to two thousand monks) nowadays count thirty to forty monks. They are located in the historical areas surrounding Hohhot, in villages and isolated regions (essentially in the mountains) inhabited by Mongol nomads and farmers who support them.

⁴⁴ Even the authorities have difficulties in counting the monks. (Hahn 1989: 83-84)

⁴⁵ Among the 31 monasteries I visited, 20 were active: one claimed to have 100 monks, two had 40 monks, three had 30 monks, one had 20 monks, 13 had between 1 to 15 monks.

One of the most important monasteries is Siregetü juu which since 1980 houses the official Buddhist association of Hohhot (Huhehaoteshi fojiao xiehui) headed by the Eleventh Siregetü qutuγtu, the most important religious figure in Inner Mongolia.⁴⁶ He has undertaken the restoration and directed the consecration rituals of several monasteries in Hohhot⁴⁷ since 1980. He is married, which is a tradition specific to this monastery. The other major monasteries are Badγar coyiling süme (which no longer holds festivals), Yeke juu, Barayun keyid (Alaša), Mergen juu, Beyile-yin süme, Sira mören süme, Gembi-yin süme and Jungγar juu. There are still a number of Mongol monks living in monasteries located in present day Liaoning (Ruiyingsi, Huiningsi), and in the Yellow Temple (Sira süme, fifteen monks) founded by the Manchus in their capital city of Shengjing (Shenyang).

Restoration costs

The first restorations were financed by the state to promote tourism and demonstrate the (limited) freedom of religious belief. Large sums of money have been provided for the rebuilding of religious monuments: according to official sources, the state spent fifteen million RMB between 1985 and 1995 for the restoration of monasteries—twelve million of which in 1986, 1987 and 1992 alone.⁴⁸ The IMAR and the leagues spent another three million RMB on restoration and reconstruction. Four million RMB were given to the Siregetü qutuγtu to restore monasteries in and around Hohhot from 1980 to 1989; the government of New Baryu spent 350,000 RMB and 30,000 RMB on the reconstruction of Aršan süme and Barayun süme respectively. The monasteries of Hohhot and Baotou Counties received additional funds to develop tourism. The state also gave a total of five million RMB in compensation for the loss of land and estate when ownership could be proved. (Delege 1998: 779)

Similar sums of money were invested by the authorities to promote another religious symbol with the aim of diverting the Mongol population from the Buddhist faith. In 1956-57 the Chinese government built the so-called Chinggis Khan Mausoleum on the site of the Eight White “Palaces” or tents in Ordos. The relics⁴⁹ were recreated and a huge marble image of the Khan was installed in the centre of the building. During the nineteen-eighties, the state allocated more than three million RMB for the mausoleum’s restoration. (Khan 1995: 267, n. 20) A further 1.35 million RMB were allocated to the site

⁴⁶ He is a Tibetan and a member of his local People’s Congress. Mackerras (1994: 450, 452, 458) interviewed him in 1992 on various subjects: the modern Buddhist revival, the role of women in Buddhism, Deng Xiaoping’s religious policy (about which he was very enthusiastic), and on the political and social role of Buddhism in Inner Mongolia.

⁴⁷ Yeke juu, Üsütü juu, Beyile-yin süme, Sira mören juu / Zhaohe. See his autobiography in *Nei Menggu lamajiao jili* 1997: 264.

⁴⁸ This seems to be the average sum allocated to religious sites in minority areas. (MacInnis 1989: 134 for examples in Sichuan)

⁴⁹ They have been stolen several times since the sixteenth century. The Guomindang, fearing the Japanese might seize the relics, removed them to Gansu (although by that time the relics were probably already fake). The Chinese Communist Party recovered them in 1949 and organised a sacrificial ceremony at Yan’an. (Bilik 1998: 62-63)

for the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the Inner Mongol Autonomous Region (June 20, 1997).

The nineteen-nineties saw the emergence of privately financed reconstruction and restoration. Monks and worshippers began to act on their own initiative and work together to re-open monasteries.⁵⁰ Yet the costs of such initiatives (the rebuilding of a small temple requires several thousand RMB) has given rise to concern and opposition among members of the elite who believe that such projects represent an increase in debts and that the manpower, material and funds would be better used to build schools.⁵¹

Examples of different situations

Passive protection of mummified buildings

Official protection does not necessarily imply conservation and restoration.⁵² (**Fig. 5**) Basic repairs, undertaken by Chinese carpenters, consist in maintaining the main buildings standing as long as possible by consolidating the sustaining structures. Several monasteries situated in previously remote areas far from urban centres, now find themselves surrounded by a Chinese village or settlement, a town or even an industrial zone, like Köndelen juu which is now located in an industrial suburb of Baotou. In rural areas where Chinese are more numerous than Mongols, or where Mongols are sinicised (i.e. the southern part of Inner Mongolia: the region around Hohhot, Baotou, the former Caqar Banners, Chifeng), no restoration or reconstruction has been undertaken; the old monasteries, whether protected or not, are usually abandoned or have been transformed into a factory, housing, or administration, and are therefore condemned to disappear sooner or later.

⁵⁰ I was able to observe the progressive transformation of Yeke juu and Siregetü juu of Hohhot and of Badyar coyiling süme from 1993 to 1999: the construction of new buildings, repainting, the growing number of new images and religious items (incense-burners, prayer-wheels, pinnacles).

⁵¹ “Much less should we go in for large-scale construction lest we consume large sums of money, materials and manpower and thus obstruct the building up of material and spiritual socialist civilization.” (“Document 19 in MacInnis 1989: 17)

⁵² In theory, measures must be taken to “valorise” the buildings under official protection. See *Nei Menggu zizhi qu zhongdian wenwu baohu danwei jieshao* 1987: 1-3.



Fig. 5. Fanzongsi (Ongniyud Banner, Juu uda league, now in Chifeng league): an example of protected mummified monastery (© Isabelle Charleux)

Museum-temples

The local government chooses to restore a monastery when a quick profit may be expected from tourism. However, tourism is limited to Hohhot and Baotou counties and a few other isolated spots. The restoration is undertaken by a department of archaeology, a local bureau of protection or a governmental agency. The buildings are frequently either under-restored or over-restored. In the first case, there is no sustained policy. Mayidari-yin juu, for instance, was restored in 1984 but now the wall paintings—the oldest in Inner Mongolia⁵³—are endangered. In the second case, various elements—often Chinese in style—which were absent from the original design, like bell and drum towers or archways, have been added. A restored edifice always comes with a Chinese-style stone inscription. Restored buildings are thus made more Chinese in style, content and use. Like elsewhere in China, new elements—shops, huge Chinese signs or even Disneyland-like attractions such as the cave-style inner corridor of Wanfodian in Mayidari-yin juu—transform the original aspect of the monastery. The name of the monastery is written in both the Mongol script and Chinese characters on a sign above the entrance and sometimes bilingual boards explain the history of the monastery, but in many banners and counties people have forgotten the Mongolian names of their monasteries.

Active monasteries reinstalled in old edifices

The authorisation to restore or rebuild a monastery was easily obtained until 1996-97 and its restoration was either partially or entirely financed by the local government. Small groups of monks began to reoccupy monasteries, many of which in the nineteenth century housed more than five hundred monks. The main buildings are repaired and redecorated and new images of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Altars, pinnacles on the roofs, prayer flags and wheels,⁵⁴ and incense burners are reinstalled. Important lamas are invited to

⁵³ Charleux 1998: 326-340.

⁵⁴ Prayer-wheels were systematically prohibited and completely disappeared from the monasteries at the end of the nineteen-fifties.

perform the re-consecration rituals. Minor lateral buildings and the upper levels are generally neglected.

In order to be self-sufficient the monasteries are obliged to develop some kind of service industry, often in the form of shops offering religious items (incense, wind-horse flags, Buddhist music), souvenirs and Tibetan medicine (in Siregetü juu), guesthouses, ethnographic museum (Badyar coyiling süme, 1998). In comparison to Inner China, Mongol monasteries make little profit from tourism (with the exception of the entrance fee) and potential economic activities are under-developed.⁵⁵ The monks spend most of their time watching over the temples and preventing tourists from taking photographs.

The most visited monastery, with two thousand tourists a week, is Badyar coyiling süme which has been almost entirely preserved with the exception of the monks' living quarters which are now slowly collapsing. (**Fig. 6, Fig. 7**) The new buildings, however, were not built according to the traditional methods: baked bricks were used instead of stone and the top floor ornamentation consists of a painted band instead of the traditional twigs pressed together. In 1998-99 for some unknown reason, one of the main assembly halls, the Lamrin duyang, was entirely dismantled and rebuilt stone by stone exactly as before. The wall paintings were removed from the walls in square sections and unskilfully pasted onto the new walls.



Fig. 6. Lamrin duyang, Badyar coyiling süme (Wudangzhao). View of the façade of the newly rebuilt temple, 1999. (© Isabelle Charleux)

Fig. 7. Ruined houses, Badyar coyiling süme (Wudangzhao). View of the façade of the newly rebuilt temple, 1998. (© Isabelle Charleux)

⁵⁵ The much more affluent Kumbum Monastery has its own construction team, a block-printing house, a Tibetan hospital, photographic services, parking lots, and restaurants (Bulag 1996: 29)

Reconstruction

Since there is no information available on the exact number of non-official, locally rebuilt monasteries and temples, I can only describe the places I visited, which I hope will nevertheless give an idea of the diversity of conditions and alternatives. In 1981, twenty monks (several of whom have studied in Amdo) together with a group of local laymen began to collect funds to rebuild the famous Barayun keyid (Alaša), which formerly housed the funerary stupa of the Sixth Dalai Lama.⁵⁶ Although the stupa was destroyed, the monastery has remained one of the most sacred sites in Alaša. **(Fig. 8, Fig. 9)** The assembly halls of Jegün keyid and of Lobunchinbu sūme (one of the few Nyingmapa monasteries in Mongolia) have also been rebuilt on the ruins of the previous sites, together with seven other monasteries in Alaša.



Fig. 8. Barayun keyid (Helanshan nansi, Alashan Left Banner, in the Helanshan mountains): assembly halls are rebuilt in front of the ruins. (© Isabelle Charleux)

The monasteries are generally restored following the traditional design but the new buildings are smaller in size and are built with baked bricks and concrete. Moreover, new elements are often added owing to the disappearance of traditional methods and skilled artisans or learned monks to supervise the Chinese carpenters who execute the work (and who moreover seem to be prompted by a genuine desire to innovate). The new assembly hall of the Blama-yin ayui (Lamadong) near Hohhot, was built according to the original plan but without a rear cella. Decorations are identical to those found on contemporaneous Chinese temples: cheap ornaments made of bricks, tiles and cement, painted ornaments on the walls in place of the traditional glazed ceramic or metal decorations. In Eastern Inner Mongolia, four halls of Gembi-yin sūme (Genpimiao, Arqorcin Banner) were rebuilt with concrete and baked bricks and concrete pillars painted green which is not the traditional colour for columns. **(Fig. 10)** New shapes for

⁵⁶ The Alaša Mongols believe he died in Alaša in 1746 and not in 1706 according to the official version.

stupas are frequent. Metal-sheet roofing (previously unknown in Inner Mongolia) may be seen in Baryu (Kölün Buir)—perhaps owing to the influence of certain religious edifices in Ulaanbaatar.



Fig. 9. *Barayun keyid*, ruins. (© Isabelle Charleux)



Fig. 10. *Gembi-yin süme* (*Genpimiao*, *Arqorcin Banner*). Temple rebuilt with concrete and baked bricks, concrete pillars painted green. (© Isabelle Charleux)

Icons

Relics, statues and thangkas that were hidden away during the Cultural Revolution, are reappearing on the altars. Many new images, copies of the Buddhist canon (*Kanjur* and *Tanjur*) and ritual instruments are bought in Eastern Tibet. For example the 13,5 m high statue of Maitreya (consecrated in 1992) in Mergen juu was made in Kumbum.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ This monastery was well-known for its independence (it used Mongolian instead of Tibetan in chanting and recitation) owing to the personality of the Third Mergen gegen, Lubsangdambijalsan (1717-66).

Most of the carpenters and painters are Chinese who excel in gaudy decorations. With the exception of pinnacles, true Tibetan decorations are falling into disuse. Although the iconography is respected, the new images, generally painted with synthetic pigments, are poor imitations of the early-twentieth century art. The main problem for an art historian is the destruction of the old wall paintings due to “restoration” or natural degradation.

Conclusion: Is Buddhism still an important feature of Inner Mongol identity?

Relations between the Chinese and Mongol communities deteriorated following the persecutions during the Cultural Revolution. The concept of identity is promoted and reasserted by the acculturated and “modern” urban Mongols and Han-Mongol half-breeds threatened by complete sinicisation. The large demonstrations of “nationalist” protest witnessed in the nineteen-eighties and nineties—especially following the Tiananmen incident—were promptly discouraged and suppressed.⁵⁸

What distinguishes the Southern Mongols from the Han living in Inner Mongolia? Since they are not considered by the population of [the Republic of] Mongolia to be “pure” Mongols,⁵⁹ Mongols living in China no longer dream of a pan-Mongol community and prefer to call themselves “Southern Mongols.” Their differences with the Han Chinese, mainly based on language, religion, ecological milieu, way of life (herding, traditional dress, dwelling), diet, culture and endogamy were still obvious for most of them up to the mid-twentieth century. All these “cultural markers,” however, have been eroded and even completely effaced in areas where Mongols and Han live together (and have intermarried). Broad cultural “symbolic devices”⁶⁰—like the symbol of Chinggis Khan manipulated by the Chinese—rather than life-style now constitute criteria defining Inner Mongol ethnicity.⁶¹

The state, fearing that the Mongols might seek to renew their traditional religious ties with the restless Tibetans and suspicious of the potential political power of Buddhism as an expression of nationalism, has chosen to promote other cultural markers as symbols of Mongol identity.⁶² Buddhism is tolerated yet not encouraged, and religious donations are seen as a “backward practice.”⁶³ The Chinese authorities deem it safer to promote ethnic, non-Buddhist vehicles of Mongol identity like the romantic image of the grassland herdsman,⁶⁴ the “folkloric” *naadam* festivals and the religious symbol of Chinggis Khan whose “mausoleum,” according to Almaz Khan, is the new site of pilgrimage for

(Charleux 1998: 139, 372-374)

⁵⁸ Massive student movement in 1981; the arrest of intellectuals in 1991; demonstrations gathering up to two hundred Mongols after the arrest of several militant intellectuals in December 1995. On Inner Mongol ethnic resistance and complicity in general, see Bulag 1999.

⁵⁹ Bulag 1998.

⁶⁰ As stresses Khan (1995: 268), “pure blood” and even the knowledge of language are no longer a must.

⁶¹ In December 1995, the demonstrators gathering to protest against the arrest of several intellectuals expressed their identity by singing Mongolian songs and exhibiting portraits of Chinggis Khan. Young urban Mongols wear Chinggis Khan pins to assert their identity.

⁶² On the Mongol values promoted by the Chinese authorities, see Khan 1995 and 1996.

⁶³ Tao Ketao 1990, quoted by Khan 1995: 143.

⁶⁴ Khan 1996; Bulag 1999.

Mongols from all over China. Its annual “traditional” ceremonies serve to “reinforce Mongol historical consciousness and national identity,” and at the same time to create a unified multi-ethnic Inner Mongol identity. The pilgrimages to the mausoleum bring together Inner Mongol Han and Mongols who, through this “emotional experience,” share a “common glorious past.”⁶⁵ The biennial ceremonies at Siregetü juu attended by Chinese clerics (*heshang* and *daoshi*) serve the same purpose, as do local pilgrimages to sites that were considered sacred long before the introduction of Buddhism (such as the caves of Lobunchinbu süme). Thus Buddhist institutions form only one of the locus for Inner Mongol identity.

Has the Chinese state attained its goal? Is Tibeto-Mongol Buddhism still a distinctive feature of today’s Southern Mongol identity, an “ethnic boundary” with Han Chinese? Another, perhaps graver, issue is the growing gap between Mongol nomads and farmers on one side and urban Mongols who no longer speak Mongolian on the other.⁶⁶ In rural areas with smaller Chinese population,⁶⁷ Mongols and Han do not mingle in everyday life. For herdsmen who preserve a traditional way of life (18% of the Southern Mongols) and farmers⁶⁸ living around the monasteries (Mergen juu for example),⁶⁹ Buddhism remains an essential part of their identity. The Buddhist revival in this milieu seems to be much stronger and closer to the traditional Mongol Buddhism as it existed in the first half of the nineteenth century. The main problems faced by these monasteries is their fragile economy and the advanced age of their monks.

In urban, industrial and agricultural areas where Han and Mongols live together, religion plays a fairly weak social role compared to other cultural markers. Chinese religious movements and new forms of worship—Chinggis Khan, Guanyin, Chinese popular deities—have invaded the monasteries. There can be little doubt that Buddhism is no longer an essential part of Mongol identity in urban areas which is threatened by sinisation.

Since Buddhism in Inner Mongolia was persecuted for a much shorter period than in the Mongolian People’s Republic, it may have preserved traditions that are now lost in Mongolia (*cam* dances for instance).⁷⁰ The stakes and conditions of the revival are very different from those in Mongolia. Buddhism in Inner Mongolia does not have to compete with other religions such as Christianity or (neo-)Shamanism.⁷¹ On the other hand, its

⁶⁵ More than 120,000 tourists and pilgrims visit the mausoleum every year. (Khan 1995: 270-274)

⁶⁶ This reflects the distinction made by the Chinese between “raw Barbarians” (*shengfan*) and “cooked by burning Barbarians” (*shaoshuzi*), a term which is homonymous with “ethnic minority,” *shaoshu*. (Harrell 1996: 7-9)

⁶⁷ Alaša, Urad, Maγu Mingγan, Dörben keüked, Sili-yin γoul, certain parts of New Baryu and Jirim, and Northern Chifeng Province. Alaša and Baryu are well documented: see *Alashan qi qingkuang* 1957-58; Dalai hu yuchang 1989: 451-455; Hao Shiyuan, Zhang Shihe et al. 1997: 168-169.

⁶⁸ Jirim and Xing’an Leagues have the largest Mongol population with respectively 36% and 34% of Mongols, the majority of whom are farmers.

⁶⁹ I attended the festival of Mergen juu in 1995.

⁷⁰ In 1992 the abbot of Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar said he found much to admire and learn in Inner Mongolia. Lincoln Kaye, “Back to the Old Faith,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, vol. 155, n°14, 9 April 1992: 20, quoted in Mackerras 1995: 115.

⁷¹ Although Shamanism is still alive in a few places like the Right Banner of New Baryu. Most of the Muslims in Southern Mongolia belong to the *hui* “minority.” I have no information on Muslim Mongols.

institution enjoys only very limited autonomy. Generally speaking, the revival of Buddhism is not as deep as in Mongolia, but has all the more merit as it is restricted and controlled by the government.

The continuity in Chinese policy since the Ming dynasty (revived in the eastern part of the country by the Japanese during the Manchukuo) has already been stressed by several scholars: the Chinese state uses Buddhism to legitimise its domination and weaken the Mongols. Control over the Mongol Buddhist institution is achieved through a powerful bureaucracy centralised in Beijing where reincarnations receive official recognition. According to Bulag, the aim of the Chinese Communists is to appropriate Buddhism as a legitimating tool; its moralist and socially-engaged precepts are used to contribute to the construction of a socialist China: “the Party wants Buddhism to influence the people to support the Party. (Bulag 1996: 37-39) At the same time, the notion of protection of cultural heritage is used by the Chinese state ideology to conceal the destruction of the main springs of Mongol civilisation and religion. The “preservation of the Mongol cultural heritage” entails its folklorisation and this political aim now seems to have been partially attained. The official status of monasteries as “cultural heritage,” and the quotas for ordained monks serve to restrict the revival. Save the relations between the larger monasteries and Kumbum, the Tibeto-Mongol religious centres of Beijing and Wutaishan, Inner Mongol Buddhism is cut off from the rest of the Buddhist world, notably Tibet and Mongolia, and does not challenge the authority of the state.⁷² Clandestine religious activities, which are impossible to evaluate precisely without further long-term research on the field, seem either not as important as in Han China, or else largely disconnected from institutional Buddhism.

The largest monasteries are at the same time centres of learning for the future generations of monks, tourist attractions, economic ventures and pilgrimage spots. The tensions resulting from these contradictory aspects have always existed, but now that they are no longer regulated by independent abbots or *qubilyans*, they have evolved into public issues. The problems faced by any large monastery in contemporary China are perfectly expressed by the Ajia’s Rinpoche’s views on Kumbum Monastery⁷³: how to conciliate Vinaya rules with modern life, meditation with a market economy and especially tourism; and above all, the absence of religious legislation? Alexandra Marois noted the disrespectful and arrogant behaviour of the young, sinicised monks of Aršan sūme and the monks from Hohhot are said to have a depraved conduct, yet the monastery is powerless to impose discipline on its monks. The social origin and family traditions of the novices are not documented, but since monkhood is a remunerated profession (and an enviable position for poor rural Mongols), the motivations for becoming a monk may have changed in the poorest areas. Monasteries cannot revive the traditional economic relationship with the people⁷⁴ and monks are not allowed to visit homes to perform

⁷² On whether we may regard the revival of religious traditions in China as a form of political resistance, see Feuchtwang, 1999.

⁷³ The Ajia Rinpoche (who fled to the United States in 1998) faced the problems of the monks’ mobility, the presence of monks motivated by economic reasons and trying to learn a trade or to make profit, the invasion of modern technology (television, microphones and bicycles). (Bulag, 1996)

⁷⁴ The “lama-donor” (*mchod-yon*) relationship. Monks are not allowed to collect alms individually, yet a

private rituals.⁷⁵ Yet in order to meet its own expenses, a monastery has little choice than to exploit its “relics” and has to justify its condition by doing useful work.

The Buddhist revival is now threatened by the generation gap within the clergy, the superficial training of young monks, the folklorisation and mummification of the monasteries, and the impoverishment of rural Mongols. Some monasteries appear more like museums “staffed by ageing monks who, on a monthly government payroll, are more like state cadres or, worse, part of the *minzu* items in display”⁷⁶. On the other hand, the spontaneous rebuilding of a monastery like Barayun küriye by young monks trained in Kumbum reveal the complexity of the situation. Such instances are expressions of a genuine, popular revival but they are scattered exceptions and not representative of all Inner Mongolia.

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devotee may make a donation to a monastery provided it is recorded in a register.

⁷⁵ I was told in 1995 that the monks of Mergen juu frequently performed rituals in private homes and received money and mutton in payment. According to Alexandra Marois, it was not true of the monks in Aršan sūme, although they could conduct private rituals in their own homes.

⁷⁶ Khan 1996: 145. In 1994, Mackerras was very pessimistic about the revival: the monasteries are too “clean” and “are as much museums as places of religious worship,” “there are hardly any pilgrims, and few people either revolve prayer-wheels, except for amusement, or go down in prostration.” (Mackerras 1995: 115 and Mackerras 1994) I would like to point out that he seems to have visited only the monasteries of Hohhot and Baotou in 1992 and had no opportunity to observe the revival in the countryside; moreover, since then many temple-museums have become proper monasteries again.

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