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A WORK ON THE HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN MONGOLIA

The library of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies contains a typewritten manuscript in Russian (call number VII M 7 ж/эрд) entitled “What is the Cause of the Religions Professed by Mongol Tribes?”. The author is Erdenipel (Tib. E-rte-ni-'phel), the translators into Russian Rinčen (Tib. Rin-chen) and Sambu (Tib. Bzang-po). The manuscript consists of 200 pages. The author, *gabju* (Tib. dka'-bcu) Erdenipel (1877—1960), was one of the most educated people in Mongolia and the first abbot of the Gandan Monastery (Tib. dGa'-ldan) in Ulan-Bator after the resumption of religious services there in 1944. He appears to have written his work in the 1930s, when he was compelled to leave the monastery because of the political persecution of Buddhist monks by the authorities in Mongolia. He may have undertaken his work at the behest of the Mongolian Scholarly Committee. Anyway, such a practice existed between the 1920s and 1930s. We know that the Scholarly Committee on several occasions commissioned works on the history of Mongolia by some learned *lamas* of name or secular writers. In discussing the construction of Erdeni Juu, Erdenipel remarks: “One can suggest that Erdeni Juu, from the day of its creation by Abatai Khan up to the 28th year of the Mongolian People's Republic, has been in existence as such for 353 years” (p. 156). He apparently takes here not the date of the Mongolian People's Republic's promulgation, 1924, but the date of Mongolia's attainment of independence in 1911, used in the past as a reference point for dates. This would mean that the work was finished in 1939, which correlates with the figure of 353 years that passed since the foundation of Erdeni Juu in 1586.

The reasons for the work's translation and its appearance in Moscow are enigmatic. The translation was made at the beginning of the 1940s, and we can name at least one of the translators. Judging by the spelling of his name and numerous remarks in the text, he was the well-known Mongolian scholar, Academician B. Rinčen. We know that B. Rinčen was employed as a translator of texts into Russian during his gaol in the early 1940s (he was charged with espionage for Japan). As for the second translator, Sambu by name, his identity can only be guessed at. The translation may have been sent to Moscow as material for a single-volume history of the Mongolian People's Republic under preparation at that time in the USSR. But this is

a mere suggestion, as the manuscript contains no information on this account and I was also unable to find any data in other sources. The translation abounds in stylistic flaws and misprints; it also lacks an introduction and commentary. The Mongolian original has not yet been found, but we can have a good idea of it, since the Russian translation has preserved many features of the lost work. It is compiled in the genre of traditional Mongolian historiography, the so-called “histories of religion”: the work includes the history of Mongolia from the most ancient times, the account of the ancient beliefs of the Mongols, of the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia, and the description of events linked with the inclusion of Mongolia into the Qing empire (17th century). The account breaks off in the second half of the seventeenth century, which leads us to conclude that this may be a first volume.

The manuscript is divided into 14 chapters. The division is conditional, and chapters often lack numbers, giving titles solely:

chapter 1. What is the final reason for the religions professed by the Mongol tribes? (p. 1);

chapter 2. On the Shamanist faith of the Mongols' ancient ancestors (p. 3);

chapter 3. The teaching of Śākyamuni and the spread of his Church in Mongolia (p. 15);

chapter 4. The acceptance of Śākyamuni's religion by the Eastern Mongols and its fall in Western and Eastern Mongolia (p. 38);

chapter 5. On religious matters among the ancient Mongols, beginning with the times of Genghis Khan up to the spread of the yellow religion (p. 49);

[chapter 6]. The era of the three khans after Genghis Khan (p. 66);

[chapter 7]. The age of Khubilai Sečen Qayan (p. 78);

chapter 8. On the ten emperors of the Yuan dynasty after Khubilai (p. 88);

[chapter 9]. The era of the sixteen minor khans after Togon Temur (p. 95);

[chapter 10]. Ways the yellow religion spread in Mongolia and a general picture of its deep ties with the power of the Manchu (p. 104);