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A Note on the Transformation of White, Black and Yellow Shamanism in the History of the Mongols

Klaus Hesse

I

In a book published in 1846, *The Black Faith, or Shamanism among the Mongols*, the Buryat-Mongol scholar Dorzhi Banzarov gives an account of the shamanism of his clan of Djelme Uriankhan and the Mongolian people in their glorious past. With reference to the Yellow Faith (Buddhism, lamaism) and Christianity, both of which suppressed shamanism, one of his major concerns was to show that Mongolian shamanism was a self-reliant, elaborate and a far from primitive belief system, and still a living tradition among his people. He himself relied in his studies on his own knowledge of the traditions of his people and on some written shamanistic sources.¹

Barely seven generations after Banzarov's account an extensive corpus of Mongolian shamanist texts and recordings of hymns, invocations, and prayers of the white, black and yellow shamans to the ancestral spirits, as well as shamanistic divination books, and texts about shamanistic folk medicine and other subjects, are now available. Furthermore, there are a few scattered collections of shamanistic paraphernalia, and shaman genealogies from North and Inner Mongolia and several monographs on the religious beliefs of the peoples of Inner Mongolia, mostly by European scholars and missionaries. Besides this, there are records of a number of Mongolian groups of the Trans-Baikha region of southern Siberia, whose ancestors had fled from Khalkha Mongolia into the territory of the Buryats during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and who have preserved their traditions.² Certain resemblances between the shamanisms of the Buryats, Tuwans and other peoples on the northern fringes of Mongolia have been shown by Dioszegi, Sanzheev, Poppe, Vladimirtsov, Rinchen, Zhamcarano

Note: This article is a revised and enlarged English version of a paper read at the International Congress of Religious Sciences: 'The End of Religion,' Berlin, October 1984.

¹ Dorzhi Banzarov, *Chernaia vera ili shamanstvo u Mongolov*, Kazan, 1846, in *Sobranie Sochinenii*, Moscow, 1955.

² Jorma Partanon, 'A Description of Buryat Shamanism,' (Böge-Gin Mürgülün Uchira), *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, LI, 1941, pp. 7–34; see also fn 3.

and others.³ These materials, the Mongolian sources with shamanistic content from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, the ethnographic material, together with the Mongol chronicles from the thirteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Buddhist literature in Mongolian language are—to the extent that the linguistically difficult shamanistic texts are further translated—source material which give new hints of the structure, content and history of Mongolian shamanism, its development, transformation and dissolution.

Mongolian shamanism reaches far back into history. The sources of the thirteenth century, when the Mongol empire was formed (earlier sources and archaeological and pictographic material of early Mongol history and proto-history will not be taken up), give only a few direct and systematic accounts of the religious ideas and shamanistic traditions. Far more extensive and richer in content are the texts and collections of so called folk-religious beliefs from the seventeenth century onward, which can also be used to gain a deeper understanding of the scattered references from the records of earlier centuries. These folk-religious texts can be assigned largely to yellow shamanism, i.e., the amalgamation of lamaistic and shamanistic beliefs and practices, but these texts hint clearly, even in spite of lamaistic influences, of an older shamanist tradition which Heissig, Bawden and others have inferred from them.⁴ Several early Buddhist missionaries in the sixteenth and

³ V. Dioszegi, 'Problems of Mongolian Shamanism,' *Acta Ethnographica*, X, 1961, pp. 195–206; 'Tuwa Shamanism. Intraethnic Differences and Interethnic analogies,' *ibid.*, XI, 1962, pp. 143–90; 'Elements in Darkhat Shamanism,' *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*, XVI, 1963, pp. 55–81; G. Sanzheev, *Darkhaty. Etnograficheskie otchet o poezdke v Mongoliiu*, Leningrad, 1930; G. Sandschew (Sanzheev), 'Weltanschauung und Schamanismus der Alaren Burjaten,' *Anthropos*, 22, 1927, pp. 576–613, 933–52; & *Anthropos*, 23, 1928, pp. 538–60, 967–86; C. Zh. Zhamcarano, *Ongony Aginskikh Burjat. Sbornik v chest' G.N. Potanina, Zapiski Imperatorskogo Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestvo po otdeleniiu emografiu*, St. Petersburg, 34, 1909, pp. 379–94; B. Vladimirtsov, 'Etnologo-linguisticheskie issledovaniia v Urge, Urginskome i Kenteiskom raionach,' *Severnaia Mongoliia*, II, Leningrad, 1927, pp. 20–35; B. Rinchen 'En Marge du culte de Guesser Khan en Mongolie,' *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, 60, 1958, pp. 1–50; 'Schamanistische Geister der Gebirge Dörben agulayin ejed in Ungaer Pantomimen,' *Acta Ethnographica*, 6, 1958, pp. 441–48; N. Poppe, 'Zum Feuerkultus bei den Mongolen,' *Asia Major*, 2, 1925, pp. 130–45; 'Opisanie mongol'skikh shamanskikh rukopisei Instituta Vostokovedeniia,' *Zapiski Instituta Vostokovedeniia Akademii Nauk*, I, 1932, pp. 151–200.

⁴ W. Heissig, 'A Mongolian Source to the Lamaist Suppression of Shamanism in the Seventeenth Century,' *Anthropos*, 48, 1953, pp. 1–29, 493–536; G. Tucci and W. Heissig eds., *Die Religionen Tibets und der Mongolei*, Stuttgart, 1970; Charles Bawden, 'Two Mongol Texts Concerning Obo Worship,' *Oriens Extremus*, I, 1958, pp. 23–41; 'Astrologie und Divination bei den Mongolen—die schriftlichen Quellen,' *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* (hereafter *Z.D.M.G.*), 108, 1958, pp. 317–37; 'On the Practice of Scapulimancy among the Mongols,' *Central Asiatic Journal*, IV, 59, 1958, pp. 1–31; *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu of Urga*, text translation and notes, Wiesbaden, 1961; 'The Supernatural Elements in Sickness and Death according to Mongol Tradition,' *Asia Major*, n.s., 8, 2, 1961, pp. 215–57; *Asia Major*, n.s., 9, 1, 1962, pp. 153–78; 'Calling the Soul. A Mongolian Litany,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 25, 1962, pp. 81–103; 'Notes on the Worship of Local Deities in Mongolia,' in L.

seventeenth centuries widely used old shamanist scriptures⁵ in formulating a Mongolian lamaist canon and religious texts, but the shamanist texts themselves mostly fell victim to lamaist autodafé. Hardly any comprehensive descriptions exist of Mongolian shamanist rituals as practised in the past.

In this article, I shall attempt to present some principles of Mongolian shamanism and its history till the early twentieth century.

II

Mongolian shamanism can be defined in general as a belief system, a world view, anthropology, folk medicine, a religio-magic cult of nature and especially as a particular form of ancestral cult, whose functionaries and protagonists were the shamans and shamanesses who communicated with the spirits, celebrated the sacrifices, exorcised and spelled evil spirits and cured sickness and diseases. They were also diviners and weather magicians, as well as bards, mimics, and poets. The shamans—male and female—called the spirits for blessing, support and protection against evil and to that extent they had important functions in the clan-life, in the communal hunts and in times of war; they asked for prosperity and health of the members of their social units and their herds, cared for the sacred fire of the clan and so on. The Mongolian terminology for the shamans and their activities is manifold and philologically not completely resolved. Usually the term for shaman is *böge* and for the shamaness *idugan*. The great Mongolian specialist, B.Y. Rinchen, for instance, renders *böge* and *idugan* as small (white and black) shaman and shamaness and the great (white and black) shaman and shamaness as *dzigarin* and *abdziya*.⁶ In this context, further terms and local specificities and variations in the terminology will not be referred to.

If the traditional world view and the belief system of the Mongols before the final domination of lamaism is called shamanism, this does not imply that the white and black, great and small, male and female shamans have been the sole religious practioners. They were specialists in communication with the spiritual abode and had their own capacities, but they did not perform any ritual or worship; this was also the concern of the leaders and elders of the social units and their wives. The nobles, important elders and the shamans had their own particular charisma. The shamanistic beliefs themselves were common to all.

Mongolian shamanism had a close correlation to the social and societal organisation. Mongolian society was not simple but complex. The formative principle of society rested on patrilinear descent from a common ancestor and the hierarchical order of descent lines and agnatic relations; the social

⁵ B. Rinchen, 'Zum Kult Tschingis Khans bei den Mongolen,' *Opuscula Ethnologica Ludovici Biró Sacra*, Budapest, 1959, pp. 9–22; Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1953, *passim*; Bawden, *Oriens Extremus*, 1958, p. 28 and *passim*. See also, especially Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 300, 302.

⁶ Rinchen, *op. cit.*, 1959, pp. 72, 61, 86, 98–100, *passim*; *Herold-Motacra, Dictionnaire Ordos*, New York, London, 1968.

units regarded themselves as being of common descent. Next to the nomadic village, the clan (*oboq*) was the central social organisation, organised on the above principles. The clan was the basic social, political and territorial unit and a ritual community. The cult, the ancestor-veneration and the religious beliefs were communal; the clan had shamans and shaman descent lines which had a particular position and function.

The principle of patrilinear descent is denoted in Mongolian as *yasun* (bone). The terminus *yasun* also refers to the social estates in society, which were organised by descent into *tsagan yasun* (white bone) or nobility, and *qara yasun* (black bone) or commoners. There was also a stratum of specific dependents and slaves. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D. the Mongols had developed a political society and a state; the clans, and the clan-and-tribal confederations became parts and agencies of principalities and the Mongolian empire, with a *qaqan* of the Chingisides as the personification of the state. The principles of the clan and social and societal organisation itself are continuous more or less up to the twentieth century.

Parallel to the hierarchical order of society there was a spiritual hierarchy with concentrically widening—respectively narrowing—conceptions.

Mongolian shamanism had ninety-nine *mgri*—fifty-five white or benevolent and forty-four black or terrifying; besides this there was, for example, also the conception of seventy-seven earth mothers (*natigai/natsigay*).⁷ The highest entity was *köke möngke ingri*, the Eternal Blue Sky, or *Chormusta ingri*. These ninety-nine *mgri* or deities were common to all Mongol clans and they were only called upon by the leaders, great nobles and great shamans on special occasions.

Besides the white and black *ingri* there was a large number of minor genii, the spirits of the ancestors who were also divided in white and black and in separate, hierarchically differentiated groups or classes of spirits, correlating with the souls of the respective ancestors. These ancestors had special idols (*ongon*) which were subject to veneration and had a special position in the shamanistic ritual.⁸

The highest group of these ancestor spirits of the clans were the souls of deceased chiefs. Introduced after their death by a special solemn shamanistic rite to the communion of clan ancestors and thus having become the benevolent lord-spirits of their clan and territory, they played a very important part in the clan-cult, for the community as a whole. According to Rinchen, everybody could appeal to the lord-spirits of the clan, worship and sacrifice to them by the intermediary of the shamans, and in extraordinary cases everyone could invite the great shamans (*dzigarin* or *abdziya*) to make an appeal to the lord-spirits and obtain their invigorating reply or spiritual

⁷ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, p. 352 and *passim*. Among others see also Partanen, *op. cit.*, 1941, pp. 8, 9.

⁸ Bawden, *op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 239–47. For the Mongolian terminology see Mostaert, *op. cit.*, 1968, index.

help which could increase the material or spiritual welfare of the members of the clan, or cure plagues and severe sickness.⁹ Further, the souls of the great shamans and shamanesses (*dzigarin* and *abdziya*) became the protector-spirits, the simple or small shamans and shamanesses (*böge* and *idugan*) the guardian-spirits of a locality of the clan territory. The souls of famous long deceased shamans, whose fame was still remembered, became the spirits of mountains, rivers, valleys, forests and so on.¹⁰

These spirits dwelled in the localities of their former habitation and burial grounds and in the vicinity of these places, especially on mountain tops and passes and other special places; special stone-heaps (*obuga*) were erected for the offerings to the spirits of these dead shamans. *Obugas* were also located on the boundaries of the clan territories.¹¹

The souls of the great and simple shamans also became members of the ancestral communion of the spirits after a special introductory rite performed by the shamans together with the members of the clan or a section of it. These three classes of higher spirits—the lord-spirits, protector-spirits and guardian-spirits had, according to Rinchen, a central position in the cult of the ancestors of the Mongols and they were called ‘the three accepting the sacrifices’ (*tayilga-yin ban*).¹² Next to these there are three classes of spirits who were not introduced by shamanist rites into the communion of ancestral spirits. In the first group or class of these spirits were the spirits of the white’s, or nobles of the clans, in the second the spirits of the black’s, or commoners of the clans, and in the lowest order were the evil spirits of the slaves and non-human goblins. These three classes of spirits were called ‘the three accepting the supplications’ (*jalbaril-un gurban*) because, as Rinchen explains, ‘in urgent need one could supplicate them and later as thanksgiving make a libation’ or a small offering. These spirits were either benevolent or malevolent and terrifying and they would, as those spirits of the black shamans, cause calamity, misery, sickness and death.¹³

Corresponding to the order of the *Ingri*, the spirits of the ancestors were also divided into white and black, great and small or simple, whereby the differentiation into great and small also implies one into white and black.

⁹ B. Rinchen, ‘White, Black and Yellow Shamanism among the Mongols,’ unpublished manuscript. A copy of this manuscript is in the possession of Prof. Lawrence Krader. He had the kindness to allow me to inspect it. Parts are published in K. Hesse, *Abstammung, Weiderecht und Abgabe. Zum Problem der konsanguinal-politischen Organisation der Mongolen des 13. bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1982, pp. 283f.

¹⁰ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1953, pp. 504, 505; Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 313–16. J. Partanen, *op. cit.*, 1941, p. 13.

¹¹ Bawden, *op. cit.*, 1958, pp. 23–41. A.L. Pollard-Urquhart, ‘An Obo Festival of Western Sunit,’ *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, 24, 1937, pp. 454–67; Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 413f.; L. Kervyn, *Moeurs et coutumes Mongoles*, Gembloux, 1947, pp. 27, 28.

¹² Rinchen, ‘White, Black and Yellow Shamanism among the Mongols,’ in Hesse, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 284.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 284. Downloaded from <http://sih.sagepub.com> by Pavel Rykin on November 21, 2007
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The white shamans venerated the white spirits, the black the black spirits exclusively, and the white shamans who called upon or venerated the black spirits lost their right in venerating and calling the white spirits; the black shamans did not dare to call upon the white spirits because of their fear of the revengeful and terrifying black spirits.¹⁴ The assignment of the souls and spirits to the respective category of spirits was determined by the social condition of the deceased; the assignment of the shamans as white or black was according to the capacity and assignment of their ancestral spirit or spirit of the shaman's descent line.

The respective categories of *mgri* and the locally and temporal variable spirits had different effects and functions and the spirits could be called upon by everybody, in contrast to the *mgri*. The shamans had the capacity of direct communication with the spirits in the shamanist ritual, made special offerings and sacrifices and performed spiritual activities and encounters with the spirits of the clan and intruding and foreign spirits, for the benefit of their units and their members.

The functions and capacities of the great and small shamans can be distinguished. The great shamans acted on behalf of the benevolence of the overarching social units, the clans and wider consanguineous-political units and they called upon the *mgri*, lord and protector spirits for the benefit and welfare of the social units and their herds and performed the respective sacrifices with hymns and prayers to the higher and highest spirits. The great (black) shamans also called upon the black and terrifying *mgri* and high spirits against evil from outside and for securing victory in war.¹⁵ They had a high and honoured position in society and the thesis has been brought forward, that the nobles and leaders of the Mongols in the process of state formation from the tenth to thirteenth centuries have been shamans.¹⁶ In the *Secret History of the Mongols* there are hints supporting this view, but not all important leaders and nobles, as can also be seen from the *Secret History* and other contemporary sources, have been shamans. There was no necessary coincidence; in the reign of Chingis Khan f.i., the functions of the shamans and the military leaders and the nobility were quite clearly separated.

The small or simple shamans had different functions than the great shamans. They stood in contact with the minor spirits, with the spirits of the simple shamans and shamanesses and those of the minor categories of spirits. Their field of activity and capacity was apparently more connected with the daily and practical conditions of the people and less with those of the cult and affairs of the larger social units and their ancestral cult. The ancestral cult itself was also mainly performed by the leaders, elders and the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹⁵ Hesse, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 153–55; K. Sagaster, *Die Weiße Geschichte (Chagan teüke). Eine Mongolische Quelle zur Lehre von den Beiden Ordnungen Religion und Staat in Tibet und der Mongolei*, Wiesbaden, 1976, passim; Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, pp. 392f.

¹⁶ B. Vladimirtsev, *Le régime social des Mongols*, Paris, 1948, pp. 60–62, 67. Distribution.

nobility on behalf of the social unit, partly together with the shamans. The activities of the simple, small shamans consisted largely of the manipulation of and the fight with the minor spirits who were thought as the cause of sickness and calamity of the individual. Their task was to serve the physical and psychic needs and wants of the members of the small social units, the families and nomadic villages; they beseeched and called upon the spirits to act on their behalf to perform the expected task of healing, divination, of small weather magic, etc., to avert mishap, sickness and evil from the individuals, their families and herds.¹⁷ In extraordinary cases these tasks were also performed by the great shamans with their greater power and mastership of the spirits, and the functional differentiation of the two kinds of shamans was in this regard not fully accomplished.

The functional differentiation between the spirits of the different classes or orders which has been referred to is also not fully drawn. Both spirit categories, the white as well as the black, and the great and the small could help the members of the clan and the villages and families by sending them animals during the hunt, protect their herds, defend against revenge or terrify malefactors and enemies, but the minor spirits were never the object of worship and sacrifices by all members of the clan.

The great spirits were regarded as higher and stronger, and they were, as already mentioned, more in charge of the clan as a whole. But the black spirits (great and minor) and their terrifying aspects were ambivalent and they could not only turn against outsiders but also against the members of their units on behalf of the black shamans. Thus, the spirits were not only benevolent but also dangerous for the people and their herds, and the souls and spirits of minor shamans and minor spirit categories, especially if the owner of the spirit-turned soul had had a miserable and unhappy life could turn, as a kind of revenge, against the members of his unit and cause, according to shamanist belief, mishap, sickness and death.¹⁸ In the shamanist world view, sickness and unnatural death are caused by intruding spirits who eat up or carry off the second soul of human being. A man is thought of as having three souls, a 'bone-soul,' a 'body-soul' and a soul that emanates out of the second after death. The manipulation and fight against intruding spirits and the rescue of a soul is the main purpose of shamanist healing in the state of trance or ecstasy.¹⁹

The communal aspect of the spiritual order and of the clan-life can be detected, for example, from the sharing and distribution of the sacrifices to the spirits, even though the clans were internally divided into nobility, commoners, dependents and house-slaves, as well as into rich and poor sections. Most explicit in this respect is again Rinchen, who states:

¹⁷ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1953, pp. 509f.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*; Bawden, 'The Supernatural Elements in Sickness and Death according to Mongol Tradition', 1962, *passim*.
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¹⁹ *Ibid.*

They [the spirits of all categories, including the lower spirits] could receive their share of smell and odour from all the offerings to the local spirits or of the chieftain in the same manner as they had received at the time of life their portion of food at the celebrations of weddings and other family feasts of the clansmen, such as the annual sacrifices to the Ancestor-Spirits of the clan when people burnt the offering parts of the meat and ate the rest, which was the share of the Ancestral-Spirits to all the participants of the sacrificial feast.²⁰

The sacrifices to the *ingri* and the world of the *ingri* was of a different order though in theory and practice all spirits were in the last instance subject to the commands of the *ingri*.

Since the lord-spirits were the souls of deceased chiefs and the central ancestral spirits of the clan and its descent lines or lineages, special reference was given to the lord-spirits and they were venerated on special occasions in the yearly ceremonial cycle and at the great gatherings at the beginning of winter. The chiefs had in their camps special standards—*tuq*—which were at once the symbol of the clan or respective consanguineous-political unit and the habitation or receptaculum of the lord-spirits. According to the division into white and black lord-spirits the chiefs had white and black standards (*tuq*) which were the receptaculum for the respective lord-spirit (*sülde*).²¹ The black standard (*qara tuq* or *qara sülde*) was the standard of war and was carried in front of the troops in times of war to support the victory, to give intrepidity to the warriors and to terrify the enemy. After the (victorious) war an important prisoner was sacrificed to the *qara sülde*.²² A special symbol of victory was to implant the *tuq/sülde* in the holy hearth-fire of the defeated chief.²³ The white *tuq/sülde* was the symbol of the well-being and welfare of the clan and its descent as well as that of the white's or noble lineage(s) of the clan or chieftainship.

III

With the formation of the state in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the unification and transformation of the Mongol clans and clan-confederations into dependent political-administrative and military bodies or agencies of the state under the sovereignty of Chingis Khan and his golden descent line (*altan uruq*) the spiritual order of Mongolian shamanism was also transformed, unified and further hierarchised.

²⁰ Rinchen, 'White, Black and Yellow Shamanism among the Mongols,' *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²¹ Vladimirtsov, *op. cit.*, 1948, pp. 187, 235; Rinchen, in Hesse, *op. cit.*, 1982, p. 155; Sagaster, *op. cit.*, 1976 is the most extensive source for this topic.

²² See fn 21 and also H. Serruys, 'Siao ta heng: Pei-lou fong sou. Les coutumes des Esclaves septentrionaux,' *Monumenta Serica* 10, 1945, p. 155.

²³ I. J. Schmidt, *Geschichte der Ost-Mongolen und ihres Fürsten-hauses verfasst von Ssanang Sseisen Chungtaidschides Qeda*, 1824, ed. by H. Serruys, 1924, (Leiden, 1924), p. 211.

With the formation of the Mongolian empire and the enthronement of Chingis Khan, the lord- and guardian-spirits of the Borjigin clan (the clan of Chingis Khan) became the ancestor and guardian-spirits of the *Mongqol ulus*, the Mongol state or empire. The white bone (*čagan yasun*) of the *oboq* Borjigin, with Chingis Khan as its leader, became the white bone of all the white bones of all Mongolian clans, i.e., the white bone of the Borjigin—the *altan uruq*—became the overarching noble descent line of the empire and around this line the higher and minor white's of the clans or units of 1,000 (*minggan*) or 10,000 (*tüman*) were grouped factually and genealogically. The great ancestor of Chingis Khan, the legendary grey wolf—*Börtä Čino*—was the unifying ancestor. This transformation has further correspondences in the spiritual system and cult of the empire. As already stated, the lord-spirits and guardian-spirits of the Borjigin clan became the central ancestors, i.e., lord- and guardian-spirits of the *Mongqol ulus*. After his death Chingis Khan was immediately deified and he became a high *ingri* and the central lord-spirit of the *altan uruq*, the Borjigin clan and the Mongol state. To these central and highest spirits all the spirits of the clans and wider consanguineous-political units submitted, i.e., all the higher spirits of the clans, the 'spirits accepting the sacrifice' changed their position of superior and independent genii into spirits subordinated to the corresponding highest spirit of the nation, and the lord-spirits of the clans changed into helpers of the central lord-spirit, and all the other spirits surrendered their might to the corresponding great spirits. They were subordinated to the highest spirits of the *altan uruq* and *oboq* Borjigin, as the clans and the nobility were in the service of the emperor and the *altan uruq*.²⁴

The cult of the Borjigin clan, the ancestral cult, the cult of the fire, etc., were also extended to the whole empire after the enthronement of Chingis Khan and generalised for the Mongol empire. The 'Mother of Fire' (*gal-un eke*) of the family of Chingis Khan became the Queen Mother of the Fire of the Nation (*gal-un qatun eke*), just as the *otčigin* (Prince of Fire), and the symbols of the Borjigin clan became the unifying symbols of the nation. Around the deified Chingis Khan and the insignia of his clan and the insignia of his sovereignty a central cult of the empire was created, the centre of this cult was the Chingis Khan sanctuary, the eight white tents (*nayiman čagan ordu*) of the emperor.²⁵

During the Mongol empire the great shamans had important functions in the camps (*ordu*) of the high nobility, the princes, at the court in Karakorum and at the Chingis Khan sanctuary. They acted as diviners, counsellors, conjurers of the great spirits, weather magicians and healers, and they had

²⁴ For further details see Hesse, *op. cit.*, 1982, pp. 155, 156, 248f.

²⁵ Rinchen, *Matériaux pour l'étude du chamanisme Mongol. I, Sources littéraires*, Wiesbaden, 1959, pp. 9–22; Sagaster, *op. cit.*, 1976, *passim*. The Mongol chronicles from the sixteenth century onward refer frequently to the Chingis Khan sanctuary and its central place. (It was the place of enthronement of the Mongol qağans.)

important functions in the cult of the ancestors, especially of the imperial ancestors. The cult of the imperial ancestors promoted the erection of special temples (*sūme*) for the ancestors, either in stone or felt. In these great and smaller imperial and clan temples of the ancestors there were, according to Rinchen and other sources, not only the diverse images, symbols and arms of the ancestors, but also, with the establishment of the Uighur script in Mongolia and the development of an individual script (*Pag's-pa*), books written on the proper performance of rites, worship and offerings to the ancestors. Manuscripts on the order of solemn ceremonies were stored in the temples and homes of the nobility along with shamanist texts on chiromancy, scapulomancy, dreambooks, prayers and hymns and hagiographia of eminent shamans. In spite of the beginnings of a written tradition of Mongolian shamanism, the oral traditions and the poetic capacities of the shamans were of central importance.

There are definite traces of the development of the great shamans in the service of the nobility and their ancestor worship into a regular priesthood. Chingis Khan introduced the office of a *bāki* of the realm.²⁶ *Bāki* has been rendered as a kind of chief-priest;²⁷ his functions cannot be detected from the sources. That the shamans in the service of the *altan uruq* had an important position is clearly stated in the various sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Thus, on the one hand, the establishment of shamanism as a state religion is visible, on the other hand with the conquests of the Chingisides a large number of non-Mongol religious elements, especially Buddhist, Taoist as well as other religious influences, are reported. In the realm of the great khans and the constituting realms of the Chingisides there was great religious tolerance and religious pluralism; at the court in Karakorum besides the shamans, the representatives of all world religions were present and they tried to proselytise, with varying success, among the ruling class. The shamanism of the old Mongols as a state religion did not seem to be rich and successful enough, especially after the conquests of China and the establishment of the Chingiside rule in the west. During the rule of the Qaqans of the Yuan Dynasty, Buddhism was propagated to a great extent and was established as state religion; the Chingis Khan cult itself was integrated into Buddhist faith and retained its particular and outstanding importance. The extent of significant Buddhist influences on the shamanism of the people in the Mongolian steppes in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are hardly detectable; the religious situation in the western realms of the Chingisides was of minor importance for Mongolia.

²⁶ *Secret History of the Mongols*, para. 216. Since various editions of the *Mongol-un ni'ucha tobchi'an* (*Secret History of the Mongols*) are available, I only make a reference to the paragraph and not to a page of an edition. <http://sih.sagepub.com> by Pavel Rykin on November 21, 2007

²⁷ W. Barthold, *Turkistan Down to the Mongol Invasion*, London, 1928, 4th ed., 1977, pp. 301-302.

IV

With the downfall of the Yuan Dynasty (1368) and the successive dissolution of the Mongolian states in West Asia and Russia and following the disturbances and wars in Mongolia, most of the literary and artistic monuments were destroyed or lost and Mongolian art came more or less to a standstill or vanished. The cultural dissolution was *pari passu* connected with the economic and political decline of Mongolia in the fifteenth century. The sixteenth century was marked by two particular events: (1) the reorganisation and reformation of the Mongolian state under Dayan qaqa and the fragmentation of Mongolia into quasi separate principalities or *qanats* under the sons and grandchildren of Dayan qaqa, and (2) by the rapid spread of Buddhism (lamaism). The latter is a highly complex subject and is especially connected with the formation of the Mongolian *qanats*, the search for a new 'Herrschaftsideologie' (ideology of political authority, ruling ideology) and the religious-integrative needs of the Mongolian nobility, the particular role of China towards the steppe-people, and the interests of the 'Yellow Church' in Tibet to enlarge its religious, economic and political spheres of influence. In the Mongolian chronicles of the sixteenth to the eighteenth century the propagation of Buddhism was brought in connection with miraculous healings of Mongol princes and other miracles performed by the Buddhist priesthood that had come to Mongolia or was invited by the nobility.²⁸ As a matter of fact, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the high Mongolian nobility converted en masse to Buddhism, and Buddhism was propagated as state religion by the Chingisides, just as their great ancestor Qubilai qaqa had introduced Buddhism as state religion in the Yuan Dynasty in the second half of the thirteenth century. The conversion of the people and the propagation of Buddhism was performed by the lamaist clergy together with the Mongolian nobility, and after a short time the Buddhist clergy was also recruited from the Mongol nobility and not only from Tibet.

This propagation and conversion was militant. Buddhist literature mentions the burning of large numbers of shamanist idols and manuscripts, of the defeat, destruction, torture, forceful conversion and persuasion of shamans in North and Inner Mongolia.²⁹ Also the overarching organisation of the shamans, for which there is evidence in the seventeenth century, was crushed.³⁰ Heissig argues for a church-like organisation of Mongol shamanism down to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³¹ For the enforcement of their religion among the people, the lamaist clergy declared that the white genii of shamanism and the great ancestors had adopted the new religion and

²⁸ See, for example, Schmidt, 1829, Chap. 9; Bawden, *The Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu of Urga*, pp. 35-41; H. Serruys, 'Early Lamaism in Mongolia,' *Oriens Extremus*, 10, 1963, pp. 181-216.

²⁹ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1953, *passim*; Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, Chap. 4.

³⁰ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1953, p. 512.

³¹ Heissig, *op. cit.*, 1970, p. 300.

integrated them as Buddhist patron-genii and saints; Chingis Khan was declared as an incarnation of the Buddhist deity *Vajrapani*; the shamanistic Chingis Khan cult of the Chingisides itself was not touched.³² The great shamans, together with their spirits, were urged to adopt the new religion, and their spirits were converted into lamaist deities and genii which could be called upon by everybody. Especially the white, great and the noble and influential shamans were the target of conversion and they were integrated into the Yellow Church without hesitation—they became the yellow shamans, and they had special functions in the monasteries and acted on behalf of the monasteries.

The Buddhist monasteries which had developed rapidly had at their disposal large tracts of land, great herds and many 'pupils' (*šabinar*), common herdsmen who were in the service of the monasteries and the high clergy. For the welfare of their herds and bondsmen, the monasteries, for example, engaged yellow shamans to call the local spirits every year, explaining that the local protector and guardian-spirits could not understand the language of the lamaist clergy and their mantras properly. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a large literature developed which can be assigned thematically and in content to yellow shamanism; shamanistic hymns, prayers, etc., were brought in accordance with the Buddhist faith. These texts are in Mongolian or Tibetan, or in Mongolian with Tibetan transcription. The monks and yellow shamans believed that a Mongolian text in Tibetan transcription was eight times more blessed than the same text in Mongolian (Uighurian) script.³³

The massive introduction of shamanistic elements into lamaist mantras, conjuring, healing and divination, as well as the incorporation of large numbers of shamanist spirits and ancestor spirits into the lamaist pantheon and the activities of the yellow shamans did much for the rapid spread and the firm establishment of lamaism in Mongolia. By 1900 approximately 30 per cent of the population was in the service of the monasteries.

The black shamans and those shamans who clung to their old faith were partly massively persecuted and their cult objects and paraphernalia, which were essential for practising their craft, were destroyed or burnt. They were exiled or killed or they fled or screened themselves by venerating their spirits, especially the black spirits in the disguise of the terrifying spirits and deities of lamaism. But the resistance and the persistence of shamanism among the local communities and their shamans, and their importance for

³² Potanin (W. Luedtke, 'Die Verehrung Technigis-Chans bei den Ordos Mongolen,' *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft*, 25, 1927–28, pp. 88f) describes the various rituals and festivals and states that they were performed by the lamas. But from the description itself, shamanistic influences can be detected without much difficulty. Rinchen held the view that in content the Chingis Khan cult is essentially shamanistic. The lamas of Potanin may be viewed as yellow shamans.

³³ Rinchen, 'White, Black and Yellow Shamanism among the Mongols,' *op. cit.*, p. 8.

the communities remained strong, especially in the remoter areas at the fringes of Mongolia. In these areas the small, and especially black, shamanism continued, partly in secrecy, partly in coexistence with the monasteries when their influence could not be broken. In several parts of Mongolia a coexistence and functional division of labour between the different kinds of shamanism, the lamaist clergy, tao'ist sorcerers, Bon-po's and special diviners can be detected even in twentieth century.³⁴

The residues of small and black shamanism are traceable in the late nineteenth and the twentieth century in North Mongolia and in several parts of Inner Mongolia and the prayers and hymns of these black shamans to their spirits which were collected in the twentieth century show the hatred and enmity of the shamans and their communities against the Yellow Church, the monasteries and the clergy who were responsible for their suppression.

A hymn to a black revenging spirit collected in North Mongolia in the early twentieth century clearly expresses this:

*Oh thou, who thou comest to eat 90 monks
and returnest to eat 100,000 monks.
Oh thou, who thou comest riding the frenzied wolves
and fedest the fire with the Kanjur and Tanjur.*³⁵

Dioszegi collected in 1960 in the Chovsugul area of North Mongolia an oath of the shamans remembered among the Darkhat:

*I do not know what the sacred books say.
I do not know the sacred books,
they may be but coloured paper.
I do not know the lamas,
they are surely just falsely professed,
shorn-headed, black quarrelsome fellows.
I should prefer to have my leg sinews cut up
if I had to revere the Bogdo Gegen;³⁶
I should prefer to be cut up seventy times
if I had to revere the Dalai Lama;
I should prefer to be cut thirteen times
if, respecting the pious lama, I had to bow with folded hands!³⁷*

³⁴ L.M. Schram, *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Border, Part II, Their Religious Life*, Philadelphia, 1957; D. Schroeder, 'Zur Religion der Tuijen,' *Anthropos*, 47, 1952, 48, 1953; W. Heissig, 'Schamanen und Geisterbeschwörer im Kueriye-Banner,' *Folklore Studies*, III, 1944, pp. 39-71. See also fn 3.

³⁵ Rinchen, 'White, Black and Yellow Shamanism among the Mongols,' *op. cit.*, p. 8; a variant is quoted in Dioszegi, *op. cit.*, 1961, p. 201.

³⁶ The lamaist pontif at Urga, also the head of the Mongolian theocracy in the beginning of the twentieth century.

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³⁷ Dioszegi, *op. cit.*, 1961, p. 201.

And, to give a last example; the curse of a female shaman from the same area (her son was taken to a monastery at the age of five years):

*I want you to lose your all!
I want you to lose everything you have in this world!
Have no place on earth!
Let them tear up the collar of your cloak!
Let them cut your bald head in two!
Let them bury your talisman in the soil!
Let them hang your writing tablet on a tree!
Let the ravens tear out your tongue, you cur!
'Buddha, Buddha'—you keep saying,
though it's but paint and canvas!
'Lama, Lama'—you keep saying,
though they are but shorn-headed wranglers!
'Sacred book, sacred book'—you keep saying,
though it's but ink and paper!
'Religion, religion'—you keep saying,
though it's but clay and oil paint!³⁸*