

52 Wangdan Yum čüng: *History of the Qori Buryats* (1875)

Translated and introduced by Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz

Introduction

Wangdan Yum čüng (Russianised name: Vandan Yumsunov) was born in 1823, in Aga province, Buryatia.^I He attended a school founded by Anglican missionaries, where he was introduced to arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and a variety of languages: Latin and English, as well as Tibetan and classical Mongolian. In later years, he served in the Siberian colonial administration as an official of the Qori steppe дума.^{II} He wrote various historical works, such as the *Memorandum about the stay of the Tsarevich Aleksej, the third son of the late emperor Aleksandr II, in the Transbaikalian Area*, and a travelogue, *Journey to St. Petersburg in 1876 of the esteemed taisha of Qori, Tsedeb Badmyn, and Tsenden-Dorjo Ayushin of the Quasai clan*. Furthermore, he translated Aleksej M. Pozdnev's learned study *The Khutukhtus of Urga* from Russian into classical Mongolian. The excerpt translated here is part of his most famous work, the historical chronicle *History of the origins of the eleven fathers of the Qori-Buryats*, which he wrote in 1875. The work is divided into twelve chapters, dealing with a wide variety of topics, including Buddhism and the "religion of the shamans," secular administration, political leadership, land allotments and rights, economics, and health care. Yum čüng's chronicle is strongly influenced by the Mongolian historiographical tradition, which writes history mainly as genealogy. But he also draws on Russian ethnographic literature about the Mongols, on documents of the steppe dumas, on Buryat legends and folktales, and on oral testimony of witnesses. Thus, his chronicle is a complex amalgam of different epistemic cultures – Russian, Mongolian, and Tibetan. The chronicle mirrors the historical situation of the Buryats, who belonged to two competing cultural-political and religious spheres simultaneously: the Russian Empire and the Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist world. The mutual interaction and influence of these cultures, as well as their complex entanglement, is exemplified in his work.

Chapter eight, which is presented here in translation, deals with the educational system of the Buryats. The text excerpt exemplifies Yum čüng's general methodological approach: He reconciles the two diverging realities of late nineteenth-century Bur-

I For more information on his biography, see Sh.B. Chimitdorjiev, "Buryatskie letopisy – pervye istoriki Buriatii," in *Buryaty*, ed. L.L. Abaeva and N.L. Iukovskaia (Moskva: Nauka, 2004), 258–62.

II The indigenous administration of the Siberian regions.

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yat society – the religio-cultural and the political – in an ultimately Buddhist narrative. Here, Buddhism proves to be the civilising force that turns the warlike and brutal Buryats into gentler contemporaries who are able to distinguish between good and evil. According to Yum čüng, only the newly acquired Buddhist ethics opened the way for the Buryats to integrate into the Russian Empire, of which they became subjects. In his account, the religious and secular domains of Buryat society are clearly separated. While the Buddhist clergy ruled the religious domain, the imperial authorities provided a secular education, which not only included language education but also provided a route into the Russian higher education system. The author is very much in favour of secular education, and expects an improvement of social conditions to result from its continuous implementation. Yum čüng's text is a prominent example of the interplay between the Mongolian-Buddhist and Russian taxonomies that built the background of the intellectual profile of the Buryat intelligentsia in the early twentieth century. This milieu brought forth such eminent personalities as Agvan Dorjiev (1853–1938) and Tsyben Jamtsarano (1880–1942), both of whom were highly influential in shaping the religious and secular landscapes of Buryatia and Mongolia in the twentieth century.

Bibliographical Information

Yum čüng, Wangdan. *Qori-yin arban nigen ečige-yin jon-u uy ijayur-un tuyuji* [History of the Origins of the Eleven Fathers of the Qori-Buryats]. In *Letopisi khorinskikh buryat*. Vol. 3, *Khroniki Tugultur Toboeva i Vandana Yumsunova*, 48–172. Trudy instituta vostokovedeniya IX. Moskva/ Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, SSSR, 1935; 141–42.

Page numbers given in square brackets refer to this edition.

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About the customs

1. In earlier times, the Buddhist religion was not widespread, and there were few lama^I teachers. Some professed shamanistic beliefs, and did not know the difference between virtue and non-virtue and the properties of the teaching. The customs were cruel. Life seemed long, the body and bones were large, and everyone behaved as he wished and as he thought right. Among themselves, they were united in clans (Mo. *oboy*), bones (Mo. *yasun*),^{II} or groups of yurts. They plundered and took by force various cattle and property from other people in the vicinity,

^I KKP: The personal spiritual teacher in Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism.

^{II} KKP: The “bone” denotes the patrilineage. A clan generally shares a common “bone.”

and, showing zeal as they could for bows, arrows, quivers, armour, helmets and other things, prepared troops and weapons. The latter they raised and plundered amongst themselves, and murdered each other.

2. Thereafter the religion of the Buddha spread more and more. There were many lamas and monks. The great works of the Buddha were translated and became known. Through them, people gradually learnt the difference between meritorious and non-meritorious deeds. Thereupon they entered the emperor's territory, and were integrated as subjects. They got to know the various hard and soft laws of the emperor. Their harsh customs were softened, and they relinquished some of their former false customs.
3. [p. 141/142] Later on, schools for the Mongolian and Tibetan religious teachings were opened. Into these, they sent their sons, and had them taught. While [only] some of them became lamas and monks, they [all] became well versed in the laws of the Buddha's teaching. The lamas introduced them to the differences between virtue and non-virtue, and, meanwhile, even our secular authorities began to explain the emperor's laws, and it became quite as it should be.
4. After 1773, monasteries were established in all regions. In all of them, there were different religious departments. In the secular sphere, many Mongolian and Russian language schools were opened. Young people, being encouraged to join in considerable numbers, studied there together. Some went on to Russian institutions of higher learning. Nowadays the customs of the people have become like those in the interior regions, and are continuing to improve.

