

CONCEPTS OF SPACE AND USE OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA PANEL

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MONASTERIES IN THE MONGOLIAN LANDSCAPE ONCE AND TODAY

SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

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Zsuzsa Majer has a PhD in Mongolian linguistics and philology (ELTE University, Faculty of Humanities, Budapest, Hungary) and MA degrees in Tibetan and Mongolian studies. Her PhD thesis was written on the ritual and ceremonial practice in present-day revived Mongolian monasteries. She has been to Mongolia 6 times since 1999, on scholarships and research trips for periods between two months – one and a half year surveying the history and revival of Buddhism. Her main researches, executed mostly in co-authorship with Krisztina Teleki, were a survey and documentation of old monastery sites of Ikh khüree or Bogdiin khüree, the old Mongolian monastic capital, a survey of all active temples of Ulaanbaatar and their ceremonial system in 2005-2006, and the documentation of 150 old monastery sites and 40 present-day temples in Öwörkhangai and Dundgow' provinces and the south part of Töv province in the framework of the Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries project of Arts Council of Mongolia in 2007, for which they prepared the survey questionnaires, glossary and methodology. They also executed interviews with about 75 old lamas countrywide on the old way of monastic life and ceremonial system. In 2009 she participated in a project of the Museum of Prehistoric Anthropology of Monaco surveying the history and revival of the two parts of the old Zaya geegen monastery in Tsetserleg and sacred places and monastic sites connected to it.

ABSTRACT

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MONASTERIES IN THE MONGOLIAN LANDSCAPE ONCE AND TODAY

The present paper is based on field researches at approximately 160 old monastery sites (of the all in all about 1000 sites that existed once in the country) and 60 present-day monasteries and temples throughout Mongolia, most of them documented in *Öwörkhangai*, *Dundgow'* and *Töv* provinces within the framework of the Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries project of the Arts Council of Mongolia with other sites surveyed between 1999-2009 in different other provinces.

The paper deals with the following issues:

Issues in connection with the old monasteries and temples:

- Influence of landscape features on planning of monastery sites and setting up monasteries in the old times: driving forces behind establishing a monastery / temple

at a given site, factors considered (water, hills, mountain peaks, spectacular natural features)

- Location of the different types of monastery sites: inhabited places versus remote sites, and location in relation to trading routes and relay stations
- The lamas' relationship with the monastery environment (places around the monastery including sacred places, peaks and waters), related rituals and ceremonies
- Forming of the landscape by the monasteries and solitary temples themselves
- Interactions, relations, connections, contacts between monasteries and local people

Handling old monastic sites after the 1937 purges and demolitions of monasteries:

- Changing of the landscape as a result of the demolitions
- Ways of usage of remnants or materials from the ruined sites by the authorities
- Ways of usage of the sites or remnants by local people in later decades

People's relationship today towards old sites:

- People's relationship today towards the ruins or slight remnants near their dwellings/ yurts
- Abandoned old monastery sites: traces of unauthorized digging by treasure hunters or for building materials by locals instead of excavation, protection and rebuilding

New monasteries after the 1990 revival and today:

- Planning of monastery sites and setting up monasteries today: the question of founding temples in today's aimag and sum centres versus uninhabited and deserted old sites
- Effects of location of new temples on survival or long term operation

PAPER

Zsuzsa Majer

MONASTERIES IN THE MONGOLIAN LANDSCAPE ONCE AND TODAY

For long centuries Buddhism was flourishing and prevailing in Mongolia till it was forbidden with its monasteries and temples closed down and ruined and its lamas killed or persecuted in 1937-38 with the Socialist era beginning. Afterwards, it was only revived in 1989 with the democratic changes.

The present paper deals with issues connected to old Mongolian monasteries and temples before their demolition in the 1937-38 purges, the ruined sites and their remnants as well as the new monasteries after the 1990 revival. The findings of the paper are based on fieldwork at approximately 160 old monastic sites (of the all in all about 1000 sites that existed once in the country) and 60 present-day monasteries and temples throughout Mongolia, most of them documented in *Öwörkhantai*, *Dundgow* and *Töv* provinces within the framework of the Documentation of Mongolian Monasteries project of the Arts Council of Mongolia with other sites surveyed between 1999-2009 in different other Mongolian provinces. The main focus of the author's researches (mostly executed together with Krisztina Teleki) is the history of the old Mongolian monasteries and their revival, with an emphasis on monastic life and ceremonial practice, on which topics she had published several articles, but for the purposes of the present conference paper to be presented in the 'Concepts of space and use of the environment in Central Asia' panel, issues connected to the connection between the founding of monastic sites and the landscape features, as well as the landscape forming role of the monastic sites themselves and are analyzed hereby.

1. Issues in connection with the old monasteries and temples

On the first hand, landscape features (water, hills, mountain peaks, spectacular natural features) as well as other circumstances such as trading routes and the network of relay stations had an influence on or determined the planning and setting up of monastery sites. On the other hand, monasteries and solitary temples further formed the surroundings / landscape even being on a remote solitary site or even being set up at an inhabited place or as a centre of a busy settlement. In addition, the lama community had a special relationship with the monastery environment with rituals and ceremonies related to the sacred places, peaks or waters around it, worshipping their local spirits. Monasteries and their lamas also had different interactions and contacts with local people, who either only visited the sites from time to time or even settled around the bigger monasteries, which also had its effect of further forming the surrounding area of the sites itself.

1.1. Influence of landscape features on planning of monastery sites and setting up monasteries in the old times

There were different driving forces behind establishing a monastery / temple at a given site, but this had to be interpreted within the limits of the characteristic features of the Mongolian landscape. Though Tibetan sutras and the strict rules laid down in them prescribe the sites suitable for founding a monastery and the way they should be chosen, in fact different factors (water, hills, mountain peaks, and spectacular natural features) that made at least life possible in the area or in some cases made the site special were considered for that. In the circumstances of the Mongolian landscape features in most cases the basic necessities had to be taken into consideration in order to establish a monastery or temple with several thousand, several hundred or even only some resident lamas. Therefore monasteries were set up on sites abundant in water, which could be rivers, creeks or wells (sometimes there were

separate wells for people and for animals). If the landscape features made it possible monasteries were founded in the foreground of hills or mountains situated mainly to the north of the site or surrounding it, protecting them from the strong wind coming from the northwest (litter was displaced usually a bit far at about 100 m from the monastic site in the southeast to avoid the bad smell reaching the monastery). In the Gow' area and in areas with similar bad conditions this meant only a well or any other source of water, with the monastery site set up in the plain area. By the time that passed on till today and especially in the last some years many of these springs and rivers dried out especially in the Gow' areas, but the trees that managed to survive in the dried out river bends still show in how beautiful areas some of these monasteries were built. Other monastic sites, however, were put up in the 'middle of nowhere', in the plain vast areas of the Mongolian steppe, where only a by now dried out well made life possible for the lamas (note that many Mongolians live till now in similar circumstances and surrounding in the countryside).

Monasteries were built, also determined by the surrounding landscape conditions, depending on the materials available locally or sometimes transported from far away places, of bricks and mud, wood or stone (mainly granite and pala). Of brick two types were used: red coloured brick (*ulaan toosgo*), that is, brick dried in the sun, and blue (gray) brick (*khökh toosgo*) which meant the burnt brick. Nearby bigger monasteries therefore there were one or several kilns (*baayuu*) where bricks were burnt. In most cases, however, different building materials were used in one complex, for example, the main temple building or the temple buildings were made of wood, while the other buildings, dwellings of monks, kitchens of brick and mud. Due to lack of woods, in the Gow' area almost everything was made of brick and mud (and stone where it was available) but sometimes wood and stone were transported for construction of bigger temple buildings.

Small assemblies sometimes operated in yurts or small buildings as the residents were few in number (or they did not reside in but only came for ceremonies) or if they were only temporary assemblies. Other small assemblies worked with only one temple building. On the other hand, monasteries and monastic cities had a main assembly hall (*Tsogchin*, Tib. *tshogs-chen*¹) in the centre and other temples were built surrounding it or in the same row, which later one was the special arrangement used in case of monasteries situated in the Gow' area. The monasteries, their temples and other buildings (as well as the courtyards) faced to the south, as it is usual in Mongolia (even the yurts are put up in this direction). Lamas' dwellings (yurts, fenced of small buildings or cells, this later mainly in the Gow') surrounded the central part consisting of temples, arranged mainly in an upside down U shape (this arrangement is called *khüree deg*, the word *khüree* having the meaning 'circle' here, and *deg* being a word derived from Tib. *sgrigs*, 'arrangement'). In the Gow' area another arrangement type was typical, where the temples stood in a row with the cells of lamas also in rows on the two sides and at the back. The other Gow' monastery arrangement type was also different: here the temples stood in courtyards (with the temples as well as the courtyard walls made of brick and / or mud) with the lama cells also arranged in courtyards.

There was a main assembly hall in every monastery where the daily chanting was held. There was at least another temple dedicated to the wrathful protector to the monastery (called *Sakhiusnii dugan* or *Arwan khangal*), too. Other temples, dedicated to Tārā (*Dar' ekhiin dugan* / *süm*, Tib. *sgrol-ma*), the Medicine Buddha (*Manaliin dugan*, Tib. *sman-bla*), Maitreya (*Maidariin dugan*, Tib. *byams-pa*), Avalokiteśvara (*Janraisegiin dugan*, Tib. *spyan-ras-gzigs*), or to the Kanjur (*Ganjuuriin dugan*, Tib. *bka'-gyur*), etc. also stood in bigger monasteries, with daily chanting, special ceremonies and training. Stūpas stood in or near to

¹ The terms are given first in their present Mongolian form as written in Cyrillic, then follows the Tibetan equivalent (Tib.). Where available, Sanskrit equivalents (Skt.) are given, too.

many of the monastic places, sometimes in a row (like the 8 stūpas of Buddha) in the north, sometimes at the four sides of the complex. There was sometimes only one large stūpa, and in other monasteries small stūpas were scattered in the area around the complex. Books were printed in some monasteries, but a separate printing house (*barkhan*, Tib. *par-khang*) operated only in some big monastic cities. Different monastic schools (*datsan*, Tib. *grwa-tshang*) specialized on philosophical, medical, astrological, Gradual Path or tantric studies belonged to the bigger monasteries and monastic cities.

The residence of the head of the monastery and of *khutagts* ('saint, majesty, dignified', a class of high Buddhist incarnate priests in Mongolia) or *khuwilgaans* ('emanation', reincarnation, incarnated lama) could be a yurt, a bigger yurt within a courtyard or even a small palace situated anywhere within or near the complex separately.

Some monastic complexes stood in a fenced-off area (the material of the fence was similar to the material of the buildings, as was available), but most of them were not fenced off, but stood in a plain area. Sometimes only the central temples or some of them were fenced-off and not the surrounding buildings and dwellings. A certain type of the monasteries founded on the order of the Manju emperor was a complex within walls, with even the lama dwellings inside, but otherwise this was not typical in Mongolia. In all cases, laypeople were not allowed to live within the monastery or monastic city, but only nearby, in lay quarters surrounding them.

Some monastic sites were themselves built in a way that the arrangement of their buildings including the temples as well as the lama dwellings followed the arrangement of the surrounding landscape: for example solitary temples for meditation hidden on top of a hill or hidden between rocky hillsides in secret a valley. Other examples are when adapting to the landscape features the monastic site was divided into parts built on different slopes of the hills or when a monastery was built alongside a river on its banks, therefore having a more longish design with the temples in a row.

1.2. Location of the different types of monastery sites: inhabited places versus remote sites, and location in relation to trading routes and relay stations

The location of the different monastic sites was adapted to their functions. Meditational temples, hermitages, small tantric assemblies or temples set up for the worship of water spirits (*lus*, Tib. *klu*, Skrt. *nāga*) were situated at remote places, while other monasteries were set up near roads to ensure that people can have access to them for making prostrations, visiting ceremonies and making donations, such ensuring the long term operation of the monastery or temple. Most of the bigger sites also had settlements of laypeople beside them, or they even served as administrative centres of their area, too. Accordingly, the different types of monastic sites were situated in different surroundings.

The old administrative divisions of Mongolia even at the beginning of the 20th century were totally different from that of today's Mongolia. While in the old times the area of the *Khalkh* Mongols was divided into four big areas (*aimag*) of the four *khans*, today there are 18 big and some smaller provinces (*aimag*), and some cities with county level state. The smaller divisions within the *aimags* are the *sums* (sub-province). The old *aimag* divisions were divided into smaller units (*khoshuu*, 'banner, battalion, administrative unit')², the centre of which was the monastic city (*khüree*) of a worldly noble. On the area of the different *khoshuus*, apart from the central monastic city, there were different kinds of monasteries from the big complexes housing around 1000 lamas, through various other monasteries with some hundreds of lamas and several temples, to shrines guarded by only one lama. In the detailed

² These *aimag* divisions and especially the *khoshuu* subdivisions within them had changed many times.

monastic system there were strong connections and well defined subordinated relations between the different sized monastic sites in the area of the same *khoshuu*.

Old Mongolian monastic sites from the 16th century till the beginning of the 20th century can be divided into the following categories: monastic city (*khüree*) with about 800-2000 lamas (the old Bogdiin khüree or Ikh khüree, the monastic capital housed 10000 lamas) and numerous temples surrounded by the lama dwellings and also outside the monastery by the districts of laypeople; monastery (*khiid*) with about 50-500 lamas and several temples, built generally in remote places; temple (*süm* or *dugan*, Tib. 'du-khang) with some dozens of lamas; and permanent or temporary assembly (*khural* or *jas*) with only a few lamas operating in one temple building being mostly a yurt temple. In some *jas* assemblies (also named as *khural* or *süm*) permanent ceremonies could be held by a few lamas, while in other only temporary assemblies, which were guarded all year around by only one lama or guard (*sakhiuul*, *manaach*), ceremonies were held only for some days in summer by numerous lamas coming for this purpose from big monasteries of the area. A special type of the smaller assemblies was the *örtöö jas* or *örtöö khural*, which were established nearby horse relay stations (*örtöö*) of Mongols, situated about 30 kilometres from each other on the route. Also by the main trading routes temples were set up. There was such an *örtöö* route in Öwörkhantai and another for Chinese merchants in Dundgow', by which several monasteries were situated in the area surveyed, but of course these kinds of temples existed at other parts of Mongolia by such routes and relay stations. In some areas there were small *jas* temples for every *otog* (clan) within the *khoshuu* (belonging to small units within the *khoshuu*), often named after the *otog* names of the area. There were also small *zod* (Tib. *gcod*, 'cutting through') tantric temples, many of them operating in yurts (sometimes with kitchen and other buildings put up beside it). In other cases *zod* masters lived nearby the big monastic complexes, holding ceremonies in their own yurts. Sometimes they even had their small temples nearby big monasteries.

The monastic sites that can be categorized as above were founded in different periods from the 16th century till the beginning of the 20th century (with the first monastery *Erdene zuu* (Öwörkhantai, Kharkhorin city) founded by Awtai sain khan in 1586). At the beginning of the 20th century there were still big and important monasteries founded as well as most of the small *jas* temples were founded then.

The monasteries can also be characterised based on the circumstances of their founding. Mongolian monasteries were categorized into the following four types by Pozneev³ at the end of the 19th century: monasteries founded on Manju order and upkept from the Manju treasury (emperor monasteries); monasteries founded for *gegeens* or *khutugtus* (*khutagts*) as their seats by the Khalkhas (gegeen or khutugtu monasteries); monasteries founded by individual parties such as Khalkha clans (*owog*, Written Mongolian *obug*) or later by administrative divisions such as *khoshuu* or *sumun* (*sum*) (khoshuun or sumun monasteries); and monasteries founded by individuals such as Mongolian nobles or princes. Of these, the gegeen or khutugtu monasteries were the wealthiest due to the big subordinated areas and their numerous lamas being upkept by the subordinates. In many cases the emperor monasteries became abandoned when the emperor ceased to maintain it from the treasury and as such the lamas left them. The khoshuun monasteries were numerous, as every *khoshuu* had one. These were situated near or at the *khoshuu* centre (the *khoshuu* noble's residence, *khoshuu* government, etc.) and therefore their operation was ensured easily. The sumun monasteries were on the other hand situated at remote places and therefore by time they also became abandoned or operating only with temporary ceremonies on the great days as their

³ Pozdneyev, A. M., *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in late 19th-century Mongolia*. ed.: Krueger, J.R. The Mongolia Society. Bloomington 1978, pp. 25.- 46.

lamas being left for bigger *gegeen* or *khoshuu* monasteries. Also the monasteries founded by individuals could operate only till the noble founding them or his successors provided all the expenses, otherwise they also ceased operation.

1.3. The lamas' relationship with the monastery environment (sacred places, peaks and waters), related rituals and ceremonies

By the lamas of the given community the surrounding hills and mountains were honoured and on their peaks *owoos* (stone heaps on the peaks and crossroads for the worship of local spirits) were erected. Usually there was one or some of these *owoos* that were worshipped annually by the monastery's lamas performing rituals for the local deities (*sawdag*, Tib. *sa-bdag*, 'earth lords'). The *owoo* veneration took place once a year, often including the 'three manly games' (*eriin gurwan naadam*), that is horse racing, wrestling and arrow shooting, for which masses of people gathered from the monastery's area.

Holy springs or creeks (*rashaan*, Skr. *rasayāna*); special rocks (for example *uushai*, human shaped rock) and caves of the neighbouring area were also worshipped, all these natural formation believed to have their own local spirits. Caves were often used for meditation, later with small altars put up in them with offerings, while the water from these holy sites was used for preparing the different offerings for the ceremonies and the holy water. In some cases there were different wells for example for the lamas and for making the offerings and holy water. Also some rituals, like the ceremony of making the *Dültsen* (Tib. *rdul-tshon*) coloured sand *maóðala* were connected to the holy springs or rivers situated near the monastery as upon the completion of this and the connected ceremonies, it is destroyed with the sand being taken in a ceremonial procession to the water where it is offered to the spirits of the land and water (*lus*, Tib. *klu*, Skrt. *Nāga* and *sawdag*, Tib. *sa-bdag*, 'earth lords').

An interesting fact is that some sites are situated just beside ancient (from Bronze Age to Turkic) burial places (*bulsh*, *kheregüsüir*), especially in the areas of *Öwörkhantai*, *Arkhangai* and *Töw*, and also in the northern part of *Dundgow*, which places are rich in such burial sites. Also, beside some monastic sites there are ancient stone mans from the Turkic period. On one hand, it may be by chance that the monastic sites were put up just beside such places, but it might also be possible that the same places with the same landscape features were found suitable for founding a monastery than were found in earlier times suitable by other people as burial places.

1.4. Forming of the landscape by the monasteries and solitary temples themselves

According to their size and function described above, the monastic sites had different arrangements and features. They were accordingly established at different places of different landscape characteristics and also they formed the surrounding landscape in different ways.

In the old times monasteries were the only settlements in the country and their temples the only fixed buildings in the land of nomadic yurts. Not only religious activities but also all state administrative activities were executed in the monastic complexes being at the same time administrative centres, and these also housed the lay population around them in separate districts. Smaller temples that were situated far away from inhabited places also had formed the environment, as these were also fixed places in relation to the moving dwellings of nomadic herding families (moving four times a year). Monasteries and temples were however built always in a way being in harmony with the environment, adapted to the landscape features either with their building materials or with their arrangement.

1.5. Interactions, relations, connections, contacts between monasteries and local people

When monasteries were the only settlements in the country bigger monasteries were at the same time administrative centres of the state, too. So monasteries not only formed the landscape but being settlements with lama inhabitants as well as many of them having laypeople's quarters nearby, they had an important role in people's life, too.

Not all monastic places but the bigger monasteries had laymen residing nearby. Small temples especially meditational places were however built at remote sites, which were only rarely visited by anyone. The biggest monastic centres were founded as residences for nobles so these nobles, people in their attendance, laymen and also Chinese merchants could live around them. Lay population did not reside in the monastic area itself, but surrounding the monastery, and poor families and beggars also could live nearby, mainly around the big monastic cities. According to the monastic rules, lamas were forbidden to make any relationship with women. Those lamas who were interested in women or had wife could not live in the monastery as they were chased out, but in the countryside, but they still came to the ceremonies every day or rarely. Believers often visited the monasteries for pilgrimage and worship, or visiting their sons, brothers or other relatives who belonged there, and the monasteries were operating from their donations (brick tea, dairy products, livestock, silk, juniper, flour, wheat, etc.), too. Monasteries had livestock being herd on remote pastures, usually the herds and flocks of the different individual temples of a monastery at different sites separately.

There were connections between monasteries situated close to each other or in the same administrative area. In many cases lamas visited each other's monastery, or came for (specialized) studies for a period. Furthermore, there was a central monastery in every *khoshuu*, which was the biggest of the area, with other monasteries being subordinated to it. Lamas occasionally came from Tibet or mainly from *Bogdiin Khiiree*, the monastic capital, for some days to give initiations and teachings. Tibetan resident lamas lived only in a very few monasteries. Itinerant lamas (*badarchin*) wandered huge areas for pilgrimage and to collect alms. These always stopped by monasteries. *Zoch* tantric masters also wandered in the countryside to meditate and do their tantric practices. For periods, they also stopped by monastic complexes and held their ceremonies there or nearby.

As mostly Chinese operated the kilns where bricks were burnt, and Chinese workers took part in monastery constructions, carving, and decoration of the temples, and also because of commercial purposes there were Chinese settlements near bigger monastery sites. Chinese merchants wandered the countryside and stopped by monasteries to sell their products and at the bigger sites there were Chinese stores (*püüis*, Chinese *pu zi / pu li*) in permanent places where animal products (wool, leather, etc.) were bought from Mongolians and other products (silk, flour, etc.) were sold for them.

2. Handling old monastic sites after the 1937 purges and demolitions of monasteries

In 1937-38, after a period of gradual suppression in the 1920-1930's, all the about 1,000 monasteries and assemblies around Mongolia were closed down and almost all of them totally destroyed or burned to the ground. In this period of the purges, as part of the Communist authorities' broader campaign to eliminate 'counter-revolutionaries', approximately 17,000 lamas were arrested and executed: all high ranking lamas, such as heads of monasteries, saints (*khutagt*) and reincarnations (*khuwilgaan*) and those having theological degrees. The medium-ranked lamas were jailed for 10 to 15 years or forced to go to labour camps in Siberia or to the army whilst the lowest ranked lamas, mainly young novices, were forced to disrobe and secularize. There remained no monasteries operating (till 1944, the partial reopening of Gandan), and all religious activities became forbidden. The monasteries were all destroyed or burnt to the ground and their sites abandoned. Monastic

sites however, even in their empty and ruined form, continued to have a role in people's lives, in city planning and in forming the landscape. The ruins or the building materials from them were used for different purposes by the authorities in the coming decades, as well as later by locals for personal purposes which goes on till today. With the revival, on the other hand, since 1989, many of those monastic places came into life again with their partly intact temple buildings restored and reopened or new small temple buildings built on their completely ruined old sites, or only as new stūpas or memorial monuments were built on them and as locals living nearby still keep these sites in mind even if only some stones or heaps marking the temple sites remained of them.

2.1. Changing of the landscape as a result of the demolitions

As widely known and as was experienced in all sites, the destruction was almost complete in 1937-38, even half meter thick stone walls were pulled down completely and huge monastic complexes with their hundreds of buildings. What was not destroyed then, was finished in different ways in the 70 years that went on. The revolution and the purges resulted in everything being destroyed and cleared away, such as religion, the old economy based on monasteries, state institutions, and habits of people. The country was completely reorganized by the Soviets. In Ulaanbaatar new city planning was introduced, with Soviet-type concrete housing estates. In the countryside new settlements came into life, with the administrative divisions being reorganized and renamed several times. The *aimag* and *khoshuu* divisions were replaced by *aimags* and *sums* within them.

Also the landscape was re-formed in this way: the old monasteries and temples were replaced by new settlements, centres of agricultural cooperations and livestock cooperations (*negdel*), *brigad /barigad* centres ('brigade', smaller regional work units inside the agricultural cooperation or *sum* districts, between about 1960-1990) and *bag* centres ('village/community', the smallest administrative unit inside the *sum*). However, where ruins remained with partly ruined but standing temple buildings on places which were not used for the purposes of the new system, these became totally abandoned with no population left nearby.

2.2. Ways of usage of remnants or materials from the ruined sites by the authorities

The centres of the new divisions and other places such as *barigad* or *negdel* centres were in many case established at the old monastery sites, partly as because there were still standing buildings that could be used, or as the building materials of them if ruined could be used easily in this way for building new houses, and also partly as because also lay population had already been concentrated around those bigger monastery sites. Most of the remnants of monastic sites (if not their materials) were used for different purposes under the socialist times, as buildings, party offices, local clubs, market places or warehouses of agricultural cooperations (*negdel*), not only in *sum* or *bag* centres but for the last of these, in the remote countryside as well. In many cases the so called *brigad / barigad* and *bag* centres, as well as *sum* centres, were put up at old monastery sites for this purpose of using the remained buildings. Those few temple buildings that remained intact till today could remain in fact due to this kind of using them for other purposes after the purges in the socialist times, which in the end had at least this positive effect of these temples avoiding destruction. Only in the later decades, in the 1950's-1960's were some exceptional remained temples or monasteries turned into local museums or museums of religious history (such as the *Choijin lama* temple in Ulaanbaatar, the several remained buildings of *Zaya Gegeen's* monastery in Arkhangai aimag centre or the few remained temples of *Erdene zuu* monastery in Öwörkhongai, Kharkhorin), in this way being used for some better purposes than party offices. These several complexes functioning as museums were renovated several times and

as such remained till today in a good state of repair. However, many of the other temple buildings that were left at the time of the destruction to be used for other purposes were used for some decades changing function several times, but not cared for, so later they became neglected when turned into a very bad state of repair. Of these, by now nothing remained or they only survived as ruined buildings.

2.3. Ways of usage of monastic sites or their remnants by local people in later decades

The material of the buildings determined the extent to which the sites that were not used for other purposes by the authorities but left abandoned and their remnants were disturbed by people in the decades after their destruction and are disturbed till today, as this is partly determined by the usefulness of the materials remained.

One factor determining the current state of the remnants is whether their remained buildings were used for other purposes and also to what extent their materials were and still are taken away by people to use them for their purposes. It is partly influenced by the location of the site: whether they are situated in *sum* centres or *bag* centres or near *sum* centres or near roads, or whether they are situated at out-of-the-way remote sites. As mentioned above, most monastic sites and their remnants were used for different purposes under the socialist times. However it affected mainly sites on which new settlements were established: *sum* centres, *barigad* centres and later *bag* centres. Other sites were not disturbed till the democratic change apart from this taking away of the building materials by locals.

In case of sites being situated at inhabited areas or at 'roads' with considerable traffic, after the destruction the material was taken away for building other by families living nearby, who use the material to build winter dwellings or shelters for animals. These less concerned sites situated in remote areas, but only in case of being no families living nearby.

3. People's relationship today towards old sites

Based on the survey on around 160 old sites, we can state that on each site (which was not a temple working in a yurt without any kitchen or other building put up) there are visible signs, at least the foundations of the old buildings marked by elevations or stones/ bricks, however small the monastery and its buildings were. In many cases yurt temples also had stone foundations which are still visible. The only exception is when a smaller site was situated in a *sum* centre or in another place when it was built over. In case of monastic complexes situated at the present site of *sum* or *aimag* centres, there are still remains, visible foundations in between the fences of yurts and houses, even if some of them were built over, but hardly visible. In case of even very small *jas* or other temple sites, even if consisting of only one temple, situated at a remote place, it can be said that even these are never without visible remains.

The current state of the remnants depends on the material they were made of. Evidently more remained of the stone buildings (though still being not more than the foundations but these being still easy to make out and some wall fragments) and of the brick buildings (again with clear foundations visible and some walls or wall remnants or perhaps some almost intact smaller buildings like lama dwellings still standing) than of the wooden buildings as these were easier to ruin by putting them on fire. Of wooden temples, apart from some exceptional cases (these remained due to being used for other purposes for decades), nothing remained, and even their exact sites where they stood within a complex is impossible to determine in case there was not any stone foundation for them. In case of complexes with wooden temples and brick and mud dwellings the sites of the wooden temples themselves, when even the foundations can not be made out now, can be judged only from the layout of the other buildings' remnants.

It is only a very few percent of old monastic sites where there are still even partial remains, with at least a temple building standing (of the 150 surveyed sites remains of at least one temple building are still standing only at six sites). In some cases these remained temple buildings were revived and are currently used as a temple. In other cases they were not revived, and thus are now in an extremely bad state of repair. Those which were revived but have been left without lamas and are inactive or are operating only with occasional services without any lam guarding the place are also in a bad state of repair. Remained and neglected buildings situated at a remote site are now in terrible state of repair in lack of any protection or care.

There are sites where the main temple building or any temple building did not remain, but there are considerable remnants of the other buildings, mostly lamas' dwellings or buildings of financial units or others, like kitchen buildings with standing walls or wall fragments where therefore the layout of the old complex is still easy to make out. These sites, perhaps making about ten percent of all sites, also should deserve protection.

However, today protection of the ruined sites is not solved, and instead of this the sites are in many case misused: people still use the buildings or materials left there for their purposes, neglecting them and also in the last several years the sites are being searched for leftover buried artefacts. However people's relationship towards to old sites is not always the same, even though only a certain percent of locals still honour the sites.

3.1. People's relationship today towards the ruins or slight remnants near their dwellings/ yurts

During the survey of all monastic sites in two *aimags* and a part of a third *aimag* it became evident that though most of the people in the *sum* centres apart from the older ones do not know all monastic places but perhaps only have heard of the biggest or more spectacular sites in the area, locals nearby the sites themselves in most cases still know the exact sites of even these small assemblies, even if all what remained on them are some scattered stones or hardly visible foundations. Some, the old ones, have knowledge of them from their childhood, and the middle aged ones were shown the sites from their parents or the lamas of the area. However, the sites are not being visited by locals, and on only some of them are *owoos* built or monuments put up to remember. It is also rare that on some sites annually ceremonies are performed by the old lamas who had studied there in their young years and their young students going there for this purpose of honouring the site. However, with the passing away of the old lamas (who are now in the 90's-100's if still living), it is not sure that this will be continued.

Locals having knowledge of such a site nearby their dwelling are however usually proud of that, especially if they have any connection with the site in their family (like any family members having been a lama there) or if they had known personally anyone else who had been a lama there. On the other hand, a way of misusing the old sites can be met also today when a family 'moves in' and uses the remnants, for example a still standing lama dwelling or partially remained walls of a temple as dwelling or rather as shelter for animals after making the required repair or changes. In other cases when a family had spent a season nearby, they tend to use the remnants, in case of only foundations being remained, as litter disposal places. Even in this context, people do not know or do not care that they use old monastic sites. It mostly happens however when a family not originally from the local area (but perhaps from another *sum* or even from another *aimag*) moves nearby such a site.

3.2. Abandoned old monastery sites: traces of unauthorized digging by treasure hunters or for building materials by locals instead of excavation, protection and rebuilding

The abandoned and ruined old sites are being hunted for treasures or being searched for useful building materials, this later being usually done by families living nearby. However, it is not determined by the location of the site being situated near or far from inhabited centres: sites near *sum* centres or roads are dug because they are easy to reach and are well known by people, and sites situated at very or extremely remote locales are dug because it is easy to search at such places without being notified or caught at the site. This treasure hunting often goes together with taking away all the useful materials, especially brick from the site, and people who dig primarily for bricks take away (and keep or usually sell) all worship objects they happen to find. In other cases, it is a more direct search for valuable and expensive artefacts and precious objects, when people with metal detectors go treasure hunting at the sites, or if they lack this useful tool, are well prepared and know the methods of how to find the really precious things they need. In most cases, the biggest holes were dug along the northern wall of the main or all the temples where, as well known, worship objects and offerings are placed in a temple, because it is supposed that when the walls were pulled down, objects that were not taken away prior to this, were buried by the ruins. Apart from these well planned diggings, sites with hundreds (!) of holes were not rare to find, showing how thorough is this search for treasures that supposedly went on for decades and is most sorrowfully still in process. The smaller sites, especially sites of the small *jas* temples that consisted of only some buildings and have almost no visible remnants, especially if their buildings were made of wood, are not searched for treasures and not dug, particularly as there is no other useful material as brick there, and also as they are not so well-known by people. This phenomenon of diggings is supposed to have been strengthened after the democratic change in 1989 or even before it in the last decades, when consequences became more light and rare. Anyway, it is very much a question of today's Mongolia, when artefacts and worship objects are sold in Art Shops and Souvenir shops at every corner in Ulaanbaatar and even in sites frequented by tourists in the countryside, and when there is a good market for people to sell their findings without any risk. The protection of these old monastic sites is very far from being solved. Only some of the sites are marked with a sign saying that they are old monastic sites under state or *aimag* protection. On the other hand, marking the sites would even make the work of treasure hunters easier, without meaning any protection. There seems to be no possibility of effective protection, deriving from the fact that most of the sites are situated far away from inhabited places, which makes their protection or control impossible (and which also helps treasure hunters in reaching their aims). On some sites, usually on remote ones, there are still a considerable amount of worship objects, like offering cups and small terracotta sculptures etc. broken into pieces and leaves of Tibetan language holy scripts scattered around. People, who happen to pass by these sites, feel free to take any of these objects, lacking any education concerning the protection of these sites and objects.

4. New monasteries after the 1990 revival and today

With the revival in 1990, the rebuilding of ruined sites or opening of new temples started. Their location in relation to old monastic sites and the new settlements was obvious at first: if a temple was left almost intact it was rebuilt of course at the same site, if no buildings remained the new temples were in most cases built at the old sites with the aim of reviving the old ruined monasteries, no matter if they were situated in a totally uninhabited area by then. Only later was the question of founding temples in today's *aimag* and *sum* centres versus uninhabited and deserted old sites raised (though in some of them temples were started right at the revival, too): by this time it became clear that without people visiting and providing for

the upkeep of the monastery by their donations it is impossible to keep the temples operating.

4.1. Planning of monastery sites and setting up monasteries today: the question of founding temples in today's aimag and sum centres versus uninhabited and deserted old sites

In the case of some old sites with greater lama populations it was not rare that 40-50 old lamas participated in the reopenings around 1990, whilst in isolated places sometimes only one or two lamas tried to revive the faded belief. However, almost twenty years had passed on since then. Now it is not rare that temples situated at old sites now far away from frequented sites became totally abandoned or in the more lucky case, moved to the *sum* centre. What accounts for the closing down of these temples is that with the passing away of the old lamas who kept temples working and ceremonies performed and with the lack of lamas already well trained and willing to move in many countryside revived temples have become completely abandoned. The young lamas having been left without a master either disrobe while staying in their homeland and live secular life afterwards finding a better paid 'business' or herding animals, or go away to the capital as they have higher donations and perhaps permanent salaries there if they join one of the main monasteries and learn there. In most cases they never return to their home temples. This is a common problem in the countryside that due to the lack of teachers and donations the revived small temples are not able to survive after the masters passing away. In the most fortunate cases, these temples remain partly active with a very limited number of lamas insisting to stay (this being in some cases only one lama), in other cases with ceremonies only held on great days of the year or in some with monthly ceremonies. This happened with about half of the revived temples. Some of the lamas who had left for the bigger monasteries and Buddhist institutions in Ulaanbaatar visit their home temples for these ceremonies sometimes accompanied by some other lama acquaintances from the Ulaanbaatar monastery to help to perform the rituals, which is also a way to help upkeep the local traditions. However, in most cases there is not much hope that they will settle back in the near future and contribute to the local religious life adding the knowledge they have gained in Ulaanbaatar. On the other hand, about one fourth of the temples are completely left without lamas, not working any more. In these cases the temple buildings (being either newly built ones or renovated old buildings) themselves are in a very bad state of repair and remain with the worship objects taken away by the lamas who left the temple or, if left unguarded, stolen by thieves.

4.2. Effects of location of new temples on survival or long term operation

Since the time of Buddha Śākyamuni donators (*jandag*, Tib. *sbyin-bdag*) have had a very important role in the maintenance of the lama community and today the places situated far away from devotees or other financial sources cannot survive. Today there is no state funding, so temples operate as private 'enterprises' wherever they depend on donations of devotees visiting on daily basis or on great ceremonial days, and on donations from companies and various foreign or local organizations. This is completed by the amount gained from reciting texts on request. All in all, the *sum* centre and even the *aimag* centre, and mostly Ulaanbaatar are more favorable and possible places for the operation of temples than remote and isolated places. This was not different in the old times. As Pozdneyev describes⁴: "The Khalkha monasteries mostly have self-supporting lamas; but these as I said already above, usually leave for khoshuun or geegen monasteries, since the situation of the latter is more

⁴ Pozdneyev, A. M., *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in late 19th-century Mongolia*. ed.: Krueger, J.R. The Mongolia Society. Bloomington 1978, pp. 44.

secure, the income is more frequent and better, and life itself in these monasteries is more cheerful and eventful”.

When revival started funds for reconstruction of partially remained and ruined monasteries or for establishing new temples came mostly from individuals, including old lamas still living and their families, the descendants of lamas who were purged or who have passed away since then, as well as local businessmen and authorities, even local party leaders. *Gandan* monastery and the Mongolian State also contributed. As works started various foreign organizations and Buddhist institutions offered help both from Europe and America and from Asian countries such as Taiwan, Japan, Nepal, Hong Kong and India. Rinpoches who embraced the movement of Buddhist revival in Mongolia like Gurudeva⁵ or Kushok Bakula (1917-2003)⁶ also had a main part in providing financial means for the rebuilding. In most cases where there was no remained temple building ceremonies were started still immediately in *aimag* and *sum* centres, in any place where these gatherings were possible, being even a room in the local cultural centre or school building, or in a yurt, as rebuilding or construction was a slower process. It was an extremely rare case that any temple building survived intact and still suitable for ceremonies from the first moment so most new temples have been set up in newly built buildings.

However, restoration of old monasteries and temples or the construction of a new temple buildings is easier than to keep them operating with an assembly. This effectively depends on the calling and education of the young lamas and even more on the generosity of donors who provide the financial background of the lama community. Without this in the countryside the remote smaller temples, even temples nicely restored in the past years are left abandoned due to the lack of finance and lamas.

By now most of the currently working temples (about 80 percent) are revived old temples, but these are mostly situated in the *sum* centres, not on the old site. In many cases, the new temple should be considered as the revival of all the monasteries that were situated in the present area of the *sum*, or in the area (as *sum* borders have changed). Only a very few are revived on the old site, in partly revived buildings or newly erected temples, and these are still active in a still fewer cases, in case of very famous sites or if being situated in the *sum* centre or other easy to reach places. In many cases when temples were found on old sites, with the passing away of old lamas and especially in lack of possibilities to maintain operation, ceremonies ceased and assemblies dispersed, with only in some cases being able to establish themselves in the *sum* centres again where the temple became more accessible for donators thus gaining more chance to survive. There are also some newly founded temples with no proven connections with old monasteries, thought at their foundations usually old lamas participated as well. After 2000, new private temples also opened in *aimag* centres: their heads had studied in Ulaanbaatar and then opened their own temples.

Nowadays the situation in the countryside is that though there were many temples founded after 1990, by now it is rather rare that an actively working temple can be found in a *sum*. The still active temples are mainly famous and revived historic monasteries, or monasteries situated on isolated but famous places also attracting pilgrims and tourists, or temples situated at *sum* centres or other easy to reach places with good transport connections. Now even *sum* centres with active temples are rare, while *aimag* centres may have 2-3

⁵ A highly esteemed lama of Inner-Mongolian origin who, escaping the purges of the Chinese, went to and learnt for decades in Tibet and Nepal. He contributed greatly to the revival, restoration and reopening of temples in Mongolia (*Amarbayasgalant*, *Delgeriin choir*, etc.)

⁶ A Geshe Lharampa (*gewsh lkhaaramba*, Tib. *dge-bshes lha-rams-pa*, holder of the highest academic degree in Buddhist philosophy) from Tibet's Drepung Losaling Monastery (Tib. 'bras-spungs blo-gsal-gling), the former Indian ambassador to Mongolia from 1989. As ambassador, he contributed immeasurably to the revival of Buddhist institutions in Mongolia. Apart from regular teachings in Ulaanbaatar, he spent his time with travelling all over the country giving teachings. In Ulaanbaatar he founded the only temple fully residential by now.

operating temples, as their population is able to maintain more temples. This is also where lamas of temples that cease operation possibly join in. These *aimag* and *sum* centres have permanent populations and devotee communities, therefore usual donations are ensured. Moreover, people from the remote countryside *ails* (yurts) visit the *sum* and *aimag* centre from time to time, and can also visit the temples there. An *aimag* centre is also good for young lamas to keep connection with modern life they so much consider important. By today, new temples are only set up in the *aimag* centres, and not even in the smaller *sum* centres.

CONCLUSION

In the old times about 1,000 monasteries and temples of different sizes were situated in the area of today's Mongolia, being the only settled down places, the only fix buildings and the only centres also with lay population around them for centuries. With the purges, however, almost all of them apart from a very few fortunate monasteries that remained partly intact was made equal to the ground, with only ruins or slight remnants remaining. Even in their ruins they continued to have an impact on the forming of new settlements and in people's life during the 50 years of total suppression of religion. With the democratic change the revival became possible, which at first went together with the rebuilding of temples that managed to survive in a bad state of repair or with the new temples built at the old sites. By now, however, this turned out to be impossible to maintain temples at sites now uninhabited, so we can conclude that by today the location of the temples became adapted to the places that in the meanwhile became central in people's life: the *sum* and mainly the *aimag* centres and the capital.