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Editor-in-chief	Zayabaatar, D.
Executive Secretary	Uranbileg, E.
Peer Review	Yanjinsuren, S. Bumdari, O.
Designer	Lhamjav, G.

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Editorial Address: Sukhbaatar Square-3  
Ulaanbaatar-11, P.O. 20A Mongolia  
Office of the IAMS Secretariat  
E-mail: [iamsmongolia@gmail.com](mailto:iamsmongolia@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.iams.org.mn](http://www.iams.org.mn)  
Phone/Fax: 976-11-261328  
Phone: 261328, 262491

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## Daily Chanting Ritual Texts (Tsogchen) and their usage in Monastic and Secular Buddhist education: The Mongolian example

Zsuzsa Majer\* (Hungary)

**Abstract:** As part of a recently started comparative study<sup>1</sup> of the daily chanting ritual texts of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries of different Schools, including Mongolian monasteries, the current paper focuses on the Mongolian *Tsogchen* (T. *tshogs chen*) textbooks, and especially on the way their texts are used not only at monastic training and at individual Dharma teachings but for educating laypeople either in monasteries or outside them in Buddhist associations and centers, at degree programs, certificate courses, or short courses. This later was studied with the aim of answering the question of „What can we learn from the Mongolian example?”. Teaching at the only accredited Buddhist College of Europe, my interest is not only bringing new research results, but to actually use the research outcomes in teaching practice for the benefit of students.

In general, these texts do not get enough research interest perhaps as daily rituals are not as spectacular as, for example, a *Tsam* (T. *'chams*) dance or any other ritual. In my opinion, they should, as they, in spite of their shortness, contain basic Buddhist teachings, theories, ideas and terminology in their fullest complexity. The texts of these collections are the most basic texts and prayers of Tibetan monastic education that novices memorize and learn first during the basic part of their training and then monks of the main assembly hall recite daily. Laypeople, devotees and practitioners similarly listen to the explanations of these texts first before meeting more deep, lengthy or philosophical texts or topics. We can learn much from the experience, example and teaching methods of Mongolian Buddhist teachers: from their traditional methods for teaching the classical Tibetan language to Mongolians, nowadays also including laypeople, or from their ways of teaching Buddhism through these basic Buddhist prayers and texts to them.

The paper consists of four parts: *Tsogchen* textbooks in general; the specialities and special texts of Mongolian textbooks; usage of these texts in monastic and secular education; and examples of implementing these practices in teaching European/western students.

**Keywords:** Mongolian Buddhism, Ritual texts, Prayers, Tibetan language teaching, monastic education, secular / laypeople education

**Introduction:** As part of a recently started comparative study<sup>2</sup> based on fieldwork and textual study of the daily chanting ritual texts of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries of

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\* Doctor (Ph. D), Associate Professor, Dharma Gate Buddhist College, Budapest, Hungary

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<sup>2</sup> In the framework of a research project funded by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office (Nemzeti Kutatási, Fejlesztési és Innovációs Hivatal) – NKFIH, with the contract number K 147237.

different Schools, including Mongolian monasteries, the current paper — and my first fieldwork on this topic executed in 2024 July-August — focuses on the Mongolian *Tsogchen* (T. *tshogs chen*) textbooks, that is, daily chanting textbooks, and especially on the way their texts are used not only at monastic training and at individual Dharma teachings but for educating laypeople either in monasteries or outside them in Buddhist associations and centers, at degree programs, certificate courses, or short courses.

This later I study with the aim of answering the question of „What can we learn from the Mongolian example?“, that is, the experience, example and teaching methods of Mongolian lamas’ use of these basic prayers in Buddhist education. Teaching at the only accredited Buddhist College of Europe, my interest is not only bringing new research results, but to actually use the research outcomes in teaching practice in a European institution of higher education for the benefit of our students. Currently I am also working on a translation volume of these texts to be published in Hungarian with detailed explanations and terminology, mainly focusing on general texts, that is, texts used irrespectively of the given school, and Gelug (*dge lugs*) daily chanting texts and prayers, but also including a selection of texts from each of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In spite of their shortness, these texts contain basic Buddhist teachings, theories, ideas and terminology in their fullest complexity and therefore I widely use them at my text-based introductory courses to Tibetan Buddhism/Tibetan Buddhist texts in Hungarian translation for students having no Tibetan language knowledge, as well as at the Tibetan language specialization at the Tibetan language lessons, where I try to incorporate the teaching methods of Mongolian lamas.

Consequently, the paper consists of four main parts: on *Tsogchen* textbooks in general; the specialities and special texts of Mongolian textbooks; usage of these texts in monastic and secular education; and examples of implementing these practices in teaching western students whereas I describe my own practices.

### 1. On *Tsogchen* Textbooks in General

The daily prayer texts are the texts that, speaking of monastics, novices meet first after learning the letters of Tibetan alphabet and pronunciation. They first learn them one by one by heart, and later on get the translation and explanations to them. Laypeople, devotees and practitioners similarly listen to the explanations of these texts first before meeting more deep, lengthy or philosophical texts or topics such as *Lamrim* (*lam rim*), Mind Training (*lojon, blo sbyong*) and so on. Also, Mongolian laypeople who, for some reason, engage in Tibetan language learning, practice pronunciation and recitation through these same texts as soon as they can read them in Tibetan. For Tibetan laypeople this is different, and many memorize such texts and chant them regularly as a way of collecting merits. Thus, these collections are of extreme importance in Buddhist training in the Tibetan tradition, being monastic or secular, where the study of texts, however, is inseparable from the written commentary and from the guru transmitting the oral explanations.

As for the details on these texts, in the Tibetan tradition the collection of these basic prayers and ritual texts are recited daily in the monasteries. This daily chanting which follows these textbooks of the different shorter and longer texts is called *Tsogchen*, T. *tshogs chen*, literally ‘great assembly’, in Mongolia. In Tibetan, mainly

the term T. (*nyin re'i*) *zhal* 'don / *kha* 'don is used, literally meaning 'daily chanting'.<sup>3</sup> This is held in the main assembly hall (called similarly T. *tshogs chen*) of the given monastery, whereas the texts are recited in the given order. This order is called *go rim* (literally 'order, arrangement, sequence'), meaning the exact list and fixed order of texts to be recited during any ceremony. Several basic general texts are included in the collections of many different monasteries or temples with some possible alternations or modifications such as a shorter or longer version of the same text, or difference in the number of stanzas recited. The number of texts differs from monastery to monastery which is also influenced by the inclusion of the texts characteristic for the given school. Such a daily chanting can last basically for 2-3 hours and may contain a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 50 different texts. Many of these texts are for recitation, written in verse.

Several of them are canonical, being Kangyur (*Ganjuur*, T. *bka'* 'gyur) or Tengyur (*Danjuur*, T. *bstan* 'gyur) texts and translated from Sanskrit. Many other texts are not canonical as were composed later or as being ritual texts exclusively characteristic of Tibetan (or Mongolian) Buddhism. The texts are of course used in themselves, too, or as part of other rituals, but during the daily chanting rituals are recited always in the given fixed order used in the given monastery.

The most frequent text types are the following: invocations or supplication prayers (*soldew*, T. *gsol* 'debs); praises or eulogies (*dodow*, T. *bstod pa*) to different buddha forms (e.g. Sākyamuni Buddha, Tārā, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Sitātapatrā etc.), saints (e.g. 16 arhats or sthaviras) or lamas/masters (e.g. Tsongkhapa, Padmasambhava); aspirational prayers (*molom*, *smon lam*); offerings (*chodow*, T. *mchod pa*); smoke offering texts (*san* or *sanchod*, T. *bsang* or *bsang mchod*), texts of tormas offerings of ritual cakes (*dorom* or *dorombul*, T. *gtor ma* or *gtor 'bul*) to the protectors or local deities, local spirits (*shawdag*, T. *gzhi bdag* or *sawdag*, T. *sa bdag*); and the (golden) libation offering texts (*serjim*, T. *gser skyems*) to the tutelary, protective, and local deities. Then such main ritual texts are also represented in the text corpus of these textbooks as for example the text of Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta (*Itgel* or *Jawdo*, T. *skyabs* 'gro skyems bskyed), the texts of Confessing Downfalls (*Dünshig*, T. *ltung bshags*) prostrating before the 35 buddhas of confession and General Confession (*Jiwshig*, T. *spyi bshags*), the text of Mandala Offering (*mandal örgökh*, S. *maṇḍala*), and the text of the Ablution Ritual (*Tüi*, T. *khrus*).

There are also texts in groups in the collections, such as in Mongolia the prayers known collectively as the six aspirational prayers (*zurgaan yerööl*, T. *smon lam drug*) or the three texts known as the three protective prayer-rituals (*gurwan gürem*, T. *sku rim rnam gsum*). These three texts are the Heart Sūtra (*shirnen*, also known shortly as *do*, T. *sher snying* / *shes rab snying po*, *mdo*, S. Prajñāpāramitāhṛdya(sūtra)), the Praise of Sitātapatrā or the goddess with the white umbrella (*tsagaan shükhert*, *dugar*, T. *gdugs dkar*, S. Sitātapatrā), and the Green Tārā text or the praise of the 21 Tārās (*dar'ekh*, T. *sgrol ma*).

Several texts appear in most of the prayerbooks in monasteries of different if not all traditions. In addition to these basic texts known and used in all traditions, the text-

<sup>3</sup> The specialized temples and monastic schools, *datsans*, *grwa tshang*, have their own daily specialized ceremonies and their specialized textbooks under a different name, *sharjin*, *shar byung*.

books of the different schools have additional texts, and some schools even own a totally different text corpus. Such texts differing in the traditions are, for example, tormas offerings or other texts to the protector deities (*sakhius*, T. *chos skyong*, S. *dharmapā-la*) and meditational deities (*yadam*, T. *yi dam*) of the given school or monastery or its main temple; short texts to the main deities and Buddha forms worshipped in the given tradition; eulogies praising the lamas of the given tradition or transmission; long-life prayers (*ölmii bat magtaal*, *ölmii bat orhsikh* or *shawdan soldew*, T. *zhabs brtan gsol 'debs*); or prayers for the quick return of certain masters (T. *myur byon gsol 'debs*). To give examples for this, in the Gelug monasteries the textbooks contain several texts to Tsongkhapa, and also short prayer texts by him; in Nyingma (T. *rnying ma*) monasteries and temples different texts such as eulogies, supplication or aspirational prayers connected to Padmasambhava are included in the daily prayers. Similarly, the other two main schools, Sakya (T. *sa skya*) and the presently existing different Kagyü (T. *bka' brgyud*) schools, as well as the revived Jonang (T. *jo nang pa*) school, also have special texts included, among them those connected to the founder and the lineage lamas of their traditions.

In addition to the differences according to the school followed, there are also a couple of local texts in these daily chanting textbooks. These include *san* or *serjim* (T. *bsang*, *gser skyems*) texts to the local deities of local mountains or texts written to local saints or tulkus (T. *sprul sku*), being in Mongolia local *khutagts* or *khuwilgaans*, recited in their temples daily. These can be eulogies, praises, long-life texts or prayers for the quick return of a master.

Apart from the above differences due to the school followed and local differences, there can also be differences or characteristic texts found at the national level. For example, in Mongolia or Bhutan, etc. there are texts used in their tradition only. Just to mention some examples of this, the long life prayers of their king are included in Bhutanese monasteries, while some of the special texts of Mongolian textbooks are mainly connected to their religious leader, the *Jewdzündamba khutagt* (T. *rje btsun dam pa ho thog tu*) or *Bogd gegeen* or are written by him or other prominent Mongolian lamas — see in the next part of the present article.

As seen from the above, the time of origin of these texts is also various. Several texts are from the Kangyur or Tengyur, and are not original Tibetan texts but translations, other text were written by eminent Tibetan masters of different centuries of the past, while the newest texts in these collections might even be contemporary. This happens, for example, when a long-life text of a contemporary master or a prayer for the quick return of a passed away master or *tulku* (T. *sprul sku*) is inserted. Two current (not necessarily Mongolian) examples are the readings for the quick return of the deceased Gelug Lama Zopa or Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (T. *bla ma / thub bstan bzod pa*) in his monasteries or the newly introduced long-life prayer of the 10<sup>th</sup> *bogd* or *jewdzündamba khutagt* by the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama chanted in Mongolian monasteries daily since March, 2023, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama introduced him to the public at Dharamsala.

In short, even though the most frequently recited basic texts appear in most of the prayerbooks, the texts included can differ in each monastery as the different Tibetan schools all have short texts characteristic of only them and also due to the inclusion of a variety of local texts.

In general, these texts do not get enough research interest perhaps as daily rituals are not as spectacular as, for example, a *Tsam* (T. 'cham(s)) dance or many other rituals but many have even manifold English or other western language translations due to their importance or as they appear also in ritual textbooks for Dharma centers of the west. In my opinion, they should get a more deep research interest and even a widespread usage in higher education in the framework of Tibetan Studies or Buddhist Studies curricula, as they, in spite of their shortness, contain basic Buddhist teachings, and theories, ideas and terminology of Tibetan Buddhism in their fullest complexity. This is why these texts occupy such an important role in the education of laypeople, too, and in the methods used by Mongolian lamas teaching Tibetan language to them of which I myself try to adapt what seems suitable for European students as well. These two topics will be dealt with in the last two parts of the current article, after giving an insight into some specialities of the Mongolian daily chanting textbooks.

## 2. The Specialities and Special Texts of Mongolian Textbooks

Daily chanting texts of Mongolian monasteries and temples of different traditions may consist of general texts used irrespectively of the school followed, additional texts of the given school and then the additional special Mongolian Buddhist texts. The special texts in their daily chanting textbooks mirror Mongolian Buddhism thus we can get to know this form of Buddhism from these texts. Even though there are considerable differences in the daily chanting practice of the individual temples and a wide variety of texts, among them local texts may be encountered in them, still there are certain texts that can be considered characteristic of Mongolian Buddhism in general.

### 2.1. Special Ritual Texts of Mongolian Buddhism: Daily Chanting, Texts Recited on Request, or at Other Ceremonies

We can group the special, characteristic texts of Mongolian Buddhism into some main categories. In the first group there are the texts composed by Öndör gegeen himself.<sup>4</sup> One of these, the most well-known prayer composed by him, that we might even call 'the main prayer of Mongolian Buddhism,' is recited every day in practically all Mongolian monasteries and temples. This prayer is known primarily as *Jinlaw Tsogzol* (T. *byin rlabs mchog stsol*), "Bestowing the Highest Blessings" for its beginning words, is also called *Adistid* (T. *byin rlabs*), meaning "Blessing", or by its original title as *Düitünji soldew* (T. *dus bstun gyi gsol 'debs*), "Prayer in Accordance with the Times". It is usually chanted 'for peace and harmony in life, for clearing away obstacles, and for the pacification of any kind of crisis, conflict, or disturbance.' The reason for this is that it was composed during the war between the Western and Eastern Mongols, Oirats and Khalkhas, with the aims of resolving the crisis, and putting an end to the war through the power of Buddhist teachings and prayers, uniting the Mongols, and bringing peace. The structure of the prayer follows that of the seven-branched prayer (*Mörgöliin doloon gishüün*, T. *yan lag bdun pa*). Some of his other ritual texts, however, are only recited during different Buddhist festivals (and thus does not belong closely to the topic of this article). One much famous of them is the „The Profound

<sup>4</sup> On these texts see my chapter: Majer, Zsuzsa, Three Ritual Prayers by Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar. In: Vesna, A. Wallace (ed.) *Sources of Mongolian Buddhism*, New York: Oxford University Press (OUP) (2020), pp. 329-358.

Sādhana of the Maṇi [Mantra],” *Maani düwtaw sawmu* (T. *ma ṇi sgrub thabs zab mo*), which is a *sādhana* and mantra recitation of Avalokiteśvara. This contains profound tantric doctrinal meaning and is connected to the *Soyombo* writing system created by Öndör Gegeen himself. Some lamas use this text for their own meditation practices, or it is used in certain communal *sādhana* practices called *Maan’ büteel* (T. *ma ṇi sgrub thabs*). Another text by him is a food offering text recited on the fourteenth day of the New Year rituals, during the ceremony commemorating Zanabazar’s death, at the *tsogchid* ritual (T. *tshogs mchod*, S. *gaṇacakrapūjā*, ‘accumulation of offerings’) and also on other occasions when meals containing meat are served to the assembly. It bears the title „*From the Om, in countless...*,” *Umlai daye* (T. *om las bgrang yas*), which is the beginning of the text. Öndör gegeen also composed all the mantras of the special mantra recitations during the fifteen days of the Lunar New Year.

The second group of such characteristic texts of the Mongols are the three texts written by the 4<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama (T. *blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan*, 1570–1662) at the request of Öndör gegeen in order to ensure the well-being of the Mongols. One of these three texts is on daily chanting. This is the “Smoke Offering Causing the Rainfall of Auspiciousness,” *Dashchiiraw san* (T. *bkra shis char ’bebs kyi bsangs*) which he is said to have written with the aim of keeping the Mongolians free from hardships and in favorable conditions and for which Öndör Gegeen himself composed the melody. This is one of the most widely used texts among the Mongols. The other two texts of this group are recited usually on request but are not part of the daily chantings. These are a short Medicine Buddha text titled *Baga Manal / Chogden jaṭwa manal* (T. *rgyal ba sman bla*, S. *Bhaiṣajyaguru*) and a *powa* (T. *’pho ba*) ritual text for the deceased titled “Hero Entering Battle: A Guide for the Transference of Consciousness” (*Potid bawuu yüljigmaa*, T. *’pho khrid dpa’ bo g.yul ’jug ma*) which is a transference of consciousness text to the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitābha.

Another group of often included texts is texts connected to Tārānātha (*Darnat*, T. *tA ra nA tha*), due to his importance to the Mongols as being the predecessor of the *bogds*, and texts connected to the *bogd* lamas or *Jewtsündamba khutagts*. One of them is a biography and supplication and aspiration prayer of Tārānātha and his reincarnations written by *ngag dbang bstan’ dzin* and titled *Puntsog güsüm* (T. *phun tshogs sku gsum*, this being the beginning of the text), “The three perfect buddha bodies,” or by its long title T. *rje btsun tA ra na tha’i ’khrungs rabs gsol ’debs smon lam dang bcas pa*. Among the texts written to Öndör gegeen or the *Jewtsündamba khutagts*, there is a praise or eulogy and supplication prayer to the 1<sup>st</sup> *bogd*, Öndör Gegeen written by the 4<sup>th</sup> *bogd*, *blo bzang thub bstan dbang phyug ’jigs med rgya mtsho*. This is titled *Geleg dodgu* (T. *dge legs ’dod dgu’i*) “[The source of] prosperity of all wishes” (the long title is: T. *rje btsun blo bzang bstan pa’i rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po la bstod cing gsol ba ’debs pa’i tshul don gnyis lhun grub zhes bya ba bzhugs so*) and is recited daily in one of the monastic schools of Gandan main monastery while in other monasteries mostly during the ceremonies of the Lunar New Year. Another such text is a long-life prayer to the *bogd* lamas composed by *blo bzang dpal ldan bstan pa’i nyi ma*, titled *Dagwa nidan* (T. *dag pa gnyis dang*, which is the beginning of the text), “Twofold purity,” or by its long title *Sawdan soldew dagwa nidan* (T. *zhabs brtan gsol ’debs dag pa gnyis dang*), “Long-life prayer titled twofold purity.” A new text among the Mongolian daily

chanting texts is the long-life prayer (*Ölmiig batatgakh zalbiral* or *Shawdan soldew*, T. *zhabs brtan gsol 'debs*), of the 10<sup>th</sup> *bogd* written by the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama.<sup>5</sup> Before that, during the life of the 9<sup>th</sup> *bogd* (1932-2012), a short long-life prayer of 4 lines of him titled *Shawdan soldew* (T. *rje btsun dam pa sku phreng dgu pa 'i zhabs brtan gsol 'debs*) was recited in many monasteries, and after his death, a prayer for the swift return of the *bogd lama* composed by one of the abbots of Ikh khüree titled *Nürjon soldew* (T. *myur byon gsol 'debs re 'bras lhun grub ma*), “Prayer for the swift return [of the *bogd lama*], the spontaneous fulfillment of wishes,” till the official announcement of the 10<sup>th</sup> *bogd*.

These are complemented by different texts by various Mongolian lamas used exclusively in Mongolian ritual system (e.g. The *Lamrim* text of Bar' lam Damtsigdorj, T. *brag ri bla ma dam tshig rdo rje*, 1781-1848, called *Pandelamsan*, T. *phan bde lam bzang lam rim*), “Excellent beneficial gradual path to enlightenment,” read monthly in *Lamrim datsan*, *Ulaanbaatar*) and a variety of different local texts, such as *san* or *serjim* (T. *bsang*, *gser skyems*) texts to conciliate the local spirits (*lus sawdag*, T. *klu*, *sa bdag*) of local mountains: e.g. the four mountains *Bogd khan*, *Chingeltei*, *Bayanzürkh*, and *Songino khairkhan* around *Ulaanbaatar* (i.e. *Dörwön uuliin serjim*, T. *ri bo bzhi 'i gser skyems*, “Golden drink libation to the four mountains [surrounding *Ulaanbaatar*]” in *Dashchoilin monastery's* textbook), or to *Khangai Mountain*, *Bulgan Mountain* (in *Arkhangai*) etc.; as well as texts written to other Mongolian main lamas: e.g. eulogies, praises, long-life texts or prayers for the quick return of any other reincarnated lama (e.g. *Zaya gegeen* or any of the other recognised *khutagts* or *khuwilgaans*) that are usually recited in their respective temples daily. An then we also find some additional other prayers or texts that are especially popular among the Mongols, for example the text known as *Khiimoriin san*, *Lündai san* (T. *rlung rta 'i bsangs*), “Incense offering for spiritual strength [represented by the wind horse],” or *Madjün jinlaw* (T. *rmad byung byin rlabs*), which is the beginning of the text meaning “Excellent blessing”).

## 2.2 Special Daily-Chanting Ritual Texts of Mongolian Buddhism

In *Gandan main monastery* the daily chanting consists of around 35 texts while in *Dashchoilin monastery*, the second biggest Mongolian monastery around 52 texts, being of different length. Several of the *Gelug* monasteries and temples use the daily chanting textbook of *Gandan* while smaller temples might have only shorter daily rituals with an around 15-20 titles. Some temples use the textbooks of the temples where they founder studied, that is, their mother temples, be it a Mongolian temple founded earlier or a Tibetan temple in India, such as the case is for example with the *Sakya*, T. *sa skya*, temples or *Jonan*, T. *jo nang* temples founded in Mongolia lately, these traditions being brought in by Mongolian lamas who had studied in their monasteries in India. Some temples use the textbooks of the old monasteries of which they are considered to be a revival or at least include some of their old readings in their daily rituals. This relevant part of the current article is based on the study of the above two Mongolian daily chanting textbooks and the daily chanting textlists or textbooks of many other Mongolian monasteries, mainly *Gelug* and *Nyingma*. The textbooks of the temples of the *Sakya* and *Jonan* traditions newly brought to Mongolia in the last decade (founded by lamas who studied in them for longer periods) are much more

<sup>5</sup> I published a translation of this in Hungarian: Majer, Zsuzsa, A 10. bogd beiktatása – az első visszhangok és hatás a mongol szertartásrendszerre. In: *Keréknyomok: 15* (2023), pp. 113-128.

different, these having either taken the textbooks of their main temples in India in their fullness into their our ritual system, or having adapted many of their special texts. As for the inclusion of the special Mongolian texts, at least the *Jinlaw tsogzol* text and the long-life prayer of the 10<sup>th</sup> *bogd* are however included in all of these as well.

From the point of view of the present article, however, the Gelug textbooks are the most important, as when we look at the different courses for laypeople and the usage of the *Tsogchen* texts in them, we will see that basically all of these courses are run by Gelug monasteries or Gelug centers. Therefore, they include the study of Gelug prayers in their curriculum.

To summarize the special texts in daily chanting textbooks in Mongolia, in Gandan and Dachschoilin monastery daily textbooks we find *Jinlaw tsogzol* (T. *byin rlabs mchog stsol*) by Öndör Gegcen; *Puntsog güsüm* (T. *phun tshogs sku gsum*), a biography and prayer of Tārānātha and his reincarnations from among texts connected to Tārānātha and the *bogd* lamas; and the “Smoke Offering Causing the Rainfall of Auspiciousness,” *Dashchiiraw san* (T. *bkra shis char ’bebs kyi bsangs*) by the 4<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, one of his three texts written for the Mongols, from among the above mentioned texts, and these are recited daily in most of the Mongolian monasteries and temples. In the Dashchoilin monastery textbook additionally the long-life prayer of the *bogd* lamas titled *Dagwa nidan* (T. *dag pa gnyis dang*) is recited right after the biography and supplication and aspiration prayer of Tārānātha titled *Puntsog güsüm*, and this is on daily chanting in many smaller Mongolian temples as well. As already mentioned, *Khimoriin san* (T. *rlung rta ’i sangs*), “Incense offering for spiritual strength” is recited daily in many Mongolian temples as well.

### 3. Usage of These Texts in Monastic and Secular Education

In monasteries in Mongolia, where the ritual language is different from the mother tongue, there are special methods for teaching the Tibetan language to the novices. specially aimed at getting young lamas able to recite at the rituals together with the others, first of all at the daily *Tsogchen* ceremonies, as soon as possible. So this primary aim determined the methods used. Novices study in groups at the monasteries (*datsan surgalt*, *tankhim surgalt*), and this is complemented by studying with one of the teachers, traditionally at his home (*ger surgalt*). Visiting the master (the honorific term *baraalkhakh* is used for this act) in the afternoons after the ceremonies first the Tibetan alphabet, writing and pronunciation is taught,<sup>6</sup> then immediately they start reading and reciting the daily chanting textbook. Of course, at the beginning only by 4-4 line stanzas, then gradually more, 8, 10, 16 lines (*shad*, T. *shad*) of the text. Everything is centered around memorizing and reciting the texts in the way it is needed at the rituals. The first step is always only learning to follow by their eyes the recitation in the Tibetan text, then the next step is reciting together with the teacher, gaining certainty in the punctual and precise way of pronunciation, and then the last step is reciting it out loud. The first collection of texts memorized and recited is the daily chanting textbook of the given monastery, on which my current researches focus. Then this is followed

<sup>6</sup> Mongolians name the Tibetan letters in a special way, where certain characters are named for their shape, others by the meaning they have as a one-syllable word. This is because they pronounce, in lack of the needed sound, several letters by the same sound, so there is need for differentiation in their names, and as this method of naming the letters suited better the young students.

by the study of the texts of the rituals held on the monthly great days, then the seasonal and annual rituals. At the beginning of their studies novices may learn to recite texts by heart even before the meaning is explained to them, and later the language itself is taught to them through these texts and their explanations.

In the current article, however, the emphasis is on how these basic prayers and short texts are incorporated into the curriculum of different courses for laypeople in Mongolia, which is done mostly in the framework of Tibetan language lessons. For this, however, some insight into the background to the changes in the education possibilities of laypeople since the revival is needed.

### 3.1. Laypeople's Possibilities for Study

Lay patrons (*öglögin ezen* or *jandag*, T. *sbyin bdag*) played a large part in financing the restoration and rebuilding of temples in Mongolia at the time of the revival and also have been supporting the operation of assemblies and the education of lamas, and still do so today. Supporting the monastic community is a way of collecting merit (*buyan khuurakh*, T. *bsod nams sdud pa, dge ba sdud pa*). However, in addition to this, some laypeople also wish to study the teachings and understand it better. Opportunities for this were initially, after the period following the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia, made available, and are continued to be offered, at Buddhist centers founded by foreign organizations. Later Mongolian monasteries and Buddhist centers founded by Mongolians themselves also started to put an emphasis on laypeople's Buddhist education as well. Now, by 2024, Mongolian laypeople have many possibilities for studying Buddhism in detail, either outside the monasteries or in them. In addition to their residing Tibetan masters or their Mongolian teachers offering occasional lessons for laypeople, several of the largest monasteries have also started courses for them. There are also several Buddhist associations and centers, mostly led by an individual Tibetan or Mongolian lamas, offering the same opportunities and even courses. These centers also conduct rituals and offer teachings on special days of the month, as well as occasional empowerments and other events.

For laypeople participating in such rituals in these centers and even at certain events and lectures at monasteries, Tibetan texts of the prayers that are chanted are distributed in Cyrillic transcription to enable them to join in the chanting without knowing Tibetan. This method is sometimes also used in Western Buddhist assemblies as well, if the texts are not recited in the local language. What is a difference is that many regular participants in Mongolia memorize the texts and are able to chant them with the traditional melodies used even in lack of Tibetan language knowledge. This is complemented with detailed explanations of the texts provided both during lessons and also in publications containing translations and added explanations. Many recorded lectures are also available freely online. This is a big change for Mongolian lay Buddhists in the last three decades that had passed on since the revival. Now they really have a wide range of possibilities for studying and understanding the Teachings. Apart from occasional programs, teachings and short courses that include instruction on different meditation methods, various Buddhist texts and practices, Tibetan language, the classical Mongolian script, and the traditional forms of teachings, including empowerments (*wang*, T. *dbang*), oral transmissions (*lün*, T. *lung*), and occasional

teachings by Mongolian or Tibetan lamas, longer or more advanced courses requiring more commitment are also available for laypeople.

The current article concentrates on the usage of *Tshogchen* texts in the framework of courses taught for laypeople run either by monasteries or by individual Dharma centers. This is because I am actively looking for the possible ways of the applicability of these methods in European higher education and for the inclusion of the study of these texts in our teaching system, both in teaching Tibetan language through the texts and in teaching the basics of Tibetan Buddhism. As we mainly need, similarly to the monastic system of Tibetan Buddhism and the courses for laypeople modelled on it, to incorporate these texts at the more beginner levels of Tibetan studies, the example of laypeople's education seems to be more useful and beneficial for my purposes. But before looking at the inclusion and usage of these texts in them, first giving an overview of the different courses available for laypeople in Mongolia today is needed.

### 3.2. Degree Programs and Courses Offered in Monasteries

Institutions of two monasteries, the Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandan (*Öndör geegen Zanabazaryn neremjit (mongolyn) Burkhany Shashny Ikh Surguul'*) and the College of Züün Khüree Dashchoilin (*Züün Khüree Kollej*) were both originally only for the lamas, but their programs have been made open to include laypeople as well.

#### Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandan monastery

Laypeople have been admitted to what is called now the Zanabazar Buddhist University of Gandan (*Öndör geegen Zanabazaryn neremjit Monglyn Burkhany Shashny Ikh Surguul'*) since 1995. The college was opened in 1970 (its name has changed several times since then), with a compulsory syllabus determined at the time by the communist regime. It included communist doctrine and some modern subjects along with limited topics from the traditional monastic education. Of course, the last more than thirty years that had passed on since the revival brought many changes, and now the university has also gained state accreditation.

The curriculum now includes five majors so students can major at the BA level either in philosophy/Buddhist philosophy (*Philosophy/Buddyn gün ukhaan*), linguistics/Tibetan and Sanskrit languages (*Khel shinjlel/Töwöd, Sanskrit khel*), religious studies/rituals (*shashin sudlal/khurlyn zan üil*), fine arts & painting/traditional sculpture (*uran zurag/Ulamjlalt shüten urlal*), or language & literature/scripts & Tibetan language (*Khel uran zokhiol/ekh bichig, Töwöd khel*). The university also has two MA courses by now: language & literature/scripts & Tibetan language (*Khel uran zokhiol/ekh bichig, Töwöd khel*) and philosophy/Buddhist philosophy (*Philosophy/Buddyn gün ukhaan*). Fine arts was originally taught at a separate institution within Gandan, called the "Mongolian Institute of Buddhist Art" (*Mongoliin Burkhany Shashny Urlakhuin Ukhaany Deed Surguul'*) founded in 1993 and led by G. Pürewbat Lama until it was merged with Zanabazar Buddhist College. At the 2023 graduation, degrees in three majors were conferred – philosophy/Buddhist philosophy, linguistics/Tibetan and Sanskrit languages, and religious studies/rituals. At the 2024 graduation degrees in two majors were issued at the BA level – linguistics/Tibetan and Sanskrit languages and fine arts & painting/traditional sculpture.

What is more relevant from the point of view of this article, is that starting in 2014, Gandan has also offered a two-years' evening course (*oroin deed kurs*) to enable laypeople to attend after working hours. In 2024 summer the tenth graduation was held (successfully finishing the study of the subjects Buddhism, Tibetan language and *Lamrim*) and in September the twelfth course began. Each year more and more, reaching by now even sixty, persons have been studying in these courses in two parallel groups. The course was initiated by the Association of Mongolian Believers (*Mongol Süsegtüii Kholboo*) and is run by Gandan University and this organization. The two years' course includes subjects such as Buddhist philosophy; History of Buddhism; *Entering the Bodhisattva Behaviour/Way* (*Bod'sadwyn yawdald orokhui*, T. *spyod 'jug / byang chub sems dpa' i spyod pa la 'jug pa*, S. *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* or *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, by Śāntideva); *Lamrim* (*Bod' möriin zereg*, T. *lam rim* by Tsongkhapa), taught by the new head abbot of Gandategchenlin monastery and Mongolian Buddhists, Geshe Lharampa (*gewsh lkhaaramba*) D. Jawzandorj; Tibetan language and writing; and recitation (*unshlaga*). The lectures are held three times a week. There is also an option for choosing the *Lamrim* studies alone. All are taught by teachers of the Gandan University.

### The College of Züün Khüree Dashchoilin monastery

The College of Züün Khüree Dashchoilin monastery was opened in 1998 and offers two majors. The first is philosophy/Buddhist philosophy. It is supplemented by classes in classical and spoken Tibetan, Sanskrit and Mongolian, and in traditional Mongolian beliefs. The classical Mongolian script (*mongol bichig*), the Soyombo script created by Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar, and the vertical square script (*bosoo dörwöljin*), or Phagpa script (*pagwa*, T. *'phags pa*), created by the Tibetan Phagpa Lama are also taught.

The second major is linguistics/Oriental comparative linguistics/scripts. This major was started in 2002 by Ts. Mönkh-Erdene (1976-2021), a Dashchoilin monk, a calligrapher trained in many scripts, a teacher at the college and, at that time, the head of education at the college. The training was modelled after the so-called "School of the Nine Kinds (of Writings)" (*Yesön züilin surguul*) of the old Züün Khüree, the eastern monastic district. Similar to its predecessor, this major is aimed at preparing students for studying the manuscripts and other sources written in many different scripts. Thus, the students are taught many Indian, Tibetan and Mongolian scripts, which include not only the classical, Soyombo, and square Mongolian scripts, but also the Oirat script (*tod bichig*, "clear script") created by the Oirat Zaya Pandita in 1648. Currently the head of the College is G. Myagmarsüren, and the head of education is B. Naranbat.

For laypeople, there are regular and evening courses. At the regular course, the subjects taught are: Classical Tibetan language, daily chanting recitation (*Tsogchen khurlyn unshlaga*), English, history of Mongolian Buddhism, Written Mongolian, Tibetan calligraphy, Tibetan grammar, reasoning (*uchir shaltgaany ukhaan*), and *Lamrim* (*Bod' möriin zereg*). At the evening course, however, only two subjects are taught: Tibetan language, and *Lamrim*. All these courses are free of charge. The monastery runs other shorter courses as well, such as several levels of Tibetan language courses and classical Mongolian calligraphy or training in the Soyombo writing system in addition to the teachings given at annual festival days or on other occasions.

### 3.3. Courses in Buddhist Centers for Laypeople

Several Buddhist centers offer two to three-year-long certificate courses for laypeople. In most of them, Tibetan language and translation is taught as part of the curriculum or separately. Some such courses went online during the covid period and later have remained available also in online form for those living in the countryside or abroad. Tibetan language courses taught in Mongolia always include memorizing and reciting the texts, starting with shorter basic prayers and daily recitation materials as people always approach the learning of this language from religious reasons and as their teachers are lamas themselves applying, even if today in a modernized and partly online form, the methods they themselves encountered in their own monastic training. Using *Tsogchen* texts in their curriculum, the methodology of these courses is of my main interest.

#### Jebtsundampa Khutagt Center

Jebtsundampa Khutagt Center (*Jawzandamba Khutagt Töw*), founded in 2004, offers a two-years' course for laypeople. The first course was started in 2016, and the eighth class was graduated in 2023. The course is held in the evenings three times a week. The subjects include basic Buddhist teachings, Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan language and writing, and Tibetan translation. This latter entails translating about ten basic Tibetan Buddhist prayers and texts as well as memorizing and reciting them by heart. Other subjects include Śāntideva's *Engaging in Bodhisattva Behavior/Way* (*Bod'sadwyn yawdald orokhui*, T. *spyod 'jug / byang chub sems dpa'i spyod pa la 'jug pa*, S. *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* or *Bodhicaryāvatāra*), Buddhist philosophy and debate, and also meditation – interestingly, based on the mindfulness meditation (*sanamsaryin byasalgal*) method of Oxford University.

The main teacher is Geshe (*gewsh*, T. *dge bshes*) D. Nyamsambuu, who was educated for ten years at Drepung Monastery in India and then studied in Great Britain, where he graduated in Religious Studies. He teaches meditation. Geshe (*gewsh*) Luwsangenden (Classical Tibetan, Tibetan grammar, recitation and translation, *ner orchuulga*, of basic prayers) and Kachu (*gawj*, T. *dka' bcu*) Nanzadorj (biography of Śākyamuni Buddha and *Lamrim*) also teach at the courses. Lately Spoken Tibetan lessons and Buddhist philosophy and debate lessons (*shalgadag ukhaan* or *düira*, T. *bsdus grwa*, 'the collected topics' or set theory, the basic texts on the Buddhist study of logic) were also added taught by the Tibetan Geshe Lharampa (*gewsh lkhaaramba*, T. *dge bshes lha ram pa*) Tüwdenchoisan.

Currently, as of 2024, this center has two Tibetan lamas from Jey College of Sera Monastery (T. *se ra byes grwa tshang*) in India, Geshe Lharampa Tüwdennamdag and the beforementioned Geshe Lharampa Tüwdenchoisan, who often teach on the annual and monthly festival days as well. There are also shorter courses on different types of meditation and different teachings held by the Mongolian or these Tibetan teachers. The center is also widely involved in charity.

#### Chukhagt Erdene Center

Chukhagt Erdene Center (*Chukhagt Erdene Töw*), or Chukhagt Erdene Cultural Center (*Chukhagt Erdene Soyol Gegeerliin Töw*) – which translates as “Supreme

Jewel” Cultural Center – is a relatively newly established, but very active Buddhist center. It was founded in 2017 and was officially registered by the state in 2020. It was established and is run by B. Darambazar, a monk from Dashchoilin who also worked for the Kalachakra Culture Center (*Tsogt Tsagiin Khürden Soyolyn Töw*), which is a translation center for translating and publishing in modern Mongolian the entire Kangyur (*ganjuur*, T. *bka'-'gyur*, the translated words of the Buddha) and Tengyur (*danjuur*, T. *bstan-'gyur*, the translated Indian treatises to the Buddha’s teachings) and making them available to all interested persons. Chukhagt Erdene Center runs a three-year *Lamrim* (*Bod' möriin zereg*, T. *lam rim*,) course, started in 2020, with the first class graduated in 2023. This was an extensive course closing with a written examination, based on which diplomas were issued. Lamrim at the course is taught by B. Darambazar himself, other teachers run the Buddhist philosophy and debate lessons (*choir*, T. *chos grwa*) and the Tibetan language classes. This means that the classes run three days a week. In addition, B. Darambazar conducts extensive research and has published several books, among them translations. Other shorter courses are also offered, such as 45-day meditation courses and other teachings. Apart from the courses, the center, similar to all others, holds regular practices and conducts rituals on special Buddhist days of the month.

### **Buman Khand Kholboo**

Buman Khand Kholboo, or Mongol Buddhist Emegteichuudiin Buman Khand Kholboo, the Association of the Hundred Thousand Dakinis (of Mongolian Women), is another center for the education of laypeople, especially women. Dakinis (*khand(ma)*, T. *mkha' 'gro ma*, S. *dākinī*) are realized beings in female form who help practitioners to attain enlightenment. The center is run by Günzee Chimed, who had studied with the Ninth Bogd in Dharamsala. She is a practitioner of *chö* (*zod*, T. *gcod* or *lüijin*, T. *lus sbyin*, offering the body), which she also learned from the Ninth Bogd. She is also a famous singer and has made several recordings of Buddhist chants. The courses here include ones on Tārā practices (*Dar' ekh*, T. *sgrol ma*, S. Tārā), including a one year course, and on *chö* (three years, one year), as well as on Tibetan language at different levels. The newest courses combine three different types of lessons, where Ch. Günzee herself teaches Tārā practices; another teacher Written Mongolian and Tibetan language, including reading and translation of different prayers; and the third teacher, who is an *agramba* (T. *sngags rams pa*, a degree in Tantric studies) teaches Tantric studies. Ceremonies are also held at the festival days, as usual.

There are a number of other courses run by monasteries. For example, Naropa Institute (Naroba Institut) also has a two years course by now where Buddhist philosophy, psychology and meditation is taught, but where Tibetan language is not a compulsory but an elective subject. Deed Bod' monastery also have different longer and shorter courses on meditation and Lamrim, as well as several of the foreign or Mongolian Dharma centers, but, Tibetan language not being taught in them, these usually are out of the scope of the topic of the present article dealing with the usage of Tsogchen texts in the courses and in teaching the Tibetan language. There are also a few possibilities for Buddhist study in the countryside, or people can join most of the courses online that are held in the capital. All in all, the possibilities for laypeople to

study Buddhist theory and practice and even the Tibetan ritual language are manifold in contemporary Mongolia with an astonishing number of people attending these courses, so I personally think, they certainly be a role model for us in this aspect.

### 3.4. Teaching Tibetan Language, Recitation, Terminology and Translation at These Courses Through These Texts

Due to usually being incorporated into the curriculum of more complex courses on Buddhism, the Classical Tibetan language is taught at these courses, with the aim of enabling the students to more easily follow the recitations at different teachings and empowerments, possibly from Tibetan language and not the usual Cyrillic transcriptions, and to enrich their knowledge with the ability of reciting texts in the original language as well as a better understanding of them. Some of the courses however incorporate some Spoken Tibetan as well, mainly phrases for conversation.

In general, these courses use a totally different method from the western scientific and grammar based methods only gradually taking students to reading full sentences and then text excerpts. During the first weeks, basically the Tibetan alphabet, the letter combinations, the syllable structure and the pronunciation is taught. The students then practice the pronunciation by reading out the most basic *Tshogchen* texts at the lessons. So, even for mastering pronunciation, immediately these texts in their fullness are used. When an adequate level of pronunciation is reached through practice, recitation and memorization (*unshlaga*) of these texts comes next. There is typically no language training at these basic levels through grammar explanations and practicing grammar points through simple word structures then through exercises and simple sentences as done usually in the gradual western language teaching methods. Later on translation and terminology (*ner orchuulga*, *ner tomiyo*) of the memorized texts is explained, but even this is done without teaching structured grammar beforehand. Grammar is basically explained through the texts themselves and through their sentences and word structures.

Memorization of the texts can only be done to the extent students are able or capable to, as usually students at these courses come from different backgrounds and age groups and are mostly working full time. This also limits the level of their acquisition of the Tibetan language, though there are also students very much devoted to learning. This is also somewhat parallel to the circumstances of the Tibetan language specialization at our Institute (Dharma Gate Buddhist College in Hungary, Budapest), as we also have all age groups and most of the students are from the evening course, working otherwise fulltime.

What relates, considering the content of these courses, most closely to the topic of this current article, the most frequently used *Tsogchen* texts at these courses are the followings:

- *Itgel* (or *Jawdo*, T. *skyabs 'gro (sems bskyed)*), the Gelug version of „Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta,” being thus the starting first text in many textbooks.
- *Gandanlkhawja(ma)* (T. *dga' ldan lha brgya ma*), “One Hundred Deities of Tuṣita,” the prayer of requests to Tsongkhapa, text of Tsongkhapa guruyoga, and text in the framework of which the Migcema prayer is recited. This text has its main importance as it is a basis of the guruyoga practice (*bagshiig takhikh yos* or *lamyn neldzsor*, T. *bla ma'i rnal 'byor*).

- *Yondonshirjürma* (T. *yon tan gzhir gyur ma*), “The Foundation of All Good Qualities” prayer of 14 stanzas. This text is especially important as the basis for *Lamrim* (T. *lam rim*) studies, „the Gradual Way (to Enlightenment)”, being a short summary of that text, written also by Tsongkhapa himself.
- a longer text, *Lamyn chodow* (T. *bla ma mchod pa* (*'i cho ga*, S. Gurupūja), “Offering to the guru,” by the first Panchen Lama Luwsan Chojijjalsan (Lozang cshötyi gyelchen, T. blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan, 1570-1662, the master of the 5<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama) used in the Gelug school for the guruyoga practice.
- *Nogoon Dar' Ekh*, Praise of the Green Tārā (T. *sgrol ma*), or the “Praises to the Twenty-one Tārās” (T. *rje btsun 'phags pa sgrol ma la bstod pa, sgrol ma la phyag 'tshal nyi shu rtsa gcig gis bstod pa*).
- *Lamtsowa namsüm* or *Möriin gurwan erkhem* (T. *lam (gyi) gtso bo rnam gsum*), „The three principal aspects of the path” by Tsongkhapa
- *Jinlawtsogzol* (T. *byin rlabs mchog stsol*), „Bestowing the Highest Blessings” by Öndör geegen
- *Mandal örgökh* (S. *maṇḍala*), Mandala offering
- *Dashchiiraw san* (T. *bkra shis char 'bebs kyi bsangs*), “Smoke Offering Causing the Rainfall of Auspiciousness” by the 4<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama
- *Tsagaan shükhert*, the Praise of Sitāpatrā or the goddess with the white umbrella (*dugar*; T. *gdugs dkar*)

As we have seen, several of these are special Gelug texts, while there are also some texts among them with special interest to the Mongols.

In Mongolia, when there is a possibility later during the studies, for intermediate level translations a text collection for studying translation and terminology called “*Neriin arwan бага*,” “Ten Small Texts for Translation”<sup>7</sup> is used. It is usually studied by Mongolian lamas before starting at the advanced level the translation of longer texts such as *Lamrim*, Tsongkhapa biography, Milarepa bibliography, Entering the Bodhisattva Behaviour/Way by Śāntideva (*Jonjüg* or *Bodśadwyn yawdald orokhui*, T. *spyod 'jug / (byang chub sems dpa'i) spyod pa la 'jug pa*, S. *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* or *Bodhicaryāvatāra*), *Togmar lojon* (T. *thog mar blo sbyong*, „The Initial Training for the Mind” by spyan snga blo gros rgyal mtshan, 1402 – 1472)<sup>8</sup> etc. These advanced texts are also called by the summary name „*Neriin arwan Ikh*”, that is, „Ten Big Texts for Translation.” However, courses for laypeople usually do not reach even this intermediate level language knowledge of the “*Neriin arwan бага*,” due to their limited scope and time available and they remain restricted to the study of a number of *Tsogchen* texts.

<sup>7</sup> Soronzonbold, B. (ed.), *bslab bya bcu'i phyogs bsgrigs rin chen 'khor lo bzhugs so [Collection of Ten Topics/Lessons. The Jewel Wheel.]. Neriin arwan бага. Ner orchuulgad suraltsakh garyn awlaga [Ten Small Texts for Translation. Handbook for Studying Translation]*. Ulaanbaatar: 2022 (third edition).

<sup>8</sup> *Byang chub lam gyi rim pa la blo sbyong ba la thog mar blo sbyong ba chos kyi sgo 'byed ces bya ba bzhugs so*, “Opening the Door To the Dharma, The Initial Mind Training for Those Who Practice Mind-Training According to the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment.” This work is devoted to the *Lamrim* (*lam rim*), “Stages of the Path,” and *Lajong* (*blo sbyong*), “Mind-Training” and includes contemplations that are to be practiced prior to engaging in *Lamrim* meditation.

#### **4. Implementing these Practices in Teaching Western Students – My Own Practices**

My aim is to combine theory and practice in my lessons and seminars. These two are usually strictly kept apart or handled separately in the west, the first, the scientific study of Buddhism and its languages usually taught in higher education, and often even text translation seminars are executed in a way as if practice would not be the essence behind these texts; while the second usually practiced at the different Dharma centers at their teachings and practice occasions, in which case often the texts used at their rituals are translated to the local language from English as a mediating language and handled as if the scientific study of the languages of Buddhism or the scientific study of Buddhism would not be a useful tool even for the purposes of practice. Of course, there are many so called scholar-practitioners as well combining the two areas and advancing research themselves, but institutions where these two areas are handled and included in the course of studies in an interconnected form are still rare. My idea is that these two can be combined even in the framework of official higher education, and students can profit from this. As part of this approach, I emphasize that when introducing the Tibetan form of Buddhism, its texts or even its sacred language we should follow, from the point of view of textual studies, the same sequence and order of studies that the education of young novices and laypeople follow in countries and areas of Tibetan Buddhism, and the basis of knowledge we deliver to them should be gaining a thorough acquaintance of these basic texts, as it is the basis in the traditional methods. Our institution provides a most suitable background to this method.

##### **4.1. Background – Our Institution**

Teaching at the Dharma Gate Buddhist College (A Tan Kapuja Buddhista Főiskola),<sup>9</sup> Budapest, Hungary, the only accredited Buddhist College in Europe, as already mentioned, my current aim is when studying the methods used by Mongolian lamas is to utilize them in teaching western students in Europe. In the history of the spreading of Tibetan Buddhism in Asia Mongols (of Outer- and Inner-Mongolia) are the biggest and most important country or population where its teachings and methods were adapted in circumstances of population with a mother-tongue different than the ritual language, Tibetan. Groups such as the Buryats, Kalmyks or Tuvas in Russia modelled their monastic system and traditions on their methods of adaptation and monastic education. This is why taking Mongolian methods of today as a role model can be useful in our different modern settings as well. The main distinctive feature of our College is that it combines Buddhist theory and practice in its teaching objectives. This is unique in Europe. The College is maintained and run by Dharma Gate Buddhist Church (A Tan Kapuja Buddhista Egyház), which is an umbrella organization of several Buddhist organizations or churches of different Buddhist traditions.<sup>10</sup>

The College has BA (3 years) and MA (2 years) courses in “Buddhist theory and practice,” as well as other types of courses and trainings. At the BA and MA courses lectures, seminars and as the third type of lessons, practice covers all schools of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana). The BA course is available in 4 forms: as a regular course with lessons on weekdays; as an evening course where lessons are held on every second weekend; as a correspondence course with online lessons

<sup>9</sup> Webpage: <https://www.tkbh.hu/>.

<sup>10</sup> Webpage: <https://tkbe.hu/>.

and several weekend teachings in one of the countryside teaching and meditational buildings of the Dharma Gate Buddhist Church; and, as the newest possibility offered, as a fully online course with online materials (videos, voice recordings and written materials for each course or unit of study) and a few exclusively online consultations. Offering the BA course in four different forms currently (as of 2024) means an annually 90-100 new students at the regular course, 35-40 students at the evening course, and around 10-15 students at each of the correspondence and online courses.

Students come from all ages (aged approximately 18-70) and from different backgrounds: some are already Buddhist practitioners in one of the various Buddhist traditions who wish to deepen their knowledge or get an organized overview of the other Buddhist traditions as well; while others are only interested and have yet no background in Buddhism. Their qualifications and thus their academic backgrounds are diverse, too, as, especially at the evening, correspondence and online course forms, there are many students already having BA and MA degrees (some even more degrees) or a PhD in other fields of studies or they come from different professions, while others do not have any academic backgrounds at all. All of these diversities determine their exact areas of interest during their studies and also have an effect on their different abilities for learning. I find this diverse background of students parallel to what teachers in Mongolia teaching at the different courses for laypeople encounter, so this is again a point confirming the useability of their methods at our institution.

Teachers of our College also come from different backgrounds, mirroring the unity of “theory and practice” in the teaching objectives. Consequently, some are masters from the different traditions or had once gained their degrees in our College, while others have scientific background, for example in linguistic studies of different Asian languages of Buddhism, or philosophy, cultural anthropology, pedagogy and so on (also we have teachers with degrees or PhD in mathematics, physics, Egyptology, legal studies, and even garden engineering). The author of this article herself is a Tibetologist and Mongolist with a PhD gained in 2009, and with a strong connection to Mongolia researching the Mongolian form of Buddhism since 1999, its history, monastic and ceremonial system, revival and current state, monastic life once and today including interviews with old lamas who survived the 1937 purges, the special characteristics of the revived Mongolian Buddhist ceremonial system, its ceremonies and ritual texts, among them for example the *Tsam* (T. ‘*chams*) dance or the Tibetan language after-death rituals for the deceased and the bereaved, with an emphasis on the research of daily chanting textbooks in the latest years.

Students at the BA course can chose from four specializations form the second semester on: Study of Religions, Buddhist meditation, Tibetan language, and Pāli language. The language specializations are less popular due to the hard work and regular study needed for acquiring these languages at an adequate level and due to the fact that most of our students are working full-time while studying at the evening course at the weekends. This means that at the Tibetan language specialization we only have around 4 new students annually. However, many more study the basics of the language at the elective introductory course in the first semester of their first year, some participated at the Tibetan recitation elective course, while some others do not study the language but are practitioners in one of the Buddhist Centers of Tibetan

Buddhist schools present in Hungary, or are in other ways connected to the Tibetan form of Buddhism. As during the BA and MA courses all traditions are represented in the studies, all students study about Tibetan Buddhism at compulsory courses such as Introduction to the texts of Tibetan Buddhism (Tibetan Egzegegesis) 1-2, History of Tibet and Inner Asia, Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy, Tantra in Tibet, Tibetan meditation, etc., both in theory and practice. But all in all, generally, due to the fact that the curriculum covers all traditions, relatively less courses deal with the Tibetan form. Therefore, students do not get such deep understanding of the Tibetan form of Buddhism itself as students at other universities at the Tibetan majors, or Tibetan Buddhism oriented Buddhist Studies programs elsewhere. This means that at my lessons and at the Tibetan specialization, to begin with, the basics are needed to be introduced.

This structure of the studies is described here as a background for the part describing the possible ways of utilizing during the studies the *Tsogchen* texts, the daily chanting texts being the most basic prayers of Tibetan Buddhism, and the teaching methods of Mongolian lamas, as here I give an insight into the practices I use in our College as an example. This structure of the studies at our College described above means that I myself have two different types of lectures and seminars: one or more lectures or seminars on different aspects Tibetan Buddhism in general (currently taught courses: Introduction to the texts of Tibetan Buddhism (Tibetan Egzegegesis), Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, other courses taught in the past: Tibetan Rituals) for full classes meaning around 35-40 students at the general course, 90 at the evening course, 10-10 at the correspondence and online courses, which means people without any study of the Tibetan language itself; and several lessons and seminars at the Tibetan language specialization, where a few students study the language and reach the level of translating short texts by the second semester of the second year or by the first semester of the third year. These two types of classes — for big classes of students without the knowledge of the Tibetan language itself and for small classes of students studying the Tibetan language — mean two different kinds for the possible utilization of these texts in the curriculum. Therefore, in the followings I will show examples of using the *Tsogchen* texts in the framework of these two different types of courses. In addition, I started elective Tibetan recitation (*unshlaga*) seminars as well (which might be continued in an even more free form in the future), based on these texts, which are open for either students at the Tibetan specialization and for students not studying the Tibetan language. I will summarize my experiences with this third kind of course and third type of the usage of these texts with European students as well.

#### **4.2. Usage of the Texts at Lessons Aimed at the Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism Through its Texts (for Students not Studying the Tibetan Language)**

The lecture “Introduction to the texts of Tibetan Buddhism (Tibetan Egzegegesis)” is basically an introduction to the basics of the Tibetan form of Buddhism and its terminology through texts to whole classes of 35-40 people at the regular course, 90 at the evening course, and 10-15 at each of the correspondence and online courses (the numbers are given as of 2024). At the same time, it is designed in a form that the basics of Tibetan language, its main characteristics, its writing system and alphabet and the basics of its pronunciation rules are also explained, giving an insight into the nature

of learning and acquiring this language, as a way to prepare students for the Tibetan specialization to start with some background knowledge, and trying to advertise the specialization itself.

At this course I use a text based approach and introduce different notions, terminology and teachings of Tibetan Buddhism based on these basic texts from *Tsogchen* textbooks, which we use, given the students are in their very first semester at our College, and most of them will not even enroll at the Tibetan language specialization, in Hungarian translation. The translations are my own translations with detailed terminology and explanations in notes. In the explanations I follow the way my Mongolian lama teacher explained once when I studied most of these texts in the 2000's in Mongolia and several of them in the following decades with him, or at other Dharma teachings where explanations of one of these texts and the underlying practice and visualization were given, and the explanations available to me online in form of videos of teachings for example, and as studied during my fieldworks aimed at the usage of these texts in laypeople's education. In short, the explanations given follow the living tradition of traditional Buddhist teachings. This is combined in the notes with linguistic explanations of the Tibetan terms and Sanskrit parallels and any additional information from available scientific publications of the given text.

The lecture is in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the 1<sup>st</sup> year. Consequently, students have yet no background in Tibetan Buddhism, and a little, or in the case of most of them, very limited general knowledge of Buddhism. Therefore, as they meet these texts without background knowledge, a lot of explanations are needed for each term new to them (e.g. *yadam*, T. *yi dam*; *khandma*, T. *mkha' 'gro ma*, S. *ḍākinī* etc.), and I also use pictures and videos and other additional available materials apart from strictly studying the texts themselves. The lessons cover a lot of connected terminology in Tibetan and especially in Sanskrit, being in itself a big challenge for most of our new students, but never extend to the grammatical or linguistic study or explanation of the Tibetan texts themselves – everything is done through the Hungarian translations. However, this introductory course has a Pāli language parallel at our College in the same very first semester. These two courses were included in the curriculum with the aim of giving an insight to these languages of Buddhism and their texts for the students in order to enable them to choose the specialization in these languages from the second semester. Therefore, I usually include one or two introductory lessons to the Tibetan language as well before the study of a collection of these basic texts, but still the main course of the study is centered around getting to know the basics of Tibetan Buddhism through these texts.

I chose the texts we study in the framework of these lessons mainly from Gelug textbooks, but include some basic Nyingma texts as well. Texts of the other main schools of Tibetan Buddhism are left out due to the shortness of the course being only one semester, but in some cases, I also include texts for which Hungarian translations are available through one of the different Buddhist Centers present in Hungary, for example, Drikung Kagyü (T. *'bri gung bka' brgyud*).<sup>11</sup> The main reason for using mainly Gelug texts is that this is the tradition I am the most familiar with through my

<sup>11</sup> This is due to the fact that some of their special prayers are available in good quality Hungarian translations from their webpage, while the translations of other centers are of various quality if looked at from a translator's point of view, as are sometimes translated from English, not the Tibetan source-language.

studies and stays in Mongolia, and, also, I consider it even more important to use these and teach about these texts as currently there are no Gelug temples or Gelug Dharma centers in Hungary at all.<sup>12</sup> The list of texts I include in these courses every year are as follows:

- Taking Refuge (*Itgel or Jawdo*, T. *skyabs 'gro (sems bskyed)*)
- Mandala offering (*mandal örgökh*, S. *maṇḍala*)
- *Gandanlkhawja(ma)* (T. *dga'ldan lha brgya ma*), “One Hundred Deities of Tuṣita,” prayer to Tsongkhapa
- The short Migcema prayer of Tsongkhapa (*Migzem*, T. *dmigs brtse ma*, “Loving Kindness”) usually recited in the 4 or 5 lines versions (with a 9 lines version also)
- The *Ganloma* praise of *Mañjuśrī* (T. *gang blo ma*), “Praise to the Intelligent One”
- *Tsigdün soldew* (T. *tshig bdun gsol 'debs*), “the Seven Line Vajra Prayer” of Padmasambhava
- *Düsüzüm szangye* (T. *dus gsum sangs rgyas*) “Buddhas of the three times,” also known as the “Six line Vajra Prayer” of Padmasambhava (*tsigdug soldew*, T. *tshig drug gsol 'debs*)
- *Hiimoriin san* (or *lungta san*, T. *rlung rta'i sangs*), “Smoke offering for strengthening vitality (and good fortune)”

Due to the fact that even the most basic terms or terminology must be newly introduced to the students, much time is needed for explanations. Sö unfortunately there is no place for including more texts, this can be done only in the framework of additional optional courses or in the framework of an optional Tibetan recitation course.

The course does not cover any text or material in Tibetan language itself, only an introduction of the language at the very beginning of the course, but I try to introduce the basics of Tibetan recitation even at this course through the most basic four-lined stanzas of Taking refuge (*itgel or jawdo*, T. *skyabs 'gro*), Generating bodhicitta (*bod' setgel üüsgekh*, T. *sems bskyed*), the Four Immeasurables (*dörwön tsaglaashgüi*, T. *tshad med bzhi*), and Migcema (*Migzem*, T. *dmigs brtse ma*) for which I provide them the pronunciation of these in Latin letters, as done in Mongolia in Cyrillic for devotees lacking the knowledge of Tibetan language and in Dharma centers in the west for practitioners. As the texts studied in this course are widely used and recited texts in the Tibetan traditions, we often watch videos of them as well in which they are chanted in different melodies.

### 4.3. Usage of the Texts in the Tibetan Language Specialization

In the very first semester there is an optional course, introduction to Tibetan language (and parallelly an introduction to Pāli language for students interested in that language), after which students wishing to enter the Tibetan specialization must take an entrance exam based on that. The Tibetan specialization itself starts at the second semester of the first year of the BA course and runs for 2 and a half years.

<sup>12</sup> The Buddha Dharma Mongolyn Soyolyn Töw or Buddha Dharma Mongolian Cultural Center run by Gandantegchenlin monastery of Ulaanbaatar operated in Budapest for several years, but currently it is not working.

There are also a few students who continue their studies at the MA level as well at the specialization. On both BA and MA levels the curriculum includes seminars, where we read and translate different texts, and lectures on grammar.

During the introductory course in the first semester students learn the Tibetan alphabet, reading and writing, together with the pronunciation and transcription to Wylie transliteration system. So they became able to read out and transcribe to Latin letters any Tibetan text. In the second semester of the first year, while they study the basics of grammar parallelly at another lesson, I usually teach through basic four lined stanzas taken from basic prayers, such as Taking refuge, Generating bodhicitta, short mandala offering, ablution offering, long-life prayer of the Dalai Lama, dedication prayers, verses of auspiciousness, short praises and so on. Grammar points not yet covered at the grammar lessons are introduced through the texts. At this point we are not able to study prayers in their fullness, but even through these short stanzas students already get connected to the actual ritual language and terminology. In this, and even in the next semester, before we start the translation of longer, full texts, memorizing short text extracts together with their meaning, their translation and grammar points is part of my methods used. One of my colleagues has a more gradual grammar centered method, and thanks to this, has published a Tibetan Grammar and a Tibetan Grammar Exercise Book in Hungarian<sup>13</sup> which is used at our College. Her methods, mirrored well in the 300-pages exercise book with many drilling exercises are much closer to the traditional European language teaching methods, and her choices of texts she uses at her text reading seminars also mirror her different fields of expertise, differing thus from traditional monastic texts and prayers, but the presentation of grammar in her books follows the Tibetan grammar system, as taught also in Mongolia.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year, after learning the alphabet, pronunciation, the basics of grammar and getting acquainted with short ritual text excerpts, we start translating prayers, starting with the same texts already studied in Hungarian translation (at the above described lecture “Introduction to Tibetan Buddhist texts”). This is important as our students, due to the fact that their education at our College includes all traditions of Buddhism, have less background knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism as for example, students at the Tibetan majors of western universities. Therefore, by starting translation with the texts the meaning and explanations of which they already studied we can make much quicker progress in the language itself. This is followed by additional texts according to the possibilities. Some examples of additional texts we usually translate in the last several years at these seminars are:

- *Mandal örgökh*, Mandala Offering
- *Nogoon Dar’ Ekh*, Praise of the Green Tārā (T. *sgrol ma*), or the Praises to the Twenty-one Tārās
- *Yondonshirjürma* (T. *yon tan gzhir gyur ma*), “The Foundation of All Good Qualities” by Tsongkhapa
- *Jiwshig* (T. *spyi bshags*), “General Confession”
- *Barchad lamsel* (T. *bar cad lam sel*), prayer to Padmasambhava titled “The Prayer

<sup>13</sup> Kuzder. Rita. *Klasszikus tibeti nyelv-tankönyv*. Budapest, A Tan Kapuja Buddhista Főiskola: 2024; Kuzder. Rita. *Klasszikus tibeti feladatgyűjtemény*. Budapest, A Tan Kapuja Buddhista Főiskola: 2024.

Which Removes All Obstacles from the Path”

- *Sambalhündew* (T. *bsam pa lhun grub*), prayer to Padmasambhava titled “The Prayer That Spontaneously Fulfils All Wishes”

Of course, Tibetan language training at higher education level must include the study and translation of other kinds of texts as well, so other genres are studied, too, for example a variety of texts written in prose such as biographies, historic texts, commentaries, etc., especially as there are currently two other teachers at the Tibetan language specialization apart from me specializing in other topics and text types in their researches and teaching. However, language training through these other text types do not belong to the topic of the current article concentrating on the study of how the daily chanting texts can be made part of the curriculum for European students. Currently I myself concentrate on including *Tsogchen* texts and prayers at the text readings and translation seminars held by me personally, and use them incorporated at the text-based grammar lectures as well, supplemented by commentaries to some of them and texts of other genres (mainly bibliographies and extracts of works from famous Tibetan masters) at the MA level, while the same groups of students meet parallelly other text types and genres at the seminars of the other two Tibetan language teachers.

#### 4.4. Using the Texts in Tibetan Recitation (*Unshlaga*) Seminars

Based on these texts, in the form of an elective course, there is possibility to practice Tibetan recitation as well, which are open for either students at the Tibetan specialization and also for students not studying the Tibetan language. This elective course might be turned into recitation occasions in near future, open to anyone. Consequently, we have to use the texts in Latin letters transcription though the original Tibetan texts are also given in Tibetan letters as well for those who have acquired reading and pronouncing it, and the main aim is to enable all participating students to recite the texts together with proper pronunciation. However, as recitation without understanding what is behind is only one level, I provide students with word-by-word explanations of each line, including words, grammatical structures and connected terminology and notions, in addition to the translation of the given text also provided. This is also useful for those who can only follow the recitation from the transcription in Latin letters, as understanding the meaning of the words and lines enhances the memorization of the texts. After this, we practice reciting the texts a lot repetitively at our lessons together. This is similar to when Mongolian laypeople without Tibetan language knowledge learn to recite from Cyrillic transcription, which are supplemented by a Mongolian translation of the given text, and perhaps additional explanations, and also similar to the methods used by Mongolian lamas at the different courses for laypeople, where, as soon as the students have acquired the Tibetan letters and Tibetan pronunciation, they immediately start to learn through these texts: first only practicing pronunciation, then getting the word-by-word translation explained to them, thus also pieces of grammar introduced through the texts.

In Hungary, there are several schools of Tibetan Buddhism present, and in these temples or Dharma centers of course there are regular ceremonies, practice occasions, meditation sessions, and teachings. Practitioners participating at their events do also

the required chantings together but most of these are in Hungarian translation, with only several stanzas or parts in Tibetan. Our recitation practice occasions are centered exclusively around reciting all texts in original Tibetan, in the traditional way, while I provide some linguistic background and explanations for the proper understanding of the meaning of them, too. Also, as there are no Gelug temples or centers in Hungary, I myself started these recitation practices as a way of having a group where at least, in lack of Gelug centers, we can practice the recitation of Gelug textbook texts regularly. We already had our first bigger event in the framework of which recitation of Buddhist texts were executed in Pāli, Japanese, Chinese, Korean and Tibetan, whereas all participants were invited to join in the recitation in all of these languages. This hopefully will grow into regular conjoined events with other teachers of our College and the practice group of Japanese, Chinese and Korean chanting lead by one of them.

### Conclusion

The first part of my article dealt with *Tsogchen* textbooks in general and the specialities and special texts of Mongolian textbooks, while in the second part I explored the methods how the texts of these are used in monastic and lay education in Mongolia which I studied with the primary aim of utilizing them in teaching at a Buddhist College in Europe. Now that Tibetan language and Buddhism is not only widely taught in the west at various universities but also widely practiced for decades, we can learn and utilize much from the adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism in the history of Mongolia if we are open to consider their different experiences gained during the centuries that had passed on since Buddhism was first introduced to their areas in different waves, during the revival after 1990, and also their modern methods utilized today.<sup>14</sup> In my personal opinion, the experience, example and teaching methods of Mongolian Buddhist teachers can also be adapted in the teaching of western students or rather, can be adapted to the needs of western students. This later covers two main interconnected areas, whereas we can learn from their traditional methods for teaching the classical Tibetan language to Mongolians, nowadays also including laypeople; as well as from their ways of teaching Buddhism through these basic Buddhist prayers and texts to them. My experience presented above and my conclusion is that the teaching methods of Mongolian Buddhist lamas in these two above areas dealt with in my article can be adapted for western students, and this can be done even in the frameworks of higher education in institutions where Buddhist studies, especially the study of Tibetan Buddhism, include not only theory but also practice and where these Buddhist studies and Tibetan language teaching is interconnected. This method basically means that we

<sup>14</sup> I totally agree with the words of Dr. Alexander Berzin, who emphasized that the experiences of the Mongols in how they adapted Tibetan Buddhism to their country can be taken as a role model in the west today, and my additional personal opinion is that we can utilize their methods in language teaching and in teaching Buddhism through texts as well: “Mongolia was the first country to which the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism spread and was translated. There is a great deal that can be learned from the example of this experience. For instance, there is much discussion in foreign countries about whether Sanskrit terms should be used in translations, whether rituals should be chanted and debates held in Tibetan or in translation, whether the monks' robes can be modified, whether the medical and astrological systems can have further modern developments, and so on. The experiences of the Mongolians with these questions is invaluable for helping other cultures face the same issues.” Dr. Alexander Berzin, *The Adaptation of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia*, <https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/history-culture/buddhism-in-mongolia/the-adaptation-of-tibetan-buddhism-in-mongolia> [last checked 2024-12-07].

teach the Tibetan language through texts, basic prayers that are usually chanted daily in the different traditions. By this method we provide an insight into the basic Buddhist terminology and a deeper understanding of Tibetan Buddhist theory and practice at the same time, which are more easily missed or delayed using the traditional western gradual grammar-based methods. This method at the same time follows the way and order in which young novices themselves meet the texts. Of course, western standards and higher education curricula require the teaching of structured grammar separately from the very beginning, but this can also be complemented by or practiced through texts starting with four-line stanzas, and gradually introduced longer texts.

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