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*Padmasambhava's Travel to the North:
The Pilgrimage to the Monastery of the Caves and the Old Schools of
Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia*¹

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In the late 16th century, the ascendant Gelugpa (dGe lugs pa) school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by the reformer Tsong kha pa (1357-1419), took a firm hold in Mongolia.² With the support of various Mongol *qans* and, from the 17th century onwards, the patronage of the Manchu dynasty, the Gelugpas gained a quasi-monopoly over Mongolia and the Tibeto-Mongol monasteries of China proper. The other schools, such as the Sakyapas (Sa skya pa), the Karmapas (Karma pa), or the Nyingmapas (rNying ma pa) seem to have vanished, overwhelmed by the progression of the Gelugpa “orthodoxy”. It is thus commonly known that Mongolia has been, since the mid-17th century, a Gelugpa stronghold.

Another particularity of the Mongol Buddhist institution was its dependence on the great Tibetan and Chinese centres of Tibetan Buddhism: the highest academic degrees could only be obtained in Kumbum (sKu 'bum) and Labrang (Bla brang) monasteries in Amdo (A mdo), Beijing and Lhasa. Not only members of the religious elite, but also ordinary devotees had to travel beyond the Mongol sphere in order to further their religious practice. Rather than developing important pilgrimage sites at home the Mongols preferred to visit Wutai Shan in China (Shanxi) or the famous monasteries or sacred sites of Tibet, especially Kumbum and the holy city of Lhasa.³ This was not owing to any lack of interest on the part of Tibeto-Mongol Buddhism in the creation of sacred places in the territory it “conquered”. On the contrary, the importance of local pilgrimages is a common feature of the whole Tibetan Buddhist world. Over the last millennium, an extensive Buddhist pilgrimage network has developed throughout Tibet and the Himalayan border regions under its cultural influence. Mongolia thus appears as an exception in the Tibetan Buddhist cultural

¹ I would like to thank Agata Bareja-Starzynska, Anne-Marie Blondeau, Katia Buffetrille, Marie-Dominique Even, Vincent Goossaert, Corneille Jest, Hanna Havnevik, and Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz for their insightful suggestions and corrections. Their assistance does not imply that they share my conclusions, and any errors are my sole responsibility.

² The term Mongolia, if not otherwise specified, refers here to the historical and cultural area that includes both present-day Inner Mongolia (or Southern Mongolia, in the People's Republic of China) and present-day (Republic of) Mongolia (called here Northern or Qalqa Mongolia), as well as the former Oirad confederations.

³ Mongol pilgrims often brought their own tents and lived self-sufficiently when they travelled to Wutai Shan or to Tibet for months or years. Their equipment was probably comparable to that of the *badarci*, described by Gocoo (1970: 73-77). These unordained practitioners travelled for various purposes: to collect funds to build a monastery, teach and spread the Dharma, or to run away from taxes and debts. Others travelled to Tibet to further their religious training.

sphere.

In the summer of 1995, I undertook fieldwork in the western part of Southern Mongolia during which I visited the most renowned monasteries in Alashan Left banner, a region inhabited by Western Mongols whose aristocracy descended from Güsri qan (1582-1654) of the Qoshud.⁴ As there was no public transportation available to cross the Yellow River and enter the Ordos league, I followed the Yellow River northwards, to Dengkou City. Having no permit to remain in Dengkou, I was approached by a courteous police officer who tried to prevent me from leaving town. However, he also informed me that a biennial festival was to take place at the nearby monastery, Aγui-yin süme. Hundreds of people from the town were going to attend and he himself was going in a bus chartered by the official in charge of the religious affairs of Dengkou. I managed to join the party and was thus able to witness the one-day festival, which eventually led me to question the notion that local pilgrimages are non-existent in Mongolian Buddhism. I reached the site of the festival, a small temple in an impressive barren mountain valley, after a rough three-hour bus ride.

Aγui-yin süme, “the Temple/Monastery of the caves”, is not only one of the thousand monasteries that flourished in Mongolia during the 18th and 19th centuries; it is also reputed to be “the only” Nyingmapa monastery of this period in Southern Mongolia. The place therefore presented a double interest since it raised both the historical question of minority schools in Mongolia and the more ethnographic one of pilgrimage. Although I am an art historian and not an anthropologist, I could not ignore the particular circumstances under which I visited Aγui-yin süme. The buildings of the monastery were completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution: their reconstruction, although of some interest is not the subject of the present study. My aim here is to examine the special status of this temple within Mongolian Buddhism and to question both its supposed peculiarities. Due to the scarcity of historical sources on this monastery and the limited time I was allowed to spend there, I can only give a brief description of the legend and history of the monastery and its caves, which will serve as an introduction to the broader issues of pilgrimages and the presence of Nyingmapa order in Mongolia.

I- THE MONASTERY: LEGEND, HISTORY AND PRESENT SITUATION

The Foundation Legend

Aγui-yin süme was sacked in the nineteen-thirties, and a part of its archives were stolen; the remaining archives were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The most precise source available is an article by Bai Shenghua (1986), a local historian who collected oral traditions on the monastery, and gathered information from local

⁴ From 1682 onwards, the descendants of Güsri qan fled the Jüngars' expansion and settled in the territory to the west of the Ordos given to them by Emperor Kangxi. The Alashan banners were attached to Inner Mongolia in 1686, and their princes (*jasaγ*) were given official titles and Manchu princesses in marriage. According to the historical records, their oldest (fixed) Buddhist monastery in these two new banners is the Yamun süme or Buyan arbitqayci süme (Ch. Yanfu si), built in 1732-1733 by the prince of the Left Wing in his new garrison town, Bayanqota (now Alashan zuoqi).

gazetteers.⁵

According to the foundation legend, Aγui-yin sūme was established by a disciple of Padmasambhava or by Padmasambhava himself, the renowned yogin reputed to have introduced Tantric Buddhism in Tibet and revered by the Nyingmapas as a second Buddha. Padmasambhava is said to have left Tibet for China with a retinue, to have visited Luoyang and the sacred Wutai mountain, and to have stopped on his way back to U rgyan (Oddiyāna, localised in Swāt valley, Pakistan), at the site of Aγui-yin sūme on the 22nd day of the 9th lunar month, 774 AD. There, Padmasambhava met five young *dâkinî* sisters (Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma*),⁶ each dwelling in a different cave. He engaged in tantric practice with each one of them in turn during nine months and twenty-five days. He is also said to have subdued a local demon that terrorised the people and to have locked him up inside the main cave. Padmasambhava left a print of his left foot below the Hongyang cave, and one of the *dâkinî* left a footprint in front of the Cave of Târâ. Before leaving, Padmasambhava made a statue of himself (2 *chi* 5 *cun* -around 70 cm- high) with his own hands. According to his own words, to behold the image is like beholding Padmasambhava himself and the image will protect one against evil spells and demons. The image was also intended to dissuade the demon from reappearing (Bai Shenghua 1986: 123).

Then Padmasambhava took as a disciple the child of a couple living in the caves named “*luoben* (**slob dpon*, teacher) Zandari”.⁷ On the 10th day of the 7th lunar month, 775, he left the site followed by his disciple, his retinue and a crowd of believers from the surrounding areas. He took “Zandari” back to India or to Oddiâna to further initiate him in tantric practice and teachings. Several years later, the disciple returned to Alashan and founded near the caves the Aγui-yin sūme, also known as Loboncimbu sūme (**Slob dpon chen po*),⁸ the “Monastery of Padmasambhava”.⁹ Many hermits and wandering monks followed his example and meditated in these caves, attracting devotees and donations.

The History

Leaving aside the legend, the gazetteers do not mention any construction before 1649, which is probably the foundation date of the first temple. Other sources mention

⁵ Bai Shenghua's article is part of an internal (*neibu*) government publication. The government official who “welcomed” me in Dengkou kindly allowed me to make a photocopy of it. Other references to this monastery are found in *Dengkou xian bingyao dizhi* 1970; Zhu Yongfeng 1983: 171-176; Qiao Ji 1994: 75 (based on local gazetteers: *Bameng diming zhi* and *Bayan nao'er meng mingzhi*); Wang Zhiguo 1997: 1517; Bai Guisheng 1997: 120-121 (partly a reprint of Bai Shenghua 1986) and Delege 1998: 633-634. All these materials being written in Chinese, it has often been difficult to recover the original Mongolian or Tibetan words.

⁶ Female figures who personify wisdom, and make themselves known to mystics under peaceful or wrathful forms, to offer revelations or tantric teachings in which they may act as partners, Herrmann-Pfandt 1992.

⁷ On *luoben*, see n. 8. I was unable to identify “Zandari”.

⁸ In the Chinese gazetteers and the accounts of Western travellers on Aγui-yin sūme, Padmasambhava is called Loboncimbu (“Luoben qingbu”, “Löwung chimpa” or “Löpön chimba”). The first term may be derived from the Tib. *slob dpon*, “teacher, instructor, professor”, which is an epithet of Padmasambhava (*Slob dpon rin po che*); the second term is perhaps a derivation of the Tibetan term *chen po*, great, large.

⁹ Kimura (1990: 42) calls it “Löpön chimba sūme”; Cammann (1951: 137), “Ago-in Sume”; Lesdain (1908: 70), “Aque-miao”; Obrucev, Khumbu-chimbu (Higgins 1966: 135). In Chinese, it is called Agui miao, or Shandong miao, “Monastery of Mountain Caves”. According to Qiao Ji (1994: 75), its original name is “Gudingji” monastery.

1798 or 1803 as the date of foundation.¹⁰ Whatever the date of the first constructions, the monastery became especially important in the early 19th century thanks to the patronage of the Fifth Noyan qutuγtu,¹¹ Aγwang Lubsang Danjinrabjai, from the Mergen wang banner in Qalqa Mongolia (Tüsheetü xan aimag [Tüsiyetü qan aimag], East Gobi). An oral tradition has the Noyan qutuγtu arriving in Alashan in 1798 in search of an auspicious site to build a temple. He obtained the support of Wangqinbanbaer, the Fourth prince of Alashan,¹² who gave him the authorisation and a site for his undertaking. The Noyan qutuγtu immediately undertook the construction of the Central assembly-hall (*γoul coγcin*). Two years later, he returned to his homeland. In 1802, he returned to Aγui-yin süme and offered a copy of the *Kanjur* (*bKa' 'gyur*), various works in Tibetan, ten masks for *cam* (Tib. 'cham) dances, a 5 *chi* (about 1,70 m.) high *stüpa*, and a statue of Padmasambhava (5 *chi* high) to be placed in the main cave. His patronage attracted further donations and resulted in the construction of additional buildings.

The Noyan qutuγtu Danjinrabjai (1803-1856) –more commonly known as Rabjai– is a well-known dramatist and lyric poet whose life is related in several biographies (see below, note 113). According to oral tradition, in 1831 he visited Alashan and “had the Loboncimbu temple-cave excavated” or “excavated (it) himself”.¹³ He returned to Alashan in 1833 and 1841. Chinese sources are obviously mistaken when they mention 1798-1803 as the date of Rabjai's arrival at Aγui-yin süme. Yet it is unlikely that the Noyan qutuγtu Rabjai excavated the caves himself or that he ordered their excavation. Indeed owing to their location, their difficult access and the abundance of such caves in the Alashan and Langshan ranges, the caves are most certainly natural. What seems more likely is that he cleared the caves which had probably been abandoned.

All this points to the probable existence of a small monastery or perhaps a cave-dwelling community since 1649, which grew in importance in 1798-1802 to become a major site following the arrival of the already famous Noyan qutuγtu Rabjai in 1831, who erected an assembly hall, “exploited” the characteristics of the caves and brought donations. One of these dates may also mark the settlement of a hitherto mobile monastery in yurts (felt tents, Mong. *ger*) which were numerous in Alashan banners up to the early 20th century.

The original name of the main cave shrine supposedly given to Padmasambhava was Qandma aγui, the Cave of the *dâkinî*(s).¹⁴ The Noyan qutuγtu gave the newly founded/expanded monastery the Tibetan name of “Laxi renbu gading ling” (*bKra

¹⁰ 1803 according to the *Bameng diming zhi* (s. d.), quoted by Qiao Ji 1994: 75. Wang Zhiguo (1997: 1517) gives 1877 as the date of foundation –which in fact is the date of the official title given by the Lifan yuan. Delege (1998) does not mention any construction before 1798.

¹¹ *Qutuγtu* (“The Blessed One”) is an honorific term for a living incarnate lama (*sprul sku*), and the highest title given to the most important Mongol reincarnations by the Qing court.

¹² According to *Huangchao fanbu shixi biao*, *juan* 3, Wangqinbanbaer succeeded his father as prince of the Alashan Left banner in 1783.

¹³ “Rabjai dort den Höhlentempel Loboncimbu ausgraben liess”; “er selbst den Höhlentempel Loboncimbu ausschaufeln liess”, Heissig 1972 I: 186 & 195: recollection of Dasicerin, quoted by Damdinsüren (1962: 45).

¹⁴ *Qandma* derives from Tib. *mkha' 'gro ma*. According to Bai Shenghua (1986: 123), “Hangruima aγui” (Qandma aγui) is later pronounced in Mongolian “Haruna” aγui. The Chinese sources also have “Yajila Hangruima aγui” or “Wurijin hangrui”, “Yajila” being identified by Bai Shenghua as a place name of Oddiyâna.

shis 'dzam bu dga' ldan gling). Several years later, the Qing court gave Aγui-yin süme the imperial title of "Monastery of the Vehicle of the Religion" in four languages (Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan and Chinese).¹⁵ In 1912, the Chinese Ministry of Mongol and Tibetan Affairs presented the monastery with a board bearing the title in four languages, which was hung above the entrance of the main hall.

According to legend, "Zandari", the Mongol disciple of Padmasambhava, founded and ruled the monastery after his master's departure in 775. Eighteen disciples are supposed to have succeeded him. The eighteenth, named Caγan diyanci, died in 1649 (the presumed date of the first foundation), and his reincarnation as a young boy was found in 1654. He was succeeded by seven successive reincarnations of the disciple who were regarded at the same time as incarnations of Padmasambhava. Thus we have the names of twenty-five successive heads of the monastery since 775.¹⁶ The Fifth reincarnate lama (*qubilγan*), named "Hanqin" pandita (*Qancin bandida), is said to have welcomed the Noyan qutuγtu (in 1798 according to the Chinese sources, more probably in 1831 as mentioned above). If we consider 1798-1802 as the main period for the monastery's foundation, we may presume that the information concerning the three last reincarnations at least is reliable. In 1945, Cammann (1951:141) mentions the "Löwung chimpa [Loboncimbu] Living Buddha" –probably the last reincarnation listed. Cammann also saw the portraits of his six predecessors, all wearing hats "like that traditionally worn by Padma Sambhava, but in yellow instead of red". When I visited the monastery, the last reincarnation had not yet been found.

The organisation of Aγui-yin süme did not differ from that of a standard Mongol medium-size Gelugpa monastery. The living incarnate lama was not the abbot but the most honoured figure. The real ruler of the monastery was the *da blama*,¹⁷ who was appointed for life. Other offices included the *demci blama* who handled the economic activities, the *gesγüi blama* (< Tib. *dge bskos*, prefect of discipline) responsible for the administration of the main temple (both of whom were appointed for three years), the *jisa demci* (treasurer of the individual "funds")...¹⁸

Until the early 20th century, Aγui-yin süme ranked among the largest monasteries in Southern Mongolia and was listed among the eight major monasteries of Alashan banners.¹⁹ It reached its maximum size in the 19th century with about 400 monks.²⁰ It

¹⁵ Under the Guangxu reign (1875-1909), *Bameng diming zhi* (Qiao Ji 1994: 75). The Chinese title was Zongcheng si; the Mongol one, Shasin kölgen-ü süme, Delege 1998: 633; Bai Shenghua 1986: 126.

¹⁶ Bai Shenghua (1986: 132-133) gives the names of the eighteen disciples and seven *qubilγan* in Chinese transcription.

¹⁷ Head lama of the monastery in the "Manchu-style organisation": Miller 1959: 50-58.

¹⁸ Bai Shenghua 1986: 134-136. On the administrative hierarchy of Mongol monasteries: Miller 1959: 50-58.

¹⁹ There were 68 monasteries with more than 500 monks out of a total of 1300 to 1600 temples and monasteries in Southern Mongolia: Charleux 1998: 234. The Chinese and Japanese early 20th century gazetteers such as *Alashan qi qingkuang*, *Alashan meng dimingzhi* or *Môko chishi* (vol. xia, p. 145), list 24 to 37 monasteries in the two Alashan banners. There were 37 incarnate lamas and about 3,700 to 4,000 monks in the Alashan banners before 1949, Delege 1998: 453, 520; Secen Môngke 1995: 173.

²⁰ Delege (1998: 519) counts 80 monks and one *qubilγan* before 1949 while Bai Shenghua (1986: 126) counts 240 monks at the beginning of the Communist regime. This is probably due to the fact that in addition to the official, ordained monks who lived permanently in the monastery there were "temporary" monks known as "steppe lamas", who were simply ordained as novices and only came to the monastery on festival days.

had four subsidiary monasteries located in Alashan Left banner: Gūüsi-yin süme;²¹ Suburyan-u süme (the “Monastery of the *stûpa*”); Manitu-yin süme and Ertuo miao (I could not reconstitute the Mongolian term), the “Monastery of the Young Camel”. Their foundation was contemporary to that of Aγui-yin süme –about 1798. All four were destroyed between 1958 and 1969. The largest among them was Gūüsi-yin süme with a hundred monks and more than 4 000 *mu* of pastureland (40 hectares) before 1949; the three others housed between twenty and fifty-five monks. None of them had a *qubilγan*, and their school affiliation remains unknown.²²

Aγui-yin süme was still the region's most celebrated religious centre in the early 20th century, attracting Russian, Western and Japanese travellers, whose accounts are our oldest sources on the monastery. The site's fame was mainly due to its sacred caves, especially the principal cave containing the statue of Padmasambhava. The Russian geographer, geologist and explorer Vladimir Obruchev (1863-1957), who travelled to Southern Mongolia from the northwest, was perhaps the first to mention the “temple and sacred caves at Khumbu-chimbu” but he did not visit the site himself.²³ The French count Jacques de Lesdain and his wife visited it on September 20th-21st, 1904. The Count and his party scandalised the monks by shooting red partridges living in the neighbouring rocks. The territory surrounding a Mongol monastery is considered sacred (*qoriγ*, “prohibition”)²⁴, and it is prohibited to cut wood, hunt, graze herds, ride horses, grow crops, put up tents and light fires on the surrounding land; but “our fear of offending them [the monks]”, writes Lesdain, “gave way before our desire of a good dish”. Four years before his visit, during the Boxer rebellion, the monks of Aγui-yin süme allegedly “caused the plunder and death of Christians of San-tao-ho [Sandaohé] and the neighbouring mission, by working upon the excited feelings of the people, and preaching a holy war”. Fearing reprisals, the monks were thus particularly accommodating with the Count, in spite of his hunting feats (Lesdain 1908: 70-85).

Kimura Hisao (1922-1989), a Japanese who travelled to Mongolia and Tibet disguised as a Mongolian monk during the Manchukuo, visited the monastery in December 1943. He made offerings and asked for a *stûpa* to be chanted (Kimura Hisao 1990: 42). Lastly, Schuyler Cammann (1951: 136-142), while visiting the main monasteries of the Langshan mountain range, spent three days there in 1949 before crossing the Yellow River.

Physical Description of the Buildings

Aγui-yin süme is located in Shajin toqui (or toqai) sumu (Ch. Shajintaohai sumu) in modern Dengkou county (ancient Bayan γoul, previously part of Alashan Left banner and now included in Bayan naγur (Ch. Bayan nao'er) league. The monastery lies between Qarayuna (or Langshan) mountains on the north, and Helan shan range²⁵

²¹ *Gūüsi* < Ch. *guoshi*, “master of the kingdom”, a title given to high lamas and translators. It is called in Chinese Gouxing miao, or Baerdahu miao (*Mong. Barday, Balday or Bardaqu monastery).

²² For their localisation and history: Bai Shenghua 1986: 124-126.

²³ He stopped short of it in October 1893, Higgins 1966: 135.

²⁴ This term originally referred to imperial burial sites and sacred mountains whose territory and occupants belonged to the Mountain god. The notion was taken up by Buddhist monasteries. Similar restrictions with several differences, apply to sacred mountains in Tibet: Buffetrille 1996: 245-249.

²⁵ To avoid confusion, we use, according to Chinese conventions, the term “Alashan” to designate the

on the south, at the foot of Aγui mountains. Aγui-yin süme was (and still is) an off-track monastery –one of the many isolated monasteries in the Langshan range. However, it stands near a former caravan route that linked Urga (Da küriye, on the site of modern Ulan-Bator) to Gansu. To reach the monastery, one must drive by jeep through around 110 km of semi-desert land north-west of Dengkou City, before coming to an extremely narrow mountain pass, the Aγui pass, located between Elesü-tei valley (sandy valley, Ch. Elesitai gou) and Geri aobao (*Ger oboya) mountain passes (Bai Shenghua 1986: 126).²⁶ From the Baoxin rock, which has the shape of a Mongolian tent, one follows an eight-kilometre track along a deep winding gorge with a dry river bed that cuts through the range. Along the old riverbed, a succession of cairns (*oboγa*) and rows of prayer-flags form sacred barriers against evil forces. The impressive red defile becomes extremely narrow, then suddenly opens onto a large circle delimited by two gullies running north to south where the modern Tibetan-style monastery stands, in a beautiful setting at the foot of a high peak and sheltered by mountains. “Its site is extremely wild, a little plain formed by the meeting of the valleys which open upon it, surrounded by pointed and most inaccessible rocks, which keep the sun from it nearly all day” (Lesdain 1908: 81). The site's configuration and the presence of the river fulfil geomantic requirements and are considered particularly auspicious.

The complex was razed to the ground during the Cultural Revolution, but old descriptions of the monastery give an idea of its original appearance. Its scatter-shot layout with no enclosure wall, no entrance gate, no axis, and no symmetry, was adapted to the terrain. Its surface area exceeded 10 hectares. In the centre stood the Central assembly-hall dedicated to Shâkyamuni.²⁷ It was a large south-facing square building nine bays large and nine bays deep. Above the entrance hung the board bearing the monastery's official title in four languages. On the right and left were two lateral halls.²⁸

A second group of buildings on the west side of the small ravine and facing south-east included the Hayagrîva temple (Tib. rTa mgrin; Mong. Morin egesigtü, “One having a horse's neck” or “One having a horse's voice”).²⁹ Delege (1998: 634) also describes a temple dedicated to Padmasambhava and a “Hall of the Practice of the Law” (Xiufa dian). All around, east and west of the two ravines, were thirteen large treasuries (*jisa*) that also served to house pilgrims. The monks' terraced living quarters were perched on the mountainside and their access was difficult (some buildings were built on slopes at an angle of almost 90°). Cairns (*oboγa*) were erected before the main

two banners, and “Helan shan” for the mountain range. Concerning the name of the range, see Stein 1951: 247; Pelliot 1959-1963: 132-137 (“Calacian”).

²⁶ The mountains “are not very high, absolutely barren” and “their naked sides rise above the desert like a great deep-coloured wall, sometimes blue, sometimes yellow, or white or pink. At the foot of them, here and there, a spring or a well gives water for the caravans. Small temples have been built in these places, and the lamas live on the tolls of the caravan drivers”. Before the Aγui pass, a “high and broad fissure... is called the Pass of the Kalchas (Qalqa)”, Lesdain 1908: 79.

²⁷ In 1945 Cammann (1951: 136, 141) describes the monastery as rather small, with the main temple dedicated to Padmasambhava and containing narrative *thang kas* of the main events of his life, three reception tents (*ger*) and other tents to house guests. Bai Shenghua, however, insists on the fact that the Central assembly-hall was dedicated to Shâkyamuni, while the caves were devoted to Padmasambhava.

²⁸ Bai Shenghua 1986: 130-131; Wang Zhiguo 1997: 1517. Delege (1998: 634) is the only author who mentions a larger group of buildings with a Gatehouse, a hall of the Four guardian kings (*lokapâla*), an assembly-hall, a main shrine, a Shâkyamuni hall and two lateral halls.

²⁹ Wang Zhiguo (1997: 1517) gives 981 *jian* (bays) for the total of the constructed area.

temples. The eastern ravine bore old engravings and was bordered by quince trees and elm groves.

The buildings were Tibetan in style: flat-roofed, square or oblong structures with thick outer walls.³⁰ Old photographs show that some of the buildings were built with bricks, whitewashed with limestone, and Chinese influence in the woodwork (Cammann 1951, face p. 140). The monastery was renowned for its wealth. In 1949, Cammann (1951: 136, 139-140) describes it as “fabulously rich”, with ritual objects cast in solid gold, images dressed in gold brocade, and gilded *kürdü*³¹ on the roofs, for it was “the only monastery over a very wide area that had not been looted by the Chinese”. A picture published by Lesdain (1908: face p. 80) shows a general view of the monastery, with many one-storey Tibetan-style temples and houses (no Chinese roofs), and a large *oboḡa*.³²

In the nineteen-eighties, the local government financed the monastery's reconstruction. In 1983, it was registered as “cultural heritage” and labelled as *baohu danwei* (“unit of protection”, protected sites) on a provincial level. In 1995, the new monastery consisted of an unassuming south-facing assembly-hall (3x7 bays) surrounded by the monks' modest living quarters and ruins of the former buildings, white yurts to house guests, and the five caves. Twenty monks were living there at the time.

The Caves

The five caves are located halfway up the cliff before reaching the buildings and form a row along a north-south axis. They are accessible by a dangerous flight of steps that were carved into the cliff. The following description is based on both my fieldwork and early 20th century accounts.

1. The Cave of Padmasambhava

The first cave, the largest and closest to the monastery, is named the Cave of Padmasambhava.³³ The steep rock-cut steps edged by prayer-flags and small brass prayer wheels, lead to a rock platform before the entrance that rises 90 metres above the Central assembly-hall.³⁴ According to Lesdain (1908: 82), “it seems to me that the feat of climbing this slippery stair, which must be impassable after a fall of snow, several times a day, is in itself sufficiently meritorious”. The entrance is guarded by heavy gates. The cave itself, which was transformed into a shrine, is 25 m. long, 15 m. large and 4 m. high (Delege 1998: 633). A gilded terracotta image of Padmasambhava

³⁰ Mongol Buddhist architecture often combines both Chinese and Tibetan elements. *Ayui-yin süme*, as well as many monasteries of the Langshan range, adopt a “pure Tibetan style”, without Chinese roofs, Charleux 1998: 518-120.

³¹ Pinnacle figuring the wheel of the Dharma flanked by two gazelles, and symbolising the first sermon of Shâkyamuni.

³² Other pictures are found in Cammann 1951: face p. 140 (the main temple), face p. 141 (the host monk and a lady).

³³ Kimura Hisao (1990: 42) described it as the chief temple, without mentioning other temples. Cammann (1951: 139) calls it the “Antelope Cave”. In Chinese the cave is called: “Agui” dong (Mong. *ayui* and Ch. *dong* both meaning “cave”), or Lianhuasheng dong (Cave of Padmasambhava).

³⁴ “A painted wooden railing ran all the way up, and here and there, but very close together, are fixed small praying wheels, so that while going up to the temple the lamas may reap a large harvest of merit”, Lesdain 1908: 82.

flanked by smaller images of his two wives, stands in front of a stone altar.³⁵ It could be the statue offered by the Noyan qutuγtu and brought all the way from Urga. In front of the images are rows of benches on which the monks sit while reciting prayers and incantations. The shrine is decorated with silk rugs and banners. An ambulatory corridor surrounds the images.

This is the most sacred of the five cave-temples, where Padmasambhava is said to have meditated, taught the Dharma and locked up the demon. It is believed that the statue standing in the cave is the one Padmasambhava supposedly made with his own hands to ward off evil spirits, and is credited with having produced miracles.³⁶ According to Kimura Hisao, the golden image appears differently to every pilgrim who beholds it. His fellow travellers and other monks said that the statue bore a moustache, an angry expression or a smile, but Kimura “thought it just looked like an ordinary Buddha”. “There is also supposed to be a young reclining lama lying half way up the reddish brown precipice directly across the canyon from the temple”.³⁷

2. The second cave, called the Cave of Demcig (<Tib. bDe mchog, Skt. Samvara), houses a statue of the meditational deity (*yi dam*) Samvara with three faces and twelve arms, in sexual “father-mother” (Tib. *yab yum*) union with his consort Vajravârhî.³⁸

3. The third cave, named Dara eke aγui (Cave of Târâ), houses images of the White and Green Târâs. It also contains a sacred spring, and, in front, there is the footprint of a *dâkinî*.³⁹

4. The fourth cave, called the Cave of the *dâkinî*, is dedicated to Garuda (Mong. Garudi), the “bird with golden wings”, mainly worshipped as a protector of Buddhism and a god of wealth (Bai Shenghua 1986: 128-129).⁴⁰ This cave is especially important and may be identified with the cave known as Hongyang in the Chinese sources.⁴¹ It contains an underground passage to which the Mongols refer with the greatest veneration. To reach the cave one must walk along the east face of the ravine for 500 metres and then climb a small steep winding path for another 400 metres up (“like a stairway leading to Heaven”) before reaching an opening in the cliff's face (Bai Shenghua 1986: 130). The cave has two floors. The main, upper floor (3 m. large, 2,5 m. high), is where the Buddha is worshipped (Zhu Yongfeng 1983: 176, quoting the

³⁵ According to Lesdain (1908: 82), the cave did not contain any large or remarkable statue. Kimura speaks of a statue of the Buddha – he may not have recognised Padmasambhava in the darkness.

³⁶ However, it is likely that the statue together with the images in the four other caves were destroyed along with the rest of the monastery. Because of the darkness of the cave, it is difficult to say whether the present image is new.

³⁷ “Again I could see nothing and was foolish enough to say so, making myself needlessly conspicuous. ‘What are you saying?’ demanded one of the monks. ‘You are only showing your lack of faith! Look, he is lying facing westward with his hand as a pillow. May he be praised!’ The other even said they could see the hem of his robe billowing in the wind”, Kimura Hisao 1990: 43.

³⁸ In Chinese the cave is known as “Demuchuke” dong (Cave of Demcig), or “Zhagarishengbu” dong (?).

³⁹ In Chinese the cave is known as “Darieke” dong (Cave of Târâ).

⁴⁰ I saw no statue of Garuda in the cave when I visited the site.

⁴¹ In Chinese the fourth cave is known as “Eerdengzhu” dong [Erdeni juu?], or Jixiang tiannü dong (Cave of the *dâkinî*). The Chinese sources do not specifically identify the Hongyang cave: “there are five mountain caves, among which the Hongyang cave”, Qiao Ji 1994: 75. Bai Shenghua (1986: 127-130) describes the five caves mentioned above, and then speaks of the Hongyang cave, as if it was a sixth one. He clearly distinguishes it from the Caves of Padmasambhava and Târâ.

Dengkou xian bingyao dizhi) and leads to a narrow vertical corridor descending to the lower floor. The passage is covered in red dust called *yuguangtu* ("dust as brilliant as jade") which is used in Mongol pharmacopoeia.

Lesdain (1908: 83-84) describes the cave, which he had some difficulty entering, probably because the monks "had no desire to see us profane this sacred place". "We went back about three-quarters of a mile along the road". He describes the dangerous climb up the narrow stone steps:

"a single slip, and we would have fallen into an abyss of some hundred feet. At last we arrived safely at the entry of the grotto, and entered it through a little low wooden door, quite plain. There was thick darkness within. Some tallow candles burning before the little gilded figures hardly gave us light enough to guide our steps. The floor was very uneven, and the ceiling varied in height, with the disagreeable result that we were constantly knocking our heads against it. The pilgrims are obliged to crawl into a little hole three feet square in the middle of the passage to reach the furthest hall."

When coming out, he noticed he was covered with red dust and tried his best to get rid of it.

Beneath, there is another cave, the depth of which remains unknown. It is believed that it extends into a tunnel that allows one to reach Central Tibet in only one day's walk. Once, a monk sent a dog down the passage. As the dog never reappeared, the monk presumed the story to be true, but according to Bai Shenghua (1986: 130) no human being has ever attempted the experiment.

Lesdain (1908: 84) noticed just above the entrance to the cave a well-preserved four-wheeled chariot resting on a small platform. It was peculiar in that its front wheels were dependent on its back wheels, which must have made it difficult to move. He was told that it bore a statue of Buddha (or Padmasambhava?)⁴² that was sent some time ago from Urga with a caravan of pilgrims. The chariot, sanctified by its burden, was placed outside the cave. It may be the same chariot that bore the statue of Padmasambhava brought by the Noyan qutuγtu and enshrined within the first cave.

5. The fifth cave is dedicated to eighteen protectors that Bai Shenghua (1986: 130) calls in Chinese *qielan shen* (*devas*, guardian deities of Chinese monasteries, usually numbered sixteen). The *qielan shen* are not worshiped in Mongol Buddhism, and I suppose Bai Shenghua did not recognise here the eighteen *arhats*.⁴³ The cave was closed when I visited the site.

The festival

During the 19th and early 20th century, a biennial festival was held on the 25th of the 9th (Chinese) lunar month to "welcome" Padmasambhava [to commemorate his arrival], and on the 10th day of the 7th (Chinese) lunar month to celebrate his departure (Bai Shenghua 1986: 123).⁴⁴ Tibetan Nyingmapa monasteries regularly worship Padmasambhava on the 10th day of each month (each monthly celebration commemorates an important event of his life), and the *dâkinîs* on the 25th of each

⁴² The Mongol term *burqan*, as well as the Chinese *fo*, are generic terms to designate a Buddha, a bodhisattva or any deity of the pantheon.

⁴³ In Chinese the cave is known as "Sangbugaribu" dong (?) or Qielan shen dong.

⁴⁴ Cammann (1951: 136) asserts that festivals are organised in the 6th and 10th (Mongol?) month. This difference may be due to the time-lag between the Mongol and Chinese calendars. My visit on the 10th day of the 7th lunar month corresponded to the Chinese calendar.

month of the Tibetan calendar (Schwieger 1997). Southern Mongols had their own calendrical system, and later adopted the Chinese calendar, but seem to have preserved the principle of the 10th and 25th days as festival dates. The same applies to Amdo where the traditional Tibetan dates of festival are transposed onto the Chinese calendar.

The festival was regularly performed until the Cultural Revolution, and was revived in the 1980's, when the authorities authorised monasteries to resume their religious activities. I attended the festival, on the 10th day of the 7th lunar month, 1995 (5th August) together with hundreds of devotees. Unfortunately, as already mentioned I was only allowed to spend a very short time at the site, but I will briefly describe the general atmosphere of the festival. Jeeps, cars and buses filled with Mongols and Han coming from Dengkou and all the surrounding areas crossed the narrow mountain pass and parked their vehicles right in front of the assembly-hall. People came in groups: family, friends, Mongol Buddhist associations, Chinese Buddhist lay associations (like Jushi lin) and even various *qigong* associations. These associations, which reflect the secularisation of religious practices, are very important in China today.⁴⁵ The pilgrims first made offerings to the deities, prostrated, made libations of *baijiu* (Chinese distilled sorghum alcohol) and paid their respects to the monks who were performing a ritual in the main assembly-hall. The monks had nothing to offer or to sell, such as wind-horse flags, holy water, medicinal herbs etc. It must be stressed that many pilgrims were citizens from Dengkou, who came to enjoy an outing, and the deeply sinicised county is not reputed for having preserved traditional ways of life such as herding, Mongolian dress, food etc.⁴⁶

The pilgrims then visited three of the sacred caves (two were closed) which appeared to be the main aim of their visit. They worshipped Padmasambhava and circumambulated the image in the first cave, which remains the most sacred of the five. The elderly had great difficulty climbing the steep paths. In the Hongyang cave, the devotees, with the help of a monk, crawled into the narrow vertical corridor descending from the upper to the lower floor. Some rushed into the narrow passage, laughed or amused themselves to scare the others. At the end of the tunnel, they emerged with their clothes covered in red dust. In the third cave, the pilgrims filled the empty cans they had brought along with water from the sacred spring. Within one hour people had visited the main temple and caves, and had settled down to enjoy a picnic, which today is the highlight of every Mongol (and Chinese) visit to a festival.

II- PILGRIMAGE AND CAVES IN THE TIBETO-MONGOL WORLD

In the following section I will re-examine the distinctive features of *Aγui-yin sūme* one by one in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhist culture through a comparative study of its Tibetan "models". I will try to distinguish those elements proper to Tibetan sacred sites and legends from possible Mongolian inventions, and attempt to explain how and when some of these features may have been introduced to Mongolia, and to give other similar examples in Mongolia.

⁴⁵ As there are very few Chinese temples in the region, Han Chinese (more than 80% of the population of Inner Mongolia) frequently visit Tibeto-Mongol monasteries. See Charleux (forthcoming) for the description of festivals and the contemporary revival of Buddhism in Southern Mongolia.

⁴⁶ In 1902, Tsybikov (1992: 26-27) already noticed the strong Chinese influence in Alashan.

Caves in Tibet and Mongolia

Mountain caves are important constituents of holy places throughout the Buddhist world.⁴⁷ In the Tibetan cultural area, caves, springs and lakes are related to the underworld of the saurian water deities (*klu* or *nâga*); they were and still are the favoured dwellings of ascetics and renowned religious figures seeking mystic experiences. Caves are thus sites of veneration and, whenever possible, circumambulation. Some have become unoccupied isolated shrines, while others located near monasteries are used for meditational retreats, or like in Aγui-yin sūme, have become shrines attached to the monastery.

The existence of hermits meditating in caves is attested in Mongolia, especially during the early period of the second diffusion of Buddhism (16-17th centuries) in the Daqing shan (northwest of Kökeqota / Hohhot), Ordos, Caqar and Eastern Inner Mongolia.⁴⁸ This eremitic tradition initiated by renowned lamas such as Neici toin (1557-1653) and Caqar diyanci (fl. 1583-1606) seems to have somewhat disappeared during the 18th century, and only a few hermitages are attested thereafter. However, caves for generally temporary meditation retreats are often found near monasteries. Around fifty Southern Mongolian monasteries are named *aγui*, "cave", most of which are located in mounts Daqing, Helan, and Xing'an (Kingyan, in Eastern Inner Mongolia). One of the most famous among them is Blama-yin aγui (west of Kökeqota), with a three-storey Tibetan-style temple perched on a cliff to protect the caves which are accessible by a steep flight of stairs. The oldest monasteries were founded on the Kitan (Liao dynasty, 916-1125) sites: the Gilubar juu (or Aru juu, "Northern Monastery", Ch. Houzhao miao – see infra) as well as the nearby "Southern Monastery" (Öbör juu, Ch. Qianzhao miao, which was entirely destroyed), in Bayarin Left banner (Balin zuoqi), Juu-uda league (today's Chifeng shi). The monastery of Arjai-yin aγui in the Little Arjai mountains (Baiyan miao, 50km East of Dengkou, Otoy banner, Ordos) was active from the Northern Wei (386-534) until the Ming period (1368-1644) (Wang Dafang, Batu Jirigala et al., 1994). Mountain caves were also worshipped in Qalqa Mongolia (see examples below). More recently, the Mongols used caves to conceal their valuable possessions, particularly Buddhist artefacts, during the religious persecutions.

It must also be stressed that cave dwellings inhabited by Han and Mongols are common in Inner Mongolia. It is not known when the Mongols adopted this Han-style habitat. Cave-dwellings excavated in the loess are found in the ancient Caqar banners, between Kalgan (Zhangjiakou) and Kökeqota, in continuity with Northern Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu, where hundreds of thousands of people continue to live in them.⁴⁹

Padmasambhava, a "Creator" of Sacred Sites

Over the centuries the figure of Padmasambhava evolved into an increasingly legendary character. He is renowned for having subdued local demons in Central Tibet

⁴⁷ The first Buddhist shrines and monasteries, in India and Central Asia, were rock-cut caves. On caves in Buddhist scriptures and traditions: Stein 1988; Birnbaum 1989-90: 118-120.

⁴⁸ On Mongol monasteries built around caves or related to caves: Charleux 1998: 71-73, 160-161, 172, 202-203.

⁴⁹ Cave dwellings are deep rooms with an average height of 2,80 m., one door and small windows in the façade. They are excavated in the loess, and reinforced by a wooden framework and adobe façade, or a stone vault.

and to have helped found bSam yas monastery. The various chronicles disagree on the length of his stay in Tibet: some mention only a few years while others more than fifty years (747-802). Legends surrounding Padmasambhava are to be found everywhere throughout the Tibetan cultural world, and the topography is often explained by his miracles. Padmasambhava is supposed to have taken almost every route that connects India to Tibet and China, including Kham (Khams) and Amdo. He is especially linked to such geographical features as mountains and caves: the majority of pilgrimage sites in the Tibetan world include caves where he is said to have meditated, occasionally with one of his consorts or with *dâkinîs*. In each of these places, he subdued local deities, bounded them by oath and “opened” the site. He is reputed to have hidden *gter ma* (“treasure texts”) for subsequent discovery at an appropriate time, and also for making prophecies that lead to later temples’ foundations. In these places, he left footprints or prints of other parts of his body. The five *dâkinîs* (as well as the five caves) of Aḡui-yin sūme’s legend probably represents the five sacred families (five transcendental Buddhas corresponding to the four directions plus the zenith) into which practitioners of the doctrine may be divided. Padmasambhava is said to have had five wives. Pentads are also numerous in the vernacular religion of the Mongols.⁵⁰

The legends surrounding Padmasambhava are elaborated in his hagiographies, as well as in pilgrimage guidebooks, and abound in oral tradition. As in the majority of pilgrimage sites associated with him in Tibet⁵¹, any activity of Padmasambhava in Mongolia is highly unlikely. The various versions of his biography (which were fully developed during the 14th century) do not mention any sojourn in Mongolia,⁵² and his Mongol disciple of Aḡui-yin sūme is not listed among his twenty-five principal disciples. The accounts of his journey to Alashan and his exploits in Aḡui-yin sūme are obviously a Mongol invention, but nevertheless closely fit Tibetan stereotypes. What deserves attention here is the transposition of these themes to Mongol sacred geography.

The Womb-cave

In addition to being regarded as one of the many places throughout Inner Asia sanctified by Padmasambhava, the Aḡui-yin sūme caves also fit into a well-known category of holy caves found in the Tibetan cultural area: the womb-cave, “hell path” or cave of initiatory rebirth, a frequent feature of Tibetan pilgrimage sites. Such caves generally consist of a narrow cavity or opening between two rocks, or a tunnel-cave with one or two entrances. These horizontal or vertical conduits are either natural or man-made. They are used for the ritual testing of one’s positive or negative karma. If the pilgrim succeeds in going through the narrow passage, he is ensured of the purification of his sins and a better rebirth, and is released from the terror of the intermediate state between death and rebirth (*bar do*). It is believed that the clefts and passages change size automatically to allow any morally suitable candidate to pass

⁵⁰ For example the five manifestations of the Blue Eternal Heaven (*köke möngke tngri*), the five gods of fate (*jayaḡan tabun tngri*), the pentads of the descending auxiliary spirits (*baḡumal*).

⁵¹ In Tibet, ten or so cave sites are associated with Padmasambhava on the basis of coherent biographical references in Nyingmapa literature.

⁵² Padmasambhava is also said to have spent several hundred years in China, India, Persia etc. See for instance the *bKa’ thang zangs gling ma*, a *gter ma* supposedly written by Ye shes mtsho rgyal in the 8th century, “rediscovered” by Nyang ral Nyi ma ’od zer (1124 or 1136-1192 or 1204), Yeshe Tsogyal 1993: 131-132, 143, 221 n. 49.

through, regardless of his or her actual body shape and size. On the other hand, pilgrims with “bad karma” may get stuck. Womb-caves may also represent the Gates of Hell (those who pass will escape from the hells) or the way leading to a Pure Land (Stein 1988). Scholars of Tibetan pilgrimage have described many examples in Western Tibet (Mount Kailash), Central Tibet (dGa' ldan monastery; gTer sgrom near 'Bri gung mthil), Nepal (Tarap in Dolpo, the Halase-Mâratika caves in Eastern Nepal), Bhutan, Amdo (A myes rMa chen)⁵³ etc. Furthermore, Rolf Stein has written an extensive study of womb-caves throughout the Asian world.⁵⁴

One of the most famous womb-cave for Mongols is located on the southern peak of Mount Wutai. The Eke-yin aγui (“Mother's Cave”), known in Chinese as Fomudong (“Cave of the Mother of Buddhas”) or Qianfodong, (“Cave of the Thousand Buddhas”), still attracts many pilgrims and tourists. Ferdinand Lessing (1957: 95, 97) gives a full description of this cave according to the Qalqa dignitary Dilowa qutuγtu (1884-1964). Raoul Birnbaum (1989-90: 137-140) and Corneille Jest (personal communication) also visited the cave and give similar descriptions of the cave and its ritual. The door leading to the cave is shaped like a *yonis*. Within the cave, there is an outer chamber with a high ceiling, followed by a narrower chamber and a one-way narrow corridor (5-6 m. long, 30-40 cm. large) leading to a third small chamber allowing room for two people to stand. A monk, nicknamed “the midwife”, assists the pilgrims and advises them on how to crawl in. Inside, the pilgrims are informed that they are within the womb of the Mother of Buddhas; and when they come out, they are told that they have been reborn. They must pay a fee in order to enter the narrow passage, and an additional fee “for ransom” to leave the grotto.

Lessing and Stein have showed that the Mongol monks and important religious figures who visited Wutai Shan, such as the Dilowa qutuγtu and the Fourth Jebcündamba qutuγtu were well aware of this kind of popular ritual and may have introduced it to Mongolia (Lessing 1957: 97; Stein 1988: 3). Birnbaum confirms that up to now this cave is particularly favoured by Mongolians and Tibetans: “it is said that Mongolians, famous for their fervent piety, invariably cry when they enter the inner chamber. [...] Adding to the lore, Nima Dorje [Nyi ma rDo rje], a learned Tibetan historian, has told me that the Wu-t'ai Shan cave has a ‘relative’ in Inner Mongolia. This cave (associated with Padma Sambhava [...]), is known as the “daughter” cave” (Birnbaum 1989-90: 138, n. 70). This seems to refer to the womb-cave at Aγui-yin süme. Amdo, especially the Kukunor (Köke nayur) area, and Wutai Shan may be seen as the probable immediate origins for Aγui-yin süme's testing ritual.

A few other initiatory passages are attested in Mongolia. Examples are difficult to find, probably because the clergy never considered these popular practices as important.⁵⁵ Lessing, who has made a study of cave rituals in Mongolia based on oral

⁵³ For examples of womb-caves linked to Padmasambhava: Ekvall 1964: 241; Stein 1988: 29-30; Buffetrille 1996: 367-370; Huber 1999: 19.

⁵⁴ Stein (1988) gives examples in Tibet, China, Nepal, India, Indochina and Japan. Wutai Shan's Fomudong is the only example in Han China. The Chinese did not develop rebirth symbolism and ritual around their caves. Another study of a womb-cave in a Buddhist context is Bizot (1980), who describes a popular Khmer cult centred on the Birth Cave of Phnom Sampau near Battambang. The villagers taking part in this initiatory rite “die” while entering the cave and resuscitate when reappearing.

⁵⁵ Lessing's teacher, the *rdorams pa* lama Blo bzang bzang po “pretended never having heard about such an outrageous rite”, Lessing 1957: 97. Literary accounts such as the *Qingliang shan xin zhi* (1701: 2.2a) mention the discovery of Wutai Shan's Fomu cave in the 1560s by chance, but do not describe the rite.

sources, qualifies this religious practice as “more or less secret” (Lessing 1957: 95). There is a womb-cave at Tövgön xiid [*Tövken or Tövgen keid] in Qalqa Mongolia.⁵⁶ Tövgön monastery was founded in 1653 as a small hermitage for the First Jebcündamba qutuγtu, the Öndör gegen Zanabazar (1635-1723), on his 19th birthday, on a vertical cliff near the Orqon waterfalls. To the west of the buildings is a small cave where Zanabazar is said to have meditated and cast some of his most renowned sculptures. His footprints are carved in the rock. A little higher lies a second cave named Eke-yin kebeli, “the Mother's Belly”. One has to crawl down to the end of the passage, squeeze around (a difficult task owing to the size of the cavity) and climb out again. The objective is clearly to be reborn purified of one's sins.

Another cave-monastery, the Gilubar juu (or Gilubar-un aγui), in Bayarin Left banner (mentioned above), has five caves, including a womb-cave named Eke-yin umai, “the Mother's Womb”, with a narrow corridor.⁵⁷ According to a legend, a disciple of the Tang dynasty Chinese monk Xuanzang, coming from Chang'an (Xi'an, Shaanxi), found the place remarkable and decided to establish a Buddhist community there. In fact, the monastery was founded around caves that were excavated in 1109, under the Liao dynasty. The Gilubar juu was abandoned from the 12th to the late 18th century and was rebuilt as a Tibeto-Mongol monastery in 1770 by the second 'Jam dbyangs bzhad pa (1728-1791) of Labrang monastery in Amdo who was captivated by the scenic beauty of the site.

Lessing mentions another womb-cave in Labrang-yin sūme, in the Caqar country,⁵⁸ Inner Mongolia (Lessing 1957: 95-96). According to his informant, a Russian missionary, there was a secret shrine called Eke-yin umai. Lessing visited the temple's ruins in 1931, and found traces of the entrance to the cave which had collapsed. The aperture was ornamented by a lotus pattern symbolising the *yonī*.⁵⁹

The Mongolian terminology for these caves focuses on the Mother (womb, belly), whereas the Tibetans refer to them as “hell paths” (*dmyal lam*), or “narrow paths” (*phrang lam*).⁶⁰ Mongols revere Mother Earth (Etügen eke)⁶¹ as an important popular deity, and their word for mother (*eke*) frequently appears in the names given to natural features of the landscape. The womb-cave ritual can be seen as a special form of earth worship.

Caves Communicating with an Underworld or with Central Tibet

Lhasa being the most sacred and distant destination for Mongol pilgrims, the

⁵⁶ Also written Tovxon, Dovxon or Duvxon in Cyrillic Qalqa Mongolian. Located in Bat Ölzii sum [Batu Öljei], Övörxangai [Öbürqangγai] province, 68 km from Erdene zuu.

⁵⁷ Heissig 1972 II: 756, according to a literary source. When I visited the monastery, only the three main caves were visible. They still contain Liao dynasty images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas; the central one presents a north-facing *parinirvāna* Buddha image that can be circumambulated, Charleux 1998: 148, 397-398. I did not see the womb-cave described by Heissig.

⁵⁸ About ten miles from the Qada-yin sūme, Гoul caγan banner.

⁵⁹ Rolf Stein (1988) also showed that narrow passages within the socle of statues or *stūpa* convey the same womb symbolism. An example is found in the pedestal of a 18th century iron *stūpa* of Amarbayasgalant monastery [Amur bayasqulangtu keid], in Selenge province, north of Ulan-Bator, built in 1723-36, Corneille Jest, personal communication, and Stein 1988: 14.

⁶⁰ The Halase-Māratika caves in Eastern Nepal (where Padmasambhava subdued a demoness, meditated with his consort Mandārava, had visions and obtained magical powers), include five hell paths called the “door of sins”, the “door of Dharma”, the “womb door”, the “door of karma”, the “gate of heaven”, Buffetrille 1994: 9-12.

⁶¹ *Eke* also means “beginning”, “origin”.

mysterious underground passage of the Hongyang cave may have been particularly venerated. In the Tibetan world, some caves are worshipped because their extended galleries, passages and underground rivers suggest access to the underworld of the *nâgas*. Caves with secret passages communicating with distant places are also common in Tibetan tradition. A Tibeto-Nepalese legend explaining the draining of the lake that covered the Kathmandu valley tells that Mañjushrî used a tunnel running from the ancient town of Lhasa to an opening in a cliff in the Kathmandu valley, now called Lhasa's cave (Lhasa pâku). Pilgrims believe that the money they throw into the cave reaches Lhasa (Corneille Jest, personal communication). The caves of Brag dkar sprel rdzong ("White Rock, Castle of the Monkeys") in Amdo contain galleries that have never been fully explored. They are believed to lead to the realm of the *nâgas* and legendary caverns beneath Lhasa.⁶² The creation of another lake, the Kukunor lake, is explained by the existence of a subterranean passage: according to legend the Jo khang temple could not be erected owing to the presence of a lake under the chosen site. A subterranean passage drained the water from Lhasa to Amdo where it formed the Kukunor lake. Padmasambhava prevented the Kukunor valley from being entirely flooded by blocking the hole with the top of the mountain Mahâdeva (Buffetrille 1999).

There are no such legends around the caves at Wutai Shan, but a close example is the Vajra Cave of Mañjushrî, with a hidden entrance, which is regarded as a paradise-cave where one remains inside, thus disappearing from human society and attains enlightenment or obtains various spiritual powers, (Stein 1988: 7-9). This type of cave is probably modelled on the Chinese Taoist "grotto-heaven" (*dongtian*).⁶³ In Beijing, on Qionghua dao, the island of Beihai Lake dominated by a white *stûpa* built in 1651, a well called Haiyan ("Sea's Eye") is said to communicate with the sea (Arlington & Lewisohn 1987 [1935]: 83).

There are few examples of passage-caves in local Mongol traditions. According to a legend collected in Inner Mongolia in 1934 by Owen Lattimore (1979: 237-239), when the Yuan dynasty collapsed, the Mongol emperor Toyon Temür (Shundi 1333-1367) is said to have fled through a cave passage, perhaps from the Yungang temple caves, up to Northern Mongolia. The biography of the Fifth Dilowa qutuytu mentions a pilgrimage made by his previous reincarnation to mountain caves called Tsogt [Coṣtu] in Sain noyon xan aimag [Sain noyan qan aimay]: "some of the branches of these caves have never been entirely explored" (Lattimore & Isono 1982: 144). Tunnel-caves seem to be an extension of womb-caves, but are not supposed to be entered by ordinary people and at any time.

Visions of Miracles

Images of Padmasambhava which he supposedly made with his own hands are frequently mentioned in Buddhist literature and art history. A monastery claiming to possess such a miraculous statue saw its prestige greatly enhanced and attracted numerous donations. The most famous example of such self-made images is the sandalwood portrait of the Buddha commissioned by King Udiyâna which is supposed

⁶² Ekvall & Downs 1987: 105. These caves, which include a womb-cave, are located in sPel thang (east of Kukunor lake). There, Padmasambhava subdued seven demons, Stein 1988: 29-30.

⁶³ Chinese *dongtian* are celestial microcosms, places of initiation and refuge from civilisation. On *dongtian*-passages whose distances are magically reduced: Verellen 1995: 269, 271. On Wutai Shan: Birnbaum 1991: 120-134.

to have been preserved from the Han to the Qing dynasties in China. Images credited with possessing special numinous qualities and believed to manifest supernatural signs and perform miracles in response to extraordinary human actions are a common feature in many Buddhist cultures. To behold such an image may lead to instant enlightenment. To mention just one example, in a meditation cave of Padmasambhava at mount Kha ba dkar po (northwest Yunnan), a self-produced image of Padmasambhava sheds ambrosia on the floor. Visions varying according to the spiritual attainment of the devotee are also common at Tibetan pilgrimage sites. At gTer sgron in Central Tibet, where miracles are mainly attributed to Padmasambhava,⁶⁴ the pilgrims press their faces and gaze up into a channel-like tube in the rock leading towards the sky. At the upper end of the channel, visions may appear in the sky, such as one's personal meditation divinity (*yi dam*) or a particular protector.

Spring and Dust

At Aγui-yin süme, the pilgrims collect spring water in the cave of Târâ, and red dust in the Hongyang cave. Mongolia is dotted with sacred springs which are especially venerated by the local population,⁶⁵ who used their waters to besprinkle the herds. In front of Kökeqota's Big Temple (Yeke juu), eight wells are said to have sprung under one of the hooves of Emperor Kangxi's horse. This place, known as the Jade Source, has been recently enclosed in a small shrine dedicated to a genius of the water (*luus*).⁶⁶ The collection of dust, stones, soil or plants by pilgrims at sacred sites is also a widespread practice in Tibet. These "harvests" are full of the transcendent power of the holy place: they "procure portable sources of a site's power to be directly consumed, or carried off for later use and further distribution" (Huber 1999: 15). Water from sacred springs and dust from holy sites used in pharmacopoeia may also be considered as sacred relics (Buffetrille 1996: 297-302). Moreover, Padmasambhava is often credited with causing sacred water to gush forth by driving his stick into the soil.

Can the Journey to Aγui-yin süme be called a Pilgrimage?

The lore and practices surrounding the caves at Aγui-yin süme are part of a larger tradition, mostly Tibetan, where they sustain the people's faith. Did the adaptation of Tibetan cave lore on Mongolian soil mean that the pilgrimage practices were adopted wholesale? May the journey to Aγui-yin süme be called a pilgrimage?

A pilgrimage may be defined as "a journey to a sanctified place, undertaken with the expectation of future spiritual and/or worldly benefit"⁶⁷ (MacKay 1998: 1). The Tibetan pilgrimage is a transaction: the pilgrims, through their prayers, offerings and physical involvement (walking, circumambulation, prostration, privations and various exploits such as crawling through a corridor), expect to obtain the above mentioned

⁶⁴ In gTer sgron, near 'Bri gung mthil, Padmasambhava is said to have spent seven years teaching his disciples in several caves. He left his footprints, caused a hot spring to emerge, tamed a demon etc., Loseries 1994.

⁶⁵ *Rasiyan* [*arshaan*], from Sanskrit *rasâyana*.

⁶⁶ The master spirits of the waters (rivers, lakes, springs) have been identified with the Tibetan *klus* (Mong. *luus*) under Buddhist influence.

⁶⁷ The Buddhist notion of merit is translated in Mongolian as *buyan* (<Skt *punya*), which also means good luck, fortune, prosperity. For a discussion of "orthodox" benefits (notions of karma and accumulation of merit) and less "orthodox" ones (such as good luck, purification of sins, transgressions and pollution, life energy, longevity), see Huber 1999: 10, 16-19.

benefits. The pilgrimage site may be a natural feature of the landscape such as a mountain, lake, cave, or rock, or else a monastery, holy city, relic, pillar, statue, book, *stûpa*, or a human reincarnation.⁶⁸ These sacred sites, objects and persons are especially visited at certain dates of the calendar, when it is believed that the merit one accumulates through virtuous actions is increased. The circumambulation of the sacred site is an important feature of Tibetan pilgrimage (Buffetrille 1996: 347-355): the generic Tibetan term for "pilgrimage" is *gnas bskor*, literally "circuiting, going around a place", or *gnas mjal*, lit. "to encounter a holy place".⁶⁹

Tibetans make the distinction between the long-distance pilgrimage to a major holy place, and regular, short-term individual worship at a local shrine: *mchod mjal* ("to pay respect with an offering").⁷⁰ There is no such distinction in Mongolian; the Mongolian term *mörgül* refers all at once to a bow (kow-tow), public prayer, religious worship, religious ceremony, as well as pilgrimage. (*Yeke*) *mörgül-dür yabuqu* (or *kikü* or *üiledkü*)⁷¹ literally means to go (or to make) a (big) pilgrimage.⁷² *Yeke*, "big, large" evokes the adventure and emotional intensity inherent in long distance pilgrimages. *Ayalaqu*⁷³ means to travel, set out for a journey, go on an expedition or pilgrimage.

On the basis of these criteria, the journey to Aγui-yin süme may be classified as a pilgrimage. Indeed, the site is not the object of regular worship, and pilgrims do more than to just attend a festival. Today, the pilgrimage lasts only one day and does not include the circumambulation of the whole complex, although circumambulation is observed within the first cave.⁷⁴ The main attraction of this site for Mongols as well as Han Chinese, are the caves, which share many of the characteristics prevalent at Tibetan pilgrimage sites. Receiving visions, crawling into a corridor, collecting water and dust... all these efforts reflect the pilgrims will to create a direct, physical and sensory relationship between themselves and the holy place. People come twice a year, on the days commemorating the arrival and the departure of Padmasambhava. It is not a long-term, long-distance pilgrimage, but may be included in the category of local and supra-local pilgrimages. The caves were renowned long ago in all of Western Inner Mongolia, and continue to attract pilgrims from several hundred kilometres away.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ In 1929, the Panchen Lama's visit to Inner Mongolia Sünid banners attracted 30,000 pilgrims, only 2,000 of whom came from Sünid banners.

⁶⁹ The notion of *gnas* is usually translated as "power place", "holy place", a "potential source of sacred energy", and also abode of a deity or a saint (Huber 1994: 23, 31). *gNas* sites are "empowered" as a result of the contact with enlightened beings (here: Padmasambhava), and by the religious practices performed there. This notion is close to the Chinese *ling*, numinous, efficacious: the manifestation of the power of a deity, Naquin & Yü 1992: 11. This could explain why Aγui-yin süme's caves attract so many different kinds of pilgrims and visitors such as *qigong* associations.

⁷⁰ But "the boundaries between these words (*mchod mjal*, *gnas bskor*, *gnas mjal*) are subject to change and are blurred", Ekvall & Downs 1987: 26. For other definitions of a Tibetan pilgrimage: Large-Blondeau 1960; Ekvall 1964: 244; Ekvall & Downs 1987: 26; Huber 1994: 23-39; Buffetrille 1996: 478; for a comparative perspective in East Asia: Naquin & Yü 1992: 1-38.

⁷¹ Qalqa: (*ix*) *mörgöld yavax* (or *xiix* or *üildex*).

⁷² The visitors I spoke with used the Chinese term *miaohui*, "temple festival". The common Chinese terms for pilgrimage are *chaoshan*, "go in audience with (or paying respects to) the mountain", and *jinxiang*, "to present incense", Naquin & Yü 1992: 11.

⁷³ Qalqa: *ayalax*.

⁷⁴ In Aγui-yin süme, since many of the buildings are perched on the mountainside and the caves are aligned along the defile, circumambulation of the whole complex is impossible.

⁷⁵ Cammann (1951:139) heard about the famous main cave from the lamas during his travels, but did not know of the existence of the monastery before visiting it: "It is one of the most sacred places of the

These typical pilgrimage features belong to the popular religion rather than to the Buddhist tradition. For most Tibetan pilgrimage sites there is a guidebook giving the “official” Buddhist version and a parallel one. The abundance of this type of literature advertising the sanctity of sites, which enjoys a wide readership, has contributed to the rapid growth of Western scholarly interest in the topic of Tibetan pilgrimage sites and their rituals in recent years.⁷⁶ By contrast, pilgrimage sites including visits to caves within Mongolia are not documented in Mongolian literature.⁷⁷ We have no mention of the existence of such guidebooks; the official Buddhist discourse appears to be absent here.

Probably due to the lack of such literature, and also because anthropologists working in Mongolia have focused very little on Buddhism, scholars of Mongolian religion usually assert that there were no “pilgrimages” in Mongolia itself. It is true that for a Mongol nothing can compare to such “international” sacred places as Wutai Shan in China, Kumbum monastery in Amdo or Lhasa in Central Tibet. Though less documented than pilgrimages abroad, pilgrimages within Mongolia did exist. The pilgrimage to Aγui-yin süme is not an exception and in the following section I will give a few examples of pilgrimages and their related rituals that follow most of the above-mentioned criterions.

Mongol pilgrimages may be classified in the following order of importance: pilgrimages abroad, supra-local Mongol pilgrimages attracting devotees from various parts of Southern or Northern Mongolia, and lastly, local pilgrimages. Wutai Shan has probably been the major pilgrimage destination for pious Mongols since the Ming dynasty. Even today, Mongols from Ulan-Bator undertake annual pilgrimages to Wutai Shan. Kumbum monastery, the birthplace of Tsong kha pa, conveniently located on the caravan route that connected Urga to Lhasa, was probably the second major destination (Tsybikov 1992: chap. 2). Thousands of Mongols also used to travel to Lhasa every year on pilgrimage and/or to study at the main monasteries, as well as for commercial purposes, thereby boosting Lhasa's tourist economy (Kawaguchi 1909: 345-346; Tsybikov 1992: chap. 1). Generally only the wealthy, or else begging-itinerant monks, could undertake such long-distance journeys (Mostaert 1956: 289). Noblemen and wealthy reincarnations, loaded with alms, were frequently attacked by brigands on the way. They often joined the two large yearly caravans that departed in the spring and fall and that brought monastic trade missions from Urga to Lhasa. Thus spiritual quest was combined with worldly gain. However, the dangers of the road, the difficulty in obtaining travel permits, the physical hardship and financial expense were limiting factors.

A few places in Mongolia, such as Urga, were popular local or supra local pilgrimage sites for those who could not afford long-distance journeys. During the 19th and early 20th century, Urga, the seat of the Jebcündamba qutuytu, was the largest monastic city of Qalqa Mongolia. It became a major pilgrimage site and trade centre for both Mongols and Tibetans from Amdo, as well as for Kalmuk and Buriat pilgrims on their way to Lhasa. Tsybikov mentions Alashan Mongols in particular who came to

Mongol people. They had considered it sacred long before they were converted to Lamaism, even before their ancestors had been known as ‘Mongols’”.

⁷⁶ For a critical review of Tibetan pilgrimage research: Huber 1994; Huber 1999: 231, n. 2.

⁷⁷ There are descriptions of holy places in Nepal (Bodhnâth stûpa), Lhasa, Beijing (the Monastery of the Sandalwood Buddha, the White stûpa) and Wutai Shan written in Mongolian: Heissig 1954: 53, n°58; Uspensky & Nakami 1999: 280-282.

Urga to pay homage to the Jebcündamba (Tsybikov 1992: 21). Kalmuks from Astrakhan came to Urga every year following the pilgrimage their princess made there in 1880. The Dalai Lama's two-year sojourn in Urga (1904-1906) may have increased its popularity as a centre of pilgrimage, and seems to have attracted an especially large number of Buriats (Jambal, Bawden ed. 1997: 35-36; Tsybikov 1904: 96). In the same way, the large concentration of temples, monasteries and high reincarnations in Southern Mongolian Kökeqota and Dolonnor (Doluγan naγur) made these holy cities supra local pilgrimage sites.

Urga was probably not the most popular pilgrimage destination. Lay pilgrims preferred to visit Erdene zuu [Erdeni juu] in Övörxangai aimag, the first Qalqa monastery, built by Abadai qan (1554-1588) in 1585-1586. Erdene zuu was the holiest monastery of Qalqa Mongolia because of its ancient and prestigious origin, the proximity of the ruins of the imperial capital Qaraqorum, the large number of its holy relics and the reputation of its schools. Moreover, it was an important commemorative centre: it was the first seat of the Jebcündamba lineage, and the site of the royal tombs of Abadai and his family. Erdene zuu witnessed some of the most important events of Qalqa Mongolia: "this is why the very mention of Erdeni Dzuu arouses love for his native land in the heart of every Mongol, and ultimately, moves him to fall on bended knee in trembling delight before this holy place" (Pozdneev 1971: 282). This monastery escaped the large-scale destruction of monasteries in the late nineteen-thirties, and has been restored several times during the 20th century. Even today people undertake the pilgrimage to this holy place and circumambulate the precinct.⁷⁸ The imperial monastery of Amarbayasgalant xiid, built to shelter the relics of the First Jebcündamba in 1736, was also a major shrine for Mongols from every Qalqa aimag (Pozdneev 1971: 28).

More comparable to Aγui-yin süme, Gilubar juu was a renowned pilgrimage site in Eastern Inner Mongolia during the Qing dynasty. It was so popular that the place was called "little Wutai Shan" (Charleux 1998: 148). The pilgrims were attracted by the Liao dynasty caves for the same reasons as the caves at Aγui-yin süme: their sacred nature, their ancient origin, the legend surrounding them (i. e. the visit of Xuanzang), and the beauty of the site. When I visited the site in 1994, the pilgrimage no longer seemed active, but Mongols still enjoyed going there for a picnic.

Aγui-yin süme and Gilubar juu are both symbolically affiliated to Wutai Shan. According to Birnbaum's informant, "it is inappropriate to enter the mother cave [at Wutai Shan] if one previously has entered the daughter cave" [at Aγui-yin süme?] (Birnbaum 1989-90: 138, n. 70). Is it a problem of precedence: one must visit the mother at Wutai Shan before the Mongol "daughter"? In any case, both Aγui-yin süme and Gilubar juu appear to be substitutes for Wutai Shan, which remains the major reference. Such substitutes are also common in the Tibetan tradition.

In addition to these supra local (but not necessarily pan-Mongolian) pilgrimages, there were probably numerous local pilgrimages belonging to the popular religion throughout Mongolia. The above-mentioned Tsogt mountain caves in Sain noyon xan aimag probably belong to this category (Lattimore & Isono 1982: 144). Another example is the shrine of Isi qatun (Esi qatun, the "Lady-mother", i. e., the "main spouse of the qan") in Ordos Wang banner. It was especially popular with women who

⁷⁸ Agata Bareja-Starzynska and Hanna Havnevik met two ladies in Erdene zuu in 1998 who had come from Ulan-Bator for religious purposes. They circumambulated the whole monastery (personal communication).

wished to give birth and could not afford to go to Wutai Shan.⁷⁹ Isi qatun's shrine was therefore another substitute for Wutai Shan. Some of these local pilgrimages have been recently revived while others have been created. For instance the ancient cult of the Mother rock in (Northern) Mongolia at Eejin xad [Eji-yin qada] sanctuary, about 20 km south of Zuun Mod [Jegün Modu], Sergelen sumu, Central aimag, which attracts people from the surrounding countryside.

A modern pilgrimage destination in Inner Mongolia is that of the Gengis Khan sacrificial ceremony (*takilγa*) held in the so-called mausoleum built by the Chinese government in 1956-1957 on the site of the Eight White Tents in Ordos. The imperial ancestral worship established by the Yuan dynasty, and restricted to the imperial clan,⁸⁰ recently evolved into a popular tradition. The Chinese have successfully created this new pilgrimage site: the "mausoleum" "has become a site of pilgrimage for Mongols not only from all parts of Inner Mongolia, but also from various regions across China [especially Qinghai/Kukunor], reminding people of and reinforcing their connectedness through the invocation of a shared proud past mediated by the symbolism of Cinggis Khan" (Khan 1997: 269). In addition to tourists, the site also attracts Qalqa Mongols from Mongolia, as well as Han in search of an "Inner Mongolian" identity. The anthropologist Almaz Khan, who attended one of these commemorations in May 1988, describes the *oboγa* ritual performed by monks, the sacrificial offering of a sheep, and the kumiss offering (Khan 1995: 269-276). The visitors –"festival-goers", "serious pilgrims" and "fun-seeking Han tourists who arrive with their picnics and boom boxes blasting Chinese disco music"– all share a "tremendous powerful emotional experience" (Khan 1997: 273, n. 30). The mausoleum is currently the most visited site of Inner Mongolia, with 120,000 visitors in 1997 alone.

Another form of ritual related to pilgrimage is the cult of sacred mountains and local deities (*γajar-un ejen*, "spirit-masters of the land")⁸¹ which has always played a major role in popular religion of Mongolia. Seasonal celebrations were performed by local communities on ritual journeys to nearby sacred mountains. There, they worshipped *oboγas*, which are a type of altar where various territorial deities are said to reside or assemble.⁸² The cult of the clanic *oboγas*⁸³ was traditionally restricted to

⁷⁹ "Pour obtenir des enfants, les femmes qui en ont les moyens ont souvent recours à des pèlerinages, soit au Ou t'ai chan (Chansi), soit à un autre endroit de pèlerinage renommé...", Mostaert 1956: 292. Isi qatun is Sorqaqtani Begi (d. 1252), the mother of Qubilai qan. The Caqar kept the shrine in activity during the post-imperial period. After the fall of their last *qan*, it was moved to Ordos: Okada 1990.

⁸⁰ As well as other shrines linked to Gengis khan's family, such as the shrine of Saγang secen and Qutuγtai secen qongtaiji (Üüsin banner, Ordos).

⁸¹ Such as the Mother-Earth, the Lords of the Earth, mountains, hills, trees, lakes and rivers, who govern the weather and environmental conditions. Mongol burial places are usually located on mountains and thus associated with the spirits of ancestors. The Mountain lords bestow prosperity, they are feared and their personal name is taboo. In particular, the Alashan mountain is a personified Mountain deity for the Mongols: Heissig 1973: 470-472; Tatar 1976. "He" was also a territorial god for the Tanguts: Stein 1951: 247.

⁸² *Oboγas* are often found around monasteries and even within monastic compounds, and *oboγa* ceremonies were held by monasteries: Charleux 1998: 441-442. The *oboγas* of Aγui-yin sūme may be an indication of the presence of earlier local beliefs and cults such as that of the Mountain god. I observed statues of Mountain gods portrayed as *dharmapālas* in various Inner Mongolian monasteries.

⁸³ Birtalan's (1998: 203) typology distinguishes between clanic *oboγas*, *oboγas* of the larger community and travellers, built on mountain passes, and *oboγas* of "superclanic importance", erected in memory of battles for instance.

the local male community who shared and worshiped a common forefather on the mountain in order to obtain his protection.⁸⁴

Buddhism strongly influenced and redefined the Mongolian concept of sacred mountains and their worship so as to strengthen its social position and satisfy the demand of the local nobility.⁸⁵ The clergy tried to appropriate the local gods by incorporating them into Buddhist pantheon and rituals as early as the 16th century. During the 18th century, great lamas such as the Mergen gegen Lubsangdambijalsan (1717-1766?) of Urad wrote prayers for the worship of *oboγas*, associating them with similar practices already established in Tibetan Buddhism, and protested against the slaughter of beasts for offerings (Bawden 1994, "Two Mongol Texts concerning Obo worship"). The Mongol mountain deities were associated with the Buddhist sacred mountains, Potala or Sumeru, and received a new name following their "taming" and "conversion". Sacrifices to purely Buddhist deities such as the four Mahâraja were also performed on sacred mountains. Ceremonies were organised on a state level, such as the cult to the Four Holy mountains of Qalqa Mongolia –Bogd xan [Bogdo qan], Songgina, Chilgeltei [Cenggeltü] and Bayanzürx [Bayan Jirüke]–, all of which received official recognition from the Qing court. Each of these four Mountain gods "converted" to Tibetan Buddhism played a role in the great *cam* dance of Urga. The great mountain of Otgon Tenger [Tngri], in the Xangai mountains, 300 km west of Uliastai, was the object of various sacrifices by the *amban* (imperial resident), the banner officials, local communities and up to the present, by religious and lay pilgrims from the entire region.⁸⁶ Every region had its own hierarchy of particularly sacred mountains whose gods were sometimes considered as equal in rank to the sky and earth. The practice of circumambulating the summit of these mountains (and not only the *oboγa*) may be related to Buddhist influence (Tatar 1976: 10, n. 41).

Buddhism as well as the Manchu-Mongol administration thus contributed to the "supra-localisation" and "regionalisation" the cult of certain mountains, giving their spirits the additional identity of a universal god. They became popular pilgrimage destinations. However, probably due to a more superficial Buddhisation, mountain worship in Mongolia evolved differently than in Tibet, where Buddhist pilgrimages to mountains (*gnas ri*) replaced or superimposed on the cults of territorial gods in many areas through "taming" and "conversion".⁸⁷

⁸⁴ These popular cults never disappeared in Mongolia and are now encouraged as an expression of Mongolian national and cultural identity. Modern *oboγa* ceremonies in Inner Mongolia are described by Sneath 2000: 235-244.

⁸⁵ Studies on Mongol sacred sites and cults to territorial gods are still at their incipient stage. Thousands of prayers to local gods are preserved, especially in Russia. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the texts written by Buddhist lamas from prayers written by shamans who adopted Buddhist vocabulary and style. For a typology and a review of studies dedicated to the cult of *oboγa*: Djakonova 1977; Birtalan 1998.

⁸⁶ The Fifth Dilowa qutuγtu mentions his pilgrimage to Otgon Tenger in his autobiography: Lattimore & Isono 1982: 149. It is still an important pilgrimage today: Flavie Segantini, a French student, attended it in 2000 (personal communication). For a description of the *ambans* worship of the Boydo qan ayula by: Jambal, ed. Bawden 1997: 16. In 1995, the cult of mountains sanctified by the Gengis Khan epic, such as Bogd Xan Uul [Boydo qan ayula] and Burxan Xaldun [Burqan qaldun], was reinstated by a presidential decree.

⁸⁷ Buffetrille (1996: 193-208) documents the transition between the local, non Buddhist life-giving cult performed by the male community who addresses mundane prayers to an anthropomorphic territorial god (*yul lha*), to the Buddhist pilgrimage with circumambulation around a "mandala-ised" and "tamed" mountain, abode of a transcendental Buddha or a bodhisattva (*gnas ri*). The two cults may be superimposed on the same mountain, which shows that different stages of Buddhisation are found in

The historical and anthropological evidence presented here suggests that local pilgrimages may have played a larger role in Mongolian religious life than what is usually assumed. Originally Mongols went on pilgrimage to Tibet and Wutai Shan, and only later developed their own holy Buddhist sites (just as Tibetans first went to India on pilgrimage and to collect religious teachings). The Buddhist appropriation of the territory, through the assimilation of local cults and deities is a slow and gradual process and appears to be at a less advanced stage in Mongolia than in Tibet. Mongolian pilgrimages have simply not had the time to reach the number, size and fame of those in Tibet.

In contrast to other Mongol pilgrimages which clearly have a local origin, the pilgrimage to Aγui-yin süme's caves represents the transposition of typical Tibetan pilgrimage themes to Mongol land. However, as shown by the examples of Gilubar juu and Tsogt caves, it is not an exception in the Mongol Buddhist world and further studies in this field will probably reveal other similar examples.

III- PADMASAMBHAVA AND THE NYINGMAPA SCHOOL IN MONGOLIA

Padmasambhava is an archetypal figure of the appropriation of a site through the taming of its local demons which is why he is associated with so many pilgrimage sites in Tibet. In the following pages I will now deal with the second issue raised by the pilgrimage to Aγui-yin süme, that of its claimed affiliation to the Nyingmapa tradition. I will give a general description of the popular worship of Padmasambhava and the history of the Nyingmapa school (the "School of the Ancients") in Mongolia which, I hope, will shed some light on the status of Aγui-yin süme in the Mongol religious landscape.

Padmasambhava's Popularity in Mongolia and Other Deities of Aγui-yin süme

The stories and legends about Padmasambhava's life were well known among the Mongols. His Tibetan exploits are related in the Mongol chronicles of Buddhism, such as by Saγang secen's "Precious Summary" (*Erdeni-yin tobci*, 1662)⁸⁸. In 1712, his most renowned biography was translated into Mongolian, confirming the importance and the systemisation of his cult, as well as the great popularity of treasure-texts (*gter ma*).⁸⁹ Aleksei Pozdneev mentions the existence in the late 19th century of a small temple in Urga (with no lama in permanent residence) dedicated to Padmasambhava located near the Summer palace: the Sira süme, also called Bandida-yin duγang. For the autumn celebration of Boγdo qan mountain, while the lamas presented offerings on the summit of the mountain, the Boγdo gegen himself (the Jebcündamba qutuγtu) held a similar service in this temple in honour of Padmasambhava, "who taught the Buddhists (how) to appease the spirits of the earth" (Pozdneev 1971: 42).

Tibet. Also Huber 1999: 22-23.

⁸⁸ Urga ms, Haenisch ed. 1955: fol. 36-37.

⁸⁹ *Badma γaton sudur-un orusiba* [A collection of stories concerning the life of Padmasambhava] written in Mongolian in 1712 on the basis of the original Tibetan text *Padma thang yig* [History of the existences of Padmasambhava], 14th century, "discovered" by the *gter ston* O rgyan gling pa (1329-1367), Martin 1997: 56. According to Heissig (1996: 281), a biography of Padmasambhava had already been translated into Mongolian in the early 17th century.

Padmasambhava's popularity has been attested and studied mainly through prayers.⁹⁰ He is especially invoked in rituals of the folk religion: he has even been credited with the invention of the Mongolian Fire cult and of non-sacrificial ritual practices such as the release of live animals regarded as sacred (*seterleqii*) (Heissig 1987: 274). Other prayers invoke Padmasambhava in the purification of the ritual dagger (*phur bu*), fumigation, beckoning fortune (*dalalju*), offering and hunting rituals, blessing of the yurt, calling of the soul etc. Various works ascribed to him were also translated into Mongolian, especially the eschatological literature in which his name is used in order to lend credibility to the prophecies.⁹¹

Padmasambhava is more specifically revered as a second Buddha by the Nyingmapas, but he is also worshipped as a sort of "cultural hero" throughout Tibet and Mongolia by people regardless of their personal school affiliation. Several Mongol incarnations of the great yogins of Tibetan history, such as Padmasambhava and Milarepa (Mi la ras pa)⁹² presided over Gelugpa monasteries of Western Inner Mongolia. The incarnation of Padmasambhava living in "Wojier" (*Vcir, Ocir: *vajra*) monastery of Qanggin banner (Ordos) rivaled with Aγui-yin süme's *qubilγan* (Cammann 1949: 137, 160).⁹³ The Qoshud ruler Güsri qan, the ancestor of Alashan nobility, who established the Gelugpa school's domination over all Tibet, was also regarded as a reincarnation of Padmasambhava.⁹⁴

In spite of his popularity, Padmasambhava's connection to Mongol religious sites is not well known, and to my knowledge Aγui-yin süme is the only site in Mongolia he is believed to have visited.⁹⁵ Furthermore, I know of no similar legends concerning the visit of other famous saints or yogins belonging to the great Indian or Tibetan traditions, such as Milarepa. The northernmost "traces" of Padmasambhava's activities are found in the Kukunor area. Aγui-yin süme thus appears as an exception in Mongolia.

Hayagrīva, another deity represented at Aγui-yin süme, also occupies a privileged position in the Nyingmapa pantheon.⁹⁶ Hayagrīva –a fierce manifestation of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara–, is worshipped by the Nyingmapas as a protector of the Dharma (*dharmapāla*) and a tutelary deity. Hayagrīva, the "Horse-necked" or the

⁹⁰ Bawden 1994: "Calling the Soul: A Mongolian Litany", "Some 'Shamanist' Hunting Rituals from Mongolia"; Heissig 1973: chap. V; Heissig 1987.

⁹¹ Sarközi 1992: 60 & n. 160. A prophecy concerning Gengis Khan and the Mongol empire is ascribed to Padmasambhava in the *Padma thang yig*, chap. 89 (Toussaint 1979: 364-365).

⁹² There were incarnations of Milarepa in Qianli miao (Urad banner, Ulaγan cabu league) and in Shanda-yin süme (Dalad banner, Ordos league), Cammann 1949: 90; 1951: 77. The first incarnation of Milarepa to appear in Mongolia was Dambadorji, recognised as the First Dilowa qutuγtu, who built the above-mentioned cave monastery of Little Arjai in Ordos under the Ming dynasty, Lattimore & Isono 1982: 268. Another reincarnation of Qalqa Mongolia, the Narabancin qutuγtu, is said to be the descendant of a Drigungpa ('Bri gung pa) lama named Nāropa, Lattimore & Isono 1982: 9. Just before 1625-1626 the Tümed had come on mission to 'Bri gung to invite Nāropa to Mongolia.

⁹³ Bawden (1989: 31) mentions two Mongol incarnations of Padmasambhava in the Ordos region, who were said to belong to the Gelugpa tradition. He does not specify their name and their monastery, but surely refers to Aγui-yin süme and "Wojier".

⁹⁴ Sum pa mkhan po, *dPag bsam ljon bzang*, quoted by Uspensky 1994: 918.

⁹⁵ According to Aγui-yin süme's legend, Padmasambhava is said to have reached the site in 774 –his biographies date the foundation of bSam yas the following year. The great majority of Tibetan pilgrimage sites claim to have been places where Padmasambhava meditated and subjugated demons, but only ten or so cave sites are based on coherent biographical references in Nyingmapa literature.

⁹⁶ The other deities represented there –Samvara, his consort Vajravârahî (rDo rje phag mo), and Garuda– are not especially favoured by the Nyingmapas.

“Horse-headed one”, enjoys an extraordinary popularity among Mongolian shepherds, who offer him consecrated horses. He also occupies a prominent place in the *Guhyasamâja tantra*, a text widely honoured in Mongolia. In Tibet, Hayagrîva and Vajravârhî are also linked to many sacred sites with caves and rocks.

Mongolia as an Ancient Buddhist Country

Even though the cult of Padmasambhava and the practice of pilgrimages to caves are both common in Mongolia, the Aγui-yin sūme's claim to having received the visit of the great yogin calls for an explanation. In fact, Padmasambhava's visit to Alashan may be seen as a supplementary “evidence” in support of the Mongols' early acquaintance with Buddhism, linking the history of Mongolia with the early history of Tibetan Buddhism. Members of the Gengiskhanid family endeavoured to be identified as reincarnations of ancient Indian and Tibetan kings (Franke 1994: 64-65). Although most Mongol historians of Buddhism agree that the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia began in the 13th century, they strove hard to find proofs of earlier links. Some even claimed that the introduction of Buddhism in Mongolia predated its introduction in Tibet, and even in China. For instance, in a 18th century chronicle, the northern nomads (i. e. the Xiongnu) under emperor Han Wudi (140-87 BC), identified as Mongols by the author, were said to have converted to Buddhism one century before the introduction of Buddhism to China (Uspensky 1994: 916).⁹⁷ Such claims, however fabricated, were of obvious advantage to Mongol Buddhism. However, it may be useful to examine the possible historical basis for these theories.

“Evidence” of early contacts between “Mongols” and Tibetans is given in sources analysed by Uspensky (1994): three Tibetan masters fled northwards to “Hor” under King Glang dar ma's (d. 842) persecution of Buddhism. There, they converted a “Mongol” king whose son, Qoricar mergen, received religious precepts and acquired supernatural powers. Qoricar mergen has been praised as an incarnation of Padmasambhava in Tibetan sources since the Yuan dynasty. The first occurrence of this identification in Mongolian literature appears in the *Erdeni-yin tobci* (1662).⁹⁸ “Hor”, identified as Mongolia by later scholars, designated prior to the 13th century various peoples of Central Asia, particularly the Uigurs of Ganzhou and the Tanguts (Tib. Mi nyag) established in Gansu, south Ordos (Xiashou) and northern Amdo (Stein 1951). After the fall of their empire, many Tibetans migrated to Tangut territory. During the 11th century the Tanguts founded a kingdom known as Xia (1032-1227) that encompassed Ningxia, Alashan and a part of Gansu. Tibetans occupied high administrative and religious functions at their court, and their close ties to the Tanguts are well attested. During this period Tibetan and Newar tantrists travelled to Wutai Shan and Ordos (Stein 1988: 31). Renowned Tibetan masters such as the Karmapa gTsang po pa dKon mchog seng ge (?-1218/19) meditated in the mountains of Helan shan before serving the king of Xia (Sperling 1987: 33).

Perhaps Qoricar mergen, his father Tamaca and grandfather Batu caγan, were

⁹⁷ It is known that Chinese monks converted some of the nomad populations of Northern China to Buddhism as early as the 4th century AD, but of course no connection can be established between these populations and the 13th century Mongols.

⁹⁸ According to Uspensky (1994: 918), a basis for this identification may be a story found in the *Deb ther rgya mtsho* (1865), relating that the person who was invited by Shāntarakshita to subdue the evil spirits who prevented the construction of bSam yas was not Padmasambhava but an incarnation of Vaishravana named Gha ba rDo rje gzhon nu who lived in the Tangut state.

(legendary?) Tangut kings who were later identified with Gengis Khan's ancestors. By the end of their dynasty, the Tanguts had developed strong cultural affinities with the Mongols, who later adopted from the Tanguts the Tibetan (and to a lesser degree Chinese) model of patronage of Buddhist institutions and arts to legitimise their state ideology. There is even the example of a Tibetan lama who had served the Tangut state before he gained the favour of the Mongol emperor Qubilai (Sperling 1987: 34; Sperling 1994).

The caves of Aγui-yin süme, being located within the Xia state, 200 km north of their capital Xingqing fu, may therefore have been discovered and used by Tibetan or Tangut hermits. The figure of Padmasambhava and possibly his cult may well have been introduced in Alashan as early as the 11th century.⁹⁹ The population of this region, however, changed between the 11th and the 18th centuries and any continuity is very difficult to substantiate. Whatever the historical realities behind the claim that Padmasambhava's cult was introduced at an early time in the Alashan, the lore of Aγui-yin süme is a discourse on the antiquity of Mongol Buddhism, and thus on the equal status of Mongolia and Tibet as Buddhist holy lands –in contrast to the actual situation in which Mongol lamas are required to go to Amdo and Lhasa for degrees and sanctification.

A Short History of the Red Hat Schools in Mongolia

Although Padmasambhava is a major figure of Tibetan Buddhism, the diffusion of his worship and ritual also has an institutional aspect and is closely connected to the development of the Nyingmapa order. Padmasambhava, however, has always been a central figure in Mongolian Buddhism independently of the Nyingmapa clergy. Indeed, in spite of the official supremacy of the Gelugpas, he was worshipped in many places, monasteries, private chapels and homes. To what extent the importance of Padmasambhava in all kinds of rituals of the Mongol popular religion is linked with the Nyingmapas remains an open question. A short history of the presence of the Nyingmapa order in Mongolia may shed some light on the subject.

Mongolian terminology distinguishes between the “Yellow Religion (or Teaching, Doctrine)” (*sira shasin*)¹⁰⁰ –the Gelugpas– and the “Red Religion” (*ulaγan shasin*) –all non-Gelugpa traditions.¹⁰¹ The “Red” label, which regroups very different

⁹⁹ Heissig's hypothesis concerning the introduction of Padmasambhava's cult in Mongolia differs from mine. According to Heissig, Padmasambhava's figure was introduced in Inner Asia at the end of the first millennium and belongs to “pre-lamaist”, “ancient forms of Northern Buddhism”, as opposed to the late institutionalised Tibetan Buddhism. The various influences of ancient “shamanistic” concepts and foreign religious systems of Central Asia and Persia merged with Buddhist figures, leading to a syncretism of the figure of Padmasambhava who is also included in the old pantheon of *tngrī* gods. His cult among Mongols started during the Mongol empire and reached its peak in the 16th and 17th centuries: Heissig 1987: 271.

¹⁰⁰ More generally, the term “yellow” refers to Buddhism and Buddhists as opposed to *qara*, black, which has the connotation of “profane, secular” (*qara kümün*, a layman). The popular expression *qara shasin* (“black religion”) which refers to “shamanism”, the popular religion of the Mongols, with the pejorative meaning of “evil, sinful”, was probably invented by Buddhists.

¹⁰¹ The Gelugpas (“the ones of the Virtuous Path”) are often referred to as the “reformed school” by Western scholars, as opposed to all the other schools, known as “unreformed”. However the distinction is ambiguous since some scholars count only the Nyingmapas as unreformed on the basis of their adherence to the old tantras of the first diffusion of Buddhism. I therefore prefer to use the Mongol distinction.

traditions, is confusing for historians of Tibetan religion.¹⁰² This distinction probably derives from Chinese Ming and Qing historiographers who distinguish the “Red [Hats] religion” or “Red [Hats] school(s)” (*hongjiao*) from the “Yellow religion” (*huangjiao*).¹⁰³ It is therefore difficult to separate the history of the Nyingmapa school in Mongolia from that of the Red Hat schools in general.

The “Red Hat orders” of Tibetan Buddhism were first introduced among the Mongols during the 13th century. The Sakyapas had a decisive influence since Qubilai granted their leader regency over Tibet. The influence of Karmapa and Sakyapa lamas at the Yuan court affected mainly the urban Mongol nobility of Qanbaliq (Beijing) in China, and Qaraqorum and Shangdu in Mongolia. Very few monasteries were founded in Mongolia during the Yuan dynasty. Owing to their determined aloofness from the political sphere, the Nyingmapas had less influence at the Yuan court than other schools. Yet, several Nyingmapa lamas received the favours of the Yuan emperors. One of them, Zur bZang po dpal, founded a tantric school in Qanbaliq (Tsering 1978: 523; Delege 1998: 79).

After the fall of the Yuan Empire in 1368, most of the Mongols returned to their nomadic way of life in their homelands. Yet Mongol contacts with Tibetan Buddhism during the 15th-and 16th century are attested in contemporary Chinese sources (Serruys 1963 and 1966; Jagchid 1988). The recently discovered paintings of Arjai-yin ayui caves in Ordos represent a rare example of the continuity of Buddhist presence from the Northern Wei to the Ming period (Wang Dafang, Batu Jirigala et al., 1994). Mongols living in Central Tibet during the 15th and 16th centuries were in contact with the Karmapas and the Drigungpas (‘Bri gung pa) (Sperling 1992). During the 15th century, the Western Mongols converted to Buddhism, but after the death of Esen qan in 1455, we have no evidence of their support of Buddhism until the 17th century. Buddhism never completely vanished from Mongolia, but was never firmly established there before the late 16th-early 17th century.

The conversion of the Mongol population to Buddhism began in earnest in the second half of the 16th century. Chinese chronicles occasionally mention the presence of Red Hat schools lamas –Sakyapa, Nyingmapa, Karmapa and Jonangpa (Jo nang pa)– in various parts of Mongolia. Most of them had only recently arrived from Tibet, but some may have been the descendants of communities established at an earlier time. These Red Hat monks were in competition with the growing Gelugpa order to convert the descendants of Gengis Khan. They bore Tibetan or Mongolian names and generally came from Amdo, or from Beijing when sent by the Ming court. Chinese monks sent by the Ming, as well as banned Chinese sectarians identified as “White Lotus” by the Chinese sources¹⁰⁴ were also present in fair numbers at Altan qan's (1508-1582) court. The Tümed and their allies, the Ordos and Qaracin tribes eventually gave pre-eminence to the Gelugpa school in 1578, when they met its hierarch, bSod nams rgya mtsho (1543-1588), who received on this occasion the title of Dalai Lama. The intense activity of Gelugpa missionaries in Mongolia, and the recognition of a great-grandson of Altan qan as the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yon tan rgya

¹⁰² In Tibet the term “Red Hat” was mainly used to distinguish between two lines within the Karmapa order (Red Hats and Black Hats), Richardson 1998: “The Karma-pa Sect”, p. 339.

¹⁰³ In the religious context, *jiao* can be translated as “religion”, “school” or “teaching”. Since the Qing dynasty, Tibetan Buddhism is called *lamajiao* (Lamaism) in Chinese. The Kagyupa (bKa’ brgyud pa) school, when not included among the Red Hat schools, is also called *baijiao*, “White school”, because of the colour of its monks’ robes. Bön is called *heijiao*, “Black religion/school”.

¹⁰⁴ “White Lotus” is a generic term used by Ming official sources to designate various millenarian sects that formed from the 16th century onwards.

mtsho (1589-1617) boosted the young faith, initiating a wave of conversions and the construction of monasteries. Gelugpa missionary lamas such as Neici toin or Jaya pandita (1599-1662) persecuted Shamanist practices and practitioners, and within the next few decades, ordinary Mongols also converted to Buddhism, either voluntarily or under constraint. The formative period was thus characterised by the initial competition between the different schools to convert the Mongol princes. The princes, in turn, tried to attract the most renowned lamas, regardless of their tradition.

The overwhelming progression of Gelugpa "orthodoxy" eclipsed any activity the Red Hat schools may have had during this period. The presence of the Red Hat schools is attested among the Tümed in the early 17th century, with famous (Nyingmapa?) hermits such as Töbed diyanci and Caqar diyanci.¹⁰⁵ In order to compensate for the departure of the Fourth Dalai Lama to Tibet, the Gelugpas sent a young Nyingmapa monk, the Maidari qutuγtu dGe 'dun dpal bzang rgya mtsho (1592-1635). He arrived at Kökeqota in 1604 at the age of twelve, and played a major role in the city's religious life. He was recognised as an incarnation of Maitreya, and the *Erdeni-yin tobci* presents him as a reincarnation of Byams ba rgya mtsho, a disciple of Padmasambhava.¹⁰⁶ The 1606 murals of the Maitreya temple (Maidari-yin juu) depict him with a beard, a red gown and a red hat, along side various protective deities (*dharmapāla*) belonging to Nyingmapa cycles.¹⁰⁷ Despite the presence of the Maidari qutuγtu, who directed its consecration, the temple was nevertheless affiliated to the Gelugpa order (Charleux 1999). The individual prestige of these Red Hat monks probably overshadowed the contradictions related to their personal religious affiliations.

Countering Altan qan's preference for the Gelugpas, the nominal emperor Tümen jasaγtu qayan (r. 1557 or 1558-1592), descendant of the eldest Gengiskhanid branch, patronised the Red Hat schools in Eastern Inner Mongolia. Converted by a Karmapa lama in ca.1576, he too attempted to invite the Dalai Lama. His court also counted a number of Sakyapa and Nyingmapa lamas. Three lamas, probably of Sakyapa obedience, Manjusri bandida (Mañjushrī pandita), Sharba qutuγtu and Biligtü Nangsu, rapidly gained favour and attempted to revive the imperial cult at his grandson Ligdan qayan's (r. 1592-1634) court.

Sakyapas and Karmapas were also active in Northern Qalqa Mongolia. In 1586 Sakyapa lamas consecrated Erdene zuu (Pozdneev 1971: 282-283). Abadai qan, the founder of this monastery, gave his preference to the Gelugpa order, and his brother Tümenkin received from the Dalai Lama the title of Sain noyan qan for his zeal in fighting the Red Hat schools (Bawden 1989: 31). Yet Abadai qan's grandson Zanabazar was recognised as the reincarnation of the Tibetan scholar Târanâtha (1575-1634?), who belonged to the dissident Jonangpa school, an order affiliated to the Sakyapas and banned by the Fifth Dalai Lama.¹⁰⁸ According to the Golden Legend elaborated during the 18th century and connected with the veneration of Zanabazar, Târanâtha came to Mongolia and built his own Jonangpa monastery there. It is

¹⁰⁵ *Boγda Neici toin dalai mañjusri-yin domoγ*, 79ab, quoted by Heissig 1953: 18. Perhaps Töbed diyanci ("Tibetan hermit") can be identified with the Tümed hermit "Dobo" diyanci Prinlaijamso (Tib. sPrin las rgya mtsho, d. 1655), the main disciple of Boγdo Caγan blama (?-1627) who founded the Blama-yin ayui monastery near Kökeqota. Töbed's school affiliation is unknown, Charleux 2000: 72.

¹⁰⁶ Urga ms, Haenisch ed. 1955: fol. 85-86.

¹⁰⁷ This fortified temple located 70 km west of Kökeqota was probably founded by Altan qan in 1575 and restored in 1606, Charleux 1999.

¹⁰⁸ It is also said that Zanabazar was the reincarnation of the Maidari qutuγtu.

possible that some Jonangpa lamas fled Tibet to Mongolia as a result of the persecutions under the Fifth Dalai Lama's rule. How is it possible then - if we are to trust Zanabazar's biographies- that the Fifth Dalai Lama recognised Zanabazar as the reincarnation of a high lama belonging to the Jonangpa school? The Japanese scholar Miyawaki Junko (1992: 601) has showed that it could not have been the Fifth Dalai Lama who gave him the title of Jebcündamba (rJe btsun dam pa), and concludes that Zanabazar was probably not originally a Gelugpa lama.

The Qalqa prince Coγtu taiji (d. in 1637), was another patron of the Red Hat schools, and founded a fortified temple named bSam yas in his headquarters at Caγan baising (in the *aimag* Tüssheetü xan). Many works belonging of the Red Hat traditions were translated into Mongolian from the late 16th to the 17th century. The Red Hat schools lacked the missionary zeal of the Gelugpas and had no leader to compare with the Third and Fifth Dalai Lamas. Yet, owing to the marginal links they maintained with various Mongol princes until the early 17th century, they contributed to a certain receptivity of Buddhism at their courts and thus prepared the ground for the Gelugpa order's success.

The 17th century was marked by internal feuds during which all attempts at recreating a united Mongolian state ended in failure. Ligdan qayan, the arch-villain of modern Mongol history, and Coγtu taiji both gave preference to the Sakyapas and the other Red Hat schools. Both founded several religious communities, temples and monasteries, which for the most part were nomadic and which disappeared after their defeat. Both Ligdan and Coγtu attempted to carve out new kingdoms for themselves in the Kukur, where they patronised the Karmapas and persecuted the Gelugpas.¹⁰⁹ Ligdan was defeated by the Manchus in 1634, and Coγtu by the Qoshud, a Western Mongolian tribe and champions of the Gelugpas, in 1635. The Nyingmapas do not seem to have played any role in these political conflicts.

Following its victories, the Gelugpa order gained the support of the Manchu dynasty who influenced the still hesitating Mongol tribes to eventually choose the Yellow school. The Gelugpas gained nearly absolute religious power over all Mongolia. They took over the Mongolian Sakyapa heritage and secured the control of old prestigious religious lineages to bring the Mongols into the Gelugpa fold. They exploited the myth of 'Phags pa–Qubilai – a later fabrication and probably not a reliable account of the events that occurred in the 13th century– in order to re-establish the lama-patron (*yon mchod*) relationship between themselves and the various Mongolian tribes.

At the same time (1636), the princes of Inner Mongolia lost their independence by rallying the Manchu confederation. The communities and monasteries of the Red schools seem to have disappeared from Southern Mongolia around 1635. Religious unification closely followed political centralisation. Were the non-Gelugpa communities pacifically or forcibly converted to the Gelugpa order? The exact circumstances of their quasi-extinction remain an enigma. Many Inner Mongolian monasteries were destroyed during this period, and their monks took refuge in Manchuria and Eastern Mongolia. Whatever the process, it is clear that ca. 1635

¹⁰⁹ Some historians believe they formed an alliance, but it seems that Ligdan died before he could do so, Bawden 1989: 46. On the contacts between the Karmapas and Coγtu, whose son Arslan eventually turned against the Karmapas and killed their pontiff, the 6th Zhwa dmar pa: Richardson 1998: "The Karma-pa Sect", 352.

marked a turning point in the history of Southern Mongolian Buddhism¹¹⁰ with the hegemony of the Gelugpas leaving only small pockets of influence and activity to the Red schools.

In Central Tibet proper, the Gelugpas, once they had gained the support of the Qoshud, progressively supplanted the other schools on the political level. Except for the Jonangpas, who were declared heretics and severely persecuted, there was no doctrinal schism or persecution. When the battle was won, the Fifth Dalai Lama showed tolerance and a certain degree of generosity towards the “unreformed” schools. He personally favoured the Nyingmapas.¹¹¹ At that time, the Tibetans viewed the Mongols in general as fanatic champions of the Gelugpas. During their occupation of Lhasa in 1717-1718, the Jüngars organised a methodical persecution of the Nyingmapa monasteries: posing as puritans, they burnt all images and works of Padmasambhava and brutally looted the Nyingmapa monasteries, dethroning and even killing their incarnate lamas and abbots (in comparison, their looting of Gelugpa monasteries was mere robbery). “More Lamaist than the lamas, [they] imported into Tibet a full-dress religious intolerance and persecution” (Petech 1972: 53-54).

Sectarianism was not restricted to the Western Mongols. The patronage that the Nyingmapas enjoyed under the rule of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the regent Sangs rgyas rGya mtsho provoked opposition from the more conservative Gelugpa lamas.¹¹² The *dge bshes* scholars of the three great Gelugpa monasteries, many of whom were Mongols “with that bigoted conviction of the truth of their own faith that so often is characteristic of the convert, would view the Dzungar (Jünger) excesses against the Nyingmapas as acts comparable to Lha lung Dpal gyi rdo rje's righteous assassination of the apostate Glang dar ma (in 842)” (Smith 1970: 21). In another example of intolerance, the Qing obsession of a Red Hat conspiracy may have been inspired by the great Mongol reincarnations of Beijing, such as the lCang skya and the dGa' ldan siregetü qutuytus, most of whom were natives of Amdo. Luciano Petech suspects these lamas, “who did not wish to be overdone in zeal by their Dsungar (Jünger) brethren”, of having advised the Qing emperor to proclaim an edict condemning and repressing the Nyingmapas and their “irregular practices” in Tibet after the civil war of 1727-1728. “They shall not perform the repression of demons, the burnt offerings (*homa*), the throwing of magical weapons (*gtor zor*), all of which are illicit exorcism etc.” (Petech 1972: 106-107). The Tibetan king Pho lha nas resisted the decree. Such intolerant measures imposed by Mongol dignitaries and the Qing state may have been employed in Mongolia itself a few decades earlier; in any event they provide an idea of the sectarian atmosphere that prevailed at the time.

The sudden absence of the Red Hat schools in the sources is not necessarily the sole effect of physical persecution. Besides the fact that they had lost all political influence in Mongolia, mention of their continued presence may have been deliberately avoided. The history of Mongol Buddhism was written by Gelugpa monks

¹¹⁰ The Qalqas formally pledged allegiance to the Qing empire in 1691 only. Their chronicles do not seem to reflect the 1630s as a turning point in the history of Qalqa Buddhism.

¹¹¹ The spiritual affinities of the Fifth Dalai Lama with the Nyingmapa traditions are well-known: Smith 1970: 21. His gurus included several great masters of the Nyingmapa tradition; he himself was well versed in both the old and new tantra and was a rDzogs chen practitioner.

¹¹² The Gelugpas emphasise celibacy and scholasticism, and the more purist and clerical elements were opposed to rDzogs chen and Nyingmapa teachings in general, viewing their practices as corrupted.

who undoubtedly wished to erase all traces of the presence of Red Hat schools in Mongolia.¹¹³ For instance Coytu taiji's wars in Kukur are known less through Mongol apologetic historiography than through Tibetan sources or archaeology.

Scattered examples, references in historical sources and the existence of Red Hat monasteries such as Aγui-yin süme, show that after 1635 the Gelugpa "monopoly" over Mongolia was not absolute. The scholar Isibaldan (fl. 1835) asserts that Sakyapa, Karmapa, Nyingmapa and Jonangpa schools had survived in Qalqa Mongolia since the Yuan dynasty (*Erdeni-yin erike* 1835: 35v, ed. by Heissig 1961). The Red orders may have survived clandestinely, in itinerant tents. The Sakya prestige lasted some time in Qalqa Mongolia where the order maintained a significant presence until the late 18th century. In 1776, monks from Erdene zuu were sent to Sakya monastery in Central Tibet in order to bring back sacred texts (Pozdnev 1971: 287). Whether the monastery is affiliated to the Gelugpa or Sakyapa order or both is still under discussion (Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, forthcoming).

The Noyan qutuγtu Danjinrabjai

What was the religious obedience of the Fifth Noyan qutuγtu Rabjai, the main founder of Aγui-yin süme? A short summary of his biography will help us to understand the position of a Red Hat monk in a Gelugpa-dominated Mongolia. Rabjai was the most prolific Mongol poet of the 19th century, and three of his religious biographies have been preserved in Mongolia.¹¹⁴ He was born into a poor family of the Mergen wang banner in East Gobi. In his early years, he lived with his mother in great poverty, roaming the countryside and begging for food. Rabjai's father was a poor monk – a *badarci* (itinerant monk), either one of the many monks who lived as ordinary laymen after having completed basic Buddhist studies (Kiripolska 1999: 104); he may have been a Nyingmapa monk or a married tantric practitioner. At the age of eight, Rabjai was officially recognised as the reincarnation of the saint lama Nawang aγramba corji, and unofficially identified as the reincarnation of the Noyan qutuγtu of the princely family (*noyan* meaning "prince") of Mergen wang banner¹¹⁵ (Heissig 1972 I: 190). Nawang aγramba corji belonged to a Red Hat school, and Rabjai, too, was known as a tantric follower of the Nyingmapa tradition.¹¹⁶ After a noviciate in a

¹¹³ Conventional Mongolian and Tibetan chronicles of the history of Buddhism in Mongolia, such as Saγang secen's *Erdeni-yin tobci*, do not mention the presence of Red Hat schools. In the same way, the Sakyapa chroniclers revised the presentation of the struggle for supremacy between their school and the Karmapas during the 13th and 14th centuries.

¹¹⁴ *Noyan qutuγtu-yin doluγan düri* [Seven reincarnations of Noyan qutuγtu], *Tabuduγar Noyan qutuγtu-yin teüke namtar-un sudur* [A Biography of the Fifth Noyan qutuγtu] and *Tabuduγar-un cadiγun tobci quriyangγui* [A brief summary of the Biography of the Fifth]. For their location and variants: Kiripolska 1999: 97. They have been studied by Heissig 1972, vol. I: 185-240; C. Damdinsüren 1962. For other articles devoted to his life and works: Kiripolska 1999: bibliography; Heissig 1972, vol. I: 221 n. 1.

¹¹⁵ On this reincarnation lineage: Heissig 1972 I: 189. The previous Noyan qutuγtu, Jamyang oidubjaamsu had stabbed a monk of his retinue who had eaten rats and was drunk during a ritual at Erdene zuu. Condemned for this murder, he died in jail in Beijing. The Manchu emperor forbade (to discover) his reincarnation, but the population of the Mergen wang banner believed that Rabjai was the Fifth Noyan qutuγtu. The first to the fourth reincarnations were Gelugpa lamas.

¹¹⁶ Kiripolska (1999: 100 sq.) analyses the mention of "only mother Maazig" or "Maziglavdan" (Ma gcig lab ldan/sgron?) in one of Rabjai's poems – a reference to Ma gcig Lab ky sgron ma, a renowned female Buddhist practitioner, initiator of *gcod*, who lived in the 11th-12th century: Kollmar-Paulenz 1998. This name could be attributed to Rabjai's mother, also called Mazigqand (Ma gcig mkha' 'gro:

monastery of East Gobi, he pursued his doctrinal and esoteric studies in the renowned Southern Mongol monastery of Badyar coiling süme (Wudang zhao, near Baotou), and thereafter, spent his life teaching and travelling in Northern Mongolia (Urga, Erdene zuu, Gobi), Southern Mongolia (Ordos, Ulaγancabu, Alashan, Dolonnur, Kökeqota, etc.), and to Wutai Shan, Beijing and Amdo, but he was never able to visit Central Tibet. His travels were also motivated by his interest in local oral traditions and songs, and the different traditions of *cam* dance. Though he probably visited Red Hat monasteries in Amdo, he was never trained in a Nyingmapa monastery.

In the nineteen-sixties, the people of the Gobi still sang Rabjai's poems and told anecdotes about he whom they called "the Madman", or "Drunkard of the Gobi". Rabjai had two wives, and was renowned as a drinker and womaniser (according to tradition, he had 108 lovers). In 1839, he went to Da küriye to visit the Fifth Jebcündamba, but he incurred his disapproval by presenting himself blind drunk and wearing a red hat, and (Heissig 1972 I: 198). Rabjai's unconventional and sometimes provocative behaviour, which is justified in his biographies by his school affiliation, follows the tradition of the great Tibetan wandering yogins. The latter are referred to as *smyon pa*, "madmen", in Tibetan, and their bizarre and often outrageous behaviour was believed to be dictated by divine inspiration. These yogins, such as the 16th century saint 'Brug pa Kun legs, were often bards who enjoyed joking, singing folk songs and composing poems strongly criticising the abuses in the Buddhist institution and society. Some among them, like Rabjai, were heavy drinkers and famous for their sexual prowess, following the example of the Indian *mahāsiddhas*.

Far from being a poor and lonely wandering monk, Rabjai was greatly appreciated by his contemporaries, and travelled with a retinue of disciples and wives. He had no difficulty in raising funds among all classes of the Mongol population, both high and low. He founded several monasteries in Northern and Southern Mongolia, the first one being the Labrang süme in Qanggin banner, Ordos, in 1822, and he furnished them with images and copies of the *Kanjur*. He was distinguished by the Fourth Jebcündamba (before being disgraced) and by the 'A kya qutuγtu, and became the disciple of the third lCang skya qutuγtu Ye shes bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan (1787-1846), who thanks to Rabjai's influence showed tolerance towards the Red Hat schools. Rabjai was also renowned for his ability to subdue the *doγshid* (< Tib. *drag gsed*), fierce deities of the Buddhist pantheon. His esoteric knowledge is illustrated by the large manual of tantric sexual positions, drawn by his own hand, on display in the new museum of Sainshand, East Gobi (Pegg 2001: 147).

Rabjai's visit to Alashan is an important moment in his biography since he greatly impressed members of the local nobility when they tried to test his faith in the Buddha,¹¹⁷ and he collected there the oral tradition of the Moon cuckoo, which inspired his famous opera, the *Saran kökügen-ü namtar*. The princes of Alashan identified him as a reincarnation of the Chinese monk Ji Gong (also called Crazy Ji),

Ma gcig dâkinî), or to his personal deity (?). It could also indicate that Rabjai was a *gcod* practitioner. Padmasambhava appears in his poems as "his refuge" and Mahâkâla was his protector deity, Heissig 1972 I: 194, 198.

¹¹⁷ In Alashan he met the lay grammarian sMon lam rab byams pa Nawangbstandar. Heissig (1972 I: 196) quotes an anecdote showing the free behaviour of Rabjai. While he feasted with women and disciples, the prince of Alashan asked Nawangbstandar to test him about the existence of demons, Buddha and reincarnation. Of course Rabjai's dialectical answers made Nawangbstandar look ridiculous.

who is said to have visited Qalqa Mongolia.¹¹⁸

Rabjai's biographies, both old and recent, emphasise his poetry but provide little information on Ayui-yin süme and the other monasteries he founded. Rabjai obviously enjoyed great popularity among the Alashan Mongols. Although he may not be the first to have discovered/founded the site, he and his disciples may well have turned it into a Nyingmapa monastery and transformed the caves into shrines associated with Padmasambhava, and thus have been responsible for the site's increased reputation. Or perhaps he was attracted by this monastery precisely because of its reputation as a Nyingmapa establishment. It would be worth investigating whether the other monasteries founded by Rabjai also claim to be Nyingmapa.

Other Nyingmapa Traditions in Mongolia

A few names, like the tantric Nawang aγramba corji and the Noyan quturytu Rabjai, suggest the presence of Nyingmapa monks in Mongolia during the 19th century. The Red Hat schools and, in particular, the Nyingmapa school, were never completely eradicated from Mongolia. The 17th century probably saw the disappearance of most of their institutions, but their traditions obviously survived. According to the musicologist Carole Pegg, recently rehabilitated monks in Mongolia, including her eighty-three-year-old informant who became a novice in Ulan-Bator in 1922, recalled that at that time many people supported the Red Hats, since their rules were less strict and their lamas/monks/members of the clergy were allowed to marry (Pegg 2001: 144, 147).

Moreover Ayui-yin süme is not the only monastery of the modern period that claims affiliation to the Nyingmapa order. There were at least three Nyingmapa temples in 19th century and early 20th century Urga. Small Nyingmapa communities have recently been founded (refounded?) in the wake of the Buddhist revival of the 1990s. In 1991 the Narxajidyn sum [*Naroqajid-un süme] was established in Ulan-Bator.¹¹⁹ A second Nyingmapa monastery, the Dechin choinxorlin xiid [*Decin coingqor ling keid], built in 1991 in Ulan-Bator (Bayangol [Bayanyoul] district), is also dedicated to Padmasambhava. This community has been under the leadership of Mongol lamas who trained at the Tibetan Nyingmapa centres of India, and by Tibetan Nyingmapa masters who recently took refuge in Ulan-Bator. Another monastery, Övgön xiid [Ebügen-ü keid] in Xögnö xan [Kögene qan] mountains (Gurvan bulag sum [Gurban bulay sumu]) claims an early foundation. When I visited it in 1999, a local monk had raised funds to rebuild this "very old Nyingmapa monastery" where his father had also lived as a monk.¹²⁰ He told me that the monastery was built by the lay tantric practitioner dPal gyi rdo rje from lHa lung who fled Tibet after having murdered King Glang dar ma in 842, and who, according to a local legend, took refuge

¹¹⁸ Heissig 1972 I: 186; and 222 n. 12, quoting C. Damdinsüren 1962: 45. Ji Gong's Mongolian popularity must be an extension of his cult in north China, which spread during the 19th century following the emergence of oral and written fiction, as well as drama, Shahar 1998: Part II.

¹¹⁹ Or Naroxajidyn xiid: Vajrayoginī temple, dedicated to Padmasambhava. This nunnery was first established in a yurt and later built as a fixed temple in 1993 on the site of an old temple established in the early 20th century, north of the Tuul river.

¹²⁰ The modern revival of Gelugpa and Red Hat Buddhism in Northern Mongolia relies on hereditary "monks": they are very often married, live in a village or in a temple if it has been rebuilt, and their vocation is justified by the fact that a member of their family was a monk, usually their father who was forced to take a wife in the 1930s.

in Mongolia.¹²¹ Other examples of monasteries tracing their roots back to secret Nyingmapa temples or individual practitioners will be given by Agata Bareja-Starzynska & Hanna Havnevik (forthcoming). The recent revival of the Nyingmapa school in Mongolia may indicate that Nyingmapa lamas were integrated in the religious system of the Mongols for more than a century, and that they now have the opportunity to take a visible place.

Unlike the other schools, the Nyingmapas are loosely organised and lack a universally accepted hierarchy. In Tibet, many of them are not monks but *sngags pa*, lay tantrics living as married practitioners in villages. With regard to Mongolia, Carole Pegg asserts that because Red Hat practitioners were allowed to be more “individualistic, travelling from teacher to teacher, working in the community, or meditating in solitude”, “many Mongols feel that non-Gelugpa or Red Hat monks were less remote than Yellow Hat monks, maintaining a closer relationship with ordinary people” (Pegg 2001: 144). It is not known whether the *sngags pas* were numerous in Mongolia, and I only know of the few examples mentioned here. Another tradition, that of *gcod* (a ritual in which one visualises the dismemberment and offering of one's body to various deities and demons), was practised in Mongolia by mendicant yogins and yoginis outside monastic circles.¹²² All this circumstantial evidence seems to indicate that various practices peculiar to the Red Hat traditions of Tibetan Buddhism may have survived on the fringes of monastic institutions, and for this reason may even have been better preserved than specifically Gelugpa practices during the Communist era.

Another possible explanation for the existence of the small number of “Red Hat” monasteries and sites especially associated with Padmasambhava is that these are in fact Gelugpa institutions claiming a “Red Hat” origin.¹²³ Añui-yin süme is perhaps a Gelugpa monastery where Padmasambhava merely enjoys a special attention.¹²⁴ Indeed, Nyingmapa practices and Padmasambhava's worship are not out of place in a Gelugpa monastery. As mentioned above, the different schools' struggle for supremacy was politically motivated (with perhaps the exception of the Jüngars' sectarian attitude).¹²⁵ It would be a mistake to view the different orders of Tibetan Buddhism as independent traditions which had the exclusive adhesion of their communities. In their teachings as well as in their lineages and traditions, the different schools (with the exception of the Jonangpas) had affiliations and connections with one another. In Tibet, it was very common for a Gelugpa monk to have a Nyingmapa teacher or vice-versa. All monks, regardless of their religious affiliation, were

¹²¹ Several monasteries of Amdo have a similar foundation legend: Tsybikov 1992: 31-32.

¹²² See the interview and biography of Lady Master Doljin Qandro (b. 1914), an 84 year-old Mongol *gcod* master, who has numerous monk and lay disciples, N. Dudka 1994. *gCod* is a genuine Tibetan teaching that was incorporated in nearly all the schools of Tibetan Buddhism: Kollmar-Paulenz 1993.

¹²³ Several modern Gelugpa monasteries of Inner Mongolia claim to have a “Red Hat” origin, such as Blama-yin añui, Caqar blama juu near Kökeqota, Xingyuan si and Hanwang miao in Siregetü blama küriye (Kulun qi, now in Jirim league), Charleux 1998: 72-73, 90.

¹²⁴ Cammann (1951: 141) thought it was a Gelugpa monastery and was shocked to see statues of Padmasambhava, the founder of the “degenerate” Red Sect: “it was almost as inappropriate as an Episcopal Church dedicated to St. Ignatius Loyola”.

¹²⁵ The Qing believed in a “Red Hat subversive plot” because of the part played by the Red Hat Karmapa lama in the Gurkha wars, but “there is no likelihood that there ever was such a threat or that non-Gelugpa sects ever attempted to organize themselves into a united ‘Red Hat’ Church”, Richardson 1998: “The Political Role...”.

welcome to study at the great Gelugpa monasteries (Richardson 1998: "The Political Role..."). It is therefore not surprising that Rabjai studied at the Gelugpa monastery of Badyar coiling süme and that he was on good terms with the ICang skya and Jebcündamba qutuγtus, and that the Gelugpa authorities sent the Nyingmapa lama Maidari qutuγtu as their representative in Mongolia. Mongol Gelugpa lamas also received religious teachings and initiations in the Red Hat traditions and used Sakyapa mandalas and deities that were familiar to the Mongols. Charles Bawden (1989: 31) mentions the presence until recently of "female lamas" called *qandma* (*dâkinî*) in several Qalqa Gelugpa monasteries and concludes that they "must be another survival of pre-reformed Buddhism". According to Bawden, Red Hat traditions and practices survived within Gelugpa monasteries in Mongolia, and their continuity indicates "some sort of reconciliation" or "indifference"; "Red lamas have continued to exist up to the present day, sometimes even in the same lamaseries alongside devotees of the Yellow Faith". This is also the opinion of Carole Pegg: Red Hat schools predominated in some Western Mongol monasteries, such as the monastery of Dashinjid, in Ulaan Xödöö (Bayanölgii), which housed both Red Hat and Yellow Hat monks. One of her informants told her that Red Hat and Yellow Hat monks also coexisted in monasteries in Central Mongolia (Pegg 2001: 143-168, Chap. "Buddhist Performance Traditions", esp. p. 145, 147). Indeed it is quite likely that different schools peacefully cohabited under the Qing dynasty, especially in off-track monasteries. The "sectarian orientation" was probably only "a matter of emphasizing some deities more than others" (Bawden 1989: 31). The term "co-existence" may thus describe the different situations in which Red Hats traditions survive within Gelugpa monasteries in Mongolia¹²⁶. This explains how the Nyingmapas may have survived in Mongolia even in the absence of a proper monastic institution. However the possibility that a small number "pure" Nyingmapa institutions did exist should not be ruled out. The lack of sources documenting the liturgy, precepts and lineages of the ancient Nyingmapa monasteries does not mean that "pure" Nyingmapa institutions did not exist in Mongolia.

Seventy years after the religious genocide of the late nineteen-thirties in Qalqa Mongolia, the monks are now attempting to recreate old traditions, practices and rituals that were present in Mongolia until the nineteen-thirties. At the same time, they are open to the new influence of Tibetan masters, and are including more and more practices from different traditions. A thorough study of the prayers and rituals in each monastery would be necessary in order to have an idea of what the Mongolian Nyingmapa liturgy may have consisted in.

What is the present situation of the Nyingmapas in Inner Mongolia? The context of the current Buddhist revival in Inner Mongolia differs from that in Qalqa Mongolia. The renaissance of its institutions is more cautious since it is strictly controlled by the State. Yet because Buddhism was persecuted there for a much shorter period, a number of traditions have been better preserved and the genocide of the clergy was less severe than in Qalqa Mongolia (Charleux forthcoming). The somewhat ossified situation of Buddhism in Inner Mongolia allows us to presume that Aγui-yin süme did not receive any major outside influence in recent times. The Nyingmapa affiliation of

¹²⁶ Unfortunately the situation in the few (re)founded Nyingmapa monasteries in Qalqa Mongolia does not shed much light on pre-20th century history. Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik (forthcoming) found various examples of Gelugpa practices in Dechin choinxorlin and Narxajidyn sum, but some of them were clearly due to the fact that these temples were established by Gelugpa monks.

Aγui-yin süme may date back to at least the early 19th century,¹²⁷ and Nyingmapa monks from Amdo may have founded a community in Alashan as early as the 16th or early 17th century.

As shown above, the Nyingmapa "label" must be used with caution here. What does it mean for the monks to adhere to the Nyingmapa tradition? The organisation of Aγui-yin süme did not differ from that of a Mongol Gelugpa institution. For Delege (1998: 634), the main differences between the Nyingmapa monks of Aγui-yin süme and the Gelugpa clergy of Inner Mongolia lie in the precepts and offerings: until 1949, the monks of Aγui-yin süme could marry and drink alcohol; "but dogmas are similar" (Delege does not mention their prayers, icons and literature as the main criteria). Alcohol, meat¹²⁸ and onions are necessary offerings during the rituals that end with the monks sharing an alcoholic beverage. The assemblies require a minimum of four learned monks to read esoteric scriptures (Bai Shenghua 1986: 129, 136; Delege 1998: 634). The iconography of the assembly hall and the caves emphasises Padmasambhava and Nyingmapa deities. The two festival dates, as mentioned above, correspond to Nyingmapa celebrations. Other criteria distinguishing Red Hat monks are their dress and way of life. However, a number of practices peculiar to the Red Hat traditions are no longer allowed. Today, all monks wear the same red gowns and hats and shave their heads. In modern Inner Mongolia, all monks, whatever their religious affiliation, are not authorised to marry and live as lay tantrics outside monasteries. They must be clearly distinguishable from laymen, i.e. they are required to shave their heads and pronounce monastic vows.

A puzzling point is the absence of affiliation or link between Aγui-yin süme and Nyingmapa monasteries of Tibet. Aγui-yin süme did not seem to have any college (*dacang*, from Tib. *grwa tshang*). Were its monks trained in Mongol Gelugpa institutions such as Badγar coiling süme (as Rabjai was), or Baraγun keid in Alashan? Or did they go to study in the large Nyingmapa colleges of Amdo or Central Tibet? Where did they come from? Was the transmission of the Nyingmapa tradition purely local and indigenous, through hereditary lineages of tantric practitioners, with the monastery living in spiritual autarky? Did a syncretism of Nyingmapa and Gelugpa practices and rituals occur? Were its branch monasteries also Nyingmapa? The answers to these questions require further field research. The conditions of my fieldwork did not allow for a study of Aγui-yin süme's rituals. I would say that the affiliation of Aγui-yin süme to the Nyingmapa order, or at least the Nyingmapa "school orientation", is possible, but only a serious analysis of the monastery's texts, prayers, precepts, the structure of the ritual corpus, the personal biographies and lineages of the living lamas, and their main deities, can provide a definitive answer.

Conclusion

The festival of Aγui-yin süme is an important pilgrimage to an ancient sacred site in which the Buddhist rituals play only a minor role. Its caves were certainly renowned long before the late 18th century, and possibly before the conversion of the Mongols to

¹²⁷ The 18th and 19th century cultural renaissance of the Nyingmapa tradition in Eastern Tibet could also have influenced the Mongol clergy. This revival laid the foundations for the *Ris med*, the "universalist" or "eclectic" intellectual movement which took place in Nyingmapa monasteries of Eastern Tibet during the 19th century. The *Ris med* represented an integration of various non-Gelugpa traditions which emphasised religious tolerance, understanding and learning, Smith 1970: 1-36.

¹²⁸ The Gelugpas also present meat offerings to wrathful deities.

Buddhism. Wandering tantrist hermits may have dwelt in these caves, as they did in the Daqing mountains. The Alashan Mongols, who settled in the region from 1682 onwards, may have imported Nyingmapa traditions from the Kukunor area. Their lamas may have institutionalised the pilgrimage and even built a small temple around 1649, before the arrival of the Noyan qutuγtu. In order to create a tangible link with the sacred geography of Tibetan Buddhism, the travels of Padmasambhava were extended to this area by propagandist tales. The site developed into a large monastery during the 19th century, and thanks to its remoteness, escaped the control of temporal authorities. It was known as the only Nyingmapa monastery of Southern Mongolia. Aγui-yin süme does not seem to have any specific affiliations with a Nyingmapa institution inside Tibet and appears to have developed uninfluenced by its Tibetan counterparts.

In the same way, although they are much less documented than in Tibet, pilgrimages also existed in Mongolia, even though pilgrimages abroad were considered more prestigious. Ancient sacred sites that had developed in Mongolia at different times were later reappropriated or rehabilitated by Buddhists, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries. By building on their territory more than a thousand monasteries within three centuries (Charleux 1998: 234; Delege 1998: 452), the Southern Mongols created a new sacred geography, which in part was superimposed on the sacred sites of the folk religion or older Buddhist ones. Padmasambhava's miracles and womb-caves are elements in the process of Mongolia's Buddhisation, but appear to be less important than in Tibet. The new religious influences and cultural models derived mainly from the Kukunor area, a region which is geographically, historically and culturally close to Alashan. Southern Mongol monasteries, and especially those of Alashan, maintained strong spiritual, academic and architectural links with Amdo. The Kukunor area, as well as the Wutai Shan are therefore the probable primary sources for the diffusion of Padmasambhava's legends and Tibetan pilgrimage features (such as womb-caves) in Mongolia.

With the current revival of Buddhism, Mongols must share and compete with other ethnic (Han), religious and secular groups for the same pilgrimage sites.¹²⁹ Their motivations for undertaking the collective pilgrimage to Aγui-yin süme are linked to their search for an "ethnic" identity on the basis of a former religious one. Mongols now claim that their Buddhism should no longer be called Tibetan Buddhism but Mongol Buddhism. The political balance of power and doctrinal relations between the Red Hat and Gelugpa schools, the assimilation of local deities, folklore and practices, and the acculturation of Buddhism in Mongolia have contributed to its new identity.

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¹²⁹ Cammann (1951: 140) reports that during the 1940s, the monks hated the Chinese and never allowed them to visit the monastery.

ziliao, 45)

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