The Resurgence of the Dharma:

Transnational Buddhism in Contemporary Mongolia

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Stagement of Originality

I, the undersigned, Gesar Temur, declare that this thesis is my own original work; where the work of others is used, I have acknowledged accordingly throughout.

Gesar Temur

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ETHICS PROTOCOL

The ethnics protocol (Protocol number 2010/007) for this thesis was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Australian National University.
This thesis studies the revival of the traditional religion, Buddhism, at a lay Buddhist centre in Ulaanbaatar, examining its function in contemporary Mongolia in the era of globalisation. Globalisation refers to the increasing complexity and interdependence of the world as a whole and to the processes and mechanisms involved. However, globalisation—the oneness of place and time—is cultural. It alters social contexts in ways that also influence religious practices. Globalisation within world culture presents opportunities and challenges for religions. I argue that we are living in an epoch of rapid social change, where capital, technology, people, ideas, and information move relentlessly across the inherited map of political borders and cultural boundaries. This thesis takes an interdisciplinary approach to the field in applying Robert Holton’s analysis of cultural globalisation, which is categorised into three theses: homogenisation, polarisation and hybridisation. My thesis examines the historical background as well as the social, psychological and religious purpose of taking Shedrup Ling, the centre of the transnational Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT) in Ulaanbaatar, as the research fieldwork base. I discovered that at Shedrup Ling the Western form of Buddhism entering Mongolia is playing a strong role in the Buddhist revival in the country overall. Increasingly, religion is not only instantiated in local communities and national societies, but is also linked with international networks that cross societal borders. This link shows evidence of different levels of motivation such as maintaining traditional beliefs, being westernised, and offering psychological self-help benefits. Information was gathered from in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 40 local believers and nonbelievers. Based on open-ended questions, the answers were recorded in both audio and written note form. Additional foreign missionary workers—who included Australians, Americans, Swedes and Tibetans who were working for this international organisation, the FPMT—were also interviewed. In addition, religious scholars from the National University of Mongolia and other important figures from public temples and Buddhist institutions were also questioned in relation to my study. The analysis of the interviews answers a review of the literature on the sociological theories of conversion, modernisation, globalisation and motivation. Although some people do not necessarily identify as Buddhists, for the individual, participation in the centre brings about a profound transformation in the
discourse of self-identity, personal motivation and the improving of psychological health.

This thesis explores a new meaning and significance for the national identity of the evolving Mongol society, as the re-introduction of the old religion is part of the revival of the old culture and an imagined reliving of Mongolia’s ‘deep past’.
INTRODUCTION
A Global Gaze on the Buddhist revival in Mongolia

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Background
On a Saturday morning in December, 2010, white snow has fallen gently on the high plateau where Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, lies. Families are gathering and walking carefully on the icy roads to make their weekly visit to the Ganden Temple—the only one not destroyed in the communist era. The honking of traffic recedes as the visitors climb the stone steps past richly carved halls, overshadowed by the chanting of the old Buddhist scriptures and the striking of the temple bell. The oldest temple in Ulaanbaatar seems so fragile in comparison with the modern buildings in the streets below. Only rituals like the worshipping of statues are taking place. The smoke from the newly lit incense makes the old temple appear like a lotus floating on a misty lake.

Only two blocks away, located in the busiest district next to shopping malls and office buildings, a modern structure looking more like a medium-sized apartment block and humming with activity, is full of people coming and going. In the main hall, a picture of the Dalai Lama hangs on the wall, and in the shrine room, a Buddhist nun from Australia leads lay devotees in chanting and meditation.

In another room in the basement, college students are just finishing their English lesson and packing up. Their American English teacher is giving instructions and announcing the homework over the noise of ringtones from the students’ mobile phones. In another room next door, students are tapping on keyboards. A computer training course is under way.

All these activities are happening at Shedrup Ling, the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition’s (FPMT) headquarters in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Religion is back in Mongolia’s cities. (Batbayar, 2002; Majer & Teleki, 2009; Kollmar-Paulenz, 2002). Contrary to the predictions of increasing secularisation by modernists and to the secularising efforts of the Mongolian state in the Communist
period, religious leaders are actively engaged in efforts to reconstruct religious organisations (McMahan, 2004, 2008 & 2012). As the vignette above illustrates, Mongolia’s Buddhists approach religion with diverse perspectives and engage in Buddhism in diverse ways. There are two different forms of Buddhism. Some people visit the old temples, and others frequent lay Buddhist centres that have Western teachers, both monastic and lay, to teach them Buddhism and job training activities.

The resurgence of religion in Mongolia during the reform period after the collapse of Communism is one of many significant social changes that have accompanied the shift from a focus on ideology to that of the economy (Schwarz, 2006). In urban areas, involvement with Buddhism is the most prevalent way for contemporary Mongolian people to connect with religion, and involvement with Buddhism continues to expand.¹ Yet, urban Buddhism has received much less scholarly attention than Christianity or rural religious trends. We still know very little about who becomes involved in Buddhism, how they are drawn in, what forms their Buddhist involvements take, and how these shape their lives. My dissertation aims to help address these questions by examining lay Buddhists² in the only Western-organisation Buddhist centre, in the capital city of Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar.

1.1.2 Globalisation and Religion: Shedrup Ling in Mongolia

The idea for this thesis germinated during a small case study of Western Buddhism that I conducted in 2008 at my local Buddhist meditation and study centre, Buddha House. Located in Adelaide, Australia, Buddha House is a branch of the worldwide organisation, Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), and as a result of the research I conducted there, I was able to observe several trends that I wished to examine further in a larger project looking at the practice of Western Buddhism. In the process of this investigation, I also discovered that the FPMT was not only active in the West, but had begun to export its form of Buddhism back into traditionally Buddhist societies in Asia. This phenomenon presented itself as an even

¹ Historically, Shamanism has been the most popular religion in Mongolia. It is widely accepted that official statistics vastly underestimate the number of religiously affiliated people in Mongolia. However, over time, having largely replaced Shamanism, Buddhism has become the dominant religion in Mongolia. In recent years, Buddhism has been changed by other religions, especially by Christian organisations. When it comes to identifying the number of adherents, the overall problem is exacerbated by the challenges of clearly defining lay Buddhists, as involvement with Buddhism is much less institutionally structured than Christian membership is. The issues of whether people would identify themselves as Buddhists just because of their cultural heritage are discussed at more length throughout the dissertation.

² My dissertation primarily focuses on lay Buddhists, that is, those not religious professionals. In the Buddhist tradition, religious professionals are monastics, having committed themselves to an ascetic lifestyle and cultivation toward liberation.
more intriguing topic for research, particularly when concentrating on the missioning efforts by the FPMT in Mongolia, a country with which I have familial links.

Mongolia has been Buddhist for centuries, but for most of the twentieth century its communist government, backed by the Soviet Union, suppressed the practice of this and all other religions. This repression was not lifted until the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, when Buddhism was reintroduced in a variety of forms (Elverskog, 2000 & 2006). Most of these had precedents in the country’s traditional types of Buddhism that had been practised before the Soviet era. Along with the reinstatement of these traditions, however, there have also been moves by various non-Mongolian Buddhist groups to establish a presence there for their particular variants. The FPMT’s efforts in Mongolia fit into this category. Although they are aligned through education and Buddhist lineage with several of the more traditional Mongolian Buddhist institutions, the form of the religion they promote in Mongolia is a variant of this; it is, in fact, the same Western interpretation of traditional Tibetan Buddhism—a form of transnational Buddhism—that I had studied in Adelaide.

1.2 Literature review

1.2.1 Theoretical Perspectives

This thesis uses sociological and anthropological theories to investigate, as part of the phenomenon of the Mongolian Buddhist revival, the emergence of a modern Western form of Buddhism in an urban centre. In particular, the macro-sociological theory of globalisation as developed by Roland Robertson and Peter Beyer is found to be particularly pertinent to the current investigation. The theory of biogenetic structuralism developed by anthropologist Charles Laughlin and his colleagues offers a complementary socio-psychological approach to the question of why religions undergo changes in modern society, especially when dealing with cultural or ideological minorities. Globalisation theorists claim that the world is rapidly becoming a single community in the minds and social organisations of peoples (Robertson, 1992; Beyer, 1994). Robertson writes: “Globalisation as a concept refers both to the compression of

3 “Mongolia” in the following article refers to the territory of the former "Mongolian People’s Republic," with its capital Ulaanbaatar. It does not include the Mongolian Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China, also commonly known as "Inner Mongolia." The processes of religious transformation and the ongoing renaissance of Mongolian Buddhism as described in this paper do not pertain to Inner Mongolia.

4 Buddhism is a transnational religion. Its popularity and expansion are built around intensive religio-cultural networks across the boundaries of nation-states. The subject under investigation in this essay is the expansion of Buddhism from Tibet to Mongolia, then to international communities then finally back to Mongolia.
the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (1992: 8). According to Robertson, globalisation began in the 1960s due to heightened global communication, and by the turn of the twenty-first century it had reached crisis proportions. The crisis conditions arose because societies all over the world increasingly faced multiculturalism and polyethnicity (Robertson, 1992: 59). A major task for a sociologist attempting to understand religion in this context is making sense of the myriad forms of religions in the global society, where different and often contradictory ideologies are juxtaposed. While focusing on the Western form of Buddhism present in one of the Buddhist centres in Mongolia, it is possible to get a closer look at the process of transformation affecting religious systems within the larger contemporary globalisation process.

Globalisation theory emerged as an extension of the debate on modernisation generated in the 1960s. Key theorists who contributed to this discussion include John W. Meyer (1994), Niklas Luhmann (1995) and Peter Beyer (1994), among others. Wallerstein asserts that capitalism was generated in the West, and the expansion of capitalism to other parts of the world is a basic structure of the world-system. John W. Meyer argues that rather than focusing on the economy one should recognise the importance of the world polity. According to Meyer (1994), certain worldwide models and ideologies receive international consensus, are granted an authority of their own, and come to dominate the world. Societies have to conform to these models in order to compete or gain acceptance in the global field. The acceptance of the Chinese Communist Government in the 1960s by the UN is a prime example (Beyer, 1994: 15-41).

Niklas Luhmann (1995) introduces a different perspective. According to him, modernity is characterised by an increase in the functional differentiation of various subsystems such as the economical, the political, the educational and the religious. This shift from a stratified system to a functional system and its eventual migration to other parts of the world is at the heart of globalisation (Beyer, 1994:15-41).

In contrast, Roland Robertson (1992), while accepting many of the above ideas, introduces into the debate the cultural dimension as a special constraint as discussed later. Peter Beyer, however, sees all these theories to be complementary; they should be viewed as a whole in order to facilitate the investigation of the globalisation phenomenon. For example, Robertson’s lack of emphasis on the economy should not be
seen as an intellectual blind spot, but rather as the consequence of his particular agenda centred on the cultural dimension.

As a result, the global field is not characterised by homogeneity or heterogeneity by the nature of its dynamic interplay between culture and universal models; rather it is a continuous emerging field. Reiterating that culture is a major constraint to homogeneity, Robertson dispels the theory advocated by Arjun Appadurai (1990) that the universal and the particular are contradictory and, therefore, competing forces. Robertson cites Appadurai as saying, "The central feature of global culture today is the politics of the mutual effort of sameness and difference to cannibalise one another and thus to proclaim their twin Enlightenment ideas of the triumphantly universal and the resilient particular" (Robertson, 1992: 10). Globalisation, therefore, is not the spread of western imperialism alone, as some Wallersteinians or Appadurai may insist, but that the West has been dramatically transformed due to encounters with various cultures.

Beyer extends this analysis into the religious field and advocates that the various religious denominations that appear in modernity are due to this historical development. He argues that, "if we want to understand the major features of contemporary social life, we have to go beyond local and national factors to situate our analyses in the global context" (Beyer, 1994:1). For him, the contemporary globalisation process had its cultural and geographical origin in Western Europe, and it eventually spread to the Americas. Beyer, however, insists that even though globalisation cannot be understood as a simplistic model of western imperialism, it does have its origin in western society. I argue that the FPMT is a practical example to explain these theories.

In the traditionally Buddhist country of Mongolia, the FPMT promotes this variant, transnational Buddhism, that is the focus of this study. In undertaking this examination, I have relied on theories developed within studies of globalisation (Robertson, 1992; Appadurai, 1996), social change and modernity (Heller, 1999). Using these theoretical frameworks, I set out to ascertain the answers to several questions. The first of these was why, with the various religious choices now available in a Mongolia wanting to modernise, have the Mongolian people returned to the practice of Buddhism? And if, as seems likely, this revival is part of the consolidation of a post-Communist identity and a re-affirmation of a pre-Communist Mongolian identity, why are they involving themselves with a trans-national, predominantly Western, form of the religion?
1.2.2 Field Site and Research Setting

My research was conducted in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia. Mongolia is a large land-locked country of 1,565,000 km² situated between China and Russia, with a relatively small population, estimated by the CIA World Factbook at 3,179,997 in July 2012. The population is predominantly young, 68.9% of the population being between 15-64 years (CIA World Factbook, 2012). At the time of my fieldwork, the country remains relatively poor with a GDP of an estimated $8.57 billion in 2011, about $4,800 per capita (CIA World Factbook, 2011). Mongolia had one of the highest debt burden ratios in the world (EDN, 8 February 2002). A third-party policy is adopted by the Mongolian government, which means it seeks other supporting countries, such as the United States and Japan, as ‘neighbouring’ countries, rather than China and Russia. (Narangoa, 2009 & 2012). In fact, globalisation is introduced into Mongolian culture and society by seeking help from more international organisations and donor countries from the West, rather than the two physical neighbours mentioned above. Since 1991 Mongolia, no longer part of the Soviet command economy, has been in the process of adapting to the demands of a new world economic system. Mongolia is not what Westerners think of as an urbanised country, but the capital, Ulaanbaatar, is a newly developed city where half of the population lives.5 The country’s economic, political, cultural and social centre is Ulaanbaatar.

5 According to the information provided by infomongolia, by 2013 statistics the population of the city was 1,300,000 people which accounts for almost 68.5% of the total Mongolian population. The official population of Ulaanbaatar was projected to reach 919,000 by 2013 at present growth rates. According to the World Bank Mongolia, the population of Mongolia in 2013 was 2.912 million. None of the current official population figures takes into account the floating population estimated at between 70,000, a low estimate, and 200,000. Nearly a third of Ulaanbaatar’s population is comprised of children under 16 and there were large numbers of street children, at least 3500 of them in 2011, and other derelicts living in the sewer system, at least some 10,000 homeless people. In all, some 70 percent of the total population lives in the city’s ger districts which lack rudiments such as running water and sewage systems and where most of the available electricity is illegally tapped. It is estimated that 27-38 percent of the capital’s able-bodied population lacks permanent employment, however, the National Statistical Office of Mongolia states that the unemployment rate in 2014 was 6.4 percent (EDN, 9 April 2001; 13 December 2001, UB Post, 6 December 2004, Buell & Le, 2006, World Bank Mongolia, 2013, National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2013).
During my fieldwork in two periods in 2010 and 2011, I interviewed and carried out participant observation with the local students at Shedrup Ling, the FPMT Centre in Ulaanbaatar that was established in 1999. It conducts daily meditation classes, daily Dharma teachings, and also offers outreach teachings in prisons, schools, universities and monasteries. Shedrup Ling is a three-storey, visible landmark in the centre of Ulaanbaatar with its entrance marked by a clean white stupa, prayer flags and sounds of Buddhist chanting that are audible from the street. The Stupa Vegetarian Café and the
office are located on the first floor; the Gompa\textsuperscript{6} and translation office are on the second and the resident teachers live on the third floor. In addition, the basement provides classrooms for both a 10-week computer course and a 10-week English course.

\textsuperscript{6} A shrine room where Buddhist teachings, ceremonies and meditation take place.
The first thing I saw on entering Shedrup Ling was a picture of His Holiness the Dalai Lama on the wall. There was an air of quiet concentration in the mixture of Mongolian and Western cultures. Several groups of students, young and old, came in and out to attend Buddhist teachings or English lessons. The former were presented by the Australian Buddhist nun, the Venerable Ani Gyalmo, and James Damico the American teacher of English, who were resident there. I lived at the centre on the third floor, which was convenient for attending Dharma classes and activities and where I was able to learn about the students’ lives by observing their social behaviours and by conducting formal interviews.

Although this research was primarily conducted there, Shedrup Ling is not the only FPMT centre in Mongolia. It is necessary to mention here the corporate structure of the FPMT. FPMT Mongolia is a multinational organisation, with its headquarters in the United States of America and a board of directors based in Malaysia. In Ulaanbaatar there are two FPMT centres, Shedrup Ling and Dolma Ling Nunnery. The nunnery has 15 nuns who are supported by FPMT Mongolia, while the former is more for teaching laypeople and facilitating translation and publication of traditional Buddhist texts. The establishment of Shedrup Ling was later followed by a sister centre, the Golden Light Sutra Centre, located in the north, in Darkhan, Mongolia’s second largest city. To accommodate this expansion into the country centre and the three-hour journey necessary to reach it, teachers are seconded from Shedrup Ling on weekends. The third
FPMT undertaking, Aryadeva Centre, having recently begun in the city of Erdent, is evidence of the organisation’s growing commitment to Mongolia.

Shedrup Ling is a sophisticated organisation. It has 17 permanent and casual staff that include workers in the office, security, maintenance, housekeeping and restaurant areas. Two Geshes, Geshe Khedrup and Gen Losang Phuntsog, came from Ganden temple and the centre is also a base for translating and publishing Dharma material. Four departments run Shedrup Ling; Administration and Membership, Finance, Spiritual Program and Dharma Teachers. All of these must be managed by the Centre Management Committee and their activities reported to both the Executive Chairman, MK Sen in Malaysia, and the Foundation’s headquarters in the United States. Details of the FPMT as an organisation and the roles it plays in Mongolia will be discussed in Chapter Two (Background).

Shedrup Ling, the FPMT’s centre in the city of Ulaanbaatar, was founded in 1999, under Lama Zopa Rinpoche’s guidance. He was an important figure in the importation of Buddhism to Mongolia after the collapse of communism. He was the Indian ambassador to Mongolia and is considered to be an incarnation of one of the Sixteen Arhats, to whom, according to Buddhist tradition, the Buddha entrusted the care of his teachings (Dup Die, 2003, p. 269)

The first invitation from Bakula Rinpoche7 to the FPMT came in 1995 when he requested Lama Zopa to open an education centre for the youth in Mongolia. This request was prompted by a story he heard from a Mongolian journalist, Batbold Baast, (Mandala, 2000, p.36). Bakula Rinpoche explained to Lama Zopa Rinpoche in his letter that it was important to have lamas and senior monks come to Mongolia to teach the youth, as some of them had been converted to Christianity by missionaries, many of whom were American Mormons (Mandala, 2000).

Lama Zopa Rinpoche thought that because Mongolia was a traditional Buddhist country, young Mongolians needed better information to enable them to analyse what they were being taught; therefore, he made up his mind to start an FPMT centre in Mongolia, which decision was also strongly supported by the the Dalai Lama.

In 1999, Shedrup Ling was founded primarily to restore Buddhist culture in Mongolia and to help provide social support and education to the deprived and underprivileged. A

7 After Rinpoche worked as a minister of the Indian government under Indira Gandhi, he began to travel to Mongolia and the USSR, where he helped re-open ancient monasteries and organise Buddhist peace conferences. In 1990, he was appointed as the Indian ambassador to Mongolia for a period of two years. When he arrived, Mongolia was still communist, but during his stay – which lasted more than 10 years – it became a free country, so Bakula Rinpoche could travel freely and work to revive Buddhism. Ven. Bakula Rinpoche died while in India on November 4, 2003.
wide range of spiritual programs are being carried out in and from this centre, such as meditation classes and teachings, yoga training and pujas, providing a Publishing, Translation and Education Department, supporting the Idgaa Choizinling and other monasteries and Dolma Ling Nunnery, providing food through the Lamp of the Path program, organising outreach teachings in the countryside, establishing the Liberation Prison Project, holding English language classes and computing classes, and running the Stupa Buddhist Cafe.

One case in particular of the Western expansion of Tibetan Buddhism is exemplified by the FPMT, which is the largest Buddhist network in the West. It focuses on what it claims to be traditional Tibetan Buddhism as taught in the Gelug order, which is the largest and most powerful of the four orders of Tibetan Buddhism.

The FPMT is an international Buddhist organisation, started in the late 1960s by two Tibetan Buddhist monks who had escaped from Tibet. It has over 115 Buddhist centres in 30 countries, spreading its form of Buddhism both to places where Buddhism is new and to others where it has previously been the traditional religion.

Without the FPMT centres and all its services, Tibetan Buddhism would not have been spread so widely in the West. The key attitude for each person offering service in the FPMT is service to others. This is embedded in the FPMT mission statements that justify the need for the organisation.

1.2.3 Research Objectives

Whilst engaging with the members of the centre, I also hoped to fulfil the project's other research objectives.

The first of these was to discover why the FPMT operated in Mongolia. Establishing this motivation, it seemed to me, would then provide information regarding their activities. My initial research suggested that there were two reasons for establishing a centre in Mongolia. As we have seen, the first of these was that local Mongolian leaders requested the FPMT international headquarters in the United States to build a centre in Ulaanbaatar because they felt that one was needed. The second reason was that the FPMT's spiritual director and co-founder Lama Zopa Rinpoche felt an obligation to help revive Buddhism there (Kunsang, Schmidt & Tweed 2003). The first of these reasons is generally in line with the way the FPMT works in the rest of the world: it attracts a group of students who then ask the central office to help them establish a centre. This suggests that this Western Buddhist organisation, which delivers a
particular transnational form of Buddhism, approached its work in Mongolia with the same motivation, mission and goals that inform its activities elsewhere. The second of these reasons, however—Lama Zopa's particular interest in "reviving" Buddhism in Mongolia—suggests that the FPMT's approach to this region was not quite the same as the one it has taken in other countries. In many ways, it needed to be different, for in those other centres the FPMT was converting non-Buddhists, but in Mongolia its mission was mixed. In addition to seeking new converts, I argue that its message was also focused on reintroducing people to their traditional religion about which they had little or no knowledge. Consequently, I would argue that this suggests that the FPMT was actually seeking to attract two new types of converts: those who had no prior family association with Buddhism and others who had a family association but no personal one.

My second research objective was to determine what effects the activities of the centre have on its individual members at a personal level. My working hypothesis in this regard was that the profiles of the forty people I interviewed at Shedrup Ling would roughly match the profiles of similar practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism at Western Buddhist centres. Studies of these people have suggested that they are usually drawn to Tibetan Buddhism because of elements of the Buddhist teachings that are similar to the self-help components of contemporary psychology (Safran, 2003; De Silva, 2005; Wallace, 2007 & 2009). They hope that these techniques will help them to overcome problems in their lives and aid in their search for an individual spiritual identity. This spiritual dimension to their search suggests that they see Buddhism as more than a kind of cheap psychotherapy. In Mongolia, I wanted to discover whether part of this grander picture was the general revival of Buddhism in the country, or whether it remained a personal pursuit.

My third research objective was to discover whether or not the converts at Shedrup Ling possessed higher education levels than those of the general populace. This objective is informed by the existing literature, which indicates that the sort of Buddhism the FPMT promotes tends to attract people who are both highly educated and searching for spiritual guidance (Kessler, 2000; Jerryson, 2007; Kaplonski, 1998, 2004 & 2008). As such, they are sceptical of unquestioning acceptance of tradition and predisposed to a presentation of these older traditions that is 'new', intellectual and modern. This is just the kind of transnational Buddhism that the FPMT presents. Yet in Mongolia, I also postulate, while this search is conducted in much the same way by
much the same group of people who undertake it in the West, it is made more complex by the vestiges of knowledge about the ‘old religion’ that are still present in the culture (Roberts, 1995; Norris, 2003; Wallace, 2008).

This leads to my fourth and last objective: to examine how thoroughly Mongolian national identity is linked to Buddhist identity and praxis. This spectre of national identity adds another level to the interactions with the ‘new’ Buddhism that is not present amongst those practising it in Western Buddhist centres (Kaplonski, 1998; FPMT, 2000; Coleman, 2001; Wallace, 2009). It is something other than these individual socio-cultural and socio-psychological prompts for undertaking a spiritual path and is particularly evident in cultures like contemporary Mongolia that are re-asserting their national identity after decades of subjugation by the broader ideologies of communism (Humphrey, 1992; Appadurai, 1996; Zablocki, 2005). In fulfilling this research objective, this thesis will examine just how national identity is presented at Shedrup Ling. In particular, it will look at how elements of Mongolia’s often war-focused historical narrative are re-interrupted within the context of Buddhist praxis. It will also examine how other symbols of national identity are used in both narrative and visual forms in the centre to help generate popular support for the new order by referencing the very old one (Blumer, 1969; Adler & Adler, 1998; Mead, 1934).

As will be evident by this stage, much of this thesis will be focused on the relationship between the large multi-national religious organisation that is the FPMT and the ethnic Mongolian Buddhists who practise at its centre in Ulaanbaatar. But it will also contextualise this relationship within the broader spectrum of the re-emergence of Buddhist practice in modern Mongolia and its relationship to the social, psychological and political agendas of the populace and its government (Schwarz, 2006; Bira, 2005).

In this way, this research marks the intersection of two different lines of social enquiry that have already been conducted under the auspices of the social face of Buddhism: its adaptation in Western, transnational settings, and its links with nationalist identities (Giddens, 1991; Denison, 2009; Dorjjugder, 2003). In that it is part of an international network of Buddhist centres that practise Western Buddhism, my decision to focus on the sociological, psychological and anthropological study of conversion to Buddhism at Shedrup Ling extends work already undertaken regarding conversion to Buddhism in the West (Norris, 2003; Veer, 1996). Because this centre is positioned in a traditionally Buddhist nation, however, whose constructions of nationhood include narratives about Buddhism, it also represents an extension of studies that have focused

Both these lines of enquiry highlight the place and significance of religion in people’s lives, the nature of individual religiosity in modern societies, and the manner in which religions influence the interpretation of life events (Beyer & Beaman, 2007; Brekke, 2002). As such, they also reflect previous studies that have looked into the nature of religious revival, which have shown that despite the secularisation of state institutions in modern societies, religion has experienced a significant resurgence (Appadurai, 1996; Froese, 2001; Laruelle, 2007; Teleki, 2009). They have also shown that, as has been the case in Mongolia generally and at Shedrup Ling in particular, this resurgence is influenced by a number of factors that range from global to individual, from social to psychological. This would suggest that the multiple reasons for Shedrup Ling’s participants to convert to Buddhism would consist of an interdependent combination of personal and nationalistic influences (Zablocki, 2005, Csepeli, 1997; Dijkink, 1996; Gillis, 1994; Hall, 1997; Lipschutz, 1998; Mach, 1993; Prizel, 1998; Schlesinger, 1991). The resurgence of Mongolian identity after the fall of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence brought Buddhism back to the fore of national conversations and the nation’s identity in a broader sense, and the Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling enables its participants to be part of this resurgence in a more modern, engaged, and personal context.

As a rapidly developing country, Mongolia is experiencing a boom in religion, as well as in its economy (Schwarz, 2006; Sneath, 2010; Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, 2006 & 2007). There is competition between different Buddhist organisations and with other religions. These have included the traditional shamanic religions of Mongolia, Islam and Christianity, the latter two of which have had a recurring influence throughout Mongolia’s history (Atwood, 1996; Balogh, 2010). The government, which sees religion playing a leading role in the social development of a country, welcomes all these groups. The twin historical and traditional roles of Buddhism and shamanism in Mongolia, however, mean that their presence and an expansion of their practice is often given precedence over other traditions in the public conversation and government policy. Moreover, because in Mongolia the form of shamanism practised is not anywhere near as organised as its form of Buddhism, it is perhaps also fair to say that while both traditions are given precedence in the public conversation Buddhist adherents, more than shamanic practitioners, also demand a certain level of precedence.
for their contributions. This means that from the perspective of the individual adherents and the larger conversation, this strand of cultural heritage is being valorised in order to support national re-integration. An exploration of how Buddhism is used in this way will also form a key part of this research.

Yet within the broader context of the revitalisation of national identity with the aid of Buddhism there is also the question of why individuals would choose to adopt a more trans-national form of Buddhism that was previously unknown to the Mongolian people rather than more traditional forms (Campi, 2005 & 2006; Højjer, 2009; Buyandelgeriyn, 2007). The addition of the trope of a personal journey of discovery to the national rediscovery narrative suggests a certain level of individualism (a direct contrast to the collectivism of the Soviet era) and therefore a connection to a non-Mongolian, transnational identity. This combination of a transnational identity and these levels of individualism suggests that—just as the previous studies of converts to Western Buddhism have found—those practising this form of Buddhism at Shedrup Ling are also elites.

This suggests two further ideas and/or lines of enquiry that will be examined within this work. The first is whether, given the societal positions of those involved, the influence of this centre is disproportionate to its size (FPMT, 2014; Dragadze, 1993; Humphrey, 1992). The second is whether, in attracting this clientele, the FPMT was merely following the format it had adopted in other countries, or whether it had a specific goal to attract “educated” believers who may play a significant role in the development of a new Mongolia (Ivy, 2014; Lopez Jr, 2008; Wallace, 2009). This last possibility can also be developed further, for if this was the intention, was it focused on the development of Mongolia, the strengthening of its own organisational influence, or a combination of both?

1.2.4 Methodological Considerations

By conducting a close study of this centre, which is one of the leading missionary Buddhist centres in the country, I set out to investigate several aspects of its mission and achievements. I wanted to discover the following:

1) What both those running the centre and those attending it believed to be its role in the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia;
2) How it attracted converts and how the local people perceived it;
3) What was the local people’s motivation for and attraction to this form of Buddhism;
4) How this involvement had benefited them; and
5) Whether they saw themselves as practitioners of Mongolian, Tibetan or Western/Transnational Buddhism.

In order to collect data on which I could base this study, my primary mode of investigation was in-depth interviews that consisted of asking open-ended questions to Mongolian and foreign religious leaders, believers and practitioners of Buddhism. I conducted these during my fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar. These findings are supplemented by an extensive literature review, subsequent email correspondences, and participant observation. In order to make sense of many of the activities within the centre, it was also necessary to research and provide readers of this thesis background information about the development and practice of Buddhism in Mongolia.

In the process of my investigations, along with discovering answers to the questions I had intended to resolve, I also uncovered others that needed answering, and hence expanded the scope of my investigations. These included the following:

1) Does the FPMT’s presence fit in well with religious revival movements in Mongolia in general?
2) Does it cooperate or compete with the more traditional monasteries in their mission of reviving Buddhism?
3) Does it aim to attract the type of members that it has in the West?
4) What roles do women play in this transnational centre? And how do these differ from their contributions to traditional forms of the religion?
5) What is the government’s policy regarding the revival of Buddhism, particularly in a non-traditional form? Moreover, how does this involvement affect the way the centre is run and its success?

These questions came from my continued interactions with people at the centre and the supporting literature with which I engaged. As these questions arose, I incorporated them into my research along with the initial research agenda.

I undertook this study with a qualitative approach, and it suited my aim to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encountered, engaged, and attended the activities at Shedrup Ling. This section is based upon conclusions drawn from the available data obtained during fieldwork.
In order to achieve this goal, I followed four lines of enquiry: read a wide range of relevant texts, asked direct and indirect questions of the participants, used direct participant observation and engaged in reflection. Every data collection mechanism involves some modification of these items (Crotty, 1998 & Patton, 2002). My research at Shedrup Ling proceeded in two stages. In the first stage, I read texts relating to Shedrup Ling Centre, the FPMT in Mongolia and FPMT International that had been written by academics, plus literature produced by the organisation itself. In the second stage, I used interview questions and participant observation. These qualitative methods for obtaining information involved interviewing devotees, foundation employees, members, and volunteers. Participant observation included gathering information related by members of the organisation which reflected their perceptions of the group’s origins and development, its activities, ideologies, and future aspirations. I accomplished this by attending a range of classes, courses, workshops and other activities. However, my interaction was more than just merely passive observation because I actively engaged in the centre’s activities as a way of empathising with the members and gaining firsthand understanding of the dynamics of its day-to-day functioning.

My interviews at Shedrup Ling were conducted with the local students over two months during my two research trips to Ulaanbaatar in 2010. Employing an ethnographical approach, I was able to interview forty people overall; one lama, one nun, twenty women and eighteen men. I also had additional contact with the lama in the Gesar Ling Temple in Ulaanbaatar and, in general, had much contact with people whom I asked questions about the development of Buddhism, shamanism and other religions in the post-communist decades.
Most conversations and interviews were conducted in English, as most participants were sufficiently versed in that language. When talking to the older generation, I used the services of an interpreter. All of the interview conversations were recorded, and translators were also involved in the translation of textual information, particularly hagiographical materials.

Throughout the period of fieldwork, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to the interviewees (See Appendix II).

My selection of lay members was basically a random or non-probability sampling but, as it turned out, these were generally university students, scholars, medical doctors, museum curators, and other educated people. Many of them mentioned a Buddhist family background that had encouraged them to explore the religion as a psychology and a way of life. They reported that learning Westernised Buddhism at Shedrup Ling had brought them personal benefits, and they were trying to apply the teachings in their daily lives.

My purpose in choosing the various lay participants was to understand a group of people who were in a specific religious institution that was founded by an international organisation (Prasopchingchana & Sugu, 2009; Numrich, 2003). This participant group represents the population at large only to a certain degree. As we have seen, they are more educated and economically secure than the general populace. It is not an overly large sample size, but given that the nature of my research was quite specific and because I concentrated particularly on the workings of one organisation, it provided me with more than enough data to present results.

After reading information about the proposed research, all of the interviewees signed the consent form (see appendix I). From the beginning of my fieldwork, I was aware of the potential risks of asking certain personal questions that could have been too sensitive for the interviewees. But I feel that I avoided this risk by following the Australian National University’s Research Ethics Committee guidelines in designing my questionnaire. Its recommended procedures suggested ways of creating less sensitive more open-ended questions. Moreover, to make the process run smoothly I provided my interviewees with an introductory flyer that gave personal information about me and the nature of my research.

An in-depth, face-to-face interview based on open-ended questions was conducted, and the answers recorded in both audio and the notes were written in summary. The notes were written in summary rather than verbatim. A few follow-up interviews, either
in person or by email were also conducted if more clarification was needed. This form of questionnaire allowed me to collect more information from the open responses of the interviewees because they were free to speak at length in a relaxed manner. After the interview I collated information relating to the questions. This enabled me to compare this data with my assumptions and those of similar research findings done elsewhere. My thesis includes a number of verbatim citations of some interviews that are particularly pertinent to the research focus.

1.2.5 Interviews, participant observation and limitations

For purposes of studying a certain group of social organisations, such as the modern metropolis, sociologists have developed a research technique that includes basic elements such as interviews, which maintain a standardised schedule of questions. In the interviews in my study, individuals were questioned concerning their attitudes, values, beliefs and actions. The interview thus became a substitute for direct observation of the behaviour of individuals.

The participant observation consisted of attending Buddhist teachings and other activities at the Shedrup Ling, and occasionally observing religious holidays and major events in other religious organisations within Mongolia. This reflects a traditional Buddhist notion that the efficacy of Buddhist teachings depends both on the persuasiveness of teachers and on the consent and support of the community and the audience. Spradley (1980: 58-62) has elaborated various levels of participant observation ranging from total non-participation, through passive participation as a bystander and moderate participation to active participation. According to the nature of my research and my desire to be directly involved, I adopted an approach of moderate participation. As Spradley (1980: 60) notes, moderate participation occurs when the ethnographer seeks to maintain a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation.

By interviewing subjects the researcher can acquire, in a matter of minutes, information about their behaviours that would require hundreds of hours of direct observation. Furthermore, even if one could afford to spend such vast quantities of time in observing the behaviour of a single individual, this would be impossible for practical reasons. Of course, if it could be combined and utilised in a balanced way with interviews, this would be ideal. However, most sociologists feel that the limitation of
disadvantage and advantage for each research study should be addressed by minimising the disadvantage and maximising the advantage.

One of the most critical steps in developing the approach employed in my study was the selection of the sample of persons to be interviewed. Since it was impossible to interview each and every student, it was imperative that those who were interviewed were as representative of the total population as possible. A truly representative 'cross-section' can be created only by following the most rigorous selection procedures (Beckford & Luckmann, 1989; Beyer & Beaman, 2007; Casanova, 1994; Coleman, 2001). However, this was not always possible in my study, as people were chosen to be part of my research, having volunteered after reading the project information sheet on the centre’s notice board.

The success of a sample questioning interview also depends greatly on the construction of the interview schedule. Clear and unambiguous structured questions in the questionnaires are needed in order to deliver a quality interview. The wording of the questions must not suggest that there is a ‘right answer,’ and the interviewer must ensure that the interviewees are familiar with the background of the questions to further assure that they respond without feeling that they might be betraying their ignorance.

To standardise the interviews in my study, the wording of each questionnaire was delivered exactly to each of the participants, and questions were also asked in the same order. The question sample in the present study may be found in Appendix I.

Finally, the success of an interview also depends upon the person who delivers the questions, the interviewer. The fact that I, as interviewer, and the respondents were almost strangers and that my subjects were not completely willing to give even their close friends, let alone researchers, any information that would be ‘sensitive’ meant that creating a suitable environment was necessary; neither too formal nor too casual. At the same time, I had to appear friendly and sympathetic to their views and not express or suggest that I felt any objection to the interviewee’s values or any distaste for his/her opinions and behaviour.

Through interviews such as the one that I used in the study, I was able to capture people’s thoughts and feelings, which provided important insights into individual experiences and cultural practices.
1.2.6 Transnational Buddhism and Transnational Buddhist studies

Of late it has become my default answer to the general question of “What are you working on?” to use the term “Transnational Buddhism”. But despite the convenience, I have not always been convinced of its appropriateness, as scholars have had many debates about whether there even is such a thing as “Transnational Buddhism” and, therefore, what it might look like, let alone whether it is worthy of serious study. As will be made clear in what follows, I have become more convinced that this term is appropriate for some forms of Buddhism in the modern, globalised world. In the past some Buddhist scholars agreed with the appropriateness of this term, although there has not been a vast volume of work done in the field. A question arises as to whether the term Transnational Buddhism should be replaced by another—perhaps globalised Buddhism, Westernised Buddhism or hybridised Buddhism (Zablocki, 2005; Bulag, 1998). I would like to leave this unanswered at present as I do not believe there are sufficient data to affect any present classificatory systems of Buddhism throughout the world.

My current research is focused on the FPMT’s variety of Tibetan Buddhism as practised in a Western Buddhist centre in Mongolia, and I choose to use the term transnational Buddhism because I have discovered that the communities involved are not immune to worldwide events. The specific brand of globalised Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling is the form the FPMT disseminates in the West. The centre is not only affected by it but, as the parent organisation expands, it also affects worldwide trends as part of the larger international influences with their deeply embedded, complicated relationships. This phenomenon requires further research. My work points only to the beginning of a new transitional Buddhist experience and cannot realistically document this in its entirety.

Accordingly, I am choosing to stick with the safe choice of “Transnational Buddhism.” Despite my employing the word “Transnational”, I hope that the reader understands that this term has deeply embedded and complicated relationships with larger, international trends (Csordas, 2009). Moreover, the specific brand of Buddhism under study here is being practised primarily in the West and around the world by the FPMT, a transnational Tibetan Buddhist centre. While the American headquarters of the FPMT may send an Australian monk to the U.S. for teachings, may share resources with American universities, and may be involved with global organisations to spread and develop the teachings, it is still, at the end of the day, the headquarters of the FPMT.
Thus, while I am aware of these global trends and will present them here, I am focused mostly on what Buddhists are doing at Shedrup Ling in Mongolia. Accordingly, the use of “Transnational Buddhism” seems most appropriate.

### 1.2.7 Chapter Outlines

In chapter two, I analyse the presentation of Mongolian Buddhist practice today which needs to begin by situating it within the unfolding story of Mongolian Buddhism. This story incorporates elements of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, which will be examined in part one of this chapter; it is grounded in the five-wave history of Mongolian Buddhism, which will be examined in part two of this chapter; and it is framed within the transnational networks of Buddhism that the FPMT represents in this study, which will be discussed in part three of chapter two.

In chapter three, I follow the contextual individual analytical approach. From details found in the responses from students at Shedrup Ling as to why they come to FPMT Mongolia and attend its various teachings. I argue that the interview results indicate that the most common reason why they do is to learn self-help, using teachings and programs that are broadly associated with this. The most common method is studying and practising meditation.

In chapter four, I explore the engagement of students in the FPMT’s interpretation of both forms of Buddhism; the importance they attribute to developing a national identity within themselves, assisted by the reconstruction of the traditional religion, Buddhism, while developing expectations that govern its new interpretations at Shedrup Ling, and the opportunity for interactions offered by them.

In chapter five, I focus on Shedrup Ling as a transnational Buddhist ‘product’ and its marketing goals in contemporary Mongolia as well as in a global culturally-hybridised society. I argue that Shedrup Ling is not only campaigning as a highly-recognised, established and successful international Tibetan Buddhist organisation, but also promotes itself by deliberately offering the Mongolian audience an opportunity to embrace a new way of learning its own lost tradition through consuming a ‘hybrid’ product repackaged by globalised ‘consumer choices’.

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CHAPTER 2
Mongolian Buddhism at the Crossroads

2.1 Introduction: the many pathways of Mongolian Buddhism

The title on Shedrup Ling’s website reads: “FPMT Mongolia: Re-igniting Buddhism in Central Asia.” In the first sentence under this headline, the FPMT claims that this re-ignition will be carried out in two ways: by “help(ing to) re-light the lamp of Mongolian Buddhist culture and to provide assistance for the poor and under-privileged” (FPMT, 2013). In this introductory sentence, FPMT Mongolia and its hub at Shedrup Ling express their own understanding that they represent both Traditional Mongolian Buddhism and Transnational Buddhism. Its links with Traditional Mongolian Buddhism are displayed through its commitment to “re-light (its) lamp”. Simultaneously, the commitment “to help” in this endeavour displays its Transnational Buddhist character, as does its choice to combine this assistance to religious revival with a form of Engaged Buddhism—“provid(ing) assistance for the poor and under-privileged”. Moreover, FPMT Mongolia’s decision to first start a dharma centre, Shedrup Ling, that teaches meditation and other forms of self-help and through this centre create a link between international Buddhist networks and their projects in Mongolia also displays its transnational character.

Working from this premise, Shedrup Ling was envisioned as, and became, a place and organisation in which these two traditions intersected: Traditional Mongolian Buddhism, with its emphasis on cultural inheritance and national identity, and Transnational Buddhism with its emphases on international connectivity, engagement and modernity. Just as the physical buildings of Shedrup Ling were more often than not the locational background for my interviews, the intersection of these two traditions was the social and cultural background to respondents’ answers. Understanding and contextualising these answers therefore requires an initial survey of the two traditions and the places in which they intersect, both conceptually and spatially in locations like Shedrup Ling. This is the purpose of this chapter.

Like most of the journeys Buddhism has taken, its journey to Mongolia and its acculturation into Mongolian society was a centuries-long and complicated process. The tale that Mongolian Buddhists inherit about Buddhism and its introduction to Mongolia
is less complicated. According to the traditional narrative, Buddhism arrived in their country in five waves, most of which were facilitated by the deeds of “great men”. The first wave carried Buddhism to the Mongol lands, if not to the Mongolian people themselves, in the early centuries of the first millennium. The second wave was the introduction of Buddhism to the Mongolian people by the descendants of Chinggis Khan (Mong. Чингис хаан; 1162–1227 CE) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The third wave occurred several centuries later during the sixteenth century when the ruler of one group of Mongols, Altan Khan8 (Mong. Алтан хаан; 1507–1582), developed a close relationship with a guru or “lama” (Tib. bla ma; Mong. лам) from the Tibetan Buddhist Gelüg (Tib. Dge lugs; Mong. гелүүг) school to whom he gave the title Dalai Lama. The fourth wave consisted of a movement to integrate the Tibetan form of Buddhism into Mongolian culture in the mid-seventeenth century, a movement promoted by the Manchu dynasty and spearheaded by an aristocratic monk known most commonly as Zanabazar9 (Mong. Занабазар; Tib. Dza na ba za; “Jñāna (wisdom)-vajra”; 1635–1723). And the fifth wave is the recent re-emergence of Buddhism following the downfall of Communism in the early 1990s.

All five of these waves were transnational, drawing on sources from outside Mongolian culture (Atwood, 1996; Elverskog, 2013; Knauf, Taupier & Gérélmaa, 2012). Initially they drew on Indian sources, for the historical Buddha was Indian and his teachings were originally positioned within Indian culture, but the main source of Buddhism for Mongolians has been Tibet. The introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia has not merely been an Indo-Tibetan affair, however, as it has also been influenced by other countries; in the past the most notable of these auxiliary influences was China and, in recent times, it has been both China and the West. Although the attendance at Shedrup Ling is relatively small, for example, the FPMT has exercised great influence through the elite nature of these attendees and on a more popular level through its sponsorship of many monasteries, nunneries and other institutions, particularly the construction of the Idgaa Choizinling College and the renovation of Dolma Ling Nunnery (FPMT, 2013 & 2014).

8 Altan Khan has been widely recognised among scholars for his contribution to Mongolian Buddhism. The Mongolian historian Shagdaryn Bira stresses Altan’s contribution and commonly recognized that never earlier had Buddhism in Mongolia had such meaning for the whole nation as it took on with uncommon speed after its adoption by Altan Khan. Bira and Krueger, Mongolian Historical Writing, p.121.
9 Many depict Zanabazar as a living god. When reading this myth, one cannot avoid seeing the comparative elements it shares with the Christian accounts of the infant Jesus.
The transnational nature of Buddhism and its repeated reintroduction to Mongolia work in a somewhat paradoxical way with the role Buddhism plays in Mongolian national identity. For despite its foreign origins, the practice of Buddhism in Mongolia is also understood as a marker of national identity, and therefore many people associate its practice with Mongolian history in general. The central role of this identity means that any understanding of Mongolian Buddhist practice is predicated on an understanding not so much of the history that Mongolian Buddhists inherit, but on the interaction between this history and their communal stories.

The five waves of Mongolian Buddhism are therefore central to the practice and identity of many types of Mongolian Buddhists, but they tend to interpret them differently; reinventing their collective backstory by drawing out the elements that aid their particular interpretations of the tradition (Abrahms-Kavunenko, 2011). When advocating traditional, cultural Mongolian Buddhism, Buddhist practice and identity, the practitioners I interviewed reflected on how Buddhism connected them to the grandness of the Mongol Empire. By engaging with its temples and traditions, they saw themselves re-performing what they understand to be Chinggis Khan’s initial relationship with the Buddhists he brought to his encampment (Bawden, 1997; Heissig, 1980). More particularly, they also understood themselves to be part of the traditional relationship between Mongolia and Tibet that stretches back to the relationship that developed between Chinggis’s grandson Qubilai Khan (Mong. Хубилай хаан) and the head of the Tibetan Sakya Tradition (Tib. Sa skyā; Mong. сакъа), the monk Phagpa (Tib. (Chos rgyal) ’Phags pa; Mong. пчагна; 1235–1280). It also enabled them to invoke other past “great men” such as Altan Khan, the Dalai Lama and Zanabazar. Those who advocated the practice of transnational Buddhism, on the other hand, tended to emphasise the international connections in Buddhism’s journey to Mongolia: its connections to India, Tibet and even China and the West. This presentation linked them to the transnational, hybrid form of Buddhism that as Zablocki (2005) has shown is performed through social and cultural networks across the globe.

There are some Mongolians who advocated one form of this practice at the expense of the other, but all of the people I interviewed at Shedrup Ling were engaged with both of these narratives. They identified themselves with the traditional forms of Mongolian Buddhism through family and national connections, and they also identified with the transnational, more inclusive and more “modern” elements of Mongolian Buddhism.
The practitioners I interviewed at Shedrup Ling, like most contemporary Mongolians, are in the process of restructuring their identities amidst abrupt changes in their political, economic and ideological milieu. Part of this reconstruction involves looking back into the past, as many think it may provide a basis for morality and spirituality in the present (Humphrey, 1992). In this context, the past matters as both a source of identity and as a paradigm for understanding how Buddhism is practised in Mongolia in the present. Therefore, any presentation of Mongolian Buddhist practice today needs to begin by situating this practice within the unfolding story of Mongolian Buddhism. This story incorporates elements of Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, which will be examined in part one of this chapter; it is grounded in the five-wave history of Mongolian Buddhism, which is the focus of part two; and it is framed within the transnational networks of Buddhism that the FPMT represents in this study, which will be discussed in part three.

2.2 A Portable (Hi) Story of Buddhism

Whether they are involved in traditional practice or in meditations at a transnational Buddhist centre like Shedrup Ling, all Mongolian Buddhists know stories about the Buddha, about his teachings or dharma, and about how these teachings travelled from India, through Tibet to Mongolia. These stories are rarely retold as a fully formed history, but more often than not are passed down from one generation to the next through tales, images, and cultural references without those involved necessarily being conscious of the transmission of the stories and ideas.

2.1.1 The Story of the Buddha and his Dharma

Buddhism is one of the world’s oldest religious and philosophical traditions. It first appeared in India roughly 2,500 years ago as the teachings of a man known by various names, but most commonly in Mongolia as Śākyamuni Buddha (Tib. Shā kya thub pa; Mong. сахьямунь). The precise dates of the Buddha’s life are not known, but it is thought that he was born about 480 in Lumbinī, in what is now southern Nepal (Harvey, 1990).

The traditional story of his life, the one with currency in Mongolia today and which is displayed on temple murals and told in children’s story books, says that he was born the son of Śuddhodana, a King of the Śākya tribe, and his queen Māyā. After a clairvoyant saint predicted he would leave the palace to live the life of an ascetic, his father banned
all those who were ill or dying from his presence and kept him a state of great luxury and splendour (Powers, 1991). He excelled at sports and games, and in his studies, but was not challenged by life’s suffering. Later, at the age of sixteen he was married to a woman named Yaśodharā from a nearby clan, and she gave birth to a son named Rāhula. But then, at the age of twenty-nine, on an excursion outside the temple he encountered what tradition calls “the four sights” (Tib. mtshan ma bzhi; Mong. дорвон санал бодол): he saw a sick person, an old person, a corpse and an ascetic. Upon seeing these things he understood that to overcome the suffering of the first three he needed to pursue the path of the fourth. This led him to quit the palace at night, leave his wife and son, and take to the road as a wandering ascetic. After he was safely outside of his home town, he discarded his princely attire, cut his hair, and took up the robes of an ascetic. He then travelled south and practised extreme asceticism for six years, before adopting what he famously called a “middle way” (Tib. dbu ma’i lam; Mong. дунд зэрэг) between the extremes of indulgent palace life on the one hand and extreme asceticism on the other. On the basis of this practice, his meditation improved, and he began to seek what he called “awakening” (Tib. byang chub; Mong. Сэрүүн) or perfect awareness. He achieved this awakening, the story continues, one night as he sat beneath a tree near the village of Bodhgayā in present day Bihār, India.

The Buddha then remained silent at the foot of the tree for forty-nine days after his awakening, absorbed in meditation. After some period of hesitation regarding the propagation of his realisation, he gave his first public teaching, the first “turning of the wheel of dharma” (Tib. chos skor; Mong. Бурхан багшны номын хүрдэх эргүүлж) to five ascetics in Sārnāth, near Vārānasī. They then became the first monks to be ordained in his religious community or samgha (Tib. dge ’dun; Mong. сангча). Later, as more followers joined the group, he developed a series of rules or vows, known as the Vinaya (Tib. ’dul ba; Mong. винаха) that prescribed and proscribed monastic behaviour. At first women were excluded from the order but, after requests from his stepmother and cousin, he allowed their admission under strict conditions. It is broadly assumed that he died in 483 BCE, his body was burnt, and the ashes were distributed and preserved in eight reliquaries called stūpas.

Along with this tale of the Buddha, Mongolian Buddhists are also told stories about the importance of his dharma, or teachings. Originally, the Buddha’s teachings were passed down orally from teacher to disciple, before a textual tradition developed centuries later (Powers, 1995). The developing textual tradition coincided with the
spread of Buddhism beyond India, as its ideas and texts were carried on trade routes around the turn of the first millennium; even during this early period, Buddhism was already becoming transnational. As it travelled, it interacted with various cultures and languages to create the traditions of Buddhism that exist today. Some of these tended to focus on monastic practice, while others emphasised meditation and yoga techniques, and yet others developed more philosophical traditions. Moreover, even amongst those who agreed on which aspects of the teachings were the most important focus of practice, not all groups or writers agreed on an approach to this topic. This led to a somewhat bewildering variety in understandings of Buddhist practices and subsequently to attempts to classify the approaches and views according to a variety of schema.

The most influential of these models for dividing the various teachings—one that was first developed in India but then later spread beyond India to East Asia, to the Tibetans and later to the Mongolians—was the metaphoric configuration of “three vehicles” (Skt. triyāna; Tib. theg pa gsum; Mong. гурван холтон) of Buddhist practice: the Lesser Vehicle (Skt. Hinayāna; Tib. Theg dman; Mong. бага холтон); the Greater Vehicle (Skt. Mahāyāna; Tib. Theg chen; Mong. их холтон); and the Vajra Vehicle (Skt. Vajrayāna; Tib. rdo rje'i theg pa; Mong. очир холтон) (Powers, 1995). In the Tibetan, and therefore Mongolian, presentation of the teachings of these vehicles, the three build on each other. The practices of personal morality in which particularly monastics but also laypeople engage are associated with the Lesser Vehicle, which emphasises individual liberation. These practices are said to lead to release from the cycle of existence (Skt. saṃsāra; Tib. 'khor ba; Mong. самсаара), when that person becomes a “foe destroyer” or arhat (Tib. dgra bcom pa; Mong. дайсан устгагч). Mahāyāna practitioners, by contrast, put off this personal release from suffering in order that they may work for the awakening of all beings. This intention, called bodhicitta, the “mind of awakening” (Tib. byang chub sems; Mong. сэхээрэл ухаан), arises when practitioners focus on the desire of all beings to be free from suffering and experience happiness. The people who have this intention in their mental continuums are called bodhisattvas (Tib. byang chub sems dpa'; Mong. бадисаттвас). As Mahāyāna Buddhists propound the idea of multiple buddhas, they also represent the Buddha in multiple forms, and often positioned these various buddha forms within their own perfected environments called Buddha lands (Skt. buddha-kṣetra; Tib.sangs rgyas shing; Mong. цэвэр газар). In time, these Buddha lands themselves became the focus of Mahāyāna practice, with practitioners praying to their respective Buddhas and seeking to be reborn within them.
The teachings of the Vajrayāna do not change the basic belief structure of the Mahāyāna, but they present a variety of ways for achieving the ultimate goal of awakening. These include practices that focus on transformation of the practitioner’s perception so that they learn to see themselves as a tantric buddha and yogas that manipulate energy flow within the body that are believed to aid this transformation (Powers, 1995 & 2008). These practices often employ manipulation of sexual energies, but for most practitioners these energies are evoked through visualisations rather than sexual acts (Powers, 2009). This focus on transformation through a variety of tantric deity visualisations is the philosophical reasoning behind the proliferation of images in this tradition. As understood in everyday practice, however, it is often the case that these deities will be approached for personal and spiritual favours in much the same ways that deities in any other religion are propitiated (Samuel, 1993).

According to historians, these three levels of Buddhist practice developed in India over the first millennium CE (Powers, 1995 & 2008), but in the context of the present study it is also important to understand that both the traditional and transnational forms of Buddhism have different narratives. According to both these traditions, these various practices all have their origins in the teachings of a buddha—and usually the historical Buddha—although s/he may have been manifest in a different form and perhaps even in a different world system or realm (Powers, 1995 & 2008; Samuel, 1993). The proliferation of sources means that the practitioners of these forms of Buddhism not only feel connected back through the lineages of the Dharma that travelled to Tibet and throughout India, but also to the other realms and buddha lands that are depicted as the sources of these practices, and often painted on monastery and meditation centre walls.

Most of these three forms of Buddhism are present in all Buddhist countries, but from the Mongolian and Tibetan perspectives certain countries have been more closely associated with one or another vehicle. From this perspective, for example, the countries of Southeast Asia in which Theravāda Buddhism (Tib. gNas brtan sde pa; Mong. Тхеравадин) is the main form of Buddhist practice are most closely associated with Hīnayāna; and the countries of East Asia in which Pure Land and other Mahāyāna practices predominate are associated with Mahāyāna; and the regions most closely associated with the Vajrayāna are Tibet, the wider Tibetan cultural sphere, Mongolia and the wider Mongolian cultural sphere.
2.1.2 The Dharma’s Journey to Tibet

As in Mongolia, the acculturation of Buddhism in Tibet was a centuries-long and complex tale that was gradually transformed by those who inherited it during several importation waves that were also associated with great men.

Buddhism was first introduced into Tibet during the time of the Tibetan Empire, in the 5th century CE during the reign of the semi-legendary king Lhato Tori (Lha Tho to rgyan btsan) of the Yarlung Dynasty, when Buddhist scriptures are said to have arrived there. Known as the “initial propagation” (Tib: snga dar), tradition has it that this first introduction was carried out by the three Dharma Kings (Tib: chos rgyal gsum). The first was Tri Songtsen Gampo (569/605–649 CE; Tib. Khri Srong btsan sgam po; Mong. сонгцан гампо; Ch: 松赞干布). He reportedly had two wives who were both Buddhist, one Chinese and one Nepali, and he is regarded as the first ruler to bring Buddhism to Tibet.10 The second king, Tri Songdetsen (Tib. Khri Srong lde btsan; Mong. трисонг дэтсен; Ch. 赤松德赞), is known for having brought the monk Śāntarakṣita (Tib. Zhi ba tsho; Mong. Шантаракшитагийн; Ch. 寂护) and the tantric master Padmasambhava (Tib. Padma 'byung gnas, c. 8th century) to the country. Traditional histories report that Śāntarakṣita introduced monastic Buddhism and Padmasambhava introduced Vajrayāna, also known as tantric Buddhism. Historical sources from the time suggest that Padmasambhava was a minor figure and that tantric Buddhist practice was very restricted, but as Tantrayāna later became the mainstay of Tibetan Buddhism, his role was latterly exaggerated (Dalton, 2011). The third king, Tri Ralpachen (Ral pa can, c. 806 – 838 CE), lavishly funded monasteries, which caused a backlash against the religion. His brother Langdarma (Glang dar ma, 838 – 841 CE) took over as king and persecuted Buddhism according to traditional histories. His assassination by a Buddhist monk led to fall of the Tibetan Empire.11

Buddhism was reintroduced in the 10th and the 11th centuries. The monastic reintroduction came from both east and west, being sponsored in the latter by Langdarma’s descendant, King Yeshe Ö (Ye shes ’od, c. 959-1036; Ch. 拉喇嘛益西沃), in the western regions of the Plateau. At the same time, more tantric traditions that had become popular in India during the interim also came to Tibet. There were two

10 Historical records don’t mention the Nepali consort and show that the Chinese wife played at most a peripheral role in court affairs.
11 Historical records suggest that Langdarma was not as bad as he has been portrayed. He tried to fix the financial mess that had been created by his predecessor. It is also not clear in traditional historical annals that he was actually assassinated. The Empire broke up because of problems with succession following Langdarma’s death and a combination of political crises and internal conflicts.
forms of Buddhism existing together, the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna in monastic institutions and the Vajrayāna, which was practised both in monasteries and within groups of lay tantrikas.

### 2.1.2.1 Developments During this Period

(a) Schools. The New Schools of Tibetan Buddhism—the Sakya, the Kagyu and the Kadam—arose, and the old school from the first transmission reformulated itself as the Nyingma (Tib. Rnying ma; Mong. ньингма; Chin. 宁玛派), which followed the early translations (Tib. snga 'gyur) of tantric scriptures. These incorporated the practice of tantric traditions that had come to predominate after the fall of the empire (Dalton, 2011).

(b) Tulkus. After the second transmission, the phenomenon of recognised reincarnates developed in Tibet. These inherited the role and property of their predecessors, thus providing a way to transfer assets without physical reproduction. The first reincarnate tradition to develop and be sustained was that of the Karmapas from the Kagyu tradition who were teachers to some Mongol Emperors. Karma Pakshi was Qubilai’s teacher before he developed a guru-student relationship with the Sakyapa Phagpa. His next two successors were the gurus of Toghun Temur, and this was the relationship model imported into Tibet.

Following all these developments between the second and third waves of Mongolian Buddhism, a new school arose and that would become the one that has had the most influence on Mongolia. This was the Gelug School. It was founded by the reformer Tsongkhapa (1357–1419, Tib. Tsong kha pa blo bzang grags pa; Mong. Богд Зонховыг; Chin:宗喀巴).

He saw himself as the inheritor of the Kadam tradition, which had emphasised monasticism and mainstream Mahāyāna. But he also incorporated tantric practices that could be performed by celibate monks and made a strict division between the practice and understanding of the tantras of the Vajrayāna and monasticism. The system he developed came to be known as the Gelug/ Gelug-pa (Tib. Dge lugs pa; Mong. Шарын Шагшип; Chin. 格鲁派), or “virtuous system”.

At first Tsongkhapa and his tradition presented themselves in opposition to the tulku system of reincarnation, but it proved so useful that it was eventually incorporated into the Gelug. It was one of these tulkus whom Altan Khan would meet on the banks of Kokonor Lake, and to whom he would give the title Dalai Lama. The FPMT aligns
itself most closely with the Gelug school and views the present Dalai Lama as one of the great exemplars of its system.

2.3 Buddhism for Mongolians

Despite the religion's pacific reputation, the integration of Buddhism into Mongolia has been anything but peaceful. Its propagation on Mongolia's steppes has been repeatedly accompanied by political disturbances, perilous liaisons and brutal repressions. The volatile union began as a political tool of the powerful Mongol emperors in the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Rossabi, 1988; Sagaster, 2007), who finally settled on the Tibetan form of Buddhism after investigating other forms of the religion. But after the collapse of their Empire, it was later reintroduced by subsequent rulers in the sixteenth century. The enthusiasm of its sixteenth century patrons led to the repression of Mongolia's indigenous religions, including Shamanism, and an increase in tensions between the two traditions; tensions that have continued until today (Atwood, 1996; Bawden, 1968; Elverskog, 2000; Heissig, 1980).

The practice of Tibetan Buddhism also created some common ground between the Mongols and their neighbours the Manchus, who subsequently became the most powerful nation in the region, establishing the Qing Empire (Ch. 清朝, 1644-1912) a century later. But while this might have led to a negotiable space between to the two ethnicities, and this in turn might have stopped the Manchus from invading greater Mongolia, the main reason they chose not to invade was because it was unnecessary. They could use the Mongolians' belief system to control them by manipulating reincarnation lineages they deemed too powerful and employing Buddhist ideology as a form of state control.

After the fall of the Qing dynasty, Mongolia was only granted a brief reprieve from foreign intervention before it became caught between two of the twentieth century's greatest empires: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Determined to eradicate religion within their realms, the governments of both these communist blocs set about destroying as many traces of Mongolian Buddhism as they could. The first to practise this type of destruction were the Russians in the early twentieth century as they took over what became known as the Republic of Mongolia (Bawden 1968; Lattimore 1962; Lattimore & Isono 1982; Moses 1977). Much of their behaviour was later copied by the Chinese Communists in the
areas of Mongolia over which they had control; an area they called (and still call) “Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region” (Mong. Өөрөө Монголын өөрөө засах; Ch. 内蒙古自治区). It was not until 1990 that religious freedoms were genuinely reintroduced to the people of the Republic of Mongolia (Kaplonski, 2004; Rossabi, 2005). Today religious practice is still strictly controlled in Inner Mongolia (Wallace, 2008).

A recurring theme of all these interactions has been the influence of foreigners on the repeated creations and destructions of Mongolian Buddhism. To begin with, it was only after the Mongols had left home, raided most of the Eurasian continent, and therefore began to explore the cultures of others, that Buddhism became known to them. Later, it was only when its rulers, particularly Qubilai Khan and his descendants, began inviting foreign Buddhist monks, and especially Tibetan Buddhist monks, to their courts that it had any perceptible influence on Mongolian culture. Moreover, it was only when these Tibetans came in greater numbers, introducing their culture more broadly across the country and down the social spectrum in the sixteenth century that Mongolia became a Buddhist country. Then just as foreigners had helped install Buddhism in Mongolia, foreigners, this time the Soviets and the Communist Chinese, attempted to eradicate it.12

2.3.1 The Adventures of Aristocrats:

4th to 16th Centuries, the first and second waves

As the Mongolians were traditionally a nomadic people who inhabited a large swathe of the Eurasian steppe at different times during their history, the dating of the introduction of Buddhism to “Mongolia” can be done in one of two ways: the date when it was introduced onto Mongolian soil, or the date it was introduced to the people. Most historians prefer the latter but, in their encouragement of an ancient Buddhist and Mongolian nationalism, some contemporary Mongolian Buddhists prefer to date its existence to the first period in which Buddhism was introduced to the country. This may have been as early as the third century BCE, when Buddhism was being passed along the Silk Road between India and China (Heissig, 1980, p.4). This fact allows people like the abbot of Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar to promote the idea, as he put it, that:

Around 2000, or more than 2000 years ago, there was Buddhism in

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12 Tibetans first encountered Buddhism during the Imperial period and subsequently decided to import Indic culture because it offered benefits to them. They also brought foreign Buddhists, initially Indians and Chinese, to Tibet, and in the second dissemination settled on Indian Buddhism as normative. And like Mongolia, later Chinese invaders worked to undermine Buddhism in what many Tibetans view as a concerted program to eventually eradicate it (this is also the stated goal of Chinese official religious policy). (Powers, 1995).
Mongolia in the ancient areas of Hunyun and the area of Tyron and in the state of Nyron. Two thousand years ago, Buddhism was the state religion and there were several ancient Mongolian States that historically had Buddhism as their official religion in their history.13

Where his assessment differs from that of historians is in his calling these peoples and states “Mongolian”, rather than proto-Mongolian or Mongolic, or other regional nomadic groups.

The more common assessment of the Mongolian people’s first interaction with Buddhism occurs when they banded together to create a Mongol nation in the twelfth century under the rule of Chinggis Khan. There is no evidence that Chinggis Khan favoured Buddhism in any way (Puri, 1987), merely that he led his army on conquests through Buddhist lands, including those of the Kitans, Uigurs, Chinese and Tanguts, and this in turn led to a growing awareness of Buddhism amongst some Mongols. Despite this lack of evidence, however, there has been a traditional and continuing acceptance among both Mongolian and Tibetan writers that Chinggis Khan was involved in the spread of Buddhism to the region (Majer & Teleki, 2009; Atwood, 1996; Bawden, 1968; Heissig, 1980). Moreover, given the popularity of the perceived founder of the Mongolian nation, it is unlikely that this traditional association will be widely refuted any time soon. Indeed, as things stand, and as I will explain in chapter two, his perceived involvement in this transformation still plays a key role in linking the practice of Mongolian Buddhism to national identity.

The two variant versions of Mongolian Buddhist history only became aligned during the thirteenth century, when the Mongol Imperial court began to develop a stronger relationship with adherents of various forms of Buddhism, and particularly with Tibetan Buddhist monks. At their court there were Buddhists from many of the regions the Mongolians had conquered, including the aforementioned Kitans, Uyghurs, Chinese and Tanguts, but it was the Tibetans with whom the most powerful Mongolian emperors formed the closest relationships, and to whom they granted the greatest privileges. Other Buddhist nations were placed under direct Mongolian control, for example, but the Tibetans were allowed—ostensibly at least—to rule their own domain, through the abbots (Tib. khri ’dzin; Mong. ađboTc) and great lords (Tib. dpon chen; Mong. Их

This variant relationship between the Imperial Court and the Tibetans began in 1240 when Chinggis’s son and the next Great Khan after him, Ögödei (1189–1241; Mong. uugdei xaan; Chinese. 蘆台汗), ordered a raid into Tibetan territory by Doorda Darkhan (Tib. Dorr ta nag po, 12th century). Rather than following the usual rules of Mongolian military operations, however, as Sagaster (2007:386) has argued, Darkhan was impressed with the Tibetan’s religion and “magic” and therefore asked his commander and Ögödei’s son Göden (d. 1206-1251; Mong. gooden xaan; Chinese. 阔端汗) to speak with them rather than subdue them. Göden reportedly took this advice and summoned one of the country’s most esteemed religious leaders, Sakya Pandita (Tib. Sa skya Pandita; Mong. saka Pandit, 1182–1251), to his court; he arrived in 1246. Both legend and history generally agree that Göden was very impressed with Sakya Pandita and became his patron (Jerryson 2007:15; Sagaster 2007:386). As a result of this relationship, it is also believed that Göden, his father Ögödei, and his brother Güyük (1206–1248; Mong. Gysg xaan; Chinese. 元定宗, who became the next Great Khan) refrained from invading Tibet.

After Güyük’s death in 1248, however, the next Great Khan, Möngke (1209–1259), was chosen from another branch of the royal family and reversed many of his predecessor’s priorities. He was the son of another of Chinggis Khan’s sons, Tolui (1192–1232), and the oldest of four brothers who would collectively have a significant influence on the introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia. Möngke sent an army into Tibet in 1251 but, in a recognition of its still-special, religious status, he established a system whereby each of his brothers received an appendage over an important Tibetan monastery. This allowed each of the brothers to establish a patron-recipient (Tib. mchod yon; Mong. ытнлнэнцлбшн-хулэн абавч) relationship with the members of these monasteries.

Out of all his brothers, the one who seems to have taken the most interest was Qubilai Khan (1215–1294; Mong. Хубилай xaan; Ch. 元世祖/忽必烈汗). At first Qubilai showed an interest in a variety of Buddhist and Tibetan Buddhist teachers. He studied with the Chinese Buddhist monk Haiyun (13th century; Ch. 海云) in his early life, and

14 Other nations conquered by the Mongols were ruled directly through the permanent presence of Mongol princes, ministers or generals, but the rule of Tibet was given to the the Sakyas by Qubilai Khan, Chinggis Khan’s grandson (Tibet and Mongol, 1996: P22). Thus, in 1260 Qubilai Khan invited Phags-pa, the head lama of Sa skya and, in the “Pearl Decree”, made public his decision to make this religion the state ideology (Elverskog, 2007; Atwood, 1996).
later began to study with both the second Karmapa, Kama Pakshi (1204/6–1283; Mong.
Кама Пакши Ch. 噶玛巴希) and Sakya Pandita’s young nephew Chögyal Phagpa
(1235–1280; Tib. Chos rgyal ’phags pa; Mong. Чогьял Пхагна; Ch. 巴思巴 or 巴思巴).
After Karma Pakshi left his court, however, the relationship between the young prince
Qubilai and Phagpa became the defining religious association of his life (Rossabi, 1988;
Sagaster, 2007), and this also influenced the way he ruled when he became Great Khan
in 1264. Together they established the institution of the patron-priest (Tib. mchod yon;
Mong. эээн-тахилч).

In his role as Great Khan, Qubilai ruled indirectly over much of Eurasia, but his
special area of influence was in Mongolia, China, Tibet and Korea: the region that
became known as the Yuan Dynasty (Mong. Юан улс; Ch. 元朝). In these regions he
established Buddhism, and particularly Tibetan Buddhism, in a special position of
authority, signing the “Pearl Charter” with Phagpa in 1252, which divided the spheres
of influence between lay (imperial) and spiritual (Buddhist) authorities in the
Mongolian Empire. 15 Under this regime, Buddhist monks and monasteries were
exempted from taxation and other imperial duties such as army and postal services
(Heissig, 1980; Sagaster, 2007; Rossabi, 1988).

The special relationship between the Mongol rulers and Tibetan monks continued for
the rest of the Yuan Empire, but it also had a lasting effect on the way that Buddhism
has been understood in Mongolia since this time. Following the decree, monk-teachers,
or gurus (Tib. bla ma; Mong. гуру) have played a central role in the practice and
tradition of Mongolian Buddhism. This has had both positive and negative effects on its
integrity and practice. As many have pointed out (Moses, 1977; Sagaster, 2007;
Jerryson, 2007; Heissig, 1980), the negative effects of this reliance include a
susceptibility to various forms of corruption, for if one of these leaders can be
corrupted, this often leads to many of their followers also engaging in less than edifying
behaviour. But it could also be argued that the charisma this system grants its leaders
has had many positive effects on Mongolian Buddhism. During the Mongolian Empire,
for example, there were said to be numerous incidences in which these gurus used their
influence to prevent killing, whether of the Emperor’s enemies, in ritual practices, or the
mass slaughtering of animals (Elverskog, 2000; Jerryson, 2007). Even if these stories
are not historically accurate, they have at least set a precedent that is often referred to
ever today.

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Moreover, it was also during this time, and thanks in part to the influence of Tibetans and Mongolian converts, that the Mongolian language became more fully literary. For even though the script Phagpa developed at Qubilai's behest was not widely adopted, the idea of writing down stories in the Mongolian language and translating texts—particularly Buddhist texts—did become popular. Likewise, Tibetan medicine and astrology also influenced Mongolian culture greatly.16

These were no doubt significant cultural breakthroughs but at this stage, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Buddhism was still only an elite religion and the fall of the Greater Mongolian Empire in 1368 also led to a vast reduction in its influence (Puri, 1987, Sagaster, 2007: 394-395, Heissig, 1980).17 The collapse of imperial support, combined with the tendency of some Tibetan monks to abuse their power, saw many of the elites turn away from Buddhism, and Shamanism and even Daoist practices regained popularity in Mongolia (Puri, 1987). After the Empire's fall, when Mongol rule devolved into a series of smaller kingdoms or khanates, Buddhism's cultural influence remained, but had it not been for a resurgence of interest during the late sixteenth century, Mongolian Buddhism might have become another historical anomaly.

2.3.2 Becoming Mongolian: The Third and Fourth Waves (16th to 17th Centuries)

The resurgence of Buddhism that occurred during the sixteenth century is often called the “second wave” (Mong. xoёр дахь давалгаа). In the main, responsibility and credit for its occurrence is given to one man: Altan Khan (Mon. Аltаn хаан; Ch. 俺答汗, 1507-1582), the ruler of the Tumed Mongols (Bawden, 1968:28; Elverskog, 2007).

Altan Khan's reintroduction of the Tibetan form of Buddhism to Mongolia is traditionally said to have begun when he convened a congress of princes and noyons from Eastern, Western and Southern Mongolia on the shores of Lake Kökø Nuur (Tib. Mtsho sngon; Mong. хөхнуур; Ch. 青海湖) in 1576. At this meeting, he proclaimed a relatively new, reforming school of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gelüg (Tib. Dge lugs; Mong. Гэлэг; Ch. 格鲁派 or 黄教) as Mongolia's new state religion.

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16 The fall of the Mongol empire in China in 1368 led to the weakening of the Tibetan Buddhist faith throughout Mongolia. The old popular religion of Shamanism gained ground again and Daoist beliefs spread to Mongolia. The Gelukpa tradition was introduced by Neyica toyin (1557-1653)—the first Buddhist missionary to the eastern Mongols, and the first Jaya Pandita (1599-1662)—the two most prominent representatives of the new west Mongolian Buddhism.
17 Bawden, p.24
According to the traditional story that is often repeated in Mongolia today, prior to this congress Altan Khan had become acquainted with several Tibetan Buddhist monks of the Gelüg school when he captured them on a raid into Tibetan territory. The prisoners then began to preach to their captor, who was so impressed by their presentation of the Buddha’s teaching the Khan became a Buddhist (Bawden, 1968:28). After converting, he then invited one of the leading teachers of the Gelüg school, a monk named Sönam Gyatso (Tib. Bsod nams rgya mtsho; Mong. Содном Джамцо; Ch. 素南嘉措; 1543–1588), to the conference he convened on the shores of Lake Kökö Nuur.

The history of the Mongols from the 14th century onwards exemplifies two main themes: 1). The rivalry between the Eastern and Western Mongols; and 2). The efforts to unite the Mongol race and to recreate the Empire of Chinghis Khan and Khublai Khan. (Ahmad, 1970). The Mongol laws were reformed as the result of their being converted to Buddhism. Whatever laws were obligatory in Tibet, were made obligatory in Mongolia and laws were promulgated to that effect. (Ahmad, 1970).

There are three questions to be answered here: 1). Why did Altan Khan invite the Dalai Lama to Mongolia? 2). Why did the Dalai Lama accept the invitation? 3). What was the nature of the relationship established between the Dalai Lama and the Mongol Khans?

With regard to the first question Mongol history after the expulsion of the Mongols from China, represents not only a struggle between Eastern and Western Mongols, but also a series of attempts to recreate the Mongol Empire (Ahmad, 1970).

To ascertain the reason why the Dalai Lama accepted Altan Khan’s invitation, one must go to Tibetan history. In 1575, after the first invitation from Altan Khan to Phags-pa, the authority of the Gelukpa Patron in Tibet had become a mere shadow. The need for a Protector had been made so clear, that the powerful Mongolian ruler of the north arrived Mongolia in 1577. Altan Khan wished to proclaim that he was a second Kublai Khan and the third Dalai Lama had accepted the invitation to recreate the days of Kublai Khan for his own purposes. In the last 16th century, Altan Khan had already established his supremacy over the entire Mongol race in Central Asia, and was well on the way to re-creating the Sino-Mongolian Empire of Khublai Khan.

To understand the Dalai Lama’s reasons for accepting Altan Khan’s invitation it is necessary to examine the historical context. The Dalai Lama’s Gelukpa order was
besieged by rival factions and on the verge of eradication. Altan Khan was a potential patron with a large army. When the two met, the Dalai Lama indicated that they had played the roles of priest and patron in past lives as Phakpa ('Phags pa blo gros) and Khubilai Khan. Their meeting both revived this past association and set the stage for a new chapter in Gelukpa-Mongol relations. For Altan, it provided an opportunity to lay claim to Tibet and to assert that he was the legitimate successor of Khubilai, a leader who could unite the divided Mongol tribes and re-enact the role of benevolent sponsor of religion.

A resuscitation of Khublai Khan and the Phags-pa was in the interests of both Altan Khan and the third Dalai Lama. The individual relationship between the Dalai Lama and Altan Khan was a religious one— the Dalai Lama as an Object of Worship and Altan Khan as Worshipper; the Dalai Lama as an Object of Patronage, the Khan as Patron; the Dalai Lama as an Object of Protection from his ‘doctrinal enemies’ and Altan Khan as Protector (Ahmad, 1970).

Sönam Gyatso was the third in a series of reincarnate Tibetan Buddhist teachers. The first of this line, Gendün Drup (Mong: Гңңүү Друп; Tib: Dge ’dun grub; Ch. 根敦朱巴; 1391–1474), had been a student of Tsongkhapa, and since then, through two subsequent incarnations, the inheritors of this line had become more prominent. This rise to prominence was accompanied by a similar upsurge in the fortunes of the entire Gelüg school, which was by this stage one of the most influential orders on the Tibetan Plateau. Through its relationship with Altan Khan’s Mongols, however, it would become even more prominent. When they met at Lake Kökö Nuur, Altan Khan added to this prominence by granting Sönam Gyatso the title by which he and his successors would come to be known.18 He called him the Dalai Lama: “dalai” is the Mongolian word for ocean, and “lama” is the Tibetan word (Tib. bla ma) for teacher or “guru”. The Dalai Lama then retroactively attributed this title to his two predecessors, calling himself the third Dalai Lama and creating what would become the most well-known reincarnation lineage in Tibet, Mongolia, and the rest of the world (Croner, 2006; Elverskog, 2007)

Following the development of this relationship between Altan Khan, the Dalai Lama and the Gelüg generally, Altan began to transform certain aspects of Mongolian society under his rule to conform with Buddhist principles. A few years later, for example, he

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18 Tibetans generally refer to them as Rgyal ba rin po che. Dalai Lama is the title mostly widely known outside of Tibet.
issued the “Statute of Ten Virtues” (Mong. Арван арнун журам). Along with the general promotion of “virtuous” Buddhist deeds and respect for Buddhist teachings, this statute also specifically condemned blood sacrifices and ordered that the killing of living creatures be stopped, and a diet of milk products be adopted instead (Jerryson, 2007). According to traditional sources and narratives, the condemnation of “blood sacrifices” also included condemnation of certain Shamanic practices that had involved human deaths (Schwarz, 2006) But the instigation of Buddhism was also carried out with great force, and some commentators have noted how the introduction of this pacifist religion amounted to a brutal war of repression against local forms of Shamanism (Atwood, 1996; Bawden, 1968; Heissig, 1980).

The re-introduction, carried out with such force, left tensions between the practitioners of Shamanism and Buddhism that would re-surface at various points in Mongolia’s history. Along with these tensions, however, this period also left a more positive legacy for Mongolian Buddhism, with the establishment of the first monasteries to be peopled with Mongolian monks and translation of important Buddhist texts from Tibetan into Mongolian (Elverskog, 2007: 64). Seven years after Altan Khan’s death, the Gelug school recognised his grandson as the fourth Dalai Lama. Here is a shift of Buddhist leader from a Tibetan to a Mongol (Tib. Yon tan rgya mtsho, 1589-1616; Ch. 云丹嘉措), and he was sent to Lhasa at the age of twelve to gain a Buddhist education (Sagaster, 2007: 401).

By the turn of the seventeenth century, this renewed engagement with Tibetan Buddhism had begun to trickle down from the Mongol elites to most members of Mongolian society. The increased acceptance and practice of Buddhism by Mongolians was represented in a number of ways. At a political level, this was best illustrated by the proclamation of Buddhism as the state religion in 1640, (Jerryson, 2007) through the Mongol-Oirat Code, which granted extensive rights and privileges to Buddhist monasteries and lamas (Mongols.eu, 2014). At a social level, one of the most obvious influences was the increasing number of young Mongolian men who took ordination as Buddhist monks (Kollmar-Paulez, 2003; Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, 2006). Their ordination and installation in monasteries in turn led to a transformation of Mongolian culture, for these young people received an education that focused on Tibetan language, medicine, astrology, history and Buddhist philosophy, which influenced the country’s cultural production. It led, for example, to the composition of works on Buddhist philosophy in the Mongolian language that encouraged a further syncretism between
indigenous ideas and Buddhist philosophy (Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, 2006; Jerryson, 2007)

A few decades later, Mongolia’s integration of Buddhism was further established through the life work of another influential scion of Mongolia’s burgeoning royal family: Zanabazar.19 Zanabazar was the son of Tüsheet Khan (Mong. ᠤᠥᠤᠡᠤᠬᠠᠤ), a direct descendant of Chinggis Khan; he was the ruler of the Khalkha Mongols, who were based in Central Mongolia. As a child he was recognised as the reincarnation of the deceased Tibetan polymath Tāraṇātha (Tib. Ta ra na tha; 1575–1634) and sent to Tibet for schooling at the age of twelve. While in Tibet, the young aristocrat was awarded the title Jebtsundamba Khutukht -- ‘Holy Lord’ (Tib. Rje btsun dam pa Hu dog du; Mong. Жавзандамба хутууг) by the fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Losang Gyatso (Tib. Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho; 1642–1682) (Jerryson, 2007).

On his return from Tibet he was also given the titles Öndör Gegeen20 (Mong. ᠬᠡᠭᠡᠭᠡᠨ; and Bogd Gegeen (Mong. ᠳᠤᠭᠤᠤ ᠬᠡᠭᠡᠭᠡᠨ; “Богд” sacred/divine), which reflected his further elevation in Mongolian society. He was able to parlay this respect into several influential undertakings. The first of these was the further promotion of Tibetan Buddhism at the expense of Shamanism and, coincidentally, the promotion of the Gelüg order at the expense of the other schools that had begun to make inroads into the region (Jerryson, 2007). Once he had helped develop a more homogenous form of Mongolian Buddhism, he then set about establishing more monasteries, adapting the Mongolian script, redesigning monastic robes, composing music and adapting bronze casting and painting for Mongolian use (Atwood, 1996; Heissig, 1980). From the perspective of later practitioners of Mongolian Buddhism, however, perhaps his most important contribution was his discursive assertion that Buddhism could be Mongolian, not merely an imported belief system.

2.3.3 Living with the Manchus: 18th to 19th Centuries

Even as Zanabazar21 worked to integrate, stabilise and systemise Mongolian Buddhism within Mongolian lands, a new threat to its practice was developing outside. Another

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19 The first Jebtsundamba Khan dead in 1634 but the Mongol-Oirat code was proclaimed in 1640. The very title Tusheet Khan was given by the Dalai Lama when he went to meet him Altan Khan in the south. Zanabazar did contribute a lot in terms of religion and arts in Mongolia. It was important to mention the marriage of Mongolian aristocratic family and Tibetan Buddhism. The Mongolian Buddhist leaders were all incarnated from Mongolian aristocratic family and thus religion and politics became part of the indigenous tradition form very early on.

20 Living Buddha.

21 "It is not by chance that [Zanabazar was the founder of the Mongolian school in Buddhist art.... Nonetheless, the Mongolian school of iconography founded by G. Zanabazar, which regarded these canons as means to depict and
people from the steppe, the Mongols’ eastern neighbours the Manchus, took control of China in the mid-seventeenth century, establishing the Qing Dynasty, and towards the end of this century they also began to exercise significant control in Mongolia. The first Mongolians to capitulate to Manchu rule were those closest to China, in the area that came to be known as “Inner Mongolia”. They were followed by the Khalkha Mongols who, when they capitulated in 1691, were ruled by Zanabazar’s father Tüsheit Khan (Bawden, 1997). Mongolian Buddhist leader Jebtsundamba Khutukht’s reincarnation had been always found in Mongolia itself until the mid 18th century when the Manchu court decided that it was too dangerous to have a Mongolian reincarnation and ordered that that the tulkus would henceforth be discovered in Tibet because the Jebtsundamba participated in a rebellion against the Manchus (Bawden, 1997). At the same time, an uprising within Central, Khalkha Mongolian lands known as Chingunjav’s Rebellion after its leader Chingunjav (Mong. Чингүнжав; 1710-1757) led to severe repercussions against many ordinary and high-ranking Mongols. Those who died as a result of the Qing/Manchu repression of this uprising included Zanabazar’s successor as Jebtsundamba Khutukht, Luvsandambiydonmi (Tib. Bļo bzung bstun pa’i sgron me; Mong. Жавзандамба хутагт; 1724–1757), who was also a member of the extended Mongolian royal family, and Zanabazar’s father, Tüsheit Khan (Jerryson, 2007).

Following this repression, the Manchu court decreed that all future reincarnations of the Jebtsundamba Khutukht would be found in Tibet, thus depriving the Mongolians of a rallying point and indigenous ruler (Bawden, 1968; Jerryson, 2007).

By decreeing that the most revered leader of the Mongolians would be non-Mongol, the Manchu used the principles of Buddhism to control the Mongolian people and lands without needing to invade (Bawden, 1968). Their power in Mongolia was facilitated by regent aristocrats and reincarnates, including the Tibetan Jebtsundamba Khutukhts, whose power depended upon the Manchu (Lattimore, 1962). It was a situation that led to an inherent elitism within the presentation and practice of Mongolian Buddhism, which still influences it today (Kollmar-Paulenz, 2003).

At the same time, however, Mongols came to identify themselves very strongly with Buddhism, which helped to differentiate them from the Chinese and promoted a shared identity among the Mongolian people (Rossabi, 2005; Bulag, 1998; Schwarz, 2006). Buddhism, a marker of their identity, strongly influenced all spheres of Mongolian

convey human beauty, is distinctive for its profoundly realistic portrayal of a human being.” Tsultem Mongolia
Zurag, 13.
culture during this period, including historiography, philology, translation, printing, architecture, mathematics, astrology, as well human and animal medicine (Bulag, 1998; Schwarz, 2006; Atwood, 1996).

This shared identity and alternate culture meant that when the Qing Dynasty fell in 1911, Mongolians were in a position to assert their identity. When they did, they marked their independence by enthroning the eighth Jebtsundamba Khutukht, known as the Bogd Khan (Mong. ᠬᠣᠭᠥᠤ ᠸᠠᠭᠠᠨ; 1869–1924). The Bogd Khan was Tibetan by birth, but arrived in Mongolia as a five-year-old (Bulag, 1998; Schwarz, 2006; Atwood, 1996). Following his enthronement in 1911, Mongolians enjoyed ten years of independence. The Bogd Khan’s tenure as an absolute theocratic ruler, however, did not bode well for the perception of Buddhism amongst many within and without the country. When Buddhism first arrived in Mongolia, it was understood to have promoted a more equal and less fraught society for Mongolians, but since then it had become closely associated with the country’s feudal system of governance. Mongolia’s national identity may have been linked to Buddhism, but its association with a feudal elite and this elite’s inability to embrace modern developments made it vulnerable to criticisms from trans-national ideologies, particularly communism. Moreover, as Mongolians had spent decades focused on maintenance of a theocratic feudal system with the Bogd Khan at its head, they had not enjoyed the same technological, military or social developments as their southern and northern neighbours, China and Russia.

2.3.4 Caught Between Two Communist Blocs: the 20th Century

The Republican Chinese were the first to take advantage of this situation. As their Republic was based on the founding principle of China being comprised of “five races under one union” (Ch. wuzugonghe 五族共和;)—Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Hui (including the Uyghur) and Tibetans—they laid claim to all of Mongolia (Chow, 2008: 31). During the Republican period, they strengthened their claims to the southern areas of Mongolia that later became known as “Inner Mongolia”. There had been attempts to include these regions into the Mongolian State ruled by the Bogd Khan, but they failed for a number of reasons, including the disinclination of Russia and local aristocrat unwillingness to help in this endeavour (Bawden, 1968: 191-201). From their base in Inner Mongolia, the Chinese then invaded Outer Mongolia in 1919.

According to Republican Chinese reports, they did this at the behest of the Mongolians themselves, who had asked for help in the face Russian threats of invasion
(Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, 2006). As with many other still politically charged aspects of Mongolian history, it is difficult to say for certain what exactly happened during this period as there is much conflicting evidence. What is obvious, however, is that there were elements of the nobility that were unhappy with their status under the Bogd Khan’s rule. It is also clear that there was much disquiet about the poverty and lack of development that plagued the Mongolian people at this point. And there was also a general dissatisfaction with the proliferation of monasteries, which were difficult to sustain and often corrupt (Bulag, 1998; Schwarz, 2006; Atwood, 1996). Whether all of these circumstances led the Bogd Khan to acquiesce willingly to Chinese claims on Mongolia is another matter, and perhaps the most important element of this history in relation to the present study is that contemporary Mongolian narratives of this time are adamant that he did not (Akademiia Nauk SSSR, History of the Mongolian People’s Republic, 275).

What they stress instead is that after Chinese troops under the control of the Republican Chinese General Hsu Seu-Cheng or Xu Shuzheng (Ch. 徐树铮) first invaded in 1919 and then forced the Bogd Khan to bow to their general and the “five races under one flag” union banner, many Mongolians were so incensed they formed the Mongolian People’s Party and began to fight back against the Chinese (Sagaster, 2007). At first they opposed the Republican Chinese, and then stood against White Russian troops under the control of General Roman Ungern von Sternberg (1885-1921) (Bawden, 1968; Sagaster, 2007). In this later campaign they were aided by the Russian Red Army and eventually defeated him. Through this facilitated victory, Mongolia ensured that it would become a satellite state of the Soviet Union rather than an integrated province of the People’s Republic of China.

The first move the Mongolian People’s Party made was to remove the Bogd Khan from power and transform him into a limited monarch (Morgan, 2007). Then when he died in 1924, they declared the Mongolian People’s Republic (Mong. Бүгд Найрамдах Монгол Ард Улс (BNMAU), Bügd Nairamdakh Mongol Ard Uls (BNMAU)).

The Mongolian People’s Republic was a communist dictatorship in which, under Soviet influence, the practice of Buddhism was not only disengaged from its relationship with the state in the 1930s, but presented as an anathema to that state’s purpose and the people’s happiness. As Brown and Onon (2001:369) have explained, the re-named “Yellow Faith” (Mong. өөрнөн шашин) was understood to consist of “backward concepts… which had totally dominated the masses’ knowledge, minds, and
all cultural matters for a period of several hundred years... (and was) the main obstacle to developing a new culture and to spreading new concepts among the masses”.

The process of suppressing Buddhism and Buddhist practice during this period went through several stages. First, as it lost all association with the state after the Bodg Khan passed away, religion became a personal, voluntary matter of personal belief. Second, it was actively discouraged both through discourses like the aforementioned anti-Buddhist rhetoric and also confiscation of Buddhist material assets. Initially, this confiscation was ordered by Stalin as part of larger transformations that were being undertaken in the entire Soviet Bloc. In 1928, he ordered the collectivisation of Mongolian agriculture and therefore impounded all the lands belonging to the monasteries. In 1936 he ordered the liquidation of all other Buddhist assets in Mongolia (Moses, 1977; Jerryson, 2007). The suppression of Buddhist discourses and the confiscation of assets were then followed by the third and most brutal stage of the repression of Buddhism in Mongolia: purges.

At first these pogroms were an extension of the “Great Purge” that engulfed the entire Soviet Bloc (Halfin, 2003). At the end of this policy, however, Mongolia had a new prime minister, Khorloogiin Choibalsan (Mong. Хорлоогийн Чойбалсан; 1895–1952), who had as much invested in the destruction of Mongolian Buddhism as his Soviet overlords. He ruled the Mongolian People’s Republic from the 1930s until his death in January 1952.

Choibalsan oversaw not only the complete dismantling of Buddhist institutions in Mongolia, but also the deaths of many of its practitioners. As Robert Rupen (1996: 155) has shown, before his rise in 1921 there were 771 places of worship and more than 120 000 ordained monks (or “lamas”) in Mongolia. By 1940 there were no operating religious centres; even Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar was closed in 1938, although it was re-opened in 1944 (Jerryson, 2007; Majer, 2009). It was one of only two monasteries to survive the Communist era (Jerryson, 2007). As many as 18 000 of the approximately 33 000 people who were killed during this period were lamas ((Bareja-Starzynska & Havnevik, 2006), and following the purge no one could openly act as a monk. Anyone who attempted to continue to worship and practise Buddhism was simply exiled from society. No Mongolian was allowed to speak about Buddhism or refer to a specific Buddhist lama, although in very rare cases some Mongolians managed to hide books or bury artefacts and practised their religion secretly (See interviews). Stalin and Choibalsan believed that the Mongolian People’s Republic had been overwhelmingly successful in the removal of all public vestiges of Mongolian
Buddhism and that this would lead to the erasure of Buddhism from Mongolia. Choibalsan’s objective was not only to eliminate the lamas but also to remove any special public relationship to and reverence for Buddhism (Jerryson, 2007).

Every Mongol family felt the effects of living each day with the fear of being arrested, imprisoned or killed. Most Mongolian Buddhist practices and even Buddhist-Shamanistic practices were banned in the non-industrialised countryside. Although some Buddhist rituals with minimal impact did continue to be observed, most rituals did not survive this suppression. Even the building of ovoo landmarks and shrines was banned, and this ban stayed in place until 1990 (Bulag, 2006: 21). Communism was expected to fill the void in Mongolian culture that was left by Buddhism.

The period of repression that began with Choibalsan and Stalin continued in many ways until the early 1990s. It therefore informed the perceptions of many Mongolians, including those I interviewed. The landscape of Ulaanbaatar is dotted with memorials to this time, most of which focus on the devastation that was wrought on Mongolian Buddhists. One of these memorials, a plaque outside the Memorial Museum for the Victims of Political Repressions in Ulaanbaatar, reads: “1937-1939, there were 767 monasteries. There were around 70,000 lamas, 17,000 of whom were arrested and 13,680 of whom were shot.”

As will become evident in later chapters, in the interviews I conducted the participants tended to focus more on their and their families’ resistance in the face of this religious oppression. As one interviewee, “T” said, for example:

My grandma used to say her prayers privately and she was able to hide the statue of the Green Tārā underground. In that way, there would be no way that the communists found it. Actually, although my grandfather was a communist, he said his private prayers, too, but no one knew about this at his workplace. After the communist period, we were able to dig out the statue and some ancient Buddhist texts from under the ground. My grandparents were really strong believers.

2.3.5 Revival: Buddhism in the 1990s, the Fifth Wave
In the end, communism left Mongolia almost as hurriedly as it had arrived, but with much less bloodshed. After the fall of the USSR, Mongolia achieved meaningful independence and held its first free, democratic elections in 1990 (Kollmar-Paulenz, 2003). The election was an important step toward the establishment of a multiparty,
pluralistic and democratic state. It also marked the end of the suppression of Mongolian Buddhism. Unlike the old, pre-communist Mongolian state, the new polity was not officially linked with Buddhism, but merely allowed for its practice. The constitution addressed the issue of religion indirectly in its preamble (Sanders, 2010: 272), which reads:

We the people of Mongolia, strengthening the independence and sovereignty of our nation, cherishing human rights, freedoms, justice and national unity, inheriting the traditions of our statehood, history and culture and respecting the common heritage of mankind, aspire to develop a humane, civil and democratic society in our homeland.

It is a preamble that neatly shows the two ways Buddhist practice is represented in contemporary Mongolia: as a matter of religious freedom and a matter of heritage. The support of religious freedom is alluded to through its appeal to “human rights” and “freedoms”, and its acknowledgement of the country’s Buddhist heritage is evoked by its reference to “traditions of our....history and culture”.

By the time this constitution was implemented and the restrictions on Buddhism removed, Mongolian Buddhism was at a curious intersection. On the one hand, despite decades of brutal oppression and the public disappearance of Buddhism from Mongolian life, there was still much affection for the religion among Mongolians. Many of them had continued to hold onto Buddhist beliefs and what practices they could perform privately in the face of severe public restrictions. Indeed, even old officials from the People’s Republican period began describing publicly their private practice of the religion (Kollmar-Paulenz, 2003). On the other hand, despite this affection for Buddhism, the Mongolian Buddhist population lacked the skills to implement it in the public sphere. To remedy this situation, they turned to the same people who had helped them establish Mongolian Buddhism in the past, the Tibetans, and in so doing began what is now called the “fifth wave” of Mongolian Buddhism.

This fifth wave unfolded on a number of levels. Like many of the other introductions of Buddhism to Mongolia, this too had its central hero, who came in the unlikely form of the new Indian Ambassador to Mongolia. He was not a career diplomat, but a recognised reincarnate lama and a learned monk named Bakula Rinpoche (1917–2004). Bakula Rinpoche came from one of India’s most northern provinces, Ladakh, which neighbours Tibet and the majority of whose population is Tibetan Buddhist. He was a
member of the Ladakhi royal family, studied at the Dalai Lama’s monastery in Lhasa, and later served in independent India’s parliament. The Indian government sent him to Mongolia in 1990, initially for two years, but he stayed for ten. While there, he focused much of his efforts on the re-establishment of Buddhist institutions in the country: helping to establish monasteries and nunneries, and granting ordination to many Mongolian men and women (Lee, 2010). The gender balance in this initiative reflected a change in the perceived worth of nuns that had occurred since the Tibetan elites had fled into exile in the late 1950s. This has also been reflected in the FPMTs focus on establishing a nunnery, Dolma Ling in Ulaanbaatar, and its providing special aid for women who wish to be ordained (FPMT, 2013). Along with these ordinations of monks and nuns and the establishment of monasteries and nunneries, Bakula Rinpoche also hosted the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (1935-), on his first visit to Mongolia, along with other high-profile Tibetan Buddhist lamas like the FPMT’s Lama Zopa Rinpoche (1946-), who visited several times.

As a result of Bakula Rinpoche’s efforts, it also became evident that there was an acute shortage of well-trained monks and nuns who could instruct the growing number of monastics. At the heart of this problem was a demographic imbalance: most of those who had managed to maintain or acquire vows in the Communist era lived on the fringes of society and were by this stage quite elderly (Elverskog, 2000). They had also received relatively little training. As the monasteries filled with younger monks and nuns, these Buddhist institutions therefore had to invite Tibetan teachers to train them, as they had in the past.22 The Dalai Lama took a particular interest in the re-emergence of Buddhism in Mongolia, encouraged his trained teachers and other high-ranking lamas to travel there, and made several journeys to the country himself, the first in 1979 before the fall of the old regime (Kollmar-Paulenz, 2003). These high-level visits were well received, not only amongst the monastics but also in the wider community (Elverskog, 2000). During the most recent of these visits, in 2011, he reflected on the long relationship between Mongolia and Tibet, which has stretched back for centuries. He first reflected on how the contact between the two nations had been lost during the communist era, and then spoke of their renewed links, saying:

The contacts gradually revived as Mongolia sends its monks and nuns to study in great Tibetan monasteries which were re-established by the Tibetans

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22 This interaction was facilitated by the continuing use of the Tibetan language in the monasteries. Tibetan language texts are recited during the ceremonies, training is conducted by use and study of different Tibetan ceremonial and philosophical texts, and all religious terminology is based on the Tibetan.
in exile....Tibet and Mongolia are (both) followers of the Nalanda (Indian Buddhist) tradition, they are the two (countries) that carry forward the pure form of this tradition (Dalai Lama, 2011).

Another reason for the steep increase in the number of monastics was the change in official policy toward this vocation. Whereas in the past monks (and to a lesser extent nuns) had brought credit to their families, in the new Mongolian Republic becoming a monastic has been presented as valid employment; and for a country with high unemployment and poverty levels, monasticism therefore became much more appealing (Majer & Teleki, 2009; Lee, 2010 & 2013). In 1998, the number of monks at the Gandan monastery was over 300, and this is still growing. In 2010, the number of monks had increased to 700.

The rising number of monastics has required food and accommodation, however, and this has had a number of repercussions for the Mongolian community. One of these is a growing sense of national pride and national reassurance within the greater Mongolian community that they are increasingly able to not only support the monks and nuns, but also can rebuild many of the temples and their associated statues and reliquaries. As a young monk at Shankh Monastery informed me: “All things here are donated by local people, and even the building was erected with their help.”

This re-engagement with these temples has manifested in several building projects, including the construction of a large statue of the bodhisattva Niduger ujegci (Avalokiteśvara), which was installed in the Maitreya temple in Ulaanbaatar in 1996 (Majer & Teleki, 2009). It has also manifested in the form of the reintroduction of monastic and lay ceremonies and rituals. In all monasteries, monastics can be observed performing these daily, and lay people also flock to the larger monasteries where they perform circumambulations, make offerings to the buddha and bodhisattva statues, and find other ways to make contributions to their local temples. Even some of the festivals that were associated with the old state are being re-performed, like the yearly Mayidari festival, which was first introduced in 1657 at the Erdeni Dzuu Monastery by the first Jebsundampa Khutukht Zanabazar. It was held again in Ulaanbaatar, in May of 2000, at Gandan Monastery.

Yet while many of the resources for this work have been provided by local people and the Mongolian government, Mongolian Buddhists have also needed to rely on the support of transnational Buddhist organisations and Buddhist donations from outside the country. Gandan Monastery, which houses a large number of monks, has worked
closely with Shedrup Ling Centre and the FPMT, for example, to fund their monks’
education (FPMT, 2010). They also co-operate on holding conferences and other
activities. The combination of self-funded revival and donor status is something of a
paradox of Mongolian Buddhism that has affected both the sense of national identity
derived from the practice of Buddhism (which will be discussed in chapter four) and the
sense that Buddhist activities link Mongolians into a transnational identity (which will
be discussed in chapter five).

Another distinct characteristic of the re-introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia has
been the central role the Mongolian capital, Ulaanbaatar, has played in this revival.
Ulaanbaatar was the only place in which residual and limited public Buddhist practice
was allowed in Mongolia. Most of this centred on Ganden Temple which, as I
mentioned, remained open for all but a brief period during communist rule. Ulaanbaatar
has also experienced rapid development and relative prosperity during the reform
period, which has, in turn, provided further resources for the revival of Buddhism. The
practice of Buddhism in the city is evident at both the individual and organisational
levels which, combined, create a prominent presence for Buddhism in the capital.

The combination of these historical and contemporary factors means that lay
Buddhism in particular is probably more developed here than in any other part of
Mongolia. In addition to the temple, which mainly still serves lay Buddhists as a focus
for their worship, Ulaanbaatar was home to several prominent lay Buddhist reformers in
the early twentieth century. Their writings, the Buddhist academy and the scriptural
press played an important role in the debates at that time over Buddhism's future
(Welch, 1968). The first International Conference on Mongolian Buddhism was also
held at Gandan Monastery, on September 27-28, 2010 (American Center for Mongolian
Studies, 2010). At this conference, scholars from all over the world presented their
research to an audience of over 200 people, most of whom were primarily lamas and
religious leaders from Mongolia, Tibet, Bhutan, Russia, Italy and the US. Even more
recently, the International Association of Tibetan Studies held its 13th seminar in
Ulaanbaatar on the 21 October 2013. One of the most important issues discussed there
was the development of Buddhism in Mongolia. In the opening ceremony of this
conference, its organisers stressed the relationship between Mongolia and Tibet. The
Khamba Lama, currently Mongolia’s foremost Buddhist leader, spoke to the
international audience, saying: “I am extremely happy that Buddhism is attracting the
attention of the world and followers and devotees are increasing. Buddhism has made
an unparalleled contribution to the development of the Mongol identity and culture” (Dalai Lama, 2013).

Along with these temporary events, Ulaanbaatar has also become the site of a proliferation of Western-style Buddhist schools, meditation centres and other new forms of Buddhist institutions. These centres tend to be led by individual Mongolian or Tibetan lamas and facilitate talks, readings and ceremonies with the aim of providing basic religious education for laypeople. Unlike traditional temples, they have no real assemblies and no sessions of daily chanting, but only occasional or weekly gatherings. This trend has been so influential that even some traditional temples have established similar programs and facilities. Gandam and Betüt Monasteries, for example, run similar classes for lay devotees that are taught by resident Tibetan and Mongolian lamas (Majer & Teleki, 2009).

However, not all trends within the capital have been necessarily positive for lay Buddhist practice, or indeed for any form of Buddhist practice. On the one hand, there are still those who cherish the memory of the communist state’s militant atheism, and therefore oppose Buddhism’s re-emergence (Bulag, 1998). There are also those who, while not wishing to see the complete demise of Buddhism, will only accept a modernised form (Elverskog, 2000). On the other hand, the democratic and political changes the country has experienced since the 1990s have led to an influx of various religions, religious sects and even some new religious groups (Elverskog, 2000 & Majer & Teleki, 2009). At the end of the 20th century, this influx meant there were 200 religious organisations operating in Mongolia, with allegiance to the three main types of Buddhism—Theravāda, East Asian Mahāyāna and Tibetan Vajrayāna—along with Islam and Christianity.

The FPMT’s centre in Ulaanbaatar, Shedrup Ling, may not be the largest of these groups, but its traditional links to the Mongolian Buddhist hierarchy, the fact that many of its members are cultural elites and its role as a fundraiser makes it one of the most influential. Indeed, this centre sits at the intersection of two traditions: the traditional forms of Mongolian Buddhism that came to the country through the five waves, and the newer trend of transnational Buddhism that is connected it to a global network of Buddhist organisations. This global network is built on social, institutional and financial relationships that run between various international Buddhist and particularly Tibetan Buddhist organisations (Zablocki, 2005), but the organisation that has the most influence on Shedrup Ling is the one to which it belongs, the FPMT. The influential
role that the FPMT has in the development of Shedrup Ling means that to understand the religio-social realm of its attendees it is first imperative to understand the FPMT’s journey to Mongolia and what the organisation has done since it established itself.

2.4 The FPMT’s Journey to Mongolia

In many ways, the FPMT claims much of the same history as traditional Mongolian Buddhism. It also asserts a lineal connection with the historical Buddha, and it understands this lineage to include Indian Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna Buddhism, along with later Tibetan interpretations of them. Like traditional Mongolian Buddhism, however, it also has a history independent of this shared story.

This independent history stems, in the main, from the European love of and adeptness at travel. It begins at almost the same time as the second wave of Mongolian Buddhism, when traders from Europe, like Marco Polo (1254-1324), made their way along the Silk Road to the court of Qubilai Khan (Lopez, 2013: 7–63). These traders were followed or accompanied by Christian missionaries in the centuries to come, and later, during the early nineteenth century, by scholarly colonial administrators in India and elsewhere, who began to conduct research and in so doing created the idea of the world religion they called “Buddhism” (Lopez, 2013: 64–212).

2.4.1 History of the FPMT

More self-consciously, the FPMT describes its own institutional history as stemming from the post-colonial world of 1960s India and Nepal, which had become a stopover on the overland route between Europe and Australia (Gyatso, 2003). It grew out of a meeting in 1965 between two Gelug monks, a teacher named Thubten Yeshe (Tib. Thub bstan ye shes; 1935–1984) and his student, the reincarnate Thubten Zopa Rinpoche (Tib. Thub bstan bzod pa Rin po che; 1946–) and a woman from the United States named Zina Rachevsky (1930–1970). Shortly after this meeting, Rachevsky became the sponsor of the two “lamas” and later was ordained as a nun. The three of them then started a Buddhist Studies Centre on a hill overlooking Kathmandu. Its name was later changed to Kopan Monastery. Rachevsky died in the late 1960s while in meditation retreat nearby, but Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa stayed on and continued to teach there (Moran, 2004: 70–74).
At first Lama Yeshe refused to run “meditation classes” at this centre as he noted that in his tradition—the sub-tradition of the Gelüg centred on Sera-je Monastery (Tib. Se ra rje dgon pa; Mong. Сэра-ЈЕ хийд) outside Lhasa—“meditation” (Tib. sgom) was only undertaken after many years of study (Wangmo, 2005: 241). He did, however, allow Lama Zopa to begin to conduct meditation retreats, and these proved very popular amongst Western travelers. This led to the unusual, but not unprecedented, situation in which the two lamas became much more widely known amongst—and were supported by—the Western traveling community in Nepal than they were amongst the exiled Tibetan and local Nepali Buddhist communities (Samuel, 1993).

In 1973, Lama Yeshe gave monastic ordination to a group of fourteen Western monks and nuns at Kopan, thus creating the FPMT’s *sangha*, which he called the International Mahayana Institute (FPMT, 2013). Following this, many of their followers, both lay and ordained, began returning to their home countries and establishing “dharma centres” in them. At first these centres were run independently, with only a loose consultant affiliation with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa. This consultancy role included encouraging teachers from their monastery, Sera-je, to move to the West and teach in these centres. Following an international tour the two monks undertook in 1974, they formed the FPMT in 1975 to create a network between centres. As the overarching structure of the FPMT developed, these centres lost their autonomous status and, as David Kay (pp. 61–62) explains, “towards the late-1970s were increasingly subject to central management and control.” This caused several of the monk teachers who had initially travelled to teach in their centres to break away and form their own networks (Kay, 2004: 61–62).

By the time Lama Yeshe died in 1984, he had established an international network of centres that stretched from India, through Australia and New Zealand, to North America and Europe. It also included another sub-continental dharma centre called Tushita Meditation Centre, located near Dharmasala. This centre and Kopan Monastery were often the first contact between the FPMT and its members, with those who attended these institutions’ intensive meditation courses then becoming involved in or founding their own dharma centres in their own countries (Lee, 2011 & 2013).

After Lama Yeshe died, the network grew even further under the leadership of Lama Zopa. Building on its association with the Dalai Lama, whose celebrity grew exponentially during the same period, it began expanding into Asia, creating centres in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Indonesia (FPMT, 2013); this
region has proved to be a rich source of sponsorship for their other projects (Zablocki, 2005). It also has an expanding presence in South America, the Middle East and Africa (FPMT, 2013). As of 2013, it consisted of a network of 165 dharma centres, projects and social services in thirty-seven countries (FPMT, 2013).

The FPMT also began to extend its activities beyond dharma centres. It developed several Buddhist education programs, and in 2005 established Maitripa College in Portland, Oregon, which provides three-year Master of Arts programs (FPMT, 1999 & 2013). It established a publishing house, Wisdom Publications, based in Boston, which publishes Buddhist books (FPMT, 1999 & 2011); and in 1995 it started its own glossy magazine titled Mandala (FPMT, 1999). It began several charitable projects, including several that sought to support monks and nuns or offer medical care and food to certain Buddhist-associated regions of the Indian subcontinent; to protect animals, and to “re-establish Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia” (FPMT, 2013). It has also been involved in the “Maitreya Project”, a planned 152-metre statue of Maitreya that is to be built near Bodhgaya, India (Zablocki, 2005).

Although each of the centres, projects or services is separately incorporated and locally financed, they are also overseen by the organisation’s international headquarters in Portland. It has a board of directors, including Lama Zopa, and a CEO who oversees its executive function (FPMT, 2013).

In the process of this expansion, the FPMT has had to leave behind Lama Yeshe’s initial reservations about teaching meditation and has instead made this the core of the services they deliver. As one of their most commonly found brochures informs newcomers, the organisation sees its own role as the providing of: “integrated education through which people’s minds and hearts can be transformed into their highest potential for the benefit of others, inspired by an attitude of universal responsibility” (FPMT, 2008).

In providing this service, like many other transnational Buddhist organisations, it is faced with the competing demands of, on the one hand, conserving the religious traditions that it seeks to propagate and, on the other hand, the need to adapt to the changed social circumstances of multiple cultures and modernity. In this regard, in that it still encourages the (re-interpreted) performance of traditional ceremonies and courses of education and urges its members to seek ordination as monks and nuns, it tends towards the conservative end of the Transnational Buddhist spectrum.
2.4.2 ‘A Place for Establishing Wisdom’ at the Crossroads of Two Traditions

This conservatism is one of the reasons why the FPMT and its members have been so committed to the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia. As inheritors of a Tibetan tradition, they have imbued the broader claim of that tradition on Mongolia as a land in which their Dharma has old and well-established roots.

Much of their role in Mongolia has also come about through the organisation’s loose but treasured ties with the Dalai Lama. This relationship has facilitated their activities in Mongolia in a number of ways. On the one hand, it was at the Dalai Lama’s request that Lama Zopa and the FPMT became involved in the re-introduction of Buddhism to Mongolia (FPMT, 1999, 2001 & 2012) and, on the other hand, their relationship with the Dalai Lama has also aided their expansion there as they have been able to use his vast symbolic capital. Yet his prominence in Mongolia has a dual nature which from which the FPMT has drawn, for he is not only venerated for the traditional role he and his predecessors played in Mongolian Buddhism, but also for the international acclaim he enjoys and his willingness to engage with modernity.

This association between the Dalai Lama, internationalism and modernity has paved the way for the FPMT to set up in Mongolia in its transnational form at Shedrup Ling. It has enabled the centre to flourish as an alternate place for Buddhist practice by creating a legitimate alternative to traditional Mongolian Buddhism for young, well-educated and open-minded audiences. These audiences seek just the combination of meditation and re-packaged Buddhist education that the FPMT provides. Unlike the traditional temple system— in which lay people would ask the monks to perform deeds that would create merit (Tib. bsdod nams; Mong. ач тусыг) for them by proxy—this is a system that relies on their own engagement with Buddhism. They are expected to develop knowledge and merit—which are called “the two collections” (Tib. tshogs gnyis; Mong. хөгжүүлэгчлэл) in the Buddhist lexicon— for themselves. They are therefore granted more autonomy over their Buddhist practice, and this is appealing to many of these educated, elite practitioners. It is an idea that is even reflected in the name that Lama Zopa gave the centre: Shedrup Ling is a Tibetan name that means “the place where wisdom will be established” (Tib. Shes grub gling; Mong. мөрөн ухаан бий болно газар).

The modernist, educated presentation of traditional Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism is reflected in Shedrup Ling’s architecture and position. As I mentioned in the
introduction, it is located in a nondescript, modernist three-story building on a busy street in Ulaanbaatar’s central business district. The centre itself consists of a complex of rooms and a courtyard. One of the rooms is a major hall of worship; there are administrative offices, rooms for the monastic residents, a dining hall, a library, a souvenir shop, two classrooms for teaching English and computer skills, as well as a vegetarian restaurant. There is also a pagoda in the garden outside, in which people may sit in contemplation.

During my time there, two monastics were living in the centre: the Tibetan teacher, Geshe Nyima Dorje, who comes from Sera-je Monastery in India, and an Australian FPMT nun named Ani Gyalmo (Glenda Lee). The centre also hosts volunteer English teachers who come for shorter stints. When I conducted my field work, the volunteer teacher was a young American man named James Damico. Along with this international teaching staff, the centre is also supported by a variety of Mongolian volunteers, and sometimes by paid workers, who help run the centre’s teaching programs and other activities, including staffing the information desk, the souvenir shop, and cooking and cleaning. These volunteers increase in number when the centre is running a special event like a festival. In addition, the nuns from the FPMT’s nunnery in Ulaanbaatar, Dolma Ling, also attend the centre to guide certain rituals called “pûjä”.

2.4.3 What Happens at Shedrup Ling?

In many ways the activities carried out by the paid staff and volunteers at Shedrup Ling are very similar to those undertaken at other FPMT centres around the globe. They include a teaching program, a ritual program and the hosting of special events. Shedrup Ling also provides pastoral care services, as is true of many other FPMT centres. At Shedrup Ling, however, the services are provided with a focus on Mongolian traditions that is unique, and they are accompanied by an outreach program that is also unique.

During the period of my research, the teaching program ran on a weekly cycle. It included:

(1) Two guided-mediation and yoga classes per week, which were led by Ven. Ani Gyalmo (See Figure 8 and 9);
(2) On Thursdays evenings, a more philosophical class was run by Geshe Khedrub and Geshe Nyima Dorje on a basic element of his monastery’s curriculum called “Mind and Mental Factors” (Tib. blo rigs). (See Figure 11 and 12).
(3) On Sunday Mornings, Geshe-la also gave a teaching on a more pastorally-minded Indian Buddhist text by Śāntideva (Tib. Zhi ba lha; Mong. Шантидева гэгээн; 8th century) entitled *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* (Skt. Bodhicaryāvatāra; Tib. Byang chub sems dpa’i chos 'jug; Mong. Бодъсдывын Амъдравын зам). This was the first Buddhist text translated in 1305 into Mongolian from Tibetan, by Coiji Osder (14th century) (Wallace & Wallace, 1997: 7).

(4) In 2004, Ani Gyalmo began teaching a module from the FPMT’s *Discovering Buddhism* course, which was designed to introduce students to Buddhism (FPMT, 2013). The first module she taught while I was there was called “Mind and Its Potential”. It has been translated into Mongolian. (See Figure 10)
Figure 8 Yoga lesson

Figure 9 FPMT Prayer Books in Mongolian
The ritual program combined daily and weekly events. The daily schedule includes a ceremony that is conducted by Mongolian volunteers every morning in which they make 1500 water offerings while reciting a confession practice known as “The Thirty-
Five Buddhas Practice”, which is based upon the Mahāyāna text Sūtra of the Three Heaps (Skt. Triskandadharmaśūtra; Mong. Гурван овоонууд нь Билгүүний; Tib. Phung po gsum pa’i mdo). The monks and nuns also performed morning and evening “pūjās” (Tib. tshogs; Mong. номын хурал) or offering ceremonies, which laypeople were free to join as a way of cultivating merit collectively instead of in their own homes. The monthly events in the ritual calendar consisted of a series of offering ceremonies that were run by the nuns from the FPMT’s nunnery, Drolma Ling. These included a Guru Pūjā (Tib. bla ma mchod pa; Mong. гуру пуяа), a Medicine Buddha Pūjā, and a ceremony in which four maṇḍalas were offered to Tārā; these ceremonies were performed on the days of the month that were specifically associated with these practices. Along with this monthly cycle of rituals, Shedrup Ling also hosted several special events during the year. These included Buddhist holidays and the Mongolian New Year, an event that occurred while I was present at almost the same time as the Lunar New Year.

The purpose of many of these rituals is cultivation of merit. The main difference between their performance at Shedrup Ling and how they are conducted at traditional temples was that the lay Buddhists were sometimes—but not always—involved in the process. The idea of creating merit is a very old idea that Buddhists inherited from the Buddha’s Indian milieu. It is based on the premise of karma, or cause and effect (Skt. karma-phala; Tib. las ’bras; Mong. Шалтгаан ба үр нөлөө нь карма). According to this presentation of conventional reality, the more merit a person accrues the more pleasant his or her experience will be, both in this life and the next, and eventually he or she will create enough merit to cut the cycle of existence completely.23 In this way, the creation of merit aids the practitioner both temporally and ultimately; helps him, her or the persons to whom they have dedicated the action in the here and now and contributes to attainment of the ultimate goal of buddhahood.

The methods for accruing merit in the practice of Mongolian Buddhism are many and varied. At one end of the spectrum lie all of the individual prayers and other acts of rightly- motivated self-improvement that a practitioner may perform during the course of a day. As the teachers and the literature produced by the FPMT repeatedly stress (FPMT, 2011), in order for these acts to be truly meritorious, the motivation for their performance must be the attainment of buddhahood for the benefit of all others, but

23 The general idea is that it leads to better rebirths and life situations conducive to Buddhist practice.
there is also the added benefit that these actions also help beings in their everyday lives. At other times, and particularly in the temples where this stress on motivation is not as prominent, laypeople will pay for more lavish ceremonies to be performed, which as they understand it will ritually intervene in this world. These ceremonies may be dedicated to success in worldly enterprises, but the most common reason for their performance is to improve the fate of a deceased parent or other relative. The laypeople may participate in these, but do not always. These ceremonies can be performed at Shedrup Ling too, but they only play a small part in the centre’s activities. It is, however, more likely that those requesting the ceremonies would take part in these rituals when they are performed at Shedrup Ling than in more traditional settings.

While the enactment of rituals is probably one of the most traditional functions that Shedrup Ling performs, one of the most innovative and characteristically transnational roles it fills is in its delivery of pastoral care. There are some precedents for this in traditional temples and monasteries, but within these institutions this aspect was not officially sanctioned or available to all visitors. It depended on whether or not an individual had developed a spiritual relationship with a particular monk. At Shedrup Ling, by contrast, the centre offers regular (although still informal) “psychological counselling sessions.”24 (See Figure 13)

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24 The differences between these two approaches will be discussed more in chapter four.
Along with these services that Shedrup Ling provides as a religious organisation, its facilitators and facilities are also used in the performance of several outreach programs. The most evident of these programs are the centre’s English language and computer studies courses. The English language classes were taught by James Damico, an American volunteer (See Figure 14), and a local Mongolian. As knowledge of English is an important qualification for finding jobs and retaining employment in Ulaanbaatar, these classes are well attended. During the period I observed the centre’s activities, eight different classes were conducted in which a total of 250 students participated. Each Saturday, the English school organised a movie evening, showing English language movies, to which the English teacher would provide a commentary. He also ran the two computer classes which consisted of approximately 30 students.

Shedrup Ling also acts as a collection centre for the FPMT’s charities in Mongolia. These programs respond to both crisis situations and ongoing needs. It has no links with similar government-run services. Indeed, a main point of distinction between the FPMT’s programs and those run by the government is that the FPMT generally gives aid to monasteries and nunneries. Through Shedrup Ling, the FPMT delivers money, volunteer labour and goods to these institutions from lay Buddhists across the world. They also seek to aid other nonreligious organisations such as orphanages and the like,
but they have found that lay Buddhists are more likely to give to help rebuild and support Buddhist institutions than to other charitable causes.

The other outreach program that Shedrup Ling runs is in the country’s prisons. This is part of the FPMT’s international “Liberation Prison Project”, which conducts outreach programs in correctional facilities in five Western countries as well as Mongolia (Liberation Prison Project, 2013). Ani Gyalmo heads this outreach program, regularly visiting different prisons and teaching basic Buddhism and meditation to their inmates. During my stay, she had begun a program that was sponsored by the Ministry of Justice at Ulaanbaatar’s High Security Prison.

2.4.4 Shedrup Ling in Ulaanbaatar’s Religious Marketplace

To understand how Shedrup Ling works, however, it is not only important to know what it does, but also how this work fits into the greater marketplace of religious “products” that exists in Ulaanbaatar specifically and Mongolia more generally. As I have already explained, the products that Shedrup Ling provides sit within the Buddhist conceptual framework that contends that the achievement of buddhahood is brought about through the accumulation of two qualities, merit and wisdom. Their share of the religious marketplace in the providing of opportunities to make merit through ritual was very limited, but they are prominent providers of opportunities for laypeople to develop merit through charity, and they are the dominant providers of venues for laypeople to develop “wisdom”.

The initiatives they offer to help their attendees and members are found within the centre’s ritual and charity programs. Their ritual program, however, pales in comparison to the ritual services offered by both large and small monasteries within Ulaanbaatar alone, not including the various monasteries that exist in the countryside. This means that even people who have some connection with Shedrup Ling may seek such services from these alternate centres.

Shedrup Ling’s provision of services that help in accumulating merit through charity are more developed than those of many organisations. They are aided in this through their ability to channel funds from their transnational network, and this, in turn, aids their activities in Mongolia by winning them favour from the government and the community. Mongolians who choose to participate in these projects also understand
themselves to be engaged in meritorious actions, but at the same time they enjoy the elevated status of acting in concert with an international organisation.\textsuperscript{25}

By contrast with their services for gaining merit, their programs for cultivating Buddhist wisdom have little competition.\textsuperscript{26} The centre seeks to help in this process through its teaching program, its meditation classes, and pastoral care services. These are services through which Mongolia’s lay Buddhists can engage in “self-help”, a form of self-improvement through Buddhist practice that is offered at all FPMT centres and is a definitive characteristic of Transnational Buddhism.

In Mongolia, however, the presentation of this form of Buddhism is slightly modified as it is mixed with the broader agenda of revitalising Buddhism in the country. This means that instead of its practitioners understanding that they are engaging in something completely new, they believe themselves to be approaching this communal heritage in a more modern, more educated way. As ‘B’, a 22 year old university student, explained when I interviewed her:

> The religious background of my family is Buddhist. Everyone in my family is a Buddhist. I have no idea of how my family practised during the communist years. But after the collapse of Buddhism... I (became) interested in Buddhism because it’s our national religion...

> I think that the Mongolians are happy about the revival of Buddhism in general. I can see that the people who surround me are showing their interest towards this religion... However, we have to learn about Buddhism first... We are lacking Buddhist knowledge... Some of the believers have no idea of what they are practising when they are doing the religious practices.

> Thanks to the FPMT, this international organisation, (that brought) back Buddhism to Mongolia, our lay Buddhists are able to learn (about Buddhism) at a centre like Shedrup Ling. (It) offers the programs and availability that traditional temples don’t offer and have never offered to lay Buddhists in Mongolia... This centre is a Western Buddhist centre to me. I come here and learn how to meditate. I think that meditation can make people more concentrated... From my observation, people are coming here for meditation and to purify their minds.

\textsuperscript{25} The elevation enjoyed by involvement with Transnational Buddhism will be discussed in chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{26} Meditation/Wisdom based courses. 10 day courses at Damma Mahana Vipassana (Vipassana Meditation Centre, 2013).
Bolartsetseg’s approach to Shedrup Ling, and the approach of many others who use the centre, is therefore one that enables her to practise the traditional family religion, but in a new way.

Despite this focus on revival, however, many of the FPMT’s activities in Mongolia are similar to those of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist missionary organisations. One of the most striking of these similarities is their willingness to promote both religious and nonreligious products, and in so doing to create a complex of interconnected organisations and sub-organisations in the country—and more often than not in the same building, Shedrup Ling. This complicates its structure.

Their nonreligious products are often consumed by lay Buddhists, but some people chose to avail themselves of educational opportunities without engaging in the centre’s religious activities. These products not only provide a service for those who may or may not be involved with the centre; they also help to establish the FPMT’s legitimacy in the government’s eyes. With these affiliated sub-organisations, such as its vegetarian restaurant, its charity organisations (See Figure 2.4 and 2.5), its English and computer classes, and its medical clinics, Shedrup Ling produces goods for nonreligious markets or social spheres.

Figure 14 Stupa vegetarian restaurant
2.4.5 Conclusion: Between Tradition and Transnationalism

The field of Buddhist production at FPMT Mongolia’s Shedrup Ling today flourishes as it introduces its new form of Buddhism accompanied by diverse activities. In its current Buddhist scene, Mongolia is facing a crossroads where both traditional Mongolian Buddhism and the new transnational Buddhism intersect. Furthermore, the space permitted for religion and the licence to innovate offered by structural and cultural changes following the collapse of communism has allowed this connection. Through social and cultural networks across the globe, the transnational, hybrid form of Buddhism connects with the traditional in Mongolia.

The interaction of these two forms influences not only the demand for social services, but also the suppliers of such services, as the areas of both lay and monastic Buddhism are re-shaped. An added benefit of globalised Buddhism’s meeting lay demand is that it supplies a major impetus towards and the space for lay leadership and small-scale lay production. The FPMT organisation provides opportunities for laypeople to become producers of Buddhism for others, and not just to remain individual cultivators and passive consumers. Because they are more active participants in the field, they find opportunities to learn or practise various personal and social skills, thereby discovering more meaning by their involvement in their spiritual growth.
Considering the information gathered from the interviews that were conducted in my study, I conclude that contemporary Mongolians are in the process of restructuring their identities amidst abrupt changes. This process involves both looking back into the imagined certainties of the past and looking forward toward the possibilities for the future to furnish a basis for morality and spirituality in the present.

I believe that these societal changes and the engagements that are provided by, and indeed represented by, FPMT Mongolia are a significant arena for ordinary Mongolian people to become involved with the world outside their families and jobs, as they participate in its lay Buddhist activities.

As discussed above, understanding and contextualising the intersection of the two forms of Buddhism is the purpose of this chapter. I discussed the arrival of Buddhism and its development in five waves, in which is embedded the analysis of the transnational networks of Buddhism that the FPMT represents.

The subsequent three chapters explore case studies at Shedrup Ling Centre in detail, in an attempt to uncover what influences are significant in the development of the interaction between traditional Buddhism and transnational Buddhism.
CHAPTER 3
Helping Yourself at Shedrup Ling

Transnational Buddhism shows practical methods and easy language that appeal to people here... The young people want to be modern like the West, and it’s tempting for them to abandon their culture. So it’s helpful when “modern” and “West” happen to coincide with “Buddhist”. Venerable Ani Gyalmo (2010)

3.1 Introduction: Buddhism as Self-Help

A series of images flash along the top of the FPMT’s international website. Most of these are of the foundation’s monk-gurus, Lama Yeshe and Zopa Rinpoche, meditating or teaching at various places around the world. The second, however, is of a lotus, floating in a dark space, with a quote from Lama Yeshe hovering over it: “The reason we are unhappy is because we have extreme craving for sense objects—samsaric objects,” the quote reads, “and we grasp at them. We are seeking to solve our problems, but we are not seeking in the right places. The right place is our ego-grasping” (FPMT, 2014).

The images and this quote suggest two of the key elements of both the FPMT’s and Transnational Buddhism’s marketing strategy: (a) that you can make yourself happy by studying Buddhism and meditating; and (b) that the key to developing happiness is the transformation of mind, not factors external to one’s psychology. This is Buddhism as a form of self-help and, as other studies have shown (Snodgrass, 2003 & 2007; Watson, 2008 & Wallace, 2007 & 2009), it has proved one of the most appealing elements of Transnational Buddhism. It is an element that depends on the assertion that all practitioners of Buddhism are able to transform their experience by working on their minds, and its psychological underpinnings are repeatedly extolled in the FPMT’s promotional material. Along with the banners that cross the top of its website, for example, most of its educational courses also repeat the “mantra” of psychological self-transformation. A free book by Lama Yeshe that is often handed out to students at FPMT centres around the world is entitled Becoming Your Own Therapist (1998). For most practitioners of Buddhism in Western and other developed countries, this
transnational form of therapeutic Buddhism is the first and primary variety of the religion that they encounter.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the connections between Buddhist philosophy and self-help psychology in the Mongolian context. Yet, as it will show, the Transnational Buddhist presentation of “psychological Buddhism” does not engage biomedical psychology, but rather promotes Buddhist philosophy as a form of psychotherapy or even pop-psychology. Transnational Buddhists define “mental health” through Buddhist ideals rather than medical definitions, and their approach to achieving it—their self-enacted “therapeutic” model—is also defined within a Buddhist paradigm (Watson, 2008).

The development and application of psychological Buddhism has been well documented in studies of Transnational Buddhism in Western, developed countries. What makes the enactment of these processes at Shedrup Ling different, however, is its Mongolian context. As the previous chapter outlined, Mongolia has a long and complicated history with Buddhism. This means that unlike the students who attend other FPMT centres—or indeed in the centres of other organisations that espouse Transnational Buddhism—in countries that are not traditionally Buddhist, most Mongolian students are already culturally Buddhist when they walk through Shedrup Ling’s doors. Their experience of Transnational Buddhism with its focus on self-help is therefore always juxtaposed with the Traditional Buddhism they have encountered through their families.

Despite the complications of communist rule, they have all grown up in a social and familial environment that supported and encouraged the practice of Traditional Buddhism. What they therefore encounter is a new form of Buddhism, not a new religion, and generally they compare Transnational Buddhism favourably with the Traditional Buddhism they knew growing up. Drawing on the interviewees’ responses, this chapter will argue that despite a primary commitment to Transnational Buddhism, the practitioners at Shedrup Ling also combine many elements of Traditional Buddhism in their practice and, in combining the two types of Buddhism fall along a continuum from a traditional ritualistic orientation to a transnational rationalist orientation. What this chapter will therefore explore is not just the practice of Buddhist self-help, but how this approach interacts with the traditional forms of Buddhism with which the practitioners at Shedrup Ling are also familiar.
Examining the interactions between social forms and personal psychology in a community is already a complicated process. In this instance, this examination is made even more problematic by the ostensibly psychological focus of the social group’s activities. In order to frame these interactions in the most lucid way possible, this chapter will focus on the interactions and influences upon and within the group, examining them from the perspective of social psychology, rather than exploring the individual psychological states of the participants. This means focusing on an aspect of social interaction that is evident to me as a participant-observer at Shedrup Ling, but is not necessarily reflected upon by the individual members of the group themselves. The analysis in this chapter will therefore be a social psychological approach to the participants’ use of Buddhist self-help or pop-psychology.

In order to describe the importance and function of “self-help” to the centre’s practitioners, this chapter will look first at the relationship between the form of Buddhism in which it is prevalent, Transnational Buddhism, and the most prominent form of Mongolian Buddhism, Traditional Buddhism. It will then examine how self-help became such an important part of Transnational Buddhism, and how it therefore affects Transnational Buddhist practice, before focusing on the Tibetan Buddhist practices that have become most associated with self-help, namely: the four noble truths, mind training and tantric practices. After outlining these, it will present the practitioners’ own thoughts on Buddhist self-help and the importance of this “modern” approach to their embrace of Transnational Buddhism. This will be followed by an examination of how modern self-help is still presented within the framework of the traditional Buddhist construction of the “threelfold training”, before the chapter ends with a further investigation of how Transnational and Traditional Buddhism compete for influence in the approach of Shedrup Ling’s attendees.

3.2 Between Two Worlds: Transnational and Traditional Buddhism

One of the primary reasons these practitioners gave for their preference for Transnational Buddhism is the self-advocacy it offers in comparison to Traditional Buddhism. Unlike the lay-centred form of Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling, Traditional Mongolian Buddhism generally only allows ordained monks and nuns to perform the majority of practices. As I described in its division of religious “labour” in
the previous chapter, in Traditional Buddhism monks were expected to develop both their "wisdom" and "method" and to focus on the development of "wisdom" through study and meditation and to practise various "methods" for the accumulation of merit. Laypeople, on the other hand, were only expected to develop stores of merit; either the type of merit that would create the circumstances for them to become a monk in their next life, or the type of merit that would help them garner "worldly" success in that life (Coleman, 2001).

Yet even the approach to merit collection between ordained and most lay practitioners was distinct. In the mainstream of Traditional Buddhist practice, lay practitioners are introduced to practices that are believed to accumulate merit through an informal education. They learn many of these associated practices through imitating their parents and other family members, and the value of these actions is enforced through informal storytelling and social pressure to conform (De Silva, 2005). The traditional monastic approach to merit accumulation, by contrast, was more often taught to the monks in formal settings through the study of texts and associated ontologies. Moreover, because these ontologies were presentations of "wisdom", the monks were taught both method and wisdom concurrently.

The "wisdom" of Buddhism was only rarely taught to lay Buddhists. Based as it is on the formal, systematic study of various sophisticated philosophical presentations, it was and still is a much more difficult aspect of the tradition to transmit informally through example and storytelling. Literacy is the basic standard for acquiring this education and, until last century, most Mongolians were not literate. Even for the literate, the study of these topics requires spare time and resources, and these are not available to the majority even today. Instead, in Traditional Buddhism, the path of wisdom, and the responsibility of personal transformation through a deeper understanding of the psychological elements of Buddhism, were usually reserved for specialists, the most highly trained monks. These monks therefore enacted the "care of self" (by proxy for the whole community. Even among the monastic community, only an elite few would be involved in advanced study or meditation.

Against this background, the decision by the attendees at Shedrup Ling— whose name means the "Place where Wisdom is Established" in Tibetan—to engage with the wisdom aspect of Buddhism could be read as a result of demographic shifts in the Mongolian populace. It indicates that more people are educated today and have free time to pursue self-improvement. Catering to this emerging educational and socio-
economic elite, Transnational Buddhism offers Mongolian students an ideal of spiritual practice that entails commitment and responsibility for the care of their own moral selves; a form of practice that my interviews suggest they find more self-fulfilling than traditional modalities. Few appear to view as significant the fact that in the past the activities in which they engage would be the preserve of the most elite monastics, people who had devoted decades of their lives to intensive study and practice and whose goals exceeded the pop-psychology ideals of stress reduction, improved family relationships and enhanced coping skills. This ideal of self care also informs the ways in which Mongolians respond to and use the services of the centre as a form of self-care.

It is not only the possibility of self-care at Shedrup Ling that makes the form of Buddhism it promotes attractive to its attendees: it is also the way in which it is presented. One of the most obvious distinctions between the practices of the Transnational Buddhism it promotes and Traditional Buddhist practice, for example, is that Transnational Buddhism allows its adherents to practise lay Buddhism. As serious-minded lay people, they can engage in self-care without the rigours of monasticism associated with Traditional Buddhism. For Traditional Buddhism, a core presumption is that the advanced goals of the Buddhist path require full-time commitment, and not just a few hours here and there in the midst of a busy modern life.

Another element of the presentation that interviewees suggested was important to them was how Transnational Buddhism combined ideas from the tradition of formal Buddhist education with contemporary, Western psychological frameworks. In effect this means that Buddhist practice at Shedrup Ling is still presented through the traditional Buddhist framework of the “threefold training” (Skt. triśikṣā; Tib. bslab pa gsum; Mong. гурван таalt сургаалт): in which method is divided into two aspects, morality (Skt. śīla; Tib. tshul khrims; Mong. өс сургахуун) and concentration or meditation (Skt. samādhi; Tib. ting nge ’dzin; Mong. бяалгал), and wisdom (Skt. prajña; Tib. shes rab; Mong. Мөрөн ухаан) is presented as the third element of “training”. Yet these trainings are often presented within the framework of Western “psychology”. The interview results indicate that the most common reason why the students come to Shedrup Ling is to engage in self-help by using teachings and programs that are broadly associated with aiding people psychologically. The introduction of a Transnational Buddhist institution and the ideas of Western psychotherapy are increasingly accepted at the centre and viewed as helpful in the project of caring for the self.
3.3 The Buddhist Doctrinal Background to Self-Help

The prominence of pop-psychology and self-help in Transnational Buddhism has also affected which Buddhist beliefs and practices are taught at Shedrup Ling and other FPMT centres. A study of the “spiritual program” at Shedrup Ling suggests that there are, in particular, three much-promoted beliefs and practices that reflect and enhance this psychological presentation. They are: (a) the doctrine of the four noble truths; (b) the practice of mind training; and (c) tantric visualisation practices. All of the centre’s classes are related to these three beliefs and practices (FPMT, 2010, 2012 & 2014).

What is also interesting about these is that none of them by themselves are innovative; they each have a long heritage within the Buddhist tradition. The innovation, therefore, comes in the way they are taught, in a manner that combines the traditional approach with psychology. The approach is also innovative in terms of its audience: instead of an intensive training program for full-time monastics, the centre has adapted it to modern lifestyles and presents them in a way that appeals to its lay Buddhist constituency. Moreover, in much the same way as the choice of beliefs and practices heightens the psychological tone of the Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling, this innovation tends to highlight the psychological elements of these already psychologically focused practices.

Despite the variant, psychological and modernist approach to the subject, by retaining many of the traditional elements of these practices, the organisers at Shedrup Ling and its attendees are also able to promote venerable origins for these ideas. Instead of construing the psychological approach as an innovation, they present it as ancient. The Buddha himself taught people how to work with their minds, they state repeatedly, and therefore understanding “mind and its potential” (FPMT, 2014) was one of the first components of Buddhism. Indeed, as will become evident, although their methods are decidedly modern, the actions and ideas on which they have chosen to focus are more “fundamental” to Buddhism than the tradition-based exercises in which the monks engage.

3.3.1 The Four Noble Truths

The most obvious example of this focus on fundamentals is the emphasis placed on the four “noble truths” (Skt. āryasatya; Tib. ’phags pa’i bden pa; Mong. ЦаглажуҮй дөрөө)
in all FPMT centres including Shedrup Ling. The four noble truths are taught in all of
the centre’s introductory courses: “Buddhism in a Nutshell”, “Discovering Buddhism”
and “Foundation of Buddhist Thought” (FPMT, 2014). They are also emphasised in its
literature and decorations, often accompanied by the life-story of the historical Buddha
Śākyamuni (FPMT Mongolia, 2010). Mongolian and Tibetan monks, on the other hand,
only study the four noble truths within the context of other textual studies, not as an
independent subject. They learn about this basic teaching as part of the Graduated Path
(Tib. Lam Rim), for example, or as one of the seventy-seven aspects of enlightenment
described in the Ornament of Realisations (Skt. Abhisamayālaṃkāra; Tib. Mngon rtog
rgyan; Mong. Абхисамаялankaара) (Powers, 1995). When they are instructed in these
and other contexts, they are usually taught as part of a complex ontology called
“dependent origination” (Skt. praṇītasyamutpāda; Tib. rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba;
Mong. хамааралтай гарал ууслээр), rather than an introductory subject.

For the attendees at Shedrup Ling, by contrast, it is taught as not only a Buddhist
fundament, but as the basis of Buddhist psychological self-help. In introducing the
topic, the teachers and associated materials stress that the four noble truths were the
Buddha’s first teaching and are therefore preserved in all the various forms of
Buddhism. In this doctrine, the materials all suggest, Śākyamuni Buddha encapsulated
the “meaning of life” (Buddhism in a Nutshell, 1996) and summarised this meaning in
four noble truths: (1) the truth of suffering; (2) the truth of the cause of suffering; (3) the
truth of the cessation of suffering; (4) the truth of the path to the cessation of suffering
(Buddhism in a Nutshell, 1996).

The cognitive basis for this statement is reflected in the explanation of these truths.
The first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is the observation that beings constantly
experience some form of suffering or dissatisfaction; even if this dissatisfaction is the
knowledge that their bliss will not last forever. The second noble truth, the truth of the
cause of suffering, explains this experience in ultimately cognitive terms. All beings
experience suffering, it suggests, because we perform “karma” (lit. actions; Tib. las;
Mong. Уйлийн) that result in the perpetuation of “samsāra” (lit. cyclic existence; Tib.
’khor ba; Mong. эрээл). As this “karma” is, in turn, propelled by ignorance, then the
“samsāra” it creates is by necessity flawed, and it is experienced as suffering (Powers
2007: 65). In order to break the cycle of existence, we must re-orient our thinking to
accord with reality. Our basic ignorance about samsāra’s reality, this teaching goes onto
explain, is the misconception that we have a self: a permanent, singular entity that
interacts with other permanent, singular people and things (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994 & 2006). Based on this misunderstanding that a self and others exist, we then develop mental states that desire some things and people and are repulsed by others. When we do not get what we desire, we suffer. When we lose others we desire, we suffer. When we encounter things that repulse us, we also suffer.

The third noble truth is the simple assertion that this suffering can have an end. If we are able to undo our misinformed conception of a self, we will neither experience the negative states of mind that arise in dependence on it nor perform actions in dependence on these negative states of mind. *Samsāra*, as the expression oft-repeated in FPMT literatures says, is cut off at the root once no-self is realised. The problems of life are cognitive, and the solution lies in cognitive restructuring.

The fourth noble truth, the truth of the path, describes the means by which this conception of no-self is achieved. It is in this presentation that the FPMT’s Transnational Buddhism, with its focus on psychological transformation, differs from Traditional Buddhism’s approach to the path. In Traditional Buddhism, the “truth of the path” is described within the doxography of various schools. In the Mahāyāna schools—to which the monks dedicate most of their studies—the “path to liberation” (Skt. *vimukti-mārga*; Tib. *thar lam*) is described as consisting of five smaller paths (Skt. *pañcamārga*; Tib. *lam Inga*; Mong. *Таван жижиг зам*) and ten grounds or levels (Skt. *daśabhūmi*; Tib. *sa bcu*; Mong. *Арван давхар*). These consist of the levels of realisation that one pursuing buddhahood attains. When bodhisattvas achieve an understanding of emptiness, for example, they enter the third path, the path of seeing (Skt. *darsana-mārga*; Tib. *mthong lam*; Mong. *гурв давх зам*). The monks learn these doxographies as part of their education (FPMT, 2010 & 2014). Generally, they are not taught to meditate on the four noble truths, nor do they use this teaching as self-help. Instead, the introductory skills the monks are taught are the essentials of either philosophical debate, tantric meditation, or both.

In the FPMT’s materials, by contrast, knowledge of and meditation on the four noble truths are not only described as a fundamental Buddhist practices but, in presenting this material, they often borrow from the Theravāda tradition and explain the truth of the path with reference to the “eightfold path” (Pāli. ariyo atthaṅgiko maggo; Skt. āryaṣṭāṅgamārga; Tib. ’phags lam yan lag brgyad; Mong. кутугану найман гөсөнө мөр), which has a much less prominent role in Tibetan Buddhism (Tashi Tsering, & McDougall, 2005: 139–140). The eightfold path describes a version of the path to
enlightenment that is particularly applicable to the lives of lay Buddhists, focused on self help. Instead of explaining to them the complicated series of mental states that highly realised beings are said to experience, it describes the path with reference to the three cornerstones of Buddhist practice: ethics (right speech, right action, and right livelihood); concentration (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration); and wisdom (right view, right thought). By following the eightfold path, by living ethical lives committed to the development of wisdom, this teaching explains, lay Buddhists can transform themselves and slowly progress along the road to awakening.

3.4 Being Your Own Therapist (With a Little Help)

As a result of these historical developments and the specifically psychological emphasis on these practices, the Transnational Buddhism that attendees encounter at Shedrup Ling is in many ways a very different religious product from those produced by the traditional centres of learning in Mongolia. In my interviews and interactions with the centre’s attendees, they described the appeal of this modern, psychological approach to me using three main themes: the centre’s approach was modern and educated, which reflected their own standing; it allowed them to work on their own minds rather than merely relying on monks to accrue merit for them; and it included a personal, quasi-therapeutic relationship with the resident teachers.

3.4.1 For the Young, Modern and Elite

The results of the interviews that I conducted show that the population of Shedrup Ling, who could be designated “elite” Buddhists, tends to be relatively affluent, highly-educated, and travelled. As such, they appear to be more attracted to a form of Buddhism that receives input from across the globe and is therefore well-suited to their lives and outlook: Transnational Buddhism.

The Transnational Buddhism taught at Shedrup Ling is an example of many aspects of contemporary Transnational Buddhism. While it derives from Mahāyāna, which has its origins in Indian Buddhism and embraces its core principles, it is at the same time perhaps the most Westernised form of Buddhism, one stripped of many “religious trappings” (Coleman, 2001). It emphasises the practice of meditation almost exclusively, as systematised and streamlined by the FPMT founders, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa, in consultation with their Western students. These monks and their students
were all part of the aforementioned twentieth century “modernisation” movement that set out to simplify Tibetan Buddhism and remake it in a new, transnational format and to emphasise meditation practice over traditional doctrines, cosmology, and devotional practices (Fronsdal, 1998). Transnational Buddhism thus attempts to shed what some at the centre have referred to as the “cultural baggage” of Tibetan Buddhism. The merits of this approach could be debated, and commentators have noted the great richness and value of those facets of the traditions that are not retained (Coleman, 2001; Gunaratana, 1991; Hart, 1987). Nonetheless, this description in many ways epitomises the kind of Buddhism I witnessed at Shedrup Ling. As thirty-six year old Yargolsaihan Porev expressed her understanding of this process:

For modern Mongolians, whether people use the teachings applying them to psychology or religious practices, the aims are the same. Older people use the traditional way and the younger people are more attracted to the Western way. The FPMT’s teachers are from Australia. It is the Traditional plus Western equals FPMT.

Dariragchaa Davaa is in her thirties, with a university qualification; she expressed a similar sentiment:

In my own personal experience, the FPMT centre here teaches in two ways, both Asian and Western. For instance, pūjās are carried out sometimes in Mongolian and sometimes in Tibetan. So far there are only two Buddhist centres for lay people in Mongolia: one is this FPMT place and the another is the Asral centre. In the Asral centre, Panchen Otrula Rinpoche visits only a few months a year and it functions more in the traditional Tibetan and Mongolian ways, but our FPMT has a more Western way, as almost everything else is carried out in English. I think this modern way is a simple way and it’s easier for the young people to understand. From coming here and working at this centre, I am gaining more knowledge and collecting more merits. This is actually my dream job – to be able to work at the FPMT centre as an interpreter. Money is not the main reason, as I am not earning very much here.

The modernisation process also emphasises Western pedagogies and “rational”, “factual” knowledge at the expense of traditional forms and presentations. There is much in the stripped-down, modern approach that the attendees at Shedrup Ling find
appealing. ‘MD’, an engineer in his forties, was one such attendee who was impressed by this:

I have been a member of the centre for nine years. All in my family are Buddhists. My father was a monk when he was a boy of five until he was twenty-two years old. My family had a big sūtra (the Eight Thousand Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra) written in Tibetan (in our house). During the communist years, my father used to read it after checking out whether there were people around or not. The sūtra smelled good, too!

I think that I learned hard science in my university years, before I graduated in 1989. In the early 1990s, people started to learn about Buddhism. I read one article (called): “Dashbalbal, Buddha, Śākyamuni”. It was an interesting article after six years of studying science and I found Buddhism offered something new. I came back to Mongolia after I gained my degree in Russia and I met a teacher here at Shedrup Ling. I didn’t read many Buddhist books at first, but I used to ask my teacher to solve my problems. Mongolians are now looking for Western solutions. After 1991 we needed to follow something. Why do people need Buddhism? Both the Western and Eastern ways are good. Some people grow with the traditional way, but some people follow the Western path. From my personal experience, I think that the FPMT centre here gives me the Western way. We have Western teachers who use different examples to teach Dharma. They use examples from everyday life, as well as Western examples, in their teachings.

This rationalist approach to Buddhist thought reflects some of the variant Western personal and academic approaches to Buddhism. Just as in this context there has been debate about whether Buddhism is a religion, a psychology, a philosophical system or a guide for individual contemplation, Transnational Buddhists, including those at Shedrup Ling, present variant understandings of their personal engagement with Buddhism. For some it is a therapy, for some a philosophy, for others it is a meditation technique rather than—or as well as—a religion. The Transnational Buddhist realm, which is at times almost entirely culturally de-contextualised, appears to encourage this multiplicity of approaches to the tradition. In this realm, it is not hard to find committed, long-term Buddhist practitioners who self-define as atheists or agnostics are generally
disinterested in religion or take a merely psychological or philosophical approach to the phenomenon of religion.

Another modern aspect of the Transnational Buddhist approach that those practising at Shedrup Ling find appealing is the FPMT’s open and flexible approach to other Buddhist traditions and other religions, which puts it in stark contrast to more traditional elements of the religion. It could perhaps be argued that some of the eclectic, nonsectarian tendencies that are found in much of the transnational Buddhism being taught at Shedrup Ling are an expression of its focus on freedom (Coleman, 2001: 177). For many Shedrup Ling students, freedom has meant, among other things, freedom from religious formalism, dogmatic teachings and teachers, religious identifications, and narrow-mindedness.

At the same time, however, the attendees still appreciate many of the traditional forms of religious practice held there. They like the ceremonies, chanting and meditation; but they also enjoy being able to perform these ceremonies themselves in an informed way. As student ‘DN’ said of Transnational Buddhism:

> It is not superstitious (it’s very logical). We should accept the Western mind-training way, but we also should keep the Eastern (more traditional) way. In Mongolia, younger people are accepting the Western approach. The traditional aspect is very interesting; they often have the old-fashioned teachings. I find that the new and the old ways are the same. The modern way is much easier to accept, because of the new easy language. The teachings are all the same. At this FPMT centre, we have the mixture of Western and Eastern ways.

As this quote suggests, one of the primary selling points of practice at Shedrup Ling is not that the teachings or content are fundamentally different from those found in Traditional Buddhist settings, but that they are presented in such a way that an educated audience can understand them without years of study. This modern approach then empowers them to take charge of their own spiritual paths.

### 3.4.2 Helping Themselves

Transnational Buddhism’s form is dependent on the acquisition of books and familiarity with other media, interaction with English-medium teachings and teachers, and the ability to understand a whole new system of knowledge. Nattier (1998: 189) described it...
as: “a Buddhism of the privileged, attracting those who have the time, the inclination, and the economic opportunity to devote themselves to strenuous (and sometimes expensive) meditation training”.

As in other places where Transnational Buddhism is practised, those I met at Shedrup Ling tended to represent a demographic that was also highly “psychologically-minded,” and the most likely to seek therapy (APS, 2014). This level of psychological awareness and engagement tends to be a product of their affluence and, in turn, influences the form of Buddhism to which they are attracted and re-perform. Only those who have both spare time and education levels advanced enough to engage with psychological theory can engage in this form of Buddhism for any length of time.

Most of the students I interviewed at Shedrup Ling highlighted what they called the “dialogue” between Buddhism and Western psychotherapy in their descriptions of their Buddhist practice. Thirty-six year old ‘YP’ said, for example, that:

‘YP’ said, for example, that:

Young people can accept the Western way, the more psychological way. I can accept it (too). My main aim in coming here is for the psychological benefits. They have absolutely made a difference to my life as I now have the correct way to see life. I’d like to help other people. Meditation means a calm and peaceful mind. I always show my compassion to people. I see Buddhism as a way of life and a psychology.

‘DD’, who is in her thirties and has a university qualification, echoed this approach:

‘DD’, who is in her thirties and has a university qualification, echoed this approach:

In the West, many members of Dharma centres are more interested in the teachings as they apply to psychology and mind-training, rather than as just a set of religious practices. It is the same here in Shedrup Ling. I have my own ideas about it; in modern times, Buddhism should be discovered from the psychological viewpoint. We have to teach mind-training to people but the older generation leans more towards the traditional way. However, in modern times, the Western way of Buddhism predominates at Shedrup Ling and eventually will in the rest of Mongolia.

‘BM’, a business administration officer in her thirties, concurred:

‘BM’, a business administration officer in her thirties, concurred:

In the West, people use Buddhist teachings as psychology and mind training. I think this is going to work for the Mongolians, too. First, we should learn the
meaning of the Dharma, then learn the rituals and pūjās, etc. I certainly don’t like superstitious stuff. This is the first Buddhist centre I have ever attended, so I don’t know what other centres are like. I believe what Lama Zopa said is true about converting suffering into a happy life and also that reading Dharma books can help people. I think after I have been practising Buddhism, I have become a better person: the relationship with my family members is getting better and I certainly don’t get angry so easily now. People’s lives are getting better in Mongolia in some way because of this centre and others like it, and we really have helped a little. I think Buddhism for me is a way of life. The Buddha found the path and we need to follow in order to gain the merits to be enlightened.

When asked if there were any connection between Buddhism and self-help psychology, ‘BA’, also a woman in her thirties, said:

Meditation is my interest rather than anything else. My purpose is to explore the knowledge of how and why the meditation works. Maybe the fact that my family is Buddhist has enabled me to become more interested in Buddhism. However, I cannot tell whether I will be following the Buddhist path for the rest of my life; it is too early to say....

This FPMT centre is different from other traditional Mongolian monasteries; I feel that both teacher and the students are getting globalised. The main advantages are the spiritual benefits from attending the meditation classes here, which is attaining the full potential of the mind and body, which are found together. One thing that I would like to get is the habit of doing meditation for five to ten minutes per day, and I have found it is definitely hard to concentrate. I also would like to come to the FPMT as much as possible. This centre is certainly not a bar or pub, so it is good to be here. FPMT gives me a mixed feeling of having transnational Buddhism here—a mixed form of Mongolian, Tibetan and Western Buddhism.

As these quotes exemplify, the approach to Buddhist practice most often taken is one that is highly individualised and personalised, after being filtered through humanistic psychology. Although it is taught within the centre, the individual pursuit of personal psychological transformation is divorced from institutions and often pursued without
sustained discipline. One significant difference between this and Traditional Buddhism is the fact that in the latter it is generally assumed that serious practitioners will remove themselves from worldly life and take monastic vows. Such vows are an essential aspect of the training program in Traditional Buddhism, but for most of the attendees of Shedrup Ling they are viewed as unnecessary and as an impediment to the sort of integrated, Westernised lifestyle to which they aspire.

The attendees understand themselves to be enacting the link between psychology and Buddhism through their study and practice of meditation. Most of the students from Shedrup Ling attended meditation classes and believe that they gain benefits from them. One of the most prominent students, the gynaecologist ‘EK’, explained that her intention was to learn “the powerful practices of insight meditation...as simply as possible without the complications of rituals, robes, and the whole religious tradition” (Khash, 2011)

I have been a member of this centre for one year. All of my family members are Buddhists. During the communist years, we were not able to practise Buddhism. But now, because of this centre I have the opportunity to learn Buddhism and I’m here for the meditation class. I think meditation is good, it can focus my mind. I think that this is the Western way of approaching Buddhism. It is good for the Mongolians. Learning meditation and receiving teachings here is the way that we apply the teachings to psychology and mind-training. I find the meditation classes are really relaxing, especially for my mind as I am better (and) more calm. It has also changed my body........ Before 1990 it was the communist time. After 1991 it was different. People are getting more stressed due to being aware of the different social classes. That’s why we are thinking about how to get rid of stress, and we are here to learn Buddhism and meditation. Why am I here? It’s because of the meditation classes.

The fulfilment that these students feel from personal engagement in meditation practice was also often linked to the specific “modern” approach that the FPMT encourages. As ‘BA’ explained:

I believe one hundred percent that I am interested in Buddhist teachings because of the psychology and mind-training part of it, and I know that this approach is useful for the modern Mongolian too. If there is a blind faith, then I do not know the reasons behind it; what it is telling me is that I am more into
the meditation and I do not want to get involved with any religious activities, such as practising rituals, etc. Meditation is NOT one of the religious activities; I can practise meditation without believing in anything.

But to say that this self-reliant approach to the spiritual path is an exclusively modern invention is a misnomer. Part of the reason for this synchronicity between the attitudes and approaches to self transformation in much traditional Buddhist writing and contemporary approaches to self-help Buddhism comes down to economic and social correlations between today’s lay-practitioners and the monk-scholars and yogis of the past. That is to say, both of these earlier groups and the elites practising today at Shedrup Ling have multiple resources at their disposal that therefore allow them to first accrue the necessary knowledge to complete the Buddhist training regimen and then dedicate time and other resources to the pursuit of the spiritual path. With these resources at their disposal, they then have the luxury of relying on themselves.

3.4.3 With A Little Help from Dharma Friends

Yet despite this overall focus on personal achievement, many of the practitioners and attendees at Shedrup Ling also described a close, therapeutic relationship with the Western teachers that, they suggested, was much harder to develop with the religious figures in a traditional monastery.

This “pastoral care” model for the role of the Buddhist teachers at FPMT centres is also an adaptation from Western traditions, which allows for a level of therapeutic interaction between the attendees and the teachers. In this context, Buddhist students can even see Buddhism as self-help psychology and the teachers as counsellors. It provides psychological comfort to come to learn the teachings at the centre. As ‘DN’, a thirty-three year old male student, said:

I have been studying Buddhism for eighteen years. I see there is a very strong connection between Buddhism and Western psychotherapy. I see all the Buddhist teachers as psychologists and counsellors. If I have any problems and queries, I often ask for advice from the teachers. They have been great. This is the kind of job that psychotherapists do.

The establishment of these relationships has been a cornerstone of FPMT centres throughout the world. Like Shedrup Ling, most of these centres can host both senior
Tibetan and Western teachers. The Tibetan teachers are usually geshes (Tib. dge bshes, literally "good friend"), a term that in this context designates those who have completed a long term of study, usually twenty years or more, at a large monastery either in Tibet or in exile in India (Dreyfus, 1994). The Western teachers are usually monks and nuns aligned with the FPMT who have been ordained for several years and completed some form of formal Buddhist training, often through the FPMT’s own educational programs.

This approach has generally worked well to date in FPMT centres located in the West, where the Tibetan teachers were afforded a high degree of respect because of their training, ordained status and ethnicity. The Western teachers then acted as cultural and religious go-betweens for the centres’ attendees and the Tibetan tradition of which these teachers are representatives. Indeed, it was such a successful model that the FPMT maintained it as it began to set up centres in traditionally Buddhist communities in Asia in the late 1980s, where the presence of Westerners had the added appeal of linking the traditions with modernity. The first teacher at the Amitābha Buddhist Centre in Singapore, for example, was the German monk Dieter Kratzer, who arrived in 1986. After him, Lama Zopa sent the American nun Thubten Chodron (who taught in a variety of venues and published several books) to the same centre. It was only in the 2000s that an indigenous Singaporean took over as the non-Geshe teacher in this centre (FPMT, 2003). The organisation then followed a similar approach in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and in Taiwan, before introducing this model to Mongolia, when Shedrup Ling’s first teacher and director, the Australian monk Thubten Gyatso (Dr. Adrian Feldmann), arrived in 1999. Ven. Gyalmo, who arrived in 2004, has continued the Australian tradition.

3.5 Therapy within Buddhist Frameworks: the Three Higher Trainings

Yet another factor that appeals to many of the practitioners at Shedrup Ling, which is not available to practitioners in traditional Buddhist settings, is the flexible way in which Buddhism can be practised there. There are some attendees at the centre who are very committed to their Buddhist practice and dedicate much time to it; others only attend the centre sporadically or come to participate in non-Buddhist activities such as learning English and information technology or eating and drinking in the cafe.
Unlike in contemporary Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, where initiation rituals and organisational membership clearly mark the boundaries of religious belonging, the boundaries for lay Buddhist involvement are less clear. There is one rite that marks practitioners as Buddhists, the refuge ceremony. In this ritual, a person affirms his/her intention to look toward the three jewels of Buddhism—the Buddha, Dharma and the Sangha—for release from suffering. The statement of this formula is often accompanied by the reception of a vow to uphold this commitment, and it can be followed by acceptance of one or more of the five primary lay Buddhist vows: not to kill, not to steal, not to tell damaging lies, and not to consume intoxicants. Yet, as has been noted elsewhere in studies of Western Transnational Buddhist centres (Safran, 2003), not all attendees at these centres commit themselves to Buddhism in this way.

At Shedrup Ling, where most of the attendees come from culturally Buddhist families, it was my observation that even fewer people participated in this ceremony than at other centres. This relaxed attitude toward taking refuge was also reflected in the interviews I conducted. ‘BA’ said, for example:

I do call myself a Buddhist, but I have not done anything like taking refuge or lay vows, etc.

‘BM’ said:

Yes, I do call myself a Buddhist, even though I have not taken refuge, but I am thinking about it in the near future.

And ‘MD’ assured me that the lack of interest in this ceremony at Shedrup Ling reflected a greater comfort with the idea of being a Buddhist than would be present amongst Western practitioners, rather than a lesser degree of commitment. He said:

I call myself a Buddhist even though I have not made any official commitment such as taking refuge, etc...

In Mongolia, in our blood we are Buddhists. Buddhism is our tradition and our culture and good way to live. A person who follows the Buddhist/Buddha’s teachings is a Buddhist. The essence of Buddhism is not harming others, don’t follow bad desires and control your mind.

Just as it is difficult to judge how Buddhist people are by whether they have made the formal commitment of refuge or not, it is also difficult to judge it by a statement of their
beliefs. Belief in reincarnation and the karmic system are important, but neither is necessary. In most cases, involvement in Buddhism is a gradual process that begins with discovering a Buddhist solution to a specific life problem and seeking for self-help as the key component. This dynamic of using Buddhist resources, and seeing this transnational Buddhism at Shedrup Ling as self-help psychology to deal with specific problems, is the classic Transnational Buddhist mode of religious involvement (Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994 & 2006).

This assortment of interactions with the centre makes it necessary to ask a few questions regarding the nature of Buddhist practice at Shedrup Ling and the understanding of its benefits. What makes a practice Buddhist? How and why do different lay Buddhists come to practise in the particular ways they do? Are there any clear modes of Buddhist practice? What do people get out of practising Buddhism when it can often be quite time- and resource-consuming? And how do we differentiate between practising Buddhists and people who simply use Buddhism as a set of ad-hoc solutions to disconnected personal problems?

In Traditional Mongolian Buddhist practice, monks (and nuns) develop a personal assortment of practices depending on their exposure and the core practices of the monasteries to which they belong (FPMT Mongolia, 2010 & 2013). A similar process occurs at Shedrup Ling today. Attendees will choose and respond to guidance about which practices best suit them. But how do individual lay people put together a personal “package” of Buddhist involvement?

As I have already mentioned, the psychological and self-help focus of those attending the centre and Transnational Buddhism more generally entails that many of the practices in which attendees engage are psychological in nature. But this approach is still often framed within a traditional format: the aforementioned “threefold training” of mindfulness meditation, the study of Buddhist teachings, and moral living. Therefore, while it is impossible to draw a line in the sand between Buddhist and non-Buddhist practice, it is also possible to investigate how the attendees at Shedrup Ling express their primarily psychological impetus through these traditional forms.

3.5.1 Meditation
Out of the three elements of the threefold training, meditation is the practice most associated with Buddhism in the Western and Transnational Buddhist imagination
And this attitude is also reflected amongst the attendees at Shedrup Ling. As ‘SK’ explained in his interview:

I certainly think that meditation is the real practice (of Buddhism), (to be carried out) after listening to (studying) the teachings.

The English word “meditation” is used to describe a practice of cultivation referred to in Sanskrit as bhāvanā (literally “becoming”; Tib. sgom; Mong. бясангаал), which includes the development of a level of mental concentration (Skt. samādhi; Tib. ting nge 'dzin; Mong. төвлөрүүлөөл) and mental stability (Skt. dhyāna; Tib. bsam brtan; Mong. санааны тогтвортоий). The practice of meditation is one that goes back more than 3000 years to India’s Vedic era. It is conducted in various forms in different religions. The development of these abilities has been a mainstay of the Buddhist tradition since its inception (Baroni, 2003). The quality cultivated through the development of concentration and mental stability is called “mindfulness” (Skt. smṛti; Tib. dran pa; Mong. дуртэахүй).

Being mindful allows practitioners to be more aware of their attitudes and actions and to adjust both accordingly. According to Buddhist meditation manuals it is therefore essential to the development of insight, realisation and finally awakening. In order to attain liberation, one must initially develop awareness of what one is doing and why one is doing it. In addition, one must learn to control and regulate the mind. A person seeking liberation must move from his or her present state of confusion and random thoughts to one of clarity and mindfulness in which he or she is aware of mental processes and attitudes and, more importantly, is in control of them (Powers 2007: 69).

Meditation that leads towards mindfulness comes in many forms, but all of these involve a level of quieting and stilling emotionally, cognitively, and physically. This approach is based on the assumption that our lives are full of agitation, changes and attachments. Developing concentration and mental stability through focusing on a specific object or simply sitting with a relaxed mind is designed to reduce chaotic thoughts and to make one more alert, focused and aware (Nhat Hanh, 1998). According to Nhat Hanh (1975), the doctrine of mindfulness is comprised of three simple objectives: to come to know one’s own mental processes, to subsequently begin to have the power to shape these mental processes, and finally to gain an element of freedom from unknown and uncontrolled mental processes. The methods of meditation used in this training emphasise the importance of the body, physiological and perceptual
processes, openness to the sounds and textures of the world, and awareness of thoughts and feelings (Edwards, 1997). As the Dalai Lama frequently explains, these distract us from the kind of deep reflection in which the possibility of awakening is realised (Dalai Lama, 1990).

Learning how to meditate is one of the most popular reasons people give for attending Shedrup Ling. Meditation is taught primarily in dedicated classes that have several components. Students are first taught how to position their bodies and then how to focus their minds. The importance of physical posture is particularly emphasised in beginner classes. The “meditation posture” all attendees are taught is the same one seen in early images of the Buddha; although compensation is given for stiff limbs and other injuries and students are merely asked to approximate this position as closely as they are able. It is believed that even an approximation of this posture is conducive to calmness in body and mind.

Descriptions of this posture are numerous, but all follow similar guidelines. I found the following description of the posture in a book prepared by Ven. Gyalmo for those who take the introductory meditation classes. It reads:

Sit in a crossed-legged position with your knees directly upon the meditation mat. You should have your clothes loosely bound and arranged. Sit upright in correct bodily posture, neither inclining to the left nor to the right, neither leaning forward nor backward. Be sure your ears are on a plane with your shoulders and your nose in line with your navel. Place your tongue against the roof of your mouth, with teeth and lips slightly open. Your eyes should remain open, and you should breathe gently through your nose. Once you have adjusted your posture, take a deep breath, inhale and exhale, rock your body right and left and settle into a steady, immobile position. After settling the body into position, the attention is brought to the breath. While sitting erect, one should breathe fully and from the diaphragm. The breath should come from the centre of the body. With focus placed on the breath, one should breathe normally and quietly. The breath should not be forced, rather just followed in and out. During the in breath, focus is only on the in breath. During the out breath, focus is only on the out breath. Just follow the breath. As one does this, thoughts will arise. When this happens, one should try not to be bothered by them. One should resist putting labels on them such as good or bad, or thinking that they should not be occurring. They should not be resisted
or pushed away. According to many who are experienced in meditation, if you leave the thoughts alone, they will depart of their own accord. This is the way to cease the movements of the mind. It cannot be done by direct application of will (Gyalmo, 2011).

After mastering the technique of sitting, the students are then taught the most common form of mindfulness meditation in the Buddhist tradition, which is focusing on the breath. This focus does not mean that they stop thinking, but that they have a point of reference to which they can return when they notice their thoughts carrying them away. As ‘EK’ explained her experience of this practice:

As I meditate, all kinds of self-comments may arise: “There I go again” or “I can’t do this” or “I’m not very good at this” or even “I’m not sure I am doing this right.” I keep telling myself that these comments are quite normal. Observe them, and let them go. They will depart if I let them. Don’t strive for some special state of mind. There is no special state of mind. If I strive for some special state of mind I’ll only disturb my mind. The sitting meditation is not a trance. It is not rest. It is not relaxation. It is just awareness of breath, that’s all. Beyond these simple instructions, the meditation will teach itself. It will teach me what it is. I will gradually learn to sit like a mountain. Though thoughts will arise, they are merely clouds passing by the mountain. The mountain need not be perturbed by the clouds. The clouds pass on, and the mountain continues to sit; observing all, grasping at nothing.

As this quote exemplifies, and as I heard repeatedly at the centre, many of the attendees approach the task of meditating as a skill in which they can train and one they can master. The attendees talked repeatedly about “attending meditation classes”, or “learning to meditate” as an extension of their education and as a self-help method.

This approach to training in meditation not only included attendance at class, but also development of a daily practice at home. For some this daily training was an extension of their strong Buddhist faith. Two examples of people I interviewed who are committed to daily Buddhist home-practice were Bolor-Erdene Marta and Dariragchaa Davaa. Bolor-Erdene Marta spent her entire interview moving the beads of the rosary looped around her wrist. She described her practices on a typical day: "When I first wake up in the morning, I try to make sure that my first thought is about Buddhism and
to visualize the Buddha." After washing herself, she offers water at an altar in her home, does prostrations, and recites the Buddha's name, the Chenresig mantra, the *Heart Sūtra*, and the *Medicine Buddha Sūtra*. This takes two to two and a half hours. This "Buddhist homework" includes both a fixed set that the teacher gives to everyone and a part that is individually tailored for each person. In addition to these specific practices, she told me:

> When I go out walking or I am on the bus, I will recite the Buddha's name. When eating, showering, on the toilet, and so on, I will recite the Buddha's name. I try to keep my mind on reciting the Buddha's name during all of my regular activities and before sleeping. I have been a member of this centre for about three years, since 2007.

‘DD’ is in her thirties, with a university qualification. She also does regular exercises at home. On a typical day, she gets up at five o'clock and washes herself, then she spends half an hour on morning meditation before getting breakfast for her husband and children. After the children leave home for school, she recites the *Heart Sūtra* for about 50 minutes before doing her housework. If she has time, she will do “five note (pads) of recitation”, which means she records a stroke in a notebook for each recitation of the Buddha's name. She has previously filled forty notebooks and is about halfway through her forty-first.

Although these skills were often approached through a specifically Buddhist lens, this was not always the case. One of my interviewees, ‘BA’, was a case in point. He said:

> I have been a member of the centre only for about one week. The religious background of my family is Buddhist; all of my family is Buddhist. During the communist years, I do not remember that they were very serious about Buddhism. They were leaning more towards Shamanism, I think. They respected the God of the sky rather than practising Buddhism on a regular basis. Maybe they believed in Buddhism in their hearts, but without much practice. It was just by chance that I walked past this FPMT centre several years ago but did not pay much attention. Then, last week, some friends were talking about the FPMT centre where people can meditate. I wanted to try this for the first time, that is why I am here. After I attended the first meditation class, I liked it very much. Nowadays, people seem to meditate a lot and at least they are willing to learn how to meditate in order to have a better life—
both physically and mentally. This FPMT centre is the first Buddhist centre I have ever been to.

Yet despite the variety of approaches to the use of meditation and the variant levels of commitment to Buddhism that accompanied these, there was in some ways a more consistent level of commitment to the practice of meditation itself. Part of the reason for this was that in order for meditation to bring about a perceived change in those who practice it, it must be cultivated on a regular basis. Therefore, while many of the attendees may not have made a commitment to Buddhism, they did accept that practising mindful meditation and adopting an ongoing practice of meditation in day-to-day life is beneficial.

The approach yet others took to meditation training was more sporadic, and therefore more in accordance with the approach some researchers have found in their studies of Transnational Buddhism (Kalmanson & Shields, 2014). In enacting this approach, attendees eschewed a continuous daily practice of meditation, but engaged in intensive practising when they were faced with a problem or crisis.

Despite the variety of approaches to mediation practice, the importance of this element of Buddhist training to the functioning of the centre and the lives of its attendees cannot be underestimated. A focus on meditation is a defining characteristic of Buddhist practice at Shedrup Ling. It also plays an important role as an object of continuity between Traditional and Transnational Buddhism, for it is central to both. The main difference, however, is that in Transnational Buddhism, and therefore at Shedrup Ling, its participant base is much more inclusive.

3.5.2 Morality

In Buddhist texts, the morality aspect of the threefold training is defined as adherence to vows: Buddhists conduct themselves morally or amorally in dependence on acquiring and keeping these vows (Keown, 2004). Transnational Buddhist concepts of morality are, however, a bit more flexible. In this cultural sphere, morality is sometimes defined as adherence to vows, but at other times it is also extended into the social sphere, in which practitioners are encouraged to work for the less well-off and even the oppressed. The discourse of Buddhist morality at Shedrup Ling follows the transnational model: morality is seen as a combination of vows and social service.
3.5.2.1 Vows

In Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism, Buddhist vows are divided into three categories, each of which is associated with one of the three levels of Buddhist practice (Skt. trisamvara; Tib. sdom gsum; Mong. Буддьн шашны практик): individual liberation vows (Skt. prātimokṣa-saṃvara; Tib. so thar gyi sdom pa; Mong. Буддьн шашны амдалтууд), which are associated with the Hinayāna path; bodhisattva vows (Skt. bodhisattva saṃvara; Tib. byang chub sems pa’i sdom pa; Mong. бодхисаттвьы тангараглаж), which are associated with the Mahāyāna path; and tantric precepts (Skt. mantra-saṃvara; Tib. sngags kyi sdom pa; Mong. тархний супраал), which prescribe behaviours detrimental to the practice of tantra. Individual liberation vows include those held by monks and nuns and the lay vows some practitioners take along with their refuge commitments. They also include the lay vows given for one day only to laypeople and monastics, during which time the practitioner agrees to either keep their existing vows very purely for a day (if they are already ordained) or to take on the basic vows of a monk or nun for a day (if they are laypeople) (Queen & King, 1996). The basic bodhisattva vow is a commitment to attain awakening in order to be of service to all sentient beings. The tantric vows prescribe a complicated array of activities, including everything from being respectful to women to viewing all appearances as empty of inherent existence (Harvey, 2000: 141-142).

Ceremonies in which these vows are bestowed are held at Shedrup Ling from time to time, but are not a regular occurrence. Those who involve themselves in these ceremonies tend to be members who are more committed and are at the traditional end of the practitioner spectrum.

Nevertheless, because the centre itself is a place in which behaviours in accordance with these vows are demanded, the practice of Buddhist morality is an activity in which all those who visit the centre are engaged.

3.5.2.2 Social Service

Another element of the practice of morality at Shedrup Ling that is less aligned with Traditional Buddhism and more aligned with Transnational Buddhism is engagement in social service. Transnational Buddhists often present this engagement, commonly referred to as “Engaged Buddhism”, as a natural extension of the Buddhist notion of interconnection and the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideas non-harm and self-sacrifice (Queen & King, 1996). Yet, my interviews with and observations of the practitioners at Shedrup
Ling suggest that performance of Engaged Buddhism does not enjoy the same participation rates there as other elements of Transnational Buddhism. Members were attracted to the idea of practising non-harm, and linked this with their other psychological training. Dariragchaa Davaa, for one, explained this area of practice very positively:

> All the teachings I have been listening to have given me meaning for my life and I feel that my life has more meaning than before. I am proud of what I’m doing as my daily work involves helping others each day. I believe that the life in Mongolia has been changed in a positive way because of Buddhism and the Buddhist centres. Mongolians see themselves as Buddhists, but they don’t have the knowledge of Buddhism. If they want to become Buddhists, they should know the religion, this is what I think. Be polite, be good and be moral!

Munkhtuvshin Damdinsuren spoke of how this attitude remained essential despite the nation’s improving standard of living. He said:

> Sure, the life in Mongolia has become better in general. The people’s lives are getting better. People are more knowledgeable. Knowing the Dharma is very good; so, by practising it, people will have a more peaceful life. I think that Buddhism is teaching us the right way to live, not making other people suffer.

There was one interviewee who commented on the practice of Engaged Buddhism positively, reflecting on how this added another element to Shedrup Ling’s beneficial influence in Mongolia. This was ‘MG’, who noted:

> (Buddhism is) good for us and for our society. In the centre, they are not only offering the Buddhist teachings, but they have social services programs, such as the Poor Fund, where they supply material and medical needs to the poor. With the prison program, they conduct prison visits monthly. In our community centre, the soup kitchen can offer lunch for seventy people.

On the whole, however, I found less enthusiasm for the active form of socially Engaged Buddhism than I did for the personal, psychologically transformative effects of the mental state of “non-harm”.

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Therefore I will return to explore this seeming disjunct between the priorities of Transnational Buddhism as practised elsewhere and the manner in which it is practised in Mongolia in more detail in chapter five, which focuses on globalisation and hybridity.

3.6 Conclusions: Traditional-Ritualistic and Transnational-Rationalist Orientations

Despite the lack of engagement with Engaged Buddhism, the embrace of the psychologically oriented, self-help form of Transnational Buddhism at Shedrup Ling is, as this chapter has shown, quite pervasive. This form of Transnational Buddhism that developed in the West and was (re-)imported to Mongolia has proved particularly appealing to the affluent, educated attendees at the centre. There it is still presented using the traditional Buddhist trio of meditation, study and morality, but these are construed from an explicitly psychological perspective.

Nevertheless, it is not true to say that their practice of Buddhism is in all ways modern and transnational. As many of them grew up as cultural Buddhists, they tend to blend their interactions with Transnational Buddhism and Traditional Buddhism. Indeed, it is my contention that, rather than separating the Mongolian practitioners of Buddhism into Transnational and Traditional Buddhists, it is more appropriate to view their various forms of practice as lying along a continuum from a traditional-ritualistic orientation to a transnational-rationalist one. What is more, many of them work hard to explicitly integrate the two strands of their Buddhist practice. ‘D’, for example, understands Transnational Buddhism to be a means of self-help, but she sees this as a development from the Traditional Buddhism she practised growing up and still practises in her family.

I have been a member of the centre since 2007. I am from a Buddhist family; all of my family are Buddhists. I still remember during the communist years, I was still a young girl and we were hiding our beliefs from the public. My siblings—my sister and my brother—are both Buddhist, but my mum is the strongest one. I am mostly influenced by her. She had lot of great lamas as her teachers and she was taking care of some of them. They were giving teachings to my mum and I attended some of them. All of the above reasons have brought me to Buddhism. I can see myself following this path for the rest of
my life. My main motivation is to understand Buddhism.

This interaction between the two forms of Buddhism will be explored in more detail in the next two chapters. In chapter four I will focus on the influence of Traditional Buddhist identity and its links with a broader Mongolian identity in the practice of Buddhism at Shedrup Ling. And in the last chapter that focuses on hybridity, I will look at the various forms of Buddhism that arise through the interaction between these two orientations.


CHAPTER 4
Finding a National Identity in Transnational Buddhism

Contrary to predictions of humanism's and internationalism's many sages, the twentieth century passed under an acute increase of national feelings throughout the planet; this process is still intensifying, and nations are resisting ubiquitous attempts to level their cultural distinctions.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Post-communist Mongolia was one of the most controversial, exciting and contradictory places in the world, where radical freedom, unpredictability and social experimentation cohabited with fatalism, survival of Soviet political institutions, revival of religion and traditional values.

K. Kollmar-Paulenz

4.1 Introduction

Many of the printed materials used and distributed at Shedrup Ling arrive in boxes sent from the FPMT’s International Office in the United States. The International Office in Portland also develops the courses that the non-Tibetan teachers in each centre deliver and keeps a watchful eye on those that the traditionally trained Tibetan geshes teach. The FPMT’s “product” is therefore presented in a similar way in all of their centres across the globe. Students in Buenos Aries, Adelaide, New Delhi and Ulaanbaatar are all presented a Buddhism with the same emphasis on self-help psychology, using the same mindfulness meditations, the same Buddhist teaching manuals and the same focus on moral living. Their members’ main project is self-improvement, working within a community to improve their own minds. As the FPMT’s mission statement outlines, the organisation’s role is to transform, “minds and hearts... into their highest potential for the benefit of others, inspired by an attitude of universal responsibility” (FPMT, 2014).
As the last two chapters have implied, however, along with the similarities they share with FPMT attendees across the globe, there is also at least one striking difference between the approach and practice of Shedrup Ling’s attendees and those in other FPMT centres. Along with this practice of self-improvement and community, these attendees also see themselves as engaged in a practise of national rediscovery. Their focus on the development of Mongolian national identity through Buddhist activities is affirmed by the presence of a deified representation of this hybrid Buddhist-Mongolian identity in Shedrup Ling’s symbolic centre, its main shrine room. This room, which attendees call “the gompa”, is dominated by a series of statues at one end. In the central position, as he is on most public Buddhist shrines, sits a statue of Säkyamuni Buddha. But in this shrine, he is flanked by two equal sized statues: one of Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelugpa sect; and a much more flamboyant one of Vajrapāni (Skt. Vajrapāṇi; Tib. Phyag na rdo rje; Mong. Онихваань ог Базарваань), who is understood to be Mongolia’s protector and to have manifested as its most famous historical figure, Chinggis Khan. In Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism, respect toward deities and other beings is shown by offering them a silk (or imitation silk) scarf called a khatag (Tib. kha btags; Mong. хаатаг); the colour of these scarves most associated with Tibet is white, and the colour most associated with Mongolia is sky-blue. The Vajrapāṇi statue at Shedrup Ling is covered in sky-blue khatag, as if to affirm the deity’s Mongolian identity.

The decision to grant the deity such a prominent role also seems to be a deliberate strategy on behalf of the FPMT, which is keen to affirm the connection between Mongolian and Buddhist identities, and thereby to strengthen its own position in Mongolia. The FPMT Mongolia website, for example, speaks of promoting “the traditions and culture of Mongolia”, as well as Transnational Buddhism (FPMT 2014). This focus on national identity was made explicit in the interviews I conducted at Shedrup Ling. In response to a series of questions (see Appendix I), many of the respondents included pride in their national group and cultural attachment to nationality as motivations for attending the centre. They repeatedly described, in other words, their practice of the FPMT’s Transnational Buddhism as an expression of their national identities.

To understand how the FPMT undertakes this role of promoting Mongolian identity, and, more importantly, what it means to the attendees of Shedrup Ling, it is therefore

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27 This term is derived from the Tibetan word for monastery, dgon pa, pronounced “gompa”.
necessary to contextualise the specific nationalist intent for carrying out Buddhist practice and to do this within broader discourses on Mongolian national identity. This means examining how a strong sense of Mongolian collective identity has developed throughout history and the alignment of Buddhism with this identity. It also requires an examination of the role that Vajrapāṇi /Chinggis Khan has played in this development.

In what follows, I examine how the tensions implicit in using a transnational form of an international religion to construct a national identity are negotiated and why these tensions appear to be more obvious to observers than participants. Why do participants perceive Buddhism as such an intrinsic part of Mongolian identity that this tension was alleviated and the practising of Transnational Buddhism as presented by the FPMT was still considered an expression of Mongolian identity?

Addressing these questions involves exploration of how the attendees understand their Mongolian identity as not only a product of history, but also a post-communist responsibility. More than twenty years after the collapse of the communist regime, they—along with most other Mongolians—are still in the process of reconstructing their national identity, and they consider Buddhism a large part of this reconstruction effort. Mongolia has emerged from decades of communist suppression of religion as a majority Buddhist country. This demographic supports the renewal of a national identity in which cultural and religious factors are a core component. The effects of this national re-calibration were clearly evident in the answers given by the study’s participants. It is a phenomenon that reflects Humphrey’s (1992) description of other post-communist countries showing a tendency to reconstruct national identities from remnants associated with the “deep past”.

The resurrection of Buddhism as an important aspect of national identity is occurring all over Mongolia, and in many ways Sherdup Ling is a small element of this process. But, as the form of Buddhism being offered here differs notably from the traditional Buddhism practised in Mongolia, it also represents a significant site for the construction of post-Soviet discourses. Unlike traditional Buddhism, it offers its attendees a chance to align themselves with a historical Mongolian identity and still understand themselves to be progressive and modern. Practising Buddhism at Sherdup Ling involves forming a new, but still Buddhist, Mongolian national identity.

Again, this not only reflects the interests of these elite Mongolians themselves, but also is a deliberate strategy by the FPMT—in consultation with the Dalai Lama—to target their spiritual “product” at this audience. The intention behind this process is not
to extract influence or resources from Mongolia so much as to ensure, along with other traditionalists, that Mongolia remains a Buddhist country. The FPMT, through Shedrup Ling, sees its role in this regard as substantial because it provides a blueprint for the continuation of Buddhism as Mongolia develops. This form of Buddhism is, as the Dalai Lama and the FPMT’s international Spiritual Director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, both described to me, understood by them and other religious leaders to be the ultimate destination for Buddhism in a developing Mongolia.28 Within this framework, it is therefore important for the elites who attend the centre to highlight the overlap between Buddhism and Mongolian identity; if they view the FPMT as the destination of Buddhism in Mongolia, it is important that it is presented as Mongolian Buddhism.

As Vesna Wallace has pointed out, the need to emphasise the Mongolian cultural dimension of Mongolian Buddhism is in many ways a survival strategy. She writes (2012: 96):

At the present time, there is once again a fear among Mongolian Buddhists that Buddhism may be discarded as irrelevant to the modern world amid Mongolians’ exposure to an ever-widening array of alternative worldviews, values, and lifestyles. These are variously promoted by materialist atheists, growing Christian fundamentalists, Shamanists, and others.

The FPMT’s alignment with Tibetan Buddhism, the source of Mongolian Buddhism, enables it to present itself as both modern—a promoter of international modernity—and traditional. This means that instructors and attendees perceive it as uniquely qualified to respond to this influx of non-Buddhist influences. In particular, FPMT Buddhism presents itself as a direct challenge to the intense non-Buddhist and non-Shamanistic religious missionary activity that began in Mongolia following the post-communist government’s decision to grant an “open door” to the world’s religions (Batceceg, 2008). Many of these groups, particularly those originating in the West, have relied on the appeal of modernity and internationalism to spread their message (Metraux, 2000). Shedrup Ling was in part conceived as the FPMT’s—and the Transnational Buddhist world’s—strategy to counter this appeal (Zablocki, 2005). The interviewees’ responses suggest that it is working, but that a significant contributor to this success is the appeal of affirming a nationalist Mongolian and Buddhist identity.

28 I spoke with Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Shedrup Ling in 2010 and attended a small group meeting with HHDL in Sydney where they shared these ideas.
In analysing the complex construction of this religio-national identity, this chapter adds to two fields of research: those that have examined the global construction of Transnational Buddhism and those that are examining the reconstruction of religious identities in post-communist countries. It shows how Shedrup Ling’s presentation of Buddhism represents a skilled, targeted presentation of a “Western” form of Buddhism, and how this global motility affects the practice of Buddhism there. In addition, it shows how this motility creates conditions for the reaffirmation of historically constructed power dynamics and the possibility of incorporating modernising challenges.

By viewing Buddhism and nationalism together, this analysis will also address Bathes’ idea of “invisibilities”. Bathes set out this idea in a paper entitled “Recognition, social invisibility and disrespect” (Carleheden, Heidegren & Willig, 2012). In this paper the researchers explain how sociological texts are not merely a location for the transmission of information about nation, religion and identity but are also, significantly, the site of a society’s construction of knowledge about these phenomena. The main discursive and ideological work of these texts, in other words, is the development of conceptual frames (structures) that organise our perceptions and understandings of the social world. These then become so naturalised that the community does not question or acknowledge them; despite their potency, they are invisible. In this chapter, I will examine how these “invisibilities” work in Mongolia generally and at Shedrup Ling in particular.

In making this presentation of the interaction between traditional and evolving identities at Shedrup Ling, this chapter problematises the generally accepted narrative of Transnational Buddhism’s dialectical development. The broad outlines of this narrative are by now familiar to many scholars and practitioners of this form of Buddhism. It describes a group of Western “elites” who seek to align Buddhism—at least in its transnational contexts—with the contemporary values and practices of the West (Appadurai 1996; Zablocki 2005). In this process, these elites focus on what they understand to be the fundamental or essential elements of Buddhism, which just happen to be those elements of the tradition that can be most easily re-contextualised. And, in response, “traditionalists” reject what they perceive as the “pick-and-choose” elite mentality, arguing that it threatens the continuity of Buddhist lineages, and that, in the worst case, it will reduce Buddhism to a variant of secular humanist psychotherapy, rather than remaining a vehicle for attaining awakening (Zablocki 2005).
As this chapter shows, however, the respondents in this study contradicted this narrative. According to the interviewees, attendance at Shedrup Ling is a way to maintain their traditional identity in a society that is increasingly influenced by modernity and the West. Rather than an expression of concern for the “pick-and-choose” model of Buddhism, they embrace this as an intelligent approach to the challenge of moderating a received tradition within the boundaries of democratic freedoms and religious choice. They want to remain Buddhist, conceiving this as an important part of their heritage, but cannot include many elements of traditional Buddhism within the democratic paradigm. In line with the Transnational Buddhist narrative, they furthermore provide religious legitimation for picking and choosing from the Buddha’s injunction to adapt whatever aspects of his teachings are useful.

By placing this further adaptation of the global motility that is Transnational Buddhism within the Mongolian context, this chapter will also fill a lacuna within the study of post-communist Mongolian national identity: the study of Buddhism’s relationship with the modern state. This gap has occurred because, on the one hand, some researchers such as Hann and Pelkmans (2009) have insisted that religions in post-communist nations will find it difficult to survive, and most other localised, ethnographic studies of the Mongolian Buddhist revival have tended to focus on the revitalisation of traditional Buddhism and other traditions within strict geographic limits (Majer, 2009). This chapter will use Symbolic Interactionism and Identity Theory to study the dynamics of the Mongolian Buddhist revival as a way to illustrate its complexity.

In describing this modernised form of Mongolian Buddhism, this chapter not only focuses on the influence of the West on its form, but also the reinvention of Mongolian history within this modernised version. In this regard, it will pay particular attention to the promotion of Chinggis Khan and his apotheosis into Vajrapāṇi, and therefore how he became a hybrid symbol of Mongolian-Buddhist identity. It shows how Chinggis Khan has been presented as the pre-eminent national figure in Mongolia and as a unifying memory for all of its citizens. It will also show how collective memories act as a precondition to any sense of identity and come to play a crucial role in the interpretation of the present (Schleifman, 1998). It will then show how this presentation of him as a national hero is blended with his role as a Buddhist deity, in a symbolic alignment between the state and religion.
After exploring the intrinsic interactions between Mongolian and Transnational Buddhism in the development of nationalist identity at Shedrup Ling, this chapter will end by noting the influence of the Mongolian state's "third neighbour" foreign policy on this discourse. It will examine, for example, how the Mongolian government's commitment to develop relationships with third neighbour countries—which is to say neighbours that are not Russia or China—has helped Western organisations like the FPMT make inroads into Mongolia. It will then examine how this state encouragement has coincided with the demand for a lay-orientated form of Buddhism in Mongolia and how this, in turn, has led to the revitalisation of a lay Buddhist practice that, although within the transnational sphere, emphasises Mongolian identity.

4.2 How to Identify a Mongolian, Transnational Buddhist

Establishing and studying identities is one of the most central and nebulous roles of sociology. The specifics of Shedrup Ling's and Mongolia's situations make this undertaking both more obviously necessary and more difficult to pin down than in many other studies. Therefore, in order to aid the analysis of the co-dependent national and religious identities found at Shedrup Ling, and to suggest why they play such an important role in motivating and guiding the attendees' engagement there, I have chosen to view these identities through the helpful prisms of symbolic interactionism and identity theory.

4.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism and Identity Theory

Symbolic Interactionism is an especially appropriate approach to the workings and influence of national and religious identities at Shedrup Ling as it is a "sociolog(y) of everyday life... approaching the study of social worlds from the concrete, tangible perspective of human beings and the everyday reality they perceive" (Adler & Adler 1998: 20). While Herbert Blumer (1969: 1) is credited with coining the term "symbolic interactionism," he traces the theory to George Herbert Mead. Mead (1934:130–135), posited that the self emerges through social interaction and that meaning is created through this interaction. We cannot exist as "selves" without social interaction or without the interpretation of symbols.
According to social interactionism, identities are not static but continuously negotiated and re-negotiated, created and re-created. This changing process of identity is made possible because meaning is not inherent in an object, but rather develops through interaction between objects and subjects. Blumer (1969: 2–6) posits three interactive relationships that underpin these evolving meanings:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows.
3. Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things (s)he encounters.

In this model for analysing the development of identity, agency plays a key role. The self is not merely acted upon but acts and is active within society.

Identities that are developed through symbolic interaction are highly fluid, multiple and pragmatic. They are therefore also difficult to define. This elusiveness led Erikson (1968: 9) to suggest that identity is “a term for something as unfathomable as it is all-pervasive.” As identity plays such an influential role in social interactions, it has become a topic of its own sub-set of symbolic interactionist theory: identity theory. This theory, developed by Stryker (1980), focuses on symbolic interactionism’s notion of the reciprocal influence of society and self. In identity theory Stryker and others sought to address some of the imbalances they perceived in symbolic interactionism, particularly its lack of emphasis on culture. In their analysis they suggested that one of the primary effects of culture is to provide a sense of identity that is inherently relational and determined by a socially and culturally constructed world (Becker, 1999; Berger & Luckmann 1966; McGuigan, 2010; Turner, 1996).

The identities constructed in this world are not, however, objective. As Castells (1997: 7) argues, they only become identities “when and if social actors internalise them, and construct their meaning around this internalisation”. This means, as Greenfield (1992) argues, that identity is a perception. If a particular identity does not mean anything to the population in question, this population does not have this particular identity.
Working within the frameworks of symbolic interactionism, Dashefsky and Shapiro (1974: 4-7) also developed a theory of the different types of identity. These inherently fluid forms of identity are based on a person's social role and life history. They include:

1. **Social Identity**: defined by "broad social categories or attributes" like "teenager", "professor" or "refugee".
2. **Self-conception**: "a cognitive phenomenon that consists of the set of attitudes an individual holds about him-or herself".
3. **Personal identity**: "how others define the person in terms of a unique combination of traits that come to be attached to him (or her)."
4. **Ego identity**: "an intra-psychic phenomenon that consists of the psychological core of what the person means to him-or herself."

Although other identities play a part, it is the second of these, self-conception, that plays the most influential role in the interviewees' responses in this research. They reflect on their own personal roles, as well as the societal ones they play. Dashefsky and Shapiro also offer a succinct descriptor of self-conception that fits well with interviewees' responses, which was reflected in later work on identity by Stryker and Serpe (1982: 206; 1994). It is the answer, they suggest, to the question "Who am I?"

The suggestion that self-conceived identity is the answer to this question not only allows for people to establish their own identity in relation to social norms; it also represents how the construction of identity is a process. A person's answer to this question will depend on who is asking the question, where it is being asked and in what context. This focus on process therefore allows for two of identity's most influential characteristics to come to the fore: fluidity and multiplicity. As Jenkins (2004: 5) puts it concisely, identity "can only be understood as a process. One's identity—one's identities, indeed, for who we are is always singular and plural—is never a final or settled matter."

The fact that this model for understanding how self-conceived identity is construed also includes the active participation of the self-conceiver is another important element of its construction. Just as individuals ask and answer the question "Who am I?", as Anthony Giddens (1991: 70-108) has noted, they are also active participants in the creation and maintenance of their identities. In this regard, Giddens (1991: 54) further notes, self-conceived identity is not about their behaviour, nor their reaction to others, but their narratives of self. The narrative of self is self-created, but needs to be validated.
through social interactions. An individual's biography, if he/she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events that occur in the external world and sort them into the on-going “story” about the self (Giddens 1991: 54).

Another element of the development of identity through self-created and shared narratives that the analysis of the interviewees will incorporate is the spatiality of these interactions. Drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1997), it will demonstrate that a person’s identity changes and is contingent upon where she is, her context, the role she is playing and the position she occupies. On this topic, Hall (1997: 4) asserts that “identities…are multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions.” These multiple, fluid identities are particularly evident in the responses from Shedrup Ling’s attendees, as they seek to combine their personal construction of a better self with the construction of a post-communist Mongolia.

4.2.2 National Identity

The particularities of the post-communist social environment in Mongolia mean that the reconstruction of a national identity is a key component of cultural production, and something to which almost all of those I interviewed at Shedrup Ling feel a conscious commitment. Yet many of them also present the re-wakening of an essential “Mongolianness” that existed in the “deep past” and was lost in the communist era. There is also a sense that Buddhism is a key part of this identity.

For those appraising this situation externally, however, the reconstruction of national identity in post-communist Mongolia is much more of a national development project than the re-awakening of any imagined essence. National identities work at two levels: they are constructed on a country-wide basis that includes a combination of geopolitics, local politics, civil society and governance; and individuals interact with the symbols of the state to create a personal sense of belonging to the nation. Their sense of belonging is then confirmed and reinforced by those around them. Many attendees at Shedrup Ling are involved in both of these projects. As cultural and social elites they engage in at least the civil and sometimes the political construction of the new Mongolia, and as individual Mongolians they are also in the process of re-defining their personal, national identity through the processes of symbolic interactionism.
Both the individual and collective aspects of this process are fluid and multiple. Like personal identities, the identities of nations are neither permanent nor immutable, neither fixed nor infinitely malleable. They can be changed, but just as a change in an individual’s identity must then be affirmed—Giddens explains—by others, in this case other nations must accept new national personas. Fluctuations in internal and external political and social situations therefore ensure that, despite appearances, nation states are not stable, static, intrinsic structures, an independent property of those that comprise them. Instead, the elaboration of national identity is a perpetual process: a nation’s identity is constantly subjected to a process of reinterpretation, usually by each succeeding generation but also by its interactions with other nations. It is constantly redefined, reimagined, redrawn and rewritten (Csepeli, 1997; Dijkink, 1996; Gillis, 1994; Hall, 1997; Lipschutz, 1998; Mach, 1993; Prizel, 1998; Schlesinger, 1991). The process of identity formation thus appears as a dynamic characteristic of a group involved in the process of historical development.

Nations have been defined in a variety of ways. Smith (1991: 14) describes a nation as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members”. While the features identified by Smith are fundamental to defining a nation, this definition does not take into account its membership within a global community, which brings a pronounced international dimension to all national identities. In the apt words of Duara (2008: 323), a nation is “cognitively and institutionally constituted by global circulations that are mediated, in turn, by regional, historical and cultural interactions”.

To understand the influence of national identity at Shedrup Ling it is also important to remember that both national and international contexts, national myths and historical memories are recreated and reinvented. Contemporary culture, both popular and elite, further defines a modern nation, circulating a national discourse of the past and present. This discourse is then adopted by individuals as part of their individual, national identity. In making this adaptation, it aligns individuals with a greater group, and this in turn allows this group identity to continue beyond one lifetime, to be passed down through generations and therefore to create a sense of continuity.

According to Benedict Anderson’s (1991) theory of imagined community, people can feel a sense of national belonging without ever interacting with more than a small number of other subjects and citizens. The nation is constituted as a “natural” unity
through linguistic and visual representations, through verbal and non-verbal practices and rituals, which connect the perceptions, emotions and memories of individuals with those of the collective, and thus signify belonging (Anderson, 1991). Thus some commentators claim that people’s connection to nation is emotional rather than rational (Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000).

The emotional attachments are shaped, tapped into and evoked through the mobilisation of traditional means of communication—symbols, religious figures and images—that have been imprinted into the population’s psyche (Blumer, 1969). Symbols do not denote; they connote, suggest, imply. Rather than standing for a single referent, these cultural constructs evoke a variety of meanings, some of which may be ambiguous. What is more, they do not simply bring about a sense of community, but also create an identity for those who use them. In this way, they are not merely arbitrary signs, but emotionally loaded components of a tradition; they represent and are connected with ideas that are fundamental aspects of human thought and culture. They evoke powerful emotions and can often unite (or disrupt) social groups (Csepeli, 1997; Griswold, 1994; Mach, 1993; Parekh, 1999).

Not surprisingly, symbols and images play a vital role in constituting and defining a community’s self-understanding and identity. Indeed, there is no community in history that has not sought to embody its collective identity in its self-image. Images are not only self-projections, but also tools of self-creation, an integral part of national identity and a common currency of political and social discourse. They constitute the community’s cultural and emotional capital (Mach, 1993; Parekh, 1999).

Some theorists have even suggested that these nationalistic images play a similar role to totemic images. According to Greenfield (1992), for example, they are not simply representations of the nation; in a very real sense, national symbols become the nation. National identity, then, becomes a set of ideas, a powerful “symbolic elaboration of [the] imagined community” (See also Mach, 1993); it describes that condition in which many people identify with national symbols to such a degree that they may act as one psychological group when there is a threat to, or the possibility of enhancement of, these internalised symbols of national identity (Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000). The nation then recreates itself through continuous symbolic discourse about its present and future, by referring to its past (Gillis, 1994; Mach 1993; Shils, 1995).

As will be explored in more depth later in this chapter, one of the most powerful symbols of collective national identity in post-communist Mongolia is the Mongol
Empire’s first Emperor, Chinggis Khan. His image and name are used as national identifiers, and then adopted by individuals as symbols of their alignment with this nation. But intriguingly, at Shedrup Ling and more broadly, this national figure is also represented as a religious identity, a tantric deity, and as a marker therefore aligns closely to the national and religious identities of many Mongolians.

4.2.3 Religion and National Identity

The combining of national and religious identities is perhaps most clearly evident in the tantric apotheosis of Chinggis Khan, but they also overlap in many other discourses in contemporary Mongolia generally, and in the respondents’ answers particularly.

The importance of religion in people’s lives makes it one of the most powerful social forces (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). This is not to say, however, that these individuals’ beliefs, behaviours, or attitudes are always consistent with the external, “official” schemas of Buddhism. Their behaviour and beliefs often contradict elite or official religious discourses. Yet as McGuire (1981 & 2001) has noted, even if lived contradictions to elite and official discourses are norms rather than exceptions within religious communities, this incongruity does not amount to incoherence. Individuals can and do live with a great deal of incongruity in their religious lives, without losing the clear idea that they belong to a greater religious group. This re-evaluation of the institutional and homogeneous model of religion by contemporary scholars recognises increased creativity and constructivism in individual religious identities. What may be incoherent to the theologian or scholar is a way of life for the individual. Rather than a set of beliefs or dogmas, their religious identity is a complex system of relationships.

Like national identity, religious identity—in both its greater and individual forms—identifies people with a group. Ramet (1998: 147) gives five reasons why religion acts as a constitutive element in national identity:

(1) It provides a “historical core” through which cultures can trace their development from “primitive tribes” into “politically conscious nations”.

(2) It is a badge of group identity, “distinguishing ‘us’ from ‘them’” that can also act as a distance—distancing one group from another.

(3) Religious groups have usually been involved in the use and promotion of national languages and literatures.
(4) As the clergy are generally highly educated, respected and politically conscious they have tended to step into leadership roles.

Although religions create links between people, however, they are not usually confined to national borders. In the Mongolian context, religious identity works across Mongolia and internationally. As Mongolian Buddhism has strong historical ties with Tibet, it creates an identity that links Mongolians as a nation with Tibetans, and through Tibetan to practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism elsewhere, most particularly in the West. In this way, a Mongolian Buddhist identity creates a link with non-Mongolians. These religious links mean that Mongolian Buddhists will assume a shared set of values with these others. As a meaning system, religion influences how people interpret experiences, make decisions, act toward other groups and so forth (Silberman, 2005). It has been suggested that religious belief systems serve to give their followers “an ultimate vision of what people should be striving for in their lives” (Pargament & Park, 1995: 15).

In their interactions with cognitively related others, especially those witnessed at Shedrup Ling, Mongolian Buddhists seem to accept that a person does not necessarily need to be Mongolian to be a Buddhist. But they often proffer an inverse causal connection between the two identities. It is understood, in other words, that to be a “real” Mongolian one must practise Buddhism.

4.3 Making “True” Mongolians

The process of transforming Mongolia from a communist, Soviet-satellite state into a modern democracy with an independent identity is a project with which most Mongolians have been involved in one way or another. As Vesna Wallace (2010) noted recently, this uncertainty about identity often manifests itself as “debates over who is a true Mongol and what makes one a true Mongol.” And as Wallace also notes, these debates have “dominated the public and private spheres” for decades. According to Tsedendamdyn Batbayar (2002: 8):

For decades, Mongolia had subordinated national identity to Soviet priorities... Now, they were set adrift in a sea of uncertainty, and Mongolians were determined to define themselves as a nation and as a people. The new
freedom was an opportunity as well as a crisis.

It is no wonder then that the attendees at Shedrup Ling are involved in this debate and relate their experiences practising Transnational Buddhism to it. Their personal involvement was also reflected in their interviews. One of the most comprehensive responses to questions of national identity came from a 19-year old university student, Baymsaikhan. Her response included three specific cultural and religious components to Mongolianness: (1) religiosity; (2) being a member of the Mongolian community; and (3) learning about Mongolian religio-cultural heritage. She said:

When outsiders think of Mongolia, and they don’t very often, the image is usually picturesque images of fast horses, endless grasslands and nomadic people living in gers or yurts. For me, having a rich spiritual life is the core of being a Mongolian. Our traditional religion is Mongolian Buddhism. We should learn our religion well and we also should teach our own religious and national history to our children. In other words, we are leading the young ones to know their own past and their own religion being part of the Mongolian community and caring about Mongolia. We should treasure the culture that we have; because of the past communist control, our Buddhist culture and Mongolian culture were destroyed a lot. Now, we should rebuild what we have lost and combine our culture with the new. Most of the Mongolians don’t know much about the religious part of our history. We should not only be a cultural-Buddhist by attending religious services without knowing much about our religion and history, but should be a knowledgeable Buddhist by reading Buddhist texts, attending regular teachings at a lay Buddhist centre like Shedrup Ling, and questioning the Buddhist teachings with modern knowledge.

When trying to build a national identity, it helps to have a national hero. In Mongolia’s case it is, naturally, Chinggis Khan. In the middle of an area of grassland is an extraordinary 35-metre-high statue of Chinggis Khan on a horse. This stainless-steel monument tells the story of 2,000 years of Mongolian history. Around 25 years ago mention of Chinggis Khan was to all intents and purposes forbidden. Now almost everything and anything is named after Chinggis Khan. Mongolia has a lot to be proud of. Building a 21st-century country with bringing back the national hero and combining this with
re-learning Mongolian Buddhism will restore the greatness of Mongolian-ness.

Through historical practices and ways of life, the ideas of the ‘Mongols’ become historicised, and people become ‘authentic’, and therefore authoritative positions for present-day values and ways of life (Cohen, 1998).

Yet while the discussion is framed within this very personal question that encourages people to reflect on themselves and their circles—“Am I a true Mongol? Are they?”—one of the most fundamental aspects of this evolving identity is a sense of belonging to much wider identities. The most pervasive and interrelated of these is the particular national identity promoted by the Mongolian State and the many manifestations of Buddhism. These two modalities have an important correlation as Mongolians draw on them to create their national identities: they are both trans-local. They both allow people who make the majority of their life’s transactions within a limited local sphere to imagine themselves as connected to a much wider community.

Along with the ability of national identity to unite disparate peoples, it also has another ability that is particularly important in the Mongolian context given their more recent history: it also provides resources for people to separate themselves out from others. Separation like this is an important tool for them as their recent history has seen them caught up in internationalist narratives such as communism.29 Within this context, Mongolians started to forget their religious rituals, customs and traditions, and their patriotic feelings inclined towards internationalism, which was put above all. The nation-wide project to promote nationalism is in the main a corrective to this previous trajectory. Buddhism is also a transnational entity, but as it is not strictly associated with the country’s immediate neighbours China and Russia, using Buddhism also helps to differentiate the smaller nation of Mongolia from others, especially when it is described not merely as Buddhism, but as Mongolian Buddhism.

4.3.1 The State as a Trans-local Identity

In this context, the state-led deployment, and even appropriation, of nationalism emerges as a critical, albeit contested, component in the development of a new national identity. The state’s use of historical narratives and other representations of belonging is often determined by its need to strategically re-invent and renegotiate tradition. In

29 This, or perhaps more precisely a nationalistic model based on historical imperial boundaries, obviously still affects Mongolians living in Inner Mongolia, which remains within the People’s Republic of China.
practice, this means that state actors draw on different elements of the nation’s narrative, and sometimes different combinations of these elements, to create a multidimensional, intensely fluid national narrative. They may draw on ethnic affiliations in the face of external threats, the idea of homeland and sense of place to create a sense of land ownership among the people and sketch a discourse of collective struggle for livelihood and resources, particularly land and gold.

In delivering this narrative, state actors imagine a community living in a continuum from the “deep past” (Humphreys & March, 1976), but there is much to contest within this presentation, and increasingly there are those who reject this inclusive narrative. Perhaps the most pronounced divisive element in Mongolia’s society that this story seeks to paper over is the rural-urban divide, which in Mongolia’s case is perhaps more properly described as a nomad-urban divide. This disjunction not only creates a distinct gap between socio-economic groups, but it also means that the nature of modernity—the goal towards which the united nation-state seeks to progress—is contested (Bulag, 2009). What is more, along with the documented tendency of those advocating the nomadic way of life to resist modernity, the unified national narrative also papers over the multiple divided identities that existed within these premodern nomadic settings. For although a contemporary, democratically-elected government in many ways seeks to define itself in opposition to the previous, communist regime, the notion of a united Mongolian identity upon which it relies is in many ways drawn from this period. Identity in Mongolia prior to the 20th century was based largely on a limited locality (Schwarz, 2006). The major focus of identity for rural people then and now was and is more localised ethnic groups or, even more restrictively, a specific geographical location.

The converse of this situation means that those in urban environments are primarily charged with upholding the national narrative and therefore often feel a particular investment in it. Moreover, urban elites, like those who visit Shedrup Ling, are usually even more invested in the project than their rural counterparts.

When I asked 72 year-old ‘BR’, who has been a medical doctor for thirty years, if Shedrup Ling has benefited her in any way in terms of meeting lay demands for an urban elite dweller. She replied:

30 In a reflection of the multiple layers of identity, however, it should also be noted that there is an emerging, discordant youth-centred discourse to the state’s nationalism in urban areas. Built on the explicit rejection of and in contrast to the very strands of identity I have described, one of its more visible outlets is Ulaanbaatar’s thriving hip-hop scene (See Marsh 2009).
In Mongolia, many people I know have benefited from learning Buddhism. They want to improve their quality of life, purify their minds, and solve their personal problems by learning the Dharma. This Shedrup Ling centre is meeting our demands by providing all the courses that we need and should attend.

I see and practise Buddhism as a religion, a psychology, a philosophy and a way of life. People are easily misled if they don’t know the teachings, but here at Shedrup Ling, we have all the qualified teachers who have done their training and come to Mongolia to teach us. In Mongolian temples, we have never had the chance to enrol in Buddhist courses for laypeople. We are totally relying on the monastics who will be ‘praying’ for us. But here, we learn the teachings ourselves and we are getting to know our own religion and from the most updated version.

I also do meditation and prayers every day—practising concentration and insight. This was inspired by the courses that are offered by Shedrup Ling. From this international organisation, we are able to link Mongolia to the past, as well as to modern life. What we are doing might be the future for Mongolia.

I think that meditation is the most important Buddhist practice and is the only way to see clearly into our own mind. It’s like in nature—you need a microscope to see things clearly.

From my observation lots of people in Mongolia are doing the magical way—the older forms of Buddhism—which is not good. We should learn about Buddhism—to know the proper reasons for doing things, which is the right way to go.

We can get what we want from Shedrup Ling, but not from the traditional temples in Mongolia.

The idea of a trans-local Mongolian identity is also strengthened, however, by its partial alignment with other identities. These include being Asian, Central Asian and, as will be explored in some detail shortly being Mongolian—which is also framed as being an inheritor of Chinggis Khan’s legacy—but the most influential of these is the population’s re-emerging, trans-local Buddhist identity.
4.3.2 Buddhism as a Trans-local Identity

Fifty-three per cent of Mongolia's 2.8 million people are committed Buddhists (Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 2011), and many of the 35% of Mongolians who declare no religious affiliation admit a cultural affiliation with Buddhism (Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 2011). The reason that I would argue that the Mongolian Buddhist identity is the most influential of these identities is not that it is necessarily the most visible—for that is probably a preeminence that belongs to Chinggis Khan—but more because of the ways in which Buddhism influences the other components of perceived belonging. Buddhism not only provides a complex of symbols upon which they can build their identity, it also influences many other symbolically constructed aspects of Mongolian particularity. Its influence can be seen in Mongolian politics, international affairs and even economics (Schwarz, 2006). Its influence is even evident in the representations of Chinggis Khan and other aspects of the Mongolian’s “glorious” past. Along with this symbolic integration, Buddhism, like most other religions, also influences the daily lives of Buddhists. According to the Mongolian Statistical Yearbook (2012), for example, 72% of the country’s Buddhists agree with the statement that, “my whole approach to life is based upon my religion”.

The trans-local role that Buddhism plays in Mongolian identity has been noted by many scholars. Humphrey (1992 & 2002), in particular, remarked on the representation of Buddhist practices as part of a “new qualification of national heritage”. Enkhtuya Khash, a 52-year-old retiree who regularly attends Shedrup Ling, echoed this sentiment when she explained this alignment in the following way:

I think that Buddhism helps the national identity and Mongolian society more as most of the Mongolians are Buddhists. I believe that in the future, they will remain so.

Humphrey (1992) also noted that this is not merely a community-based qualification; it is also state-sponsored, and one of the indicators for this state sponsorship is the increased prominence of state officials at revived ovoo (or cairn) ceremonies. Elverskog (2006: 29) additionally noted this use, suggesting that in post-communist Mongolia religion “is now simultaneously deemed to be central to one’s ethnic and/or national identity and also something one knows virtually nothing about”.

In his interview, 52-year old ‘EK’ said:

All of my family members are Buddhists, but we really don’t know much
We believe that being a Mongolian should mean being a Buddhist, not only just a cultural believer, but also a practising one. I clearly remember that during the communist years we were not able to practise Buddhism. The absence of freedom of religious expression, the lack of Buddhist knowledge and having to conceal one’s private Buddhist practice made living in the communist era very frightening. Now, we have freedom of religion, we should practise Buddhism as free, modern Mongolians. This Shedrup Ling centre provides opportunities for us to know our roots, receiving our religion but now with a global approach. Attending the teachings has become part of my life now. Being an older Mongolian, I would say that I know a bit more about Buddhism than most of the younger generations, but the young ones especially should learn Buddhism in more depth, because it’s our own cultural and spiritual heritage.

A lack of knowledge about the transnational sweep of Buddhism and its elite representation may be common in Mongolia, but despite or perhaps because of this it is still an influential component of the trans-local identity. Indeed, as Igwara (1995) has noted, it may even be true to say that religion (in this case Buddhism) acts as a cause of Mongolian identity, rather than just being a component of it. Religion certainly is a crucial factor in keeping alive public solidarity, which, according to Mirsky (2009), always has a tendency to overgrow into a feeling of a common and unique destiny.

Yet in Mongolia, there is also a tension between not merely the trans-local but also the transnational character of Buddhism on the one hand and the necessity of creating this feeling of a common and unique destiny on the other. This makes it necessary to occupy the space in which Buddhism and Mongolian-ism meet: to be not merely a Buddhist, but a Mongolian Buddhist. And for this to occur, identity’s reliance on symbolic interactions necessitates a symbol for this intersection. The historically unlikely, but nevertheless widely accepted, totem for Mongolian Buddhism is Chinggis Khan.

4.4 The Reinvention of Chinggis Khan

Chinggis Khan was not a Buddhist. He was not even—strictly speaking—a Mongolian. He was a tribal leader who came to rule a group of Mongol tribes, who then set off on a
military adventure that united large swathes of Eurasia under Mongol rule. Today, however, at Shedrup Ling and across Mongolia his pervasive image is used to represent Mongolia, the Mongolian people, and, intriguingly, through his representation as the tantric Buddha Vajrapāṇi, Mongolian Buddhism.

Although this re-use of Chinggis Khan is again made on the assumption that he represents Mongolia’s deep past, his use as a national symbol dates to the early communist era. During this time, in the early twentieth century, he was represented as the “secularised ancestor of all Mongols” (Wallace, 2010). After the end of communism, he retained his position as the primal ancestor, but this role was no longer presented in purely secular terms. Rather, he began to be re-presented in his pre-modern form as a foundational and even ontological link between Mongolia and Buddhism. As Vajrapāṇi, the tantric god who personifies the power of all the buddhas, he could represent both the warrior culture of the Mongol Empire and the complexities of Mongolia’s most enduring cultural import, Buddhism. In this form, this symbol of power and the Mongol Empire plays a central role in the functioning of Shedrup Ling.

If there is one image and idea that has been granted totemic status in Mongolia, it is Chinggis Khan. And as such, it needs to fulfill a number of functions. Many of these were and still are evoked visually, literarily and in conversation at Shedrup Ling, but the three main forms in which he was presented, and therefore the three main forms that will be discussed here, were: (1) as a symbol of the past; (2) as a symbol of the nation state; and (3) in the form of Vajrapāṇi, as a symbol of Mongolian Buddhism.

4.4.1 Chinggis Khan as The Past

The reinvention of Chinggis Khan for a post-communist age has much in common with the use of historical figures as symbols of nationalism in other nations.

Like many other post-communist states, after the fall of the Soviet Bloc, Mongolia needed to reformulate its identity in a new world order. This involved re-invented narratives of its past and traditions with which its people could identify, and these narratives and traditions needed to be made meaningful in the contemporary world. This ongoing process is similar to that Marlène Laruelle (2007: 4) noted in other Turkic-Mongol Central Asian states, when she said the “global phenomenon of a modernity.... defines itself by its ‘invention of traditions’”.

There can be no doubt that, despite its pervasiveness, the image of Chinggis Khan used in contemporary Mongolian nationalist discourse is such an invention. It may be
presented as an image of the deep past, but this presentation in itself is a contemporary and evolving phenomenon.

As I described in chapter two, the historic Chinggis Khan was not so much a builder of a nation state as a conqueror of other territories. He united the Mongol tribes during the last decade of the eleventh and first decade of twelfth century in the main through military campaigns, and once this was achieved used the combined might of these tribes to begin campaigns against other ethnic groups. These campaigns took him all the way to Europe and would lead the Mongols to create the largest contiguous land empire in history (although this did not happen until after his death).

After Buddhism became the dominant religion in Mongolia in the 13th and 17th centuries, he came to seen as both a Buddhist and—as I will explain in more detail shortly—a buddha. Yet this presentation did not only hold religious significance; it was also political. Its function was in part to affirm an important image of Mongolian identity, with a forged link to a sacred Buddhist deity that would defend the country if the country, in turn, defended the Dharma. It was a usage that transformed warlike aggression into an acceptable Buddhist frame, but it was not a form of Buddhism that would be familiar to those studying at Shedrup Ling today. At times, this alternative vision of Chinggis Khan, the defender of the Dharma, was even blatantly utilised to wrest political control from central forces, or to guard against the antagonism of neighbouring ethnic groups and countries. Chinggis Khan was also, as Biran (2007: 248) has pointed out, “A symbol of exclusive prestige and imperial political and religious legitimacy [rather] than of unity among various tribes” (Biran, 1997; Bulag & Diemberger, 2007). Commoners could only access Chinggis Khan through the medium of local forms of Buddhism, in which ritual texts suggest he was seen as a demiurge who created Mongolian material civilisation and invented its customs, especially marriage (Heissig, 1980: 423–30).

The image of Chinggis Khan began to shift again with the burgeoning influence of an elite trained by the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) who re-secularised his image somewhat, making it more Confucian and therefore an embodiment Chinese ethical principles (Samuel, 1993). From there the image was re-constructed as the Qing Dynasty lost power and those involved in Mongolian nationalist movements began to re-present Chinggis Khan as a secular, democratized ancestor of all Mongols and progenitor of the Mongolian nation, people and customs. One of the best examples of this new form of
Chinggis Khan is to be found in Injannasi’s *Blue Chronicle (Köke Sudur)*, the first Mongolian historical novel, published in 1871 (Lhamsuren, 2006: 91; Elverskog, 2008).

In this primarily twentieth century form, Chinggis was associated with modernity and worshipped in schools, where incense was burnt for him, and cheese and fresh fruits were offered before his portrait. In school textbooks instructions for his worship were published. In one, published in 1936 for use in primary schools and mostly translated from Chinese, there were admonitions to worship him (Narangoa, 2003).

Given the radically and forcefully secular nature of the communist Mongolian state, this was the only form of Chinggis Khan allowed during this period. It was not until the end of this period that his traditionally ascribed religious character was revived, and he came once again to be associated with the unofficial “national religion”: Buddhism.

What was important throughout all these transfigurations was clearly therefore the understanding that his totemic spirit endured, rather than endurance of the specific traditions associated with him. Mongolians, in other words, had to agree to these changes in perception in order for Chinggis Khan to remain a potent symbol. This reflects one of the clearest truisms of invented traditions: that they depend on the creation of a shared memory. As Smith (1986) explains, “there can be no identity without memory, no collective purpose without a myth.” This heritage of shared values, traditions, memories, and myths is the single most powerful factor of national identity construction. Symbols of national identity—like Chinggis Khan—and myths of a nation’s past are mutually reinforced by belief in shared national values.

Thirty-three year old ‘DN’ said:

‘Our ancestor, Chinggis Khan, influences everyone’; this exemplifies this symbolic identity. ‘We see him as our national hero, a buddha and a protector for our nation. It is very important to carry on our proud past into the future. We need to continue with our strong heritage, and it needs to be taught and carried on by our children and grandchildren because in that way we will never lose our cultural and religious legacy.’

Collective stories not only bestow a shared identity on those who adhere to them; they can also grant dignity to the members of this collective, and after years of rule by foreign powers, dignity is a much cherished possession in contemporary Mongolia. Indeed, in many ways, it could be said—and has been said—that national identity is fundamentally a matter of dignity. According to Greenfield (1992: 487), its main
function is to give people reasons to be proud. Social communities, like individuals, have important memories that help them define themselves, understand the world, and structure their motivations. Most communities presumably have some positive accomplishments in their past, and by emphasising and embellishing them groups can give themselves a compelling basis for being proud of their heritage. Associating themselves with Chinggis Khan, who ruled others rather than being ruled by them, helps strengthen contemporary Mongolian sense of collective worth.

The personal connection people of a nation feel with dignifying stories of the past plays the additional role of drawing these stories into the present, and they become intertwined with the nation’s contemporary narratives. People want to think well of their social group, to be proud of its heritage and to identify with a “glorious” past. This allows them to define a national character through a heroic tradition of the nation, and this in turn allows them to have the security of belonging to a valued community (Mach, 1993; McGuigan, 2010; Pennebaker, 1995; Smith, 1991). As Mirsky (2009: 17) has pointed out, “Glorifying the past, lionizing heroes is indispensable for preserving the historic memory [of a nation].” It also helps the nation to create a narrative of victory in the present. By drawing on examples from Mongolia’s past, contemporary Mongolians are able to use their emotionally entrenched shared memories of past struggles and eventual victories as a rallying call for contemporary economic and development challenges.

This focus on the models that the past provides is more than a rallying call, however: it is also a plea for patience. As Mach (1993:110) has noted, frequently occurring images of the superiority of national, religious and political interests over all others also suggest to the participants in the nation the necessity of loyalty to the state, even if life is not entirely satisfactory. This was a sentiment I heard repeatedly in Mongolia generally and in my interviews at Shedrup Ling.

Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, is experiencing rapid growth in media and communications, infrastructure, and business. An increasingly varied number of businesses and NGOs are occupying the new office buildings and high-rises that are changing the city’s skyline. However, outside of the capital, other cities are just starting to recreate the social services that suffered during the economic crisis of the 1990s, and some small settlements still do not even have basic infrastructure.

According to Mongolia’s Ministry of Nature and Environment, over half of all wells were inoperative in 2009. Their report found that no new systems had been put into
place, and minimal or no repairs had been carried out due to the lack of capital and investments. The huge gap between urban and rural, rich and poor is enormous. Even though the state is increasing its efforts to lessen rural poverty, the greater part of the national budget is directed toward the growth of the capital city.

One of the interviewees, 'SR', a 52-year old engineer, said that

Although Mongolia is getting richer and more modern, unfortunately social equality remains a big problem. The government has noticed this, too, but it is not enough to rely on the government alone. Poor people are everywhere. With the modernisation of their lifestyle the herders are moving from the countryside to the capital city, which cannot offer enough jobs for them all. Because of this, the crime rates are beginning to rise. All these social problems originate from social inequality. I think that coming to Shedrup Ling gives us a choice to learn about ourselves and our national religion. I hope that in the future we can use what we have learnt from Buddhism and be better and stronger people to build a more equal society in Mongolia.

As Shils (1995) noted, a key component of the construction and preservation of shared memories is inter-generational participation. He even suggests that nations could not exist without the reception and reenactment of traditions that convey images of significant past events and persons. This is another way in which a nation becomes a collective in which the past and the present exist simultaneously. Much of the effort to promote any nation, and particularly Mongolia, is focused on the reaffirmation of the continuity of the present state of the nation with significant elements of its past. Ultimately, the importance and interest of communal memories is that they persist for years or even generations.

In Mongolia, as elsewhere, the state ensures the continuity of this narrative’s repetition through involvement in ceremonies that venerate historical figures and in history books, yet the clearest example of the use of historical tropes in the present is clearly the pervasive and widely accepted use of Chinggis Khan, his image and story, to define the contemporary Mongolian nation.

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31 A striking example of this inter-generation negotiation of tradition can also be found again in many of the lyrics to Mongolian hip-hop, in which the protagonists often protest vehemently against government actions, but in doing so repeatedly call themselves "true" descendants of Chinggis Khan (Marsh 2009).
4.4.2 Chinggis Khan as The Nation

It would be very hard to travel to Mongolia and miss the country’s connection with Chinggis Khan. He may be a representative of the country’s past, but his image is affixed to many of its national symbols of modernity. Travellers who arrive by air fly into Ulaanbaatar’s “Chinggis Khan Airport” (Figure 16), and many stay in the largest hotel, “The Chinggis Khan Hotel” (Figure 16) or eat at one of many “Chinggis Khan” Restaurants or are taken to the many sites associated with him by tourist operators who focus on his legacy. In the markets, souvenir stalls sell Chinggis Khan wallets, rugs and homewares (Figure 16). His image is emblazoned on vodka and beer bottles, cigarettes, t-shirts, and children’s wear (Figure 18). If anyone wishes to purchase any of these items, he or she may do so with the nation’s currency, the Tögrög (Figure 16), most denominations of which carry his image. They could then send their purchases home with postal stamps on which his visage is displayed (Figure 18).
Figure 16 Chinggis Khan international airport, wallet, beer, hotel and currency.
Figure 17 A large Chinggis Khan statue stands outside Parliament House and the national symbol, the Soyombo on the national flag.
The alignment of Chinggis Khan with the modern Mongolian state is further intensified by the repeated use of his image in and around government buildings. A large Chinggis Khan statue stands outside Parliament House (Figure 17). He is often associated with the national symbol, the Soyombo (Figure 17), which appears on all 124
government buildings, the coat of arms, and all official documents. In these official images he is often shown holding objects symbolising his role as a law-giver and nation builder such as books and official stamps. Portraits incorporating this theme are found in the Government Palace, government ministries, administrative buildings, universities and schools. This image is also found in public religious sites, like the major Buddhist temples and Shedrup Ling. Moreover, along with these comes an official discourse that exalts his effigy as a symbol of the Mongolian nation, one that presents him as a model and leader to all, from students to officials.

The use of this trope fits with what Caroline Humphrey (1992) called “mimicry” (as opposed to “embodiment”), in which there is an intention to reproduce selected events or objects of the past while being conscious that the present event is only a simulacrum. All these uses of Chinggis Khan’s image are conscious mimicry of the imagined palladium; it is only within the religious realm that he is believed to be an embodied presence through his alignment with the buddha Vajrapāni.

Along with the repeated use of his likeness and its associated narrative, however, there are also regular state and civil ceremonies that edge this mimicry towards embodiment by performing narratives of his life. These nationalist re-enactments are staged by the authorities or by some intellectuals, but they arouse, and at the same time are supported by, popular adhesion.

The representation not only acts as a symbol of the nation in the abstract, however—it also offers those who use it a marker of belonging. It does this through both inclusion and exclusion: by defining what those who associate with it are and what they are not. What they are is descendants of a common ancestor their nation’s founder. National symbols like this function to create bonds between citizens. This cohesive power emerges from the unique, sacred nature of collective memory. Mongolians are able to feel a communal and personal connection with this figure; he is their own personal ancestor and the progenitor of the nation.

But positing a common ancestor is not the same thing as identifying with a nation; there are many across the steppe who may see themselves as somehow related to Chinggis Khan but do not claim to be Mongolian. In order for these symbols to work, they must both tell those who adhere to them about who they are and also delineate who they are not. As Smith (1986: 202) explains, these symbols tell citizens “who they are, by demarcating what is authentically theirs from what is alien” (Smith 1986: 202). They not only mark them as a group, in other words: they also differentiate this group from
all others. As a symbol, Chinggis Khan automatically distinguishes Mongolians from non-Mongolians.

This is particularly important in a nation like Mongolia that needs to demarcate its identity from its powerful and large neighbour nations, Russia and China. As Buyandelgeriyn (2008: 245) suggests, in the post-socialist world, “the politics of nationalism, ethnicity and identity . . . are about dynamic contestation with other identities and respond to others’ prejudices, biases and stereotypes.”

Rallying around a figure like Chinggis Khan, a warrior who founded an empire that ruled the landmass now occupied by China and Russia, is one way to fight back symbolically against the power and influence of these neighbour states. Yet, at the same time, it also helps to highlight Mongolia’s reduced status, and this has led to a growing representation of Mongolia as a humiliated “Great Power” in national discourse (Dunlop, 1993). Within this discourse, the dissolution of the Mongol empire is often described in terms of injury and pain of the soul, which is related to “the infinitude of Mongolian land” (Bold, 2001). According to Pesmen (2000) the national discourse also links it to a “genetic” national identity: Mongolians are genetically defined by greatness, and the achievement of anything less does not reflect their natural state. Mirsky (2009) links this narrative to a discursive pre-occupation with the past. It is not the current political or military situation that counts, he argues: it is Mongolian history, the memory of the heroic past and its legend. It is the imagined past that is the source of national pride, not the present. Reflecting on the fact that Mongolia has now lost all its vestiges of a great power, its citizen feel bitter and humiliated, and this sense of injured national pride and dignity requires that people must take a stand and draw a line somewhere.

As scholars looking at other countries have noted (Atwood & Bulag, 1999; Batbayar, 2014; Hall, Grindstaff & Lo, 2010; Wanner, 1998), the bonding around national symbols like Chinggis Khan can be so powerful that people regard the symbol itself as sacred. In Mongolia, the image of Chinggis Khan exerts a moral authority that renders individual interests secondary to the collective attributes of the symbol. Durkheim (1965) described these ideas as having a power to bind citizens in a shared consciousness and help individuals to “feel themselves to be in unison”. In other words, collective self-consciousness is the shared image of the nation and the natural awareness of its members who participate in that image (Shils, 1995:107).

In Mongolia this quasi-religiousness and militaristic bond is re-enforced by the apotheosis of Chinggis Khan within the tantric Buddhist pantheon. By aligning him
with Buddhism in this way, traditionalists in the country—including many within its government—make an explicit link between Buddhism and Mongolia through his image. They say, through symbols, that if the nation is represented by Chinggis Khan, and Chinggis Khan is a Buddhist deity, then the nation too is both Buddhist and divinely sanctioned.

4.4.3 Chinggis Khan as Vajrapañi

The negotiation between the officially secular position of Mongolia’s government and the clear links between its most prominent symbol and Buddhism can sometimes be difficult to negotiate. One such incidence occurred when images of Chinggis Khan with his warrior standards were placed inside the Government Palace that holds the Parliament, but were not "brought to life" through a ritual (Dulam, 2006: 143). Consecrating images in such a way that the deities themselves are asked to come and abide in the statue’s physical form is a common practice in Vajrayāna Buddhism (Wallace, 2010). The fact that this ceremony was contemplated highlights the common perception that Chinggis Khan is divine, and the fact that this divine essence was not asked to enter his statue in Government Palace is a concession to secularism. Such concessions are not common in Mongolia, however, and in many other instances Chinggis Khan is presented as a deity, a manifestation of the tantric buddha Vajrapañi.

Vajrapañi is one of the oldest deities within the Buddhist pantheon; he is the only Buddhist deity later incorporated into the tantric pantheon mentioned in the Pāli canon, and images of him are found throughout East Asian forms of Buddhism (Kaplonski, 2008) In the iconography of Mahāyāna Buddhism he is represented as one of Śākyamuni Buddha’s three protective deities: Avalokiteśvara (Tib. Spyan ras gzigs; Mong. Жанрайсыр), who represents compassion; Mañjuśrī (Tib 'Jam dpal dbyangs; Mong. Зээлэн эгшигт), who represents wisdom; and Vajrapañi who represents power. These three beings are variously described as Dharma-protectors (Skt. dharma-pāla; Tib. chos skyong; Mong. дхармапала), bodhisattvas (Tib. byang chub sems dpa’; Mong. Бодьсагда) and fully awakened buddhas. Earlier references to them tend to present them as dharma-pālas or bodhisattvas, but more latterly they are described as buddhas. Through the course of Vajrayāna Buddhism’s dissemination through East and Central Asia, these three bodhisattvas came, in turn, to be associated with the cultural spheres of Tibet, China and Mongolia (Kollmar-Paulenz, 2003). The linkage between Mongolia and Vajrapañi then morphed into an association between Chinggis Khan and Vajrapañi.
In this presentation, Chinggis is a manifestation of Vajrapāṇi who laid the foundations for the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia. According to Vesna Wallace (2008: 49), Vajrapāṇi “has been traditionally considered by the Mongols as a powerful guardian against the enemies of the state and the Buddha-Dharma, as the one who not only crushes obstacles in the form of enemies, heretics, and demons but also enforces religious and state laws.” Enkhtuya Khash expressed as similar sentiment:

In Buddhism, we believe in reincarnation, and our national hero, Chinggis Khan, is the emanation of Vajrapāṇi who is the protector and fights evil. This is the extra bond between Buddhism and Mongolians.

This pre-communist, religious model of Chinggis Khan was the last transformation in a series of connections made between him and divine paradigms. These began not long after his ascendency in the 12th century, when he was initially said to be either Qormuzda Tengri—a shamanistic deity whose name derives from that of the Persian/Zoroastrian deity Ahura Mazda—or his son (Sagaster, 1976: 256). Later, he came to be associated with the two Indian gods Indra (Tib. Brgya byin; Mong. Индра) and Brahmā (Tib. Tshangs pa; Mong. Брахма). Although most prominent within the non-Buddhist South Asian pantheon, where they are considered powerful figures associated with the absolute, these deities were brought into the Buddhist world in a subservient form as Dharma-protectors who are obedient to buddhas and Buddhists.

From the sixteenth century on, Chinggis Khan was identified as a cakravartin king (Tib. 'khor bsgyur rgyal po; Mong. Чакравартин хаан) who rules his people in peace. “Cakravartin” literally means “wheel-turning”, giving the sense that their chariots can go anywhere without obstruction (Wallace, 2008). Yet representations in a Buddhist context are rare. A cakravartin is a semi-divine figure who, through accumulation of vast stores of positive karma, acquires the power to rule the world, and then because of his innate goodness rules his empire benevolently. The historical emperor with whom it is most associated is Aśoka (Tib. Mya ngan med; Mong Асока; 304–236 BCE), who ruled most of the Indian subcontinent and proclaimed to his subjects that his ruling philosophy was in accordance with Dharma (Batceceg, 2008).

There is much evidence that Aśoka himself did not fit the model of a cakravartin who gained dominion over the world through the force of Dharma. The expansion of his empire was achieved by armed conquest, and other rulers did not submit to him willingly in response to his moral qualities. Certainly the details of Chinggis Khan’s
march across Eurasia did not align themselves easily with the behaviours of a cakravartin, but this did not stop changes being made to his biography by high-ranking lamas in order to make the imagined connection more acceptable. Later in Mongolia, from the mid-seventeenth century on, lists of cakravartin kings were created that begin by describing mythical Indian and Tibetan rulers and go on to insist that Chinggis Khan was their descendent (Wallace, 2010). The image of Chinggis Khan as a cakravartin persists in Mongolia today alongside his association with Vajrapāṇi. During my fieldwork, I visited the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts in Ulaanbaatar and discovered an illustration of Chinggis Khan as a wealth-bestowing cakravartin. In this image he is dressed in white and sits between his two traditional standards surrounded by his paladins and wives.

His full apotheosis, his transformation into the deity Vajrapāṇi, began a little after his initial presentation as a cakravartin in the late sixteenth century. At first, like Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, he was presented as a dharmapāla and a bodhisattva, but gradually with the development of tantric practices that focused of these three archetypes as aspects of the awakened mind, all of them came to be presented as buddhas. As mentioned, this development coincided with the alignment between the three deities and the three Vajrayāna Buddhist spheres of Tibet, China and Mongolia. In Mongolia itself, the relationship between Chinggis Khan, Vajrapāṇi and Mongolia meant that 16th and 17th century Tibetan Buddhist missionaries could find a place on the Vajrayāna map and incorporate the already influential cult of Chinggis Khan into their pantheon (Hurcha, 1999).

The physical reminders of this association are still to be found in prominent positions across the Mongolian countryside and in Ulaanbaatar. One of the most famous of these resides in the main temple of the revered Gandantegchenling Monastery in the capital. There, behind the large centrally-placed statue of Avalokiteśvara hangs a large thangka of Vajrapāṇi (Figure 4.10), the detail of which includes an image of Chinggis Khan represented as one of Vajrapāṇi’s emanations (Figure 4.11).
Figure 19 Large thangka of Vajrapāṇi

Figure 20 Large thangka of Vajrapāṇi (detail Chinggis Khan)
Figure 20 Vajrapāṇi Mountain

Figure 21 Chinggis Khan/ Vajrapāṇi is in front of the Vajrapāṇi Mountain

Figure 22 President Enkhbayar Performing Vajrapāṇi Mountain Ceremony
Another place particularly associated with Chinggis Khan/Vajrapāṇi is Vajrapāṇi Mountain (Mong. Ṭʊгнэнгэр) in Zavhan Aimag; this was highlighted during the 2010 sacrifice to the mountain. (Figure 21). This site has been linked for centuries with the ritual worship of Vajrapāṇi as Mongolia’s religious protector.32 These practices were forbidden during the Communist era, but in 2003 President Enkhbayar (Figure 20) not only attended the revitalised ritual but also offered a large symbolic bowl of *kumis* (fermented mare’s milk) to Vajrapāṇi Mountain on behalf of the Mongolian State, in the hope that the country would prosper and its borders would be safe (Batceceg, 2008). The ritual was repeated in the summer of 2007 when the new President Enkhbayar first participated in the same ceremony, and then later commissioned Purevbat33 to create a large appliqué *thangka* of Vajrapāṇi that could be displayed on the front of the mountain whenever the ceremony was repeated (Figure 19 & 20). The image was commissioned to bring merit and security to the state and prosperity to the nation. It was

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32 Otgontenger Mountain was set aside by the government and was designated as a National Strictly Protected Area in 1992. The mountain was sacred from ancient times and was defined as part of the physical and psychological boundaries of the Mongolian sacred homeland.

33 G. Purevbat, director of the Mongolian Institute of Buddhist Art in Gandantegchinlen Monastery Ulaanbaatar. Mongoliin burhanii urlaahin uhaaniit deed surgual’. See details on: http://www.purevbat.mn. Actually Purevbat only did the drawing; the painting was done by his workshop.
completed in May 2008 and, attracting a huge crowd of believers, was displayed during a ceremony officiated by President Enkhbayar in the Palace of Wrestling (Batceceg, 2008). It is now kept behind the monument in Megjidjanraisig Temple in Gandantegchinlen Monastery. It has been used in later performances of the ceremony in 2010 and 2013 by the current President Elbegdorj. These acts have not only re-affirmed the link between Vajrapâni, Buddhism and the state but, as Wallace (2008: 49) has suggested, in this “renewed ritual worship of Vajrapâni Mountain, he [Vajrapâni/Chinggis Khan] has been reinstated by the Mongol government as the protector of the Mongol state.”

The link between Mongolia and Chinggis Khan/Vajrapâni is evident in other less well-known but more frequently encountered public images across the country, and particularly in Ulaanbaatar. In these images, the figure of Chinggis Khan is placed directly below Vajrapâni to indicate that Chinggis was a manifestation of this archetype of power (Figures 19 & 20). These repeated images further erode the spatial separation between the secular and religious in Mongolia. They are also the spaces through which many of the attendees at Shedrup Ling travel on their way to attend the centre, and it is no surprise therefore that some do not attempt to make a distinction between secular and religious Mongolia in their descriptions of their national identity. Khulan Dembereldorj, a 40-year-old accountant and translator, described the connection between Mongolia, Chinggis Khan and Vajrapâni:

We all believe that Chinggis Khan is an emanation of Vajrapâni in our culture. He is the national idol and icon for us. He will protect us in this lifetime…. From my understanding people here are happy about the revival of Buddhism; it’s the revival of our national figure, Chinggis Khan, as well. Even though society is open to all other religions….for most Mongolians their hearts lean more towards Buddhism. I like what His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, that we should study our own religion first, then others. Our national religion is Buddhism, our religious figure is Chinggis Khan/Vajrapâni.

When I asked Venerable Gyalmo if she had noticed how the Mongolians see the relationship between Chinggis Khan and Buddhism, she replied:

Mongolia is a Buddhist country….Chinggis Khan is a heroic figure. No one can deny the importance that he has in Mongolian life. He is the national God figure. In this case he is a buddha-figure….From my own observation, almost
everyone believes this. It’s the way they live, their way of life.

As Venerable Gyalmo suggests in this quote, the state representations of Chinggis Khan/Vajrapāṇi are not the only depictions of the pair: they are also approached in this way within the private sphere by many Mongolians, including attendees at Shedrup Ling. Portraits or statues of Chinggis Khan are often placed on the altars of herdsmen, urban dwellers and practising Buddhists, for example. Even before the fall of the communist regime, Walther Heissig (1984:19) reported seeing portative icons or effigies of Chinggis Khan inside homes to which the residents made offerings.

The most notable influence of this pervasive use of Chinggis Khan/Vajrapāṇi to symbolise Mongolian identity at Shedrup Ling, however, is the way in which links between the state and religion work the other way. Not only does religion invade national discourses and governmental spaces: national and governmental discourses are also very strong in religious spaces. This strongly influences Buddhist practice at Shedrup Ling. It too reflects the state cult and the personal religious relationship people have with Chinggis Khan/Vajrapāṇi. ‘DD’, a 32-year-old Buddhist, explained, for example, how she sees Chinggis Khan and his relationship to Buddhism.

Buddhism has been our traditional, historical religion. It’s not only because of that I’m a Buddhist, but I feel that Buddhism should be part of our national identity.

Chinggis Khan has been our national hero, and we can’t have the life that we now have if not for his sacrifice for us. He is the emanation of Vajrapāṇi who will protect us. That’s why we are at FPMT and looking for spiritual and moral support here.

In this presentation, the use of Chinggis Khan at Shedrup Ling conforms with the use of totemic figures described in other research (Bellah, 1970; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Durkheim, 1965; Geertz, 1966; Beckford & Luckmann, 1989). In these works, figures like Chinggis Khan who are believed to combine national and religious importance act as symbolic forms for understanding reality in a socially and personally constructed world. They are a means by which individual humans can transcend organic life and society can represent its self-consciousness. This is the characteristic way of thinking about collective existence. According to Bellah (1970: 21), such religious figures represent the highest order of symbolisation and values. He defines religion as: “A set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence”.

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He (1970: 25) then goes on to argue that religious people can to some extent “transcend and dominate” suffering or other limitations imposed by the conditions of their existence through their “capacity for symbolization”. This need for symbolic identification is particularly acute during times of stress and disturbance.

In this way, the image of Chinggis Khan/Vajrapāṇi, the religious figure, works as a similar rallying symbol to that of Chinggis Khan, the secular ancestor. It gives Mongolians a reminder to focus on the greater good rather than their own problems. This demonstrates the overlap between the two identities amongst Shedrup Ling’s attendees, and it illustrates how the above quote shows that the alignment between the two uses makes both of them more highly emotionally charged.

As some of the attendees noted, however, the fact that Mongolians are typically—and at least technically—allowed to choose their religious identity but not their national identity means that this often rated as more important to people’s self-concepts than other associations such as race, gender, and class (Buyandelger, 2013). In the context of contemporary Mongolia, particularly among the educated elite who make up the majority of attendees at Shedrup Ling, remaining Buddhist was presented as a choice. But this choice was still defined within nationalist discourse: remaining Buddhist involves upholding Mongolian tradition, and converting away from Buddhism entails losing something of that identity. As ‘EK’ explained:

Other religions are coming to Mongolia. Because people are hungry and the Churches provide food, etc. they just go there [to these religious centres] for that, but I still think that Buddhism remains part of the national identity, our heritage, the national religion.

In addition, religious identity can also play a preeminent role in people’s lives because, in addition to any sense of belonging gained from group identity, this linkage is further empowered by the fact that members share strongly held personal beliefs about how this eternal group membership will benefit their well-being. It is a unifying meaning system (Silberman, 2005) that also serves to bind individuals into moral communities (Tacón, McComb, Caldera & Randolph, 2003).

Religion often provides emotional support in times of rapid change like the sociocultural dislocation that has occurred in Mongolia during the last twenty years as a result of the collapse of communism, along with the rise of globalisation and the resources boom. In times like these, cultural patterns of renewal and reintegration often
take religious forms. As others have shown, they encourage populations to embrace religion as an alternative moral system and as a focus for national identity (Csepeli, 1997). Religions provide people with a sense of solidarity and validating symbolism for a nation’s way of life. The members of Shedrup Ling recognise this sense of societal change and view their adherence to Buddhism as a mark of continuity.

As ‘MD’, a 44-year-old engineer, said,

Buddhism has always been part of our Mongolian life. Now Buddhism in Shedrup Ling has changed our way of seeing traditional Buddhism. We used to think that we were are blessed by the monks and their prayers, but since I started attending the classes here, I know that we have to learn and practise Buddhism ourselves, by combining both modern ways of delivering the teachings and the strong connection with the past. I think it’s certain that Shedrup Ling has changed Buddhism in Mongolia, especially for the younger generation.

Indeed, the Buddhism at Shedrup Ling acts as a conduit between the past and present because it blends links with the deep past while constructing a national identity with modernity.

4.5 The Uses of the West

Western culture is the other non-Mongolian element included within the development of Mongolian Buddhism at Shedrup Ling. The influence of the West—usually approached as an amorphous but singular entity by Shedrup Ling’s attendees—manifests in a variety of ways at the centre.

The majority of these are a direct result of globalised trends in Transnational Buddhism, which allow outward- and forward-looking Mongolians to re-imagine their traditional religion within a different sphere. Many of Shedrup Ling’s projects are also highly dependent on the contribution of wealth that is accrued through these international networks and, more indirectly, the lay-based model of Buddhism that enables members to earn wealth while still practising Buddhism. The combination of these influences sees the Western model of Transnational Buddhism emphasised in three specific ways at Shedrup Ling: in the practice of lay Buddhism; in the lay Buddhists’ investment in the creation of an ideal Samgha through monetary
contributions and consequent dictates to this community; and through the general embrace of a more user-friendly approach to Buddhist practice.

There is also, however, a coincidental political contributor to the embracing of Western ideas, cultures and forms of Buddhist practice whose influence is evident at Shedrup Ling. This is the Mongolian government’s focus on what it calls the “third neighbour policy” in foreign relations, which is to say its decision to create ties with as many strong countries in the region as possible in an effort to counteract the influence of Russia and China.

In practice, this means that Shedrup Ling’s attendees are not only using a tradition imported from Tibet to re-affirm their national identity; they are also incorporating cultural and social elements from the West to do this. I will begin the exploration of how this works by examining the influence of the “third neighbour” foreign affairs policy, before moving on to the more specific influence of Transnational Buddhism in the development of Mongolian identity at Shedrup Ling.

4.6 The Third Neighbour’s Buddhism

Perhaps the clearest way to underscore the importance of the “third neighbour” policy to the Mongolian government is to re-examine the country’s national image of Chinggis Khan. He obviously works as a symbol for the Mongolian government, otherwise it would not continue to employ him in this way. But he also works as its national palladium, and he does not actually symbolise the workings of the Mongolian government. Chinggis Khan was an autocratic imperialist. The contemporary Mongolian political plan is to establish a viable democratic government with a Western-oriented, free-market economy. What Chinggis Khan represents is the government’s and the people’s commitment to meld this new political system with what they understand to be a unique, valuable native culture.

The reason for the great Khan’s prominence, therefore, has much more to do with Mongolians’ need for a unifying national symbol than it does for their wish to duplicate his governmental or political model. From this perspective, his ubiquity in modern Mongolia can be viewed as a representation of the difficult task Mongolians have in carving out a national identity from the internationalism of communist culture. As widely observed and recently reiterated by Danzer (2009), the formulation of new
national identities has become a central concern for many post-Soviet states and Soviet satellites like Mongolia.

Mongolia's search for national identity is not merely about its emergence from communist internationalism, however; it is also concerned with a perceived danger of integration, re-integration or domination—either economic or political—by its powerful neighbours, China and Russia. From this perspective, the pervasive use of Chinggis Khan's image can be interpreted in yet another way. He is a positive symbol of Mongolian identity, and he is also a negative representation of it in that he was neither Russian nor Chinese. And any attempt by either the Russians or the Chinese to claim him as a countryman would be ridiculous. Furthermore, his armies conquered much of Russia, and his descendants conquered China. Chinggis Khan therefore represents a quintessentially non-Russian and non-Chinese image of Mongolia that at the same time seeks to remind these large neighbours of a time when Mongolia threatened and ruled them.

Yet, as the Mongolian government and people have discovered, the workings of a globalised economy mean that either Russia or China do not need to physically invade Mongolia in order to transform it into a satellite state. They can exercise strong influence on the developing nation through its economy, and both have a track record of behaving in this way. China has established itself as the largest investor in Mongolia during the past ten years (Worldbank, 2013). During this decade, Mongolia has also become increasingly dependent on both countries for imports that are helping to raise its standards of living: China is the source of most of Mongolia's consumer goods and Russia is the source of most of the petroleum products it consumes (Narangoa 2009: 364–367). Both countries have also attempted to stop Mongolia from developing strong ties with other nations (Merli, 2014). And China has attempted to stop visits to Mongolia by the Dalai Lama (Bulag, 2009).

The result of this increasing dependence and interference in Mongolian political, economic and religious life has led to increasing fear of the influence of these two countries amongst the population and the introduction of efforts by the government to counterbalance it. This is the main reason why Mongolia has, for example, demonstrated a preference for extracting and processing its own strategic resources: including copper, gold, coal, and lately uranium. It also provides the impetus for the government’s policy of reaching out to other countries for third-party investments to aid this development and for the demand that other countries have at least an equal

This process of seeking economic relations with countries other than Russia and China is perhaps the most commented-upon manifestation of the “third neighbour” policy, but history shows that the first usage of it was political, and my investigations at Shedrup Ling suggest that there has also been a socio-religious dimension to the policy.

The term “third neighbour” was first used in relation to Mongolia by the United States Secretary of State, James Baker, in 1990, when he described the relationship between the United States and Mongolia. Baker’s visit there coincided with the first free elections in Eastern Europe and, reflecting on the decision to use the term later, he described it as “A rhetorical gesture to support Mongolia’s first moves toward democracy” (Ganbold, 2013). Despite the rhetorical rather than policy-driven motivation for the term’s inception, it was enthusiastically embraced by the Mongolian media, academics and policymakers. Eventually, it was formalised as foreign policy through legislation (Ganbold, 2013). Having first coined the term, United States diplomats were much less exuberant about its use, and only agreed to be designated as a third neighbour by Mongolia in the late 1990s (Campi, 2005 & 2006). By the time George W. Bush had become the first sitting United States President to visit the country in 2005—in order to strengthen support for his “war on terror” and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—he announced that the United States was “proud to be called” Mongolia’s “third neighbour” (Campi, 2005 & 2006).

By this stage Mongolia had begun to apply the policy not only to the United States but also to other countries in its region and beyond. Former President Enkhbayar said that Mongolia’s multi-polar foreign policy was the outcome of his country’s concern not to be isolated. In its region, Mongolia began to develop ties with Japan, South Korea, India, Kazakhastan and Turkey. Further afield it forged connections with Canada and the European Union (especially Germany and the United Kingdom). These are, coincidentally, some of the countries in which Transnational Buddhism is practised by large numbers of people.

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34 There is also evidence that Mongolia’s relationship with India has been influenced by their mutual Buddhist history and the presence of practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism within India’s borders. As I described in chapter two, the first Indian ambassador to Mongolia was a monk reincarnate from Ladakh named Bakula Rinpoche.
4.6.1 Lay Buddhism

The support that Mongolian Buddhists are receiving from abroad, and the perception that this support aligns with governmental priorities, is also important for the continuation of the tradition, because the task of rebuilding Mongolian Buddhism after the fall of communism is exceedingly difficult for a number of reasons. The first of these is that Mongolian Buddhism required more than mere continuation: it also needed to be rebuilt as the communist state had destroyed many of its religious sites and the leadership that had guided these institutions.

As mentioned above, Tibetans made a large contribution to the re-education and re-establishment of the Mongol Buddhist hierarchy, but this hierarchy still struggles to meet the demands of its lay followers. The need to devote financial resources to maintaining legitimacy within the state and overcoming militant atheism in the general populace has created competing priorities for Buddhist producers. They must also contend with mixed signals from the government, which on the one hand is happy to support connections between Buddhist and Mongolian identity, but on the other hand has removed itself from the traditional sponsorship role for monasteries that was historically performed by Mongolian rulers.

The primary consequence of this has been a marked shift of power relations between lay and ordained Mongolian Buddhists that has again been greatly influenced by lay-centred Transnational Buddhism. This power shift is represented by two dramatic changes in Buddhist praxis: the development of lay-orientated practice centres like Shedrup Ling; and lay Buddhists’ attempts to fulfil the role of monastic patrons vacated by the government.

The first of these, the laicisation of Buddhist practice, is in part a consequence of the inability of monasteries and temples to meet the demands of lay Buddhists. These demands come in two forms: rituals and spiritual guidance. Requests for rituals are easier for the monks to fulfil than the granting of spiritual guidance, but younger, well-educated and employed lay-Buddhists find it difficult to fit the performance of these ritual services into their schedules. Many of them also feel that the uninformed performance of these rituals does not match their tastes.

The other form of service of the monasteries, spiritual guidance, is much harder for the monks to provide on an on-going basis, but the demand for this kind of service is growing amongst the same well-educated, employed group. Personal counseling has not been the traditional role of Buddhist monks in Mongolia, so adapting to meet this
cohort's need for it has proved difficult. The monasteries have served as intermediaries and gathering places for regular devotees and those in crisis. They also provide a conduit through which people can make donations to the needy or engage in charitable works and making merit. But it has not been their custom to teach the Dharma, meditation and yoga in the same way that Transnational Buddhism has. Shedrup Ling offers knowledge of the Dharma, meditation training, material blessings or interventions, charitable opportunities, and guidance and advice. Producers at Shedrup Ling draw on a combination of traditional, taken-for-granted forms and on newer forms as they search for ways of delivering a Buddhism that works practically and has legitimacy for both outsiders and insiders. They also overcome the lack of community that is the main weakness for the traditional temples. The growing group of people who want these kinds of services has turned to Western-influenced institutions like Shedrup Ling, where they can attend regular Buddhist programs and activities and can also participate in other instrumental courses such as computer skills and English instruction.

This is very different from the cultural Buddhist's orientation, often based on unexamined faith and involving visiting traditional temples and making donations to monastics. There is even a sense that old-style institutions are becoming merely tourist attractions. These temples are often the main visible remnants of "traditional Mongolia", and they are mostly located in the CBD or in scenic rural areas. Thus, they are common tourist and leisure activity destinations for the general populace. This is one of the main ways that people engage with Buddhism, but touring religious sites without learning about the religion itself is not enough to generate involvement or plant the seeds of interest in the Dharma.

72 year-old 'BR' explained this phenomenon in response to a question I posed to her about Shedrup Ling's attempts to meet lay demand:

In Mongolia, many people I know have benefited from learning Buddhism. They want to improve their quality of life, purify their minds, and solve their personal problems by learning the Dharma. This Shedrup Ling centre is meeting our demands by providing all the courses that we need and should attend.

I see and practise Buddhism as a religion, a psychology, a philosophy and a way of life. People are easily misled if they don't know the teachings, but here at Shedrup Ling we have all the qualified teachers who have done their training and come to Mongolia to teach us. In Mongolian temples, we have
never had the chance to enrol in Buddhist courses for lay people. We are totally relying on the monastics who will be “praying” for us. But here, we learn the teachings ourselves and we are getting to know our own religion and from the most updated version.

I also do meditation and prayers every day—practising concentration and insight. This was inspired by the courses that are offered by Shedrup Ling. From this international organisation, we are able to link Mongolia to the past, as well as to the modern stuff. What we are doing might be the future for Mongolia.

I think that meditation is the most important Buddhist practice and is the only way to see clearly into our own mind. It’s like in nature you need the microscope to see things clearly.

From my observation lots of people in Mongolia are doing the magical way—the older forms of Buddhism—which is not good. We should learn about Buddhism—to know the proper reasons for doing things, which is the right way to go.

We can get what we want from Shedrup Ling, but not from the traditional temples in Mongolia.

What Boyankhuu Rentsen is describing here is lay people being granted access to the collection of wisdom (traditionally the sole preserve of a few elite monastics) rather than just the collection of merit, the processes of which I described in the last chapter. But what is interesting about this approach in the present context is that many practitioners as Boyankhuu Rentsen says this as a way to “link Mongolia to the past, as well as to the modern stuff”. It enables them, in other words, to affirm their identity as Mongolians, but to practice in a mode aligned with modernity and science—“you need a microscope to see things clearly”—rather than superstition or “the magical way”. This is nothing less than a reinvention of the way Buddhism is pursued in Mongolia.

The FPMT’s Transnational Buddhism has both an altruistic and a utilitarian aspect. Its proponents appear to be genuinely motivated to “spread the Dharma”, so that more people can gain the benefits of Buddhist teachings and start to practise themselves in their daily lives.

In addition to its teachings, Shedrup Ling provides numerous opportunities for leisure activities and entertainment: animal liberation (a ceremony in which dozens of cages of pigeons are released into the forest), meditation for children, Buddha’s Birthday
celebrations, etc. I participated in the meditation for children during my fieldwork (See Figures 3 and 4). This group was guided by a lay teacher with a degree in Buddhist studies who taught the children basic mindfulness meditation as an introduction to Buddhism. All of these enterprises combined religious cultivation practices with leisure activities, and I attended a few during my fieldwork. Some of the children had been practising Buddhism, or their parents had, for several years, while others were newcomers or were simply curious about Buddhism: but for every child, the cultivation and leisure aspects seemed naturally to flow together.

In fact, although the leisure aspects of Buddhism were usually discussed as a transnational strategy to encourage an interest among the young and more vibrant potential students of the Dharma, rather than as a core aspect of practising Buddhism, a few people saw these activities as a way of calming and purifying the heart. One children’s meditation teacher told me:

The meditation program is designed for the younger generation of Mongolians who need to know their own national identity by embracing Buddhism. Traditional temples don’t offer what we do here. Many students and their parents have told me that they feel their hearts calm down. The outside world is so chaotic and full of busy things and problems. Mongolian students and their parents are facing more pressure in the modern world. We teach the students how to show their compassion to the animals as well as to their families and friends. The number of child students has increased from 5 to 25 in the last year. FPMT at Shedrup Ling is doing well. This is the only place that provides Buddhist programs for lay Buddhists and children in Mongolia. I am grateful for this opportunity and the FPMT’s philosophy—the transnational way—reviving the old, but delivering it via a new, modern and Western path. It’s what the local Mongolians need.

Along with the introduction of this new form of Buddhist practice to Mongolia, lay Buddhists have also begun to contribute to the monastic community. The political changes and religious freedoms of the modern era have allowed the laity to take over the patronage role previously confined to political rulers and local elites. A crucial factor in the supplying of and support to Tibetan Buddhist lamas in Mongolia is the involvement of the laity who directly fund their maintenance, including travel and housing. Lay Buddhists are also the primary sponsors of collective rituals performed by
visiting lamas, to whom they usually donate generously. These funds are often channelled into supporting monastic education and institutions in rural Mongolia, thus indirectly ensuring the future supply. Although this happens across the spectrum of Mongolian Buddhist institutions, the role of the FPMT in this endeavour is remarkably strong (Lee, 2010).

Buddhism is in a period of expansion and experimentation. The producers at Shedrup Ling possess diverse repertoires in transnational form that they draw upon as they try to satisfy the local lay consumers' needs and demands. This transnational, hybrid form of Buddhism has never been encountered in Mongolia before and responds well to the changed structural conditions of modern Mongolian society, especially in urban areas.

Although my data comes from people already involved in Buddhism, I believe that more urban Mongolian people would become involved in Buddhism if the supply was greater, more diverse, and more visible/available to the lay community. And as I described earlier, it is certainly the understanding of Buddhist leaders like the Dalai Lama and Zopa Rinpoche that this form of Buddhism will grow in popularity. I will examine this in the next chapter, which deals with the discourse of hybridity and transnational Buddhism.

4.7 Conclusions

National identity remains the main glue of most societies. A clear sense of commonality provides a necessary condition for continuous order and noncontroversial normative regulation of the members of society. Unambiguous self-definition and self-location in the social environment are crucial prerequisites to their mental and spiritual balance, psychological security and well-being (Dinello, 1994; Femenia, 1996).

FPMT Mongolia plays a vital part in the political concept of re-establishing a national identity for Mongolia, but is also seen by both its international Spiritual Director, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, and also by the Dalai Lama as the ultimate destination for the rebirth of Tibetan Buddhism. They, and the directors of Shedrup Ling, believe that the modern transnational Buddhism supplied by the FPMT can provide the means to fill spiritual and social gaps. The power of foreign, especially Western, input cannot be underestimated in the need to capture the hearts and minds of modern Mongolians in their desire for spiritual and social services.
The next chapter discusses hybridity in relation to Shedrup Ling. It outlines the main factors of the impact of globalised Mongolian society and its relation to religion—transnational Buddhism.
CHAPTER 5
Hybridisation

"Hybridity has become one of the most useful concepts for representing the meaning of cultural difference in identity."
(Papastergiadis, 2000:14)

"Buddhism asserts that hybridisation implies the emergence of an alternative religious spatiality...undermining the centre and creating something new, different, not previously noticed, and marked by negotiation of meaning and representation"
(Taylor, 2008: 38)

5.1 Introduction: Overseas Impacts and Local Transformations in the Era of Globalised Buddhism.

As an Australian woman in Mongolia, Shedrup Ling’s Ven. Gyalmo embodies hybridity, and her manner highlights its presence. During the time I conducted fieldwork, she held meditation classes at Shedrup Ling several times per week. She began these meditation classes by adhering to tradition and performing three prostrations to the Buddha statue at the front of the room. Once she was seated, the class continued the traditional approach to Buddhist learning and prostrated to her, their teacher. By enacting this tradition the Mongolian attendees at the class were performing a role similar to many other Mongolians across the country and reaching back through time, but the object of their prostration was anything but traditional. It is highly unusual, to say the least, for Mongolians to view either Westerners or women as their spiritual teachers, and Ven. Gyalmo was (and is\textsuperscript{35}) both.

Her speech further accentuated her hybrid nature. She frequently code-switched between standard English, Mongolian, and her native Australian dialect. "Sain bai nuu", she began the class, "Hello Everyone. G’day.... Let’s begin with our Wednesday

\textsuperscript{35} Given that I am reflecting the period of my fieldwork in this chapter, I have used the past tense to describe what I saw. As far as I am aware, however, the same phenomena I describe here still occur at Shedrup Ling today.
meditation class as usual. Are there any new students here today?" As the class continued, Ven. Gyalmo drew on elements of Indian, Tibetan, Western and Mongolian culture and society to make her points, adding as many Mongolian words as she was able while continuing to teach in her native English. Her speech was then translated into Mongolian by a local interpreter.

As an Australian teaching in English in Mongolia for the United States-based FPMT, Ven. Gyalmo is carrying on something of a tradition. The first foreign Buddhist teacher to arrive in Mongolia after the end of the communist era was also an Australian: the monk Thubten Gyatso, who started teaching in 1999 when Shedrup Ling was first established. Thubten Gyatso established the precedent of the centre having a Western Buddhist teacher, and now Ven. Gyalmo’s presence as a woman further highlights the differences between traditional Mongolian Buddhism and the Transnational Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling. Yet as both teachers have been ordained members of the Buddhist Samgha, they also personify the intersection between the contemporary West and the lasting traditions of Buddhism.

Moreover, the interactions between Mongolia and the Transnational Buddhism that these two teachers have brought to Shedrup Ling have not all been one way; the site of their work, Mongolia, has also had a profound effect on the way both teachers presented (and in Ven. Gyalmo’s case still present) their material. Unlike other global FPMT centres, the FPMT as an organisation—and particularly its Western teachers—has also consciously chosen to represent (and market) Shedrup Ling as a site where Modern Mongolian Buddhism is practised. Through salient discourses of hybridity, Shedrup Ling has managed to carve out a successful and unique position for a locally-produced “global Buddhist centre”. As such, it fits with Berkwitz’s (2006: 5) assertion that: “The encounter between Buddhists, modernity and globalisation has produced several significant developments with respect to how the Buddhist religion is represented and practised”.

The hybrid form of Buddhism created by this globalised interchange prompts several questions that I will address in this chapter. The most pressing of these are: Who is the target audience for the meditation classes led by the English-speaking Australian nun? What is more, since the centre has survived since 1999, and there are now other similar institutions, how is Shedrup Ling positioned in the Mongolian religious marketplace? What identity is given to its brand?
In this chapter, I focus on these questions by framing Shedrup Ling as a transnational Buddhist product that is marketed in contemporary Mongolia, a global culturally-hybridised society. I argue that in this context Shedrup Ling not only relies heavily on its status as a branch of a highly-recognised, established and successful international Tibetan Buddhist organisation, but that it also actively promotes itself as a place of cultural hybridity: a Buddhist teaching centre that uses Western methods to encourage the revival of Mongolian Buddhism. In other words, the transnational FPMT deliberately offers the Mongolian audience an opportunity to embrace a new way of learning its own lost tradition through consuming a hybrid product repackaged by globalised consumer choices. In this analysis I follow Robert Holton’s theory of globalising hybridity that stems from the broader field of globalisation studies. I also make use of Ulf Hannerz’s idea of the “ecumene”. After outlining these theories, I apply them to my observations at Shedrup Ling. In this analysis I trace the formation of the “hybrid” Buddhist centre in relation to the hybridisation of cultures and of Buddhism itself. I also focus on the representation of the “self” and the “other” and the role of the constructed dichotomy of “East-West” in the religious construction of modern transnational Buddhism. As evidence of this hybridisation, I provide a series of examples of how it works at Shedrup Ling. These include: (1) the use of facilities; (2) the style of worship; (3) the form of religious education; (4) the use of monastic discipline; (5) the practice of engaged Buddhist activities; and (6) the employment of rationalism.

5.2 Hybridity in Theory: Globalising Buddhism

Hybridisation is a term coined by theorists of globalisation to describe the process by which cultures borrow and incorporate elements from each other, creating hybrid, or syncretic, forms. The two areas of culture in which this appears most clearly—and therefore the two areas of culture in which this phenomenon has been studied most thoroughly—are popular music and religious life (Holton, 2005).

Despite the obvious evidence for the globalising process of hybridity at Shedrup Ling, there are also some elements of the discourse on globalisation that are not reflected in the centre’s practices and therefore need to be examined first. Part of this mismatch stems from the holistic nature of much globalisation discourse that insists it is a process by which a multiplicity of technologies, economic systems and cultures across the world are being transformed into a single, global society (Beyer, 1999). By contrast,
what we see at Shedrup Ling is a much more complex picture. It is true that the centre relies on the FPMT’s donors from more established and powerful economies. It is also true that a large part of the centre’s appeal stems from its ability to introduce and instruct its attendees in new technologies in their classes, whether they are information technologies such as computers or pedagogical and psychological ones. But in the cultural realm there is much more interdependent and fluid exchange. In this instance, it is not so much the colonisation of one weaker culture into a dominant global culture, but rather a conscious negotiation between the representatives of various cultural groups who are all seeking to preserve the local (already-hybrid) culture.

Because this is the case, it is helpful to apply the work of Robert Holton (2005) to the analysis, as he recognised not one but three main forms of globalisation: homogenisation, polarisation, and hybridisation.

This picture of homogenisation, evident from the 1950s onward, is equivalent to Westernisation, or even more specifically, Americanisation. The mechanisms of change, in this view, are associated with the worldwide spread of a market economy and the global strategies of multinational companies. Microsoft, Google and Amazon.com have joined the status of Coca-Cola and McDonald’s as cultural icons. This indicates both that global consumer culture is itself changing very rapidly and that patterns of homogeneity are far from static and secure. Another dimension of the issue of homogeneity is the integration of elites from around the world in the economic, political and educational life of Western societies. Whether at Harvard, Oxford or the Australian National University, this homogenisation not only diffuses Western forms of knowledge but also helps to create international networks of value in global corporations.

The evidence of polarisation recasts the limitation of cultural homogenisation. Analysts as diverse as Samuel Huntington, Edward Said and Benjamin Barber have had an impact on thinking of the worlds in a dichotomous manner, integrated by conflict or hate rather than peace or love. Said’s work on orientalism (1978) looks at the ways in which cultural dichotomies have been constructed between the Western and the non-Western. Cultural imperialism operates through a discourse of power, wherein the non-Western world is regarded as the other that is fundamentally different from the West. The polarisation form tells a story that struggles between good and bad, sacred and profane.

Holton (2005) uses the third category, hybridisation, to describe what happens to culture in the face of globalisation. He created this category to reflect cultures’ complex
interactions and lack of standardisation. As Shedrup Ling demonstrates, global interconnection and interdependence do not necessarily create cultural conformity. Rather, intercultural exchange and the incorporation of cultural elements from a variety of sources within particular cultural practices creates new, hybrid syncretic cultures. Just as biological hybrids combine genetic material from different sources, so too hybrid social practices combine cultural elements from a range of sources. Homogenisation and polarisation may be important elements of globalisation, but in no way do they exhaust the complex multidimensional elements that make up global culture.

This is particularly evident in the performance of interconnected religious paradigms. Religious cultures have a long history of interconnection and proto-globalisation (Martell, 2010). Hannerz (1992) describes this process as an “ecumene”, which he defines as “a religion of persistent cultural interaction and exchange”. Hannerz has used the term ‘global ecumene’ to describe these transitional interactions, this world of movement and mixture. Much of his discussion about the term ‘global cultural order’ engages the question of homogenisation. In other words, religion is part of the two moments of the total process of globalisation and the localisation of cultural production, a process conditioned by increasing flexibility in the structure of capitalist accumulation (Hannerz, 1992).

Religion has always had a globalising character, being carried from country to country as the Mongolian history I outlined in chapter two demonstrates. This exchange and the subsequent development of hybrid forms of religious practice have intimate links with economy and technology, but again, while these latter have been adapted in full, the interchange between religion and culture has been much more subtle. This chapter will give examples of how, well before the modern age, Mongolian Buddhist practices—and, before them, Tibetan Buddhist practices—adapted extra-cultural ideas into new contexts.

Globalisation, as it has evolved over the last 5000 years (Holton, 2005), has always depended on intercultural borrowing and exchange. Therefore, globalisation and hybridisation work — a synthesis of the forces of homogenisation and polarisation—but are not quite the same. Hybridisation is a result of globalisation, but also exemplifies resistance to it. These have occurred in Mongolian history and are not only still evident, but are even more prominent today in this age of intensified globalisation.
5.3 Hybridity in Practice: Shedrup Ling

In practice this means that two primary elements can be seen influencing religious practice at Shedrup Ling: (1) cultural globalisation; and (2) the cultural hybridisation that arises from globalisation. In order to analyse these processes properly, both of these elements of cultural exchange and synthesis need to be taken into account.

5.3.1 Shedrup Ling as a Product of Cultural Globalisation

Hybridisation is allowed and encouraged to flourish at Shedrup Ling in large part because of the Transnational Buddhist organisation to which it belongs: the FPMT. As explained in chapter two, the FPMT is a large—by some estimates the largest (FPMT, 2013)—Tibetan Buddhist organisation in the world, with an international headquarters in Taos, New Mexico, and affiliated monasteries and centres throughout East, South and Southeast Asia, North and South America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Africa (Zablocki, 2005).

As such, as I also previously explained, like many other Transnational Buddhist organisations it is constantly working to strike a balance between the conservation of the religious tradition it seeks to propagate and the need to adapt to changed social circumstances. Among these factors, globalisation is evidently one of the most influential. Rather than shrinking from this pervasive phenomenon, however, the organisation has chosen to embrace it, heavily promoting its international links and the sense of an international community. Within the Mongolian religious marketplace, Shedrup Ling’s unique brand is its identity as a global Buddhist Centre. The way that the FPMT engages its students is very different from the traditional Mongolian approach to practice. Often, unlike the older temples that do not offer lay teachings and trainings, the FPMT encourages the development of practice among laypeople who either already call themselves Buddhists or are new converts. Its presenters are Western, and its offerings are Western-orientated meditation and study courses. It holds “weekend workshops” and celebratory styles of worship in a brightly lit office building. Bilingual Mongolian and English textbooks are made available to the attendees, as are high-quality audio-visual presentations. Moreover, language classes and informational technology are also provided in English as well as manuals on Buddhist theory and practice.

Nevertheless, the FPMT has resolutely determined to maintain traditional orthodoxy in both practice and belief despite the fact that its membership is dominated by a large
number of new Buddhists, who could have encouraged dramatic reinterpretation of practices and doctrines.

5.3.2 Shedrup Ling as an Example of Hybridisation
In the Mongolian context, its adherents have made an extra effort to adapt many Mongolian nationalist and traditional Buddhist practices. As an organisation, the FPMT has, in other words, consciously adopted a strategy of hybridisation at Shedrup Ling and adapted salient discourses of hybridity to present a "locally produced" version of their global brand. They do not use the word "hybridisation", preferring more user-friendly terms such as "global Buddhism" and "new Mongolian Buddhism", but the effect is the same.

The active manifestation of this policy of hybridisation is evident throughout the workings of Shedrup Ling's organisation and community. The extent of the influence of this underpinning philosophy was evident in both the interviews and other interactions I had with the attendees at Shedrup Ling and in the practice of religion that I observed there.

Of particular importance in this context was their conscious interactions between "foreign", "Western" and "international" influences and the preservation of local traditions. As an observer, I found that the exchange of influences was also pervasive.

5.4 Categorising the Impact of Hybridisation on Shedrup Ling
The details of these observations and interviews are provided in detail in the next section of this chapter, which categorises the many ways in which hybridisation manifests at Shedrup Ling. As these examples of hybridity are welcomed at the centre and supported by the FPMT's underpinning philosophy, it was not difficult to elicit responses from the interviewees and other interlocutors on this point. Nevertheless, by questioning the process of hybridisation I was asking them to reflect on a process that they had often naturalised, and this should be remembered when reading their responses.
5.4.1 The use of facilities

The first element of hybridisation at Shedrup Ling is the facilities the centre provides to its attendees. This begins with the choice of a building to house the centre. Rather than a more traditional Mongolian-style building, the organisers chose a modern Western structure with bright lights and large rooms.

The brightly lit worship space is called the “gompa” in FPMT parlance. This term is a derivation of the Tibetan word for “monastery” dgon pa, which translates the Sanskrit term vihāra, meaning “isolated place”. But this particular “gompa” is anything but isolated and has a seating capacity for fifty guests.

As ‘G’, the centre director, told me:

The construction workers asked us how we would like the centre to be decorated. I told them just decorate it as a business premises but with traditional temple settings inside, so when people come they will feel familiar rather than uncomfortable, as well as getting a modern feeling. As a result, many students did not want to go back home when they came to Shedrup Ling. They wanted to stay and have meals at the vegetarian café. Later they invited their friends and colleagues to our centre. For many people this was the first time in their lives coming to this modern transitional Buddhist centre as all they went to before was old temples. They were all surprised that a Buddhist centre could be like that (sic). Most Mongolians thought the temple was mysterious. You could not go to a house temple freely. The idea of going to a temple in an ordinary building was a new concept. And we are the first, and the only one still remaining.36 But our Shedrup Ling is very brightly lit and open to anyone, and we offer year-long Buddhist teachings, computer courses and English courses and even a vegetarian café where you can chill out. People feel comfortable when they are here. They enjoy studying the teachings here and, as a result, many have taken refuge.

The “traditional temple settings” of which Ganbataar spoke are a mix of Mongolian and Transnational Buddhist artefacts. At the focus end of the room is a traditional Mongolian background with a large Buddha statue in the middle. Inside the gompa there are fifty seats and cushions in rows facing the front. Each chair is cushioned and

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36 There is another lay Tibetan Buddhist centre, the Asrol Centre, which has a Tibetan teacher who comes for three months a year from the United States, but it is not open all year round.
has a small wooden folding table for people to use for note taking during the teachings. This gives the shrine-room a classroom feel. This kind of seating comes from the FPMT international influence: the Buddhist monastics are viewed as teachers and authority figures, and attendees come to classes for both religious and secular instruction. As Ganbataar went on to explain, although Westerners may perceive an office space as cold and uninviting, not the most appropriate place for worship, for Mongolians this setting represents progress. Most local Mongolians have never seen a modern office-like Buddhist centre. If they have visited traditional temples, they would have found themselves in cramped and crowded conditions. Shedrup Ling, by contrast, is spacious and comfortable. This stands in sharp contrast to worship in dingy, cramped old temples.

The gompa and the classrooms—where English and information technology are taught—are fitted with modern sound and video systems. What is more, there is a loudspeaker outside the centre broadcasting Buddhist mantras so that people who are passing by will know this modern building is a centre for lay Buddhists. Hybridisation, along with the introduction of quality facilities and a highly-organised Buddhist worship program, is shaping forms of worship, and it also has an effect on the nature of spiritual formation and discipleship.

5.4.2 The Style of Worship

The second way in which globalisation has impacted on religious practice at Shedrup Ling is in the style of worship. At Shedrup Ling, religious practice occurs alongside the aforementioned study program and counselling, and it is fundamentally hybridised.

The most striking imported element to the activities that I witnessed during my stay there was the convocation of a Sunday service. This followed the Christian custom, and it also allows people who work from Monday to Friday to practise on weekends.

The Sunday service opened in a celebratory atmosphere. Ven. Gyalmo led the students in the gompa in recitation of reflective prayers. These were chanted first in Mongolian, then in Ven. Gyalmo’s native English. Although English elements had been inserted into the traditional Mongolian prayers, the order of service, in both Mongolian and English prayer books, followed the traditional pattern. Sometimes they were also sung, and traditional bells and drums were played in the background. The use of the old ritual instruments set the mood, establishing a sense of reverence. But unlike the traditional Mongolian Buddhist style of prayer, in which a monk would lead all
attendees in a Tibetan formula or Sanskrit mantra that the reciters did not understand, here the attendees were asked to engage with the prayers more directly by speaking words they understood. Using commonly spoken languages to recite traditional prayers within a communal format is a distinctive part of Transnational Buddhist techniques. It is practised in FPMT centres around the world, and Shedrup Ling is no exception.

Along with the recitation of general prayers, the attendees at Shedrup Ling also perform more specific Tibetan Buddhist rituals. The majority of these rituals are readaptations of meditation practices that Tibetans had already adapted from Indian tantric traditions. In developing these, the Tibetans simplified the often complicated contents of the Buddhist *tantras* (Tib. *rgyud*; Mong. *Tanmpa*) into scripts that could be followed communally or individually in monasteries (Beyer, 1994). Translations of these scripts were used by all attendees at the rituals at Shedrup Ling, and most often referred to by the Indic name of this literary genre: *sādhana* (Tib. *sgrub thabs*; Mong. *zau jünüün*). The performance of a ritual that follows these scripts is also described by an Indic term: *pūjā*. The use of this term seems to be an invented tradition that aligns the practice with similar rituals performed in the Hindu tradition.

These rituals generally begin with an opening prayer that focuses on the attendees’ motivation. This is followed by a series of visualisation practices, in which practitioners either visualise a tantric buddha in front of them, or imagine themselves to be tantric buddhas. The ritual then ends with the dedication of the merit achieved through the ritual to the wellbeing first of all beings, then of specified beings and specific purposes. They are often performed, for example, for teachers’, friends’, or benefactors’ long life, health and success and for world peace. They are often requested or performed when a person encounters what is called “an obstacle” in traditional Buddhism. They are also performed for the sick and dying and for the deceased. In traditional Mongolian Buddhism, these practices were performed by *samgha* and dedicated to the rituals’ sponsor. In Transnational Buddhism, they are performed by ordained and lay people and dedicated both to those present and others who may have made specific requests to be remembered in the dedications.

37 This reflects a common pattern in Western Buddhist centres, and particularly Tibetan ones: Sanskrit terms are commonly used instead of Tibetan ones, probably because they are viewed by converts as more ‘original’. One of the interesting results of this is that Tibetan teachers who operate in these centres learn the terminology preferred by their Western students and begin using it, perhaps because they also think that Sanskrit is more ‘original’ or maybe because this is a useful adaptation.

38 This term is widely but loosely used in Transnational Buddhism. In Indian and Tibetan Buddhism, there are two obstacles (*āvarana*; Tib. *nyon mong*): (1) afflictive obstructions (*kleśāvarana*); and (2) obstructions to omniscience (*jneyāvarana*). On websites and publications from Transnational Buddhist centres, however, one sees many different configurations and interpretations of “obstacles”.

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One of the most common pūjās performed at Shedrup Ling is the Tārā Pūjā. A large section of this practice is dedicated to the repeated recitation of a prayer called *Praise to the Twenty-One Tārās*, which evokes this buddha in twenty-one different wrathful and peaceful forms (Beyer, 1994). An example of a verse from the FPMT prayer book (FPMT Mongolia 2010), combining Tibetan transliteration and English translation, and dedicated to one of these forms of Tārā, reads:

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CHA-TSAL DROL-MA NYUR-MA PA-MO  
Praise to Tārā, She who is Swift, the Heroine,

CHEN-NI KE-CHIK LO-DANG DRA-MA  
She who has Eyes like instantaneous lightning

JI-TEN SUM-GÖN CHU-CHE SHAL-CHI  
She who appeared from the opened blossom

"GE-SAR CHE-WA LE-NI CHUNG-MA"  
Of the Lotus Face of the Lord of the Three Worlds39 ......

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As a female, tantric Buddha and a force associated with the removal of obstacles, Tārā has taken on an even more prevalent role in Transnational Buddhism than she already had in Traditional Tantric Buddhism. When I attended this ritual at Shedrup Ling, Ven. Gyalmo led the attendees in its performance. She wore her full set of robes and sat at the front of the gompa, reciting the prayers with great enthusiasm and passion. Towards the end of the ritual, she arrived at the section of the sādhana during which the participants visualise themselves making offerings to Tārā. Her introduction to this practice used much traditional imagery and ideas, but made references to contemporary problems like unemployment. She said in part:

There are many benefits from reciting the Tārā mantra or the Praise to the Twenty-One Tārās. Tārā can solve many problems in your life: she can liberate you from untimely death; help you recover from disease; bring you success in business; help you find a job; and bring you wealth. When you have a really serious problem, such as a life-threatening disease, if you rely on Tārā, commonly you will be freed from that problem, or you will recover from that disease...These are common experiences...Tārā’s meditation practice is quick to grant success in obtaining the ultimate happiness of enlightenment. You

39 This refers to the tradition that she was born from tears that fell from the eyes of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara when he beheld the sufferings of beings in the world.
receive much good merit, the cause of happiness. It prevents a suffering rebirth in your next life; you receive initiation from millions of buddhas; and you achieve enlightenment. Remembering Tārā, singing praises, and reciting mantras at any time of the day or night protects you from fear and dangers and fulfils all your wishes. Tārā is particularly quick to grant help.

After she introduced the offering section in this way, she and approximately twenty students were involved in making a physical offering of food to the Tārā statue at the front of the room. This follows a pattern that is performed at FPMT centres worldwide, where a well-organised prayer program that encourages participation from all is an established norm. This is, however, very different from how the practice is performed in traditional settings. During these it is usually the monks who make the offerings, although some lay people may be asked to perform limited tasks under the monk’s strict guidance.

When the ninety-minute session had finished, Ven. Gyalmo announced upcoming events at the centre, running through a newly-printed program point by point. She then finished the session by saying goodbye in Mongolian.

Reflecting on the performance of the ritual later in an interview with me, she said:

A pūjā is a ceremony in which meditational prayers are offered to the buddhas and holy beings to request their blessings or help. Traditionally in a monastic setting, monks and nuns perform prayers for the long life, health and success of their teachers, friends, benefactors, all living beings, and for world peace. Pūjās are performed for general success in all activities, for the sick and dying, and for the deceased. Prayers and pūjās are powerful methods to deal with difficulties in our lives, such as when facing sickness and death – our own and of those we love. The knowledge that there is indeed something we can do for those who are sick and dying can be especially comforting during a time when we may feel helpless....

In our centre, the combination of mixed global and local elements makes this worship service stand out and allows Transnational Buddhism to work to convince people of their need for our services. Sometimes our programs and workshops touch people so intensely that many are moved to tears just by hearing the prayers and experiencing the service, even though they do not fully understand the content of the prayers. This convergence of the global and local
in worship is new to both local Mongolian seekers as well as typical “house Buddhist” believers, who have been used to attending and only watching worship services in crowded traditional temples.

In order to get a proper sense of contrast between the practices at Shedrup Ling and those in traditional Mongolian temples, I went to watch similar ceremonies being performed at Gandantegchenling Khiid. This is a traditional Gelugpa temple that is the largest religious complex in Ulaanbaatar and is considered by many to be the centre of Buddhism in the region. There I saw laypeople ordering prayers, sūtra readings and pūjās from a “prayer shop”. In this shop, they could choose from a set list which prayers were appropriate for their situation. Then, depending on what they could afford, they could designate whether a high lama or ordinary monk would read their prayers and how many times they would be repeated. After making their orders, the worshippers were given a receipt with their names on it and the title and price for each prayer. At busy times of the year, particularly during Tsagaan Sar, the Mongolian New Year, the “prayer shop” would become very crowded. Outside the shop, the temple itself was also full of people, with monks reading scriptures aloud and some laypeople sitting and listening to these recitations. Yet others were circumambulating nearby holy objects.

Reflecting on the comparison between the two styles of practice, one of my interviewees at Shedrup Ling said:

At temples, you often go to the front desk and you give your name and your request—what kind of scripts that you want to have read by the monks. There are so many different scripts with different meanings; like those good for your health or study or career or even prosperity. After the monks read your choice, one of the monks goes around the outside and applies different holy waters and flowers to the skin in order to get bad things out of your body—(the things that need) to be thrown away….However, at Shedrup Ling, things are totally different. The students are doing prayers by themselves. Not just reading them out loud from the textbook that’s provided by the centre, but we actually go home and study the meaning of it. It’s a worthwhile journey for me. I think that the main difference between Traditional and Transnational Buddhist settings are that the students are more in control of things, we are more active, rather than passive. Also, we understand what we are doing and it’s not just blind faith. This is my experience (anyway).
Some people also said that they went to Shedrup Ling to attend the Püjä and they felt a sense of lightness, calmness and happiness. As a 40-year old student, ‘H’, explained to me:

I like to come to Shedrup Ling and do the prayers and püjäs myself and I don’t necessarily like going to the temples for something to be read for me. But, instead, I do them by myself at this centre. It’s nice to be at Shedrup Ling to see what’s happening and it’s a social activity for me. We often go to the vegetarian café and have a chat over there after having done a püjä. We feel much closer to the teachers here as we know them personally rather than asking some monks to do the prayers for us at the temples. These are Western teachers who are well-trained with the latest knowledge, therefore they are here. We had a gap in the communist era, our monks are not very well-educated and haven’t kept their vows. I like being at Shedrup Ling.

During an interview Ven. Gyalmo reflected a more conciliatory approach to the variant practices, saying:

I have been teaching meditation and leading prayers and püjäs for a long time in Mongolia. I have had to consider the various daily and periodic events of the Buddhist calendar and retain here only those items which can be practised by lay Buddhists without access to monasteries, temples, stūpas, and so on. Out of the rich traditions found in Buddhist countries like Mongolia, all these rituals and real learning of Buddhism, such as learning Buddhist meditation, has never been done in Mongolia by the lay Buddhists. It is very important to have some regular daily dharma practice. We are trying to promote the teachings to our lay Buddhists as well as liaising with the local traditional temples to send the local monks to India or Tibet for more professional training. Our final goal, which has been the same for both the Traditional and Transnational Buddhist organisations, is to revive Buddhism in its cultural homeland and for its people, but in a modern transnational way.
5.4.3 The Form of Religious Education

The contrast between Traditional and Transnational Buddhist approaches to education is even more stark. In this area too, Shedrup Ling follows a hybrid approach that presents traditional Buddhist subjects through contemporary pedagogical and—as I explained in chapter three—pop-psychology methods. At Shedrup Ling, Western teachers encourage an open-ended question-and-answer teaching style, scriptural analysis, explanations for ceremonies and meditation that are augmented with music. This new type of learning is powerful and effective. It gives people another way to receive Buddhism where information negates ignorance and the need for blind faith. Moreover, these are presented as part of a program that creates a sense of stability and tradition amongst those who attend the centre.

For many cultural Buddhists in Mongolia, the idea of studying Buddhism is precluded by their educational levels and economic situations. For the elites who attend Shedrup Ling it is a priority. Moreover, it is a priority that they feel is being dangerously neglected in the practice of traditional Buddhism in Mongolia, not only as a form of outreach to the lay community by the monks, but also within the monasteries themselves. As 'H' explained to me:

> When you go to a traditional temple and pay a monk to read your sūtras out, even some of the lamas themselves tend not to understand some of the sūtras and they need to be educated about what they are reading. What is missing at the traditional temple is...a lack of a spiritual dimension ... They don’t educate (the monks) much ... I think there should be at least some rooms or libraries where people can just go to read and study Buddhism there. I don’t know there is this public space, public sphere, missing at the monastery. This is the kind of thing that is missing.

Many of the interviewees and other attendees at the centre expressed the same wish for an increased focus on education within Mongolian Buddhism generally. It was repeatedly suggested that the monks focus on performance of religious services—and the income they produce—at the expense of their education and that of the broader lay populace. Like Huhebaatar, many also expressed a desire for the monks who conduct the services for laypeople to gain a better philosophical understanding of the services they perform rather than merely enacting culturally-defined rituals.
In some of my interviews this attitude towards religious education was linked to global religious organisations or religious figures. In others it seemed to come from the pedagogical ideas embedded in secular education, perhaps due to the influence of decades of socialist, atheist education practices. ‘S’, for example, a fifty-year old professional male expressed his dissatisfaction with the traditional presentation of the Buddhist teachings:

I want to follow Buddhism in a more practical way. A couple of years ago, when the Dalai Lama came to Mongolia for a visit, I was there. He said: “You should study the theory of Buddhism. Without learning theory you can’t pray.” (The Dalai Lama said this because) he (had) found Mongolians just pray(ing) without learning any theory. We can’t get anything from the temples. There is nothing available for our laypeople.

In order to follow the Dalai Lama’s advice, Suhe began to attend Shedrup Ling’s meditation classes and pūjās. He believes that all Mongolians (including himself) need to become better educated about religious doctrine, and he feels that he is getting this from Shedrup Ling. He is happy to be able to acquire this knowledge from Western teachers whom he regards as well-trained and well-qualified.

Along with other attendees, Suhe describes the programs run by Shedrup Ling as “an opportunity”, using a term that is often associated with liberal societies and markets. As elites who are able to make international comparisons and exercise choice, Suhe and other attendees subject the product they are being provided by both Traditional and Transnational Mongolian Buddhism to greater scrutiny than do other religious consumers. Their high levels of education and economic opportunity have led them to expect more from the religious professionals who provide the services they consume, and from themselves as consumers. As Ven. Gyalmo explained to me:

The regular comers (to the classes) are mostly from the middle class and they are mostly older women. Normally other Buddhist organisations don’t have structured programs, but here we are not only running such programs, but we also have social services programs. People often have this perception that the Western way of teaching is fast, modern and scientific, but the traditional way is too slow and out-of-date.
This, in turn, has created doubts in their minds about the provision of services in traditional contexts, in which they understand themselves to be asking for religious guidance from monks and lamas who are less educated than themselves. By sending educated, Western teachers to Mongolia who then set out to fulfil this elite’s desire for education, the FPMT is thus filling a gap in the religious marketplace that is not being addressed in traditional temples.

5.4.4 The Use of Monastic Discipline

Following on from this focus on education of both ordained and lay Buddhists, another, perhaps more surprising role that the FPMT is playing in Mongolia presently involves acting as a catalyst for the re-institution of monastic discipline. This is an example that clearly subverts the assumed interaction between Traditional and Transnational Buddhism and demonstrates the complexity of hybridisation in the Mongolian Buddhist context.

From the perspective of Buddhist history, the FPMT’s focus on re-installing strict monastic discipline in Mongolia has many precedents. Buddhist history provides many examples of externally-directed reform movements. The founder of the Gelugpa, Lama Tsongkhapa (Tib. Rje Rin po che Tsong kha pa; 1357-1419), is commonly presented as a monastic reformer in Tibet. What is complex about the situation in Mongolia is that the effort to reform traditional Buddhist monasticism is being at least funded if not led by Transnational Buddhist monks and nuns.

This situation has come about through a widely perceived decline in the standards of monasticism in Mongolia that may even precede the socialist era and was certainly exacerbated by it (Abrahms-Kavunenko 2011). Majer (2009: 57) estimates that there around 1000 “lamas” in Ulaanbaatar and that 660 of these are affiliated with the city’s two largest monasteries. There is, however, much controversy around the designation of the title “lama”. In Tibet, this term is primarily used only to describe Buddhist teachers. Not all monks are lamas and, particularly in non-Gelugpa orders of Tibetan Buddhism, not all lamas are monks. The religious community is therefore made up of a combination of monks, nuns, monk-lamas, rarely nun-lamas, and low- and high-level lay-lamas (Samuel, 1993). As Gelug is the main order of Tibetan Buddhism practised in Mongolia (and in the FPMT), however, and because this order places a particular focus on monastic discipline, tradition would dictate that the majority of lamas lived in monasteries as monks. And, indeed, at least a facsimile of this idealised situation did
exist before the socialist era. But during this period the government applied a policy of “domestication”, which insisted all monks leave their monasteries and return to their family homes (Abrahms-Kavunenko, 2011). As a result, few of those referred to as “monks” at the end of the socialist era held monastic vows (Majer & Teleki, 2008).

After 1990, many old men, who had been part of monasteries before the socialist period, once again identified as lamas, shaved their heads and started to wear robes. These lamas had been forced to disrobe and marry during the 1930s, and when they again became lamas they now had families. They saw no contradiction between being a Buddhist lama and maintaining a household. These lamas have taken on students who, following their teacher’s example, may have a wife or a girlfriend.

In response to this, the FPMT has worked to re-establish a more “traditional” approach to monastic discipline. They have done so at the behest of the Dalai Lama and with the assistance particularly of Sera Monastery in India, the home institution of the organisation’s founders, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche (FPMT, 2010 & 2013). Their approach to this reform is multi-faceted, working to apply pressure from without the monasteries and from within. The external pressure comes through two means: (a) through the advice provided to the monastic institutions by revered teachers such as the Dalai Lama; and (b) by increasing expectations of strict monastic behaviour from lay-Buddhists, particularly elites such as those who attend Shedrup Ling. They also hope to provide internal pressure by providing teachers and monastic trainers for Mongolian monasteries from Tibetan institutions in exile and sponsoring Mongolian monks to live and train in India (Abrahms-Kavunenko, 2011). As Ven. Gyalmo explains:

We, in the FPMT, often send Mongol monastics to India or Nepal to receive a comprehensive Buddhist education and learn to live within strict monastic vows. Our focus at Shedrup Ling is to provide comprehensive Buddhist education programs for lay Buddhists. They are the people who need the knowledge most, and most of them are willing to learn. The traditional temples don’t offer anything to them, but we do. We also invite numerous Tibetan Rinpoches [reincarnate lamas] and respected foreign teachers to visit Shedrup Ling to give teachings to lay Buddhists and monastics and to conduct ritual tantric initiations. These will change the local Mongolian monastics’ situation of having loose monastic vows. Our goal is to tighten monastic restrictions in order for them to re-join the global Buddhist Samgha.
Another element of the FPMT's strategy is to send to Mongolia learned Western monks and nuns who follow monastic discipline to Mongolia. This shows that these kinds of practices can be made compatible with the modern world and have an international appeal. In this context, it is essential for Ven. Gyalmo to provide a model of Transnational Buddhist ministry that showcases her adherence to monastic vows and incorporates Western ideas. She does this through a series of discipleship cases and a well-organised small group ministry. Such groups are the places where, she believes, life transformation and spiritual formation takes place and where she wants every member to be involved. It is also important that she and the Tibetan monk/lama from Sera Monastery who teaches at the centre both display a combination of traditional monastic discipline, knowledge of Buddhist philosophy and practice, and the ability to apply these in a modern context.

5.4.5 The Practice of Engaged Buddhist Activities

The practice of “Engaged Buddhism” is yet another clear example of hybridity at Shedrup Ling. As has been explored elsewhere in great depth (Queen, 2000), Engaged Buddhism is a form of Buddhist practice that has developed mainly in Western countries as Buddhism came into contact with a long tradition of Christian social service and political activism. It has also come to play a role in traditional Buddhist countries, particularly Japan and Thailand (Queen & King, 1996). And, although it has been implemented less comprehensively across the Tibetan Buddhist world, it is an approach favoured by the Dalai Lama, who is the FPMT’s senior spiritual head.

The Dalai Lama first spoke of the need for Buddhists to practise Engaged Buddhism in dialogues he conducted in the 1980s with Western Christians (Tenzin Gyatso, Hopkins & Napper 1984: 9–17, 45–50). “Buddhists have not acted vigorously to address social and political problems,” he said, “In this, we have much to learn from the Christians”. As the Dalai Lama explains, the idea of social engagement easily fits with many of the principles of both Buddhism and other religions, but has been traditionally and generally neglected by Buddhist institutions and societies. In his talks with Buddhist organisations, he often stresses the notion that compassion is basic to all Buddhist practice, and he further insists that direct engagement with other people and their problems is necessary in order to develop genuine compassion. He urges Buddhists to become involved in the world, insisting on the necessity of achieving a balance
between contemplation and social activism, as both are essential components of a healthy spiritual life:

This is important. Because the very purpose of practising the Great Vehicle is service for others, you should not isolate yourself from society. In order to serve, in order to help, you must remain in society (quoted in Powers 2000: 231).

The FPMT follows his directive in Mongolia, and therefore an idea developed in the West and promoted by a Tibetan hierarch who has a long association with Mongolia is now being implemented there in a number of ways.

Its implementation creates yet another point of contrast between Traditional and Transnational Mongolian Buddhisms. Perhaps the greatest point of contrast—and yet another example of the uneven economic balance between the practitioners of the two forms of Buddhism—is “The Mongolian Sangha Food Fund”. This was established by FPMT International and provides lunch seven days per week for fifty monks at Gandantegchenling Khiid (FPMT, 2012). Through this program—which as Ven. Gyalmo explained is again mostly staffed by older middle-class women—Shedrup Ling not only provides a social service that the traditional institutions cannot, but it does so to one of the institutions that might perceive it as a competitor.

It is not, however, the only form of outreach in which it engages. There are several others that all stretch the centre’s activities beyond the walls of its compound. Ven. Gyalmo stated that one of the most influential of these programs is a soup kitchen the centre runs at Gandantegcheling Khiid temple for the monks and an associated health clinic:

The health clinic was established in 2006 to provide basic health care and information to the patrons of the soup kitchen. It is staffed by a Mongolian doctor and, in 2008, a nurse was employed to assist her. The clinic now has over 400 people registered to use the facility. As well as free consultations, the patients are provided with free medicines when required. If patients have needs which our clinic is unable to fill, such as mending broken bones or treating a serious illness, they are referred to one of the many hospitals with which we have a contract for the care of the homeless. Due to the stigma attached to being homeless, it not always easy for them to receive the appropriate care.... Every two weeks, the doctor and nurse provide trainings on various topics.
related to healthy living, disease prevention and general hygiene. A recent addition to the Community Centre is a hot shower for the homeless to use.

Ven. Gyalmo and other volunteers working at the centre also engage in various sorts of social work that have been traditionally stigmatised in Mongolian society, like, for example, programs for alcoholics and drug addicts. In January and February 2013, FPMT Mongolia implemented an alcohol treatment program in cooperation with the Ulaanbaatar Police Department, five district police departments in Ulaanbaatar City, the Association Against Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, and the Maanit Compulsory Alcohol Treatment Centre in Bayansoum, Tuv province. This was financed by the Mongolian Ministry of Justice and was titled: “Overcoming alcoholism and introducing a healthy lifestyle in Mongolia” (Ven. Gyalmo, 2010).

During the transition of Mongolian society from socialism to democracy, people’s lifestyles underwent significant changes, resulting in both positive and negative long-term influences. Abusing alcohol, smoking and drug-taking became popular as a way of dealing with the challenges of this transition. Statistics collected by National Statistical Office of Mongolia show that seventy-two percent of violent crime is a result of alcohol consumption and that fifty-two percent of the population regularly consumes alcohol to excess (NSO, 2013). The society is also experiencing adverse indirect health effects from this phenomenon, including a noticeable statistical increase in premature deaths, theft, violent crime, accidents, domestic violence and other destructive behaviours (Guinness, 2011). The FPMT outreach program is a seminal initiative that introduces addicts to both Western and Buddhist techniques to deal with their addiction. The approach includes teaching those involved effective communication and coping strategies to deal with stress, pain, frustration, anger, and other negative mental states rather than turning to alcohol. As Ven. Gyalmo explains:

Our project’s purpose is to educate, inspire and support the participants to implement a healthy lifestyle in order to be free from dependency on alcohol and other damaging substances. An important focus for us was to develop a training program that addresses both the prevention of and release from alcohol addiction and that includes strategies drawn from the disciplines of
meditation and hatha yoga.40

In the context of international exchange and hybridity, it is interesting to note that almost all those involved see the lack of community service as a “fault” of Mongolian traditional Buddhism. Even the ever-diplomatic Ven. Gyalmo reported a disconnect between the rich, urban, middle and upper-middle class people who attend Shedrup Ling and the Mongolians with whom she engaged in her outreach work. According to her observations, the attendees at the centre did not contribute to the welfare of others as much as they should. As she understood it, part of her mission in the country is to convince those who come to the centre that it is also imperative to see to the physical needs of the less fortunate in their community, both ordained monks and nuns and laypeople.

As Ulaanbaatar continues to grow, and those in need continue to increase, this aspect of Shedrup Ling’s mission in Mongolia may take up more of its time and resources. The National Statistics Office of Mongolia has reported that the urban population has now extensively surpassed the rural population in Mongolia, and many of the people displaced from their traditional land arrive in Ulaanbaatar with few or no resources (NSO, 2011). How the centre’s approach to social outreach will develop, given the disjunct between the two polarised approaches to the problem, is difficult to say.

5.4.6 The Employment of Rationalism

Rather than focusing on the negative side of modernisation, it is my observation that the attendees at Shedrup Ling are more focused on the phenomenon’s positive implications. As generally highly-educated, urban intellectuals, scientists and members of the professions, they seemed much more interested in aligning Buddhist ideas with scientific rationalism than with social service. Following the lead of nation’s political leadership, who promote scientific advancement as a key priority for the country’s future in a globalised world (Holton, 2005), the attendees appear intent on creating a synthesis between their Buddhist faith and rationalism. As they understand it, the Transnational Buddhism presented at Shedrup Ling is much more malleable to this undertaking than traditional Buddhism.

40 This is also an interesting bit of hybridization: Hatha yoga is not a Buddhist practice. It was originally Hindu, but it has been adapted to Western preferences and is widely used, generally with no religious content or at most a hazy New Age philosophy.
This idea was repeated in the conversations I had with people at the centre, the conversations I overheard between them, and the questions they asked in classes. The most comprehensive response to the link between Transnational Buddhism and rationalism came, however, in one of the interviews I conducted with a student named Tuya Sarangowa. Given its comprehensiveness, I will repeat her reply here in full:

In the worship service and Buddhist teachings programs, I saw a deep theological background. That is one thing I have not experienced in Mongolia. I think for the transnational Buddhist centre, the preaching is more like a theological and scientific lecture; the way they worship and Buddhist teachings. The first time I came to Shedrup Ling, I felt this place was really different from what we have had before in Mongolia, but later I felt all the teachings touched my heart. Also the teachings and meditations helped me to think deeper about myself. They inspired me to go deeper.

Thinking is a way of worship here. In my school, some teachers taught us why thinking is a way to worship. It is all connected. Why do you study hard? Why do we challenge you? When I took meditation classes and the Introduction to Buddhism course, I had never learnt Buddhism before and I was afraid to look inside myself, so it was really hard for me. So I asked Ven. Gyalmo if I could have some spare time each lesson to go through the difficulties. She responded very positively. She asked me to come to her office and she was really willing to help me. So for my classes, she and other teachers gave me lots of help. That I really appreciated.

In this example, the traditional education in Mongolia I had was very different from what I am experiencing at Shedrup Ling. Teachers want you to obey in Mongolia, but here, you challenge your thoughts. They taught me that I needed to be very positive. I needed to ask instead of just receive. Sometimes I needed to be more assertive. That is what I have never experienced in Mongolia. Teachers teach in Mongolia, you learn, but you do not ask questions.

This new experience has changed my perspective of Buddhism. I used to think that to obey Buddha, I just had to do what I thought Buddha wanted me to do. After I came to Shedrup Ling and went through all these teachings, I started to ask myself how should I be a better person. What should I say to be wise, to be more efficient? Mongolian culture makes people's brain lazy.
Follow the order and just do it. Do not think. In the past two years, I learnt why I should obey this order. How it will affect me if I follow the order. I think more. I am changing. I'm becoming more rational.

Rationalism is from the western culture. Mongolian culture is also becoming more rational element because of globalisation. We also need the rational in people’s faith. Shedrup Ling is doing some work in me. I am getting to know why Buddhism is so important to me and all the Mongolians.

This focus on rationalisation could in some ways be seen as the beginning of the next wave of globalisation to hit Mongolia. Once people are introduced to a more personal rational epistemological faith, the desire to feed their intellectual needs will likely increase. Shedrup Ling views its mission as involving a deepening of doctrinal and theological teachings in Mongolia that will satisfy these needs.

5.5 Conclusion

The form of hybridised Transnational Buddhism practised at Shedrup Ling has successfully integrated the global (Mongolian, Tibetan and Western) with the local (traditional temple), which serves to broaden its appeal to the constituency that is attracted to its brand of Buddhism. Considering the hybridisation, the worship and the way of presenting the teachings at Shedrup Ling, it is easy to see how the local Mongolians could be drawn to the mixture of traditional and contemporary elements. It represents a convergence of several traditions, local and global.

In analysing the relationship between the global and local at Shedrup Ling, however, it is also important to remember that the opening up of the “religious marketplace” has created an economically competitive environment for religious institutions. In this context, the FPMT provides an “original Western product”, one that represents Western culture and its international hegemony. But at the same time its hybridity allows Mongolians to emphasise the “Mongolianness” of this institutional self reflexively. The students have no problems in accepting Western teachers as imparters of Buddhism and are not afraid of their “imposing Western imperialism”. Those running the centre provide access to global and Western cultures while at the same time incorporate elements of local, indigenous cultures. Contextualisation like this is helpful in assessing the extent to which local cultures and people are impacted by global culture. Mongolians who attend the centre are therefore able to invert the transnational versus
traditional divide, often displayed in Mongolian national discourse, by mixing forms from both these elements of Mongolian culture.

As I outlined in this chapter, this contextualised hybridity is expressed in a number of different ways. It is expressed through the centre’s facilities, the forms of worship and teaching it carries out and the outreach work it conducts. It is also expressed through the presence of experts from the global FPMT and other Buddhist organisations who provide models of Buddhist study and training that are more acceptable to the international Buddhist community than some local forms. This influences the practice at the centre primarily, but also affects monastic institutions with which Shedrup Ling has a financial or religious connection.
Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that insights contained in Mongolia's Buddhist revival are evidenced both by the growing use of Buddhism to establish national identity and by the presence of international religious organisations like the FPMT. The primary focus has been on discourses of authenticity and legitimacy at the organisational level, but relatively little is known about the routine practices and beliefs of the broader Buddhist population, and this is an important topic for future research. Throughout the course of this dissertation, my aim has been to begin the exploration of these practices by examining the activities of the urban transnational Buddhist centre Shedrup Ling. As I did this, I asked what conformation Buddhism adopts as it re-emerges in contemporary Mongolia, especially for the ordinary laypeople who make up the majority of those involved.

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the main findings of the dissertation through a recapitulation of the chapters, reflecting on the work’s five main contributions to the broader discipline of religious studies and the social sciences more generally. I outlined these interactions in the body of my thesis, and here I want to conclude by directly aligning them with the five research questions presented in the introductory chapter. Namely:

(1) What do those running the centre and those attending it believe its role to be in the revival of Buddhism in Mongolia?
(2) How do local people perceive Shedrup Ling, and how does Shedrup Ling attract converts?
(3) Why are local people attracted to this form of Buddhism, and what is their motivation for attending the centre?
(4) How has this involvement benefited them?
(5) Do they see themselves as practitioners of Mongolian, Tibetan or Western/Transnational Buddhism?

Stepping back from these specific questions, I then reflected on two broader contributions made by the dissertation: the topic of nationalism and the relationship between religion and national identity. The encounter between Buddhists, modernity and globalisation has produced several significant developments in the representation
and the practice of the Buddhist religion. Usually this means that two elements can be seen influencing religious practice at Shedrup Ling: (1) cultural globalisation and (2) the cultural hybridisation that arises from globalisation.

I closed by offering three potential research trajectories for future work based on this preliminary study, as well as a set of thoughts on how the interventions of transnational Buddhism are pushing a significant portion of religious activity beyond the formal boundaries of Mongolia’s Traditional Buddhism.

6.1 Summarising the Main Findings

The Buddhist practitioners at Shedrup Ling, and all other Mongolians, live in a culture profoundly shaped by recent history. A host of tumultuous political, social and religious changes has transformed their society during the twentieth century. During the past few decades, Mongolia has begun to recover from the ideological excesses of the communist era, while simultaneously experiencing rapid growth and alteration to the economic and social structure. No sphere of society or individual life has been left untouched by these modifications. The re-emergence of religion in this context combines attempts to reconstruct "traditional" institutions and patterns of religiosity with adaptations and innovations. All modernising projects in Mongolia’s recent history have taken religion as an important area needing change. Globalised, Transnational Buddhism is a clear example of this. It represents one case of the Mongolian people’s ongoing religious reassessment. Generally speaking, their knowledge of Buddhist practice is tentative, but a majority of them still claim to be Buddhists. At Shedrup Ling, many participants seek to solidify, through education, their Buddhist identity claims. The education they receive at this Transnational Buddhist centre, however, is distinct from the limited education offered to laypeople in the Traditional Buddhist context.

I have shown, for example, how self-help, national identity and hybridity discourses affect the ways in which Buddhism is promoted and presented at Shedrup Ling. In the practice of traditional forms of Mongolian Buddhism, the role played by laypeople has been primarily devotional and centred on donations to monastics that lead to accumulation of merit. The form of Transnational Buddhism presented by the FPMT, by contrast, focuses on ethical, social and cosmological constructs of knowledge. By stripping away some of the traditional Buddhist context, new opportunities have been created for the laity to occupy roles previously reserved for monastics. Shedrup Ling’s
attendees are therefore able to access a re-interpreted form of Buddhism that incorporates hybrid discourses on science, psychology and self-help.

After addressing these specific concerns, I then reflected on two broader contributions that the dissertation makes, albeit implicitly, to important conversations in the social sciences. One of these is the implications of the relationship between nationalism, national identity and Transnational Buddhism. My analysis of this relationship shows a symbiotic connection between Buddhism and Mongolian nationalism and identity. It is clear from my own and previous studies (Majer, 2008; Elverskog, 2007 and 2013; Teleki, 2011) that the emerging form of nationalism practised in Mongolia encourages the application of Buddhism. What I also wanted to argue, however, is that, in turn, Buddhism has influenced the development of Mongolian identity and the technologies of its state.

After introducing Mongolian Buddhism in chapter two, in chapters three through five I traced the contours and main variations in lay Buddhist involvement across several stages and dimensions. Chapter three showed how ordinary people find their way into Buddhist belonging and how they develop personal packages of practice. It demonstrated several ways in which they use Buddhist resources to improve their lives and described their strategies for justifying and representing Buddhism in a society where the cultural legitimacy of the religion is contested. The purpose of chapter three was to explore the connections between Buddhist philosophy and self-help psychology in a socio-psychological context as a means for improving people’s lives and the characteristics of transnational Buddhism at Shedrup Ling.

In chapter four, I considered in detail how the students’ contributions and Shedrup Ling’s organisation of the field of Buddhist production shape the opportunities for laypeople to assume Buddhist identity in this modern era.

When studying the revival of Mongolian national identity in all of its complexity, I employed Symbolic Interactionism and Identity Theory to examine the dynamics of how people use transnational Buddhism for this purpose. This multiple-methodological approach, based on interviews, identified a divide between formal conversations about Buddhism and more popular interpretations. Religious leaders and professionals, both at Buddhist institutions and the university, commonly view the revival as wide but not deep, and they criticise this lack of deep engagement with the religion on the part of self-identified believers. The producers at Shedrup Ling possess diverse repertoires in transnational form that they draw upon as they try to satisfy the local lay consumers’
needs. This transnational, hybrid form of Buddhism has not previously been encountered in Mongolia and responds well to the changed structural conditions of modern Mongolian society, especially in urban areas.

In this context, I also affirmed Humphrey’s (1992) claim that Mongolia is like other post-socialist nations in that it has reconstructed its national identity from ideas of its pre-socialist history, its “deep past”. Cultural and religious models are the core components of this new Mongolian national identity. In describing this modernised form of Mongolian Buddhism, chapter four focused not only on the influence of the West on its configuration, but also on the reinvention of Mongolian history within it. In this regard, it paid particular attention to the promotion of Chinggis Khan and his apotheosis into Vajrapāṇi, through which he has become a hybrid symbol of Mongolian-Buddhist identity. The chapter showed how the Great Khan has been presented as the pre-eminent national figure in Mongolia and, thus, as a uniting memory for all of its citizens. It also argued that collective memories act as a precondition to any sense of identity and come to play a crucial role in the interpretation of the present (Schleifman 1998). This presentation of him as a national hero is blended with his role as a Buddhist deity, in a symbolic alignment between the state and the religion.

My research locates a contemporary construction of these discourses at Shedrup Ling. I have demonstrated that for those I interviewed and observed at the centre being Buddhist is a core component of being Mongol. What is more, this has occurred despite the government’s “open door” policy, which has encouraged a variety of religious communities to missionise in Mongolia. My observation in this regard explains further, based on Hann & Pelkmans (2009) assertion, that in “Mongolia, as the other postsocialist nations, traditional religions will be facing new challenges”, such as reinterpretations from within and missionising efforts of Christians from outside. I have shown that more “modern” forms of Buddhism, particularly Transnational Buddhism, can thrive in this environment.

After exploring the intrinsic interactions between Mongolian and Transnational Buddhism in the development of nationalist identity at Shedrup Ling, chapter four also examined the influence of the Mongolian state’s “third neighbour” foreign policy on this discourse. It shows how the Mongolian government’s commitment to developing relationships with nations other than Russia and China has helped Western organisations like the FPMT make inroads into the country. Chapter four explored how this state encouragement has coincided with a demand for a lay-orientated form of
Buddhism in Mongolia, and how this, in turn, has led to the revitalisation of lay Buddhist practice.

The subject of chapter five is the hybridity evident in this transnational form of Buddhism. The version practised at Shedrup Ling has successfully integrated the global (Mongolian, Tibetan and Western) with the local (traditional temple) where elements of both traditions make it effective. Considering this syncretism in the manner of worship and the way of presenting the teachings at Shedrup Ling, it is easy to see how local Mongolians could be drawn to such a mixture of traditional and contemporary elements. As an organisation, the FPMT has, in other words, consciously adopted a strategy of hybridisation at Shedrup Ling and adapted its salient discourses of hybridity to present a "locally produced" version of its global brand that represents a convergence of several traditions, local and global. Its teachers do not use the word "hybridisation", preferring more user-friendly terms such as "global Buddhism" and "new Mongolian Buddhism", but the effect is the same. The active manifestation of this policy of hybridisation is evident throughout the workings of Shedrup Ling’s organisation and its community. The extent of the influence of this underpinning philosophy was evident both in the interviews and other interactions I had with the attendees at Shedrup Ling and in the practice of religion that I observed.

I argued that the impact of hybridisation on Shedrup Ling expresses itself through the various global flows: (1) the use of facilities; (2) the style of worship; (3) the form of religious education; (4) the use of monastic discipline; (5) the practice of engaged Buddhist activities; and (6) the employment of rationalism. In this context, the FPMT provides an "original Western product" in Mongolia, one that represents Western culture and its international hegemony. But at the same time its hybridity allows Mongolians to emphasise the "Mongolianness" of this institutional self reflexively. This is helpful in assessing the extent to which local cultures and people are impacted by global culture. Mongolians who attend the centre are therefore able to invert the transnational versus traditional divide, often displayed in Mongolian national discourse, by mixing forms from both of these elements of their culture.

6.2 Directions for Future Research

Throughout the course of this dissertation I have contextualised historically the modern phenomenon of the transnational Buddhist centre Shedrup Ling in Ulaanbaatar. I have shown how both traditional Mongolian and hybridised-transnational Buddhist
discourses affect the ways in which Buddhism is promoted and presented to the attendees at the FPMT. Within the intercultural exchange there between the teachers and students, transnational FPMT Buddhism is treated as a new-Buddhist practice not devoid of devotional, ethical, social, or cosmological context. At the same time as the traditional Buddhist context is stripped away, new opportunities are opened for the Mongolian laity to occupy roles previously reserved for monastics. Shedrup Ling teachers apply strategies of reinterpretation that resonate with cultural understandings of the transnational and the traditional, employing discourses of science, psychology, and interreligious dialogue.

The leaders, organisers and volunteers at Shedrup Ling are clearly striving to meet the spiritual needs of both young and old Mongolians in a variety of ways. On the basis of their access to a globalised network of resources, they provide a highly organised program of teachings and meditations that appeals to members. This is based on the FPMT’s international materials, and therefore presents the organisation’s standard form of Transnational Buddhism.

In Mongolia, however, this standard form is combined with local elements to express a hybridity in practice that is specific to urban Mongolia and, more specifically, to Ulaanbaatar. This interaction with local traditions is not, however, one-sided. Along with the FPMT’s efforts as an organisation to make accommodations for Mongolia’s unique cultural mix, it also asks its local attendees to challenge their culturally-acquired perceptions of Buddhist practice. This is particularly evident in its encouragement of socially engaged forms of Buddhism, which are not an aspect of traditional Mongolian Buddhism, either for monastics or the laity.

The future continuation and expansion of the centre will depend on its ability to meet several challenges that are the result of the same processes of globalisation that brought Transnational Buddhism to Mongolia. The challenges are as follows:

First, the people who attend Shedrup Ling tend to come from the country’s social and educational elite. They are either young professionals or older people who have been exposed to Western, hybridised culture in their daily lives. This is a group that is comfortable with transnational forms of knowledge and engagement with other cultures. Their high levels of education and international exposure also mean, however, that they are less inclined to devotional interpretations of their faith and more interested in what they understand to be a rationalistic approach to Buddhist beliefs and practices.
Second, their rationalistic orientation is accompanied by the influence of consumerist global culture, which is also evident in the practice and promotion of Transnational Buddhism in Mongolia. To survive in this economically competitive environment, the advocates of Transnational Buddhism at Shedrup Ling must make their product appealing. This is not to discount the advocates’ clear intention to preserve and promote what they understand to be an authentic form of the Buddhist tradition. It merely recognises that this commitment to a pre-consumerist tradition needs to be re-packaged in urban Mongolia’s contested spiritual marketplace, as ‘new’ religions come to Mongolia. In this milieu, Transnational Buddhism performs a neat trick. It manages to present itself as an antidote to Mongolia’s growing globalised consumerist culture while using many of the marketing techniques of this same culture to increase its appeal.

Third, the FPMT will also need to manage the expectations of its growing Mongolian membership, as participants will inevitably wish to become more involved in organisational roles in the process. They will need to develop local talent and not just rely on missionaries from abroad. Ven. Gyalmo believes that FPMT International will send more missionaries around the world, including to Mongolia, by the year 2030. If the Mongolian FPMT community—particularly its ordained members—could be incorporated into this international exchange, it would significantly help the FPMTs standing in the wider Mongolian community. The Mongolian cohort could learn much from the FPMT’s decades of experience in missionising and, in the future, begin to run education programs in Mongolia themselves.

The training Mongolians receive, which is provided by the FPMT, could significantly help them in two ways. (1) The FPMT already sponsors ordained Mongolians to travel abroad for training in large monastic institutions. The continuation and expansion of this program and the subsequent hiring of qualified Mongolian Buddhist teachers at places like Shedrup Ling would contribute much to the viability of Transnational Buddhist centres. In the instigation of this program, Shedrup Ling’s organisers should also work closely with proponents of Traditional Buddhism to avoid replication of resources, isolation of monastic organisations, and destructive divisions between the two groups—the transnational and the traditional. However, the keen expressions of spiritual vitality in modern Mongolian society are still present in the activities of the traditional-cultural monasteries. (2) Another significant contribution that FPMT training could provide is the skills to run socially engaged programs in Mongolia. This is an area of outreach that has much scope for expansion and much beneficial capacity; for example, in promoting
conversation. Missionaries all over the world have been aided in their conversion efforts by setting up schools and clinics, which provide positive advertising. If this interest leads to an increase in socially engaged Buddhism, this could be particularly beneficial for Mongolian society.

6.3 Final thoughts

This dissertation reveals robust religion-identity-hybridity connections between the Shedrup Ling Centre and Mongolian society. It has aimed to improve our picture of the remaking of religion in contemporary Mongolia by examining the form of urban Buddhism that was introduced by the FPMT. I asked what Buddhism looks like as it reemerges at Shedrup Ling, especially for the laypeople who make up the large majority of those involved. I summarise how it appears at the centre for the laity who are involved with a newly-introduced transnational Buddhism that highlights the possibilities of varied forms of commitment.

My findings generally support rational choice perspectives, suggesting that by using Shedrup Ling as the location for the case study in this dissertation I have shown how a stable and cohesive system with a structured voluntary organisation can thrive in Mongolia. Moreover, the results add to our knowledge about religion in contemporary Mongolian society and help form a view of religion-identity-hybridity connections. I have also shown how Buddhist involvement could become a pathway to civic engagement for many laypeople. The demands of the Mongolian state and the changed characteristics of Mongolian society may force Buddhist leaders and the laity to adapt traditional organisations and practices as they reconstruct ways of applying Buddhism that work today. Nevertheless, caution should be exercised when these findings are generalised to other cultures and societies. On the one hand, it would be fruitful to extend this research to study religion in other Asian nations and elsewhere that share the same or similar religious and cultural elements with Mongolian society.

As a whole, Transnational Buddhism’s interventions push a significant portion of religious activity beyond the former boundaries of Mongolia’s Traditional Buddhism. They promote rationalism and intellectualisation in Buddhist practice. On the other hand, it would be misleading to force the use of arbitrary religious measures and methods in cross-cultural research, without taking into account culture-specific variations.
As discussed, there is significant scope for future researchers to continue to explore religious differences between Asian and Western societies. Thus, I think it is appropriate to conclude my dissertation here by quoting the motto of the John Templeton Foundation, "How little we know, how eager to learn."
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Dear ___________________

This research is being independently undertaken by Mr Gesar Temur towards his Doctorate (PhD) degree at the Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University (ANU), in Australia.

The research relates to how local Mongolians become interested in and involved with Buddhism at the Shedrup Ling Centre, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, and people’s opinions on the revival of Buddhism, the social factors accompanying this and the increasing awareness of other religions from both inside and outside of the Buddhist community. This particular stage of the research is to gather some information for which individual interviews need to be undertaken. Of course, this will only happen if you agree to participate in Gesar Temur’s study.

Participation in interviews is voluntary and confidential. You may choose to withdraw at any time without repercussions and, if this happens, any data you provide will be destroyed. All the interviews will be transcribed and summarised. Full transcription is necessary so that the details of information from the interviewees can be useful for the research.

The interview instrument has not been designed to elicit any information that is confidential, sensitive or potentially incriminating in nature. The results of this research will be reported in a doctoral thesis and may be published in academic journals or books. The names of individuals or the position titles will not be reported in connection with any of the information collected during interviews.

This confidential audio interview contains more than 20 questions concerning such things as your religious background, interest in and attraction to Buddhist ideas, etc. and should definitely take less than an hour. A possible follow-up email interview would only be undertaken if some points are not clear.

All participants in this research are those who are regular attenders at Shedrup Ling Centre, Ulaanbaatar, who are either Buddhists or who consider the Buddhist ideas/teachings to have an impact on their lives. They could also be non-believers in Buddhism who would like to give their opinions on the social influence and changes of Buddhism in people’s daily life in Mongolia after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991.
If you think you would like to be part of this research, if you need further information, Gesar will be happy to provide it.

If you have any questions or concerns about any parts of this research during implementation, or after the researcher has returned home, please feel free to contact him, and or his supervisors at the university. See details below.

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If you have concerns regarding the way the research was conducted please contact the ANU Human Research Ethics Committee:

**Human Research Ethics Committee**

Research Office

*Human Ethics and Recombinant DNA*  
Level 3  
Innovations Building (124)  
Corner Eggleston and Garran Roads

Email: Kim.Tiffen@anu.edu.au
I understand that any personal, sensitive or potentially incriminating information will be kept confidential so far as the law allows. This form and any other data collected throughout the duration of the interview will be stored separately in a locked office at the Australian National University. Data entered onto a computer will be kept in a computer accessible only by password by Gesar Temur.

I have read, or have had read to me in a language that I understand, this document and I understand the purposes, procedures and risks of this research project as described within it.

I give permission for the research, Mr. Gesar Temur to release and publish information to The Australian National University concerning my personal opinion and answers for the research questions that are needed for this project. I understand that such information will remain confidential.

While information gained during the research project may be published in academic journals or books, my real name and position title will not be used in relation to any of the information I have provide. I consent to be identified by a made-up name, numbers or alphabets when quoted in any publications produced as a result of this research.

I consent to this interview being recorded.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and I am satisfied with the answers I have received.

I understand that any personal, sensitive or potentially incriminating information will be kept confidential so far as the law allows. Data entered onto a computer will be kept in a computer accessible only by password by Gesar Temur.

I freely agree to continue participation in this research project as described within this document.

I understand that I will be given a signed copy of this document to keep.

Participant’s name (printed) ...........................................

Signature ........................................... Date

Name of witness to participant’s signature (printed) ...........................................

Signature ........................................... Date

Declaration by researcher*: I have given a verbal explanation of the research project, its procedures and risks and I believe that the participant has understood that explanation.

Researcher’s name (printed) ...........................................

Signature ........................................... Date
CONSENT FORM

Filling the void: An examination of the revival of Buddhism in Contemporary Mongolia

Researchers: Mr. Gesar Temur ANU.

1. I .............................................................(please print) consent to take part in the examination of the revival of Buddhism in Contemporary Mongolia Research Project. I have read the information sheet for this project and understand its contents. The information provided explains the nature and purpose of the research project, so far as it affects me, to my satisfaction. My consent is freely given.

2. I understand that if I agree to participate in the research project I will be asked to take part in an interview, which should last for no more than hour; and that in preparation for the interview I will be sent a list of questions indicating the matters to be discussed.

3. I understand that while information gained during the research project will be published in the researcher’s PhD thesis, and may be in academic journals or books, my name and position title will not be used in relation to any of the information I have provided, unless I explicitly consent in writing to be identified when quoted.

4. I understand that personal information, such as my name and work contact details, will be kept confidential so far as the law allows. This form and any other identifying materials will be stored separately in a locked office at the Australian National University. Data entered onto a computer will be kept in a computer accessible only by password by a member of the research team.

5. I understand that although any comments I make will not be attributed to me in any report or publication without my written consent, it is possible that others may guess the source of information, and that I should avoid disclosing information to the researchers which is of confidential status within government or which is defamatory of any person.

6. I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage, without providing any reason and that this will not have any adverse consequences for me. If I withdraw, the information I provide will not be used by the project.

Signed ...................................................... Date ................................

Audio taping

I consent to have my interview (if any) audio-taped by the interviewer. I understand that the tapes will be stored securely at the Australian National University and will be erased at the conclusion of the study.

Signed......................................................Date.................................
Suggested questions for members of Shedrup Ling.

Personal

- What age are you? 20s, 30s, 40s etc.
- How long have you been a member of the centre?
- What was the religious background of your family?
- How did you / your family practise this during the communist years?
- What made you, as an adult, become interested in Buddhism?
- Can you see yourself following this path for the rest of your life?

Forms of Buddhism

In the West, many members of Dharma Centres are more interested in the Teachings as they apply to psychology and mind-training, rather than as just a set of religious practices.

- Do you think this approach is useful for modern Mongolians, too, or would they prefer the older forms which are derived from Tibetan Buddhism?
• When you first came to this centre, was there anything in the activities that you found very different from those of the forms of Buddhism traditionally practised in Mongolia?

• What benefits do you receive from attending the centre? Spiritual? Material?

• Have they made a difference to your life?

• Has life in Mongolia in general become better in some way because of this centre and others like it?

• Do you see/practise Buddhism as a Religion, a Philosophy or as a Way of life?

• Do you call yourself a Buddhist? (Have you made any official commitment such as Taking Refuge, Five Lay Vows, Tantric Vows, thinking of taking Ordination etc?)
• What does it mean to be a Buddhist in modern Mongolia?

Government Policy

• How do you think Mongolians, in general, regard the revival of Buddhism?

• How do you think they regard the introduction of other religions?

• What attitude does the government take to religion in general?

• Is there government support for religious centres such as Shedrup Ling?
  (Legal, financial, moral.. etc?)

• Which religion, if any, would the government prefer to see established?
• Which religion would help the national identity and Mongolian society more?

Suggested questions for Centre Director(s), Lamas, Lay Teachers, Administrators, foreign Assistants, et al.

• What sorts of people attend this centre?
  (Nomads, city dwellers, professional people, those in need ... et al. .. )

• What are they looking for?
  (Spiritual instruction, moral support, material needs etc.)

• Does there need to be any adaptation, to meet cultural and legal differences, of the teachings, the activities, the organisation and administration of the centre?

• Where does the centre get its support: financial, administrative, moral etc.?

• What Government requirements does the centre have to meet in order to be permitted to function?