Dzengseo and others often fell ill, mainly from gastric complaints or from debilitating fevers; he was so weakened by one such bout that he was unable to stand for several months. Other causes of death included friendly fire from soldiers carelessly shooting their arrows at passing game. On that occasion Dzengseo and two others presided over the ensuing inquest, which led to the payment of monetary compensation, presumably to the victims’ families.

Beyond the many compelling details, Dzengseo’s diary will enrich the ongoing debate about the degree of assimilation of the Manchu in the early Qing. Di Cosmo is right both when he points out that certain practices cannot be definitively assigned to either Manchu or Chinese culture, and when he suggests that Dzengseo’s familiarity with certain aspects of Chinese culture amounted more to a shared common knowledge than to any real ‘sinicisation’ (p. 42). That Manchuness was less important than military culture as a defining feature of Dzengseo’s identity is unlikely to have been unusual in that time and place.

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Mongolian Buddhism: the rise and fall of the sangha

Michael K. Jerryson

This brief book is really two works collapsed into one, and which at times rest uneasily with each other. One book is a relatively straightforward account of what Michael Jerryson calls the sangha – ‘a clerical community’ or ‘congregation’ (p. 2) – of Mongolian Buddhism. It is, in other words, a brief history of Buddhism in Mongolia. The history is useful, particularly as it provides a reminder of quite how extensive the role of Buddhists and Buddhism was in early twentieth century Mongolia. This time period is the key focus of the book, with close to half of the body of the text devoted to the period.

The recounting of history, with its emphasis on the Buddhist aspect, also gives a different perspective on events and people that may be familiar to readers. It also help reminds us that although there is tendency to view the Buddhists as a single entity, in reality it was a community as fragmented, if not more so, than the early socialists. However, drawn largely from extant English-language literature, this aspect of the book will probably appeal most to readers lacking a background in Mongolian history. Regional specialists will be familiar with the account presented here and will probably find things to quibble with and wish for a more extensive use of newer material. Johan Elverskog’s work on the uses of Buddhism by the Qing, for example, goes unmentioned here. Similarly, many may wish for a more critical reading of older sources, such as Larry Moses’ work,
which although criticised in the Introduction (p. 5) is relied on quite a bit in the text itself. I would also wish for a greater discussion of the impact of Buddhist philosophy and teachings on Mongolian politics in the early twentieth century, both in the ‘periods of autonomy’ prior to 1921, when the Mongolian state was headed by a Buddhist incarnation, and after, when the call for a ‘purer Buddhism’ by some socialists was in fact an attempt to undermine the power of the sangha through a claimed return to the origins of Buddhism, which, the socialists pointed out, was not caught up in worldly possessions, as the Mongolian lamas now were.

The second, and for me, much more intriguing, aspect of the book is a compilation of interviews conducted by Jerryson and others, particularly the Mongolian historian D. Ölzibaatar, on the repressions of the 1930s. (In the interest of full disclosure, I travelled with Jerryson for a while in the summer of 1999 when some of the interviews were conducted and provided notes of some of my other interviews.) The interviews are used in the sections of the book dealing with the 1930s, but they also largely stand on their own strength, and form an appendix that comprises almost one-third the total length of the book. The narratives provided by Ölzibaatar, which tend to be the longest, are particularly interesting and bring a humanising aspect to the accounts of the ‘reign of terror’ in Mongolia in the 1930s. (Contrary to the author’s claim (p. 203, n.3) Mongolian historians – when writing in Mongolian – tend not use this term. It is an artifact of Western influences.) It would have been interesting to see these used a bit more to challenge the received narratives of older accounts, which Jerryson begins to do here, but not as fully as one might wish. The narratives reveal a much more complex and nuanced account of the 1930s than the standard histories, and it would have been fruitful, I think, to tease out their implications a bit further.

Because of the time the author spent in Mongolia conducting interviews, it is a bit surprising not to see greater use of Mongolian sources, particularly since one of the newer ones is mentioned in the Introduction (p. 7). The classic Mongolian work on early socialist approaches to Buddhism – Pürevjav and Dashjams’s *The resolution of the question of the monasteries and lamas in the Mongolian People’s Republic* (1965) – upon which almost all pre-1990 Western accounts of the period are based, is cited only through Moses’ use of it, and any of the more recent work by Mongolian historians on the period are unmentioned. Two works he does cite by Mongolians (writing in English), Sandag and Kendall’s *Poisoned Arrows* and Dashpurev and Soni’s *Reign of Terror in Mongolia*, are as much political tracts as they are histories, and need to be treated with caution. To cite one example, Jerryson repeats Sandag’s argument that Soviet / KGB involvement in the repressions ‘undercut[s] Mongolia’s and the Dotood Yaam’s responsibility’ (p. 78). This, however, although a fairly common argument in Mongolia, is really a political stance, as it is clear that many Mongolians were willing participants, and not coerced puppets as Sandag’s view implies.

The book could have used a stronger editorial hand. It is not clear what is meant, for example, by ‘Buddhism is widely unknown in Mongolia’ (p. 2). Also,