



BRILL

INNER ASIA 17 (2015) 169–173



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Editorial Introduction

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The papers in this issue of *Inner Asia* address a range of subjects, secular and religious, contemporary and historical, but each offers a new perspective on topics that have attracted scholarly attention.

The first two papers both re-examine received wisdom regarding Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism. Lobsang Yongdan reveals the little-known story of the uptake of scientific astronomy in Tibet through the study of the 18th century translation of Jesuit mathematical and calendrical works. When he was a child, the author's maternal granduncle was one of the many Tibetan monks who made calendrical calculations and astronomic predictions using techniques described in Tibetan texts, in this case from the library of the famous Labrang monastery in Amdo. In many ways these techniques could be seen as entirely 'traditional' since they existed squarely within the ancient monastic institutions of Tibet. However, in the course of his research, Lobsang was astonished to learn that the origins of these Tibetan calendrical techniques was actually the Jesuit works on astronomy translated into Chinese, Mongolian and Tibetan in the early eighteenth century. The story of these texts reveals something of the complexity of knowledge-flows in the Qing period. Rather than a simple binary relationship between a Jesuit-mediated 'European' science and some notional 'Chinese culture', we see particular projects of dissemination carried out by a Qing court that was linked to both Inner Asian scholarly traditions and those in the Chinese language. In the Tibetan case, mathematical and astronomical techniques originally brought by the Jesuits became central to calendrical methods that came to be thought of as entirely Tibetan. When Younghusband made his incursive expedition into Tibet in 1903, then, he did not bring two hitherto disconnected systems of knowledge into contact for the first time. The Tibet that the British encountered had already studied and indigenised elements of the same mathematical and calendrical science known to Europe.

One fascinating aspect of this history is the role that Mongolian scholarship played in the process. When the Qing Kangxi emperor (1654–1722) ordered the compilation of a new Chinese mathematical compendium based on the

work of the Jesuits, he had the work translated into Mongolian. When the emperor later ordered that the work be translated into Tibetan this was done by translating the Mongolian language version using a team of monastic scholars including the senior ecclesiastical figure of Mongolia, the Jebtsundamba Khutuktu. As a language of scholarship, then, Mongolian was clearly a better initial medium of translation to Tibetan than was Chinese.

Buddhism is also the subject of the second of our papers, but in this case Nikolay Tsyrempilov explores the anti-Buddhist narratives of 19th century Russia. His paper examines the vociferous critiques of Lamas and their 'superstitious' teachings by Russian Orthodox missionaries, and other commentators, including Tsarist officials, who denounced the importance of Buddhism among the Buryat and Kalmyk subjects of the empire. This was a war of representation, a concerted attempt to cast the religion in a particular and almost entirely negative way, by activists with the ear of the Russian administration. Tsyrempilov describes variants of familiar negative tropes that answer to the shorthand term of Orientalism. These narratives describe the dead hand of a false ideology blighting the progress of the unfortunate lands under its sway, a corrupt leadership (the Lamas) that was a burden to their own people, kept in place by deceit and ignorance; an implacable enemy to Christian civilisation, engaged in sinister plots to undermine and subvert the West. The paper charts the extent of these narratives, and the logic of this representation of 'Buddhism as a Problem' to be addressed by imperial civil and religious policy. But Tsyrempilov also notes some of the counter-currents; more positive representations of Buddhism that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Tame and condescending though they be by 21st century standards, even these less-negative narratives of Buddhism had to contend with the dominance of strident and implacably disapproving attitudes towards Buddhism within the Orthodox establishment.

The paper reminds us of the limited and precarious nature of religious tolerance in the Tsarist state, and the outspoken influence of those within the establishment who lobbied for the suppression of a 'foreign' religion. Here we find a sort of predecessor of the Cold War and War on Terror logics of conspiracy and subversion, by which enemies of the (Tsarist) state promoted policies designed to corrode and collapse the moral order, so that Lutheran Germans within the administration were said to have promoted Lamaists with secret loyalties to the oriental Qing enemy. With historical distance these attitudes seem patently self-serving and judgemental. But Tsyrempilov's point is that this anti-Buddhism reflected an identification on the part of the commentators concerned with the project of rulership of the imperial state. In this respect this particular variant of Orientalism was but one variety of power-oriented