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‘Unbiased Scholars’ and ‘Superficial Intellectuals’

Was there a Public Culture between Europe and Inner Asia in the Long 19th Century?

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Was there a Public Culture between Europe and Inner Asia in the Long 19th Century?

Abstract: This working paper is derived from a larger research project exploring what I consider to be a tenuous but persistent form of “public culture” extending between Inner Asia and Europe over the course of the 18th and, especially, 19th centuries. This “stranger relationality,” as Michael Warner would have it, was mediated by new forms and routes of Eurasianist textual circulation. In this late imperial period, spread along the frontiers of the Qing, Tsarist, and British empires, Tibetan, Mongolian, and Buryat monks read works by European and East Asian intellectuals on all manner of technical knowledge, and began writing not to fellow scholastics or local readers, but to a global community of “the knowledgeable” (Tib. *mkhas pa*; Mon. *baysi, nomčin*).

The social site of what I am exploring as a new form of reading, interpreting, and writing in Asia’s heartland was the dispersed web of monastic colleges (Tib. *grwa tshang;* Mon. *datsang*) that connected generations of polyglot and cosmopolitan scholastics across the otherwise diverse and segregated socio-political blocs of late imperial Central and Eastern Tibet, north China, all Mongolian territories, and Siberia. My ongoing research is revealing how the practices of secularity (as defined by the Multiple Secularities framework) enacted by this commonwealth of frontier, synthetic scholastics was repurposed in the early 20th century, in the ruins of the Qing and Tsarist empires, to invent the social imaginaries, national subjects, civil societies, and other products of socialist secularism that produced modern Inner Asia (and continues to legitimize claims by Russia and the PRC on its Inner Asian frontiers).

In this working paper, I will briefly introduce the social sites of my sources, the Buddhist monastic colleges that spanned the Sino-Russian frontiers, and provide a few examples of synthetic scholastic products that emerged in this previously unstudied form of Eurasianist public culture (c. 1750–1930s). I will also share some preliminary arguments I have drawn about the ways that practices of secularity amongst the actors my work considers led directly to the creation of the modern public sphere,

civil society, and ironically, revolutionary institutional forms and models of history that had violently erased scholastic culture from public life.

Social Site: Datsang and Late Imperial Géluk Scholasticism

In an undated essay published posthumously in 1997, the eminent Tibetan monastic scholar and education reformer Dzémé Rinpoché addressed an "issue" (Tib. *dpyad gzhi*) that for centuries had vexed Buddhist literati in the Tibetan, Mongolian, and Siberian heartland of Asia.[1] This was the claim that the earth was round and rotated on an axis. This scandalous proposition had arrived from Europe with the Jesuits during the Ming Dynasty in the 16th century but was often misattributed to "heretical" (Skt. *tīrthika*; Tib. *mu stegs pa*; Mon. *buruyu nomtai*) Chinese literati and Indian paṇḍits. In contrast, canonical sources record the Buddha describing, in some detail and on multiple occasions, the world as flat. Unlike more familiar debates from early modern Europe, such incommensurable representations of the world, whether attributed to the Buddha or Copernicus, were not in fact the problem for Dzémé Rinpoché. Indeed, the Buddha himself had hardly been consistent on the issue in the received record of his teachings. In the Mahāyāna sūtras and in the tantras, for example, the Buddha describes at length the topographies and typologies of the world's beings and their environment in innumerable ways that overlap and mutually contradict one another. In canonical scriptural collections such as the *Abhidharma* (Tib. *Chos mngon pa*; Mon. *Abidarma*) and the *Kālacakra-tantra* (Tib. *Dus kyi 'khor lo rgyud*; Mon. Čay *un kürdün* ündüsün), for instance, the Buddha describes the shape of the *axis mundi,* Mt. Sumeru, as square and as circular.

Quite unlike the more familiar debates about non-Biblical descriptions of the cosmos in early-modern Europe, the scandal for Tibetan and

1 Dze smad rin po che *alias* Blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas (1927–1996). The fourth incarnation in the Dze smad line, this hermit, scholar, and poet was a very influential though controversial figure in the first forty years of the Tibetan diaspora. For a biographical sketch and summary of his works, see the memorial of his student and editor, Thupten Jinpa, in: Dze smad rin po che, *Skyabs Rje Dze Smad Rin Po Che'i Gsung Rtsom Gces Btus* (Mundgod, Karnataka, India: Tashi Gephel House, Shartse College, Gaden Monastic University, 1997). For his collected works, see: Dze smad rin po che blo bzang dpal ldan bstan 'dzin yar rgyas, *Blo Bzang Dpal Ldan Bstan 'dzin Yar Rgyas Gyi Gsung 'Bum*, 6 vols. (Mundgod, Karnataka State: Zemey Labrang, Gaden Shartse Monastic College, 1997).

Mongolian scholastics over the last three centuries had not been that a round earth contradicts some kind of sacred cosmology. As Dzémé Rinpoché felt compelled to re-articulate from his post in the Tibetan refugee settlements of South India only a couple decades ago, the implication for Inner Asian scholastics *concerned not the world but how we know it*. Competing astronomical, mathematical, medical, cartographic, and Orientalist knowledge arriving in the 18th and 19th centuries had profoundly challenged the knowledge practices of late imperial Buddhist scholastics, much less so the contents of that knowledge.[2] For such scholastics, the world and how we know it are the same. Valid propositions about the structure of the world have less to do with mirroring reality 'out there' than with correctly following a hierarchy of direct and inferential cognition that braided together knowing with techniques of moral, affective, and salvific self-cultivation.

The disciplining of such hierarchies of knowledge took place in the dominant, indeed almost singular, educational facility in Inner Asia: the monastic college (Tib. *grwa tshang*; Mon. *datsang*). While monastic colleges always existed in local ecologies of political intrigue, patronage, and administrative affairs across Tibetan, Mongolian, and Buryat societies, over the course of the late Qing and Tsarist period they shared institutional forms (a five-fold college structure), degree systems, dialectical training, coursebooks, interpretative techniques, genres of expression, and importantly, a *lingua franca* (literary Tibetan).[3] Directly related to the development of a dispersed Eurasianist public culture, scholastic pupils traveled by the tens of thousands over vast distances during this period to study and teach in scholastic centers, such as in the great Géluk monasteries of the

2 Which is not to say that the contents of frontier Géluk scholastic knowledge did not radically expand during this period. As I describe below, it most certainly did. But in the global exchanges that scholastics felt they were entering, empiricism and the like did not threaten but rather hardened scholastic commitments to received hierarchies of knowledge; in other words, to received procedures for producing valid knowledge (described below).

3 On Géluk scholastic colleges along the Tibeto-Mongol-Sino-Russian frontiers in this period, see: Stacey Van Vleet, "Medicine, Monasteries and Empire: Rethinking Tibetan Buddhism in Qing China" (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 2015); Matthew W. King, "Surveys of Monastic Colleges as Polemic in Zawa Damdin's Golden Book (T. Gser Gyi Deb Ther; M. Altan Dewter)," *Mongol Studies* 35 (forthcoming); Matthew W. King and Pamela E. Klassen, "Suppressing the Mad Elephant: Missionaries, Lamas, and the Mediation of Sacred Historiographies in the Tibetan Borderlands," *History and Anthropology* 26, no. 5 (2015); Matthew W. King, "Giving Milk to Snakes: A Socialist 'Dharma Minister' and a 'Stubborn' Monk on How to Reject the Dharma in Revolutionary Buryatia and Khalkha," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 4, no. 2 (2016).

Lhasa region in Central Tibet (Tib. *Dbus gtsang*), in Eastern Tibet (Tib. *'A mdo*), in Beijing (such as the imperial Yonghegong Monastery), Mt. Wutai (in Shanxi), or Yeke-yin Küriy-e (contemporary Ulaanbaatar).

While there are many Buddhist traditions in Inner Asia, for political and social reasons that cannot detain us here, it was the reformed Géluk (Tib. *dge lugs*) or "Yellow Religion" (Mon. *sir-a shasin*) tradition of the Dalai Lamas that was at the forefront of global encounters in the late- and post-imperial period.[4] The Géluk school was taken up with fervor by the Qing court, with Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661), Kangxi (r. 1662–1722), Yongzheng (r. 1723–1735), and Qianlong (r. 1736–1796) emperors all installing Inner Asian scholastics as court advisors and widely patronizing the spread of Géluk scholastic culture across north China, Inner and Outer Mongolia. In the 18th century, as Tsarist Russia began to exert its influence more actively along the Siberian frontier as part of escalations in the Great Game, rulers from Catherine the Great (r. 1762–1796) to the Tsarist Nikolai recognized the Géluk tradition as Europe's only indigenous Buddhist tradition, and incorporated its scholastic culture into evolving projects to consolidate and defend its Asian frontiers.[5]

After the 18th century, such Géluk monastic colleges became the primary site of education, literacy, medical practice, and all forms of non-bureaucratic knowledge production in Inner Asia. As such, such colleges and the monastic estates to which they belonged were inextricable from the projection of Qing and Tsarist power into Inner Asia, and for mediating (as well as resisting) such projections on the part of local communities.

4 On the "Qing-Géluk formation," see: Johan Elverskog, *The Jewel Translucent Sūtra. Altan Khan and the Mongols in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003); Johan Elverskog, "Mongol Time Enters a Qing World," in *Time, Temporality, and Imperial Transition. East Asia from Ming to Qing*, ed. Lynn A. Struve (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawai'i Press, 2005); Johan Elverskog, "Wutai Shan, Qing Cosmopolitanism, and the Mongols," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 6 (2011); Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China: A Political History of the Tibetan Institution of Reincarnation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

5 Anya Bernstein, "Pilgrims, Fieldworkers, and Secret Agents: Buryat Buddhologists and the History of an Eurasian Imaginary," *Inner Asia* 11, no. 1 (2009); Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China*; Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror. History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Patricia Ann Berger, *Empire of Emptiness. Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003); Elverskog, "Wutai Shan"; Johan Elverskog, *Our Great Qing. The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006); Matthew W. King, *Ocean of Milk, Ocean of Blood. A Mongolian Monk in the Ruins of the Qing Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, these monastic colleges became staging grounds for nationalist and socialist movements that produced the modern formation of Inner Asian societies we know today. Indeed, I would argue that the network of Géluk monastic colleges, which by the early 20th century stretched between the Himalayan foothills of the British Raj, the Qing Empire, the Siberian front of the Russian Empire all the way to St. Petersburg, was the most dispersed institutional recipient of socialism in Asia (perhaps the world). In the 1910s, '20s, and '30s in Mongolian, Siberian, and (in the 1950s) in Tibetan communities, many prominent Géluk scholastics became leaders in the nascent progressive movements (before enduring profound socialist state violence and erasure enacted by revolutionary governments).

In Géluk "mother monasteries" (Tib. *ma dgon pa*) and in their ever-replicating webs of monastic colleges spread across Asia's heartland, dialectics, epistemology, and 'valid reasoning' were the bedrock of scholastic degrees that pivoted on the public performances of debate. In these raucous dialectic contests, seated 'answerers' (Tib. *len 'debs pa*) attempt to defend particular philosophical positions against standing 'questioners' (Tib. *rtags gsal btang ba*) who assault their logical consistency, deride their opponent's poor memorization of scriptural passages, and mock their clumsy use of 'the sharp sword' of logic and reasoning. For the scholastic elite of the Géluk school, the practice of debate is a collaborative pursuit of religious certainty. Tom Tillmans writes pointedly that Tibetan debate logic is "through and through a set of rules for a dialogue" that Kenneth Liberman writes is founded through the performance of routinized displays of physical and intellectual confrontation violence.[6] And it was in the late-imperium, my research suggests, that such dialogue opened to a dispersed dialogue with stranger-scholars across new Eurasianist circuits of exchange.

In practice, such scholastic pursuits never exceed the established truths of particular authorities, such as the founders of a particular philosophical college as recorded in monastic textbooks (Tib. *yig cha*).[7] Elijah Ary has recently illuminated some of the usually hidden intellectual acrobatics

6 Tom J. F. Tillemans, "Formal and Semantic Aspects of Tibetan Buddhist Debate Logic," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (1989); Kenneth Liberman, *Dialectical Practice in Tibetan Philosophical Culture: An Ethnomethodological Inquiry into Formal Reasoning* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 57.

7 Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping the Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2003).

required by Géluk scholastics to define their institutional identities, power structures, and influence.[8] Realpolitik aside, in Géluk rhetoric at least, debate and reason stand alongside, if not above, scripture (Tib. *gsung*) as a dependable source for arriving at religious certainty.[9] What matters here is that newly arriving technical knowledge from Europe, such as astronomy, was legible in this Géluk matrix of materiality, emotion, and 'reason.' Similarly, the distant European authors of such knowledge, though rarely encountered in person until the 20th century, were legible as other 'knowledgeable ones' engaged in a shared pursuit of knowledge about the world.

More specifically, foreign scientific knowledge and its associated epistemologies were legible to monks in such a way that it required a response. Conflicting accounts of the shape of the earth, for example, could be synthesized with authoritative scholastic positions or it could be rejected using the 'sword' of logic and reasoning. Conflicting claims could not just be ignored. Nor could they be dismissed by quoting scripture (a child-like move identified by Géluk scholastics in Protestant missionaries, who they began to meet in Eastern Tibet in the 19th century, and who seemed unable to defend their religion or justify their missionizing using logic and reasoning, only biblical quotations).[10] As José Cabezón writes, unlike many other less-scholastically inclined Buddhist traditions from Asia, there was (and is) a Géluk-sect scholastic compulsion to take contrarian claims seriously, whether this entails refuting them or synthesizing them with orthodox positions.[11] And for this reason, the imperially-central Géluk school opened itself for centuries to a Eurasianist global exchange that was at first a textually-based public culture, but transformed later into those

8 Elijah S. Ary, *Authorized Lives: Biography and the Early Formation of Geluk Identity* (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015).

9 As the primary technique of monastic education in this context, the performance of dialectical reasoning in debate is understood to encompass the trilogy of classical Buddhist soteriological technologies: 'hearing' the teaching (Skt. śruta; Tib. *thos pa*); 'contemplating' its meaning (Skt. *cintā*; Tib. *bsam pa*); and 'meditating' to achieve a definitive realization (Skt. *bhāvanā*; Tib. *sgom pa*). As Daniel Perdue writes about Géluk monastic education: "Great emphasis is placed on the knowledge to be gained through debate. Debate for monks in Tibet is not mere academics but a way of using direct implications from the obvious in order to generate an inference of the non-obvious state of phenomenon" (Perdue 1992, 6–7). The central purpose of such debate is "to defeat misconceptions, to establish correct view, and to clear away objections to that view" (1992, 6).

10 King and Klassen, "Suppressing the Mad Elephant."

11 José Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

paradigmatic forms of modern social imagination: the national subject, the public sphere, unilineal History, and rationalized models of development and emancipation.

Knowing the World and Its Contents: Trends in Late-Imperial Border Scholasticism

One effect of the bloody 17th century centralization of political and religious authority under the Géluk umbrella by the Fifth Dalai Lama (Tib. *Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho,* 1617–1682), his famous regent, the Désí Sanggyé Gyatso (*Sde srid Sangs rgyas rgya mtsho*, 1653–1705), and their Qoshuut Mongol patrons, was that various fields of scholastic knowledge tied to classical India were promoted as both underlying the authority of the new Ganden Potrang government and guiding the curriculum of the ever-spreading Géluk monastic network. These fields of knowledge included most centrally the "five major sciences" (Skt. *pañcavidyā*; Tib. *rig gnas che ba lnga*; Mon. *ukhaghan tabun*; Ch. 五明 *wuming*) and "five minor sciences" (Tib. *rig gnas chung lnga*) that included mathematics, astrology, poetry, and composition. Of the major fields of knowledge, medicine (Skt. *cikitsāvidyā*; Tib. *gso ba'i rig pa*; Mon. *emneku ukhaghan*; Ch.醫方名 *yifangming*) was widely promoted alongside arts and crafts (Skt. *śilpakarmavidyā*; Tib. *bzo gnas kyi rig pa*; Ch.工巧明 *gongqiao ming*), logic (Skt. *hetuvidyā*; Tib. *gtan tshigs kyi rig pa*; Mon. *učir siltaghan*; Ch.因明 *yinming*), grammar (Skt. *śabdavidyā*, Tib. *sgra'i rig pa*; Mon. *daghun-u ukhaghan*; Ch.聲明 *shengming*), and finally, the "inner knowledge" of Dharma practice (Skt. *adhyātmavidyā*; Tib. *nang gi rig pa*; Mon. *dotughadu ukhaghan*; Ch.內明 *neiming*).

It was within this rubric of the five major and minor sciences, hierarchies of direct and inferential knowledge, and the imperative to dialogue with opponent traditions, that frontier Géluk scholastics came to interrogate Copernican astronomy, geographic knowledge, medical arts, and cartographic techniques. In such encounters, we see a relentless inquiry on the part of scholastics to account for foreign bodies of knowledge: a Eurasian treasure hunt that might find hidden teachings relevant for Buddhist self- and community formation in "western fields of knowledge" (Tib. *nub pa'i rig gnas*) as diverse as astronomy, cartography, veterinary

medicine, and Christian doctrine. To authorize this synthetic approach to global circuits of knowledge and knowledge practices, monastic authors often quoted the canonical *Samādhirājasūtra*: "There is no doubt that any well-explained teaching one may hear was taught by the buddhas."[12]

Many of the earliest and most sustained engagements by Géluk scholastics with the "well-explained teachings" of European technical knowledge occurred in the context of astronomy and mathematics (Tib. *rtsis rig*). Such knowledge fields were very germane to the grand synthetic ambitions of the early Qing emperors, who installed Tibetan and Mongolian scholastics as well as Jesuits at court as experts in astronomy and calendrics.[13] The Jesuits had come to China during the Ming dynasty in the 16th century, and by the advent of the Qing in 1644 had already translated a substantial number of scientific works into Chinese. A very famous example from the Ming would be Matteo Ricci's (1552–1610) 1607 translation, with Xu Guangqi, of Euclid's *Elements*. Once polyglot Tibetan and Mongolian scholastics arrived in the cosmopolitan centers of Qing power, these Chinese translations of European math and sciences were available and, in some cases, voraciously consumed.

For example, in the early 18th century during the reign of Kangxi, Tibetan and Mongolian scholars translated a large of number of the European astronomical texts into Mongolian and Tibetan under the title *Tibetan Translations of the Astronomical Works of the Mañjuśrīi Emperor Kangxi* (*'Jam dbyangs bde ldan rgyal pos mdzad pa'i rgya rtsis bod skad du bsgyur ba*), or in short *The Great Chinese Astronomical Compendium* (*Rgya rtsis chen mo*). Among these translated texts was: *Skud pa brgyad kyi ngos 'dzin* (*The Actual Identification of Eight-line Tables),* one of Johann Schreck's (1576–1630) works on trigonometry. Lobsang Yongdan, Dieter Schuh, and Brian Baumann have all explored ways that Chinese and Jesuit-inflected

12 Michael J. Sweet, "Jesus the World Protector: Eighteenth-Century Gelukpa Historians View 'Christianity'," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 26, no. 1 (2006): 175.

13 For surveys of the evolution and after-effects of Qing strategies to classify and manage its multiethnic empires, see: Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*; Lynn A. Struve, eds., *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Evelyn S. Rawski, *The Last Emperors: A Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Pamela Kyle Crossley, "Pluralité Impériale et Identités Subjectives Dans La Chine Des Qing," *Annales, Histoires, Sciences Sociales* 63e Année, no. 3 (2008); Elverskog, "Mongol Time Enters a Qing World"; King, *Ocean of Milk*.

mathematic systems intersected with Indo-Tibetan systems in the hands of late-imperial frontier scholastics.[14] An example is Akya Lobzang Tenpai Gyaltsen (*A kyā blo bzang bstan pa'i rgyal mtshan*), who was able to study the Pythagorean theorem in Beijing and then transmit it in Tibetan language written works into the mathematical and astrological systems still employed in Eastern Tibet.

While there is much work to be done as yet to establish clearly the details of exchange with Chinese and European intellectuals, in the 17th–18th centuries we see an explosion of empirically-based, critical hermeneutical approaches developed in Géluk scholastic cultures driven by specific groups of monks that were in sustained exchange with Qing cosmopolitan centers. For example, Janet Gyatso has argued recently for an early-modernity in Tibet which paralleled that of Europe, based on a turn away from scriptural tradition to empirical observation and experimentation in medicine, such as the privileging of observation of dissected corpses over scriptural descriptions of physiology, considering the relation of sexuality to health, and systematizing monastic knowledge about fetal development.[15] Longstanding monastic fields of knowledge about immunology and veterinary medicine were similarly expanded or overturned entirely.[16] Other examples include dramatic developments in life-writing, a major preoccupation in Inner Asia, focused on appropriate genres of expression and rhetorical practices that suggest new considerations of individual

14 Brian Gregory Baumann, *Divine Knowledge: Buddhist Mathematics According to the Anonymous Manual of Mongolian Astrology and Divination* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Dieter Schuh, *Studien zur Geschichte der Mathematik und Astronomie in Tibet: Teil 1, Elementare Arithmetik* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1967); Lobsang Yongdan, "An Exploration of a Tibetan Lama's Study of the Pythagorean Theorem in the Mid-18th Century (L'introduction Du Théorème de Pythagore Au Tibet Au Milieu Du XVIIIe Siècle)," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines*, no. 49 (2018).

15 Janet Gyatso, "Experience, Empiricism, and the Fortunes of Authority: Tibetan Medicine and Buddhism on the Eve of Modernity," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

16 Erdenibayar, "Sumpa Khenpo Ishibaljur: A Great Figure in Mongolian and Tibetan Cultures," in *The Mongolia-Tibet Interface. Opening New Research Terrains in Inner Asia,* ed. Uradyn Erden Bulag and Hildegard Diemberger (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Thuken Losang Chökyi Nyima, *The Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Systems: A Tibetan Study of Asian Religious Thought* (Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2009); Vladimir L. Uspenskij, "Ancient History of the Mongols According to Gombojab, an Eighteenth Century Mongolian Historian," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 58, no. 1 (2005).

agency and self-representation.[17] Curiously, it has not been noted in prior scholarship that the drivers of all these seemingly disjointed developments were polyglot Géluk scholastics moving between imperial centers and the Inner Asian hinterland, all engaged in their broader work with the kind of public cultures my project explores (described below).

Beyond Inner Asian interaction with hard sciences, we also see the same communities of frontier scholastics engaging the fruits of the nascent human sciences, such as philology, archaeology and ethnology, and trying to synthesise these with received scriptural traditions. This was especially so in the 19th century, when early European Orientalist scholarship on classical Indian Buddhism began to be translated from Russian and German into Tibetan and Mongolian. So too were the findings of early excavations of the so-called Silk Road in Central Asia, when scholarly articles, pictures of artefacts, and ethnographic descriptions of living Muslim communities began to circulate through monastic colleges.[18] This prompted scholastics to dramatically re-assess received historical narratives about, for example, the transmission of the Buddha's teachings to Inner Asia, but also about re-assessing the chronology of history itself. For example, a recurring debate concerned whether the tradition should abandon the received dating of the Buddha's life, part of a scholastic genre known as *ten-tsi* (Tib. *bstan rtsis*), in light of newly circulating British and Russian Orientalist publications on dates recovered from inscriptions on the Aśoka pillars at Buddhist sites in India.

While the 16th–18th centuries saw Jesuits as primary intermediaries between foreign intellectual traditions and Qing circles, as the 19th century progressed it was Protestant missionaries working in north and eastern China (including east Tibet in Amdo) and Orthodox churches in Siberia that brought competing models of religious life, biomedical practice, cartography, and models of socio-political progress most forcefully into the intellectual life of the Géluk scholastic colleges.[19] Indeed, alongside the synthesis of foreign mathematics and astronomy into scholastic bodies of

17 Kurtis Schaeffer, "Tibetan Biography: Growth and Criticism," in *Editions, Éditions: L'Écrit Au Tibet, Évolution et Devenir*, ed. Anne Chayet, Cristina Scherrer-Schaub, Françoise Robin, and Jean-Luc Achard (München: Indus Verlag, 2010); King, *Ocean of Milk*.

18 King, *Ocean of Milk*; Matthew W. King, "Knowing King Gésar Between Buddhist Monastery and Socialist Academy, Or the Practices of Secularism in Inner Asia," *Himalaya. The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 36, no. 10 (2016).

19 See, for example: King and Klassen, "Suppressing the Mad Elephant."

knowledge, rudimentary descriptions of Christian doctrine were inscribed into classical Indo-Tibetan doxographies of Buddhist and non-Buddhist views (Tib. *grub mtha'*).[20] So too were the philosophical positions of Chinese Buddhist schools and Daoism, as in Güng Gombojab's revolutionary 18th century *History of Buddhism in China* (*Rgya nag chos 'byung*) and Tuken Chökyi Nyima's 1802 *Crystal Mirror of Tenet Systems*, wherein readers of Tibetan encountered details about topics such as Chan and Confucianism, or Japanese and Korean religious history.[21]

A particularly interesting example for my project, to which I will turn for the remainder of this paper, was the 'cartographic move' of the 18th and 19th centuries, wherein dedicated geographic texts describing in detail most of the territory of what we now consider Tibet, China, and Mongolia began to appear that shared "a distinctively early modern conception of a plateau-wide Tibetan [and Mongol-Buryat] region."[22] A prominent example is the 1865 *Oceanic Book: A Clear Description of the Manner in Which the Precious Buddha's Teachings Spread into the Land of Amdo* (Tib. *Yul mdo smad kyi ljongs su thub bstan rin po che ji ltar dar ba'i tshul gsal bar brjod pa deb ther rgya mtsho*) written from the 1830s to 1865 by Drakgön Zhapdrung Konchok Tenpé Rapgyé (Tib. *Brag dgon zhabs drung Dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas*, 1800/1–1869).[23] What is particularly important for my project is that the scholastic authors of these 18th- and 19th-century works were required to amalgamate new information about global geography into received cosmologies from the Abhidharma and Kalācakra-tantra. This included reports of European sites such as St. Petersburg, Paris, and Germany in works by figures such as Gombojav

20 King and Klassen; Sweet, "Jesus the World Protector."

21 mGon po skyabs, *Rgya Nag Gi Yul Du Dam Pa'i Chos Dar Tshul Gtso Bor Bshad Pa Blo Gsal Kun Tu Dga' Ba'i Rna Rgyan* (sDe dge: sDe dge par khang, unknown); Thu'u bkwan blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma, *Grub Mtha' Shel Gyi Me Long* (Lan kru'u: Kan su'u mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 1984).

22 Gray Tuttle, "Challenging Central Tibet's Dominance of History: The Oceanic Book, a Nineteenth-Century Politico-Religious Geographic History," in *Mapping the Modern in Tibet. PIATS 2006: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies. Königswinter 2006*, ed. Gray Tuttle (Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies GmbH, 2011), 135.

23 Brag dgon zhabs drung dkon mchog bstan pa rab rgyas, *Yul Mdo Smad Kyi Ljongs Su Thub Bstan Rin Po Che Ji Ltar Dar Ba'i Tshul Gsal Bar Brjod Pa Deb Ther Rgya Mtsho* (New Delhi: Sharada Rani, 1975). The first edition of *The Oceanic Book* was completed in 1833, expanded in 1849, and supplemented in 1865. See: Tuttle, "Challenging Central Tibet's Dominance of History."

(Tib. *Mgon po skyabs*, 18th century) and Tsenpo Nomonhan Jampel Chökyi Tendzin Trinlé (Tib. *Btsan po no min han 'Jam dpal chos kyi bstan 'dzin 'phrin las*, 1789–1839).

The blossoming of this new genre, tied inextricably to Qing and Tsarist imperial projects to systematize knowledge about the topographic, ethnic, linguistic, and religious mosaic of their empires, also included reports about the Arctic and its movement between seasons of endless light and endless night. The implication of this new knowledge was that the earth was round and rotating, prompting three centuries of scholastic debate that included Dzémé Rinpoché just a few decades ago, and illustrates the formation of a tenuous, Eurasian public culture with which my project is concerned.

While examples of synthetic, cosmopolitan scholasticism are plentiful, I will pause here and emphasize my research question, which is not simply *what did such monks read*? Not only *what knowledge practices did they draw upon to make sense of radically new bodies of knowledge*? Not only *what new forms of scholastic writing and scholastic knowledge arose as a result*? But, primarily, *for whom did such monks write*? *What was their public*, *and what public of strangers did they come to feel themselves a part of* as they looked anew at stars, cadavers, the ritual life of newly discovered societies, the topographies of the known world, and the material evidence of the deep history of the Buddhadharma?

To explore these question a little further, I will now focus on an exemplary case study that anchors my project: the work of the 18th-century frontier scholastic *par excellence*, the polymath Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Peljor, and the interpretative precedents he innovated that lay as the bedrock for the later forms of public culture my research considers.

Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Peljor, the Round Earth, and the Roots of Inner Asian Public Culture

Late-imperial ruminations on European astronomical and related knowledge in Inner Asia largely begins with the controversial work of the polyglot Sumpa Khenpo Yéshé Peljor (Tib. *Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor,* 1704–1788) and his close reader the Sixth Panchen Lama (Tib. *Paṇ chen bla ma blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes,* 1738–1780), second in authority and

stature only to the Dalai Lama in Inner Asia.[24] Sumpa Khenpo was an incarnate lama from a Tibetanized Oirad Mongol community in the eastern Tibetan monastery of Gönlung (Tib. *dgon lung*). He exemplifies the kind of border-crossing, synthetic scholastic that my project explores, continuing to influence the narrative and interpretative practices of globalizing scholastics down to today. [25]

In his own lifetime, Sumpa Khenpo was apparently known as far as Central Tibet for his sober discernment between superstitious fantasy and evidence-based assertion. For my purposes here, that conversation-changing approach is most evident in Sumpa Khenpo's widely-read 1747 world history, entitled *Wish-fulfilling Tree* (Tib. *Chos 'byung dpag bsam ljon bzang*), his regional history of contemporary Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan, entitled a *Historical Account of Kokonor* (Tib. *Tsho sngon gyi lo rgyus*), and his 1777 geography, entitled *A General Description of Jambudvīpa* (Tib. *'Dzam gling spyi bshad*). In the wake of these genre-bending synthetic works, a series of letter exchanges ensued between Sumpa Khenpo and the Sixth Panchen Lama on pressing topics as diverse as the actual cause of Chinggis Khaan's death, the historicity of King Gesar of Ling (Inner Asia's King Arthur), and the shape of the earth.[26]

In *General Description of Jambudvīpa,* Sumpa Khenpo took serious account of Jesuit publications in Chinese on heliocentrism, Copernican astronomy, and the state of European geographical knowledge and cartographic

24 Tib. *Sum pa mkhan po ye shes dpal 'byor*; Mon. *Sümbe Khambo Ishibaljur*; Tib. *Pan chen bla ma blo bzang dpal ldan ye shes*; Mon. *Banchin Lubsangbaldanishi*. This is not to say that Sumpa Khenpo's work was the first to consider European technical knowledge, but that his synthetic approach was a widely read and immensely influential example over the next two centuries.

25 For introductions to Sumpa Khenpo's work, see: Turrell Wylie, *The Geography of Tibet According to the Dzam-Gling-Rgyas-Bshad* (Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1962); Matthew Kapstein, "Just Where on Jambudvīpa Are We? New Geographical Knowledge and Old Cosmological Schemes in Eighteenth-Century Tibet," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia. Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Gyatso, "Experience, Empiricism, and the Fortunes of Authority"; Kurtis Schaeffer, "New Scholarship in Tibet, 1650–1700," in *Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern Asia: Explorations in the Intellectual History of India and Tibet, 1500–1800*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

26 On Sumpa Khenpo's interpretation of the historical Gésar of Ling, Inner Asia's most famous epic hero, see: King, "Knowing King Gésar"; Solomon George FitzHerbert, "On the Tibetan Ge-Sar Epic in the Late 18th Century. Sum-Pa Mkhan-Po's Letters to the 6th Paṇ-Chen Lama," *Études Mongoles et Sibériennes, Centrasiatiques et Tibétaines*, no. 46 (2015).

techniques in the 18th century. The result was revolutionary. In Sumpa Khenpo's erudite work, Germany, France, and St. Petersburg were mapped onto classical Indic cosmologies recorded in the Buddhist canon. More problematic was Sumpa Khenpo's synthesis of Jesuit narratives about the Arctic Circle, a previously unheard of part of the world where the sun either never set or never rose. Herein lay the controversy: as Jesuits already knew, to account for these cycles of arctic sunlight the world had to be spherical and not flat. Also, the planets and the sun needed to be in orbit around one another. This caused an explosion in Tibetan and Mongolian intellectual circles that could only be quelled by the supreme authority of the Panchen Lama, who wrote a widely read public letter that demanded Buddhist literati keep an open mind and to take these contradictory European claims seriously.

Between Sumpa Khenpo in the 18th century and Dzémé Rinpoché in the latter half of the 20th century, scholastic debate over the round earth continued alongside scholastic reckoning with the global circuit of European, Chinese, and Indian mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and in the 19th century, archaeology, philology, ethnology, and a nascent Oriental Studies. Because of space, I can provide only one example: Sumpa Khenpo's synthesis of the European representation of a round earth and the way this continued to reverberate across the public cultures of late-and post-imperial Inner Asia. Specifically, I'll introduce three prominent heirs to Sumpa Khenpo's inquiry from either side of late-imperial Inner Asia: the radical Tibetan intellectual Gendün Chöpel (Tib. *Dge 'dun chos 'phel*, 1903–1951), the Buryat diplomat and philosopher-monk Agvan Dorjiev (Tib. *Ngag dbang rdo rje*, 1854–1938), and the subject of my recent book, the conservative Khalkha Mongolian abbot Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin (Tib. *Rtsa bar ta mgrin lo bzang rta mgrin*, 1867–1937).[27]

Perhaps the most famous modernist representative of the Géluk scholastic establishment was Gendun Chöpel (Tib. *Dge 'dun chos 'phel*, 1903–1951) a gifted but haunted scholastic philosopher who abandoned the repressive intellectual climate of early 20th century Géluk monastic life to travel widely in colonial India and Sri Lanka and deeply engaged global intellectual and cultural currents.[28] His contributions to Tibetan literature included detailed descriptions of Buddhist sites in India and the varieties of

27 King, *Ocean of Milk*.

28 Gendun Chopel, Donald Lopez, and Thupten Jinpa, *Grains of Gold: Tales of a Cosmo-*

Theravādan Buddhist societies, translations of the *Kama Sutra* (which he concludes with homages to several prostitutes who brought the text to life for him while in India) and the *Dhammapada,* and a new history of ancient Tibet based on British and French collections of Dunhuang manuscripts.[29] He returned to Tibet in the 1940s intending to assemble materials for an encyclopedia of Indian classical civilization and popular culture, while publicly teaching radical interpretations of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka philosophy. Likely because of his unorthodoxy, Gendun Chöpel was imprisoned in 1946 and tortured for two years.[30] He died after his release in 1951 from injuries sustained during imprisonment and his alcoholism, on the very day the Chinese People's Revolutionary Army marched into Lhasa.

On June 28, 1938, Gendun Chöpel published a short essay entitled "The World Is Round or Spherical" (Tib. *'Jig rten ril mo'am zlum po*) in *The Mirror* (Tib. *Me long*), the only secular Tibetan-language newspaper of the period published in the avant-garde ex-pat communities of Kalimpong. It reads, in part:

> In the past, in the lands of the continent of Europe it was only said that this world is flat, just as it appears to the non-analytical mind; there was not a single person who said that it was round. All the ancient religions in the various lands said only that the world is flat; there was not one that said that it was round. Thus, when some intelligent people first said that it is round, the only method to keep it from spreading was to order that they be burned alive. However, in the end, unable to withstand the light of true knowledge, everyone came to believe that it is round. Today, not only has the fact that it is round been determined, but also the size of all the islands in the world just four or five yojanas long have been measured down to spans and cubits. Therefore, in the great lands there is not a single scholar who has even a doubt.[31]

Like Sumpa Khenpo and the Panchen Lama before him, and like Dzémé Rinpoché sixty years later, Gendun Chöpel relativizes the apparent inconsistencies in the Buddha's presentation of a flat earth:

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politan Traveler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Donald S. Lopez, *Gendun Chopel: Tibet's Modern Visionary* (Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2018).

29 There are various editions of his collected works available today. For example: Dge 'dun chos 'phel, *Dge 'dun Chos 'Phel Gyi Gsung Rtsom* (格敦群培著作), 3 vols. (Lha sa: Bod yig dpe rnying dpe skrun khang, 1990).

30 His heterodox interpretations were published posthumously as *Adornment for Nāgārjuna's Thought* (*Klu sgrub dgong rgyan*). See: Donald S. Lopez and Dge-'dun-chos-'phel, *The Madman's Middle Way: Reflections on Reality of the Tibetan Monk Gendun Chopel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

31 Lopez, *Gendun Chopel.*

> If he set forth even matters of great importance such as emptiness and the stages of the path to liberation in various types of provisional meaning in accordance with the thoughts of sentient beings, what need is there to discuss these presentations of environments and their inhabitants?[32]

But relativizing definitive and provisional meanings of the Buddha's presentation of a flat earth was hardly a universal response amongst Géluk scholastics facing an encroaching scientism and antagonistic political movements elsewhere in late and post-imperial Inner Asia. This is particularly true in Buryatia and Mongolia, sites for Asia's first experiments in state socialism that dramatically pitted science against scholastic knowledge. We get a sense of the terms of this contest in one of a series of questions sent by the Buryat scholastic Agvan Dorjiev, one of the most prominent Géluk figures of the early 20th century, a confidant of the Dalai Lama and Tsar Nikolai, an interlocutor of early Russian Buddhologists, and an eventual victim of Bolshvik violence.

> Especially nowadays in this area,
> Many people reject the existence of past and future lives.
> They accept as valid knowledge[33]
> Only direct perception[34] and not inference.[35]
> If we can overcome perverted views such as these,
> Held by those who do not accept [rebirth],
> It is possible they might once again become Buddhists.
> As such, since none other than you possess one thousand [wisdom] eyes,
> Who else could [wield] the hundreds of sharp logical reasons
> Powerful enough to completely obliterate such wrong views?[36]

This question, along with seven others, was addressed to another of the most prominent Géluk scholastics in the socialist ruins of the Qing and Tsarist empires, the Khalkha abbot, pilgrim, and historian Zava Damdin.

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32 Lopez and Dge-'dun-chos-'phel, *The Madman's Middle Way*, 16.

33 Skt. *pramāṇa*, Tib. *tshad ma*, Class. Mong. *kemziye*. Pramāṇa remains a central area for scholastic training and inquiry in Agvan Dorjiev and Zava Damdin's shared Géluk school, as it is in other Tibetan Buddhist traditions. *Pramāṇa,* or "valid knowledge," generally concerns definitions of, and techniques that may lead to, legitimate knowledge about the world.

34 Skt. *pratyakṣa*, Tib. *mngon sum.*

35 Skt. *anumāna*, Tib. *rjes dpag.* There are usually three divisions of inference listed in the Indo-Tibetan-Mongolian *pramāṇa* (Tib. *tshad ma*) literature known to Agvan Dorjiev and Zava Damdin. First, inferential knowledge arisen through belief (āpta-anumāna). Second, inferential knowledge arisen through renown (*prasiddha-anumāna*). And third, inferential knowledge arisen through the force of truth itself (*vastu-bala-anumāna*).

36 Blo bzang rta mgrin [Agvan Dorjiev], "Mtshan Zhabs Mkhan Chen Gyis Chos 'Byung Las Brtsams Te Bka' 'dri Gnang Ba'i Chab Shog," in *Rje Btsun Blo Bzang Rta Dbyangs Kyi Gsung 'bum*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, 1975).

His answer similarly gives us an initial sense that relativizing hierarchies of knowledge, as had been done in the cosmopolitan Qing, was no longer viable for Géluk scholastics facing economic, political, and social marginalization in new, rationalized socialist public spheres.

> In ancient times, the King of Subduers, his heirs,
> And all Indian *paṇḍitas* and *siddhas* used their own powers
> To defeat barbarian *tīrthika*-heretics
> Using magical displays and the power of their mind.
> Whereas the unfortunate, perverted teachings
> Of the barbarian *tīrthikas* have grown and spread,
> Nowadays, small-minded people like me
> Cannot tame even our own minds.
> Wishing to tame the minds of others is therefore
> An object of ridicule for all gods, demons, and humans.
> In the same way, if you do not develop your own insight,
> This is just another example of the above.
> By taking hold of knowledge and
> Refuting the false views of opponents,
> The intelligent may claim the pride of brave warriors.
> But, if most Tibetan and Mongolian practitioners,
> Successors to the heirs of Śākyamuni,
> Are haughty, then they harm the Dharma with their speech.
> Present day Europeans,
> Those who have been forever born in places without the Dharma,
> Have emerged as either faithful or stupid.
> They read the scriptures and their commentaries strangely.
> However, such wrong views
> Are connected to the Buddha's activities.
> An exceedingly wise Mahātmā such as yourself
> Should pray to be reborn in a Pure Land.
> I, an un-influential person,
> Pursue purification, prayer, and so forth
> So that in this life and the next,
> I do not come to hold the wrong views of the barbarians.
> *Kye ma!*[37]

With the collapse of the Qing empire, Euro-Russian scientific and cultural achievements began circulating into Mongolian erudite circles beginning in the Autonomous Period (1911–1919). These transits were largely

37 Blo bzang rta mgrin, "Mtshan Zhabs Mkhan Chen Gyi Dogs Lan Tshangs Pa'i Drang Thig," in *Rje Btsun Blo Bzang Rta Dbyangs Kyi Gsung 'bum*, vol. 2. (New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, 1975), 561–72.

the products of what Robert Rupen labeled the "Buryat Intelligentsia", a group of Buryat nationalists who, from their position as intermediaries between Russia and Mongolia, engaged in all manner of intellectual and socio-political projects in post-Qing Mongolia: from gathering folk songs to drafting the platform of the Mongolian People's Party. Their wide-ranging intellectual interests were, at their core, inspired by a particular brand of progressive nationalist politics but also drew deeply upon late imperial scholastic culture (indeed, many early members had trained as Buddhist scholastics earlier in life, or remained ordained as monks over the course of the revolution). Their focus on Mongolian languages, folk traditions, epic and historical traditions, literature, and ritual life were both motivated by, and produced anew, an "increased consciousness of 'Mongol-ness'."[38] This group generally considered Buddhism the very condition for conceiving of a pan-Mongolian ethnic family, and of Géluk scholastic traditions as providing forms of knowledge that would synthesize with new modernist social imaginaries.

The more strenuously the government and missionaries pursued their policy of Russification and religious conversion, and the more they subjected the Buryats to persecution and violence, the stronger and more unanimous became the movement toward Buddhism and towards those of their brethren [i.e., Transbaikal Buryats and Mongols] who had conserved their writing, national integrity and solidarity thanks to Buddhism.[39] An important caveat here is that for these reform-minded Buryat intellectuals and their sympathizers in Mongolia, even though Buddhism was considered the "shelter of the national spirit,"[40] there was a need for reformation based in large part upon introducing what were considered the technological, pedagogical, and cultural advances of European civilization (often by way of the Russian academy).

One of the early interfaces by which these products of Euro-Russian 'modernity' entered into Mongolian Buddhist space in the Bogd Khaanate was *The New Mirror* (Mon. *Shine Toli*), an immensely controversial secular newspaper. I. Y. Korostovets, a Tsarist representative in Urga, backed

38 Rupen, "The Buriat Intelligentsia," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1956): 396.

39 Jamtsarano (1907), 21 quoted in Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, "The Buriat Alphabet of Agvan Dorzhiev," in *Mongolia in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Stephen and Bruce A. Elleman Kotkin (Aromonk, NY; London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 83–84.

40 Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, "The Buriat Alphabet."

the effort but the Buryat reformer and nationalist Tseveen Jamstsarano effectively directed the paper. In the pages of *The New Mirror*, literate Mongolians, including many Buddhist scholastic elites, were able to read, in their own language and for the first time, excerpts from the works of Leo Tolstoy, Jules Verne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jack London, and more.[41] They also encountered what was then cutting-edge scholarship on Mongolian linguistics and history by foreign academics. In many cases, these articles proposed alternative visions of the Mongolian past from what had been widely promoted in Qing-era historiography since the 17th century. In these earlier indigenous compositions, Mongolian history, Buddhist identity, and Qing rule had been historicized and naturalized selectively according to newly emergent models of 'Buddhist rule' associated with Qing state-craft.

These circumscribed royal genealogies were projected back from Chinggis Khaan to the rulers of the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty, and on to the mythic Indian sovereign Mahāsammata.[42] In contradistinction to these familiar historical tropes, monks and literati who flipped through the pages of *The New Mirror* encountered, for instance, Ramstedt's challenging article *History of the Uighur* (Mon. *Uiyur ulus-un quriyangqai teüke*).[43] Ramstedt introduced the radical idea that Mongolians shared Turkic origins with other Central Asian peoples, not Buddhist kings in India or Tibet, nor even the minority socio-political identities which had been issuing from Qing centers for the last two and a half centuries. Readers of *The New Mirror* also encountered the work of the Frenchman David-Léon Cohan, whose histories and fictional works on a shared Turkic-Mongol past would prove to be so influential in nascent Turkish nationalist movements far away in the Ottoman Empire.[44]

More relevant here, and far more troubling to post-Qing scholastic readers, the *New Mirror* also regularly published pieces on what amounted to 'popular science' from Europe and Russia. These, in part, "embod[ied] modern conceptions which demolished the Buddhist cosmology. Mongolian

41 Rupen, "The Buriat Intelligentsia," 396n34.

42 On these transitions, see: Elverskog, *Our Great Qing*.

43 Written in 1912, but I am unclear just when it was published in the "New Mirror." See: Dittmar Schorkowitz, *Staat und Nationalitäten in Rußland: der Integrationsprozess der Burjaten und Kalmücken, 1822–1925* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag, 2001), 296n79.

44 Léon Cahun, *La bannière bleue: aventures d'un musulman, d'un chrétien et d'un païen, à l'époque des Croisades et de la conquête mongole* (Paris: Hachette, 1877).

folklore and western science were presented almost simultaneously."[45] In a radical turn from the Qing-era synthetic accomodationalism of their Géluk predecessors, here the claim of European astronomy was insufferable.

The first issue of *The New Mirror* was published in 1913 and sent shockwaves through literati circles in Urga. This was so, at least at first, for much the same reason as Sumpa Khenpo's *General Description of Jambudvīpa* almost one hundred and fifty years earlier: European astronomical claims of a round and moving earth. It is unsurprising perhaps that such controversial claims graced the first issue, since its then-editor Zhamsarano was committed more than anything else to extending what one witness, Wilhelm Alexander Unkrig, described as, "modern astronomical knowledge among the Mongols."[46] The first edition sold out immediately, being consumed by a fascinated and apparently outraged audience. Its contents seem innocuous enough to us today, containing simple descriptive accounts of topics such as: "The Earth, the Continents," "Heat and Cold," "Wind and Atmosphere," "Thunder and Lightning," "The States of the World and Their Forms of Government," "The Development of Culture," "Race and Religion," and "The Life Expectancy of Man."[47] Elites from Gandentegchenlin Monastery (including perhaps Zava Damdin, introduced below, who was a prominent scholar there at this time) complained to the highest religious authority in Mongolia, the Bogd Khaan Jebtsundamba, that Jamstsarano's public dissemination of 'Western' ideology and 'scientific' falsities was an affront to Buddhism.[48]

We get a sense of the source of scholastic outrage at *The New Mirror* and at the content of their refutation in the work of the great polymath Zava Damdin Lubsangdamdin (1867–1937).[49] Zava Damdin was not only the most prolific and prominent Buddhist scholastic in Urga during the imperial-socialist transition, right up to the purges of 1937, but he was also a sought-after interlocutor for Soviet scientists and, earlier, nationalist thinkers and the professional historians and ethnologists they employed. While Zava Damdin joined the early Mongolian Scientific Academy, he

45 Rupen, "The Buriat Intelligentsia," 397.

46 Unkrig as quoted in Robert A. Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Publications, 1964), 221n126.

47 I have not as yet been able to access any original copy of the Shine Toli from the Mongolian archives. This table of contents is taken from Rupen, *Mongols*, 83–84.

48 Rupen, *Mongols*, 83–84.

49 Zava Damdin is the protagonist of my recent book: King, *Ocean of Milk*.

remained resolutely conservative and opposed to Western influences in the Tibeto-Mongolian scholastic world. The primary intellectual product of his post-Qing career was the *Golden Book* (Tib. *gser gyi deb ther*; Mon. *altan devter*). The opening to that history, the culmination of a lifetime of learning in the waning years of the Qing empire and through two decades of revolutionary upheaval, was concerned with only one thing: refuting the idea of the round earth and the empirical ways of knowing upon which such a view of the world rested.

The *Golden Book* was begun in 1919 as a "commentary" to an earlier, versified "root" historical text that Zava Damdin had composed in the very early days of the Autonomous period, the *Melodious Sounding of the Auspicious Dharma Conch* (*Byang phyogs hor gyi yul du dam pa'i chos rin po che byung tshul gyi gtam rgyud bkra shis chos dung bzhad pa'i sgra dbyangs*). In both of the post-imperial works, Zava Damdin sets out to reconcile contradictory claims in Buddhist canonical sources regarding the physical layout of the "vessel-like" world (Tib. *snod*) and its living "contents" (Tib. *bcud*). Many biographical and historical works produced by Mongolian Buddhist literati and their Tibetan counterparts spatially and temporally arrange their narrative subjects in relation to several foundational socio-religious events, such as the enlightenment of the Buddha or the life of Chinggis Khaan.[50] None of the historical works Zava Damdin cites begin their accounts with the type of extended delimitation of the physical universe we see in his works.[51] Why such an extensive and defensive presentation?

Part of the answer is that Zava Damdin was seeking to introduce a very expansive vision of the Mongolian Buddhist past, which depended upon identifying "Mongol" actors across a vast swath of Buddhist literature.[52]

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50 Tuttle, "Challenging Central Tibet's Dominance of History."

51 Dharmatāla's "Rosary of White Lotuses," for instance, begins straightaway with a "General Account of the Emergence and Spread of Buddhism in the World" (Spyir 'jig rten du chos ji ltar byung tshul) (1889, xxv). Likewise, Gushri Tshe 'phel's 1819 (1981) "History of Buddhism in Hor" promptly begins with an account of the early "enlightened" kings of Tibet, their connection to Mahāsammata, and their work to import Buddhism during the Yarlung empire. While several 18th century Amdo scholars (all Qing cosmopolitans) did apply themselves to either geographical projects or geographically-heavy historical works, we do not find in their pages an extensive defense of traditional Buddhist cosmology (its limits and contradictions).

52 On an earlier, influential attempt to do the same, see: Elverskog, "Mongol Time Enters a Qing World."

This, in turn, depended upon a particular presentation of the physical universe and its living contents that could be mined convincingly for 'Mongolian' and 'Buddhist' stories lost in what he often described as "the rivers of Sūtra and Mantra." In the *Melodious Sounding of the Auspicious Dharma Conch*, completed in the first years of the Autonomous Period, this entailed merely synthesizing the views expressed in Buddhist canonical presentations and their associated exegetical material. However, by the time he began writing the *Golden Book* in 1919, it was not simply contradictory claims in his Buddhist sources that required careful synthesis or refutation, but also the troubling claims made by European science then in circulation in learned Mongolian society. Whence did these troubling claims, and their empiricist modes of production, come to intrude upon his scholastic horizon?

Following some standard poetic verses and opening homages, Zava Damdin broaches his description of the world with a quote from the *Flower Garland Sūtra*[53] on the nature and form of the waters bounding the land whose stories he will soon narrate:

> In the lands of all directions, oceans have appeared,
> Several are round and several are triangular.
> In several directions are [oceans in the shape of a] square.
> Moreover, [in the final analysis] it is the ocean of karma that writes (*bris*) the form [of these waters].[54]

The point of this quotation for his larger argument is stated poetically in its final line – the world is 'written' by the karma of sentient beings. This provides an important scriptural authority for what he develops as a 'karmic relativity defense' against the perceived threats of scientific description:

> There are a variety of ways of explaining the number, size, measure, and so forth of the underlying *maṇḍala* base, the mountains, the oceans, the continents, and so forth in [the scriptures] of Sūtra and Tantra, [such as] the Higher and Lower Abhidharma,[55] the *Kālacakra-tantra*, and so on.

53 Skt. Buddha fivataṃsaka-mahāvaipulya Sūtra, Tib. Sangs rgyas phal po che zhes bya ba shin tu rgyas pa chen po'i mdo.

54 Blo bzang rta mgrin, "Byang Phyogs Chen Po Hor Gyi Rgyal Khams Kyi Rtogs Brjod Kyi Bstan Bcos Chen Po Ngo Mtshar Gser Gyi Deb Ther," in *Rje Btsun Blo Bzang Rta Dbyangs Kyi Gsung 'Bum* (New Delhi: Mongolian Lama Guru Deva, 1975), 44.

55 The Abhidharma is one of the "Three Baskets" of the Buddhist canon (Skt. tripiṭaka; Tib. sde snod gsum), and is a term that is notoriously difficult to translate. It has been rendered into English variously as "phenomenology," "higher knowledge," "manifest knowledge," and so forth. Abhidharma is, in general, concerned with classifying experience and systematizing many of the topics mentioned in the Sūtras (the "Sayings of the Buddha," another of

> However, these are never mutually contradictory.[56] Those [mountains, oceans, etc.] are not established from their own side, but rather they are established from the karma of sentient beings. In our own world, many different oceans, mountains, and islands have all appeared at once. These might appear to the vision of one sentient being, but not another [depending on their karma] [...] because of this we cannot object if one person does not see what another sentient being sees.[57]

This point, which for Zava Damdin pre-emptively provides an explanation for the contradictions found in the primary Buddhist presentations of the "arrangement of the world and its beings," is further supplemented by a classic Buddhist example of karmic relativity. He writes that if a god, a human being, and a hungry ghost were all to gather in front of one cup of water, "at that time, because of their different karma, for one it would appear as nectar, for one it would appear as water, and for one it would appear as pus. While this is true, we would not say that there is more than one cup of water."[58] The point, he continues, is that Buddhist canonical sources describe the world in which we live differently, according to the different karmic potentialities of sentient beings. As such, it is not the varied presentations of space and time in the Buddhist scriptures that are invalid, partial or limited. Rather, what at first presents itself as a collection of contradictory accounts is in fact a collection of explanations tailored to the varied dispositions of beings. The contradictions are, as such, ultimately non-contradictory. They also, by this logic, prove the 'enlightenment' of their authors, since the assumption here is that different presentations depend on an omniscient reading of the karmic potentiality of any given textual audience.

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the canonical 'baskets' of the tripiṭaka). Topics include: the five psychophysical aggregates (Skt. pañcaskandha; Tib. phung po lnga) which are the basis for imputing the 'self,' the six sense-faculties, and their six sense objects (Skt. dvadaśa āyatana; Tib. skye mched bcu gnyis); the eighteen classifications of all knowable things (Skt. aṣṭadaśa dhātu; Tib. khams bco brgyad), and so forth. One such classification, which Zava Damdin evokes here, concerns the physical structure and genesis of the universe. These are generally divided up into the physical world, understood as a "vessel" (Tib. nod), and the beings who inhabit it, known as the "contents" (Tib. bcud). Famous commentaries on the Abhidharma include Asaṅga's 4th-century Compendium of Abhidharma (Skt. Abhidharmasamuccaya; Tib. Mngon pa kun btus), and his younger brother Vasubandhu's Treasury of Abhidharma (Skt. Abhidharmakośa; Tib. Chos mngon pa'i mdzod) and Auto-Commentary on the Treasury of Abhidharma (Skt. Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya; Tib. Chos mngon pa mdzod kyi bshad pa).

56 phan tshun 'gal 'dur mi 'gyur.

57 Blo bzang rta mgrin, "Byang Phyogs Chen," 44.

58 Blo bzang rta mgrin, 44.

While a clarification of confusing cosmological presentations from canonical sources also occupies Zava Damdin in his earlier *Dharma Conch*, (on which the *Golden Book* is ostensibly a commentary), a more specific polemical target soon becomes abundantly clear in this later work:

> [When] non-Buddhist barbarians use their many different machines to investigate all over the world, it is not necessary that they see by means of their direct cognition in the same way as is described in the Sūtras and Tantras.[59] This is so since most of them are obscured by karma and so this [Buddhist] presentation remains a secret to them. [Additionally, in relation to] some of those [geographic features, etc.], the names and objects have already changed [since the time they were described in Buddhist sources], and now they are identified differently, and have different shapes, and so on.
>
> This is why the "Superficial Intellectuals"[60] [i.e. scientists] of Europe (*Yi wa ro pa*) use machines to describe this world as being shaped like an egg [i.e. round] and always continually rotating—something they believe they are actually seeing! [This is akin to] the "Story of the Eighteen Blind People Describing the Elephant]"[61] depicted in the *Compendium of the Great Vehicle*.[62]

According to Zava Damdin, these foreign "Superficial Intellectuals" depend upon their "machines" in order to produce knowledge about the world only by means of 'direct cognition' (*mngon sum*). The implicit critique is that they do not employ that more extensive sort of reasoning prized by Géluk scholastics that, among other things, produces a provisional inferential cognition (*rjes dpag*) of hidden truths about the world, such as past and future lives, the workings of karma, and so forth.

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59 That is to say, the fact that they do not see the world in the same way as is described in Buddhist canonical sources does not disprove the validity of those sources.

60 The designation Zava Damdin uses for "scientist" here is rtog ge pa. Instead of an adaption of a foreign word to describe this class of people, or even a favorable indigenous term, his use of rtog ge pa positions them in rather derogatory terms. This word is generally used in scholastic contexts to designate a logician or 'reasoner' who relies too heavily upon logic and scripture without any real experience of what the terms actually mean (through, for example, meditative practice). As such, I render this above as 'Superficial Intellectuals,' as opposed to simply 'Logicians.'

61 The Mahāyānasaṃgraha (Tib. Theg pa chen po bsdus pa) attributed to Asaṅga. This story describes the limited, inaccurate descriptions of an elephant by eighteen blind people who can only access some partial feature (a tail, a foot, etc.) by means of their other senses. The analogy points to the classical Buddhist characterization of unenlightened experience, which is defined as necessarily 'blinded' by karma and delusions.

62 Blo bzang rta mgrin, "Byang Phyogs Chen," 44.

Having "subdued" the epistemic challenges stemming from this "scriptural tradition of heretical others" (Tib. *mu stegs gzhan gyi gzhung lugs pa*), Zava Damdin begins his vast historical presentation. On the basis of this initial engagement with European empiricism, the entire *Golden Book* can be read as a polemical argument for the centrality of an increasingly threatened scholastic mode of organizing knowledge in revolutionary Mongolia. If we remember the actual threats posed to Buddhist institutionalism over the years that it took to complete, we can appreciate how Zava Damdin could not accept earlier injunctions such as those of Sumpa Khenpo to simply adopt a hermeneutic syncretism in relation to European empiricism and its astronomical assertions. This was not a Qing cosmopolitan environment of the 18th century, but rather an appeal in the midst of very real socio-economic and militarized pressure. Nonetheless, in terms of the Multiple Secularities project, these were all practices of secularity, distinguishing between religion and non-religion, but in a dispersed circuit of textual exchange and public address.

His scorn for the 'Superficial Intellectualism' of science (increasingly centred in the Soviet-inspired initiatives of the MPRP) surfaces again in a note to his readers from the final pages of the *Golden Book*:

> The intelligent should take what I have already given here as your example, and make any [further] investigations that are necessary. In contradistinction, nowadays barbarian non-Buddhists write about meaningless and backward topics- such as the types of insects in the world such and how many fish are in the four different oceans- and conceitedly claim that they are writing śāstra [ie. scriptural commentary].[63]

In Mongolia, as elsewhere in early post-Qing Inner Asia including the Himalayan foothill stations of the British Raj, modernism (and secularism specifically) was constructed in zones of contact shared between folk tradition, Buddhist monasticism, and a privileged scienticism then circulating along newly opened routes of global exchange.[64]

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63 Blo bzang rta mgrin, "Byang Phyogs Chen," 428.

64 Bernstein, "Pilgrims, Fieldworkers, and Secret Agents"; Rupen, "The Buriat Intelligentsia;" Rupen, *Mongols*; Robert A. Rupen, "Cyben Zamcaranovic Zamcarano (1880–?1940)," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 19, no. 2 (1956); Dugarava-Montgomery and Montgomery, "The Buriat Alphabet;" Thupten Jinpa, "Science As an Ally or a Rival Philosophy? Tibetan Buddhist Thinkers' Engagement with Modern Science," in *Buddhism and Science: Breaking New Ground*, ed. B. Alan Wallace (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

For example, from academies in Irkutsk, Leningrad, and Ulaanbaatar, Soviet scholars spent decades combing the Mongolian and Tibetan religious, literary, archaeological, and ethnographic record for the historical conditions that had led to the 'sudden' awakening of a people's movement and to the concomitant rationalization of the Mongolian socio-political landscape. For example, they argued the historical Buddha Śākyamuni had been the world's first materialist, a sagacious precursor to Marx, Engels, and Lenin. Likewise, such scholars argued that Buddhist monastic law and Mongol-Buryat customary laws were implicitly socialist.

In Urga, where Zava Damdin wrote *The Golden Book,* it was widely proclaimed that examples such as these had equipped a newly imagined pan-Mongol people – which included Tibetans in many formulations – with the distant historical conditions for the blossoming of national autonomy, social emancipation, and a properly 'Mongol' modernism founded in techno-scientific knowledge and practice. However, Zava Damdin and the conservative monasticism of his revolutionary-era monastic milieu clung to a very different narrative: that scholastic ways of knowing (direct and inferential cognition) needed to be actively asserted over the empiricism suddenly favored by socialist authorities who were, incrementally, annexing and threating monastic establishments leading up to the mass purges of the late 1930s.

We might now return to Dzémé Rinpoché, who also wrote on the round earth from the Tibetan communities in exile in India in the latter half of the 20th century, before concluding with some reflections on public culture and practices of distinguishing between religion and non-religion with which we are concerned. Writing almost three centuries after the first Tibetan monastic encounters with Jesuit astronomical positions in the Qing courts, two generations after Gendun Chöpel's short essay, and in a less politicized context than the desperate critiques of Agvan Dorjiev and Zava Damdin in revolutionary Mongolia and Buryatia, Dzémé Rinpoché still engaged competing claims about the earth addressed to a global audience of scholars and concerned with hierarchies of direct and inferential cognition.

Using his famous gift for poetry, Dzémé Rinpoché begins by arguing that in any legitimate religious or scientific inquiry, "actual investigation is like a jewel: appropriate to clasp at one's heart as if it were one's heart (*dpyad*

pa'i dngos ni rin chen bzhin snying la snying bzhin 'dzin 'os)."[65] With analysis (Tib. *dpyad pa*) and not faith (Tib. *'dod pa*) in hand, Dzémé Rinpoché then confronts two erroneous positions held by his readers: (1) that a round earth is debatable in light of incontrovertible empirical observation; and (2) that silence about the undeniable roundness of the earth is proof of the Buddha's ignorance.

As for the first, Dzémé Rinpoché writes: "Established on the basis of direct perception (Tib. *mngon sum*), the world's discerning knowledgeable ones assert unanimously that the earth is round. If one disagrees, this is a clear sign of the fault of one's own foolishness."[66] He admonishes his readers still further. Though the much-maligned (in classical Indian Buddhist doxography) Cārvāka materialists ignorantly denied the reality of phenomena that remain unperceivable to the senses, such as karma, even they would never dispute the existence of something they perceived directly. By the same standards of evidence, which even the pitiful Cārvākas accepted (that one can neither dismiss nor accept the existence of material phenomena or the mental lives of others except on the grounds of perceiving it directly), Dzémé Rinpoché then refutes the logical sequence that, because the Buddha never mentioned a round earth in the sūtras, he was ignorant of the undeniable empirical reality.

In the first place, he writes, neither monastic scholars nor scientists have direct access to the contents of the Buddha's mind. Furthermore, there are many possibilities as to why statements on a round earth are absent in the Buddha's recorded teachings. For example, it is possible that the early Buddhist community simply failed to record such teachings (the Buddha never wrote anything). Or perhaps they were recorded but were never translated from Indic sources and left in their original form somewhere along the Silk Road. Or else he may have given such teachings, in line with the science of early modern Europe, in another country, in another time, in another body, or in another language.[67]

Dispensing with any argument that the Buddha's silence on a round earth supports an argument about his ignorance, Dzémé Rinpoché then

65 Dze smad rin po che, "'Dzam Gling Hril Zlum Gyi Dpyad Gzhi," in *Skyabs Rje Dze Smad Rin Po Che'i Gsung Rtsom Gces Btus*, ed. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (Mundgod, Karnataka, India: Tashi Gephel House, Shartse College, Gaden Monastic University, 1997), 205.

66 Dze smad rin po che, "'Dzam Gling Hril Zlum Gyi Dpyad Gzhi," 205.

67 Dze smad rin po che, 205.

confronts a more fundamental and enduring issue. This is to legitimize the relativity of knowledge about the world and of the world thus known:

> Even if the Buddha mentioned something in the sūtras, it did not necessarily exist. For example, [he sometimes said] a person is truly existent (when persons are actually empty of inherent existence), [that] Mt. Sumeru is both round and square: even when he was questioned [on such disparities], he said these both exist and do not-exist.[68]

The world appears differently to ants and elephants. A single person appears differently to her friends and enemies. Worlds *appear* differently and thus *exist* differently, dependent upon the theoretically limitless positions from which they may be known. On this note, Dzémé Rinpoché concludes his short essay, contented that he had valorized the undeniable reality of the round earth by undermining the finality of any conventional knowledge about the world and its beings. Since Dzémé Rinpoché's death, this synthetic position has been bolstered by the Dalai Lama for decades through yearly encounters between Géluk scholastics and European science in the Mind & Life Institute and in the introduction of scientific education in Géluk monasteries in the Tibetan exile communities of India.

Public Culture, Late-Imperial Inner Asia, and the Multiple Secularities Framework

In this research, I am interested in understanding, not only the reception of scientific (and in some cases, artistic) representations at the Inner Asian crossroads, but the ways that monks and their Euro-Russian interlocutors entered into what I am calling "interpretative communities" (which builds on Stanley Fish's exploration of the social hermeneutics of textual communities):[69] intellectual networks that took account of, and in many cases sought to repurpose, categories of knowledge such as empiricism and "valid cognition" (Skt. *pramāṇa*; Tib. *tshad ma*; Mon. *kemjigen*) and their attendant techniques, real or perceived, for self-cultivation and community organization.

68 Dze smad rin po che, 206.

69 Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

But my project is not simply about constructions of valid cognition on the margins of globally circulating models of reality between Europe and late imperial Asia. I am focused more generally on the ways that micro-technical debates about epistemology, the movements of stars, the physiology of tantric bodies, the dating of the Buddha's birth, the location of the arctic, the difference between "mind" (Tib. *sems*) and "brain" (Tib. *klad pa*), or the contents of Silk Road excavations provide evidence for imperial scholastics opening into a tenuous but persistent form of *public culture* that included Western European, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian interlocutors.

Indeed, in the late imperial sources my research considers, none of the usual secularization narratives are present. "Religion" (or even the Dharma) was not claimed to be dwindling in presence or relevance, nor was it claimed to be rising and polluting a defined secular sphere, nor was it identified as a continuous presence merely taking new form in modern secular society. The imperial-era sources my project considers instead created boundaries between appropriate knowledge practices for coming to certainty about the world – whether the course of stars, the shape of the earth, the contents of our bodies, or of history's hidden truths. Very importantly for the direction this project is taking, the scholastics my project considers elaborated on these debates in the context of newly globalized public culture that included monk and scientist, East and West, in a dispersed, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual public of "scholars" (Tib. *mkhas pa*; Mon. *baysi, nomčin*).

The working hypothesis of my project is that the 'public' of this imperial-era commonwealth of learning – that encompassed scholastics spread between the British Raj, Tibet, north China, Mongolia, Siberia, and even St. Petersburg – created the conditions for the invention of the national subject, civil society, and the revolutionary social imagination in the ruins of the Qing and Tsarist empires. The pseudo-rational, nearly-modern encounters with Western science and the radical critiques of received canonical tradition of frontier scholastics were obsessively memorialized by, for example, Soviet-era historians, PRC folklorists, and even contemporary post-socialist Buddhist revivalists.

As has been widely explored already by the founders and other research fellows in the Multiple Secularities group, the rise of civil society and a rationalized public sphere in Asia is usually told in a diffusionist mode:

as the unilineal effects of contact with Western power, arts, and sciences. The expectation is that modernization in Asia was provoked as a function of outside forces like colonial and imperial dominance, capitalist markets, military incursion, and technical mastery. As 'impact' or 'cultural contact,' the study of modernity's arrival in Asia is recoverable using a rather flat methodology that, as Bernard Cohn once wryly put it, "seeks to sort what is introduced from what is indigenous."[70]

In the binary discourses of colonial regimes and emergent nation-states alike, the 'modern' – progress, self-mastery, social emancipation, science, technology, capitalism/socialism, academic institutions, democracy, Europe – is expected to hasten the retreat of the 'traditional' – stasis, superstition, other-mastery, suppression, folk tradition, religion, Asia. This movement of the modern and traditional is at the heart of the what Webb Keane calls the moral myths of modernity, yet what configuration of power does it authorize?[71] What lies beyond this ideological- and desire-saturated representation? These are hardly new questions, but they are ones that have too rarely been asked in relation to the study of the late- and post-imperial history of Eurasia's crossroads: the Mongolian, Siberian, and Tibetan societies of Inner Asia.

My hypothesis in turning to the Eurasianist exchanges of frontier scholastic monks from Inner Asia is that different but mutually recognizable and intertwined forms of public culture developed in and between Western Europe and certain frontier Inner Asian scholastic communities over the course of the 18th–20th centuries. This Eurasian circulation of knowledge and knowledge practices were coded in some places as scientific, others as scholastic, some as Asian, others as Western, some as producing knowledge about the world, some leading to the rationalization of the public sphere and a modern social imaginary, others to conservative attacks against scientism and the very terms of modernism in Asia's heartland. What do I mean by public culture? While there is of course an extended literature on public culture (and public religion), at this early stage of my project I have been finding very useful insights in the work of Michael Warner.[72]

70 Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

71 Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns. Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

72 Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002).

In the first place, for Warner a public is an imagined object; it is a social totality to which discourse is addressed, or in which we feel we are a part when we are addressed. A public may be a nation, a commonwealth, Christendom, or whatever, but in each case it is a bounded field of strangers. Secondly, a public knows itself as a community of strangers set into relation with one another through the circulation of public discourse and through a sense of common action and purpose. Thirdly, publics come into being only in relation to texts and their circulation and are self-organized in relation to discourse. "The way *the* public functions in the public sphere – as *the people* – is only possible because it is really *a* public of discourse. It is self-creating and self-organized, and herein lies its power as well as its elusive strangeness."[73] According to Warner, a public is separate from a state, a closed professional circle, a social community. Public culture means only participating in participation: being addressed by, and addressing in turn, a community of strangers. "The people, scholarship, the Republic of Letters, posterity, the younger generation, the nation, the Left, the movement, the world, right-thinking people everywhere, the brotherhood of believers, fellow queers: these are all publics. They are in principle open-ended. They exist by virtue of their address, and they must include strangers who are not entirely known in advance."[74]

I argue that a tenuous but persistent public culture, an extended community of strangers, opened in the social imaginations of frontier Géluk scholastics over the course of the 17th–20th centuries. In their writing – whether when engaging Jesuit mathematics, Indian Buddhist scripture, scientific positions about a round earth, or competing dating of the Buddha's life – they regularly addressed not a closed community of elite scholastics, nor fellow Tibetans or Mongols, nor Buddhists, but an open-ended public of "intellectuals" (*mkhas pa*). Zava Damdin laments the conclusions of superficial intellectuals and appeals to non-biased scholars. Gendün Chöpel ends his short essay on the round earth by hoping that if only his open-ended readership "would believe in this world that we see with our eyes rather than that world that we see through letters, it would be good."[75] This was a series of highly synthetic, global encounters and debates that did not rely on face-to-face encounter but rather on new texts and their circu-

73 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 52.
74 Warner, 56.
75 Lopez, *Gendun Chopel.*

lation, always self-organized in relation to discourse. In the context of this dispersed scholastic culture, which extended across (and helped spatialize) Indian, Tibetan, Mongol, Chinese, and Russian polities and spheres of influence, this public culture coalesced around discourse that self-created and self-organized (quite unlike the top-down imposition of modernist projects in colonial India or the Americas, for example).

"The interactive relation postulated in public discourse," writes Warner, "goes far beyond the scale of conversation or discussion, to encompass a multigeneric lifeworld organized not just by a relational axis of utterance and response, but by potentially infinite axes of citation and characterization."[76] Just so, in the context of three hundred years of scholastic citation and characterization my project considers, this frontier public culture produced: (1) hierarchies of cognition between direct and inferential knowledge; (2) new forms of public address to communities of strangers; (3) new language ideologies wherein discursive address to a global public of 'intellectuals,' 'non-biased scholars,' and the like led directly to the production of modern social imaginaries, the national subject, secular organization of the public sphere and social institutions, and (ironically), the legitimation of socialist-backed violence against monastic thought and institutions.

The manner in which late-imperial practices of secularity were repurposed to invent the secularisms and secularization of 20th century Inner Asia is made clear by again returning to Sumpa Khenpo and some of his later readers. Here I think we see very clearly an example of the kind of processes we are most interested in with our Multiple Secularities approach. For Soviet-era scholars working in post-revolutionary scientific institutes after the bloody purges of scholasticism in Buryatia and Mongolia, the works of cosmopolitan Buddhist monks such as Sumpa Khenpo (and Zava Damdin and Agvan Dorhiev) were strategically memorialized as early harbingers of a familiar rationalism and secular sensibility.[77] In Soviet-era Mongolia after the Qing collapse, the scholars responsible for this characterization considered themselves heirs to a long Mongolian tradition of 'scientific' historical inquiry going back to Sumpa Khenpo. Critically, this extended deep into Tibetan and Qing space and tradition. For Mongolian and Russian scholars such as Shagdaryn Bira, Ts. Damdinsüren,

76 Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 62.

77 Kapstein, "Just Where on Jambudvīpa Are We?;" Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World*.

N. Poppe, B. Dandaron, and A. I. Vostrikov, Sumpa Khenpo represented one of several Inner Asian modernists who, they believed, had developed a radical scientific acumen that foretold the national, historical-materialist awakening of the Mongolian peoples after the Qing collapse. This was made all the more remarkable by the fact that he had been embedded in 'feudalist Buddhist monasteries' that had most often acted as an agent of 'exploitative Qing imperialism.'

Of great interest here was the fact that in such Soviet-era memorialization, Sumpa Khenpo's fame was due not just to his progressive reception of science in an otherwise dark age of religious superstition. It was due more fundamentally to Sumpa Khenpo's adoption of 'rational' ways of knowing (i.e. the ways of knowing being promoted by socialist officials). The great Mongolist Shagdaryn Bira wrote, for example, that Sumpa Khenpo had exhibited "a serious, critical, scientific approach to his sources," having "overcame blind faith in the infallibility of the Buddhist canons."[78] Sumpa Khenpo's description of the world was lauded as "equal in importance to great research in the fields of history and literature" of the Soviet period; his "departure from the long obsolete tradition of Buddhist literature are [his] most positive characteristics."[79] Sumpa Khenpo's histories were widely acclaimed for "broadening of the historical theme, the acquisition of new materials, their critical treatment, and, finally, the increase in secular motifs and a gradual departure from the religious viewpoint of history."[80]

Memories such as these gave shape to the socialist transition in Inner Asia, which involved very centrally the invention of Buryat, Mongol, and Tibetan national subjects and the translation of Inner Asian history into Eurocentric modernist narratives such as tradition/modernity, science/religion, West/non-West, self-ownership/other-ownership, and other binaries we usually associate with the process theories of modernization, globalization, and secularization. Revolutionary events, such socialist commentators often wrote, had been prompted by the partial awakening of Géluk scholastics to rational, scientific thought, which had in turn led to a people's revolution and the 'gradual departure from the religious viewpoint' in many, if not most,

78 Sh Bira, T. S. Damdinsuren, and Stanley Frye, *Mongolian Historical Literature of the XVII–XIX Centuries Written in Tibetan* (Bloomington, IN: Mongolia Society, Tibet Society, 1970), 20, 30.

79 Bira, Damdinsuren, and Frye, *Mongolian Historical Literature,* 20.

80 Bira, Damdinsuren, and Frye, 32.

spheres of Inner Asian society. The periodization of the birth of Mongolian modernism itself was seen to be rooted, for such mid-20th century Soviet historians, in the attainment of "the knowledge of scientific materialism for the Mongolian 'ard masses'" [i.e. the nomadic-pastoralists], where "science developed and spread on the firm basis of earlier tradition the new concepts of the People's Revolution and Marxist-Leninist theory," and "developed having conquered and surmounted feudalist and capitalist ideologies as well as reactionary religious doctrine."[81]

In the terms of our Multiple Secularities group, Sumpa Khenpo's work and memorialization exemplify a broad trend that I am exploring: a transition between Qing and Tsarist secularity – dispersed practices for distinguishing religion from non-religion in the context of a tenuous but persistent public culture of 'knowledgeable ones' – and post-imperial secularism, wherein Buddhism as a religion was invented and then excluded, as were monastic colleges as valid sites for the production of knowledge, and so on. At this admittedly early stage in my research, I agree with the orienting principles of the Multiple Secularities framework regarding the foundational effects of the secularity effect. The tenuous public culture of the dispersed scholastic culture I am exploring – one that engaged a community of strangers that included knowledgeable people in East and West, defined by the circulation of texts, and invented as a discursive object of address – was a multi-generational, dispersed project of defining, delimiting, regulating, and spatially and temporally arranging appropriate practices for knowing the world. In the ruins of the Qing and Tsarist empires, this imperial history of knowledge practices was called upon to organize – conceptually and institutionally – the new arrangements of revolutionary society, to disastrous and bloody effect for scholastics themselves, but in ways that produced the modern in Asia's heartland.

81 William A. Brown and Urgunge Onon, *History of the Mongolian People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asian Center, 1976), 382.

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