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BORN IN THE BODY OF BEASTS. ANIMALS AND THE SOCIAL ORDER IN THE DIDACTIC BUDDHIST LITERATURE OF BURYAT-MONGOLS (19TH– BEG. 20THCENTURY)

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This paper engages with current discussions concerning the ways in which human cultures construct the sphere labeled as "social" against that of the broadly defined environment. I contribute to these discussions with ananalysis of the didactic Buddhist literature of Buryat-Mongols (19th–beg. 20thcentury), focusing on the image of non-human animals and their position in the social/universal order.
With the emergence of environmentalist trends in the humanities, pre-modern/"non-Western" inter-species relationships have often served as counter-alternatives to the problematic "Western" nature-culture dichotomy. While expecting to see the human being described as a part of "nature" in the analyzed texts, I found a different picture: the anthropocentric social sphere is clearly distinguished from animals, and in some fragments the idioms used with regard to animals are reminiscent of European evolutionist discourse. Though an exhaustive analysis of Buryat attitudes towards animals is beyond the scope of this study, this literature gives insight into a particular cultural discourse as represented in reputed sources of the period.

KEYWORDS: animals, social order, environment, Buryat-Mongols, Buddhism

While a strong conceptual boundary between human and animals used to be considered universal among human societies, recent scholarship admits wide cultural and historical diversity with regard to these categories (Mullin 1999, 202). In recent decades, anthropologists have come up with various arguments to see non-human animals not just as mere resources or a part of the natural environment, but rather to incorporate them as participants in social life, thus questioning the exceptionalism conventionally attributed to the human being (White and Candea 2018). In some cases, it has been argued that non-human persons and cultures exist (White and Candea 2018, 1), in others, societies without a notion of animality or "animals" as a distinct category have been made subjects of consideration (Mullin 1999, 202–207).

In the present study, I would like to discuss the way in which the human-animal relationship was conceptualized among the Buryat-Mongols, a formerly nomadic

community of Inner Asia. I draw on sources from Buryat religious elites, with a bias towards 19th century texts from Transbaikalia. I focus on Buryat Buddhist didactic texts which were in circulation till early Soviet times. I look at the human-animal relationship from a sociological perspective trying to understand the way non-human animals were perceived with regard to the social order in the Buryat didactic literature of the period.[1] I will explore whether animals were included in the social sphere and, if not, examine what was the classification of the living universe as outlined in didactic texts.

As George Barstow has recently pointed out, the human-animal question is not a new one in Buddhist Studies. As he rightly states, these studies focus mostly on South Asian Buddhist traditions, and often seek to define a pan-Buddhist approach to animals (Barstow 2019, 2). However, it is not the case that no attention has been paid to these questions in the Mongolian Buddhism context. For example, in her article *Placing Self Amid Others. A Mongolian Technique of Comparison*, Caroline Humphrey attempts to understand comparison as an intellectual endeavour in a non-European cultural milieu on the example of works by an 18th century Inner Mongolian Buddhist lama and poet, Mergen Gegen. Of particular relevance for this study is that, among other things, her analysis covers the way humans and animals were sorted and classified in these works (Humphrey 2016; see also Humphrey and Ujeed 2013). In my view, looking into the specific Buryat Buddhist tradition, based on the Tibetan version of Buddhism, should add value to this debate.[2] This study can potentially contribute to the various "turns" (the animal turn, or the ontological turn) in social analysis, introducing new archive data with a strong attention to distinctions between voices and texts (Pedersen 2001).

BUDDHIST DIDACTIC LITERATURE AMONG BURYAT-MONGOLS

"Buryat" Buddhism is not a monolithic entity, but a broad variety of viewpoints within the wider Tibeto-Mongolian tradition, primarily of the Gelug School. The numerous monasteries that spread around the region which was part of the Russian Empire from the early 18th century were primarily educational centers. Disciples were taught

1 Hereafter, I will use the term "animal" for all non-human animals.

2 The topic of animals in Buryat and in Mongol culture in general is a popular one in academia and has been considered in terms of phraseology, and of spiritual and material culture (Belyaeva 2020; Dondokova 2008; Badmaev 2002). The topic is also popular in the Buryat media, see: "The Cult of Nature" http://selorodnoe.ru/history/show/id3629604/ (accessed 10.04.2020), or "The Cult of Nature of Traditional Peoples of Buryatia" http://www.baikal-center.ru/books/element.php?ID=51042 (accessed 10.04.2020).

Buddhist theology, philosophy, astrology, medicine and art. The liturgical language was Tibetan and the monasteries extensively published religious literature. Aside from such centers as Beijing, Chakhar or Urga, Transbaikalia was one of the largest centres of book-printing of Buddhist literature (Tsyrempilov 2013, 189).

The practice of Buddhism in Buryatia is conventionally divided by scholars into its monastic and lay forms, as the prescriptions addressed to Buddhist monks and the laity differed significantly (Morokhoeva 1994). Buddhist philosophy in its full canonical form was predominantly available to monks. Few lay people could read and understand the Tibetan language and Buddhist terminology, and they lacked the necessary education, knowledge and experience needed to understand and interpret the sacred texts. The laity were taught to achieve enlightenment by gradual accumulation of "positive karma" through several subsequent incarnations.

While most canonical literature was not accessible and understandable to the laity, in the 18th century the literature called *yosun-u* š*astir* (sastras of the order), *surγal* (teachings), *sayin nomlal* (good preaching) or *bičig* (letters) became one of the major ways of spreading Buddhist ideas among the lay people. Scholars conventionally denote these works as Buddhist didactic literature, as distinct from canonical literature (Khurelbaatar 1987; Tsydenzhapov 1990). In fact, this is only a conditional division since "didactic" literature could include fragments of the "canonical" texts as well.

These texts were initially translated from the Sanskrit and Tibetan, and were available in several versions. For example, *A Drop of Nectar, Arad-i tejigekü rasiyan-u dusul kemegdekü yosun-u šastir orusiba* attributed to Nagarjuna (as part of the Tibetan Buddhist canon *Tanjur*) was translated into Mongolian in the 18th century by Lobsan Danzan and Dai-gushri Agvan Dampli (1700–1780) and by Chakhar gebshi Lobsan Tsultem (1700–1810).[3] *The Precious Treasury of Aphoristic Sayings*, *Erdeni-yin sang subasid* by Gungaajaltsan (1182–1251) was translated into Mongolian in the 13th century in Beijing (Kara 1972, 31), and into Oirat script in the 17th century by Zaya Pandita (1599–1662), in the 18th century by Dambajalsan (1730–1780) and in the 19th century by Rinchen Nomtoev (1821–1907). Original Mongolian language didactic literature developed, taking these translated works as a model (Tsydenzhapov 1990, 9). The authorship of many surviving texts is unknown. Among the most popular Buryat authors from the 19th–20th centuries were Lubsan Galdan Rinpoche of the Anaa datsan, Erdeni Khaibzun Galshiev of the Khudan datsan (1855–1915), Dorzhi-Zhigmed Danzhinov of the Aga datsan (?–1899), Rinchen Nomtoev of the Tugno-galtai datsan (1821–1907) and Galsan-Zhimba Dylgyrov of the Tsugol datsan (1816–1872) (Chimitdorzhiev and Mikhailov 1994).

3 Commentaries to "A Drop of Nectar" were written by Rinchen Nomtoev "Yosun-u Sastr-a arad-i tejiegekii dusul tayilburi…" (1882) IOM: Q38, egz.1, accession number 3398.

The literature characterized by scholars as didactic (Dashiev 1997; Khurelbaatar 1987) includes fragments of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, short fairy tales, poems and short moral parables. These were relatively short works, from a few pages long to roughly a hundred pages of text, written in classical Mongolian script which lay people could understand, available in the form of printed or manuscript books. It is worth noting the high intertextuality of these works and their connection with the Buryat oral tradition. Unlike original Indian didactic literature, the Tibetan and Mongolian texts were closely connected with current social reality and the natural environment – for this reason, the authors used proverbs and images familiar to readers.[4] These included the four distinct seasons of the annual cycle, the migration of birds, the particular singing of the cuckoo, seasonal moving with cattle to fresh pastures, and young camel and horse training and races (Khurelbaatar 1987, 290–291). On the other hand, many expressions from these works enrich the phraseology of modern Mongolian languages, which shows that these texts were widely read (Tsydenzhapov 1990; Khurelbaatar 1987, 292). For example, the following contemporary Buryat sayings originated from these texts: "A real man grows wiser the more he suffers, a precious stone grows shinier the more it's rubbed" (Tsydenzhapov 1990, 59); "For a cow to give milk feed it well in wintertime, for you to prosper learn knowledge in your youth" (Arad-i tejigekü); or "If a swindler sees a saint he will scoff that the saint is faint, when a monkey sees a man it will mock that he has no tail" (Erdeni-yin sang).

The lamas used didactic texts as a means to spread basic elements of Buddhist moral principles which they wanted lay people to apply in their daily lives (Khurelbaatar 1987, 291). These texts were characterized by their authors as a small contribution to spiritual advancement: "a few words", "a drop", "a small piece of advice" or a "cure" for everyday practices which many people thought of as harmless (Ene sayin galab…). The target audience for these works were mainly "common people" (*egel kümün; yerü kümün*), although some texts were addressed to Buryat secular leaders (*qara sayid*). I would argue that the wide distribution of didactic literature among the Buryat population also promoted a shared vision of a social order, a question I intend to investigate in future research.

Unfortunately, a major part of original Buryat Buddhist literature was purposefully destroyed during the Soviet antireligious campaign in the 1930s. The collection preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg is one of the few still surviving in specialized libraries, museums and in private possession. These didactic texts have mainly been studied in a linguistic and historical context (Dashiev 1997; Tsydenzhapov 1990; Khurelbaatar 1987; Muzraeva

4 For example, in the text *Teaching of an Old Man* one can find the proverb: "Far is the way for a man on a lazy horse" (*qasig mori unigsan kumun-du gajar qola*) (Erdini sastir neretü… 5a).

2013; Kollmar-Paulenz 2010, 2017; Sazykin 2004), but have rarely been considered as a source of social thought.

Since I have not encountered any texts dedicated specifically to animals, this article is based on about 30 random texts which I studied at the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts in Saint Petersburg.[5] Many of my key texts have Buryat authors and show local problems and realias of the relevant period. I have also studied the tales about Buddhist hell published in transliterated form and in Russian translation by Alexei Sazykin (2004). In Władysław Kotwicz's archives (in the Science Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences and Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Krakow)[6] I studied a beautifully illustrated book *Molom toyin* (from the Khalkha Mongolian region), which was also popular in Buryatia in the 19th–20th centuries.[7] I have also made use of recently published didactic texts in the modern Buryat language, such as *Bilig-ün toli* by Erdeni-Khaibzun Galshiev (2012) and the anthology of Buryat pre-Soviet literature *Altan gadahan* (2009), compiled by Valentin Makhatov and Khanda Tsydenova.

Before proceeding to the main analysis, it is necessary to outline some limitations of the empirical material used in this article. First of all, this is a far from exhaustive selection of texts, which represents the view of a particular social strata, mainly lamas.[8] Though it was addressed to laymen, one cannot be sure what was the reception of these ideas: there might have existed different/contradictory elements of Buryat culture, e.g. folk views that do not coincide with those expressed/held by lamas. In future work, further investigating the social impact of these sources might therefore prove important. For now, we possess scant information on their social influences on the illiterate population, the scale of their distribution or their mode of use. However, it is nonetheless important to know what an average potential reader of these texts could learn about the "proper" social order.

5 My study was made possible by scholarship support from the German Historical Institute in Moscow (Project title: "The Ideas of Social Order of Buryats as Reflected in the Didactic Buddhist Literature and Legal Documents from the Archives of Saint Petersburg", 02.09–02.10.2019).

6 Financed by internal grants of the University of Warsaw BSt UW (Project title: "The Sources of Normative Systems in Inner Asia"). I also would like to express my gratitude to Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz and Michael Gulyaev for reading the first draft of the article, and Jargal Badagarov for correcting the Latin transcriptions of classic Mongolian.

7 This tale recounts the story of Maudgalyāyana's journeys to the Buddhist hells to save his mother. This tale has different versions spreading from India through Central Asia to China. In the 19th century, the tales apparently became so popular that illustrated books started to circulate (Kollmar-Paulenz 2010).

8 There exists a large number of ritual texts, praise poems, songs, riddles, etc., that concern animals that could be referred to in the future.

ANIMAL BODY AS A PUNISHMENT

Classical Buddhist cosmology divides the world into six realms, comprising gods (*devas*), semi-gods (*asuras*), humans (*manushya*), animals (*tiryak*), ghosts (*pretas*), and creaturesof hell (*niraya*). The Buryat texts use the word *amitan* (*ami-* life, vitality; *-tan* suffix *nomina possessiva*) to define all these sentient beings.[9] Each of these various worlds carry certain qualities and have their own distinct experiences, but no one is bound forever to a particular form (Bartsow 2019, 4; Wilson 2010). Caroline Humphrey, in her analysis of the illustrations by 18th century lama and poet Mergen Gegen (Inner Mongolia), noticed that living beings (*amitan*), including humans, are depicted as sorted according to their kind and their environment. Accroding to Humphrey, the aim of such a depiction conveys a didactic message: "Humans are animals (amitan «living beings») among others. They may have been animals in a previous life and as animals they may be reborn. In this human life they alone can achieve enlightenment by means of meditation, but a uniquely human, definitively superior position does not exist" (Humphrey 2016). In line with Buddhist cosmology, the Buryat didactic texts also frequently remind readers that their "soul" *sünesun* can acquire various "bodies" *bey=e* in the never-ending cycle of birth and death, depending on the "fruits of their deeds" (*üiliin üri*) during the current lifetime.

The didactic texts addressed to laymen, apart from familiarizing readers with the universal order, give relevant instructions for living in the human world. Birth in the "human body" (*küm*ün-ü *bey=e*) or "humankind/race" (*kümün-ü ijaguur; kümün t*ü*relkiten*), along with birth as gods, is presented as the one of the most desired incarnations. The texts also warn readers of three "bad fates" (*maγu jiyaγan*) or a "prison of bad fate" (*maγu jiyaγan-u gindan*) (Galshiev, 2012, verse 856) stating that the "hell dweller, hungry ghost or animal" are "the most undesired incarnations" and "the result of mistakes in this life" (*tamu*, *birid*, *aduγusun//küsel-ün moγai?// ene nasan-u gem*) (Olan amitan-u 21a). Ghosts are not able to sate their hunger, and spend their lives suffering and searching for any food. The dwellers of hell reside in agony and constant torture for their previous misdeeds. Hell was richly depicted in thangkas and other illustrations, with its residents shown as having naked human bodies and enduring enormous sufferings in hot and cold hells. The preventive function of this realm is reflected in one of the major topics in didactic Buddhist literature, descriptions of journeys to hell. In the Buryat regions, these included the Story of *Molon toyin*, the Story of *Choizhid dagini*, the Story of *Güsü Lama* and the Stories of Benefits of the Diamond sutra (Sazykin 2004).

9 In the contemporary Buryat language, the word amitan is usually used for animals only; see, the online dictionary of contemporary Buryat: http://burlang.ru/ (accessed 09.04.2020).

Birth as an animal is also considered to be a punishment (though a more minor one than being in hell) for misdeeds and sins in a previous life. Some may receive the "bodies of the animals that they killed during their lifetime" in order to atone for their faults (Choizhid dagini 36b, see Sazykin 2004, 166). According to the *Güsü Lama* tale, sinful people turn into predators (*aryatan*) after getting to the in-between world, *Zaguurdi* (Güsü lama 2b, see Sazykin 2004, 230). Besides predators, (Olan amitan-u 10) insects, especially those living in excrements (Üne yeke-tü ülemji 3b), are presented as the worst incarnations. The didactic literature thus richly uses the animal image to illustrate Buddhist teachings.

The category of animals includes the whole variety of non-human animals. In Buddhist theory, animals are divided into those born of eggs (birds, snakes, turtles), wombs (elephants, horses, cows, etc.) and from the vapour of the basic elements of the universe – water, wind, ground and fire (bees, mosquitos, etc.) (Yermakova and Ostrovskaya 2004, 151). Interestingly, the abovementioned lama Mergen Gegen illustrated "birds" generically on one page and "animals", on another (Humphrey 2016). There existed also a category of self-conceived animals like Garudas or Nagas, but they were not considered as inferior incarnations (Yermakova and Ostrovskaya 2004, 151); likewise, some animals were considered as sacred, like deer, bull and elephant, which were associated with the life of Buddha (Dorzhigushaeva 2002, 17). In the Mongolian practice of divination, animals represent the twelve months of the annual calendar cycle, and serve as symbols denoting years, directions, months and hours (Humphrey 2016).

"EVOLUTIONISM" AND SOCIAL ORDER

For the sociological perspective, it is important to note that the human and animal worlds are clearly demarcated in the didactic literature. The texts mainly use the term *adaγusun* or *adaγusun törölkiten* for denoting "animals", or more precisely "beasts", as opposed to humans and other sentient beings.[10] Also in the Tibet-Mongolian glossary from the 19th century, animals (*adaγusun*) and human (*kümün*) are given as separate entries (Yakhontova 2019).

It is notable that in both the didactic and other Buryat texts of the same period one can trace ideas reminiscent of European evolutionism. A history chronicle written in 1875 by Vandan Yumsunov (Vangdan Yumčung-un, 1823–1883) contains a vision of pre-Buddhist times: "people would behave as they feel like, according to their own reasons/habit; they gathered into clans, tribes and families to rob their neighbours,

10 Though *amitan* as a generic term may sometimes refer to animals in the didactic texts (Diamond sutra 61b, see Sazykin 2004, 125; Choizhid dagini 15, see Sazykin 2004, 190; 42, see Sazykin 2004, 120).

took their cattle and other property; they possessed and were gaining proficiency with handling bows, arrows, arrow cases, armour, helmets and other weapons; they armed heavily and prepared troops, looted and killed each other". This fragment recalls the debates over the *natural condition* of mankind to be found in early European political philosophy, tending towards the Hobbesian state of "war of everyone against everyone" (Hobbes 1994, 74–79). Likewise in Yumsunov's chronicle, the destructive "nature" of humankind is said to be quietened (*nomuqadqa-*) and improved (*sayijira-*) with the dissemination of proper teaching (Buddhism) and the both harsh and merciful laws of the khan (*qaγan-u eldebqataγu jögelen qauli*; *qaγan* in this case is meant to be the Russian Tsar) (Yumsunov 1935, 141). It is important to note that I do not make claims concerning a historical linkage between Buddhist ideas and European evolutionism. This "civilizing" effect of Buddhist teaching is actually a very old trope which Tibetan Buddhist lamas used as early as the 13th century in the Mongolian Empire, and which was also present in later historical periods (Kollmar-Paulenz 2014). "Evolutionist" narratives thus have old roots in Buddhist traditions that developed independently from European intellectual traditions. However, it is interesting to point out some similarity in thinking about the "social" issues connected with "animality".

In a similar manner, the authors of didactic texts describe the human as possessing certain inclinations towards the "animal" way of behavior. Human communities first go through the stage of "savagery" then suppress their "animal traits", as a rule by converting to Buddhism. Erdeni Khaibzun Galshiev uses an expression "wild/savage human" (*jerlig küm*ü*n*) to describe someone roaming in the forest as opposed to those living in settlements and towns. The *Erdeni sang* didactic book refers to people who are marked by "egoism" and are not abstemious over food and drink, as "beasts on (two) legs" (*köl-tü aduγusun*) or having an "animal-like way of behaviour" (*yabudal-un yosun inu aduγusun adali*) (Erdeni-yin sang 8b, 16a). Animal behaviour designates a minimal moral level, as indicated by the frequent use of expressions like *aduγusunču*, which means "even animal…": "Do not make public your evil deeds/ Even animals, dogs and cats, try to hide their excrements in sand (Galshiev 2012, verse 318). People should express and feel gratitude to those around them, if not, they are worse than a dog: "Even a dog after eating a meal at least swishes its tail" (Galshiev 2012, verse 782).

The human ability to live a social life is one of the traits distinguishing humans from animals: "If one knows how to live in unanimity and concord with others, he is a wise man; those who join together like animals compose a flock in a pitiful way" (Erdeni-yin sang).[11] Animals, although they reside together, are merely striving to satisfy their own hunger; the human community, on the other hand, is built through consent (*sanaγ=a neyileku*) and harmony (*eb, el, ey=e*). To denote the human social

11 Busu busu amitan-u sanaγan-dur neyileküi; yabudal-i medebesü mergen inu tere bui; aduγusun bögesü ber jokilduqu ayimaγ=tan; qamtu nige sürüg bolju ülü aqu buyu a.

order, the didactic texts often use the word *yosun*. The term *yosun*, which encompasses a wide range of meanings from rituals to tradition and culture, is one of the key elements of the Mongol view on the idea of orderliness (Tangad 2016a, 2016b). This term is also used in respect to secular and religious orders *qoyar yosun* (Kollmar-Paulenz 2001, 134). Thus, apart from the knowledge of Buddhist moral principles, humans should also know the secular social order: "Although you are a common man/ You should familiarize yourself with the laws (*qauli*) of this world/ The one who does not know what to accept and reject/ Is close to the status of animals" (Galshiev 2012, verse 722). Thus, calling a human an "animal" (*adaγusun*) certainly carries degrading connotations in the didactic texts. So what are the "human" traits that are absent among animals?

Another important human trait missing among animals is the ability to distinguish social roles and create hierarchies.The hierarchical social order provides safety, while those who do not have stronger protectors are like "a wild animal from a forest" (Galshiev 2012, verse 39), or those who shun (do not listen to) a knowledgeable person could be called an animal (Erdeni-yin sang 8b). The didactic texts pay a lot of attention to family hierarchy, especially regarding relations with parents and seniors. In many didactic texts, women and especially daughters-in-law are taught to know their place in the family and respect their older relatives. One text states that a daughter-in-law who is disrespectful to her in-laws "should not be counted as a human but as an animal"[12] (Beri ber qadam…). Family relations in this context are seen as an important feature of human society.

Like other Buddhist forms, the Tibetan/Mongolian tradition recognizes that animals are capable of emotions and some level of thought. Animals can feel fear, desire, love (Barstow 2019). However, from the didactic texts one can conclude that animals lack many other, what I would call "social" emotions, like *ečiguri* (shame,decency), *sonjiγuri* (disgrace), *ayiqu* (fear before parents, superiors). These "formal" emotions are an important constituent hierarchical arrangement regarding relations with parents, seniors, and secular and religious leaders. Thus, "the one who does not have a sense of shame and decency cannot be called a human, but should be called an animal" (Beri ber qadam…).[13] Having no shame in relieving oneself in public is designated with the same term used for animals' excretions, *aduuhan mete* (Galshiev 2012, verse 4). Moreover, animals are also unable to distinguish the difference between giving respect to (*takhi-*) and mocking (*bahamzhal-*) others (Galshiev 2012, verse 383).

Apart from the lack of some "emotions" and "feelings", animals are described as intellectually inferior. For example, in *Erdeni-yin sang*, animals and "animal-like behavior" are frequently opposed to the way *mergen*, the wise men, conduct themselves:

12 kümün-ü toγan-dur ülü abuγad aduγusan-u toγan-dur toγalaγdaqui.

13 ečigüri kiged sonjiγuri ügei=ten-i kümün kemen büüügüle aduγusan kemen ügülegdeküi.

unlike the former, the human can learn skills and knowledge (*arγa uqaγan*), improve the self, listen to the wiser. Especially, the fragments of the didactic literature make this distinction with reference to *cattle* – "as stupid as cattle" (*mal metü teneg*) (Arad-i tejigekü…4a), "cattle with two legs" (*khoyor khülte mal*) (Galshiev 2012, verse 236) and wild grassing animals (like antelopes), which though harmless and weak, due to a lack of wit and caution are said to often be misled by predators and hunters (Galshiev 2012, verse 277, 282). Animals' lack of intelligence means that they are unable to practice religion, more specifically Buddhism, and recite *maṇi* (mantra) (Barstow 2019, 9).

In original Mongolian texts, the authors used images of animals familiar to the reader from everyday life. Initially the majority of Buddhist literature of the Buryats were translations from Indian and Tibetan texts, which included animals exotic for a northern region like Buryatia. These include: crocodile (*matar*), elephant (*jaγan*), monkey (*saramaγčin, bičin*), turtle (*yasuta melekei*), lion (*arslan*), peacock (*toγus sibaγun*) and parrot (*toti*). These usually play the roles of characters in Indian fairy tales and often stand for various human character traits which are considered morally significant: a foolish vixen (*uqamsar ügei ekener ünegen*), quarrelsome monkey (*keder saramaγcin*) ormad elephant (*galjaγu jaγan)* (Arad-i tejigekü…; Yosun-u šastr-a… tayilburi). Such stories were often written in the form of satires and used animals as metaphors for negative human behaviour. However, some fragments show traits seen as inherent to particular animals. This is the case of some didactic texts, where dogs are described as capable of mean and villainous behavior like attacking an enemy, who is ill and grew weaker: people behaving like this are "being an old dog in human appearance" (Galshiev 2012, verse 470); or one who is tormenting a weaker counterpart is called "a dog on two legs and speaking human language" (Galshiev 2012, verse 692).[14] In another fragment, a person stingy with food is compared to "a dog showing its teeth" (Galshiev 2012, verse 21). A monkey is mentioned as ugly and gross (*γutumšiγ bičin-u adali*) (Onol-tu ebügen… 1a). Insects carry an important symbolic function due to their small size and as creatures not realizing their limitations: "as a worm climbing on a fortress" (Galshiev 2012, verse 328). Insects/worms (*qoruqai*) or parasites (*qubalja*) that grow by sipping animals' blood are the same as a human who grows richer from violence or sinful deeds (Olan amitan-u 12a). A snake is also described as unrecoverably viperous, just as are those people who live with evil thoughts (Erdeni--yin sang; Galshiev 2012, verse 496). Pigs are seen as eating everything, even rotten things, like people who do not distinguish virtue from sins (Erdeni-yin sang… 14a).

14 Natalia Dondokova in her analysis of Buryat proverbs expresses her surprise that unlike in Russian phraseology, where a dog is presented as a good friend of humans, in the Buryat phraseology, as a rule, a dog is described in negative categories: as an animal living among humans, but failing to distinguish their hierarchies and norms, as in the proverb: "A thoughtless dog is barking at the moon" (Dondokova 2008, 57).

It seems that in most instances mentioning animals carries negative overtones or refers to negative aspects of human behaviour except, perhaps, for the case of horses which are compared to a good friend (Qagan-u nigen…; Galshiev 2012, verse 400). Animals are considered to be inferior, because they are highly dependent on their natural needs and lack human will (Yermakova and Ostrovskaya 2004, 130), certain "social" emotional or intellectual abilities. However, the same as is the case for human and other sentient beings, there is no question that animals are capable of suffering, feeling physical and mental pain, and thus humans should consider their needs when acting in the world (Barstow 2019; Dorzhigushaeva 2002, 17).

Fig. 1. "The Molon Khatun enjoying sinful deeds". Source: *The Tale of (how) the saintly Molon toyin Bodhisattva, who attained great perfection, repaid good actions to his mother* (Mong. 417–19) Manuscript 19th century, Inner Mongolia (?). Reproduced with the permission of the Copenhagen Royal Library.

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS ANIMALS

Promoting itself as a religion of compassion, Buddhism set itself in opposition to shamanism: animal sacrifices, common as part of shamanist rituals practiced by Buryats before the adoption of Buddhism (and after), were one of the major points of contention (Dorzhigushaeva 2002, 8). The didactic texts insisted that blood sacrifices are an improper form of worship. For instance, one of the major sins described in the Story of *Molon toyin* is that performed by the eponymous hero's mother: "(…) she

ripped out the hearts of living pigs, took them and offered them to the bad *ongɣod*" (Kollmar-Paulenz 2017,177). In the Story of *Choizhid dagini*, killing horses and dogs are cited in the same category of sins as killing humans. Sazykin explains that this is related to the initial period of the spread of Buddhism among the Mongols, and the struggle against local shamanist cults which most often used horses and dogs for sacrifice. The killing or torturing of animals was considered to be a sin also because animals are former humans: in "the universe where everything dies and finds its new incarnation without beginning or end"[15], everything has been one's mother in a previous life (*minueke boluɣsan*) (Ečige eke-yin… 5a). Despite such an attitude, the murder of animals was, and still is, one of the most problematic issues in this and other Buddhist regions.

According to Sazykin, the fact that Buddhism appeared in developed agricultural societies influenced the basic commandment of Buddhism to avoid killing animals for food.[16] However, moving northward from India to countries such as Tibet and especially Mongolia that were based on cattle breeding, this requirement became virtually impossible to implement. Thus, a way out was found: the sin of killing animals and the sin of eating meat from slaughtered animals were differentiated. Although both deeds are qualified as sins, in practice, the sin of consuming meat for food was considered much smaller sin than that of killing an animal for these purposes (Sazykin 2004, 234). For example, in the Story of *Choizhid dagini*, a man during a hell trial justifies himself as follows: "I have commited sins, I have consumed the meat of many killed animals, but I have not killed them myself"[17] (Choizhid dagini 15a, see Sazykin 2004, 190).

Indeed, few mentions are made in the texts of people being criticized for eating meat. Like Tibetans, from whom Buddhism was adopted, Buryats, who were nomads for centuries, had a complex relationship with the animals they bred. These traditionally included five types of animals (*tavan khushuun mal*): horses, camels, cows, goats and sheep. Buryats' daily survival depended on these animals, which were treated as means of transportation/carriage and as a source of dairy products, meat, wool, fur

15 törüku ükükü terigün ecüs ügei orčilang.

16 As Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz notes in private correspondence, this is only the case in Mahayana-Buddhism. In the Pali canon, there is no demand to avoid eating meat. On the contrary: the Buddhist monk has to eat everything people put into his alms bowl. Only if an animal is especially slaughtered for the monk, has he to reject it. Otherwise, he has to eat the meat. Interestingly, only a few lamas nowadays know that Buddha did not forbid eating meat. According to her personal communications with Tibetan and Mongolian lamas about this topic, they simply assume that not eating meat is required, but that they themselves are too weak to follow this rule (private communication, April 22, 2020).

17 kilinče-yin jüg-tüüyiledügsen olan amitan-i alaɣsan miq=a idebei: bi ober-iyen ami tasuluɣsan ügei.

and leather. Galshiev recommends that one should be grateful to animals, whose flesh or milk is consumed, or whose skin is being used, and pray for their well-being as one would for one's own mother (Galshiev 2012, verses 678, 679, 952). Even if condemnations of consuming meat appear, most of them do so with regard to an immoderate or improper way of consuming meat (e.g. abusive ways of cooking for the best taste, eating the meat of mass slaughtered animals) and wastefulness (e.g. eating only the best parts and throwing out or burning the rest). The following fragment of the Story of *Molon toyin* describes the way in which his mother committed such sins (Fig. 1):

> […] with gold and silver she bought many animals, fattened them, hung them from wooden hooks and hit the still living animals with wooden sticks so that the blood in their bodies stocked. Saying that they would taste good, she let them get killed, then mixed the meat and blood, flavored with garlic and sweet wine, ate and savored it. Further, she threw living fish into a pot, roasted and ate them. Furthermore, she threw geese, chicken and many other birds alive in a hot pot, so that they plucked out their own feathers and died (Kollmar-Paulenz 2017, 177).

According to this text, the improper way of consuming animals is punished in various sectors of hell. For example, a hell called "Crushing in a mortar" contains sinners who "during their lifetime tore the skins from live animals and took only their meat and marrowbone"[18] (Molon toyin 16b: Sazykin 2004, 54); a Hell of Swords, where suffer those who wasted meat and skin in fire (Molon toyin 17a: Sazykin 2004, 54); or a hell of a "Fire Town" – for "those who picked in their skirting bird eggs that did not see the sun and moonlight, and baked them in fire"[19] (Molon toyin 19a: Sazykin 2004, 55).

Traditional mass gatherings of people during summer feasts and wedding ceremonies required mass slaughter of animals for food. The authors of the didactic literature condemned this practice and encouraged a non-meat diet serving dairy and grain-based products instead of meat (*alaγsan miq=a*) during such events (Ene sayin galab…). A popular Buryat 18th century short novel about Princess Balzhan khatan also includes a similar passage: "When a girl is married off, due to the needs of the ceremony a lot of cattle (*aduγusan mal*) are slaughtered. My beloved father and mother, when the time will come to marry me off, when preparing the wedding ceremony do not take the life of cattle (*shuhata mal* – "cattle with blood"); use dairy products, fruits and bulbs for those needs, that will be enough" (Balzhan khatan tukhai… 1992, 215). A non-meat diet, which is currently often seen as foreign to the Buryat tradition, actually was present in the culture of the 19th century in ethnic Buryatia.

18 ede erigüten amidu büküi-tür adaγusud-un arisun-i öbčigsen miq-a inu kim-a tataγsan-u nigül-ün.

19 naran saran-u gerel-i ese üjegsen aliba sibaγun-u üngdeged-i abču qormoyilan irejüγal-un dotura bolγaγsan-u nigül-ün.

If the issue of domestic animals (*mal, adaγu mal, boda mal* "cattle"; animals residing "at one's home" *gertegen*) seems to be at least problematic for the authors from a moral standpoint, the viewpoint on the murder of non-domesticated/wild animals is more rigid.[20] In the didactic and folk literature, the figure of the hunter (*görügesüci, anguushan*) is often depicted as a negative character: "a sinful hunter" *qilensetei anguushan* (Galshiev 277; also in Molon toyin, especially The Stories of Benefits of the Diamond Sutra 35b, 41a–42b: Sazykin 2004, 79–80).[21] In the texts depicting journeys to the Buddhist hell, there frequently appear scenes in which hunters are punished for killing wild animals. In the Story of *Choizhid dagini*, during a hell trial a man explains that he used to kill wild animals because it was a tradition (*jang*) in the place where he lived. However, he was still convicted of murder: "while sinless wild animals nibbled grass, you chased some of them with dogs and killed them, caught some with a lasso pole, shot some with a bow. (…) you killed ninety wild goats, sixty-seven musk deer, five bears, seven big musk deer and seventeen monkeys"[22] (Choizhid dagini 34b, see: Sazykin 2004, 166). In the Story of *Molon toyin*, one of the hell residents who used to be a Brahmin was punished for many sins, including training falcons to hunt smaller and weaker birds, and training hunting dogs to chase game (Molon toyin 2015, 18).[23] This perhaps influenced the folk oral tradition, as I have heard stories about "punished hunters" during my fieldwork in Buryatia.

20 I would include into this category, predatory and grazing animals *ariyatan kiged görügesün* (Choizhid dagini 55a: Sazykin 2004, 207); and also worms/insects/pismire *sirγuljin qoruqai terigüten* (Molon toyin 17b: Sazykin 2004, 54), birds šibagun and fish *jigasun* (Molon toyin 17a–b: Sazykin 2004, 54).

21 As Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz informed me in private correspondence, this actually goes back to the stories about Milarepa, who met a hunter and the deer he was hunting, and showed the hunter the way to liberation. This perhaps most famous of all Milarepa-tales has been translated into Mongolian very early on (around 1600).

22 görügesün-nügüd ebesün iden aqui-dur: či jarim-dur-iyan noqai talbiju alan: jarim-dur anu uriq=a tosqaju alan: či jarim-dur anu sumu-bar qarbuju alaγsan: tede inu yeren imagan görügesün: jiran doluγan küderi: tabun tüme doluγan yeke küderi: arban doluγan saramaγčin alaγsan-iya.

23 In the historic chronicles, some warriors asked to perform a three-day rite in a monastery after they hunted animals in a battue (Balzhan khatanai tuuzha… 1992, 221). We can find a similar trope of moral reflection in the diary of an Inner-Mongolian duke, Galdanwangchugdorji: "Always, since [I] was aged ten [I] liked killing and smashing things, and loved using traps, lassoes, slings, and sticks, and wandering in hummocks of thick grass, killing any baby animals which were bigger than rats or mice and sparrows. [I] roasted goose eggs on fires, and [I] made baby hares my food, and in this way [I] grew up making all those activities like games. From the age of fifteen, [I] went hunting on horseback, using a gun or a bow and arrows on the northern and the southern side of the mountains. [I] forced yellow and black people [lamas and lay serfs] to serve me, and in this way [I] made people fed up with me, but [I] did not know fear orshame, and [I] did not notice how my father and mother were worried about myacting like this, and I went on acting like an animal (adugusun mal)" (Humphrey and Ujeed 2013, 117).

Apart from consuming animals as meat, they were also considered as a "property object" (*edlel mal*) (Ekener-ün qubčad…) and a monetary unit (*boda*) as stipulated in the pre-revolutionary Buryat legal codes, which regulated the life of the Buryats in the Russian empire. In legal codes, terms like *andza* and *yala* were counted in *bodo*, which denoted material value calculated in terms of amount of cattle. A *Bodo* is equivalent to 1 cow/bull or 1 horse, 7 sheep or 10 goats – a camel, meanwhile, was counted as 1.5 *bodos* (Tangad 2013). In line with the Buddhist doctrine, the didactic texts condemned some social practices and commercial transactions which could have tragic consequences for animals. Particularly, the didactic texts condemned Buryat women's desire to dress up and use expensive and heavy jewelry made of corals, pearls, gems, gold and silver. The texts say that such excessive behaviour leads to the suffering and death of animals who are often sold in exchange for fashionable items: "it costs a lot, thus in order to cover its cost many cattle (*mal*) are sold, and thus are given to a butcher to be slaughtered; this brings harm (*qoor-a*) to the life (*ami*) of many creatures, and puts a lot of sins on those who are selling the cattle." The text also says that those women who enjoy wearing large-size jewelry will be born as worms living in excrement (Ün-e yeke-tüülemji… 3b). The horse racing and archery that took place during Buryat summer feasts were also condemned in the didactic texts. It is said that horses suffer from unnecessary lashing during races and that animals are used as prizes for winners and gamblers. Besides, people massively consume meat during these feast celebrations. Those who watch horse races are to be reborn as wolves and jackals (Olan amitan-u uile… 5a).

Thus, those who kill or torture animals may face serious challenges in subsequent incarnations. On the contrary, the kind treatment of animals, such as saving the lives of insects or refraining from beating cattle, may "relieve diseases", "maintain life in times of danger" and will bring positive karma for future incarnations (Galshiev 2012, verses 134, 136). In the story of *Molon toyin*, the protagonist had to save the life of animals in order to relieve the sufferings of his mother (Molon toyin 32 b: Sazykin 2004, 62). Human handling of and responsibility towards animals is thus based on humans' power over animals and their capacity to moderate this power.

CONCLUSION

The present study concerns the way in which Buryat Buddhist elites in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century presented animals and their place in the social and cosmic orders. The didactic literature makes a clear distinction between the human and animal orders. This view is clearly an anthropocentric one, based on the concept of human incarnation seen as a privilege. Animals are objectified in cautionary tales in ways that aim at discouraging humans from evil acts. While the texts prescribe treating animals

with care and highlight the possibility of humans being "downgraded" to animals, interactions with animals are presented mostly from a position of power.

This study aims to contribute to the general debates in the social sciences regarding the way human cultures construct the sphere labeled as "social" in opposition to the broadly defined natural environment (Latour 1993, 2005; Luhmann 1981). In post-humanist social theories and environmental philosophy, "non-Western" traditions of thought often serve as counter-weight alternatives to a conventional "Western" nature-culture dichotomy. The materials analysed in this article demonstrate, however, that Buryat conceptions of the relationship between human and non-human animals were coined in categories that seem to resonate more, for example, with Philipp Descola's idea of naturalism than with his rendition of animism or totemism (Descola 2013). I argue, moreover, that one should not necessarily see the ideas expressed in these texts as borrowed from or developed under the influence of European modernization processes mediated by the Russian Empire; instead, I see them as a part of Buddhist and other local traditions with long historical roots, which should be explored in more detail in future research.

An exhaustive analysis of general Buryat attitudes towards animals is beyond the scope of this study. It is possible that studying other didactic texts might expand and enrich the reading of the material presented here. My observations seem to be consistent with other similar research done in Buddhist Studies (Barstow 2019; Waldau 2002) and could serve as additional comparative material for the aforementioned debate.

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