AN I[illegible] THE HAMBO LAMA

By HOLMES WELCH

THE purpose of this article is to report an interview granted to the writer by the Hambo Lama of Mongolia, the Venerable Samagyn Gombojav, on November 17, 1961. The interview took place not in Ulan Bator, but in Phnom Penh, where the Hambo Lama was attending the Sixth Conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Since this was the first such meeting in which Mongolia had participated, I shall begin by explaining the circumstances and giving a brief history of the W.F.B.

The World Fellowship of Buddhists, which is the only world Buddhist organization, was founded in 1950 by Dr. G. P. Malalasekera of Ceylon who served as its president until he became Ambassador to Moscow in 1958. His successor, U Chan Htoon, is Justice of the Burmese Supreme Court. Meetings are normally held every two years (1950 in Colombo, 1952 in Tokyo, 1954 in Rangoon, 1956 in Kathmandu, and 1958 in Bangkok), but the meeting in Phnom Penh, originally scheduled for 1960, had to be postponed because of the death of the Cambodian king.

Under its Constitution the W.F.B. has forty-four "regional centres" throughout the world, of which some thirty-six have sent delegations to one or more of its world conferences. Its objectives are (1) to propagate Buddhist teachings among non-Buddhists; (2) to work for their observance by Buddhists themselves; (3) to organize welfare activities; and (4) to work for peace. Because the Fellowship has no permanent paid staff, its rôle thus far, however, has been chiefly to provide a forum where Buddhists can get to know each other and exchange information about the progress of Buddhism in their respective countries.

The W.F.B. ignores the iron curtain. It has regional centres both in Peking and Taiwan as well as in North and South Vietnam. Although the Cambodian hosts at the Sixth Conference had not sent an invitation to Taiwan, they invited the two sides of other divided countries: North and South Korea; East and West Germany. North Korea and East Germany refused, so that in all there were delegations from four Communist countries: the Soviet Union, China, Mongolia, and North Vietnam. I attended the conference as an observer on the Hong Kong delegation.

The People's Republic of Mongolia was represented by three persons: Samagyn Gombojav, the Hambo Lama or Grand Lama*; Tsenvegyn

* Erdenipel was declared "Head of the Buddhist Church of the Mongolian People's Republic" in 1954 (Robert Rupen, "Mongolian Nationalism," *Royal Central Asian Journal*, Vol. XLV, Part II, April, 1958, p. 174). In 1961, since he was over eighty years old, he retired. Gombojav, described as "Gabje lama (professor of theology) of the former Great Urga," was named his successor by the "religious assembly of the [Gandang] Monastery" (*International Buddhist News Forum*, Vol. I, No. 11, November, 1961, p. 15). It appears that the head of the Gandang Monastery is *ex officio* head of the Buddhist Church, or at any rate is chosen by the monks of that monastery, which is the largest in the country. Gombojav also succeeded Erdenipel as President of the Mongolian Buddhists' Association. (*Gandantehchinling Monastery*, Ulan Bator, 1961.)

Dorji, a lama older than Gombojav; and Gigmidin Namsrai, a young interpreter.* They all lived together in one large room of the same hotel that I was staying in. The two lamas spoke only Mongolian, while their interpreter spoke Mongolian, French, and Russian, but no English. This may be the reason why at one point during the conference the Mongolians split their vote with the rest of the Communist delegations. Since the incident is not without significance, let me give a brief account of it.

In the past, W.F.B. had taken all decisions unanimously. At the Sixth Conference, however, disagreement arose over a resolution that warned against the dangers of radioactive fall-out and condemned atomic tests. The Bloc delegations followed the Soviet lead in maintaining that this amounted to implicit criticism of the Soviet Union and should be amended to call simply for universal and complete disarmament. Because the disagreement seemed irreconcilable and the Japanese delegation was on the verge of walking out, the President suggested that perhaps the W.F.B. would now have to abandon the principle of unanimity and instead follow its Constitution, which calls for taking all decisions by a majority vote. He put this procedural question to the assembled delegates, that is, he asked them to vote on whether to vote. The "ayes" had it, 24 to 3. It was at this point that the Mongolians split with China, North Vietnam and Soviet Union and voted with the majority. On two subsequent ballots, first on the actual condemnation of fall-out, and second on the expulsion of the Taiwan Regional Centre, they rejoined the Bloc. It seems unlikely, however, that this temporary difference was intentional. Although the Mongolians voted after the Chinese, who were seated just in front of them, the Mongolian interpreter probably did not understand what the Chinese were doing when they voted "Against," first in their own language and then in English. It was the first international conference of any kind that the Mongolians had attended.† In fact, it was reported the first time that they had ever been out of Mongolia.

This may also account for the fact that during the two weeks of the conference they were affable, but a little wary. None the less they made a good impression, I think, on most of the other delegates. Although the Grand Lama engaged in an occasional political sally (as when in his main address to the conference he attacked countries that "openly support the traitors on Taiwan"), his overriding theme was the need for "peaceful coexistence" and throughout the meeting he and his fellow countrymen conducted themselves with great dignity, and, according to their customs, with perfect correctness. It is fortunate, perhaps, that there were no

*Gombojav's name is spelled according to his calling card, the names of the other two according to the final published list of delegates to the Conference; according to an earlier list their names were Tsengengin Dorj and Tignedym. The romanization of place-names throughout this article is that used by the Mongols themselves.

† An Outer Mongolian Delegation headed by the then Hambo Lama, Erdenipel, arrived late at the IVth World Conference held November 15-21, 1956, in Kathmandu. Its presence, however, is not mentioned anywhere in the official report of the conference. One person who attended has a recollection that there was a discussion about the seating of Mongolia, and that the delegates from Peking were opposed to it on the grounds that because of Mongolia's relationship to China, they were competent to represent it themselves.

Theravadin Buddhists at our hotel to see the Venerable Dorji order a large, rare filet mignon, and that since he and the Grand Lama both wore leather shoes, the one monk on the delegation from Peking wore leather shoes himself.* It should, perhaps, be mentioned that not only was the Mongolians' dress magnificent, but it was immaculately clean, and their faces and finger nails were as well-scrubbed as a Scandinavian schoolboy's.

My interview with them took place on the morning before the final session and hence before they became involved in the political struggle over fall-out and the expulsion of Taiwan. My wife and I went to their room at 9 o'clock as appointed, and found them waiting to receive us, the lamas in their ecclesiastical robes, and the interpreter in a light blue gown. I should mention that he was plainly just an interpreter and nothing more. He had to get all his answers from the Grand Lama and did not even seem to know enough about Buddhism to understand all the questions. Since the interview does not add a great deal to our knowledge of Buddhism in Mongolia but is chiefly interesting for the tone of some of the statements made, I shall give it below verbatim.

Welch: Many people abroad have heard stories about the decline of Buddhism in Outer Mongolia.

Gombojav: All elements in history undergo change from time to time. It is difficult to say what the future will be.

W.: But is there not some way of reassuring people abroad about the future of Buddhism in Outer Mongolia?

G.: It has a future.

W.: How many young people are being ordained?

G.: Young people are entering monasteries, where they make their professional future. All citizens of the Republic have the right to choose Buddhism.

W.: For example, last year how many young people were ordained?

G.: There are no exact figures, but there are 10,000 lamas—over 10,000†

W.: Are there young men being ordained each year?

G.: There are, but no figures are available.

W.: Does the number of those ordained annually maintain this figure of 10,000 or is it declining?

G.: It is hard to say. Perhaps it is going up or staying the same.

W.: Are there any seminars where young people can do their religious studies?

G.: Yes.

W.: What are their names?

* Theravadin Buddhists may eat meat if it is offered to them, but not order it. Chinese Buddhists may neither eat meat nor wear leather. It is interesting that the Hong Kong Communist newspaper *Wen-hui Pao* for December 21, 1961, in criticizing the Americans who attended the conference, made the point that they "ate beef steaks." The Chinese must have seen the Mongolians eating them too, since they took their meals at neighbouring tables in the same hotel.

† Gombojav's predecessor as Hambo Lama, Erdenipel, gave the same figure to the Venerable Amritananda of Nepal when he visited Mongolia in 1959. (*Buddhist Activities in Socialist Countries,* Peking, 1961, p. 67.) The year before Robert Rupen had placed the number of lamas at "some 300" (*Royal Central Asian Journal,* Vol. XLV, Part II, April, 1958, p. 169).

G.: There are schools where one studies Buddhist philosophy and beliefs and the spirit of peace—Buddhist schools.

W.: How many such schools are there?

G.: There are two or three.

W.: Are they attached to monasteries?

G.: Yes.

W.: Is there one attached to the monastery of the Venerable?*

G.: Yes.

W.: How many students?

G.: About 100.

W.: Is this figure for novices only or does it include ordained monks?

G.: With us lamas are not like in Cambodia. They have to study every year to improve their knowledge.†

W.: What kind of people are the students?

G.: They are thirty to eighty years old. There are no young ones in our monastery, but in our area there are.

W.: Is every monastery able to ordain lamas?

G.: Yes.

W.: Does every one have to pass examinations in order to become a lama?

G.: Yes.

W.: Is your school the same thing as the Chinese Buddhist Academy in Peking?

G.: It is different.

(The interpreter then said that Gombojav would like to ask me some questions. I agreed to try answering them.)

G.: How many Buddhist schools are there in Hong Kong?

W.: There are about seven schools with 10,000 students. The students are not monks, but school children. These schools are operated by the Buddhist Association as a work of charity. There has been only one seminary for monks in Hong Kong, which had to be closed because of the lack of students.

G.: How many lamas are there?

W.: About 200 monks and 800 nuns.

G.: Do they study Buddhist philosophy?

W.: Yes, but the studies are not organized. There are only a few venerable monks, who give lectures weekly in their temples.

G.: What is the principal aim of Buddhist activities in Hong Kong?

W.: As in China, it is to realize oneself, to become a Bodhisattva, and to help other creatures. Naturally the common people do not understand this. They want simply to be reborn in the Western Paradise.

* The Gandang, or Gandantehchinling at Ulan Bator. Amritananda (*op. cit.*, p. 59) was told that it had 100 monks in all, so that, if we accept the figure of 100 students given below, all the monks are students.

† Amritananda (*op. cit.*, p. 67) states that very few monk scholars know Sanscrit, but they know Tibetan well. "Tibetan and Chinese are taught in their University." They work for education, peace, international contacts, and the construction of their country. "They are not only respected by the common people, but also duly respected by the government officials. They have representatives in the Government."

G.: What efforts are Buddhists in Hong Kong making for peace?

W.: Hong Kong is not in a very secure position, perhaps. There are a million refugees who live there. They do not want to get involved in politics either of the left or of the right.

(I then resumed my questions.)

W.: Can lamas in Mongolia accept presents and money from the faithful?

G.: Yes.

W.: Just as they could formerly?

G.: When the inhabitants want to offer presents, they can. Gifts from foreign guests are also accepted.

W.: Do the monasteries have other sources of revenue?

G.: It is the right of the citizens to give.

W.: Is there any government aid?

G.: Donations are the principal source.*

W.: Can one have disciples?

G.: It is the Council of Mongolian Buddhists† that decides. If someone wants to be a monk, he asks the Council and the Council has him take an examination. Anyone who consecrates himself to Buddhism must know the Buddhist discipline.

W.: That is a good thing. People have criticized Buddhism in Mongolia because they found that certain lamas did not have enough education.

G.: Critics are critics.

W.: Is the Council of Mongolian Buddhists part of the government?

G.: In Mongolia religion is separate. That is why the Council chooses the monks themselves.

W.: But is it part of the government?

G.: No, separate.

W.: How many lamas are there in Ulan Bator and how many are there in the rest of the country?

G.: There are 10,000 in the country.

W.: Do they live in big temples or are they small?

G.: There are not many big temples in the country; many small ones.

W.: In the People's Republic of China the monks work like other citizens. How is it in Mongolia?

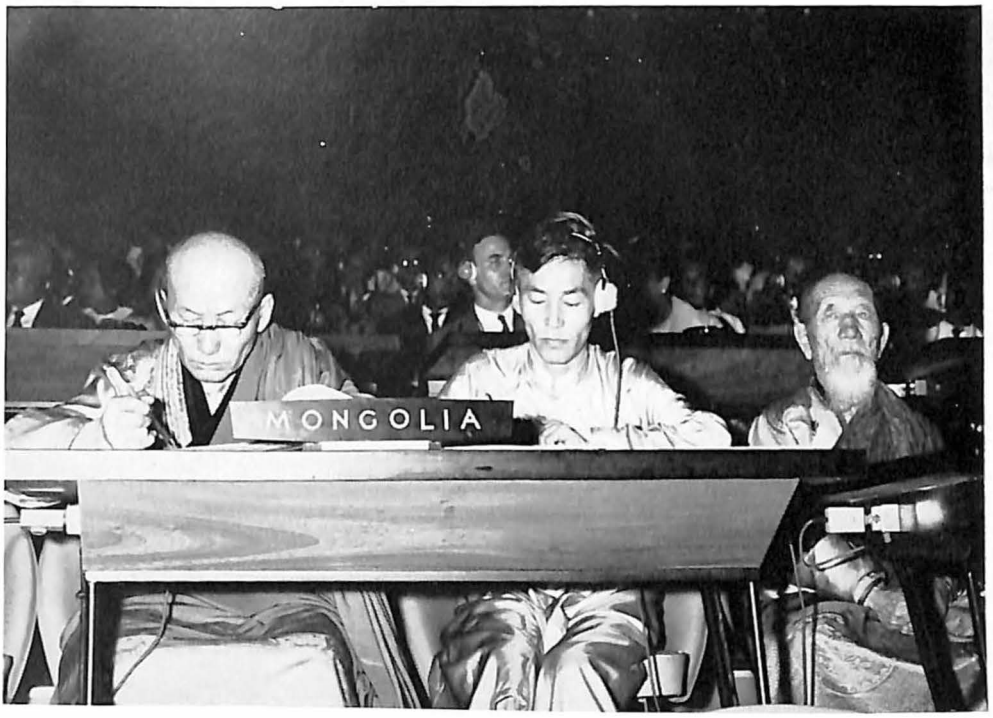
G.: There are no lamas who work in factories. They are monastic.

W.: Do they lead the traditional life?

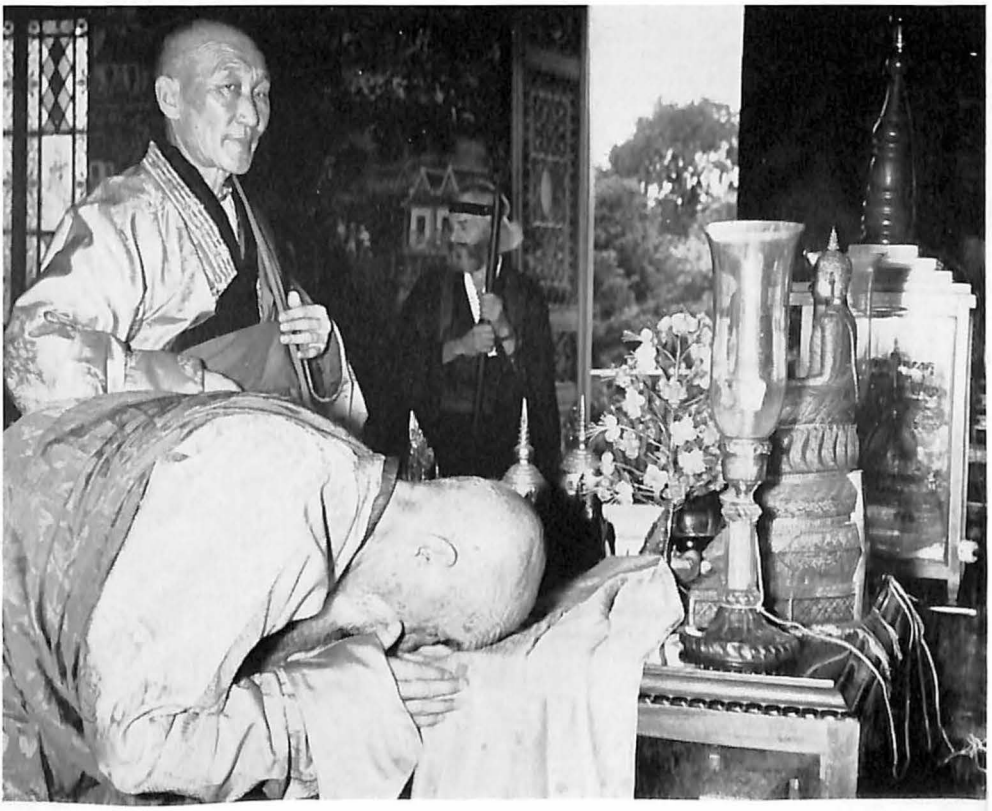
G.: Yes.

* Amritananda (*op. cit.*, pp. 66-67) states: "The [Gandang] monastery owned some property and it is also supported by the general public. Every monk got a share out of the income of the monastery every month. Other sources of income were offerings and donations from the public. The balance of the money is kept for common use and the administration of the monastery. If the income was not sufficient for their maintenance, the government helped them. The monastery is free from any kind of tax. The monks are quite free in their religious activities. The monastery does not belong to the state." Amritananda does not speak much about the restoration of monasteries now being carried on at government expense, *e.g.*, at the Gandang, Erdenezhu, Amarbayasgalangt.

† This is presumably the same as what Amritananda calls the Buddhist Central Council of the Mongolian People's Republic. Erdenipel was its president at the time of his visit (*op. cit.*, p. 64) and presumably Gombojav has succeeded him.



Left to right: GOMBOJAV, NAMSRAI, DORJI SEATED IN THE CONFERENCE HALL OF THE VITH WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF BUDDHISTS CONFERENCE, PNOM PENH, 1961



THE HAMBO LAMA (*left*) AND THE VENERABLE DORJI

To face p. 176

W.: Do they carry on political studies?

G.: No. (Both lamas laughed at this question.) Formerly there were many lamas. Now new organizations have been created. The lamas in the provinces choose the organizations in which they wish to work. They have to leave the monasteries in order to work, since one cannot work and be a monk.

The interview was then terminated because, as our hosts explained, they had another appointment.

I could not help being impressed by Gombojav's frankness. His answers were notable for the same absence of apparent exaggeration that one finds in the Mongolian press, which has not been given to claiming "great leaps forward." Gombojav made no effort to convince me that Buddhism was flourishing in Outer Mongolia as it had never flourished before. He seemed to be a serious, intelligent person, capable of severity, but with a sense of humour. His participation in politics apparently rests on the foundation of working for "world peace," a goal that sounds, at least, as acceptable to Buddhists as to Communists. How much he knows about the real obstacles to world peace is another question.

COMMENTARY ON AN INTERVIEW WITH THE HAMBO LAMA

Mr. Holmes Welch's interview with the chief lamas of Mongolia, the Reverend Gombojav and the Reverend Dorji, is not the first to have taken place in recent years, since most foreign visitors to Ulan Bator have enjoyed a visit to the beautiful Gandang monastery and the pleasure of a meeting with its presiding lamas. Nor is this the first time that Mongolian lamas have gone abroad: a small delegation was sent to Burma a few years back at the time of the great celebrations of the anniversary of the birth of the Buddha. However, it is, apparently, the first interview to be reported with the present heads of the Mongolian church and their first venture abroad. Of even more interest and importance is the fact that the remarks made by Mr. Gombojav would, taken in isolation from what is otherwise known, give a completely erroneous impression of the size, functions, scope and prospects of the Buddhist church in Mongolia. I hope in what follows to provide alternative facts and views against which Buddhists and others may check what was said in Phnom Penh.

The composition of the Mongolian group is an interesting one. The death of the Reverend Erdenipel, the Hambo Lama of Gandang whom all visitors to Mongolia in the late 1950s will remember,[1] was reported some time ago. He has been succeeded not by his immediate subordinate, the Reverend Gombodo,[2] who was proctor (*yeke gebküi*) at the time, or by any of the senior lamas whom visitors met at the Gandang monastery, but by an apparent outsider. Both Mr. Gombojav and Mr. Dorji are indeed known to have practised as lamas. Both delivered learned papers at the First International Congress of Mongolists which was held at Ulan Bator in 1959, and in the programme of the Congress they were both listed with their theological degrees of *Gabje*. However, when I met Mr. Gombojav in 1958 he was introduced to me as a "former lama," and he was at that time employed as curator of the Tibetan books in the State Library, being, presumably, an employee of the then Committee of Sciences and Higher Education. I never saw either him or Mr. Dorji at Gandang or wearing ecclesiastical dress, though of course they may well have done so at other times. It seems that the direction of Gandang monastery is being confined now to learned lamas who are re-entering the church from secular life, men who are already of a considerable age.

This matter of personalities is however of far less significance than the tenor of Mr. Gombojav's remarks. It is not only Mr. Welch who has been impressed by his

frankness. He is a person of evident learning to whom more than one visitor, myself included, has warmed. Thus it is a somewhat embarrassing task to have to point out that much of what he says in this interview fails to accord with the facts, either as observed by foreign visitors, communist and anti-communist alike, or as presented by the Mongolian authorities themselves. The most obvious inaccuracy is in the estimate that there are 10,000 lamas in Mongolia. It is certainly true that the Mongol word for 10,000 (*tümen*) is also used to express a vague but high number, and so the possibility exists that the interpreter gave an exact but exaggerated value to what was meant only as an indefinite expression of quantity. But this seems rather unlikely, since the same figure was given, as Mr. Welch shows, independently to the Reverend Amritananda of Nepal in 1959. The figure of 10,000 looks like being well on the way to acquiring currency as a reliable estimate of the number of lamas in Mongolia, and it would be as well to scotch it straightaway. Official figures published in 1958 give the number then as 200, of whom some eighty were at Gandang:[3] hence even Robert Rupen's shrewd guess is 50 per cent. too high. More recently a statistical handbook shows that a section of the population made up of "lamas, private traders, free professions, etc." has declined between 1959 and 1960 from 0·1 per cent. of the population to 0·01 per cent.[4] This decline is probably due to the final suppression of free trading in Mongolia, carried out since 1958, but even if, accordingly, we take the 1960 percentage of 0·01 to refer exclusively to lamas, it represents less than 100 persons, the total population of the country being given as 936,900.[5] It is hard to see what relation Mr. Gombojav's figure can bear to this official one. It may be a guess at the number of ex-lamas alive in the country still. If so, it would be interesting to have the basis for this estimate. But the figure would still be quite a meaningless one, since a lama who has been secularized since the mid- and late 1930s, when religion was suppressed in Mongolia and most monasteries razed to the ground, can be of little importance in a modern community with forty years of socialist revolution behind it, and well on the way to communism. This is not merely a personal opinion, but a fact recognized by the régime as long ago as 1944 when the right to vote was restored to lamas and others who had been deprived of it previously. Two reasons for this step were given at the time. On the one hand, these elements no longer represented an organized power opposed to the "people's democratic régime," and in any case their number was unimportant, being only 0·08 per cent. of the total population. On the other hand, the vast majority of disenfranchised persons had been engaged "for more than ten years" on work of public utility and belonged in practice to the labouring mass.[6] A further seventeen years have passed since this statement was made.

The full history of the decline of Buddhism in Mongolia and its virtual extinction as an organized religion since the revolution of 1921 will probably never be known to us, but the general lines of this "obstinate struggle for influence over the masses, which came to an end only at the end of the 30's with the complete defeat of this last organized bulwark of feudal reaction and foreign intervention"[7] can be pieced together. In the first years of the new republic, after the death of the last Living Buddha in 1924, lamaism even flourished, and it was not till after 1928 that the anti-religious programme was enforced with ever increasing vigour. When modern visitors to Mongolia talk of respect for the lamas on the part of government officials, it is as well to recall that in the days when the church still represented an obstacle to Marxist revolution a "Central Anti-religious Commission" was attached to the government to co-ordinate all measures directed against the church, and that it was supported by a mass organization modelled on the "League of militant Godless" in the U.S.S.R.[8] That the form of respect is observed nowadays is indeed a fact: I observed it myself in Ulan Bator in 1958 and it was pointed out to me in so many words by a government official. But the truth is that it no longer matters one way or the other inside Mongolia itself, the church being in all practical matters powerless, and operating, though nominally independent, as an official agency.

The end of organized Buddhism in Mongolia was not by any means a peaceful process, and only with the help of Russian troops did the Mongol authorities manage to disperse the lamas and destroy their monasteries. An observer of some experience, Mr. Ivor Montagu, has treated this episode from the Marxist point of view in his book *Land of Blue Skies* and in an article in the *Geographical Magazine,* and rather

makes light of the sufferings of those years. He writes: "What happened to the lamas? . . . the answer respecting most is very simple and unexpected. Ex-lamas form the bulk of the industrial working class."[9] In fact, the answer was neither so simple nor so humane. Thousands of lamas were put to death in one way or another, either in fighting or as a result of trials on charges so diverse as plotting with the Japanese, arson, and mass-poisoning of sick children.[10] Actual figures are not available, but one young Mongol estimated to me that 30,000 lamas lost their lives in 1937. This figure cannot be documented, but it is noteworthy that official statistics do show that for the years 1935-38, when the female population of Mongolia rose by 12,500, the male population dropped by 3,200.[11] This would appear to indicate a loss in natural increase of nearly 16,000 males over these years. Further figures show a decline in the total population over eight years old of 9,300 between 1935 and 1940.[12] The greater part of these losses must be put down to civil disturbance, since the only other factor likely to have hindered the growth of the male population, namely sporadic battles against the Japanese, accounted for only some 2,000 killed and wounded in the ten years from 1935 to 1945.[13] Apart from the net and potential fall in population, a more lasting result for Mongolia was the elimination of organized Buddhism. Almost all monasteries were destroyed or turned to secular use, so that in this land, where in the 20's there were more than 2,600 monasteries of all sizes, physical traces of lamaism are now so rare that it is difficult to realize, from the appearance of town and country, that Buddhism has ever touched the country. True, a trace of the former organization has survived or has been revived. I was informed that during the war some twenty or thirty lamas petitioned the government to be allowed to resume their functions, and that as a result the Gandang monastery was re-opened, but that lamas were excluded from all political influence. In addition, there are now four other lamaseries functioning, I was told. This is the total extent of organized Buddhism in an area seven times the size of Great Britain. Otherwise, temples simply do not exist. In Ulan Bator, apart from the New Maidari temple which now houses the State Archives, one can see only the former Oracle Temple and the Palace of the Living Buddha, both now museums. In Tsetserlig, formerly the seat of the Jaya Pandita of the Khalkhas, one temple building has been restored for use as a provincial museum, while another which I saw is used as a store house and is in a sad state of disrepair. In other places the ecclesiastical buildings have disappeared. It is true that restoration work has been undertaken at the great monastery of Erdeni Zuu. But it must be emphasized that this, the great centre of Mongolian Buddhism for 350 years, which was ruined by military action in 1937, has not been used for religious purposes since, and is now a state museum. The restoration work, supervised by the Academy of Sciences, has nothing at all to do with Buddhism.

Hence it is hard to see what Mr. Gombojav means when he says that "there are not many big temples left in the country: many small ones." The official figure is five in all, with a total of 200 monks in 1958. His mention of young men being ordained each year is equally subject to scrutiny. Certainly Mr. Montagu was under no illusions about the future of Gandang, a "zoo of the past" as he called it. To the young Mongolian, he says, Lamaism has even ceased to be an issue and become something absurd and a little embarrassing, strangely enough of interest to foreigners, and of which it is hard to remember that in it their parents, and even some of their own number, once believed.[14] He remarks on the fact that all the monks are old men, a perfectly correct observation. Early on in the history of the republic it was made illegal for the church to recruit children under the age of eighteen for instruction,[15] and this regulation was reinforced in 1936 on the grounds of repeated evasion. At that time all lamas under the age of eighteen who had been enrolled since 1933 had to be released from the monasteries, when they came immediately under a law passed in 1935 which demanded a high personal tax from all males between eighteen and forty-five who had not performed military service.[16] It would still appear to be illegal to recruit young disciples, even if such offered themselves nowadays. Indeed, it is officially stated that there exist now no faculties of instruction in the Buddhist canon in the monasteries.[17] It is quite true that the Constitution of Mongolia guarantees freedom of worship, along with freedom of anti-religious propaganda, but the few scattered and depopulated monasteries lack the possibility of accepting students;

while against the influence of the hundreds of very good secular schools, the technical institutes and university, the Young Pioneers and the Higher Party School, the facilities afforded by press, wall displays and slogans, mass-meetings, cinema and books, and state-run radio with tens of thousands of public relays as well as private receivers, it is perfectly clear that official Buddhism does not stand a competitive chance, especially as the policy of state and party is avowedly atheistic.

It is certainly true that donations are the principal source of revenue, since the confiscation of monastery estates has removed other sources of income. Foreigners, too, may contribute, or refrain from doing so, without restraint. But Mr. Gombojav does not mention that the income of the church is steadily declining, nor the official reason for this decline. Between 1946 and 1956 the revenue of Gandang sank from about 1,500,000 tugriks (of which 1,365,000 arose from contributions from the faithful) to 542,145 tugriks, since " as the cultural level of the people rises, so, correspondingly, the number of the faithful drops."[18] (For the sake of comparison it may be mentioned that state expenditure on social and cultural services for 1947 and 1957 was 82·7 and 228 million tugriks respectively.)[19] Church and state have been legally separated since 1926. Nevertheless the church works pretty closely with the régime. The high lamas are members of organizations, such as the Peace Committee and the Asian Solidarity Committee of Mongolia, which can only be accounted as agencies of the communist party, while at the same time the government maintains a member of its staff with responsibility for religious affairs. In 1958 this was a Mr. Danzinwangjil whom I met briefly when he visited Gandang at the same time as our party on the occasion of the arrival of a delegation of monks from a monastery in the Gobi with a gift of camels and horses destined for the Peace Committee. Further, one may point to a novel sutra called the White Lotus of Peace, in which Picasso's dove figures among the more familiar Buddhist emblems. This sutra was produced in 1959 under the editorship of Professor Damdinsuren, a member of the presidium of the Mongol People's Revolutionary Party.[20]

Internally, it seems the persistance of this tiny rump of Buddhist monks and temples may cater for the innate piety of many Mongols. Certainly some lay people regularly frequent Gandang: in 1958 the figure was 600-700 attendances a week out of a population of possibly 125,000 for the city of Ulan Bator.[21] I do not know of any other religious gathering or organization available to the people. The statistical handbook for 1960 does not mention any such group in that part of it devoted to Education and Culture. Externally, however, the survival of lamaism, tolerated and even ostensibly cherished by the communist régime has, it seems, a very definite purpose, just as the new tolerance of Buddhism in the U.S.S.R. has. The Mongol church survives as an instrument of government policy, exploited in order to impress Asian Buddhists with the apparent communist tolerance of religion. This show of tolerance towards a minority which is no longer of the slightest internal significance is being employed as a political weapon in the penetration of south Asia.[22] That this policy, so transparent against the history of the treatment of Buddhists in earlier years, can be effective, appears from the fact that the Reverend Amritananda of Nepal is reported, for example, to have referred to lamaism as the " common religion " of Nepal and Mongolia.[23] At the same time, let it be remarked, public utterances on the part of the church in Mongolia match exactly the thinking and extravagant vocabulary of the régime. A typical example is the manner in which Mongolian Buddhists are reported to have referred to the 1959 uprisings in Tibet: " Being incited by crafty foreigners, the black forces of reaction and obscurantism have committed bloody crimes and thus plunged the peaceful laymen and innocent clerics in the country in sorrow and sufferings. . . . The loathsome rabble and the wretched traitors, having the support of American grabbers, and in collusion with the Chiang clique, attempted to wrest Tibet from People's China, mighty with its national unity."[24]

In face of the above facts, most of which have a Mongolian or Russian source, it is difficult to explain the extraordinary naïveté of some of Mr. Gombojav's remarks. Something may be due to misunderstandings on the part of the interpreter: it is possible that the remark that " the lamas in the provinces choose the organizations in which they wish to work " may actually refer not to the present but to the years 1938-40 when, according to Purevjav, there was a mass exodus from the monasteries,

which as a result stood almost deserted.[25] But the general picture of the situation of Buddhism in Mongolia as given by Mr. Gombojav is, I regret to say, a false one. It shows what purports to be a self-perpetuating clergy forming over 1 per cent. of the population, recruiting and instructing the young, whereas other reports are quite unanimous in their observation that Buddhism as a religious force is dying out. Although the régime claims never to have attacked religious belief as such, but only the feudalistic organization of the church, the fact is that the extirpation of the church has involved the collapse of Buddhism in the country. Indeed the official attitude is quite plainly atheistic. Purevjav quotes various governmental pronouncements on this subject, of which the following from 1944 is typical: "The Mongol People's Revolutionary Party has always carried out anti-religious propaganda amongst the mass of the people and in future will carry out explanatory work on the question of overcoming religious prejudice," and he concludes: "The Mongol People's Revolutionary Party and the government of the Mongol People's Republic pay great attention to the question of atheistic propaganda. . . . The twelfth session of the Party in 1954 emphasized that residual survivals of feudalism even now influence the backward part of the population. The session pointed out the necessity of reinforcing ideological and political educational work among the masses. . . . Survivals of the past still exist in people's consciousness and life, amongst them religious prejudices, but these are being overcome by the whole system of measures for the ideo-political education of the masses, which are being put into practice by the part and government of the M.P.R."[26] This seems indeed to be a clearer forecast of the future of Buddhism in Mongolia than that hinted at by Mr. Gombojav, and Mr. Welch's remark that his interpreter seemed to know little about Buddhism is true for the younger generation of Mongolia as a whole.

The foregoing is not in the least intended as a criticism of the religious policies of the Mongolian government over the last forty years. Its purpose is simply to throw some light on the curious picture presented by Mr. Gombojav and to present a few independent facts against which their veracity may be tested.

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NOTES

[1] Portrait in *History Today*, February, 1959, p. 109.

[2] Portrait in Ivor Montagu, *Land of Blue Sky*, facing p. 40, the right-hand figure. The same photograph in *Geographical Magazine*, July, 1955, p. 121.

[3] S. Purevjav, "Polozhenie lamaistskoi tserkvi v MNR" in *Sovremennaya Mongoliya*, 3, 1958, p. 19.

[4] *National Economy of the Mongolian People's Republic for 40 Years*, Ulan Bator, 1960, p. 45.

[5] *ibid.*, p. 39.

[6] I. J. Slatkin, *Die Mongolische Volksrepublik*, Berlin, 1954, p. 284. This is a German translation of the original Russian book published by the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R.

[7] Slatkin, p. 241.

[8] W. Kolarz, *The Peoples of the Soviet Far East*, London, 1954, p. 135.

[9] *Geographical Magazine*, July, 1955, p. 127.

[10] Slatkin, p. 241.

[11] *National Economy*, p. 41.

[12] *ibid.*, p. 45.

[13] G. M. Friters, *Outer Mongolia and its International Position*, London, 1951, p. 295.

[14] *Land of Blue Sky*, p. 48, the final sentence of a chapter entitled significantly: "The Vanishing Lama."

[15] Slatkin, p. 236.

[16] Slatkin, p. 238. The tax varied from 5 to 70 tugriks annually and was tripled for those who were within the age limits of active military service.

[17] Purevjav, p. 19.

[18] *ibid.*

[19] *National Economy*, p. 50.

[20] Mr. Welch reports that the lamas denied laughingly that monks carry on political studies in Mongolia. The question was not without point, however. 1934 saw the first measures on the part of the régime to instruct lamas in the mother-tongue, *to introduce work of political enlightenment among them*, and to attract them to productive work. See Slatkin, p. 238. (My italics.)

[21] An approximation. The 1960 figure is 164,000.

[22] I have drawn this conclusion elsewhere, *e.g.* in the issue of this *Journal* for April, 1960, and Robert Rupen has expressed similar ideas in his article "Inside Outer Mongolia" in *Foreign Affairs*, January, 1959. There seems no reason to modify it.

[23] Montsame news bulletin, Ulan Bator, November, 1959, quoted in Bawden, "Economic Advance in Mongolia," *The World Today*, June, 1960, p. 266.

[24] *ibid.* I was informed in Ulan Bator in 1958 that no religious relations existed then between Tibet and Mongolia, in spite of the close historical relations between the two churches. (The conversion of Mongolia can be traced to the direct instruction of the third Dalai Lama that the monastery of Erdeni Zuu should be founded on the site it subsequently occupied.)

[25] Purevjav gives no indication that this was not a voluntary exodus, and Montagu (*Land of Blue Sky*, p. 45) suggests that education, opportunities of town life and so on had undermined and disintegrated the monasteries, causing wholesale desertions. That this is not the whole story is shown by Slatkin's account, p. 248. He refers to the liquidation in the years 1938-39 of the "lamaist counter-revolutionary centre," after which action the old feudal lamaist church ceased in fact to exist. Monasteries were closed, or closed themselves, and the monks were scattered all over the land. However, Slatkin says deliberately that most of these were still hostile to the revolution and the popular régime, but lacking organization could not prevent the collapse of the theocratic system.

[26] *op. cit.*, p. 21.