

# 'How faint a whisper...'

The role of translation  
in the development of syncretism in Mongolia

A REPORT

by Jeanice Conner

Based on data  
collected from Mongolian countryside people  
during a socio-linguistic survey  
conducted between 1998 and 2007 on  
spiritual terms from the Bible

*He it is Who spreads out the northern skies over emptiness and hangs the earth upon or over nothing. He holds the waters bound in His clouds ... and the cloud is not rent under them. He covers the face of His throne and spreads over it His cloud. He has placed an enclosing limit ... upon the waters at the boundary between light and darkness. The pillars of the heavens tremble and are astonished at His rebuke. He stills or stirs up the sea by His power, and by His understanding He smites proud Rahab. By His breath the heavens are garnished; His hand pierced the ... fleeing serpent. Yet these are but ... the outskirts of His ways or the mere fringes of His force, the faintest whisper of His voice! Who dares contemplate or who can understand the thunders of His full, magnificent power*

*From Job 26:7-14 (Amplified)*

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# HOW FAINT A WHISPER

## The role of translation in the development of syncretism in Mongolia

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### INTRODUCTION

The soft rustle of autumn leaves heralded the arrival of a flock of still-unseen turkey hens, and one skinny little head, a naked knob all eyes and beak, poked up over the edge of the hill. Immediately sighting hunters, she pulled her head back down, thrust it back up to make out if she really saw them, jerked it back down and then up again several times. Bob, bob, bob.

The young turkey, still the only one visible, began to gobble frantically to her flock-mates, "Warning, warning! Danger, harm, enemies!" The rest of the birds, however, had already smelled the water, and ignoring the alarm of their young feathered sister, they flooded up and over the hill, down to their morning drink, which was sparkling a welcome to them in the morning sun. The little would-be sentinel stared hard at the hunters for a second and then, her turkey instincts calmed by the unconcern of the older and smarter birdbrains, ("Oh, well. They know better than I!"), she ran over the hill and down to the water. The first blast of the shotguns took her out before she could even dip her beak into the cold pool.

We feel right now somewhat like that young turkey, bobbing our heads up and down and squawking, trying to point out a danger which those around us are perhaps not seeing. And what is that danger? We don't live and minister in one of the places in the world traditionally fraught with peril, or at least not with many more risks than somewhat more vigorous and jostling street traffic, somewhat more aggressive and quick-fingered pickpockets, somewhat more clamoring and assertive beggars than we would be likely to find in the main cities of our home country. So what danger?

### THE PEOPLE AND THE PROBLEM

We live in Mongolia -- this land of energetic, independent, intelligent, innovative, and open-minded people! How else can you describe a group which has so creatively tried to meld animism, Buddhism, atheism, Islam, Communism, capitalism, etc., etc., with Christianity in its myriad versions extant in the country today! When the Mongols hearken back as they do to their honored Chingis Khaan, reveling in memories of his truly astounding abilities and feats, it is easy to forget that they are still emerging from centuries of oppressive domination from near neighbors and that they are passionate about and protective of their culture, traditions, nation, and history.

We are Christian missionaries who have been in Mongolia for about fifteen years. We're speakers of the language and well-enough acquainted with the culture to be able to recognize key features of the Mongol way of life and trace them through much of the interaction we have with our Mongol friends. In his book *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World*, Jack Weatherford ably describes one of those key features, i.e., the genius the Mongols have demonstrated for centuries in seeking out characteristics they think admirable in foreign societies and incorporating them into their own traditions. Such incorporation has many names, some positive, some negative, but we're concerned today with the aspect of incorporation which often has pejorative meaning ... that is, 'syncretism.'

We believe that syncretism is alive and well today in Mongolia, and for the sake of any who do not understand the nature of syncretism and its danger, or who do not know that it exists, or who are genuinely concerned with the purity of God's Word, we have undertaken long-term field and scholarly research on the matter to form our stance, that stance being that translation is one of the most powerful mechanisms for the development of syncretism and that translation of the Bible and other Christian evangelistic and discipleship materials into Mongolian using folk-Buddhist terminology has helped bring about a vigorous syncretism with Christianity here in Mongolia.<sup>1</sup>

In order to explain and substantiate this position, we will first look at some of the literature available on the issue of translation as a generating mechanism for the development of syncretism, then present a synopsis of our own research data collected between 1998 and 2007. After then extrapolating from that data and making some further observations, we will summarize, conclude, and finally make an appeal for the attention of those concerned about the clear presentation of Bible truth to Mongolians.

### What is syncretism?

For this present work we have discovered more than twenty definitions of the word 'syncretism,' some connected with secular subjects, most with religious ones. Webster defines 'syncretism' as "the combination of different forms of belief or practice." According, however, to well-known experts Shaw and Stewart (1994), syncretism is "the infiltration of a supposedly 'pure' tradition by symbols and meanings seen as belonging to other, incompatible religions." And it is through this definition we can understand something of the mindset of many people, at least in the scholarly community. "Infiltration" means 'to introduce slyly'; the word "supposedly" means 'according to a tentative assumption'. Then in this case, the quotes around the word 'pure' imply that whatever is being called 'pure' is not really so. And finally, the words "seen as" are a denigrative implier, marginalizing the ones who 'see.' Our conclusion must be that to many people, syncretism is an inevitable cultural phenomenon that should be tolerated or even embraced, while to others, it is a problem to eliminate.

In particular, many secular scholars do not consider the mixing of religions to be a negative issue, but rather a neutral one, what Starkloff (1994) calls "a natural historical occurrence." Pye (1971) says, "It is striking how pejoratively the term [syncretism] is often used.... It is seen as a loss of identity, an illicit contamination, a sign of religious decadence." The term itself is thus loaded with varieties of negative meanings and has therefore developed a myriad of euphemisms. Consider just these few which we happened on unintentionally in our present research and have tried to place on an informal continuum of negative to positive --

Syncretism	Absorption	Contextualization
Mongrelization	Assimilation	Accommodation
Hybridization	Amalgamation	Contextual evangelization
Mixture	Synthesis	Indigenization
Creolization	Bricolage	Interculturalization
Pluralism	Compromise	Disemia
Hinduization/Muslimization/etc.	Transcreation	Tolerance
Unity	Transformation	

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<sup>1</sup> Because our own responsibilities in our organization include translation, and because there is no way one can translate and not choose terminology, we were in great need of independent data upon which to base our terminology decisions. This present report is the journey we took to discover that data. The position we have taken here is ours alone (Dick and Jeanice Conner), and does not represent an official position taken by our organization. Any plural pronouns, therefore, refer usually to only the two of us, never to our organization, and we take full responsibility for the content of this paper.

Note the surfeit of terms! Such terms are designed to evoke or maintain what are considered to be the positive connotations of intercultural contact, while avoiding its unfavorable denotations.

There is thus an obvious effort to avoid even using the word 'syncretism.' Yet today, having learned to acknowledge the validity of cultural norms other than their own native ones, Bible teachers have been teetering on the narrow path between two ditches: one, the ditch of considering culture more important than Bible truth; the other, the ditch of completely ignoring the cultural heritage of the target culture. Most missiologists appear to be searching for steps which will take a missionary to an appropriate level of cultural knowledge and sensitivity without compromising Bible truth; they are hoping for an indigenized synthesis of cultural features which can be incorporated without compromise, but not syncretism (Nthamburi, 1989; also cf., Racey 1996; Ro 1978; Sanchez 1998). This must also be every foreign Christian worker's goal, but how does one discern the line between synthesis and syncretism? It is not an easy matter. For example, Heldenbrand (1982, pp. 134-139), expressing his concern over Bible ministry in a Muslim context, wrote "Somewhere...a step is made that passes from Biblically appropriate cultural adaptation to an accommodation of... theology that develops finally into a syncretistic amalgam of water[ed] down Bible truth guided not by a biblical hermeneutic but by a Koranic one."

When such a step is made, whether intentionally or unintentionally, certain logical steps must follow. Continuing with the Muslim example above, here is the rationale some Christian missionaries in that milieu have developed regarding why Muslim/Islam is 'of God': "Mohammed brought about religious reforms calling his people back to monotheism and the worship of the one, true God; therefore he must have been led of God. If he was indeed led of God then Islam in its purist and original state is a God-inspired religion. Therefore, Islam today as a socio-religious system, although changed and affected by winds and currents of colonialism and political domination, discontent, poverty and political corruption of Arab leaders, is essentially, at its core a manifestation of God at work in the social setting of the ancient East..." (Coleman 2004, p. 18). The logical result of such thinking is that "...since their religious heritage is not evil, Muslims should not have to give it up" (Tinker 1997, pp. 1-4, quoted *ibid.*), that is, give it up in order to become believers in Christ. When such a conclusion is reached, the result can scarcely be called conversion. Indeed, secular writer Van der Veer (1994, p. 198) does not hedge, clearly stating that when syncretism occurs, genuine conversion has failed.

The above sounds very much as though 'genuine conversion' may not be of great concern to some. And if it is in fact true that there is no pure religion as many scholars secular and religious alike maintain (cf., Guss, 1994; Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk 2005; Shaw and Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1994; Van der Veer, 1994), then why should anyone convert to Christianity? It would seem that we would have no basis upon which to claim that our Bible-based faith is true, nor any reason to present the Bible as the true Way of Life. Our concern regarding the philosophy of such individuals and groups is thus highly connected with the issue of the uniqueness of the Bible message and its claim to be the sovereign power for salvation.

Some of today's missiologists are making statements about cultural relevancy being of the highest importance; about not only understanding the host culture's world-view, but also identifying with that world-view as closely as possible while still calling what they teach 'Christian'; about developing separate Christian 'theologies' for each people-group; and even about finding ways to eliminate offensive doctrines so that unbelievers may more easily accept the fundamentals of the faith. And yet some of those doctrines which are being eliminated seem to be themselves some of those fundamentals (cf., Coleman 2004, p. 51-52; Beall 1996, p. 6). It is not within the purview of this present work to search out reasons why missiologists should seek to cause Bible truth to be palatable in whatever

religious context, but in reading even a little of the wealth of literature on the subject (cf., Beall 1996; Coleman 2004; Garfield 2008; Heideman 1997; IBT, Russia/CIS 2006; Johnstone 2006; Kempf 1994; Kraft 2002; McGregor 1974; Nagai 1999; Racey 1996; Sanchez 1998; Schreiter 1993; Temme 1988; Tippet 1975, etc.), it is hard to understand how such a focus could be completely unconnected with the matter of 'counting converts.' We find ourselves forced to agree with Durston (2007, p. 15), who writes that "syncretism is accommodation or inculturation run amok.... Religious traditions are merged to the point where essential features of the Christian message are lost."

### How common is syncretism?

In the general world of religion, however, it would almost go without saying that modern, conservative evangelical Christians in the West are very concerned about the development of religious syncretism. It may not be so obvious, however, that many people and religious groups through the centuries have demonstrated exactly the same kind of apprehension. Consider Justin Martyr of c. AD 100-67 (Meyer 1994, p. 64), the CIS Shor people (IBT 2006), Zambian Christians (Clark 2001, p. 93), African Pentecostals (Clark 2001, p. 97), modern-day Buddhists (Garfield 2008, Section 5), the Greek Orthodox Church (Stewart 1994, p. 139), certainly the Muslims (Werbner 1994, p. 213), and even the Pope (Beall 1996, p. 7-8; Durston 2007, p. 13) and the Seventh-Day Adventists (Coleman 2004, p. 3), just to name a few of the many who have been concerned about these issues.

It might seem, then, that all religions indeed eventually syncretize and become bricolages, i.e., hodgepodge mixtures of whatever faiths have been at hand. In fact, if one looks at history and at the literature on the subject, the evidence seems compelling that there is today virtually no religion which is untouched by some 'contaminant' at some time from somewhere else. In just the past 40 years or so, academic works by both religious and secular scholars clearly document syncretisms between or among myriad contexts, not only religious but also secular, such as the political, literary, economic, and social. Consider just these examples between:

- Hindu and Buddhist and Christian and Islam and Sri Lankan animist (Abeyasingha, 1982)
- South African Afro-messianic and Christian (Beyerhaus, 1975)
- Ancient Bosphorus and Jewish (Binder, n.d.)
- African animist and Cuban animist (Cahill, (internet) 2004)
- Muslim and Christian (Chastain, 1995; Gilliland, 1998; Heldenbrand, 1982;)
- Medieval Roman Catholic and Scandinavian mythologic (Ciklamini, (internet), n.d.)
- African animist and Pentecostal/Asian Hindu and South African Pentecostal/African ancestor cult and Christian (Clark, 2001)
- Seventh Day Adventist and Muslim (Coleman, (internet) 2004)
- Andean Quechua animist and Christian (Durston, 2007)
- Muslim religious and secular societal (Ferme, 1994)
- Islam and animist (Ferme, 1994)
- Traditional Asian Buddhist and modern Western Buddhist (Garfield, 2008)
- Venezuelan Indian animist and Roman Catholic (Guss, 1994)
- Egyptian and Greek and Roman and Christian and Occultic (Hoeller, 1996)
- CIS Shor ethnic group's ancient beliefs and Christian (Institute for Bible Translation, Russia/CIS, (internet) 2006)
- Papua New Guinea 'Yawing' animist and Catholic and Christian and modern secular (Kempf, 1994)
- Japanese modernist and Western (Koepping, 1994)
- Japanese Christian and Japanese Buddhist (Michelotti, 1995)
- Hindu and Roman Catholic (Mosse, 1994)



Finnish and East Indian Tamil (Sivathamby, (internet) n.d.)  
 Hellenist and Christian (Stewart, 1994)  
 Native American animist and Christian (Temme, 1988)  
 Hindu and Muslim (Van der Veer, 1994)

The fact of syncretism is thus easily established around the world, in various locales, and between/among numbers of diverse systems.

For a secular example, let us reflect on the nineteenth century British Romantic writers. "Romanticism" itself is a philosophical stance<sup>2</sup>, one which is part and parcel of an assimilative process: take diverse materials, meld them, and use them as a way of recreating the target culture (Saglia 2002, p. 101). Some of the writers of this era were fascinated with Dante, and they had a passion for translating him into English (ibid., pp. 95-96), developing thereby many different meanings and emphases. Through their translated works, these very influential writers affected their own culture. Some viewed translation as 'cultural politics' and a 'domestication of the foreign,' and in their translations, they violated the source text in order to bring them into accord with the target culture, renewing, legitimizing, or reinforcing target culture categories, rather than those from the source culture (ibid., p. 98). They caused Dante's and other texts of 'orientalism, medievalism and classicism' to become active components of British culture. This was the whole idea of "the syncretic nature of the 'romantic' in literature and art" (ibid., p. 100), so famous in that era.

Thus Dante, in the process (as above), was 'remade', so to speak, in Britain's image (ibid., pp. 103-04) by translators who transferred Dante in a way that created a 'new' language, one enlarged by the translated text. Their goal was beauty and relevancy to their own personal underlying philosophical purposes, and if they were successful in these goals, most of the translators did not seem to care if the translated text was faithful to the original or not. Such translation issues are not, therefore, a phenomenon only of today, nor are they only religious.

### Mechanisms for the development of syncretism

Today, many 'culturally sensitive' evangelism efforts are first theorized and then implemented from 'above', i.e., from (often) an organization's international theologians to the foreign field workers, and thence to local native leaders. When such pressure causes a mixture with another religion, we are calling it 'top-down' syncretism. Such a philosophical stance may be seen in many organizations, from those of relatively conservative, mainstream Christians (cf., Beyerhaus, 1975; Chastain, 1995; Clark, 2001; Daidanso, 1983, etc.), to the Theosophical Society (Kraft 2002, p. 147) to the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and its parent organization, the World Council of Churches (WCC). Within the past couple of decades, for example, the WCC supported an invocation preceding one of their meetings "which synthesized prayers and dances from Christianity, Buddhism, Korean shamanism and Australian Aboriginal ritual" (Shaw and Stewart, 1994). The SACC had a shaman open their proceedings "by invoking the spirits of plants, animals and insects. The group... was asked to hum like bees as this invocation took place." (Clark 2001, p. 97). Such activities go hand in hand with the focus on globalization with its goal of a one-world church and one-world government (cf., Bachmann-Medick (Gottingen), (internet) 2008); Kempf 1994, p. 123; Kraft 2002, p. 152; 'Traduzione Tradizione?' 2006; Yalcin-Heckmann 1994, p. 182; etc.).

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<sup>2</sup> 'Romanticism' is "a literary, artistic, and philosophical movement originating in the 18th century, characterized chiefly by a reaction against neoclassicism and an emphasis on the imagination and emotions, and marked ... by sensibility and the use of autobiographical material, an exaltation of the primitive and the common man, an appreciation of external nature, an interest in the remote, a predilection for melancholy, and the use in poetry of older verse forms" (Webster's). For further information, check [www.wnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic\\_4/welcome.htm](http://www.wnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_4/welcome.htm)

When, however, a syncretism rises up from among native peoples as a grassroots movement, we are calling it 'bottom-up' syncretism (cf., Clark 2001; Kiernan 1994; Kraft 2002; Meyer 1994; Mosse 1994; Shaw and Stewart 1994) Bottom-up syncretism might come about for a number of reasons, from the people's efforts to make sense of poorly explicated teaching, to motives of nationalism, to attempts to make economic gain, to the endeavor for good health, or for the sake of the manipulation of a perceived power source for other personal gain. Again, top-down syncretism is usually theory-based; bottom-up syncretism is often personally motivated at a more basic level, that of 'felt needs.'

### And antisyncretism?

Not everyone, however, supports a syncretist position. Going back to our secular example of the nineteenth-century British Romantics, Lord Byron was a notable exception. Byron was not only a brilliant writer and poet, he was also a translator whom we might call an 'anti-syncretist.' So what is 'anti-syncretism'? Shaw and Stewart (1994, p. 7) define it as "the antagonism to religious synthesis shown by agents concerned with the defense of religious boundaries."

Now as we said, the word 'syncretism' is generally connected with religious matters, but may also be concerned with politics, literature, and culture. And thus it is with its antipode 'anti-syncretism.' Byron was certainly concerned with the philosophical, literary, and linguistic boundaries between the medieval Italian and nineteenth-century British cultures, and there were many praises for his efforts to translate Dante which resulted in a style reflecting the original. Indeed he and some others of the Romantic period felt that Dante's language, indeed his actual usage, had special attributes of empowerment which Byron even termed 'talismanic.' Their writing was therefore influenced by the philosophy and style of the original Dantean works and further, by some of the structures which were not otherwise particularly admired in that day (Saglia 2002, pp. 102-03, 112-03).

Thus, as syncretism not only affects religions, but also secular issues, so it is with anti-syncretism. It is not hard to remember, for example, anti-syncretist issues espoused by certain factions in Japan, France, and Germany through recent centuries, and we ourselves can think of anti-syncretist issues in our native United States.

One might be tempted, however, to say, "So what!" We have given the secular example of Byron's anti-syncretism above in an effort to show that attempts to protect the integrity of something worth preserving is not a marginal mindset as some scholars would have us believe. There are indeed issues for which we legitimately must maintain boundaries, and from our point of view, the purity and uniqueness of the Bible message is certainly far more worth preserving than that of Dante's or any other person's or group's literary, political, racial, or linguistic distinctiveness.

As above, sometimes theologians' sentiments seem to lie with preserving and joining with arguably inappropriate aspects of the target culture. But this perspective ignores the fact that when a given people have turned irrevocably from their old paths and as a matter of conviction have genuinely placed their faith in the truth they see in the Bible, their world-view must change, and they reject those aspects of their own culture which clash with a Biblical world-view. For example, Clark (2001) tells us of Nyirongo, an African pastor from Zambia, who

"simply denies that there is any possibility of maintaining traditional African religious values and still practicing biblical Christianity. The worldviews are simply too remote from each other. He is scathing in his criticism of syncretistic African theologians. What worries [Clark]... is the denial of the

cardinal truths of the Gospel by some well-known African theologians. They have not twisted what we might term "peripheral" aspects of the Gospel but its very pillars. In doing so, they have [deceived]--and continue to deceive--many Africans.... The denial can be briefly summarised in one proposition: that the African religious beliefs are not 'dead works' but a beginning, an inspiration for the Christian faith.... The African religious life is not just a scaffold, but contains ingredients that qualify it to be a model religion for Christians!

Nyirongo proceeds to spell out the major discontinuities between the worldview of the Bible and that of traditional African religion, in terms of the knowledge of God, the spirit world, sin, judgement and salvation, human community, suffering, sickness and witchcraft. The point that he makes is that, no matter how desirable a synthesis or syncretism between these two worldviews may appear to be, they are simply too far apart in every vital aspect to be reconcilable."

(p. 93)

While statements of such 'bottom-up' antisyncretist positions from minority groups are not common in the world, they obviously are not unknown, and we wholeheartedly ally ourselves with such a stand, believing that it is our God-given duty to hold Bible integrity above cultural accommodation.

In brief, we have seen that syncretism is:

- a universal phenomenon
- an issue which causes concern in the context of religion
- a matter which is denied by means of euphemistic description
- an event which if embraced, can precipitate a denial of fundamentals

Anti-syncretism, on the other hand, is:

- also a universal phenomenon
- a response against syncretism
- a statement of boundary maintenance
- a defense of or return to fundamentals

## TRANSLATION CONSIDERATIONS

### The Bible: from the hand of God

In contemplating an antisyncretist position, we must consider first whether or not we can trust the Bible to be God's pure word and, in fact, the whole of it to be God's word for all peoples. When God inspired the original writers, what they physically wrote down Bible scholars term 'the autographs'. The autographs were inspired, completely pure, without error. Year upon year, the huge percentage of copiers of the autographs recognized the need to handle the Word of God with reverence and extreme care. Thus, although century after century, indeed millennium after millennium, we no longer have any of those dog-eared, worn-out originals to study, we do have tens of thousands of copies which we can compare one with another. Bible scholars are able, therefore, to recognize by means of the vast bulk of common agreement where the rare inconsistencies must be rejected. This is not true of any other ancient text. And in reality, none of these discrepancies affect any major doctrine. God has indeed protected His message to us through the ages, and we may trust that that is so (cf., Sproul 2005).

Translations are, however, quite a different matter. What nearly all Christians read are translations of the Holy Scriptures, and one feels on less firm ground in the contemplation of them. Many Bible translations around the world have been done by translators who have had little in the way of qualification other than a warm heart for the Gospel, and the results are very often less than adequate. If, however, the translators of a given work have followed the translation principles laid down by international scholars, then, given that we have a translation instead of the original writings, it is possible to have a relatively trustworthy translation. One must first consider what a good translation team consists of.

A Bible translation team should include members which have:

- 1) *A thorough familiarity with the source language* (the language from which the Bible is being translated). The very best are able to translate directly from Hebrew and Greek. If there is no translator available who is sufficiently proficient in these Bible languages and translation must be done from a second language, for example, English, a Bible scholar who has a thoroughly proficient knowledge of the source language must do exegesis from the source language into the target language for the sake of the native language translators. Adequate, scholarly translation helps should be freely used, and the translators should be schooled in their use.
- 2) *A thorough, even skillful knowledge of the target language*, not only in order to follow basic grammar rules properly, but also in order to write in a style which lends to the translation the honor due to the eternal Word of God, especially if the target culture is literate and has a scholarly tradition. In addition, the translators should be fully cognizant of possible cultural implications of all vocabulary choices.
- 3) *A good understanding of the Bible as a whole book*, not just parts of it
- 4) *A good knowledge of Bible translation principles*, including issues of form-based (which some people call 'literal') versus meaning-based translation, both of which have very useful purposes in given settings.
- 5) *Proper accountability to an appropriate Bible agency*, which implies regular checks by qualified translation consultants at various stages of the translation procedure, regular correction and rechecking, verse-by-verse back-translation checks, culminating in a thorough check before publication. This kind of regular

checking ensures that a translation team will learn early on if they are weak in any of the first four areas, enabling them to become more and more proficient as time goes on.

### Meaning transference in translation

The translation principles which such a translation team should follow are multifaceted and complex, reminding us of what Milutinovic (2008) says, "Misunderstanding in human communication is a rule, and understanding is an exception and a miracle, something to struggle for, and to celebrate as a blessing if and when it occurs" (p. 1). It is true that sometimes in the process of translation, meanings are not readily and easily transferable from the source language and culture into the target language and culture. Yet, it seems it should go without saying that before one can say that an idea has been adequately transferred in a translation, the meaning which the writer in the original language intended his/her readers to understand is the same meaning which readers receive via translation in the target language. In order to illustrate this matter, we will look at a few examples of issues with which qualified translators must struggle -- First, 'primary/secondary senses', followed by the related 'translation choices', and finally, 'unknown concepts'.

#### Primary and Secondary senses

Matching the primary or secondary senses of a given word or phrase in both source and target languages may cause a struggle. The 'primary' sense of a word or phrase is what most people think of when they hear the word or phrase in isolation. Beekman and Callow say that the 'primary' sense of a given word may in addition refer to a class which encompasses the greatest number of entities (objects, states, etc.) and/or is simply the most generic in meaning (p. 172).

On the other hand, a secondary sense of a word or phrase is one which, while always sharing a referent or 'thread of meaning' with the primary meaning (ibid., p. 94), must occur in conjunction with other words and phrases which will make the meaning clear (Larson, p. 107). For example, should an English speaker be asked to use the word 'run' in a simple sentence, he/she would probably say something like, "The child ran." If, however, one wished to elicit a simple sentence using the word 'run' together with the word 'vine' (one of the secondary senses of 'run'), one would need to ask the person to use 'run' *in the context of growing things*. If the contextual words were not included in the request for a sentence, one would be highly unlikely to elicit a sentence like, "The vine ran," or even "The vine ran along the garden wall."

In translating the meaning of a word or phrase from a source language into a target language, the most desirable target language term would be one in which the primary sense of the chosen term would be the same or very close to that of the primary sense of the source language term. If that were not possible, one might choose a term which had a secondary sense which matches well with the primary sense of the source language term, as long as the *primary* sense of the target language term does not interfere with understanding the true primary sense of the source language term.

If, however, the target language term's primary sense clashes with the primary sense of the source language term, indeed, if it is detrimental to understanding that sense, such a term should be rejected. In addition, should any of the target language term's secondary senses be so far off from the source language term's meaning that it does damage in some way to understanding the source language term's general intention, then that term, too, should be rejected.

### *General Example of Primary/Secondary senses*

A very simple example word is 'bank.' This word has several different primary senses, all harkening back to an Old English word which meant 'bench.' The word is so old that over the years it has developed more than one primary sense in today's common usage. Although there are several verbal<sup>3</sup> senses, we will look at only three different, but related nominal<sup>4</sup> senses.

The earliest (13c) primary nominal meaning of 'bank' is 'a mound, pile, or ridge raised above the surrounding level' [of whatever]. Its secondary senses are: 'the rising ground bordering a lake, river, or sea or forming the edge of a cut or hollow'; a steep slope (as of a hill); 'a protective or cushioning rim or piece.'

The next (15c) primary nominal sense<sup>5</sup> is 'an establishment for the custody, loan, exchange, or issue of money, for the extension of credit, and for facilitating the transmission of funds', which definition is connected with the now obsolete meaning, 'the table, counter, or place of business for a money changer.' Its secondary meanings are: 'a person conducting a gambling house or game, i.e., a dealer'; 'a supply of something held in reserve'; 'a place where something is held available'.

The third (1599) primary nominal sense is 'a bench for the rowers of a galley'. Its secondary meanings are: 'a group or series of objects arranged together in a row or a tier (e.g., a row of keys on a typewriter)'; 'one of the horizontal and usually secondary or lower divisions of a headline'. The interconnection of these three primary senses, what Beekman and Callow call the 'thread of meaning,' are not too difficult to see -- from 'bench' to 'a mound, pile, or ridge'; or 'bench' to 'a money counter's table, counter, or place of business' to 'a money establishment, etc.'; or 'bench' to 'a bench for the rowers of a galley, etc.'

In translating a word the basic sense of which is the same or very similar to 'a monetary establishment' from another language into English, one could probably use the English 'bank' successfully. Because, however, one of the secondary senses of that word is a 'gambling house dealer,' one would need to know that using in translation such a word as 'bank' would never call into mind the integrity of the banking establishment. In English, the primary sense of 'bank' is so strong that it is unlikely that used in its proper context the secondary sense would ever intrude. In certain subcultures of English speakers such as the gambling industry, however, this problem might indeed surface. If so, one would probably prefer to use the descriptive phrase, 'a monetary establishment,' as an alternative to 'bank.'

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<sup>3</sup> referring or relating to verbs

<sup>4</sup> referring or relating to nouns

<sup>5</sup> Please see Chart #1

## Primary / secondary senses for 'BANK' (15C)

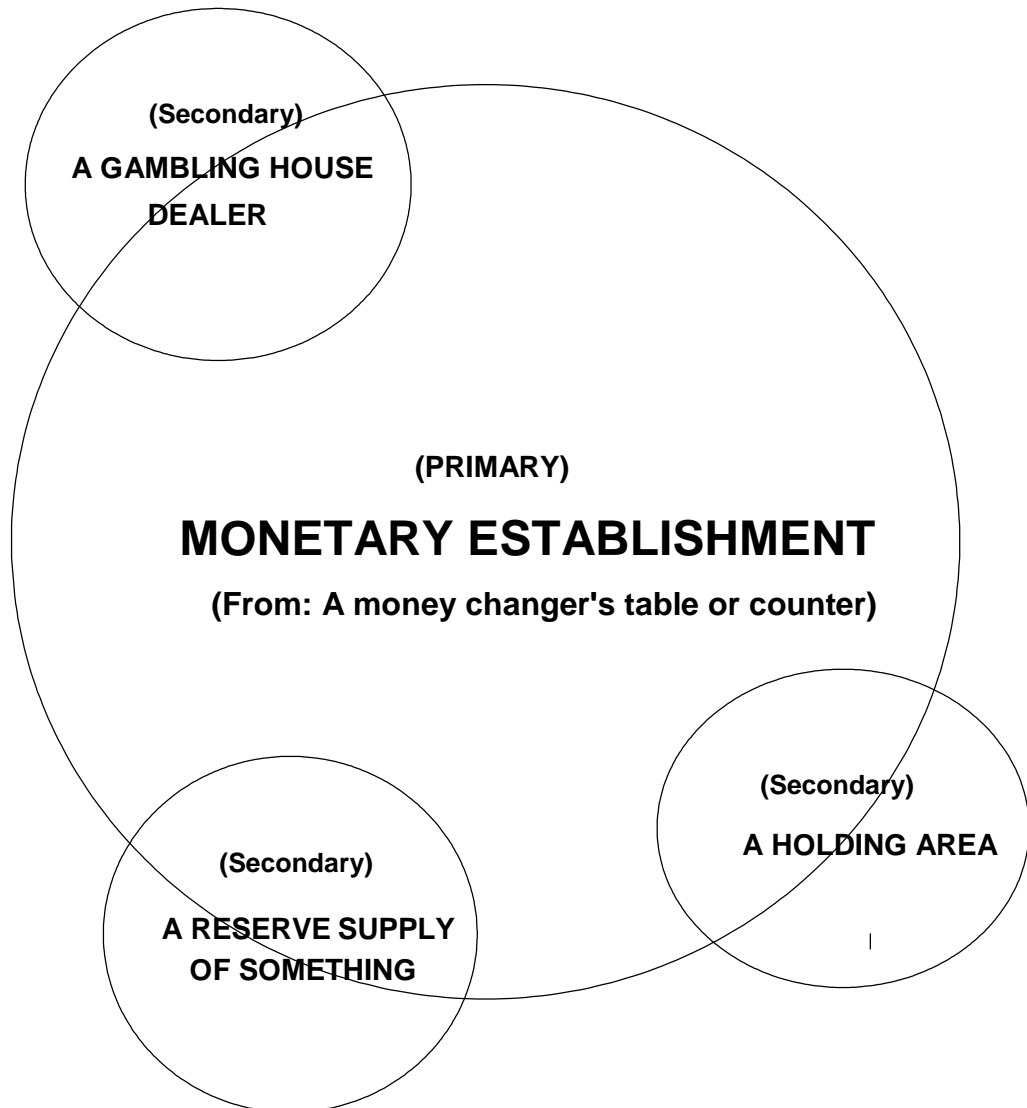


Chart #1

## Translation Choices

After considering primary/secondary constraints, here in simple chart form are some translation choices which translators make, from the most desirable to the least. The word 'interference' is used here to mean 'hindrance to understanding.'

From Source Language	-	To Target Language
Primary sense	-	Primary sense with no interference from secondary senses
Primary sense	-	Secondary sense with no interference from primary sense
Secondary sense	-	Primary sense with no interference from primary/secondary senses
Secondary sense	-	Secondary sense with no interference from primary/secondary senses
Descriptive phrase	-	Primary sense with no interference from secondary senses
Descriptive phrase	-	Secondary sense with no interference from primary sense
Descriptive phrase	-	Descriptive phrase

If there is interference from any of the surrounding meanings, here are some possibilities --

Primary sense	-	Descriptive phrase
Secondary sense	-	Descriptive phrase
Primary word	-	Transliteration <sup>6</sup> , but only as a last resort for a word such as 'baptism', where there might be no suitable word or phrase in the target language, and there are knotty differences of opinion regarding mode

One issue of meaning 'interference' may be that there is indeed a word or phrase in the target language which matches the primary sense of the source language well, but there are social constraints which make such a choice unacceptable. An example of such a word might be the English word 'barren.' In Western culture, a barren woman who wants children is a matter of great sadness, but such a person is not considered unclean. To many Mongolians to whom we spoke, however, it is not only a matter of great regret for a woman to be barren, but they also consider her to be unclean. Once a Mongolian woman has had a child, they consider her to be cleansed. A translator would need to be very careful what kind of sense or meaning he/she was transferring in such a case.

## Unknown concepts

Our third example is probably one of the most tricky translation problems, i.e., the translation of absolutely unknown concepts into another language. There are several possible translation choices, and which choice the translator might make would very probably be connected with social constraints in the target language as well as fidelity to the textual and historical sense in the source language.

For example, should a given culture have no knowledge whatsoever of sheep or sheep-like animals, the translator's choices might include, in no particular order of preference:

- A generic word with a descriptive phrase -- a mild-tempered herd animal
- A modifier with a generic word - a 'woolly' animal
- A generic substitute with a very general meaning - an animal
- A descriptive phrase - an animal used for its wool/hair and milk products
- A cultural substitute - llama

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<sup>6</sup> A word or phrase which is not translated at all from the source language but is simply used as is, a foreignism which is spelled with the target language alphabet or sign system and adjusted somewhat in pronunciation to accommodate the phonemic system of the target language.



Even in an effort to make meaning culturally relevant, one would never want to choose a word like 'pig,' for a translation from 'sheep,' even though sheep or a sheep-like animal might be absolutely unknown and pigs the main herd animal of the culture. There are too many secondary senses in the source language which are absolutely unacceptable, and one would certainly be constrained by such verses as John 1:29, "Behold the lamb of God...."

To conclude this section on translation problems, there are certainly far more complicated issues which translators must consider than just these few examples above. From just these illustrations, however, it is easy to see that it is imperative that Bible translators treat their task with solemn and holy caution. They must make certain -- by means of using the time-honored Bible translation principles which have been developed through the years -- that a given translation will be an accurate transferal of the original sense, will be clearly understandable to the reader, and will be in language natural to the target culture.

### Remember the 'Source'!

In the same way that the British Romanticists (and others before and after them) focused on the target culture or on their own agenda, rather than on the source language meaning, we showed above that some translators today are thinking that they should be more sensitive toward their target language and culture than toward the source text (cf., Kalra, Kaur, Hutnyk 2005, p. 8; Cahill (n.d.); Coleman 2004, p. 20; Saglia 2002, p. 98). Indeed, as long as their source text is not the Bible and they clearly state such a stance to their readers, such a translation does no real harm. But a Bible translator's responsibility is very different. He/she must never let the target language and culture overwhelm the source text in such a way that the reader misses the intent of the original Author. Consider what Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote in 1938:

Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader toward the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader... In the first case, the translator takes pains, by means of his work, to compensate for the reader's lack of understanding of the original language. He seeks to communicate to his readers the same image, the same impression that he himself has gained - through his knowledge of the original language...."

(quoted in Cutter 2005, pp. 16-17).

Although Schleiermacher's reference is to generic translation, his is a wonderful statement of the focus required by Bible translators. They must 'move the reader toward' the Writer, i.e., that is toward their understanding of the God of the Bible.

### Translation - the language and culture power tool

The objective in Bible translation should be, therefore, to transfer the message as cleanly as possible into the target language. Regrettably, however, translation sometimes fails this goal and for some of the reasons explored above, syncretism develops. The development of syncretism via translation, often in non-religious contexts, can have from the secularists' point of view quite positive results. They see languages and cultures as constantly evolving, which is indeed true, and through this evolution, the eventual change and establishment of new sociopolitical 'macro-polysystems' as something to be desired ("Traduzione Tradizione?" 2006), which we are not so quick to think is true. One interesting phenomenon is that it is not unusual to find that if a given 'translation' ends up being written beautifully or persuasively in the target language, people, from scholars to the 'common Joe' reader, are

prone to forgive mistakes in accuracy or clarity (cf., Bachmann-Medick (Gottingen), (internet) 2008); Ciklamini, n.d.; Cutter 2005, p. 1; Garfield, 2008; Muller, 1995; Saglia, 2002; Sivathamby, n.d.; etc.). It has not been uncommon to find documentation on such translations being used as statements of rebellion against intruders (Cutter 2005, p. 5) or as change-agents, perhaps unifying diverse aspects of the target culture in some way (Ferre 1994, p. 30).

One might see even a poor translation as an entity of power (Cutter 2005, pp. 16-17). That is, even when a given work is not accurately or clearly translated, if people pay attention to whatever new meaning it has developed in the target culture by means of that bungled translation, it also can become a springboard for creative energy, for independent action, for sedition even. As secular writer Meyer (1994, p. 61) says, "In my view indigenous interpretations of Christianity are not *given* by the mission, but *made* by converts themselves in a process of appropriation (often against the meanings missionaries intended to evoke)."<sup>7</sup>

As an example, we would like to consider some of the translation choices which Bible translators in the middle of the Nineteenth Century made for the Ewe language of an African tribe. The missionaries chose four different types of terms to express the meanings of the names of the Trinity and of the Devil.

Source language meaning	Target language word	Chosen term's source
Almighty God	Mawu	Pre-Christian/animism
Jesus Christ	Yesu Kristo	Straight transliteration from the Bible
Holy Spirit	Gbogbo kokoe	Descriptive term from the Ewe language
Devil / Satan	Abosam	Borrowed term from the Akan language

Some of the target language term choices were acceptable. Some, however, were not satisfactory from the point of view of whether or not they led the Ewe people to an understanding of the historical meanings of Bible doctrine. For example, the animist word "Mawu" did not imply a positive, caring power, and thus the Ewe had difficulty assigning these qualities to the Bible God. "One might say," writes Meyer 1994, pp. 52-55), "that listening to the Christian message triggered reflection about the old religion on a new, comparative level.... For many [Ewe] people, Yesu Kristo [was] an exorcist.... Christianity was presented to the Ewe in terms of their existing cosmology, which had a decisive influence on their understanding of Christian key terms."

The Ewe 'conversion' to Christianity did not mean that Ewe Christians took up the new meaning the missionaries gave to their old deities. In this not-unusual ministry situation, the terminology had one meaning for those Ewe who claimed to have become Christians, another meaning for the missionaries, and a third meaning for non-Christians. Meyer (ibid., p. 47) states that "Mission depends on translation. In order to be comprehensible, the missionaries had to make use of existing terms which evoked concepts they possibly wanted to replace. It is therefore reasonable to assume that through the vernacularization of the Christian message transformations of meaning occurred, and that this can shed light on the issue of syncretism."

The problem here, we believe, stems from the decision to use terms which 'triggered reflections' into the minds of the Ewe people meanings which the missionaries then had to replace. We like to use the example of trying to teach about elephants (using no pictures or other helps) to a target group of people who have never heard of or seen one before. In doing so, a language helper, perhaps misunderstanding what the foreigner wants, might tell the teacher to use a word in the target language which means 'beetle' -- for our purpose,

<sup>7</sup> This is another example of 'bottom-up' syncretism.

we'll say 'tsokh'. The foreign teacher will innocently tell his/her audience that a tsokh is huge, that it has a long nose, is highly intelligent, extremely strong, and that men train tsokhs to work and pull enormous loads through the jungle. The learners will struggle for a period, but after a while, some of them will grasp the fact that when the foreigner uses the word 'tsokh', it means one thing; when they use it in ordinary life, it means something else. After a while, they will get used to the new foreign meaning, and it will just become part of the jargon one uses around the outsiders.

### Buddhism in Central Asia

What is jargon for one group, however, can contain central meaning for another. Most of those who profess Christianity in Mongolia use the folk-Buddhist terminology, following the most commonly used Mongolian Bible translation, the whole version of which was published in 2000. While there seems to be at present a rather vigorous attempt to claim that these terms are generic enough to use for a (to the Mongolian general public) 'foreign' religion, based on our data, these terms immediately and without question call the tenets of both Tibetan Buddhism and traditional Mongolian animism into the minds of nearly every Mongol in Mongolia who does not profess Christianity. Because of this fact, and because teaching Bible doctrine via this terminology produces such unclear understanding of Christianity, a syncretism between folk-Buddhism and Christianity has been the inevitable result<sup>8</sup>. It behooves us, therefore, to take a brief look at the history of Buddhism in Mongolia and at some aspects of that religion's teaching and philosophy.

Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into Mongolia between approximately 1547 and 1650, although there was Buddhist missionary activity before this period, and certainly afterwards (Heisseg 1970, pp. 26-33). Between 1650 and 1911, many Tibetan Buddhist writings were translated into Mongolian, and Heissig (1970, p. 34) states that "Despite the administrative and political separation of Mongolian Lamaism from Tibet which was successfully carried out by the Manchu emperors, the spiritual and theological dependence on Tibet remained very close." The ultimate effect of the introduction of this version of Buddhism, called 'yellow', and of its mixture with the Mongols' ancient shamanist animism, was to pacify somewhat the warlike Mongols.

In essence, syncretism as an actual philosophy is at the foundation of much Buddhist thought, and their scholars relish the synthesis of ideas. For example, Muller (1995, p. 1) tells us that Kihwa, a Buddhist scholar in Korea, "compared the 'three teachings' of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism in an ecumenical fashion, showing how, in terms of their basic principles, they were in agreement with each other" (ibid., p. 2). In Nepal, too, one of the basic tenets of Buddhism is the syncretistic pattern of joining belief systems, in particular Buddhism and Hinduism (Shrestha n.d., p. 51), and indeed Nepalese legends celebrate tolerance, compromise, and syncretism. "For the laity," writes Shrestha, "there was no difference between Buddha and Shiva" (ibid., p. 60).

The Tibetan Buddhist tradition assumes a teacher will work with the student. Written text is, however, a starting point only, not the authority as it often is in the West. Since the Buddhist text is always difficult and usually impossible for the beginner to comprehend, the importance of a live teacher is understandable. Garfield (2008, p. 3) explains that Buddhist rites and rituals are effective for the Buddhist version of salvation whether one understands them or not, and this must be true of their writings also, since Muller (1995, Section 2) says that Buddhists feel that enlightenment is gained through the reading of a Buddhist text. Thus, a great amount of oral teaching is assumed in order to attain 'salvation,' although such oral teaching will vary with the teacher and the times. This is the "the textual tradition that is so central to Tibetan Buddhist culture" (Garfield 2008, p. 9). A 'textual tradition' certainly implies reading, but reading which must be interpreted by a teacher, reading which the student is not customarily

<sup>8</sup> In this paper, 'folk-Buddhism' will mean the syncretism of Mongolian shamanist animism and Buddhism. Buddhism is called the 'yellow' religion (*шарын шашин* / *бурхны шашин*), and shamanist animism is called the 'common' religion (*харын шашин*).

encouraged to pursue alone. Buddhism has, however, spread to the West, and because would-be converts, especially in America and Europe, often will not settle for an intermediary transfer of learning, today's Asian Buddhists struggle with the doctrinal changes which have occurred in texts by means of their translation into English, which translations have then found their way back into Asia (ibid., p. 2-3). This means that translators are determining how Buddhism is 'understood and adopted', which, even given the Buddhist philosophy of the impermanence of all things, Garfield suggests is a betrayal of Buddhism (ibid., p. 10).

Again, in brief, those interested in Bible translation in Mongolia must remember that:

- the Bible in the original languages was perfect, without error of any sort
- translation is complex and not to be undertaken without proper training
- the source text meaning must have preeminence over the target culture
- translation is a powerful tool for the development of syncretism
- Buddhist tradition actively promotes syncretism

### Import for Bible teaching in Mongolia

The above is of great importance to Christian ministry in Mongolia for any Bible teacher genuinely concerned with seeing his or her Mongol friends truly understand Bible truth. We cannot, of course, state unequivocally that anyone who clearly understands the Gospel expressed in a way which has no connection with folk-Buddhism is bound to accept it. It is our responsibility to teach the Scripture clearly, but it is, after all, the sovereign Holy Spirit alone who can open people's hearts. Still, we believe that there is solid evidence that many of the Mongolians who are claiming some kind of connection with things Christian are amalgamating Bible truth with their folk-Buddhist heritage, whether inadvertently or purposefully.

Given the Mongols' historical propensity for absorbing and using ideas and the Buddhists' strong tendency toward philosophical synthesis, how could it surprise anyone that Chingis's children would greet with affirmation what they see as a Western religious text which expresses its doctrine via their traditional religious terminology? Some years ago, having recognized and become concerned about folk-Buddhist/Christian syncretism in Mongolia, we discussed the matter with the leaders of some of the churches in Ulaanbaatar. One of them said, "We don't have syncretism in our church! Do you have syncretism in your church?" "No," answered another person, "We don't have syncretism in our church!"

This reminds us of a passage in T.H. White's The Once and Future King (1939) where he describes Merlyn's introduction of his owl Archemedes to the boy Arthur, not-yet king of Camelot. Archemedes has been Merlyn's companion for a very long time, and perhaps considering that he may lose his place in Merlyn's attention, the owl is upset. "It is only a boy," said Merlyn. 'There is no boy,' said the owl hopefully, without turning around" (p. 25).

To us, denying the presence of syncretism in Mongolia seems tantamount to Archemedes's wishful denial of the presence of the boy Arthur. Whatever we might want to call it, multiculturalism or amalgamation or transformation or synthesis or accommodation, etc., etc., syncretism is all around us in the literary, social, political, and economic arenas in this emerging Central Asian country. In particular, religious syncretism is well and healthy in Mongolia and is present in numbers of churches which teach from some version of the Bible.

Before any person should say too quickly, "Not in my church!", it might be worth while to consider the results of the socio-linguistic research we have conducted in the Mongolian countryside for the past ten years or so.

## ABBREVIATED DESCRIPTION of Conner socio-linguistic research

### Our background experience

When we first began teaching the Bible to Mongols many years ago, very much like the missionaries to the African Ewes, we did not understand the world-view of Mongols or know what terminology to use. We had learned before we came to Mongolia that we might teach something with our own ideas in mind, but that those learning from us could very well hear and understand something far different because they filter it through their own culture and life-experience. Most learners do expect to understand rather than to not understand what they hear, and therefore in an effort to make sense of what they are being taught, they relate the unknown they are hearing to the known with which they are familiar, whether that 'known' is what the teacher has intended or not.<sup>9</sup> We knew this! And yet,...

Following the lead of our language helpers, who gave us 'religious' words<sup>10</sup> to use, we employed folk-Buddhist terminology to describe Bible truths. For example, we were using the word 'Диваачин' to mean God's dwelling place. We did not know at the time the great difference in meaning there was, not only between this word and 'Heaven,' but also between Bible terms and most of the other words and phrases in the folk-Buddhist collocation of religious terms. In retrospect, we realize that our language helpers were doing the best they could to give us correct terms for what they were understanding, again, relating the unknown they were hearing to the known with which they were familiar. Underlyingly, we discovered later, they were very nationalistic, and staying to the 'Mongol' side of culture was exceedingly important to these people who had been oppressed by their two huge neighbors for centuries. Not only that, because they did not understand the nature of Christianity well at all, they had no other 'religious' words to use, and the concept of using non-religious, descriptive terms was not one which readily came to their minds. For years, using the folk-Buddhist terminology, we explained Bible truth over and over until we received back responses which indicated that some of our listeners were bordering on understanding the Bible and seeming to remember that, yes, although the words are the same as their old religion, what the Bible teaches is different from their folk-Buddhist tenets.

We must feel sorry for our learners! Just as in our 'elephant/tsokh' example, we were using words the basic meanings of which were quite different from the new Bible meanings we were trying to insert into them. Some few people did seem to be understanding and remembering our new senses for their old words. These 'first-generation believers' did seem to be able to make the switch and understand the truth of God's Word, at least somewhat, and therefore we must admit it became too easy for us to become complacent and assume that all our hearers were understanding the truth and not mixing the Bible with error. After a while, especially when teaching very dynamic personalities whose underlying, original motives for learning the Bible may have been very different from what we were assuming, we stopped emphasizing the different meanings altogether.

Finally, a Mongol friend reluctantly admitted to us that understanding the most commonly-used Bible written with the folk-Buddhist terminology was difficult.<sup>11</sup> This person, however, was intent on struggling through in order to learn the Bible and somehow felt that it was appropriate that the Bible was obtuse, that people should not understand it for themselves, that it should require teachers to tell seekers what the Bible says, that after one read a portion over and over and over again, meaning would rise mysteriously into the mind. This sounds dangerously like a kind of enchantment to us, certainly the antithesis of the

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<sup>9</sup> Again, 'bottom-up' syncretism

<sup>10</sup> For example, 'God,' 'repentance,' 'sin,' 'eternal life,' 'place of eternal suffering,' 'Heaven,' 'devil/demon,' 'prayer,' 'soul,' or 'worship.'

<sup>11</sup> It must be admitted that it is not just the terminology which makes that Bible difficult to comprehend.

desire we sense in reading the Bible ourselves, that we are meant to understand the simple Gospel easily. And we are not the only ones who have heard comments similar to the above regarding what Amos Lee (2003) calls "the abstruseness of this difficult translation" (p. 3). He says that one missionary communicated to him that Mongolians feel that "religion should be difficult and arcane, as it is in tantric Tibetan-Buddhism and shamanism. Thus if one struggles with the text and comes to a point of understanding, this is considered an almost magical moment in which one has achieved some spiritual mastery" (ibid.).

One is reminded of numbers of religions in the world which utilize a 'mystery' language to keep the masses in ignorance, for example, Catholicism, with its centuries-long use of Latin which few other than the clergy understood; Islam, which uses Arabic texts, incomprehensible to a high percentage of the Muslim population of the world; and Buddhism with its Tibetan writings, which only a minority understand, and its mystery words intoned as a mantra during meditation. Indeed, the translation struggles of Francis Cleves, which he describes in the Preface and Introduction to his translation of the *Secret History of the Mongols* (pp. ix-lxv) substantiates the comments we have heard more than once that this important book was written in Mongolian which was not intended to be easily understood by the general populace. Most centrally, howbeit anciently, one must never forget the Babylonian 'mysteries', in which "a mysterious power was attributed to the clergy," which in their role as interpreter of the text "[drew] away the souls of men from direct and immediate dealings with" God (Hislop (1916/1959) p.9).

Gradually, then, we became aware that in many cases, we were not seeing the miraculous life-changes one should expect to see when people are transformed through God's word and His Holy Spirit. What we saw happen was when our 'first-generation believers' taught others, their emphases on the new meanings were not as strong, nor were they as regularly reiterated. Therefore, the 'second-generation believers,' those who claimed to become believers through the witness of our first-generation believers, understood the truth less clearly. Their vision of Christ, seen through the lenses of the folk-Buddhist terminology, was dim. Then these second-generation believers passed on their understanding to a 'third-generation', and so on, and the Water of Life became more and more murky.

Finally, we had to admit that indeed we were not on the right track. Therefore, after consulting with others, most of whom were ministering the Scriptures in far away countryside locations, we decided that, trusting the Lord for guidance and direction, we should do some research into this matter of spiritual terminology, which was so vital to the Mongolian people really understanding the truth of God's Word.

### Research study background

Not long after we arrived in Mongolia, we had been charged by our organization with the responsibility of overseeing the translation of our Bible-based evangelism and discipleship materials into Mongolian. Part of the responsibility of such a task was, without a doubt, to decide which key Bible terms we would use, which was inarguably necessary in light of the experiences we were having, and also simply because one cannot waffle over terminology in a translation project. This would prove to be a challenging task, especially given the divided opinions in the community which claimed to be Christian over whether folk-Buddhist terms could be used at all, and if so, to what extent. We thus felt constrained to come up with suitable, independent grounds for term usage for ourselves, both professionally and personally, grounds which would be separate from any factions and which would serve as our foundation for supplementation or replacement of the rationale being used in Ulaanbaatar.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Please see footnote 1, pg. 8, this paper.

In spring 1996, we attended and observed a concurrent session on translation held during an international conference in Ulaanbaatar. During that session, we listened to discussion and some of the dispute regarding key terms in the Bible. As the session ended, we began to think about a Mongolia-wide, scientific socio-linguistic survey on these key terms and, in seeking information on whether or not such a survey had yet been attempted, we discovered that it had not. We realized that such a survey would best be done by a qualified linguist, and since my own educational background and professional qualifications were adequate<sup>13</sup>, we undertook the task.

### Rationale

Our idea was basically this: if a researcher could question a broad range of people across Mongolia on these spiritual topics, rather than being limited to people who are being constantly affected by fresh foreign influence in Ulaanbaatar, it would be beneficial for our own work, which at the time was focused primarily on countryside people instead of on city people. We then could make our choice of terms on the basis of that research evidence, as an alternative to personal or cultural preference. In addition, we hoped from the beginning that whatever information we came up with might be useful to the community at large which claimed to be believers in Christ.

### Methodology

A socio-linguistic survey may produce two basic kinds of information, quantitative, i.e., statistical data which one can count or calculate; the other, qualitative, i.e., monologues or discussion on a given subject or life histories, etc. Through the first method, a researcher may prove or disprove a hypothesis; through the other, display an element of human reasoning, rationale, and thought in his or her final analysis. Often a researcher chooses one or the other of these methods, but our research includes some aspects of both kinds, because the strengths of one method suitably offsets the weaknesses of the other. After consultation with professionals who were experts in socio-linguistic survey methodology, we developed a research system tailored to the Mongolian countryside venue.

Those who chose the terminology for the various Mongolian New Testaments -- from language scholars at the Mongolian University, to ordinary city people interested in Bible translation (some of whom were foreign, some Mongolian) -- had been highly influenced by outside contact. Therefore, we decided we should learn what Mongols whose language is not so influenced by outside contact would come up with when thinking about the Bible meaning domains we would be studying. On the basis of the idea of surveying outside the environs of Ulaanbaatar, we knew that the very best possible data would be collected from a proper cross-section of the countryside population, taking into consideration age, gender, economic status, profession, educational level, location, political persuasion, and religious or belief-system affiliation, the percentages of each of these reflecting those nationally. The original release time we had available from our other responsibilities was approximately a month, so we chose certain parameters for our pilot study, which we hoped would contrast demographically with the terminology decisions at that time, and still be accomplishable in about a month.

Consequently for our pilot study, we limited our travel to five out of the then nineteen countryside aimags, spiraling out from Ulaanbaatar: Tov, Overhangai, Arhangai, Bulgon, and Khovsgul. As much as we would have liked to include educational level, political persuasion, religious or belief-system, and economic status as controls in the survey, in order to contain the study, the final interview profile which emerged included herdsmen of both genders over the age of 15, living no less than 25 kilometers from any urban area,

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<sup>13</sup> Please see p. 77, this work.

such as a city, some center, or village. The fact that the basic profession of our subjects is that of herdsman also of necessity controls economic status and education in a modest way, although not on purpose and not as much as a researcher might who was purposely choosing to regulate these factors.

Following the pilot study and after a fairly full analysis of the original data, I myself interviewed more correspondents virtually all of whom were also countryside-based people. These people added another five aimags, Bayankhongor, Selenge, Dzawkhan, Ows, and Umungobi, to the range of distance which the full survey covered, for a total of ten aimags.

This most recent inclusion also broadened the range of time over which the survey was conducted, to us a very positive addition. Rather than using the same survey questions with these final interviewees, I instead questioned them, usually in small groups, regarding their ideas and understanding of the total 130 original terms we elicited, plus the four terms we added from the Bible translations. Our questions generated discussion among the Mongols, often energetic, on the senses of those terms. Thus while the pilot study produced plenty of quantitative data, the follow-up study provided a wealth of qualitative data, as well as expanding the study's locale and duration.

### Elicitation Technique Choices

As we stated above, when for the pilot study we originally chose a series of data elicitation and analysis techniques, some quantitative and some qualitative, we primarily had the idea that in such an elicitation, we wanted to utilize certain aspects of the Mongolian culture in an advantageous way, rather than struggling with them (Marshall and Rossman 1989, pp. 102-04).

#### Quantitative

Knowing that people enjoy games of all kinds, for the purpose of gathering quantitative data for statistical analysis in the pilot survey, we chose 'free listing,' 'pile sorting,' and 'ranking.' 'Free listing' is a powerful technique in which a person or perhaps a group of people is asked, "How many X's can you name?" or "What kind of X's are there?" An enormous amount of information may be derived from what they list, in what order they list it, and how often a particular item comes up on a given set of people's lists, etc. (Bernard 1994, pp. 239-42)

A logical outgrowth of free listing is 'pile sorting,' wherein a subject is given a pile of cards, on each of which is written a word from the given semantic domain (ibid., pp. 249-52). The subject is then asked to sort them so that the ones which are similar to each other in meaning are together. Often, researchers tell their subjects that they may make as many piles as they want, as long as there is more than one card in a given pile. Then, in the third technique, 'ranking,' the researcher asks the subject to take a pile of those same cards and order them or rank them on a particular hierarchical feature, e.g., prestige, lucrativeness, like, dislike, etc. (ibid., pp 252-53; Pratt and Loizos 1992, pp. 70, 78). The researcher thus gains a hierarchical list of words numbered from one to however many cards are in the pile.

These three quantitative techniques worked very well together for us with the countryside Mongols. We first had the herdsmen free list words in the particular meaning domain we were exploring, and we wrote on cards any new terms which had not been listed before by another subject. Then, if they had not listed one or another of the terms which we included from the Mongolian Bible translations, we added cards with these words to the stack and then asked them to pile sort the words in what ever groupings they chose. Then we put the cards in random order again and, giving our subjects a hierarchical feature specific to the term being researched, asked them to rank the words from highest to lowest in a value chosen specifically for the given term.



## Qualitative

Often during an actual interview, a researcher will attempt to separate the interviewee from others living in the area in order to gain the ideas and opinions of just that one person. We had been thinking long about this issue and about the fact that Mongols are in certain respects a profoundly communal culture, at ease among themselves, but quite distant with those they consider outsiders, who may be as diverse as foreigners from another country or Mongols from another aimag, som, or city -- especially Ulaanbaatar. Many Mongols love to gather together and will do so with just about any provocation, the arrival of a guest being one of the very best excuses for countryside people. We wondered for some time about the wisdom of trying to separate a little community of people into individuals for the sake of data gathering if, instead of fighting that attribute, there might instead be some way to actually turn this characteristic into an advantage. Workers in any communal culture are well aware of the propensity of such people for consensus and group decision (cf., Devereux and Hoddinott 1992, p. 32; Pratt and Loizos 1992, p. 70; McKinney 1997, p. 61; also cf., Tjosvold and Field 1983; Postmes et al 2001; Sager and Gastil 1999).

Among a number of semi-structured, group interview techniques is one called the 'focus group.' Focus groups were developed by a Columbia University team in 1941 for radio research (Bernard 1994, p. 225), but they have become a routine data-gathering method. Beine (1995, p. 376) says that "focus groups are... believed to be better suited to studies that seek to identify community attitudes and patterns of practice." While normally focus groups are quite structured, in a personal communication Beine told us that they may be less structured in some contexts and might well lend themselves to a very informal situation. We therefore decided to develop a type of focus group discussion which would lend itself well to such a casual situation. Thus, we prepared a series of questions designed to engage the various groups of Mongols in our pilot study in discussion on the meaning domain, following the period in which we gathered the data through the above quantitative techniques. We also used this very technique in the gathering of data from our 2005-07 correspondents, and it indeed turned out well, as generally when there were several Mongols together, they appeared at ease and spoke freely.

It might be a matter of concern to some that in a group discussion setting, individuals whose opinions veer from the majority will not be adequately represented in the resulting data. That could indeed be a problem if the data gatherer were not sensitive to this possibility, but we have observed over and over that while a consensus opinion is the nearly inevitable outcome of an energetic discussion, in order to reach that consensus, individuals seem to participate fully and uninhibitedly before that accord is reached. In genuine consensus societies, the leader is willing to avoid overemphasizing personal opinion in order to summarize and state the consensus opinion, even though his/her private opinion is not necessarily exactly the same as the final joint conclusion (cf., Devereux and Hoddinott 1992; Pratt and Loizos 1992; McKinney 1997; Tjosvold and Field 1983; Postmes et al 2001; Sager and Gastil 1999). Therefore, we feel confident that the summary statements of the group discussions adequately represent the vast majority of the correspondents.

We must make one issue very clear. In every part of our data elicitation we were especially careful to shun asking leading questions which were predisposed to draw out particular answers. Additionally, we took lengths to stay away from personal bias towards or against respondents' answers. To have done so would of course have woefully skewed our entire data set. We therefore purposely and consciously avoided such a practice.

Another qualitative research technique we felt would give deeper insight into the way Mongol countryside people think is the 'life history' (Bernard 1994, pp. 363-65). We had hoped that if, using this method, we could become better acquainted with a cross-section of the subjects, it might give some even deeper insight into the way Mongols think and why they give the opinions they do. What we found, however, was that after spending anywhere from two to four hours with a given group, there was simply no more time for them to devote to

helping us, as gracious as they usually were about the interviewing. Mongolian countryside people's work never ends, and even the presence of guests, American ones at that, could not stop the need to milk the cows and mares.

### Research question

On the pilot survey, we went out with the following basic question: If one describes a Biblical concept, being as careful as possible not to suggest any particular word as an answer, and asks the subject(s) to give a term or expression they might use when speaking about that concept, will any words or phrases surface regularly, and if so, what are they?

In order to elicit Mongolian expressions for the semantic and cultural domains we chose, we developed a general beginning question for each of the domains drawn from meanings which stemmed from the Greek and Hebrew definitions of these concepts in the Scripture, rather than straight from an English dictionary. These questions were generally of the form, "What words or phrases do people use to describe or discuss....?", and were designed to produce free-listed terms. The questions were open-ended, i.e., not designed in any way to elicit specifically folk-Buddhist terms, but rather to find out what language people use naturally to describe spiritual concepts and then evaluate that language in light of Biblical meaning.

### Choice of key spiritual terms for the pilot survey

Not all the Biblical key terms were in dispute among the Christian community in Mongolia, but there were far too many in question to be able to conduct a properly contained survey on them. In order, then, to determine the particular concepts which, first of all, were most in doubt, and secondly, were conceived of by the translators in the community of professing Christians as most important, before we began the pilot study, we interviewed a representative of each of the four New Testament translations available at that time, asking each of them to list, in their opinion, the ten most important disputed key terms. Then, since the results of our survey are important to us in our own translation work, we asked the same question of our own organization members living in the countryside who were actively engaged in Bible teaching. From their varying responses, we chose the ten terms which most often came up. They are as follows: God, repentance, sin, eternal life, place of eternal suffering, heaven, devil or demon, prayer, soul, and worship.

Since we had no experience with the amount of time it would take to interview a given subject or group of subjects on ten semantic domains, but guessing that maybe there might not be enough time to do them all, we separated this group of ten terms into two groups of five each: Group A (God, repentance, sin, eternal life, and place of eternal suffering) is composed of terms which, if the unsaved do not understand them clearly, they cannot understand the Gospel. Group B (heaven, devil or demon, prayer, soul, and worship) are those which were less chosen by the New Testament translation representatives. It was fortunate that we divided the terms in this way, because the Group A terms took enough time to work through in both the pilot and follow-up surveys, that sometimes our subjects became too tired for good, rigorous discussions.

## Route and routine

On our pilot trip, we stayed away from main roads as much as we were able to, instead four-wheeling a total of about 3000 kilometers to remote ger groups by means of side roads or faint tracks, and occasionally making our own pathways. In this manner, we interviewed one or two groups per day, with occasional breaks for regrouping and data analysis as we went. In gathering our follow-up data between 2005-2007, we traveled to Selenge and Dzawkhan aimags for interviews, and then located and spoke with countryside-based subjects from Ows, Umungobi, and Bayankhongor aimags who had only recently arrived in the environs of Ulaanbaatar.

## Quantitative 'full-data' elicitation

As the number of words we collected tallied up interviewee by interviewee, it became more and more difficult for the interviewees to handle so many words. Thus, after we finished talking with the first ten people, we chose words which were as representative of a given semantic category as we could determine at that point, and so began to give the subjects five or six words, among which were included the words from the Bible translations. Then we added any other word they might free list which was not among those main terms. We therefore have full data drawn from five or six words from each of the five Group A semantic domains. Data from the remainder of the words were drawn only when they were free listed. We term the words in each semantic domain for which we have full data from all subjects as *full-data* terms. The reader will find a rather fuller meaning analysis of each of these full-data terms in the 'Term Recommendations' section in the Observations portion for each of the five semantic domains.

## EXPLANATIONS AND COMMENTS ON THE FOLLOWING DATA PRESENTATION

As we now present the terms and phrases we elicited for each of the five meaning domains: Eternal Life, Place of Eternal Suffering, God, Repentance, and Sin, please note first an alphabetized list of the terms, then a summary statement of our subjects' observations, followed by the terms and phrases themselves in the following order: 'Terms not recommended for Bible teaching,' 'Terms conditionally recommended,' 'Recommended terms,' i.e., recommended to ourselves. Within these three general categories, we have subcategorized the terms according to a statement of features common to the particular group. Then, following each separate term or phrase is a dictionary definition, as appropriate, while following others of the terms is a more expanded explanation if the subjects' comments warrant it or if it is a full-data term. After our presentation of all five semantic domains, we have included a synopsis of anomalous data, which were comments so rare as to be statistically insignificant.<sup>14</sup>

Should a reader wonder why we include a summary of dictionary definitions (cf., Bawden (1997); *Дамбажав* (2006); Damdinsuren (1998); Hangin (1986); *Wt.tl* (1966)) as well as the abundance of definition information elicited from our correspondents, a dictionary definition acts as a prescriptive definition, i.e., should anyone need an 'authoritative' statement on a given term's meaning, a dictionary is where practically any person might look. Such definitions, however, often do not take into account the human and social context in which such a term is used. Indeed most dictionary explanations are often so condensed and abstract as to be of little use should the reader wish to know for him/herself just how to use that term in real life. We must say, though, that *Дамбажав's* work is a rather wonderful exception. In contrast, the meanings elicited from our correspondents demonstrate just how a given term is used in real life, in what context, where the term fits on the

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<sup>14</sup> This present paper is a highly abbreviated version of our full report, which is several hundred pages long. The complete version, which includes statistical analyses and explanations and more expanded versions of the subjects' responses, is at yet unpublished. Should anyone be interested in seeing such data, they are welcome to contact us, and we will be happy to give them an estimate when the full report will be available.

formality-informality register, the colloquial setting, historical significance, etc., on the part of the correspondents.

An example would be the term *МӨНХИЙН ХӨДӨЛГӨӨН*, which according to our dictionary summary means, 'the form of existence which reposes in matter; the course of the unceasing progress of the material universe in five basic aspects - engineering, physics, chemistry, living matter, and society. Therefore, *МӨНХИЙН ХӨДӨЛГӨӨН* is 'eternal motion,' i.e., motion which lasts forever. According to common usage, however, Mongols use this term as an adjective to describe people who are industrious and hardworking. For foreigners who do not read Mongolian, such information is not readily available, and thus may only be gleaned from social interaction, not from dictionary definitions.

We remind our readers that the terms for the five semantic domains which emerged from this survey are only our respondents' answers plus any we added from the Bible translation(s), and therefore we do not intend to imply that there are not other terms which might fit either well or poorly with Bible meaning. In particular, when reading the term summaries on all domains, it is important to remember that these are not terms which erudite, worldly-wise people chose to discuss philosophical issues, but rather are terms which ordinary countryside people chose in order to talk about the concepts we introduced to them. Some of the terms came up as we were describing the concept; others came up as they themselves were discussing the matter. Any oddities in meaning, any veering from genuine Bible sense probably stems from the freedom we gave our correspondents in discussion, and thus must usually be laid at the feet of the researchers, not attributed to our subjects, who generously gave their time to help us.

A further note regarding our correspondents: Especially out in the countryside, the herders were often shy of foreigners and a little cautious that we might have some unfriendly motive. Therefore any way we could set them at ease by gentle conversation, playing games with the children, and, following the elicitation sessions, simple gifts of candy, staple goods, clothing items, Polaroid photos, and little toys (cf., Marshall and Rossman 1989, p. 63) worked to make our time with them pleasantly memorable. We appreciate each and every one of these fine people.

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS  
on elicitations for the semantic domain:

*ETERNAL LIFE*

Our subjects free listed a total of 14 terms for the semantic domain ETERNAL LIFE, some of which terms reflect Bible definitions in their primary sense. At least two of these terms are in (a) Bible translation(s). An alphabetized list follows:

<i>бурхан</i>	<i>мөнхийн амьдрал</i>	<i>үүрд мөнхийн амьдрал</i>
<i>Бурхан багш</i>	<i>мөнхийн залуу</i>	<i>үхэхгүй амьдрал</i>
<i>мөнх амь</i>	<i>мөнхийн хөдөлгөөн</i>	<i>үхэшгүй мөнхийн амьдрал</i>
<i>мөнх амьдрал</i>	<i>мөнхрөл</i>	<i>эцэс төгсгөлгүй урт амьдрал</i>
<i>мөнхийн амь</i>	<i>мөнхрөх амьдрал</i>	

ETERNAL LIFE semantic domain data summary statement

Our correspondents' ideas regarding the meaning of 'eternal life' were varied, such as considering *бурхан* or *бурхан багш* to encompass that meaning; 'being alive'; 'ordinary life which is eternal'; 'eternal youth'; 'eternal motion'; 'subsumption into nirvana'; 'eternality'; 'one's descendants'; 'one's influence or knowledge passing on to one's descendants'; hyperbole for 'very long life.'

A few correspondents expressed such ideas as when a person dies, it is like changing one's robe, and that a person with eternal life will not be sick or old. Some also suggested that various expressions of the idea could be philosophical conjectures, such as the cycle of nature or of our living universe, a youthful spirit or mind, health, or the activity of one who is industrious.

For the most part, our subjects described 'eternal life' in terms of simply being alive forever, in the sense of reincarnation or nirvana. They do not believe that there is any such thing as eternal life, when one means by 'eternal life' natural or animal life which does not end. The thought seemed almost appalling to them. It is imperative, therefore, when one is introducing and teaching Bible concepts, to explain thoroughly what 'eternal life' means, so that they will not think that believing on Christ will result in the unending continuation of their lives of struggle and sorrow.

Terms not recommended for Bible teaching:

Our correspondents saw these first two terms, which we do not recommend, as strongly connected with Buddhism. The only connection with 'eternal life' seems to be an implicit one.

*бурхан* - 'From the religious word in Sanskrit which means Buddha, that is, a person who, according to the ritual of the Buddhist religion, dominates everything and, having caused his mind to become perfect, fully understands all knowledge, having reached this condition following wiping out all impurity and desire on the basis of inner meditation by means of a right mind; a Buddha image; images or sculpted figures of many and varied things which people believe in and worship; a name by means of which Gautama Siddarta, i.e., Shagimoni, is revered; the 12 figures which the great Buddha designed; one's forebears; a tomb, stuba, or small shrine with an image of a deity; a god or divinity'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>15</sup> -- To most of our correspondents, using the term бурхан to mean 'eternal life' required a stretch of imagination. Generally, in Buddhist doctrine to have 'eternal life' means to be delivered from the cycle of death and reincarnation and be subsumed into nirvana, a place or state wherein one is alive, but without suffering, desire, or external reality. Therefore when one dies, or, as in the euphemism, 'becomes бурхан', that person has attained eternal life because бурхад do not die.

While this was a very interesting exploration of extended meaning among our correspondents, whose ideas were remarkably similar, nevertheless, the primary sense of 'eternal life' in the Bible, 'natural or animal life which does not end,' does not match at all with any of the primary or secondary senses of the term 'бурхан'.

Бурхан багш - 'the Gautama Buddha'

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The following not-recommended term is reminiscent of man's desire to remain young forever, old age having its negative side even in a culture which claims to revere the elderly.

мөнхийн залуу- 'eternal youth, i.e., a never-ending time when living entities exist at the pinnacle of vigorous strength'

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The next term which we do not advise using is far too general and again does not match well with Bible meaning. It is more of a philosophical term for the physical world or an idiom for industriousness.

мөнхийн хөдөлгөөн - *Хөдөлгөөн* is 'the form of existence which reposes in matter; the course of the unceasing progress of the material universe in five basic aspects - engineering, physics, chemistry, living matter, and society,' and therefore 'eternal motion' is that state lasting forever.

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This next not-recommended term was free listed five times in this semantic category, an unusual number of occurrences for the number of people we interviewed, especially as it does not appear in the dictionaries we have. It does not by itself suffice to describe the Bible concept of 'eternal life,' but it might be a good word to use for a more general concept, especially since it was so often elicited.

мөнхрөл - 'eternality, immortality'

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The coming phrase which we do not advise using has an odd twist in meaning to it, in that, according to some respondents, it implies that right now life could not be eternal, but will in the future become so. While there is a way in which one might be able to say this is in line with Bible meaning, in general, 'eternal' means 'eternal.' If life is not eternal in the present, it

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

is not eternal in the Bible sense, meaning outside the concept of time -- past, present, or future.

мөнхрөх амьдрал - 'life which will be eternal, immortal'

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The next not-recommended phrase does not really mean 'eternal life,' but rather a confirmation that one will not die. It is very general and weak in comparison to several other words with more succinct meaning. It might be able to be used for the type of eternal existence of those who will exist forever in eternal suffering apart from God.

үхэхгүй амьдрал - 'active life in which one does not die'

#### Terms conditionally recommended:

The first two conditionally recommended terms should be used in a clear contrast between what being alive is and what it is not.

МӨНХ АМЬ - 'амь' is the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body; a principle or force which is considered to underlie that distinctive quality of animate beings. *АМЬ* may also be the nature of a living creature's existence which is revealed by the evidence of the body's being born, growing, changing, and dying.' Delete the word 'dying,' and the meaning becomes 'eternal life'. The word works fine in the context of simply being alive forever, rather than dead.' [*МӨНХ АМЬ* is therefore the above described state existing without end, i.e., without the living entity's dying.]

МӨНХИЙН АМЬ- '*амь*' is the quality that distinguishes a vital and functional being from a dead body; a principle or force which is considered to underlie that distinctive quality of animate beings. *АМЬ* may also be the nature of a living creature's existence which is revealed by the evidence of the body's being born, growing, changing, and dying. With the word 'eternal' added, the phrase means such life which is eternal.' Delete the word 'dying,' and the meaning becomes 'eternal life'. The word works fine in the context of simply being alive, rather than dead.

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>16</sup> - Our correspondents said that this is the condition of being alive forever, with the genitive form of the word *МӨНХ* implying that this condition of being alive belongs to, is in, or is connected with eternity. They say it has the same sense as *МӨНХ АМЬ*, but nearly all adamantly maintained that there is no such state possible.

Because the word *амь* is simply the state of being alive, the term does not adequately demonstrate the Bible meaning of 'eternal life,' i.e., natural or animal life which last forever. Thus, should it be used, this meaning should be clearly described.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-

The meaning of the next conditionally recommended phrase matches Bible meaning, but it does seem quite long. Mongolian, however, regularly uses doublets (two words which have similar meanings). Since the two words, үүрд and мөнх, have similar meanings, this doublet is a natural usage pattern for the Mongolian language. Using it for the sake of total clarity would probably be very useful.

эцэс төгсгөлгүй урт амьдрал - 'life which is so long it has no end'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>17</sup> -- Although a few of our correspondents found this phrase long, nearly all considered this phrase to be a very well modified, clear definition of "long" or "eternal" life, one which would work well for someone who does not understand. There is significant emphasis in this phrase on that 'life' being one's ordinary, everyday life here on earth, meaning that it does bring out the Bible sense quite well.

### Recommended terms:

These four phrases seem to immediately suggest a meaning close to the Bible sense for 'eternal life.'

мөнх амьдрал - 'амьдрал is a period of life, existence, social interaction, or livelihood, and therefore, with the word 'eternal' added, the phrase means such life which is eternal'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>16</sup> -- Our correspondents' perception of the meaning of this phrase was 'ordinary, active life which continues on forever,' which matches very well with the primary Bible sense. Most of them, however, volunteered the opinion rather vigorously that there is no such thing as ordinary life which lasts forever, and a few of them therefore offered the suggestion that the phrase could be used hyperbolically to mean 'a very long life.'

Because this phrase matches so well in official definition and in common usage meaning with the primary Bible sense, it is evident that the nature of 'eternal life' as taught in the Bible needs to be clearly taught. That is, eternal life will not be the continuation of this life's sorrows and difficulties, but rather an active, joyful, purposeful, perfect, and love-filled existence which has no end.

мөнхийн амьдрал - 'амьдрал is a period of life, existence, social interaction, or livelihood, and therefore, with the word 'eternal' added, the phrase means such life which is eternal.'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>16</sup> -- Our correspondents said that this term means generally the same as *мөнх амьдрал* although the genitive form of the word *мөнх* may imply 'life which is of eternity.'. Their perception of the meaning of this phrase was 'ordinary, active life which continues on forever,' which matches very well with the primary Bible sense. Most of them, however, volunteered the opinion rather vigorously that there is no such thing as ordinary life which last forever, and a few of them therefore offered the

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үүрд мөнхийн амьдрал - 'Life of the sort which implies existence, social interaction, and/or livelihood which lasts forever.'

үхэшгүй мөнхийн амьдрал - 'Life which is so long it has no end'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>18</sup>-- Our correspondents said that this phrase is a poetic doublet which has the same meaning as, or stronger than, *МӨНХИЙН АМЬДРАЛ* or *ҮХЭШГҮЙ АМЬДРАЛ*. It is a good phrase to use when describing eternal life for learners who do not understand about the Bible sense for eternal life, that is, 'natural or animal life, existing forever.'

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<sup>18</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS  
on elicitations for the semantic domain:

*PLACE OF ETERNAL SUFFERING*

Our subjects free listed a total of 10 terms for the semantic domain PLACE OF ETERNAL SUFFERING, none of which terms reflect Bible definitions in their primary sense. One term from one of the Bible translations was added, for a total of 11 terms. An alphabetized list follows:

<i>айхтар там</i>	<i>тамын орон</i>	<i>Эрлэг номон хааны газар</i>
<i>мөнхийн зовлонгийн газар</i>	<i>тамын шүүлтүүр</i>	<i>Эрлэгийн газар</i>
<i>там</i>	<i>халуун там</i>	<i>Эрлэгийн элч</i>
<i>тамын ёроол</i>	<i>шүүлтийн газар</i>	

PLACE OF ETERNAL SUFFERING semantic domain data summary statement

Our correspondents were most familiar with the folk-Buddhist terminology, and their answers reflected this. According to them, the concept of *там* stems from Buddhist dogma and is a temporary though terrible place of suffering without any joy or pleasure, into which people fall after death and judgment. There are several *там*s, hot, cold, one with boiling water, another with boiling oil. Evil spirits live there, they say. To most, an eternal place of suffering is unthinkable, although some people do believe this. Some think it is better to consider the suffering place after death being the grave. Whatever one does in this life influences what punishment one receives and for how long. According to their understanding, there is a very bottom to this place in which people must explain their bad deeds.

After a person dies, Erlig, the deity of death, sends his messenger, kind of like a policeman, who snatches the soul and takes it to the place of judgment, where one's next reincarnation is determined and where the person is punished according to exactly scrupulous and fair principles by means of certain equipment, furnishings, or gear. According to most correspondents, all people go to this place after death, hoping that they will 'sift out' all right. If one slips through the holes in the 'sieve,' he/she will go to *там*. If not, he/she is one of the better people and will go to *диваачин*. The result can be told by how long it takes for an exposed body to be 'taken,' i.e., decompose or be eaten by birds or animals -- if quickly, the person was good and went to *диваачин* with *бурхан*; if slowly, the person was bad and went to *там*.

Therefore, for the most part, the correspondents agreed with the idea that suffering after death is not eternal, but rather a purgative period, after which the person is released to go on to another life, whether a round of reincarnation or some other version of living again.

Because the 2006 *Дамбажав* (2006, p. 568) dictionary definition says that *там* is the opposite of *диваачин*, in order to fully understand what *там* is, a better understanding of *диваажин* might be useful. Although Bawden (1997, p. 126) briefly describes *диваажин* as 'paradise' or 'the next world' in both Buddhist or Christian systems, *Дамбажав* has a very different perspective, one which far more clearly delineates the sense of *диваажин* as it springs from its genuine roots. '*Диваажин*' comes from the Sanskrit term 'devasthana,' which means 'the realm in *тэнгэр*.' The Tibetan is: 'de ba can,' and in the Buddhist writings, the sudar, *диваажин* is where one undergoes reincarnation according to one's karma, i.e., the fruits of one's actions, renounces the evil of sin and defilement, does good works, and experiences '*Авидь*' the dwelling place of the *бурхад*, where those who have become *бурхад* live.

According to the authority of the blessings and good luck of fate and by means of the figures of *бурхад*, one is reincarnated 'as if from the flowers' in *ДИВААЖИН*; those who live there do not know any suffering, revel in joy, hear songs of the book of joy, and do everything for the sake of the advantage of living creatures (*Дамбажав* 2006, p. 568). The word is also a euphemism for dying, or a spoken figure of speech for a place of joyful life.

There are some surface similarities in the description of *ДИВААЖИН* and what we know of the Heaven which is the dwelling place of the God of the Bible. *ДИВААЖИН* is not 'nirvana', which according to Webster's is 'a place or state of oblivion of care, pain, or external reality.' Instead it appears to be a place where active life goes on, employed in good works. It is very obvious, however, that *ДИВААЖИН* is connected with the doctrine of reincarnation and that many deities, i.e. *бурхан*, live there. Because one of the euphemisms of 'to die' is 'to become a *бурхан*', this means that *ДИВААЖИН* is the place where all those who, having lived good lives and thus become deity, live together. As we said above, according to *Дамбажав*, *там* has the opposite meaning as *ДИВААЖИН*.

All of our subjects felt that punishment after death is based on the amount of good or evil one has done in life. It was rare for anyone to suggest any idea that the place or world of the dead is one of eternal burning, and no one submitted that we are accountable to a supreme Being by means of whom there is no hope for the sinner outside of His mercy and grace. Because the Bible teaches very clearly that there is eternal suffering to shun, the concept of temporary suffering must be carefully dealt with from the Scriptures.

#### Terms not recommended for Bible teaching:

The following terms and phrases all use a base word of folk-Buddhist/shamanist origin, *там*, which, while very fearful, over and over suggested to most of our subjects a temporary place for the purpose of punishment and purging away evil from which one may be released after a time. In addition, the word clearly included other senses which are unbiblical, such as a very hot *там*, and also a very cold *там*, perhaps rather understandable in this land where deep cold is longer lasting and more dangerous in a given year's time than heat.

айхтар там - 'According to Buddhist teaching, one of the three evil fates, the terrible place of punishment, howbeit temporary, of which there are 18, with the opposite meaning implications of *ДИВААЖИН*, there is a hot *там* and a cold *там*, where the spirits of the dead are tortured and caused to undergo suffering; the sorrows one suffers during life; prison; a very deep hole.' The word *айхтар* means 'terrible,' and thus emphasizes the awfulness of this place, although one might wonder if such a modifier is necessary since *там* is in and of itself terrible, that is, there is not a contrasting 'nice' *там*.

там- 'According to Buddhist teaching, one of the three evil fates, the terrible place of punishment, howbeit temporary, of which there are 18, with the opposite meaning implications of *ДИВААЖИН*, there is a hot *там* and a cold *там*, where the spirits of the dead are tortured and caused to undergo suffering; the sorrows one suffers during life; prison; a very deep hole.'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>19</sup> -- Our correspondents say that this is a terrible place, a place of suffering by means of boiling water or oil which everyone wants to avoid, but into which, after judgment, one falls and temporarily goes through fearful suffering in punishment for one's sins. They say *там* is a general term

<sup>19</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

since there are many *тамс*, e.g., hot, cold, watery, etc. A very few say it is eternal, but most others say that it is temporary. Whatever one does in this life influences what punishment one receives and for how long. The primary meaning they give for *там* does not match that of the Bible sense, place or world of the dead, or place of eternal burning, in particular because of the temporary nature of suffering.

In addition, it is clear from not only our correspondents, but also from the dictionaries, that because of its clear connection with folk-Buddhist teaching, the term is really not an acceptable term to use to transfer Bible meaning.

тамын ёроол - 'the bottom or very depths of the place of punishment'

тамын орон - 'the realm of the place of punishment'

тамын шүүлтүүр - 'the judgment in the place of punishment'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>20</sup>- According to our correspondents, Erlig, the deity of death, snatches the soul and takes it to the place of judgment, where the person is tried by means of the шүүлтүүр (filter/sifter/sieve) of *там*. If one slips through the holes in the sieve, he/she will go to *там*. There is virtually no correspondence between this idea of judgement in *там* and the place of eternal suffering described in the Bible.

халуун там - 'hot place of suffering after death; according to Buddhist teaching, one of the three evil fates, the terrible place of punishment, howbeit temporary, of which there are 18, with the opposite meaning implications of *диваажин*, there is not only a hot *там*, but also a cold *там*, where the spirits of the dead are tortured and caused to undergo suffering; the sorrows one suffers during life; prison; a very deep hole'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>19</sup> - Our correspondents say that *там* has several levels, the lowest of which is hot, thus 'hot *там*,' a terribly hot, fiery place with a boiling hot pot. Other than the fiery heat, there is no correspondence between this description and the eternal place of suffering described in the Bible, in particular because *там* is a place of temporary punishment, much like the Catholic purgatory.

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The next phrase, a place name, does not imply the Biblical concepts of either punishment or eternity.

шүүлтийн газар - 'place of judgement'

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Three terms introduce the name of Эрлэг, who is the king of там, a being who although fair and exactly scrupulous and who has the power of life and death in his hand, does not in any way fulfill the qualities of the end-time Judge revealed in the Bible. Thus the terms do not at all reflect the Biblical concept of a place of eternal punishment.

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<sup>20</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-

Эрлэг номон хааны газар - 'place of the king of the underworld'

Эрлэгийн газар - 'the place of *Эрлэг*'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>21</sup> -- Our correspondents describe this location as the place of Erlig, the being who first takes life from a person and then brings that person to this place and judges him/her. It is not the place of suffering, but the place of judgement or condemnation connected with *там*, where one's next reincarnation is determined. There is no correspondence between the meaning of this term and the place of eternal suffering described in the Bible.

Эрлэгийн элч - 'the messenger of *Эрлэг*'

Terms conditionally recommended:

None

Recommended terms:

The following term, while a somewhat long phrase, reflected Biblical meaning immediately to our subjects, most of whom had never read any Bible before.

мөнхийн зовлонгийн газар - 'place of eternal suffering'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>20</sup> -- Our correspondents said that this phrase clearly means a place of eternal suffering without any joy or pleasure, from which one may not emerge and that if such real place exists, it would be ranked for 'most terrifying' at the top of a list of terms far longer than the one they were working with. A few said that it is the place where evil spirits are and is the same as *там*, only eternal. Since most Mongols are imprinted with ideas stemming from folk-Buddhism, anyone using this term should carefully teach the meaning from the Bible, i.e., the place or world of the dead, or the place of eternal burning, emphasizing and contrasting what is very different from *там*.

This term has very little about its primary sense which requires additional teaching, other than making sure that learners understand it is not the same as *там*.

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21 Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS  
on elicitations for the semantic domain:

GOD

Our subjects free listed a total of 36 terms for the semantic domain GOD, none of which terms reflect Bible definitions in their primary sense. Adding two which are in (a) Bible translation(s) to the list makes a total of 38 terms researched. An alphabetized list follows:

<i>аав, ээж</i>	<i>Гомбогүр Эрдэнэзуу</i>	<i>сахиус</i>
<i>Алаг толгой</i>	<i>Гончигсүм</i>	<i>сүлд хий морь</i>
<i>амин шүтээн</i>	<i>гэгээн</i>	<i>тэнгэр</i>
<i>ариун ёс суртахуун</i>	<i>Далай лам</i>	<i>тэнгэр бурхан</i>
<i>Базарьяань бурхан</i>	<i>Далайээж</i>	<i>уул ус</i>
<i>байгаль дэлхий</i>	<i>Дарь эх</i>	<i>хайрхан</i>
<i>богд</i>	<i>Долоон бурхан</i>	<i>хар лус сахиус</i>
<i>бөө</i>	<i>Ертөнцийн Эзэн</i>	<i>хувраг</i>
<i>бурхан</i>	<i>ёс заншил</i>	<i>хурмаст тэнгэр</i>
<i>Бурхан багш</i>	<i>ёс төр, уламжлал</i>	<i>хүмүүжил</i>
<i>бурхан тэнгэр</i>	<i>Их Эзэн</i>	<i>шүтээн</i>
<i>бурхан шүтээн</i>	<i>лам</i>	<i>эцэг эх</i>
<i>Бүрэн хаан уул</i>	<i>лус савдаг</i>	

GOD semantic domain data summary statement

The ideas of our subjects regarding words or phrases suitable to express the collocation of meanings for the semantic domain GOD were varied, with correspondents suggesting parents and/or ancestors, nature or natural phenomena, physical objects of worship, i.e., idols, customs and traditions, various named deities, *бурхань тэнгэр*, certain humans, and certain spirits.

The main feature of the correspondents' responses was the strong connection between parents, one's birthplace, and nature in all its essentials. There were many comments and ideas which were connected with Buddhism, but far stronger was the living, animistic world-view expressed by nearly everyone, whether they overtly claimed Buddhism, folk religion, atheism, or even Christianity, to which two or three correspondents had been exposed.

In asking our correspondents about a being in whom is combined the following attributes: the creator of everything in time and space, who constantly possesses, has dominion over, and cares for everything everywhere in that creation, who knows everything infinitely, who is the most powerful, the very highest of all authority, never changes, exists eternally, is absolutely true and completely righteous, and yet who is altogether loving, gracious, and merciful, some said there is no such thing, some had no idea, while others suggested Buddha, mother, the government, nature, *тэнгэр бурхан*, and the dragon. Some did not understand why such a being should have any connection with 'grace.' One person suggested there might be a being who was the Lord of the Universe who could fit such a definition, but others said they did not understand *Ертөнцийн Эзэн* and *Их Эзэн* very well.

When asked about a common word for deities worldwide, some said they were not sure, but others suggested government, Buddha, *тэнгэр*, religious faith, 'life' (as in *амьдрал*), customs and traditions, *бурхан*, heritage, or a place, such as a mountain. A general word for such a

concept, they said, would come from the particular religion itself or from the particular thing one honors spontaneously by addressing and praying to it.

*Ертөнцийн Эзэн* and *Их Эзэн* are not associated with traditional religious concepts and were often difficult for people to understand immediately as terms for deity, indeed because they are not 'religious' words, but rather descriptive. Once the terms were explained, however, people comprehended them easily and without prompting connected them with the Bible meaning for 'God.' It has been impressive to us that there are many people far out in the remote countryside who have heard the terms and know that they refer only to the God of the Bible. Because there is virtually no connection between folk-Buddhist doctrine and Bible truth, and because we would certainly want to avoid syncretism, this seems a compelling reason for using them. There are other acceptable terms, of course, translated with correct meaning from Hebrew or Greek for other names of God, but these two, *Ертөнцийн Эзэн* and *Их Эзэн*, are the only ones we used in this present survey.

Virtually all the entities which our subjects suggested as worthy of honor and worship were connected with folk-Buddhism through either their ancient folk animistic traditions (*харын шашин*) or the more recent Buddhist (*шарын шашин*) connections, a syncretism of which came into being in between 1547 and 1650 (Heisseg 1970, pp. 26-33).

#### Terms not recommended for Bible teaching:

The first two terms are direct references to worship of human parents and/or ancestors. Some Mongols very clearly and simply said: "Father is *бурхан*."

аав, ээж - 'father and mother' [usually the spoken form]

эцэг, эх - 'father and mother' [usually a more formal, written form]

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These next terms which are not recommended are all direct references to nature itself or certain aspects of nature which our correspondents see as worthy of worship.

Алаг толгой - 'name of a mountain'

Байгаль дэлхий - 'all things organic and inorganic in the realm of nature'

Some of our correspondents, mostly those who ascribe to atheism, said that nature exists by its own eternality, and that there is no supernatural being which knows and governs it, but only man, and he alone is responsible. A good number of our correspondents felt that because man springs from the earth, so to speak, nature is an entity to which we might assign all the attributes of creator, etc. Man being intrinsically connected with the natural world, if nature is destroyed, so will man be. Man should love nature and the natural world and care for it. If not, and if nature is destroyed, it would be very difficult for mankind, they said.

Бүрэн хаан уул - 'name of a mountain'

Далай ээж - 'the great mother; a term used when referring to the sea as an entity to worship'

Долоон бурхан - the seven gods; the stars called the seven old men; Ursa Major, the Big Bear or Big Dipper constellation

Уул ус - 'mountain and water'; a doublet meaning 'nature,' which has somewhat more general meaning than an ordinary reference to mountains and water'

Хайрхан - 'euphemistic reference to sacred mountains or tabooed creatures'

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All the terms which include the word *шүтээн* have a strong connection with an object of worship, like an idol, and are therefore not recommended.

амин шүтээн - 'One's very nearest and dearest personal objects of worship or veneration.'

бурхан шүтээн - 'an object of veneration, an idol'

шүтээн - 'an object or thing of veneration, an idol; a religious belief or worship practice; a cult; a place of religious veneration; a shrine'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>22</sup>-- Our correspondents comments indicate that for them the primary sense of *шүтээн* is a physical idol, as well as some revered or beloved person. Most of them said it is synonymous with *бурхан* with which it is used as a doublet.

Even in the most general primary sense of *шүтээн* in the official definitions, one cannot extrapolate that it has the same meaning as the general term 'deity', and certainly not the primary sense of God-of-the-Bible, as the unique one who is the supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation. In addition, the term's secondary senses indicating physical objects of worship, i.e., idols and physical places of worship, introduce ideas far from appropriate in expressing Bible truth regarding God.

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The next terms which are not recommended all refer to customs, traditions, and proper upbringing.

ариун ёс суртахуун - 'the established morals and ethics, traditions, principles, customs, and good habits of life which have come to be regarded as holy, revered, pure, and noble'

ёс заншил - 'a code of customs, traditions, and laws which are appropriate for people to lift up as principles, and which they absolutely must follow'

ёс төр, уламжлал - 'rituals of honor, ceremony, heritage, and traditions of the people which have come to be customs'

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<sup>22</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'



хүмүүжил - 'the successive influences on a child as he/she grows up; a person's ability, experience, and development of self control and behavior in public; the act of becoming a good person; enculturation, education, upbringing'

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The following category includes specifically named deities, the names of none of which are acceptable for referring to the God of the Bible.

Базарваанс бурхан - 'A Buddhist deity named Badzarwaans; an exclamation meaning, 'Oh, my goodness!''

Бурхан багш - 'a term for the Dalai lama'

Гомбогүр Эрдэнэзуу - 'A particular *dejhg*'s name; the first Buddhist lamasery, built in 1586 on the edge of the Orkhon River through the initiative of *G.,ga hggy*'

Гончигсум - 'the Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha, the Monkhood, and the Teaching; also used as an oath'

Гэгээн - 'a title used in addressing and referring to a well-known incarnate lam who specializes in the understanding of the books of religious rules; bright'

Далай лам - 'the head of Buddhism, normally headquartered in Tibet'

Дарь эх - 'a group of 21 Buddhist deities devoted to women and children'

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This next word in our category of unacceptable terms is very familiar to people and, in the mind of most of our correspondents who did not claim any connection with Christianity, is primarily associated with the traditional religious concepts of Buddhism and shamanist animism. It is the word most closely connected with one of the Bible translations and is used by a majority of Mongols who say they are Christians.

бурхан - 'from the religious word in Sanskrit which means Buddha, that is, a person who, according to the ritual of the Buddhist religion, dominates everything and, having caused his mind to become perfect, fully understands all knowledge, having reached this condition following wiping out all impurity and desire on the basis of inner meditation by means of a right mind; a Buddha image; images or sculpted figures of many and varied things which people believe in and worship; a name by means of which Gautama Siddarta, i.e., Shagimoni, is revered; the 12 figures which the great Buddha designed; one's forebears; a tomb, stupa, or small shrine with an image of a deity; a deity or divinity'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>23</sup> -- Most of our correspondents' comments indicate that their own perception of the primary meaning of a *бурхан* is as a very general word of Buddhist origin for deities or worshipped things, in particular for idols or pictures which people can look at and handle, of which there are thousands of different ones with different names which are personally worshipped by individuals. Most consider *бурхад* to be eternal and to have spirits connected

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<sup>23</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

with them. Although some said that a person may become a *бурхан* if he/she attains the 'five wisdoms' of Buddhism, generally a common euphemism for saying a person has died is that he/she has 'become a *бурхан*.' A few people consider one of the *бурхад* to be the creator of the earth and to require people to be accountable to him, and that worshipping the lesser *бурхад* is the way to reach the 'big' *бурхан*. A shrine where images are kept is also called *бурхан*. The term can be very general and has now becoming a modifier for anything very loved or doted on.

The word is broadly understood by our correspondents to be an entity, most often a material object, connected with faith and devotion, indeed something worshipped, but the word obviously has a great number of meanings which vary with the person/people who use it. Some correspondents said that they had been taught that some *бурхан* created the actual universe and that that being plans people's lives, which idea is expressed in such ways as, "This is the picture painted by *бурхан*," an expression of fate meaning that one's life is as an already painted picture. Others said that they had not been taught about *бурхан*, but they just know without being able to explain it well. Some felt that *бурхан* has no ability to see everything, although one's own conscience might make one think such a thing, and that *бурхан* has no ability to affect anything. Some people felt that one cannot 'make' a *бурхан*.

It is interesting that one of the official secondary senses in the dictionaries, i.e., idols or images, is the primary understanding of most of our correspondents in this sociolinguistic study. While people constantly mentioned the 'yellow religion', they rarely used the word pronounced 'Buddha' in English, a form of which has been transliterated into Mongolian. They instead used *бурхан*, as synonymous with the deity connected with the 'yellow religion,' that is, of course, Buddhism, meaning, therefore, Buddha.

Although the common usage meanings of *бурхан* ostensibly include a few elements which one might glean from descriptions of the God of the Bible (e.g., some people say *бурхан* is 'creator'), based on this present survey data, the meanings of *бурхан* do not come even close to incorporating the full body of the Bible God's attributes, that is, the unique supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation.

Indeed our findings justify our early uneasiness about trying to pack the term *бурхан* with the above collocation of meanings. Our inescapable conclusion is that the most common senses of the word *бурхан* understood by a very high percentage of our correspondents are very far from the primary meaning of God-of-the-Bible.<sup>24</sup> The only ones who understood any meaning for the term *бурхан* connected with the Bible were the two or three who had been exposed to a version of the Bible, and their understanding was highly mixed with folk Buddhism.

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<sup>24</sup> Please see pg. 62 for a fuller explication of this issue, plus charts

One might wonder if the next references to the sky or heaven, which we have indeed categorized as unacceptable, might not be adequate as reference to the 'Deity of Heaven,' since some of our Mongols think of a supernatural being dwelling 'up there.' *ТЭНГЭР*, however, is a word used in similar ways as *сахуус*, which term is clearly connected with shamanist magic.

Although it is easy for some, especially foreigners, to think of *тэнгэр* as a highly revered power closely connected in various ways with the physical sky, the *тэнгэр* are a pantheon of about 144 deities, e.g., *гал тэнгэр* (the fire deity), *дайсан тэнгэр* (the enemy deity), *жил тэнгэр* (the year deity), *охин тэнгэр* (the maiden deity), *өндгөн тэнгэр* (the egg deity), *хөх мөнх тэнгэр* (the eternal blue-sky deity), *хөхөө тэнгэр* (the cuckoo deity), *цахилган таван тэнгэр* (the five lightning deities; there are many *тэнгэрс* numbered this way), *эрхт тэнгэр* (the deity with authority)<sup>6</sup> etc.

Used this way, the word *тэнгэр* is not directly connected with the sky or heavens, and therefore a straight translation into English as 'the sky deity' or the 'deity of heaven' does not at all illustrate the meaning of the term. Calling the *тэнгэр* 'heavenly beings/powers' may come a little closer to illustrating the connection between them and the sky. Yet on the other hand, there is an almost mystical reference to the blue eternal sky itself as the entity from which all power, good and evil, comes and which is the creator of all things. In our opinion, the *тэнгэр* are probably the most deeply, even secretly, revered deities in Mongolia.

*бурхан тэнгэр* - 'deity or deities which shamanists worship, similar in meaning to *тэнгэр бурхан* or *сахуус*; a guardian spirit which lives above the cosmos and rules everything; Buddha'

*тэнгэр* - 'authoritative magic power which dwells in the cosmos and owns and rules everything, also the place where the entity(ies) live(s); the guardian spirit(s) of the shamanist religious system, in certain contexts synonymous with *бурхан тэнгэр* or *бурхан сахуус* or *хийморь*; the sky, the heavens, that is, the atmosphere which one can see above the earth; weather'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>25</sup> -- This is the most generic of the *тэнгэр* terms and is directly connected with the animist/shamanist system. According to that old system, some of the approximately 144 *тэнгэр* are the ones which do everything evil to humans; some are those which do everything good. While they seem to have power and intelligence, it is not limitless, nor is their influence or presence. The *тэнгэр* often are closely connected with certain aspects of nature, as well as the manipulation of other aspects of power.

There were a few of our correspondents who ascribed sentient qualities to the *тэнгэр*, but for the most part, these do not seem to be beings with whom they relate on a personal level. The most general sense of *тэнгэр*, i.e., 'sky', certainly does not match that of the God-of-the-Bible, and while occasional attributes of the primary sense of this term, e.g., '... power which dwells in the cosmos and owns and rules everything,' do not necessarily conflict, nevertheless most of the collocation of shamanist/animist meanings surrounding this term are so far from Bible truth, there is really no way *тэнгэр* could ever be construed as synonymous with the God who is the unique supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator

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<sup>25</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation.

тэнгэр бурхан - 'deity or deities which shamanists worship, similar in meaning to *бурхан* *тэнгэр* or *сахийус*; a guardian spirit which lives above the cosmos and rules everything; Buddha'

хурмаст тэнгэр - 'the very most important venerated entity of the upper realm, called Esrun; the very most fundamental of the Mongolian deities; the chief of the thirty-three тэнгэр deities; a high level of the sky, heavens, that is, the atmosphere which one can see above the earth'

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One category of unacceptable terms refers to humans who are worshipped.

богд - 'a title given to a person (or object) who for some reason is more enlightened and wise than many others; holy, sacred, divine, saintly; august'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>26</sup> -- According to our correspondents, the word *богд* is a title which was set up by Tibetans for Mongolians. Sometimes the word is given to a most highly honored, revered person, perhaps Chingis or other great leader, or is used for a reverently worshipped mountain. It may also be a general name for a number of worshipped, revered things, even a very loved child. While this title is very honorable, it has no genuine correspondence with the primary sense for the God of the Bible, who is the unique supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation.

'Богд' is a word which in particular refers to a rank or title conferred upon one who has become an incarnated Buddhist lam, far outshining others in learning and wisdom. There is no evidence in the primary sense of this term of uniqueness, i.e., there is more than one person who is entitled 'богд', and while this in itself may not be enough to prohibit calling the God of the Bible '*богд*', since we also call Him 'Lord,' a word which is also used for other beings, nevertheless this title is Buddhist, and any reference to it immediately calls to mind the collocation of terms and their associated meanings which express Buddhist doctrine.

бөө - 'A male mediatory agent between man and the world of the unseen in shamanist folk-religion, i.e., a shaman, the female of which is called an *удган*, one who mutters incantations in order to be possessed of a spirit'

лам - 'the high lord of salvation and blessing bestowed by touch; the general name of priests of the *бурхан* [i.e., Buddhist] religion'

хувраг -- 'priest/monk'; often used as a doublet with *лам*

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<sup>26</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

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The next not-recommended terms are all connected with the worship of spirits of the land, sky, and water.

лус савдаг - 'a name which emerges from common speech and from legend for the rulers of localities and bodies of water, which are considered to live under the land, and control the rivers and streams, rain, and the earth and revered mountains; local deities'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>27</sup> -- According to our correspondents, the primary sense of *лус савдаг* is supernatural power connected with various features of nature, such as trees, bodies of water, the land, mountains, etc. According to the folk-Buddhist religious system, they are living, bodiless entities which are not human and which dwell in the land (*савдаг* - animus of a given area/tree/mountain, etc.) and the water (*лус* - animus of a given river, lake, etc.) of a particular location. They have limited knowledge and limited power, sometimes benign, other times very evil. They relate to people in that they react to the good or bad acts such people perpetrate on the particular place or body of water for which they act as guardians, but they do not seem to have a sentient relationship with people. They seem to be amoral and unconcerned with anything other than their own sphere of influence.

The primary and secondary senses of the doublet *лус савдаг* do not in any way reflect the nature and person of the God of the Bible, who is the unique supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation.

сахиус - 'In religious teachings, an authoritative magic power which is able to bring forth and protect nature; an object of veneration which one wears on the body in order to protect oneself from danger, i.e., a guardian spirit or protective deity, worn as an amulet'

сүлд хий мор, - 'wind-horse flag or standard; *хий мор*, is a powerful, albeit matterless entity which exists in every person, without which no one can live; because *хий* is [like] a horse on which the person 'rides', this entity is called *хийморь*; it is not only valuable, but is also the force which helps to protect one's natural life and helps one to be bright, sharp, and lively and in good health; the 'book'<sup>28</sup> reports all signs which cause one's *хий морь* to flourish, reduce its store, etc.; one's *хий морь* is directly connected with the year in which one was born, all part of the Buddhist system; good luck, fortune, spirits, morale; a favorable sign or omen'

хар лус сахиус - 'dark/evil or common/ordinary deities of land and water; guardian spirits'

### Terms conditionally recommended:

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<sup>27</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

<sup>28</sup> i.e., the Buddhist book(s) which the lams consult to tell one's 'fortune.'

None

Recommended terms:

The following two Mongolian phrases are not associated with traditional religious concepts and are terminology from one of the Bible translations, translated from Hebrew or Greek for certain of the names of God. They were often difficult for people to understand immediately as terms for deity because they are not 'religious' words, but rather descriptive. Once the terms were explained, however, people comprehended them easily and connected them with the Bible meaning for 'God.' There are other acceptable terms, of course, translated with correct meaning from Hebrew or Greek for other names of God, but these are the ones used in this present survey.

Ертөнцийн Эзэн - 'lord of the universe'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>29</sup> -- '*Ертөнц*' is a word which means variously 'world', 'cosmos', or 'universe,' the suffix '-ийн' means, in this case, 'of the', and the word '*Эзэн*' means 'owner', 'master', 'holder', or 'responsible person.' Thus the full term could be taken in a number of ways, i.e., 'owner/master/responsible person of the world/cosmos/universe'. The primary sense of the words '*ертөнц*' (world, cosmos, universe) and '*Эзэн*' (lord, master, ruler, owner, proprietor) have virtually no meanings which are at variance with the Bible sense for GOD (the almighty), but because '*ертөнц*' does have some ambiguity in its meaning, any teacher using it to express the meaning of the God of the Bible should be certain their hearers are understanding that the God of the Bible is the Lord of the entire universe, not a portion of it. To constantly call Him *Одгаригс дэлхий ертөнцийн Эзэн* ('the Lord of the universe which entails the earth, solar system, and entire rest of all the known and unknown cosmos') would be very clumsy, but certainly some such clear explanation must be kept in learners' minds.

There is, therefore, a strong necessity for further teaching to establish who '*Ертөнцийн Эзэн*' is, i.e., the supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation. The necessity of teaching more fully who *Ертөнцийн Эзэн* is does not, as we emphasize above, stem from having to correct wrong meaning. There are no secondary senses in the words of this phrase which are in conflict with Bible truth.

Nearly all comment on this term from our correspondents was neutral or mildly positive. One person said that this term is exactly right to describe the nature of the God of the Bible, while another said that *Ертөнцийн Эзэн* was not an intimate term, but seemed to refer to a being who was far off. This is something about the nature of the God of the Bible which of course should be carefully taught.

Их Эзэн - 'one who is the owner and master of all; the great lord'

This is the term used in one of the translations to express 'Adon'.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS  
on elicitations for the semantic domain:

*REPENTANCE*

Our subjects free listed a total of 30 terms for the semantic domain REPENTANCE, some of which terms reflect something of Bible definitions in their primary sense. Adding one which is in a Bible translation to the list makes a total of 31 terms researched. Following the survey and in looking over the data, it became obvious that the question we had initially asked our respondents about this term was in itself flawed, in that as stated, instead of eliciting words and phrases which implied turning to right after having turned from wrong, it simply elicits words and phrases which imply turning from wrong. An alphabetized list follows:

<i>байх</i>	<i>засаж хүмүүжүүлэх</i>	<i>хийгээгүй (гэх)</i>
<i>байчих</i>	<i>засах</i>	<i>хийхгүй гэж андгайлах</i>
<i>болих</i>	<i>засрах зогсох наманчлах</i>	<i>хийхгүй гэж тангараглах</i>
<i>гарах</i>	<i>орхих</i>	<i>хуучин амьдралаа орхих</i>
<i>гэмт амьдралаа орхих</i>	<i>татаж авах</i>	<i>хүмүүжих</i>
<i>гэмших</i>	<i>ухаарах</i>	<i>хэзээ ч хийхгүй (гэх)</i>
<i>давтахгүй байх</i>	<i>ухамсарлан ойлгох</i>	<i>цагаадах</i>
<i>дахиад тэгэхгүй (гэх)</i>	<i>хаях</i>	<i>цээрлэх чадсангүй</i>
<i>дахин хийхгүй (гэх)</i>		<i>яршиг (гэх)</i>
<i>ерөөсөө болих</i>		
<i>жигших</i>		

REPENTANCE semantic domain data summary statement

According to our correspondents, in the act of repentance, intention is very important, and a repentant person's expression of that intention will give some insight into the depth of his/her decision. Some people felt that a connection with religion might help a person to truly repent. Just feeling bad about wrongdoing or expressing sorrow over it means very little, but on the other hand, people whose emotion is not engaged at all in their decision to stop doing something wrong probably will have a higher incidence of repeating that wrongdoing. A person should own up to his/her own sin, and therefore a wrongdoer who denies responsibility for having done wrong is the very worst kind of person. Our correspondents considered a genuine vow to abandon wrong to be an exceedingly telling indication of intention. They felt that a person who has been raised right will have a conscience bent toward abandoning wrong.

Discussion among some of the correspondents indicate that they think very negatively about a person who only feels bad or is worried about his/her wrongdoing, but doesn't change his/her actions. They feel that a person's conscience tells him/her to do right and that even though some evil things, such as drinking too much alcohol, are very hard to stop doing, if such a person is really sincere and not just pretending, he may change by making a decision to do so. Sometimes a person does not really want to abandon his/her wrong, but even while deploring that fact, goes back to the wrong again and again.

This semantic domain was interesting in that there were a fair number of terms and/or phrases which have no connection with religion of any sort and which, with suitable modification, might therefore be acceptable to use to express the action of 'turning back, hence, away; changing the mind, primarily changing from present action toward the new action, especially turning from wrong to right.' It was very obvious that this is an issue which our correspondents considered to be very serious. They especially felt that an expression of

intention to turn from wrong was a very telling matter and that a person who did not fulfill such an intention was especially culpable.

Terms not recommended for Bible teaching:

This term includes the completive suffix, and as such does not express intention.

байчих - 'to already be stopped (doing something)'

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The following term is an interesting word, in that it does express sorrow over wrongdoing, which certainly is not a bad thing. Because such an emotion does not guarantee, nor even express an intention of not repeating that wrongdoing, and also says nothing about doing right, we do not consider it acceptable for the Bible meaning of repent.

гэмших - 'to regret, be sorry for (having done something); to understand one's own wrong'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>30</sup> -- While being sorry for one's wrongdoing is a positive start, our correspondents said that while a person who uses this word is worried and remorseful about having done wrong, there is no real indication of whether or not the person will repeat the behavior which generated the regret. This term does not disclose the primary Bible meaning of the word 'repent,' that is, to turn back, hence, away; to change the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right.

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The meanings of the next two words and a verbal phrase, border on the idea of self-reformation. While repentance does indeed imply reformation and transformation of some sort, one of its primary senses is that of sorrow over wrongdoing which results in going a different way. These words have no such implication and therefore are not recommended.

засах - 'to fix or correct something which is lacking in some way,' etc.

засрах - 'to become better, to reform, turn over a new leaf'

татаж авах - 'to pull (oneself or someone else) out (of something, e.g., wrongdoing)'

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This next term we do not recommend does demonstrate stopping something, but the term has such general meaning that the amount of modification it requires to cause it to demonstrate the central meaning of 'repentance' seems unnecessary, given the abundance of terms available.

зорсох - 'to stop (doing something); to stand up'

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<sup>30</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'



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The next word requires that someone in authority perform a speech act, declaring a person innocent, in much the same way one in authority pronounces the Olympics as begun, the timing of an exam as finished, or two people as married. Thus it is not a word which reflects the actions or intent of the person him/herself to turn away from wrongdoing and is not acceptable to express repentance.

цагаадах - 'to be cleared, exonerated, declared innocent; also, to be too white; to be overly optimistic; to be trusting or guileless'

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Two words speak of becoming a good person. This meaning, however, is somewhat connected with being 'well-reared' from a human standpoint, does not imply very strongly the idea of turning from wrong ways to enter into right ones, and therefore is not acceptable to express the Bible meaning of repentance.

засаж хүмүүжүүлэх - 'to correct (something wrong) and be caused to become a good person'

хүмүүжих - 'to grow into a person, become a good person; to enjoy a cultured, educated upbringing; to come to have knowledge, education, and professional ability'

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The following unacceptable word is very closely connected with folk Buddhism, which along with its doublet partner word *залбарах*, connects actions like placing the hands together and repeating formulaic prayers with recitation of one's sins.

наманчлах - 'to pray, entrusting oneself to a high religious authority to avert one from hindrances or obstacles which one might meet; to put one's hands together in prayer and confess penitence for one's misdeeds; to remember and regret one's sins'

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The next phrase is a trifle embarrassing for this author because it is very likely that the person who said it was irritated at the time regarding being pulled away from her work in order to entertain foreigners. In its common usage, it means something like 'Oh, bother!'

яршиг (гэх) - 'to say "trouble, bother, burden"

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These two words, which we do not particularly recommend, express understanding something rather deeply, perhaps indeed one's wrongdoing, but they do not imply what the result of that understanding will be. Should they be used in conjunction with other explanation which demonstrates that one is understanding sin and eschewing it, they are not altogether wrong.

ухаарах - 'to comprehend, grow wiser'

ухамсарлан ойлгох - 'to become conscious of, comprehend, understand, grasp, and appreciate the nature of the appearance of things, their meaning and reasons'

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To simply declare that one has not done something (i.e., wrong) avoids facing the consequences of wrongdoing, as in the following unacceptable terms.

хийгээгүй (гэх) - 'to say (of oneself, he/she) did not do (something)'

чадсангүй (гэх) - 'to say (one) could not (do something)'

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Because this word means to abhor and forbid doing something (wrong), but does not actually imply turning from that action, we do not recommend it.

цээрлэх - 'to give up, abhor, renounce, shun, or refrain from doing or saying anything which is prohibited; to taboo, forbid, or prohibit (something)'

#### Terms conditionally recommended:

The next phrases which we conditionally recommend attract attention in that a person is saying that he/she will not do something again, something like a promise. They are rather weak statements, however, in that there is nothing said about what one is stopping, whether right or wrong. They might be all right to use along with full explanation of what 'repentance' is.

дахиад тэгэхгүй (гэх) - 'to say (one) will not do something again'

дахин хийхгүй (гэх) - 'to say (one) will not do something again'

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Although the following phrase fully means to do right, it has no implication in and of itself of turning from wrong to do right. If it were more fully modified to include such a meaning, it would be fine.

амьдралын зөв замаар явах - 'to go on the right way in life'

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The following phrases all have a full meaning of stopping something, but they have no implication in and of themselves of turning to do right. More fully modified with such a meaning they might be fine in a given context.

байх - '(a secondary sense of the 'to be' verb) to stop, cease, or give up (doing something), used as a transitive, i.e., to stop 'something', whether an action or object'

болих - 'to desist from, cut out (doing something); to decline, get worse'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>31</sup> -- According to our correspondents, the primary sense of this word has a strong meaning, and a person who uses it will stop doing whatever he/she did before and not do it again. The term is, however, very general, and means stopping doing any action. If it were used, therefore, it would have to include full Bible meaning, that is, to turn back, hence, away; to change the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right.

гарах - '(to leave;) to leave off (doing something); for something to begin; etc.'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>30</sup> - Our correspondents say that this word is very general, similar to *байчих* or *болих*, and a person using this word will indeed leave off doing something, which may include bad or wrong things or not. In order for such a word to bring out Bible meaning, i.e., to turn back, hence, away; to change the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right, it would require much modification to specify what the person came out from, etc.

давтахгүй байх - 'to not relapse or repeat (doing something)'

жигших - 'to absolutely not correspond in one's mind with something; to turn against, go off (something); to be disgusted at, loathe, or hate (something)'

орших - 'to abandon or leave (something) behind; to cast;' etc.

хаях - 'to abandon, give up, or reject (something)'

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Because the sentences in which these three phrases occur must include what the person has completely stopped doing, they are quite strong statements in and of themselves. In order to be acceptable, however, they should include an implication of beginning to do right.

ерөөсөө болих - 'to completely stop (doing something)'

хийхгүй гэж андгайлах - 'to take an oath or swear that (one) will not do (something)'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>30</sup> - According to our correspondents, this is a very strong and believable vow, showing strong intention to not do something again, which if not fulfilled, makes the promiser a bad person. If the Bible sense of 'repent', i.e., to turn back, hence, away; to change the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right, were to be clearly revealed to the learner, a teacher would need to emphasize such meaning.

хийхгүй гэж тангараглах - 'to take an oath, make a vow, or swear that (one) will not do (something)'

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<sup>31</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

The next phrase attracts attention in that a person is saying that he/she will never do something, something like a promise, but there is no evidence that he/she has ever done it before. In addition, there is nothing said about the positive side of repentance, that is, doing what is right after stopping doing wrong. This phrase would be acceptable to express repentance if it is fully modified to include the above meanings.

хэзээ ч хийхгүй гэх - 'to say (of oneself, he/she) will never do (something)'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>32</sup>-- Our correspondents reaction to this term was interesting in that they said that although by means of this rather strong expression, a person says that he/she will not ever do something, this is not a vow, and one must watch to see if the person will do, or having done, repeat the action. This brings up the Bible sense for 'repent,' which emphasizes turning back. hence, away; changing the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right. By means of using this term, a person would not be admitting his/her wrong and declaring intention to do right. The term would need to be very thoroughly modified to include the missing meanings.

#### Recommended terms:

Here are the very clearest phrases arising from this survey to express the idea of repentance. the first expressing leaving behind one's sinful life, the other, one's old life, thus implying there will follow a new life, a life not categorized as sinful. Since leaving an 'old' life might also be used to describe entering into, for example, a new profession, that phrase should be in a clear context of eschewing sin. One of these is an expression from one of the Bible translations, but the other emerged from our survey questions.

гэмт амьдралаа орхих - 'to abandon one's errant life'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>31</sup> - Our correspondents say that this is a very strong statement of intention, and a person using it really means it and will not do wrong again, but will start doing right. The phrase is a very succinct expression demonstrating the Bible sense, to turn back, hence, away; to change the mind, primarily a change from present action toward the new action, especially to turn from wrong to right.

хучин амьдралаа орхих - 'to abandon one's old life'

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<sup>32</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND COMMENTS  
on elicitations for the semantic domain:

SIN

Our subjects free listed a total of 39 terms for the semantic domain SIN, a number of which terms reflect something of Bible definition in their primary sense. Some of these terms are in (a) Bible translation(s). An alphabetized list follows:

<i>алдаа</i>	<i>бүтэхгүй зүйл</i>	<i>нүгэл</i>
<i>аюултай юм</i>	<i>гайтай юм</i>	<i>нүгэл хилэнц</i>
<i>бага хэрэг</i>	<i>гэм</i>	<i>өөдгүй юм</i>
<i>балай юм</i>	<i>гэм буруутай үйл</i>	<i>санамсаргүй хийсэн (юм)</i>
<i>болчимгүй юм</i>	<i>гэм нүгэл</i>	<i>том хэрэг</i>
<i>бузар юм</i>	<i>гэмт хэрэг</i>	<i>төвөгтэй юм</i>
<i>булай юм</i>	<i>гэнэн хэрэг</i>	<i>үйлийн үр</i>
<i>буруу ажил</i>	<i>дэмий юм</i>	<i>хариуцлагагүй юм</i>
<i>буруу зүйл</i>	<i>зарчимгүй явдал</i>	<i>хэцгий үйл хэрэг</i>
<i>буруу номын юм</i>	<i>зөрчил</i>	<i>зөрчил</i>
<i>буруу үйл</i>	<i>лай</i>	<i>эндэгдэл</i>
<i>буруу хэрэг</i>	<i>муу үйл</i>	<i>ял</i>
<i>буруу юм</i>	<i>муухай юм</i>	

SIN semantic domain data summary statement

The words or phrases our correspondents suggested to express acts of wrongdoing were various words for mistakes, big or small bad deeds, euphemistic forms, filthy wrong, wrongs categorized by folk-Buddhism, dangerous matters, indeed any wrong act connected with the different voices within law, religion, and ordinary life, whether general or specific, serious or simple, official or friendly, purposefully or accidentally done.

In discussion surrounding this topic, correspondents said that committing a crime or doing any wrong deed is a bad sin. According to the Buddhist list, there are ten dark, bad sins, or *нүгэл*. They felt that if one puts his/her palms together in ritual prayer for forgiveness (*наманчлан залбирах*), probably a deity would forgive. In everyday life, although there may not be any official or religious law concerning such a thing, if a person does such things as avoiding doing his/her own work or if one is disorderly and carouses instead of using his/her natural gifts to improve life, that, too, is a sin. Of course, sometimes people do wrong unexpectedly.

Our correspondents felt that even a mistake was important because it affects one's life, usually in a negative way. Such a matter may affect others, too, and may swell into a great matter if not addressed at once. Some of the euphemisms are expressions of rebuke which although expressed softly, may imply a stronger meaning than what is expressed outwardly.

The term *гэм* is considered by some Mongolians to refer to some really unimportant offense, almost not worth thinking about. It is, however, considered in the category of trespasses against a standard, either internal or external, which may be connected with either secular or religious issues. We say 'either' because at one point a correspondent divided all the words in this semantic domain into two categories, 'religious' and 'secular,' and to our surprise, even though this word *гэм* is very general, he included it in the 'religious' category. There is, however, no such implication in the dictionaries.

Terms not recommended for Bible teaching:

There are a number of terms and phrases offered for 'sin' which generally fall into the category of 'mistake,' that is, an act or thought which unintentionally deviates from what is correct, right, or true. While that may certainly be true of sin, sin is much more than this in that it is a deviation from an authoritatively established, divine law.

*алдаа* - 'an accident, mistake, error or shortcoming; an act in which one has broken a law, gone against regulations, or contravened discipline; waste without profit'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>33</sup>-- Our correspondents described an *алдаа* as a mistake, and whether it is on purpose or not, even if it is a simple thing, it is wrong and bad, especially if connected with one's life. The term is inadequate to express the Bible sense for 'sin,' i.e., a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind.

*бага хэрэг* - '(an official or private act or action of little consequence; a small need or necessity); a small act which is against the law; a small matter, offense, or wrong deed'

*буруу ажил*- 'something wrong, an error or mistake'

*буруу зүйл* - 'a wrong sort of matter or thing'

*буруу үйл* - 'a wrong act or deed'

*буруу юм*- 'something wrong'

*санамсаргүй хий(сэн юм)* - 'something done unexpectedly, unintentionally'

*эндэгдэл*- 'a mistake, blunder, omission, error, in doublet with *алдаа*; a sudden accident, danger, mishap, or disaster, in doublet with *осол* or *аюул*

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Quite a few people offered terms and phrases for wrongdoing, which while they are indeed indicative of transgression, are closely connected with human ideas of right and wrong and thus not acceptable to express the Bible sense for 'sin.'

*гэнэн хэрэг* - 'a blunder or mistake done by one who is not experienced in the world'

*зарчимгүй явдал*- 'an act or event in which one does not conform with some sort of theory, teaching, science, custom, or decorum'

*муу үйл* - 'a bad deed'

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<sup>33</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

*ТОМ ХЭРЭГ* - '(an official or private act or action of some import; a strong need or necessity); a large matter, offense, or wrong deed'

*ХЭРЭГ* - '(an official or private act or action; a need or necessity); trouble or an offense; a bad deed or act'

*ЯЛ* - 'a criminal act which is against a nation's laws or public order; the punishment of such wrongdoing or crime'

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The meanings of these following phrases which we do not consider acceptable either typify or border on euphemism, some of them more connected with embarrassing social violations, than with accountability to a higher power for wrongdoing, others probably indicating that the respondents were loathe to talk about sin.

*БАЛАЙ ЮМ* - '(blind); something silly, foolish, stupid, ignorant, or backward'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>34</sup> -- According to our correspondents, this term means an act which is on the bad side of silly, stupid, or unimportant, with generally a similar sense as ;*tbna* /*b*. It does not express the Bible sense for 'sin,' that is, a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind.

*БОЛЧИМГҮЙ ЮМ* - 'something silly, careless, frivolous, reckless, imprudent, or incautious'

*БҮТЭХГҮЙ ЗҮЙЛ* - 'an unsuccessful or unfinished sort of matter; something which is good-for-nothing, inferior'

*ГАЙТАЙ ЮМ* - 'some danger or trouble which has happened suddenly; a troublesome influence; something harmful or dangerous; something which includes the main reason for suffering; something unlucky, troublesome, or ill-fated'

*ДЭМИЙ ЮМ* - 'something worthless, idle, vain, useless, aimless, without purpose, empty'

*ЛАЙ* - 'retribution, fate, or karma; misfortune, trouble, burden'

*ӨӨДГҮЙ ЮМ* - 'one who behaves him/herself as lazy, a liar, a thief, and/or a fighter; doings which are unsuccessful; something useless, wretched, or good-for-nothing'

*ТӨВӨГТЭЙ ЮМ* - 'a matter which is difficult, hard, complicated, or troublesome; often spelled *түвэгтэй*

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<sup>34</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

*хариуцлагагүй юм* - 'work which is slovenly, that is, done on the surface only; an assigned responsibility which is fulfilled poorly and sloppily; some matter of irresponsibility'

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These next three unacceptable phrases are again secular expressions which, while they certainly express the deep repugnance one should have toward sin, do not imply 'missing the mark or the right path.'

*бузар юм* - 'something filthy, impure, abominable, dirty, or defiled'

*булай юм* - 'something dirty, filthy, disgusting, embarrassing, vile, or abominable'

*муухай юм* - 'something awful to the senses, unpleasant to hear, horrid, ugly, or nasty; a euphemism for the opposite meaning'

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These next elicitations are overtly connected with folk Buddhism and thus not acceptable to us.

*буруу номын юм* - 'something connected with heresy'

*нүгэл* - 'the violation of something which is forbidden according to a religion's rules, in particular, the Buddhist religion's; a sin or sacrilege'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>35</sup> -- According to our correspondents, this term expresses the worst wrong and is the very strongest Buddhist word for 'sin', i.e., disobeying parents, stealing, going against the established customs and traditions, killing, plus other listed acts. There are other kinds of wrongdoing which, while indeed they are sin, are not serious, and therefore not '*нүгэл*'.

The Bible does not categorize sin as serious and not serious. Sin is sin, i.e., a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind. In addition, the Bible does categorize sin insofar as whether it is against God or against man. The Buddhist system does not do so. In that system, there seem to be no sins, 'serious' or otherwise, against a deity, only against one's fellow man.

*нүгэл хилэнц* - 'the doublet for *youth*; a forbidden or evil act which breaks the rules of [the Buddhist] religion; an act which does damage to the interests of others; sins; a sinful deed or act; a crime'

*үйлийн үр* - 'karma; the fruits of one's actions; cause and effect; a [Buddhist] religious phrase formed by the combination of the two words; *үйл* is the realization of the good and evil sides of the mind, or desire and interest which rises from a person's character, intelligence, and/or talent. Either of these two sides, good or evil, comes to light by means of a person's self, tongue, or mind. The *үйл*, or action, is brought about from every desire and interest of a person, and the *үр*, or result, comes forth from that action, and from this, a person's

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<sup>35</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'



thoughts and desires become actions. In other words, good actions come from a good mind, and from good actions, good results arise, [religiously categorized] good works increase, and one experiences joy. On the other hand, evil actions come from an evil mind, and from evil actions, evil results arise, sin increases, and one experiences suffering.'

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The following not-recommended phrase is used rather regularly by many who claim Christ in the major metropolitan areas as a doublet which incorporates large and small sins. The phrase is, however, closely identified with Buddhism by those who are not Christians.

*ГЭМ НҮГЭЛ* - 'a misdeed'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>36</sup>-- Our correspondents say that this doublet denotes serious sin according to Buddhism, that it is a very strong religious phrase delineating the ten black sins of Buddhism, which lists ten good acts and ten bad acts [which are: killing any creature, beginning with worms and bugs; stealing; exploiting people; telling lies and deceiving; gossiping and slandering; being jealous and envious; coveting possessions, position, or fame; being selfish and possessive; and thinking evil of and not trusting others].

The Bible, however, does not categorize sin as serious and not serious. Sin is sin, i.e., a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind. In addition, the Bible does categorize sin insofar as whether it is against God or against man. The Buddhist system does not do so. In that system, there seem to be no sins, 'serious' or otherwise, against a deity, only against one's fellow man.

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This next is a phrase which certainly indicates the respondent's understanding of the seriousness of a situation, but does not carry any moral implication, and thus we do not recommend using it.

*аюултай юм* - 'something which causes suffering or harm; something dangerous, terrible, dreadful, or fearful'

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This not-recommended phrase is a description, howbeit a somewhat narrow one, of evil, which directs the hearer's attention to its violence, rather than to any responsibility of the perpetrator to an outside standard.

*хэрцгий үйл* - 'an aggressive, cruel, fierce, wild, savage, or brutal act'

Terms conditionally recommended:

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<sup>36</sup>Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

The following word is a very general word which might be used as an alternative word for 'sin', or perhaps as a modifier for another word with a more succinct meaning.

*буруу хэрэг* - 'a wrong matter or deed, a crime or offense'

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These two responses are directly connected with violations of a law of some kind.

*гэмт хэрэг* - 'a crime, an act which causes one to be guilty'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>37</sup> -- According to our correspondents, this phrase describes the activity of a criminal, i.e., a serious offense against the law, officially recognized as criminal action. Therefore this is a legal term, rather than a religious one. Since the Bible definition of sin is a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind, one might be able to use the term, emphasizing that the law which one sins against is God's law and therefore is against God Himself.

*зөрчил* - 'an offense, transgression, violation, or contravention, especially of the law; an act whereby one struggles and goes against the standard or legality of a matter, or does not follow instructions'

#### Recommended terms:

These terms are very general, encompassing any sort of misdoing, thus emphasizing the purity of the standard against which one has committed such an act.

*гэм* - 'a case of having broken a law or regulation, or the influence or consequences of such an action; an action committed apart from law, ethics, decency; a crime; defect or damage; a fault or mistake; a hidden illness or its remaining cause'

FULL-DATA TERM<sup>36</sup> -- Our correspondents consider a *гэм* to be a medium level wrongdoing, like *алдаа*, only stronger, a bad act which does not have to be connected with religion, a relatively unimportant matter, almost not worth thinking about. It is, however, considered in the category of offenses against a standard, either internal or external. Neither the term's primary sense, nor any of the secondary senses do injury to the Bible meaning of 'sin.'

Because the Mongols' idea of right and wrong is so strongly connected with their experience with folk Buddhism, it is of vital importance to teach the Bible meaning for 'sin,' that they may fully understand that it is a falling away from or missing the mark or the right path, breaking divine law, anything which is contrary to the expressed will of the God of the Bible, whether written or implanted into the heart or mind.

*гэм буруутай үйл* - 'an errant, faulty act'

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<sup>37</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

## ANOMALOUS COMMENTS

In our summary statements of our subjects' information, we presented information expressed by more than one person. There were, however, atypical and therefore statistically insignificant comments expressed occasionally by someone for each of the meaning domains, and we mention them as follows:

From 'Eternal Life' One correspondent from the later period, and he exposed to the Bible, proposed that only a person who is with the eternal God has this kind of life. Another from the earlier period thought of Jesus Christ. Another suggested it means life in *ДИВААЧИН*.

From 'Place of Eternal Suffering' One person said that the place of suffering is not a real place, but is in one's mind. Another equated it with the eternal place of suffering in the Bible and said that if a person is good, he will go to *ТЭНГЭР*, if not, to *ТАМ*. Also one lone person said that it is Erlik's messenger himself who is the one who decides who are good and who are evil people.

From 'God' One person connected *Гончигсум* with *богд*, perhaps meaning he highly reveres this *бурхан*. One person thought maybe the name *Далай ээж* might also actually mean 'mother,' as in a person's mother. One person said that a person who lives a good life may become a *дарь эх*. One thought *Ертөнцийн Эзэн* might certainly be someone whom the Dalai Lam sent, his student perhaps. One person did not think there is any real connection between *тэнгэр бурхан* and Buddhism. One correspondent said that lams always and only do good things.

From 'Repentance' One correspondent said that a person using *хийхгүйгэж тангараглах* makes his/her vow after clasping his/her own hands together. Another correspondent suggested that a person who would say they cannot repent is not a Khalkh Mongol, but a proud person, not accepting his/her own responsibility.

From 'Sin' One person said that *Лай* has little connection with the subject of wrongdoing.

## FURTHER OBSERVATIONS

### Revisiting primary/secondary senses

On pages 15-18 of this present paper, we explored primary/secondary senses as one of the examples of important issues which all translators must consider in their work. As we said, according to translation experts, the primary sense of a word or phrase is what comes to the mind of most people when they consider it in isolation. Secondary senses will always share some 'thread of meaning' with the primary sense, but will need to be considered in special context before they are comprehensible (Larson, p. 7; Beekman and Callow, p. 94). It is always meaning which must be considered first in translation, that is, the translator's goal should be that the readers of the target language text should be able to understand the same meaning as did the readers of the original text.

We will now reexplore primary/secondary senses -- in particular disparity of those senses through translation -- in light of the data we have presented on spiritual terms from the Mongolian countryside. Although the entire collocation of folk-Buddhist terms which we elicited are worthy of further study, we will limit our deeper exploration to one word, the term *бурхан*, which is one of the full-data terms<sup>38</sup> for this present survey.

There has been rather a good deal of discussion that the word *бурхан* has the same sort of general meaning or significance as does the English word 'god,' that is, little-g god, one of the secondary senses of 'God' in the English dictionaries. The real Bible meaning comes, of course, from Hebrew and Greek, and therefore whatever meanings the term 'God/god' has in English is not of great moment for finding a term in Mongolian. Even so, the idea of the importance of the English meaning has probably gained credence in Mongolia first of all, because of the present emphasis on Bible translation from the English language, and second, because translation principles are often not well-understood.<sup>39</sup>

The English word 'god' descends from a word which in various languages sifts down to mean 'almighty', the same sense as that of the Hebrew word 'el'. The primary English dictionary meaning<sup>40</sup> is 'the being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness whom men worship as creator and ruler of the universe.' The primary sense in common usage is 'God of the Bible.' Its secondary dictionary senses are: 'a being or object believed to have more than natural attributes and powers and to require man's worship [the term of widest-ranging significance, i.e., little-g god]'; 'a person or thing of supreme value'; and 'a powerful ruler.'

According to the definitions gleaned both from this present survey correspondents and from the meanings in the available Mongolian dictionaries, the primary sense<sup>41</sup> of the word *бурхан* is 'Buddha,' in a general sense. We feel, however, that the most usual secondary sense, that is, 'idol / worshipped thing' has gained such strength in common usage that it might legitimately be considered as another primary sense. As we pointed out in the full-data explanation of this word, the countryside Mongols perceive of a *бурхан* as a very general word for things worthy of worship, in particular for idols or pictures which people can look at and handle, of which there are thousands of different ones with different names which are personally worshipped by individuals. Other secondary senses are generic 'deity (the term of widest-ranging significance, i.e., anything worshipped)', and 'tomb / shrine'.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf p. 29, this paper, for an explanation of 'full-data'

<sup>39</sup> Some excellent references for the study of translation principles are Bible Translation, by Katharine Barnwell, Translating the Word of God, by John Beekman and John Callow, and Meaning-based Translation, by Mildred L. Larson.

<sup>40</sup> Please see Chart #2

<sup>41</sup> Please see Chart #3

## Primary / secondary senses for 'GOD'

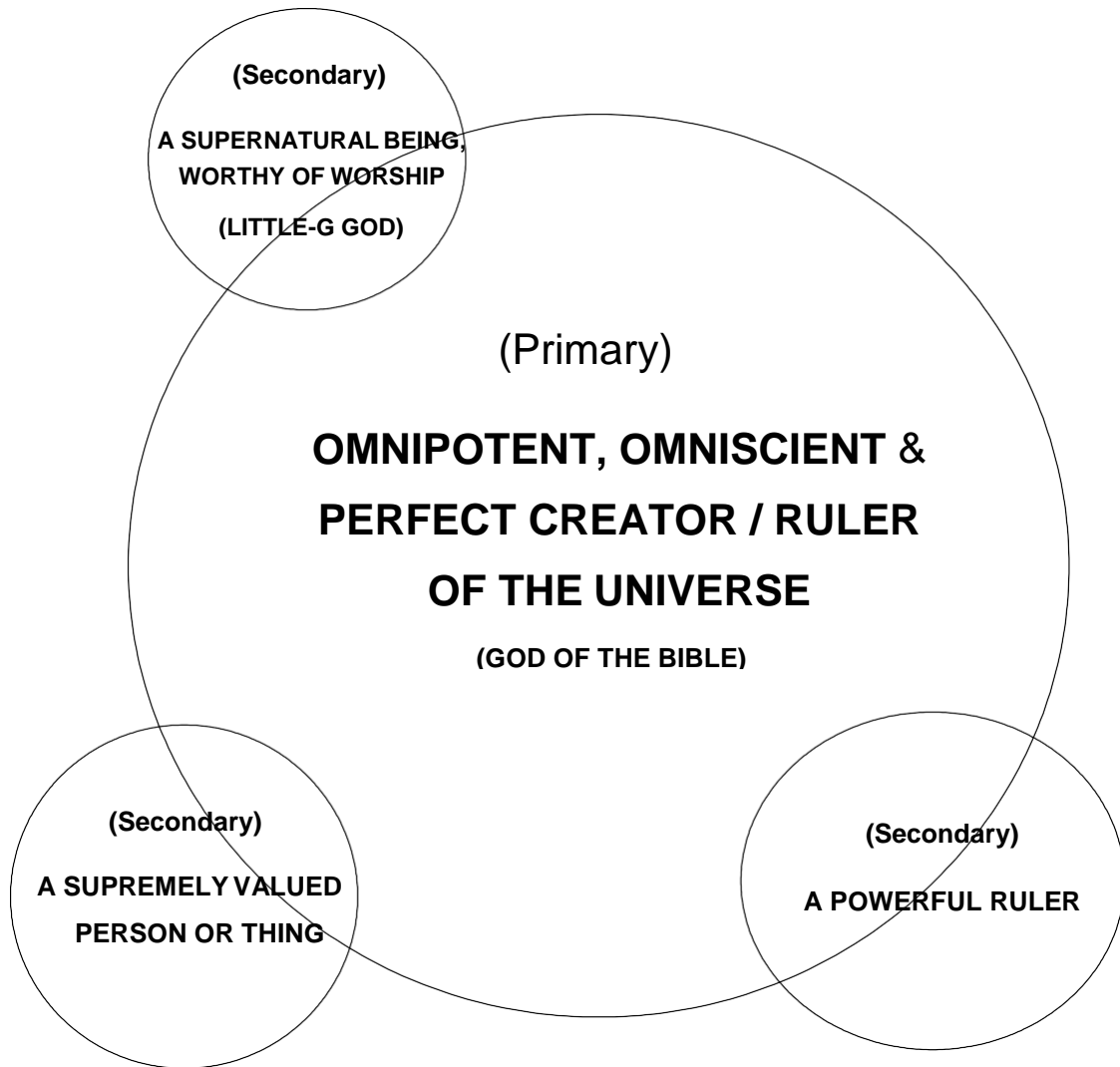


Chart #2

## Primary / secondary senses for 'БУРХАН'

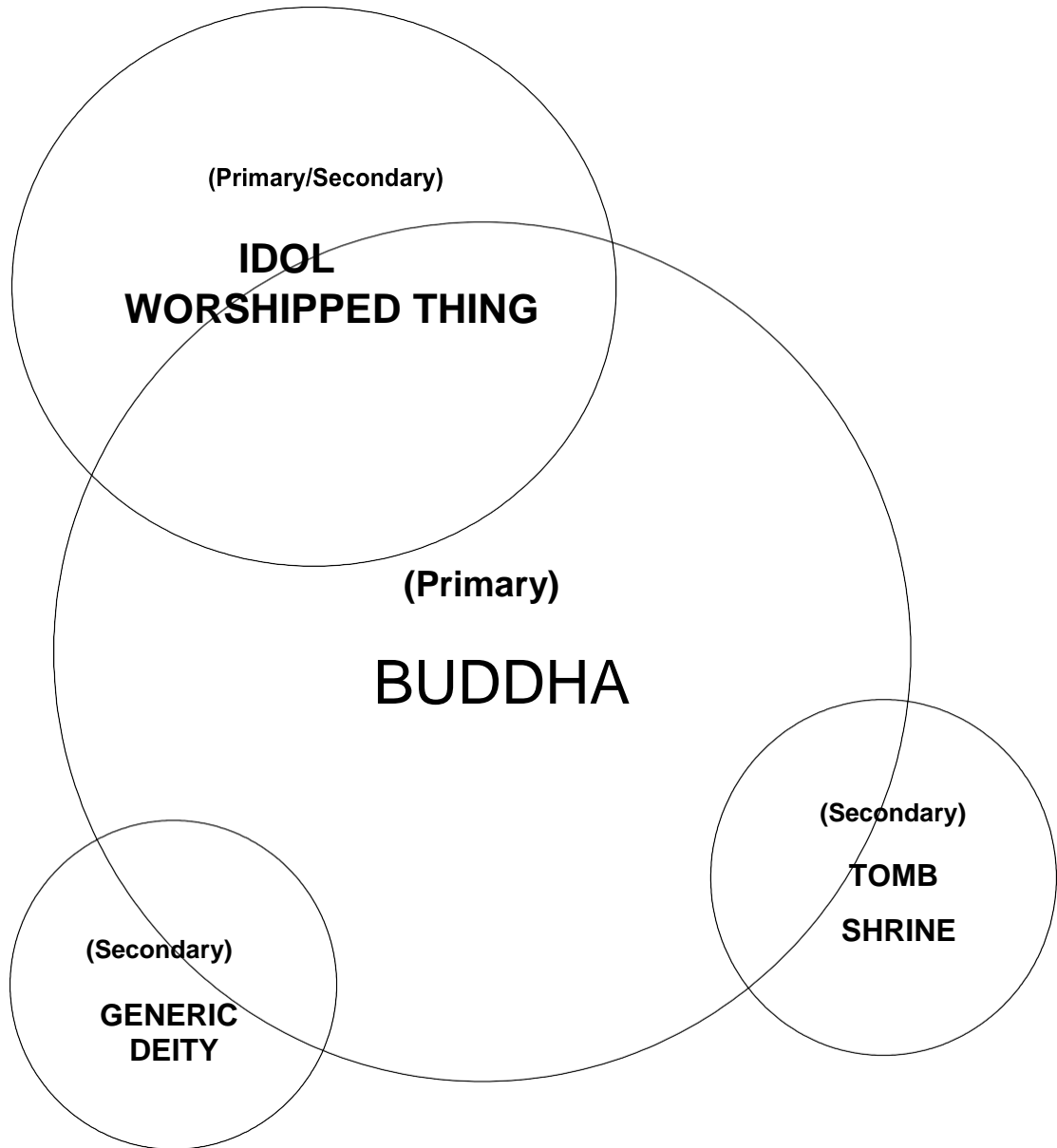


Chart #3

Remembering that a translator might be justified in using the term *бурхан* if its primary sense were the same as the primary sense of the word 'god,' we must see immediately that the primary senses do not match at all. This is a critical issue. The primary sense of *бурхан*, 'Buddha,' and its corollary primary sense, 'idol/worshipped thing,' which is understood most prominently in common usage Mongolian, are both very strong understandings and very far from the genuine meaning of the God-of-the-Bible, i.e., the unique one who is the supreme personal intelligence, a Spirit who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, immutable, self-sufficient, the knowable creator and preserver of all things, perfect moral ruler/governor of the universe, utterly sovereign, wholly just, altogether true, completely loving, merciful, and gracious, eternally and vitally connected with His creation. Therefore, it requires a great deal of explanation in order for people to understand the word *бурхан* at all in its new context as referring to a unique Deity. Indeed the term demands continued repetition of that explanation in order to keep the source language meaning in mind.

Translating from English into Mongolian, some think that the little-g 'god' secondary senses in both languages seem so very similar, that should justify the use of *бурхан* for the God of the Bible. Remembering the issue of contextual clues being of paramount importance in understanding secondary senses, because little-g 'god' is a secondary sense in both English and Mongolian, we must consider what the collocates<sup>42</sup> are in each language. In English, little-g 'god' refers to things which people worship *other* than the God of the Bible. This is certainly not the meaning anyone translating the Bible is trying to transfer into Mongolian. In Mongolian, the secondary sense of generic 'god' (little-g), again means something which *others*, i.e., outsiders, worship, and again, this is not the meaning which Mongolians need to understand. The God of the Bible is unique, not one of many, and He is the God of the whole universe, including Mongolia and Mongolians.

Summing up the above on primary/secondary senses of 'god' and '*бурхан*':

- The source primary and target primary senses do not match, but clash
- The source primary and target secondary senses do not match, but clash
- The source secondary and target secondary senses of 'little-g god' match somewhat, but the meaning of 'little-g god' is not the meaning of 'God of the Bible'

Very directly, the primary sense of 'god', i.e., 'God of the Bible,' could not be successfully translated as '*бурхан*' without huge amounts of widespread propaganda and many decades of reiteration in order to assure that the term might call immediately into the minds of most Mongols, believers in Jesus or not, both the denotative and connotative meanings which are intended in the Bible. Indeed, such an end could certainly only be obtained if the Buddhists themselves were in favor of such a use of their name '*бурхан*/Buddha,' and we do not understand that at all from this survey's correspondents.

What do the Buddhists think about using the term *бурхан* for the God of the Bible? They do not approve it in any way. Not only did our survey subjects understand the vast difference, but Buddhist scholars in Mongolia are also concerned. For just one example, in a 24 November 1999 article in 'Dzuunii Medee' Tsedengiin Namsrai explains that '*Бурхан*' and '*ТЭНГЭР*' are mutually exclusive terms and that to use them for Jesus is a shameful deception of the Mongolian people. Furthermore, he asserts that a translation of the Bible should be in "very beautiful Mongolian which appeals to the masses of the population." His critique of the Bible version, the New Testament of which came out in 1996, makes it devastatingly clear that "every single sentence is so confused as to be impossible to comprehend for any

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<sup>42</sup> entities which are grouped or classed together

Mongolian person. In this way they are insulting and reviling the Bible, which is one of the precious items of the history of mankind."

Please consider that if using the most basic term '*бурхан*' causes such deep problems in teaching ordinary Mongolians to truly comprehend Bible truth, one might expect to see similar problems in using the entire collocation of Mongolian religious terms for comparable reasons. Indeed this is so. The folk-Buddhist terms, words, and phrases must be used as a group. One cannot mix them with secular terms and phrases, such as choosing to never use '*бурхан*', but using the folk-Buddhist terms for Heaven or Hell or sin or repentance, or any of a hundred other spiritual terms. Unfortunately, as soon as learners hear their old words, no matter what you call 'God', they will begin to fall back into their general understanding of their own ancient religion. We know by personal experience that the new 'believers' give lip service to the few new terms the teacher is insisting on using, but just imbue them with the old meaning. "Well," we've actually heard Mongols say to one another when we have taught using mixed terminology (i.e., some folk-Buddhist and some descriptive terms), "that's the word the Christian teacher uses to mean '*бурхан*' or '*дываачин*' (Heaven) or '*там*' (Hell) or..." whatever. One really needs to decide never to use any of the folk-Buddhist terms. Mixing those religious terms with clear, comprehensible terms just furthers syncretism and begs the question of the truth of God's Word being holy, completely set apart, and different from the folk-Buddhist system.

## SUMMARY

We have looked at the central nature of syncretism and have shown that it is a phenomenon which happens naturally when two systems of thought come into contact, and in fact, has happened in numberless situations through time and across the world. These systems might be political, literary, economic, or social, and in these realms, there may be no practical or philosophical reason why two given systems should not meld. If that is the case, there may also be no conflict among the peoples involved. The term 'syncretism', however, especially applies to religion, and because this is so, the term usually has strong pejorative connotations. In particular, if people perceive as pure one or more of the religions which have come into contact with one another, its adherents will likely be anti-syncretist, that is, they will seek to prevent syncretist intrusion into their belief system. This is especially true where there is a text such as the Bible which is perceived as having special integrity. The translation of such a text into another language and culture is, therefore, of special interest, because syncretism very readily begins and is continued through a less-than-acceptable transfer of meaning from a source language into a target language.

We have demonstrated a number of efforts which have been or are being made to bring Christ to the world through various levels of contextualization, indigenization, accommodation, etc. Advocates of this type of evangelization effort use as their justification the desirability of being culturally relevant, and there is a spectrum of opinion about this which goes from those who are wary of admitting the necessity of any cultural sensitivity, to those who are willing, for whatever reason, to claim as converts those who do not even profess to be believers in Christ.

Sometimes pressure for syncretism comes from the 'top-down', i.e., from the strategizing of a given organization's leadership. It is not rare to find such demands connected with globalization, whether such a result is intentional or not. Sometimes, however, that pressure for syncretism arises from the 'bottom-up', that is, from grassroots efforts to reconcile new ideas, whether well or poorly understood, with the given ethnic group's native belief system.

Because of the way a group can conceive of their central study text, such as the Bible, as worthy of preserving in as pure a form as possible, studies in anti-syncretism show how



such groups have sought to maintain the integrity of the original meaning when seeking appropriate terminology for translation into a target language. Part of that search involves sifting through connotative and denotative meanings, either primary or secondary, in both dictionary definitions and common usage.

Buddhist philosophy all over Asia (called the 'yellow religion' in Mongolia) is at its core syncretistic, and its reverence for lams, teachers, and 'books' (Buddhist texts) requires students of Buddhism, especially in Asia, to seek out an instructor, instead of studying on their own. This disposition has caused many Mongolians who are interested in studying Christianity to have little concern over a poor translation of the Bible, but to just listen passively to what they are taught, thus enhancing the development of the vigorous syncretism in Mongolia.

We have presented our collected and analyzed data set in the way of a support for making terminology choices which will maintain the integrity of Bible truth. The main feature of our survey correspondents' responses was the strong connection between reverencing one's parents, one's birthplace, and nature in all its essentials. There were many comments and ideas which were connected with Buddhism, but far stronger was the living, animistic world-view expressed by nearly all of our subjects, whether they overtly claimed Buddhism, folk religion, atheism, or even Christianity, to which two or three correspondents had been exposed.

Our data show that the Mongol herdsmen, as the Mongol version of 'Everyman', consider parents to be creator. Father and mother are highly connected with morals and ethics, traditions, principles, customs, and good habits of life and also with the worship of whatever deity or deities they pass down. Our subjects regard nature with the very highest reverence generally and connect their birth place with their parents, because it was the place where they 'fell to the earth from the mother.' Thus, they hold both place and progenitor in the highest honor. They also highly venerate other entities -- kings (in particular, Chingis), the shaman/odgongs and their rituals, Buddha, whom they usually called *Бурхан* and other specifically named Buddhist deities, teachers of any kind, but Buddhist teachers in particular, other holy men or scholars, shamans, the *ТЭНГЭР* deities, various physical idols, certain features of nature which are held in general reverence, others only by the residents of its local area, the stars in a very personal sense, amulets and their spirits, a particular person's personal aura, rocks from a revered spot which represent the guardian spirit of that place, evil spirits, and finally, the sky as the governing entity for weather and other phenomena which affect the welfare of a life lived in the open, in particular caring for herd animals.

The responsibility of Bible translators in the development of syncretism is therefore pivotal, and the choice of Bible translation which evangelists and Bible teachers have made and are making in Mongolia is key to the future of Mongols having a genuine opportunity of clearly and accurately understanding the Scriptures, and on that basis accepting or rejecting the work of Christ in their behalf.

## CONCLUSIONS

Given that this was a pilot survey, this present data has still weighed heavily in our coming to understand the part that terminology has played in the development of syncretism in Mongolia, and indeed it provides a legitimate basis for our present term usage, especially in light of our concerns regarding such syncretism. We have mentioned more than once something of our early experience in trying to teach the Bible using folk-Buddhist terms and the resulting confusion and lack of understanding which resulted. Foreign Christians, ourselves included, eager to share the Gospel of Christ, have too readily accepted

folk-Buddhist religious terminology as an acceptable vehicle for transferring Bible meaning into the Mongolian language.

We believe that we have shown that the vigorous syncretism which exists at present between Mongolian folk-Buddhism and various versions of Christianity is part of the broad history of such syncretistic belief systems across time and around the world. We have also demonstrated the reasons for such syncretisms, what they are, both positively and negatively, how they develop in a given venue, and what the results have been and are, suggesting that there might be a reason for concern for those who consider the Bible to be unique and to have meaning which is worthy of preserving clearly, accurately, and in natural language.

Our research question for our Mongolian countryside term survey was, "If one describes a Biblical concept, being as careful as possible not to suggest any particular word as an answer, and asks the subject(s) to give a term or expression they might use when speaking about that concept, will any words or phrases surface regularly, and if so, what are they?" After giving our Mongolian countryside subjects broad definitions of our various meaning domains from the Bible and asking them, "What words or phrases do people use to describe or discuss ...?"<sup>43</sup>, we found that they struggled to come up with words or phrases which really matched Bible definitions in any way. Thus they gave us terms which, as best as they were able, or as close as their personal experience allowed, expressed such meanings. Especially where those meanings were connected with anything in the 'religious' category, they had no words or phrases other than those which were folk-Buddhist-based with which they could give answers. We suggest that this is highly indicative of the fact that there is actually no foundation in the lives of the Mongols to understand Bible truth unless that truth is clearly separated in meaning from their native belief system.

Because translators of various versions of the Mongolian New Testament, especially that one which came out in the middle 90's, including its whole Bible which appeared in 2000, have used these folk-Buddhist terms, Bible truth has become mixed with folk-Buddhist teaching. Therefore, people's understanding of the Bible's genuine meaning was not clear nor was it accurate. Whether or not those Bible versions were written in good Mongolian language is a matter for native Mongolians to acknowledge. We believe, however, that even should a Bible come forth written in beautiful Mongolian, if it uses folk-Buddhist terminology, not only will it not satisfactorily or adequately present the true meaning of the Scripture, it will actually further confuse and syncretize the two systems.

We acknowledge that there are two major cultural systems in Mongolia, one in the city which is heavily influenced by expatriates and world communications, and the other in the countryside, far more insular regarding outside influence. Some might want to claim, therefore, that city Mongols understand Bible teaching far more easily than do countryside Mongols, and that therefore, one can use the folk-Buddhist terms with impunity among them. What we have found through the years is that there is a strong subconscious layer of Mongolian culture and tradition even among young Mongol sophisticates, and whether they nod and agree with their foreign friends or not, such Mongols are at heart Mongolian first. The government-sponsored media in particular is fiercely averse to Christianity, and foreigners who live here would have to be blind and deaf not to observe the Buddhist programs which air regularly, the Buddhist philanthropic efforts mirroring Christian aid programs, and the family-centered meetings which have begun to proliferate in Buddhist centers.

In addition, when we arrived in Mongolia fifteen years ago, public display of folk-Buddhism was rather rare. Back then one did see the oboos, mounds of rocks and poles decorated

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<sup>43</sup> Please remember that we were careful not to suggest actual terminology, but explained the meanings for which we were looking for terms.

with occasional silk scarves, but compared to what surrounds us today, even in the city environs, one can only agree that folk-Buddhist worship is burgeoning. To us, using the religious terminology connected with this worship system is tantamount to taking part in its rituals and inviting the Lord Jesus to bless the activity.

To be very clear about our conclusion in this matter, Bible truth has no parallel with Mongolian folk-Buddhism. The two systems are in very separate categories, and therefore not only is the Bible term for God an unknown concept, other terms and teachings in the Bible are not transferable via folk-Buddhist terminology. According to international translation principles, using descriptive terminology is one of the acceptable alternatives when target language 'religious' terms do not convey clear meaning (Larson, pp. 164-5).

The most serious concern with using descriptive terminology drawn from secular contexts, instead of the folk-Buddhist terminology, seems to be that Mongols are not used to using such language in a religious context. The issue here is whether transferring the actual meaning of Bible text is more important than using the customary collocation of religious terms with which Mongols feel immediately comfortable, even though such terms do not represent the correct sense of the source language. We assert that the right words are not the 'popular' words or the ones most commonly used, but rather those which transfer the right meaning. Because the folk-Buddhist terms do not convey Bible truth, and because we found that once our Mongol subjects understood the secular terms in context, they had no problem with using such secular words and phrases for Bible meaning, we also affirm that such secular terms are not only far superior for correct meaning transfer, in addition, they do not foster the development and maintenance of syncretism.

#### APPEAL TO FOREIGN CHRISTIANS IN MONGOLIA

We have asked if there is no pure religion and have had to answer both "Yes!" and "No!" Yes, in the beginning was the Word, and that Word which said "Let there be light!" was absolutely pure. And yes, when that Word became flesh, He spoke nothing which was not absolutely pure. We must say, however, that somehow it is in the nature of man to forget that the 'status quo,' i.e., our own culture or the one in which we are ministering, is not necessarily Biblical. We so easily can allow ourselves to drift away from our foundations if we do not constantly hearken back to our roots, that is, to the Bible, in particular to its meaning in the original languages.

Could it possibly mean that because such a drift towards syncretism can happen unintentionally, unconsciously, almost subliminally, it is therefore all right? Absolutely not! In our own context this means that if, in an effort to ally ourselves with Mongolian culture, we were bonding with aspects of the native world-view which are diametrically opposed to eternal truth, we were deceiving ourselves in the real effectiveness of our ministry, we were deceiving the Mongols themselves when we told them overtly or covertly that Bible truth is much the same as aspects of folk-Buddhism, and we were acting as instruments in the dark power's doomed efforts to foil God's work.

Everything our research subjects told us that they honor and worship are, according to the Bible, products of creation and thus are worshipped in place of a supreme Creator. If we are to present Bible truth in as pure a form as possible, we are convinced that we must distance ourselves from such systems of belief and use spiritual terms which will show the vast difference between the God of the Bible and all other focuses of worship, rather than implying that He may indeed be one of the same entities as those which Mongols have been worshipping for centuries.

Risking redundancy for the sake of a reminder that all the above affects the souls of real people, here are another couple of examples from our own personal experience. First, a Mongolian friend had been interested in Christianity and had been going to a church which teaches the Bible via the folk-Buddhist terminology. When an acquaintance of hers asked about the difference between Christianity and Buddhism, she tried to explain her understanding of Bible truth using the terminology with which she was familiar, but found that she was using the same terms for concepts in both systems. Becoming confused, she gave it all up in frustration, saying that there was indeed no difference in the two religions and that she did not want to have anything to do with either of them.

Again, this time quite recently, a lady, well into old age, has been a Buddhist adherent for long years. She has listened to her family members who claim to be believers in Christ trying to tell her about the Lord Jesus, again via the folk-Buddhist terminology, and simply responds that she sees no difference and she prefers to stay with what she knows best. Our questions are, must Mongols like the two above continue to misunderstand the Bible message because of using folk-Buddhist terminology, which cannot clearly and accurately convey God's word to people's minds? Or must a seeker be able to read and compare a Bible in English or Russian or Korean or German, etc., in order to figure out what the Mongolian text is trying to communicate? How sad.

We know that these two people are not isolated examples, and we know that others besides us are concerned about it. We are, however, also acquainted with people who, mostly in an effort to effect peace or build bridges or promote 'understanding,' suggest that the terminologies can be mixed together successfully and that seekers after Bible truth will not suffer in the outcome. Let us face the problem squarely and ask ourselves, indeed what is the result when a new system of thought with a radically different meaning domain tries to use the same terminology as an old system? Any reader of our report above knows that we are now back to the issue of syncretism. If there are those who understand well the radical difference between the two systems and yet persist in using the folk-Buddhist terminology, surely it is understandable if we wonder about their motives for doing so, be those motives conscious or subconscious. The whole issue seems somewhat more complicated than the single purpose of promoting the glory of the God of the Bible.

We have heard a number of times from Mongols who profess to be Christians that they wish that the foreign Christians would just fund native Mongolian endeavors from outside Mongolia, but that in-country foreign Christians should simply go back home. This leads us to why God has brought foreign Christians into Mongolia. We are the group who know Bible meaning best. Our responsibility, therefore, as teachers of the Bible in a foreign land, is to learn the language and culture of our host land, to struggle through the years necessary to accomplish acculturation so that we will understand our hearers' worldview. Then, when we teach Bible truth, we will know very clearly -- not how to meld their culture into our Bible teaching -- but just where that truth will conflict with error in their culture. We can then teach contrastively, making certain our hearers understand the difference between the true and false ways.

We have found that it is easy to lose sight of this purpose and begin to think that we must accommodate Bible truth to the host culture so that unbelievers will accept it more easily, especially if we feel pressure from our organization or supporters to 'produce results.' Genuine believers in Christ are, however, enjoined by the Scriptures to separate from unbelievers and those unclean forms which are connected with them. We must never dim, dull, or sully the pure meaning of God's word, whatever conscious or subconscious 'good' may motivate us to do so. We must never allow any hidden desire, whether intentional or not, to be 'successful' cross-cultural workers to cause us to veer from an accurate, understandable, and natural presentation of the true meaning of God's pure Word.

If we are going to be faithful to the truth of God's word, indeed to God Himself, we cannot with impunity link His pure and perfect nature with the plethora of deities in the Mongolian folk-Buddhist system. We strongly encourage foreign workers in Mongolia who are Christians and who desire to share their faith to learn the Mongolian culture and language. But not only that, learn the folk-Buddhist terminology and its implications. We can't help but think that the deepest desire of any genuine Christian in Mongolia is to confidently explain the glorious Good News in a way which will be likely to keep the pure Water of Life pure.

Again, the information in focus in this paper is socio-linguistic in nature, based on real Mongols' ideas and opinions, often very deeply held. Thus, because the core of our study is based on live data, i.e., our conclusions are for the most part not founded on scholarly investigation into written historical records or erudite academic journal articles, the best way others could legitimately seek further knowledge which would advance their understanding of this present data set would be for someone properly qualified to conduct a survey of similar extent under similar constraints. If one of the results of this study might be to cause others to delve into these matters extra deeply, we will have found this present study even more profoundly worth the effort.

As in the story of our young turkey at the beginning of this paper, we have metaphorically stuck our necks up and cried, "Warning, danger!" While it is possible we still have yet to face some 'lethal' blast, we have at least gotten to 'dip our beaks', so to speak, in the pure Water of Life. It is our prayer that what we have learned through this study might be helpful and even compelling to others, but the decisions we have reached via the data retrieved through our research should not be construed as some sort of constraint which we are trying to lay upon the consciences of others. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the conclusions of this paper, one thing should be remembered: we conducted this present survey in order to have a basis upon which we ourselves may choose terminology other than allying ourselves with political issues in the community which claims Christ in Mongolia. The results of this present survey seem so persuasive to us and the conclusion that we draw, i.e., that we must eschew using folk-Buddhist terminology in teaching Bible truth, seems so unavoidably clear, that we thus state our resolution without wavering.

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