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Making “Mongolian” Nature

Medicinal Plants and Qing Empire
in the Long Eighteenth Century

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Blood on the Battlefield

Bujir was a terrifying enemy to encounter on the battlefield, and he had repeatedly proved his mettle against both Muslims and Rus. Fiercely loyal to Chinggis Qan, he fought on behalf of his leader and the Mongol empire in countless attacks, always eager to launch himself into the heat of the fray. During one such battle, Bujir’s body was perforated by arrows. When Chinggis went to see him, the soldier was not in good shape. Luckily for Bujir, his leader knew a remedy that could cure him. Chinggis first ordered the arrows to be removed from the body of Bujir, who collapsed in a widening pool of the blood seeping from his many wounds. Near death, Bujir was then placed in the stomach of an ox that had been sliced open for just this purpose. After some time, having soaked in hot blood inside the belly of the beast, Bujir revived and lived to fight another day.¹

For twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers, the tale of Bujir has many of the features that typify “Mongolian” medicine as a historiographical object. It focuses on the healing of external wounds on the body and proceeds from circumstances in which that body has been opened up. In the story, animal bodies and blood mediate healing, especially animals like oxen and horses, which would have been employed as part of Mongolian daily life.² It invokes a medicine that works, in part, on the basis of an analogy between beasts and the Mongolian men who tend them: Bujir’s revival in the ox’s abdomen is like his rebirth from a bloody womb. The tale implicitly gestures toward the healing powers of shamanic practices, a connection that is made explicit in other tales of Mongolian healing. It invokes Chinggis Qan as a marker of Mongolian identity. And, crucially, it locates the expertise of Mongolian healing on the battlefield.

A particular constellation of features is drawn together by the character of “Mongolia” as a spatial imaginary that is informed by the geopolitics of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: animals, battle, bones, blood. However, this generative dialogue between “Mongolian medicine” and “Mongolia” as epistemic objects has a much longer history. In this chapter I will begin to trace that history by turning our attention to the possible production (or at least a claim thereof) of Mongolian medicine as an object in a very different locality, the Qing empire (1644–1911) empire in the long eighteenth century.

The approach taken here will play with scale. This is a fractal chapter. We will zoom in for a close encounter with a particular moment in a single text in order to understand the patterns that appear when we then zoom back out again into the larger context. A single plant will key us into botanical knowledge more broadly conceived. The single text will open us to larger patterns in the written culture of the Qing empire. A slice of time will help us consider a mega-century. And a single name as part of a set of names will help us look for multilingual and multiethnic identities in early modern Eurasia. We will treat identification and identity creation as a set of practices instead of taking identity for granted as a stable characteristic that persists across time and space. We will explore what the “long eighteenth century” might mean in the context of Qing early modernity, what natural history mobilized for the purposes of medicine looked like from the perspective of an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Mongolian identity in the making, and what all of this has to do with botany and empire. But first, we turn from Bujir to ‘Jam dpal rdo rje, our guide for the duration of this exploration.

Titles in Translation

We encounter him as a man of many names. ‘Jam dpal rdo rje was born in Inner Mongolia in 1792. I met him as ‘Jam dpal rdo rje. When you meet him (if you happen to run into him again) you might meet him as འཇམ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ། as Jampal dorje, as Qiangbeiduojie (強貝多傑), or perhaps as Zhanbuladao’erji (占不拉道爾吉). You may find him as Na’i man

dge bsnyen ‘jam dpal rdo rje (འཇམ་པལ་རྡོ་རྗེ་འཇམ་དཔལ་རྡོ་རྗེ།), indicating that he was a lay monk of the Naiman banner, an administrative division of what is now the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in today’s People’s Republic of China. ‘Jam dpal can be translated as “the Bodhisattva Manjusri.” When we add the *rdo rje*, he becomes the adamantine, the indestructible, the thunderbolt, the scepter, the King of Stones. It is unclear when he attained this evocative name, but it is clear that he became preoccupied with naming and the identities of many-named entities as he himself became a many-named entity over the course of his life.

As a seven-year-old boy, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje began studying the Manchu and Mongolian languages. We do not know what he was speaking and writing before that, but we can tell from his grasp (or lack thereof) of written Chinese in some of the work he produced as an adult that it was not likely to have been Chinese. He was, however, fluent in Tibetan-language texts. He spent his young adulthood studying them with a series of Tibetan Buddhist teachers at a series of Buddhist monasteries, traveling from his home in the northeastern part of the empire in what is now Inner Mongolia to the southwestern reaches of the Qing to study in temples in Shigatse and Lhasa.³ He earned at least one more name as a result: as a new twenty-seven-year-old monk he became, as later rendered in Chinese, Ye-xi-duan-ru-bu-dan-bi-zhalla-zhan (葉喜端如布丹畢扎拉贊).

At some point before he died in 1855, this polynomial man created a polynomial paper world that he could remember, inhabit, and use. Late in life, he wrote an illustrated Tibetan-language introduction to the plant-, stone-, and animal-based drugs of the Mongolian steppe. Along with descriptions of the sizes and shapes of leaves, the efficacious medical powers of rat droppings, and the colors of bats, the text is full of what now read as wonders and marvels of the natural world. The sound of a phoenix song steals your ears the way a beautiful girl can steal your heart.⁴ Nightingale meat can cure a scratchy throat. Five-colored pigeon feathers will make you see demons if you fan them through the air. We learn all this paging through the *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan*, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s Tibetan text that is full of directions on how to heal human bodies with Mongolian materia medica.

When completely spelled out, the title of ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s text is a fingerful: *Gso byed bdud rtsi’i ‘khrul med ngos ‘dzin bzo rig me long du rnam par shar pa mdzes mtshar mig rgyan*. It is usually shortened to *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* (མཛེས་མཚར་མེག་རྒྱན་). This title has been rendered in several languages in several (partial) translations that each put the translated title to work in an interesting way. Thus, the partial English translation turns the book into *An Illustrated Tibeto-Mongolian Materia Medica of Ayurveda*.⁵ This version only translates the table of contents and leaves the body of the text in Tibetan, though its title communicates at least two things to us: Tibeto-Mongolian is a form of identity, and we can understand what ‘Jam dpal rdo rje was doing by situating him within the history of Ayurvedic medicine. The Chinese translation of the text renders the title as *Mengyao zhengdian* (蒙藥正典), identifying it explicitly as work of Mongolian (*meng*) materia medica (*yao*). Both renderings incorporate the text into a particular kind of broader context, embedding the work into the history of Ayurveda as an identity and a genre of healing practice or into the history of Mongolia as a place and “Mongolian” as a characteristic. The importance of this incorporation will become clearer later in the chapter. What is important for us right now is to begin our exploration of the text and its place in the history of botany, empire, and the long eighteenth century with our eyes open to the fact that histories of translation create new identities for those texts and objects being translated. Today we are part of that history: we are also translating ‘Jam dpal rdo rje and his text, and we are thus creating it as a new object, situating it within a new discourse of imperial botanical identities at the same time that we try to understand what the author was up to in the context of his own contemporary practice. If we are clear on that point, let us continue on and see what our poly-nomial polyglot polymath was doing in the pages of his many-titled tome.

Plants on the Page

The *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* introduces the natural history and medicinal uses of hundreds of natural substances. The structure of the work is itself a kind of landscape and is worth exploring in some detail. The text is divided into eight major categories, most

of which contain further subdivisions. Altogether the text describes about 570 drug materials, not including some extra entries listed as variations of individual substances. Plant-derived drugs make up more than half of the total contents of our medicinal landscape.

The premises informing the classification of these materials are fascinating. Can an object be melted? Has it been excreted by another life form? How does it eat, kill, or catch its prey? The answers to these questions determine where we encounter objects and their collectivities in this textual terrain. First are what we might consider the rocks and minerals. The text begins with “Gems and Metals” (*rin po che’i sman*). This category includes thirty-eight objects divided into precious substances that cannot be melted (twenty-five objects) and those that can (thirteen objects). Next are “Medicinal Substances Derived from Rocks and Minerals” (*rdo sman*). This second category contains forty-three objects divided into mineral substances that may or may not be melted (thirty-two objects) and those that can definitely be melted (eleven objects). The third and final category devoted to minerals is “Medicinal Earths” (*sasman*), which includes thirty-one objects divided into three categories: natural earths (seven entries), manufactured earths (four entries), and salts (separated into sixteen naturally occurring and four manufactured objects).

As we move on from the earthy substances, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje brings us to a category of things exuded and excreted (*rtsi sman*). There are twelve of these, a mixture of bezoars and dried sap and other plant- and animal-based concretions that can be used as medicinal drugs.

Now we come to the fifth major category of substances and the first of many groupings of botanical materia medica. We start with ninety-eight medicinal substances obtained from trees. In dividing up the categories of tree-derived substances, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje also tells us how he conceives of arboreal anatomy: fruits and nuts, flowers and blossoms, leaves, twigs, wood, branches, roots, bark, and gums and saps. Next are sixty-three medicines prepared from boiled extracts of various parts of the plant. After that, we arrive at the largest region in this textual landscape: medicinal plants, herbs, and grasses. One hundred sixty-two entities live here,

grouped not by type of object but instead by type of drug preparation. Thus, we meet wild roots, leaves, flowers, and fruits that are individually prepared as *materia medica*. We meet drugs that are made by preparing a combination of leaves, stalks, flowers, and fruits. We meet drugs that are prepared from the entire plant. Finally, we learn about special categories of drugs made of plants that do not grow in the wild and instead must be cultivated: cereals, pods and beans, assorted roots.

The final, eighth category of substances dwelling within this textual ecology brings us to the 123 sentient creatures. We encounter, in turn, birds that use their claws to catch and kill prey and birds that use their beaks instead, herbivorous animals, carnivorous animals, even more birds, livestock and domestic animals, creatures that dwell in holes or burrows, and animals that live in or alongside water.

When we stop to read any one of the entries collected into this encyclopedic material landscape, we find a distillation and compilation of information that ‘Jam dpal rdo rje considered crucial for a full understanding of the natural history of the object as a medicinal drug. For the most part the text does not include recipes, so a reader would not consult it for detailed directions on how to produce drug preparations. The text does contain a relatively brief discussion of various principles of and procedures for drug preparation at the end, including an illustrated guide to medical tools of the trade (knives, needles, smokers, and assorted pokers and prodders), but those practical directions are largely kept out of the descriptions of individual drug substances. Instead, the reader of an entry will find a combination of Buddhist precepts, quotations from classical Tibetan medical works, images, recipes, exposition, and names in several languages.

The materials that made up the documentary archive from which ‘Jam dpal rdo rje wove his story about Mongolian *materia medica* were varied. He cites over 150 texts by name. The most foundational was the *Bdud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud* (བདུན་རྗེ་སྤྱིང་པོ་ཡན་ལག་བརྒྱད་པ་གསང་བ་མན་ངག་གི་རྩུང་ or Four tantras, abbreviated *Rgyud bzhi*), a 156-chapter foundational text of Tibetan medical knowledge that was probably compiled in the twelfth century.⁶ Sometimes ‘Jam dpal rdo

rje invokes it in its entirety and other times names one of its four individual parts: the “Root Treatise” (“Rtsa rgyud”), the “Explanatory Treatise” (“Bshad rgyud”), the “Oral Instruction Treatise” (“Man ngag rgyud”), and the “Final Treatise” (“Phyi ma rgyud”). Beyond this work, he mined a wide range of different kinds of texts for medical knowledge. Among these were works of Sanskrit verse and medical knowledge that had been translated or transliterated into Tibetan, Tibetan medical classics, Buddhist sutras and philosophical texts, local gazetteers (including a significant text on the local history of Mount Wutai), volumes of illustrations of plants and of *materia medica*, and other Tibetan documents.⁷ In addition to classic texts and medical works, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje also includes references to spoken language and other nontextual forms of evidence. This latter category includes unattributed invocations of Sanskrit knowledge, individual people invoked by name, and dictionaries and other translation-related materials. In some cases he does not cite any authorities, textual or otherwise, for his material; the implication seems to have been that this unattributed knowledge was from ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s own learning and experience.

The text’s descriptions of medicinal drugs and their uses are often illustrated—not just with prose examples from classic Tibetan and Sanskrit medical literature but also with images. Most of these images are labeled in Tibetan and have brief descriptions that differentiate varieties or parts of the object from one another: the male bird versus the female, the different stages of flowering or fructification of a plant, the fruit as found in China versus India, the appearance of a fruit when dried versus fresh, black versus yellow versus white variations of a plant, the various grades of a drug from top quality to cheap and common. These illustrations include both visual renderings of the size, shape, and characteristics of the object at hand, as well as alternate names of each object in Manchu, Mongolian, Tibetan, and Chinese scripts. And this is where things start to get really interesting.

Names of Nature

If we transition from walking along the broad contours of ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s text and instead spend

some time dwelling in the communities of its pages, it becomes clear that the author had a particular agenda. His encyclopedia used the practice of natural history to enact a particular vision of Qing identity in the long eighteenth century. Whether or not this was also a vision of “Mongolian” Qing identity is open to debate, and we will get to that in a moment.

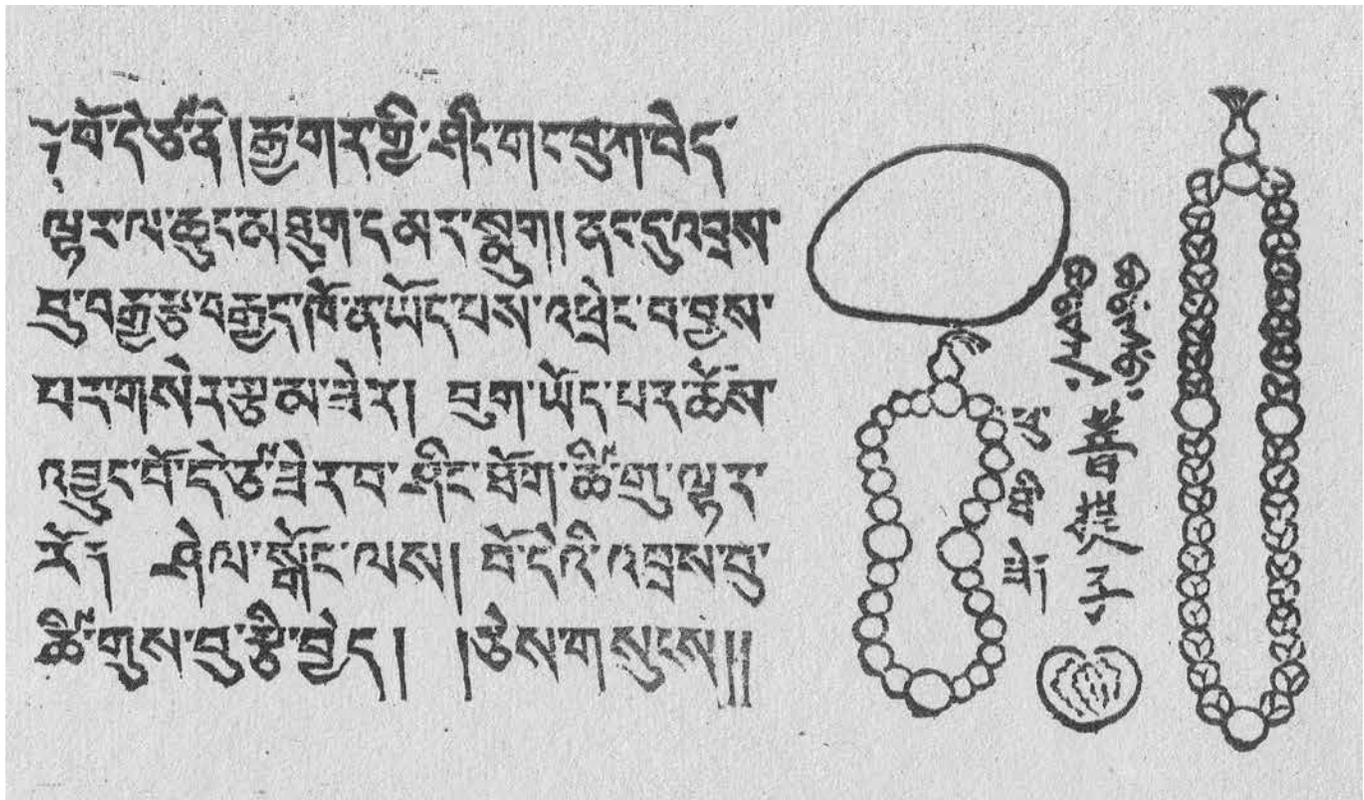
Natural history and the explication of materia medica, sometimes as separate endeavors and sometimes as aspects of the same text, became spaces for working out forms of identity in the high Qing. As the empire doubled in size through the first century and a half of the dynasty, the Qing empire consolidated its rule over border areas and incorporated new lands and peoples. A documentary archive emerged that described and debated these new geographies.⁸ Much of the geographical knowledge from this period was devoted to textual research focused on reconciling philological debates over foreign nomenclature. Similarly, natural history knowledge also expanded its geographical scope as authors of botanical works and other texts on natural objects attempted to bring the frontiers into the Qing garden and medicine chest. Medical authors such as Zhao Xuemin (趙學敏, 1719–1805) began incorporating more gazetteers and studies of local products into their revisions and expansions of the classic canons of materia medica.⁹ Other naturalists simultaneously moved away from an early modern tendency to privilege the epistemic authority of autopsy associated with fixed living spaces and conditions (i.e., those who lived in a certain area had privileged access to knowledge about its natural products and features) and instead assumed itinerancy and movement as preconditions of natural knowledge acquired by observing texts and objects. Reconciling the nomenclature of nature had always been a feature of works on plants, animals, and stones in the Chinese textual world, but this process took on a new cast in the context of Qing empire.

Though he was writing in a very different space (physically and conceptually) from Chinese medical writers like Zhao Xuemin, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s work shares some features with theirs. One of these features is an identification (implicit or explicit) of a specific kind of practical and textual knowledge of the natural world as located in a particular set

of places. A locally grounded narrative of medicinal nature and its uses and histories emerges when we explore discrete narratives of his drug descriptions: the *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* locates this narrative firmly in the region that we would now identify as Qinghai, Tibet, and Sichuan, while also ranging further afield to discuss objects from India, Kashmir, Sri Lanka, and Malawi, among other places. In doing so, the text was part of a larger trend in eighteenth-century pharmacy that was exemplified by the *Shel gong shel phreng*, a list of materia medica (*shel gong*) and explication of those medicinal materials (*shel phreng*). This collection had been compiled by a traveling Tibetan doctor who recorded observations about local medicinal plants and their uses in the course of roughly two decades of peregrinations through Qinghai, Tibet, and western Sichuan. These observations were combined with close readings of the Four tantras and the *Sman dpyad zla ba’i rgyal po*, another Tibetan medical work.¹⁰ The book was finished in 1732 and printed in 1740, and ‘Jam dpal rdo rje frequently cited it and largely reproduced the order of its categories. To see where he diverged from this foundation, let us consider an example from his text.

Nestled within the fruits and nuts section of the text, the largest subset of the larger category of medicinal substances made from trees, we find a necklace (Figure 15.1). First, we learn the Tibetan name of the object: *bo de tsa* (བོ་དེ་ཙ་). Next, we read that it comes from a tree that grows in India (*rgya gar*). We learn to recognize the fruit of the tree, while the text compares it to that of other plants (here, a gourd) and describes its size, thickness, and color. According to the text, one can make a string of rosary beads sometimes called *gser rtsa ma* or (if the seeds are perforated with holes) *chos ’byung bo de tsa* by gathering roughly one hundred of the seeds from inside the fruit. Finally, we have a quotation from the *Shel gong* on some medicinal uses of the fruit.¹¹

This description contains several notable elements that are representative of the accounts offered elsewhere in ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s text. First, it mentions the local origin of the fruits. Many of the objects described in the text are of Indian origin—sometimes they are given Sanskrit names, are derived from Sanskrit books, or are characterized



Is this correct?

FIGURE 15.1
The *bo de tsa* (བོ་དེ་ཙ་ཙ). Reprinted from Lokesh Chandra and E. Gene Smith, eds., *An Illustrated Tibeto-Mongolian Materia Medica of Āyurveda* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1971), 104.

with the help of information from the Sanskrit language. Also of note is the embedding of drug knowledge within a wider context of Buddhist worship and practice. Here, the fruits are valuable resources not only for their medicinal properties but also for their use in prayer. The practical use of a plant, animal, or stone as a material object in daily life was also a feature of many other drug descriptions in the text: ‘Jam dpal rdo rje describes and shows jewelry, magnifying glasses, weapons, needles, ceramics, inkstones, various baskets and other woven objects, metal implements and instruments, and wooden tools throughout the collection. The descriptions of these objects sometimes include a rationale for the healing properties of an object that was deeply embedded in a conceptual frame explicitly derived from Buddhist texts, and they sometimes comment on the use of an object within the material culture of ritual practice. Another notable aspect of this description of the necklace is ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s invocation of the *Shel gong* as a textual authority.

Significantly, the text here is also deeply concerned with identification. The preface of the *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* justifies the need for the work by

invoking errors of identification made by previous writers on materia medica and cites specific examples of writers mistaking one drug for another. Visual illustrations are provided for the different instantiations of the *bo de tsa* that are mentioned in the text: the two different kinds of prayer bead strings, the fruit, and the seed found inside the fruit. One of the many reasons this is interesting is that, as elsewhere in the text, the illustrations seem to have been made by someone who was intimately familiar with the textual description of each object and was using the images to offer further visual explication of these descriptions. This specificity was not always characteristic of illustrated Qing texts about medicinals, which often tended to borrow plant, stone, or animal illustrations from other works without worrying too much about concordance with the textual description of the object being imaged. It is likely that the illustrations were made in consultation with other illustrated Tibetan medical texts, without exactly reproducing them.¹²

Another aspect of the account of the *bo de tsa* is absolutely crucial to the work that the text is doing, and that is its concern with the performativity of

script and naming. ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s account mentions the primary name of the object (bo de tsa) and also names the individual kinds of rosaries made from it. In addition, the illustration of the bo de tsa contains names in three other scripts: Mongolian (*bodisa*), Manchu (*bodisu*), and Chinese (*pu ti zi* 菩提子). A Tibetan gloss is offered for the Chinese script but not for the Mongolian or Manchu, signaling that the author assumed his readers would be able to read the latter two.¹³ Most of the hundreds of other objects in the text are also illustrated with alternate names in some combination of Mongolian, Manchu, and Chinese scripts. Though all of the names in this example sound roughly equivalent, that was not necessarily the case for other drugs: the naming was not, in other words, typically a matter of simply transliterating a Tibetan name into other scripts, but of providing names in several languages. (In fact, sometimes the main Tibetan name of an object was itself a transliteration from a Mongolian or Sanskrit term.) Here and elsewhere, where alternate names are illustrated in more than one language, the Mongolian name comes first.

The prayer bead, in this sense, is a microcosm of Qing empire. Since its founding, the Qing was a multilingual state: Chinese and Manchu were functionally the two official scripts (though only Manchu was known as “Qing writing” or *qingwen* 清文), and beyond these languages Mongolian, Tibetan, and other Turkic languages were also crucial to the functioning of the state and the daily lives of many of its people. This multilingualism was as true of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as it had been upon the mid-seventeenth-century founding of the dynasty¹⁴ and was as true of its objects as its people and documents. In dictionaries, manuscripts and printed books, and other media, the presence of multiple Qing scripts within a single frame was a visual performance of the multilingual and multiethnic nature of Qing people and power.

‘Jam dpal rdo rje was far removed from this imperial power; he spent his days in monasteries rather than the court and wrote treatises on materia medica rather than memorials to the throne. He cannot be reasonably claimed as an organ of the Qing imperium or a representative Qing subject. Nonetheless, and perhaps more interestingly

because of this nonrepresentativeness, he (or whoever was responsible for imaging the names in four scripts, which may not have been ‘Jam dpal rdo rje) also included multiple scriptural identities for many of the medicinal objects in his text. In doing so, he assumed a particular kind of Qing reader: one who could read one or more of the Tibetan, Mongolian, and Manchu scripts unproblematically and one who may not have been able to read Chinese but would find it useful to be able to recognize Chinese names as identifying images. For ‘Jam dpal rdo rje or his illustrator, then, medical botany was Qing botany, and Qing botany was visually and epistemically multilingual.

“Mongolian” Nature?

Take a moment to recall Bujir, the Mongolian warrior with whom we began this exploration. The body of Bujir was a metonym for Mongolian medical identity as it has been constructed by a subset of modern historians: violent, wounded, bloody, and full of animal parts and broken bones. Our move from Bujir to ‘Jam dpal rdo rje has been simultaneously a move from the battlefield to the temple and from a construction of Mongolian identity based in battle to one infused by Buddhist ideology and practice.

But what makes ‘Jam dpal rdo rje and his text “Mongolian”? There are several answers to that question, depending on where we look. The *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* has been incorporated into the canon of “ethnic minority medicine” (*shaoshu minzu yixue* 少数民族醫學) in modern China. In this context, the book represents a significant landmark in Mongolian medical theory and practice, and one sign of this importance is the identification of ‘Jam dpal rdo rje as a medical doctor of Mongolian ethnicity (*mengguzu yiyao xuejia* 蒙古族醫藥學家).¹⁵ His book has consequently been translated into Chinese under the title *Mengyao zhengdian* (蒙藥正典), a Mongolian (*meng*) work on materia medica. This is a particular form of Mongolianness: it is Mongolian as ethnicity and specifically as an ethnic identity that is subsumed under and incorporated into a larger Chinese identity. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the text was also translated into partial editions in Mongolian¹⁶ and

Russian.¹⁷ In the title (for the Mongolian edition) or explanatory materials (for the Russian edition) of these translations, the text is described and coded as “Mongolian.” As briefly mentioned, the English version of the text (which is “English” only in that the edition has a title, very brief preface, and table of contents in English) identifies the text explicitly as a “Tibeto-Mongolian” work of Ayurveda.

This description is based on ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s own self-identification, in his colophon to the text, as a member of the Naiman banner of the Ju’ud league. Banners are administrative divisions of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in today’s People’s Republic of China, and they descend from the banner system that was used by the Manchu Qing empire to divide families into administrative units for the purpose of military and political organization.¹⁸ Groups of banners were aggregated into leagues. In identifying himself as a member of the Naiman banner, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje marks his home as the region that is equivalent to today’s Chifeng, a city in southeastern Inner Mongolia. However, this self-identification and the incorporation of names in Mongolian script into his drug identification apparatus seem to constitute the sole explicit engagement with “Mongolia” as a unit or form of identity in the text. It seems that ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s medicine has been made Mongolian by translation, in translation, and by association with the Qing administrative identity of its author.

Qing Botany and Empire in Time and Space

If we continue to zoom out from the specificities of the text to consider the frames that encompass it, we are able to show how ‘Jam dpal rdo rje is integrated into the larger contexts that this volume is meant to explore: the nature of botanical knowledge in the long eighteenth century, the shape of empire in the histories of botanical knowledge, and the utility of the “long eighteenth century” as an object and tool. I hope that examples like that of ‘Jam dpal rdo rje enable us to pose different kinds of questions about botany and empire in a global context than we otherwise might ask.

How do ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s plants coexist with other forms of Qing botanical knowledge? Given

his citation practices, his training, and the authors and texts with which he was conversant, we can comfortably situate his work within a history of Tibetan medicine and pharmacology. Though twentieth- and twenty-first-century Chinese historians have routinely likened his text to the *Bencao gangmu* (本草綱目, Systematic materia medica) and described his work as a *bencao* (本草, a kind of hybrid work of natural history and pharmacy), it is not at all clear that he knew about or was speaking to a Chinese *bencao* tradition; indeed, we have no evidence, at least not yet, that he could comfortably read Chinese.¹⁹ The closest we can come to relating the *Mdzes mtshar mig rgyan* to Chinese *bencao* is via analogy: though he engages different authorities and embeds his understanding of the properties of medicinals within a different conceptual frame, the form of ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s text and of its individual entries and the work he does in the preface to the text (justifying his work in part by claiming to rectify the errors of past writers in identifying drugs) do share a family resemblance with the Chinese *bencao* genre. If we can link the text to a Chinese genre by formal analogy, we can also link it to a more expansive global history of botanical-pharmaceutical discourse. Like contemporary forms of botanical knowledge, ‘Jam dpal rdo rje’s work was concerned with identifying and classifying nature, with utilizing natural products, and with localizing botanical knowledge. These plants were identified, utilized, and localized, though, in relation not just to Qing identities but also to Buddhist histories, materialities, and temporalities.

To what extent can we talk about “Qing botany” in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries? For historians of science, medicine, and empire, the critical question is how to reconcile two impulses. First is an interest in approaching Qing science, technology, and medicine in a way that acknowledges the Qing as a multiethnic and multilingual empire, moving beyond the usual configuration of the nation-state and refiguring botany as a Qing practice rather than continuing to write that multiplicity out of our histories by simply talking about the Qing as “China” or “Chinese.” Considering even a single object on a single page of a single Qing text about materia medica already helps us understand the Qing as a time and space that simultaneously accommodated

different systems of value (Manchu, Mongolian, Chinese, Buddhist, natural, practical/instrumental, medical, botanical, etc.), without bringing Europe into the discussion at all. At the same time, it can be challenging to integrate non-Chinese texts into the larger Chinese-language textual archive by showing a genealogical link between them: if we cannot demonstrate a community of individuals who were in touch with one another or engaged explicitly with one another's work, can we demonstrate a cohesive Qing botany? On what other evidentiary basis and from what other networks and encounters might a Qing botany (or natural history or medicine) have emerged? What makes these "Qing" texts? Should "Qing" be a category? If so, what holds it together? How, if at all, is it related to other Chinese, Manchu, and other texts written in this period?

Similarly, in what ways does the Qing story link up to a larger global history of botany and empire in the long eighteenth century? Other scholars have considered how to translate the temporal concept of the "long eighteenth century" into a Qing context.²⁰ Though mapping temporal units across localities is always artificial, I would argue that in this case it works particularly well. In chronological time, this period roughly overlaps with a unit that Qing scholars have otherwise deemed the "High Qing," a period of cultural and social efflorescence extending from the imperial reign of Kangxi (r. 1662–1722) through that of Qianlong (r. 1735–96). Already, we have coinciding in one brief description multiple temporalities: imperial reign (Kangxi, Qianlong), chronology (centuries), cultural production (efflorescence), dynasty (Qing, High Qing), and global dialogue (a "long eighteenth century" that might extend somewhat into the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries). For a historian, of course, this multiplicity is unsurprising. On some level, modes of periodization are always multiple and always relative: in periodizing history, we create relationships between people and events in time. A historian's time is thus an instrument used to create these relationships, and one mode of shaping time is not necessarily more correct or natural than another—it depends on the use to which we are putting the periodization. The long eighteenth century, then, is not a thing or an object, nor is it a unit; rather, it

is an act, a way of creating conversation and relationships. If we think in these terms the question becomes, what kind of work does including the Qing in the long eighteenth century do?²¹ What relationships does it create, and what new objects might emerge from those relationships?

As a concluding gesture, let us take a moment to zoom way beyond our current frame. When we bring 'Jam dpal rdo rje and his monastery-based botanical work into this conversation, we open up questions that we might not otherwise have brought to the intersection of botany and empire in this period. New communities and localities of botanical knowledge emerge. We need, for example, to begin looking to the temple and the itinerant monk for the production of botanical knowledge and to Buddhist conceptions of time, space, nature, and bodies as forms of locality. Prayer beads become part of botany, the botany of empire reaches into spaces of worship on the frontier, and relevant voices multiply beyond those typically associated with the rubrics of imperial expansion, resource extraction, commodification, and industry. How, if at all, does this change our concept of "imperial botany" as an object? The Qing historians among us also need to extend our understanding of the reach of the Qing performance of multilingualism and associated forms of identity beyond the court and state. Our case studies may consequently not be related genealogically (X directly influenced Y, and we can point to concrete evidence of that influence in Z text); we may need to look for other modes of constructing historical evidence by looking for forms of resemblance across sites that otherwise might be difficult to relate genealogically. And how, then, might this transform how we understand and locate historical causality, what we consider to be a compelling historical explanation, where we attempt to excavate evidence, what we take to constitute an archive?

Acknowledgments

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Notes

- 1 This account is taken from Francis Woodman Cleaves, "A Medical Practice of the Mongols in the Thirteenth Century," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 17, nos. 3/4 (December 1954): 433.
- 2 The tale of Bujir is one of many cases of wounds healed with the skin and blood of animals, a medical practice apparently used by Mongols in the thirteenth century as described in Cleaves, "A Medical Practice." Modern preoccupations with the healthful properties of milk from the Mongolian steppe are a genealogical descendant of this earlier historiographical characterization.
- 3 Although movement and travel across the Qing was tightly regulated, the issuing of special travel permits made it possible for some people, including Buddhist pilgrims and monks, to legally make this kind of a journey. On the special Qing dispensation given to Mongolian Buddhist pilgrims to Tibet, see the recent dissertation of Jonathan Schlesinger, "The Qing Invention of Nature: Environment and Identity in Northeast China and Mongolia, 1750–1850" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2012).
- 4 For a rendering of this description as a fictional love story, see Carla Nappi, "The One Who Claws at His Names," <http://carlanappi.com/2013/01/16/read-to-me-2-the-one-who-claws-at-his-names/>, accessed October 25, 2015.
- 5 'Jam dpal rdo rje, *Mengyao zhengdian* 蒙藥正典, in *Zhongguo bencao quanshu* (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 1999), 397:365–544, and 396:171–312. Another edition of the text is available as Lokesh Chandra and E. Gene Smith, eds., *An illustrated Tibeto-Mongolian Materia Medica of Āyurveda* (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture, 1971).
- 6 See Janet Gyatso, "The Authority of Empiricism and the Empiricism of Authority: Medicine and Buddhism in Tibet on the Eve of Modernity," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24, no. 2 (2004): 83–96.
- 7 Many of 'Jam dpal rdo rje's references were derived from texts that he worked with in compiling his collection of materia medica, including textual editions collected in encyclopedic compendia that he would have accessed at the monasteries where he lived and studied. Because he reproduced references to Sanskrit-language texts and names from the work of other authors without crediting them, it is unclear whether he worked substantively with Sanskrit-language texts. Several Sanskrit texts on medicine and pharmacy were preserved in Tibetan translation in editions of the *Tengyur*, a collection of Buddhist commentaries and treatises from the second through eighteenth centuries. On the contents of the *Tengyur*, see Kurtis Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 151–58.
- 8 On the transformations in Qing geographical knowledge, see Matthew W. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy: The Question of India and the Transformation of Geopolitics in Qing China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). Mosca traces this shift from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, roughly contemporaneous with the period I consider here.
- 9 On Zhao and Qing materia medica in this context, see Carla Nappi, "Winter Worm, Summer Grass: *Cordyceps*, Colonial Chinese Medicine, and the Formation of Historical Objects," in *Crossing Colonial Historiographies*, ed. Anne Digby, Waltraud Ernst, and Projit Bihari Mukharji (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 21–36.
- 10 On debates over whether this work was translated from a Chinese original, see Yang Ga, "The Sources for the Writing of the *Rgyud bzhi*, Tibetan Medical Classic" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010), 68–75.
- 11 The text consistently cites the *Shel gong* as *Shel sgong*, here and elsewhere.
- 12 Compare, for example, the images in the Tibetan text that has been reprinted as the *Bencao tupu* 本草圖譜, in *Zhongguo bencao quanshu* (Beijing: Huaxia chu ban she, 1999), 396:459–511.
- 13 Indeed, it is unclear whether the illustrator himself (whether or not it was 'Jam dpal rdo rje) could read the Chinese script: the script is treated in this text as an image rather than a legible language, and it seems that whoever produced it was likely copying it from somewhere else.
- 14 As of the early eighteenth century other languages, such as Russian, took on special importance for the Qing imperium as well.
- 15 Liu bai yi la 柳白乙拉, *Mengyao zhengdian* 蒙藥正典 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2006), 1.
- 16 Jambaldorji, *Monggol em-i job taniqu toli* (Kökeqota: Öbör Monggol-un Arad-un Keblel-un Qoriy-a, 1988).
- 17 B. Badaraev, *Dzeitskhar Migchzhan: Pamiatnik tibetskoi meditsiny* (Novosibirsk: Izd-vo "Nauka," Sibirskoe otd-nie, 1985).
- 18 The classic account of this system is Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- 19 On the bencao as literature in China and on the *Bencao gangmu* in particular, see Carla Nappi, *The Monkey and the Inkpot: Natural History and Its Transformations in Early Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 20 Susan Mann, for example, describes the temporality of women's writing in her work as a "long eighteenth century." See Susan Mann, *Precious Records: Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1–18. For a discussion of the "long eighteenth century," see pages 4–8. For another recent invocation of this temporality in order to situate Qing history within a broader global context see Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- 21 It is also worth considering the kind of work accomplished by the long in the "long eighteenth century" concept. In *Beyond the Metropolis: Second Cities and Modern Life in Interwar Japan* (Berkeley: University of California

Press, 2013), Louise Young considers the rebirth of modern cities in terms of urban expansionism in which, for many Japanese cities, city X became “greater X” as suburbs became integral elements of urban space. We might

analogize to what is happening in the history of periodization, as “the X century” often becomes “the long X century” in a kind of temporal expansionism that conceptualizes time in spatial terms.