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The Mongolian-Buddhist Deity Čayan ebügen  
'The White Old Man' by Brian Baumann

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For over sixty years, we have offered a wide range of innovative, high-quality educational and cultural programs, along with social and culinary events where participants share their knowledge and enthusiasm. SAA's popular Arts of Asia Lecture Series, open to all, was the core of the museum's docent-training curriculum. We sponsor international and domestic travel, visits to private art dealers and collections, in-depth study groups, special lectures by leading scholars, literature courses and symposia. Much of our programming supports specific exhibitions. During restrictions imposed by COVID-19, the SAA's programs have continued through online streaming.

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# The Mongolian-Buddhist Deity Čayan ebügen

## The White Old Man

By Brian Baumann



Figure 1. White Old Man in Dance.

In Géluk-Mongolian Buddhism is a deity named *Čayan ebügen* 'White Old Man' that sheds light on the interface between religious and secular realms under Géluk Buddhist hegemony and how that interface has been interpreted in modern scholarship. Scholars first became interested in the White Old Man as a character in Mongolian Buddhist ritual masquerade dance (Mong. *čam* < Tib. '*chams* 'dance') which became popular during the 19th and early 20th centuries. See [Figure 1](#). Study of the White Old Man encompasses not only his role in the masquerade dances of other Buddhist nations but also veneration of the deity in his own right in a

cult kept principally by the Mongols but by other Buddhist nations as well. Practice of the cult is attested in written sources, oral tradition, painting, and plastic arts.

Pictorially the White Old Man is represented in the manner of the Chinese god of longevity, *Shouxing* (壽星). Both have a bulbous bald pate, wield a dragon-head staff, and sit placidly in an Arcadian setting under a peach tree in the company of deer and cranes (or swans or geese) and sometimes bats. Sometimes they hold a rosary or a scroll.<sup>1</sup> See, as examples [Figure 2](#), [Figure 3](#), [Figure 4](#) and [Figure 5](#).

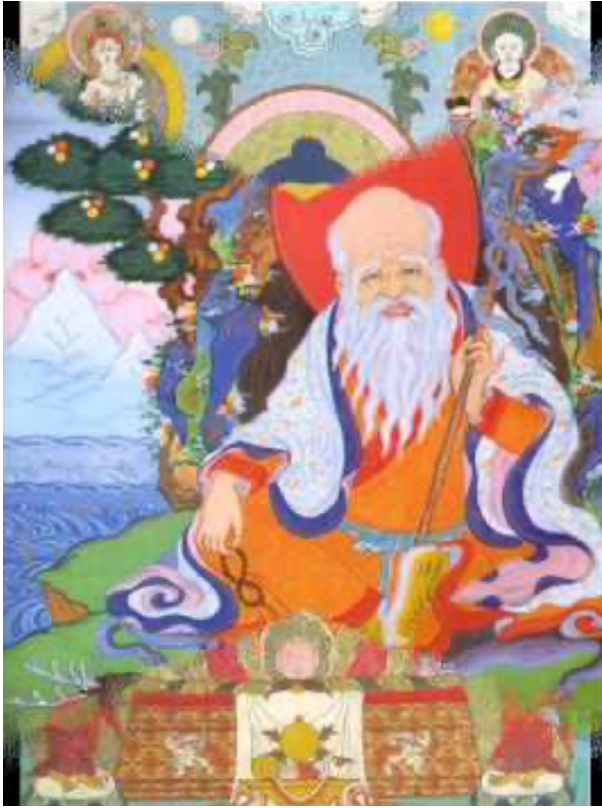


Figure 2. Painting of White Old Man.

### Who Is the White Old Man?

Liturgy describes the White Old Man as a very old man with a completely white beard and hair like that of an elderly person. He wears a white caftan and holds in his right hand a dragon-headed staff. This staff is bent and heavy, and he leans on it. The dragon topping the staff roars mightily. He resides in the southeast, on the summit of a snow-white mountain named Fruited or Fruitful. Some texts say that he comes from Wutaishan, land of Mañjuśrī. He variously has a white lion for a mount, comes to earth on a white horse, and travels by an agile stag. He keeps an oath he made of yore in the presence of Buddha Shakyamuni. He is lord of the earth, lord of the twenty-four lands, directions, or places. He is able to pacify land and water. He makes produce plentiful. He holds a book in which, like Erlig Khan (i.e. Yama), he writes down unerringly the names of those who commit sinful deeds. He knows truly the consequences of living beings'

deeds and supports those who are righteous. He fulfills one's desires or fulfills wishes according to the dharma. He establishes regulations and customs, brings happiness, repels demons and harm, purifies demons, is able to offer protection from enemies and obstacles, is able to cure infectious diseases, and to dispel all danger from earth and water. He causes destiny to arise, lengthens life, increases chattels and herds, propagates Buddhism, and so on.<sup>2</sup>

An aim of the liturgy is to apologize for the White Old Man's non-Buddhist origin by effecting his conversion. In *Noyoyan Dar-a eke-yin tuyuji* (Tale of Mother Tārā, the Green) the White Old Man is reincarnated as a Buddhist deity from a non-Buddhist celestial sage, the White Rishi. This conversion comes about through the blessing of the female bodhisattva, Mother Tārā, the Green. Tārā says, "Although in this life you have been a secular teacher, in your next life let you occupy Mt. Fruitful and become a Buddha named the White Old Man who, having passed [into Buddhahood], holds a dragon-headed staff in your right hand and goes about purifying all of the various ailments and afflictions of people and animals."<sup>3</sup> In another account of his conversion, a short text titled *Čayan ebügen-ü sudur* (White Old Man Sutra), Buddha happens upon the White Old Man at his mountain retreat in the Fruited Forest. Buddha asks him, why do you live upon this mountain in solitude? In reply the White Old Man says that he lives on the mountain with the sky up above and a consort, Mother Earth (*Ütügen eke*) below. After he enumerates his multifarious deific functions, Buddha recognizes that these deeds are beneficent and in accordance with the dharma, and he is assimilated.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the White Old Man's assimilation into Buddhahood is less than full. His status as a Buddha is conditioned on being able to deliver on his promises. If unable to keep his word he asks that he not then be a Buddha.<sup>5</sup> Buddhist clergy feel compelled to denigrate him. They exclude the White Old Man from the ranks of true Buddhist deities and label him a lay deity of the Mongols' *qara šasin*.<sup>6</sup>

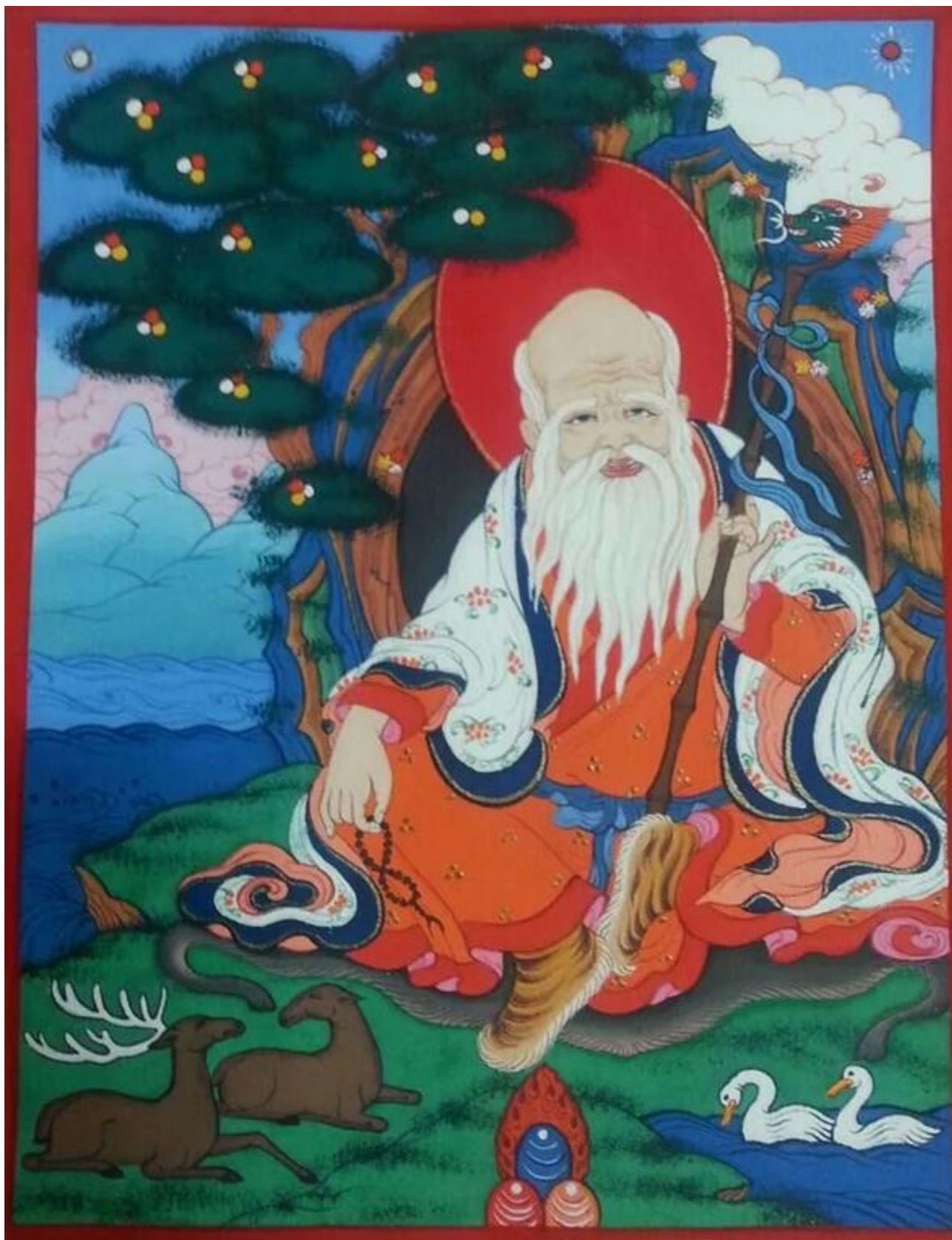


Figure 3. Painting of White Old Man. (Also shown on this issue's cover as a detail.)



Figure 4. Painting of White Old Man.

In this denomination the term *qara* is a Turco-Mongolian word meaning literally ‘black’ but also ‘limpid’ as in *qara usun* ‘clear water’ and also ‘common’ as in *qara kümün* ‘common person’ or ‘commoner.’ The term *šasin*, oft translated ‘religion, teaching, faith, doctrine, precept,’<sup>7</sup> is a loanword derived from Sanskrit *śāsana*. The Sanskrit refers to something that commands or governs and may be rendered ‘teaching, instruction, discipline, doctrine,’ and so loosely, ‘faith,’ and ‘religion.’<sup>8</sup> In Mongolian Buddhist idiom the phrase is used in reference to non-Géluk authority. A fair translation is ‘secular dominion.’

Scholars, however, have traditionally not understood the phrase in this way. Ever since an influential treatise of 1846 by the Buriat scholar D. Banzarav scholars have translated *qara šasin* ‘black faith’ and equated it with “Shamanism.”<sup>9</sup> They characterize the White Old Man as an indigenous shamanic deity; a manifestation of Mongols’ archaic belief in forces of nature that they do not comprehend and so worship superstitiously as gods.<sup>10</sup> Since the mid-twentieth century, this shamanistic school of interpretation has largely been accepted by Mongols and come to influence how they themselves perceive the White Old Man.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, this interpretation is wrong.

Contrary to the notion that the White Old Man is indigenous to the Mongols, scholars correctly note that the deity shares affinities with other foreign deities. These include the Tibetan’s *Mitséring* ‘Long-lived Man’ or *Lhachentséring* ‘Great Longevity God’, the Tajiks’ *Gargaru bobo* ‘Grandfather Thunder’,<sup>12</sup> the Zoroastrian ‘Father Time,’ *Zurvan*,<sup>13</sup> the Japanese deity *Jurôjin* ‘Old Man of Longevity,’ and the Korean mountain deity, *Sanshin*, a lonely old sage. Buriats associate the White Old Man with Orthodox Christian St. Nicholas.<sup>14</sup> Mongols and scholars recognize a close resemblance between the White Old Man and the Chinese god of longevity, *Shouxing*.<sup>15</sup> Some scholars minimize the implications of these potentially foreign influences. Some they write off as coincidence; others they ascribe to a hypothetical shared shamanic antiquity. They



Figure 5. White Old Man in relief carving.



argue that Chinese *Shouxing* is an interpolation from an unspecified time after an earlier time, also unspecified, when the White Old Man was a purely shamanic deity.<sup>16</sup>

By this selective interpretation, scholars strip away attributes of the White Old Man they deem foreign to leave those they deem more ancient and authentic, revealing his core shamanic essence. This core essence they take to be his signification of whiteness and old age, aspects of nature such as mountains, and aspects of primitive culture and economy such as clans, bows, arrows, spears, and animal husbandry. In aggregate they say he personifies “creative power.”<sup>17</sup>

### Why the Shamanistic Interpretation of the White Old Man Is Wrong

One problem with the shamanistic interpretation is that, though scholars argue that it existed in time immemorial, sources for the cult of the White Old Man go back only to the 18th century. To account for the considerable hiatus between then and time immemorial, scholars argue that the presence of the White Old Man cult among the Oirats living in the Caucasus suggests that the deity must have existed before their westward migration ca. 1630. To support this inference they note that Yuan emperors worshipped an elderly, white-bearded manifestation of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī at Wutaishan in Shanxi, China and conjecture that this indicates that the pre-Buddhist White Old Man had been incorporated into Buddhism as Mañjuśrī already in the 13th century.<sup>18</sup> By linking these two unrelated facts, they speculate that there might have been an older cult of the White Old Man originating among the Mongols at a time before which material evidence exists.

Second, and more problematic, the notion that Mongols practice a religion known as “Shamanism” is anachronistic. “Shamanism,” one must remember, is not a professed religion. Rather, it is a notional religion invented

by Western scholars and ascribed to others. Though Western intellectuals had conceived of the notion of Shamanism as early as the 18th century, the promulgation of Shamanism as a religion arose only after the 1951 publication of *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaïques de l'extase (Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy)* by the Romanian scholar Mircea Eliade (1907-1986). Eliade invented Shamanism in the same way that Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) invented the modern notion of religion. Eliade examined priestly traditions worldwide, and from those which he considered archaic or a primitive type he contrived an elaborate ontology by synthesizing common elements. Eliade named his creation “Shamanism,” derived from a Tungusic word for ‘priest.’ The creation was given life when scholars adopted the term to “classify” non-modern traditions into a convenient paradigm. Prior to Eliade’s work, no people on earth ever professed belonging to a religion of “Shaman.”

A third problem is that modern scholars built their ideas about Shamanism on a false assumption about science. They assumed that Europeans discovered science during the Enlightenment in Europe, and that mankind evolved by stages from (1) primitive nature worship to (2) religion, to (3) science. This assumption fails to recognize that science is universal among sentient beings, who rely on it to overcome the void in nature and survive.

A fourth problem with the shamanistic interpretation is the assumption that peoples such as the Mongols whom they dub “shamanists,” worship nature in the first place. Believing that nature holds immutable order, modern scholars assume that there exists but one created world; which is perfectly objective, material; and that all peoples everywhere have always believed this but worshipped the power of nature in a religious way because they did not understand the science of this world. This assumption ignores that there are an infinite number of created worlds, created politically, subjectively. It ignores too





the truth that nature as wilderness is a void and separate from the created world. The Mongols, as a rural people who live close to wilderness and know it, do not worship nature as wilderness. The Mongolian word for nature as wilderness is *baiyiali*. With 800 years of sources to draw from not one shows Mongols venerating it. Rather, sources show them venerating that which they rely upon to bring *order* to the void. These organizing entities include Chinggis Khan, who brought them *törö* 'state' and *jasay* 'law' and cairns (*oboy-a*) that serve as points of reference and facilitate overland travel. Above all Mongols have traditionally venerated *tenggeri* 'heaven' from whence come space and time.

### The White Old Man is a God in Heaven

So, if the White Old Man is not a shamanic deity, what kind of deity is he? Sources tell us explicitly that the White Old Man is a god in heaven. What do we find if we look for him there? In the Chinese sky is a star called *Laoren* (老人) 'The Old Man,' known in the West as Canopus.<sup>19</sup> Of a brilliant white hue, Canopus shines as the second brightest "fixed" star after Sirius. Positioned near the solstitial colure in the southern sky at approximately 53° south latitude, for observers stationed north of 37° north latitude it remains invisible below the earth's horizon. For those near the 37th parallel, it is only barely visible peeking over the southern horizon—and then, only briefly—and in the best weather. Those peoples in the Northern Hemisphere who were able to see it used it for navigation, taking it for their guide to the south.<sup>20</sup>

### The Canopus Allegory in China

In Chinese tradition the star's allegory is attested from the Han dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD).<sup>21</sup> The *Tianguanshu* 天官書 "Treatise on Celestial Offices" by court polymath Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145–ca. 86 BC) states that near

*Tianlang* (天狼) 'The Heavenly Wolf,' i.e. 'Sirius' is a large star called *Nanji Laoren*.<sup>22</sup> The astronomical section of the *Jin Shu* (晉書), the history of the Jin dynasty (265-420) written during the Tang dynasty (618-907) in 648, states that *Laoren* stands south of *Hu* (弧) 'The Bow' and is also known as *Nanji* (南極) 'Extreme South' or 'Southern March.'<sup>23</sup>

The tropes of Chinese Canopus allegory developed relative to a point of observation at the ancient capital, Chang'an, situated between 34° and 35° degrees north latitude. From Chang'an the royal court could witness Canopus' heliacal rising in late September, around the autumnal equinox, its culmination at midnight around the winter solstice, and its heliacal setting around the vernal equinox in late March, after which time it would remain hidden below the earth's horizon during spring and summer. From Chang'an the star made a very low transit through the sky, passing just over the horizon, grazing the tops of the Zhongshan Mountains to the south. The arc made by Canopus' transit takes the shape of a mound or tumulus. Daoists designated Canopus "Supreme Verity of Cinnabar Tumulus" and "Old Man of the Southern Culmen." The heavenly mountain Canopus makes as it traverses the sky had in symmetry a counterpart (Chinese *xiang* 象) on earth.<sup>24</sup> From Chang'an the terrestrial mountain that corresponded to Canopus' marchmont and so marked due south was Nanshan (南山) 'The Southern Mountain.'

Passing so closely to the horizon, atmospheric impediments frequently obscured the star, so Tang court astronomers classified it a variable phenomenon. When Canopus *could* be seen, the occasion was deemed highly auspicious, a sign of calm atmosphere and good weather.<sup>25</sup> In relationship to the expanding transits of stars as they approached the celestial equator and then narrowed as they approached the celestial North Pole, watching Canopus make its short, low transit across the southern sky allowed the viewer to gauge the position of the celestial and terrestrial South Pole. Among the stars of Ursa



Major was a star whose position in the north corresponded to that of Canopus in the south. The turning of these stars in step illuminates the axis mundi. In marking the axis mundi, with heaven reticulated from the celestial North Pole above with lines of longitude and latitude likened to the warp (*jing* 經) and woof (*wei* 緯) threads of a woven canopy, viewing Canopus make its short low transit across the sky enabled one to behold the vast, star-spangled weave of heaven twirling with it, as if Canopus were the turning handle of a parasol. See [Figures 6 and 7](#). With its heliacal setting occurring on or around the vernal equinox, the star was a harbinger of the coming of the sign of spring, the rising of the Cyan Dragon, and with it the renewal of cosmic order.<sup>26</sup> For reifying the perpetuation of world order Old Man Canopus was also known as *Shouxing* (壽星) ‘Longevity Star.’<sup>27</sup>

In symmetry between heaven and earth, Canopus signified longevity not only for the order of heaven but for the government on earth as well. In particular, Canopus’ signification of longevity was auspicious for the person of the emperor, who, as Son of Heaven, had the duty to hold the respective orders of heaven and earth together in harmony.<sup>28</sup> Proclamations stated that when Canopus shines the emperor is secure and “glorious in longevity;” however, if, upon the taking of omens, Canopus was obscured, the presage was for armed conflict.<sup>29</sup> In a reciprocal way, when the emperor acted in accordance with “heaven’s virtue” it was said that *Shouxing* had drawn near to him, but if he had acted without virtue, it had moved away.

Given the star’s political importance, the allegory of Canopus (especially during and after the Tang dynasty) filtered into various media and vehicles of propaganda. Memorials to the emperor mentioned it.<sup>30</sup> Historians included its omens in chronicles.<sup>31</sup> Poets alluded to it.<sup>32</sup> Authors made it a stock character in literature.<sup>33</sup> Dramatists gave it a part in plays.<sup>34</sup> Painters and artists developed an iconography of it and represented it in paintings on silk.<sup>35</sup> Daoists and Buddhists propitiated it in ritual.<sup>36</sup>

This body of Canopus allegory spread to neighboring peoples with whom Chinese dynasties had political, cultural, and economic ties. Through Daoism in particular, but also Buddhism, the Chinese allegory of Canopus spread to Korea and Japan.<sup>37</sup> In Japan Canopus is known as *Nankyoku Rojin* (南極老人) ‘Old Man of the Southern March’ and *Nankyoku Sei* (南極星) ‘Southern March Star.’ Personified as *Jurôjin* (壽老人) ‘Old Man of Longevity,’ Japanese iconography of Canopus conforms very closely to that of Chinese *Shouxing*. See [Figure 8](#). As *Fukurokuju*, personification of Canopus is conflated with that of two other neighboring stars as a single deity.<sup>38</sup> *Fukurokuju* is held to be cognate to the Korean triune god, *Samsin* or the mountain god, *Sanshin* (山神 ‘mountain god’), likened to a lonely sage.<sup>39</sup> See [Figure 9](#).

The Chinese allegory of Canopus was familiar to Buddhist science. During the Tang dynasty in the twelfth year of the Kaiyuan era (724 AD) the Buddhist monk Yixing (683-727), a renowned astronomer and polymath, led an expedition south by sea to chart the stars of the southern sky and expressly to observe Canopus at higher altitude. Having crossed the equator and pushed on to about 20° south latitude, the expedition added several new constellations to the Chinese sky.<sup>40</sup>

### The Canopus Allegory in Gélukpa Tibetan Buddhism

Under Gélukpa dominion Tibetan Buddhist sages knew Chinese allegory of Canopus through the legacy of Chinese Buddhism in Tibet and through their ongoing assimilation of Chinese astral science. One deity presumably derived from Chinese allegory of Canopus is “Old Father Khen pa.” The term *khen pa* refers to the Chinese trigram *gen* 艮 ‘limit.’ Tibetans propitiate him together with a female counterpart, an old woman of the trigram *kun* 坤 ‘maternal earth.’ This old man is represented with snow-white hair, white robes, and riding on the white dog of the sky. In Chinese-influenced Tibetan astral science this dog might signify the black but white-headed, *Namkhyi* (*Gnam khyi*) ‘Sky-dog’ (Chi-

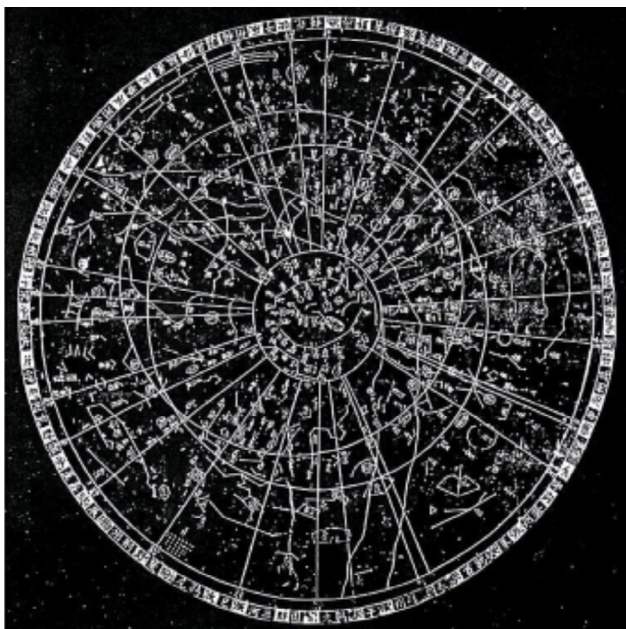


Figure 6. Chinese circular map of heavens.

nese *Tiangou* 天狗 'Heavenly Dog'), an asterism just above Canopus.<sup>41</sup> More straightforwardly, Tibetans assimilate Chinese allegory of Canopus in the figure of *Mitséring*, a literal rendering of Chinese *shoulao*. The deity's alternate appellation, *Genpo karmo* or *Genkar* 'White Old Man,' is a literal rendering of Mongolian *Čayan ebügen*. This latter rendering suggests the possibility of intermediary Mongolian influence, and, in Amdo, Tibetans consider him a foreign deity borrowed from the Mongols.<sup>42</sup>

Although Tibetans knew Chinese allegory of Canopus, the cult of the Old Man was not prominent in Central Tibet. This apparent lack of recognition is not due to lack of reverence for Canopus, however. At 29° north latitude, residents of Lhasa have a fair look at the star. Rather, it appears to be due to reverence for an alternative allegory. Tibetan astral science is wittingly comprised syncretistically of both Indian and Chinese traditions.<sup>43</sup> Of these two, Tibetans tend to privilege Canopus' Indian allegory over the Chinese.



Figure 7. Woman with parasol.



In India Canopus is known as Agastya. Traditionally, Indian astronomers aligned the calendar with the heliacal rising of Canopus (*agastyôdaya*), which was to occur on the seventh day of the second half of Bhādra (August-September), a rainy season in India.<sup>44</sup> In the south the mountain Agastyakoodam (Peak of Agastya) lies on the border between Kerala to the west and Tamil Nadu to the east.<sup>45</sup> The word *agastya* denotes at once the star Canopus and a certain Indian ṛishi—one of seven inspired sages said to have authored the Vedas. As Canopus itself, *Agastya* is said to be the “cleanser of water” because turbid waters settle and become clear when it appears.<sup>46</sup> In this allegory the appearance of Canopus perhaps indicates the season when summer runoff from the Himalayas subsides.<sup>47</sup>

In Central Tibet the designation *Karma rishi* (*Skar ma ri shi*) ‘Rishi Star’<sup>48</sup> for Canopus keeps with the Indian allegory. In worship of this allegory Tibetans held an annual water festival of thanksgiving in conjunction with Canopus’ heliacal

rising around the autumnal equinox. From the star’s reappearance in the early dawn Tibetans receive *karchu* (*skar chu*) ‘star water,’ meaning pure water. The star’s appearance also signifies the daily fall of morning dew.<sup>49</sup> Tibetans personify the star as an ascetic saint who lives alone for long periods in meditation. When he finally reappears Tibetans go joyfully to lakes and rivers to fetch water and under Canopus as healer, practice balneotherapy, bathing for health benefits. Monks go in procession and make offerings.<sup>50</sup>

### The Mongols Adopt the Canopus Allegory

As sovereigns of the Mongolian Plateau who went on to establish the largest contiguous empire in world history, even before conquering China, Mongols knew Chinese *tian* (天) ‘heaven’ intimately and had appropriated much of it for their own world order. After conquering China and establishing the Yuan dynasty (1260-1635) the Mongols appropriated Chinese heaven in its entirety, including all that it holds of Canopus. They knew the mythos to Canopus allegory through forms of propaganda disseminated in various media. For instance, in theater, Mongols witnessed the golden age of Chinese drama in the *zaju* 雜劇 plays of the Yuan dynasty and continued to follow the theater thereafter in the Qing.<sup>51</sup> These dramas are composed as astral allegories. Reading them with a mind for Chinese *tianwen* 天文, they are steeped in references to celestial phenomena derived largely from Daoist astral science. Writers drew from a stable of stock characters who, in polysemy, represent simultaneously celestial phenomena, historical personages, and contemporary court figures. These characters include the courtesan, the judge, the guard, the prince and princess, the emperor and empress, and the old man.<sup>52</sup> His name changes from one drama to another. But his distinctive attributes persist. He has a white beard and holds a cane. He resides in the south, at a mountain pass, in a garden. He often plays a cantankerous fool or half-wit who



Figure 8. Carved stone Fukurokuju figure.



Figure 9. Seated sage with tiger – perhaps Korean.

nonetheless possesses supernatural power and great wisdom.<sup>53</sup> The Mongols knew the logos to Chinese allegory of Canopus from authorities on astral science, Chinese *tianwen*, under their liege. This logos was overt in tracts on astral science, memorials to the throne, ritual practice, in historical writing, and in calendrical science and the almanac.<sup>54</sup>

During the Qing dynasty reign of emperor Kangxi (r. 1661-1722), around 1711, a Jesuit-made systematization of Chinese astral science, which at the time was state-of-the-art, was

translated into Mongolian from Chinese, and then from Mongolian into Tibetan, and in 1715 was block-printed.<sup>55</sup> See [Figure 10](#). This treatise, known as *Tngri-yin udq-a* (The Explication of Heaven), expressly reveals esoteric knowledge of the logos of Chinese Canopus allegory in Mongolian. In one of its star-charts the text renders Canopus *Ebügen kümün* 'old man' and in corresponding commentary states that the star is "on the South Pole" and that "because it exits and enters [heaven in every] spring and autumn [respectively], its age is immortal."<sup>56</sup> See [Figure 11](#).



## From Allegory to Cult

Although Mongols knew the Chinese allegory of Canopus before their conversion to Gélukpa Buddhism in the late 16th century, precisely when they developed the allegory into a uniquely Mongolian cult of the White Old Man is uncertain. Imperial Turco-Mongolic nomads have a long tradition of venerating Canopus as the guardian of the south.<sup>57</sup> At the founding of their empire in 1206, it is possible the Chinggisid Mongols worshipped Canopus in some way, perhaps even in Chinese allegory. Their literature makes reference to white-betokening, mountain-dwelling, supernatural wise old men which may well refer to Canopus and so prefigure the Géluk cult of the White Old Man. For instance, an Uygur creation myth recounted in Juvaini's Chinggisid history tells of an old man clothed in white and holding a white staff who hands over to the Buqu Khan a jasper stone in the shape of a pinecone saying, "if you can maintain grasp of this stone, the four corners of the world will be under the shadow of thy command."<sup>58</sup> In *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Canopus allegory may be personified in the figure of *Üsün ebügen* 'Oldy Locks,' patriarch of the Baarin clan, who, as presumably an old man with white hair, wears a white robe, rides a white gelding, sits on a dais, and is so honored for his wisdom that Chinggis Khan consults him yearly and monthly for advice.<sup>59</sup> However, if these allegories do indeed refer to Canopus, their affinity with the allegories of the White Old Man in Gélukpa tradition are vague.

Yuan dynasty sources do not indicate the existence of either indigenous Mongolian or Buddhist cults. Even in Qubilai Khan's lifetime Sakya priests had assimilated rituals of the Mongols' imperial tradition into Buddhism. Whereas some of these rituals are attested in sources such as Marco Polo's *Travels*, no mention of a cult of the White Old Man is found. Neither do we find pictorial representations of the White Old Man as a uniquely Mongolian deity. The claim that Mongol emperors' worshipped a Buddhacized cult of pre-Buddhist White Old Man is merely conjectural. The elderly, white-bearded manifestation of

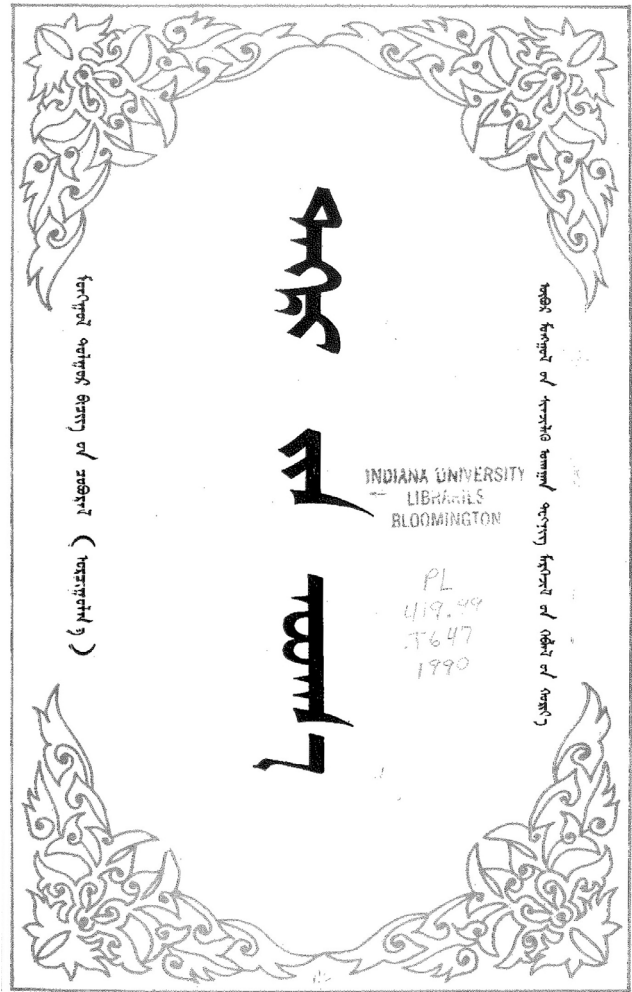


Figure 10. Cover of Treatise, *Tngri-yin udq-a* (The Explication of Heaven).

the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī at Wutaishan could just as well refer to a Chinese deity, *Shouxing-cum-Laozi*.<sup>60</sup> The supposition that the White Old Man cult must have existed before the Oirat's westerly migration in 1630 is specious because, though the distance is significant, Oirats returned to Inner Asia regularly and could have started the cult in their new home at a later date.<sup>61</sup>

As a matter of religious practice, the cult of the White Old Man as found in Mongolian Buddhist tradition appears to have been first promulgated under Géluk hegemony. The cult's earliest extant written sources are attested during the eighteenth century.<sup>62</sup> The dissemination of the cult at this time coincided with a political drive orchestrated





by the Qianlong emperor (r. 1735-1796) under the direction of the Second Janggiya qutuytu, Rolbaidorji (Tib. *Lcang skya Rol pa' rdo rje*, 1717-1786) to promote unity through new rituals that functioned to inculcate nationalism and loyalty to a Buddhist-Qing world order. These trends coincided with Mongols' increasing reliance on the new-age Chinese heaven as given in *Tngri-yin udq-a*.<sup>63</sup>

The evidence is compelling that the cult was first promulgated from Mergen Monastery in Urad Right-Wing Banner, Inner Mongolia by the Third Mergen Gegen Lubsangdambijaltsan (1717-1766). His literature is the source of later White Old Man literature.<sup>64</sup> Also, his creation of this liturgy is in keeping with other liturgies he created. In those he converts rituals of indigenous Mongolian culture—concerning, for instance, a fire cult, weather magic, cairns, and Chinggis Khan—into Buddhist form and composes them in the vernacular. For this merit, he is credited not only in Inner Mongolia but throughout the Mongolian Buddhist world as being the founder of Mongolian Buddhist liturgy. No liturgy of the White Old Man was prevalent before him.<sup>65</sup>

A generation before the Third Mergen Gegen's liturgies, during the reign of Kangxi (r. 1661-1722), Mongols began to make pilgrimages to the seat of their emperor's apotheosis, the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, at Wutaishan, a sacred mountain in Buddhist cosmology, located in Shanxi Province. In 1721 a Mongolian guidebook to Mañjuśrī veneration at Wutaishan promulgated by Rolbaidorji, Mañjuśrī is represented as an old man who appears on the mountain from time to time to impart wisdom.<sup>66</sup> When one assumes that the White Old Man is an ancient Mongolian shamanic deity, one naturally sees the old man in this guidebook to be Mongolian and concludes that here we see the Mongols' Čayan ebügen influencing Mañjuśrī. However, when one sees the White Old Man as the personification of Chinese Canopus, then, it would seem instead that it is Mañjuśrī who is engendering Čayan ebügen. Whether this 1721 guidebook indicates an existing cult of

the Mongolian White Old Man spawned the cult directly, or merely sewed seeds for the creation of the cult by Mergen Gegen a generation later remains to be proved.

What is clear is that in the latter half of the eighteenth century the cult of the White Old Man developed in the Mongol realms and spread throughout the Géluk world.<sup>67</sup> Whether or not Mergen Gegen founded the cult, his liturgy was central to its dissemination.<sup>68</sup> One type of incense offering composed by Mergen Gegen was published in Beijing. A variation was published in eastern Inner Mongolia, among the Khorchin, and another, in Ordos in the west. The cult was adapted from the clergy by the laity, and spread throughout Inner Mongolia to Khalkha, Oirats, and Buriats. From Beijing, perhaps during the 1760s, Mergen Gegen's incense offering was translated into Tibetan by a Chakhar Mongolian monk, Lubsangtsuldem (1740-1810), as *Sa bdag rgan po dkar po'i bsang bzhugs* (Incense offering for the genius loci, White Old Man).<sup>69</sup>

In Géluk masquerade the White Old Man character appears to have been introduced by the Mongols, perhaps from Khalkha. Mongolian *čam* (Tib. *'chams*; Khalkha *tsam*) is thought to have been performed among Oirats as early as 1723 and first attested among the Khalkha at Erdene Zuu monastery in 1786.<sup>70</sup> Whether the White Old Man played a role in these performances is unknown to me. His role is attested in what is known as the *Jakhar tsam* first performed under the auspices of the Fourth Jebtsundamba khutukhtu (1775-1813) at Ikh Khüree in 1811.<sup>71</sup> From Ikh Khüree the White Old Man character apparently spread to other monasteries across the Mongolian realms and into Tibet. Upon returning to Tibet after a period of exile among the Khalkha from 1904 to 1906, the 13th Dalai Lama introduced the character at Lhasa. During the early decades of the 20th century accounts of travelers and scholars show that iterations of a White Old Man character had been assimilated across numerous monasteries and nations throughout the Géluk world.<sup>72</sup>



Perhaps the White Old Man's inclusion in Géluk ritual dance relates to the Mongols' abiding love of Chinese drama. In the world of Géluk masquerade the Khüree *tsam* stood out for its elaborate design and emphasis on entertainment. Mongol aristocrats introduced new characters into the dance from Chinese drama.<sup>73</sup> One of these was the White Old Man.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, around the time the White Old Man appeared in the Khüree *tsam*, Chinese dramas featuring an Old Man character were being translated into Mongolian and staged throughout Mongolian lands.<sup>75</sup> (At Khüree the theater for performances of Chinese drama was located in sight of the *tsam* stage). The influence of Chinese drama on the White Old Man character of Khüree *tsam* can be seen in his comedic role as a jester. (See [Figure 1](#)) This part is common to the Old Man characters of Chinese *zaju* but foreign to the deity propitiated in incense offerings and prayers.

### The Polymorphous Nature of the White Old Man in His Cult

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, when the cult of the White Old Man was most prevalent, one finds him a polymorphous entity. His character has been strongly influenced by Mongolian cults of Čayan ebügen. This Čayan ebügen has been assimilated into the Géluk fold from a *qara šasin* 'secular dominion' comprised of multifarious non-Géluk authorities. These include Chinese dynastic tradition, Daoism, and, especially, the Mongolian aristocracy.<sup>76</sup> Although influenced by the Mongols' secular tradition, his makeup is not limited to Mongolian influence. His Mongolian incarnation has supplanted, or intermixed with, pre-existing forms. His biggest prototype is *Shouxing*, that is, Chinese allegory of Canopus. But he also contains Indian elements of Canopus allegory as personified by *Agastya*—and perhaps other foreign influences (such as the Turkic or Iranian) as well. Although his essential features are consistent, the range of his attributes vary, sometimes considerably, from one emanation to another.

Anything but timeless, his being is in a perpetual state of flux. In Tibetan masquerade his emanation is influenced by Mongolian tradition. In Mongolian masquerade the roles are reversed as his character comes to be known by a Tibetan name, *Lkhachintseren* (Mong. *tngrī-yin yeke urtu nasutu*) 'Greatly Aged of Heaven.'<sup>77</sup> At Wutai-shan the White Old Man morphs with Mañjuśrī. Perhaps he morphs with the deities of sacred mountains generally.<sup>78</sup> In Khalkha painting he appears to morph with a horsehead-fiddle-playing bard.<sup>79</sup> He morphs with the deified Chinese Buddhist monk Hwashang.<sup>80</sup> And among the Bayad Mongols, after a destructive earthquake in 1905, he morphs with Indian allegory of Canopus when in the local masquerade his dance is changed to express the calming of waves and still water.<sup>81</sup>

Another metamorphosis of the Géluk White Old Man is into Christian Santa Claus. Scholars have noted that the Buriats associate the White Old Man with Greek Orthodox St. Nicholas: both are old men with white hair, big bellies, and a jovial character; and both carry a staff and wear a white caftan. This has been dismissed as coincidence.<sup>82</sup> However, there is an astral connection the Buriats may have noted. The White Old Man and St. Nicholas abide on the axis mundi, one, on the South Pole, the other, the North. In Chinese tradition, if Canopus is the southern culmen, its counterpart to the north is the star Mizar.<sup>83</sup> In Arab tradition, Canopus was aligned with the star Alcor of Ursa Major "occupying respectively the highest and lowest posts in the celestial hierarchy."<sup>84</sup> For Northern Europeans Alcor, Mizar, and two other stars of Ursa Major formed Odin's Wain.<sup>85</sup> For Christians, who appropriated the pagan cult of Odin, this became St. Nicholas' sleigh. If the staff St. Nicholas holds represents the axis, as the White Old Man's staff seems to, then the two of them might well be holding onto the same thing.

This transmutability of the White Old Man's nature is not rare. In astral science, allegorical tropes assume their meaning not as independent terms but, rather, as metonyms in interrelationship



with every other such that to know any one trope in full is to know every other as well. In literature any one trope can be unfolded like a peacock's tail into a resplendent panoply of tropes only to be dovetailed back into one. For literati transforming one thing into another was a game. Indeed, one can say that if one cannot turn any one thing into any other and from everything into nothing, then one does not truly know the thing. Prior to the ascendancy of soteriological world order, this ability to riddle it all as one was considered a key aspect to possessing "perfect knowledge."<sup>86</sup> In promoting a new soteriological world order, Paul repudiates just this sort of science when he says, "If I understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . but have not love, I am nothing."<sup>87</sup>

Tropes metamorphose within a given tradition and transmute cross-culturally as well. Throughout human history people have relied on a conventionally constructed heaven for orientation in space and time. Because orientation is a conventional—not absolute—reality, from government to government, and over time, heavens change, such that the heaven of any one people is not the same as that of any other. As nations interact they share their heavens so as to be in accord over where things stand in space and time.<sup>88</sup> In the case of China, although by the genesis of the Han dynasty a remarkably indigenous heaven had been canonized, its astral allegory too appears to bear the trace of foreign influence.<sup>89</sup> And just as Chinese tradition has influenced that of the nomads to the north and west, so too nomads may have disseminated western allegories into China.

## Conclusion

That the Mongols' Čayan ebügen and the greater Géluk White Old Man must be identified as none other than Canopus is given by the deity's attributes. These correspond perfectly with principally those of *Laoren*, i.e., Chinese Canopus allegory, but also to a lesser degree with those of *Agastya*, i.e., Indian Canopus

allegory. This correspondence exists from one emanation of the White Old Man to another and no matter how disparate sets of attributes may be. Correspondence is with not only the mythos of Canopus, by which the relationship might be merely coincidental, but also with the uniquely Chinese logos of Canopus, by which correspondence is spatial and temporal and comprehensible in scientific and historical terms.

In comparison, both the White Old Man and Canopus are white. Both are an old man. An alternate name for the deity in Tibetan, *Mit-séring*, is a literal rendering of *Shoulao*, an alternate name for the star in Chinese. Both the White Old Man and Canopus as *Shouxing* hold a dragon-head staff, and in the sky the star illuminates the staff-like axis mundi and its heliacal setting heralds the rising of the Cyan Dragon of spring—at the beginning or "head" of the year.<sup>90</sup> The White Old Man holds a bow and arrow, and in the Chinese sky directly above Canopus is the asterism *Hushi* (弧矢) 'Bow and Arrow.'<sup>91</sup> See [Figure 12](#). The White Old Man lives on a mountain, and in Chinese allegory Canopus dwells on the sacred mountain that corresponds with the mound-like transit he makes across the sky. Both mountains are in the south. The White Old Man's mountain is fruited, lush with produce, especially peaches, and in Chinese allegory Canopus resides under the constellation *Tianyuan* (天園) 'Celestial Garden' which Sima Qian says represents an orchard with peach, apricot, and cassia trees and is said to be the place where Old Man Canopus grows his herbs of longevity.<sup>92</sup> See [Figure 13](#). Both the White Old Man and the star have a consort: the White Old Man has Mother Earth (Mong. *ütügen eke*), and in Chinese allegory the star has the asterism *Houtu* (后土) 'Queen Earth', rendered in Mongolian as *Etügen eke* 'Mother Earth.'<sup>93</sup> See [Figure 14](#). The White Old Man stills water, and in Indian allegory Canopus does too. The White Old Man can be the White Rishi, and in Indian allegory Canopus is the White Rishi. In *Dar-ake-yin tuyuji* the transformation of the non-Buddhist celestial sage (*oytaryuy-yin mergen*), the White Rishi (*Čayan arsi*), into the Buddhist

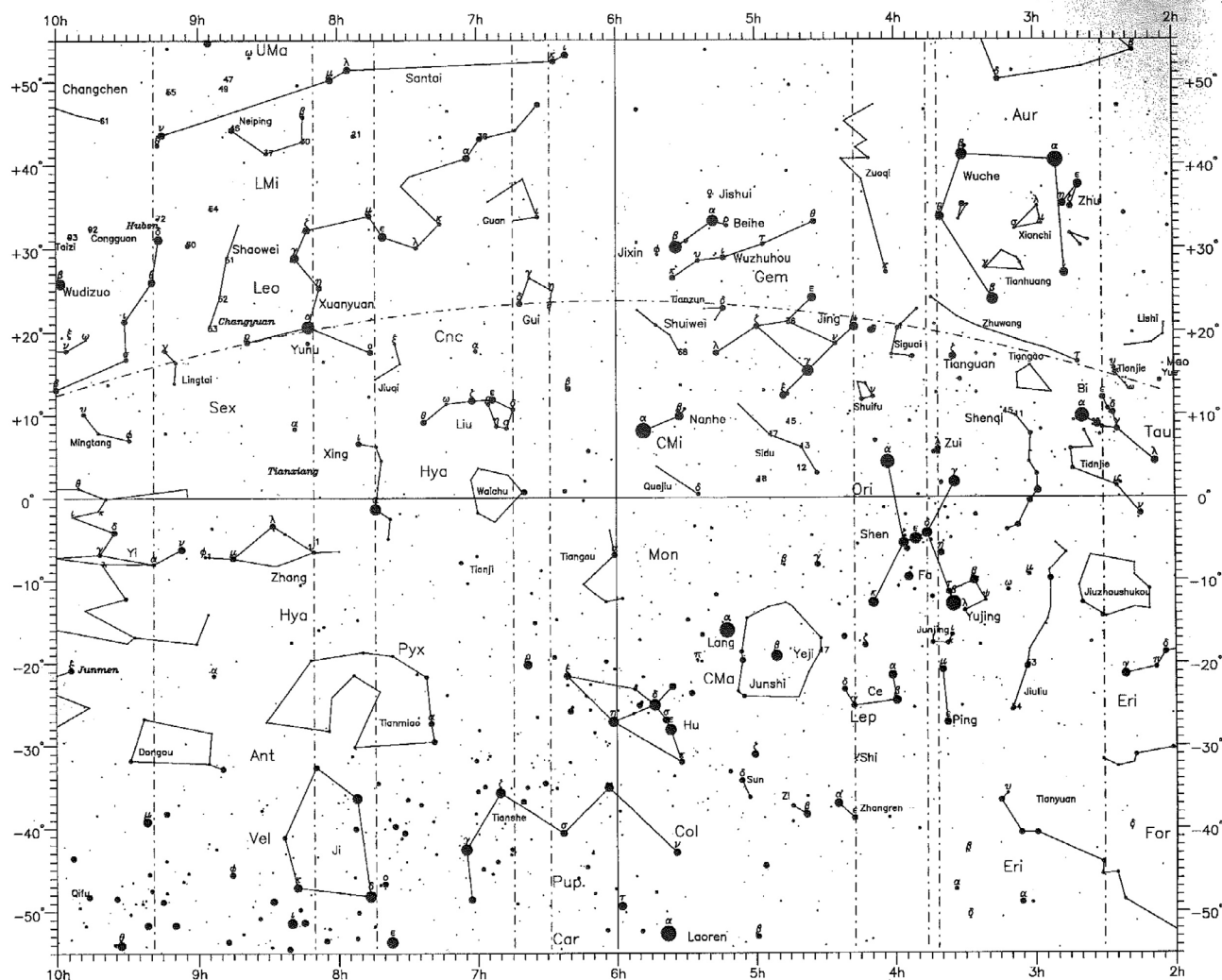


Figure 12. Chinese sky during the Han period.

deity Čayan ebügen suggests a change of preference from Indian Agastya allegory to Chinese Laoren allegory.

There are many correspondences between the White Old Man and Canopus allegory. Both the White Old Man and *Laoren* have a bulbous bald pate;<sup>94</sup> are beneficent; instill wisdom; insure longevity; control the seasons, land and water, and agricultural fertility;<sup>95</sup> ride a deer or stag;<sup>96</sup> and hold a scroll.<sup>97</sup> In Mongolian masquerade, similar to the Old Man character in Chinese *zaju* drama, the White Old Man plays a fool, suffers humiliation, and is ridiculed. Scholars assert

that this debasement signified Mongolian hatred for Chinese.<sup>98</sup> If Mongolian audiences did indeed interpret the scene in this way, perhaps the financial burden brought on by Chinese usury practices had something to do with it. However, in Chinese *zaju* drama the Old Man character is bullied. The prototype for the scene was understood to be the figure of Han Xin in Sima Qian's *Shiji*. There the scene is meant to exemplify how humility and self-discipline bode future greatness.<sup>99</sup>

The identification of the Géluk White Old Man with Chinese Canopus allegory is further cor-

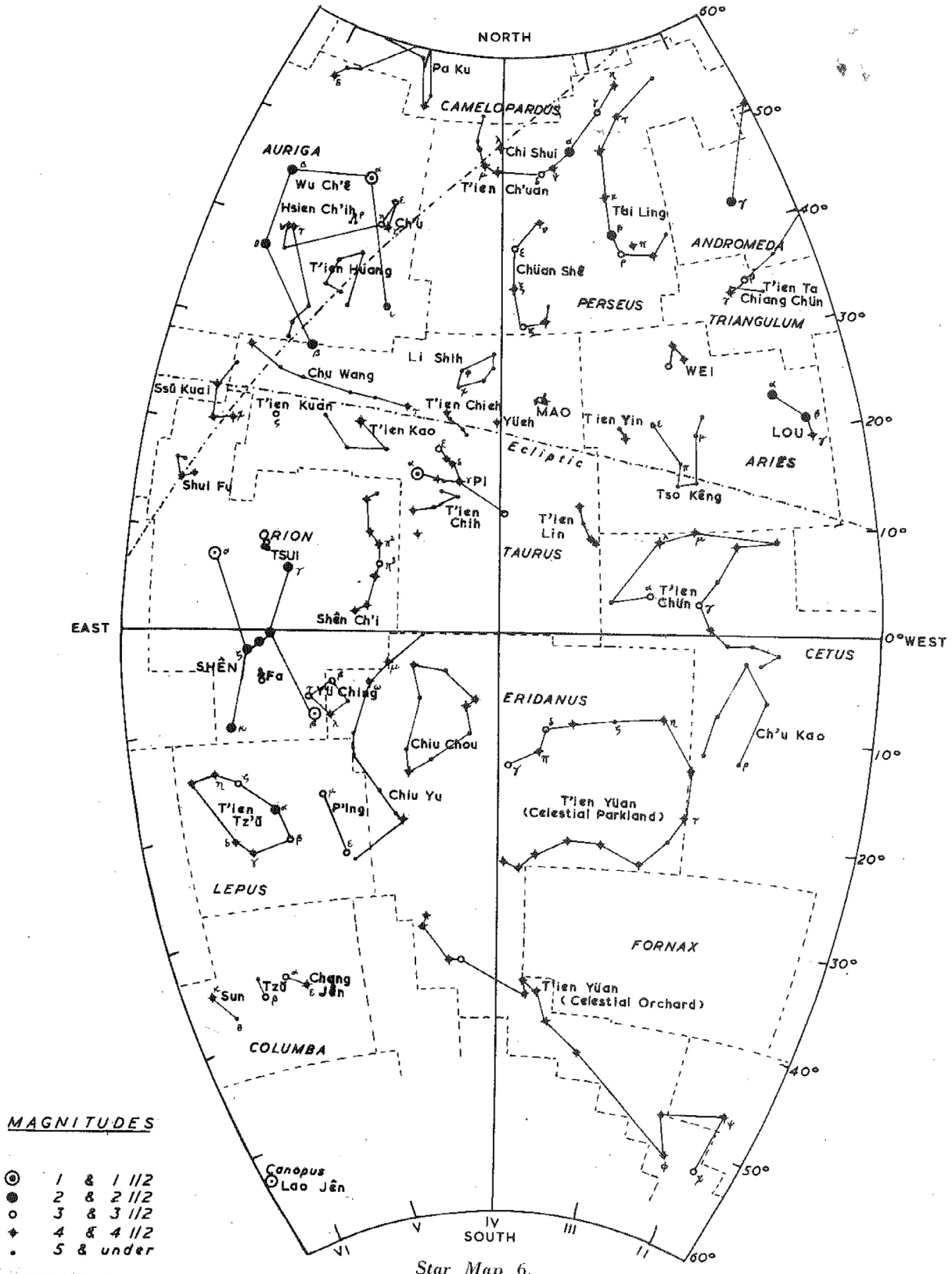


Figure 13. Star Map 6.

1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

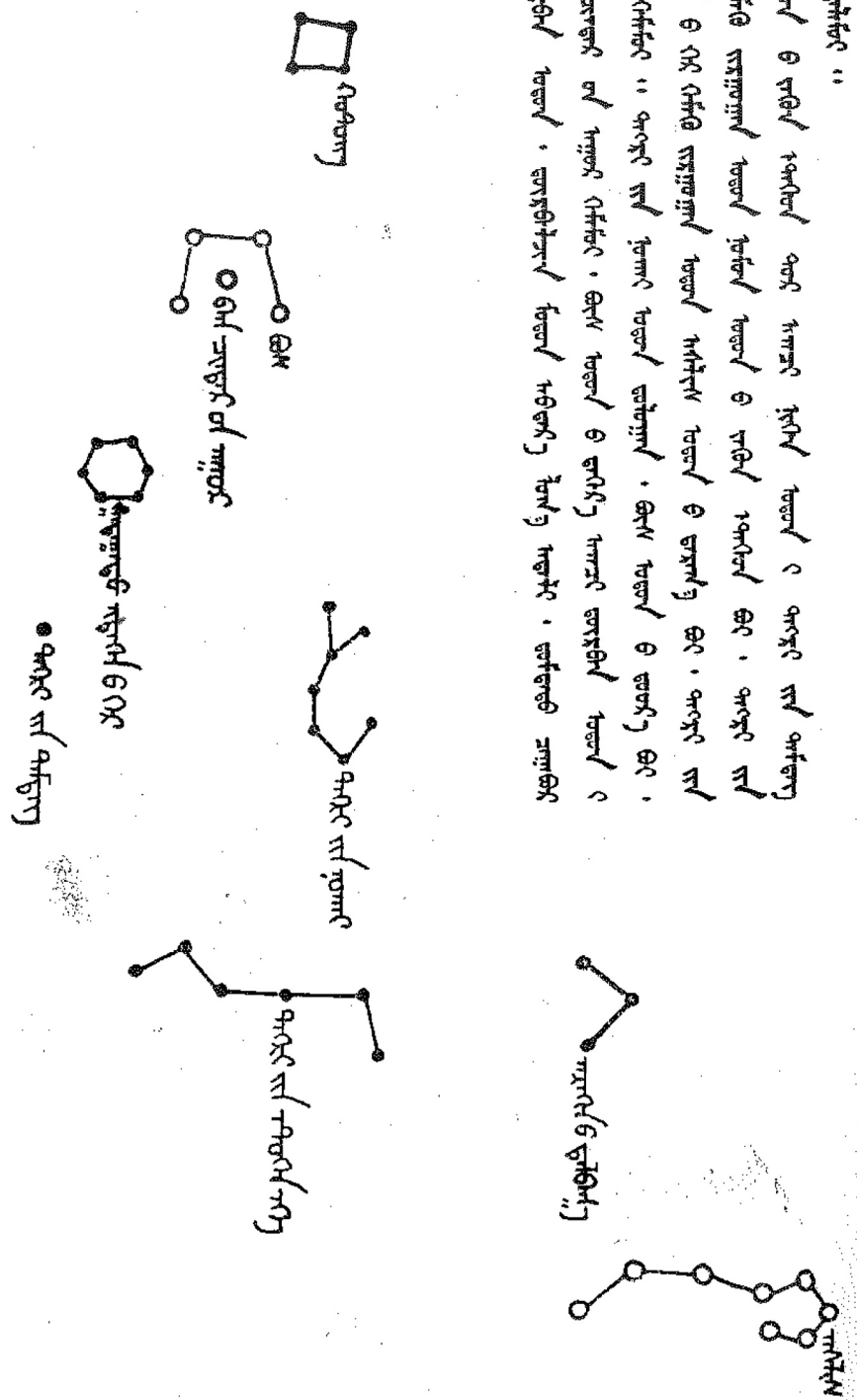


Figure 14. Mongolian star map.



roborated in other ways. In his iconography in painting and plastic arts, the White Old Man's representations as a white betokened old man with white hair and robe, a bulbous bald pate, holding a dragon-headed staff, accompanied by deer and crane, and seated in a bucolic setting under peach trees match those of *Shouxing* more or less exactly.<sup>100</sup> Mongols themselves identify their White Old Man with the Chinese longevity star.<sup>101</sup> And even modern scholars recognize that the Géluk White Old Man cannot but be related to Chinese *Shouxing* in some way.

The personification of Canopus as the White old Man allows him to exist in space and time. On a clear night at the right place and season, you can see him. His attributes are either objectively visible or empirically comprehensible. As an agent by which Géluk hegemony brings order to the void in nature, he serves an express and essential purpose as a deity or god in heaven.<sup>102</sup>

By comparison, the shamanistic interpretation is purposeless. The White Old Man's color reflects a shamanic veneration of whiteness; his advanced age, shamanic veneration of agedness; his mountain home, shamanic veneration of mountains; his bow and arrow, shamanic veneration of bow and arrow. He somehow personifies "creative power." The interpretations are either tautological or abstract. The shamanistic interpretation also ignores science; it fails to connect the White Old Man with a star even when the Chinese word for star is present in his Chinese counterpart *Shouxing's* very name.

Today, questions of the White Old Man's reality assume new importance, as Mongols define their own past after Communist ideology worked to erase it. Has the invention of shamanism changed the White Old Man's essential being? Certainly foreign scholars and many Mongols see him in anthropological terms as a foil to modernity. Their conceptions would be enriched by his history as present-day conceptions of the White Old Man adjust to meet new needs.<sup>103</sup>

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## Notes

1. For images of Čayan ebügen see N. *Tsultem, Development of the Mongolian National Style Painting 'Mongol Zurag' in Brief*, Ulaanbaatar: State Publishing House, 1986, figs. 118, 183; P. Berger and T. Bartholomew, *Mongolian: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*, San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1995, pp. 126-32, esp. fig. 4, p. 132; Agnes Birtalan, "Cagaan Owgon—the White Old Man in the Leder collections: the textual and iconographic tradition of the cult of the White Old Man among the Mongols" in *The Mongolian collections retracing Hans Leder*, Maria-Katharina Lang and Stefan Bauer, eds., Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2013: 84-94; Heissig, *Mongolische volksreligiöse und folkloristische texte*, pl. XV; Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, pl. I-IV; Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual*, 135-36; Sanj Altan, An Oirad-Kalmyk Version, fig. 1, p. 22.
2. This summary is compiled from text transcriptions in Mostaert, *Culte du Vieillard Blanc*, 109-16; Heissig, *Mongolische volksreligiöse und folkloristische texte*, 129-39; A. Sárközi, "Incense-Offering to the White Old Man," in *Documenta Barbarorum: Festschrift für Walther Heissig zum 70. Geburtstag*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983, pp. 357-69; and Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 589-616.
3. See Č. Damdinsürüng, ed., *Mongyol uran jökiyal-un degeji jayun bilig orosibai*, 4 vols., [Kökeqota]: Öber Mongyol-un arad-un keblel-ün qoriy-a, 1982, v. 2, p. 749.
4. Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual*, 629-31.
5. Sárközi, *Incense-Offering*, 362.
6. Futaki, *Classification of Texts*, 37; Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual*, 135-36.
7. F. Lessing, *Mongolian-English Dictionary*, Bloomington: The Mongolia Society, 1982, p. 753.
8. M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899, pp. 1068-69.
9. D. Banzarov, "The Black Faith, or Shamanism among the Mongols," Jan Nattier and John R. Krueger, transl., *Mongolian Studies* 7 (1981-2): 53-91, p. 56.
10. One may cite numerous examples. See, for instance, Heissig, *Religions of Mongolia*, 77; Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 589; Ágnes Birtalan, "Die Mythologie der mongolischen Volksreligion," in *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, Klett-cotta, 2003, p. 958; and Birtalan, *Cagaan Owgon*, 84.
11. K. Kollmar-Paulenz, "The Invention of 'Shamanism' in 18th Century Mongolian Elite Discourse," *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* 2012: 90-106.
12. Nebesky-Wojtkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances*, 83-84.
13. S. Hummel and G. Vogliotti, "The White Old Man," *The Tibet Journal* 22 (1997): 59-70, p. 63.



14. Pozdnevayev, *Religion and Ritual*, 135.
15. Futaki (Classification of Texts, 44), for instance, notes that texts attributed to Mergen Gegen representing Čayan ebügen mounted on a deer, carrying a curved stick, and holding a medical elixir and a scroll appear to the influence of the *Shouxing*. See also Birtalan, Cagaan Owgon, 90.
16. See Pozdnevayev, *Religion and Ritual*, 135 (resemblance to St. Nicholas a coincidence); Hummel and Vogliotti, *The White Old Man*, 62-63 (Gargaru bodo and Zurvan derive from shared Shamanic antiquity).
17. Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 589-90; Birtalan (Cagaan Owgon, 86) posits his whiteness and oldness as two features belonging to the most ancient layer of belief. Hummel and Vogliotti (*The White Old Man*, 62, 63, 69) posit the others: Heissig, *The Religions of Mongolia*, 77.
18. Heissig, *Mongolische volksreligiöse und folkloristische texte*, 23; and Heissig, *Religions of Mongolia*, 79; Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, 590-91.
19. G. Schlegel, *Uranographie chinoise*, vol. 1, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1875, p. 426.
20. Allen, *Star Names*, 71; J. L. Berggren, and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: an Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 66. Apparently the star's area of visibility was more extensive in midlatitudes millennia prior; however, due to the precession of the equinoxes it appears to have drifted southward reaching the vicinity of its current position by roughly the sixth century BC. See W. Hartner, "The earliest history of the constellations of the Near East and the motif of the lion-bull combat," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 24 (1965): 1-16, p. 16; and K. van der Toorn, et al., eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (DDD), Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995, s.v. Constellations.
21. Y. Maeyama, "The oldest star catalogue of China, Shih Shen's *Hsing Ching*," in *Prismata. Festschrift für Willy Hartner* (1977): 211-245.
22. Sun Xiaochun and J. Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky during the Han: Constellations, Stars and Society*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 156.
23. Ho Peng Yoke, *The astronomical chapters of The Chin Shu*, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1966, p. 111. Comprised of stars of Canis Major and Puppis, The Bow is also known as *Tianhu* (天弧) 'The Celestial Bow' and *Hushi* (弧矢) 'The Bow and Arrow.'
24. E. Schafer, *Pacing the Void: T'ang Approaches to the Stars*, Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1977, pp. 5, 66-68, 70.
25. *Ibid*, 68-69. See also W. B. Henning, "An Astronomical Chapter of the Bundahishn," *JRAS* 1942: 229-248, p. 246.
26. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 77; and E. T. C. Werner, *Myths and Legends of China*, London, Bombay, Sydney 1922. pp. 171-72;
27. *Ibid*; H. Doré, *Recherches sur les superstitions en chine*, Part Two, vol. 11, Shanghai, Imprimerie de la mission catholique, 1916, pp. 966-67.
28. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 69.
29. *Ibid*, 68, 69. According to *Xingjing* 星經 "Treatise on the Stars," when the star shines bright and clear there is longevity in heaven and peace on earth (老人明大則人有壽天下安寧). According to the *Tianguan shu* 天官書 "Treatise on Celestial Offices" when Laoren is seen the government is at peace; but when it goes unseen armed conflict will arise (老人見治安不見兵起). See Schlegel, *Uranographie chinoise*, 426-27.
30. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 68-69.
31. As in the *Jinshu* above; see Yoke, *Astronomical Chapters*, 111.
32. As in Wang Wei's poem above. See also Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 68-69.
33. For representations of the 'old man' character traditional Chinese literature, see J. S. M. Lau, *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*, Columbia, 1978, pp. 120, 416-17, *passim*; see also the story "Kuan Lo" in A. Waley, *Ballads and Stories from Tun-Huang*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1960, p. 174-76, where the star of the South Pole is explicitly personified.
34. C. T. Hsia et al., *The Columbia Anthology of Yuan Drama*, Columbia University Press, 2014, p. 14.
35. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 232; and L. Gesterkamp, *The Heavenly Court: A study on the Iconopraxis of Daoist Temple Painting*, [PhD dissertation], Leiden University, 2008, p. 45.
36. K. M. Schipper and F. Verellen, eds., *The Taoist canon: A historical companion to the Daozang*, 3 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, v. 2, pp. 1006-7.
37. F. R. Stephenson, "Chinese and Korean Star Maps and Catalogs," in J. B. Harley and D. Woodward, eds., *History of Cartography, Volume Two, Book Two, Cartography in the Traditional East and Southeast Asian Societies*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994, pp. 511 ff., 589; F. Vos, "Tong-fang Shuo, Buffoon and Immortal, in Japan and Korea," *Oriens Extremus* 26 (1979): 189-203; and Birtalan, Cagaan Owgon, 91.
38. Vos, *Tong-fang Shuo*, 194.
39. Birtalan, Cagaan Owgon, 91; Hummel and Vogliotti, *The White Old Man*, 62-63; Vos, *Tong-fang Shuo*, 194-95; and H. H. Sørensen, *The iconography of Korean Buddhist painting*, 1989, pp. 19-21, pl. XLI, XLVII.
40. The party was able to cross the equator and push on to about 20° south latitude. Sun and Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky*, 28-31; J. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 3, Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, p. 274; Stephenson, *Star Maps*, 533.
41. L. A. Waddell, *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, Cambridge, 1895, pp. 484-87; Schlegel, *Uranographie chinoise*, 433-34; and B. Baumann, *Divine Knowledge*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, p. 123.
42. S. Hummel, "Der Tigerbändiger in der Tibetischen Ikonographie," *Folklore Studies* 20 (1961): 1-13, p. 2.
43. Baumann, *Divine Knowledge*, 249.
44. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 4. For a discussion of the heliacal rising of Canopus in Indian tradition, see S. B. Rao, et al., "Heliacal Rising of Canopus in Indian Astronomy," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51 (2016): 83-91. See also K Chandra Hari, "On the visibility of Agastya (Canopus) in India," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51 (2016): 511-20.
45. I thank Dr. Gayatri Devi for informing me of the existence of this mountain and its significance in Hindu cosmology.
46. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 4. See also Canopus' association with water in Egyptian and Iranian traditions in Allen, *Star Names*, 70-71.
47. With his absence from view Canopus marks the season of running meltwater around the summer solstice, so perhaps his heliacal rising marks the season's end. See Mirashi, Vasudev Vishnu, and Narayan Raghunath Navalekar, *Kalidasa: Date, Life, and Works*, Bombay, 1969, p. 16.



48. See also the corrupt form *Skar ma ri byi*; and variant forms: *Skar ma rib ci*; and *Skar chu* in Jäschke, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 1881, p. 20; and S. Ch. Das, *A Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 1902, pp. 86, 1177. See also Waddell, *Lamaism*, 509-10.
49. For the connection between Agastya and the morning dew, see Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 86. Aristotle's *Meteorologica* (1.10) states that dew is formed from the south wind, not the north. For Canopus as dispenser of morning dew internationally, and in Egyptian tradition in particular, see Allen, *Star Names*, 67.
50. Waddell, *Lamaism*, 509-10. See also Jäschke, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 20; Das, *Tibetan-English Dictionary*, 86; and H. Laufer, *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Tibetischen Medicin*, Berlin, 1900, p. 72.
51. Shih Chung-wen, *The Golden Age of Chinese Drama: Yuan Tsa-chu*, Princeton, 2015. Mongols continued to enjoy Chinese opera during the Qing at theaters in Beijing, Kalgan, Kökeqota, and in the Maimaicheng district of Ikh Khüree. See A. M. Pozdneyev, *Mongolia and the Mongols*, Bloomington: Indiana University, 1971, p. 87.
52. Shih, *Chinese Drama*, 47-67. For the 'Old Man' as a stock characters in Yuan drama, see also Hsia, *Yuan Drama*, 44.
53. Hsia, *Yuan Drama*, 49, 135, 145, 151, 164, 181, 238, 280, 293-294, 358, 407.
54. For example, see Yoke, *The Astronomical Chapters*.
55. See Čeden, et al., analyst, *Tngri-yin udq-a* [The Explication of Heaven], [Kökeqota]: Öbör Mongyol-un Sinjilekü Uqayan Teknik Mergejil-ün Keblel-ün Qoriy-a, 1990, p. 1; Baumann, *Divine Knowledge*, 109; L. van der Kuijp, "From *Chongzheng lishu* (崇禎曆書) to *Tengri-yin udq-a* and *Rgya rtsis chen mo*," in *Tibetan Printing: Comparison, Continuities, and Change*, Hildegard Diemberger et al., eds., Brill, 2016, p. 54.
56. Čeden, *Tngri-yin udq-a*, 915-16.
57. Yehoshua Frenkel, "The Turks of the Eurasian Steppes in Medieval Arabic Writing," in *Mongols, Turks, and Others*, Reuven Amitai and Michal Biran eds., Brill, 2005, p. 218.
58. Ata-Malik Juvaini, *Genghis Khan: The History of the World-Conqueror*, J.A. Boyle, ed. and transl., 1958, pp. 55-58.
59. I. de Rachewiltz, transl., *The Secret History of the Mongols: A Mongolian Epic Chronicle of the Thirteenth Century*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 47, 143, 148, 447, 808.
60. Futaki (Classification of Texts, 42-43) also notes the unlikelihood of a Mongolian Čayan ebügen cult at Wutaishan in the imperial 13-14th c. For *Shouxing's* association with Laozi, see Mostaert, *Culte du Vieillard Blanc*, 111.
61. Lessing notes the familiar presence of Oirats from the Caucasus at the Yonghe gong temple complex in Beijing. See F. D. Lessing, *Yung-ho-kung: An Iconography of the Lamaist Cathedral in Peking*, Stockholm 1942, p. 2; see also R. Taupier, "The Western Mongolian Clear Script and the Making of a Buddhist State, in *Buddhism in Mongolian History, Culture, and Society*, Vesna Wallace, ed., Oxford: OUP, 2015: 23-36, p. 34.
62. Sanj Altan, An Oirad-Kalmyk Version, 15.
63. Baumann, *Divine Knowledge*, 109-12, 240.
64. H. Futaki, Classification of Texts. See also W. Heissig, "Zum Einfluss des Mergen gegen auf die Čayan ebügen-Verehrung" ZAS 30 (2000): 53-67.
65. C. Humphrey and Hülrebaatar Ujeed, *A Monastery in Time: The Making of Mongolian Buddhism*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013, p. 65.
66. I. Charleux, *Nomads on Pilgrimage: Mongols on Wutaishan (China), 1800-1940*, Brill, 2015, pp. 196-97.
67. Mostaert (*Culte du Vieillard Blanc*, 108) notes that the cult became popular during the reign of Qianlong (1735-1796). See P. S. Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer Nachrichten über die mongolischen Völkerschaften*, 2 vols., St. Petersburg, 1776-1801, v. 2, pp. 211, 214-15. See also Sanj Altan, An Oirad-Kalmyk Version, 15.
68. Heissig, *Mongolische volksreligiöse und folkloristische texte*, 21; Futaki, Classification of Texts.
69. Futaki, Classification of Texts, 38-39, 41.
70. Majer and Teleki, *Reviving the Cam Dance*, 15.
71. The term jakhar (< Tib. *lcags mkhar* 'iron fortress'; Mong. *temür ordun* 'iron palace') refers to the hall of Yama, for whom the dance was composed. See Majer and Teleki, *Reviving the Cam Dance*, 15. The dance was introduced in Ikh Khüree in 1811 from Tashilhunpo. See Fedotev, Evolution of Tibetan 'chams, 51; and Majer and Teleki, *Reviving the Cam Dance*, 17.
72. For the spread of tsam in Mongolia, see Fedotev, Evolution of Tibetan 'chams, 51-53. See also note 6 above.
73. Fedotev, Evolutions of Tibetan 'chams, 52.
74. Majer and Teleki, *Reviving the Cam Dance*, 17.
75. Ch. Atwood, "The Marvellous Lama in Mongolia: The Phenomenology of a Cultural Borrowing," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 46 (1992/93): 3-30, pp. 28-29.
76. This context enables one to glean what, in Gelukpa eyes, might constitute the Mongols' *qara šasin* 'secular dominion.' Rather than a popular religion held by the Mongolian common people in the practice of a timeless form of nature worship, it is an imperial religion held by the Mongolian aristocracy in the practice of an evolving form of heaven worship.
77. Majer and Teleki, *Reviving the Cam Dance*, 51. In Mongolian he is also widely known by the Tibetan name Tserindag.
78. In masquerade dance, sacred mountains are sometimes personified as an old man. See, for instance, the Khüree tsam character, Blue Old Man (Mong. *Köke ebügen*), personification of Songino mountain, west of Khüree. Ibid, 44-45.
79. Tsultem, Mongol Zurag, fig. 184.
80. Filchner, *Kumbum Dschamba Ling*, 327; Heissig, *Einige Bemerkungen*, pl. III; Tenzin Jamtsho, *Monastic Dances in Bhutan*, 204; and Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances*, 83.
81. Citing Khülrebaatar, see Pegg, *Mongolian Music*, 160.
82. Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual*, 135.
83. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 51.
84. Allen, *Star Names*, 445. As *Shouxing* (Canopus) and *Luxing* (Alcor) these stars appear to be linked in Chinese Daoist tradition as well. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanxing\\_\(deities\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanxing_(deities)).
85. W. T. Olcott, *Star Lore of All Ages*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911, pp. 363-67.
86. In demonstration of this sort of perfect knowledge, Ovid wrote *Metamorphoses*.
87. 1 Cor. 13.2.





88. Examples of celestial phenomena whose allegories resonate widely across Eurasia include those of Sirius (the Canine), Aquarius (the Pitcher), Orion (the Hunter), and Ursa Major (the Wain or Bear). For these, see Allen, *Star Names*.
89. Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 10. Compare, for instance, the Chinese Bow and Arrow asterism (*Hushi*) in Sun and Kistemaker (*The Chinese Sky*, 101) with the Mesopotamian Bow and Arrow in B. L. van der Waerden, "Babylonian Astronomy. II. The Thirty-six Stars," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 8 (1949): 6-26, p. 16.
90. For a celestial link between Canopus and the Cyan Dragon, see Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 76.
91. These are stars of Canis Major, see Sun and Kistemaker, *Chinese Sky*, 156.
92. Sun and Kistemaker, *The Chinese Sky*, 184-85. For the peaches, see also Williams, *Chinese Symbolism*, 209; and Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 172.
93. For the lore of Chinese Houtu, see Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 165. For Etügen eke as a Chinese asterism in the Mongolian sky, see Čeden, *Tngri-yin udq-a*, 916.
94. Williams, *Chinese Symbolism*, 209; Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 172. The Mongols call Čayan ebügen *gūjege toloyai-tu burqan* 'belly-headed Buddha'; See Mostaert, *Culte du Vieillard Blanc*, 110; and A. Mostaert, *Dictionnaire ordos*, Beijing: Catholic University, 1944, p. 274, s.v. 'GWDŽĚ.'
95. For Canopus as disposer of earthly things and eternal ruler of the seasons, see Williams, *Chinese Symbolism*, 209.
96. Williams, *Chinese Symbolism*, 209; Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 172.
97. Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 172.
98. See Fontein, *Dancing Demons*, 50.
99. Hsia, *Yuan Drama*, 123.
100. C. A. S. Williams, *Chinese symbolism and art motifs*, Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1941/reprint, p. 209; and Werner, *Myths and Legends*, 171-72.
101. Mostaert, *Culte du Vieillard Blanc*, 111.
102. For stars as gods in Chinese tradition, see Schafer, *Pacing the Void*, 126.
103. See, for instance, his contemporary cult among the Kalmyks of Kalmykia in C. Humphrey, "A politico-astral cosmology in contemporary Russia," in *Framing cosmologies: The anthropology of worlds*, A. Abramson et al., eds., Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014: 223-43, pp. 236-40. I thank Isabelle Charleux for this reference.



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