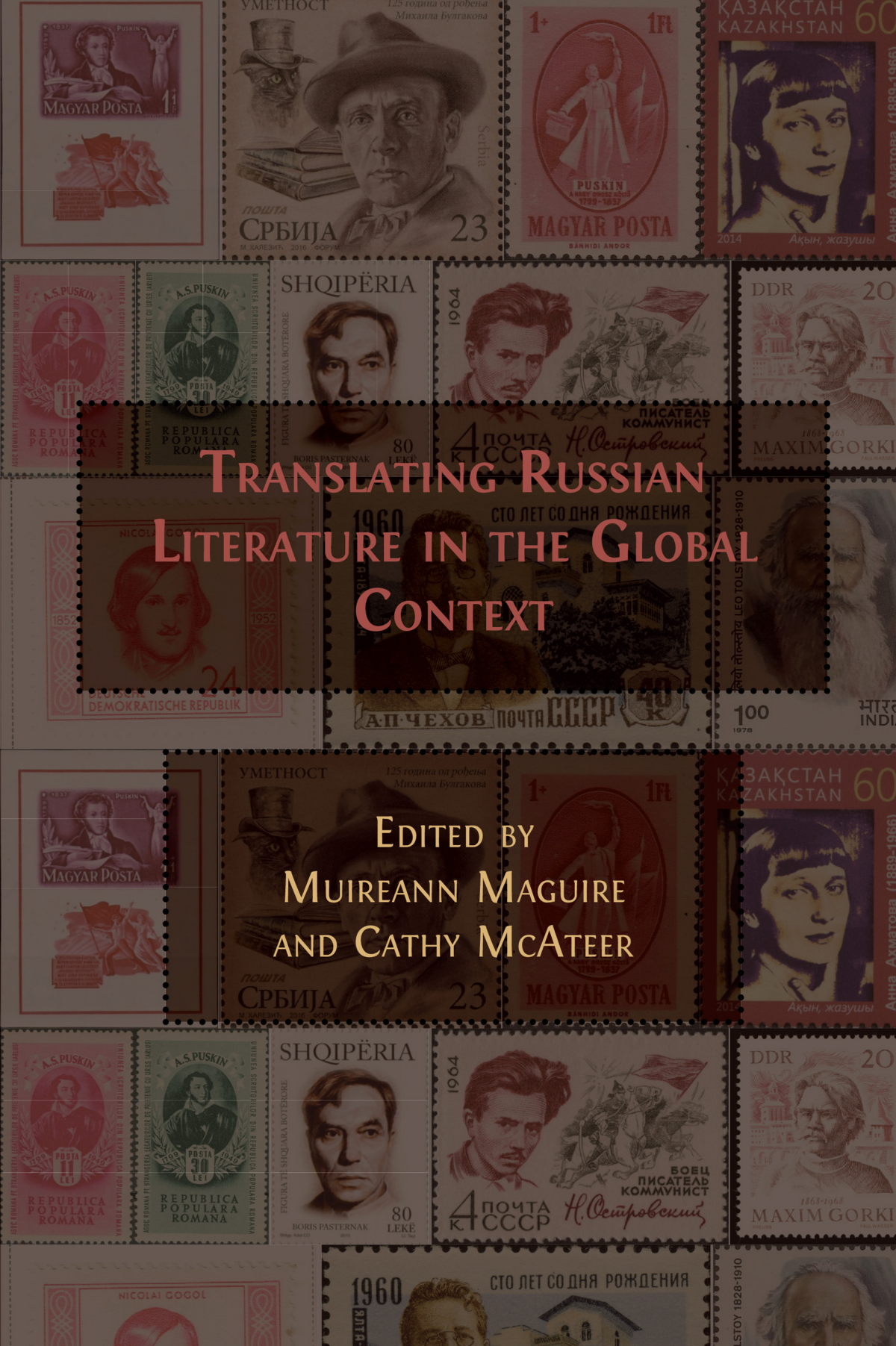

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

Edited by
Muireann Maguire
and Cathy McAteer

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Mongolia

Cultural Dialogue between Russia and Mongolia: Gombosuren Tserenpil and the Poetics of Translating Dostoevsky's Novels

Zaya Vandan

(*Translated from Russian by Muireann Maguire*)

> [T]here is not a single nation [...] which has developed culture in isolation.[1]

This essay will examine several facts from the history of the reception of Russian literature in Mongolia, allowing us to draw clear conclusions about how Russian and Soviet culture spread through this country, influencing its culture. I aim to complete the history of cultural dialogue between these two countries while providing insight into the history of Mongolian Translation Studies. In the case of the history of translation, as in the history of literature, there are pitfalls in developmental thinking. To avoid an evolutionary approach, I rely on the theoretical work of Jeremy Munday, which examines the dilemmas and possibilities of writing translation history and tries to construct a social and cultural history of translation by creating a microhistory of translators using extra-textual material.[2]

In the seventy-year historical relationship between Russia and Mongolia, the main creative drive was intercultural dialogue, within which translated

1 Johann Gottfried Herder, *Idei k filosofii istorii chelovechestva*, trans. by A.V. Mikhailov (Moscow: Tsentr gumanitarnykh initsiativ, 2013), p. 507.

2 Jeremy Munday, 'Using Primary Sources to Produce a Microhistory of Translation and Translators: Theoretical and Methodological Concerns', *The Translator*, 20:1 (2014), 64–80.

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literature gained particular significance. The influence of Russian writing on the formation and history of Mongolian literature is impossible to measure. Translations of Russian works aided the development of the latest Mongolian literature in the broadest sense while assisting in the latter's interaction with global literature, or—as Pascale Casanova has defined international literary space—the *World Republic of Letters*.[3]

The first text to be translated from Russian into Old Mongolian was a Bible printed in St Petersburg in 1827.[4] Following the Mongolian People's Revolution in 1921, Russian became the main foreign language from which translations were effected, in all genres of written literature.[5] Translators' heightened interest in Russian literature can be explained by a range of facts, one of which was equivalence in alphabet.[6] Moreover, during the second half of the twentieth century, a new generation of Mongolian intelligentsia emerged: they were university-educated, spoke cultured Russian, and no less importantly from our perspective, took an interest in the theory and practice of translation. One of the first Mongolian scholars to turn his attention to the problem of literary translation was Rinchen Biamba (1905–77), an author, historian, literary scholar, and widely respected translator, who graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Eastern Languages with a degree in Oriental Studies. His excellent command of Russian and skill as a researcher was such that even in his earliest works, he broached issues related to Translation Studies, identifying concrete problems arising in the translation of literary fiction—particularly Russian and Soviet

3 Pascale Casanova, describing the formation and evolution of the international literary field, states that works and genres are distributed in the original language or translation, forming the World Republic of Letters. See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (London and Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

4 Irina Kul'ganek, 'Neizvestnaia rabota A.M. Pozdneeva o perevode Sviashchennogo Pisaniia (Iz arkhiva vostokovedov Sankt-Peterburgskogo filiala Instituta vostokovedeniia Rossiiskoi akademii nauk)', *Istoricheskii vestnik* 7 (2000), 111–31. About the now lost, earliest recorded translation of the Bible into Mongolian, see Staffan Rosén's study: 'The Translation History of the Mongolian Bible', *Mongolian Studies*, 30/31 (2008/09), 19–41.

5 By the mid-1950s, one thousand, seven hundred and seven works from thirty-nine countries had been translated and printed; of these, 84.5% were translations from Russian. See Onon Chinbayar, 'Izdanie proizvedenii russkikh pisatelei XX veka v Mongolii' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Moskovskii Politekhnicheskii Universitet, 2019), p. 31.

6 In 1941, efforts were made to replace the Old Mongolian script with the Latin alphabet, but a few months later, Mongolia began using the Cyrillic alphabet, a decision largely motivated by political factors. See Stéphane Grivelet, 'The Latinization Attempt in Mongolia', in *Historical and Linguistic Interaction Between Inner-Asia and Europe: Studia Uralo-altaica* (39), ed. by A. Bertalan and E. Horváth (University of Szeged, 1997), pp. 115–20 (p. 119).

classics—into the Mongolian language.[7] His ideas and theories, including those about the interdependence of Russian and Mongolian literature, would inform later studies. Nonetheless, in order to illustrate the nature and the stages of intercultural linkage reflected in the processes of translating Russian literature into Mongolian, rather than dwelling on Rinchen's work, we should turn to the achievements of a translator from a younger generation, the diplomat Gombosuren Tserenpil (born in 1943).[8] Gombosuren's contribution to the transmission of Russian literature in Mongolia has been (and continues to be) immeasurably great. His work, in my view, opens perspectives upon both the study of Mongolia's reception of Russian literature and the wider history of translation.

Gombosuren's life and career were closely connected with Soviet Russia and Russian culture generally; he first encountered the latter in 1961 as an eighteen-year-old youth matriculating at Moscow State University. After graduating, he worked for several years in the Mongolian Government Printing Department, returning in 1974 to Moscow to study political science. In 1976, he was appointed head of the Mongolian Department of Foreign Affairs, and from 1982 he served as deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 1984, he returned to Moscow once again as an advisor and representative for the Mongolian ambassador to the USSR. After serving three years in this role, he was made deputy head of Mongolia's Department of Foreign Affairs, and in 1988 he became Foreign Minister. He held this position for two consecutive terms, during the democratic revolution of 1989 and subsequent events which profoundly altered Mongolian society and changed the course of its history. After his years in Moscow, Gombosuren spoke Russian perfectly. His spell in the printing department had allowed him to forge acquaintance with leading figures in contemporary literature and culture, including the writers and translators who directed Mongolian literary translation. This created an opportunity for him to start working as a translator.

The long-standing tradition in translated literature determined the direction of translation politics even in the Soviet era because literary texts for translation were allocated only to those whose skills were undisputed in the highest professional circles. To be allowed to translate professionally, the young Gombosuren had to pass an examination and translate ten pages from Alim Pshemakhovich Keshokov's novel *A Wonderful Moment* (*Chudesnoe mgnovenie*, 1964). His submission was evaluated by the well-known translator and editor

7 About Rinchen's literary translations, see N. G. Ochirova, 'Zhizn' i deiatel'nost' akademika B. Rinchena v kontekste kalmytsko-mongol'skogo nauchnogo vzaimodeistviia', *Mongolovedenie*, 4/1 (2007), 5–16 (p. 12). One of his important theoretical works on translation was *Mark Tvenii min' makhy n' idezh dee. Orchuulgyn tukhai*, ed. by Akim Gotov (Ulaanbaatar: Armiin Khevlekh uildver, 1991).

8 Hereafter referred to as Gombosuren, given that the first name is traditionally used in Mongolia.

Amar Gurbazar (1933–2016), who had translated several acknowledged masterpieces of Russian and world literature into Mongolian, including Johann von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774; *Zaluu Verteriin shanalan*, 1966), George Sand's *Consuelo* (1842; *Konsuelo*, 1981), and selected works by Fedor Dostoevsky (see below). As a result, Gombosuren was permitted to translate Keshokov's lengthy historical novel, which would occupy him for the next two years. His translation appeared in 1972 under the title *Gaikhamshigt egshin*. Thus, from the outset, Gombosuren's translation activity was closely linked to Russian literature. It is probable that his deep knowledge of the language and his familiarity, as a reader, with Russian literature predetermined his long and productive journey as a translator, interrupted between 1988 and 1996 by diplomatic service. In order to explore the stages and the nature of the reception of Russian literature in Mongolia, an essential feature of the intercultural exchanges between these two countries, I will examine Gombosuren's career as a translator from two perspectives: the Soviet and post-Soviet contexts of Mongolian history.

In accordance with the government's transformative aims, from the 1950s onwards Russian and Soviet literature were actively translated into other languages. A significant portion of such texts consisted of books spreading propaganda in favour of Soviet ideology and lifestyle. Gombosuren's earliest translations played a major role in popularising these concepts. Translations such as Keshokov's above-mentioned work, Vadim Mikhailovich Kozhevnikov's novella *The Special Section* (*Osoboe podrazdelenie*, 1969; *Ontsgoi salbar*, 1974), or Petr Andreevich Andreev's *A Story About My Friend* (*Povest' o moem druge*, 1979; *And nokhriin tukhai tuuzh*, 1983) all shared a common focus on the character and outlook of Soviet man. Collectively, they bore witness to the friendly relations between Mongolia and Soviet Russia and to the prevalence of propaganda on behalf of the latter's culture and way of life. In addition, a Mongolian-inflected strategy can be traced: when selecting works for translation, Mongolian translators favoured those which considered the national peculiarities of their own culture, aware that these books would exert enormous influence on the development of contemporary Mongolian literature. They thus favoured scenarios for resolving problems such as the retention of traditional national culture or the transmission of the ideas and achievements of other cultures.

Gombosuren's next translation, in 1982, also reveals the presence of this strategy. This was a translation of Viktor Petrovich Astaf'ev's *Tsar Fish* (*Tsar'-ryba*, 1976), describing the way of life, customs, and traditions of Siberian ethnic groups. The novella's main theme is the relationship between humans and nature, our unity with the environment, both notions which connect with traditional Mongolian conceptualisations. As a result of this theme and the poetic language Gombosuren used in the text of his 1982 translation (as *Khaan zagas*), his version became genuinely part of Mongolian culture. This is evidence that agreement between the themes and ideas in Soviet literature

and the traditions and national features peculiar to the Mongolian people was one of the chief criteria in the selection of works for translation from Russian to Mongolian. This is confirmed by Anatolii Larionovich Builov's *The Great Nomadic Movement* (*Bol'shoe kochev'e*, 1982), which appeared in Gombosuren's translation (*Ikh nuudel*, 1989) and which describes the life of the Evenki, nomadic reindeer herders whose way of life resembles that of the nomadic Mongols.

Before beginning his diplomatic service, Gombosuren successfully translated an extract from Anatolii Naumovich Rybakov's novel *Children of the Arbat* (*Deti Arbata*, 1987; *Arbatiin khuukhduud*, 1989), which exposes truths about Stalin-era Moscow. The appearance of a text like this in the popular Mongolian journal *Literature and Art* (*Utga zokhiol urlag*) shows the extent of political change and the Mongolian government's intention to remove ideological links with Soviet power. At the end of the 1990s, a new, post-Soviet period began for Gombosuren. The Mongolian translation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita* (*Master i Margarita*, 1967), a book which had by then become a global classic, demonstrates the translator's intention to expand the cultural experience of Mongolian readers by introducing them to works of worldwide importance. The translation came out in 1998 as *Master, Margarita khoer*. In 1999, the second volume in Rybakov's tetralogy, *Fear* (*Strakh*, 1990), appeared in Mongolian translation as *Aidas*. This was followed ten years later by the third book, *Dust and Ashes* (*Prakh i pepel*, 1994), as *Uns, chandruu* (2009). On the cusp of the new millennium, Gombosuren began making expanded and annotated translations of the works of early Soviet-era prose satirists Il'ia Il'f and Evgenii Petrov. Thus, *The Twelve Chairs* (*Dvenadtsat' stul'ev*, 1928) reached Mongolian readers in the year 2000 under the title *Arvan khoer sandal*, and a year later *The Golden Calf* (*Zolotoi telenok*, 1931) was published as *Altan tugal*. Over the next several years he translated Iurii Trifonov's novellas *The House on the Embankment* (*Dom na naberezhnoi*, 1976; as *Uiltei baishin*), *The Exchange* (*Obmen*, 1969; *Solio kholio*), and *Another Life* (*Drugiaia zhizn'*, 1975; *Ondoo am'dral*), which appeared as an anthology in 2015. Gombosuren's recent translations include a large number of masterpieces from Russian and world literature; for space, I will mention here only Ivan Bunin's *Life of Arsen'ev* (*Zhizn' Arsen'eva*, 1930; *Arsen'evyn am'dral*), which brought its author the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1933 and which appeared in Mongolian in 2017, and Nobel laureate Svetlana Aleksievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* (*Chernobyl'skaia molitva*, 1997; *Chernobyliin emgenelt zalbiral*, 2016). Gombosuren's repertoire of translations includes many other important books. One of his greatest achievements—in terms of the history of the reception of Russian literature as well as the Mongolian-Russian cultural exchange—was his translation of Dostoevsky's major works into Mongolian.

The appearance of Dostoevsky's novels in Mongolian translation marks an important recent cultural development. The Mongolian public began reading Dostoevsky in their own language only in the second half of the twentieth century when Navaan-Iunden Nasan-Ochir's (190885) translation of *Poor Folk* (*Bednye*

liudi, 1846) appeared under the title *Yaduu khumuus* in 1956. It is interesting to speculate on what caused this remarkable delay. One of the reasons may have been the Soviet censors, who withheld approval from Dostoevsky's works until the Khrushchev Thaw not only on their own territory, but also in other countries within the Socialist camp. One might note the contrast with Dostoevsky's reception in their Southern neighbour: in China, translations of his novels were in print as early as 1918,[9] not to mention the many academic and informational works devoted to him, while in Mongolia there were still no translators with experience working from Russian. The novel *Poor Folk* was almost unknown to the public, nor did critics rush to evaluate it. In general, the popularisation of Dostoevsky in Mongolia was not a major priority for the country's cultural politics; he would not be translated again for almost thirty years. Finally, in 1983, the novel *The Insulted and the Injured* (*Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, 1861; *Dord uzegdegsed*) came out, followed two years later by *White Nights* (*Belye nochi*, 1848; *Tsagaan shono*, 1985), both translated by Amar Gurbazar. As mentioned above, Amar had evaluated Gombosuren's very first translation, and by approving it, launched Gombosuren's professional career as a junior translator. In this context, his translations of Dostoevsky's major novels may be considered as a natural follow-up, the continuation of what Amar had begun.

The next and most important stage in Dostoevsky's Mongolian reception is closely connected with Gombosuren. The first work he translated was the novel *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866), published in 2003 as *Gem zem* by the Interpress publishing house. Although Gombosuren had had to resolve a host of problems during the translation process, linked to the difficulty of finding a Mongolian linguistic equivalent for Dostoevsky's idiolect,[10] the translation was highly praised by both critics and the general public;[11] it

9 Zhang Runmei, 'Osobennosti vospriyatiya idei F. M. Dostoevskogo v Kitae', *Vestnik Rossiiskogo universiteta druzhby narodov, Seriia: Filosofiia*, 21:3 (2017), 411–18 (p. 411). See also the essay by Hang Yu in this volume.

10 When collecting materials for this essay, I arranged an interview with Mr. Gombosuren, during which he responded to a range of my questions connected with translation practice and pointed out several problems which arose during the translation of *Crime and Punishment*: "Insofar as this translation represented my first experience with Dostoevsky's work, I came up against certain difficulties connected not only with his language and style but also with his system of thought. Therefore, I had to turn to Amar's translation of *The Humiliated and the Insulted*." This information shows that in order to resolve difficulties of idiosyncratic style, Gombosuren would study other texts by the same author, comparing the originals with previous translations to familiarise himself with the choices and strategies adopted by earlier translators, while at the same time refining his own practice. Please note that all translations from Russian and Mongolian are my own unless otherwise indicated.

11 The leading Mongolian Studies scholar Lidiia Grigor'evna Skorodumova, calling Gombosuren's translation "brilliant", wrote: "This book has become a significant event in the cultural life of our country. It is famously difficult to convey

immediately became prescribed reading for secondary school children. After this outstanding success, Gombosuren began translating *The Brothers Karamazov* (*Brat'ia Karamazovy*, 1880), which appeared in 2009 from the Monsudar Press as *Karamazovyn khovuud*. I have analysed the poetics of this text elsewhere in numerous articles, contending that Gombosuren's fundamental method—with several translational strategies at his disposal—was to preserve the atmosphere and spirit of the original, without violating the harmony of the Mongolian language.[12] After a short interruption, in 2015 Gombosuren published his version of *The Idiot* (*Idiot*, 1868), which appeared as *Soliot* from Monsudar. This third novel of the five translated by Gombosuren revealed him as a now-experienced translator of Dostoevsky's language; I will examine his treatment of Dostoevskian lexis separately below. Although Gombosuren had not planned to translate all of Dostoevsky's major novels early in his career, he soon started work on the outstanding volumes (of the five considered 'great'). *The Adolescent* (*Podrostok*, 1875; *Hovuun zaia*) appeared in 2016 from the publishing house Bolor Sudar, and the final novel, *The Devils* (*Besy*, 1872; *Albinguud*) reached Mongolian readers in 2018, again from Bolor Sudar. These translations are regularly re-issued, and while they are not currently the subject of much academic study, readers still—especially online—regularly discuss them, demonstrating a clearly marked need in Mongolian society to appreciate Dostoevsky's world.

In this chapter, I want to pause upon Gombosuren's translation of Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*, in order to analyse several examples of the use of cultural realia and the poetic/semantic formation of the original text, to indicate the aesthetic determination of the devices used by the translator.[13] In Lawrence Venuti's view, some so-called "ethnocentric violence" is inevitable in literary translation, since the process of translating texts and cultures always subjects them, to some degree, to reduction, omissions, homogenisation, and so on.[14]

Dostoevsky to the Mongolian mindset". See L. G. Skorodumova, *Mongol'skaia literatura XIX–XX vekov: Voprosy poetiki* (Moscow: RGGU, 2016), p. 154.

12 For more on this, see my 'Osobennosti peredachi kontsepta *bog* v mongol'skom perevode romana *Brat'ia Karamazovy* F. M. Dostoevskogo', in *Ad vitam aeternam. A Volume in Honour of the 70th Birthday of Professor István Nagy, Readings 6* (Budapest: ELTE BTK, 2017), pp. 313–19. In connection with the Mongolian translation of *Crime and Punishment*, see my 'Semantika i semantizatsiia *vechnosti* v romane *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* i ego mongol'skom perevode', *Mongolica*, XXIV:3 (2021), 33–40.

13 The problem of a translator's freedom is one of the most complex and disputed issues in translation theory. The many-sidedness of translation activity suggests that any analysis of the latter must account for the personality of the translator themselves, as they make subjective translation decisions. Pym holds this view, arguing for the necessity of "humanizing" translation and recommending that translation analysis focuses first and foremost on the identity of the translator and only secondarily on the text they create. See Anthony Pym, 'Humanizing Translation History', *Hermes*, 42 (2009), 23–48 (p. 32).

14 Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*: *A History of Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 310.

Does the essential difference in religion and culture signal the impossibility of fully realising a novel like *The Idiot*, so rich in subtexts, in Mongolian? It should be useful to examine the strategies selected by Gombosuren for translating those specifically Christian concepts unfamiliar to Mongolian readers.

My analysis reveals the translator's orientation towards reception, in this instance towards Mongolian culture. He resorts to a domesticating device more than once, showing his immediate substitution of Buddhist concepts for Christian ones.[15] Thus, the word "God" ("*Bog*") in the novel is translated as "*Burkhan*". In Constance Garnett's version: "Well, if that's how it is, […] you are a regular blessed innocent, and *God* loves such as you" (p. 11),[16] while in Gombosuren's translation: "Za herev tiim bol, noën min', chi ëstoi khiitei khun bolzh taarakh n'. *Burkhan* cham shig khuniig khairladag ium" (literally, "Well, if that's how it is, sir, you're going to be filled with air. God loves people like you" (p. 25)).[17] There is no doubt that for the majority of readers of this translation, the concept of 'Burkhan', equivalent to 'God' for Mongolians, is very similar to 'Buddha' since the main Mongolian religion is Buddhism.[18] Nonetheless, in the given context this kind of device is acceptable for the achievement of reasonable accuracy, insofar as accuracy is measured in terms of equivalent emotional effect by the original and the translation. But, as a consequence of this domestication, readers of the translation miss out on the novel's important Christian connotations. An example of a meaningful passage from the original

15 The opposition between *domesticating* and *foreignising* translation has become a constant landmark in translation studies, originating with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). According to his theory of translation, what we call *domestication* today brings the author's linguistic and conceptual world closer to the recipient, without any effort or interaction from the reader. Schleiermacher finds this unacceptable, on the basis that domestication inevitably distorts the author's concepts and thoughts. In his opinion, the translator should "leave the author in peace, as much as possible", and "move the reader towards him." Therefore, a translation should sound "foreign" enough to its reader, who "must always remember that the author lived in a different world and wrote in a different language." See Schleiermacher's 'On the Different Methods of Translating', in *Translation/History/Culture*, ed. by André Lefevere (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 162. Despite Schleiermacher's rejection of the possibility of combining these two strategies (because they are mutually exclusive), I will argue that Gombosuren was able to create a translation that preserved foreignisation while involving the domestic assimilation of a foreign text.

16 All quotations from *The Idiot* are cited from the following text: F. M. Dostoevskii, *The Idiot*, trans. by Constance Garnett (London: Heinemann, 1913), with pages indicated in parentheses.

17 All quotations from the Mongolian translation of *The Idiot* are cited from: F. M. Dostoevskii, *Soliot*, trans. by Ts. Gombosuren (Ulaanbaatar: Bolor sudar, 2015), with pages indicated in parentheses.

18 For the problems of the Mongolian translations of the Bible, see Klaus Sagaster's study, which also covers the word 'Burkhan': K. Sagaster, 'Bible Terminology in Mongolian Translation', *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, LXV:1 (2012), 171–79.

which becomes inaccessible to readers of the translation is the passage from Part One, Chapter Five of *The Idiot* where Myshkin recalls a donkey—immediately and consciously identified by him with the image of Christ. But to Mongolian readers, unfamiliar with biblical stories, these important analogies and symbolic values remain hidden or bereft of meaning. For such cases, Eugene Nida suggests adding some sort of explanatory note.[19] Gombosuren did not use notes, but there are other instances where he succeeds in compensating for similar losses. In the example above, the word 'blessed innocent' ('iurodivyi') became *'khiitei'*. The word *'khiitei'*, in literal translation, means 'filled with air' and is used to mean 'trusting, incautious, impulsive, boastful, insane', meanings which are far from compatible with the Russian 'iurodivyi'. But if we examine the etymology and semantics of this word, the translator's choice begins to make sense. The root *'hii'* refers to 'air', one of the five basic elements in the Buddhist understanding of the world. Not only air, but also its attributes—such as transparency and whiteness—are organically linked with the heavenly, or divine world, a connection reinforced by the Mongolian word *'Khiimor''* (literally, 'steed of the air'), which means 'the god of destiny' or 'the righteous part of the soul'. *'Khiimor''* is portrayed in the form of a horse with a blazing mane; it indicates the connection between fire and light, and in Mongolian thought, it is identified with the soul, fate, and fortune. On the etymological and semantic planes, the element of air and wind is identified with the word *'am''* ('life energy, the essentials of life, spirit'), from which words such as *'am'sgal'* ('breathing') and *'am'drakh'* ('to live') are derived.[20] *'Khii'* can be found in words such as *'delkhii'* ('world, universe').[21] In a semantic sense, *'khaki'* is cognate with words for transparency, light, and the colour white.[22] In *The Idiot*, whiteness is one of Prince Myshkin's consistent attributes that accompanies him from the very first pages of the novel (think of the insistent references to the Prince's *white*-blond curls and his bundle full of underclothes—known as *'whites'* (*'bel'e'*)) in

19 "But one does not do justice to the intention of the writer if he tries to 'ride the fence' in the case of those expressions which can have two or more meanings among which he cannot easily decide simply because he cannot reconstruct the cultural setting in which the writing first took place. In these instances, it is better for the translator to select the meaning which seems best supported by all the evidence and to put this in the text, while placing the other in a marginal note." Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber, 'A New Concept of Translating', in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, ed. by Eugene Nida and Charles R. Taber (Leiden: Brill, 1982), pp. 1–11 (pp. 7–8).

20 Skorodumova, *Mongol'skaia literatura*, p. 241.

21 Ibid., p. 233.

22 See Skorodumova, *Mongol'skaia literatura*: "The qualities of air are transparency, brightness, and white light. The moving fire-wind-air unites with our perception of the road, of the paths of fate" (p. 241). Thus, in the etymology of the Mongolian words *khii* and *delkhii* a semantic relationship emerges, much as exists between the Russian words *belyi* ('white'), *svet* ('light'), and *vselennaia* ('universe'), underlining the universality of these concepts.

Russian.[23] For readers of the original, well-versed in Christian culture, it is easy to interpret whiteness as a symbol of purity, chastity, and saintliness which leads on to the image of Christ. But how can a translation reformulate these allusions? Consider the following example (my italics):

> The owner of the cloak was a young man, also twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, above the average in height, with very fair thick hair, with sunken cheeks and a thin, pointed, almost *white* (*'sovershenno beloiu'*) beard. (Garnett, p. 2).

> Iudentei tsuvny ezen zaluu bas khorin zurgaa, doloo ergem nastai, dund zergiinkhees arai ondor gekheer chatstai, otgon gegchiin *tsav tsagaan* sevlegtei, ionkhoin khonkhoison khatsartai, barag tsagaan, shingekhen iamaan sakhaltai azh. (Gombosuren, p. 12).

The phrase 'very [white-]blond' (*'ochen' belokur'*) to describe Myshkin's hair colour is missing (!) from the English version; in Mongolian, it is translated as *tsav tsagaan* (literally, 'very white'), with the adverb 'completely' or 'perfectly' (*'sovershenno'*) omitted in relation to Myshkin's blond beard. This omission does not appear to overly influence the reception of the hero by readers of either translation, but in reality, this text suffers several losses of internal connotations. '*Sovershenno*', via its link with 'completeness' or 'perfection' (*'sovershennost''*),[24] functions similarly to 'white', by emphasising the Prince's similarity to Christ. We have seen how some allusions to the text of the Bible are lost to readers of the translation. But how can the translator manage to create the same (equivalent) emotional effect upon readers as does the original? Gombosuren, as it will be seen below, consciously, or not, chose the method closest to Nida's concept of "dynamic equivalence", which has played a key role in the establishment of modern Translation Studies.[25]

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23 The term *'belyi'* ('white') appears not only in constructing the image of the hero, but in the depiction of the Swiss countryside, thus interacting with the semantics of perfection, calm, and harmony: "At moments he dreamed of the mountains, and especially one familiar spot which he always liked to think of, a spot to which he had been fond of going and from which he used to look on the village, on the waterfall gleaming like a *white* thread below, on the *white* clouds and the old ruined castle. Oh, how he longed to be there now, and to think of one thing!—oh, of nothing else for his whole life, and thousand years would not be too long!" Dostoevsky, *The Idiot*, pp. 338–39.

24 Compare with these meanings: "the ideal, the conceptual image of the beautiful, worth, virtue, fulfilment", and so on. See *Tolkovyi slovar' russkogo yazyka*, ed. by D. N. Ushakov and others, 4 vols (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo inostrannykh i natsional'nykh slov, 1940), IV (1940), p. 338.

25 In *dynamic equivalence*, translators concern themselves less with matching a target language message with a source language message and more with creating a dynamic relationship "between receptor and message that should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message".

In Mongolian culture, the word '*tsagaan*' ('white') is associated with purity; it is one of the most admired colours, used to represent the values of peace and the thinking of the people. It conveys the concept: "The first is the beginning of all".[26] The Mongolian language contains many widely used expressions that reflect the Mongolians' regard for the colour white. For example, New Year in Mongolia is traditionally called '*tsagaan sar*' (literally, 'the white month'), symbolising the beginning and the end of the year; '*tsagaan setgel*' (literally, 'the white soul') is a symbol of moral purity and a synonym of the word '*ariun*' (which literally means 'sacred, pure'). In Buddhism, many symbols and gods are referred to as 'white', showing that whiteness is also a symbol of sacrality. In this way, the textual codes of the original, implicitly linked with images of the Prince and of Christ, are reconstructed in the Mongolian text through the semantic link with *tsagaan* and *khiitei*, which connect to some of the most important Mongolian religious and mythological symbols. As a result of this, the symbolic composition of the Prince is supplemented by images analogous to those of the original. The translator's use of the word *khiitei*, while at first appearing strange, is justified by its links with Prince Myshkin, since he thoroughly expresses the essential qualities of the book's hero (a connection with the universe, with the divine world, with destiny, the soul, the beginning and the end, eternity and so on).[27] Thanks to this strategy, the extra-lingual context of the translation goes some distance to compensate for its inevitable losses.

Let me turn to one more interesting example. One inadequacy of the Mongolian version of the novel is the fact that the names of characters are not translated, even though they play an important role in communicating information and values. Providing equivalents to Dostoevsky's so-called 'speaking names' (for his characters) is clearly a complicated task for the translator, if not the most complicated task of all; so challenging, that so far it has not been possible to find a semantic match in Mongolian for any of the meaningful elements of personal names in the novel—for example for the syllables '*lev*' ('lion') or '*mysh*'' ('mouse') in Prince Lev Myshkin's name—while retaining their national characteristics. To fully convey Dostoevsky's intentions, a translator must resort to notes or parenthetical glosses. Since Gombosuren has not done so, the Prince's name does not direct the reader towards deeper questions. But if he could rescue these connotations, which are contained in the

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See Eugene Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating: With Special Reference to Principles and Procedures Involved in Bible Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964), p. 159.

26 Skorodumova, *Mongol'skaia literatura*, p. 223.

27 "In Buddhism, the god or gods are not separate from nature; there is no anthropocentrism. Unity (the absolute) emerges directly in the form of the individual, and the most profound reality is experienced as a result of unrealised being […]. from which follows the disconnect between being and time, a total disregard of 'historicism'." See E. M. Meletinskii, *Srednevekovyi roman* (Moscow: Nauka, 1981), p. 67.

language itself, the interpretation of the most profound ideas of the translation could not be distorted or false by comparison with the original. When analysing the semantic peculiarities of the concept of '*tsagaan*' ('white'), the example of the phrase '*tsagaan sar*' (that is, 'New Year', literally 'white month') might return. The days of the 'White Month' depend on the phases of the moon (the word for moon in Mongolian—like the Russian '*mesiats*' ('month')—is '*sar*'). The lunar calendar, which Mongolians use, begins with '*am tsagaan khulgana*' ('the white-muzzled white mouse').[28] That means that some of the lost semantic content in Prince Myshkin's name is activated in the word '*tsagaan*'. One more concept related to the word '*tsagaan*' deserves our attention. That is '*tsagaach*' and '*tsagaachlakh*', which contains the meaning of 'vagrancy, a person with no fixed home address', that is to say, rather like the Prince, who has neither a permanent home nor any means of survival (at least, at the time of his arrival in Petersburg).[29] In this way, thanks to the rich semantic associations of the word '*tsagaan*', the text of the translation develops new connotations which not only expand its meaning, but are also included in the network of meanings making up the image of the Prince—without distorting the ideas of the original and, in fact, restoring them to the Mongolian text on the semantic and etymological levels.

According to Venuti, in the process of translation, the norms of the source language and culture are often severely distorted under the influence of target culture conventions—especially if the cultures in question are as widely separated as Russia and Mongolia. Meanwhile, my analysis indicates that the Mongolian translation of the novel *The Idiot*, together with this text's frequent use of devices for assimilation, generally exhibits effective transmission of the semantic and syntactic content of the origin. My view is that Gombosuren could not remain "invisible" when translating Dostoevsky's text, as while creating his version, he had to focus on the cultural identity of his target readers.[30] His crucial achievement, however, remains the wealth of conceptual images from the original, which, by making the most of the Mongolian language, he managed to transfer into a completely different linguistic system. His translation creates a new unity in cohesion with a new linguistic space: the internal form of the Mongolian words is restored, thus activating implicit meanings which correspond to the semantic world of the original.

The examples discussed above bear witness to Gombosuren's extraordinary inventiveness and poetic approach to the text. Thanks to his literary translations, the Mongolian public has been treated to an authentically global heritage; after all, the works of writers like Dostoevsky or Bulgakov belong to all humanity.

28 Mongolia, like several other Eastern and Central Asian countries, follows a lunar calendar on a twelve-year cycle (with years named after animals).

29 Skorodumova, *Mongol'skaia literatura*, p. 227.

30 Venuti uses this term ('invisibility') in order to determine the translator's ideal position in academia.

In this way, Gombosuren's labours as a translator have created a basis for dialogue not only between Russia and Mongolia; they stand as an intermediary in intercultural dialogue on a broader scale, transcending the development of literary language to play a role in the cultural and spiritual enrichment of the Mongolian people.[31]

31 Schleiermacher thinks of translation as a general cultural programme aimed at personal development and enrichment of language ("we should not fail to acknowledge that much of what is beautiful and powerful in our language has in part either developed by way of translation or been drawn out of obscurity by translation" ('On the Different Methods of Translating', p. 165)), where the goal is understanding. Translation thus becomes a "phenomenon influencing the whole evolution of a culture" (p. 159).