

## In Honor of the Jubilees of Anna Tsendina and Vladimir Uspensky

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n 2024, Prof. Anna Tsendina and Prof. Vladimir Uspensky, two leading scholars of Tibetan and Mongolian history and written sources, highly respected by their colleagues in Russia and abroad, celebrated their 70th birthdays. Both graduated from the renowned Faculty of Oriental Studies at the Leningrad State University. Although Tsendina moved to Moscow and Uspensky remained in Leningrad/Saint Petersburg, they have always maintained close academic and friendly ties. For the authors of this contribution, they represent an admirable link to the great Saint Petersburg tradition of Tibetan and Mongolian studies, which dates back to the 18th century. It is also a great comfort to know that we can always rely on their immense knowledge and scholarly advice. We are delighted to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt congratulations on their significant Jubilees and to wish them robust health and many more accomplishments in research and teaching.

### *Birthday anniversary of Prof. Anna Damdinovna Tsendina*

Anna Tsendina was born in Ulaanbaatar on August 11, 1954, into the family of the well-known Mongolian scholar and writer Tsendiin Damdinsüren (1908–1986). Her mother, Lyubov Zevina (1911–1987), came from a Jewish revolutionary family and studied Mongolian in Leningrad in the 1930s, where she met Damdinsüren and later followed him to Ulaanbaatar. Anna was their fourth child (and only daughter), and she jokes that she ended up in Mongolian studies both by chance and... not by chance. Her father, one of Mongolia's most prominent scholars, author of the national anthem of Mongolia, and compiler of the first major Russian-Mongolian dictionary, never pressured her to pursue Oriental studies. In the late 1960s, Damdinsüren

was sent on a long-term assignment to Leningrad, and the family relocated there. In 1971, Tsendina enrolled at Leningrad State University, which at that time was the only institution in the country with a school of Oriental studies and a vast collection of manuscripts in Mongolian, Tibetan, and many other languages. Although Tsendina grew up in Ulaanbaatar, it was her mother who persuaded her to apply to the Mongolian Studies department.

After graduating in 1977, she moved to Moscow to work as an announcer at the international broadcasting radio station, which broadcast to Mongolian-speaking regions of China, where she worked for thirteen years. At the same time, she enrolled in the part-time graduate program at the A. M. Gorky Institute of World Literature of the USSR Academy of Sciences, joining a department where remarkable Orientalists worked, including sinologist Boris Riftin (1932–2012), indologist Pavel Grintser (1928–2009), and folklorist Sergey Neklyudov. The latter became her unofficial advisor for her PhD thesis, “Mongolian Novels of the 17th–19th Centuries and Indo-Tibetan Narrative Traditions”, which she successfully defended in 1984.

After joining the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences (now the Russian Academy of Sciences, or RAS) in 1990, Anna Tsendina embarked on research into various medieval and later Mongolian texts. Her first major work, published in 1999, was the edition and translation of “The History of Erdene Zuu”, a unique early 19th-century text dedicated to the history of Buddhism’s spread in Mongolia and the founding of the first monastery in Northern Mongolia.

In 2003, together with Alexey Sazykin (1943–2005), she published a Russian translation of the verse autobiography of the renowned Buryat monk Agvan Lobsan Dorjiev (1853–1938), which he composed in Mongolian in 1921. This book included an introduction, commentaries, and a facsimile edition of the rare Buryat manuscript preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS.

Two years later, Anna Tsendina, in cooperation with Aleksandr Zheleznyakov, published the book “History in the Works of Scholar Lamas”, which contains Russian translations of three previously unpublished chronicles written by Mongolian lamas in the 17th, 19th, and 20th centuries. These chronicles clearly illustrate the development of historical thought among nomadic peoples.

Her next book, “Mongolian Chronicles of the 17th–19th Centuries” (2007), was based on the habilitation dissertation she successfully defended in 2004. In this work, Anna Tsendina analyzed the narrative structure of Mongolian chronicles, the literary traditions upon which medieval authors relied, and the techniques they employed. She explored the stages of development of these chronicles and identified

elements of cross-cultural influence, examining their relationships and roles in the formation of Mongolian literature.

In 2014, she published, in cooperation with Rinchensambuugiin Otgonbaatar, the book “Samples of the Written Tradition of Northern Mongolia” (available in both Russian and Mongolian versions). This important edition included texts in Mongolian and Tibetan that were composed within the linguistic tradition of the northern Mongols from the late 16th to the early 20th centuries. It featured examples of manuscripts and block prints showcasing various writing systems used in Mongolia, including a range of syllabaries in Mongolian and Tibetan, original works on the systems of transliteration and transcription of foreign texts, and Mongolian texts written in Tibetan script, as well as those in the less-known Soyombo and “square” scripts.

Anna Tsendina has devoted significant effort and time to making Damdinsüren’s legacy and personal collection accessible to the academic community. She occasionally jokes that her father was a ‘dry drunkard’ because he would spend his entire salary on manuscripts and books. During the Soviet era, Damdinsüren organized several expeditions to the countryside with the primary aim of discovering manuscripts and block-printed books hidden in mountains, caves, and other hard-to-reach locations. Today, many of these books are housed in the National Library of Mongolia. However, nearly five thousand manuscripts and xylographs are also preserved in his personal library at his house-museum in central Ulaanbaatar. Together with Damdinsüren’s closest students, Gaadambin Bilguudei and Rinchensambuugiin Otgonbaatar, Tsendina has published nine volumes of his collected works, along with three volumes of rare manuscripts he collected and a catalog of his library.

A new edition of “The Yellow History” (*Sir-a tuyuji*), a unique Khalkha chronicle from the 17th to early 18th centuries, was published in 2017. This edition features a corrected Russian translation by A. Tsendina that clarifies and rectifies many aspects of previous translations. It also includes, for the first time, a facsimile of the so-called “W. W. Radloff’s Version”, preserved in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS.

In the most recent monograph, “Life Reflected in Texts: Folk Magic of the Mongols (Late 16th to Early 20th Centuries)”, Anna Tsendina explores previously unknown Mongolian texts on omens, dream and fortune-telling books, various amulets, spells, and prayers used by the Mongols in their daily routines. The book introduces unique manuscripts and block-printed books collected by Damdinsüren and Otgonbaatar.

In Russia, a wide audience is well aware of Anna Tsendina’s semi-popular book “... and the Land is Called Tibet” (2002). In this book,

she presents major information about the political history of Tibet from ancient times to the mid-20th century in an amusing yet professional manner. It covers the formation of Tibetan ethnic identity, the emergence of the Tibetan Empire in the 7th to 9th centuries, the establishment of a theocratic monarchy, the imposition of Manchu suzerainty, the struggle for independence, and its incorporation into the People's Republic of China. The book is also adorned with vivid details about various aspects of Tibetan culture.

Meanwhile, among foreign scholars who do not read Russian or Mongolian, Tsendina is best known as a co-author of Jan-Olof Svanteson's "The Phonology of Mongolian", the first comprehensive description of the phonology and phonetics of the Standard Mongolian language.

After defending her habilitation dissertation in 2004, Anna Tsendina attained a position as a professor at the Institute of Eastern Cultures and Antiquity at the Russian State University for the Humanities. In 2006, she successfully established a department for Mongolia and Tibet, where she has been training students ever since. Today, this department is part of the Institute of Classical East and Antiquity at the Higher School of Economics.

Throughout these years, Prof. Anna Tsendina has been actively teaching, giving lectures, and writing books. While most of her works are scholarly, she has also written a collection of stories titled "Terton Mandavasarpini Was Crazy" (published in 2023), showcasing her literary talents and sense of humor. This collection is of great interest to all who love and appreciate Mongolia.



Prof. Anna Tsendina at her desk (2024). Photo courtesy of Yana Leman.

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### *Birthday anniversary of Prof. Vladimir Leonidovich Uspensky*

Vladimir Uspensky was born on December 12, 1954, in Leningrad. His grandfather was a Christian Orthodox priest, hence the surname, which is typical of the Russian clergy. In Soviet Russia, however, it was best to keep this connection a secret. In 1975, Uspensky enrolled in the Faculty of Oriental Studies at Leningrad State University. As he shared in his 2018 interview for the “Oral History of Tibetan Studies” project,<sup>1</sup> his initial choice was Persian philology. However, he ultimately decided to study Mongolian upon learning that it could lead to a job working with old books at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences (now the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS). As an admirer of old book culture, this opportunity prompted him to pursue the field of Mongolian studies. Simultaneously, he studied Tibetan under the guidance of Prof. Bronislav Kuznetsov (1931–1985).

In 1981, Vladimir Uspensky graduated from the university with honors and entered the doctoral program at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, completing it in October 1984. Following this, he was hired as a junior researcher. In 1985, he successfully defended his dissertation titled “The Works of the Gong Gombojab as a Textual Monument of 18th-Century Mongolian Historiography”. From 1986 to 1991, he served as the academic secretary for International Relations at the Leningrad (later Saint Petersburg) Branch of the Institute and subsequently worked in various departments, eventually

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<sup>1</sup> URL: <https://oralhistory.iats.info/interviews/vladimir-uspensky/> (access 14.12.2024). Interviewed by Anna Sehnalova.

attaining the position of a leading researcher at the Department of Turkology and Mongolian Studies.

From 1992 to 1996 and again from 2002 to 2005, Vladimir Uspensky participated in a Russian-American project aimed at creating an electronic catalog of the Institute's Tibetan collection, about which he wrote a presentation article in 1996. In 2005, he served as the curator of the Tibetan collection but was forced to leave this position shortly after, against his will. He dedicated considerable effort to studying the history of this renowned collection and introducing some of its most interesting items to the academic community. Thus, in 2006 and 2011, he published articles on the hieromonk Amphilochius (1885–1937), a lecturer at the Kazan Theological Academy, and Paul Schilling von Canstadt (1786–1837), whose collections became part of the Institute's holdings. Previously, in an article from 1996, Uspensky introduced a manuscript copy of the fascinating "Secret Biography" of the Fifth Dalai Lama, which included extensive illustrations that he had discovered. He also prepared a presentation CD-ROM on this manuscript. Numerous other publications included information about materials from the Institute's Tibetan and Mongolian collections. During this period, Vladimir Uspensky also became the foremost expert on the corresponding collections held at the library of Saint Petersburg State University.

In 1996–1997, he was a visiting professor at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. This period resulted in several major publications issued in Tokyo in English. The series began with a monograph on the Manchu prince Yunli (1697–1738), a brilliant connoisseur of Tibetan Buddhism who personally communicated with the 7th Dalai Lama and wrote works on Buddhist themes in the Mongolian language. The monograph was based on volumes that had belonged to Yunli and were brought to Russia by Vasily Vasilyev (1818–1900) in the mid-19th century, which Vladimir Uspensky identified in the University's library. Simultaneously, he worked on the catalog of Mongolian manuscripts and xylographs preserved at Saint Petersburg University, which was issued twice, in two volumes (1999–2000) and in one volume (2001), introducing this significant collection to academia in its entirety for the first time. Additionally, in 2006, he edited a unique manuscript of the Mongolian translation of the Sakya hierarch Pakpa Lama's (1235–1280) encyclopedic work "Explanation of the Knowable", also preserved in the same collection.

In his habilitation dissertation, defended in 2004 and later revised into the book "Tibetan Buddhism in Peking" (2011), Uspensky summarized many years of research on the flourishing of Tibetan Buddhism in China's capital during the Manchu Qing dynasty. He

explored a variety of topics, including the lamas of Peking and their high-ranking patrons, Buddhist temples, the printing of religious texts, and the creation of religious art objects. Unfortunately, this outstanding book has not been translated into English.

In November 2007, Vladimir Uspensky left the Institute, which had been rebranded as the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS, and began working as a professor at the Faculty of Oriental Studies, Saint Petersburg State University. He served as the head of the Department of Mongolian and Tibetan Studies from 2009 to 2016 and again from 2018 to 2023. Despite the demands of teaching and administrative work, he continued his research on Mongolian and Tibetan textual sources.

In 2014, he co-authored and edited a collective book that serves as a guide to the collections of manuscripts and xylographs in various Eastern languages preserved in the library of Saint Petersburg State University. He has also published a series of articles on various aspects of Mongol-Tibetan relations, particularly the period of Khoshut dominance over Tibet in the second half of the 17th century. His latest article, on the Mongolian-language correspondence relating to the Fifth Dalai Lama's visit to Beijing in 1652–1653, was published in the special issue of *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*, dedicated to the Oirat Legacy and the Origins of Tibetology (2024).

From the early days of his academic career, Prof. Uspensky has had a deep interest in Vasily Vasilyev, an eminent Russian scholar of the 19th century. In the 1850s, Vasilyev was moved from Kazan to Saint Petersburg along with other Orientalists and their collections. This transfer brought Yunli's books and other acquisitions by Vasilyev to Saint Petersburg, where Uspensky studied them extensively. He also published a paper on Vasilyev's plans to introduce Tibetan as an official subject of education in Russia, which, unfortunately, were never realized (2019). Vasilyev's connection to Kazan, now the capital of Tatarstan, resonated with Prof. Uspensky's personal ties to the region, as his wife, the Indologist Elena Uspenskaya (1957–2015), belonged to a subethnic group of Kryashens, sometimes referred to as Baptized Tatars.

In recent years, Prof. Uspensky has maintained close ties with the Saint Petersburg Buddhist Temple, built by Agvan Dorjiev between 1909 and 1915. This relationship follows the longstanding tradition of cooperation between academic scholars and Buddhist priests that always (from the 18th century) characterized Russian Tibetology and Buddhology. Uspensky has occasionally taught Old Mongolian to the lamas of this temple and has participated in various events organized by its authorities. At the same time, they kindly agreed to sponsor Ogyen Tsering, the first ethnic Tibetan doctoral student in Saint Petersburg, to begin his program at the University. Although he is not

the official supervisor in this case, Prof. Uspensky assigns great significance to this project, as it may ultimately contribute to promoting the teaching of Modern Tibetan in Saint Petersburg, a relatively new subject at the University. Previously, Prof. Uspensky supervised three PhD dissertations on topics related to Tibetology, all of which were successfully defended.<sup>2</sup>

It is always difficult to predict the future regarding Russia, but we sincerely hope that Tibetology in Saint Petersburg and other Russian educational centers, supported by distinguished scholars such as Prof. Anna Tsendina and Prof. Vladimir Uspensky, will continue to develop successfully in the fourth century of its history.



Prof. Vladimir Uspensky at the conference dedicated to the 70th anniversary of Anna Tsendina (October 7–8, 2024, Moscow, HSE University).

Photo courtesy of Yana Leman.

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<sup>2</sup> They were written by Delyash Muzraeva (1994), who is now the leading Tibetologist at the Kalmyk Scientific Center, RAS (Elista); Yulia Elikhina (2006), the curator of the Mongolian, Tibetan, and Khotanese collection at the State Hermitage; and Maria Soloshcheva (2014), who has focused on administrative work in the Department of Asian and African Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in Saint Petersburg.

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