




Analysis of the Main Factors of Spreading and Development of Buddhism in Russia

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[Abstract]

This Article is the summarizing of the research named “A study of historical and current development of Russian Buddhism”, which was conducted from 2016 to 2018. Objective of the work is to analyze the brightest phenomena, which have a key impact on Buddhist communities in Russia. They are six: government, foreign Buddhist influence, political situation, another religions, eminent persons and science. The study of these factors is necessary for developing adequate perception of Russian Buddhism, as a unique phenomenon and for analysis of political, social and cultural conditions of Russian society, in which the Buddha's teachings is applied. In this paper, the mix method was applied. Based on the data collected by historiographical and sociological methods, the author has identified and analyzed the mentioned factors. As a result of the research, a clear understanding of the conditional character of the environment of Russian Buddhism was formed and basic recommendations for more fruitful consolidation of Buddhism in new territories were formulated.

Keywords: Russian Buddhism, Factors of development, Ethnic and non-ethnic Buddhists, Conditionality

Introduction

Buddhism penetrated into the territory of Russia due to the fact that large groups of Mongolian people became part of the Empire. Previously, these people adopted Tibetan version of Buddhism, but they transformed it to their customs and mentality.

In Russia, for centuries, Buddhism remained within the ethno-territorial borders of resettlement Mongolian nationalities: Buryats and Kalmyks. Only in the end of XIXth beginning of XXth centuries, global political changes contributed to development of Buddhist society. In 1914, the Buddhist republic of Tuva became part of Russia.

After 1917, the Soviet (communist) regime inflicted total damage of Buddhism in Russia. But after collapse of the Soviet Union, the religion regained its lost positions quickly. Currently, there are two types of Buddhists in Russia: ethnic and non-ethnic.

Research Objective is to analyze the brightest phenomena, which have a key impact on Buddhist communities in Russia.

Research Conduct. To create a complex picture, the author used various approaches. The two main ones are historiographical and sociological methods. They have different characteristics and are applied to different phenomena. Both of these methods have important distinctive features.

Through studying the historical context of Buddhism development in Russia, the author reconstructed the circumstances, which defined the development of religion in a certain direction. Main tendencies of this process were highlighted. Also, by the means of historiographical method, the author defined the main forms and specifics of Buddhist tradition that developed in Russia during centuries.

However, political changes that occurred 25 years ago created conditions for new phenomena that do not have a deep historical context. Therefore, it is impossible to apply the historiographical method to study them. In the first place, these phenomena related to the fact that Buddhism transcended ethnical and geographical boundaries.

This is why the author applied sociological method to study the situation in the sphere of non-ethnic Buddhism. This method allowed to reveal the main forms and features of non-ethnic Buddhist communities, which exist outside of traditional Buddhist areas. In its turn, the sociologic method does not expose the tendency of Buddhism development in Russia. It only describes its modern state of existence.

Finally, the factors, which affected the establishment and development of Buddhism in Russia were detected by summarizing results of historiographical and sociological researches.

Research Result. After the studying of this factors from different points of view, author defined their main qualities and conditions, in which these factors have the strongest effect. By main qualities, author means qualities that remain regardless of research method and circumstances, in which they occur.

Government

Government always played the key role in development and distribution of Buddhism. In the times of the Buddha, when a king declared himself a Buddhist lay follower, large quantities of people in the country would follow his example. (Paribok, 1989: 24)

In historical perspective, it is evident that government acted not only as a main initiator of spreading its own religion to neighboring countries, but also as an essential recipient of Buddhism. Dharma was perceived on the level of government in Sri-Lanka (Safronova, 2000: 27), throughout Southeast Asia and in Tibet. In these cases, the country's leadership took responsibility for solution of many problems associated with the spread of religion among common people.

The role of government as a recipient in the historical context of the Mongolian state was expressed by author in historiographical research. (Berezin, 2017: 22) The spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia was provoked by the government. It was connected to the change in the political climate.

However, the Russian authorities did not perceived Buddhism. This is the main reason why the successful spread of Dharma did not reappeared in the new political reality, as it happened in Tibet, and consequently in Mongolia. The spread of Buddhism within Russian borders almost did not happen.

Nevertheless, the Russian government remains an important factor of formation and development of Buddhism. Historiographical method allows us to see quite clearly three different phases of relationship between government and Buddhism as follows,

- 1) Government dominates over Buddhism and accepts it (before XX century)
- 2) Government dominates over and suppresses Buddhism (Soviet period)
- 3) Government does not dominate over Buddhism and avoids interfering in religious matters (1989 – 2016).

These phases reveal inconsistency of political authority as a factor of Buddhism development. Therefore, we should consider these phases individually.

During the expansion of Russia's borders, the authorities retained control over religious affairs and interfered in the activities of the clergy. This was especially apparent in Buryatia. National and linguistic affinity between Buryats in Russia and Mongolians in China threatened the newly established border, and created the risk that Buryats will leave to China. In order not to provoke Buryats, Russian authorities did not try to convert them to Christianity (Tsybikdorjiev, 1999: 47). On the other hand, it was necessary to reduce the influence of China. To create an independent and centralized Saṅgha was a successful solution of this problem (Galdanova, 1983: 15). Centralization of Saṅgha was the major effect of the government, as a factor contributing to the development of Buddhism in Russia.

However, negative aspects of the factor should be noted as well. Governmental control allowed Buddhism to develop only within certain limits, and did not let it spread outside of geographic and ethnic boundaries (Galdanova, 1983: 56). Nevertheless, a unique Buddhist tradition of

Kalmykiya and Buryatia was formed during this time.

During the Soviet Union period, brutality of activities applied by the Communists to destroy Buddhism (and other religions) is comparable with the Islamic expansion in India. Obviously, in this period government did not have any positive qualities for the development and spread of Buddhism. On the contrary, it has caused irreparable damage to all aspects of religious life.

An example of communist repressions clearly shows that the government is a crucial factor for the existence of Buddhism. If Buddhist values contradict with the objectives of authorities, no other factors will help Buddhism to take its rightful place in the social environment of the country. Since the beginning of the 1990s, a new attitude of non-interference to religious affairs was proclaimed in Russia (Ostrovskaya, 2009: 1). This attitude enabled the rapid growth of Buddhism in Russia. Buddhist legacy destroyed by the communists was restoring rapidly. It is important to note that although central administration followed the policy of non-interference, the regional authorities were actively helping to restore the religion in the Buddhist republics of Buryatia, Kalmykiya and Tuva.

The governance of Tuva was the one to initiate and organize the first Dalai Lama's visit to the republic (Ostrovskaya, 2009: 7). Only the policy of republican government, aimed to cultivate national identity, made it possible to develop Buddhism. During his reign, Ilyumzhinov, the president of Kalmykiya, achieved the recognition of Buddhism as the state religion of this republic (Safronova, 2007: 57).

An important feature of the new stage in the development of Buddhism is pluralism. During this period, plenty of independent organizations appeared, which did not supported the main organization of the republic, and even confronted with it.

In new political conditions, Buddhism was able to overcome ethnic limits and became a notable social and cultural phenomenon in many regions of Russia. At the same time, due to the policy of non-interference, development of traditional and non-traditional Buddhism conducted. By

non-traditional Buddhism, we mean a variety of new schools, which mostly came from Europe. Main organizations that profess modern forms of Buddhism are very enclosed. It may be noted that a certain separatism is present amid the pluralism of non-ethnic Buddhist schools.

After a dramatic improvement in the development during the 1990s, came a period of stagnation. According to the author's sociological study, non-ethnic communities of Buddhists do not grow: the number of new members equals the number of those who have stopped Buddhist practice (Berezin, 2017: 154). The separatism is the main condition of this situation. Thus, the division of religion from government is favorable only for a brief period. Russian Buddhists showed to be unable to sustain growth without the help from the government.

Now it is impossible to predict the direction, in which the policy of government will change. The author considers actions to centralize the spiritual hierarchy in Buddhism the most favorable. However, these trends are not present in the activities of state authorities.

Buddhist Influence

This factor is crucial for the existence of Buddhism in Russia. In fact, it is the source of Russian Buddhism.

The first teachers in the Buryat environment came from Tibet. After Buryatia became a part of Russian Empire, Mongolian and Tibetan presence remained so strong that the government was forced to respond by legislative measures (Galdanova, 1983: 18).

Subsequently, foreign religious influence was an important factor. Despite it was impossible for Tibetan lamas to arrive, many lamas from Buryatia and Kalmykiya went to Tibet and Mongolia for training.

The movement of Buddhism renovation in Russia in the late XIX century began after a similar transformation took place around the world. One of the main initiators of this movement was Agvan Dorjiev. Despite he was an ethnic Buryat, he received religious education in Tibet. In addition,

he conducted all his activities in Russia as a representative of the Dalai Lama. Thus, the reforms of Russian Buddhism were induced by external influence. One of the main results of Dorjiev's activity was the construction of the first Buddhist temple in the capital of Russia. Most of the funds for the construction came directly from the Dalai Lama (Galdanova, 1983: 39). Post-communist period in Russia was much more favorable for the external influence than all the previous stages. Buddhists from Kalmykiya and Tuva were unable to rely on their own religious experience. Adopting foreign culture was the only option to restore Buddhism in these areas. Buddhism was mainly perceived from the transnational Buddhist commutative network (Ostrovskaya, 2009: 1). The Tibetan government in exile created this network after the establishment of Chinese rule on the territory of Tibet in 1951. This network was in need of new spheres of influence to spread its own culture.

Because of the existing mutual needs, first visits of the Dalai Lama in Russia produced an explosive effect. Religious organizations start to register in large numbers, construction of many temples and stupas began. First students went to study in Tibetan monasteries in India. Without foreign influence, it was impossible to inspire people and unite them. Dalai Lama's visits played a crucial role.

Foreign Buddhism was equally important for the development of non-ethnic Buddhism in Russia. During the sociological research, the author explored that two of the three studied communities are subject to foreign influence, not only spiritual, but also administrative (Berezin, 2017: 150). The communities of the Karma Kagyu and Dzogchen are branches of quite rigidly centralized organizations.

The desire of foreign organizations to retain control over the followers and limit their interaction with other Buddhists led to the phenomenon of separatism, which has already been mentioned. The policy of governmental non-interference is the background of this phenomenon, and the foreign influence is the reason.

The ambition to control Russian Buddhists is quite natural for both country's authorities and foreign organizations. However, the results of this

commitment are opposite. Active intervention of the government in religious affairs leads to centralization of clergy and uniting efforts of Buddhists. The influence of foreign organizations, as a united factor, leads to emergence of many independent communities and consequently to separatism. Therefore, it can be assumed that these two factors are opposed to each other and stand in a particular conflict.

Factor of foreign religious influence has vital importance for Russian Buddhism. However, there are some negative effects of this factor. Separatism and hierarchical confusion are the main of them. Their manifestation inevitably provokes the government to limit foreign initiatives.

Political Situation

This factor is indirect. It influence Buddhism, particularly through government institutions, which have already been described earlier. Nevertheless, it should be considered separately, because its effect is not limited to the influence of government. The political situation affects also the social and cultural climate in a society. It regulates the processes of inter-ethnic and inter-religious communication. Foreign policy affects foreign religious influence. All these factors manifest themselves as a result of certain political phenomena and altogether form the environment for the Russian Buddhist clergy.

Before the XIX century, activities of public authorities were primarily triggered by the political situation. The impact of those activities was already described at the beginning of the article. The weakness of Russian borders in the south and east did not allow the authorities to convert Kalmyks and Buryats to Christianity. On the contrary, Buddhism has been recognized at the state level (Galdanova, 1983: 18).

During the Tsarist regime, Buddhism was limited by extremely narrow territorial borders, which were settled by representatives of Mongolian ethnic group. In political circumstances of that time, significant development of religion was impossible.

At the end of the XIX century, a new stage in the development of Buddhism

in Russia was conditioned by the changes in global political environment (Abaeva, 1983: 134). In this context, the considered factor manifested itself in conjunction with foreign religious influence. The previous Dalai Lama initiated a political rapprochement with Russia because of the threat from England. Sympathetic relations between the two countries formed a more favorable attitude to Tibetan religion on the part of Russian state elite.

We can also assume that political cooperation between colonial states in the XIX century allowed the phenomenon of Buddhology to arise. Subsequent events in Russia demonstrate, how the changings of the political climate influences to Buddhism. In a situation of chaos, legal acts, which hindered the development of Buddhism, were overturned. As a result, in this period spiritual development raised.

Furthermore, during communist period, Buddhism was almost completely destroyed. Nearly all the achievements of Renovation movement were negated.

Nevertheless, we cannot claim that Buddhism absolutely could not exist during communist regime. Thus, after the Second World War, two temples in Buryatia were restored. Overcoming hardships, Soviet Buddhologists continued their activities (Torchinov, 2000: 136-137). Important to note that the communist regime proclaimed non-ethnic values. Because of the regime, ethnic division of society finally disappeared. As a result of this policy, seeds for the subsequent emergence of non-ethnic Buddhism were sown.

Another breakthrough in the development of Buddhism, which took place in the 1990s, again was associated with the change of political situation in the country. Critical administrative exemptions led to emergence of a huge number of religious organizations.

Nevertheless, this period did not last long. After coming to power, President Putin has gradually changed the course of the country. In foreign policy, it was expressed in rapprochement with China. As a result of this rapprochement, the Dalai Lama was prohibited to enter Russia (Terentyev, 2009: 66).

Strengthening of the state's influence in the spiritual life of Russian citizens is a certain concern, because at the moment, only restrictions become more strong, but not the public liberties in religious sphere. As a result, over the past 17 years no new major religious groups arisen in Russia and the number of Buddhists is not growing.

It can be argued that the number of Buddhists and their religious life may be improved under the influence of the political situation, for example with the development of intensive cooperation between Russia and Buddhist countries. Trends toward a dramatic deterioration of these indicators due to political factor are unlikely.

In general, it can be noted that since Russia is not a Buddhist state, the government does not carry out special policies for the development of Buddhism. Therefore, changes rarely happen in the Buddhist environment in a stable political situation.

Analysis reveals a certain uniqueness of the political situation as a separate factor of development of Buddhism. This uniqueness lies in its clearly expressed dynamic aspect. Religion actively respond to any changes in domestic and foreign policy of the country. Major improvements in distribution and development of Buddhism were noted during the expansion of Russian Empire, during the overthrow of monarchy, during the establishment of communist regime and during the period of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Another Religions

This factor can be divided into two different types: religion, which were suppressed by Buddhism, and religion, which restrained its spread.

The first type includes all autochthonous religions, especially shamanism. Here we can speak about the interaction between religions, rather than the impact of shamanism on Buddhism. In Mongolia, the Buddha's teaching was not just displaces old beliefs. Many rituals and traditions were accepted by the new religion, and kept almost unchanged. Usually Buddhist lamas completely taken over the function of shamans (Ulanov, 2010:

120). Such factors are the main feature of Mongolian Buddhism. Within the diversity of Mongolian ethnic groups, these same traditions allow to distinguish Buddhism of Kalmykiya and Buryatia.

Thus, religions, which were suppressed by Buddhism, are a factor affecting its development. It manifests itself while the world's religions are adapting to local folk traditions. This is one of the most important factors, which form the original shape of the various national manifestations of Buddhism.

Buddhism evolved a completely different relationship with stronger religions. Christianity did not allow Buddhism to distribute freely. On the contrary, the Russian Orthodox Church many times tried to impose their religion on Buryatia and Kalmykiya (Orlova, 2006: 46). In the present situation, there were quite audacious attacks on some representatives of Buddhism. During the historical research it was founded that Karma Kagyu community (the largest organization of non-ethnic Buddhists) was added to the list of totalitarian sects (Berezin, 2017: 102).

Attempts of Christianity to exert pressure led to strong opposition and mobilization of the Buddhist clergy. This has stimulated the development of Buddhism. Thus, we can conclude that, like a strong opponent not able to defeat his enemy completely, a strong religion, when trying to fight against Buddhism, just make it stronger.

Science

This factor appeared only in the XIX century and do not have a deep historical background. However, in less than 200 years, scientific approach established itself as a key aspect for perception of Buddhism in the space of non-Buddhist culture, thus it contributed to the spread of this world religion. Science allows to study any phenomenon through a universal set of methods. It is a relatively new ideological approach, which does not tolerate any cultural, ethnic, religious and even geographical limitations. Probably, it is the most important aspect of modern globalization.

It is interesting that in Russia, among the first Buddhologists there were

many members of Christian clergy. Such vast activity of a Christian priest in relation to another religion was possible because the scientific approach lies beyond religious denomination.

Among the various types of scientific activities, it is necessary to mention the work of translators. Publication of the main doctrinal texts in Russian language enabled numerous people to become acquainted with the teachings of the Buddha without years of studying Pali, Tibetan, Chinese and other languages.

However scientific method has its own prism of perception and fraught the danger of changing the emphasis required for an adequate perception of religious works (Tenzin Gyatso, 2006: 50). In addition, scientists not always have an impartial opinion. They take a position and defend it. Thus, we cannot blame researchers for ignorance. Nevertheless, we have to stay alert concerning their works. Often they are not followers of the considerate doctrine and have narrow outsider's view without being able to look from the inside.

Further, we should consider an opposite effect. Science not only paved the way for the perception of teaching in the foreign cultural environment. The scientific approach fundamentally changed many Buddhist methods of preaching and analyzing (Plotnikov). Modern preachers are increasingly drawing parallels between Buddhism and science. However, they often express disdain for traditional philosophical approaches that do not fit into the scientific picture of the world.

Science is also the main source of education for Buddhist teachers. In Russia, the Buddhist educational institutions operate only on the territory of Buryatia. There is only a small number of them, and the level of knowledge offered is very low (Interview with a member of the Shad Tchup Ling S. Burmistrova, May 24, 2016). Therefore, most prominent Russian translators of Buddhist texts have graduated from a secular university with a degree in Oriental studies. This path is particularly important for non-ethnic Russian Buddhists, because training in Buryat seminaries and universities abroad is complicated through cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences.

In this context, it is important to re-emphasize that secular education leaves its mark, leading to differences from the traditional religious worldview approach. Not all Buddhist researchers are able to overcome excessive rationalism and materialistic views. Increasingly, these limits become the key characteristics of a variety of Buddhist works.

Summarizing, we can conclude that science allowed to perceive Buddhism in new territories and cultural environments. At the same time, it has left its mark and cut off all that defies rational interpretation. Science do not lead to emergence of faith and meditative experience. Therefore, it is not a self-sufficient factor.

Eminent Persons

Often, the activities of one person has a tremendous influence on the course of world history. Life of Buddha Shakyamuni, the founder of one of the three world religions, is a good example. Therefore, speaking about the development of Buddhism it is necessary to consider the factor of a strong personality.

Historiographical study did not revealed any detailed information about this factor in the period of more than 150 years ago. Nevertheless, correspondence between Mongol khans and spiritual teachers allow us to assume that the key stages of spreading Buddhism in Mongolia were initiated and implemented by particular people with outstanding qualities.

Agvan Dorjiev is the first great personality, which we can consider due to significant historical information that remained. His activities went beyond Buddhist regions. There is evidence that he initiated the emergence of Buddhist communities (Bardin, 1992: 81-82) and construction of many Buddhist temples in the Irkutsk region, which is neighbor to Buryatia (Asalhanova, 2008: 10). However, his most renowned work was the construction of a Buddhist temple in the capital of Russian Empire. In St. Petersburg, he had to overcome strong resistance not only from the local administration, but also from the society, since more than 90% of the population professed

Christianity in the city (Andreev, 2004: 64-65).

Speaking about the legacy that remained from the time of Tsarist regime, another outstanding person should be mentioned, Pandita Hambo Lama XII Dasha Dorji Itigelov. He was a contemporary of Agvan Dorjiev. As stated in one of his biographies, Itigelov alone accomplished responsibilities of Education, Culture and Health Minister in Buryatia (Amogolonova, 2012: 138).

However, most important were his achievements of supernormal powers that he was able to apply in the best possible way. He had the ability of foresight, predicted tough times of repression and then the collapse of the Soviet regime. He also had the unique ability to control the biochemical processes of his body. Because of this, he was able to make his body incorruptible and contribute to the restoration of Buddhism in Buryatia 75 years after his formal death.

In 2002 XXIV Pandita Hambo Lama Damba Ayusheev carried out the exhumation of Itigelov's body. It remained incorrupt. Ayusheev put the body for public observation and allowed the scientists to examine it twice (Moiseyenko, 2012: 2). As a result, over the past 15 years, religious pilgrimage to Ivolginsky temple has significantly increased. The position of Traditional Buddhist Saṅgha of Russia and its current leader Hambo Lama Ayusheev has strengthened. Hambo Lama Itigelov himself became a symbol of Buryat ethnic and cultural revival (Amogolonova, 2012: 138).

In modern Russia, the factor of a strong personality is particularly noticeable. It is especially important for non-ethnic Buddhist communities. As demonstrated by a case study, these communities do not have a vast access to the Buddhist tradition. Therefore, the main source of inspiration for non-ethnic Buddhists are the founders of their communities. The vast majority of respondents confirmed that they have received the basic information about Buddhism from the head of their organization. This happened directly (through lectures and individual conversations with the teacher) and indirectly (through the guidance of senior students and books that were written by the leader).

Organizations created by representatives of the Dalai Lama also have a cult of their founder. Telo Tulku Rinpoche, the head of Buddhists in Kalmykiya, is not a monk. However, he is recognized as the reincarnation of a great Lama and is more revered than many Kalmyk monks are. Problems caused by the difference of ethnic mentalities did not allow Geshe Jampa Tinley, the official representative of the Dalai Lama, to succeed in Tuva Republic. However, his teachings are very popular among non-ethnic followers.

After staying in Russia and learning Russian language for a long time, a teacher himself perceives the local culture. He adapts himself and adapts his teaching for the students. Historiographical and sociological studies show that methods of modern Buddhist teachers differ from the traditional ones. Such flexible adaptation is possible only within a bright and creative individuality. There are very few of such individuals.

Currently in Russia, there are no authoritative Buddhist institutions such as a large monastic community and high-level educational religious institutions. As long as they do not appear, a strong personality factor will play a key role in the development of Russian Buddhism.

Conclusion

Of course, the considered phenomena do not exhaust the list of factors that are worthy of mention. Nevertheless, historical and sociological research did not reveal other fairly vivid aspects that had a sufficiently clear influence on the Buddhist society of Russia.

In general, the conducted analysis offers a non-standard foreshortening of the description of interaction between Buddhism and surrounding non-Buddhist space. Indeed, in this case, the object of analysis is neither Buddhism nor the surrounding society, but their interaction channels. At the same time, the impact of these channels on one side of the process, was studied in detail namely their influence on Buddhism.

This formulation allowed us to cut off the redundant information, and concentrate all attention on one phenomenon. In addition, only such

extremely narrowed technique allows us to use the information, which was obtained in different methods (historiographical and sociological).

The data obtained make it possible to draw an unambiguous conclusion about the nature of these factors. Government and foreign Buddhist influence play a key role for the existence of Buddhism in Russia. At the same time, these factors have been opposed to each other in many aspects of the analysis.

Foreign influence is the main source for Buddhism in Russia, but at the same time, it introduces chaos and promotes the development of separatism among Buddhists. On the contrary, Government structures Saṅgha and promotes its consolidation, but it hinders influence of foreign Buddhists in particular and hinders development of Buddhism as a whole.

The political situation and other religions are the basic conditions, in which the Teaching exists. Other religions can be described as the main form-building factors that provoke the most radical elements of Buddhism adaptation. Thus, they are responsible for the emergence of key features of a certain Buddhist tradition that distinguish it from the background of other forms of this religion.

Factors of eminent person and science play a supporting role. They adapt Buddhism to new, nonspecific conditions. Due to science, Buddhism finally overcame ethnic boundaries.

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