

## THE BUDDHIST RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MONGOLIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF BURIATIA

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**Main goal:** *This paper provides a peek into the Buddhist Buryat ethnic group in Russia, explores the history of Buddhism in (Republic of Buriatia) Buryatia and its relations with Mongolia from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. The paper also seeks to provide an answer to the question of how was the religious relationship between Mongolia and the Buryat ethnic group, in the span of several centuries, from it's first development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. Our study suggests that historically, Buryats have had a close religious and cultural ties with Mongolia over the centuries.*

The history of Buddhism in Buryatia can be divided into five stages. We did this classification depending on Buriats' scholars studies.

1. First Buddhist contact, 16th to early 17th centuries – prior to joining the Russian Empire.
2. Late 17th to end of 19th centuries – spread of Buddhism, monastery building, publishing
3. Late 19th to early 20th century – “golden age” of Buddhism in Buryatia-
4. 1920's to late 1980's – destruction and persecution.
5. Late 1980's to present – restoration of the Sangha.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century Buddhism spread from its origin of place in India to the neighbouring Asian countries near Russia. Also, during the same period the Russians had their first contact with Buddhism through the Kalmyk Mongolian ethnic people who migrated to the lower reaches of Volga river in Russia. In Russia there are many Mongolian ethnic groups but Buddhism particularly emerged as the dominant religion for the Buryat ethnic group.

Before the Buryats migrated to Russia there was no Buddhism, but Shamanism. Buddhism spread in different periods of time among the Buryats. It also spread near Baikal lake, close to the Mongolian border.

In 1712 Mongolia entered a turbulent period and as many as 100 Mongolian and 50 Tibetan monks fled the country to Buryatia. These monks helped to spread Buddhism and its teachings. At that time people started to gather at tent temples, yurts for nomad people. Russian statistical sources mention that there were 11 temples and 150 monks in 1712 in Buryatia.

The Russian queen, Elizabeth (ruled 1741—1762) exempted the monks from paying taxes. In 1741 the Russian empire recognized Buddhism as an official religion. Buryat Jay-a pandita Dambadarjā first pandita khamba lama (abbot) in Buryatia visited Tibet and there he learnt Buddhist philosophy in Drepung monastery.

After that he returned to Buryatia and established Tsongol monastery, which was the first big monastery in the area of the Buryats. At the same time Jimba Ahaldaev visited Uрга-capital of Mongolia where he

studied Buddhist philosophy and on his return to Buryat he established Galuut nuur (Galūt Nūra) monastery, also known as Tamch (tamč) monastery.

In the 18th century a new monastery was established in the area of the Khorī Buryat. All these three monasteries shared a similarity in their doctrines and teachings.

Officially all Buddhists of the Transbaikalian Region were under the control of the head lama of the Tsongolsky datsan. But in reality each three centers had their own head lamas confirmed by the government of the Russian Empire.

By 1831 4,637 lamas had been listed in Buryatia and by 1846, 34 monasteries had already existed. It is also interesting to note that the attitude of the Russian government towards Buddhists in Buryatia was different from its attitude toward the Kalmyks and Buryats in the Irkutsk area. Transbaikalia was a cross-road for communication with the Far East, and this was an important reason why the religious policy was more flexible and tolerant, whereas in Kalmykia and even in the Western Baikal area, it was more repressive. For successful international policy in Mongolia and Tibet, Russia needed a reputation as a country that supported Buddhism. The government preferred to have centralized structure than many competing monasteries, and one abbot rather than several competing. At the same time, the government did not want Buddhists to be integrated too strongly within the Empire. Thus, different ministries controlled the religious life of Kalmykia and Buryatia. The history of Buddhist religion in Mongolia is similar to the history of Buddhist religion in Buryatia with same features. From the 17-20<sup>th</sup> century a great number of monasteries were built and were home to many monks.

In Russia the Christian Orthodox Church convinced some of Buryat people to change their religion and culture. However, later they started to resist the orthodox ideas. The Orthodox Church started to translate the Bible into Buryat language and also gave scholarships to children. It also gave money to people to start farming projects instead of

herding the livestock. However, Buryat people resisted these things and there was no change in their daily life. In 1850 a Buryat noble, Dambayev who converted to orthodox religion upon meeting the Russian Tsar Alexander (reign 13 March 1881 –1 November 1894) and Queen Maria Alexandrovna (8 August 1824 – 3 June 1880). The king granted him a golden medal and gave his daughter earrings and a golden ring. He also exempted anyone from taxes for three years who had converted their religion and granted them Russian citizenship. Although the Russian Government gave a lot of incentives to the Buryats many of them did not abandon their own religion and culture so the government started punishing them by sending them into exile in Siberia.

When they came back they married and lived in Buryatia. Nevertheless many people continued to convert to orthodox religion: more than 1500 people in 1887. During the same period many monasteries and renowned Buddhist monks continued to spread Buddhism and lecturing Buddhist teachings in Buryatia. Among these are the first abbot in Buryatia was Dambadarja, Dashi-Dorji Itigelov (1852-1927), the 12<sup>th</sup> Pandita Khambo Lama of Buryatia, Bidia Dandaron (1913—1974), Agvān Doržiev (1854—1938), one of the teachers of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, and a man who earned the highest philosophical degree of Tsanid Khambo Lxāramba, a famous Buddhologist and recognized reincarnation of Jayagsy Gegēn, the former Khambo Lama of Kumbum monastery, Buddhist scholar Luvsan Samdan Tsedenov (1850-1922) and Drepung monastery in India abbot Agwānnyam. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century many monasteries and temples were destroyed by the communist Russian government in Buryatia. Several monks were imprisoned and hundreds of books and rare manuscripts were burnt.

In 1940 there were only two temples working as propaganda to show their tolerance towards religion in Buryatia, but in fact, there were small number of monks in every temple who worked only few hours a day. Buddhist religion revived and spread again in Buryatia in the new established datsan in Ivolga and Khamba monasteries. The Russian primer,

Joseph Stalin (Ruled 3 April 1922 – 16 October 1952) allowed building the Ivolga monastery in Ulan-Ude, capital of Buriatia in 1945.

This monastery is a very big complex at present. It includes several temples, a library, monks' dormitory, a hotel and stupas, the Buddhist University of Dashchoinkhorlin (Dašchoinxorlin), shops and a museum.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, new monasteries were built. More monks joined the monasteries, and a great number of books were published. Currently, the Buddhist monasteries in Buryatia are facing financial difficulties, due to the lack of fund and a competition with other religious organizations.

Another specific feature of Buddhism in contemporary Buryatia is that Buddhists actively participate in political life.

### **Recent relationship between Mongolia and Buryatia**

The relationship between Mongolia and Buryatia started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when many monks and novices visited Mongolia to study Buddhism and exchange their knowledge with fellow monks in Mongolia.

At that time famous Buryat monks invited many monks from Mongolia. Those monks used to teach side by side with Buryad monks. In addition, many monks from Buryatia went to Tibet to study seeking to further deepen their knowledge of Buddhism and Buddhist study.

Some Mongolian teachers taught those students and monks for many years. Buddhism first came to Buryatia in 1712 when about 100 Mongolian monks fled to Buryatia because of the turbulent times under the rule of Manchu dynasty.

Some Mongolian famous monks and the Mongolian religious leader, the Bogd gegēn supported the Buryat people. For instance in Urga, the previous Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar, Jimba Akhaldav, a great scholar who studied in Mongolia returned to Buryatia and established the Tamche temple.

In 1898, Choi Māramba, the Mongolian Buddhist doctor went to Buryatia and

established the Indian-Tibetan medical school inside Tsugol monastery.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongolian-Buryat relationships developed and many destroyed temples were agreed to be rebuilt. Buddhism was on its rise again.

In 1970, The Buddhist religious center in Gandantegchenlin monastery and Abbot Gombojav (1901-1980) organized the Asian Buddhist Religious Conference for Peace. This conference included the representatives of twenty one countries who agreed in peace and respect between all the countries. The UNESCO and UN recognized this conference and supported it. This conference was the first event which supported Buryat ethnic groups and it is still supporting them.

The Russian scholar, Nicolaj Rerih visited Mongolia and studied the Mongolian culture and religion. He met the abbot Gombojav at Gandantegchenlin monastery, and the Mongolian scholar Ts. Damdinsüren (1908–1986) at the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. On his visit he showed his concern for the monks and their age and mentioned the importance of young monks to carry on the Buddhist studies and its legacy. He pointed out the need for establishing a Buddhist university and developing training programs for current and future monks.

Abbot Gombojav and some monks visited the Buryad Ivolginsky datsan. He met many monks there who paid their respect to him. In 1967, the Mongolian Khamba lama, Gombojav invited the Buryad Khamba lama Zhargal- Dorzhi Gomboyev (1897–1983) the 19<sup>th</sup> bandito khamba lam and they agreed to establish a Buddhist religious university. In 1970 they established the Buddhist religious university at Gandantegchenlin monastery in Mongolia. At that time the Mongolian - Buryad relationship and contacts developed, and many Buryad monks joined the university. Many Buryad monks having graduated from that university went back to Buryatia where some of them worked hard to spread the Buddhist religion and build new monasteries. They educated many people in Buryatia in the Buddhist teachings. Several famous Buryat

monks graduated from that university, most notably, the 24th Abbot (Khamba lama), Damba Ayushev, the former Abbot Jamiyān Šagdarov, Budayev Čoidorjo and Abbot Gomboyev. For more than two decades as been the abbot at the buddhist monastery, he made a valuable contribution in establishing strong links with other Buddhist organizations in foreign countries, and played a significant role in building new Buddhist monasteries.

The 20, 21, and 24th Pandita Khambo Lamas had good contact with the Mongolian Buddhist religious center, Gandantegčenlin monastery. In 1995 Damba Ayušev was elected on an alternative basis as the 24th Khamba lama, the chairman of the spiritual centre of Russian Buddhists, later renamed as the Buddhist traditional Sangha of Russia.

Damba Ayušev, the 24<sup>th</sup> Pandita Khambo lama in Buryatia, is a renowned monk well-known for his dedication to the development of Buddhism in Buryatia. He helped in rebuilding many damaged monasteries, stupas, and temples. The Buryat Buddhist center extended its effect on Buddhism in Russia and its name was changed into Russian Buddhist center. He sent many monks to study in Mongolia and India. In 1990 Mongolia and Buryatia exchanged Buddhist representatives. At present Buryats invite Mongolian monks and teachers, who educate Buryat monks in Buddhist philosophy, rituals, astronomy, Buddhist medicine and monastic chanting.

As Damba Ayušev said “We, Buryats, received Buddhism thanks to the son of our people, Zayaev, who studied in Tibet. He initiated the spread of Buddhism when he returned from Tibet. Subsequently, Buddhism in Buryatia received autocephaly and its own institution of the Abbots’, and upon meeting Zayaev, Catherine the Great could see that he was a man of greatness”.

Daši-Dorji Itigelov (1852–1927) was a reincarnation of Zayaev, and Itigelov became a great master though he never traveled abroad to receive initiations from Tibetan lamas. “Why do we Buryats always try to bow in front of foreigners? Look at Itigelov – he never went anywhere,” writes Ayušev. Foreign lamas and

authorization from abroad are not considered to be as necessary as they had been previously to the further spread of Buddhism in Buryatia. In this context, the exhumation of the body of Itigelov in 2002 became an event of great importance. Upon death, his body, seated in the lotus position, had not deteriorated. Now it is kept at Ivolginsky Datsan, placed in the glass sarcophagus for viewing on special occasions. The phenomenon of Itigelov attracted much attention to Buryatia and was encouraging to many believers. It is credited with starting a chain of events that may yet change the place of the Buryad Sangha in the Buddhist world.

Many people accuse him of having a disorganized Sangha, of failing to invite the 14th Dalai Lama to visit, and not showing proper respect to the Mongolian Bogd Gegēn (The Ninth Khalkha Jebtsundamba) when he visited Buryatia. People claim that he is rude, does not accept criticism, and has damaged relations with local authorities. But after the exhumation of Itigelov, the finding of relics at Aninsk, and the appearance of Yanzhima, his position became stronger.

Another specific feature of Buddhism in contemporary Buryatia is that Buddhists actively influence political life. As was also the case several centuries ago, when Buddhism has become an important instrument for gaining political influence many contemporary lamas have been involved in politics. Among them were the deputies of the Supreme Soviet, the State Duma, and other organizations. Many local politicians also use Buddhism for political purposes in Buryatia. For instance, the image of the 14th Dalai Lama was used during the election campaign of the President of Buryatia in 1998. Many businessmen and politicians visit Dharamsala and get blessings from the Dalai Lama.

At present, Khambo Lama Damba Ayušev is a member of Inter-religious Council and the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation (Межрелигиозный совет России), and is a member of the interreligious council of Russia (Общественная палата Российской Федерации).

Buryatia is a region where the influence of



shamans was traditionally strong. Despite the Buddhist's own persecution of shamans before the 20th century, and by the Soviet authorities in the 20th century, shamanism in Buryatia survived and has experienced revival since 1990. The increasing number of shamans and shamanic cults, and their influence on the population, raises some concerns among the Buddhists.

Apart from the Buryats there are Tibetan lamas (such as Eshe Lodoi Rinpoche and Jampa Tinlei) who teach in the Republic. While the Gelugpa holds the pre-eminent Buddhist position, other Buddhist schools such as Dzogchen, Karma Kagyu, schools of Korean, Japanese, and Chinese Buddhism, plus Theravada Buddhism also have followers in Buryatia.

Tibetans and other teachers give lectures and initiations for lay people. They represent a transnational form of Buddhism that has evolved mostly in the West. It implies focus on the essence of the Dharma, the teaching of meditation methods, and pays less attention to the ritual and monastic sides of Buddhism. The activities of these centers and teachers raise concerns for abbot Ayušeev because they are largely beyond the control of the traditional Sangha.

At present there are around 22 Buddhist temples in Kalmykia, 16 in Tuva and 30 temples in Buryatia. Many Buddhist centers opened in all big cities including Moscow and Saint-Petersburg. Today the total number of Buddhist followers in Russia are estimated to be 700000 including Buriats.

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## ХУРААНГУЙ

Тус өгүүлэлд Монгол Буриадын бурханы шашны харилцааны талаар товч танилцуулахыг оролдсон болно. Буриад дахь бурханы шашны түүхийг 5 үед хуваан үзэв. Үүнд;

1. Шашинтай учирсан үе буюу ХҮI-ХҮII зуунд анх Монголоос бурханы шашиныг дэлгэрүүлсэн үе.
2. Бурханы шашныг буриад зонд нутагшуулсан үе буюу ХҮII зууны сүүлээс XIX зууны төгсгөл үе хүртэл. Энэ бол бурханы шашин Буриадад дэлгэрч, сүм хийд баригдан, ном судар хэвлэсэн үе.
3. Буриададхь Бурханы шашны хөгжилийн үе буюу XIX зууны төгсгөл XX зууны 20 -иод он хүртэл цаг хугацааг хамарна. Энэ үеийг Буриад дахь бурханы шашны алтан үе гэж ч нэрлэнэ.
4. Цөвүүн цаг буюу 1920–1930 оны сүүл хүртэлх үе. Энэ бол сүм хийдүүдийг нурааж бурханы шашныг хэлмэгдүүлсэн үе.
5. Дахин сэргэсэн үе буюу 1930 оноос одоог хүртэл. Энэ үеийг сэргээн байгуулалтын үе гэнэ.

Буриад дахь бурханы шашны түүхийн талаарх судалгаануудаас үзвэл Буриад дахь бурханы шашин нь Монголоос эх авсан нь тодорхой бөгөөд одоог хүртэл лам хуваргуудаа Монголд сургасаар байгаа ба шашны хэргээр монгол лам нарыг нутагтаа залсаар байна.