

Anatoliy M. ALEKSEEV-APRAKSIN

| The Altai Republic Buddhist Transfers |

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THE ALTAI REPUBLIC BUDDHIST TRANSFERS

The article is dedicated to the multi-confessional life of the Gorny (Mountainous) Altai and the Buddhist transfers that had a profound impact on culture of the Altai peoples. Methodological basis of the work is the theory of cultural transfers, comparative principles, and cultural studies. This paper represents results of scholarly study of the region's Buddhist realities undertaken by researchers. Here the author provides the diachronic analysis of the Buddhist transfers in their ethnosophical and historical dimensions. Modern Altai Buddhism is studied in its development based on both historical data and mythological sources. It is shown that the coexistence of Buddhist traditions today is based on the principle of complementarity of traditional, modernist, and metacultural views. Addressed to different people and representing alternative paths to a common goal, they are connected in diverse ways as the history of the region's culture witnesses. It justifies the logic of adopting the status of a traditional Buddhist region acquired by the Altai Republic in 2003. The article substantiates the relevance of the Buryat transfer concerning the revival of the Altai traditions and ethnocultural originality. The significance of Tibetan transfer supported by the Dalai Lama is revealed here. Transnational Gelug tradition's presence serves as a pitchfork for classical forms of monastic studies and

model practices of Tibetan Buddhism. Rich in its ethnosophical content, a Japanese transfer which solves the local problems of mental and physical recovery of the local population, has been studied. The Yungdrung Bon tradition with its close relations with shamanic practices is also presented; it demonstrates significant potential for meaningful disclosure of the most ancient forms of the Altai culture. The metacultural Diamond Way (Russian-European transfer of the Tibetan Vajrayana) is presented in more detail. This tradition satisfies the demands of people interested in yogic self-actualization outside of monastic life and ritual practices. According to the author, the development of all existing branches of Buddhism is based on historical, ethnocultural, and ethnosophic foundations and thus helps the consolidation of the Altaians and cultural revival of the region.

Key words: Buddhism, ethnosophy, Ak-Burkhan, Gelug, Kagyu, Lotus Sutra Community, Yungdrung Bon.

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Introduction

Altai is a protected mountainous republic comprised of the areas belonging to Russian, Mongolian, Chinese, Tuva, and Khakass cultures. The

place is ancient and, in the context of Russian ethnosophical ideas, hierotopic. The remoteness from the modern civilizational process contributes to the preservation among the autochthonous population the mythopoetic heritage, animism, and shaman-



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ism. Despite the considerable territorial isolation and relatively small number of inhabitants (a little more than 220,000 people of which representatives of the indigenous Altai peoples make up about a third), the region is multi-confessional. The poorly urbanized local population (Gorno-Altaysk is the only city in the republic with a population of 57,000) is ethnoculturally divided into several dozen *seoks* which ensure not only the preservation of traditions and social coordination but also people's idea of their tribal identity. The mosaic structure of cultural topology is associated with the uneven distribution of the peoples who settled here as well as the presence of large and small zones of intercultural exchange¹. The worldview of the Altaians preserves the tribal mythology and legendary stories. It is supported by ritual practice, ethnosophic chronology, sacred topology, and also bears the features of strong influences of all world religions widespread here. The confessional picture is complicated by the fact that the Gorny Altai has long served as a place of attraction for numerous seekers of antiquity, meditative solitude, and hidden meanings. This constant and powerful influx of spiritually and healthy lifestyle oriented pilgrims, including representatives of the diverse branches of the New Age movement, leads to diversity and worldview synthesis. Nowadays, a particular specificity of the locality is elucidated by the fact that representatives of the traditional, modern, and post-modern worldviews coexist and interact with each other.

According to the official data in 2022, there are sixty religious organizations registered in Gorny Altai: twenty-nine Orthodox Christians, six Buddhists, nine Muslims, and sixteen other reli-

gious denominations². The results of surveys and statistical studies give a very controversial picture regarding the quantitative and qualitative composition of religious organizations. As for the Buddhism, according to the Atlas of Religions in Russia³, in the Altai Republic, there are less than 1% of Buddhists and about 13% of traditional ancestors professing followers, while, according to the Research Institute of Altaistics by S. S. Surazakov, Buddhists in Altai comprise up to 3% of the population, and people who identify themselves with traditional beliefs, including shamanism, make up about 81%. The figures vary but no matter what statistics one takes, there are not so many Buddhists in Altai. However, in 2003, an initiative group of Altaians made an application and received consent to include Gorny Altai along with Kalmykia, Buryatia, and Tuva among the traditional Buddhist regions.

Is this decision driven by the region's history or current trends? What is Altai Buddhism today? Clarification of these and related issues is the main subject of this article. Here we will rely on approaches relevant to the study of cultural diffusion; we will try to find out the historical dynamics of Buddhist transfers, identify zones of influence, organizational and ideological specifics of modern Buddhist organizations and their cultural potential in terms of preserving cultural identity as well as the involvement of Buddhist organizations in the development of the Altai Republic.

Understanding the Buddhist realities of Altai

Evidence about the dissemination of Buddhism in Altai appeared during the initial contacts

¹ Щеглова, Т.К. Народы Алтая в прошлом и настоящем: численность, размещение, этнокультурный состав, этноконтактные зоны // Вестник АлтГПА. – 2015. – № 23. – С. 97–107.

² Религиозные организации республики Алтай по состоянию на 23.03.2022 <https://www.altai-republic.ru/society/religious-denominations/> (accessed on August 22, 2022).

³ Атлас религий и национальностей России. <https://sreda.org/arena> (accessed on Aug. 21, 2022).



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of the Russian pioneers with the inhabitants of Siberia and, in particular, with the Altai Oirats in the 17th–18th centuries. It is found in the lists written by the diplomat F. Baikov, some features were recorded on the maps by S. U. Remezov. Such kind of evidence should also include Buddhist manuscripts from the Ablay-Hit monastery library, which, together with maps of little-known lands and established forts, were delivered to the Senate and Peter the Great by Major I. M. Likharev who returned from an expedition to the upper Irtysh River and Lake Zaisan. Specialists are familiar with the materials of the large-scale and fruitful expeditions of D. G. Messerschmidt as well as the pioneering studies of the Altai culture carried out by G. F. Miller⁴ and J. I. Schmidt⁵ who initiated academic Mongolian and Tibetan studies. Of particular attention are the works by V. L. Kotvich who studied Russian - Oirat relations⁶. A significant contribution to the understanding of the Buddhist component of Mongolian culture was made by M. A. Pozdneev⁷, B. Y. Vladimirtsov⁸, and

G. N. Potanin⁹. The ethnographic research on Telengits and Altai-Kizhi cultures was undertaken by D. A. Klements. Among the works of the Soviet and post-Soviet times, we shall note the studies of I. Y. Zlatkin¹⁰ as well as a translation of Zaya Pandita's¹¹ biography by G. N. Rumyantsev supplemented and published by A. G. Sazykin. The biography was written by Zaya Pandita's student Ratnabhadra who included valuable information about the culture of the Dzungar Khanate in the second half of the 17th century. Important studies clarifying the situation with Buddhism in Altai have been carried out by philologists and historians, including archaeologists. Among them are the works by V. I. Stebleva who studied ancient Turkic-language literature, by N. S. Yakhontova who revealed the links between Oirat literature and Chinese texts from Dunhuang along with Sanskrit lexicons borrowed by the Mongols and Oirats from Tibet. We find studies of the region's Buddhist culture in the works by C. C. Velikhanov, I. V. Erofeeva, K. M. Baipakov, E. S. Kazizov, and N. V. Yampolskaya who deepened our knowledge about Ablay-Hit monastery¹². Buddhism in the cultural life of the Altaians was studied by S. V. Bakhramaev¹³, A.M. Sagalaev¹⁴, N.S. Modorov¹⁵, L.I. Sherstova¹⁶, G.P. Samaev¹⁷,

⁴ Миллер, Г.Ф. Описание Сибирского царства и всех произошедших в нём дел от начала, а особливо от покорения его Российской державой по сии времена. – СПб.: 1750. – 510 с.

⁵ Schmidt, J. I. *Forschungen im Gebiete der älteren religiösen, politischen und literarischen Bildungsgeschichte der Völker Mittel-Asiens, vorzüglich der Mongolen und Tibeter*. St. Petersburg, Leipzig. 1824; *Geschichte der Goldenen Horde in Kiptschak, das ist: der Mongolen in Rußland*. Pesth. 1840, 602–642; *Über die Verwandtschaft der gnostisch-theosophischen Lehren mit den Religions-Systemen des Orients, vorzüglich des Buddhismus*. СПб., 1828.

⁶ В. Л. Котвич. Монгольские надписи в Эрдэни-дзу // Сб. Музея антропологии и этнографии при Российской АН, т. 5, в. 1, П., 1918, и др.

⁷ Позднеев, М.А. Очерки быта буддийских монастырей и буддийского духовенства в Монголии [в связи с отношениями сего последнего к народу]. СПб.: Тип. Имп. акад. наук, 1887; Сказание о хождении в Тибетскую страну малодэрбэтского Бааза-багши / калм. текст с пер. и прим., составленными А. М. Позднеевым. СПб.: ИАН, 1897.

⁸ Владимирцов, Б. Я. Работы по истории и этнографии монгольских народов. – М.: Восточная литература, 2002. – 560 с.

⁹ Потанин, Г.Н. Очерки Северо-Западной Монголии. Вып. IV. – СПб., 1883. – 433 с.

¹⁰ Златкин, И.Я. История Джунгарского ханства (1635–1758). 1-е изд. – М., 1964; 2-е изд. М., 1983.

¹¹ Раднабхадра. Лунный свет: История рабджам Заяпандиты. Перевод: Г. Н. Румянцева, А. Г. Сазыкина. 1999. – 176 с.

¹² Байпаков, К.М., Ерофеева, И.В., Казизов, Е.С., Ямпольская, Н.В. Буддийский монастырь Аблай-хит. – Алматы: ТОО «Археологическая экспертиза». 2019. – 400 с., илл.

¹³ Бахрамаев, С.В. Буддизм на Алтае // Религиозные объединения Республики Алтай. Горно-Алтайск: 2009.

¹⁴ Сагалаев, А. М. Мифология и верования алтайцев. Новосибирск, 1984. – 120 с.

¹⁵ Модоров, Н.С. Россия и Горный Алтай: Политические, социально-экономические и культурные отношения (XVII–XIX вв.). Горно-Алтайск, 1996.



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N. V. Ekeev¹⁸, A. V. Torbokov¹⁹, V. A. Klesheva²⁰, V. K. Kosmin²¹, M. V. Mongush²², S. B. Filatov²³, O. M. Khomushku²⁴, A. Znamensky²⁵, and A. Berzin.

Currently, studies of the cultural and religious traditions of the Altai Mountains are being carried out at the Research Institute of Altaistics by S. S. Surazakov, at the Gorno-Altai State University as well as by researchers from the Agency for Cultural and Historical Heritage of the Altai Republic, and the National Museum by A. V. Anokhin.

¹⁶ Шерстова, Л.И. О религиозном синкретизме алтайцев в конце XIX – начала XX вв. // *Мировоззрение народов Западной Сибири по археологическим и этнографическим данным*. – Томск, 1985. – С. 163–165.

¹⁷ Самаев, Г.П. Присоединение Алтая к России. Горно-Алтайск, 1996.

¹⁸ Екеев, Н. Религиозность населения Республики Алтай: традиционные и новые факторы // *Родник. Приложение на русском языке к АлтайдынГЧолмоны*. – № 31. С. 153–155. 30.07.2009; Екеев, Н.В. О движении бурханитов на Алтае в 1904-1905 гг. // *Движение Ак жанг (белая вера) – бурханитизм: взгляд через столетие*. Горно-Алтайск, 2004. – С. 49–83.

¹⁹ А.В. Торбоков. Буддизм. Религиозные деноминации в Республике Алтай / БНУ РА «Научно-исследовательский институт алтаистики им. С.С. Суразакова» – Горно-Алтайск: ООО «Горно-Алтайская типография», 2015. – 480 с.

²⁰ Клешев, В.А. Народная религия алтайцев: вчера, сегодня. Горно-Алтайск, 2011. – 246 с.

²¹ Косьмин, В.К. Влияние монгольского буддизма на формирование и развитие бурханитизма на Алтае // *Бурханитизм на Алтае: история и современность*. – Горно-Алтайск, 2012.

²² Монгуш, М.В. История буддизма в Туве. – Новосибирск, 2001. – С. 136.

²³ Религиозно-общественная жизнь в российских регионах. Том 1 / Отв. ред. С. Филатов. – СПб.: Летний сад, 2014.

²⁴ Хомушку, О.М. Религиозный синкретизм у народов Саяно-Алтая. Дисс. на соискание степени доктора филологии.

²⁵ Знаменский, А. «Белая вера» в Горном Алтае: тибетский буддизм, Монголия и Ойротское пророчество (1880–1920-е гг.) // *Государство. Религия. Церковь*. – № 1 (38). – 2020. – С. 123–151.

Diachronic Analysis of Buddhist Transferences

Altai ethnosophy sets the first contact of the autochthonous population with Buddhism at the time of the Scythian spread in this region, more precisely referred to as Pazyryk culture (6th–3rd centuries BCE). This is done mainly based on a comparative analysis of images found during excavations but they cannot be unambiguously interpreted and only indirectly support this hypothesis. More convincing is the information about the spread of Buddhism among the Turks in the Hunnic period (4th–5th centuries)²⁶. Convincing data on the spread of Buddhism among the Altai elite in the middle of the 6th-century dates back to the time of the First Turkic Khaganate.

Among the evidence of this transfer is the Sogdian text on the Bugut stele which reports about «the most important stage in the spread of Buddhism among the Turks, the creation of a Buddhist sangha» (B II, line 10: RBkw nwh snk' 'wst: «establish a great new sangha») - an event also known from Chinese sources²⁷. Another evidence informs that in 574–584 the live transmission of the Buddhist Dharma was carried out throughout Altai by monks who arrived from Northern Zhou. The Indian illuminator Chinagupta was among them. In the archives of A. Berzin, we read: «Under the patronage of the Turkic rulers, Indian, Central Asian, and Chinese masters translated many Buddhist scriptures into the ancient Turkic language»²⁸. Majority

²⁶ Литвинский, Б.А. Буддизм и буддийская культура Центральной Азии (древность) // *Московское востоковедение. Очерки, исследования, разработки*. – М.: Наука, 1997. – С. 53–78.

²⁷ Кляшторный, С.Г., Лившиц, В.А. Согдийская надпись из Бугута // *Страны и народы Востока*. – т. X. – 1971. – С. 121–146.

²⁸ Berzin, Alexander. Buddhism and Its Impact on Asia Asian Monographs, no. 8. Cairo: Cairo University, Center for Asian Studies, June 1996. Цит. по <https://studybuddhism.com/ru/prodvintuyy-uroven/istoriya-i->



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of researchers record the eclectic nature of Buddhism of this period.

The next wave of Buddhist transfers happened during the Uighur Khaganate because of its close political and trade ties with the Tang Empire, Sassanid Iran, and Tibetan Empire. In the 8th – 9th centuries Altai became part of the Uighur Khaganate, and Buddhism coexisted and interacted with ancient forms of polytheism, shamanism and Tengrism as well as with officially recognized Manichaeism. This gave rise to new ideological syntheses and led to the development of high intellectual culture, at least among the Uighur elite. «Buddhist writings are especially widely represented in the Uighur during the 8th-13th centuries. This literature was translated over several centuries mostly from Chinese, Tibetan, and Tocharian and was kept in the libraries of Buddhist monasteries.»²⁹ Among the texts studied, we find the «Golden Light» sutra written by the 10th century in Old Uyghur, Prajnaparamita (Transcendental Wisdom) sutras, Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakosa, Jatakas, Avadanas and other texts. At first, Buddhism was represented here as «...a mixture of elements belonging to the faiths of Sogdian and Chinese merchants and local Tokhars of Turfan.»³⁰ This ideological eclecticism was also preserved during the reign of the Yenisei Kyrgyz in Altai (840–924).

In the Khitan period (924–1206), the authorities were in many respects sinicized and, just

like their predecessors, demonstrated their religious tolerance. They officially revered ancestral emperors, built temples of all confessions common on their territory, and performed animistic rites. Since the end of the 13th century, the traditions of the Tibetan Vajrayana prevailed here just as it happened in Mongolia and Tuva. It had a profound experience in adapting polytheistic, animistic, and shamanistic views and practices within the Buddhist, compassionate and pacifying, context.

A new wave of Buddhist transfer among the Altai peoples dates back to the end of the 16th - beginning of the 17th centuries when within the state of Altyn Khans Kagyu and Gelug Tibetan lamas had been solving rivalry between clans. They also widely disseminated the teachings and practices of meditation among the population. These events significantly influenced the culture of the region; this period is thoroughly elucidated in the works by B. U. Kitinov³¹. Further strengthening of Oirats in the Altai historical scene led to the creation of the powerful Dzungar Khanate (1635–1756). The ethnic structure of this state was heterogeneous and consisted of Mongolian- and Turkic-speaking groups. Descendants of both origins formed the current population of Gorny Altai Republic as well as Khakassia and Tuva areas³². In 1640, a pan-Mongolian congress approved the ethical and legal «Steppe Code» designed to regulate the social and cultural life of the peoples inhabiting vast territories. This meeting was attended by highly revered Tibetan lamas, among them the famous Zaya Pandita. The council of lamas and leaders

kultura/buddizm-v-tsentrallyy-azii/istoriya-buddizma-sredniy-turkskiy-narodov (accessed on July 24, 2022).

²⁹ Стеблева, И.В. Древняя тюркоязычная литература // История всемирной литературы в 8 томах / АН СССР; Ин-т мировой лит. им. А. М. Горького. – М.: Наука. 1983–1994. – Т. 2. – 1984. – С. 200.

³⁰ Berzin, Alexander. Buddhism and Its Impact on Asia Asian Monographs, no. 8. Cairo: Cairo University, Center for Asian Studies, June 1996. Цит. по <https://studybuddhism.com/ru/prodvintuyy-uroven/istoriya-ikultura/buddizm-v-tsentrallyy-azii/istoriya-buddizma-sredniy-turkskiy-narodov> (accessed on July 24, 2022).

³¹ Китинов, Б.У. Священный Тибет и воинственная степь: буддизм у ойратов (XIII–XVII вв.). / Под общ. ред. Бонгард-Левина. Москва: Т-во научных изданий КМК. 2004. 190 с.; Китинов, Б.У. Буддийский фактор в политической и этнической истории ойратов (середина XV в. – 1771 г.). Дисс. Доктора ист. наук. – М.: 2020. – 527 с.

³² Хойт, С.К. Этническая история ойратских групп. – Элиста, 2015. – 199 с.



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adopted Buddhism of the Tibetan Gelug tradition as the main official religion of the Dzungar Khanate.

In course of striking victories, the Oirats in a short time managed to significantly expand the territories of their nomad's camps and strengthen their political influence by taking under their sway nearly all of Tibet. However, the glorious period interpreted by modern Altai ethnosophy as the heyday of the Altai statehood ended with the defeat of Dzungaria. The long bloody confrontation between the Manchus and Qing China swayed the ancestors of modern Altaic groups to the decision to accept help from Russia. Signing in 1756 an agreement on voluntary entry into the Russian Empire, twelve *zaisans* (heads of large tribal Altai clans) headed by Lama Lobsang Zunduy took an «oath of allegiance to the Russian crown» in front of the Buddhist images³³. Russian presence in the region has become increasingly visible. The Old Believers began to move to Altai; the Orthodox Christian Altai Spiritual Mission started working here in 1829. Nevertheless, Buddhism did not cease to exist. There is a lot of evidence derived from the Orthodox missionaries that the Buddhists served at the administrations of *zaisans*, and that Mongolian lamas continued to visit the area. The center of Buddhist life in Altai in the 19th century was the alpine and spacious Chuyskaya Steppe.

In 1904, a new religious doctrine, Burkhanism, arose in Altai. It is associated with the myth of invincible and fair Oirots Khan who would come from the East and revive the golden age of the Holy Dzungaria. In Burkhanism, Buddhist ideas entered another powerful synthesis with shamanism, Tengrism, and the mythological ideas of the Altaians. Declaring themselves the followers of the «White Faith», the Burkhanists eventually acted as

³³ Самаев, Г.П. Присоединение Алтая к России. – Горно-Алтайск, 1996. – С. 82.

strong opponents to the shamans, followers of the «Black Faith» communicating with the lower worlds of Erlik-Bey. The authorities even had to take shamans under protection. After 1917, the actual power in Altai (since 1918 – the Karakorum-Altai District) passed into the hands of the Regional Council headed by the artist and social revolutionary G. Gurkin. He and his comrades were supporters of the «White Faith» so Burkhanism revived again, and its activists even began to fight the Bolsheviks as supporters of the «Red Faith». It is of no surprise that elimination of Burkhanism became a top priority for the Soviet government which successfully coped with the task by closing all churches and religious organizations altogether.

Since 1929, the Council for Religious Affairs has been operating in the USSR. In the post-war period, the Central Spiritual Administration of Buddhists (CSAB) was established. CSAB joined the World Fellowship of Buddhists and its delegations visited Nepal (1956), India (1964), Thailand (1966, 1976), Malaysia (1969), and Sri Lanka (1972). High delegations from Cambodia, Japan, Burma, and Ceylon visited Soviet lamas. «In 1970, CSAB USSR headed by Pandito Khambo Lama J.-D. Gomboev and Mongolian Buddhists established the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace with its headquarters in Ulaanbaatar.»³⁴ In the same year, the first Soviet Buddhist University by Zanabazar was opened there. The Oirats of Altai and Kalmyk Buddhists were excluded from these image projects of the Soviet government.

³⁴ Торбоков, А.В. Буддизм. Религиозные деноминации в Республике Алтай / Редколл.: к.и.н. Н.В. Екеев, к.и.н. Тадышева Н.О. (отв. ред.), к.полит.н. Г.Б. Эшматова; БНУ РА «Научно-исследовательский институт алтаистики им. С.С. Суразакова». – Горно-Алтайск: «Горно-Алтайская типография». 2015. – С. 106.



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Buddhism in Altai today

The revival of Buddhism in Altai began, as in the rest of the country, after the USSR Supreme Council in 1990 passed the law «On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations» and, subsequently, the law «On Freedom of Religion» which abolished the Council for Religious Affairs and granted citizens freedom of religious speech, thoughts, and deeds. By that time, society has developed huge spiritual deficits and responded to these freedoms with incredible enthusiasm and naivety. Many wanted to keep distance from atheism and materialism, but what to be adopted instead, and how? N.K. Roerich family have done much in spreading spiritual romantic metaphysics regarding Altai and other eastern mysterious areas as *focus loci*. Roerich's spiritual movement arose and spread consisting mainly of the Soviet intelligentsia in larger cities. Already in the 1980s, many people came to Altai in search for the mysterious Shambhala. Seduced by the N. Roerichs and H. Hesse ideas, people went on a «pilgrimage to the East». Idealists, they perceived such journeys as an introspective Path leading to self-realization, and Altai itself for them was the valley of the «seven happy jewels». As for the local population, the works of N. Roerich also had a noticeable influence on them. Yet, for the Altaians, the main specificity of the place was associated with religious revival with tribal structure. Regarding it as a functioning institution, many people chose the faith their ancestors adhered to.

Buddhism of the Gelug tradition

Burkhanists were perhaps the first participants of the Buddhism revival in the Altai. It was rather a group of people who extracted the fragments of Burkhanist ideas consistent with the Gelug Buddhist views, the youngest among the main

traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Je Tsongkhapa in the 14th century. This choice was certainly connected with revival of Dzungarian heritage. Under the name «Ak-Burkhan», the Buddhist community headed by A. Sanashkin was officially registered in 1991; the only thing lacking was a living transmission of Dharma. To accomplish the goal, an initiative group engaged in a dialogue with the XIV Dalai Lama who recognized Ak-Burkhan as the Altai national form of Buddhism. To revive the Dharma, Tendzin Gyamtso sent a young highly qualified Geshe Jampa Tinley to Russia. The charismatic lama-cum-scholar has repeatedly visited Altai as well as Kalmykia, Buryatia, Tuva, and many other cities. Over the past years, he has written and published in Russian many important books on the practices of Calm Abiding and *ngondro* meditations, commentaries on Lamrim, Buddhist logic, etc. Geshe Tinley to this day conducts retreats, gives initiations, and publishes books. Having gained a large number of followers in the post-Soviet space, he leads the Buddhist organization «Je Tsongkhapa» comprising today 20 Buddhist centers in different Russian cities.

Among the latest projects related to the Tibetan transfer, we shall mention the project of constructing the Shine Rangbab-ling monastery for long-term retreats. It was approved by the Dalai Lama and supported by the lamas of the Drepung Gomang monastery in 2020. Further development of the Ak-Burkhan community turned out to be connected not with the classical Tibetan transmission but with the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR; until 1997 called CSAB). Young Altaians who returned after studying at the first Russian Buddhist University Dashi Choikhorling and the Aginsky Buryat Buddhist Institute reproduced the Soviet-Buryat model of the Dharma institutionalization in their homeland. In 2001, the



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Central Spiritual Administration of Buddhists of the Altai Republic was founded. It included groups of Altai Buddhists adhering Gelug tradition. This school is based on a community of monks; its participants are involved in deep studies of Prajnaparamita Sutras, Madhyamaka Prasangika (tib. *rangtong*) theory, Pramana, Abhidharma, Vinaya, and the practice of Tantra. The first elected Khambo Lama of the Altai Republic became 29-year-old Erketen Kozhutov but soon, in 2003, Mergen Shagaev replaced him. This lama maintains close ties with the Petersburg Datsan Gunzechoinei. Despite the small number of sangha members, the Buddhists of Ak-Burkhan enjoy authority among the population and authorities of the republic. They provide services related to Tibetan medicine, astrological divination, and welfare rituals. They work closely with the BTSR, St. Petersburg Datsan, Buddhists of Tuva, and Tibetan lamas of the Southern Indian Monastery Drepung Gomang.

In general, Ak-Burkhan is a modern attempt to reconstruct and establish the Dzhungar version of Buddhism that followed the Gelug tradition. In attempt to make Buddhism more understandable, they began translating Buddhist prayers and texts into the Altai language. The followers are also active in reviving and incorporating folk traditions that do not contradict the Dharma into Buddhist practice for the sake of preserving national cultural identity. Few officially registered Buddhist communities cooperate with Ak-Burkhan: Ochyra (Vajra) of Ust-Kan district (2013), Amyr Sanaa (Calm Mind) of Maylin district (2019), Altyn Sudur (Golden Sutra) of Chemalsky district (2019), Ak Sumer (Sacred Peak) of Ongudaysky district (2019). According to N. V. Ekeyev and A. V. Torbokov, at present «...Buddhist temples are being

built at the settlements of Ust-Kan, Chemal, Maima.»³⁵

Kagyū Buddhism

The Karma Kagyū tradition began to spread in Russia in 1989, after a visit to St. Petersburg by Ole and Hanna Nydahl, the first Western disciples of the XVI Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the transmission holder of one of the key lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Its actual founder in Tibet, a householder Marpa Lotsava (1012–1097), employed his profound knowledge and experience in tantric practices obtained from Indian mahasiddha Naropa in realizing the Mahamudra (tib. *chagchen*, Great Seal), the ultimate attainment. Later the practical and informal approach of this tradition was institutionalized by introducing the monastic discipline and thorough scholastic studies. However, the Kagyū tradition is called «Oral Transmission» because the main force of practitioners' development is the living word of the root teacher. Many hierarchs of this tradition led a nomadic lifestyle so it is natural that they were the first to introduce Oirats to Buddhism long before they adopted the Gelug approach. The philosophical discrepancy between Kagyū and Gelug lies in the interpretation of *shunyata*, emptiness. Kagyūpas uphold the *zhentong* view of Prasangika-Madhyamaka scholastic tradition, attributing certain qualities inherent to the absolute truth of the state of enlightenment, whereas Gelugpas, attempting to avoid the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, refute any substantiality of the absolute; their position in Tibetan is called *rangtong*. Historically, between these traditions were some clashes but they rather were caused by political issues than subtle philo-

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³⁵ Торбоков, А. В. Буддийская община в Республике Алтай в начале XXI века. Народы Алтая в социокультурном пространстве России на рубеже эпох. – Горно-Алтайск: 2021. – С. 377



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sophical disagreements. Nowadays, this rivalry is devoid of substantial ground in contemporary Altai mostly because of the difference between the followers. The Diamond Way School has spread widely throughout the world by consolidating lay Buddhists and yogis. Here, the practice of meditation is supposed to be more important than conceptual development. Gradually getting acquainted with the view, followers begin with the practice of *ngondro*, focusing on guru yoga, and implying the view of Mahamudra. Teaching and practice here are carried out in their native language and are cleared of mysticism and ethnographic exoticism. This approach invariably attracts to the Karma Kagyu creative youth interested not in the form but the content of teachings and psychophysical results of the practice. In 1993, dozens of meditation groups came together to form the Diamond Way Buddhist Association of the Karma Kagyu Tradition. In terms of structure, it is a self-organizing branch of the global transnational network. In Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Union, it unites about a hundred local communities with urban and suburban retreat centers.

The idea to create a retreat center in Altai came from the Buddhists of the Novosibirsk Kagyu Center in 1992 but only in 1995 a suitable location was found in Askat village of Chemalsky District, popularly known as the «village of artists». In 1996, Lama Ole Nydahl visited and blessed the construction. Russian and European Buddhist volunteers managed to arrange the place based on collective work done by a group of like-minded people. Since 2002, the Askat retreat center became suitable for individual practice, group lectures, and meditation programs. Among the events of recent years are courses of painting in the Karma Gadri style repeatedly held here by the famous Nepali artist Dawa Lhadripa. A team of residents living in the center organizes life here and officially repre-

sents the Karma Kagyu school in Altai. Under the auspices of the Association, lectures are held, dharma workshops operate, traveling art exhibitions and Buddhist festivals are organized, films are made, and international scientific and practical conferences are held. Buddhists of the Diamond Way always try to establish friendly relations with people and communities around them but, in practice, they strictly adhere to their line of transmission. For this reason, they sometimes unfairly are declared sectarians. The organization is headed by the XVII Karmapa Trinley Thaye Dorje (b. 1983) and Lama Ole Nydahl (b. 1941). Maintaining close ties with Tibetan lamas, with educational and scientific institutions, the Diamond Way Association does not create hierarchies and develops as an international cluster network of friends. Its attitude to politics is indifferent. The supreme governing body is the conference of representatives of the centers; in the intervals between conferences the Council is functioning. The Altai retreat center Askat has a library and a small shop with books and magazines. The followers of the Kagyu are sociable and altruistic people; they provide talks and excursions for tourists and curious visitors. Altai traditions are treated here with great interest and benevolent distance in attempt of not disturbing the ethnocultural identity with metacultural concepts, with clinging or repulsion.

Lotus Sutra Community

The Japanese transfer of the Buddhist Mahayana reached Altai in 1997 in the form of a well-known Mahayana school founded by Nichiren (1222–1282) who based his teachings on the Lotus Sutra³⁶. Altaians have a special relationship with

³⁶ Сутра о бесчисленных значениях. Сутра о Цветке Лотоса Чудесной Дхармы. Сутра о постижении деяний и Дхармы бодхисаттвы Всеобъемлющая Мудрость. / Пер. с



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Japan. A hundred years ago, the Burkhanists of Altaians believed that the savior Oirok Khan would come from there. At the same place, according to the ideas of the Altai Old Believers, Belovodye (White-water Land) is situated there - an important, among other things, reference point for N. K. Roerich. Followers of the Lotus Sutra Community claim that Siddhartha who was from the Shakyas tribe thus belongs to the Sakas or Scythians. The Scythians, according to the contemporary head of the school Terasawa Junsei, after the appearance of Buddha Dharma in India widely disseminated his teaching in Central Asia, and already in the Hun era, it reached the Pacific Ocean along the northern routes of the Silk Road. On its basis, the *tiantai zong* school arose in China in the 5th century. Based on the theory of *tathagatagarbha* and the concepts of *madhyamaka* by Nagarjuna, the philosophers of the Lotus School developed several original concepts, for example: «in one [act] of consciousness three thousand [worlds] is present» and the concept of «mind, or consciousness only». In this tradition, it is argued that not only all sentient beings but also seemingly inanimate nature are endowed with Buddha nature. This idea is not shared by all Buddhists but it was appealing to the Japanese as it coincided with the traditional Shinto animation of the world. It also turned out to be attractive to the Altaians who abide in constant and close contact with the power of elements. At the beginning of the 9th century, Lotus School teachings were spread by the monk Saicho (767–822) in Japan where it was called Tendai. Since the 13th century, thanks to Nichiren, the school became one of the most influential and numerous. The transfer of this tradition to Russia and Altai is connected with the events of 1918 when the master of the *Nichiren* school Nichidatsu Fujii (1885-1985)

кит. и комм. А. Н. Игнатовича. – М.: Янус-К. 1998. – 537 с.

created his order Nipponzan Myohoji whose goal was to return forgotten teachings of the Lotus Sutra to the West. His famous student Terasawa Junsei's projects included the creation of 80 Peace Stupas, including one at the bank of the Thames in London. Terasawa first visited the USSR in 1988 by invitation of the CSAB. Since 1991, a group of followers has formed around him. Terasawa ordained them as bodhisattva monks and established in Moscow and then in other cities of Russia and Ukraine community called «Places on the Way» (jap. Do Jo). Being not only a religious figure and scholar but also a political activist, he participated in numerous antiwar protests and was forbidden to visit Russia. Thus Nipponzan Myohoji tradition received further development in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan only. In Gorny Altai, the followers registered the religious organization «Lotus Sutra Community» in the village of Ongudai. In 2004, the leader of this organization N. Antonova obtained monastic ordination from the teacher. Worth to mention, the members of the local organization are Altaians. Alike all other Buddhists, they participate in academic events, conduct ascetic retreats, and provide courses on a healthy lifestyle for those who want and need it. They participate in the national Altai holidays and keep in touch with their teacher and people with similar views in India, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Nepal, and Japan.

Yungdrung Bon tradition

Bon is an ancient Central Asian shamanic religion that originated in the mountains on the Iranian-Tajik border and flourished in Western Tibet. By the 11th century it evolved under the (mutual) influence of Vajrayana Buddhism and became known as Yungdrung Bon (Unchanging, Eternal Teaching). Preserving the original metaphysics, cosmography, chronology, and ritual practice that go back centuries, it absorbed the ideas of karma,



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incarnation, and monastic way of life along with the teachings and practices of the Tibetan traditions of Tantric Buddhism. The highest practical teaching of this school is *Dzogchen* (Maha-ati, Great Perfection). This specific Tibetan transfer has taken root in Altai owing to the followers of the Yungdrung Bon tradition led by A. Hosmo, an expert and popularizer of Tibetan astrology, medicine, and sacred geomancy. Shen Ling retreat center (Abode of the Priests) of Altai originally was conceived as an educational settlement called Shenten Mindrol Ling. Like the Lotus Sutra community, the followers do not aspire to spread something new but care about returning the Teachings to their native places. They seek to confirm and prove the presence of their roots in the Altai and Southern Urals through written sources and archaeological finds. The direct transmission of the teachings in the Altai center is carried out by Russian and Tibetan masters from the Menri Monastery with the blessing of the current head of the Bon tradition, Menri Tridzin Lungtog Tenzin Nima. Many initiations, instructions, and practical courses were given in Altai by Tibetan masters in the decade preceding the Covid-19 pandemic: Shang Shung Dzogchen, Yogas of Sleep and Dreams, practices of *ngondro*, *phowa*, *tummo*, rituals of *chod*, *tsog*, *chutor* and other practices known in tantric Buddhism and specific to the modern Bon.

Due to the little knowledge about ancient Central Asia nomadic civilizations, it is impossible to either confirm or refute the assertions of the followers that Bon, concerned with the nature and magic, is a form of ancient Altai beliefs now interpreted as a synthesis of animistic and Buddhist views.

Conclusion

The historical studies of Buddhism in Altai allow us to see several broken-in-time periods of

rooting the various Buddhist views and practices. Some of these periods are thousands of years old; it allows us to consider Buddhism as a traditional phenomenon of the Altai culture. Today, thanks to the work of our predecessors, we have the opportunity to trace from where and in which manner certain ideological transfers were carried out to Altai. It is an important point because no culture produces everything from itself, in isolation. Peoples tend to learn from each other by taking what is useful for their development. Today we got to know some turning points in the Altai history, including the periods of acceptance and oblivion of Buddhism as well as the names of people who initiated deep cultural transformations in the region. Although the research work is far from complete, much cultural diffusion are distinguishable in the Altaic culture: Turkic and Russian, Tibetan and Japanese, Mongolian and Chinese.

The study of modern Buddhism in Altai points to its heterogeneity. Considering forms of its development we may once more confirm the old thesis about nonrandomness and subjectivity of cultural development since each of the currently developing areas of Buddhism is historically predetermined and associated with the creative activity of specific people. Most researchers of this topic note that only the Gelug school is actively involved in the revival of regional traditions. However, from a cultural point of view, the situation looks much more varied. This happens because all Buddhist schools are complementary to each other and to the society where they develop. Their coexistence in Altai is currently based on the principle of complementarity of traditional, modernist, and metacultural approaches. It provides the basis and necessary background for overall sustainable development in an unpredictable and changing reality.



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The traditions presented above are focused on different types of people and show alternative paths to the common goal, the state of Awakening for the benefit of all living beings. It is uncertain which of these traditions will gain more success and influence tomorrow. At present, some observers believe that the most suitable would be the Buryat transfer aimed at the revival of local traditions and ethnocultural originality. It is complemented by the Dalai Lama-sponsored Gelug transfer serving as a kind of pitchfork for classical Tibetan teachings and reference practice. The Japanese transfer is focused on a radical solution to the global and local problems of modern Altaians while working for the mental and physical recovery of the population. Aimed at self-improvement Yungdrung Bon tradition also has considerable potential for meaningful disclosure of the most ancient forms of shamanism, the Altai form of Buddhism, and culture in general. As for the metacultural Diamond Way, today it represents a Russian-European transfer of the Tibetan Vajrayana focused on modern people who are not satisfied with the role of parishioners but interested in yogic self-actualization outside of ritual practices and monastic life. At the same time, it is obvious that the Buryat, Mongolian, Japanese, and Tibetan Buddhist transfers are currently based not only on historical but also on ethnosophical grounds to justify their cultural rootedness. The development of all existing Buddhist branches, at their different levels and in different circumstances, can help the cultural revival of the region. As for residents' fears to lose their ethnic identity, it should be remembered that Buddhism generally is not characterized by imposing foreign cultural models. It always successfully adapts itself to the culture of the recipients. This idea was beautifully formulated by Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche, an outstanding master of the Vajrayana, with whom the author met on sever-

al occasions. At one of the meetings, he said: «Buddhism is not accidentally compared with a diamond... If a diamond lies on a red surface, it turns red, on a blue one it turns blue, but it remains a Diamond»³⁷.

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³⁷ Алексеев-Апраксин, А. М. Старшее, моложе младшего (традиции и новации отечественного буддизма) // *Studia Culturae*. – Вып. 4 (30). – Academia. – 2016. – С. 9–17.



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БУДДИЙСКИЕ ТРАНСФЕРЫ РЕСПУБЛИКИ АЛТАЙ*

Статья посвящена мульти-конфессиональной жизни Горного Алтая и буддийским трансферам, оказывающим глубокое воздействие на культуру алтайских народов. Методологическая опора работы – теории культурных трансферов, компаративистика и культурологическая аналитика. В работе представлен опыт научного изучения буддийских реалий региона предшественниками. Дан диахронный анализ буддийских трансферов в их этнософском и историческом измерениях. Исследован современный алтайский буддизм, опирающийся в своем развитии как на исторические данные, так и на мифологические источники. Показано, что комплементарное сосуществование буддийских традиций сегодня строится на принципе взаимодополнительности традиционных, модернистских и метакультурных воззрений. Адресованные разным людям и представляя альтернативные пути к общей цели, они в той или иной форме связаны с историей культуры региона, что представляет оправданным обретение в 2003 году Республикой Алтай статуса традиционного буддийского региона. В статье обоснована актуальность бурятского трансфера, направленного на возрождение алтайских традиций и этнокультурного своеобразия. Выявлена значимость поддерживаемого Далай Ламой тибетского трансфера, который служит своего рода камертоном

классических форм обучения и эталонной практики транснациональной Гелук. Исследован, богатый на этнософские содержания японский трансфер, который решает локальные проблемы ментального и физического оздоровления местного населения. Представлена таинственная традиция Юндруб Бон, демонстрирующая значительный потенциал для содержательного раскрытия древнейших форм алтайской культуры. Исследован метакультурный Алмазный путь (российско-европейский трансфер тибетской Ваджраяны), который ориентирован на людей, заинтересованных в йогической самоактуализации вне монастырской жизни и обрядовых практик. По мнению автора развитие всех имеющихся направлений буддизма, на исторических, этнокультурных и этнософских основаниях, способно помочь консолидации алтайцев и культурному возрождению региона.

Ключевые слова: буддизм, этнософия, Акбурхан, Гелуг, Кагью, Орден Лотосовой сутры, Юндруб Бон.

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