

The History and Current Situation of Traditional Buddhism Belief Areas in Russia

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Abstract: The traditional belief in Buddhism of Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmyk in Russian has certain influence on contemporary Russian culture, internal affairs and diplomacy. The special Buddhism history and current situation owned by these nations should be considered as a main chapter of the world's Buddhism spreading history.

1. Introduction

Russia is a country that crosses Europe and Asia and takes orthodox as its main religion. However, Buddhism has a history of nearly five centuries and has become one of the four traditional religions in Russia. This is mainly because Buddhism is the traditional religion of the three nationalities of the Russian Buryat (Бурятия), Tuva (Тыва) and Kalmyk (Калмыкия). The Republic of Buryat, the Republic of Tuva, the Republic of Kalmyk, the state of Chita and Irkusk, where these three ethnic groups live together, have become the traditional areas of Russian Buddhism. They all believe in Tibetan Buddhism.

In addition to the above-mentioned ethnic groups and regions, some new Buddhist groups have gradually formed and developed in the European region of Russia after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Compared with Buddhism in traditional areas, these new Buddhist groups have more schools and different understandings of Buddhist beliefs. The above two forms of Buddhist beliefs in Russia, especially the traditional Buddhist beliefs of Buryatia, Tuva and kalmyk, have exerted a certain influence on the culture, internal affairs and diplomacy of contemporary Russia. The unique historical and current characteristics of Buddhism in these nations should also be an important chapter in the spread of Buddhism in the world. Therefore, the study of Russian Buddhism has great historical and practical significance.

Based on the above understanding, this paper attempts to elaborate in detail the history of Buddhism among Buryat, Tuva and kalmyk in Russia (that is, in the traditional areas where Russian Buddhism is believed), and summarize and analyze the current situation and characteristics of Russian traditional Buddhism in the Russian Federation.

2. The History of Russian Traditional Buddhism Before the Soviet Union's "Religious Suppression" Policy

As one of the three major religions in the world, Buddhism originated in the northeast of India from the 5th to 6th century BC. Buddhism was introduced into Russia by the Buryat, Tuva and Kalmyk, three branches of Mongolian from 17th to 18th century AD, and Buddhism became the traditional religion of these three nationalities.

In 1741, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the Russian government officially recognized Buddhism as one of the national religions, so Buddhism experienced a period of vigorous development in these ethnic settlements. Although the origin and spread of Buddhism in the above-mentioned traditional areas are different from each other, they have been suppressed by the Soviet government since the 1930s. It was not until the collapse of the Soviet Union that Russia's traditional Buddhism was revived in a real sense.

2.1 The History of Buddhism in Buryat

The Buryats in Russia belong to a branch of Mongolian nationality, and live in the east of Baikal Lake, that is, the present Buryatia Republic, Chita State and Irkutsk State of Russia. They once belonged to the Mongol Empire. Until the mid-17th century, the region was occupied by the tsarist Russia and joined Russia. Buryat people believe in Buddhism, which is the largest nationality in Russia. The Buryat Buddhism is also the northernmost branch of Mahayana Buddhism in the world.

In the 13th century, the Mongolian Empire declared Buddhism the state religion. At that time, buryates under the jurisdiction of the Mongolian Empire began to contact Buddhism. But it was in the 17th-18th century that Buddhism really spread and developed among Buryat residents. In 1712, 100 Mongolian lamas and 50 Tibetan lamas fled to the Baikal and Buryatia regions of Russia because of evasion of war [1]387. It was also after this incident that the Buddhist monasteries in the area developed rapidly.

Before 1727, monks from Mongolia and Tibet were free to enter and leave Buryatia for missionary activities. However, the Russian government soon issued a decree prohibiting the Mongolian Lama from entering the Russian territory, because at that time Russia was not on good terms with the Qing government of China, and Mongolia was a vassal state of China. In order to separate the local Buddhist temples from the influence of Mongolia and Tibet, the Tsar government hoped to strengthen its control over the Buryats through Buddhism. Therefore, in 1741, Queen Elizabeth of Russia issued an order declaring Buddhism one of the officially recognized religions, exempting the Lama from tax, and facilitating the Buryat Lama to spread his doctrines to the public. At that time, there were 11 mobile chacangs registered with the state in the outer Baikal region, with 150 lamas [1] 387.

In the middle of the 18th century, the mobile warehouses in the Baikal region began to be replaced by fixed, permanent wooden warehouses. Gusino Ozersk Sakura (Гусиноозерский дацан) and Dungudagodaevsk Sakura (Тунгугалтаевский дацан) appeared at that time. Zonguoerzacang (Цонгольский дацан) was the center of Buddhism in the Trans-Baikal region at that time. Its abbot was granted the title of “Banzhida-Kampo-Lama” (Бандидо-хамбо-ламы всех буддистов) by the Tsarist government in 1764. The chief lama became a Buddhist leader in the Buryatia region. At the end of the 18th century, there was a war for the dominance of Buddhism in Zakang. In 1809, the position of “Banzhida-Kampo-Lama” in the Buryatia region was changed to be chaired by Gusino Ozersk Sakura (Гусиноозерский дацан). Throughout this period, Buddhism in this area developed rapidly. In 1796, there were 16 warehouses and 700 lamas. At the beginning of the 19th century, Zhacang also appeared in the eastern part of Trans-Baikal (that is, in the Buryatia Autonomous Region of Chita today), including Ajinskoye Zhacang (Агинский дацан) and Cuoguoer Zhacang (Цугольский дацан). By the middle of the 19th century, the number of warehouses in the Baikal region had increased to 34, with more than 5,500 lamas [2]466. At that time, every family of buryates had a son who became a Lama.

Although the government did not interfere with the freedom of religious activities of lamas for a long time, the rapid growth of lamas caused the government's concern that tax revenue would decrease continuously, so the government took measures to limit the number of Zhacang and lamas from the middle of the 19th century. Through the Regulations on the Administration of Lamaism in Eastern Siberia, the government only recognized 34 Zhacang and 285 lamas, and the rest of them were converted to Buddhists at home. No new Zhacang was allowed, and the establishment of new Buddhist monasteries also needed the approval of the governor. According to this regulation, the government allocates arable land to Zhacang, “Banzhida-Kampo-Lama” can be divided into 500 acres, “Xiditu (шиперуй)” (ie abbot) can be divided into 200 acres, and the rest of the lamas also The corresponding cultivated land will be obtained according to the position in the teaching. In addition, the “Ban Zhida-Kampo-Lama” can also receive a national salary of up to 1,000 rubles per year [1] 390.

Even though the government took restrictive measures, the period from the end of 19th century to the beginning of 20th century was still the prosperous period of Buddhist culture in Buryat region. At the end of the 19th century, the number of Buddhist monks in the outer Baikal region reached

80% of the local residents. You can study Tibetan, Mongolian, Sanskrit, Buddhist philosophy, Tibetan and Mongolian medicine, astrology, Buddha art, religious architecture, etc. In addition, the printing industry at that time was able to develop rapidly. According to statistics, there were 29 printing plants in the area in 1887. Before the Soviet Union was destroyed, these printing plants only published about 2,000 kinds of books in Tibetan and Mongolian [3].

With the establishment of the Soviet regime in the Buryatia region, the nationalization of Zakang assets began and the Buddhist school was closed in 1926. In 1929, the lamas lost their land and began to leave Zhacang one after another. In the 1930s, the Soviet government's attack on religion became more severe. The sacrificial buildings were destroyed, Buddhist art works, books and manuscripts were destroyed, Buddhist temples were looted and Buddhist personnel were suppressed. By the early 1940s, almost all the Buddhist temples in Buryat region had disappeared.

2.2 Buddhist History in Tuva

Tuva covers an area of 170,000 square kilometers and is located in the upper reaches of the Yenisei River, bordering Mongolia. The spread of Buddhism in Tuva began in the 13th century when some Mongolian tribes moved here. For a long time, Tuva was attached to the Mongols' Junggar Khanate. In the 1820s, Tuva (then known as Tannu Uriankhai) saw the first batch of mobile barns. In 1753, Buddhism and Shamanism were proclaimed to be Tuva. From 1757 when the Mongolian Zhunger Khanate was defeated by the Qing government of China, until 1911 Tannu Uriankhai (that is, Tuva) was under the jurisdiction of the Qing Dynasty of China. In 1914, Russia illegally occupied the Tannu Uriankhai area, which belonged to the Qing government of China, by force. It was later renamed the Tannu Uriankhai border region (Урянхайский край), and the capital was designated Kizil (then named Белоцарск). The Tsarist government has not interfered with religious affairs in the Tuva region. On the eve of the October Revolution of 1917, Tuva had a total of 20 Zhacang and more than 3,000 lamas [2] 467.

Before Buddhism was introduced into Tuva, the people in this area believed in Shamanism. Although Buddhism finally replaced Shamanism in Tuva, Buddhism in Tuva region has incorporated many Shamanism traditions because of the long-term coexistence of the two religions. In Buddhist rituals, shamans can often be seen with the lama, and there is also a special priest "shaman lama" (бурхан боо, or ламы-шаманы) in the Zhacang temple in the Tuva region.

Construction of the permanent fixed barn in Tuva began in the 1870s. At the beginning of the 20th century, the largest temples were Ersin Temple (1772) (Эрзинский монастырь), Sama Kartai Temple (1770) (Самагалтайский монастырь), Ayona Temple (Оюннарский монастырь) Chada and Lower Chada Temples (1873) (Верхне-Чаданский и Нижне-Чаданский монастырь). In the 19th century, there were Baikal Zhacang (Байкара), Chaaho Zhacang (Чаа-Хольский), Chalabre Zhacang (Шарабулгунский) and Xiaqiada Zhacang (Нижне-Чаданский).

At that time, the head of Mongolian Buddhist Church in Urg (now Ulaanbaatar) was regarded as the spiritual leader of Tuva Buddhists, while the abbot of Xiaqiada Zhacang was in charge of all Tuva lamas. At that time, religious committees and religious courts performed management functions. In 1907, a Tibetan Lama was invited to Tuva. He opened a senior Lama school in upper chadhacang. In other zacang schools have been set up for children to receive an introduction to Buddhism. In order to receive higher Buddhist education, Tuva needs to go to Mongolia.

In the ten years before Tuva joined Russia, the government provided a good Buddhist environment for the region, so that in the late 1920s, there were nearly 5000 lamas in the region. However, the religious repression policy in the 1930s quickly suppressed the development of Buddhism in Tuva area. In 1937, there were only five ZHACANG and 67 lamas left in this area, and they were all destroyed in the early 1940s [4].

2.3 The History of Buddhism in Kalmyk Area

Kalmyk people are the only people who believe in Buddhism in Europe. Today's Republic of Kalmyk covers an area of 76100 square kilometers, between the Volgograd state and the Caspian Sea. Kalmek is the descendant of the weilat people, belonging to the West Asian type of Mongolian race. Before the 12th century, the ancestors of the Kalmyks mainly lived in the Baikal region and

the upper Yenisei River, and gradually migrated westward. They once settled in the historical Junggar region (that is, the northwestern territory of China today). At the end of the 16th century, some Oirats, namely the Durbert and Turhut tribes at that time, migrated to the nomadic grasslands of southern Siberia, and they began to be known as “Karmek people” (Калмыки). They crossed the Volga River in 1644 and reached the Don River in 1662. Then they established a Khanate (known as “Kalmyk Khanate” in history and existed until 1771) and became a part of Russia.

After the establishment of the Kalmyk Khanate, Buddhism was determined to be the state religion. The popularity of Buddhism among the Kalmyks began at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1640, in the Darbatai (Тарбатарай) region (located in today’s Kazakhstan’s Sebalatinsk region), the Buddhism Congress determined that Buddhism was all Oirat Ulus (улус, Mongolian social term, referring to Mongolian Khanate Can be translated as “people” or “divided land” of the state religion. Buddhist literature began to be translated into Kalmyk in 1648. At the same time, the first batch of non-mobile temples appeared in the Irtysh River Basin (Kalmek “Хурул”). The Kalmyks along the Volga River have only had mobile prayer tents for a long time (Karmyk called “сюмэ”).

In the second half of the 18th century, the Russian government began to restrict the independence of Kalmyk Khanate and made every effort to make it an administrative region of Russia. At the same time, the government has taken a series of measures to encourage Kalmyk people to convert to Orthodox Church. Finally, in 1771, the Tsar government abolished the Kalmyk Khanate and reorganized it into the kalmyk Management Office, and the government affairs were managed by the provincial offices of astrakhan. So three quarters of the Kalmyks decided to leave for Jungar. However, a large part of them died on the way back. Along with the migration were a large number of Buddhist documents and sacred objects. There are about 50000 Kalmyks left in Russia. In the end, the rights of the Buddhists were preserved, and the supreme Lama was elected in each of the three karmec ulus.

At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the Kalmyks had their own fixed Buddhist temple (хурул). The Ganbahu Temple (Большой Багацохуровский), which had existed in Junggar during the nomadic period, was moved to Kalmyk Chagan Oman (Цаган-Аман) in 1798. At that time, the most famous temple in Kalmykia steppe was Huoshen Uto Temple (Хошеутовский) (located in the territory of Astrakhan today), where manuscripts of Buddhist scriptures and some other Buddhist relics of ancient Mongolia and Tibet were preserved.

As most of the Kalmyks returned to Zhunger at the end of the 18th century and at the same time lost contact with the Buddhist centers of Mongolia and Tibet, signs of the decline of Buddhism gradually appeared in the Kalmyks of Russia. As a result of the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries, the Kalmyks raised a “Buddhist Revival” movement. In 1907, a Buddhist academy was established at the Little Jerbite Temple (Малодербетовский улус) (located in the present-day Kalmyk Little Jerb special zone). In 1908, the same Buddhist academy was established at the Ikizuhonovsky Temple (Икицозуровский) in Stavpol Province (Ставропольская губерния).

After the February Revolution in Russia in 1917, Buddhism in the Kalmykia region experienced a period of rapid revival. According to statistics, there were 41 large-scale Buddhist temples and 78 small-scale (mobile) Buddhist temples at the time, and about 2,730 lamas served in them [1] 403. However, most of the temples were destroyed during the Russian Civil War, and some monks emigrated abroad. When the Kalmyk Autonomous Region was established in 1920, there were only 35 Buddhist temples and 1,000 monks[1] 403.

Like Buryat and Tuva, the struggle against Buddhism in kalmyk began in 1930s. Lamas were deported, Buddhist colleges were destroyed, Buddhist masters and students were arrested. Even so, Buddhism in the Kalmyk area is still slightly illuminated in an unofficial, everyday form. According to statistics, in 1985, 30% of the rural residents and 23% of the urban residents admitted to be Buddhists, and 48% of the families retained the sacrificial tradition. However, 98% of the respondents still celebrate the traditional Buddhist Festival [5] 238.

3. Present Situation and Characteristics of Russian Traditional Buddhism after World War II

3.1 Restoration of Russian Traditional Buddhism

After the policy of “religious repression” in 1930s, there were few Buddhists and lamas left in Russia, and Buddhism and Buddhist activities were completely suppressed. It was not until World War II that Buryatia Buddhist groups tried to restore Buddhist organizations. In 1945, taking advantage of Stalin’s religious policy to loosen slightly, Mongolian-Tibetan affairs expert Badmayev Dolj (П.Доржи) and the famous Buddhist scholar Jiya Dandalong (Б. Дандароном) and other Buddhists The apprentices asked the government to open the Zarak in the Buryatia Ivordinsk region (Иволгинский район) and restore the life of the monastery in Ajinsk Zachen (Агинский дацан). In view of the contributions made by Buddhists in World War II, the government agreed to their request that year. And the newly built Ivor Kinzacang (Иволгинский дацан) serves as the official residence of the Soviet Central Committee of Buddhist Religions (Центральное Духовное управление буддистов СССР). Later, the Soviet government allowed the opening of the second Buddhist temple in Chita Prefecture, and Buddhism gradually gained its legal status. Nevertheless, in fact, the situation of Buddhism has not been substantially improved, and the monitoring of Buddhists is still very harsh. In 1970, the Soviet government arrested Lama Diyalong (Б. Дандароном), who established a Buddhist group in Buryatia, for organizing a “Buddhist small group”. By the end of the 1970s, there were few lamas in the three regions. This situation continued until the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union. After Gorbachev's “reform”, Tibetan monks were able to make public statements in Buryatia, Kalmyk, Tuva, and Leningrad from 1988 to 1989. Since then, traditional Russian Buddhism has experienced It was only after nearly half a century of suppression that a real recovery was possible.

In January 1990, the first Buddhist group was registered and established in Tuva Republic, and then the Zhacang temples were restored one after another. In 1993, there were 9 Buddhist groups in Tuva area, and the first group of Tuva students were sent to study in Indian Buddhist College. Kalmyk registered and established the first local Buddhist group in 1988, and opened the first prayer room in Elista, the capital of kalmyk, the following year. In 1991, the Kalmyk Buddhism Federation (Объединение буддистов Калмыкии) was established at the Kalmyk and Astrakhan Buddhist Conference, the organization does not depend on the central religion of the Soviet Buddhists in Ulan-Ude Authority. In 1996 Kalmyk built a large temple center. Lama Kalmyk began to practice Buddhism in Mongolia and India. By the end of the 20th century, there were 14 temples and prayer rooms in Kalmykia [5]239. Buddhism began to truly revive in several traditional Russian areas of worship, such as Kalmyk, Tuva, and Buryatia.

3.2 The Characteristics of Russian Traditional Buddhism after the Renaissance

After the establishment of the Russian Federation, Buddhism was truly revived and developed in Russia. In addition to being spread and developed in the form of more factions in some non-traditional belief regions in Russia and Europe, traditional Buddhism in Buryatia, Tuva, Almek and other regions has gradually become a real force, which has a significant impact on local social, spiritual and political life. Its characteristics are mainly shown in the following aspects:

First, the leaders of the Russian Federation began to value Buddhism. As early as 1992, when Yeltsin visited Siberia, he made a special visit to Ivolgin Zhacang (Иволгинский дацан) and promised to provide practical help for the restoration of Buddhism. Subsequent leaders of the Russian Federation will send congratulatory messages to the Russian Buddhists on the eve of the most important festival of Russian-Tibetan Buddhism, the White Moon Festival (Buddhist Lunar New Year). Both Putin and Medvedev personally visited Buryat Ivolgin Zhacang and met with Buryat Buddhist leader “Banzhida-Kampo-Lama” (Бандидо-хамбо-ламы всех буддистов). Putin fully affirmed the important role played by Buddhism in Russian history and modern society, and promised that he and the federal government would provide 100% support to Buddhism in Russia. Medvedev said that the state will provide development funds for Buddhists, and Russian Buddhists do not need to accept foreign funding.

Secondly, the influence of restored Buddhism in Buryat, Kalmyk, Tuva Republic and other traditional areas was expanded. After the founding of the Russian Federation, the society began to pay attention to Buddhist thought and culture. A large number of Buddhist dioceses were officially registered in the above areas, a large number of Buddhist chacangs were restored and built, and new Buddhist management institutions were established. For example, in 1991, the Kalmyk Buddhist Association (Объединение буддистов Калмыкии) was established at the Buddhist representatives conference in Kalmyk and Astrakhan. In 1998, the Russian traditional Dharma church (Традиционная Буддийская) was established in Buryatia. сангха России) and the Buddhist Religious Administration (Духовное управление буддистов). Soon, new Buddhist leaders were elected in these areas, a new generation of Buddhist monks emerged, and a unified organization composed of several parishes was formed. Buddhism regained its official religious status. Buddhism once again flourished.

Third, new forms of traditional Buddhism have emerged. Influenced by the new practice methods of Buddhist parishes in Russia and Europe, some visiting initiates or monks come to the Buddhist learning groups in traditional areas for exchanges and guidance. The Buddhist in traditional areas still mainly adopt the way of monasteries, through long-term meditation training to achieve enlightenment. The new form of practice also adds more freedom and variety of practice options to the traditional form.

4. Conclusion

Generally speaking, Russian traditional Buddhism has finally ushered in a period of steady development after a tortuous history. Consistent with Buddhism's doctrine of peace of mind, social stability and harmonious development between man and nature, the Russian government and people are also actively looking for the direction of the country's rise, supporting freedom of belief and strengthening cooperation and exchanges with the international community. This is also a good trend for the traditional Buddhism in Russia. It can be predicted that the traditional Buddhism in Russia will continue to maintain its vitality and enter the track of rapid development.

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