

**Mapping the Buddhist Lands of Russia: Understanding the Post-Soviet Sangha and  
Its Political Connections**

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**Abstract**

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Buddhism is officially one of the four traditional religions of Russia, along with Russian Orthodoxy, Judaism, and Islam. Buddhism can be found being practiced all over Russia, but it is primarily in the three autonomous republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva. While all three regions have been successfully rebuilding temples and opening Buddhist organizations, there are a number of issues from drunken monks in Buryatia to a peaceful but complicated relationship with Tuvan Shamanism. Along with this, these three Buddhist movements have evolved differently over time. The intention of this thesis is to understand why these different trajectories have occurred and how they influence the socio-political climate in these regions. I argue that the main reasons for these different trajectories are historical and cultural in nature in that they have occurred primarily as a result of the treatment they received under the Soviet Union.

## Introduction

Most people would not know that the first Buddhist temple built in a European capital was built in St. Petersburg.<sup>1</sup> Today in Russia there are officially four traditional religions, including Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> In the Russian Federation, different Buddhist groups can be found all over Russia, including in St. Petersburg and Moscow. However, the three main centers of Buddhism are the autonomous republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva whose peoples have strong historical ties with the religion. Three post-Soviet trajectories have developed in these regions that are very different from each other. In Tuva, the Buddhist movement is a unified front. In Buryatia and Kalmykia this is not the case as there is a divide between Buddhist groups, with Buryat Buddhism in charge of Buryatia, and Tibetan Buddhism in charge of Kalmykia. The purpose of this thesis is to understand why these three different trajectories have evolved. I argue that the main reasons for these different trajectories are historical and cultural in nature in that they have occurred primarily as a result of the treatment they received under the Soviet Union. I also argue that the reason why these Buddhist movements are having different stances is because of these historical and cultural differences have also influenced the local political and religious leaders, and this has led to the conflicts between them. I will also look at how divergent characteristics of Buddhist movements relate to their socio-political relationship with the government and other Buddhist groups. I intend to show that these relationships have played a huge role in the religious movements, as most of the conflicts within post-Soviet Buddhism have been connected with disagreement amongst Buddhist

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<sup>1</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 2

<sup>2</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 302

leaders as to how the religion should be handled along with how to deal with foreign or non-traditional Buddhists.

The four official religions of the Russian Federation- Buddhism, Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism -- are given certain protection and privileges thanks to a 1997 federal law on religion in Russia.<sup>3</sup> One such privilege is that these four religions are the only ones allowed to have chaplains for their faith in the military.<sup>4</sup> While only 1% of military chaplains in 2012 were Buddhist, this does not reflect the number of Buddhist soldiers as there were many Buddhists serving in the trans-Baikal region.<sup>5</sup> The 1997 federal law that made these four the official religions of Russia, but they also restricted the activities of religious organizations that are not officially recognized.<sup>6</sup> The 1997 law essentially marked non-traditional religions as ones that do not belong in Russia.<sup>7</sup> When these non-recognized religious groups have been targeted or harassed by other groups, the Russian government usually has done nothing to protect them as they mostly just ignore their complaints.<sup>8</sup> There have even been calls in the past to make the law stricter to target religious groups that are considered extremist by others.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in April 2017 the Russian Supreme Court officially banned Jehovah's Witnesses from the Russian

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Kirill A. Tsekanovskiy, *Military Clergy in the Modern Armed Forces of the Russian Federation*. University of Washington, 2013: 23-24

<sup>5</sup> "В российской армии будет возрожден институт военных священнослужителей, пообещал вчера министр обороны РФ Сергей Шойгу. Глава оборонного ведомства отметил, что «в армии должно быть религиозное оформление по всем конфессиям». Пока же в вооруженных силах служат около тридцати православных священников и два мullahы. Предста" *newiz.ru* December 12<sup>th</sup> 2012. Accessed March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 302

<sup>7</sup> John Anderson. "Religion, State and 'sovereign Democracy' in Putin's Russia." *Journal of Religious and Political Practice* 2, no. 2 (2016): 255

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

Federation, labeling them as extremist.<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, one of the groups calling for this action was the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>11</sup> This is despite the fact that Jehovah's Witnesses have been in Russia for almost a century,<sup>12</sup> yet this has not protected it because it is not considered "traditional" enough for protection.

Buddhism has strong historical ties with the ethnic groups of the three autonomous republics. However, not every Buddhist group has this connection. Buddhist groups such as the Karma Kagyu<sup>13</sup> and Green Tara have been in Russia since the early 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Along with this are the Tibetan Buddhists that have come to help in rebuilding the faith in the three autonomous republics, primarily thanks to the Dalai Lama. Originally the Dalai Lama was allowed to visit Russia many times. He made three different visits to Kalmykia.<sup>15</sup> His early visits to these regions were considered extremely important to the revival of Buddhism, and many Buddhists in Russia were asking for his help.<sup>16</sup> However because the Russian government was trying to keep a working relationship with the Chinese, they have been trying to downplay their relationship with

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew Higgins. "Russia Bans Jehovah's Witnesses, Calling it an Extremist Group." *The New York Times*. April 20, 2017. Accessed May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/20/world/europe/russia-bans-jehovahs-witnesses.html?_r=0)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Even though the Karma Kagyu are a foreign Buddhist group, they are very popular amongst ethnic Russians. Their website claims that they are the largest Buddhist group in Russia as well. Interestingly, after the 1997, the Department of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kalmykia officially listed the Kagyu School the organization belongs to as a traditional religion of Kalmykia claiming it had been around since the thirteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> Geraldine Fagan. "Buddhism in Postsoviet Russia: Revival or Degeneration?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 11-12

<sup>15</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 948

<sup>16</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 40

the Dalai Lama and his people.<sup>17</sup> They have been refusing to give the Dalai Lama visas as a result,<sup>18</sup> which many Buddhists have protested. Khambo Lama Ayushyev was one of these early critics in 2002, but his opinions have since changed.<sup>19</sup> He still acknowledges the Dalai Lama as the leader of the Gelug School, but he does not consider him as important to Buryat Buddhism's development.<sup>20</sup> He now believes that Buryat Buddhist should be allowed to develop independently.<sup>21</sup>

Other foreign Buddhists have also been banned from the country as well such as Shiwalha Rinpoche who had a major impact on Tuva's Buddhist revival.<sup>22</sup> The 1997 law does not specify which Buddhist groups count under the law, but that hasn't stopped Khambo Lama Ayushyev of Buryatia from trying to use the law in the past to attack "non-traditional" Buddhist schools.<sup>23</sup> What this means is that while Buddhism has been given certain privileges, the law does not protect all Buddhists. Buddhist groups that depend on foreign leaders or lamas such as those helped by the Tibetans and groups such as the Karma Kagyu could be impacted if the government ever steps in.

There have been many scholars who have conducted research on this topic, which has greatly helped my own research. Most of these articles are ethnographies or case

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<sup>17</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 8

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

<sup>19</sup> Edward C. Holland,. "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 397

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Ilya Kizirov. "Banished Tibetan Lama Says He Was Warned By Russian Authorities."

*RadioFreeEuropeRadioLiberty*. October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Accessed January, 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tibetan-lama-expelled-shiwalha-rinpoche/27308604.html>

<sup>23</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 302

studies of the various Buddhist groups primarily in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva.<sup>24</sup> For the most part, these articles each focus only one republic, primarily Buryatia and Kalmykia. However, there are exceptions. This is what sets my research apart from previous cases as I plan on comparing and contrasting all three regions instead of focusing on one.<sup>25</sup> However I am not the only one that has covered more than one region. The oldest article is Andrey Terentyev's 1996 article on Tibetan Buddhism in Russia.<sup>26</sup> His article is primarily a basic summary of the Buddhist movements in these three regions, listing their history, organizations, leaders, and number of temples. While very informational, he does not try to make any arguments and that is not the case with other scholars. One of the most vocal is Geraldine Fagan. In one of her articles she argues that while Buddhism may have revived, she questions how successful it has been.<sup>27</sup> Buddhism in Russia is dealing with many issues from drunken monks to disputing religious leaders.<sup>28</sup> These problems sometimes cause Buddhists to become disillusioned with the faith.<sup>29</sup> Fagan's article is a more generalized summary of the various Buddhist movements in Russia and especially their problems, though unlike other articles she also covers the non-traditional groups such as Karma Kagyu and Green Tara. Edward C. Holland's article "Buddhism in Russia: challenges and choices in the post-soviet period,"

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<sup>24</sup> Such examples of these studies is Anya Bernstein's Dissertation "Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism" and her later article "Buddhist Revival in Buryatia: Recent perspectives," Philip Walter's "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation," and Tara Sinclair's "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism."

<sup>25</sup> Bernstein, Hamayon, Quijada, and Zhukovskaia focus only on Buryatia, Sinclair and Tsomo on Kalmykia, D'Iakonova, Lindquist, and Walters on Tuva. Fagan, Holland, and Terentyev are the only ones I found that cover more than one republic.

<sup>26</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996)

<sup>27</sup> Geraldine Fagan. "Buddhism in Postsoviet Russia: Revival or Degeneration?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 9-20

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



takes Fagan's argument and expands on it stating that the main reasons for these problems with Russian Buddhism is based on how its religious leaders perceive the religion in a Russian context.<sup>30</sup> The Buddhist leader of Buryatia argues that Buryat Buddhism is its own unique cultural faith that should work independently from others, while the leaders of Kalmykia and Tuva disagree.<sup>31</sup> In fact they have been pushing for closer ties with Tibetan Buddhism because it is the historical and theological center of their faith.

A common theme amongst most of the research conducted on this topic has been how successful these movements have been at resolving the problems of rebuilding Buddhism. One of the most positive about the revival was Anna Bernstein's "Buddhist Revival in Buryatia: Recent Perspectives," which argued that because Buddhism is so popular in Buryatia, the faith will continue to grow and prosper as long as the Tibetan Buddhists are helping.<sup>32</sup> She also mentions many of the same issues in the faith that Fagan and Holland brought up such as many Buddhist communities that were leaving the main Buddhist organization of Buryatia the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia due to disagreement.<sup>33</sup> Despite these issues, her perspective is much more positive than Fagan's or that of N.L. Zhukovskaia's. One of Zhukovskaia's arguments in "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects" is that the number of issues in Buryatia can be blamed on the Soviet Union.<sup>34</sup> Most of the younger monks who have grown up in

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<sup>30</sup> Edward C. Holland. "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 390

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 393.

<sup>32</sup> Anna Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 10

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5

<sup>34</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 34

the Soviet Union have a different mentality than those monks who came before.<sup>35</sup> In post-soviet Buryatia, monks are sometimes succumbing to drunkenness and disorderly conduct amongst lamas.<sup>36</sup> She also fears that the rapid training of new lamas to teach the faith would lead to the religion becoming “a parody of itself.”<sup>37</sup>

Other articles on this topic have reported similar cases as well. For the most part these articles have focused on issues of theology and religious ethics, as well as on the main disagreements amongst monks, lamas, and Buddhist lay people. There are exceptions to this of course such as Galina Lindquist’s article on the similarities and differences between Buddhism and Shamanism in Tuva,<sup>38</sup> and Anna Bernstein’s extensive dissertation on Buryatia’s relationship with Buddhism, the Russian government, and foreign Buddhists.<sup>39</sup> Tara Sinclair’s article does an excellent job of covering the ideological differences between Buddhists in Kalmykia. Her article “Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism” argues that the school of Buddhism being spread by the government and monks in Kalmykia is different from the more traditional Kalmyk Buddhism.<sup>40</sup> There was a divide between traditional Kalmyk Buddhists and the visiting Tibetan Buddhists that were leading the faith because Tibetan Buddhism is much more philosophical and scholarly than Kalmyk Buddhism. Overall, all of these articles have all greatly contributed to my own research in many ways, especially since I was

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 43

<sup>38</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses.

<sup>40</sup> Tara Sinclair. “Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism.” *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 242

unable to conduct my own ethnographic research. However with this thesis I intend to do something different that goes beyond what these articles have previously covered.

Edward C. Holland's "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period" article may cover all three autonomous republics, but he mostly focuses on Buryatia and Kalmykia. This is the main aspect that sets mine apart from his, as I will focus more extensively on all three regions. In this thesis, I will be focusing on the three autonomous republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva and comparing and contrasting them. The reason for this is because these three regions all have similarities, which make them good for comparison. All three regions are republics made specifically for the ethnic groups that reside in them (respectfully the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvans). Obviously, this makes them case studies in the federalist policies of the Russian Federation as well. Along with this, in all three Buddhism is in fact a major part of their cultural and ethnic heritage. This cultural and historical connection is the main reason why reviving the faith was considered so important to these people. Along with this their regional governments have heavily supported all three regions in the revival. They also have contact and support from Tibetan Buddhists including the Dalai Lama.

Finally all three regions practice the same school of Buddhism, which is the Gelug School (also known as yellow hat), a tradition from Tibet that started around the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century.<sup>41</sup> This is also the same school that the Dalai Lama leads. The Dalai Lama and Gelug School has always had a connection with Central Asia and especially Mongolia as the first Dalai Lama was

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

originally the Grand Lama of Lhasa.<sup>42</sup> He was given the title Dalai Lama by a Mongol leader, the Altyn Khan as a part of his plans to spread Buddhism amongst the Mongols.<sup>43</sup> However, while all three of these regions belong to the same school of study, there is actually a difference in what is happening there. The Gelug tradition in these regions was influenced and altered by local customs and other religious traditions such as Shamanism.<sup>44</sup> As a result, in Buryatia and Kalmykia there is a disagreement amongst Buddhists on what version of the faith should be practiced, as both the Gelug tradition as taught by visiting Tibetan monks, and the tradition that was altered by local religion and customs are at odds.

In Buryatia, the dominant group is the more localized Buryat version. The head of the faith Khambo Lama Ayushyev has been promoting Buryat Buddhism as its own special and unique religion over the years. On the other hand, Kalmykia is the opposite as the main school practiced is the Gelug tradition as taught by the Tibetan monks and supported by the Kalmyk government. Their leader Telo Tulku Rinpoche is a foreign Buddhist himself, as he is originally from Philadelphia. Finally, in Tuva, Buddhists there, are solely dedicated to the Gelug tradition, despite other groups trying to gain traction and failing in this region. The leader of Buddhism in Tuva, the Khamby Lama has always maintained a close tie with the Dalai Lama, working directly under him. Because of these differences, these three regions provide us with three different examples of how Buddhism has been rebuilt in Russia. While these differences make it harder to compare

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<sup>42</sup> David S. Noss. *A History of the World's Religions*. 13th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012: 202

<sup>43</sup> VP. D'Iakonova. "Lamaism and Its Influence on the Worldview and Religious Cults of the Tuvans." *Anthropology And Archeology Of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 53

<sup>44</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 37

these three regions, each situation in these republics is unique compared to the others. Although the purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast these three situations, it is also to point out and acknowledge their uniqueness where it applies. The intention of this thesis is to focus on why these three different perspectives have evolved, specifically focusing on these movement's relationships with the government, foreign Buddhists, and other religious groups such as Shamanism and even Christianity. These differences have occurred because of their unique historical and cultural experiences in the Soviet Union.

### **Buddhism in Buryatia: A Political Lama in the Struggle Between Tibetan and Buryat Buddhists**

Buryats make up the largest ethnic minority in Russian Siberia.<sup>45</sup> But Buryat populations also live in Northern Mongolia, and Manchuria China.<sup>46</sup> Buryats are not the main population in the Buryat republic: in 2002 they only made up 27.2%, while Russians made up the majority.<sup>47</sup> This has been the case for a long time, as in 1990, they only made up 36%<sup>48</sup> and in 2010 only 30%, while Russians made up 66.1%.<sup>49</sup> However despite not being the majority population in Buryatia, they have worked hard to reestablish their national identity since during the 1980s.<sup>50</sup> One of the ways they have

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<sup>45</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 23

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 12

<sup>48</sup> Tishkov, Valery, and International Peace Research Institute Content Provider. *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union The Mind Aflame*. International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO). London: SAGE Publications, 1996: 88

<sup>49</sup> "About Buryatia." *Buryatia.ru* Accessed March 1, 2017.

<http://president.buryatia.ru/eng/index.php?id=9>

<sup>50</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 1

done so is through relying heavily on the old faiths<sup>51</sup> that they practiced before the Soviet religious persecution, and Buddhism was one of these faiths. There are three religions that are strongly connected to Buryat ethnic identity: Shamanism, Buddhism, and epic hero-ism (a faith based on the epic of Geser).<sup>52</sup> All three of these religions have been rebuilding over the years as well.

Officially Buddhism started reviving in Buryatia in 1988, especially with the opening of Buddhist organizations.<sup>53</sup> When Buryat Buddhists started officially rebuilding Buddhism, they opened and rebuilt new temples and Buddhist schools for training, established Buddhist organizations for lay people, published Buddhist literature, and started establishing international ties with other Buddhist groups including the Dalai Lama.<sup>54</sup> There was a massive support for Buddhism by both young and old Buryats as many Buddhist temples were actually rebuilt or opened due to local private donations.<sup>55</sup> The other main supporters were the Dalai Lama and Tibetan lamas whom he sent from his private circle to teach Buddhism, but these lamas also helped heavily in the rebuilding of temples after the late 1980s.<sup>56</sup> Buryats, the government, and foreign Buddhists heavily supported the revival of this faith. However this has changed over time, mostly because of Buryatia's religious leader. Khambo Lama Damba Ayushyev is certainly an intriguing leader, as he has been praised by even his harshest critics for some of his decisions in the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon. "Shamanism, Buddhism and Epic Heroism: Which Supports the Identity of the Post-Soviet Buryats?" *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 1 (1998): 52.

<sup>53</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 28

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>55</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon. "Shamanism, Buddhism and Epic Heroism: Which Supports the Identity of the Post-Soviet Buryats?" *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 1 (1998): 52.

<sup>56</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 2 and 7

past.<sup>57</sup> However he is also a very controversial figure, primarily because he has started distancing himself from other Buddhist groups, but particularly the Tibetan Buddhists and the Dalai Lama. Khambo Lama Ayushyev is also the most influential Buddhist in Russia, as he is heavily supported by the Kremlin and considered the leader of the whole faith.<sup>58</sup> However while the Russian government supports him, he does not have the support of other Buddhist communities and he has even had disputes with the Buryat government. In this chapter we will look at this controversial leader and his relationships with these other groups, but also what other issues have been affecting Buddhism such as Buryat Lay Buddhists' lack of understanding about Buddhism, and the impact of Political Lamas on society.

### **History of Buddhism in Buryatia**

Buddhism spread quickly because of the Buryats' shared culture and linguistics with the Mongols, and the similar culture also made it easier for Buddhism to combine with some local Buryat traditions.<sup>59</sup> By 1701, eleven Buddhist temples were built around the Lake Baikal area, and in 1712, 150 Mongolian and Tibetan lamas were sent up to the region to help spread the Gelug tradition.<sup>60</sup> Of course these were not the only reasons for Buddhism's success amongst as Buryats as it was actually favored by the Tsarist regime. Originally they wanted the Buryats to convert to Russian Orthodoxy, but the Buryats

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<sup>57</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 142

<sup>58</sup> Edward C. Holland. "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 394

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 25

were not interested in it.<sup>61</sup> Because Empress Elizabeth considered Buddhism to be a more civilized and better alternative to Shamanism, she officially recognized it in 1741.<sup>62</sup> This made Buddhism an official religion in the Russian Empire.<sup>63</sup> This policy was an attempt to further welcome Buryatia in to the Russian Empire while severing ties with Mongolia and Tibet.<sup>64</sup> The Russian Empire also used this as a move to control Buryat people by creating the position of Khambo Lama to lead not only Buryat Buddhism but also all of Buddhism in Russia.<sup>65</sup> Buddhism flourished in this region.<sup>66</sup>

However, Buddhism was persecuted by the Soviets in the 1920s when most of the Buddhist temples were shut and burned down, priests were arrested, and most of their Buddhist artwork was sent to museums or destroyed.<sup>67</sup> All public Buddhist culture in Buryatia was destroyed by the 1930s, with it only existing amongst individuals who continued to practice it secretly and in underground circles.<sup>68</sup> From 1941-1946 there were no functioning monasteries in Buryatia, as all had been closed down by the government and destroyed.<sup>69</sup> After World War II in 1946, the Soviets allowed two Buryat temples (they actually rebuilt them) to be reopened as a political move to show that Soviet Citizens were free to practice whatever faith they wanted.<sup>70</sup> It proved hard at first to

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<sup>61</sup> Justine Buck Quijada. "Soviet Science and Post-Soviet Faith: Etigelov's Imperishable Body." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 140

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 6

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5-6

<sup>66</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 26

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 26-27

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.,



actually find priests to serve in these temples, but the religion was technically allowed again in Buryatia.<sup>71</sup> However, there were some heavy restrictions, as Buddhists were only allowed to perform rituals and pray within the temples, and they were observed closely by the local Soviet government to make sure they did not step out of line.<sup>72</sup> The Soviet regime did not permit temples to function from 1941-1946. Nonetheless in general, Buddhism maintained a strong presence amongst Buryats. In fact, despite all of the persecution by the Soviets, Buddhism remained so central to Buryat culture, that the Soviet government felt the need to establish the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists in 1946.<sup>73</sup> They made this move to attempt to control Buddhist populations in the Soviet Union, establishing a Khambo Lama again as head of the religion.<sup>74</sup> Out of these three republics, this is what sets it apart from the other two, as not only was there a strong Buddhist presence, but they actually had a Buddhist organization (The Board of Buddhists) to lead the official rebuilding of the faith in 1988. It is also interesting that the post of the Khambo Lama was established by Empress Elizabeth, was then reestablished by the Soviets. In both cases, the creation of the position of Khambo Lama was an attempt to give the Russian government, control of the Buddhist faith. This pattern is visible again in the fact that Khambo Lama Ayushyev is closely aligned with the Kremlin and is even promoting ideas similar to their agendas.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 27-28

<sup>73</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 5

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

## **Lack of Religious Teachers and Interest in Monasticism: The Effects of the Soviet Union on Buryat Buddhism**

Aside from these lama politicians interfering or being heavily involved in Buryat society, there were a number of issues or obstacles for Buddhism's revival, and most are connected with the Soviet Union. The main issue was that as a result of the Soviet Union, there were not many educated Buddhist lama left alive.<sup>75</sup> So even when thousands wanted to learn the new faith, there were not enough properly trained Buddhists to teach them.<sup>76</sup> The lack of educated lamas was also an issue mostly because they had been building so many temples and monasteries in Buryatia, as while they had many Buddhist structures; they needed lamas to fill them. As a result, they shortened the years required for spiritual training in Buddhist schools.<sup>77</sup> Normally for a monk to receive a proper Buddhist education and be given the ability to teach Buddhism himself, he would have to study for fourteen years.<sup>78</sup> The shortest period it would take a student to become a fully ordained monk was three years.<sup>79</sup> As one can imagine this might not be very good for Buddhism as a whole, as the monks would be rushed through training and not as well trained as they normally would.<sup>80</sup>

Along with this, there was a general disconnect and age gap between the older Buddhists and the younger Buryats, also as a result of the Soviet Union's religious

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 39

<sup>78</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 7

<sup>79</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 39

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

oppression.<sup>81</sup> While most of the older educated lamas who had survived the Soviet Union started passing away of old age, the ones left behind were a much younger generation of lama, who had grown up in the Soviet Union.<sup>82</sup> As a result this younger generation grew up in a different and more socialist climate that prioritized secular public life and working for society instead of religious education and spiritual study.<sup>83</sup> As a result, the main affects of socialism was a general lack of religious education about Buddhism and teachers to teach it, but also an increased interest to participate more in secular political and public life instead of monasticism.<sup>84</sup> In general most Buryats actually believed that the Tibetan lamas had failed in Buryatia because of this, as monasticism wasn't very popular with younger Buryats.<sup>85</sup> Many Buryats went to study in India to become monks.<sup>86</sup> However most Buryats who have returned are not fully ordained and are even married with children.<sup>87</sup>

To become a monk in most Tibetan schools, and especially in the Gelug tradition, students are expected to take monastic vows, live in monasteries, and be celibate.

However the only celibate fully ordained monks in Buryatia were the Tibetan visitors,

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<sup>81</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 4

<sup>82</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 34

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 120-121

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 179

<sup>87</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 7

older Buryat Buddhists, and a few Buryats who returned from India.<sup>88</sup> As time has gone over, celibate monks have become more rare as most Buryat monks returning from India usually give up their monastic vows, start families, and start their own private Buddhist practices or work with smaller Buddhist groups.<sup>89</sup> Some even end their vows even if they do not intend on marrying or having sex, for fear of accidentally violating one's vows, as it is considered a greater sin to violate your vows then give them up all together.<sup>90</sup> One monk explained that he did it, because Buryatia is too tempting of a place especially because women and girls have been known to visit the monasteries, hoping to flirt with and maybe even marry a monk.<sup>91</sup> He also explained that the reason why this is so common is because the Buryats do not understand that monks are supposed to be celibate, and they refuse to accept it because of their communist and post-soviet mentalities.<sup>92</sup> Tibetan monks have also been known to give up their vows and marry local Buryat women as well.<sup>93</sup> Interestingly enough because Buryat Buddhists are seeing the visiting Tibetans do this, they are assuming that it is okay which has actually lead to even more Buryats giving them up.<sup>94</sup> Of course giving up one's vows to have a family is not necessarily all that bad, as many of these monks have continued their work in Buddhism despite this. Some Buryat monks have also struggled with alcoholism.<sup>95</sup> Most did not know that drunkenness and debauchery is condemned amongst lamas and monk, and

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<sup>88</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 197

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 197-198

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 198

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 34

there were many cases of them being drunk and disorderly.<sup>96</sup>

### **Khambo Lama Ayushyev: Supported by Moscow, but Not by Anyone Else**

Since 1990, there have been four Khambo Lama, the first of which was Munko Tsybiko, who was appointed to the position before the Soviet Union's collapse.<sup>97</sup> He remained in the position until his death, after which he was replaced by Zham'ian Shagarov (1992-93) and Cho-Dorzhoi Budaev (1992-95).<sup>98</sup> Both of these men were in power for a short time however, because both were removed by a vote of the Board of Buddhists, as they were not considered qualified to lead Buddhism.<sup>99</sup> During this time period the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists had lost a lot of its power and influence in society, as there were many scandals including cases of money laundering and corruption amongst the lamas.<sup>100</sup> Many Buddhists were removed from power based on accusations of embezzlement in 1995,<sup>101</sup> and during this time was when the Board of Buddhists elected Khambo Lama Damba Ayushyev into power.<sup>102</sup> At the time, no one expected Ayushyev to be in power for long (let alone, as long as he has been) as he was very young and inexperienced when he took the position.<sup>103</sup> This makes sense, as before

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 33

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 141

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 34

<sup>103</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 141

becoming a lama, Ayushyev was a former physical education teacher who studied Buddhism in Mongolia.<sup>104</sup> However when he took charge, he took financial control over all of the monasteries in Buryatia, so as to prevent further corruption and focus on rebuilding monasteries and stupas.<sup>105</sup> He was also harshly punishing any lama found guilty of corruption, and took the matter very seriously.<sup>106</sup> Even his biggest critics and rivals admitted that he was an excellent leader of Buddhism, especially because he was dealing with fighting the corruption and theft within Buddhism.<sup>107</sup> He even reformed the Board of Buddhists, renaming it as the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia, making the main organization to represent all Buddhism in Russia.<sup>108</sup> However this opinion of him has changed as some critics have even referred to him as the “incarnation of Mara.”<sup>109</sup> Mara is the Buddhist god of death and desire, who attempted to prevent the Buddha from reaching enlightenment by tempting him with pleasurable desires.<sup>110</sup>

#### Ayushyev’s Relationship with the Russian Government

The Kremlin supports Khambo Lama Ayushyev as the main leader of Buddhism in Russia.<sup>111</sup> His organization, the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR), is also the only organization that has a direct relationship with Russia’s presidential

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 142

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 146

<sup>110</sup> David S. Noss. *A History of the World's Religions*. 13th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012: 149.

<sup>111</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 394

administration.<sup>112</sup> Along with this, Khambo Lama Ayushyev is the only Buddhist who is a member of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation and on the Interreligious Council of Russia in Moscow.<sup>113</sup> He is also on the Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO.<sup>114</sup> The Khambo Lama is the only Buddhist to be involved in the federal government and is supported by the Kremlin. He has also shown great support for the federal government as well, as his opinions are similar to the Kremlin's. For example, Ayushyev's complaints against the involvement of foreign Buddhist influences is similarly to Putin's 2000 national security policy, which made it official that religious organizations and influences from abroad were a direct threat to Russia's stability.<sup>115</sup> Medvedev also said during a speech at Ivolginsk monastery that Russia's Buddhist peoples do not need help of international Buddhist groups to rebuild Buddhism.<sup>116</sup>

While Ayushyev is considered the leader of Buddhism in Russia, he is not viewed as such by other Buddhist groups. In fact, most of the Buddhist intelligentsia and his critics see Ayushyev as a spiritually corrupt man, and argue that most of his decisions are based on increasing relations with Moscow and the Russian majority in Buryatia.<sup>117</sup> In many ways, this seems to be that case considering he has been pulling Buryat Buddhism away from outsider influences while aligning more with Russia.<sup>118</sup> He even approves of

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<sup>112</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 145

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 145-146

<sup>114</sup> "Commission of the Russian Federation for UNESCO" *unesco.ru* August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009. Accessed May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017 <http://www.unesco.ru/en/?module=pages&action=view&id=29>

<sup>115</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 3

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 86

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 88

Buddhist monks serving in the military.<sup>119</sup> He believes that Buddhists should be allowed to fight when they are defending their faith and homeland, in this case being Buryatia and Russia as a whole.<sup>120</sup> Along with this Ayushyev has shown support for some of the Russian government's decisions, such as what happened with the Aga autonomous district. In 2008, this Buryat based district was dissolved into its neighboring regions.<sup>121</sup> Some Buryat Buddhist groups protested this decision and the fact that the Russian government would not grant the Dalai Lama a visa.<sup>122</sup> When asked about it, Khambo Lama Ayushyev was against these protests and felt that he was obligated to follow any decision made by the Russian government because Putin was the White Tara,<sup>123</sup> and he'd be stupid to go against the White Tara.<sup>124</sup> The White Tara is a one of the forms of the Bodhisattva Tara, a female figure in Buddhism representing wisdom, higher insight and is the protector of compassion.<sup>125</sup> The White Tara is in both shamanistic and Buddhist culture.<sup>126</sup> However, this concept is not that new actually as back during the Russian Empire, the Buryats would treat the Russian Emperors as the White Tara.<sup>127</sup> In 2009 Khambo Lama Ayushyev also referred to Medvedev as the embodiment of the White Tara despite critics' complaints that a Russian Orthodox President cannot be a Buddhist

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<sup>119</sup> There are actually military monks from the BTSR are actually serving in the military.

<sup>120</sup> "Interview with Pandito Khambo Lama XXIV Ayusheev" *tibethouse.ru* Accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. <http://www.tibethouse.ru/2016/aiushev-01-en.html>

<sup>121</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 52

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

<sup>123</sup> This is interesting because Medvedev was president at the time.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87

<sup>125</sup> David S. Noss. *A History of the World's Religions*. 13th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012: 199

<sup>126</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 11

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*



goddess.<sup>128</sup> However, not only does Ayushyev support similar ideas as the Russian government, but he is heavily supported by them as well, even though he does not have that much support from other groups.

Even though he received his Buddhist education and position as a lama from Mongolia, since then he has distanced himself from them and other Buddhist groups. Tension between Mongolian Buddhists and Khambo Lama Ayushyev grew further when he refused to meet with them,<sup>129</sup> which he has done with other groups as well. Another group he has alienated are the visiting Tibetan Buddhists who came to help Buryatia. As mentioned previously, the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhists have helped greatly in the rebuilding of Buddhism. Originally Khambo Lama Ayushyev's relations with Tibet were very good as the Buryat Sangha personally asked them to come help rebuild Buddhism in Buryatia.<sup>130</sup> They even let them live at the main monastery of Ivolginsk.<sup>131</sup>

However, around the time he turned the Board of Buddhists into the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR), tension between Buddhists began developing, as many Buddhist groups started splitting off from the BTSR to form their own smaller groups.<sup>132</sup> From 2000 to 2014, twenty different communities left the BTSR to start their own groups in protest of Khambo Lama Ayushyev's leadership.<sup>133</sup> The reason was because Ayushyev was promoting the idea of one united Buddhist tradition in Russia,

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>129</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 9

<sup>130</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 89

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 89-90

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>133</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 393

which they heavily disagreed against.<sup>134</sup> In more recent years, Ayushyev has declared that the Gelug School is the only traditional Buddhist school of Buryatia, and even made claims that they should treat the non-Gelug Buddhist schools as the Russian Orthodox treat Pentecostals.<sup>135</sup> He defended his claim, using the fact that Buryat, Kalmyk, and Tuvan Buddhists all belong to the Gelug tradition, so following this one school is fundamental to the unity of Buryat Buddhism, especially because too many Buddhist schools in one area can lead to conflict and violence.<sup>136</sup> His promotion of one united faith has led to more tension in Buddhism, such as with these Buddhist organizations leaving the B TSR. These groups have left in protest, but mostly because they feel that there are many paths to enlightenment and they disagree with his idea of one united Buddhist tradition.<sup>137</sup> They also feel that Buddhism should not focus so much on nationality.<sup>138</sup> This is also interesting, because while he has promoted the idea that the Gelug tradition is the only Buddhist school of Russia, the Tibetan Buddhists also follow the Gelug tradition, meaning that technically they belong in Russia as well, but this is not the case according to him. Along with this, most of the visiting Tibetan lamas ended up leaving Ivolginsk monastery to start their own practices, temples, and monasteries in Ulan-Ude.<sup>139</sup> Another thing that occurred as a result of Ayushyev's reforming of the organization, was that some of these rival organizations actually started their own Board of Buddhists, even

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 142-143

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 143

<sup>137</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 393

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 89-90

going so far as to elect lama Nimazhap Illiukhinov as the new Khambo Lama.<sup>140</sup> This means that there are currently two Khambo Lama in Buryatia. Illiukhinov is also one of Ayushyev's biggest critics as he has accused Ayushyev of using his authority as Khambo Lama to attack and destroy other Buddhist communities.<sup>141</sup> He says that the Gelug School is important because it has ties to Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva.<sup>142</sup> However, he strongly believes that the main Buddhist organization of Russia (which technically is the BTSR) should be inclusive of all schools of Buddhism and not just the Gelug School or Buryats.<sup>143</sup> However this is not the case with Khambo Lama Ayushyev.

#### Ayushyev's Promotion of Buryat Buddhism as Its Own Unique Faith

Khambo Lama Ayushyev has certainly become a controversial figure over time. He was fairly tolerant of other Buddhist groups originally, but has since become more antagonistic as he has even tried to use the 1997 Federal Law that restricts the activities of foreign religious groups and protects the four traditional religions against foreign Buddhist groups in Buryatia.<sup>144</sup> He has also spoken against Tibetan and Asian Buddhist missionaries and their popularity in the republic, as he does not like their influencing Buddhism.<sup>145</sup> He even switched the language used during services from Tibetan to Buryat.<sup>146</sup> Interestingly, Buddhism has a very good relationship with the Russian

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>141</sup> Geraldine Fagan. "Buddhism in Postsoviet Russia: Revival or Degeneration?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 11

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 302

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>146</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 9

Orthodox Church in Buryatia.<sup>147</sup> However, this is mostly because they have a shared experience in the persecution of their faith.<sup>148</sup> In 1996, both groups even united to try and restrict the power and influence of non-traditional religious groups in the region, even going as far as to try and create a law restricting what religious freedom they had.<sup>149</sup>

In more recent years, Ayushyev has been promoting the idea of Buryat Buddhism as its own unique indigenous religion, separate from other Buddhist groups.<sup>150</sup> He has asserted that Buddhism should be allowed to develop independently without the influences of outsider and foreign Buddhists.<sup>151</sup> He has even made claims that Buryat Buddhism did not actually come from Tibet because of the first Khambo Lama, Damba Darzha Zaiiev.<sup>152</sup> He claimed that one Zaiiev's past lives learned from the Buddha directly.<sup>153</sup> This meant that he learned about the teachings of Buddhism directly and not through Tibet. This claim confused many critics, especially consider the Gelug tradition that first came to Buryatia came from Tibet. But others have condemned his other opinions as well. For example, Ex-Khambo Lama Cho-Dorzhi Budaev and opposition leader to Khambo Lama Ayushyev argued that there is no such thing as "Buryat Buddhism" as even Mongolian Buddhism has not been given such a status despite its long history with Buddhism.<sup>154</sup> Many other Buddhist leaders also agree with Budaev as

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<sup>147</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 41

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 6-7

<sup>150</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 88

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 157

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 51-52

well, saying that there is no difference between Buryat, Mongolian, and Tibetan Buddhism as ultimately they all follow the Dalai Lama.<sup>155</sup> As we shall see, the other leaders of Buddhism in Kalmykia also agree with this opinion, and Ayushyev is considered in the minority amongst leaders. However, it has been found that other Buryat Buddhists also concur with Ayushyev, as they are even against the involvement of the international Buddhist community and especially the Tibetans in Buryatia.<sup>156</sup> While Ayushyev has been promoting Buryat Buddhism as its own unique religion and separating their ties with Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhists, he has actually been forging a stronger connection with Russian society and the Russian government.<sup>157</sup>

### **Buryat Buddhism' Relationship with Shamanism**

When critics of Ayushyev say that there is no such thing as Buryat Buddhism, what they mean is that even though the Buddhism practiced in Buryatia may have its cultural differences, it is ultimately still a part of the world Buddhist community. However, there are differences between what Buryats practice, and what the Tibetans practice, and this is mostly because of Shamanism. Shamanism and Buddhism are closely linked together and have been influencing each other for centuries in Buryatia.<sup>158</sup> Both are considered important to the Buryat people, Shamanism especially because of its connection to their Mongolian heritage.<sup>159</sup> However, while Shamanism used to be popular amongst the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 87-88

<sup>158</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 9

<sup>158</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 37

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Buryats before Orthodox Christianity and Buddhism became popular in the region, it is not as popular as it used to be.<sup>160</sup> Because of propaganda about Shamanism being primitive and savage, this mentality has persisted and nowadays Shamanism is primarily practiced privately.<sup>161</sup> It does not have much of a presence in modern Buryat society and culture, except in how it has affected Buddhism. Buryat Buddhism took on a lot of Buryat Shamanism's deities, rituals and spirits, and along with this many Buryat lamas will practice Buddhist rituals with Shamanistic motifs.<sup>162</sup> Interestingly, Khambo Lama Ayushyev is against Shamanism,<sup>163</sup> despite the fact that the Buryat Buddhism that he is promoting was so influenced by Shamanism. Many Tibetan lamas are against the involvement of these Shamanistic elements, wanting to keep the two faiths separate,<sup>164</sup> and many Tibetan and Western Buddhists consider Buryat Buddhism to be "inauthentic" or inaccurate, when compared to the Tibetan school.<sup>165</sup>

There was also a bit of a controversy between the Tibetan and Buryat Buddhist schools concerning rituals and what to use as sacrifices.<sup>166</sup> In Buryat traditions and especially in Shamanism, the use of meat and vodka for sacrifice is a common tradition.<sup>167</sup> However, when some Buryat Buddhists were using these in their Buddhist

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<sup>160</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon. "Shamanism, Buddhism and Epic Heroism: Which Supports the Identity of the Post-Soviet Buryats?" *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 1 (1998): 53

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 57

<sup>162</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 3

<sup>163</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 42

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 37

<sup>165</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010  
Dissertations and Theses: 91

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 123

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

rituals, they received many complaints from Tibetan Buddhists and their followers.<sup>168</sup> They claimed that the ritual failed because of the use of alcohol is banned in Buddhism, especially amongst monks.<sup>169</sup> They also argued that only certain types of meat are allowed, though meat is also banned altogether amongst some Buddhist schools because of their non-violence doctrine.<sup>170</sup> However anti-Tibetan monks fired back, saying that not only were meat and vodka a common Buryat tradition, but that the Tibetan Buddhist's rituals were failing because the spirits will not listen to foreigners and that they were meddling where they do not belong.<sup>171</sup> Whether or not Buryat Buddhism is its own religion, there are certainly a lot of influences from Shamanism that have led to it developing traditions that are different from what is practiced or approved of by these Tibetan lamas. However, they aren't the only Buddhist group Buryat Buddhists have had to deal with, as we shall see in the next section.

#### The Struggle for Dominance and Control: Relations with other Buddhist Groups

Historically, no other school of Buddhism other than Gelug has ever been practiced in Buryatia, as all other attempts by other schools failed.<sup>172</sup> However more recently, some of these differing schools have emerged in Buryatia, though they are not as popular as the Gelug tradition.<sup>173</sup> Ayushyev and the Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia have made claims that Buryat Buddhism is a bridge between Asian and European Buddhism, while

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 124-125

<sup>172</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 29

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

also using its uniqueness to set itself apart from the rest of the Asian Buddhist schools.<sup>174</sup> However their relations haven't been the best as previously shown. Also, while the 1998 law protects Buddhism and gives it special privileges as a traditional religion of Russia, the law in question did not specify which Buddhist organizations are considered a part of the traditional faith.<sup>175</sup> Because of this, Ayushyev's attempt to use the law have failed, and Buryat Buddhists have been having to struggle with these other Buddhist groups for power in Buryatia.<sup>176</sup> The visiting Tibetan Buddhists are their main competition, but there are other groups such as the Green Tara Society women's monasticism movement and the Karma Kagyu, which came to Buryatia through European Russia.<sup>177</sup> Along with this, in 2002 it was unclear what would happen to Buryat Buddhism, as Ayushyev and the B TSR's reputation was in decline.<sup>178</sup> However, this all changed when they found the preserved body of Khambo Lama Etigelov in the late 1990s.<sup>179</sup>

Etigelov was the twelfth Pandito Khambo Lama to lead Russian Buddhism, but hid away right before the beginning of the Soviet persecution.<sup>180</sup> Before doing so, he told his students to flee to Mongolia in 1927, and went into a cave where he sat in the Lotus position meditating.<sup>181</sup> He also instructed his students to check on him every 25 years,

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<sup>174</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 91

<sup>175</sup> Justine Buck Quijada. "Soviet Science and Post-Soviet Faith: Etigelov's Imperishable Body." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 140

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 144

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Justine Buck Quijada. "Soviet Science and Post-Soviet Faith: Etigelov's Imperishable Body." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 140

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.



which they proceeded to do.<sup>182</sup> However when his body was finally unearthed and removed from its tomb, it was found perfectly preserved and he was still sitting in the Lotus position.<sup>183</sup> It is claimed that while he was meditating, he reached a state of Nirvana and left his body behind in its preserved state.<sup>184</sup> Today Etigelov's body is kept at Ivolginsk, where countless Buddhists, Russians, and tourists come seeking healing or spiritual healing, or just out of curiosity.<sup>185</sup> Etigelov even helped with local Buryats as well, as many of them got interested in Buddhism again after seeing him at the temple.<sup>186</sup> The discovery of this lama ended up being what Ayushyev and his organization needed, as it helped greatly in gaining him power and influence in the region again.<sup>187</sup>

However what's interesting is that while there was this intense rivalry between the B TSR and other Buddhist organizations, most Buryats did not see a difference between the two groups or have any problems with either.<sup>188</sup> In fact many would both visit Etigelov at Ivolginsk and see services by Yelo Rinpoche (Not to be mistaken with Telo Tulku Rinpoche who will be discussed later) and his organization, which are a competitor of Ayushyev's.<sup>189</sup> Also around 2004 Ayushyev was actually a highly respected Buddhist leader by the community and his organization considered a major success.<sup>190</sup> He even told

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 142-143

<sup>186</sup> Justine Buck Quijada. "Soviet Science and Post-Soviet Faith: Etigelov's Imperishable Body." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 141

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 140

<sup>188</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 147

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 148-149.

an interviewer that no one criticizes him anymore mostly because they are afraid of Etigelov not forgiving them if they do.<sup>191</sup> It seems that despite all the disagreements and tensions between these Buddhist groups, things have actually evened out over time. However, these Buddhist groups haven't been the only ones with which Ayushyev has had bad relationships.

### **Worsening Relations with the Buryat Government and Lama Politicians:**

#### **Buddhism's Affects on Society and the Government**

While the Russian Government massively supports Ayushyev and his organization, this has not been the case with the Buryat Government. For the most part the relations between the B TSR and the Buryat government were relatively good, but surprisingly the potential tour of a Buddhist artifact in America changed this. Ayushyev first got into a dispute with Buryatia's then president Leonid Potapov<sup>192</sup> when Potapov was arranging for a Buddhist historical text *Atlas of Tibetan Medicine* to be sent to America on a tour with the US-based cultural agency Pro Cultura in late 1998 to early 1999.<sup>193</sup> When Ayushyev heard about the tour, he and a group of Buddhist protesters started trying to stop the book being sent to America, claiming it was a national treasure that belongs to the Buddhist people, even though the state argued it was their property as a historical artifact.<sup>194</sup> At the time the atlas was being kept in a museum, meaning that the Buddhists did not have control over where it was sent even though Ayushyev thought that they should.<sup>195</sup> The

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> An ethnic Russian.

<sup>193</sup> Edward C. Holland. "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 393

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

protesting Buddhists ended up being arrested and allegedly thirty monks were assaulted by police officers trying to break up the protests.<sup>196</sup> Ayushyev's relations with President Potapov also worsened because Potapov accused Ayushyev of trying to ruin his political campaign, as elections were about to happen not long afterwards.<sup>197</sup>

As time went on, relations between the leaders grew worse as Potapov even started supporting the Board of Buddhists and some of the Tibetan lamas who had been starting their own groups.<sup>198</sup> The Buryat government even started supporting these groups financially, which worsened their relations further.<sup>199</sup> Khambo Ayushyev has made proud claims that his organization did not need financial support from the Buryat Government as if he were to take it; it would be like taking a narcotic drug.<sup>200</sup> However, it certainly is interesting how Potapov sided with the foreign Buddhist groups and they started receiving financial aid as a result. In 2001, both the BTSR and Yelo Rinpoche's group were having an event on the same day.<sup>201</sup> One of the people with Rinpoche was President Potapov, who was clearly showing his alliance with the alternative groups.<sup>202</sup> However, in 2004 Potapov made his first official visit to Involginsk monastery, while Ayushyev visited the Buryat government to make peace with them.<sup>203</sup> Since then, relations

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 143-144

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 144

<sup>200</sup> "Interview with Pandito Khambo Lama XXIV Ayusheev" *tibethouse.ru* Accessed March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2017. <http://www.tibethouse.ru/2016/aiushev-01-en.html>

<sup>201</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 147-148

<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 148

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 149

Ayushyev and Potapov improved.<sup>204</sup> But relations between the BTSR and Buryat government increased especially after 2007, when the much more tolerant Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn was elected as president.<sup>205</sup> However, this is not the only case in which Buddhists and the government have interacted.

A common occurrence in Buryatia is that well known Buryat lamas are often lama-politicians as they often get heavily involved in politics and often appeal to the masses.<sup>206</sup> But their reputation is not great, as they are mostly known as uneducated lamas who get involved in regional politics and are often corrupt or at least involved in scandals.<sup>207</sup> However these lamas have been heavily involved in politics in the past. One such lama-politician, Edema Tsybikzhapov, even gave up his vows and position as a lama to become a full time politician.<sup>208</sup> Another, Dorzhozhap Markhaev, was heavily involved with the CSBB and also a member of the Constitutional Assembly of the Russian Federation, though this caused a controversy as most felt his political views and connections with the “Russia’s Choice” party went against Buddhism’s ecclesiastical order.<sup>209</sup> Finally, head of the Dharma Community, lama Nimazhap Iliukhinov (and the other Khambo Lama of Buryatia), ran for deputy in the State Duma of the Russian Federation in 1995, though he was not elected.<sup>210</sup> He argued that he wanted to get

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 393-394

<sup>206</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 35

<sup>207</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 4

<sup>208</sup> N.L. Zhukovskaia. "The Revival of Buddhism in Buryatia Problems and Prospects." *Anthropology & Archeology of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 35

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

involved in politics, because it would best help poor people.<sup>211</sup> These lamas were getting directly involved in politics and trying to help society (though some of them did it for personal gain). However these lamas' involvements in politics have also had a negative impact on Buddhism as some Buryats became skeptical and uninterested in Buddhism after seeing these lamas so heavily involved in politics.<sup>212</sup> Along with this, while Buryatia's officials promoted Buryatia as a place of religious freedom where people can practice what they want, these Buddhists were getting heavily involved in secular affairs and interfering with this image.<sup>213</sup>

### **Understanding Levels of Religious Adherence: The Difference Between Cultural Tradition and Personal Belief**

The purpose of this thesis is not to say which Buddhist movement is the most successful as there is no real way to gauge a religion's level of "success." In these republics, they have reopened many temples or Buddhist organizations. However having a large number of temples does not necessarily mean success. The same applies to the number of adherents as well, as even if a religion reports high numbers of followers, this does not mean they are actively practicing. For instance, some followers may come to every service while others just attend services on holidays. A common issue with religions that are strongly connected to a culture's ethnic identity is that citizens will

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 30

<sup>213</sup> Anya Bernstein. "Buddhist Revival in Buriatia: Recent Perspectives". *Mongolian Studies* 25 (2002): 4

often list themselves as a part of the faith even when they aren't religious.<sup>214</sup> This actually is a common issue in places such as the post-Soviet region as it has been found in Russian Islam,<sup>215</sup> Russian Orthodoxy,<sup>216</sup> Mongolian Buddhism,<sup>217</sup> and in Russian Buddhism as well.<sup>218</sup>

Justine Quijada found in her time in Buryatia that many Buryats consider Buddhism to be a part of their national heritage, and they are interested and sympathetic to its revival as a result.<sup>219</sup> However, while they feel this way, their connection to the religion is often only with their national identity as many of them also have an atheist mentality as a result of Communism.<sup>220</sup> Along with this, after the Soviet collapse the Buryats were greatly interested in reviving their ethnic identity.<sup>221</sup> They wanted to recreate and build their Buryat culture and heritage.<sup>222</sup> But because Buddhism is not only practiced by them and is in fact an international religion, it is not unique to their culture.<sup>223</sup> So while they were supportive of Buddhism because of its connections, there was also a lack of interest due to this difference that would not have been there with other traditional religions. Along with this, it is unclear how many Buryats are actively

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<sup>214</sup> Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin. "Statistics on Religion in Russia: The Reality behind the Figures." *Religion, State and Society* 34, no. 1 (2006): 35

<sup>215</sup> Alexei V. Malashenko, "Islam in Russia," *Social Research* 76, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 321.

<sup>216</sup> Sergei Filatov and Roman Lunkin. "Statistics on Religion in Russia: The Reality behind the Figures." *Religion, State and Society* 34, no. 1 (2006): 35

<sup>217</sup> Udo B. Barkmann. "The Revival of Lamaism in Mongolia." *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (1997): 70

<sup>218</sup> Holland, Edward C. "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 958-959

<sup>219</sup> Justine Buck Quijada. "Soviet Science and Post-Soviet Faith: Etigelov's Imperishable Body." *American Ethnologist* 39, no. 1 (2012): 141

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Roberte N. Hamayon. "Shamanism, Buddhism and Epic Heroism: Which Supports the Identity of the Post-Soviet Buryats?" *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 1 (1998): 59

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

practicing Buddhism, especially because many who do will also sometimes go to shaman or churches as well.<sup>224</sup> As mentioned previously, some Buryats lost interest in Buddhism because of the lama-politicians, but many were also atheist because of the Soviet Union.<sup>225</sup> However despite this a majority of Buryats at least consider themselves Buddhist or at least that it is a part of their heritage.<sup>226</sup>

Even if they identify as Buddhist, however, it is unclear how many are actually practicing. One study conducted in 1996-1997 and 2000-2003 went to try and find out such information by asking local Buryats.<sup>227</sup> The 1996-1997 studies found that out of all Buryats asked 32% believed Buddhism was a part of their cultural heritage and 41% said they followed all traditions and rituals in Buddhism.<sup>228</sup> The rest said they were believers but do not follow them (22%), are unsure how religious they are (15.4%), are atheist (9.4), or did not answer (1%). The 2000-2003 results were much more higher with 46.7% believing that Buddhist was a part of their cultural heritage and 48.3% saying they follow all traditions and rituals.<sup>229</sup> While this study does show the various levels of religiosity in Buryatia, one must definitely consider the fact that the results are based on how those questioned were answered. But as we can see, while Buddhism appears to be very popular amongst Buryats, especially because of its connections with their culture and heritage, how actively they practice Buddhism will vary greatly. In some ways this mirrors other developments in the rest of Buryatia's Buddhist movement. For example,

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<sup>224</sup> Anya Bernstein, Bruce Grant, Tejaswini Ganti, Faye Ginsburg, Fred Myers, Gray Tuttle, and Katherine Verdery, *Religious Bodies Politic: Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism*, 2010 Dissertations and Theses: 30

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

while they have certainly succeeded in reopening temples and garnering interest in Buddhism, there are also a number of key issues including the lack of educated lamas, lack of belief amongst lay Buddhists, and the disagreements amongst Buddhist group in Buryatia especially with Khambo Lama Ayushyev.

### **Conclusions about Buryatia**

The main rebuilders of Buddhism in Buryatia were the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists, an organization originally started by the Soviet government. This is the only republic that was allowed to have such a Buddhist organization before the 1980s (even though it was controlled and enforced by the Soviet government), and as a result Buddhism and especially Buryat Buddhism had a stronger presence than in the other regions. The Board of Buddhists is the ones who elected the Khambo Lamas, and they asked the Dalai Lama for help originally. However because they were ultimately the ones in charge of Buddhism, that meant that when Ayushyev started pushing away outsider influence, he had the ability to do so. These other groups left the BTSR and formed their own group with a new Khambo Lama, but they still are not as powerful as Ayushyev's group. As a result, since this organization supported localized Buryat Buddhism, it is the dominant faith.



### **Buddhism in Kalmykia- Europe's only Buddhist Nation**

Out of the regions we are covering, Kalmykia is the only one in the European half of Russia as it is in the northern Caucasus region next to Dagestan.<sup>230</sup> As a result it is the only Buddhist nation in Europe.<sup>231</sup> It is however also one of the poorest regions in the Russian Federation, with high unemployment.<sup>232</sup> Along with this, their president from 1993 to 2010, Kiran Ilymzhinov, was a very eccentric millionaire who was accused of using state resources for his own personal purposes.<sup>233</sup> However he was also an enthusiastic supporter of Buddhism's revival in Kalmykia. He declared Buddhism and Orthodox Christianity to be the state religions of the Kalmyk people while also welcoming other faiths in the region.<sup>234</sup> However while the state promotes religious tolerance, within the Buddhism movement there is a disagreement on how Buddhism should be practiced amongst Buddhist leaders. As we shall see, the Kalmyk people do not see a difference, but several Buddhist lamas argue that there is, which is a result of many traditions and aspects of Kalmyk culture altering and changing Buddhism over time. Along with this, there is a general disconnect between the visiting Tibetan Buddhists and Kalmyks, in that while the Kalmyks are very supportive of Buddhism, they do not always agree with or fully understand Buddhist practices that the lamas consider "proper Buddhism." We shall explore all of these concepts in this section.

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<sup>230</sup> "Regions and territories: Kalmykia" *BBC News*. November 29, 2011. Accessed February 8, 2017. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/4580467.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/4580467.stm)

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Edward C. Holland, O'Loughlin, John, Little, Jani, Staeheli, Lynn, Stefes, Christoph, and Toal, Gerard. *Buddhism in Post-Soviet Russia: The Geographic Contexts of 'revival'*, 2012, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses: 13

<sup>233</sup> "Regions and territories: Kalmykia" *BBC News*. November 29, 2011. Accessed February 8, 2017. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country\\_profiles/4580467.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/country_profiles/4580467.stm)

<sup>234</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996): 61-62

## History of Buddhism in Kalmykia

Buddhism has always been a part of Kalmykia, at least while Kalmyks have lived along the Volga River. When they first came to settle around the Volga River, they were already practicing Buddhists as they set up khuruls or movable temples.<sup>235</sup> As time went on in the region, they started setting up more permanent temples.<sup>236</sup> The Russian Empire also supported Buddhism and actually managed to have their religious leader work under their control, though they mostly did this to try and keep the Kalmyks away from foreign religious influences.<sup>237</sup> Kalmykia's Buddhists followed strongly the monastic tradition taught and practiced in the Gelug tradition, training boys from ages seven or nine until they finally received full ordination as a monk thirteen years later.<sup>238</sup> In 1917, there were 105 monasteries in Kalmykia, though all of these structures were destroyed by 1941.<sup>239</sup> At first, the Soviets did not attack the Buddhists or Muslims in Kalmykia, mostly because these faiths were strongly connected with their national and cultural identities.<sup>240</sup> However, around the mid-1920s, Buddhism started facing persecution when the Soviets started persecuting all religions heavily and especially those that had been left alone.<sup>241</sup> In their restriction of Buddhism, the Soviets also required that all novices of Buddhism had to be older than eighteen and forbid traditional Tibetan medicine being imported into Kalmykia.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 61

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 952

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 952-953

During World War II, the German army had invaded part of Kalmykia until 1943.<sup>243</sup> In 1943, the entire Kalmyk population was exiled to Siberia and all the Kalmyk soldiers who had fought in World War II were sent to the Gulag.<sup>244</sup> The reason given for the exile was because the Kalmyks were viewed as traitors by the Soviets and accused of collaborating with the German military.<sup>245</sup> However, the Kalmyks suspected another reason as some argued it was racially motivated because Stalin hated the Kalmyks, and they were called racial slurs while being forced out of their homes.<sup>246</sup> Forty percent of the Kalmyk population died while exiled in Siberia, and they were not allowed to return home to the northern Caucasus region until 1956.<sup>247</sup> Unlike the Buryats, the Kalmyks were not allowed to officially reopen or open temples and practice their faith until after 1988.<sup>248</sup> However since then, Buddhism has been allowed to rebuild, especially with the help of the government and Tibet.

### **The Kalmyk Government's Involvement in Buddhism**

During the 2004 visit of the Dalai Lama to Kalmykia, Kiran Ilymzhinov announced his intentions to build a Buddhist temple, the Golden Temple.<sup>249</sup> Since then,

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<sup>243</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996): 61

<sup>244</sup> Karma Tsomo. "Prayers of Resistance: Kalmyk Women's Covert Buddhist Practice." *Nova Religio* 20, no. 1 (2016): 90

<sup>245</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 953

<sup>246</sup> Karma Tsomo. "Prayers of Resistance: Kalmyk Women's Covert Buddhist Practice." *Nova Religio* 20, no. 1 (2016): 90

<sup>247</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996): 61

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 954

the temple has been built partly with donations from Kalmykia's citizens.<sup>250</sup> It also houses Europe's largest Buddha statue.<sup>251</sup> In Kalmykia, the Golden temple is a symbol of national pride but also what united Kalmyks and Buddhists together as they had to work together on this common goal.<sup>252</sup> As with the other regions, Buddhism is considered an important part of not only Kalmykia's religious culture, but also of its culture and society, so the revival was seen as the religion properly returning to the public and social sphere again.<sup>253</sup> As a result, it was also considered very important by the government. President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov was both a major financial and political supporter of the construction of the Golden Temple, but the state also provided 70% of funding for the building of khuruls leading to 21 of them being built between 1993 and 2003.<sup>254</sup> In Kalmykia, one of their main focuses with rebuilding Buddhism was in the construction of Buddhist structures,<sup>255</sup> and the government has helped greatly in this aspect, but there was another main supporter of Buddhism.

### **Tibet's Involvement in Buddhism**

Kalmykia, like Buryatia, faced a lack of qualified Buddhist teachers. They had sent five Kalmyks to Mongolia but only three finished their training, and the boys sent to Buryatia ended up not being qualified enough to teach Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>256</sup> The government was taking the revival of Buddhism very seriously, and as a result they asked

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 948-949

<sup>254</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 395

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 954

<sup>256</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 245

the Dalai Lama for help.<sup>257</sup> As a result, the Dalai Lama sent Tibetan monks from India to live in the main Gelug temple near Elista, while Kalmyk Buddhists would be sent to India for training.<sup>258</sup> Aside from the government, one of the main influences and supporters on the revival of Buddhism in the region has been the Tibetan Buddhists. Their leader, the Dalai Lama, has visited Kalmykia three times<sup>259</sup> before the Russian government stopped giving him invitation visas.<sup>260</sup> His 2004 visit was also considered very important to Kalmykia as it revived interest in Buddhism again amongst the local population and gave an important boost to the Buddhist community in Russia in general.<sup>261</sup> Along with this, during his visit to Kalmykia in 1992, he appointed Telo Tulku Rinpoche the head lama of Kalmyk Buddhism to lead its religious revival.<sup>262</sup> Telo Tulku Rinpoche is very interesting especially when compared with the other leaders of Russian Buddhism Kambo Lama Ayushyev and the Kamby Lama of Tuva as unlike them Telo Tulku Rinpoche is not from Kalmykia.

### **Telo Tulku Rinpoche: The Tibetan Buddhist from Philadelphia**

While the first Kamby Lama of Tuva after Soviet persecution, Agankkh Kkhertek, trained in India<sup>263</sup> the Kamby Lamas have ultimately always been Tuvan. Telo

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 245-246

<sup>259</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 948

<sup>260</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 395-396

<sup>261</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 948

<sup>262</sup> Karma Tsomo. "Prayers of Resistance: Kalmyk Women's Covert Buddhist Practice." *Nova Religio* 20, no. 1 (2016): 89-90

<sup>263</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 26

Tulku Rinpoche is different in this case as he was actually born in Philadelphia where he grew up.<sup>264</sup> But this does not mean that he does not have a connection to Kalmykia, as he is actually a Kalmyk American whose ancestors fled the Soviet Union in the 1920s.<sup>265</sup> Born as Erdne Ombadykow, he grew up in a not very religious Buddhist family, but he wanted from childhood to become a monk.<sup>266</sup> He trained in India before he was sent to Kalmykia to lead the religious revival.<sup>267</sup> However because of the language gap and his lack of knowledge about the area and its culture, he ended up having a crisis of faith, quitting, and returning to America.<sup>268</sup> During this time he married and had a child, got a job as a pizza deliveryman, and lived in Colorado.<sup>269</sup> However, the Dalai Lama managed to convince him to return to Buddhism, and he finally returned to Kalmykia, where he has served as their religious leader ever since.<sup>270</sup> Nowadays he spends his time between Kalmykia and Erie, Colorado where his wife and child live, and he spends half of every year in Colorado working odd jobs to support his family.<sup>271</sup> However, while he may have

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<sup>264</sup> Tim McGirk. "All-American Lama. How an 11<sup>th</sup> Century Mystic was reborn in Philadelphia." *Time*. April 9, 2012. Accessed February 8, 2017.

<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111552,00.html>

<sup>265</sup> Karma Tsomo. "Prayers of Resistance: Kalmyk Women's Covert Buddhist Practice." *Nova Religio* 20, no. 1 (2016): 89-90

<sup>266</sup> Tim McGirk. "All-American Lama. How an 11<sup>th</sup> Century Mystic was reborn in Philadelphia." *Time*. April 9, 2012. Accessed February 8, 2017.

<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111552,00.html>

<sup>267</sup> Seth Mydans. "THE SATURDAY PROFILE; An Ex-Telemarketer's Other Life as a Buddhist Saint." *The New York Times*. June 12, 2004. Accessed February 8, 2017.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/12/world/the-saturday-profile-an-ex-telemarketer-s-other-life-as-a-buddhist-saint.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/12/world/the-saturday-profile-an-ex-telemarketer-s-other-life-as-a-buddhist-saint.html?_r=0)

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Tim McGirk. "All-American Lama. How an 11<sup>th</sup> Century Mystic was reborn in Philadelphia." *Time*. April 9, 2012. Accessed February 8, 2017.

<http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2111552,00.html>

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Seth Mydans. "THE SATURDAY PROFILE; An Ex-Telemarketer's Other Life as a Buddhist Saint." *The New York Times*. June 12, 2004. Accessed February 8, 2017.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/12/world/the-saturday-profile-an-ex-telemarketer-s-other-life-as-a-buddhist-saint.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/12/world/the-saturday-profile-an-ex-telemarketer-s-other-life-as-a-buddhist-saint.html?_r=0)

given up being a monk for a very short period, he is considered very important to Kalmyk Buddhism's revival and the Kalmyk people.

While Khambo Lama Ayushyev may be considered the leader of Russian Buddhism, many people actually consider Telo Tulku Rinpoche to be instead.<sup>272</sup> People primarily argue this because he remains in constant contact with the Dalai Lama, and often goes to India to visit him.<sup>273</sup> Along with this, in 2014, he was also officially appointed as Honorary Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Russia,<sup>274</sup> since the Dalai Lama cannot return to Russia. This is interesting in itself, especially since Rinpoche is not a Russian citizen himself. He has also been very vocal against China's treatment of Buddhists such as calling their treatment of Tibetan Buddhists genocide.<sup>275</sup> Because of this and his connection to the Dalai Lama, it is surprising that he also has not been banned from Russia as well. Nonetheless, one could say that Telo Tulku Rinpoche is the complete opposite of Khambo Lama Ayushyev: while Ayushyev has been focused on keeping Buddhism isolated from outside influences, Rinpoche is working directly with the Dalai Lama and is an outsider himself. This would explain why the two leaders do not agree on matters especially as Rinpoche has said multiple times that there is no distinct or specific Kalmyk Buddhism. For instance, he once argued in an interview that while many different cultures practice Buddhism differently, there is ultimately no such thing as

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<sup>272</sup> Anna Nemtsova. "A wondrous Buddhist tradition resurrected in Kalmykia." *Russia Beyond the Headlines*. October 26, 2011. Accessed February 8, 2017.

[http://rbth.com/articles/2011/10/26/buddhist\\_revival\\_in\\_kalmykia\\_13607.html](http://rbth.com/articles/2011/10/26/buddhist_revival_in_kalmykia_13607.html)

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> "Telo Tulku Rinpoche Appointed Honorary Representative of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Russia." October 24, 2014. Accessed February 8, 2017. <http://tibet.net/2014/10/telo-tulku-rinpoche-appointed-honorary-representative-of-his-holiness-the-dalai-lama-in-russia/>

<sup>275</sup> "What is happening in Tibet is genocide: Telo Rinpoche" *Tibet.net* March 7, 2013. Accessed February 9, 2017. <http://tibet.net/2013/03/what-is-happening-in-tibet-is-genocide-telo-rinpoche/>

Kalmyk Buddhism as “Buddha did not write separate teaching for separate peoples.”<sup>276</sup>

However while Rinpoche has not agreed with the Russian government’s decisions to allow the Dalai Lama back into Russia, he has spoken positively about the government as he thanked them for educating students in high schools about religious cultures including Buddhism.<sup>277</sup>

### **Kalmyk Buddhism’s Relations with Other Religious Groups**

Telo Tulku Rinpoche’s office in Kalmykia is at the Golden Temple, where his organization the Buddhist Union of Kalmykia (OBK) is located.<sup>278</sup> This organization is the main Buddhist Organization in Kalmykia, and heads the rebuilding and construction of Buddhist *khuruls*.<sup>279</sup> It was founded in 1991, while Telo Tulku Rinpoche was appointed in 1992.<sup>280</sup> Over all, this group of Buddhists has maintained relatively good relations with other religious groups in the area.<sup>281</sup> However, despite this, Telo Tulku Rinpoche’s authority was still being challenged by other Buddhist leaders in the region despite him being appointed by the Dalai Lama.<sup>282</sup> Along with this, the OBK formed an alliance with the local Russian Orthodox Church community, as both of them feared non-traditional religious groups in the area such as the imported Buddhist group, Karma

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<sup>276</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 962

<sup>277</sup> “Honorary Representative Telo Rinpoche Speaks at International Buddhist Seminar in Moscow” *Tibet.net*. August 24, 2015. Accessed February 9, 2017. <http://tibet.net/2015/08/honorary-representative-telo-rnpioche-speaks-at-international-buddhist-seminar-in-moscow/>

<sup>278</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 954-955

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 955

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>281</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 395

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 394



Kagyus, gaining too much popularity.<sup>283</sup> This is interesting, especially considering the Buryat Buddhists have also aligned with the Orthodox Church in the past to deal with imported threats, but especially because the BTSR is in some ways completely opposite to the OBK. As mentioned in the last section, the BTSR like Ayushyev supports Buryat Buddhism as its own unique religion. As a result, this Shamanistic influenced Buryat Buddhism is the main Buddhist group there, while the visiting Tibetan Buddhist groups and other newer movements live on the fringes. In Kalmykia, we shall see that this is the opposite as the OBK supports the Gelug tradition and is made up of Tibetan monks from this tradition, while the more localized Kalmyk group lives in conflict with them.

### **The Main Two Buddhist Schools of Kalmykia**

When interviewed by Tara Sinclair in 2003, not only were most Kalmyks convinced that Buddhism had successfully returned to Kalmykia, but they also thought that it was the same version of Buddhism as it originally was before the Soviet Union.<sup>284</sup> In a way this is correct as the school being taught by the Tibetan monks is the Gelug tradition that was originally brought to the Oirats when they first adopted Buddhism. However it seems that the religion may have changed over time or at least been affected by local culture, much like in Buryatia. Along with this, during the Soviet Union, Kalmyk Buddhists were forced to go into hiding secretly practicing their faith until perestroika.<sup>285</sup> This may have had an impact Kalmyk Buddhism's development considering they were cut off from the rest of Buddhism. Tara Sinclair found that the revived Buddhism being

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<sup>283</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 955

<sup>284</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 242

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 242

practiced by these Kalmyks is far different from the Gelug School being taught by Tibetan monks and promoted by the government.<sup>286</sup> This is similar to what happened in Buryatia, except in that case the more traditional Buryat Buddhism is supported more because of its connection to their national identity.<sup>287</sup> In Kamlykia's case it is the complete opposite as while it is considered important to preserve the old Kalmyk traditions, more focus has been put towards the Tibetan School.<sup>288</sup>

While Buddhism is considered important to Kalmykia's cultural heritage, it might seem strange that more focus would be put on the Gelug tradition than these Kalmyk traditions. It is hard to say why this is the case, but part of it is probably connected to the fact that most Kalmyks do not see a difference between the Buddhism being practiced. Along with this, the Gelug tradition is just as deeply connected with the Kalmyk's heritage and culture as these Kalmyk traditions, despite the fact that this school came from Tibet originally. In this way, it seems that Kalmyks are different from Buryats. For instance, while some Buryats support the parts of Buddhism that are unique to their community and heritage, Kalmyks do not seem to see a difference and consider all of it as a part of them, even if it is connected with other international influences.

Ultimately, what this means is that while there were Kalmyk monks who survived Soviet persecution, these monks were not given any authority in reviving Buddhism, as they were not considered qualified enough.<sup>289</sup> However, this makes sense, as there is actually a difference between the two versions. The Gelug School is more philosophical and based in reading and studying of Buddhist scripture, focusing on one's own spiritual

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 245

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

training, and meditation.<sup>290</sup> As for traditional Kalmyk Buddhism, it is based more in rituals and following the same traditions that survived the Soviet Union,<sup>291</sup> such as the honoring and veneration of the saiga. These rituals have little to no connection with most Buddhist scripture, but they are considered important as they keep alive historical Kalmyk Buddhism and its traditions.<sup>292</sup> It has also been found that some of these Kalmyk traditions are important as it can help Kalmyk society such as with environmental issues.

### **Traditional Kalmyk Buddhism's Affects on the Environment**

One such tradition in Kalmyk Buddhism is the veneration of the saiga as a sacred animal.<sup>293</sup> The saiga is a critically endangered antelope whose numbers declined 95% after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>294</sup> While Kalmyk Buddhist traditions do not outright condemn the killing of saiga, their traditions still encourage less killing and respecting of them.<sup>295</sup> However, even this tradition has been affected by the influence of Tibetan Buddhism becoming more popular in the region.<sup>296</sup> This makes sense however, as the saiga is found in Kalmykia, but not Tibet. As a result, because the Tibetan Buddhism was becoming more popular in Kalmykia (especially amongst the youth), fewer people were learning these traditions from Kalmyk Buddhism.<sup>297</sup> In fact, when conducting a study, researchers found in 2012 that no Kalmyks younger than thirty saw the saiga as a

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 243

<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Kerry A. Waylen, Anke Fischer, Philip J. K. McGowan, and E. J. Milner-Gulland. "Interactions Between a Collectivist Culture and Buddhist Teachings Influence Environmental Concerns and Behaviors in the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia." *Society & Natural Resources* 25, no. 11 (2012): 1126-1127

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 1121

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., 1126-1127

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 1127

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

sacred animal.<sup>298</sup> However since then, Kamlykia's Dharma Center started incorporating some Kalmyk traditions along with Tibetan Buddhism, including ones that encourage protecting the saiga and the environment.<sup>299</sup> They even encouraged followers to pray about the environment more often,<sup>300</sup> and more Buddhists were keeping clean sacred sites in nature, after their prayer.<sup>301</sup> More Kalmyks were concerned about and helping the environment than before by taking initiative to plant trees and flowers, as they felt it was their duty to do so than relying on the government to handle it.<sup>302</sup> This example shows how Buddhism can have an effect on local society, but also how there have been cases where these two versions of Buddhism can cooperate. However there is still a divide between Kalmyks and the Tibetan Buddhists.

### **Kalmyk Buddhism's Relationship with Kalmyks**

It is primarily older Kalmyks (especially those who remembered the old traditions) who practice traditional Kalmyk Buddhism.<sup>303</sup> However Kalmyks have been known to go both to the main temples with Tibetan monks, and old Kalmyk practitioners who have small practices.<sup>304</sup> However while Tibetan Buddhism is very popular in the region, there is some miscommunication between it and the Kalmyks. As mentioned above, Kalmyks are very supportive and enthusiastic about Buddhism's revival especially

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 1128

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid., 1129

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 245

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., 252-253

because of its connection to their culture and national pride.<sup>305</sup> However the Buddhist elite in Kalmykia also feel that this interest is only skin deep, as lay Buddhists are more concerned with how Buddhism affects their everyday needs and concerns than studying and understanding Buddhist doctrine.<sup>306</sup>

### **The Varieties of Religious Practice in Kalmykia**

This criticism, in a way makes sense, a 2010 study looked at how “religious” Kalmyk Buddhists actually are. The study was conducted with a sample size of 300 Kalmyks, and 281 out of the 300 identified as Buddhist.<sup>307</sup> The study conducted this research by asking the participants how religious they consider themselves based on how often they attend services and participate in religious activities. However when asked how religious they consider themselves, only 9% said they were very religious, while 38% said they were somewhat religious.<sup>308</sup> The study also found that primarily women, older Kalmyks, and those with high ethnic pride identified as very religious.<sup>309</sup> Along with this, when asked how often they attended Buddhist services, only 25.3% said they attended religious services once a month, while 56.9% said they only attend a few times a year.<sup>310</sup> Many of those polled identified as Buddhist despite not being very religious, perhaps because Buddhism is so closely connected to the Kalmyk’s ethnic identity.<sup>311</sup> Because of Buddhism is a part of Kalmyk national identity, many are categorizing themselves as

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<sup>305</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 949

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 955

<sup>307</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 956

<sup>308</sup> *Ibid.*, 958

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 960

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 959

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 956

Buddhist and not because of their beliefs. This means that even if a faith reports high numbers of adherents, it is hard to tell how accurate these numbers are along with how successful a certain religious group is.

### **Younger Kalmyks and Buddhism: A Disagreement on Monasticism**

The study also found that in general the younger a Kalmyk was, the more likely they were to be not very religious in that they do not practice the faith or do not attend services often.<sup>312</sup> This could have a negative effect on the religion as a whole, as fewer younger Kalmyks having interest in Buddhism may impact its future development. However despite this, most young Kalmyks who are religious are more interested in the Tibetan Tradition, because of its philosophical nature.<sup>313</sup> This of course means that over time, the Kalmyk Buddhist traditions may not survive as long as Tibetan Buddhism, unless do something like educating people like they did with environmentalism and Kalmyk Buddhism at the Dharma Center. However while Tibetan Buddhism may be more popular amongst younger Kalmyks, there is a similar problem going on in Kalmykia that also happened in Buryatia. The same issue that both regions faced when reviving their faith was the general lack of teachers to teach Buddhism.

When the Kalmyk government and Buddhists began building monasteries in the area, they planned originally on having the new Kalmyk monks they sent to India fill them.<sup>314</sup> Twenty Kalmyks were sent to India, but only six returned as fully ordained

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 958-959

<sup>313</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 241

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 246

monks.<sup>315</sup> Even those who did return as monks did not stay that way forever. For example in 2003, there were twenty-three Kalmyk and six Tibetan monks in Kalmykia. However, most of the Kalmyk monks eventually gave up their monastic vows and even became laypersons again.<sup>316</sup> While these younger Kalmyks were very enthusiastic about Tibetan Buddhism, it seems that they did not agree with what is required to become a teacher.<sup>317</sup> In order to teach Buddhism, one must be a fully ordained monk who lives a monastic lifestyle and keeps certain monastic vows.<sup>318</sup> However these post-Soviet Kalmyks were not interested in the monastic lifestyle because training proved difficult, or because they wanted to have lovers and families and live domestically instead of monastically.<sup>319</sup> Because this monastic aspect is required in Tibetan Buddhism, Kalmykia continues to have a problem with a lack of Buddhist teachers to help spread Buddhism.<sup>320</sup>

### **The Kalmyks' Lack of Buddhist Knowledge**

Aside from this, there seems to be some misunderstanding between Buddhists who attend services and the Tibetan monks as well. Buddhist monks found that in general most of those who come do not actually know anything about Buddhism and mostly come because they want help with something such as charms for good luck or blessings.<sup>321</sup> For the most part, when at services most Kalmyks seem to just recite Buddhist doctrine without knowing what they are saying, because it is all they have been

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., 241

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 246-247

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., 246

<sup>320</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 955

<sup>321</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 249

taught to do.<sup>322</sup> It seems that they think reciting Buddhist doctrine will give them protection and blessings,<sup>323</sup> even if that is not what the text is for. In one such case, the text was actually instructions on how to visualize and honor a Buddhist deity, the White Tara and see her enlightened qualities,<sup>324</sup> and not actually something one reads aloud for prayer or protection. The Tibetan monks have also found that Kalmyks do not even seem to understand basic concepts found in Buddhism such as karma and the three jewels of Buddhism.<sup>325</sup>

Buddhism's revival in Kalmykia has been considered a great success because of its popularity and number of adherents.<sup>326</sup> However there is a lot that needs to be worked on in Buddhism.<sup>327</sup> The general lack of knowledge about Buddhism is one of them, which is why the Buddhist community in Kalmykia has been planning to focus on this more.<sup>328</sup> For instance one of the main plans was to start translating and publishing more religious texts so as to help educate the community about Buddhist doctrine.<sup>329</sup> The building of khuruls also greatly increased interest in Buddhism over the years; so religious leaders in Kalmykia were planning to use these structures as a way to build a community based on educating followers more about Buddhism and its doctrine.<sup>330</sup> These Buddhists are addressing some of the issues in their faith, with the outcome uncertain. Further research will need to be conducted to ascertain the results.

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 247

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Competing Interpretations of Buddhism's Revival in the Russian Republic of Kalmykia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 6 (2015): 961

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 962

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 961



### **Conclusions about Kalmykia**

In Kalmykia there was not any form of organization like in Buryatia, as the Kalmyks were not allowed to practice their faith until the late 80s. This also meant that there was a lack of Buddhist presence in Kalmyk society, as practicing Buddhists had to do so secretly. This meant that even though surviving Kalmyk Buddhists wanted to help, they were not qualified enough. As a result, the Kalmyk government has led Buddhism's revival in Kalmykia. The Government asked the Dalai Lama for help, and as a result he appointed Telo Tulku Rinpoche to the region, where the Dalai Lama's people have been in charge. These traditional Kalmyk Buddhists were still around, but they did not have any power and mostly work in their own small practices for people who wished to see them.<sup>331</sup> The Soviet Union also led to a number of other issues in Buddhism, the main being that younger Kalmyks did not agree with monasticism despite preferring Tibetan Buddhism. The Soviet Union also led to lack of knowledge about the faith, and many Kalmyks being Buddhist only because of ethnic identity.

### **Buddhism in Tuva- Buddhism's United Front with the Tuvan Government to Reestablish National Identity and their Rivalry with Shamanism.**

Out of the three regions we are covering, Tuva is the smallest and has the smallest Buddhist movement as well. It is an autonomous republic bordering on northeast

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<sup>331</sup> Tara Sinclair. "Tibetan Reform and the Kalmyk Revival of Buddhism." *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 252-253

Mongolia, and the autonomous republic of Altai and Khakassia.<sup>332</sup> Their religious revival has been very interesting, especially because they have had massive support by the Tuvan government. However they have dealt with a number of issues as a result of communism, such as a lack of interest as a result of atheism.<sup>333</sup> Another was a general lack of knowledge about Buddhism, along a loss of their religious texts, which are very important in the Gelug school of Buddhism.<sup>334</sup> However both of these issues were dealt with as the Tuvan government started mass publishing Buddhist literature and information in magazines so as to spark interest in Buddhism.<sup>335</sup> Tuva's Buddhist movement may be small. But it is also one of the most united, as we shall see. It also has an interesting relationship with Shamanism. In 1995, Tuva was also one of the first regions to officially establish a law on religion in the Russian Federation.<sup>336</sup> As a result Buddhism is officially one of three traditional religions officially accepted and practiced in Tuva, the other two being Shamanism and Russian Orthodoxy.<sup>337</sup> This is extremely interesting that the Tuvan government would consider it important enough to establish this religious law, but especially so because Shamanism is one of these religions. However the reason for its inclusion is because both Shamanism and Buddhism are an important part of Tuvan culture and traditions, and as a result both play a major part in

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<sup>332</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 154

<sup>333</sup> Stefan Sullivan. "Interethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Tuva." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 77

<sup>334</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 166

<sup>335</sup> Stefan Sullivan. "Interethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Tuva." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 77

<sup>336</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 25

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

Tuvan society.<sup>338</sup> While Shamanism being a part of local ethnic identity is not unique as this was the case in Buryatia, Tuva's case is much more different as Shamanism has maintained a stronger presence and is still a major part of Tuvan society. In fact, both Buddhism and Shamanism have played a part in the Tuvan government.<sup>339</sup> Not only has Buddhism worked in and influenced the government, but the government has supported Buddhism as well.

### **History of Buddhism in Tuva**

Unlike Buryats and Kalmyks, Tuvans are actually Turkic, but they still have a strong connection to Buddhism.<sup>340</sup> However, they would not have this connection without the help of the Mongols. They had great relations with the Mongols, and this resulted in them eventually adopting Buddhism and their new Buddhist leader working directly under the Bogdo Gegan or the head Mongolian Buddhist.<sup>341</sup> Ultimately, Buddhism greatly helped Tuvan society in that it increased relations with Mongolia along with Kalmykia and Buryatia, but it also heavily influenced their culture and gave them an ideological basis.<sup>342</sup> However the original religion practiced in Tuva was Shamanism, which maintained a strong presence amongst Tuvans despite Buddhism's growing

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<sup>338</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 157

<sup>339</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 26

<sup>340</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996): 67

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 155

popularity.<sup>343</sup> The first Tuvan Buddhist temple was built in 1772, while they were still under the rule of the Manchurians, but when Manchuria's rule over them ended there were twenty-two temples.<sup>344</sup> Tuva did not join the Russian Empire until after 1913. However, during the Russian Civil War, Tuva considered unifying with Mongolia or becoming independent.<sup>345</sup> Because of Tuva joining the Russian empire so late, the Russian authorities did not try to affect Tuva's religious movements.<sup>346</sup>

Tuva officially joined the Soviet Union in 1921, but the Tuvan government actually protected Buddhism to keep it from religious persecution until 1936 when they could not any longer.<sup>347</sup> As a result, all religious buildings were burned to the ground and most monks were shot on site or sent to prison.<sup>348</sup> However despite this persecution, Buddhism managed to persist as many surviving lamas were still conducting services and trying to keep Buddhism alive.<sup>349</sup> Despite everything, Buddhism maintained a strong presence as a result, and Tuvans were even being sent to the Mongolian Gandantegshinlin Lamasery (a Buddhist school), after its opening in 1970.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 24

<sup>344</sup> Ibid.

<sup>345</sup> Ibid.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 24-25

<sup>348</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 155

<sup>349</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 24

<sup>350</sup> Udo B. Barkmann. "The Revival of Lamaism in Mongolia." *Central Asian Survey* 16, no. 1 (1997): 71

### **A United Buddhist Front In Tuva**

Buddhism started rebuilding during the beginning of Perestroika.<sup>351</sup> One of the main issues in Tuva as a result of Communism was that all of the monks and lamas who had survived were actually too old to lead or teach Buddhism.<sup>352</sup> They were also debating about whether they should begin working with Buryat or Mongolian Buddhists to help rebuild it.<sup>353</sup> It would make sense for them to work with Buryat Buddhists as both groups were in Russia, but the Mongolians had a traditional connection especially in that both areas practice the same form of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>354</sup> However while other Buddhist groups have tried spreading in Tuva, ultimately these groups have all failed.<sup>355</sup> What makes Tuva unique when compared with Buryatia and Kalmykia is that while both of those regions have had conflict between Tibetan and localized Buddhism, this was not the case in Tuva. Unlike them there is only one main school of Buddhism, which is the Gelug tradition.<sup>356</sup> Despite everything, they have remained completely loyal to the Dalai Lama and even maintain contact almost exclusively with him.<sup>357</sup> As we know, Kalmykia's main Buddhist group also follows the Gelug School and acknowledges the Dalai Lama, but the main difference there is that they have to deal with traditional Kalmyk Buddhist groups as well. In Tuva, that is not the case as Tuvans have experienced considerably less conflict within Buddhism when compared with Kalmyk's and Buryat's. However, part of

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<sup>351</sup> Andrey Terentyev. "Tibetan Buddhism in Russia." *The Tibet Journal* 21 no.3, Russian-Tibetan Relations (Autumn 1996): 67

<sup>352</sup> Ibid.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>354</sup> Ibid.

<sup>355</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 27

<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

this may be because the Buddhist faith and their organizations in Tuva are much smaller than the other regions.<sup>358</sup>

Another reason seems to be because Tuva's Buddhism is much more cohesive, which may in part be due to the fact that their surviving lamas were too old to teach and they had to rely heavily on the Tibetan monks. Another reason may be the fact that the Tuvan government protected Buddhism from religious persecution until 1936.<sup>359</sup> Not only was Buddhism persecuted later than in other cases, but they were even collectivized much later due to their remoteness in the USSR.<sup>360</sup> This meant that Soviet culture was not as present or forced upon them as it had been elsewhere, though it also helped that Buddhism never really died out completely. They may have had their temples burned down and monks shot but despite this, Buddhism was able to persist more easily because of this late integration and their remoteness. These are only a few of the possible reasons why there is only one Buddhist school in Tuva, but it is certainly an interesting occurrence.

As is the case in Buryatia, Buddhist culture in Tuva is heavily influenced by Shamanism.<sup>361</sup> Both religions were influencing each other especially during the 1920s and 30s, when Tuvan Buddhists incorporated traditionally Shamanistic practices.<sup>362</sup> So the same thing that happened in Buryatia and Kalmykia, also occurred in Tuva, despite the absence of conflict between the Tibetans and Tuvan Buddhists. Ultimately, it is hard to

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<sup>358</sup> Edward C. Holland, "Buddhism in Russia: Challenges and Choices in the Post-Soviet Period." *Religion, State & Society* 42, no. 4 (2014): 395

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 24

<sup>361</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 27

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*

say why this has occurred without further research. However, not every Buddhist in Tuva likes the idea of Shamanism and Buddhism mutually influencing one other.

### **Tuvan Buddhism's Interesting Relationship with Shamanism**

In general, Buddhism has maintained a very peaceful relationship with other religious groups as one of the Kamby Lamas was very tolerant of other religions and wanted people to find their own special happiness in religion.<sup>363</sup> He also thought that ultimately the best religion for Tuvans is Buddhism, as it will lead them to a happier future.<sup>364</sup> He even spoke positively of there being other Buddhist schools in Russia aside from the Gelug tradition, as it enriches the basic doctrine.<sup>365</sup> However, there has been tension between Buddhism and other religious groups in the past as Buddhists in a small village got into a dispute with an Evangelical group called "Light of the Gospel."<sup>366</sup> The Evangelical group's leaders claimed that Buddhist lamas were spreading rumors that villagers were dying because of the Evangelical group's presence there.<sup>367</sup> Despite more or less peaceful relations, Shamanism has remained as one of Buddhism's biggest competitors, partly because they fared much better against the communists.<sup>368</sup> Since Shamanism was not as organized as Buddhism, it was much easier to hide and even pass off Shamanistic traditions as folk culture.<sup>369</sup> Buddhism, on the other hand, was much more organized and therefore identifiable, which made them easier targets in the anti-

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 28-29

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>365</sup> Ibid. 27

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid, 28-29

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

religious campaigns.<sup>370</sup> Over all, it was much easier for the Shamans to practice secretly as many actually hid amongst their kin and taught Shamanism to family members.<sup>371</sup> Shamanism was heavily persecuted all over the Soviet Union, but because of Tuva's more remote areas and towns it was easier for them to hide as well.<sup>372</sup> Another reason for its survival was because Tuvan folk scholars such as Mongush Borakhovich Kenin-Lopsan in the 1960s and 1970s was able to collect folk tales and preserve Buddhism secretly under the disguise of conducting research.<sup>373</sup> Kenin-Lopsan actually led the revival movement for Tuvan Shamanism,<sup>374</sup> as he opened the Shamanistic Dungur society in 1991.<sup>375</sup> Interestingly, he was also one of Buddhism's largest critics, condemning it for being a foreign faith that does not work with Tuvan traditions and culture.<sup>376</sup>

He was not the only one however, as there were many Buddhists and Shamans in Tuvan society who wanted nothing to do with the other faith and felt that the two needed to be kept separate.<sup>377</sup> This is interesting because both Buddhism and Shamanism are inseparable from Tuvans and their daily life, and a part of their culture.<sup>378</sup> However, as researchers such as Galina Lindquist have found, there are similarities between the two

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<sup>370</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 155

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 156

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 29

<sup>374</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 154

<sup>375</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 29

<sup>376</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 154

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.



faiths, or at least there have been cases in which that the two faiths can cooperate.<sup>379</sup> Unlike his religious counterpart, one of the Kamby Lamas was much more tolerant as while he believed that 90% of Tuvans are Buddhist, he thought that occasionally they will go to Shamans.<sup>380</sup> He believed that both religions could work together peacefully.<sup>381</sup> Along with this, Buddhist and deputy from Tuva to the Russian State Duma, Kadyr-ool Alekseyevich Bichel'dei agreed with him.<sup>382</sup> He said in an interview in 2000 that everyone in Tuva has a right to practice what he or she wants, and that Shamanism is one of these faiths.<sup>383</sup> However, not everyone agrees with this mentality as some Buddhists and born-again Christians have made claims against Shamanism, saying its practices are satanic in nature.<sup>384</sup> Some shamans are also against Buddhism like Kenin-Lopsan. For instance there was a female Shaman who wanted to learn more about Buddhism but did not because her parents forbade her, because they did not like Buddhism.<sup>385</sup>

However despite the critics, there are also cases of tolerance or acceptance as well. Tuvans have been known to see both shamans and lamas, when they need a ritual to be performed.<sup>386</sup> This makes sense. While shamans and lamas do practice rituals for similar issues in a person's life, they also specialize in other aspects.<sup>387</sup> For instance, Shamans primarily handle natural disasters and seeing off the dead at funerals while

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid.

<sup>380</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 27

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Galina Lindquist. "Allies and Subordinates: Religious Practice on the Margins between Buddhism and Shamanism in Southern Siberia." In *On the Margins of Religion*, 153-68. Berghahn Books, 2008: 154

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 163

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 157

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

lamas are used primarily blessing newborns and newly-weds.<sup>388</sup> Along with this, lamas can be used for natural disasters, but they are never used for funerals in Tuva, while Shamans are never used for blessings.<sup>389</sup> These differences are partly what have allowed these groups the opportunity to work together; as both specialize in different services and Tuvans will go to the practitioner who will help them best with their problem.<sup>390</sup> Even in Buddhism, many Shamans and Lamas are very tolerant of each other, often living in harmony and agreeing on who will perform rituals for what.<sup>391</sup> There are even cases of lamas who send clients to shaman friends and vice-versa.<sup>392</sup> Lamas have even been known to marry female shamans, or go to practitioners of the other faith when they needed help with something that they thought they could handle.<sup>393</sup> Naturally there have also been cases of fights between shamans and lamas,<sup>394</sup> but otherwise Tuva's Buddhists have maintained a very complicated but cooperative relationship with each other. This is certainly a very unique situation, especially because both of these religions are involved in the government as well.

### **Tuvan Buddhism's Collaborative Relationship With the Government**

In 1992, President Sherig-ool Oorzhak invited the Dalai Lama to Tuva in order to inspire the revival of Buddhism amongst Tuvans and to officially welcome Buddhism

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 164

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> VP. D'Iakonova. "Lamaism and Its Influence on the Worldview and Religious Cults of the Tuvans." *Anthropology And Archeology Of Eurasia* 39, no. 4 (2001): 66-67

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 71

back into public light.<sup>395</sup> As previously stated, Buddhism was a part of Tuvan ethnic and national identity.<sup>396</sup> Because of this the revival of Buddhism was considered very important to the process of remaking Tuvan national awareness.<sup>397</sup> Along with this, they wanted to reestablish a moral center in society to help sway Tuvan youth away from violence, alcohol, and drugs.<sup>398</sup> During the Dalai Lama's visit they made an agreement on September 22nd for Tibetan Buddhists to help completely with the revival including: teaching clergy, pilgrimages to Tibet, rebuilding temples, sending Buddhist literature for free, and sending three monks to teach Tibetan medicine.<sup>399</sup> Tuva's government also paid all the expenses for the event.<sup>400</sup> In general, The Tuvan government has had a major impact on the government especially when President Oorzhak was in power.<sup>401</sup> He even provided his own money towards the building of a Buddhist centre in Kyzl,<sup>402</sup> and was known for often requesting Buddhist lamas and shamans to perform rituals.<sup>403</sup> He was also a major supporter of Shamanism, as he signed an agreement to set up a research centre lead by Kenin-Lopsan, though his support was not as great as it was for Buddhism.<sup>404</sup> Interestingly enough, during an election back in 2001, the main opponent of Oorzhak criticized him for not being involved enough in Buddhism's development despite the fact the Oorzhak also regularly attended rituals, festivals, and meetings with

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<sup>395</sup> Stefan Sullivan. "Interethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Tuva." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 76

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., 77

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 76-77

<sup>400</sup> Ibid. 77

<sup>401</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 25-26

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>403</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., 29

Buddhists.<sup>405</sup> That his opponent used this claim against Oorzhak, demonstrates how important Buddhism is in governmental matters.

Actually, Buddhism was becoming extremely widespread amongst the Tuvan political elite, and there was even an idea that Buddhism needed to be an ideological basis for Tuvan statehood.<sup>406</sup> This is partly why Buddhism has, in general, been so supported by the government as they have even funded the building of new temples in the past.<sup>407</sup> Buddhists have been very cooperative with the government as well, as they even signed an environmental protection agreement between the State Committee for the Protection of the Environment and the Directorate of the Kamby Lama of the Republic of Tuva in 2000.<sup>408</sup> The Kamby Lama has also been involved in helping protect the environment in other cases as one of the later Kamby Lama's Jampel Lodoi promised the WWF in 2007 to help in the conservation and protection of Tuva's environment and rare species.<sup>409</sup> The Kamby Lama serving in 2000 also felt that Buddhists needed to be more involved in the government, as it was their obligation to society as many of the basic principles of Buddhism promote and support democracy.<sup>410</sup> He was not the only one who felt this way, however.<sup>411</sup> Other Buddhist clergy in Tuva were aspiring to be apart of all aspects of Tuvan society, not only culturally but also politically and economically.<sup>412</sup> In

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 26

<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> "Kamby-Lama of Tuva is ready to help in snow leopard conservation." *WWF.ru*. October 23, 2007. Accessed January 19, 2017. <http://www.wwf.ru/resources/news/article/eng/3360>

<sup>410</sup> Philip Walters. "Religion in Tuva: Restoration or Innovation?" *Religion, State and Society* 29, no. 1 (2001): 27

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

some ways, this sounds similar to the lama politicians of Buryatia. Ultimately Buddhism was a leading force in daily and political life in Tuva.<sup>413</sup>

Of course, part of Buddhism's direct effect on the Tuvan government depends primarily on its officials and their connections with Buddhism. After all part of why Buddhism has had so much influence in the government was because of President Oorzhak requesting lamas and shamans to perform rituals along with other cases. One of the main political conflicts, going on in Tuva's government was on whether they should seek more autonomy from the Russian government or not.<sup>414</sup> It was essentially a struggle between remaining close with the Russian government who they were financially dependant on or embracing their national and very non-Russian identity and independence.<sup>415</sup> However things have changed that had pushed Tuva closer to Russia. In 2004 Putin introduced a new law that meant that instead of being elected by citizens, governors could be appointed by the Russian Government.<sup>416</sup> These officials are still from the regions they serve in, but this law was put in place to unite executive powers and create more effective governance.<sup>417</sup> Sherig-ool Oorzhak had been previously elected by Tuva's citizens,<sup>418</sup> but he was not by Moscow. Instead, Sholban Kara-ool and leader of the local United Russia party was personally nominated by Vladimir Putin to take his place as Chairman of Tuva in 2007.<sup>419</sup> As a result Tuva became much more supportive of

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>414</sup> Stefan Sullivan. "Interethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Tuva." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 66

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 64

<sup>416</sup> Ksenia Pimenova. "The 'Vertical of Shamanic Power': The Use of Political Discourse in Post-Soviet Shamanism." *Laboratorium* 5, no. 1 (2013): 124

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> "Putin Nominates Local One Russia Leader to Head Tyva Government." *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, April 03, 2007.

the Russian government than it previously was as most nationalist, anti-federalist, and anti-Russian groups have gotten less support.<sup>420</sup> While this means that the government would be more supportive of the Russian government now, it also meant that there would be less of a push for having this separate national identity apart from Russian culture.

However, despite Chairman Kara-ool's connections with Putin and the Russian government, he has still met with representatives of the Dalai Lama and has in general been very involved in Buddhism and especially Tibetan Buddhists. For instance in 2016, he met with Telo Tulku Rinpoche serving as representative of the Dalai Lama mainly to look over and discuss the construction of a Buddhist complex in Kyzl.<sup>421</sup> During this talk Kara-ool also talked about their plans to encourage more studying and learning about Buddhism from researchers, as there was, in his opinion, unfortunately a lack of those who study Buddhology and Tibetology.<sup>422</sup> He also stressed the importance of inter-faith and inter-ethnic harmony in the region, promoting acceptance of all faiths and groups.<sup>423</sup> Another example was from 2014, when the seventh Kamby Lama of Tuva was elected.<sup>424</sup> At the event Kara-ool talked about how President Putin stressed at a Security Council meeting the importance of the traditional religions of Russia in confronting extremism, terrorism, and xenophobia.<sup>425</sup> He also added to this saying how the Office of the Kamby

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<sup>420</sup> Ksenia Pimenova. "The 'Vertical of Shamanic Power': The Use of Political Discourse in Post-Soviet Shamanism." *Laboratorium* 5, no. 1 (2013): 125

<sup>421</sup> "Глава Тувы и представитель его Святейшества Далай-Ламы посетили стройку буддийского комплекса и открыли конференцию." *Официальный портал республики Тыва*. September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Accessed January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

[http://gov.tuva.ru/press\\_center/news/society/26891/?sphrase\\_id=26456](http://gov.tuva.ru/press_center/news/society/26891/?sphrase_id=26456)

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> "В Туве состоялась интронизация вновь избранного Камбы-ламы." *Официальный портал республики Тыва*. December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Accessed January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

[http://gov.tuva.ru/press\\_center/news/society/11733/?sphrase\\_id=26456](http://gov.tuva.ru/press_center/news/society/11733/?sphrase_id=26456)

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

Lama and other Buddhist organizations in Tuva were going to help in that struggle.<sup>426</sup> However he also talked highly of the Dalai Lama and how important his 1992 visit was to Tuva, especially because the Dalai Lama helped immensely in reestablishing Buddhism.<sup>427</sup> He also mentioned how honored he was that he was able to meet both the Dalai Lama and Metropolitan Kirill.<sup>428</sup> Over all, Chairman Kara-ool has primarily stressed the importance of interfaith relations especially with the traditional relations, but he also speaks highly of the Dalai Lama and his involvement with Buddhism. This makes him a very interesting leader, as while Tuva is aligned more with the Russian government, he has not actually spoken out against the influences of foreign religions, as was the case in Buryatia.

However, in 2016, Chairman Kara-ool officially resigned from his position, though he remained as chairman of the republic until there would be a new elected leader.<sup>429</sup> In the end, Kara-ool did not actually leave his position, as the Tuvan people elected him President of Tuva for a third term in a landslide victory.<sup>430</sup> Ultimately, Tuva's leaders have been very tolerant of Tibetan and foreign Buddhists, but who knows what will happen with the next leader, especially since the Russian government has the ability to choose the new leader. This new leader could have a similar stance, be even more supportive of Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhists, or like Khambo Lama Ayushyev, could

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<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> "Executive order on early termination of mandate of Head of Tyva." *Kremlin.ru*. May 23, 2016. Accessed January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Transcript.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/catalog/persons/247/events/51982>

<sup>430</sup> Yeshe Choesang. "Tibetan PM congratulates president of Tuva Republic on 3<sup>rd</sup> term win." *The Tibetan Post International* September 25, 2016. Accessed January 23, 2017.

<http://www.thetibetpost.com/en/news/international/5197-tibetan-pm-congratulates-president-of-tuva-republic-on-3rd-term-win>

also be less tolerant especially of outside influences. While it is unknown what will happen in the future with the Tuvan Government, the Russian Government has in the past directly affected Buddhism, and it even involved the deportation of a Tibetan lama.

### **The Russian Government's Deportation of Foreign Buddhists**

Shiwalha Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist who has had a major impact on Tuva's Buddhist revival.<sup>431</sup> Not only did he have more than 1000 disciples in Tuva and the neighboring region, but he also helped in spreading Buddhism in Tuva and had been doing so since 2004.<sup>432</sup> However the FSB (Federal Security Service) has deported him with no intention on letting him back into the country again, after he was declared "undesirable."<sup>433</sup> His expulsion was solely blamed on the FSB, as Chairman Kara-ool actually tried to convince the FSB to handle the matter differently and said that the Tuvan government had no involvement in the matter whatsoever.<sup>434</sup> Rinpoche had no idea the FSB were going to expel him however, as he had not received many complaints about his activities.<sup>435</sup> In fact the only case was a year before when some FSB officials came to his lecture and warned him to have less sermons, which he ended up doing.<sup>436</sup> When questioned about the expulsion, the FSB cited a federal law that states that foreigners can be banned if they pose "a genuine threat to national defense and security, to public order,

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<sup>431</sup> Ilya Kizirov. "Banished Tibetan Lama Says He Was Warned By Russian Authorities." *RadioFreeEuropeRadioLiberty*. October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015. Accessed January, 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-tibetan-lama-expelled-shiwalha-rinpoche/27308604.html>

<sup>432</sup> Ibid.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.



or to public health.”<sup>437</sup> However, his followers since then have protested the decisions looking into pursuing legal action and they have stated that he is an extremely peaceful man who only promotes tolerance and peace.<sup>438</sup> Everyone is confused on why he would be considered a threat as he was even helping Tuvans overcoming their drug and alcohol addictions,<sup>439</sup> which, as discussed earlier, were something the Tuvan government, had wanted from Buddhism. There is a lot of speculation on why the expulsion occurred, but some suspect that China might have been involved since Rinpoche heavily promotes Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>440</sup> Religious expert Boris Falikov supported this claim. He stated that China has been known to target the Dalai Lama and well-known Tibetan lamas’ international influence, and that they probably pressured the FSB to deal with him.<sup>441</sup> Nonetheless, because Shiwalha Rinpoche was a major influence and helper in developing Buddhism in Tuva again, his expulsion has a major affect on the movement. This also has harsher implications, because even though Shiwalha Rinpoche is just one lama, there is also a chance that the FSB or Russian government could do this again with other foreign Buddhists.

### **Conclusions for Tuva**

Because the Tuvan monks were too old to teach, the government stepped in and asked the help of the Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama’s group has worked hard and closely with the Tuvan Buddhists ever since. Unlike Buryatia, Tuva did not have an official Buddhist organization, but they did still have a strong presence in society. This is

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

in contrast to the Kalmyks, who were severely persecuted and exiled to Siberia. There was a lack of a conflict between the Tuvan Buddhists and the Tibetans but mostly due to their movement focusing on cooperation instead of how to practice the religion.

### **Conclusion**

Post-Soviet Buddhism has been rebuilding all over the Russian Federation, but especially in the three autonomous republics of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. In these three republics, we have three different scenarios for how the Buddhist movement has rebuilt, and I have argued that the most important reason for these differences derives from how Buddhism was treated in each republic by the Soviet Union. These differences have also influenced the Buddhist and local political leaders in each of the three regions. In the case of Post-Soviet Buddhism, there is a strong connection between politics and religion. All three Buddhist groups faced temples being burned down, monks arrested and killed, and having to practice their faiths in secret, but they also all had different experiences. Buryatia was allowed to open two temples in 1946 even though they were heavily restricted and controlled by the government. The Soviet government also created the Central Board of Buddhists and reestablished the position of Khambo Lama to control the Buddhist populations in this region. This meant that when Buddhism was officially allowed to rebuild, they had the Khambo Lamas and Board of Buddhists to help, and this is ultimately what has given Khambo Lama Ayushyev the authority he has over Buddhism. Ayushyev, it will be recalled, has also insisted that Buryat Buddhism should be protected from foreign influences.

By contrast, in Kalmykia, Buddhism was extremely repressed and the Kalmyks were sent to Siberia. All of their Buddhists were forced to practice in secret isolated from other Buddhist movements. This is part of what led to there being a difference between Tibetan Gelug Buddhism and Kalmyk Gelug Buddhism, which also meant that when the Tibetans stepped into lead the religion, Tibetan Buddhism was given more attention than Kalmyk Buddhism. Along with this, because the leader of Kalmykia's Buddhist movement, Telo Tulku Rinpoche is a Kalmyk American and Tibetan lama, naturally he and Kalmykia would be more accepting of the Tibetan Buddhists. However, this has not stopped him from fearing the popularity of the imported and non-Gelug schools such as the Karma Kagyu.

Finally, in Tuva, a strong Buddhist presence persisted primarily because they were integrated so late into the Soviet Union, but also because the Tuvan government actually protected Buddhism until 1936. While they faced hardship as the others did, Buddhism continued to survive secretly. To be sure, Tuvan Buddhists, like those in Kalmykia, needed a lot of help from the Dalai Lama. They received this help in 1992 when President Oorzhak personally invited him and they made the agreement. The Khamby Lamas have been Tuvan but have been trained by Tibetans and there is no conflict because Tuvan Buddhism has remained a united front. Along with this, other Buddhist groups have failed to spread as successfully there, mostly due to the fact that the movement is much smaller than the other republics.

These Buddhist movements have successfully rebuilt temples and opened Buddhist organizations, but there have also been a large numbers of issues as well that are mostly a result of the Soviet Union's control. There has been disagreement about

religion amongst Buddhist leaders about who should run the St. Petersburg Datsan, alcoholism amongst monks, post-Soviet Kalmyks and Buryats' lack of interest in monasticism, and the lack of understanding of Buddhist education. However these religious groups have primarily worked around these issues or are at least trying to do so. Of course there is also the fact that the Russian government has the right to remove from the Russian Federation foreign Buddhist it consider a threat, even if the Buddhist in question is not. This was the case with Shiwalha Rinpoche, but it also happened to the Dalai Lama, who has not been allowed back in the country.

Buddhism is one of the four official traditional religions of Russia and it is given certain privileges as a result. Out of the three regions, Buryatia and specifically Khambo Lama Ayushyev, has the best and closest relationship with the Russian government. However because of the government not giving the Dalai Lama visas or the possibility of removing other foreign Buddhist leaders to please China, this could heavily impact the Buddhist groups that rely heavily on them, especially in Kalmykia and Tuva. In fact Telo Tulku Rinpoche may be the representative of the Dalai Lama in Russia, but he could be removed just as easily considering he is originally from America. However, problems such as this have not yet occurred, and it is unclear what might happen to these movements in the future.

Glossary:

Bodhisattva- Someone who has found enlightenment but chooses to stay on earth so as to teach the religion and help others find enlightenment.

Buddha- The title for a person who has found enlightenment, which releases them from the cycle of reincarnation. The founder of Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama often referred to as the Buddha, Gautama Buddha or Shakyamuni Buddha.

Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR)- The main Buddhist organization of Buryatia and technically all of Russia. Was originally the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists before Khambo Lama Ayushyev changed it.

Buddhist Union of Kalmykia (OBK)- The main Buddhist organization of Kalmykia, headed by Telo Tulku Rinpoche.

Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists (CSBB)- The main Buddhist Organization of Buryatia before it was changed into the BTSR. Lead the Buddhist revival after Perestroika.

Dalai Lama- Leader of the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism and an influential international public figure. The title Dalai Lama was first given to a lama by the Altan Kahn, a powerful Mongol leader.

Dharma- The teachings of the Buddha, mostly consisting of the fundamental principles and beliefs required in Buddhism.

Gelug School- A school originally from Tibet and apart of Tibetan Buddhism. Their leader is the Dalai Lama. This school is the main one that came to Russia through Mongolia where it is also the main school. This school is also primarily focused on monasticism and philosophical studying of Buddhist literature and sutra.

Ivolginsk Monastery- The main datsan or temple of Buddhism in Buryatia. Was reopened after World War II by the Soviets. Where the body of lama Etigelov is located.

Kamby Lama- Title for the leader of Tuva's Buddhist movement. There have been seven Kamby Lama in Tuva since Perestroika.

Karma- A word that means "Action." The actions or deeds a person as done through out their lifetime. In Buddhism, when someone dies their actions they have done in life is judged. Depending on what they have done will determining where they go or what they will be in their next reincarnation.

Khambo Lama- The title for the leader of Buddhism in Buryatia. The first Khambo Lama was put in charge of all Buddhism in Russia by the Russian empire. Damba Ayushyev is the current Khambo Lama and head of the BTSR.

Khuruls- A form of Buddhist temple that is mainly specific to Kalmyk Buddhism.

Lama- Specific to Tibetan Buddhism, lama are teachers of Buddhist teachings.

Lotus Position- A meditation position where the mediator sits in a cross-legged position.

Mara- A powerful demon that is believed to have attempted to keep Siddhartha Gautama from reaching enlightenment by tempting him with beautiful women and other pleasures. He is often associated with desires, death, and an antagonist to those seeking enlightenment.

Nirvana- A state of being a person reaches when they have found enlightenment and are finally freed from the cycle of reincarnation.

Sangha- A word that means “community” or “assembly. It is used to refer to the Buddhist community. Sometimes it specifically refers to only the monastic community of monks and nuns, but it can also refer to individual Buddhist communities or the entire Buddhist community as a whole.

Shamanism- A religion based in nature focused on shamans who communicate and influence spirits and go into trances.

Stupa- Dome-shaped structures that often contain Buddhist relics and are often places of prayer.

Telo Tulku Rinpoche- Leader of the Kalmyk Buddhist movement in Kalmykia and head of the OBK. Originally from Philadelphia, he is a Kalmyk-American that also lives in Erie, Colorado.

The Three Jewels of Buddhism- The three jewels are the Buddha (the founder of Buddhism), the Dharma (his teachings), and the Sangha (the community of Buddhists). In order to become a Buddhist, one must understand and have these three jewels in their heart and life.

WWF- The World Wildlife Fund. An organization focused on saving the environment and helping endangered animals.

White Tara- Tara is primarily found in Tibetan Buddhism and is a popular female Bodhisattva. There are many different forms of the Tara of varying color. One of them is White Tara who is known for compassion, long life, and healing.

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