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Buddhist Revival in the Context of Desecularization Processes in Russia (on Materials of Buryatia)

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The paper discusses the desecularization of public consciousness in modern Buryatia in the overall context of a religious revival in Russia. Basing on the functional approach, the author discusses the most important characteristics of religiosity among Buryats including the measurement of ethnocultural identity. Simultaneously, the author undertakes an analysis of the correlation between, on the one hand, revival of worldview foundations of religion and, on the other hand, banal religiosity as constructing ethnic differentiation.

Keywords: desecularization, Buryats, Buryatia, modern Buddhism, ethnic identity, religiosity.

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Introduction

The term *desecularization* strongly corresponds to the processes of religious revival in Russia; it embraces both relation between the state and churches and growth of religious feelings among majority of population. For the state, reapproachment with religious institutions is an argument for proving that Russian authorities completely refused from the soviet ideology that included atheism as an indispensable condition. Simultaneously, the state lays hopes on religion in the questions of improving sociocultural climate: "Our country... can find moral principles in religious values only. Our people, the citizens of the Russian Federation have got some moral

foundation and footing, which is essential for the stability of society, for the future of the state and every person" (Shorthand report, 2012).

Looking at the strong state support to officially recognized religions (not only Russian Orthodoxy but also Islam and Buddhism, and in Buryatia the Russian Old Belief also), we can conclude that realization of freedom of belief – one of democratic freedoms – really takes place and the multiethnic population of Russia can choose their religious identity, follow the religious traditions, or not to believe. Moreover, desecularization has become a national project aimed at restoring some of the social functions of religion – first of all, the functions of social control and regulation

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in the secularized society that implies separation of religious sphere from the worldly practices. In this connection the question arises: whether religion is in state to fulfill the function of social regulation in the society, in which the basic worldview function of religion characterizes neither individual nor mass consciousness? Another and no less important question concerns the correlation between *religiosity* and *religious belief*: how religiosity as a phenomenon that is quite amenable to sociological dimensions can reflect extremely personal sentiments concerning belief in divine power, God's trade and reliability of religious dogma?

To answer these and other questions we can on the example of contemporary Buryatia that gives us opportunity to study on local materials the desecularization process in a particular ethnic group and extrapolate the results on post soviet space in whole.

Materials and Methods

In my paper, I employ field materials of my own including questioning, qualitative interviewing, observation and participation in religious rituals and worshipping, as well as archives and mass media materials. Also I used sociological and statistical data gathered and published by other researchers and official institutions.

The research applies the methodology of religious functions proposed by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1964) and the principles of social constructivism (Berger, Luckmann, 1966; Bloor, 1976; Barnes, 1977; Connor, 1994). Actualization of social functions of religion in the desecularization processes flows from providing religious practices with the qualities that are characteristic for the worldly life: "And the fact that it is society alone which is the author of these varieties of apotheosis, is evident since it frequently chances to consecrate men thus

who have no right to it from their own merit. The simple deference inspired by men invested with high social functions is not different in nature from religious respect. It is expressed by the same movements: a man keeps at a distance from a high personage; he approaches him only with precautions; in conversing with him, he uses other gestures and language than those used with ordinary mortals. Thus the moral power conferred by opinion and that with which sacred beings are invested are at bottom of a single origin and made up of the same elements" (Durkheim, 1964: 213). Thus, in full correspondence with E. Durkheim's ideas, I propose to approach to the desecularization processes in Russia from functional positions that prove to give a best instrumental set for studying religiosity in various measurements and aspects. Validity of Durkheim's idea is confirmed with political strategy in Russia where strengthening of religious identity implies social stability, or, according to Durkheim's principles, promotes social cohesion and stability that bring to loyalty to the state.

The methodological principle proposed by P. Berger sounds like this: "My point is that the assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today, with some exceptions... is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever... To be sure, modernization has had some secularizing effects, more in some places than in others. But it had also provoked powerful movements of counter-secularization. Also, secularization on the societal level is not necessarily linked to secularization on the level of individual consciousness (Berger, 1999: 2-3). P. Berger's sharp refusal from his previous views on correlation between modernization and secularization appears to be productive regarding post soviet transformations when after decades of peripheral place of religion in social practices, Russian society rushed into deep concern about religious values and

spirituality. For example in Buryatia, within the last twenty five years the number of people who recognize themselves as believers has increased from approximately 5% (Kruchkov, Mikhailov, 1987: 45-46) to almost 100% at present. It is worth marking that while during the soviets the so called religious 'survivals' were characteristic mainly for the villagers, at present the city dwellers show definitely higher percentage of believers (Budaeva et al., 2010: 47-49).

Results

In the USSR, the highest permission to express religious fillings was given in late 1980-es. Despite Perestroika, it was the time when most of soviet citizens, though in word only, declared their atheism or indifference to religious issues and the population of Buryatia was not exclusion. At present, the situation changed completely: most of Buryats definitely say that they are Buddhists, with steadily increasing figures from 61, 2 % in 1999 to 70 % in 2011.

One of the specialists in sociology of religion, Georgy Manzanov, thinks that the reason for religious revival lies in disintegration of the USSR, in the system crisis of Russian economy and in poverty, which became characteristic for the most of the population. He says that in religion people are looking for support and consolation (Manzanov, 2012: 134). In reality it would be naïve to explain the situation in the Marxist terms. It is more productive to agree with Berger's desecularization theory and admit that believe in supreme power never left individual minding even during the soviets, though it was not religiosity within a definite religious system. The nowadays situation is similar to that during the soviets: before it was dangerous to speak about one's religiosity, and now it is unprofitable to speak about indifference to religion.

Simultaneously, there are some serious doubts about the hidden religiosity during the

soviets. First of all, let us remember that the first post totalitarian polls on religiosity did not reveal considerable growth of believers. But beginning from early and especially middle of 1990-es the number of atheists has become close to the number of believers in the USSR and continues to reduce. In this concern it would be reasonable to mark that religious worldview could not occupy the positions it had in the traditional society and thus the issue of special interest concerns changing in the social functions of religion. We can hardly say that within late twenty five years the basic world view and compensatory functions of religion have occupied dominant place in public consciousness; however persuasive ideological advertizing of religion and constant appeal to religion as the most important component of culture inevitably construct collective and individual cultural values. Thus it becomes a good form-style to be a believer at least because religion is considered as a component of patriotism in different senses similarly as atheism was a part of soviet patriotism and loyalty.

Religion takes on the function of a marker for social identification at a time when Russia as a whole has been transformed into a rationalized and secularized society. In comparison to a traditional society, religious belonging at present plays mostly a symbolical role in the ascription to a community. Thus, the actual revival of religiousness takes a considerably smaller place in the life of an individual than the nominal belonging to a religious community; when declaring his/her religious creed, a person draws a parallel between the religious and the politico-cultural community.

In the discourse about the Buryat national revival, it is not so much the institutionalized religion, i.e. institutions and practices of Buddhism and Shamanism that matters but the predominant idea of space modeled after symbolical and sacral concepts. It is irrelevant whether these symbolic

representations are traditionally inherent to the religion or newly acquired. Therefore the declaration of one's religious denomination serves as one of the principle signifiers of the *national image* and, secondly, as a means of symbolical communication. In this sense, for an ordinary person identifying him or herself by ethnicity, religion is a primary marker of ethnic boundary in any given sense, from the socio-cultural to the political.

On the other hand, due to the fundamental change in the relationship between the state and religion, religious institutions have undergone an essential modernization. This concerns practically every aspect of their activities, from the narrow confessional, i.e. world-view concepts, ritual, educational and institutional aspects to the participation in politics, everyday life and international affairs.

Thus, religious revival in Buryatia needs to be considered simultaneously on two levels: the revival of religiousness and the substantial change of the social function of religion. There exists a high interdependence between these levels that is established and developed through a constant exchange between the nominally believing public and the leaders, among which, at first sight paradoxically, the most active promulgators of religious revival are not the clergy, but the intellectual and political elite.

Within the last twenty years, Buryat national ideology has undergone a substantial transformation from the inculcation of the concept of *the birthright to the land*, i.e. militant secessionist and irredentist ethnonationalism, to the present-day propaganda to preserve ethnic cultural traditions. Religion is considered to be the most stable and universal element of Buryat culture, and therefore in the public understanding Buddhism and Shamanism have taken a role as religions, which are ethnic space markers as well as national symbols – the *national religion*.

Notably in the last years the discourse on national identity, both in the scientific literature and in the mass-media, has emphasized the national character of Buddhism and Shamanism, despite their obvious distinctions, and has attributed to them a unity of world-outlook and conceptual apparatus, brought about by using the terms and categories of Buddhist religious-philosophical thought. Moreover, in the discourse, Buddhism and Shamanism have become synonyms for the ethno-national culture. The components of this culture, notably the traditional world-outlook, the folklore, the spirituality, and other features of an ostensibly national character (tolerance, responsiveness, hospitality, aspiration to knowledge, etc.) are exclusively explained by religious values.

Despite the decrease in ethno-political mobilization in Buryatia since 2000, religion as a marker of cultural boundary has become one of the main arguments in the discourse about political identity: “the people of Buryatia” in the sense of a fellow-citizenship¹ solely denotes the fact of joint residence in the same territory. Though the peaceful character of this joint residence is very often emphasized, nevertheless the *boundaries* between the ethno-cultural components of such a community appear to be much more important than the *common historical destiny*. Therefore, the newly created community of a “Buryat nation” – an ethno-nation – is capable of producing more emotions and empathy than the well-known and recognized but featureless and amorphous category “people of Buryatia” does.

Buddhism and Shamanism (which in public understanding appear most often as indistinguishable entities) are considered as instruments of ethnic integration and as symbols of ethnic belonging, irrespective of the individual depth of belief and knowledge (if at all existent) of their religious mythologies and dogmas. This conclusion can be drawn from the results of

sociological inquiries in which the respondents (persons with higher education) answered the question “What in your opinion is first of all associated with the concept of our Buryat people?” 44.4 percent of the respondents chose the answer “our religion”, whereas only 22.2 percent chose the answer “the state, in which I live” (Biltrikova, 2001: 75).

However, it is notable that under the present-day condition of religious freedom and the ongoing politicization of religious belonging, the overwhelming majority of Buryats describe themselves as belonging to the Buddhist religious community: while in 1990-es nearly half of the respondents simply believed in God and supernatural forces (Biltrikova, 2001: 74), in 2011 only 1, 1 % chose the answer “I believe in my own God and do not care what is my religious creed” (Manzanov, 2012: 134). Nevertheless, any attempt to reveal what is the essence of personal religiosity shows that religiosity is not Buddhist in strict terms. The cultural interdependence (the coexistence of Buddhism, Shamanism, and Russian Orthodoxy in Buryatia) and dominance of Russian culture inevitably brought to Christianization of ordinary consciousness. Of course, ideas about moral behavior and retribution in Buddhism and Christianity can't be strictly divided; but simultaneously, against universal religious ignorance, the majority of people, especially young, show acquaintance, though weak, to Christian mythology about origin of the universe and people or about soteriology. Hence, in the people's syncretistic religious understanding the very fact of belief is much more important than religious dogma.

Simultaneously, the emphasis on the religious component of culture in the discourse of ethnic identity promoted a growing interest in the rituals: in 2011 the number of those who participated in religious rituals was 69, 8% (Manzanov, 2012: 134). In addition, sociological

research has brought to light that many educated people who call themselves Buddhists, want to obtain a better knowledge about the history of Buddhism and its philosophy. Therefore literature on Buddhism, publications in the mass media, and in an even higher degree the various teachings of Buddhist lamas, especially Tibetan, are very popular among intellectuals. Moreover, Buddhist advanced philosophy and enormous global importance suggest that a person who declares him/herself a Buddhist must possess a high intellectual ability and morality. Nevertheless, the eastern (Transbaikalian) Buryats are confident that Buddhism is their native religion while they consider the western (pre-Baikal) Buryats to be shamanists by birth because historically Buddhism did not occupy prominent position in those territories. Nowadays, however, the majority of Buryats, irrespective of their regional origin, declare themselves Buddhists. Moreover, in recent years the idea that Buddhism is a kind of “genetic accessory” of all Buryats has taken root in public discourse.²

Due to the ethno-national revival, Buddhism has acquired a quality, which was not characteristic to it within the framework of traditional Buryat society: the ability to fulfill a function of wide social modeling and integration. This essentially new quality of the Buddhist religion serves various functions, enforcing a particular ethno-identity understood in various senses. First, Buddhism as the national religion of all Buryats becomes the core of the national idea in its political aspect because the preservation of the national values is identified solely with the Buryat statehood. Secondly, the Buddhist revival is considered as one of the principal components in the return to the historical, political, and cultural memory and roots. Theoretically, this excludes the Buryats from the existing Russian community and attributes them to a different historical and cultural commonness, such as the

All-Mongolian and Central-Asian community. In the most global sense, the territorial space of such a community is called the 'world Buddhist civilization' and the Buryats have obtained a most worthy place in this space as a people living on sacred territory. Thirdly, at the present time when socialist reference points disappeared, Buddhism becomes a moral imperative and the driving force behind the moral education of the Buryats in a spirit of compassion, contemplation and aversion of a bad influence on the part of Russia and the West. One can compare this topic of the Buryat discourse with the ever more extending role of Orthodoxy in the socio-cultural discourse of the Russian ethno-cultural majority in Russia.

In my opinion, for the current period in the history of Buryatia, the Buryat *nationalist* project has already been completed. At the same time, despite the elite's far from complete realization of programs on ethno-cultural revival, ordinary citizens seem to feel a *residual sensation of participation* in ethno-politics, which in their latent form include both ethnic and religious components. The reason for this latent politicization lies in the fact that since Perestroika and down to the most recent past, due to ethnic mobilization, paradigms about ethnic community have shaped Buryat public and individual discourse. Thus, a modern ethnic cosmology was formed, which, being based on the idea of cultural sovereignty, is nothing more than the transformed and depoliticized idea of political sovereignty. Moreover, the political element (political sovereignty in its specific Russian connotation) has by now become a constant, and ethnicity that is still topical, concerns mainly the qualitative filling of the ethnic cultural space.

In Russia and Buryatia lay people seem to agree that modern life forces the religious institutions to adapt to change. Therefore, the participation of the clergy in politics, especially

at the all-Russia level, does not meet with disapproval, on the contrary: the political commitment of clerics is considered evidence to the increasing role and importance of the Buryats in the Russian state. At the same time, however, common Buddhists are not apt to accept religious innovations which obviously contradict the aspiration of higher spirituality. This is also a question of the increasing diversity of the previously indivisible Buddhist community, which led to conflicting public claims of the Buddhist leaders and even to mutual insults. It is obvious to the believers that such behavior has nothing to do with religious belief and dogma but is aimed at the seizure of spiritual territory and the acquisition of the 'flock'. The problem is closely connected with the commercialization of Buddhist practices that in the opinion of parishioners is also incompatible with the true Buddhist belief.³

In my opinion, the revived Buryat Buddhist institutions present the brightest evidence for the successful construction of a Buryat cultural *Ethnosphere* (see for details (Amogolonova, 2008)). They obtain an increasing importance in various aspects of daily spiritual life including both religious and worldly practices. People resort to the authority of the Buddhist clergy when the strategies of district or area development are under discussion, when people face personal and family troubles, and even when artistic shows or sports competitions take place. For example, Buddhist lamas enthusiastically supported the idea of developing tourist-recreational zones in Buryatia, taking into consideration the problems of spiritual keeping and that the cultural traditions are the Republic's brand. At the All-Russia scientific-practical conference in Ulan-Ude which was devoted to the exposition of a "regional brand", the participants concluded that Buddhism and Russian Old Belief must become the trump card of Buryatia.⁴

In this way Buddhism alongside its role as a major spiritual value becomes a part of the image of Buryatia and the Buryats. Buddhism is transformed into a consumer good as rare and exotic bait for tourists. In both world-views, the traditional one and the modern market oriented, we note the construction of an extraordinary – *sacral*, *wonderful* and even *magic* – spatial continuum through symbols of spiritual continuity, thus stressing the spiritual aspects of the Buryat cultural and socio-political history.

Neither now, no in the recent past, despite the active participation of the Buddhist clergy in political activities (membership in political parties and the elective government bodies), in Buryatia there is no explicit politicization of Buddhism in the sense of support for the nationalist (either secessionist or irredentist) propaganda of the elite.⁵ On the contrary, institutionalized Buddhism – the Traditional Buddhist Sangha of Russia – quite well meets the requirements demanded from *the state* religions. These requirements consist, in particular, in a protective function, i.e. the support of legal power and the counteraction to any attempt to change the political and social conditions. In this sense, Hambo Lama Ayusheev's public work is rather characteristic because he personifies a traditional for Buddhist clergy alliance between the Buddhist institutions and the Russian authorities. He actively advertises the indissoluble ties between Buddhist religious leaders and the Russian authorities by means of his personal participation in all possible for his rank councils and committees including the Public Chamber for the President of the Russian Federation.

In this connection it's necessary to say some words about Hambo Lama Ayusheev's activities as the spiritual leader of Buryats. Having become a head of the Buddhist church at young age when he was 32, he immediately showed himself to be a first-rate organizer. Numerous examples of his

participation in republic's and all-Russia affairs both religious and secular are the evidences of his tireless expression of loyalty to the Russian state. Rumors about his desire to proclaim Dmitry Medvedev (when he was the President of Russia) an incarnation of White Tara didn't prove to be true, however had some basis, as Ayusheev repeatedly says that since times of Catherine II, in Buddhist tradition in Buryatia, the tsars have been considered the incarnations of this goddess. In addition, he laid a *bubma* – a sacred ritual vessel – on a place of the subsequent construction of dugan devoted to White Tara, the patroness of Russia's rulers.

But Ayusheev's contribution to the Buryat ethno-national ideology is more interesting. In the field of economics, he gives sheep and foals of the Buryat breed to the villagers in order to restore traditional nomadic stock-breeding and way of life; he supports traditional sports: platform for wrestling and stands have been constructed immediately by the gates of the Ivolga datsan.

His activities are more stunning in the sphere of organizational strengthening of Buddhist church in Russia. He is a tireless and persistent initiator of autocephaly declaring that Buddhism in Buryatia is independent from Tibetan and Mongolian tradition. He says that Buryats received Buddhism from Damba-Dorzhi Zayaev – the first Hambo Lama, and he in his first birth received it from the Buddha Kasyapa and in the second birth – from the Buddha Sakyamuni (Mahachkeev, 2010: 164). So, Ayusheev says, Buryats should not feel themselves as people of second-rate if compared to Tibetans and Mongols because in reality Buryat Buddhism is an independent direction of Northern Buddhism.

In his autocephalic expectations he persistently speaks about necessity to transfer the religious services into the Buryat language because even lamas can not understand old-Tibetan properly and ordinary parishioners would

of course prefer sermons in Buryat. This rule, he says, was first introduced in 1923 and by now it was not cancelled. By the way, he says that he himself began the hard work on translation of the Tibetan texts into Buryat.

One more Ayusheev's special position concerns Lamahood. Laymen are deeply concerned whether lamas must adhere to celibacy and chastity as it is demanded in vinaya rules. One of them – brahmacharya vow – means that monks can not marry and have children. Damba Ayusheev says that monasticism is not a compulsory condition for the lamas. It is of less importance than compassion and help to people in religious and everyday life.

Buryat autocephaly in Damba Ayusheev's ideas has a deep political context as he often says that the institute of Dalai Lamas in the modern conditions will be inevitably *cinocized*, and it is better to take care beforehand that China had no great influence on Russian Buddhists in the future. These ideas that come from the head of the biggest Buddhist community in Russia can be, with some reservations, considered as elements of religious reformation, an immanent condition of modernization. As for the reservations, they are serious enough and concern, first, little interest of the believers in such innovations, especially among Kalmyks and Tuvinians. Another reservation concerns Damba Ayusheev's personality. Being deeply esteemed as Hambo Lama, he is nevertheless skeptically estimated as an official: people dislike his servility towards the state leaders and his ambitiousness. Simultaneously, people approve that he managed to put himself as the Master of the Republic as he seems to be superior to the ruling elite when meeting and talk to them.

What definitely plays for Damba Ayusheev is strengthening of the Traditional Sangha. In reality, the events in the Buddhist church in Buryatia in 1990-es were a reflection of the

situation in Russia: multiplication of Buddhist community and centrifugal tendencies that resulted in numerous autonomous Buddhist communities was similar to the whole political situation in Russia. The vertical of power carried out by Vladimir Putin found its reflection in the Buddhist community: now the Traditional Sangha undoubtedly occupies the strongest positions among Buddhists in Russia and is the only Buddhist organization that is considered by the Russian authorities.

A decisive role in this strengthening was played by the miracle of Hambo Lama Itigelov. Beginning from his Return in 2002, which is inexplicable from a scientific point of view, the Itigelov's phenomenon occupies central position in the Buddhist revival in Buryatia. The obvious lack of a satisfactory rational explanation of the phenomenon endorses the point of view, which claims that an explanation of the phenomenon of Itigelov can be found only and exclusively in the context of Buddhist religion and philosophy. In particular, this idea was expressed by the 14th Dalai Lama: "Many Buddhist monks learn about death whilst dying during meditation and thus release themselves from earthly existence. They can meditate for decades while their bodies do not decay. The meditating lama in Buryatia whose body is imperishable for already 75 years gives an example for this" (quoted from (Chimotdorzhin, 2004:101)).

Hambo Lama Ayusheev sceptically acknowledges the huge stream of people wishing to see and touch Itigelov: "People were not ready for the return of Itigelov... The overwhelming majority of people come to Itigelov to solve their personal problems" (quoted from (Budaev, 2007: 8)). Ayusheev believes that laymen should less aspire to blessing or help and more a change of attitude towards life. However, it is beyond doubt that the miracle of Itigelov's return not only helped to increase the number of pilgrims

to Ivolga *datsan*; in many respects, thanks to the broad discussion of the phenomenon of Itigelov in the mass media, concepts of Buddhist religion and philosophy (*karma*, *moksha*, *samadhi*, etc.) found their way into the vocabulary of everyday language. Those laymen who are interested in philosophical substantiations of the miracle receive explanations from lamas; some of the latter willingly publish papers on this topic in scientific journals.

It is no coincidence that the number of those who avow themselves to be faithful Buddhists has considerably increased since 2002 (for details, see (Amogolonova, 2009: 267–268)). Certainly, we still deal with nominal religiousness and conventional belief; but the desecularization process of the public sphere takes place nonetheless. In this context, it is worth noting that Itigelov's belonging to the Buryat ethnic community promotes strengthening feelings of ethnonational exclusivity and the construction of a Buryat self-image and identity. With full confidence we can say that the phenomenon of Itigelov appears to be a major symbolic momentum of the contemporary Buryat ethnonational revival.

Buddhism that is considered as a principle characteristic of Buryats and the only integrating force (no matter how deep is faith and knowledge about its doctrines) ensures notable role of Buryats in Russia and in the global scale. Even depoliticized, Buryat Ethnosphere is ideologically related to Buryat ethnonationalism – the feedback between the former leaders and present-day social mentality consists in uncritical taking on trust a postulate about common fate and ethnic values. Thus, such a feedback concerns not only national identity and the desecularization in the public sphere. Implicitly it promotes the Buryat national idea, which has essentially faded after Vladimir Putin's coming into power, when thinking ethnationally was out of political fashion. The

exclusiveness of Itigelov's miracle has inspired the Buryat national idea, as it confirms the extraordinary role of Buryats in Russia.

The fact that the *miracle* happened in Buryatia attests to the reality of the Buryat Buddhist revival. Simultaneously, it has become a central momentum in the actualization of the discourse on the improvement of the republic's image and on solutions to its economic problems. This is a practical aspect of the phenomenon of Itigelov.

The Republic of Buryatia is one of the most troubled regions of Russia. Economic problems in industry and agriculture have essentially aggravated the development of the region during the post soviet period. Having submitted a program to develop tourist-recreational zones in the Republic, a few years ago the Buryat legislative and executive powers won a competition for governmental support regarding the creation of large recreational areas around Lake Baikal and in other territories. However, nothing notable resulted out of this: The absence of infrastructure and initiatives as well as the severe climate appear to be insuperable obstacles to solutions of the tourist industry to Buryatia's economic problems. But the mass media continue to discuss the search for a unique and attractive brand for Buryatia. Along with Lake Baikal and various other natural features, intellectuals recommend the consideration of Buryat traditional culture (Buddhism and Shamanism) and the intercultural interaction of the different Transbaikalian ethnocultural groups as a brand.

After Itigelov's 'Return' the discussions have become more brisk and purposeful. The core issue of this discourse has nothing to do with the spiritual aspect of the phenomenon but deals with its practical side, namely "the Buryat miracle" as national property of Russia that is included in the informal rating of the world famous brands. The same topic is actively discussed on the

website of the Forum of the Buryat Nation: “Our republic is now talked about as a land where a real miracle happened” (Forum, 2007). Because of the indefatigable interest in the phenomenon of Itigelov, the inclusion of Itigelov as the main feature in the list of tourist attractions of Buryatia is being formulated as a priority, mainly because other features, including Lake Baikal, do not possess such uniqueness – a criterion essential to the successful tourism that Buryatia aspires. Meanwhile, the information confirmed by lamas that Itigelov renders real help to everyone who comes to him finds ‘convincing proof’ in the mass media.

Conclusion

Neither Itigelov’s miracle nor numerous datsans and lamas can promote overcoming of a deep gap between banal religiosity and true religious belief. The pragmatic attitude to religion certainly wins over desire to understand Buddhist Dharma. People willingly name themselves the Buddhists but their religious practice is mainly just in case – they address to spirits-ancestors or Buddhist deities in hope to receive benefits. A propos, numerous pilgrims to the Imperishable

Body have the same goal – to wheedle benefits for themselves and their family. For this purpose people are ready to give donations. The Dalai Lama when addressing to the Buryat Buddhists said noteworthy words: “we, the representatives of the Buddhist communities do not pay attention to the foundations of the Buddhist Dharma. We simply limit ourselves to praying and cultivating of faith. Thus performing of rituals becomes a simple tribute to the tradition. People come to the monks with donations and that is all. It should not be like this! People need inner values” (Dalai Lama’s Address, 2011: 1).

Returning of religiosity in its traditional form is hardly possible in the modernized society that is nowadays Russia. The question is different: Buddhist religion as any other religion being an important phenomenon of culture possesses tremendous psychological and ethical potentials that could improve the situation of mutual intolerance and mistrust that is so characteristic for modern Russia. The question is whether for this it is necessary to revive the basic worldview functions of religion or this is achievable in the conditions of secularized public consciousness?

¹ The Constitution of the Republic of Buryatia proclaims the existence of the “multinational people of Buryatia that in the course of historical development has united the Buryats, Russians, Evenks, and citizens of other nationalities”.

² For example, the journalist M. Saidukova writes that most Buddhists in Buryatia are Buddhists by birth [Saidukova, 2006: 11].

³ Hambo Lama Damba Ayusheev openly approves of the commercial activity of clerics: “A Datsan is nothing more than an airport, in which the dugans, suburgans and other cult constructions are the alarm beacons. <...> During the service the lamas invite gods to go down on their air liners to them on the land and to render the feasible help to each believer who is taking part in the service. And here the lamas play a role of avia dispatchers. However, the service ends, and the invited visitors-inhabitants of Heaven take their liners and depart for home. <...> In this case, the believers are the sponsors who pay for gasoline” [Rain of Flowers, 2005: 26].

⁴ Shevchenko, 2008: 1.

⁵ Clerics acting outside institutionalized Buddhism sometimes express their negative opinion on the union of the Buryat districts with the Irkutsk and Chita regions that has already become a fact. As the well-known teacher of Buddhist philosophy who became a layman (i.e. he renounced his Buddhist vows and titles including the Geshe title) Jumpa Tinley states: “The integration of the regions will interfere with the spiritual development of Buryatia. The disappearance of the unique and original Buryat culture will become a tragedy not only for Russia but also for the whole world. Before making any decision, the government should be interested not only in the material aspect but also in the spiritual life of people. I am a citizen of Russia; therefore I can allow myself to express my views on the given question” [Uchitel 2005: 1].

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**Буддийское возрождение
в контексте процессов десекуляризации
в современной России
(на материалах Республики Бурятия)**

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В статье исследуются процессы десекуляризации общественного сознания в общем контексте религиозного возрождения в России. Основываясь на функциональном подходе, автор выделяет и анализирует наиболее значимые характеристики религиозности с учетом этнокультурного измерения. Одновременно автор исследует соотношение между возрождением мировоззренческих оснований религии и банальной религиозностью, конструирующей этнокультурную дифференциацию.

Ключевые слова: десекуляризация, буряты, Бурятия, современный буддизм, этническая идентичность, религиозность.

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