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Introduction (1)

The Buddhism of contemporary Russia is a tangled socio-cultural complex. It embraces the three-century-long monastic and lay traditions of the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvinians, as well as those of newer Buddhist convert communities. The present article aims at revealing the five phases of Buddhism's spread and its subsequent consolidation in Russia.

The article starts with the early history of Buddhism in Russia, which is closely connected with the establishment of the Buddhist tradition in Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva (see Section I).

Russia's first contact with Buddhist religion and culture came in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries. This was especially true for Saint Petersburg, the capital of the powerful empire at that time. In the

time of Peter the Great and Empress Elizabeth Petrovna, the establishment of solid diplomatic and commercial ties between Russia and a number of Far Eastern and Central Asian countries led to the penetration of Buddhist culture in Saint Petersburg.

Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva became an integral part of the Russian Empire, which generated the original research area of Buddhist Studies within the Russian academic fields. The first Oriental Studies center was set up in Saint Petersburg, to study the Buddhist tradition of the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvinians and to translate Buddhist canonical texts. The publication of materials gathered during field research trips to Tibet and Mongolia and translations of Buddhist literary texts aroused public interest in this religious belief. On top of it all, they provided the textual basis that was necessary for Buddhism to spread further, and to penetrate into Russia (see Section II).

The beginning of the twentieth century marked the establishment of a Buddhist monastery in Saint Petersburg, which became the Buddhist outpost of the western part of Russia. Buddhist penetration into the northern capital of Russia took a long time, and was both dramatic and fascinating. Many factors contributed to Buddhism's spread in the northern capital of Russia, leading to the construction of the Buddhist temple in Saint Petersburg in 1913 (Section III).

The dramatic history of the *datsan* mirrors Russian culture and politics of the past: the relationship between Russia and Tibet, Buddhist persecution during the Soviet times, the birth of Buddhist covert communities in the early 1990s, and so forth. In the late twentieth century Russia witnessed the appearance of Buddhist convert communities as a new form of Buddhism. These communities were set up by Europeans and Buddhist teachers from India and Nepal. The

intense religious and social activity of these groups integrated issues characteristic of the Tibetan Diaspora into the socio-cultural environment of Saint Petersburg (see Section IV).

I. The Early History of Buddhism in Russia

Although the ethnic, non-literate culture and history of the Buryats, Tuvinians, and Kalmyks is distinct, the evolution of their social and political organization as well as their written language has much in common.⁽²⁾ This can be primarily traced to the fact that all three ethnic groups appealed to a Tibeto-Mongolian form of Buddhism. Moreover, the Buryat and Kalmyk acquisition of national territory, and the full establishment of an ethnocultural tradition and pattern of political administration was significantly predetermined by joining the Russian Empire.

The Buryat-Mongolian Buddhist region

Northern Mongolian tribes that fell under control of the Russians were the core of the Buryat ethos formed in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. According to the Nerchinski Peace Treaty concluded between China and Russia in 1698, Transbaikalia was annexed to Russia. The Buryats who inhabited this land were granted Russian citizenship, and were not forced to convert to Russian Orthodox Christianity. Orthodox missionaries baptized only those who volunteered to do so.⁽³⁾

The Tuvinian Buddhist region

The people who were to become known as the Tuvinians trace their origin to the Turkics living in the territory of the Central Asian states in the sixth to ninth centuries, namely Turkic and Eastern Turkic *kaganats* as well as Kirghiz and Uigurs states. In the thirteenth to fourteenth

centuries Turkic, Ket, and Samodyi tribes, the ancestors of modern Turkics, were "Mongolianized" both culturally and ethnically. Tuva of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, then called Tandu-Uryankhai, was under Mongolian control. This greatly contributed to the wide propagation and practice of Buddhism among the Tuvinians. When the Dzyngarian *khanate* suffered defeat in 1757, it was the Manchu rulers who took control over Tandu — Uryankhai. This resulted in more close contact with Buddhist schools both in Mongolia and Tibet, constituent parts of the Chinese Empire. When the Manchu Empire collapsed in 1911, Tuvinian Buddhist clergy and nobility appealed to the Russians for protection. In 1914 the Russian protectorate was established over Tuva, which was given the new name of Uryankhaisky Krai. It is important to emphasize the fact that the Tsarist government was tolerant of the religious beliefs of the Tuvinians. So, it did not stand in the way when new Buddhist temples and monasteries were built in the Uryankhaisky Krai, and even allowed Russian architects, artists and craftsmen to take part in their construction.⁽⁴⁾

The Kalmyk Buddhist region

The first official Russian records about the Kalmyks date back to much earlier times.⁽⁵⁾ The Decree was issued by Ivan IV, the Terrible in 1574, and granted the *Stroganovs*, the merchants, the right of free trade with the population of Siberia, and referred to the Kalmyks as a nationally recognized ethnic group. Vasily Shuysky, the Tsar of All Russia, received the ambassadors of the Kalmyk princes in Moscow in 1608. He allowed the Kalmyks to wander in the uninhabited and remote Russian steppes. Consequently, the year 1609 is considered the year of the Kalmyk integration into Russia. In the late seventeenth century the Kalmyk *khanate*, a new administrative district, was formed within Russia. The Kalmyk *khanate* existed until 1771. In the middle of the

seventeenth century the birth of the Kalmyk written language stimulated the translation and spread of Buddhist canonical texts of Indian and Tibetan Buddhist literary heritage. Although the Tsarist government did not intervene in the religious life of the Kalmyks, it encouraged their conversion to Russian Orthodox Christianity in every possible way. Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, Russia pursued a new policy regarding the areas inhabited by the Kalmyks. It aimed at restricting Kalmyk independence in order to take over these lands. In 1771 the Kalmyk *khanate* was liquidated as an administrative district, thus driving most of the Kalmyks to Dzungaria. In the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries the Russian government restructured the political administration of the Kalmyks living on its territory. A new position, called "Administrator-Lama of the Kalmyks," was created within the Ministry of State Property. Officials appointed to this post administered the lands inhabited by the Kalmyks. As was the case with the Buryats and Tuvinians, the rights of the Buddhist clergy were preserved, but it was now within the Astrkhan Governor General's responsibility to appoint the Kalmyk's religious leader. The Buddhist clergy would submit candidates to fill the position and the candidate who won the election was later approved by Senate Decree after he was introduced to the Ministry of Internal Affairs.⁽⁶⁾

Socio-political peculiarities of the Buddhist tradition of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva

The ethnic groups mentioned above, the Buryats, Tuvinians, and Kalmyks, submerged under Russian culture, all propagated Buddhism in its Tibeto-Mongolian form. The Dalai Lama, the theocratic ruler of Tibet and leader of the Gelugpa (a Tibetan Buddhism school), was recognized as the religious Head. In this context it should be emphasized that further Buddhist spread and intensive propagation among the Buryats,

Tuvinians, and Kalmyks was taking place in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, at the time when the Gelugpa school achieved its acknowledged and unchallenged supremacy in Tibet.

Having come to political power in Tibet in the seventeenth century, the Gelugpa ideologists ousted the rest of the Tibetan Buddhist traditions into the remote areas of the country in an attempt to control their opponents and minimize the rivals' missionary activities both throughout Tibet and in other countries, in every possible way. It was the Gelugpa masters who introduced Buddhism into Mongolia. The Mongols then adopted the theocratic method of state administration. The Buryats, Tuvinians and Kalmyks came to Buddhism through Mongolian and Tibetan religious teachers. The canonic texts in Tibetan and Mongolian were translated into the Buryat, Tuvinian, and Kalmyk languages. The religious masters of Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva, have always been educated in the Gelugpa monasteries of Tibet, supervised by the Dalai Lama's people. [\(7\)](#)

The Russian Empire expanding into Asia resulted in the growth of Buddhist followers who treated the Dalai Lama as their religious leader. The Tsarist government thought this situation to be fraught with the danger of separatism, fearing that these newly acquired lands would want to separate from Russia. Trying to minimize this threat, the Tsarist government sought ways of incorporating the Buddhist territories into the All-Russian historical and cultural process. In fact, Russia was the first European country to grant Buddhism the status of state religion for the peoples inhabiting its far-off territories. The Decree issued by Empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1741 proclaimed Buddhism an officially accepted religious belief within Russia, but at the same time gave predominance to Russian Orthodoxy. [\(8\)](#)

The Buddhist areas of Russia were independent from the Dalai Lama's political and intellectual influence. This resulted in a new social and religious status for the Head of these territories. In 1764 the Tsarist government opened the position of High Religious and Secular Leader of the Buddhist ethnic minorities. The position acquired the name of Bandido Chambo bLama, which corresponded to the Tibetan Pandita mkhanpo blama. Up until 1917 the Tsarist government appointed candidates to fill this position. All the candidates were from Buryat High Lama-Tulkus.

Thus, the peculiarity of Buddhism's spread in Russia was predetermined by the ethno-religious tradition of the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvinians who practiced it over the centuries. Buddhism acquired the legal status as the local religion of the ethnic minority groups in 1905.

II. Saint Petersburg as a Center of Buddhist Research in Russia

Saint Petersburg became one of the largest centers of Buddhist scientific research in the nineteenth century. Although the first Russian researchers of Buddhism did not follow this Oriental religious path, they took a keen and deep interest in it. Their published works and educational activities acquainted Russian intellectuals with Buddhism. According to contemporary Buddhist Studies, the spread of Buddhism as a unique religious and ideological system is primarily determined by the availability of translated fundamental doctrines. From the very spring of Buddhist studies in Russia, home Orientalists majoring in Buddhism, starting with Saint Petersburg scholars, have paid particular attention to the translation of major Buddhist texts and their adequate interpretation. Today scientific translations, which are also called academic translations, are thought to be the most reliable source of knowledge and information about Buddhism that is available for Russian lay readers. In

this context it is most appropriate to say that the milestones of Russian Buddhist Studies coincide with the steps Russia has made in getting acquainted with this religion.

The birth of Buddhist Studies

Russian Buddhology as an independent branch of applied Oriental Studies was formed in the first half of the nineteenth century to contribute to the development of the Tsarist policy to be later pursued in Central Asia. The Asian peoples who joined the Russian Empire (meaning the Buryats and Kalmyks back in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, and Tuvinians in the early twentieth century) followed Buddhism in its Tibeto-Mongolian form. Thus it is no wonder that the first scholars who launched Buddhist Studies majored in Tibetan and Mongolian. Among the most prominent Buddhist scholars, we can mention Isaac Y. Schmidt (Yakov I. Schmidt) (1779-1847) who is one of the founders of Mongolian and Tibetan studies in Russia, and Osip M. Kovalevsky (1807-1878) who majored in Mongolian studies and is widely known for his fundamental work *Buddhist Cosmology* (1837).⁽⁹⁾

Kazan University was historically one of the Russian centers that focused on Buddhist and Oriental Studies. O. M. Kovalevskyi, a Mongolianist, and V. P. Vasiliev, a Chinologist, were deeply involved in Buddhist studies and were on the teaching staff of its Oriental Studies Department. In 1854 the Oriental Studies Department of Kazan University moved to Saint Petersburg. A year later in 1855 the Oriental Studies Department was set up within Saint Petersburg State University. The Asian Museum of the Russian Academy of Sciences, which was founded in 1816, served as another center of Oriental Studies in Saint Petersburg. Today it is the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Oriental Studies Institute with the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Stcherbatsky's Buddhology group

Russian Orientalists did a good job collecting research data on Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva, Tibet, and Mongolia. Their research expeditions were arranged by the Russian Geographic Society and sponsored by the Tsarist government. The latter did not do it for the sake of science, but to provide a basis for the further development of appropriate geopolitical doctrines.

The researchers of Buddhism did not restrict their activities to studying the classical Buddhist literary heritage of India. Minaev and his disciples S. F. Oldenburg and F. I. Stcherbatsky considered it obligatory for any person involved in Buddhist studies, no matter what his or her field was, to be well acquainted with the living Buddhist tradition existing in Central, Eastern, and Southern Asia. Saint Petersburg Buddhist scholars have been sticking to this approach for generations.

Sergey Fyodorovich Oldenburg (1863-1934) was an Indianist just like his teacher Minaev. His field of study lay within popular Buddhist literary texts and iconography. Oldenburg and Stcherbatsky set up a series of books called *Buddhist Library* (Bibliotheca Buddhica), which aimed at publishing original Buddhist texts, monographs and multi-author books devoted to Buddhism. At present, the series numbers thirty-seven volumes.

Oldenburg was one of the organizers of the first Buddhist exhibition held in the Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg in 1919. The exhibition aimed at acquainting visitors with the Buddhist doctrine, as well as its art and cultic artifacts on loan from Saint Petersburg museums. The exhibition could be classified as the first Buddhism educational event due to the lectures given by such outstanding Russian Buddhist scholars as F. I. Stcherbatsky, O.O. Rosenberg, B. Y. Bladimirtsov, and S. F.

Oldenburg.

Fyodor Ippolitovich Stcherbatsky (1866-1942) was the founder of the Saint Petersburg Buddhist Studies tradition. His major field of study was Buddhist Philosophy, especially logic and epistemology. His first book of a significant importance, *Epistemology and Logic as They are Viewed by Succeeding Buddhists* (vol.1, 1903; vol. 2, 1909) deals with the translation of a Buddhist treatise on logic and its subsequent commentary. *The Core Concept of Buddhism and the Meaning of Dharma* (1923), *The Concept of Buddhist Nirvana* (1927) and *Buddhist Logic* (1930-1932) soon followed. They were published in English and made their author, along with Russian Buddhist Studies, famous worldwide. Russia held this reputation for years and guided the European science.

Fyodor Stcherbatsky⁽¹⁰⁾ was not only a distinguished scientist but an outstanding teacher as well. He trained and educated a number of highly qualified Indianists, Buddhologists and Tibetan scholars. O. O. Rosenberg, Y. Y. Obermiller, A. I. Vostrikov, and B. B. Baradiyn are only a few famous names among his most advanced students. Stcherbatsky's approach was to combine academic and applied scientific achievements within the framework of Russian Buddhist Studies. Moreover, he sincerely believed that research of the Indian and Buddhist traditions provided a solid basis for coming to terms with those Buddhist forms that sprang up later and diffused among the Buryats and Kalmyks. He took a pro-active part in arranging the expedition to Tibet and Mongolia for G. Ts. Tsybikov and B. B. Baradiyn.

The second half of the nineteenth century is marked by intense field research in the areas of Buddhism's traditional spread.⁽¹¹⁾ Aleksei Matveevich Pozdneev (1851-1920) was among the pioneer Buddhist

scholars to conduct applied Buddhist Studies. He had broad background knowledge in regional geography and Buddhism, and spoke Mongolian and Tibetan fluently. He went on several long trips to the areas of the diffusion of Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism. Pozdneev's expeditions always focused on, among other things, acquiring information on the social, political, and economic situation of the Buddhist areas of the Russian Empire and its neighboring countries. His logs gave rise to several books that were the first reliable source of precious information on Buddhism in Mongolia in the nineteenth century.

Gombodzab Tsebekovich Tsybikov (1873-1930) is also widely known for his field research of Buddhism. His trip to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, lasted from 1899 to 1902. At that time any foreigner was denied of the right of entry into Tibet unless he or she was a Buddhist follower and Asian native. Tsybikov managed to get into the country under the pretext of being a Buddhist pilgrim. Actually it was far from being a personal trip, but was actually a well-planned scientific expedition under the auspices of the Russian Geographical Society. In fact, it was the idea of Pozdneev, one of Tsybikov's teachers, to send him to Tibet as a pilgrim. Upon his return to Russia, Gombodzab Tsybikov reported back to the Geographical Society with general information on Tibet's geography, climate, ethnography, economics patterns, state administration, and religion. While being on this trip, Tsybikov kept a log that later grew into a book entitled: *A Buddha Pilgrim Visiting Tibetan Shrines* (1919).

Badzar Baradievich Baradiyn (1878-1937), a prominent Buddhist scholar and field researcher, made an outstanding contribution to the research of Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and Mongolia. His professors at Saint-Petersburg State University were academics S. F. Oldenburg and F. I. Stcherbatsky. Baradiyn went to the Labran Buddhist monastery,

one of the three largest Gelugpa educational centers in the north of Tibet (the present-day territory of Gansu province, China). His work *A Trip to Labran* (1908) is based on various data of the monks' life in Labran, obtained during his trip. One of Baradiyn's key works is *Buddhist Monasteries* (1926), which contains valuable information on Buddhist monasteries in Buryatia, Mongolia, and Tibet.

Otton Ottonovich Rosenberg, Stcherbatsky's most devoted disciple and associate (1888- 1919), mainly focused on studying Indian Buddhist philosophical texts (*Abhidharmakosha* by Vasubandhu) and their interpretation in China and Japan. In 1912 to 1916 Rosenberg went to Japan on a research trip to observe Buddhism as it was in the country at that time. He also wanted to get direct access to original Buddhist philosophical texts. Unfortunately, he did not live long, leaving just a few works behind, his monograph *Problems of Buddhist Philosophy* (1918) being of paramount importance. This work and some of his brief articles set forth a number of basic methodological statements that greatly predetermined the further development of Buddhist studies in Russia.

Yevgeny Yevgenievich Obermiller (1901-1935) combined the study of Tibetan Buddhist written records with the field research of Buddhist monasteries (*datsans*) in Buryatia in 1926-1927. Obermiller translated *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, a historiographic text by the distinguished Tibetan historian Budon Rinchendub (fourteenth century), into English and commented on its historical, cultural, and religious aspects.

Along with the translation of Buddhist canonical texts and their subsequent interpretation, the Saint Petersburg Buddhologists played a pro-active role in setting-up the *datsan*, a Buddhist research center (see

Section III).

Buddhist Studies in Soviet times

After the October Revolution of 1917 Buddhist Studies went on in Saint Petersburg, despite such difficulties as a lack of up-to-date scientific information and literature, and problems maintaining contact with foreign scientists. F. I. Stcherbatsky and S. F. Oldenburg, along with many other prominent Oriental Studies scholars, chose not to leave Russia both in the post-revolutionary years and during the Civil war. Although the Russian scholars and scientists faced a myriad of difficulties, they did continue their research and teaching. New and unprecedented projects sprang up. The Buddhist Exhibition of 1919 is an example of such an unexpected event.

The years that followed the October Revolution abounded in Buddhist field research. For instance, Stcherbatsky's students Y. Y. Obermiller, A. I. Vostrikov, M. I. Tubyansky, and B. V. Semichov went to Transbaikalia to do field research on the living Buddhist tradition.

In 1927 the Institute of Buddhist Culture (INBUC) was set up within the Soviet Academy of Sciences, on the initiative of Stcherbatsky, Oldenburg, and Tubyansky. Young and promising scientists Y. Y. Obermiller, A. I. Vostrikov, B. V. Semichov, B. A. Vasiliev, and E. N. Kozeroovskaya, worked there, majoring in the study of Sanskrit, Tibet, Mongolia, and China. INBUC saw its core activities as conducting studies of Buddhist culture and its forms, tracing their historical evolution, and doing research on the living Buddhist cultures that settled in various Asian countries. The structural reorganization of Oriental Studies bodies within the Soviet Academy of Sciences took place in 1930. As a result, the Asian Museum, the Institute of Buddhist Culture and the Department of Turkish Studies merged together to set up the

Institute of Oriental Studies within the USSR Academy of Sciences. Stcherbatsky was the head of the Indian and Tibetan Studies Department of the newly established institute.

The Bibliotheca Buddhica series was published until 1936. The year 1936 saw the last issue in the series, number thirty, containing the original Sanskrit treatise *Madhyanta-Vibhanga* submitted by Stcherbatsky. The series resumed publication twenty-five years later.

The Russian scholars were able to conduct Buddhist studies as original and independent research in 1930. The Russian Academy of Sciences was guided by the pre-revolutionary Regulation of 1836 for several decades after the October Revolution of 1917. The 1836 Regulation did not impose any ideological restrictions on the research area and subjects. In 1930 a new Regulation was adopted by the Russian Academy of Sciences, one that banned any religious research. Nevertheless, the Indio-Tibetan Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies was privately engaged in Buddhist studies for seven more years. The latter were non-scheduled events with the Department.

In the late 1930s the activities of the Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) Buddhist Studies school glimmered only slightly. Many of Stcherbatsky's students were subject to repression and executed. Academician Sherbatksy was persecuted on the basis of his being an idealist Neo-Kantian. He was accused of disseminating reactionary ideas and propagating "*Indian popovshchina*" (retaining the services of priests). His last works were published exclusively in English. When the Great Patriotic War of 1941 started in Russia, Stcherbatsky, along with other scientists, were evacuated to Borovoy, a settlement in the north of Kazakhstan. He died there on March 18, 1942, having survived nearly all his students and followers.

The 1960s Buddhist Studies revival is associated with such names as Y. N. Roerich([12](#)), O. F. Volkova, L. E. Myall, A. M. Pyatigorsky, and B. D. Dandaron.[\(13\)](#) This Buddhist Studies Renaissance period was relatively short and came to its end in the early 1970s. Dandaron, who had been subject to repression in Stalin's epoch, was arrested in 1972 for the study and propagation of Buddhism. He was accused of setting up a sect, sentenced to imprisonment, and died in prison. Many Buddhist Studies scholars who maintained close relations with him and who witnessed for the defense in court were also prosecuted. The Soviet government adopted an attitude of mistrust toward Buddhist Studies and started to suspect people involved in it of crime. As a result some Buddhist Studies scholars were denied the right to conduct scientific research and some of them emigrated from the country, like A. M. Pyatigorsky and A. Y. Shurkin.

Although certain ideological limitations existed with regard to proper Buddhist Studies, the following years saw the further evolution of Oriental Studies in terms of the historical, social scientific, philological, and cultural aspects connected with Buddhist research in one way or another. Here are only some of the Orientalists who provided insights into Buddhist issues: G. M. Bongard-Levin, who dealt with spiritual world of ancient India; L. N. Menshikov, who focused on Buddhist texts (*Dunjhyana*) and Chinese Buddhist literary texts (*Byanven* genre); M. I. Vorobieva-Decyatovskaya, who covered Buddhist texts in Sanskrit available in Central Asia; I. S. Gurevich, who studied Yujlu, the language of Chan; V. I. Kornev, who described Buddhism and public life in the countries of South-Eastern Asia; V. N. Goreglyad, who was mainly concerned with Buddhism and Japanese literature; A. S. Martunov, who did research on the role of and interaction between society, the state, and Buddhism in China and the Far East; and E. V. Zavadskaya, who studied the impact of the Chan (Zen) tradition on

European culture in the twentieth century. A new scientific center was established at that time. It was the Buddhist Studies Department within the Institute of Social Sciences, the Buryat branch of the Siberian division of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. This Department focused mainly on the study of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism. Such scholars as N. V. Abaev, L. E. Yangutov, S. Y. Lemekhov, and S.P. Nesterkin worked here.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the Russian government switched to the new socio-political doctrine, it brought about the revival of Buddhist Studies in Saint Petersburg. The Buddhist Studies boom of the 1980s and 1990s is associated with the following names: A. N. Ignatovich, who studied the history of Buddhism in Japan; V. N. Androsov, who dealt with Nagarjuna doctrine; V. G. Lusenko, who focused on early Pali Buddhism; A. V. Parebok, who also covered Pali Buddhism; A. M. Kabanov, who was interested in Zen and traditional Japanese literary texts; S. D. Serebryany, who dealt with Indian religious and philosophical texts and Mahayana Sutras; E. A. Torchinov, whose major concern was Chinese Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy; and M. E. Yarmakov, who studied Buddhist hagiography in China and the Chinese Buddhism of the common people.

The late 1980s saw the formation of a task group headed by V. I. Rudoy, which in 1992 achieved the status of a Buddhist Studies task group within the Saint-Petersburg division of the Oriental Studies Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences. At present, it is made up of V. I. Rudoy (the Head of the group), E. P. Ostrovskaya, and T. V. Ermakova. Rudoy was the first to start a Buddhist Studies tradition guided by its own methodological principles and based on a distinct strategy of conducting scientific research over decades. One of the group's core scientific activities is to translate and interpret *Abhidharmakosha*, a basic religious

and philosophical treatise of the Indian Buddhist tradition.

Today, Russian Buddhist Studies, in Saint Petersburg in particular, is going through another revival.

III. The Saint Petersburg Buddhist Monastery⁽¹⁵⁾

The establishment of Buddhism as a traditional religious belief of Russia is closely connected with the construction of the first European Buddhist *datsan*⁽¹⁶⁾ in Saint Petersburg. The history of the Saint-Petersburg Buddhist shrine is very dramatic and intriguing, mostly due to the fact that the Russian Empire had always treated Buddhism as a religious belief of ethnic minority groups. Orthodox Tsarist Russia was rather flexible towards peoples who practiced other religions (like Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism) in the sense that it did not hamper the evolution of their religions and cultures. At the same time Russian Empire ideology was always rooted in Orthodox Christianity.

The Saint Petersburg Buddhist community at the beginning of the twentieth century

The construction of the Buddhist *datsan* in Saint Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire until 1917, was brought about by particular events and circumstances. In the early twentieth century a large Buddhist ethnic community was established in Saint Petersburg, which numbered hundreds of people. The establishment of this Buddhist community went through several phases. Thus, in 1869 there was only one Buddhist registered; a year later in 1897 there were 75 Buddhists; and in 1910 there were 184 Buddhists. The core of the community was made up of Buryat and Kalmyk people, natives of the traditional Buddhist territories of the Empire, namely the Transbaikalia, Astrakhan, and Stavropol provinces. They came from various social strata: college

students, craftsmen, merchants, low ranks of the Cossak military units quartered in Saint-Petersburg, and so on.

In the early twentieth century Kalmyk princes of the Tundutovs' and Tumens' clans settled in the capital. The Tundutovs took an active part in the social life of the city. The Russian nobles, public and political figures, attended their fashionable, regularly held gatherings. There is some evidence that Saint Petersburg Buryats and Kalmyks had an opportunity to repeatedly petition the Emperor for permission to build a Buddhist temple, thanks to the patronage of the Tundutovs' acquaintances.

The Orientalists majoring in Buddhism and Buddhist culture played a pro-active role in settling the issue. It should be noted, however, that they did not propagate Buddhism themselves. Their primary concern was to set up a center of Indian and Tibetan Spirituality and Culture within the *datsan*, in order to have the opportunity to study and translate Buddhist texts into Russian, with the direct help of Buddhist written record holders, i.e., ordained religious masters.

The thirteenth Dalai Lama Thubden Gyatso (1876-1933) and Agvan Lobsan Dorzhiev (1854-1938), a Russian subject and the Dalai Lama's representative in Russia, demonstrated their direct and immediate initiative to establish a Buddhist monastery in Saint Petersburg. Dorzhiev managed to get imperial approval to build the *datsan* and succeeded in raising the funds to employ the best architects and craftsmen. Hence, it is no wonder that even today in the twenty-first century, the Saint-Petersburg shrine is famous worldwide for its beauty and originality.

Agvan Dorzhiev

Being a political leader, scholar and propagator of Buddhism, Agvan Dorzhiev still mesmerizes Buddhists and researchers as one of the most outstanding political and cultural leaders of Tibetan Buddhism. Much of his life still remains unknown to researchers, however this paper covers only those biographical details that highlight his contribution to the establishment of the Buddhist *datsan* in Saint Petersburg. A Khory Buryat by origin, at the age of nineteen he left his homeland for Tibet to study in Drepung, one of the largest of the Gelugpa monasteries. Having successfully completed the traditional course of religious studies, he began the academic Buddhist degree of *Lharampa*. He continued his studies to become *Tsanid-Hambo*, or "Master of Buddhist Philosophy." Dorzhiev's talents and profound knowledge won him a good reputation and the respect of Tibet religious scholars. Soon he joined the staff of the Dalai Lama's mentors. He was with the Dalai Lama for decades without break when he finally became one of the most distinguished religious and political figures of Tibet. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries England laid its military claim on Tibet. The Tibetan religious and political administration was actively seeking ways of rescuing the country from becoming a British colony. By that time Dorzhiev had been appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs under the administration of the Dalai Lama and the tough task of establishing diplomatic ties with Russia fell to him.

It was Dorzhiev who came up with the idea of establishing friendly ties with Russia, and treating it as a potential protector of the Buddhist state. In 1898 Dorzhiev, acting as an official representative of the Dalai Lama, passed the Tibet ruler's appeal to Nicholas II to establish diplomatic relations and render assistance in the struggle against the military aggressiveness of England and China. This appeal happened to parallel the policy Russia was pursuing toward the eastern countries. Nevertheless, the negotiations of 1901, held in Peterhoff Palace between

Nicholas II, the Tsar of All Russians, and the Tibetan delegation headed by Dorzhiev did yield some results toward this end. In response to the Dalai Lama's official appeal and generous gifts, the Russian monarch promised Tibet his protection and expressed the desire to establish a solid, friendly relationship between the countries. He entrusted Dorzhiev with the official Russian reply and with gifts for the Dalai Lama.

The Tibetan delegation returned to their homeland, except for Dorzhiev, who stayed in Saint Petersburg to act as an official diplomatic representative of Tibet. He did his best to strengthen and cement the ties between Tibet and Russia. His major concern was to acquaint Russian intellectuals and educated people with Buddhism and Buddhist culture, and to diffuse accurate knowledge about Buddhist teachings among them. This allowed him to raise more funds to build new monasteries in Buryatia and Kalmykia, which would later serve as religious educational centers.

Since Dorzhiev was appointed the Tibetan diplomatic representative to Russia, he was persistently trying to promote the establishment of a Buddhist temple in the capital of the Russian Empire. He became acquainted with Saint-Petersburg Orientalists, and world-renowned Buddhist, Tibetan, and Mongolian Studies scholars and artists like V. V. Radlov, S. F. Oldenburg, F. I. Stcherbatsky, H. K. Roerich, V. L. Kotovich, and A. D. Rudnev, among others. Having enlisted support and received backing, Dorzhiev entered into negotiations with Nicholas II to discuss the location and architecture of the proposed temple.

In 1903 Dorzhiev went back to Tibet to report on his activities both in Saint Petersburg and in the Buddhist territories of the Russian Empire. By that time Tibet's situation in the world arena had been considerably aggravated. Having gained victory in the Anglo-Boer war in the south of

Africa, and having entered into alliance with Japan against Russia, England launched a military invasion in Tibet. The Dalai Lama had to leave the country for Mongolia, where he sought Russia's assistance through the mediation of Dorzhiev, his diplomatic representative to Russia.

Through the years that followed (1905-1907) Dorzhiev raised funds to build the Buddhist *datsan* in Saint Petersburg, which was then viewed as a would-be residence of the Tibet theocratic ruler in Russia. Having received imperial approval, Dorzhiev tried to spark the interest of Saint Petersburg and European scholars and artists in this undertaking.

However, the Russian Orthodox Church was strongly against the establishment of the Buddhist *datsan* in the capital of Russia. These protests gave rise to a wave of church services and public prayers against the "pagans" throughout the country, in Kiev, Kazan, Irkutsk, and so forth. The Theological Department was flooded with petitions to repeal the approval to build the *datsan*. The anti-Buddhist drive greatly slowed down construction of the *datsan*, and led to the revision of the initial construction plan in order to minimize Buddhist symbolism on the temple fronts.

Nevertheless, despite all the difficulties, resistance, and counteraction, February 21, 1913 witnessed the first service held in the *datsan*. It was also the year the Romanovs celebrated the 300 year anniversary of their rule. Construction of the *datsan* was fully completed in 1914 and 1915. Nicholas II confirmed the arrival that very year of a staff of clergy and nine lamas. Three of them came from Tranzbaikalia, four from Astrakhan province, and two from Stavropol province.

The second large Buddhist service was held on June 9, 1914 for the consecration of two Thai statues that were solemnly brought into the

datsan. One of the statues was a gilded copper figure of the Sitting Buddha Shakyamuni, a gift from the King of Siam, Rama VI, Prince Vajiravuda. The other was a molded bronze figure of the Standing Buddha Maitreya, stuffed with plaster for sturdiness. It was a gift from G. A. Planson, from the Russian Council in Bangkok.

August 10, 1915 saw the consecration of the *datsan*. The *datsan* was given the name of Gunzechoinei, or "The Source of the Buddha's Religious Teaching that Has Deep Compassion for All Beings."

Construction of the Buddhist datsan in Saint Petersburg

The construction of this imposing building was rather fascinating. Once the architectural design of the *datsan* was underway, Dorzhiev suggested taking a classical Tibetan cathedral temple as its pattern. The temple was meant to be a place for holding Buddhist services for Buryat, Kalmyk, and Tuvian laity now residing in the city, and an educational center for would-be monks.

Dorzhiev chose the site of the future *datsan*, guided by the Buddhist construction canon. Upon the Emperor's approval he bought a plot of land on the outskirts of the city, on the northern bank of the Greater Nevka in Staraya Derevnaya, at the corner of Blagoveshenskaya *ulitsa* (now Primorsky Prospect-Maritime Avenue) and Lipovaya Alley. This site met all the requirements of the Buddhist construction canon. The building would be located on the northern bank of the river, which served as a natural boundary between the "lay" part of the city and the sacred territory of the *datsan*. The woods surrounded the *datsan* on the south, which more or less met the Buddhist requirement that the southern walls of the *datsan* be protected by the mountains.

Since Dorzhiev's plans were to establish a Buddhist educational center

(*datsan*) for future monks, the initial plan was to build a two-story temple and a residential building next to it for disciples to live. The construction committee consisted of academicians V. V. Radlov, F. I. Stcherbatsky, S. F. Oldenburg; Architect and Expert in the field of Civil Engineering G. V. Baranovsky; Prince E. E. Uhtomsky, a high Emperor official; artists N. K. Roerich and V. P. Schneider; Orientalists V. L. Kotovich and A. D. Rudnev, both of whom taught at the Saint Petersburg State University.

The Saint Petersburg *datsan* was consistent with other Tibetan temples in consisting of two parts: southern and northern. Its southern part, or the temple pivot premises, was the place for the monks to gather and hold religious services (*khurals*). It was a spacious room divided by the columns into three naves. Light came from a glazed opening in the roof to fall on the eight-petaled lotus made of tiles on the temple floor. Such internal arrangements within the temple aimed to copy Tibetan and Buddhist symbolism. The light that traditionally symbolized Knowledge and Enlightenment was to stream down from the skies onto the Earth to fill the lotus, a symbol of human consciousness on its way to Enlightenment. It was to project in practitioners' minds an image of the attainment of religious essence.

The massive altar occupied a deep niche and faced the entrance of the ceremonial room. The three meter tall Buddha statue was placed in the heart of the altar. Small religious statues brought from Tibetan, Chinese, and Mongolian sanctuaries occupied glass cases to the Buddha's left and right.

The throne for the temple's religious Head (abbot) to sit on was placed right in front of the altar. According to tradition, the temple superior should sit on a dais, like the Buddha among his disciples, while services

are being held and sermons are being delivered. The height of the throne, draped with the most exquisite and soft hand-made furnishings, indicated that the temple superior, or any other highly educated monk, was a representative of those religiously high ranking individuals solely responsible for the preservation of the Buddhist written tradition and its passing over from one generation to another.

In the central part of the ceremonial room two rows of low benches lined the columns. There were tables piled with sacred texts and ceremonial things. At religious services ritual objects such as *vadhras* (bronze or silver symbolic plates picturing ancient sacred arms), bells, and seashells serving as sacred brass instruments were used. Some of these ceremonial articles were ordered by Dorzhiev from Peking and Dolon Nura in Mongolia. Others were made in the shop run by the Emperor's jeweler Nicholas Linden in Saint Petersburg.

Thankas (Buddhist iconographic items) and religious flags that symbolize victory over greed, ignorance, and the evil of death in the Buddhist doctrine, were placed in the altar niche and among the columns.

The central part of the second floor, located above the ceremonial room, was tiled with glass and circled with small wood-partitioned cells. The cells were designed for the religious masters permanently residing at the temple and for visiting monks to stay in. They also stored Buddhist texts, sacerdotal robes, *thankas*, musical instruments, and so forth.

The northern part of the *datsan*, a four-story tower, was a small praying room. According to the Buddhist construction canon, it was a sacred dwelling place for the Buddhist deity who safeguarded the Teachings. Their statuettes and the statues of the temple guards — Mahakala and Lhamo — were placed there.

As for the temple architecture, the Oriental prototypes — Tibetan, Mongolian and Buryat *datsans* — were considerably adjusted to suit the European modernist style. The entrance hall and staircases in the southern part of the *datsan* illustrated the European architectural approach, which was most evident in the layout and choice of finish materials. Hence, the *datsan* style differed greatly from Tibet patterns of temple construction. The *datsan* fronts were finished with materials in full compliance with the northern architectural canon: rock-face granite, as well as decorative and glazed tiles. A modernist style was evident in the temple interior as well, for example, in the strikingly beautiful stained glass plafond, in rails decorated with Buddhist symbols, and in the multicolored tiled floor of the ceremonial room.

As had been initially planned, a four-story hostel for the religious disciples was built outside the temple's stone walls.

The Buddhist clergy chose to be a part of Russian and Saint Petersburg public life. The years that followed the temple's opening witnessed mass prayers targeted at helping the Russians gain victory in World War I.

The Buddhist datsan in the 1920s and 1930s

The history of the temple, which was never used as the thirteenth Dalai Lama's residence or great Buddhist Theological Academy, is rather complicated and confusing.⁽¹⁷⁾ The defeat of Russia in the Russian-Japanese war led to the country's failure to render assistance to Tibet, and to the Dalai Lama being denied the right to come to Saint Petersburg. After the October Revolution of 1917, or to be more exact, the fall of 1919, the Red Army unit was quartered in the *datsan*, driving the monks out of Saint Petersburg.

It should be pointed out that the religious situation in Russia was rather

complicated and confusing until 1929. In 1929 a law was adopted that imposed a ban on propagating and practicing any religious belief in the country. Back in 1918 the government had issued the Decree that broke off the long-existing ties. It separated the Russian Orthodox Church from the State and cut off the educational system from the Church. The Decree of 1918 did not directly ban religion within the country.⁽¹⁸⁾ Its primary concern was to reduce the ideological impact and influence of religious institutions. However, this Decree had little to do with Buddhism at that time. The new government treated Buddhism as a means to ideologically consolidate the ethnic Buddhist minorities of Russia. This was possible thanks to a new political movement that sprang up amongst Buryat lamas. They called themselves Buddhist Modernists, and interpreted Buddhism as an atheistic doctrine relating to Marxism-Leninism. According to Buddhist Modernists, Buddhism, just like Marxism-Leninism, granted equal rights to all the people no matter what their origin or social status was, and no matter what ethnic group they belonged to. Above all, it was emphasized that Buddhism denied classes and castes. The Congress of Soviet Buddhists was held in winter of 1927 in Buryatia, under Dorzhiev's direction. The congress delegates discussed the possibility of uniting Buddhism and Communism. Thus, the Buddhist lamas' loyalty to the new government and Dorzhiev's intense activity made it possible to propagate Buddhism, set up new monasteries, and so forth, in the first decade after the October revolution of 1917. In Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva the candidates for the Communist movement were sought among students of Buddhist monasteries. At the same time there was a great increase both in the numbers of Buddhist adherents and newly established Buddhist monasteries. Buryatia counted 34 monasteries and 15,000 lamas. In 1928 there were 119 secondary schools and seventy-three schools for Buddhist monks. In 1916 Kalmykia had seventy monasteries and 1,600

lamas. The latter greatly increased in number to 2,840 in 1923. In 1929 Tuva counted twenty-two Buddhist monasteries and approximately 2,000 monks from an overall population of 60,000 people. Thus, the Decree of 1918 mainly affected the religious centers of Saint Petersburg and Moscow.[\(19\)](#)

The *datsan* was temporary closed in 1919. The Buryat lamas who lived in the temple left the city. The Buddhist library was vandalized and destroyed. These acts desecrated the shrine and raised Dorzhiev's strong protest, and he appealed to the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs for help. It should be emphasized that the regular Buddhist clergy was not directly persecuted at that time (the 1920s) and was not prohibited from holding religious services in the temple. In 1922 the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs ordered the Red Army unit to leave the *datsan* premises and the local authorities helped to restore the building. The temple land was registered as its property. However, no services were held due to its understaffed clergy.

The operation of the *datsan* was closely connected with Dorzhiev's intense political and religious activity. He was among the most proactive propagators of so-called "Buddhist Modernism" in Russia. The Soviet Government tried to patronize the Asian people who took to Marxism-Leninism, especially in Mongolia and Tibet. Dorzhiev, who was respected by the highest lamas of Russia, was appointed Tibet's representative to Soviet Russia and became an authorized diplomat. He set up a Mongolian mission at the Saint Petersburg *datsan*, which viewed its core task as cultural enlightenment.

In 1926 the temple was handed down to Mongolia, as part of the heritage equally shared by Tibet and Mongolia. The year 1927 marked the revival of religious ceremonies held on great religious days by

Mongolian and Tibetan monks. In the 1930s the Gunzechoinei *datsan* was more of a Buddhist cultural center in Leningrad (the Soviet name for Saint Petersburg) than an educational center for would-be religious masters. The first All-Union Buddhist gathering took place in January 1927 in Moscow, to decide about converting the Leningrad *datsan* into the residence of the All-Union Religious Board of the Soviet Buddhists. So, in the late 1920 and early 1930s the Leningrad *datsan* became an arena of fruitful cooperation of Buddhologists and Buddhist religious masters from Buryatia and Kalmykia. The four-story building that used to be a hostel for religious disciples now provided lodging for the students of the Institute of the Contemporary Oriental Languages: Buryats, Kalmyks, and Mongols. Academician F. I. Stcherbatsky founded the Institute of Buddhist Culture in 1927. The Buryat and Kalmyk religious masters who stayed in the *datsan* were advisors to the Institute, due to their knowledge of the Buddhist tradition.

This short period wherein the *datsan* resumed its activities was over in 1929 with the adoption of the law banning religion in Russia. Mass media widely propagandized this law. Leagues of Militant Atheists were set up throughout the country to spread the ideas of Science Atheism. The Leagues also focused on making it clear to the people that Buddhism and Marxist teachings would never integrate. For example, such a League was set up in Buryatia to reveal the threat of Buddhism and the falsity of its philosophy. This period was marked by the intensive persecution of the Buddhist monks and the closing of the monasteries.[\(20\)](#)

The toughest time for those who either practiced Buddhism, propagated it, took a deep interest in Buddhist culture, or conducted scientific research on it, started in the mid 1930s with the Epoch of Stalin's Terror and Repression. Starting 1933, no religious services were held in the

temple, and the year 1935 brought a wave of arrests of the Buddhist masters currently staying in Leningrad. In 1934 Dorzhiev was exiled from Buryatia to Leningrad, where he was arrested in 1937. A year later he died in a prison hospital in Ulan-Ude. Starting from the late 1930s the temple passed from one institution over to another, never being used for religious purposes. This situation lasted until the late 1980s, only to dramatically change in the early 1990s. The Law on Liberty of Conscience and Freedom of Religions, and Saint Petersburg Buddhist followers' efforts targeted at taking back their shrine greatly contributed to the Gunzechoinei *datsan* becoming the heart of Buddhist culture in the northern capital of Russia.

IV. Buddhism in Saint Petersburg During the Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-first Centuries

The religious Renaissance that started in Russia in the late 1980s was a result of fundamental changes in the state political doctrine. The Law on Freedom of Religions was adopted in the early 1990s. It should be pointed out that the Law of 1929 was re-issued without any changes in 1975 and was in force until 1990.

The Law on Liberty of Conscience and Freedom of Religions (1990-1997)

When in 1990 the Supreme Council of the Russian Federation adopted the Law on Freedom of Religions, foreign Christian and non-Christian missionaries flooded the country. The law did not restrict in any way the registration of the religious groups and movements set up with the local authorities by foreign missionaries. The Law of 1990 followed the stipulations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. According to the Constitution (Clause 28) and the Law of 1990, the citizens of Russia, as well as

foreigners, enjoyed the right to adopt and practice the religion of their choice, as well as to form associations that can acquire status as legal entities. The Law did not draw a clear-cut distinction between foreign religions and those traditional to Russia. 1990-1996 witnessed the revival of the religions that were practiced in Russia for centuries. At the same time, new religious movements, psychocults, and intensive conversion of the Russian citizens to non-traditional religions brought about the need to introduce some restrictions on the propagation of these non-traditional religions, and to register the religious groups formed by foreign missionaries. The Law on Liberty of Conscience was adopted in September of 1997. The new law signified a radical departure from the spirit and concept of the Law of 1990. This Law favored the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as an "inseparable part of the all-Russian historical, spiritual and cultural heritage" and mentions the state's recognition of Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, and other religions that "traditionally existed in the Russian Federation" (the Preamble).

Buddhist convert communities at the turn of the century

Along with the re-birth of the Saint-Petersburg *datsan*, the early 1990s marked the springing up of various Buddhist convert communities that propagated autonomous religious forms free from clergy. The majority of these were established by religious Western convert teachers. The communities founded by Ole Nidal, Namkhay Norbu, and Russian Buddhists who studied in India and Nepal were widely known and popular. The community members considered themselves to be Buddhist laypeople. As for the *datsan*, they went there only to attend lectures delivered by traditional religious masters from Nepal, India, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka. The birth of these Buddhist convert communities, which did not associate their religious life with services held in the Saint Petersburg *datsan*, constituted a highly extraordinary phenomenon at the

turn of the century.⁽²¹⁾

The convert communities claimed to be autonomous from both the Gelugpa tradition and the Buryat Buddhism propagated by the *datsan*. I would like to stress the fact that the Saint Petersburg *datsan*, in its history, has never functioned as a monastery or as an educational center over a long period of time. The *datsan* had its own monastic community for several years only, from 1989 through 1996. At this time the community abbot tried to introduce Buddhist practices and ceremonies for laypeople, as well as religious curriculum for would-be monks. Since 1996 a fierce struggle between the Buryat Buddhist monastic community and Buddhist converts living in the *datsan* has taken place. This never-ending war prevented the *datsan* from becoming a sacral place for those who would like to follow the Buddha's path.⁽²²⁾

The religious boom brought to life numerous Buddhist convert communities throughout the country, in Saint Petersburg, Moscow, and other Russian cities. The first Buddhist missionaries came to Saint Petersburg from Europe and the US and would not establish close ties with the Saint-Petersburg *datsan* as a monastery center. It seems appropriate to say that the "religious market" in Saint-Petersburg and Russia, on the whole, does not imply free competition between religious movements and denominations for followers, due to the peculiarities of the socio-cultural history of the county. In Russia, non-Christian religious beliefs were treated as ethnic traditions and did not target the conversion of the Russians (this fact is found in the Law of 1997). The adoption of the Law in 1997 did change the religious situation in Saint Petersburg. For example, the Buddhist communities that failed to prove that they belonged to the Buddhism characteristic of Russia faced great difficulties while being re-registered. When I talk about the Buddhism traditional for Russia, I primarily refer to the Gelugpa doctrine that

predominated over other schools in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. The Gelugpa tradition was characteristic of Saint Petersburg as well, since it was propagated by the *datsan*. In the early 1990s a new religious organization, the Traditional Sangha of Russia, was registered with the local authorities in Moscow. This organization united the heads of all the monasteries found in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. Bandido Chambo bLama, a religious and spiritual leader of the Russian Buddhists, was appointed Head of the organization. In other words, Buddhism restored its pre-revolutionary status in Russia via the restoration of the position of Russian Buddhist Leader, and by framing itself as one of the country's ethnic traditions. The Saint Petersburg *datsan* also became a member of the Traditional Sangha of Russia.

The Tibetan Buddhist communities set up by convert-teachers were most popular with the youth. The community leaders demonstrated an unquestioned and strong loyalty to their foreign religious masters as well as a willingness to be engaged in the socio-political activities suggested by these masters. Russia generated a fierce competition among Buddhist convert communities, especially among Tibetan Buddhists. This competition was rooted in Buddhist converts' desire to gain more followers through harsh criticism of their rival convert communities.[\(23\)](#)

The communities made up of Russian Buddhist converts differ greatly from traditional ones in that they are patterned after privately owned corporations. Their economic status is that of "self-repayment." They offer consumers (Buddhist convert adepts) such goods and services as participation in practices for a particular fee; book-publishing and sales; and distribution of ceremonial and religious articles through a network of stores. The money made covers the salaries of community leaders and the financing of international relations. The present international ties are established and maintained with the Tibetan diaspora, and some

Buddhist communities located in Europe and the United States.

One of the distinctive features of these Buddhist communities, new to Russia and Saint Petersburg particularly, is their orientation toward alternative religious forms, in comparison to the ones employed by traditional Buddhism as it was practiced by lay people in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. Although these communities claim to follow Buddhist doctrine and perform such traditional religious practices as meditation, text reciting, and so forth, they demonstrate a type of religiosity that suggests a secularized attitude toward reality and the Buddhist religious goal. They know very little about the Buddhist canon and severely criticize the monk's path. The majority conceive and reinterpret the Buddhist doctrine in a narrow way, in accordance with the sermons and interpretations of the foreign teachers who established their particular communities in Saint-Petersburg.

They tend to worship their leaders, the community founders, as if the latter were great religious prophets. As a rule, they translate and publish the sermons delivered by the community founder. They also publish those Buddhist texts that the community head has chosen to spread, through posters and community periodicals and the performance of certain Buddhist rituals. The peculiarity of the newly-established Buddhist communities in Saint Petersburg and Russia, on the whole, stems from the fact that convert Buddhist missionaries, who founded the Buddhist communities throughout Russia and in their homelands as well, were not raised in a proper Buddhist environment. Many of them belong to European cultures based either in Protestantism or Catholicism and its values.

However, many communities made up of convert Buddhists have undergone considerable changes. Their adherents are mostly Russians,

Saint Petersburg residents, of various occupations and ages. The age of community members ranges from eighteen to sixty. The more they learn about Buddhism, its doctrines and the culture of Buddhist countries, the more they diverge from the interpretation given by their European Buddhist covert mentors. A keen interest in Buddhism urges some of them to reevaluate Russian Orthodox culture, and appeal to traditional Buddhist forms being revived in Buryat and Kalmyk monasteries, like the study of written records of sacred Buddhist teachings.

V. Conclusion: Five Phases of the Spread of Buddhism in Russia

According to the above analysis, the spread of Buddhism in the territory of Russia went through five main phases.

The first phase embraces the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Buryats, Kalmyks, and Tuvinians, whose culture, social, and state organization was greatly predetermined by Buddhist ideology, became an integral part of Russia. This was the time when the European part of Russia had its first contact with Buddhism, which stirred the cultural interaction of Christianity and Buddhism.

The second phase covers the study of Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, and history conducted by Russian, and particularly, Saint Petersburg Orientalists. During the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, fundamental canonic and post-canonic texts were translated from Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese into Russian. These basic texts covered a wide range of issues, namely Buddhist doctrine, philosophy, and Tantras. Spreading over new territories and countries, Buddhism required the translation of the texts of the Indian Buddhist Tripitaka into native languages as a critical condition of its institutionalization. In this context it should be emphasized that Buddhism, as a world religion, could be reproduced only in accordance with its written sacral knowledge.

Moreover, one of the basic principles of Buddhist missionary preaching stated that the Dharma should be taught in the language of the congregation. Today, the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni are available in Russian for scholars, Buddhist converts, and anyone who is interested in this Oriental religious belief, thanks to the work done by Russian Buddhologists who translated and interpreted the texts.

The third phase takes a look at Buddhism's consolidation in Saint Petersburg, a Russian megapolis at the beginning of the twentieth century. It also describes how the *datsan* was built in the city thanks to the joint efforts of the Buddhist adherents and Buddhologists.

The fourth phase of Buddhism's spread coincides with the integration of Russian Buddhist converts into the ranks of lay Buddhists and the boom of religious communities and centers established by those Russian Buddhist converts. It must be kept in mind that many of these converts were raised in the Russian-language milieu, and that their socialization took place in the Soviet atheistic environment. Thus, the fact that the first European Buddhist communities emerged in Saint Petersburg is of a paramount importance. At present, Saint Petersburg counts about ten Buddhist convert communities that differ from one another with regard to their religious activities, history, and organizational structure. The following Buddhist convert communities have attracted the largest numbers of followers and have propagated the autonomous religious life of Buddhist adherents: the Zen Kwan Um Saint Petersburg school, the Saint Petersburg Dzogchen community, and the Karma-Kagyü Buddhist Association. The rest of the communities, namely the Fo Guang community, the Tibet Friends Community, Svetoch Dharma, and so forth, are part of the Saint Petersburg Buddhist Union and view their core task as that of propagation. They hold seminars, arrange visits of religious masters from China, Nepal, India, Taiwan, and Sri Lanka, and

translate and publish Buddhist texts.

On the whole, the Buddhist revival in Saint Petersburg in the 1990s resulted in its reestablishment, and the enrichment of its social and cultural forms within the context of the metropolis, as well as its involvement into the global network of lay Buddhist communities.

The fifth phase of Buddhism's institutionalization in Russia took place in the late twentieth century. It is a complex process that can be analyzed through its two characteristic features. The first feature is determined by the fact that traditionally, Buddhist territories viewed this religion as a potential state ideology. Contemporary Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva have witnessed the revival of monastic culture, religious education, and the construction of new temples. The essence of the second feature lies in the fact that the Buddhism that has settled in the Russian capitals — Moscow and Saint Petersburg — greatly differs from the Buddhism practiced in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. Buddhism in the capital is being propagated by Nepalese, Indian (from the Tibetan diaspora), Sri Lankan, and Taiwanese monks, as well as western convert leaders who are much more popular with their Russian adherents.

A final point: In the context of cultural and religious globalization, it is predominantly the transnational Buddhist convert communities that are subject to thorough scientific research as an institutionalized part of Global Buddhism.

Endnotes

(1) There is little information available about Buddhism in Russia, which is particularly true for Russian Buddhism within English-speaking circles. So, I tried to fill in this niche by providing a generalized analysis

of the institutionalization of Buddhism in Russia and the emergence of Buddhist convert communities. It should be emphasized that, with some exceptions, there are practically no monographs devoted to the spread of Buddhism in Russia. I used an analytical scheme introduced by M. Baumann (1995) in my research in order to discover the key phases of Buddhism's spread in Russia. Actually this work can be viewed as the first attempt to reveal the pivotal historical and cultural factors that have determined the present socio-cultural form of Russian Buddhism.[Return to Text](#)

(2) Although the Buryats, Tuvinians, and Kalmyks belong to one and the same ethnic group as that of the Mongols, they speak different languages in terms of linguistic family. Thus Buryat and Kalmyk are classified as Altaic languages: Northern, Mongolian. Tuvinian is considered to be an Altaic language: Turkic, of the Uigur subfamily. The historical cradle of the ancient Buryats is Transbaikalia, which is south of Eastern Siberia (present-day Buryat Republic and Chita Oblast) and the upper reaches of the Angara River (present-day Irkutsk Oblast). The Tuvinians inhabited the mountainous areas in Eastern Altai, the Western and Eastern Sayan Mountains, and around the Yenisei River, which is the territory of the present republic of Tuva. The Kalmyks, who are considered to be the Mongolian Western Oirat (Dzungar), came from Dzungaria, which is in the northwestern part of the Peoples Republic of China. At the end of the sixteenth century the depletion of Dzungaria's pasture land and the aggressiveness of neighboring China made some Oirats move into the southern Siberian steppes up the Irtysh, Ishim, and Ob Rivers, and Lake Zaisan. The Oirats who left Dzungaria adopted the name Kalmyk, which literally means "separated." (See also Snelling, 1993.)[Return to Text](#)

(3) This part of my research is based on a variety of articles available in Russian dealing with issues surrounding the ethnic, cultural, social, and

political history and structure of groups of Turkish-Mongol origin. I mention only the most credited works by Kichanov (1997), Klyashtorny (1982), Melihov (1970), Malyavkin (1981), Markov (1976), Mongush (1992), and Zhukovskaya (1977). Among the western monographs used, Beckwith (1987), Heissig (1959), and Irons (1975) should be mentioned.[Return to Text](#)

(4) See Mongush (1992, 2001), Dulov (1956), Bashki (1999), and Kislakov (1969) for detailed research on Buddhism in Tuva, its history and impact on social and political structural organization.[Return to Text](#)

(5) See Bakaeva (1994), Zhitezky (1893), Zhukovskaya (1977), and Pozdneev (1887, 1896) on Buddhism in Kalmykia. See Mitirov (1998) on the history of Kalmyks.[Return to Text](#)

(6) See Zlatkin (1983) on the history of Dzungaria.[Return to Text](#)

(7) See Per Kvaerne (2000), Snellgrove (1987), Snellgrove and Richardson (1968), and Tucci (1980). Data from my own studies on Buddhism in Tibet, especially on the four great schools, are used here as well. See Ostrovskaya (2002a).[Return to Text](#)

(8) See Snelling (1993), and Goldstein (1989).[Return to Text](#)

(9) The Russian Orthodoxy conducted Buddhist Studies because missionary activities directed toward Buddhist followers; the Buryats and Kalmyks were also among their major concerns. Although their works did not pretend to have any scientific value (they mainly focused on apologetic and political issues in order to prove the predominance of Christianity over Buddhism), they contained highly important and

valuable information. Nill, Archbishop Yaroslavskiy (1799-1874), the Orthodox priest John Popov, Hieromonk Mephodyi, and V. A. Kozevnikov (1852-1917) were among those Orthodox followers who appealed to Buddhism in their works. The Russian Holy Mission located in Peking was one of the major Oriental Studies centers. Many top Chinologists, such as Father Iakinph Beechurin (1777-1853) and Father Palladyi Kafarov (1817-1878), worked there throughout the years. Among other things, they studied Buddhism mainly because it was one of the mainstream religious beliefs of China and the state religion of the Manchu Chinese rulers of the time. See Ermakova (1998) for a full description and detailed study of the first field studies held in Buryatia, Kalmykia, Mongolia, and Tibet.[Return to Text](#)

(10) See Chattopadhyaya (1970).[Return to Text](#)

(11) See Alekseev (1982), Ermakova (1998), Stcherbatsky (1989), Jong (1976), Roerich (1945), and Snelling (1993).[Return to Text](#)

(12) N. Roerich was the first among the Russian Orientalists and field researchers to gain wide popularity with Buddhist converts during Soviet times. His wife Elena Roerich, like Madame Helena P. Blavatskaya, formed a closed group of disciples and preached her own teachings, which she called "Agni-Yoga."[Return to Text](#)

(13) B. D. Dandaron was proclaimed High Tibetan Lama Reincarnation. Buryat by origin, he was the only teacher to become a religious leader of the first generation of Russian convert Buddhists during the 1960s and 1970s. He propagated the Buddhist Tantra according to his own interpretation.

(14) I refer only to the most authoritative contemporary Buddhologists of Moscow and Saint Petersburg.[Return to Text](#)

(15) This part of my research is based on the works published by Andreev (1992) and Snelling (1993). I also conducted interviews with the Buddhists of Buryat origin residing in Saint Petersburg; the monks who preached in the *datsan* from 1991 to 1996 and Buddhist converts of the so-called first generation. The first Buddhist convert generation falls into two groups. The first is Dzogchen. According to Dandron's interpretation, it embraces his direct disciples. Some of them suffered greatly from religious persecutions during Soviet times. The second trend is made up of the Gelugpa followers, meaning those converts who went to Buryatia in the 1970s and 1980s in search of personal teacher.[Return to Text](#)

(16) *datsan* is the ibetan word for the Buddhist religious and higher educational institutions that specialize in Buddhist Logic and Philosophy. In Buryatia the word *datsan* is used to refer to Buddhist monasteries with their own educational tradition. So, the Saint Petersburg temple is usually called *datsan*, in full accordance with the Tibeto-Buryat tradition.[Return to Text](#)

(17) See Snelling (1993).[Return to Text](#)

(18) The first law on freedom of religion and liberty of conscience was adopted in Russia in 1905. On October 17, 1905 the Tsar issued the manifesto Improvements on State Order. One of the articles of the manifesto gave the peoples of the Russian Empire the right to take civil liberty, meaning liberty of conscience and religious freedom. This greatly facilitated the task of obtaining government permission to set up a Buddhist temple in the capital of Russia.[Return to Text](#)

(19) See W. Kolarz. Die Religionen in der Sowjetunion. Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1962; and Religion in the Soviet Union. London, 1961.[Return to Text](#)

(20) See H. Bräker. "Der Buddhismus in der Sowjetunion im Spannungsfeld zwischen Vernichtung und berleben." Berichte des Bundesinstituts für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien. 36, 1982.[Return to Text](#)

(21) The last part of the article is based on my studies. I conducted field research on the Buddhist convert communities of Saint Petersburg from 1989 to 1998. The results formed a solid basis for my doctoral dissertation. At present, it is the only sociological field research on the Buddhist converts. Lately the focus of my studies has shifted to Russian convert communities in the context of global culture. See Ostrovskaya-jn. (1999) and Ostrovskaya-jn. (2002b).[Return to Text](#)

(22) The *datsan* was passed to the Saint Petersburg Buryat Buddhist community in 2002.[Return to Text](#)

(23) An alternative point of view, one that ignores the existence of competition, is found in Zhukovskaya (1997). The comparison describes the current situation of Buddhist converts in Germany. See Baumann (1995), Bitter (1988), and Saalfrank (1997). The Saint Petersburg competition mirrors the situation taking place among Tibetan immigrants in India and Nepal, where Tibetan Buddhist traditions are fighting for leadership in the politics and religion of the Tibetan diaspora. See Ostrovskaya-jn. (2002b), for a detailed account on the global institutionalization of Tibetan Buddhism, namely the network of Buddhist convert lay communities and Tibetan diaspora monks.[Return to Text](#)

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