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Buddhism and Urbanism in Post-Soviet Buryatia

Abstract

With the collapse of the Soviet Union the traditionally Buddhist regions of Russia, including the Republic of Buryatia, experienced the revival of religion. Along with the traditional Gelug school of Mahayana Buddhism existing on the territories around Lake Baikal for more than three hundred years, the globalized model of Buddhism started to spread quickly in Buryatia in the 1990s. Tibetan Buddhist teachers started to establish new Buddhist organizations in Buryatia and thus to transform the urban landscape of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the republic. The article traces how global and local Buddhist organizations become

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represented in the urban landscape of Ulan-Ude and considers the anti-urban position of Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev.

Keywords: Buryat Buddhism, anti-urbanism, post-Soviet Buryatia, environmental ethics.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union traditionally Buddhist regions of Russia, including the Republic of Buryatia, experienced the revival of religion. At the same time, local Buddhist monasteries faced the choice of relying on Tibetan institutional forms or developing traditional Buryat form of Buddhism: along with the traditional Gelug school of Mahayana Buddhism existing on the territories around Lake Baikal for more than three hundred years, the globalized model of Buddhism started to spread quickly in Buryatia in the 1990s. While some valued the Tibetan sources and connections of Buryat Buddhism and strived to strengthen them in the religious revival, others insisted the Buryat Buddhist community should be autocephalous and tried to distance it from its Tibetan and Mongolian links (Bernstein, 2013). As a result, post-socialist revival of Buddhism in many aspects turned into a clash of global and local forms of Buddhism (Dorzhigushaeva et al., 2018). As new Buddhist organizations were founded in Buryatia, they started to transform the urban landscape of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia.

While discussing the modern Buddhism of Buryatia with the research group, we discovered that in Ulan-Ude there is not a single *datsan* (temple) belonging to the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR), the largest association of traditional Buddhists in Russia. Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev, the head of BTSR, often criticizes urban life and promotes traditional values and lifestyle. A preliminary content analysis of articles and interviews with Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev led us to the conclusion that his views can be considered anti-urban. The experience of ruralism of Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev is valuable because it is not a theoretical anti-urbanism. His views have a bearing on practice: his initiative of livestock herding is seen as "a tool for solving the problem of the depopulation of Buryat villages" (Amogolonova, 2015, p. 232). Thanks to his activities there are people who abandoned city life and moved to the countryside to graze herds.

Today the role of religion is re-evaluated within the urban studies, especially in the context of Asian cities and megapolises (see Taylor, 2008; van der Veer, 2015). Religion is no longer assumed as something of the past, but is perceived as part of urban politics and governance. "Instead of processes of secularization that unfold as part of an inevitable

modernization and urbanization, one can discern discrete projects of secularism that come up against projects and ambitions of a religious nature. Urban studies has neglected this particular form of contestation which takes the city as its public arena […]" (van der Veer, 2015, p. 11). In this article we would like to trace the peculiarities of the contemporary state of affairs in connection to Buddhism and urbanism in the Republic of Buryatia. Taking into account the historical and socio-cultural contexts of Buryatia, the history of urbanization in the region, as well as the clash of global and local forms of Buddhism, we aim to analyze how various Buddhist organizations become represented in urban/rural landscape of the republic, as well as to consider the anti-urban position of Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev.

We start with an overview of urban history in the Republic of Buryatia as well as the revival of traditional Buddhism after the collapse of the Soviet Union; further on, we define the major Buddhist communities who perform their activities within the urban space of Ulan-Ude. We analyze interviews of Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev as well as critical literature devoted to his activities and trace his anti-urban ideas; finally, we take a closer look at the "Social flock" of sheep initiative of Buryat sangha, which is aimed to support the rural Buryat Buddhists.

The History of Urbanization in Buryatia

The Republic of Buryatia is a federal subject of Russia and is part of the Far Eastern Federal District. About 60% of the coastline of Lake Baikal, the deepest freshwater lake in the world, is located on the territory of Buryatia. Despite the general idea of Buryats as well as Mongols to be rooted in traditions of nomadic pastoralism, yet, towns and even cities have been a part of Buryat and wider Mongolian civilization since early times. "Towns first appeared in the Mongolian steppe along the caravan routes which linked China with the West through Central Asia. Karakorum [Kharakhorum], the capital city of the Mongol empire in the 13th century, for example, was firmly connected with other big cities of the world by the Silk Road" (Bruun & Narangoa, 2006, p. 2). From the late sixteenth century a lot of cities played the role of spiritual centers and were formed around large Buddhist monasteries throughout Mongolia. The same refers to Buryat Buddhism:

> The main achievements of Buryat Buddhist architecture, sculpture, book-printing and fine arts from the 18th to the first quarter of the 20th centuries were related to the appearance of the datsans, the stationary Buddhist monasteries and

> temples, which became both religious and cultural centres. Traditional Buddhist arts flourished there, active literary, publishing and printing activities took place as well. During this period there were constructed about 44 Buddhist temples, which, undoubtedly, played important role in the rise of Buryat culture in general. (Vanchikova, 2006, p. 276)

Nevertheless, such a model of urbanization where the city was formed around a Buddhist temple declined with the beginning of the Soviet regime. That is why the history of urbanization in the republic is generally studied within the framework of Western paths of urbanization, following the Marxist traditions that "focus on the city as a crucial site of capital accumulation" (van der Veer, 2015, p. 3). In this context, in the seventeenth century the first towns, Barguzinsk, Selenginsk and Verkhneudinsk (modern Ulan-Ude), were founded on the territory of the present-day Buryatia, Troitskosavsk – in the eighteenth century, Mysovsk – in the nineteenth century. These first towns were founded by Russian Cossacks; at that time they were called forts (wooden settlements), and provided protection for the first Russian settlers and administrative centers for collecting *yasak*. In the eighteenth century, Verkhneudinsk came to the forefront due to its favorable geographical location: "In 1783, Verkhneudinsk turned into a chief town of Irkutsk governorship with magistrate administration, ethnically homogeneous, Russian in population (with a noticeable proportion of Jewish residents)" (Baldano & Kirichenko, 2015, p. 75).[1] At that time the Buryats did not take part in urban life or management of towns; they mostly came to towns for short visits on market days. M. N. Baldano and S. V. Kirichenko describe how the Soviet policies turned the town of Verkhneudinsk into Ulan-Ude – the capital of the Buryat autonomous republic:

> The change in the ethnic composition happened not because of displacement of the previous ethnicities, but due to a massive influx of new, mostly Buryat population. New social and professional groups, the nomenklatura, the intelligentsia, urban middle strata, workers, were purposefully formed through the system of "social lifts" in the context of socialist industrialization. A new education system was formed, a policy of indigenization was conducted. As a result, a typical metropolitan set of social and cultural infrastructure was formed, starting from the government system to museums and theaters, common Buryat literary language […]. (Baldano & Kirichenko, 2015, p. 74)

The Soviet modernization policy focused on mass urbanization, industrialization, as well as secularization (Bruun & Narangoa, 2006, p. 13). The advancements in social mobility, urbanization and education

[1] This and all subsequent quotations from sources in Russian have been translated into English by Galina Dondukova.

levels during the Soviet period were exceptionally striking in Buryatia. As noticed by Melissa Chakars, "before authorities implemented many of Stalin's policies over the course of the 1930s, almost 85 percent of Buryats still practiced some form of nomadism, few Buryats lived in cities, and literacy rates remained low" (Chakars, 2014, p. 8). However, within several decades the Buryats experienced great transformations. The new generations "went en masse to Soviet schools, participated in official cultural activities in large numbers, spoke Russian, consumed Soviet media, lived in cities, and occupied a wide variety of professional and political positions (Chakars, 2014, p. 9).

At the same time, the Buryat Soviet success story was not without cost. Beginning from the 1950s and 1960s the national languages were gradually replaced by Russian in the spheres of politics, culture and education since the official language and new social models were considered to be the only possible way of general progress. Such a policy could not but produce identity confusion and transformation for people across the Soviet Union, including the Buryats. Rural Buryats who moved to the city took hard depreciation of their previous experience and traditional way of life by the city dwellers.

> While ethnicity for rural Buryats was still an everyday unproblematic reality, naturally reproduced in everyday routine practices (later in urban conditions), for urban Buryats involved in the process of socio-cultural universalization through activities of an industrial type, urbanization of lifestyle, dispersed settlement and intensification of interethnic contacts, its [ethnicity] reproduction shifted to the periphery of life's tasks. (Batomunkuev, 1999, p. 38)

In addition, in the Soviet atheistic times, the clergy and religion had no influence on the processes of urbanization and modernization. The situation started to change only with the collapse of the socialist system.

Post-Soviet Revival of Traditional Buddhism in Buryatia

While according to the opinion polls carried out in 1982–1987 the number of believers had fallen to less than 10 percent, and was even lower among the urban population, in the post-Soviet period, the religiosity of the population rapidly increased. "Among urban Buryat women, the total number of unconditional believers and those inclined to faith, is 96.4 percent (among Buryat men, 79.6 percent), with the majority of surveyed identifying themselves as Buddhists" (Amogolonova, 2017, p. 35). The revival of Buddhism in Buryatia was foreseen even in the late 1980s, which

is why the construction of new *datsans* and *dugans* (monasteries and temples) was initiated; the Damba Darzha Zayaev's Buddhist University "Dashi Choinkhorlin" was opened at Ivolginsky Datsan in 1991.

The number of officially registered Buddhist communities was rapidly increasing. "According to the Council for Religious Affairs of the Council of Ministers of the Buryat SSR (now the Republic of Buryatia), in the period from 1991 to 1993 10 Buddhist communities were registered" (Amogolonova, 2015, p. 228). Along with the associations affiliated with the Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR) there also emerged communities that were not members of the Sangha. For example, in January 1995 there were 11 Buddhist associations of BTSR and four other communities. In 2014 the number of registered Buddhist organizations increased to 63 (Amogolonova, 2015, p. 229).

While Buddhism in Russia was just starting its revival, the world had already been experiencing globalization of Buddhism – the spread of networks of various traditions, which is usually referred to by Western Buddhologists as Buddhist modernism. Buddhist modernism is the adaptation of Buddhist doctrines to the needs of Westerners by simplifying them. Such adaptation of Buddhism involves interacting with science and developing methods that can provide psychological and medical assistance to people exhausted by a rapid pace of life in metropolitan areas (McMahan, 2008). In this context, the global model of Buddhism can be called urbanized. Religion becomes imbued with characteristics of any other urban community of interest and acquires such characteristics of globalization as increasing importance of public religious discourses, formation of free market of religions, which functions on the principle of individual demand and choice, relativization of religious authority (Agadzhanian, 2005). In other words, globalization leads to "a synthesis of different religions, spread of informal religious movements, commercialization of religious activity, 'network' religion of autonomous communities which exceed national and confessional borders, loss of attachment of traditional religions to a particular territory and ethnicity" (Dorzhigushaeva, 2012, p. 154).

Urban Buddhism in Ulan-Ude

This research actually started with a discussion on modern Buddhism in Buryatia, when we noticed that in the capital of Buryatia, Ulan-Ude, there is not a single datsan belonging to the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR). Khambo Lama Ayusheev has a negative attitude towards establishing Buddhist datsans in big cities. He believes that temples and

monasteries should be located in secluded places. That is why the datsans located in the city of Ulan-Ude belong to other Buddhist communities. For example, Tibetan lamas living in Buryatia have established their centers in busy areas of the city. When speaking about Tibetan lamas, we mean Tibetan monks who emigrated to India and later arrived in Buryatia. Recently, teachers from the Tibet Autonomous Region of the PRC have also begun to come to Buryatia, for example, Dr Nida Chenagtsang and others. Although these centers have the interior decoration of datsans, they are positioned as "centers", which further emphasizes their intertwinement with the urban space.

"The Buddhist Dzogchen community in Buryatia came into being in 1992, when the prominent Tibetan teacher of Dzogchen, Namkhai Norbu, first visited the republic; one association of lay Buddhists, and one Dharma Centre" (Amogolonova, 2015, pp. 228–229). The Tibetan Center "Buddha of Medicine" was built in the 43rd quarter at 33 Zherdev Street; it is headed by the doctor of Tibetan medicine Yampil Bagsha. In the center of Ulan-Ude, at 21/4 Kalandarishvili Street, there is a Buddhist center "Otosho", which was founded by the Tibetan Lama Nima-Tsyren, who studied at Gyudmed tantric monastery.

A special case of urban datsans is one in the urban area of Shishkovka, where Tibetan lama Yeshe Lodoi Rinpoche runs a complex called "Rinpoche Bagsha" on Mount Lysaia. Apart from the Buddhist temple this center includes a recreation zone as well as a restaurant (Kailash) and a large souvenir shop. Discord between Khambo Lama and Yeshe Lodoi Rinpoche occurred precisely because of the siting of the datsan. Khambo Lama offered Rinpoche to build the datsan in the forest area of Upper Berezovka on the outskirts of the city, where the foundations for datsan had already been built. But Yeshe Lodoi Rinpoche preferred the area of Mount Lysaia, the highest point of Ulan-Ude, which can be regarded as a place dominating over the city.

Within the Tibetan diaspora itself, there are also conflicts related to the redistribution of spheres of influence in the city. The correspondent of *Gazeta RB* Petr Shvedov writes about this in his article "Illegal Trade from Tibet":

> In general, if we consider the current situation, the Buddhist republics (Buryatia, Tuva, Kalmykia) are seen by the Tibetans as a tasty morsel that can bring superprofits from the sale of "healing" products. The current conflict in the diaspora is a banal redistribution of the sales market, a desire to snatch a piece of this "pie". Galsan-bagsha is just a small "cog" in this industry, where such venerable tycoons as Yampel (Tibetan center at Zherdev Street), Gendun Gyaltsen (Buddhist community at Kalinin Street), Nyima Tsering (Buddhist community

> at Kalandarishvili), Sizhi ("Arya Dari" datsan at Gurulbinskaya Street), Gyaltsen Dakpa (Buddhist community at Borsoev Street). They control most of the market of the Republic of Buryatia in this sphere. When the competition for patients' money escalates, competitors are never welcome. (Shvedov, 2013)

Some Buryat lamas also do not share the position of Khambo Lama and created new organizations in the 1990s. For example, Nimazhap Ilyukhinov established the Spiritual Administration of Buddhists of Russia (DUBR); later ex-Khambo Lama Choydorzhi Budaev founded the Association of Buddhists of Buryatia (OBB). They formed the renovation wing of Buddhism in Buryatia and, within their revival framework, believed that Buddhism should become the spiritual basis for the democratic development of Buryatia. Buryat neo-renovators recognize the value of other schools and streams of Buddhism and do not contest their spread in the socio-cultural space of Russia. They sympathize with Western Buddhism and establish ties with European Buddhist centers, at the same time emphasizing spiritual bonds with Tibetan teachers and especially with the 14th Dalai Lama. The datsans of the above-mentioned opposition lamas are also located in residential areas and business centers of Ulan-Ude, for example, the datsan of Lama Nimazhap Ilyukhinov for some time shared its building with (or rented it out to) the bank "Rus".

In other words, the global Buddhist communities, including that operating in Ulan-Ude, have developed methods of adaptation to large cities in the form of services for urban masses. The maintenance of the centers is quite dependent on community members and their donations. While in traditional Buddhist regions this issue practically does not cause difficulties, in Western cities Buddhist centers have to attract followers with the help of various spiritual/medical services. In this model, such factors as convenient location, accessibility and traffic become decisive. The functioning of the centers involves the use of signage, which shares the information space with advertisements of a variety of commercial services, symbolically being positioned alongside with them.

In addition, most Buddhist centers lose the element of "paying a visit" to the temple, which is important from the point of view of Tibetan Buddhism. Traditionally, before entering a temple, Buddhists make a cleansing tour around the entire temple complex – *goroo*. In general, there is a tradition of distance, where, in order to come into contact with holy objects, the believer must make efforts that are designed to arouse serious aspirations and motivation. In urban conditions, the area of Buddhist centers is usually quite small, and sometimes they even rent some space in a large building, which makes it impossible to organize a *goroo*.

Thus, although territorial accessibility makes it possible to quickly meet religious needs, it can lead to the loss of some important elements of the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore, the emergence of new Buddhist centers in the urban space often transforms the functioning of Buddhist sites. It should be noted that in this context we are not talking about cities that were formed around Buddhist monastic complexes, but about cities for which Buddhist sites are something new. In our case, despite the fact that Buryatia is a Buddhist region, its capital, Ulan-Ude, was not founded around a Buddhist temple. This means that Buddhist sites there bring a new experience for both the city and the Buddhists.

Anti-Urban Position of Khambo Lama

The institution of Khambo Lamas, senior Buddhist monks, was established in Buryatia shortly after the official recognition of Buddhism as one of the religions of the subjects of the Russian Empire in 1741. The total number of Khambo Lamas in Buryatia since that time has been 24. "During the Tsarist era of Buryat Buddhism, the Hambo [Khambo] lama was considered not only a religious leader, but also an official performing bureaucratic functions entrusted to him by the state" (Amogolonova, 2015, p. 226). Damba Ayusheev became the head of the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists of the Russian Federation (TsDUB RF) in 1995. In 1997, he changed the name of this religious organization to the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (BTSR), as the old one sounded outdated and was associated with the oversight function of Soviet state bodies. Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev believes that the Buddhist republics of Russia (Kalmykia, Tuva, Buryatia) should independently revive Buddhism in the post-Soviet space through internal spiritual growth. He consistently implements his position, which he expressed at the dawn of his activity in an interview for the magazine *Buddhism of Russia* in 1997, where he stands for equal relations with Tibetan Buddhists.

Although what he says is often ambiguous in terms of tact and political correctness, it is a fact that most of the post-Soviet period changes in Russia's Buddhist Traditional Sangha are associated with his name (Amogolonova, 2015). What is more, it is possible to say that today Khambo Lama's influence goes far beyond religion and extends on social and even economic spheres of Buryatia, which positions him not only as the spiritual, but also national leader of Buryatia. "Hambo [Khambo] Lama's organizational and social work is carried out on a broad field of secular practices aimed at preserving the Buryat people and restoring their traditional values and

lifestyle" (Amogolonova, 2015, p. 232). Indeed, Khambo Lama Ayusheev not only develops traditional Buryat Buddhism, but also revives traditional Buryat sports (archery, wrestling and horse-riding) and agriculture with predominance of indigenous species of livestock.

However, his policy is criticized by pro-Tibetan opposition (Choy-Dorzhi Budaev – ex-Khambo Lama, and others) as well as newly converted Russian disciples of Tibetan lamas. These disagreements have historical roots. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the Buryat Buddhist community was more developed and tended to hold autocephalous position. In Soviet times, the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was the only region with Buddhist institutions. Although today the level of the Buryat sangha is much lower than in pre-revolutionary Russia, relying on such past, Ayusheev does not agree with the position of subordination to the Tibetan center and does not want to take the position of "younger brothers", insisting on the autocephalous status of Buryat Buddhism (Garri, 2014, p. 338). In addition, the adoption by the Buryats of globalized Buddhism is probably understood by Ayusheev as a threat to the ethnocultural identity of the Buryat people (Ulanov, 2016, p. 159). In general, his policy is mainly focused on nationalist discourse, aimed to promote Buryat patriotism and nationalism.

Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev criticizes urban forms of Buryat Buddhism. His position is clearly apparent in his interview for Alexander Makhachkeev in the TV program "Neĭtral'naia territoriia" [Neutral Territory]:

> Journalist: Are you taking the course for the revival of what was before the revolution, that is, a large number of datsans with a large number of lamas, or is the modern version still better, with many practicing laymen and fewer lamas who sit in datsans?
>
> Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev: It's necessary to focus on datsans, on rural areas, so that people living in villages could receive certain knowledge of Buddhism there and apply it in practice. We now have such a tendency: city people receive teachings from numerous teachers, they gather in a hall, sit for two or three hours a day... but unfortunately, in the future they turn this into their profession, they are engaged in missionary activities... they sell special Buddhist literature, they do business on Buddhism. I think that this is wrong, but unfortunately it is practiced. I would prefer people to receive education and knowledge from lamas who are next to them in the course of their whole lives; and that knowledge wouldn't be airy, superficial, but practical... Everyone should stick to their own business. It's new, when Buddhists gather in city apartments, like intelligentsia in their time; it turns into a system where the urban population, who has a lot of time, is mainly engaged in idle talk more... In the countryside we are open to admiration, surprise, but the urban ones cannot be surprised by anything... They are already smarter than us;

> they, that is, Buddhists, know what the Dalai Lama, Panchen Lama, Bogd Gegen said, they already have an answer for any question, they can open the book and say... what Michael Roach said about this issue. Therefore, city people have a lot of information, but something is missing, and I think that something important is missing and therefore great people still live away from people. We had such a practice, if a person in the datsan didn't build anything, what is the point of him going into meditation... If you have not done anything on this Earth, except studying the theory and pretending doing *goroo* around datsan, I think it doesn't give any credit to you. (*Neĭtral'naia territoriia*, 2014)

Analyzing the response of Khambo Lama, we can identify several aspects of his criticism in relation to urban Buddhist laymen. He is not satisfied that:

1. urban laymen are engaged in missionary activity (Buddhist teachers usually have a negative attitude towards missionary activity; they believe that it is impossible to impose religion on a person, that religious truths can be taught only on request of a lay person him- or herself);
2. they turn religion into business; he calls city datsans "spiritual kiosks";
3. the awareness of urban laymen does not lead to qualitative changes;
4. their religious practice is far from real deeds.

From this perspective, the views of Khambo Lama can be considered anti-urban. We follow the definition of anti-urbanism proposed by V.A. Nekhamkin: "Anti-urbanism is a system of theoretical considerations and practical actions which negatively assesses the role of cities in the lives of people, considers urban areas the sphere of immorality, crowd, chaos, crime and other anti-social manifestations, and insists on the need of compulsory relocation of the urban population to the countryside" (Nekhamkin, 2015, p. 7). It should be noted, however, that Khambo Lama's anti-urbanism is of a purely religious and ethnic nature. He does not think that living in a village, practicing agriculture and taking care of the local lama is good for all people. He believes that this way of life suits the Buryat Buddhist believer. Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev openly criticizes migration of Buryats to cities. He says: "Cities absorb the lives of our children like a vacuum cleaner, dissolving them. The larger the city, the less likely it is to find oneself in it" (Makhachkeev, 2015, p. 30). Life outside the city, and especially livestock farming, according to Khambo Lama, is a good and even economically viable choice for modern Buryat youth. Many rural lamas also share his opinion, and some of them even actively try to convince their followers not to move to the city. Therefore, social involvement in this case has not only a religious, but also a socio-economic dimension (Jonutytė, 2020, p. 113). In an interview for the *Russian Reporter* magazine, he says:

> If I lose these villages, and all the Buryats move to Ulan-Ude and Moscow, then I will lose, Buddhism will lose. If I, for example, engage in propaganda – let's say, I put a statue of Buddha on every street, then I will throw all my lamas into the cities to entertain our intelligentsia... There is such a way, of course. Over there, Tibetans give lectures, give initiations – they think that it's Buddhism. Well, what are they? They are foreigners: they will take their wealth and go somewhere – who cares. And I have to live here. I'm vitally interested in the people to live richer in the countryside than in the city. (Andreeva, 2012)

Interviewers notice the frankness and sincerity of Pandito Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev. For example, Andrei Terentev, editor of the magazine *Buddhism of Russia*, gives the following postscript to the interview: "We are grateful to Khambo Lama for a sincere and open interview: it is easy and pleasant to deal with a person who is direct and does not disguise his views" (Terent'ev, 1997, p. 56). The journalist of *Russian Reporter* Olga Andreeva writes: "A tall, large-bodied and stately Buryat with a swift gait and a grasp of a proper village man. People say different things about him: a non-intellectual, a fierce patriot, he can shout at you. He did not yell. On the contrary, he was delighted. It seems that it is very important for him that there, in Moscow, everyone finally understands something important about Buddhism" (Andreeva, 2012).

The benefits of the rural life, as well as his views on the development of countryside, are described in the interview with Khambo Lama on the website *Rodnoe selo* [Native Village]:

> – Venerable Khambo Lama, what does the village mean to you personally?
>
> – I myself come from a village. I'm proud that I was born and raised in a small village where there were at most thirty households. People who grew up in rural areas are much stronger. And not only physically. What makes rural people different from urban ones? It's impossible to survive in a village following the principle "every man for himself". Here everyone helps his neighbor, friend, and doesn't expect gratitude in return. This is the basic principle. There is no other way to survive here. And it's precisely this quality that makes the villagers spiritually stronger. My dream is that our villagers have the opportunity to become wealthier financially too. […]
>
> – How should our countryside develop?
>
> – […] I believe that in every rural family where there is pasture there should be at least thirty sheep. It is the economic base for self-sufficiency. Families who develop their flocks will never starve. They will be able to raise their children, educate them decently and give them access to all the modern benefits that everyone is striving for today. A villager confidently standing on his feet would never trade a village for a city. He can come to the city once a month, join the city culture and... return home. The urban environment is initially aggressive for humans. […]
>
> – Recently you organized an experimental sewing workshop at Ivolginsky Datsan.

How does this relate to your ideas and projects?

– Our next step is to develop a system for processing sheep products in every family. In every village. […] And when blacksmiths, chasers, carpenters, masons, tailors, bakers start working in our villages, then life in the countryside will revive! […]

– You are engaged in the revival of national sports, chess. How do you associate this with the development of villages?

– If there are no strong healthy men in the villages, then the village will not improve. We have created a system in which men compete not just once a year, on Surkharban, but go through many competitions of different levels. The winners also receive sheep from us as a reward. The most successful athletes already have quite decent herds of two or three hundred heads and associate with one another to preserve and increase their economy. (Podgorbunskaia, 2013)

In other words, the Buddhist leader is not only an ideological leader who promotes rural lifestyle, but he actively organizes and takes part in various initiatives to "revive" life in the countryside. One of such cases is the "Social flock" of sheep initiative.

The "Social Flock" of Sheep Initiative of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia[2]

In 2009, Khambo Lama Ayusheev began to develop the "Social flock" project. The idea is to donate flocks of 300 or more sheep to local farmers for subsequent breeding. One of the primary tasks of this project is the revival of the Buryat breed *Buubei*, which was originally bred by the nomads of the Buryat steppes. Due to the agricultural policy of the Soviet government, the Buryat breeds of sheep and cows were almost wiped out on the territory of Buryatia, and only at the initiative of the Buddhist Sangha they were purchased and brought from Mongolia and China, where they survived in local Buryat communities. The restoration of Buryat cattle breeds in the region, adapted to local climatic conditions, will help to solve the problems of economic feasibility of cattle breeding.

In 2012, Khambo Lama met with Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, and shared his idea. The president supported his initiative and allocated 70 million rubles to the project (about $ 2 million in 2012; *Ovtsevody Khambo lamy*, 2018). With these funds, 10,000 Buryat ewes were purchased from different regions and the distribution of the first flocks began. Every year

[2] This part of the article is partly based on our research presented in the article *Socially engaged Buddhism: cattle-breeding initiative of the Buryat Buddhist sangha and its ecological significance in the Baikal region, Russia* (Dondukov, et al., 2021).

the number of sheep for further sharing is growing. In 2016, about 3,300 sheep were given to new farmers, and in 2019 there were already 5,050 of them. In 2021, it is planned to distribute 8,100. As of 2019, 52 flocks of 300 or more sheep and 22 flocks of 100 sheep were given to farmers. In total, almost 20 thousand sheep were given by the Buryat Buddhist sangha during this period. According to the forecasts of sangha, in 2020 the total number of sheep handed out will reach 25 thousand (*Khambo Lama: "Ovtsy dlia nashego naroda – ėto bogatstvo"*, 2019).

Nowadays, in addition to distributing sheep and in order to use more efficiently the cattle, Buddhist sangha is building a manufactory for processing wool and hides. Along with sheep breeding, the Buddhist community is preparing a project of "Social herd", whereby Buryat breeds of cows will be distributed on the same principle.

We planned a personal interview with Khambo Lama, but we had to cancel it due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in personal communication on Facebook, the leader of Buryat Buddhism told us the following:

> Of course, the decline of rural life brings many problems, including environmental ones. Buryats have lost cattle breeding and either leave the villages or begin to cut down the forest, even illegally. Logging is not a traditional type of activity for the Buryats-nomads; in former times, there was a system of taboos against logging. We understand that people are engaged in this trade for their survival. However, sheep breeding, as a traditional occupation of the Buryats, will help to reorient rural residents to more environmentally friendly activities. In the past, we did not experience such environmental problems, and people were more responsible for the world around them. I think that the loss of traditions in general affects the decline of the Buryat spirituality, therefore their revival is of exceptional value. (Khambo Lama Damba Ayusheev, Facebook message to the author, April 12, 2020)

Thus, Khambo Lama draws on environmental motivation to argue in favor of rural lifestyle. At the same time, he does not see his project exclusively in practical terms, but emphasizes its spiritual benefit for the participants. In his interview for the Public Television of Russia Khambo Lama says:

> We teach people to give. If he takes 300 or 500 sheep, then let him learn to share. Not everyone is lucky to have a possibility to give something to people in his life. This is the real wealth. He doesn't help his relatives. The person who receives the lamb – they don't even know each other. And here is the beauty. (Bogomolov, 2019)

According to Khambo Lama, the transfer of livestock to others develops the *paramita* (excellence, dignity) of generosity – one of the key perfections necessary to achieve the state of Buddha. In other words, the project for

revitalizing the rural life, developed by Buryat Sangha, is able to provide not only economic aid, but also ideological benefits (Dondukov, et al. 2021).

"Social flocks" of the Buryat Traditional Sangha of Russia significantly change the state of affairs in the rural areas of the republic. For the Republic of Buryatia, where the population is less than a million, the creation of 86 "social flocks" in all rural districts of the republic is a serious response to the challenges of globalization and urbanism. There are cases when families return from towns to villages in order to develop a "social flock". Three families from the city of Ulan-Ude returned to the village of Dyrestuy, Dzhida district – the Dansarunovs, Khandashievs and Toktokhoevs. Around their farms a social infrastructure is being formed, in which, depending on the size of the flock, from ten to thirty people are involved. The distinguished Buryat wrestler Zorigto Tsyrendondopov returned to his native village of Noekhon in the Selenga region and was one of the first in the republic to become a participant of Khambo Lama's project. Later he also started horse breeding and opened a shop selling *kumys* (mare's milk) in his village. His family annually donates 200–300 lambs for subsequent breeding to other districts of the republic and supplies 200 liters of *kumys* a day to the market of Buryatia. The case of "Social flock" initiative again shows that Khambo Lama is not only the head of the Buddhist sangha, but also a national leader, who is interested in people prospering in the countryside.

Conclusion

The post-socialist religious revival in Buryatia has been marked by differences between the global and local models of Buddhism developed in the region – they became reflected even in the location of the datsans. The analysis of the urban landscape of Ulan-Ude shows that only the new Buddhist communities organized by Tibetan lamas, or Buryat lamas in opposition to traditional sangha, built their centers in the city. As for BTSR, led by Khambo Lama Ayusheev, it consistently develops anti-urban ideas and implements projects supporting villagers. Thus, both global and local models of Buddhism successfully operate in Buryatia: while one model becomes embodied in the urban landscape, the other one is oriented to rural areas of the Republic of Buryatia.

We come to the conclusion that, from the point of view of Khambo Lama, the development of traditional Buddhist sangha in the urban space of Ulan-Ude would lead to a number of transformations. Specifically, it would mean sangha's acceptance of its service role for different layers

of laity, which would further lead to the transformation of traditional interrelations between sangha and laity, with the interests of the latter coming to the forefront. What is more, expansion to the urban space by BTSR would mean its losing position in comparison to the global Buddhist communities, as they already have vast experience of operating in the urban environment. Being at the stage of revival, experiencing shortage of lamas, with no urban experience, sangha will not be able to form an equal competition to global Buddhist communities. In other words, maintaining the distance, including territorial one, between the laity and the sangha allows maintaining the traditional model of relationships, as well as sangha's patronal role. The initiatives of Khambo Lama, which are aimed at supporting rural people and become implemented with the financial support from the federal sources, show that Ayusheev perceives himself as the leader of the Buryat people, who not only develops, but also determines himself the trajectories of development for the Buryat society, rather than adapts to the challenges of modernization and urbanization.

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Зүблэлтэ үеын удаадахи Буряадай Буддизм ба хотожолто

Зүблэлтэ гүрэнэй задаран унаһаар Росси уласай уламжлалта буддын шажанта орон нютагууд, энээнэй дотор Буряад Улас, шажинаа дахин һэргээжэ эхилһэн түүхэтэй. Гурбан зуу гаран жэлэй туршада Байгал нуур оршомой нютаг дэбисхэр дээрэ оршон тогтожо байһан Махаяна буддизмын уламжлалта Гэлэгба һургуулиин гадна, 1990-ээд онһоо Буряад нютагуудта бурхан шажанай даяаршаһан загбар хурдан таража эхилбэ. Түбэдэй бурхан шажанай багшанар Буряад нютагуудта буддын шажанай шэнэ эмхинүүдые байгуулган, Буряад уласай Улаан-Үдэ нийслэлэй хото һуурин дүрсые хубилгажа эхилбэ. Энэ үгүүлэл дэлхэйн болон орон нютагай буддын шажанай эмхинүүдэй Улаан-Үдэ хотодо хэрхэн түлөөлэгдэжэ байһание харуулһан ба Хамбо лама Дамба Аюшеевын хотожохо ябадалые бууруушаһан һанамжыень абажа үзэнэ.

Түльхюүр үгэнүүд: Буряадай Буддизм, хотжохо ябадалые бууруушаһан һанамжа, Зүблэлтэ үеын удаадахи Буряад улас, байгаали оршоной ёһо зүй.

Buddyzm a urbanistyka w poradzieckiej Buriacji

Wraz z upadkiem Związku Radzieckiego w tradycyjnie buddyjskich regionach Rosji, w tym w Republice Buriacji, zaczyna się proces odrodzenia religijnego. Wraz z tradycyjną szkołą gelug buddyzmu mahajany, funkcjonującej na terytoriach wokół jeziora Bajkał od ponad trzystu lat, w Buriacji rozprzestrzenia się nowy zglobalizowany model buddyzmu. Tybetańscy nauczyciele buddyjscy w okresie poradzieckim zaczęli zakładać nowe organizacje buddyjskie i przekształcać w ten sposób miejski krajobraz stolicy republiki, Ułan-Ude. Autorzy artykułu stawiają pytanie, w jaki sposób globalne i lokalne organizacje buddyjskie są reprezentowane

w miejskim krajobrazie Ułan-Ude, oraz rozważają antyurbanistyczne stanowisko Khambo Lamy Damby Ayusheeva.

Słowa kluczowe: buddyzm buriacki, anty-urbanizm, Buriacja post-sowiecka, etyka środowiskowa.

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