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**STATEMENT OF BUDDHISM IN THE SPIRITUAL SPACE OF**  
**RUSSIA**

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***Abstract***

The study is devoted to the problems of Buddhism in the Russian spiritual space, the analysis of individual modifications and ways of presenting Buddhist values, its embeddedness in a post-secular society. The article reveals the essential features of axiological values through the ethnic consciousness of the Mongolian peoples; the attitude of Orthodox Christianity, Russian scientists to the Buddhist worldview. The idea is substantiated that Buddhist principles act as the mentality and mindset of the Kalmyks in the conditions of the renewed Russian society. The authors use little-studied materials on the history of the Kalmyks and the voluntary entry of the Kalmyk people into Russia, when Buddhism was the other religion both for the Kalmyks themselves and the Russian subjects. The authors try to determine the priority of Buddhism in the near future in the context of world communities and create a single map of analysis. Analyzing the place and role of Buddhism in the spiritual space of Russia, it is worth noting its axiological values in the life of man and society. Buddhist norms act as the moral basis of Kalmyk motivation and behavior, as a regulator of the formation of Buddhist consciousness. Buddhism carries the functions of culture, traditions and peacemaking. It is no coincidence that in Russia the XVII – early XX centuries. There were no sharp clashes between Buddhists and Christians, between Buddhists and other religious denominations. Thus, the accumulation of the integration potential of Buddhism is especially important and necessary in contemporary Russia.

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**Keywords:** Buddhism, ethnos, Kalmyk, Mongolian peoples, Christianization, ancestral cult.



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## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the topic is expressed in the fact that, adequately assessing developmental trends of Buddhism, one can understand the mentality of Mongolian peoples, their inclusion in the context of the relevant philosophical problems of Russia. Theoretical relevance is also expressed in the fact that, by analyzing the characteristics of the axiological orientations of Buddhism, the flexibility and perspective of its existence, the authors try to determine the priorities for the development of religion in the spatio-temporal coordinate. As a result of the voluntary entry of Kalmyks into the Russian state (1609), Russia became acquainted and came into contact with the other religion – Buddhism, the attitude to which initially was wary.

## 2. Problem Statement

Russia is a multicultural state where culture and society are not unipolar concepts, but are interconnected. Axiological values are combined with specific meanings inherent in the culture of any type of society, and express the characteristics of communication methods and activities of people, ethnic groups. It is cultural meanings that characterize general, ethnic, ethical, Buddhist traditions, their inherent understanding of space and time, good and evil, attitudes towards nature, work, etc. And in this regard, the culture of the Mongol-speaking peoples (Buddhism) reflects the specificity and difference (nomadic lifestyle, genetics, mentality, behavior). Interaction with religious organizations appears not only as a dialogue and culture, but as cooperation, with one or another denomination in the name of the good of each of them, and not the exaltation of one of them by infringing on the other, i.e. disputes without hatred.

For many years, scientific and religious literature has been devoted mainly to Christianity, Orthodoxy; with regard to Buddhism, the issue of its study and analysis was solved schematically, fragmentarily. Currently, the situation has changed significantly – a lot of literature on the reconstruction of Buddhism in Russia, its philosophical aspects has emerged (Guchinova, 2004; Mongush, 2016; Sabirov, 2017; Tarbastaeva, 2018; Zhukovskaia, 1990). The authors of the article identify the common sources of the ethnic culture of the Mongol-speaking peoples (Kalmyks, Buryats, Mongols), its individual evolutionary processes. Having state formations, the Mongols, Kalmyks and Buryats are in places quite remote from each other, although there is mutual cooperation and understanding, mutual agreement. The Buryats and Kalmyks are in a single spiritual space of Russia; the Mongols proper (Mongolia) and the Inner Mongols (China) are located in other states, which introduces ambiguity in the content of cultural traditions, rituals, and prescriptions of the Mongolian-speaking peoples. Currently, there is a search for new forms of communication. Buddhism in Russia occupies a peripheral position in comparison with the dominance of the Orthodox Christianity.

## 3. Research Questions

Buddhism, being a foreign cultural value, which seemed obscure and even alien to the bulk of commoners, later became a kind of ethnic component. Russian scientist Abaeva emphasizes: “For a relatively short historical period, Buddhism had such a powerful effect on all spheres of spiritual culture, the ethnopsychological composition of these (Mongolian – K.N.) peoples, that somewhere around the

turn of the XVI–XVII centuries it becomes a “living soul”, their traditional culture, its axiological core of the value-force field of all their spirituality” (Abaeva, 1992, p. 56). One can argue about the “living soul” hyperbole, since there are no categorical concepts in Buddhism (the phenomenon of “soul”, god, sin, the concept of death). Buddhism for a long time was the only system of ideological reference of the Mongol-speaking peoples, when there was no universal system of knowledge, but there were scattered pre-Buddhist beliefs and ideas.

The attitude of Western scholars towards the study of Buddhism has also changed, since, being an axiological value, it has its own niche and acts as a unique and distinctive phenomenon on the Russian and global scale. Studying and analyzing the Buddhist constant makes it possible to understand the essence of the doctrine, its influence on the culture of Russia and contributes to the enrichment of the Buddhist cultural world.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main sources for writing this article were the primary sources, scientific monographs, articles of various authors, philosophical studies, their analysis and interpretation, as well as our own observations and conclusions. The little-studied archives of the Mongolian peoples, their comparative characteristics, materials of the archive of the Republic of Kalmykia – all this contributed to the creation of a single picture of the cultural basis of Buddhism. Library funds in the Mongolian State University of Culture and Art (Ulaanbaatar), the Russian central archives were partially used. An analysis of research sources helped to deepen the conceptual vision of the distinctive culture of the Mongol-speaking peoples and draw attention to their unique phenomenon. The authors, in their analysis, adhere to the principles of universal interconnectedness and development, as well as causal conditionality of events and concepts. The article uses historical-anthropological, comparative-cultural methods that contributed to the study of the problem specifically, abstractly and interconnectedly.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The historiography of the problem under study is quite extensive, the authors had to narrow it down, focusing on the study of Buddhism in the socio-cultural, spiritual space of Russia, mainly in the pre-revolutionary period (XVIII – early XXI century). Extensive scientific literature includes not only general works devoted to the origins of Buddhism in Russia, but also to the attitude of the Russian state to such a difficult religious value of the Kalmyks. The policy of the Tsarist government towards Buddhism has undergone changes: the transition from alertness to balance and, at the same time, reflected an integral part of the general policy of the Russian state towards non-Russian peoples.

The purpose of this study is to determine the transformation, adaptation of Buddhism to the cultural spiritual space of Russia, the identification of its ethnic features and contradictoriness. The process of achieving this goal involves the analysis of the literature and factors that influenced the formation and establishment of Buddhist culture. The process of achieving this goal involves the analysis of the literature and factors that influenced the formation and establishment of Buddhist culture. Buddhism, declared by Khubilai (the grandson of Genghis Khan) as the state religion in the XIII century,

dealt with all Mongolian peoples: "Lama is the root of high religion and the lord of doctrine; the emperor is the Head of the Power and the holder of earthly power; the laws of true doctrine, like the sacred silk lace, cannot be impaired; the laws of the great emperor, like the golden yoke, are indestructible." Buddhist ideas began to spread in Russia, from the sixteenth century, and Buddhism interested representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, such as L.N. Tolstoi, the academician B. IA. Vladimirtsov, scholars Shcherbatskii, Solovev and others, and Rosenberg joined the Buddhist faith.

In the 80s of the XIX century the Russian philosopher Soloviev (2011) tried to comprehend Buddhism in terms of his "philosophy of absolute unity" and believed that Buddhism is important for the history of mankind on the path of the transition from the natural religion to the free human person. Along with this, Solovyov is pursuing the idea of "a possible, albeit unlikely, peaceful inclusion of the Mongol race in the circle of Christian education ..." (p. 53).

## 6. Findings

The role of Buddhism is manifested in the fact that it liberates the Mongol ethnic groups from the zoological properties of people's egoism and nationalism. Thanks to the unconditional and comprehensive moral foundation, Buddhism acts as a measure and model of a positive attitude towards other nationalities and occupies a special place in the spiritual Russian space, being a non-standard worldview. Ethnocentrism, focused on the absolutization of the ethnicity in religion, has given way to universalism in Russia, where Orthodoxy was the state religion. This was understood as the main condition for the integrity of Russia, its originality, distinctiveness and special development paths, the orientation towards an objective reflection of the unique phenomenon of the Russian multinational community. The Russian philosopher Fedorov noted that the tasks of living generations are the "common cause" of all mankind, having realized its determination, absolute unity, leading to the universal and kinship, overcoming the "hostile" state both in nature and society" (Fedorov, 1900, p. 27).

The Buddhist lamas also contributed to the process. The clergy belonged to the rich privileged estate, thus their positions and influence in the Kalmyk public life were noticeably strengthened. At the beginning of 1905, on the initiative of a group of Kalmyk nobles due to the growing role of the Buddhist organization in the formation of public consciousness and ethnic consciousness, the tsarist administration was asked for equal rights of Buddhists with Orthodox Christians. During the period of the bourgeois-democratic revolution that began in April 1905, the tsarist administration made the required concessions and adopted the decree "On Strengthening the Principles of Religious Tolerance." According to the Doctor of historical sciences, Professor Maksimov (2002), the main purpose of this document was to calm the Kalmyks and channel the awakening national consciousness in the controlled direction. Its basic principles were soon confirmed by the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, which proclaimed freedom of conscience. The policy of the trusteeship administration on "restoring order in the khuruls" is terminated. The number of large and small khuruls in the Kalmyk steppe by 1914, compared with 1904, increased from 62 to 78, and the number of clerics – from 679 to 1399; students in khuruls – from 113 to 702 manzhiks. In the same years, a Buddhist temple was built and put into operation in St. Petersburg, and a Mongolian department was opened at the Kazan Theological Academy to train Kalmyk ministers. Two theological schools also began to work (Manych and Ikitsokhurov uluses of the Kalmyk region). It is no

coincidence that the Lamaist confessors became the official support of tsarist politics in the Kalmyk steppe. At the same time, secular education of Kalmyks was not given much attention, and it remained, in the opinion of Maksimov (2002), “almost stalled, with the exception of training personnel for Buddhist khuruls. This approach to the education of Kalmyks was determined by the financial capabilities of the population and the interest of tsarist officials. It was much easier to manage the illiterate population, and the clergy of the Kalmyk people supported this approach. Nevertheless, 15 Kalmyks studied at Russian universities in the 1916–1917 academic year, and about 50 people received higher education until 1917. The development of material and spiritual production led to the revitalization of public life. In the Kalmyk region, the search for national identity has begun.

First of all, attention was drawn to ending persecution by state authorities of Kalmyk clergy and infringement of religious freedom. Of particular concern were agrarian contradictions, constraints in the field of culture, and education. An enlightenment movement was emerging in Kalmykia, its main participants of which were the Kalmyk intelligentsia, progressive Russian teachers, doctors working in uluses, as well as representatives of the upper Kalmyk class (zaisangs, lamas).

Buddhism in Kalmykia was finally entrenched in the 16th – 17th centuries, although it had its own peculiarities: a centralized church organization did not take shape; the total number of khuruls and clerics was significantly less than in Buryatia. Lamas, for the most part, came from Tibet. The Kalmyk nobility had its tribal Buddhist yurt-chapel, and lamas had to observe and keep in obedience the Kalmyk people, according to the letter of Paul I dated October 14, 1800 “On the Free Conduct of All Spiritual Rites of Kalmyks”. It is no coincidence that Catherine the Great was proclaimed Tsagan-Dar-Ezh (White deity, Goddess Giver). In addition, during the XVII – XVIII centuries, individual noions (the Kalmyk nobility) “exempted from taxes and duties people who accepted Buddhist teachings” (Tavanets, 2001).

Buddhism is one of the components of the social structure of society, and the characteristic features of social relations are always reflected in the religious ideas of members of society and in the practical activities of clergy and their cooperation with state structures. The most important factor in the common imperial identity was religion, not language and culture. The tsarist government did not want to complicate relations with the Kalmyk nobility, especially since the Kalmyk khanate had a strong and combat-ready army. But some representatives of the Kalmyk nobility converted to Christianity for self-interested purposes (XVIII century). Orthodox Christianity, being the state religion, acted as an instrument of Russification of the policy of the state structure. The goals and objectives of Christianization are expressed in the words of the member of the statistical committee of the Don Army Krylov: “To achieve the merger of Kalmyks with Russians, Christianity must be spread” (Tavanets, 2001).

Academician Vladimirtsev (1934) emphasizes the inconsistency of the tsarist policy towards the Kalmyks, saying the following: “... state power in relation to the Mongols, i.e. “Buryats and Kalmyks, despite all the differences and peculiarities, was trying to keep their nomadic vassals in their primeval state for military-political purposes, but on the other hand, energetically and consistently changed their lives” (Tavanets, 2001). The Kalmyks were gradually switching to a settled way of life: they live in urban conditions, work in seasonal crafts in the Russian environment. In general, the Christianization of the Kalmyks failed, but they did not completely abandon this idea. It is no coincidence that in 1726 Field Marshal M.M. Golitsyn supported Baksadai-Dorzhi, one of the grandchildren of Aiuka Khan, who

converted to Orthodoxy under the name of Peter Taisha. According to the Kalmyk scientist Maksimov, the official policy of the tsarist administration, which was activated since the second half of the 18th century, regarding the conversion of Kalmyks to Orthodoxy, should be considered as an attempt to divide the non-Russian peoples. The Russian scholar Chetyreva writes: “The Christianization of non-Russians in the Russian national and religious politics of the 19th – early XX centuries were considered as the most important element of acculturation and Russification” (Chetyreva, 2017, p. 151). The adoption of Christianity by a part of the Kalmyks was accompanied by certain benefits. (Regulation 1847) Some representatives of the Kalmyk nobility who adopted the Christian faith retained all privileges, property, possessions and subservient Kalmyks. Common Kalmyks, who converted to Orthodoxy, also received state assistance from the treasury for economic establishment: for families – 15 rubles in silver for each family member; 8 rubles in silver for singles (Maksimov, 2002). As a result of the relief laid down in the Regulation, part of the Kalmyks, for personal gain, converted to Orthodoxy: material assistance, the opportunity to get rid of the authority of the Kalmyk nobility, criminal record. There were also dissatisfied ones – khans, in particular, the charismatic, powerful and subtle politician Aiuka-khan, for they were losing their subjects; disapproval from the Kalmyks and the Russian population, although the baptized Kalmyks along with their owners were resettled from the main settlement.

At the same time, Russia as a single spiritual and intellectual space contributed to the unification of the Mongolian peoples as a whole and each ethnic group individually. In fact, this position offers, on the one hand, the practice of the Russian Orthodox tradition, which remains monotheistic in contrast to Buddhist culture. On the other hand, it is not possible to bring positive results to the solution of global problems without introducing the human factor into them. Only the consideration of man and society as an inalienable part of a single whole, subject to universal, universal laws, taking into account regional and ethnic issues, can become a guarantee of the development of all mankind and man in general.

As a result of targeted state policy, a shift of religion as a “living faith” to Buddhism as a part of the cultural heritage occurred. Religion began to be positioned as part of the history of the people, their culture; rethought in the framework of ethno-national categories (Buryat, Mongol, Kalmyk = Buddhists, Kazakh = Muslim, Russian = Orthodox, etc.). Researcher Pelkmann calls this phenomenon “folklorization of religion” (Sabirov, 2017). A number of functions performed previously by the Buddhist institution are transferred to the secular state: medicine, education, art; in particular, Buddhist emchi (healers), bagsh (teachers), etc. are used.

The spiritual climate in the state should be based on common cultural and moral values; on the problems and difficulties arising during the centuries-old history of Russia, without idealizing the ethnic culture and considering it as a ready-made answer to the difficulty of social existence. It was L.N. Gumilyev who acutely felt the significance of Russian culture, expressing his position: “Not the West and not the East, but Russia, as a general, collective, superethnic, if you like, concept, is the mother and true home of the peoples living in it” (Gumilev, 1992, p. 46).

Buddhism, depending on the region of distribution, has its own specifics. Researchers Bernstein, Sabirov believe that “Buryatia is an original and independent tradition that does not need external manifestation” (Bernstein, 2011, p. 623), then “Buddhism is given a new, more important place” (Sabirov, 2017, p. 10). The central Kalmyk khurul initiates the support and propaganda of the Kalmyk

tradition and the Kalmyk language (Kalmyk language course), various competitions are held. At the same time, the Association of Buddhists of Kalmykia does not strive for autonomy and independence, in all likelihood this is due to the fact that the Central Hurul is led by Telo Tulku Rinpoche, an American Kalmyk, a disciple of Dalai Lama XXIV. As for Tuva, the prestige of Buddhism is increasing there, there is a keen interest on the part of the youth. A community of lay people with a modern education and competence in the field of Buddhism is forming.

In the early 1990s, believers began to unite in organizations: the Union of Mongolian believers, the Buddhist traditional Sangha of Russia, the Association of Buddhists of Kalmykia; Buddhist Association of Tuva of the Russian Federation. In Russia, there are Dharma centers that are most adapted to modern reality and promote Buddhist teachings in the framework of secular education. Particularly active work is carried out by the Danish lama Ole Nidan, who is criticized by both religious scholars and Buddhists, calling it "Buddhism – lite" (an unconventional Buddhist sect). The Russian Association of Buddhists of the Diamond Way of Karma Kagyu tradition, as a community in a Europeanized and modernized form, is the most popular and effective in Russia and in the West.

Buddhism in Russia is a rather controversial phenomenon. How should Buddhism develop? This issue is of concern to the scholarly and religious communities. Traditionally the influence of Tibetan Buddhism is strong. Buddhist associations of Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva do not have a common organizational center. Unity and objective opinion are possible with the coordination of the Buddhist communities themselves and with the support of believers, taking into account today's realities.

Analyzing the place and role of Buddhism in the spiritual space of Russia, it is worth noting its axiological relevance in human life activities. Buddhist principles and commandments act as the moral basis for the Kalmyks' motivation and behavior, as a regulator of the formation of Buddhist consciousness, which takes on the function of culture and the guardian of traditions. It is no coincidence that in Russia in the XVII – early XX centuries there were no sharp clashes between Buddhists and Christians, between Buddhists and representatives of other religious confessions.

Despite the difficult conditions of the nomadic life (the constant danger of an attack by enemies, distant and long passages), the Kalmyks, entering a different faith, adapted it to their living conditions, created and preserved an original culture, making its own specific contribution to both Russian and world culture. In the opinion of doctor of historical sciences, professor Erdniev (1993), the voluntary entry of the Kalmyks into the Russian state turned out to be a positive event, primarily for Russia. In the Kalmyks it acquired a reliable market for the sale of handicraft and industrial goods and a source of raw materials for light industry. Kalmyks mastered the vast steppes of the southeast of the European part of the Russian plain. The dry, waterless steppe fed a huge amount of cattle of a previously unknown breed. Russia acquired in the person of Kalmyks loyal guardians of the southern and southeastern borders (Erdniev, 1993). According to Chetyreva (2017),

the influence of the Russian environment on the Kalmyks was positive in terms of their acquisition of home economics techniques and the assimilation of hygiene practices. However, we must not forget about the negative impact of the urban culture and the resulting vices – drunkenness, gambling, etc. (p. 151)

Identity, evolution of Buddhism in Russian culture, the study and investigation of Buddhist cultural traditions reveal and show a special contribution to the development of the philosophy of Buddhism and the ethnophilosophy of Kalmyks. A new culture has emerged – the synthesis and symbiosis of Buddhist values, nomadic culture, and cultural traditions of Russia.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, it can be noted that the scientific interest in the analysis of the value of Buddhism was dynamic and changed due to the changing spiritual atmosphere in the country and the world, but was in the context of a relevant philosophical and methodological problem, sometimes becoming acute. For example, in 1771, the Kalmyks migrated to Dzungaria. Researchers Baskhaev, Diakieva, Maximov, Chetyreva, the Russian poet Esenin reveal the origins of this uneasy decision. the Russian poet S. Esenin. Particularly poetically and with pain S. Esenin, in chapter II of “Flight of Kalmyks” of the poem “Pugachev” exclaims:

Listen, listen, listen, you didn't dream of a cart whistle? This night, at the liquid dawn thirty thousand Kalmyk wagons from Samara, crawled to Irgiz. From Russian bureaucratic bondage, because they, like partridges, pinched them in our meadows, they reached out to their Mongolia ... (Esenin, 1992, p. 333).

Christianization, which was unsuccessful; a different way of life, as compared with the traditional one, the activation of the tsarist government, the fear of the disappearance of Kalmyks as an ethnos, ethnoculture and ethnophilosophy and other reasons forced the governor of Ubushi Khan and his entourage to decide on such a fateful decision that brought terrible damage to the Kalmyks.

The authors of the article tried to determine the priorities for the development of Buddhism in the near future, which includes the intensification of scientific research in Buddhist studies. There is a direct scholarly connection between the Russian, Western scholars and Buddhism. It is necessary to become seriously interested in each other's elaborations and create a single analytical map. This is also a constructive approach, the creation of a conceptual vision of the essence of Buddhist values, the desire not only to explain, analyze Buddhism, but also to understand the essence of the process and phenomena, to understand Buddhism through ethnos, ethnophilosophy and ethnoculture; the contribution of axiological traditions to the modernization of Russia.

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