

Buddhism in the Soviet Union: Annihilation or Survival?

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The development and problems of Buddhism in the Soviet Union have so far had only limited publicity in the West. The reason for this must be attributed to the fact that until now the problems facing Buddhism have been of interest only to a relatively small circle of specialists, whereas by contrast it can be assumed that much more is known today about the other “foreign religions” in the Soviet Union, and particularly about Islam, as a result of events in the Middle East in the last three years.¹ It therefore seems sensible to make a few general opening remarks on the present situation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union. Its significance as a religious community in the Soviet Union is relatively small — in fact, in comparison with Islam it is negligible.

Quantitative Significance

The exact number of Buddhists who not only live in the Soviet Union but who also practise their faith openly cannot be ascertained. As is well known, Soviet statistics do not contain any details of religious affiliation. The only way to reach a very rough quantitative estimate is, as with Islam, to count those ethnic minorities who have traditionally always been reckoned as being Buddhist. These are:

- the Buryat Mongols, who live in the Trans-Baikal region. They were and still are the largest Buddhist minority in the Soviet Union;
- the Kalmyks, who live along the Volga to the north-west of the Caspian Sea;
- the Tuvinians, who live in what was originally part of Outer Mongolia. After Mongolia’s declaration of independence from China in 1921, the region was ceded in 1924 as the Republic of Uryankhai (later re-named Tannu Tuva) and was eventually annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944 as an “Autonomous Region”.

As at 1 January 1981, the population of these three Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republics was about 1.5 million (929,000 in the Buryat ASSR; 301,000 in the Kalmyk ASSR; 269,000 in the Tuvin ASSR). On the basis of

the ethnic population of these regions some 665,000 of these would still profess to be Buddhists (353,000 Buryats; 147,000 Kalmyks; 166,000 Tuvinians).² However, this figure does not provide much quantitative information about the situation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union. Even if one were to assume that it reflects the actual number of professing Buddhists — which is hardly likely to be the case — these 665,000 would still represent only a tiny minority in comparison with

- the total population of the Soviet Union (266.5 million at 1 January 1981);
- the two main religious groups in the Soviet Union (Orthodox Christians and Muslims);
- the number of Buddhists throughout the world, which is estimated at between 400 million and 500 million (excluding Chinese Buddhists).

Historical Perspectives

The figure of 665,000 possible Buddhists in the Soviet Union today does not, of course, give any qualitative information at all about the inner life of the Buddhist community. That this community still exists is beyond doubt, and consideration will be given to it later in this article. The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that it originated from the Tibetan branch of Buddhism — mahāyānist Lamaism — which first established itself in Mongolia in the 16th and 17th centuries and was then spread by monks among the Buryats, Kalmyks and Tuvinians towards the end of the 17th century.³ This fact does, however, give some important, albeit very general pointers, to two central aspects.

Firstly, in comparison with the monotheistic religions in the Soviet Union (mainly Christianity, Islam and Judaism), Buddhism was originally “only” an ethical-atheist system which has developed into a kind of theistic religion only in its mahāyānist-lamaist form. In fact, although Buddhism may be classified as an “atheist religion”, Schopenhauer rightly recognised that to equate atheism with materialism, irreligiosity or lack of morality would in this case be unjustified.⁴

Secondly, in comparison with Islam (the largest “foreign religion” in the USSR, with between 40 million and 50 million adherents), which does not know any segregation from or negative attitude towards the world, in which the profession of religion and political worldliness form a unity and in which standards for the concrete daily activity and conduct of its adherents are laid down, Buddhism, in all its “denominational” forms, demands — broadly speaking — that the individual renounce all worldly life and activity. Buddhism has therefore been characterised, and to a certain extent correctly, as a religion of escape from reality and of political passivity.⁵

For this reason Buddhism, in comparison with Islam, has never presented the Soviet leadership with a comparable intellectual-religious, i.e. ideo-

logical or even political, challenge. Yet Buddhism has always been a difficult problem for the Soviet State and Party leadership. This point needs to be expanded a little.

Firstly, the Tolerance Edict proclaimed by Nicholas II (1894-1917) on 30 April 1905, which resulted in a significant strengthening of Lamaism, inevitably takes us back to the pre-revolutionary period. In fact, as early as 1728 Lamaism had been recognised in the Russian Empire as a “permitted” religion. The elected head of its “church” leadership is the Bandido Chambo Lama (in Tibetan, Paṇḍita mKhan-po Blama; the office was created in Russia in 1764), who is responsible for both the administration and the spiritual leadership — like the Dalai Lama in Tibet. Before 1917 his appointment had to be approved by the imperial governor. The Lamas subordinate to him enjoyed considerable privileges and came under the protection of state laws. The encounter with Christianity and other occidental philosophies, which the 1905 Tolerance Edict made possible, led to the development of a movement which has been described, analogous with developments in Buddhism generally, as “Lamaist modernism”.⁶ This is all the more noteworthy because no comparable developments took place in the Lamaist Buddhism of Tibet until after the confrontation with Chinese communism in 1949.

“Lamaist modernism” in Russia was closely linked with the head of the Buryat religious orders, Lama Agvan Dordzhiev (in Tibetan, Ngag-dbang rDo-rje). As adviser to the 13th Dalai Lama in Lhasa,⁷ he had established connections between the latter and Nicholas II as early as 1901; however, the planned and even prepared visit of the Dalai Lama to Imperial Russia did not take place.⁸

Buddhist “Modernism” and the Soviet System

Secondly (to continue on the difficulties Buddhism poses for the Soviet authorities), it was Dordzhiev who, after the October Revolution, attempted to continue the development of “Lamaist modernism” by expounding the compatibility of Buddhism and communism. The basis for this was, of course, the atheism of Buddhist teaching.⁹ It is worth noting that leading Russian orientalists supported this attempt to find a modern exegesis of Buddhism that would be acceptable in the Soviet Union. This step was just as much a matter of survival for them as it was for Lamaism itself. Thus, for example, at an exhibition of Buddhist art held in Petrograd in 1919, in the midst of the chaos of the civil war, the orientalist S. F. Oldenburg referred to the importance of Buddhism in advancing the brotherhood of nations and thus to its role as the harbinger of Soviet ideals.¹⁰ On the same occasion his colleague, O. O. Rozenberg, described Buddhism as a religion of the oppressed; it had established the principle of the equality of all living things.¹¹ The famous Russian scholar on India, F. I. Shcherbatskoi, even

ventured to claim that the basic idea behind the Buddhist religion came extraordinarily close to the modern, scientifically-based *Weltanschauung*.¹² For its part, the new Soviet leadership took advantage of this Buddhist modernism and made every effort to link Soviet power with the messianic expectations of the Lamaist world.

The most significant official interpretation of Buddhism at that time is to be found in the article on Buddhism in the first edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*.¹³ This article links the messianic conceptions of Mahāyāna-Buddhism with the aspirations of the oppressed masses. One of the central arguments is that Buddhism is also “atheist” and thus relates more closely to the materialist worldview. It reads, in part, as follows:

“The system of Buddhism brought a whole series of very important consequences for practical life. . . . Foremost among these is respect for the human being or for the person in general. At no time did Buddhism impose national, class or caste barriers on its adherents. The human being whom we are considering is and remains no more than a human being. . . . Thus Buddhism becomes a kind of declaration of human rights and of citizens’ rights in the East. . . .”

However, this interpretation was not in any way indicative of a favourable inclination towards Buddhism but was rather prompted by sober political pragmatism. For in the interests of the internal consolidation of its power, Russia’s new Bolshevik leadership had to avoid any confrontation with non-Marxist intellectual or religious forces.

It is plain that this pragmatic conduct was not in keeping with the Soviet leadership’s true ideological and political objectives, since a decree was passed shortly after the October Revolution (on 23 January 1918) “on the separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church”. The aim of this decree amounted in practice to the destruction of the institutional framework of all the religions in the Soviet Union.¹⁴ While this had hardly any effect on Islam since Islam is not dependent upon an institutional framework, the institution of the “monastery” is of central importance to Buddhism — and this is true of its Lamaist form, too; Buddhist lay people also focus completely on the monastery. Thus if this “institution” were eliminated, Buddhism would inevitably be deprived of its most important basis. However, until the end of the 1920s this decree was used extremely cautiously.

With its initially cautious policy towards Buddhism, the Soviet leadership risked an extensive revival of religious life which could have caused it serious difficulties. This revival was reflected in a considerable increase in the number of monks and in a perceptible flourishing of the Buddhist monastery school system. Even the young communist movement of Central Asia recruited its cadres from the monastery schools. A few figures will illustrate

the point.¹⁵ In 1916 there were 34 monasteries with approximately 15,000 Lamas in Buryatia. By 1923 several new monasteries had been founded (the exact number is not known) and the number of Lamas had risen to 16,000. In 1928 there were still 73 monastery schools in this region, compared with 119 state schools.

In the region inhabited by the Kalmyks there were, in 1916, 1,600 Lamas in 70 monasteries. By 1923 the number of Lamas had actually increased to 2,840.

In Tuvinia, Lamaism was able to develop relatively undisturbed until 1929, when there were 22 monasteries and about 2,000 Lamas amongst a total population of 60,000.

At the height of this development, in the winter of 1926-27, a "Congress of Soviet Buddhists" took place in Buryatia under the leadership of Dordzhiev. This Congress acquired an international character as a result of the attendance of numerous Buddhists from other countries of Central and Eastern Asia and thus made a significant contribution toward disseminating the theory of the compatibility of Buddhism and communism. The message of devotion which the Congress sent to the Dalai Lama in Lhasa must have been a provocative demonstration of the international orientation of Buddhism, which constituted a threat in the eyes of both the Party and the state leadership.¹⁶

Ideological and Administrative Opposition

At this point the development of Buddhism in the Soviet Union had not only reached its peak but in fact already passed it. The consolidation of Soviet power and Stalin's emergence as leader marked a radical turning point in Soviet policy towards religion, and thus also towards Buddhism.¹⁷ This policy led to the extensive decimation and, by the second half of the 1930s, eventual annihilation of Buddhism.

At first, an increasing number of articles appeared in the Party press in which the theory of the compatibility of Marxism-Leninism and Buddhism and the idea that Buddhism had a special place among the religions of the Soviet Union because of its atheist character were described as absurd and condemned as a dangerous false doctrine. A branch of the Association of the Militant Godless was established in Buryatia as early as 1929. Its aim was supposed to be to "extinguish" religious consciousness by exerting an ideological influence, i.e. by atheist propaganda. However, this measure had almost no effect because many Buddhists joined the Association, since they regarded themselves as atheists. The Party and State countered with the argument that Buddhist atheism had nothing to do with militant atheism, which was based on the Marxist-materialist interpretation of the laws of nature and society. The precise and binding outcome of this "new" attitude is to be found in the article on Buddhism in the second edition of the *Great*

Soviet Encyclopaedia.¹⁸ This argued that the theory that Buddhism was an atheist religion or a philosophical system was totally untenable, and that it was an attempt by the ideologues of the exploiting class to gloss over the reactionary nature of Buddhism. In reality, Buddhism was no more than an instrument erected by the feudal lords to exploit the working masses.

However, since ideological means did not prove all that effective in the struggle against Buddhism, administrative measures were adopted and implemented at the same time. As early as 1928, heavy taxes were imposed upon the monasteries (which were maintained by the population). In 1929, many monasteries were forcibly closed and many monks arrested and sent into exile. In 1934 even Agvan Dordzhiev was exiled to Leningrad. He was arrested there in 1937 and transferred to a prison in Ulan-Ude, where he died in 1938 (possibly as a result of torture).

The Japanese expansion in China between 1937 and 1939 as far as the borders of Outer Mongolia provided the Soviets with a pretext for intensifying still further their persecution of the Buddhists: with the — unproven — accusation that the Lamas were agents of Japanese imperialism, even the few remaining Buddhist monasteries were closed down.¹⁹

Relics or Rebirth of Buddhism?

For all practical purposes Buddhism in the Soviet Union had thereby been deprived of its last centres and institutions. But was it also annihilated or at least condemned to insignificance? The best way of answering this question is with a few observations.

1. *Relaxation of the Policy on Religion*

The fact that a few Buddhist monasteries were re-opened in the Soviet Union even before the end of the Second World War — 1944-45 — would suggest that this was not the case. These were Ivolginsk Datsan (datsan means temple or monastery), about 30 kilometres from Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat ASSR, and the Aginskoye Datsan in Chita. In the mid-1960s there were also several reports of a small Buddhist temple being open in the Astrakhan region. It is not known if the latter is still functioning today. The great Buddhist monastery-temple built in the Tibetan style in St Petersburg shortly before the First World War at the suggestion of Agvan Dordzhiev was closed in 1937 and is still closed today — even to tourists — despite the efforts of Soviet orientologists and art experts as well as Buddhists. The Ivolginsk and Aginskoye monasteries have since been maintained by the State. The Ivolginsk Datsan was appointed as the residence of the supreme Lama of the Soviet Union (Bandido Chambo Lama) and later also as the seat of the “Buddhist Central Council of the USSR” (established in 1950 as the central spiritual leadership for Buddhists). A special library was also set up here to house a collection of the remaining “holy books” gathered

together from all over the Soviet Union. According to a report published in 1963,²⁰ this library was said to have consisted then of the 108 volumes of the Kan-yur in Tibetan and the 225 volumes of the Tan-yur in Sanskrit.²¹

At the same time that these two monasteries were re-opened, a new Bandido Chambo Lama was installed, with a residence in the Ivolginsk Datsan. Until 1956 this office was held by Gabzhi Darmayev Lobsan-Nima, then by Ezhi Dori Sharapov until 1969, and since then by Zhambal Gambojev. The latter was previously Sharapov's deputy.²²

The data for the number of Lamas in the Soviet Union today is extremely varied and therefore unreliable. Soviet sources quote a figure of between 20 and 40 in 1959²³ or "just a few dozen Lamas" in 1960.²⁴ On the other hand, official Buddhist sources in the Soviet Union claimed, in 1961, that there were "more than 300".²⁵ Finally, in an interview in the London *Times* in October 1970, the Bandido Chambo Lama, Zhambal Gambojev, claimed that "today" practically every village in the Buryat ASSR had its own Lama.²⁶

The Burmese President of the "World Fellowship of Buddhists" in the 1960s, U Chan Htun, stated after a visit to the Buryat ASSR in 1961 that he had met many deeply believing but for the most part elderly Buddhists. He had also met a few trained Lamas. However, they were being kept isolated from their fellow-believers by being placed in Soviet museums and similar institutions to carry out research on ancient manuscripts. U Chan Htun felt on the whole that in the regions he visited, there was something archaic about Buddhism.²⁷

Professor Malalasekera, who founded the "World Fellowship of Buddhists" in Colombo in 1950, and who was the Sinhalese (Sri Lankan) Ambassador in Moscow in the 1960s, was optimistic about the situation. From the countless lectures he gave in the Soviet capital, he was aware of the great fascination that the Buddhist philosophy and system held for the Moscow intelligentsia.²⁸

The results of research into religious life in the Buryat ASSR are particularly revealing with regard to the present situation of Buddhism in the USSR. The research was carried out in the 1960s by the Academy of Science's Institute of Ethnography,²⁹ and confirms the observations made by U Chan Htun and Professor Malalasekera, the foreign visitors referred to above, in that it concluded, for example, that on religious festivals the monasteries and temples were again full "to over-flowing". Among those taking part in the services were many middle-aged Buryats who worked in production or on collective farms, but who knew very little about their religion.

The research confirmed that the number of Lamas was negligible but that religious ceremonies were conducted by older believers who were familiar with Buddhist beliefs. Among these were a considerable number of former novices who had fled from the monasteries during the persecution of the

1930s, and Lamas who had given up their office under the pressure of religious persecution.

Even among young people, who are in general hesitant about showing their interest in religion in public, "one still encounters religiosity". No small number of them held the Lamas in high regard, as did their parents, and called on them for the blessing of a marriage, the naming of new-born children, requests for a particular guardian spirit to watch over a newly established family, and finally for prayers on the death of relatives.

It was said to be regrettable that "lamaism, despite the creation of the new [Soviet] man . . . has in no small measure retained its adherents". It cannot be denied that Lamaism in the USSR has experienced a certain amount of revival.

2. *Causes and Background*

This inevitably gives rise to the question as to why the Soviet leadership should have "breathed new life" into Buddhism in the USSR. A conclusive answer to this question cannot really be found, but the following points can be made by way of explanation.

The most obvious explanation is that the Buddhist institutions were established only to put Buddhism on an equal footing with Islam — which had been "granted" its own institution two years earlier. The limited "legalisation" of Buddhism since 1944-45 has without doubt enabled the Party and State to keep tight control over Buddhist life in the Soviet Union.

Another explanation is that this was intended as a demonstration, particularly to Asia, of the credibility of the principle of the "freedom to practise religion" (naturally within the framework of the existing legislation on religion) which was guaranteed in the Constitution and the Party programme.

However, a more significant and much more obvious explanation is that in establishing the "Buddhist Central Council of the USSR", the Soviet government's intention was mainly to create an instrument of foreign policy for itself. Thus, for example, at all congresses of the "World Fellowship of Buddhists" or at the so-called "Peace Conferences of Asian Buddhists", the "Buddhist Central Council of the USSR" has been not so much a representative of Buddhists in the Soviet Union as a mouthpiece for Soviet foreign and Asian policy.³⁰

An important, if not the most important criterion in judging Moscow's "new" policy towards Buddhism is without doubt to be found in the pressure on the Soviet leadership to react to the attitude of the Mao regime towards the Buddhist minorities in China, which had been growing more and more "positive" since about 1952 — although here, too, the Buddhists had earlier been severely decimated by a ruthless Marxist-Leninist-style policy on religion. This "new" Chinese policy on Buddhism in many respects

resembled that of the Soviet leadership in the 1920s. However, the post-1952 Chinese interpretation of Buddhism went far beyond the Soviet interpretation of 1927, in that it constituted a subtle, albeit cynical, kind of “positive” reinterpretation of the teachings and history of Buddhism according to the principle of dialectical and historical materialism.³¹

The basic principle of Buddhist teaching and tradition — renunciation of the world with the aim of attaining enlightenment, i.e. release from the eternal circle of birth-death-rebirth (*samsāra*), through individual meditation, was clearly totally unacceptable from the point of view of communist goals. An attempt was made, therefore, to reinterpret this particular element: if the aim of meditation was to purify one’s thoughts, words and deeds, enlightenment could not be found in some remote place but could be attained only through action, sharing the difficulties and cares of the community. Thus it was said to be harmful for a Buddhist to practise his religious customs in isolation from the practical tasks of life. The decline of Chinese Buddhism had proved that meditation and religious practice in isolation from daily life was bound to lead to religious decay. This also proved that only work in the context of communist goals could be understood and represented as religious practice.

It therefore followed that redemption in the Buddhist sense could be sought and found only in the collective. Buddha’s rules also said that monks and nuns had to live a collective life in which there was not only no private property, but not even one’s own “ego”. To be concerned about oneself meant that one was clinging to one’s own ego. If this is not relinquished, it is something that is born and then dies. In this sense the so-called “Paradise of the West” — a concept from one of the ten schools of Chinese Buddhism — in which all Chinese Buddhists hope to be reborn, was also reinterpreted as meaning the goals and activities of the Chinese Communist Party, which intended to create the “Paradise of the West” here on earth. This was the aim of the Chinese Five Year Plan; the implementation of the Plan was therefore to be equated with the realisation of a “Paradise of the West on earth”.

With this interpretation, Chinese Buddhists are called on, as are all other (non-Buddhist) citizens, to make their contribution towards fulfilling Chinese economic planning: productive work means nothing other than fulfilling the vow of the Bodhisattva (one who strives towards becoming a Buddha, who is on the way to “enlightenment”), for Bodhisattva-like conduct consists in being good to all living things, helping them towards redemption. And thus, so to speak, the circle is closed, for no Bodhisattva can attain full enlightenment without helping other living beings. It follows, with dialectical logic, that enlightenment cannot be attained in isolation from the working masses.

The main aim of the Chinese reinterpretation of Buddhism was to back up China’s renewed foreign policy in South and South-East Asia, which lasted

up to the time of the Cultural Revolution; and it was also clearly intended to influence the Buddhist minorities in the regions of southern Siberia bordering on China.³²

The Current Situation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union

This in itself gives an indication of the present situation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union, since it implies that beneath the surface of the Soviet leadership's institutional policy towards Buddhism, outlined above, Lamaism is still actively practised. However, it can be no more precisely quantified than can, for example, Islam or Russian Orthodoxy. Evidence of this is provided by the critical discussions on Buddhist practices which are published from time to time in the Soviet media. Three examples will serve to illustrate this.

Principles of Scientific Atheism, published in Moscow in 1961, asserted:

At present, the majority of the Buddhist leadership in the Soviet Union and in other socialist countries is loyal to the State.

The change in the political attitude . . . does not, however, in any way change the unscientific approach and reactionary nature of the Buddhist *Weltanschauung* itself.

Buddhist religious concepts, which in the course of thousands of years have penetrated and become rooted in the consciousness of the people, prevent believers from becoming fully conscious and active builders of communist society. . . It is plain that in our country, too, Buddhist dogma and rites have retained their reactionary character. . .

The second example is taken from A. N. Kochetov's book on Buddhism, which is still regarded today as the standard work on the atheist interpretation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union:

The Lamas, and those who are active as such, continually break the laws concerning religious cults. They even conduct religious rites in the homes of believers. Some of them still even practise traditional Buddhist medicine. The Lamas have even revived barbaric [Buddhist] customs such as the marriage of minors and the purchase of brides.

The final example is a quotation from the *Handbook of Atheism*, published in Moscow in 1971, which states:

As a result of the victory of the great October Revolution, the building of socialism and the creation of a new culture, the influence of Lamaism on the Buryats, Kalmyks and Tuvinians has steadily declined. In the 1930s, the majority of the monasteries (datsans) in the Baikal region were closed, as were all the local

centres of Buddhism in the Kalmyk ASSR, and the buildings were handed over to the workers. Some of the Lamas who were forced to leave the monasteries turned to productive work, but others continued to practise their religious activities illegally.

Be that as it may, Lamaist traditions, thought to have been left behind long ago, are far from being completely eradicated.

Buddhism perpetuates an unjust social order in the world and promotes a bourgeois attitude to society.

These examples have provided a few comments from Soviet literature on the present-day situation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union. It would be possible to add countless similar comments made in the recent past.

Further evidence of the obviously still very active life of Lamaism in the Soviet Union was also provided by the show trial of the Buddhologist B. B. Dandaron in Ulan-Ude in 1972 (18-24 December). Dandaron was a member of the Buryat Institute of Social Sciences in the Siberian Academy of Sciences. He was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in a labour camp, where he died two years later. Four of his colleagues and students were interned in a psychiatric hospital. (See *RCL* Vol. 1, Nos. 4-5, pp. 43-7 — *Ed.*) The charge brought against them was based on article 142 of the RSFSR Criminal Code, which relates to contravention of the 1918 Decree "on the separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church", and on article 227, which deals with the "infringement of the person and rights of citizens under the guise of performing religious rituals".³⁴

There can thus be no doubt that Buddhism in the Soviet Union is still alive today and that it is actively practised. This has been recently reconfirmed by the Soviet press in connection with the visit of the Dalai Lama to the Soviet Union while en route to the Fifth Asian Buddhist Peace Conference (held in Ulan Bator, 16-20 June 1979). The official news agency, TASS, reported that the Dalai Lama had been welcomed at the Ivolginsk Datsan by the Bandido Chambo Lama, Gamboev, and "by thousands of believers".³⁵ A religious service had been held in "honour of the eminent visitor", at which "the Dalai Lama delivered a sermon". However, to repeat what was said earlier: it is even less possible to quantify Buddhist life today than it was in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is certainly more difficult to quantify than Islam in Central Asia between the Caspian Sea and the Chinese border.

¹This article is a considerably extended version of the lecture given by the author on 3 October 1980 at the Second World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, held in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, West Germany.

²*Narodnoye khozyaistvo SSR v 1980g. Statistichesky yezhegodnik*, Moscow, 1981, pp. 12, 29.

³For information about the spread of Lamaism in Russia, see Ye. Ukhtomsky, *Iz oblasti lamaizma*, St Petersburg, 1904; A. M. Pozdneyev, "K istorii razvitiya buddizma v Zabaikalye", in *Zapiski vostochnogo otdela russkogo arkhelogicheskogo obshchestva*, St Petersburg, 1886, Vol. 1; I. Ulyanov, *Astrakhanskiye kalmyki, ikh domashno-religiozny byt i obshchestvenno-*

religioznye nuzhdy, St Petersburg, 1910. Early reports about Buddhism in Russia can also be found in P. S. Pallas, *Reisen durch verschiedene Provinzen des russischen Reiches*, St Petersburg, 1776-78, Vol. 3. For a summary of the history of Lamaism in Russia and the USSR, of the monasteries and the temples up to 1938, see Nicholas N. Poppe, "The Buddhists in the USSR", in B. Ivanov (Ed.), *Religion in the USSR*, Munich, 1960, pp. 168-79.

⁴Quoted in H. V. Glasenapp, *Der Buddhismus — eine atheistische Religion*, Munich, 1966, p. 13.

⁵For general literature on the system and history of Buddhism, see the bibliography compiled by H. Bräker and C. Regamay, and the article on "Buddhism" in the encyclopaedia *Sowjet-system und Demokratische Gesellschaft*, Vol. 1, Freiburg, 1966.

⁶For general references to Buddhist "Modernism" see especially H. Bechert, *Buddhismus, Staat und Gesellschaft in den Ländern des Theravāda-Buddhismus*, 3 Volumes, Frankfurt/M., 1966-73. On the development of Lamaism in Russia and Siberia, see also E. Sarkisyanz, *Geschichte der orientalischen Völker Russlands bis 1917*, Munich, 1961, pp. 255-64, 379-82, 385-7, 392.

⁷Dordzhiev, born in 1853, received his instruction in Tibet where he became a close friend and confidant of the Dalai Lama. On his life until shortly before the October Revolution see the article "Dordzhiev, Agvan", in *Novy entsiklopedichesky slovar*, Brokgauz-Efron, St Petersburg, 1911-16, column 675. See also G. Schulemann, *Geschichte der Dalai-Lamas*, Leipzig, 1958 (2nd ed.), pp. 373f., 377f., 384, 386.

⁸Dordzhiev, while in Petersburg in 1901, had made the suggestion during a special audience with Nicholas II, whose interest in the mysticism of the Orient was well known, that Russia should proclaim itself as the liberator of Asia and defender of Buddhism and should then advance to the south over the Himalayas in the course of its operations "to free the enslaved peoples" (i. Korostovetz, *Von Cinggis Khan zur Sowjetrepublik*, Berlin, 1926, quoted from E. Sarkisyanz, *Russland und der Messianismus des Ostens*, Tübingen, 1935, p. 381). This incident was one of the causes of the English invasion of Tibet. The English put a price of 20,000 rupees on Dordzhiev's head. For an English evaluation of Dordzhiev see P. Landon, *Opening of Tibet*, New York, 1905, p. 21f.

⁹For Dordzhiev's activities after the October Revolution see especially the article, "Dordzhiev", in the *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, 1st ed., Vol. XXIII, Moscow, 1931, p. 290.

¹⁰S. F. Oldenburg, *Pervaya buddistskaya vystavka v Peterburge*, Petersburg, 1919.

¹¹O. O. Rozenberg, *O mirosozertsanii sovremennogo Buddizma na Dalnem Vostoke*, Petersburg, 1919.

¹²F. I. Shcherbatskoi, *Filosofskoye ucheniye buddizma*, Petersburg, 1919.

¹³M. A. Reysner, "Buddhism", in the *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, 1st ed., Vol. VII, Moscow, 1927, pp. 772-92.

¹⁴Text in *Kommunisticheskaya partiya i sovetskoye pravitelstvo o religii i tserkvi*, Moscow, 1959. German translation in R. Stupperich, *Kirche und Staat in der Sowjetunion: Gesetze und Verordnungen*, Witten, 1962, p. 5f.

¹⁵The following statistics are all from W. Kolarz, *Die Religionen in der Sowjetunion*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien, 1962, p. 447f. (translated from the English *Religion in the Soviet Union*, London, 1961).

¹⁶On this Congress see W. Kolarz, *op. cit.*, p. 449f.

¹⁷The legal basis for this was the amplification or extension of Soviet legislation on religion by the decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of the People's Deputies "On Religious Communities", dated 8 April 1929. Original text in *Kommunisticheskaya partiya i sovetskoye pravitelstvo o religii i tserkvi*, Moscow, 1959; German translation in R. Stupperich, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-28.

¹⁸See the article "Buddizm" (no indication of author) in the *Bolshaya sovetskaya entsiklopediya*, 2nd ed., Vol. VI, Moscow, 1951.

¹⁹For more information on the annihilation of Buddhism in the Soviet Union, see N. N. Poppe, "The Buddhists in the USSR", in *Religion in the USSR*, Institute for the Study of the USSR, Munich, 1960, pp. 168-79; and "The Destruction of Buddhism in the USSR", in *Bulletin of the Institute for the Study of the USSR*, No. 7, 1956, pp. 14-20.

²⁰E. Benz, *Buddhas Wiederkehr und die Zukunft Asiens*, Munich, 1963, p. 201.

²¹The two collections both form the standard Tibetan Buddhist canon. The Kan-yur

(Tibetan: bKa-hgyur) contains the teaching of Buddha in 108 volumes; the Tan-yur (Tibetan: bsTan-hgyur) consists of 225 volumes of commentaries and explanations of the Kan-yur and also includes some scientific writings with no religious content. In addition to sūtras, legends, monastery discipline and church organisation, the Tibetan canon also includes extensive literature on magic as well as works on philosophy, medicine and grammar. The canon is arranged according to the three divisions of the Tripitaka.

A detailed account of the fate of this complete Tibetan canon, which was originally kept in Aga monastery until it was closed in about 1934, can be found in N. N. Poppe, *The Buddhists in the USSR*, p. 178. Poppe had a considerable part in the efforts of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR to save the rich library collections and works of art from Buddhist monasteries and temples from destruction by the Communist Party.

²²According to E. Benz, *op. cit.*, p. 202, Sharapov was born in Buryat-Mongolia in 1885. His father was a nomad herdsman. He entered the Lama monastery of Gusino-Ozersk at the age of 12. He finished his Buddhist studies there at the age of 25, and when he was 30 he achieved the rank of a Gelun-Lama. Nothing else is known about his further development until he was elected Chambo-Lama in 1956.

No biographical details are available on the other two Bandido-Chambo Lamas, Darmayev and Gamboyev.

²³*Sputnik ateista*, Moscow, 1959 (quoted in Lazar Pistrak, "Moskau verschärft den Kampf gegen die Religion", in *Aussenpolitik*, No. 12, 1961, p. 823).

²⁴*Nauka i religiya*, No. 6, 1960, p. 23.

²⁵*Kratki nauchno-ateistichesky slovar*, Moscow, 1969, p. 376 (with reference to a report of the Buddhist Central Council of the USSR, dated 1961).

²⁶*The Times*, 6 October 1970.

²⁷U Chan Htun, "Buddhist Mission from Burma", in *World Buddhism*, No. 2, 1961.

²⁸cf. E. Benz, *op. cit.*, p. 198f.

²⁹To quote just one example, N. L. Zhukovskaya, "Sovremenny lamaizm (na materialakh Buryatskoi ASSR)", in *Voprosy nauchnogo ateizma*, Akademiya obshchestvennykh nauk pri TsK KPSS, Institut nauchnogo ateizma, Moscow, 1969. The following remarks are based on this fairly lengthy article.

³⁰See, for example, the detailed reports by Holmes Welch, "Buddhists in the Cold War", 8 March 1962, and "Asian Buddhists and China", 4 April 1963, both in *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

³¹On the following, see H. Welch, "The Reinterpretation of Chinese Buddhism", in *China Quarterly*, 22/1965, pp. 143-53; "Buddhism under the Communists", in *China Quarterly*, 3/1961, pp. 1-14; "Facades of Religion in China", in *Asian Survey*, No. 7/1970, pp. 614-26. These investigations are based primarily on the evaluation of all available Chinese periodicals and press items.

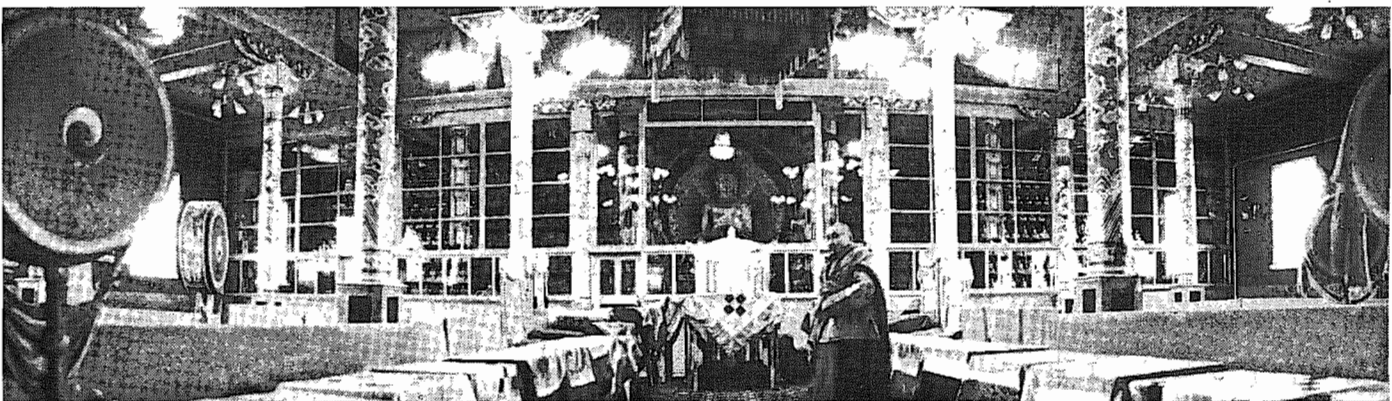
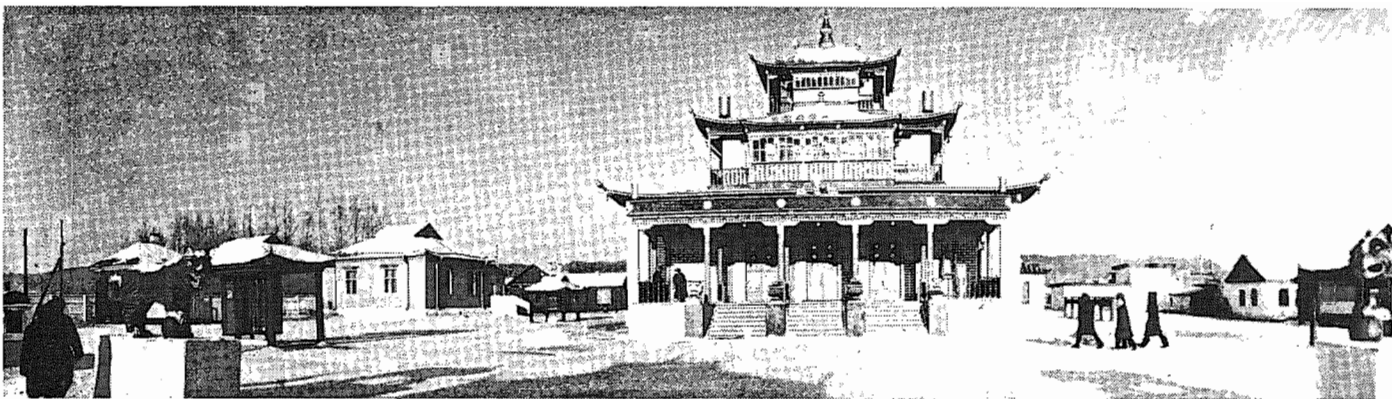
³²See H. Bräker, "Der Buddhismus als Instrument der chinesischen Aussenpolitik", in *Ost-Probleme*, No. 17, 1965, pp. 464-8; and "Kommunismus und Buddhismus: Zur Religions- und Asienpolitik der Sowjetunion und Chinas", in *Moderne Welt*, No. 1, 1967, pp. 50-64.

³³A. N. Kochetov, *Buddizm*, Moscow, 1965 (izdatelstvo "Nauka", Akademiya nauk SSSR).

³⁴The trial was dealt with at great length and documentary evidence given in *Samizdat*, No. 10, 1973.

³⁵TASS, 14 June 1979.

Translated from German by G. M. Ablitt



The Ivolginsk datsan (temple or monastery), guarded by tigers set on plinths outside (*above*) is the centre of Soviet Buddhism. *Below* is the interior of the datsan. (See article on pp. 36-48). Photos © Ian Buruma.



Turning the great prayer drum outside the Ivolginsk datsan. © Ian Buruma.



Members of the Chinese Protestant delegation to Britain in October 1982 (see pp. 93-4). *From left to right:* Rev. Zheng Yugui; Bishop K.H. Ting, President of the China Christian Council and Chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement; Mr Zhao Zhilian; Mrs Phoebe Shi Li; Mr Han Wenzao; Bishop Zheng Jianye; Professor Zhao Fusan. *Photo courtesy of Rev. Bob Whyte.*