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*At the Crossroads:
Through a Definition of Buryat Identity*

Marinandrea Gamba

Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary research and studies on Eastern Europe
MIREES (LM 52)

GRADUATION THESIS
in
Developing Multicultural Skills in Global Contexts

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Abstract

The deep integration of Buryat people in the territory of the Russian Federation and their peaceful national revival was a surprise for its multicultural character in a country where ethnic conflicts are on the agenda. The matter of concern regards the historical reasons of their inter-cultural approach and the possibilities these people have been able to seize in order to assimilate into the multi-ethnic Russian society without precluding themselves the chance for a cultural renaissance. The thesis explores the vast world of Buryats throughout their history from their origins as an ethnic group up to present day in the Republic of Buryatia and in the big metropolitan city of St. Petersburg.

The goal of this enquiry is to demonstrate, how over time Buryats have been able to absorb and independently work out cultural traits from peoples with whom they have come into contact, thereby defining their own cross-cultural identity.

Analysis has taken place through a historical point of view by considering each step taken by the Buryat people in the formulation of their identity as a group and afterwards the enquiry took on a more sociological character by looking carefully to the contemporary results of their multicultural interaction and their efforts of identity-keeping in the diaspora.

The study has revealed how the multicultural territory where Buryats originally lived was decisive for the formation of intercultural identities, strongly unified among them by a feeling of belonging to the same natural and social tradition. The advent of Buddhism brought an even further inter-ethnic approach to Buryat culture, since it came to encompass and assimilate Buryat specificities into a more cosmopolitan horizon. Its basic principle of non-violence and its history of intercultural development laid the foundations of Buryat contemporary renaissance as people of multicultural origins grouped around a Buddhist tradition of opening and assimilation, but also as people with a strong sense of cultural affiliation.

Introduction

The Russian Federation is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world, where approximately 160 different ethnicities have been living together for centuries, since the first East and South moving of the Russian Empire.

In its push eastward, the Empire achieved the goal to submit a lot of peoples living in the vast plains and mountains of Central Asia and South Siberia. Among them there were the countless nomadic tribes from Tatar-Mongol origins.

It is particularly interesting to consider the development of a Mongol ethnic group raised in plains, mountains and river-sides around the Baikal Lake, not far-away from the current Mongolian State: the Buryats. They live in an area long disputed among Russia, China and Japan in the race to the hegemony of the Siberian steppes and the Mongolian plateau, but this territory is also the result of continuous migrations among peoples of Central Asia and Asia Far-East, a crossing-border-area.

Despite many cases of unsolved clashes between the Russian government and other minority groups, the history of this Buryat people has left place for reflection about the reasons and the backgrounds for its tolerant example of quite peaceful coexistence among different cultures living together on the same territory for such a long period of time. Buryat cultural identity has been shaped along symmetries of inter-ethnic and inter-cultural exchanges, which have allowed them to become a sponge of inter-national processing with its own national personality.

In the present time of Globalization, with the revival of nationalities and national self-consciousness, Buryats have demonstrated to know how to revive their own national culture through the challenges offered by the comparison with other cultural identities. National rebirth is experienced by Buryats as a process of further awareness of their national specificities, and the exaltation of the latter is accomplished by a deep inquiry into the differences which separate them from other peoples, a deep analysis of those which were the contributions and those which were the differentiations in the formation of their national identity, and this process of awareness has also involved processes of discard of ethno-cultural elements not recognized as characteristic. Another important element, which emerges from the history of those people, is their sense of community and collective belonging, a different way of conceiving identity as a community, without the traits of individualism, and this aspect connects them to the more Asiatic sense of living in society. In such terms, a fundamental role is played by the Buryat spiritual “leader”, Buddhism, which reveals itself to be the key agent of Buryat intercultural expression and their “visiting card” to other cultural identities.

1. Who were the Buryats?

1.1 Between tradition and an inter-cultural territory

The Buryats are people of Mongol origins living in the northern part of the Russian-Mongolian borders, in an area covering the steppes around the Baikal lake. They are by tradition a pastoral nomadic people, who had been practicing sheep-farming up to their fall under Russian control.

These were the people of Mongolian culture and language, who in earliest times migrated into the lands of Angara River valley and the Turken valley of Eastern Sayan Mountains. Originally they counted a large number of different tribes, which in the common Mongolian mythology were addressed as the “Burte Chino” (Blue Wolf people); because they were supposed to have a common ancestor born from the union between Burte Chino and Goa Maral (Beautiful Red Deer), among whose successors it is possible to count Chinggis Khan’s clan. So from this ancient name for “wolf” originated the name “Buryat”, and to this “wolf clan” Mongols refer as a lineage among the Buryat Mongol. In the past, Burta Chino’s clan occupied a vast area on lake Baikal, named Barguzin Tukum. This region is universally recognized by the whole Mongolian world as the cradle of all Mongolian people. Thanks to its collocation in the middle of the vast Siberian area, the Burta Chino’s land had been closed to many socio-historical events, which had brought it to become the first player of cultural and economic development of the Siberian region.

The main reason for the great success of this ancestral area was, first of all, its geographical position, exactly in the center of the Asian continent, at the crossroads of different communication routes. One of the first of these routes was the Great Tea Road. Tea originated in China, where for millennia it has been exported. For a long period of time, tea was broadly used as a medicine, and only later as an invigorating drink. In order to trade great quantities of tea to the Western world, China made use of the long and far-reaching Siberian ways, first through Mongolia and then Russia. The meeting point of these roads was the region of the Baikal lake. *“The history of Tea road is the history of the development of diplomatic, trade and cultural relations between people of Eurasia, including the Buryatia, in the Middle Ages”*.¹

Soon a big move of goods between Russia and China started to take place along Siberian roads and large amounts of wealth passed throughout these lands. Little by little, the Burta Chino area became a land connecting different cultures and civilizations, thanks to its gravitational location of peoples and goods.

¹ M. Lubsanov, “The Great Tea Road and its role in the history of nations, inhabiting Buryatia”, page 12, Economic-Trade College, Ulan-Udè, “My Buryatia”, April 15 2011.

Despite the enormous economic potential of the region, in the late 12th century all Mongolian tribes did not present a common socio-structural organization; theirs was a system of unbound tribes. Temujin (or better known as Chinggis Khan, who came from the Baikal lake) rose to power as a worthy warrior and leader, and thanks to a series of victories in battle, he managed to unify the entire Mongolian speaking world. After his death, and under the pressure of the Chinese thrust, his empire broke out in several smaller khanates, and three branches of the former Mongolian dynasty took different steps: one part developed in Persia, one in Russia and another one in Turkic Central Asia. People from all three divisions highly assimilated with the populations they had previously ruled and developed separately from each other. Only in southern Siberia tradition remained strong, while in the other regions, Mongols became Muslim and almost blended in with the local culture.

After some time, the civil war started and the core of the Mongolian empire disintegrated as it was completely corroded by Mongolian princes' wars. All tribes were dispersed and took different migration paths all around Asia (in China and Russia, above all). *"After the fall of the Mongolian empire the ethno cultural processes started to develop individually. (...) the tribes around the Baikal in this period kept living in peace in close relation with tribes of Mongolia"*². At that time the Baikal zone was a highly disputed piece of land among Asian big superpowers, and the dispute reflected the ethnic composition of the area. The annexation of Buryatia to Russia involved natural consequences from the colonial politics. As stressed in the work of Abaeva and Zhukovskaya "Буряты" ('Buryats', Москва Наука, 2004), Moscow society was interested in the development of new territories, rich in natural resources (mostly gold and furs, in the case of Siberia), where it could spread its political and cultural influence. The native population was mostly interested in the establishment of exchange of goods, since this new relationship could mean for them a real cut with the traditional paths of trade in Central Asia, which at that time still represented a breeding ground for Buryats. Additionally, the native population resided in a strategical location, which the Tsar did not want to miss in the perspective of consolidation of its power in Asia.

In a situation of chaos and disorder, when the Chinese Manchu dynasty was trying to expand into the weak Mongolia and started to invade its lands, some princes of the Mongolian Northern horde looked at the Russian Tsar for protection and a better administration. Annexation of Mongol Buryatia to the Russian Empire was not full, since the local princes continued to hold a certain amount of power until the official proclamation of the Soviet Union. It was decided to establish a kind of Russian protectorate over them, at least for the moment.

Even if the Russian protectorate saved the Buryat Mongol from the Manchu, it did not mean that its management did not create any problems. These later occurred because the first instance of Russian power was at that time represented by Cossaks, who initially raided Mongolian settlements and in this way forced Buryats to move away and resettle elsewhere. According with Bogdanov's report in "Очерки истории бурят-монгольского народа" ('Essays on the history of Buryat-Mongol people', Buryat Public University, Ulan-Udè, 2008) their lands were soon transformed into farm lands and at the end of the '50s of the XVII century large streams of Buryats started to migrate into the Mongolian territories, in the attempt to escape the construction of towns by the Russians. From a certain point of

² Абаева, Жуковская, «Буряты», страница 38, Москва Наука, 2004.

view these continuous flows of people coming and leaving demonstrated somehow a high degree of flexibility and mobility of people of the region.

According to Abaeva and Zhukovskaya's study materials in "Буряты" ('Buryats', Москва Наука, 2004) the establishment of the Russian-Chinese borders in Siberia determined a certain degree of isolation of Buryats from other peoples of Central Asia, Mongolia and China, so that Buryat traditions started to deeply differ from those of the others, although migration and exchange flows increased continuously. The result of these changes and ethnic displacements was the creation of a different ethno-territorial configuration of the population. Furthermore, in the boundary territories, several ethnic groups were resettled with the aim of preserving the frontiers from the enemies. So, Buryat tribes, Tungus, Turk and representatives of more nationalities, found themselves living side by side in close relation with each other. At the same time, the process of acquisition of foreign elements from the "local culture" was forming among Buryats, who began to assimilate Tungus and Central Asian Turk features. It is possible to guess the degree of ethnic integration at that time by the words of Tsar Peter the Great who said *"Well, we have a population without language, without its own culture and without a territory. We can note that there no a population at all, whereas there's assimilation by the Buryat of branches of Soyots family"*.³

Abaeva and Zhukovskaya proceeded in their work emphasizing the importance of this interethnic influence among the Buryats, which provided these people of Mongolian origin with a change in their every-day-life and economy, but also in the material and spiritual elements of their culture. Also, physical features started to change, and began to appropriate characteristics different from those properly Mongolian, and which nowadays we point out as "typically Buryat". As suggested by the two authors, it is not like making a mistake, if we say that the process of ethnic formation of the Buryats could find a sort of completion only after the arrival of the Russians, through their constant assimilation with traditions of other "national" groups.

As Abaeva and Zhukovskaya underline, it is also interesting to notice that in this situation of ethnic formation, where local cultural identity was left to the shaping action of inter-culturalism, the image of the Baikal lake rose as a symbol and reference of a new-born nation. Characteristics of landscape acquired a pregnant meaning in the shape of cultural personality and ethnic belonging.

All these events contributed to create in the Buryat people a feeling of always more independence towards the traditional Mongol world where they had come from, and since those times it is possible already to catch sight of the first formation of a peculiar Buryat society.

Anyway, for centuries the feudal system of Western Russia was never imposed on the Mongol-Buryats and most of the local authority remained in the hands of the Mongolian chiefs. Even a Buryat Cossak regiment was shaped, whose tasks were to control the borders with the Manchu empire and guarantee their safety.

Around the middle of the XVII century Russian Cossaks began to consolidate in West Siberia by moving eastward founding a series of towns along the trade roads (like Ilimsk, Balagansk and Irkutsk and others). In so doing, they fast reached all lands around the Baikal Lake, and over time the incorporation of all Buryat lands took place. With the advent of Peter the Great in power in Russia, the course of events in this region took a decisive turn:

³ Абаева, Жуковская, "Буряты", страница 59, Москва Наука, 2004.

“Peter not only gave the Buryat clans the right to ownership of their lands, but also allocated the leaders of these clans a number of administrative functions (...) The eminent diplomat, Fedor Golovin has always remained a convinced supporter of friendship between Russians and Buryats, believing, that without it a real security of the borders between Russia and China is impossible”.⁴ People of the Baikal became an integral part of the Russian Empire, a multinational and far eastern widespread society.

Soon after the incorporation of their land into the Russian state, the Transbaikalia became a place for penal detention of political prisoners, intellectuals, and men of arts and sciences banned from the Western Russian courts. What was born as a punitive detention became a great resource for the local Transbaikal society. Poles, Lithuanians, and Ukrainians started to arrive in large streams in Transbaikalia and in the Irkutsk region of the Baikal lake. Among exiles, there were a lot of well educated scientific persons, often representatives of different social movements, who brought new ideas and knowledge among the natives through education and scientific progress, and the whole heterogeneous Transbaikal society started to acquire new shapes.⁵

A second big stream of migration from the West took place in the second quarter of the XIX century with the arrival of an exiled Decembrist in the region. The Baikal region had become the center of political exile. “Decembrists were closely connected with native population, contact with them was of great value to them. Very often they spoke with progressive-minded people about the future of their motherland-Buryatia. Being settled in different regions of Buryatia, Decembrists developed the many-sided economic, cultural, educational and public activities, which had an essential effect on the development of the region. This influence can be seen in the rising level of education, culture of the population, making more active social and political life in the region (...)”⁶. Furthermore, as Dorzhieva states in her script “Cultures, traditions and customs of the Buryat and the Evenks” (in *Моя Бурятия - материалы республиканской студенческой научно-практической конференции К350-летию вхождения Бурятии в состав Российского государства*, Улан-Удэ, издательство бурятского госуниверситета), Buryatia is a combination of cultures and traditions of very different peoples from both Asia and Europe (Buryat, Yakut, Evenki, Russian, Tofalars, Belarusian, Polish, Ukrainians and so on), whose formation followed the development of Transbaikal society, but every national culture has also kept its own main features and individuality. This aspect, however, has not ruled out their mutual cultural exchange, in so doing promoting the tolerance and coexistence of several national groups. “it (Buryatia) reflects cultural values, ideals and norms of nomadic civilization, the northern forest hunters, the European nations. As a result of the interaction and interpretation of the cultural traditions they have been closely intertwined, which is reflected in everyday life, habits, norms of public morality and arts”.⁷

⁴ V Putilina, “stages of voluntary incorporation of Buryatia in the Russian State, Buryat financial and credit college, page 19, “My Buryatia”, Ulan-Udè, April 15 2011.

⁵ “Exile in Siberia”, <http://baikalnature.com/info/86595>, consulted December 11, 2013.

⁶ D. Myasnikova, “the influence of political convicts on the development of Zabaikalye-Decembrists in Buryatia”, page 5, Sport and services college, “My Buryatia”, Ulan-Udè, April 15 2013.

⁷ M. Dorzhieva, “Culture, traditions and customs of the Buryat and the Evenks”, the Buryat Republican agrotechnical institute, “My Buryatia”, page 32-33, Ulan-Udè, April 15, 2011.

With a major attention into traditions of Buryats, it can be said that they are originally nomadic herders and hunters, who with the arrival of Russian Cossaks, quickly turned to a more sedentary agricultural life style. The practice of hunting diminished in time, but it left behind the complexity of Buryat social organization. “Buryat social organization is centered around the joint principle of patrilineal descent and agnatic relationship (...) All Buryats trace descent from a single common ancestor, a mythical figure who may differ from group to group within Buryat society”.⁸ The stronger the kinship relationship between two Buryats, the more likely the possibility they live next to each other in residence.

Trans-Baikal Buryats present a more steady social organization than the Cis-Baikal Buryats, where the impact of Russian colonization was felt much more strongly than on the Eastern side of the lake. The two parts also reflect the different developments undertaken by Buryats during the first period after Russian arrival in these lands: the Western side was more Christianized and there was a more sporadic number of “original” Buryats, while in the Eastern side the presence of Lamaist culture (Buddhist culture) was much more preeminent and traditions were much more ingrained. In the Buryat culture today, as in the past, they are basically all Shamanist (despite Christianity, Islam or Buddhism).

The worship of the Shaman calls to mind the memory of ancient beliefs and legends around a single character, which has special powers and special relations with the extra-mundane world. As suggested by Krader in his extensive studies on shamanic cultures, shamanism is a widespread reality, which crosses many peoples of different beliefs and cultures in Asia and not only in the Asiatic continent. It varies from person to person, and its worship is variable. Among Asians practicing shamanism, Buryats are certainly the more complexly organized, because they have been growing and developing close to great civilizations and they have been enjoying favorable environmental conditions. They continue to practice shamanism closely related with Central Asian traditions existing in Mongolia at the time of Chinggis Khan.

“(The shaman) is socially recognized as such, and he is called forth as a shaman by his own social group; he can only function as a shaman if he is recognized as one in potential by his contemporaries. His local group then undertakes to pay for his training and the ceremonials of becoming shaman (...) in order that he may fulfill the social roles and functions that are required of him”.⁹ It is wrong to see in the shaman only a spiritual figure. He is a kind of “special delegate” at the service of the community, which is related to him through common ancestors and spirits belonging only to a particular kin-ship family.

In the past, its presence was highly related with the ritual of hunting, which was proper of a nomadic society. The shaman was the person directing the hunt; they served as lay and spiritual leader of the social group, and as Krader suggests, in ancient times he was not just a religious leader but also law-giver: expressing both the cosmos and social laws. In the past, this character has held more of the features of the outsider and the sorcerer. Krader defines the shaman as “a specialist of the society”; his figure could be also translated into a social phenomenon but without institutions. Basically, all Buryat groups have their own deities to appeal to in case of need. The shaman intercedes for them by giving his/her body and psyche at the mercy of the spirit, in order to create a bond between people and deities.

⁸ Lawrence Krader, “Buryat religion and society”, page 322, vol 10, Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, 1954.

⁹ Lawrence Krader, “The Shamanist Tradition of the Buryats (Siberia)”, page 105, Anthropos Intitute 70, 1975.

Most of the collective and social rites linked with the worship of the shaman were generally performed in open spaces, outdoors, mostly on riversides, at the foot of the mountains or along the coast of the Baikal lake, usually where previous shamans had been buried, so their spirits could provide intercession for people still alive. Each of these rituals led back to the primordial link between man and nature, between life and death, between humankind and natural landscape, so then the Baikal and its uncontaminated nature became the symbol of territorial and cultural belonging, regardless of any attempt of creating ethno-cultural differentiations.

Feelings of belonging to those landscapes had rooted in Buryats' collective imagination a deep bond with their local traditions, values and sense of kinship, together with the harmonization with other peoples' cultures. In the Buryat imagination, their home land always had its roots in the creative force of several and different national perspectives. This last aspect had never allowed them to lose the memory of their own ethnic values and habits, rather, it made possible a revival of their national peculiarities, enhanced by a common cultural heritage, which had also enriched their references with Mongolia and the whole Central Asian world. The early history of Buryat people contributed to the focus on their particular inclination towards a peaceful meeting with other peoples and their capacity of mediation with them. The formation of a "Buryatness," as something different than the Mongols from Central Asia, is also to refer to the numerous influences and interactions with other peoples, with those inhabiting the Baikal and simultaneously with Russian migrants. Buryats have come to incorporate typical characteristics from all these peoples and to create their own cultural consciousness, thus paving the way for further development of peaceful dialogue and cultural exchange.

1.2 A cosmopolitan creed

With the establishment of Russian-Chinese borders in 1727 it was possible to trace the beginning of an independent Buryat identity formation against the Mongolian peoples of the central steppes. Since the imperial time of Chinggis Khan up to present, Buryats have been always very open and interested in what was happening beyond their territory. They very often undertook long voyages and pilgrimages through Mongolia, Tibet and even India, by making paths crossing Asia from North to South and from East to West, like a true nomadic population as they were. By crossing the spatial space of nation-states and cultures, they developed a unique identity of hybrid shapes. Even if they had always been considered a part of the peripheries of great civilization empires (Mongolia, China, Russian Empire, Soviet Union and Russian Federation), Buryats found the way to appropriate and process a new form of cultural pulse, which they had the opportunity to meet during their cross-border-meetings with peoples of Asia: Buddhism.

Since the war time, all Mongols became acquainted with their Chinese and Tibetan neighbors, from whom they received some knowledge about writing, astrology, medicine and historic backgrounds. Among other things, they also became more knowledgeable in

the world of Buddhist faith, which had come to Tibet and then Mongolia from India. Even if Buddhism was rudimentarily known before the coming of the first Tibetan lamas in Buryat lands at the beginning of the XVIII century, around the '70s its propaganda in Transbaikalia had already begun. Gradually, the image of lamas moving around in a mobile worship yurt became increasingly widespread. These yurts were lamas from Tibet and Mongolia, and they usually stopped in countryside villages and in places very close to stone temples. These yurts did not serve just as centers of cult and worship, but their function went beyond the simple task of letting people cultivate their new faith. During their pilgrimage around Buryatia they collected art masters (painters, sculptors, carvers, writers of annals) who followed the yurts during their journey. In this way, mobile monasteries became spiritual and cultural centers for all Buryat society, and played a great influence in the management of the daily life sphere of people. A famous European traveller of that period, Pallas, describes that although local people of the Baikal were still bound to the Shamanic rituals, there was a good majority of them already practicing the Lamaist cult¹⁰ (Lamaism is a term coined by a German scholar referring to the particular devotion among Buryat people towards the figure of the lama, through whose features Buddhism had mostly gained ground in the Baikal region, where, in their belief, the lama is considered almost equal of Buddha and the Karma).

In 1741 in Buryatia there were already 11 datzan (Buddhist temples, as the Ivolginskiy Datsan illustrated in image n°1) and 150 lamas (some of which came from Tibet), and this year could be marked as the official date of recognition of Buddhism as one of the legitimate religions of the Russian Empire by the empress Elizabeth. In 1764 we could recall the official date of the establishment of Pandito Khambo Lamas as the supreme ecclesiastical Buryat leader, who guarantees somehow the autocephality (in administrative terms) of the Buryat Buddhist Church against the authority of the Tibetan Dalai Lamas and their Mongolian counterpart Jebdzundambas (although the supreme spiritual leader remained the Dalai Lama in Lhasa).



Image n°1: Ivolginskiy Datsan (Buryatia) the major monastery-temple of the Russian Federation, 10/28/11

¹⁰ М.Н. Богданов, "Очерки истории бурят-монгольского народа", страница 154, издательство бурятского государственного университета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

It is out of the question, however, that Buryats received Buddhism from Tibet and partly from India. “(...) many Buryats have long viewed themselves as cosmopolitans, regarding the long history of Buryat Buddhist pilgrimages to Mongolia and Tibet as a prominent marker of southern Siberia’s transnational history and identity. (...) Some view themselves as a truly cosmopolitan people spanning three major Eurasian states (Russia, Mongolia, and China) and extending their transnational religious practices into two more (Tibet and India); others express a more restricted understanding of their homeland within the Russian Federation”¹¹.

Buddhism started to penetrate Buryatia at the same time the Russians did. While in Cis-Baikalia, Slavs tried to convert natives. The emperor gave more freedom to Transbaikalia peoples, due to their necessary support in the control of the borders with China. Buddhism found fertile ground for its diffusion and a new generation of students began to migrate into the Amdo region of Tibet for learning and practicing the faith. “Tibetan monasteries functioned as multinational communities with various ethnic groups living together, evidence of Inner Asian Buddhist cosmopolitanism. (...) Amdo served as a bridge for the spread of Buddhism from Tibet to Mongolia. Out of three thousand monks in Labrang, the majority of whom were Tangut, there were about five hundred Mongols of various ethnic groups, including one hundred Buryats, several Tungus, and thirty Chinese. (...) the monasteries often developed what he calls – middle dialects – a sort of lingua franca mixing diverse Mongolian and Tibetan dialects”¹². Monasteries collected people from various nationalities and with different notions of tradition for teaching and transmitting the doctrine of Buddhism and by creating in this way a multi-plot reality of faith. Once back to Buryatia, monks engaged themselves in teaching and research in their native land, spreading Buddhism everywhere. They became carriers of new frontiers in the development of a new form of medicine, together with the opening of new secular schools and the promotion of European literature on Buddhism, and at the end they abolished the cult of oracles and incarnate lamas in their homeland.

With his dedication to the Buddhist faith, monks became fully dependent and at the service of their community. They could feed themselves thanks to their belonging to the community and they did not possess anything of their own, everything they needed was bestowed by the little society around them. At the beginning, lamas moved through caravans, which were prepared especially for them, in order to let them meet as many people as possible, in the hope of spreading the faith and bring help and spiritual support in the villages. But soon, as Bogdanov underlines in his writings “Очерки истории бурят-монгольского народа” (“Essays about the history of Buryats-a Mongolian nation”, бурятского госуниверситета, Улан-Удэ, 2008) new types of steady monastery-universities were created, in which all kinds of knowledge of that time was taught, like Buddhism, philology, epistemology, medicine and all sorts of art. In this kind of monastery, students, writers, intellectuals, and creators of religious and philosophical systems lived together with lamas. What was even more important, in these places of cult

¹¹ Anya Bernstein, “Religious Bodies Politic-Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism”, page 34, The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

¹² Anya Bernstein, “Religious Bodies Politic-Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism”, page 52, The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

and study, a critical approach of Buddhism and the dialectical method of debate were encouraged and practiced. In addition, Bagdanov stresses the fact that is often disputed between the prominent heads of Buddhism and non-Buddhist intellectuals but took place according to the usual rules and practices in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In case of defeat, the losing side had to move among the ranks of the winners. This was a very common practice in the teaching of Buddhism, which, unlike other religions (for example, European Christianity and Islam), does not provide for the application of violence in the battle for ideas. Another interesting point about the educational systems of Buddhist monasteries was that their view on the world was not limited to mere religious doctrine, but ranged its “thirst for knowledge” among other disciplines, like other non-Buddhist philosophical systems, and also the practical study of scientific sciences like agriculture and architecture.

This aspect of the Buddhist doctrine and the universal teaching methods appropriated by Buryats are to be referred to a particular branch of the Tibetan Buddhism, which in turn drew from the late Buddhist tradition of India. As Bagdanov states in his research, Tibet appropriated Indian Buddhism in its last stage of development, by adopting its most intellectual and hermitical forms of experiences, but also by making Indian Buddhist literature its own subject of investigation. This type of traditional faith enjoyed great success in Mongolia, from where it spread to Buryatia. In the Buryat monasteries in particular, almost the whole didactical part was developed through the studying and acquisition of texts in Mongolian and Tibetan, which monks were asked to translate (including ritual texts and philosophy).

In its first stage towards diffusion, Buddhism in Buryatia had to face the ingrained belief in Shamanism, and on the other side of the Baikal, the consolidation of Christianity among Irkutsk Buryats. In these first times there was no violent battle against the traditional shamanist faith of the Buryats, but often large compromises were taken between Shamanism and Buddhism regarding rituals, tradition and habits. As stressed by Bogdanov, the successful “weapon” of victory employed by Buddhism was the practice of the Tibetan medicine among local peoples.¹³ As it has been defined by Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, Tibetan medicine itself was already the result of different approaches to the cure, which collected references in the field from Persia, India, China, Nepal and even Europe. The medical achievements were taught and learned through different language mediums, like Sanskrit, Chinese, Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Latin and by so doing, in the monasteries the first faculties of medicine of the time were opened.

The first to write about Tibetan medicine in Buryatia was Joan-Georg Gmelin, who in 1735 met the physical lama for consulting books, medicines, work tools and for some demonstrations about the preparation of drugs. According to Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, this lama practiced bloodletting, cauterization and also was able to perform some surgical interventions. Soon these medical practices spread among a large number of lamas, and increasingly a majority of them gained more and more experience in chemical preparations and in the arts of care. At the beginning of the XVIII century there were a lot of healers, who could use already all techniques and methods of the Tibetan medicine, and by so doing, they gained great success among the people. This practice acquired such a positive mean-

¹³ М.Н. Богданов, “Очерки истории бурят-монгольского народа”, страница 178, издательство бурятского госуниверситета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

ing amongst the people that it found itself reflected in the articles of customary laws of that time. In 1869 the official opening of the first medicine monastery school took place in Tsugolskij temple, and little by little many other schools in Buddhist temples were opened in the regions. At the end of the XIX century there were already 700.

As stressed by Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, over time the isolation between the Buryat Buddhist world and the Tibet world (including Mongolia) brought about an “indigenous” specialization of the Buryat medicine compared to the rest of the Central Asian Buddhist sphere. At the end of the century, Buddhist temples in Buryatia already owned a large amount of medical literature also in Tibetan and Mongolian languages, and also almost every lama had its own medical recipes (a result of individual specialization and personal experience in the field). In addition, a conspicuous majority of lamas became acquainted with local plants and natural remedies of the Baikal region, which soon partly replaced other kinds of ingredients.¹⁴

Later, with the advent of the October Revolution, a reset of the medical system of temples occurred, with the introduction of the teaching of anatomy, physiology and diagnosis of disease according to the European method. Subsequently, the first new schools in accordance with the new method were opened in Baikal temples. Officially the first was Azagaskij temple in Cis-Baikalia. According with Abaeva and Zhukovskaya’s research, in this same period a systematic study of Tibetan medicine was introduced in Russia, which saw the spread of the knowledge referring to Tibetan medicine and its variants all around its territory. Two big centers of study and research of Tibetan medicine opened in Moscow and Saint Petersburg thanks also to the teaching of specialists from Mongolia and Tibet, who were employed there.

*“In its long story of practice in the ethnic Buryatia, Tibetan medicine adapted to local conditions, apprehended health treatments of the indigenous people, replaced almost its entire suite of drug tools with local species and it can be viewed as one component of the traditional Buryat culture. This approach to the heritage of the Tibetan medicine requires the creation of secular educational institutions with the teaching of this medicine in Russian. It displays traditional medicine under the monopolistic influence of Buddhist clergy, removes religious, national and linguistic barriers to education and treatment in general, promotes an atmosphere of openness, mutual understanding and willingness to cultural dialogue of all the people living there”.*¹⁵

The history of Buddhism among Buryats traces a turning point of the genesis of a Buryat identity. Buddhism has left a deep mark on the sense of belonging to a unique nation in the Mongols of Russia; its essence and its practices have contributed to the definition of a cosmopolitan attitude of Buryats towards all other forms of identity expressions around them, because the Buddhist profile absorbs and contains peculiarities from different cultural traditions, which are reworked under a single multi-faceted profile. Furthermore, in their original way of assimilating Buddhism, Buryats passed through a process of multiculturalism, whereby mobile training in different lands, study and practice through different languages and points of view, conflict resolution by means of dialectic and opening to different ideas

¹⁴ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 457, Москва Наука, 2004.

¹⁵ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 459, Москва Наука, 2004.

were the necessary ingredients for their religious formation. However, the point is that Buddhism for Buryats did not only define the spiritual aspect of the majority of them, but rather, in its way to consolidation among these tribes it had also meant a “glue” for many differences among them (Buryat tribes). It had meant a unifying element to a common background, which had given rise to a new elaboration of tradition, based on multicultural principles.

1.3 Ecology as identity

By looking at the geo-climatic conditions of Central Asia and Siberia (where most Buddhism has roots), it comes naturally to consider the quality of relations between man and nature.

As suggested by Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, in a land of cross-borders and migration cultures the development of an ecological consciousness goes hand in hand with its ethno-cultural and ethno-confessional processes. In the first stages of Buryat ethno-genesis a crucial role in the habits towards nature is attributable to shamanic practices. The key aspect of this relation is the shamanic ideology and domestic economy of early times, but also a relevant contribution must be given to Buddhism, which links the late development of Buryat identity with nature.

*“it is possible to speak of – ecosystem – as a flexible interaction between three main parts: environmental media, technological superstructure and non-material regulators (tradition, belief, rituals, habits, stereotypes, behavioral norms). (...) Big nations have to understand, that uniformity of the humankind is not something to tend; while small nations have to know, that their survival largely depends on safety of nature and cultural environment, on elements from the traditional forms of life, which shape their spiritual-moral and cultural-psychological image”.*¹⁶

From this point of view, the ecological feeling of every single culture takes shape from a defined natural landscape of a specific territory and from the first forms of relations among peoples themselves. The first ecological representations of ancient Buryat peoples are traced back to their archaic beliefs and cults, referring to their daily and shamanic practices, like the cult of the Earth, of the mountains, of ponds and caves, of the countryside, etc. Later it was the rise of Buddhism that brought a big contribution to the sphere of cultural ecology of the Buryats. At the heart of Buddhist tradition, Tibetan culture was in charge of the diffusion of this new “support” to the ecology perceptions of these nations. It presents itself as a synthesis of cultural traditions of peoples from Nepal, India, China, Tibet and Persia, in which, as Abaeva and Zhukovskaya underline, it was possible to trace a specific way of approaching nature by man and an almost common way of understanding the concept of a “living being”. These peculiar traits of this macro-region depended on its particular historical development, its geo-natural conditions and its socio-ethnic way of land tenure.

Almost all “nations” living in Central Asia were nomadic or semi-permanent people, who had learned to live highly dependent on nature changes and rules; their habits with na-

¹⁶ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 475, Москва Наука, 2004.

ture were those of a respectful child to a severe and generous mother, who allowed them to live as part of a unique and integrated cycle of life. Nomadic people of this territory were used to spending their life in taiga, steppes and along rivers in search of food. Also their nomadic tents met the criteria of environmental sustainability, deeply bound with natural needs. A relevant stage in the development of ecological tradition of this region insists on the result *“of a synthesis of Tibetan Buddhism with the traditional beliefs and cults, with rites and customs of the Mongolian people of Central Asia. Buddhism brought to these ethnicities not only a high level of ecological consciousness, corresponding to the level of development of religious and philosophical and ethical teachings of the world religions, but met with the ecological traditions of the other Eastern nations”*.¹⁷

Buddhism integrated all variants of Central Asian cultures and easily assimilated in peoples' own spiritual and material traditions, and so, at the same time it was able to re-create a new expression of belief, bearing new hybrid relations with nature. *“In this way, overall, the ecological culture of the Central Asian region took shape and developed under the influence of different factors (climatical, geographical, economical, religious, ethnocultural, political, etc.) determining the originality of the ecological traditions, which underlied it”*.¹⁸

1.4 Shamanism and ecology

In the pre-Buddhist context of shamanism among Buryats, traditional customs and visions of the world were deeply connected with a concept of spiritualization and deification of all aspects of nature. The spiritual life of peoples penetrated every single aspect of their daily tasks and habits.

Their model of world construction was made by anthropomorphic and zoomorphic creatures, who inhabited and were a constituent part of the natural realm (both heavenly, terrestrially and subterraneously), in which they lived. The shaman was the guardian of this world and intercessor among people of the will of natural gods (who presided over life and death).

Nomads of the Baikal region strictly processed their identity in relation to their surrounding natural landscape. They conceived nature as a macro-cosmos, where people could be identified as a smaller expression of the whole (micro-cosmos), so the creative process of nature was already intrinsic in their life and nature was the engine of everything's and everyone's destiny, having humankind part of this cosmological process. The various and mighty nature of Siberia also contributed to the formation of an esthetic feeling of peoples inhabiting those lands, which could find expression in a form of veneration and gratitude towards spirits living in the elements of the landscape. In this case, the geographical environment created the conditions for a living ethnos and at the same time, affected the ethno-ecological consciousness of people. In this way, nature of the Baikal re-

¹⁷ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 479, Москва Наука, 2004.

¹⁸ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 480, Москва Наука, 2004.

gion came to symbolize ethnic feelings of belonging amongst the different ethnic groups living in the same natural environment.

Baikal lake, mountains, rivers, steppes and forests occupied an important place in the Buryat beliefs and cults, since every single element was “lived” by a different natural spirit, and they all together shaped the shamanist Buryat pantheon of the Earth deity (which was a symbol of richness and fertility). Theirs was a polytheism which also dictated rules and norms to keep in their daily life between man and nature, but it also disciplined the life among all other human beings living around the lake, who were submitted to the same inspiring natural and spiritual rules. The spirits' benevolence depended upon the destiny of men and women. For example, men could not dig into the ground, if not absolutely necessary for survival, or break shrubs, because all elements were the homes of deities, and for killing some living being it was necessary to perform rituals in order to make deities benevolent and compliant with human action. Furthermore, the lake Baikal had become a natural junction of cultural, historical and economic connections between Middle and Central Asia (Persians and Arabs, too, used to travel to the lake and leave their marks on its coasts together with other tribes who lived permanently there). Soon the lake became an element of shared identity of different traditions and it started to inspire in their cultures a deep feeling of belonging, whose poetry production symbolized one of the first forms of expression. Poems from different ethnic traditions met around the life of the Baikal lake, which soon became a common reference and a converging magnet of different peoples sharing the same identities and spiritualities.

The vision of the world by the Baikal population attested to the variety of shamanist folklore, which permitted the living standards of people and which helped define their life. An example could be the traditional celebration of new year in accordance with the moon calendar, ‘сагаалгана’ (‘Sagaalgana’), which, according with Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, linked tradition with the concept of “ecological time”, since the calendar falls within the cyclic natural changes of the year, and it determines all the socio-economic actions of people. A shared celebration among peoples of the lake, Saagalgan, usually marked the end of the harsh Siberian winter and the beginning of the new hunting season, which saw men performing a complex series of rituals and celebrations.

It was exactly this vision of things happening and living the environment, which shaped the first ecological culture of Buryats (and not only Buryats) around the veneration of landscape elements and the respect for the spiritual essence in every living being. Buryats owned a shared spirituality and a common vision with other peoples of the Baikal, which allowed them to construct a common space of behavior and thought with respect to the surrounding nature, and it was precisely that same feeling of nature, which made every single man and woman a sharer of the same matrix.

1.5 Buddhism and ecology

In the Buddhist philosophy, the concept of human beings as a micro-cosmos of the whole is still present, as in the shamanic cult. The Buddha's thoughts added another meaning to the human figure in its cosmological view of the world: its trans-humanity. The Eastern tradition does not present an anthropocentric point of view for other living beings, rather it tends to approach him/herself in a more intuitive and unconscious way. *“With a conception of personal identity that is fundamentally trans-human, Buddhists have traditionally shaped the problem of inter-species relationships in quite different terms, and as a result we should expect traditional Buddhist environmental ethics to look quite different from its counterpart in the West”*.¹⁹ As Alan Sponberg quite well illustrates in his research, the same notion of rights differ greatly from one side to the other. While in the Western countries, (Christian civilization) the word “right” is highly bound with the concept of human responsibility and duty, which he does not share with the other elements of nature. In the Eastern civilization, (mainly Buddhist) the rightness of something/someone is considered an intrinsic value of that being.

This deep belief is expressed by the human action through compassion towards other forms of living nature. In this intrinsic respect of the being, Buddhist ethics finds its place, because every human being is profoundly bound to other species through the Karma, and to the cosmologic rules of the Karma, every creature is submitted, every creature in the world shares with the others a “responsibility” and an “ethics”. This understanding of nature so imbued with ethics comes from the rooted belief of reincarnation. In the Buddhist philosophy, the adoration of nature has the same validity as one of reincarnation (while in Christianity there is a God who creates nature, within which there is also the human kind). In Buddhism there is a necessity for realization of man into a whole with the being. Man must go beyond his egocentrism in order to become in tune with other living beings. *“Based as it is in cultivating an ever insight into the trans-species mutuality of sentience and hence potential for enlightenment, Buddhist practice can only express itself as a compassionate, environmental sustaining altruism. (...) Buddhist ethical precept of non-injury or (...) as an implication of the Mahayana doctrine of emptiness understood as variety of non-dualism that entails compassionate activity towards all other beings (...) if all things are seen as empty of intrinsic existence, then all things must be seen as interrelated, and the only possible course of action becomes one that seeks to compassionately sustain all of existence”*.²⁰

In the course of its development in the Baikal region, Buddhists assimilated and made some tendencies of shamanism its own. A lot of Buddhist rituals were borrowed from shamanist faith, for example, the cult of Earth. Creatures were put beside anthropomorphical gods and the cult of three, already present in the shamanic faith, received further development as the place of dead people's home.²¹

¹⁹ Alan Sponberg, “The Buddhist conception of the ecological self”, Western Buddhist Review”, http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol2/ecological_self.html.

²⁰ Alan Sponberg, “The Buddhist conception of the ecological self”, Western Buddhist Review”, http://www.westernbuddhistreview.com/vol2/ecological_self.html.

²¹ Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 490, Москва Наука, 2004.

Buddhism brought a transformation of social relations in the community, which could find reflection in the different tasks and professions of Buryats. For instance, hunting and fishing for religious reasons, before the coming of Buddhism, were valued as sinful. Before killing any other creature, one would perform complex rites to have spirits approval. Buddhism gave these professions more lawfulness by stating that such practices could continue only if their actions were focused on the continuation of the human species and to the support of human vital functions. In this way, human action toward nature would stay focused on the exploitation of earth only for the necessary human survival requirements, and not on its destruction. Customs dictated by the Buddhist tradition contributed to the maintenance of the necessary ecological balance of the natural environment and at the same time, the health of the people. This feeling of supporting natural elements in the process of nutrition penetrated into the public consciousness, it found reflection in the way of life of the people and contributed to the formation of a certain mentality. *“So, for example, nomadic herders at the pasture with animals considered the relationship between the seasonal cycle and the current groundwater. This current changed depending on the time of the year, which in turn influenced on the quality of grass. Therefore, in the mountainous terrain shepherds grazed herds at different heights during the year, migrating with them, so that the groundwater level was at the optimal depth. For working outdoors they used clothing from materials of animal origin (fur, wool)”*.²²

According with Abaeva and Zhukovskaya, another circumstance where people focused on natural solutions was in the spaces of rice cultivation. For example, peasants who cultivated rice spent always a lot of time in cold water, which often brought about hypothermia. As a remedy for this health problem, they used a lot of pepper (which contains warming elements), and this practice helped them to regain energy and health. This was later a remedy, which Buddhist medicine made its own (together with other treatments), since this kind of medicine showed a particular attention to the sustainability in the preparation of medicines. These were only some examples about the way ecological consciousness of Buryats (and of other Buddhist peoples) became an integral part of their socio-economical system.

It can be said that the original ecological culture of Buryats was not ignored by Buddhism in its social development, but, on the contrary, it synthesized and made traditional shamanic elements its own ones. In its expansion into the Central Asian region, Buddhism integrated into its own traits every traditional culture of people living these lands, by creating in this way a hybrid conception of Buddhism itself. This integrated plural vision of reality assimilated with the respectful feeling towards nature brought a broader understanding of relations between mankind and its significant cohabitation requirements. Respect for other forms of life, recognizing themselves as a unique part of the whole and compassion for other living beings, forged among Buryats a high sense of the “other”, which is an integral part of their “self”.

²² Абаева, Жуковская, “Буряты”, страница 495, Москва Наука, 2004.

1.6 First attempts of cohabitation: buryats and russians

As already mentioned in the previous chapters, the annexation of Buryat territory by the Russian empire is not to refer to the word “conquest”, since Buryats voluntarily decided to become Russian subjects, due to the lower tax burden and lighter state duties assessed by the Mongolian large khanate.

Gradually, policies of the Russian government created further distinctions among Buryat groups, but initially they did not stand as an obstacle against Buddhism in Trans-Baikalia, while the Western side of the lake was lowly Christianized. Unlike the Trans-Baikalia counterpart, where the majority of Buryats lived and where Buddhism was a community-consolidating factor, soon the Irkutsk side became subject to forced Russification, which, however, left a space for the practice of Christianity with a mix of Shamanism. The first enemy to fight in the region was Lamaism, and since the number of practitioners was lower than the Eastern part, it would result in more easily controlled lamas and their followers. Russian missionaries initially stood against the habits of Buryats living in the steppes, against their customary law and against allogeneic self-management. It was essential to focus the attention on Buryat lamas and instill in them a new cultural education.

However, the Russian government knew that this region had an important strategic position: it was the key-place for all trans-Siberian communications, and the focal point of commercial relations between Russia and China. Local governments had to take into consideration all these aspects in their political resolutions and they had to keep caution and fear in mind when dealing with Buryat-Buddhist affairs and their restrictions. The Administration considered that continuing to protect Buddhism would bring about the uncontrollability of the Buddhist church’s political actions and it would encourage the penetration of foreign influence within the Russian empire.²³

In the middle of the XIX century the Russian government revised its policies towards non-Christian religions, and in 1853 it issued a decree entitled “The Statue on Lamaist Clergy in Eastern Siberia”, whose aim it was to regain control of Buryat Buddhism by restricting the number of monasteries and lamas, (with the lamaist church subordinated to the tsarist government) and to prohibit the construction of new monasteries without the permission of the St. Petersburg Ministry of Internal Affairs. Also, at the local administration level, the government undertook some changes. According to Anya Berstein’s report, since 1822 Buryats were left with quite a degree of local self-management (Speranskij statute), in which they were still divided according with their existing clan organization. This latter provided for their own constituting steps-dumas (corresponding to their councils of elders), which were in charge of representing all Buryats before the Russian Provincial administration. By the end of 1800 these dumas were abolished and Russian peasants took over the reins of local administration.²⁴

²³ Шатуев Николай Викторович, “Государственно-правовое Регулирование религиозных отношений в Забайкалье во второй половине. XVII-начале XX вв, страница 60, Москва, 2006.

²⁴ Anya Berstein, “Religious Bodies Politics- Rituals of Sovereignty in Buryat Buddhism”, page 22, The University of Chicago Press, 2013.

As underlined by Shatuev research, in 1872 the administration decided to define the boundaries of spiritual competence of the Buddhist temple-monasteries (datzan), as, up to that time, Buryat datzans had never had strictly limited territory. In this way, the construction of new Buddhist monasteries caused the necessity of unifying or dividing different ethnic groups and territories which had never been ethnically changed for centuries.

Despite numerous attempts of containing the Buddhist phenomenon, during the second half of the XIX century this later gained more and more popularity and followers.

According to Bogdanov’s research, mostly in the Cis-Baikalia, after the first attempts of “forced” Christianization, for which Buryats became Christian in order to get a job and so feeding themselves, the Siberian government adopted a new tactics to penetrate the heart of natives. It asked special missionaries from England to come and teach among groups of Siberian Buryats. These missionaries, who arrived in 1817, had already prepared themselves for local customs and learned to speak limited Mongolian, in order to better perform their public sermons. Once they found themselves among Buryats, they also started to learn Buryat grammar and its writing in the Mongolian language. By doing this, they hoped to converge on a spiritual level their work with the traditional look of the congregation.

With the knowledge of Mongolian language, they were now able to translate (with the help of Buryats) the Sacred Scripts and prayers into local languages, and in addition, to enrich the vocabulary of these people. Then, a large number of Buryats were called to listen and possibly also to sing Christian pieces in their own language. It was thanks to this kind of sensibility that English missionaries came out to find the convergence with local people. However, their work soon drew attention from the Russian Orthodox missionaries, who started to look at them suspiciously. In 1835, with an imperial edict, English missionaries were forbidden to baptize new Buryats. The excuse was that the teaching of Europeans *was* purely linguistic and that they covered only a form of Christianization, which was “purely aesthetic”. In this way, English missionaries interrupted their work and came back to Britain.

As Bogdanov suggests to us, an important element of this time to underline is that in this same period the nationalization of schools was taking place in Cis-Baikalia. Buryats were already quite good at the translation of the Gospel and the sacred scripts, there were many initiatives by educated Buryat people to create the first schoolbooks for Buryat and Mongolian languages, and masterpieces of the Russian literature were already under translation together with Buddhist aphorisms. On the surge of enthusiasm around the 70s of the XIX century, a delegation of Buryat deputies in Saint Petersburg incited a petition for the opening of schools for learning Buryat and Mongolian languages. They used as reasons for their request the necessity to teach in these two languages in order to better “feed” trade relations between Russia and Mongolia.

*“Neither the religio-philosophical doctrine of the East, received by Buryats together with Buddhism, nor the education to research, arrived here through Russian schools, did not stay without influence on Buryat cultural representatives: some of them rose in the study of Buddhist philosophy, of Mongolian and Tibetan literature and in eastern politics; others, known for their researches on the method of European science, travels and public proliferation activities by them, at home, for the cultural acquisition of the West.”*²⁵

²⁵ М.Н. Богданов, “Очерки истории бурят-монгольского народа”, страница 235, издательство бурятского государственного университета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

The attempts of political “suppression” of Buryat traditional elements had instead brought to a reworking of their cultural identity, by enriching their social and communication skills. Contrasts had occurred which made possible changes and elaborations of intercultural solutions among Buryats and the more European side of Russia. A new Buryat intelligentsia was on the road to form, which later would bring Buryatia and its people towards revolution and the rise of a national consciousness.

1.7 The revolution and the Soviet time

Transbaikalia represented a unique region inside the Russian territory, where ideals of the February Revolution continued somehow to survive throughout the whole Soviet period, although local elites rarely perceived the incongruity between their own ideas of Revolution and what was happening on the European side of Russia. *“The dream of the February revolution, which had long been replaced by the anguished longing for bread, land and peace as the motivating force of the revolution in European Russia, was still operative in Transbaikalia. Despite growing differences, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries continued to cooperate in local politics on the assumption that the Constituent Assembly would make the ultimate decision about Russia’s future political and social order”*.²⁶

This was a land long inhabited by people from different ethnic origins and of revolutionary exiles, who had learned despite differences to reach a social compromise in order to better cohabit and create a border land between peoples. Both Russian and Buryat intelligentsia played a great role in the diffusion of the Revolution in these lands and in the keeping of national antagonisms to a minimum, with no exceptions.

In addition, there was also a local cultural propensity for Buryats toward revolutionary action, and this feature had to be found in their Buddhist utopianism, which came to coincide in part with the Communist vision of revolutionary revival. Although Communist policies provided no exceptions to religions of Russia, their appeal seemed to find footholds with some Buddhist prophetic notions.

Up to the time of the Russian Revolution among Buddhist peoples of Central Asia there was still the waiting of the messianic event of “Last King of Northern Shambhala”. *“The legendary twenty-fifth and last monarch of Northern Shambhala is supposed to be called Ridgan Dagbo or Rigden Jye-po (also known as Rikbandanbo) and is the subject of prophecies about a coming millennium. One reported from Tibet, foretells that when Lamaism has declined and become impotent. (...) In this future incarnation, the ruler of Northern Shambhala is expected to lead the Lamaistic peoples into the last and decisive combat against the enemies of righteousness. (...) With the triumph of the hosts of Shambhala, Buddhism is to spread over the entire earth and to find its fulfillment”*.²⁷

²⁶ Russel E. Snow, “The Russian Revolution of 1917-18 in Transbaikalia”, page 203, Hofstra University, 1971.

²⁷ Emmanuel Sarkisyanz, “Communism and Lamaist Utopianism in Central Asia”, page 624, The Review of Politics, 1958.

The myth of Shambhala could be broadly confirmed by the messianic vision of Socialism in the Revolution. Also, the expansion of Communism with the advent of the revolution could bring to a new area peace among peoples and also a broader conception of the world as a community of people bound together by brotherhood and solidarity. Both myths led to messianic and millennial expectations. For centuries the expectations of the new Lamaist Kaesar had been associated with thoughts of social revolution. As Sarkisyanz reports in his essay “Communism and Lamaist Utopianism in Central Asia” (Cambridge Journals, 1958), in a memorial to Alexander III in 1893 Badmaev stressed the importance of the “White Czar” in the Lamaist world by underlining how much the Lamaist Asia, in general, was putting great expectations on the Russian Tsar and he supported Russian expansion into Mongolia, Tibet and China. This messianic vision of the Russian Tsar was validated thanks to the creed, which showed the Romanov dynasty as a descendant from the Rulers of Northern Shambhala. There was a widespread belief also in Tibet of a great Buddhist empire led by the Russian Tsar, where Russia was seen as the champion of Asia and defender of Buddhism.

Soon with the advent of Communism, the attention of the Buddhist world was still focused on Russia but the slogans of the “White Tsar” were replaced by those of Socialism. The messianic event was still expected to come from Russia, but this time with a different shape than that of the Tsar. Ideas about radical improvement of social conditions were highly expected among the nations of Mongolia and Central Asia, and also Mongol Communism in its early times was connected with the expectations about the Kaesar’s rebirth in Northern Shambhala. Soviet agents were in contact with the Dalai Lama in Tibet and they tried through numerous expeditions to convince the Buddhist clergy that Communism and Lamaism had much in common and they both could be thought of as different expressions of the same need of change and socio-cultural upheaval. Much more emphasis was given by Communist cadres to the feature of Buddhism as a philosophy of life rather than a religion.

“In 1924 the Darnata Pandita Hutukhtu, a Lamaist incarnated hierarch of Outer Mongolia declared that Buddhist morality was equalitarian, and endorsed the Soviet System. In 1925 a Commissar of Agriculture of the Buryat Autonomous Soviet Republic could still speak about cooperation with Lamaism and its ‘transformation into Socialism’. All Soviet and ‘People’s Government’s administrative personnel in both Buryat and Outer Mongolia were initially recruited from Lamas, ex-Lamas, or pupils of Lamaist monastery schools”.²⁸ Western civilization was appointed by Lamaist modernists as the primacy of egocentrism, whose results were capitalism and imperialism, while Lamaism could express in history the remedies exposed by Lenin against the West. As Sarkisyanz stresses, from then on Buddha was acclaimed as the predecessor of Lenin by Buryat modernists, and even one of them, the revolutionary ideologist Zhamtsarano stressed the fact that Buddha had given the world a certain form of Communism and the best way to see his doctrine accomplished was for each person to develop according to Lenin’s ideals (still nowadays both symbols of Communist and Buddhist traditions find a common space of representation in the major public places of Ulan-Udè, as illustrated in image n°2).

²⁸ Emmanuel Sarkisyanz, “Communism and Lamaist Utopianism in Central Asia”, page 631, The Review of Politics, 1958.



Image n°2: the monumental Head of Lenin and the ice-sculpture of a dragon from the Buddhist tradition located in the Parliament square of Ulan-Udè, 02/06/12.

The way Buryats welcomed the Revolution was also deeply linked to the promotion and development of their own nationality and culture. According to Lenin's policies on nationalities, each nation had the right to self-determination and the possibility to develop a certain amount of autonomy within the broader horizon of the Soviet Union. This latter should become a great Union among peoples of different nationalities, called out to work together for the accomplishment of Socialism in the world. At the political and cultural level, this state should develop a shape of socialist content within a national form. According to this general goal, the local intelligentsia in Buryatia started to mobilize in favor of the revolution.

The first All-Buryat Congress was held in Chita in 1917. This congress called for the creation of an autonomous Buryat territory within Russia, a land reform and more Buryat language education. Subsequently, numerous Buryat leaders became promoters of several more congresses around Transbaikalia even before the October Revolution. The first Buryat people's Duma was founded in February 1919, whose participants organized a pan-Mongolian conference in Chita with delegates from both Mongolia and Russia. A provisional government was elected, led by a reincarnated lama (Neisse-Gegen). Between 1918 and 1919 the Bolshevik government had already set up various national autonomous regions in Central Asia, and so, in compliance with Lenin's nationality policies, two autonomous Buryat-Mongolian territories were established (this decision was also made for political reasons, due to Buryat strategic location close to Mongolia and China). The two regions were automatically incorporated into the Russian Federation and only later, in 1923 they were united to form the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic with Verkhneudinsk as capital (later Ulan-Udè).

Towards the middle of the 1920s, the policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization) began. The program was to create a modern socialist society where all ethnic groups would contribute in its formation. "In the multinational Soviet society was of great importance Lenin's thesis that international culture is not without nations. He argued that each culture develops

on its own national soil, in their historical national forms. (...) Lenin demanded the Marxist approach to each national culture, the use of all its progressive and democratic elements in the interests of cultural construction of a socialist society".²⁹ In Buryatia, it was suggested to establish the Buryat language and writing system, to develop Buryat literature on the base of Marx-Lenin's ideas. The Horinskij dialect was chosen, which was spoken among a major quantity of Buryats, as national Buryat language. Additionally, in 1926, a plan was introduced to guarantee that at least 37.7 % of government institutions should be occupied by Buryats, and Russians had to learn some Buryat.

Mongol script was finally introduced, and in order to promote the widespread usage of the script, particular attention was put on the educational system, and soon compulsory elementary schools were created for everyone. Authorities wanted teachers to be able to teach both in Russian and Buryat, and by so doing, often in the classes there was a mixing of Buryat and Russian among students and teachers. According to Melissa Andrea Cakars in "Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia" (UMI, 2008), in the same period a lot of textbooks and periodicals were published and around 1926 the publishing houses were issuing fifty-two titles in Mongol script. In those years there were two main national newspapers: *Buryat-Mongolskaya Pravda* and *Buriaad-Mongoloi Unen*. Throughout all the 1920s great productions of plays, stories and poems in Russian and Buryat spread all around Buryatia. As for Cakars, these works usually contrasted, in their topics, life before the revolution and life after it, and how much it had developed and improved since the year 1917. Some works were also anti-religious, but they never compromised the local devotion for Buddhism and Shamanism (together with Tibetan medicine), since the local government did not oppose their practice. The government did not have sufficient reason to struggle against Buddhism, since both "disciplines" had many similar ideas (they were compatible), and furthermore it did not want to provoke reactions from Asiatic neighbors like China and Mongolia.

"Dorzhiiev, who had once served as the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's emissary to the Tsar and had founded a Buddhist temple in St. Petersburg in 1913, sought to protect Buddhism under Soviet leadership by reforming the Russian Buddhist church. With the input of numerous Buryat intellectuals, Dorzhiiev and his supporters explained that Buddhism was not a religion like Christianity. It also did not oppose modern science. Previously at an All Buryat Buddhist Congress in 1922, Dorzhiiev, influenced by socialism, had called for the abolition of lamas' property, the creation of communal forms of living, and elections for the monastic hierarchy. He attacked greed, ignorance, and other abuses in the Buddhist church".³⁰

After these statements, several monasteries attempted to become agricultural communes according with the nationalization policy promulgated in the country, however, some of them failed since the lamas were not good at pursuing farmer's tasks, so, many of them continued their religious practices undisturbed. As Cakars underlines in her book "Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia" (UMI, 2008), *korenizatsiia*, somehow, planted the seeds for a future cultural change, which would take place in Buryatia (and not only Buryatia), and additionally, laid the foundations for the autonomous development of Buryatia until the 1930s.

²⁹ Е.Г. Санжиева, "Формирование и развитие культуры Бурятии в советский период", страница 35, Полиграфический Комплекс ФГОУ ВПО ВСГАКИ, Улан-удэ, 2008.

³⁰ Melissa Andrea Cakars, "Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia", page 50, UMI, 2008.

It was decided that *datzan* (Buddhist temples) would become cultural centers for all Buryats and that they would support governmental institutions (by so doing, all temples were declared the heritage of people and nationalized). Around 1929 the discussion over Buryat national development of art and literature started. One of the first steps towards cultural and social improvement was the goal of liquidation of illiteracy, and for this reason, the threshold of compulsory schooling was moved until 17 years of age. In this way, more diffusion of cultural and professional preparation among the young was realized.

A strong push towards the development of literature, theater, radio, music and cinema gained a foothold inside Buryat society. In order to promote interest and active participation in cultural activities among the population, socio-cultural community centers were suggested by the local government such as museums and clubs. *“Buryat and Evenk peoples continued to operate mobile reading rooms, houses and red Buryat yurt. Red corners became very popular among the masses, who worked in kolkoz brigades and livestock farms. These small pockets of culture gave life to newspapers and magazines, libraries, mass literature, chess and checkers”*.³¹ These new forms of cultural diffusion became important provisions of economical and social redefinition. In a short time, every major city in Transbaikalia registered several cultural and reading clubs, various libraries and Houses of cultures. Soon these centers became important laboratories of national cultures and brought about the emergence of a spontaneous artistic production. *“This emerging literature has been defined as the Buryat literature of enlightenment, then became a literature of Buryat bourgeois-democratic enlightenment. (...) This literature has matured and has been fostered by the ideas of the national liberation movement of the pre-revolutionary period, as embodied with some historical delay. (...) Under the influence of this literature in Cisbaikalia and Transbaikalia, people spontaneously erected amateur-theater groups, creating little one-act plays and hand-written dramaturgy”*.³² In the first period, dramaturgy dominated the national scene of artistic literary expression, later it was followed by the massive production of periodicals by Buryat writing groups, who, together with the other artistic community of Siberia, contributed to the expansion of Siberian cultures all around Russia. In 1926, the first meeting of young writers of Buryatia took place, and during the assembly a national writing group was organized in two languages: Russian and Buryat. From this experience the Siberian Union of writers was founded in 1927.

After 1930, the situation changed dramatically. Stalin decided to collectivize agriculture and industrialize the whole country. Collective farms completely changed Buryat life and economy by bringing them under direct control of the central government in Moscow. It followed the deportation of hundreds of thousands of kulaks into exile or forced labor, and the remaining middle or poor class was collectivized. All Buddhist temples and monasteries in Buryatia were closed in 1930-s and only in 1945 the first one (Ivolginski Datsan) was re-established.

Soon the government arrogated the right to decide for all national questions and challenges. In this way, the process of formation and rebirth of Buryat culture and literature en-

³¹ Е.Г. Санжиева, “Формирование и развитие культуры Бурятии в советский период”, страница 81, Полиграфический Комплекс ФГОУ ВПО ВСГАКИ, Улан-удэ, 2008.

³² Е.Г. Санжиева, “Формирование и развитие культуры Бурятии в советский период”, страница 87, Полиграфический Комплекс ФГОУ ВПО ВСГАКИ, Улан-удэ, 2008.

tered a phase of ideological struggle, with the Communist Party imposing a socialistic realism on art production and with the imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet for Buryat language. The soft action of the first decades had gone.

Only in the last years of Stalin’s dictatorship, and subsequently, there was a recovery of national art, above all, of theater. In 1938, the first Republican Theater was opened and the first Drama Opera was performed: “Bair”. The theater was constructed in the service of local government and consisted of graduates of the professional school of theater and music. Soon, national amateurs’ performances started to develop.

With the Second World War, the cultural process of artistic production was subjected to a sudden interruption, but it recovered in the subsequent years. In the 1950s, operas and different kinds of dramas were performed. Toward the end of the decade, the repertoire included international, Russian and Soviet classics. After Stalin’s death, the interest in classical and folklore music grew, and more and more theaters and music clubs arose. In parallel, any sort of social culture was promoted: libraries, museums and cultural houses, which received more support and material provision by the state. Cakarsin “Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia” (UMI, 2008) points out how interviews, lectures, discussions and concerts were provided regularly every week for workers, and how many residents in Buryatia were attending these events and institutions. *“Buryats took part in these institutions – either by attending them or staffing and creating them-more and more for several reasons. For one, people took part largely because they were simply more of them in existence by the 1960s and 1970s and, particularly in rural areas they provided an opportunity for socializing. For another, the rise in education levels helped to bring more people to libraries and other educational institutions such as museums. Education also contributed to the rise in the number of professional men such as doctors, writers, and teachers, who were often required to give lectures and lead activities at their local cultural-educational institutions”*.³³ Youth organizations and women- soviets were the best outlets for activity discussion, and on these occasions they always showed how positive their lives were after participating in these institutions. As Cakars underlines, these new institutions soon replaced traditional institutions like churches, datsans and private organizations: *“For example, kolkoz clubs and houses of culture provided places for people to get married, register births (instead of baptism), and celebrate the Soviet rites of passage such as receiving one’s first passport and signing up for the army. They were places for celebrating holidays such as New Year on the Julian calendar instead of Sagaalgan, The Buryat-Mongolian lunar New Year, or Orthodox Christmas. They promoted the celebration of new Soviet holidays such as International Women’s Day, Red Army Day, and anniversaries making events like 100 years since Lenin’s birth”*.³⁴

In addition, local authorities started to expand instruction in the Buryat language to higher levels. Around the 1980s, Buryats counted as the third ethnic group in the Soviet Union with the highest degree of education. They were represented more and more in their institutional bodies and they decisively contributed to the transformation of their republic from a rural poor country into a new industrialized and urbanized one, by letting it, in this way, become an integral part of the Federation. Furthermore, as Cakars suggests, the wide-

³³ Melissa Andrea Cakars, “Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia”, page 192, UMI, 2008.

³⁴ Melissa Andrea Cakars, “Being Buryat: Sovietization in Siberia”, page 193, UMI, 2008.

spread level of instruction and culture created in Buryats a deep sense of belonging to the Soviet Union, since educational content expressed Soviet patriotism and loyalty. Being a Soviet citizen meant to get a better job, education, a house and a greater possibility of a career, above all, thanks to the language policies promulgated by the Soviet government in its decades of life, like the possibility of studying and working with both the two Buryatia's national languages, Russian and Buryat, with the establishment of schools from the lowest levels to the highest, in which parents could choose whether to send their children to a Buryat language class or to a Russian language one.

Even the great educational reform of the late 1970s, which provided for education only in Russian, did not disturb so much the Buryat population, who were already used to officially communicating in Russian and saw in this reform an opportunity for their children to improve their Russian language skills and to have access to the highest educational and political ranks. The publishing action of textbooks, and various books in Buryat language did not cease, and in this way, young people could keep on practicing and studying their own ethnic language.

The Soviet years had brought Buryats to become one of the most cultured minority ethnic groups of the Soviet Union. Their education had deepened in all sorts of knowledge, giving a hybrid result of local traditions and folklore integrated into the spaces and methods of the European Russian heritage. Soviet policies had, on one side, standardized all arts expressions of the URSS, but, on the other, had allowed Buryats to shape their own professional culture and science, which had made them part of a broader Eurasian socialist reality, by tracing their faith as perfectly integrated members of the Russian Federation.

2. Post-Soviet Buryatia and the revival of Buryat identity

2.1 An hybrid intelligentsia heritage

According to Robert Rupen in "The Buryat Intelligentsia" (Global Oriental, Far Eastern Quarterly, 2010), Buryats could be identified as an "avant-garde" among the Mongol tribes, because, since the earliest times, they had been introducing, leading, processing and assimilating the revolutionaries (and not) ideas of the time. For centuries they had never tried to advocate Buryat separatism or Pan-Mongolism among them, but even during the Soviet times their intelligentsia became a sort of "agent" for broader socialist ideals.

During the days of the Revolution, they worked to establish a common Mongolian language and at the same time to promote the European science in a perspective of integration with the Mongolian way of working and living. They continuously insisted on an evolutionary development as liberal democrats of their time. Their intelligentsia had been educated at the most excellent schools and universities of Russia (in St. Petersburg and in Moscow) and abroad, and during the studying years they had cooperated with the most prominent Russian Orientalists of the time.

Buryat intelligentsia had never been homogeneous, and as for Rupen, it could be split up in four groups, each of which contributed to the development of a national consciousness of their people: nationalists, Pan-Mongolists, Russian "agents" and scholars.

The first group insisted on the right to cultural self-determination, even if what they claimed with equal force was to become citizens in all respects by seeking for equal rights and free political participation. As for Rupen, one example is Mikhail Bogdanov, who asked for self-government of Buryatia within the Russian empire. Another nationalist is Tsyben Zhamtsarano, who undertook a series of journeys throughout Mongolia, Manchuria and Central Asia to collect oral poetry traditions and fought for recognition of Buryat rights in the empire. The second group, Pan-Mongolists, included people who tried to prioritize within the central government the position of Buryatia, by arguing its importance in the relations with the Mongolian world. As Rupen carefully stresses, Pan-Mongolism could be associated with Pan-Buddhism, since the only difference between them is that the second adds Tibet to the geographical area which should be subjected to one single political power. The major advocate of this idea was Agvan Dorjeev, a lama, already a student in Mongolia and Tibet, who became the first representative of the Dalai Lama at the court of St. Petersburg (he was also the creator of the Buddhist temple in the capital). During his life he made several trips to the major Asian and European capitals spreading the idea of a messianic kingdom (Shambhala), which could be identified in the vast Russian empire under the control of the Tsar.

The third group of Russian agents represented those people, who, with time, had absorbed Russian styles and habits. Even if born in the Mongolian world, they had made Russian ways of life their own. In this sense, we could see these features once again in Dorjeev. He was Pan-Mongolist and a Russian agent at the same time. He studied and worked in St. Petersburg and to half of his existence he converted to the Orthodox faith, and gradually spread in the capital the practice of Tibetan medicine. He spent much of himself for his own people (among his actions were founding the gymnasium level school for Buryats and the Russian-Buryat newspaper, both in St. Petersburg, and the arrangement of visiting-trips for Buryats who wanted to visit the capital) and had great expectations for the Russian Empire in Asia.

Among the lines of the last group of scholars and educators, it is possible to count Gombojab Tsybikov and Badzar Baradin. They both were educated in Kazan and spent much of their lives in translating Mongolian scripts and literature in order to make them accessible by the Russian speaking public. They were very active in education and pursued the goal to spread literacy among their people. Great emphasis was given to the Western studies for universal education of youth. They believed in the necessity of teaching the Mongolian, Chinese and Tibetan heritage of Buryats through the Western method, by presenting Mongolian folklore and Western science simultaneously to their students.

This heterogeneous landscape of ideas embodied the world of reference of Buryats in the transition phase which occurred in the 1980s. To this aspect, a critical thinking was added about the specific historical totalization culture of the Soviet years, in which Buryats had played a significant role in the transformation of their identity under an always more tangible Russian sphere of influence. Methods and tools acquired from the European side of Russia had come to be essential elements for the constitution of their national consciousness. Their art expressions had the opportunity to develop through typical European models such as theater and opera, but also in other areas of knowledge the scientific method of research and study proved to be essential. A massive repression had taken place during the Soviet time, which had concerned the religious and spiritual life of Buryats. As Osinskij explains in his writings “традиционные ценности в духовной культуре бурятской национальной интеллигенции” (“Traditional values in the spiritual culture of the Buryat national intelligentsia”, The New Research of Tuva, 2001), the spiritual aspect of culture has always been a prominent part of Buryat life and of national self-identification, and the driving form has always been the national intelligentsia, this later appearing not only as the carrier, but also as the foundation, the start to innovations, which could be turned into tradition. One of the most important traditional values of a nation is language. “*It stores and rebroadcasts spiritual values, expresses the mentality, deepens in the ethnic members a sense of belonging to this ethnic group. Language is inherent in the most important function in the formation of national identity, without which there cannot be the ethno-social integrity*”.³⁵ As Osinskij underlines, language is an essential factor in the formation of a mentality, but it is at the same time also a “reflection” of a constituting mentality. In the tradition, the national elements can also differ greatly from one another in content, in shape and in the role they play in the life of the nation. “*Among the most important,*” Osinskij continues “*the best aspect*

³⁵ И.И. Осинский, “традиционные ценности в духовной культуре бурятской национальной интеллигенции”, страница 5, The New Research of Tuva, 2001.

characterizing national Buryat intellectuals are love for their land and people, friendly attitude towards other ethnic groups, the ability in critical periods experienced by the nation, calm, sober understanding of what is happening and making informed decisions in the desire for knowledge and progress”.³⁶ Osinskij identifies values such as discretion, tolerance, openness, friendliness as their translated representatives in the national quality, and he adds that in the formation of the Buryat ethnic group, such values influenced not only the natural habitat, but also the specific Eurasian culture and historical development.

In the Russian Federation, Buryats have always been indicated as a pacific example of minority, concerning coexistence between different nationalities, and also a good example of people adapting to various political and social changing in the life of the Russian country. As Kathryn Graber points out in “Public information: the shifting roles of minority language news media in the Buryat territories of Russia” (University of Michigan, ELSEVIER-Language & Communication, 2011) they have seemed to be a people always ready for public political “enlightenment” and transformative projects, and an example could be the policies of the Soviet government during the last century. In order to promote Bolshevik ideology, the Russian government decided to start publications of journals in Russian and in the vernacular language to better cover peripheries. This happened because most of the ranks of Bolsheviks were occupied by a large number of native activists, including schoolteachers, secularized lamas, members of Buryat intelligentsia, who, according with Graber’s historical profile, were able to read newspapers for themselves and their comrades. And so, the first language to be used was the Buryat to make the Soviet message more understandable. As it has been underlined, it was an effective way to indigenize Leninism. By so doing, during the first decades of Soviet era, Buryat assuaged to the role of the language of business and administration with its status of “language ad Leninism”. It is from those times that “*Buryat-language publications also began to initiate an ideal of interethnic brotherly love-what would later become known as the --druzhba narovod-, or friendship of peoples- that remains central to the self-conception of the Republic of Buryatia today*”³⁷. It is interesting to notice that precisely during the Soviet years, a particular language politic approach came to be an essential tool to shape an identity based on the necessity of “inter-culturality”. In the aims of Lenin, there was that of suppressing Russian chauvinism and support to their national self-determination, and by so thinking, he mainly focused on minority populations of Russia.

Around the beginning of the 1940s, language policy suffered a shift in public diffusion and saw Russia occupying a privileged position, while Moscow was trying to standardize Russian origins for all peoples of the Union. This standardization affected all official documents, party terminology and education in the Soviet peripheries. In the effort of constructing a broader Soviet Republic, paradoxically according to Graber, there was the attempt to institutionalize equality between Buryat-speaking and Russian-speaking public. For example, the study and lecture of native Buryat literature was encouraged in both Buryat and Russian. Slowly, Buryats faced a rapid decline in public places, supplanted by Russians, even

³⁶ И.И. Осинский, “традиционные ценности в духовной культуре бурятской национальной интеллигенции”, страница 7, The New Research of Tuva, 2001.

³⁷ Kathryn Graber “Public information: The shifting role of minority language news media in the Buryat territories of Russia”, page 128, University of Michigan, ELSEVIER-Language & Communication, 2011.

if both languages were actually not in competition with each other, since a kind of bilingual audience was forming in those years. Nowadays, television, radio programs, and entertainment are granted in both languages. Increasingly, a more urban, younger and cosmopolitan audience of Buryats is rediscovering its cultural, spiritual and linguistic roots. There are still people who prefer to get information in Buryat than in Russian but they are usually elderly people who live in the countryside and they do not make up a large portion of the public. *“Instead, Buryat-language media are viable mainly as pedagogical tools, as symbols of national vitality, and as conduits of culture. Knowing some Buryat, even if only a few words or a formulaic holiday toast, can be tremendously helpful in demonstrating self-identification and -samosoznanie- (consciousness). In an important sense, Buryat words have become metonymic for Buryat culture as emulated in publicity performable modes such as dance, song, and dress”*.³⁸

The native language is considered a salient feature of Buryat ethnic identity, and also Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov in “Language and Ethnic identity of Minorities in Post-Soviet Russia: The Buryat Case Study” (Journal of language, identity and education, 2004) underline language as a symbolic marker of identity, which in case of abandonment, would mean the loss of ethnic self identity. Also, during the Soviet time there were some people among Buryats who considered themselves Russian, and for this reason, it was not possible to force the use of Russian language instead of the native one, since Buryats had always been highly assimilated with local peoples (including Russians) from whom they had also adopted some cultural features during the coexistence time. A very trendy example of assimilation was the numerous inter-ethnic marriages, which pushed parents to raise children in a very multicultural atmosphere.

According to a recent survey, organized by Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov in 2004, the level of Russian speaking public is higher than that one of Buryat, *“Generally speaking, Russian is utilized for external (public) communication purposes, whereas Buryat is used for internal (private) ones. (...) the level of mother tongue proficiency among Buryats varies from the absence of any proficiency, passive proficiency (understanding, but not speaking) to bilingualism and diglossia. (...) At the same time, the majority of the population masters Russian to a greater or lesser extent. The main tendency is that Russian continues to be lingua franca for the vast region of modern Russia”*.³⁹ As for Khilkhanova and Khilkhanov, another interesting point is that most of the Buryats do not consider Buryat language as a high-status-language, in particular young people, since nowadays, well educated Buryats willingly switch from Buryat to Russian, especially, when they are talking with their children. This behavior is due to the fact that Buryats believe Russian to be a language of prestige. It is undoubted that Russian influences social and professional perspectives for youth, but even more so for adults. Over time, Buryats have been able to become a significant part of the industrialized world and according to recent statistics they are the people within the Russian Federation with the highest degree of education. This exemplifies progress and de-

³⁸ Kathryn Graber “Public information: The shifting role of minority language news media in the Buryat territories of Russia”, page 134, University of Michigan, ELSEVIER-Language & Communication, 2011.

³⁹ Erzhen Khilkhanova and Dorij Khilkhanov, “Language and Ethnic identity of Minorities in Post-Soviet Russia: The Buryat Case Study”, page 93-94, Journal of language, identity and education, 2004.

velopmental steps taken by Russians during the last and newest century. It also means that they can properly use all the communication tools and that they were able to reach higher educational levels at the university (which is available in Russian).

Buryats do not reject their ethnic group and their historical and ethnic heritage, *“They have learned new cultural knowledge (first of all, the majority language) for successful integration into the predominantly Russian society and have selected relevant ethno-cultural markers. (...) However, if language is not included in the set of relevant markers, we have the phenomenon when a person identifies himself or herself as a Buryat without knowing the Buryat language. (...) This implies that the minority can share some values with the majority without sacrificing their minority culture”*.⁴⁰ This case can show that ethnic identity can survive the loss of some indigenous group’s cultural features and can acquire new ones. In this instance, identity survives because identity is strengthened through the features of another culture, which enriches and at the same time highlights the main features of the minority.

2.1 An ethnic revival within a multicultural heritage

With the arrival of *perestroika* and the following declarations of independence by the Union member states, the Republic of Buryatia declared its sovereignty the 8th of October 1990, and it remained within the new Russian Federation. This declaration was also made to respond to the interests of different ethnic groups, which had started to carry a great weight in the decision-making bodies of the country, and whose importance could not be ignored. Although in Buryatia more than 100 minorities have lived together for centuries, it has never had disintegrational problems, but rather of integrational tendencies, with no explicit case of political conflict.

This delicate aspect concerning cohabitation was promptly resolved in the republic by a great respect and protection for ethnic minorities, which finds its roots in the past history of Buryatia, but also in new precautions taken by the post-Soviet government of Ulan-Udé. In fact, in the Buryat republic, there is a socio-political system based on consociationism, which means that all relevant groups in a state should share responsibility in the process of political decision making and in the enforcement of the law. In “A Siberian Challenge: Dealing with Multi-ethnicity in the Republic of Buryatia” (Routledge, 2007) by Olaf and Utta-Kristin Lisse, this particular model is very well explained through five principles: 1) each group should be independent in its decision-making and administrative procedures; 2) the government of the region should include the leaders of all major political parties or bodies; 3) all ethnic groups should also be represented in the legislative bodies and have equal access to administrative posts; 4) every group should have the right of veto against legislative measures that are intolerable to them; 5) the “negative” veto should be balanced by “positive” mechanism of arbitration in order to prevent the political process from being blocked by conflicting interests.

⁴⁰ Erzhen Khilkhanova and Dorij Khilkhanov, “Language and Ethnic identity of Minorities in Post-Soviet Russia: The Buryat Case Study”, page 97, Journal of language, identity and education, 2004.

As Leisse suggests to us, this form of political mechanism can find more success in republics, or regions, where the percentage of people of each minority is equally balanced and where there is no huge difference in number of people belonging to different ethnic groups. Leisse continues by saying that it is also extremely important for the republic to promote the existence of common institutions and symbols to encourage the establishment of consociational democracy, because, in this way, group-transcending loyalties are created among people of the country, *“through the adequate representation of all relevant groups in the form of political parties, ethnic conflicts are transformed into -ideological- conflicts which put them up for debate. This may in turn lead to a political culture that favours compromise and peaceful resolutions”*.⁴¹

Buryatia also presents additional forms of socio-political representations, which contribute to social-stability and to the prevention of conflicts. Those are modern institutions which come from ways of ancient traditions and from the Soviet time, they deserve to be mentioned, like the Council of Stareyshins (‘the Council of the Elders’) and the Council of Women. *“The Council of Stareyshins symbolize a specific form of collective public counseling of the president. Members make trips to the regions of Buryatia for gathering information, they try to take into account public opinion, and their analysis of facts provides the basis for negotiations with the president. The council members are absolutely independent and totally free citizens and can express the people’s will, as they perceive it”*.⁴² This institution emanates from features of Central Asian civilization, anchored in the principle of social coexistence, it comes from the meeting of sedentary people and nomadic ones, who found themselves to live together following the geo-political events regarding Asian superpowers. This was the context from where Buryat-Mongol culture grew up and fed itself. This civilization was imbued with the experience of nomadic meetings impregnated with unique systems of values and religious life, where ethics and law organized multicultural communication of people inhabiting Central Eastern Asia. The elders of the original “primitive” councils originally gathered from different cultures and ethnic roots, collected almost all peoples of the area, and brought them together for discussion, and by so doing making it possible to represent a large spectrum of points of view on common topics concerning the region. The old leaders represented each specific interest of cultures living together, and they often discussed important problems related to the economic development of the region and social issues.

The Buryat Republic decided to maintain and modernize this ancient institution in order to let the multi-ethnic reality of Buryatia express itself freely in questions of social and economic importance. Subsequently, inherited from the Soviet experience, the Council of women has come to life. It was established in 2002, and its tasks are the same as a public organization. It mostly discusses topics pertaining to family and child development, but it is an effective tool to spread consensus and reconcile citizens’ important welfare questions. As stressed by Boldonova and Zhygmytov in their article “Government-Citizens Dialogue in the Republic of Buryatia” (The Public Manager, 2002), both kinds of council have been cre-

⁴¹ Olaf and Utta-Kristin Leisse, “A Siberian Challenge: Dealing with Multiethnicity in the Republic of Buryatia”, page 777, Routledge, Nationalities Papers, Vol.35, No.4, September 2007.

⁴² Irina Boldonova and Bayar Zhygmytov, “Government -Citizen Dialogue in the Republic of Buryatia, page 36, The Public Manager, 2002.

ated to accomplish the duty of “two-way” communication strongly desired by the local government in order to fulfill the principle of direct and indirect connection with the public by the political agents of the republic. Both councils provide an appropriate way of action for a democracy, whose setting is to be found in the Central Asian experience. Attention to different cultural expressions in the form of organizations and councils are also supported by the Constitution of the Buryat Republic. According to resolution N179 of the government of the Republic of Buryatia, on March 29, 2007 the State supported the initiatives of ethnic communities to establish public associations and natio-cultural centers. For ensuring dialogue between political powers and ethnic communities, the President of the Republic has guaranteed the creation of different councils, like the Council for Nationalities and the Council for Cooperation with Religious associations, made up by representatives of all ethno-cultural associations which already create the Assembly of peoples of Buryatia.

For more than a decade, with the government of Potapov, which speaks Buryat, the legislative and executive body consisted of an equal number of Russians and Buryats, and in so doing, the two major constituent ethnic groups were very well represented, allowing Buryatia to reach the requirements for being a successful consociational democracy model. In this way, the Buryat part of the population did not feel excluded from the political sphere and, according to Leisse’s survey of 2007, ethnic origins did not have impact on the actual political establishment. Both groups seem to be at home in the Republic, additionally, even the 82.5% of young students interviewed by Leisse, declare their satisfaction with Buryatia continuing to be a member of the Russian Federation.

“Free use of one’s native language, access to theatres, museums, etc., recognition of autochthonous ways of life, beyond that a culturally sensitive education - these are the pillars of a peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups. The satisfaction of cultural demands, for instance the formation of an ethnically diverse school system, far from being the first step towards secession as feared by many centralist governments, does in fact seem the best way to contain ethnic nationalism. It is only when a single ethnic group raises demands which are explicitly political and incompatible with a country’s political framework that danger of secession becomes imminent”.⁴³

Nowadays, in Buryatia we can freely speak of a high level of integration, also thanks to the growing inter-ethnic, socio-cultural relationships (including mixed marriages) among the population, so that a new class of assimilated Russian-Buryat families appeared, and this later contributed to the development of a unique Buryat culture and self-identity (the result of centuries of multicultural interconnections). According to Prof. Warikoo from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Buryat intellectuals adopted a “Russianized” approach to traditional Mongolian themes, they addressed issues such as Buryat culture, epic poetry, folklore, Buryat and Mongolian history, shamanism, Buddhism and indigenous from a “Russian” point of view, that means, as constituent agents of Russian history and social system, but also from a broader Mongolian, or even better Central Asian, ethnosphere. Educated in the best universities of European traditions and trained in Russian institutions, they became the engines of Buryat national revival. *“Despite having a long chequered history, Buryats have always demonstrat-*

⁴³ Olaf and Utta-Kristin Leisse, “A Siberian Challenge: Dealing with Multiethnicity in the Republic of Buryatia”, page 784, Routledge, Nationalities Papers, Vol.35, No.4, September 2007.

ed benevolence and respect to their neighbours, who arrived in the Baikal region at different periods of time. Notwithstanding their Russian education and training, Buryat intellectuals played a key role in retaining the Buryat traditions and culture while modernizing themselves. In this process of synchronization, as a result of application of Russian science, technology, language, literature and culture in the traditional nomadic society of Buryatia, the indigenous Buryats retained their local tradition and ethos adjusting themselves to the new wave of dominant Russian and later Soviet cultural and political influence (...) Today, cultural, religious and social traditions of different peoples in Buryatia are closely interwoven forming a unique pattern of peaceful coexistence".⁴⁴ Over time, Buryats have managed to process their national identity through various socio-cultural changes and mixings without losing their own national peculiarities, but rather revising and adding new features and peculiarities, so embedding them in a broader multicultural context. They have even maintained their religious and mythical traditions, but in a hybrid way, for example, even if following Buddhism, they have kept on practicing shamanist rituals in connection with Buddhist creed.

The recovery of the mythical figure of Geser, taken from the ancient Mongolian and Tibetan mythology, has revitalized the idea of equality and collectivism of people. As it has been suggested by Prof. Warikoo, Buddhist tradition brought from Tibet and Mongolia composed the base of their "original" culture, which they have even developed and led to the best results in the system of medicine, astrology and printing literature, while their more European Russian side of their identity expression is discoverable in Russian literature, drama, opera and ballet, musical performances, cinema, cultural centers, circuses and clubs.

As pointed out in "Construction of a National Emblem, Recomposition of Identities and Heroic Millenarianism in Post-Soviet Buryatia: a Reappraisal" by Hamayon (Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity edited by Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada, 2004), the celebration of the 100th anniversary in 1994 of the heroic epic Geser is attributable to an attempt of building national symbolic references in a new political perspective, where Buryats feel a need for recomposition of identities on a territorial basis. According to Hamayon, the name for epic in Buryat language is *ül'ger*, which means 'example of reference', from this it follows that this hero is not considered an ancestor but a symbol of ideal values. Geser is a revitalized medieval warrior by the Buryat intelligentsia, who was included in the epic tradition of both Mongols and Tibetans. In Tibet he became champion of Buddhism, while in Buryatia and Mongolia, he became the greatest of all other heroes, a defender against invaders, he was clearly a unifying leader of Mongol peoples and embodied an ideal self-defense. Around his figure there was a kind of "messianic expectation", his characteristics were rooted in ancient times but his principles seemed to be valid in the present, too. "Beyond its role in enhancing Buryat self-consciousness, the process appears to have been also aimed at building a national identity at a higher level, that of the Republic of Buryatia as a political unit".⁴⁵ As Hamayon clearly points out, what matters is the expectation itself, rath-

⁴⁴ К. Вaрикoo, "Глобализация и Монгольский мир" сборник статей по матерьялам международной научной конференции, проведенной 15-18 июля 2010г., page 107, правительство республики бурятия-институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетской СО РАН Улан-Удэ, 2010.

⁴⁵ Roberte N. Hamayon, "Construction of a National Emblem, Recomposition of Identities and "Heroic Millenarianism in Post-Soviet Buryatia: a Reappraisal", page 301, Circumpolar Ethnicity and Identity edited by Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada, 2004.

er than the concrete action of defending against someone; he entails a symbolic construction of the "nation". However, Geser remained the privileged object of intellectuals and authorities of the Republic, rather than becoming popular among the population.

Another important event, which marks a significant step towards the rebirth of national culture in Buryatia is the jubilee marking the 250 years of recognition of Buddhism in Russia, celebrated in 1991. In March of the same year, the All-Buryat Congress of Consolidation and Spiritual Resurrection of the Nation took place, together with the foundation of the Buddhist Union Law. At the same time in the Russian capital the Moscow Society of Buryat Culture was created, in order to revive interest in the Buryat and Mongolian culture and human heritage, through the promotion of Sunday schools in native language, lectures, publications and celebrations of national festivals.

In the process of resurrecting Buryat culture, a very important place was given to Buddhism, which was celebrated with the arrival of the Dalai-Lama XIV and the eruption of opening datsans in Buryatia (today, 12 temples are still in use). Nowadays, Buryats emphasize the reunion with all Buddhists of the world, "the majority of the urban and rural Buryat population actively demonstrate these sentiments in their behaviour, visiting datsan, buying and reading Buddhist (not just Buddhological experts) literature, practicing confessional festivals and rituals and wearing various Buddhist symbols: rosaries and cords often blessed by the Dalai-Lama. The jubilee was an especially clear demonstration of such attitudes".⁴⁶ In urban context, like in the capital Ulan-Udè, the need of cultural preservation is even more felt by Buryats, as explained in "буряты: социокультурные практики переходного периода" ('Buryats: social and cultural practices in Transition', МИОН, Иркутск, 2008), because the presence of Russian Slavic is more strong, so Russian language became the privileged tool of communication especially for youth and children. Families tried to preserve in the home situation the use of Buryat speaking language, and a central role in this task was performed by mothers and women. As reported in "Buryats: social and cultural practices in Transition", very significant, for example, is the fact that the symbol of the city of Ulan-Udè is a monument to hospitality at the gate of the city, which is a Buryat sculpture representing a woman in traditional costume and with a shawl-Hadak (a kind of Buddhist scarf), symbol of hospitality and friendship. "Buryat women preserved always more than Buryat men the -national culture- (religious practices, Buryat costume and so on) (...) It is considered, that Buryat women preserve the cleanliness of blood of the Buryat nation. In this way, through gender symbolism of the monument the meaning of the Buryat national revival is conveyed as a true revival of the Buryatness (note that Russification affected, primarily, urban Buryats) and preservation of the ethnic group and its traditional culture".⁴⁷

This monument could be taken as a sample of the spiritual ethnic revival which is taking place peacefully nowadays in Buryatia, throughout the respect and the enhancement of all ethnic national heritages. The revival has developed during these last two or three decades following the principles of tolerance and peaceful coexistence of nations inhabiting the country, so that we can speak about a general and broader national awakening, concern-

⁴⁶ N.L.Zhukovskaya, "Buddhism and problems of national and cultural resurrection of the Buryat nation", page 40, Central Asia Survey, 2007.

⁴⁷ "буряты: социокультурные практики переходного периода", страница 124, МИОН, Иркутск, 2008.

ing all nationalities of Buryatia. Datsans have been restored, new Christian temples constructed, and all traditions of Zaibaikal peoples have been preserved thanks to the government and the collective consciousness of the people. *“Both the Indo-Buddhist, Mongolian and Russian-European cultures and Shamanism, Buddhism and Christianity have played their role in the formation and development of Buryat culture through history. Due to its unique geographical location (being situated on the borders of Russia, Mongolia, and China) and historico-cultural development, Buryatia and Buryats present a unique synthesis of both culture of the East through Buddhism and Mongolian language and culture and that of the West through the medium of Russian language and culture”*.⁴⁸

The recovery of values from the Buryat tradition has not denied the core of other cultural expressions, since most of the Buryat identity presents itself as a hybrid synthesis of all the other cultures, with which it has developed and shaped during the time, and additionally, the Soviet experience has allowed values such as collectivism, brotherhood and friendship among peoples to strengthen and to develop a feeling of common good and social tolerance. Over time, Buryat culture has become like a “sponge” of cultural, social and political ideas, and it has been able to suggest and formulate new values of broad humanitarian breath.

In the present day, the Republic is considered one of the first cultural centers of Siberia, whose lively environment of traditions and festivals promote the local multicultural expressions through theater, ballet, writings, dances and all kind of music. Buryat ethnic revival has seen the reinforcement of relations with other Buryat cultural centers all around Russia and abroad, above all, in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev and Irkutsk, and these new strong connections have contributed to the promotion of solidarity and cooperation among them. Buryats became bearers of a new concept of “being Russian” (with ‘Russian’ meaning people who live in Russia despite ethnic origins), which is extended to include the cultural sphere of all Central Asian countries gravitating around the post-Soviet range of influence.

3. The diaspora in St. Petersburg

In many contemporary contexts of globalization, the concept of ‘*ethnos*’ is congruent to the idea of awareness of their particular community, sometimes this feeling of belonging could turn into ethnic extremism and intolerance, but in some other cases, into preservation of one’s own cultural tradition and identity through the continuous comparison with other cultures and always growing consciousness of belonging to the same intercultural community.

The consciousness and the realization of an ethnic identity is not invariable, it rather depends on situations. Ethnic construction is not only awareness of a community, but also an evaluation of the membership in this same community on the basis of personal emotions. Those feelings usually refer to emotional relations with people of this community, and often people can have different solutions for their choices, and they could, in this way, identify with more than one group. The loss and the maintaining of the identity depends on the level of acculturation and social support.

Buryat people have always been guided by a spirit of brotherhood among themselves, but also towards other ethnic groups, and for this reason it becomes extremely interesting to consider their situation as a community in a multicultural space like that of St. Petersburg, in a different context than Buryatia, but still within the sphere of “Russianness”. St. Petersburg is a contemporary megalopolis, where more than 3,000 Buryats live. In this particular context, Buryats have learned to strengthen their feelings of ethnic community and simultaneously remain open towards other ethnic groups living in the city including Russians (the majority group). Problems of improvement in the metropolis represented among Buryats the main reason for education on sociality and integration.

Buryat diasporas in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the XX^o century made a contribution through the cultural heritage of its intelligentsia to the development of the city capital. The publishing house Naran was organized in those years in the city with the first publications of books in the Buryat language. The second important event for the life of the Buryat community in St. Petersburg was the erection of the Buddhist temple (‘*дацан Гунзэнчойнэй*’), the first Buddhist temple in Europe and the one located the furthest north. It was activities that took place inside and around this temple, which continue nowadays to preserve Buryat identity and strengthen their cultural features in the northern capital.

⁴⁸ К. Warikoo, “Глобализация и Монгольский мир” сборник статей по матерьялам международной научной конференции, проведенной 15-18 июля 2010г., page 108, правительство республики бурятия-институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетской СО РАН Улан-Удэ, 2010.

3.1 The need for a temple

Among the first constructors of St. Petersburg there were Buddhists, which in large numbers took part in the work at the foundations of the Peter's fortress, and in this way the first Buddhist community started to form. After one century they would count between 70 and 80.

A conspicuous part of them consisted of Buryats and Kalmyks, the two main ethnic groups coming from an originally-rooted Buddhist culture from the Siberian steppes, they used to move to the imperial capital for business and then remained there for all their lives. These were followers of the Mongolian and Tibetan school of Buddhism called 'gelug', voted to the cult of the lamas (Lamaism).

As indicated in "Храм Будды в Северной столице" ("The Temple of Buddha in the Northern capital", Andreev, Nartang, 2012) before the construction of the temple, Buryats and Kalmyks used to offer their own private houses to gather for the worship and for collective reunions, together with other Buddhist foreigners living and working in the city, like Chinese, Japanese and Siamese. A significant part of the adherents, however, were representatives of the upper enlightened and liberal Russian intelligentsia, who had started to attend oriental circles of discussion and who had become passionate about Orientalism and oriental doctrines.

During the XIX century, big philosophical discussions took place among the cultural salons of St. Petersburg, but soon in all major cultural capitals of Europe at that time as well (like London, Paris, Berlin, Rome and Vienna). The teachings of Buddha gained ground among the educated classes and its philosophical doctrines took place in the range of cultural suggestions of academic study. Buddhism became a trend and its propaganda started in all of Europe, through the spread of its catechism, where students were taught of Buddha's life, the religious doctrine itself and the way the Buddhist community should live and experience the world. Tendencies and insight regarding this traditional-religious subject were also on the agenda of many intellectuals in Russia and contributed to the enlargement of cultural horizons of the Russian civilization under the influence of both Oriental and Western knowledge. *"In this way, the Russian capital in the end of the XIX century and at the beginning of the XX constituted the place of meeting between two different Buddhist traditions: one spread from the West- from Paris and London, these were important theosophical and at the same time Buddhist centers of Europe, and it represented a predominantly early European intellectual environment; the other one from the East, from followers of the medieval reformed Mongol-Tibetan Buddhism, of the Russian Buryats and Kalmyks"*.⁴⁹

Within the big Buddhist family, Buryats have always represented an "attachment point" between the Far Eastern world and the Western civilization through Russia. The most suitable candidate for the construction of cultural bridges between the East and West could only be a Buryat: Agvan Dorzhiev. He was the personal representative of the Dalai Lama in Russia, as well as his closest adviser. He was personally sent by Dalai Lama XIII with a huge diplomatic delegation in St. Petersburg at the end of the XIX century. He was born in the Transbaikal region and he had later carried out his studies in Tibet, where he became the privileged partner of the young Dalai Lama in philosophical and religious disputes; he

⁴⁹ А.И.Андреев, "Храм Будды в Северной столице", page 19, Нартанг, Санкт-Петербург, 2012.

had great influence on his Holiness. When his candidacy was decided for Buddhist representation in St. Petersburg, Dorzhiev thought of creating at the court of the Tsar a kind of pro-Russian political group, which could define over time a political atmosphere favorable to Tibet. The main goal for the Dalai Lama was to test the water and gather support for the Tibetan cause against England. The aim of Dorzhiev was to persuade the Russian government to become protector of Tibet on the international stage, and this first meeting in St. Petersburg was meant to facilitate the establishment of friendly ties.

After meeting the Buddhist community at the capital, Dorzhiev came up with the idea of constructing the Buddhist temple-monastery in St. Petersburg. He saw it as a possibility to spread the eastern religion in the west side of Russia, where the Orthodox presence was already highly consolidated. Finally, it was decided that there should be a permanent presence of the Tibetan delegation in St. Petersburg, with Dorzhiev as its most valuable representative. The choice of Russia as the "protector country" was culturally dictated by the prophecy of the White Tsar (from the Shambala myth), who would bring peace and protection to the Buddhist world on the Earth.

Works on the temple began, and at the same time Dorzhiev petitioned Buryats and Kalmyks for the start of a new publishing house of Buddhist books, which was to be established within the walls of the temple. The temple-monastery was to become a prototype for the confessional schools situated in the Baikal region, as well.

The following step of Dorzhiev was the construction of a temple committee, among their ranks were Mongol and Sanskrit scholars, who were asked to conceive and plan the architecture of the monastery. They decided on an aesthetic image, which could bond both the Tibetan tradition and the European gothic one, in order to better show the role of crossroads embodied by the temple presence in the Northern capital. In 1915, the construction was finally completed and the temple sanctified (as illustrated in images n°3 and n°4).

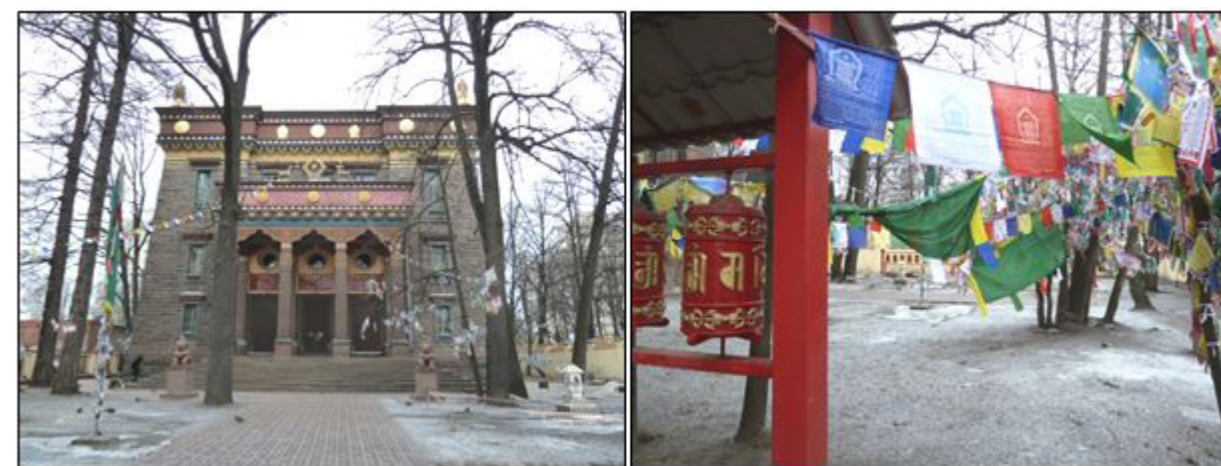


Image n°3: The Buddhist temple of St. Petersburg, 02/03/14

Image n°4: The external yard of the Buddhist temple of St. Petersburg, 02/03/14

Dorzhiev received much money from Tibet for the realization of the religious building and from the generosity of P.A.Badmaev, a popular Tibetan doctor, who was also trying to spread the practice of the Tibetan medicine in Europe. The presence of the temple, in fact, represented a great point of departure for the sensitization towards traditional practic-

es of Buddhism among other creeds and ethnicities. Through his work as a doctor, Badmaev gained the confidence and the esteem of the emperor, who wanted the Buryat doctor to work professionally at his court.

The 2nd of March 1914, Nikolaj II allowed the formation of the religious body, which would become the clergy of the temple, with 9 ministers: three from the Transbaikal region, 4 from the Persian lamb, and 2 from Starvopolsk (the following year a Latvian monk would join them as well).

The first worship in the temple had already taken place the previous year, on the 21st of February 1913, on the 300th Anniversary of the Romanov dynasty. This event was cherished by all Buddhists of Russia and not only them, since it referred to the incarnation of the White Tsar. For the occasion, delegations from Eastern Asia came to St. Petersburg, including Bandido Xambo Lama Dashi-Dorzhi Itigelov (from Buryatia) and political representatives from Siam. The establishment of steady diplomatic relations between Russia and Siam went back to the middle of the XIX century, but Buryats demonstrated particular interest for the king of Siam, due to his great generosity shown on the occasion of a gift to the Buryat community, in which he gave an especially valuable relic: particle bones of Buddha.

As described in “Храм Будды в Северной столице” (2012) by Andreev, soon a Buryat congregation was formed during those first years and a hostel for monks was created, where youth could learn Buddhism and its precepts, and where subjects concerning Tibetan medicine were taught to the students. Thanks to collaboration with local universities, the traditional practices of Tibetan medicine were associated with the methods of the European medical experiences, in order to get acquainted with a broader vision on the subject. With the advent of the Revolution in the city, people started to breathe the air of reforms, so Buryat and Kalmyk intelligentsia began to feel a new urgent phase of renovation concerning political and religious decisions, and they together decided to renovate the committee at the temple. Dorzhiev suggested creating by the temple a base for national training of specialists in different disciplines and knowledge of Buryatia, Kalmuck, Mongolia and Tibet. “*The need for such a move was furthered by the desire of peoples constructing their own new life according to the revolutionary principles. More specifically, the discussion concerned the construction of boarding hostels for students, which had just opened in the Petrograd Institute of Living Oriental Languages, where they lived collectively in two houses which belonged to the restored temple. Concerning the fact that Petrograd was chosen as the place to create such a database, Dorzhiev discussed two factors - first, that the city had traditionally been the largest center of Oriental studies in Russia, and second, because there was only one Buddhist temple in Western Europe. In fact, according to their habits to always demand the best for themselves, the Buryat-Mongolian population presented a particularly compelling incentive to send their youth to a foreign country to acquire knowledge*”.⁵⁰

At the beginning of 1924, a first group of 15 young Mongol students was sent to Leningrad (the new Soviet name of the city of St. Petersburg) though, the whole “academic” complex of the temple-monastery became effective only around the year 1927, when a huge group of lamas from Tibet and Mongolia arrived in the city: the temple was about to become a renowned base for the study of Buddhism in Russia. The temple transformed into a facul-

⁵⁰ А.И.Андреев, “Храм Будды в Северной столице”, page 92, Нартанг, Санкт-Петербург, 2012.

ty of Workers (following the Communist principles of Union of Workers) endowed with two big divisions: Northern and Eastern (studies). “*On the eastern branch studied Tannu-Tuva, Buryats, Mongols, Shors, Uigurs, Kazakhs, Tibetans, Kalmyks, Yakuts and the Kyrgys. Part of them - mostly immigrants from Buddhist countries - were enrolled in the Faculty of Workers by request of the Tibetan representation and then settled in the eastern dormitory in the Old Village*”.⁵¹ As Andreev suggests to us, the temple was incorporated into the idea of renovationism, by carrying out the functions of service and socialization, which were considered to be rudiments of socialism and at the same time “pure forms of Buddhism”. With this project, Dorzhiev thought of realizing and organizing a renovationist program, which showed itself as a synthesis of medieval Eastern research and contemporary Western science. In this way, the temple in Leningrad became one of the most prominent Buddhist centers for scholarship and culture of Northern Russia.

With the death of Dorzhiev and the Soviet repression, the temple lost its cultural and religious functions and became a base for sport-training. Only towards the end of the ‘80s, the temple would witness a rebirth of its past traditions; it again started to host foreign people coming from different countries like, Japan, Korea, Thailand and Sri-Lanka, “*this community consisted mainly of former clandestine Buddhists - the Europeans, as well as traditional Buryat Buddhists*”⁵² and the temple got back a lama, Bakula Rimpoce, thanks to whom all the rituals started again to be performed. In 1987 also the Dalai-Lama XIV visited the building of the temple and on the 27th of May 1990, the first public celebration took place since the Soviet time (a Buryat lama, Tuvan Dorzhe, presided over the ceremony). Thanks to the reopening of the Buddhist temple in Leningrad, relations between Russia and Tibet could improve and the city became again the outpost of the Indo-Tibetan spiritual culture in the West.

3.2 An intercultural and challenging environment

Since her first lines in the essay “Экспедиционные научно-исследовательские проекты Санкт-Петербургской буддологической школы” (‘Expeditionary research projects of the St. Petersburg school of Buddhism’, буддийская культура- история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство, Четвертые Доржиевские Чтения, Нестор-История Санкт-Петербург, 2011) Ermakova stresses the great value which Buryats have always given to education among peoples of the Russian Federation, by saying that since their childhood they have always been prepared for Mongolian studies and trainings regarding languages and culture, and that, Buryat families have always looked for high standard of academic education for their children in the most cutting-edge universities of the capitals (in particular St. Petersburg).

⁵¹ А.И.Андреев, “Храм Будды в Северной столице”, page 111, Нартанг, Санкт-Петербург, 2012.

⁵² А.И.Андреев, “Храм Будды в Северной столице”, page 141, Нартанг, Санкт-Петербург, 2012.

It was under the imperial direction of St. Petersburg that the first expeditions in Siberia started, and its museums were the first “containers” of vestiges and finds of the Eastern Siberian indigenous peoples, which contributed to the start in the capital of the first anthropological studies about peoples of Russia. But research was conducted on a large scale and they included not only Siberian peoples but also some other Asiatic ethnic groups, one example was the researcher Tsybikov: “on his return to St. Petersburg in 1902, the researcher delivered the RSU procured during the expedition, more than 300 Tibetan Manuscripts. That same year, the collection was transferred to the Asian Museum, since the profiles of RSU activity do not assume scientific descriptions and further storage of such rarities. The Asian Museum collection of Tsybikov became a valuable acquisition, as it were part of the Buddhist philosophical treatises - as translated into Tibetan from original (including lost) Sanskrit and created by Tibetan authors, as well as works of Tibetan historiography on medicine, astrology and writings telling about the history of monasteries and related Buddhist schools of Tibet”.⁵³

Soon, a great interest for the Buddhist and Oriental world grew among the cultural circles of St. Petersburg, and many studies about the topic caught on in both academic and non-conventional fields of research and in-depth analysis. The new department of Oriental studies went under the direction of Badzar Baradievich Baradijn, a Buryat man of pastor origins coming from the Transbaikal region, who assumed an inspiring role in a new secular university knowledge branch dedicated to Asia and its cultural expressions. In the beginning, he studied at the University of St. Petersburg, where later he became professor of Sankrit, Tibetan and Mongol language.

Another important magnet for cultural and anthropological studies was the Peter’s museum, *Kunstammer* (the first Russian museum) which, until nowadays, had been collecting materials from different Asiatic cultures, like India, China, Tibet (and so on), and where, since the first expedition results, it was possible to learn and understand the multicultural matrix of Russia and its Eastern neighbors. The collections of all ethnographic and academic museums of St. Petersburg were increased after each Asian expedition made by its “academic explorers” and men of letters. Furthermore, after the celebration for the 300 years of the Romanov dynasty, when also the Dalai-Lama was invited to St. Petersburg, the collection and the interest for anthropology increased thanks to the gifts and donations of the Dalai-Lama to emperor Nikolaj II of objects from the Buddhist Tibetan tradition, which contributed to enrich the existing collection of the Anthropological Museum of the city. “In an atmosphere of Buddhist active searches worked Minayev, offering new methods of study of Buddhism, and his activity as such was very different. He published new Buddhist monuments and their translations, as well as engaged in theoretical studies in the field of Buddhist doctrine and individual stages of its development”.⁵⁴

⁵³ Т.В. Ермакова, “Экспедиционные научно-исследовательские проекты Санкт-Петербургской буддологической школы, буддийская культура- история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство, Четвертые Доржиевские Чтения”, page 75, Нестор-История Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

⁵⁴ М.Ф.Альбедиль, “Буддийская культура Источниковедение и языкознание- Индийский буддизм в собрании Музея антропологии и этнографии им. Петра Великого (Кунсткамера) РАН: коллекция И.П.Минаева”, буддийская культура- история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство, Четвертые Доржиевские Чтения, page 207, Нестор-История Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

At that time, movements of all ethnic cultures of the Empire converged in the capital, and soon St. Petersburg became a cosmopolitan center. Furthermore, all international relations between Russia and other countries were developed and dealt in this urban center. In Peter’s city, the intercultural ferment was growing, which would later make St. Petersburg the most important place of arts, sciences, culture and advanced studies. Nowadays, St. Petersburg contains the first constructed Mosque and Buddhist temple in Europe, a Synagogue, Evangelic, Catholic, Orthodox and various Protestant and different Christian confession-al churches. With the advent of *perestroika* and the fall of the Soviet Union, it was decided to collect all ceremonial objects, works of art, and materials of any sort, in order to organize them into an interactive museum showcasing all religions of Russia, and so all religions whose representatives constituted the social background of St. Petersburg. Nowadays, the State Museum of History of Religions finds its place in St. Petersburg and presents different expositions and virtual tours of Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam (in all their forms and variants) and additionally, religions of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, ancient Rome and Greece. It is an important point of reference for all inhabitants of the city and a sort of place where all cultures of Russia find a common background of research.

St. Petersburg has always been the capital of a great multicultural-empire and also the privileged center of cultural elaboration for Russia. Also, in the post-Soviet era, the city has been able to keep its primacy on arts, although the political center has shifted to Moscow. Still now, St. Petersburg has been able to assuage to the role of special platform for cultural and social experiments. One of those, which is worth being mentioned, is the “Tolerance Programme 2006-2010” (the extended name is “Programme of promoting Harmony of Inter-ethnic and Intercultural Relations, Preventing Ultra-Nationalist Tendencies and Strengthening Tolerance for Everyone in St. Petersburg”). It was meant to be “a comprehensive project targeted at assisting residents of St. Petersburg with acquiring the knowledge and abilities of dealing with a more open and more complex intercultural environment”.⁵⁵ The fact that the city of Peter had felt the need of such a programme is highly indicative of the level of multi-ethnic presence, and it has revealed the problem of cohabitation of such a huge number of different cultural groups. The city gives home to more than one hundred ethnic minority communities (which represents around the 15% of the city population). “Social surveys indicate the high frequency of interethnic contacts within the city community: 91% of citizens communicate with representatives of other nationalities on a regular basis, and more than 48% of the population regularly interacts in multinational groups of people”.⁵⁶

The programme aims to raise the consciousness that inhabitants of St. Petersburg are not different ethnic groups, but rather that the city is inhabited by citizens of various nationalities, who are equally responsible for the destiny of the city itself. The project has involved resources of civil society and it has mostly worked with educational institutions and recreational ones. It provides extracurricular education on the cultural heritage of peoples of Russia and of the world, systems of adaptation of foreign students in Russian schools (both lower and higher educational level), competitions, conferences and festivals, Council of Foreign Student Affairs, organizing workshops and surveys among the population of the city, promoting harmo-

⁵⁵ “St. Petersburg unites people”, St. Petersburg Government Programme on Tolerance, page 5, 2006.

⁵⁶ “St. Petersburg unites people”, St. Petersburg Government Programme on Tolerance, page 4, 2006.

ny in interethnic relations through media projects, special press clubs providing information on interethnic and intercultural issues, improvement of mutual cooperation between government and religious organizations, interactive exhibitions dedicated to the role and place of various religions in the culture of Russia, training courses for law officers, support and rehabilitation of the racial, ethnic and religious crime victims and cooperation on interethnic and intercultural dialogue with cities of the world and international organizations.

*“According to experts, in the 2.5 years of implementation of the programme, citizens have demonstrated high interest in national cultures; most of them are convinced in the necessity and importance of intercultural dialogue. More than 2500 actions have been held in the sphere of intercultural interaction. (...) According to polls, 44% of respondents share the opinion that the multinationality enriches the cultural life of the city; 71% of respondents declared interest in national traditions of various people”.*⁵⁷

St. Petersburg has become an important point of reference for many regions of Russia, which want to implement an intercultural dialogue and social policy; it is an example of “well-done-applied” coexistence among nationalities. In October 2009, the city received from UNESCO the prize for the promotion of tolerance and nonviolence; it was awarded for its efforts to construct mutual respect and tolerance in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, in the objective of eliminating all forms of discrimination. Within this multi-cultural and multi-faceted context ranks the Buryat diasporas, and its process of integration, largely attributable to its Buddhist engagement and its history of cross-cultural assimilation.

*“However, one of the leading and dominant civilizational features of Buddhist culture is its integration capabilities on a global scale. The ethno-integrational Buddhist culture is clearly recorded in his anthropocentric, meta-ethnic, universal pattern, as well as in the spiritual harmony in its self-improvement directionality, in mercy, in compassion, and in a clear hierarchy of confessional pantheon headed by the founder of Buddhism, the Buddha”.*⁵⁸ Buddhism is considered a world religion, and as world religion, its theories and practices have inter-ethnic and international results, where ethnic and state borders are deliberately ignored. As a religion, Buddhism is also a kind of “thinking” creed, while Christianity and Islam, for example, are more about acting. It has given rise to a religious culture, which includes in itself an aggregate of all knowledge about humanity and all its psycho-perspectives, and this psycho-descriptive analysis could be potentially applicable to all ethnic cultures (it is exactly in this way that Buddhism came out to incorporate all cultural peculiarities of peoples among whom it spread).

*“On the border of cultures a special space of interaction is created, within which there is intense mutual contact of cultures, inner expression and changes in the form and content of the identity”.*⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “St. Petersburg unites people”, St. Petersburg Government Programme on Tolerance, page 17, 2006.

⁵⁸ Т.В.Наумкин, “Буддизм и ислам в современном мире: между обществом, человеком и политикой (попытка сравнительного анализа), Глобализация и Монгольский мир”- Сборник статей поматерялам международной научной конференции проведенной 15-18 июля 2010г.,page 169, Провительство Республики Бурятия-Институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетской СО РАН, Улан-Удэ, 2010.

⁵⁹ Т.В. Бернюкевич, “Религиозный синкретизм буддийских верований в России как следствие культурного пограничья”, Буддийская Культура- история, источниковедение, языковедение и искусство,page 59, ГИПЕРИОН, Санкт-Петербург, 2013.

Buddhism has meant for Buryats an opportunity to cross the borders among other ethnic groups, but also a chance around which to gather as people from the same culture. In all Buryat contexts we are witnessing a resurgence of the ethnical spirit of belonging, but, while in Buryatia these emotions refer to the Buryat ethnic group as such with all its different features (Shamanist Buryats, Buddhist Buryats, Christian Buryats and so on), in its diasporas Buryats mostly collect around the Buddhist tradition and faith. The Buddhist character in the diasporas is more accentuated, and this gives rise to the creation of an ethnic culture primarily focused on religion.

The rebirth of such a need of collecting around unifying-cultural symbols is the result of the failing action of the Soviet propaganda, which after the 1990s left a vacuum of ideologies which had to be bridged. As Amogolonova specifies in “Contemporary Buryat ethno-sphere” (Ulan-Udè, 2008): *“their political enthusiasm rather quickly lost relevance even for their creators - the elite. However, the grain of ethno-political propaganda fell on fertile ground, because even in the current indifference to politics the engagement in ethno-cultural identity remains quite pronounced. Manifestation of this in modern times is the strengthening and growth of interest in national Buryat culture, particularly Buddhism”.*⁶⁰ Buddhism also determines the cultural connotations, which Buryats should have: peacefulness, tolerance, special guest reverence, diligence, respect for elders and love for children, qualities intrinsic in people, and reflecting the soul of a good Buddhist.

As Amogolonova underlines in her essay, Buddhism can lead Buryat people towards the path of renovation (rebirth) through the practice of compassion, since Buddhists are obliged to help the others: *“the more you give, the more you receive. (...) nowadays Buddhism is largely socialized into modernity through participation in social life”.*⁶¹ Buddha himself says that everyone should think and act according to his/her own rules and nobody can prohibit it. In this case, Buddhism aims at the desecularization of public consciousness, in order to bring it into the mainstream of religious morality, which now can be identified as universal morality. People themselves go to datsan (without anybody pushing them) and there from lamas people learn tolerance, wisdom of life, compassion, non-violence, love and responsibility, all character-traits which Buryats make their own in daily life with their fellows, but above all, with all other cultural groups they must live with.

*“We, as representatives of one of the world’s religions, condemn evil manifestation of hatred and malice, terrorism and extremism as a means of resolving conflicts and differences among people, populations, and nations. Life is given to us to perform good deeds for the sake of life on Earth, for the benefit of all living things. We live in an era of great change in the era of globalization and integration in all spheres of life of the modern man and society”.*⁶²

Steeped in this kind of religion-philosophy, Buryat identity has learned to live its own cultural principles through the experience of common living with other ethnic groups, carriers of different worldviews, and it has learned to increase the values of its national features in relation with their status of minority among other minorities. The Buddhist faith has be-

⁶⁰ Д.Д.Амоголонова, “Современная бурятская этносфера- дискурсы, парадигмы, социо-культурные практики”, page 160, издательство Бурятского Госуниверситета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

⁶¹ Д.Д.Амоголонова, “Современная бурятская этносфера- дискурсы, парадигмы, социо-культурные практики”, page 161, издательство Бурятского Госуниверситета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

⁶² Д.Д.Амоголонова, “Современная бурятская этносфера- дискурсы, парадигмы, социо-культурные практики”, page 185, издательство Бурятского Госуниверситета, Улан-Удэ, 2008.

come the reason why Buryats could consider themselves “a cultural specificity” in a context of diasporas. This trait has strengthened itself in situations of “displacement” from the original home territory, Buryatia. This tendency, however, has not allowed intransigence to grow against other confessions or mores, but rather it has allowed the finding of “rich soil” for their own path towards the perspective of broader concepts of multicultural citizenship.

The first container of cultural regeneration and aspirations are young people, and among them, students who move from one place to another in search of new ideas and identities. As already mentioned, the first city of culture and study in the Russian Federation is St. Petersburg, where most of the Buryats (and Siberian) “children” are sent to undertake studies (and in some cases, work activities). The city collects young talents from all parts of Russia and partly from all over the world. In a survey conducted by Spiridonova in 2003 (“студенты - сибиряки в Санкт-Петербурге: образ города, освоение культуры, поиски идентичности”, “культура и менталитет населения сибирии”, Санкт-Петербург, 2003) about identity perception of students from Siberia studying in Petersburg, interesting results have emerged. For example, it appears that for Siberian students, St. Petersburg means culture, the capital of culture, which they associated with a “second home”, where we can see the great results of a civilization (meaning the kind of civilization which they are part of). To the question whether they feel like citizens of St. Petersburg, the answer is almost always “half”. This is a “half” which, it is easy to guess, Petersburg shares with Buryatia in most of the Buryat answers, even if, a good part of the respondents are also of the idea that St. Petersburg is deeply bound with themselves.

It is self-evident that the city of St. Petersburg still represents in the collective imagination of the federal migrants the symbol of their own civilization. Despite all cultural and ethnic differences, it can still set itself as a cradle of multi-culturality in Russia, as a synthesis of all cultural expressions living within the borders of the Russian Federation. For Buryats it seems to have come back to their own original home territory, Buryatia, which, like St. Petersburg, ranks among the very first places in Russia for a huge presence of cultural diversity (officially recognized as cultural heritage), a place for cultural development, just as Petersburg. According with Antonova, only Buryat students positioned themselves very well in the city of St. Petersburg for education and initiative in the cultural field, through the organization of clubs and associations, designed to preserve the traditional heritage of their culture and social commitment, for instance, youth associations “Sagaan Dali”, “Surxarbaan”, “Kubok Dazana”, “Youth ballet”. All these examples have become a tradition in the metropolis and they have caused a kind of genuine interest in the public of the city, while for youth it has become a way for ethnic self-assertion. According to Antonova, traditional celebrations are one of the several ways through which public consciousness and ethnic psychology could form, and they trace the path of the historical development of peoples. The most important is the development of an ethnic consciousness among others, so that the way towards identity is marked by cultural comparisons and common platforms of evolutions with other ethnicities.

Another example of shared initiative by Buryats is the creation of “the Council of aspirants and of young students from Buryatia in St. Petersburg”. It presents itself as consolidated centers for young people, for educational initiatives by representatives of Buryatia, for current practical research projects in the field of politics, legislation, for socio-economical and cultural actions

of the Baikal region and of the whole Russian Federation. “In April 2009 in St. Petersburg the -Council of aspirants and of young students from Buryatia in St. Petersburg- organized a fruitful work of all Russia scientific-practical conference -Socio-economic development of Russia: regional problems- with the support of the Committee on Youth Policy and Education, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Buryatia and the St. Petersburg University of Economics and Finance. The conference was held as part of Russia - the Year of Youth and implementation of the target program -Moin RB-Youth Buryatia (2008-2010) - in the direction of-Youth-return migration-”.⁶³ Specialists from several urban centers of Russia took part in the conference, including St. Petersburg, Moscow, Novosibirsk, Chita and Ulan-Udè.

Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged, that the city of St. Petersburg hosts some of the major theaters, ballet and music schools of the world, its artistic tradition is universally known, and every year the schools host a huge number of Buryat students, which are able to rank among the best performers in the academies. In the intention to promote and support the study and the interest of the theatrical culture among young Buryat people, in 2004 the student group ‘Uliger’ was founded and the organization played a great role in the future of these talented people. “Creativity of young actors has caused genuine interest and admiration of fellows in St. Petersburg, and this assessment is very important to young artists. Since then, support for young talent has been included in the program of targeted public support. The establishing of contacts with artists enabled the implementation of musical concerts, which the members of the society took over. Interest in such events was large, but there were no further funds to rent the rooms.”⁶⁴ For the organization of such concerts, many different public national-autonomy associations were engaged in the work, and their meeting had a great meaning for the life of St. Petersburg. These active diasporas played a buffer role between the northern capital and the national republics in the field of cooperation and economy.

It has been noticed, how these kinds of youth, ethnic and artistic associations suggest actions within the society, which could be considered a new form of transmission of their own cultural heritage, a popularization of national culture in a non-traditional environment. Furthermore, such actions contribute to the diffusion of Buryat culture in the city thanks to their continuous open dialogue with the local institutions and all social partners, and they keep on preparing suggestions for social commitment.

3.3 “AYA-GANGA” (‘АЯ-ГАНГА’)

Around the 1980s in the northern capital, a new period of rebirth took place and new natio-cultural communities and unions were created together with inter-nationalities’ pub-

⁶³ М.А. Антонова, “Сохранение этнической идентичности бурят в интеграционной среде”, “Глобализация и монгольский мир-Сборник статей по матерьялам международной научной конференции проведенной 15-18 июля 2010г.”, page156, Правительство Республики Бурятия-Институт монголоведения, буддологии и тибетской СО РАН, Улан-Удэ, 2010.

⁶⁴ И.Н. Селиванова, “Санкт-Петербургский общественный фонд Общество бурятской культуры-Ая-Ганга” 10 лет деятельности (2000-2010гг.), “Буддийская Культура-история, источниковедение, языковедение и искусство”, page 117, Нестор История, Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

lic organizations, which all together shaped an independent natio-cultural movement. This wave took hold in the wake of the contemporary conversion of the Soviet Russia into a democracy. *“Petersburg is one of the centers, where the national-cultural movement roused thousands of different nationalities, living in the northern capital. The process of unification on a national and cultural basis took place simultaneously with the revival of religious communities and with their transferring into temples and churches”*.⁶⁵ The same members of those natio-cultural organizations became active participants of the religious rebirth. As pointed out by Selivanova, the Buryat diasporas have always been very active in the social background of the city and of the whole Russia, and the results of such a great initiative are now visible after almost twenty years of activity in the northern capital.

*“Founded in 1990, Leningrad Society of Buddhists united people of different nationalities, but in the first council of the society representatives of the Buryat fraternities prevailed. Buddhist datsan (...) was returned to the Buddhist community. This was the first in the backgrounds of Russia”*⁶⁶, in the wave of such events also datzan in Buryatia, Kalmykia and Tuva opened again. Soon in the temple of St. Petersburg the formation of national and cultural activities took place, up to 2000, when the charitable foundation Society for Buryat Culture “Aya-Ganga” was officially registered. The decision for its constitution was taken during a Council at the Buddhist temple in 1998, and the aim was that of promoting and popularizing Buryat culture in Petersburg, while at the same time to preserve Buryat heritage from generation to generation. *“The coming of people from Buryatia, who arrived in St. Petersburg to study and work, had formed a community of Buryats, who usually met at the Buddhist temple; juridically it had not created the society yet. (...) Soon the temple became a place where to meet, to spend time together by talking, celebrating fests, acting together, entertaining each other and so on”* so spoke Zyrendar Sambueva, vice-president of Aya-Ganga, in an interview with Marinandrea Gamba, on the 3rd of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple, Datsan Gunzéčojnéj, in St. Petersburg. The reopening of the temple stirred the spirit of initiative of Petersburg, and a lot of people came to help in the renovation works of the temple (and every week the local TV broadcasted news about them). Soon the temple became the center of attraction for the performance of rituals, cultural events and festivals, where people could go in order to rediscover their own traditions.

In the process of integration in the city, many Buryats had lost knowledge about their rites, national traits, language (etc.), and the gatherings at the temple could become an opportunity for all those people to discover and practice them again. A series of concerts and artistic events with artists from Buryatia and other Russian cities were organized with the help of the association Aya-Ganga, which on these occasions started to conceive the idea of creating its own independent collective. So in 2004, Aya-Ganga ensemble was founded, which began its work with kids, by teaching them dances, music, instruments, national games and literature. In addition, a traditional costume competition was organized each year with the help of a Bury-

⁶⁵ И.Н.Селиванова, “Санкт-Петербургский общественный фонд Общество бурятской культуры-Ая-Ганга” 10 лет деятельности (2000-2010гг.), “Буддийская Культура-история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство”, page 113, Нестор История, Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

⁶⁶ И.Н.Селиванова, “Санкт-Петербургский общественный фонд Общество бурятской культуры-Ая-Ганга” 10 лет деятельности (2000-2010гг.), “Буддийская Культура-история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство”, page 114, Нестор История, Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

at famous costume designer. Children, and also some adults, started to take part in the international festivals ‘Altargana’, which took place in Buryatia and Mongolia.

A few years before, during the 1990s, a great active excitement and action took place in St. Petersburg for transforming the northern capital into a major center of Buddhism. In this process, Aya-Ganga and many religious and academic activists, participated together with institutes and centers of research, the Museum of history of religions, the Kunstkammer and other Buddhist organizations. *“Created in those years, the University of Buddhist culture has become a platform for famous Buddhologists and Orientalists. A unique exhibition on Buddhism in the city’s museums attracted the attention of thousands of people of St. Petersburg. Transmissions by radio and television appeared. They began to publish magazines and books on Buddhism. Petersburg returned more than a thousand religious objects from the museums of the city to the Buddhist datsans in Buryatia. All this has led to the fact that Buddhism and Buddhist culture began to restore their former positions in the northern capital”*.⁶⁷

As Selivanovahas pointed out, during the crisis years money for research and culture were not sufficient. It was thought to continue the work of cultural enrichment and scientific research through the establishment of a scientific and practice conference, which was to be held twice a year by the support of Aya-Ganga and various academies, dedicated to the famous Buddhist figure of Dorzhiev, the so called ‘Dorzhiev’s lectures’. Usually participating in the conferences were professors, specialists and students of the Eastern fields (like, philosophy, linguistics, arts, research, folklore, and culture) from eight universities, six academic institutes and collectives from Russia’s museums. Very often scientific subjects were addressed, above all, Tibetan medicine. The first conference on the topic was held in 2013 and different aspects of the practice of this discipline were addressed by scholars and doctors, who were familiar with medicine from India, China, Tibet, Greece and Persia. The Tibetan medicine had been proclaimed one of the five most important sciences of the Buddhist tradition, nowadays mostly practiced and developed by Mongol and Buryat peoples. During the meeting, specialists focused on the integration of Tibetan medicine with the new contemporary approaches, the in-depth analysis of this discipline at the academic level, how to improve diagnosis methods and their effectiveness and how to extend the number of representatives and specialists of this field in the European part of Russia.

Recently, in 2009, the charitable fond Aya-Ganga has also started to organize a ten-day period of meetings and celebrations of Buddhist cultures at the temple of St. Petersburg, whose aims are those of pushing forward and deepening the harmonization of inter-ethnic relations among citizens of St. Petersburg, by viewing Buddhist culture as an integral part of the city’s history and heritage. *“The Decade was marked by Tibetan medicine, and their foundations are the philosophical ideas of impermanence and variability of the world, the unity of the spiritual and the physical nature of man. In Peters, these ideas do not sound for the first time, the name of the doctor Badmaev, who at the end of the XIX and at the beginning of the XX centuries was one of the firsts to practice Tibetan medicine in the highest circles of the society, known to many. Today in St. Petersburg work renowned doctors of Ti-*

⁶⁷ И.Н.Селиванова, “Санкт-Петербургский общественный фонд Общество бурятской культуры-Ая-Ганга” 10 лет деятельности (2000-2010гг.), “Буддийская Культура-история, источниковедение, языкознание и искусство”, page 118, Нестор История, Санкт-Петербург, 2011.

betan medicine, since 2005 there are three centers and 28 public hospitals, in a rehabilitation unit led by Dr. Victor Bazarov, which successfully applied traditional Tibetan medicine” (Irina Selivanova, “Сияние лотоса на берегах Невы”- ‘Shining Lotus on the banks of the Neva’, article from “Бурятия7” on the 23rd of July 2010).

This initiative is strongly supported by the government of St. Petersburg, the Republic of Buryatia and the Republic of Kalmykia. Over the years it has been possible to notice a unifying tendency led by this project (which has now become an established appointment), which has acquired a positive valence in terms of self-recognition of representatives of different schools of Buddhism. The fond Aya-Ganga plays a great and fundamental role in the organization of these events, so we can say that it is the driving force and promoter of almost all the initiatives which take place within the Buryat and Buddhist community, which demonstrate a great spirit of solidarity and perform a wide range of actions in the broader city reality.

“All the families in the community help each other. All Buryat students, who come from Buryatia to study in St. Petersburg are helped to continue their studies and strongly supported by the community, which allow them to find a place to express themselves and deepen their artistic studies. We ask them to participate in concerts and to take an active part in all events organized by the community. And so, we thought of creating our own Aya-Ganga’s ensemble with Buryat students studying music, ballet and musical instruments. Furthermore, we have also created a school on Sunday to teach our children the Buryat language, so that the knowledge of our own language and traditions would not be lost. In Petersburg there is a great tradition of ballet and theater, 7-8 children of us who play are not so consistent, but it is in any case important for us to continue our tradition and folklore. In this sense, we also organized traditional sport competitions, to which we invite anyone who wishes to take part in them. (...) As an association we always try to put our attention on the city’s dimension, and for this reason we want to be open to every kind of initiative suggested by other local realities (different associations, organizations, institutions of other cultural and ethnic groups, etc.). In this sense, we often go to school to let children and teenagers become familiar with our culture, but also to meet and organize meetings with other cultures between the school walls. This particular attention given to school is also due to the position held by our president of the association, who works as professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the St. Petersburg State University. For this reason we also organize conferences and meetings where representatives of various social backgrounds can discuss their arguments, problems, subjects of interest.” (Zyrendar Sambueva, vice-president of Aya-Ganga, in the interview with Marinandrea Gamba, on the 11th of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple, Datsan Gunzėčojnėj, in St. Petersburg). As an effort to promote a new consciousness among young people about their own cultural identity through the rediscovery of common values with whole Russia, Zyrendar Sambueva takes as an example the relatively recent project “Social Dialogue: Baltic-Baikal” for children from needy and socially vulnerable families, which Aya-Ganga implemented in those last years with the collaboration of local partners in Buryatia.

The project pursues the goal of making children and teens familiar with the richness of the spiritual traditions of their people and the cultural treasure of the whole Russia through the experience of the voyage, the source of knowledge of the world, without which, accord-

ing with Aya-Ganga visions, contemporary education is not possible. It provides the organization with two trains with two groups of children, one from the pedagogical college of St. Petersburg to the Republic of Buryatia, and the other one from Buryatia to St. Petersburg and to the mountains of Pushkin. The journey addresses several areas of Russia, where children have the opportunity to visit museums and places of historical and cultural interest before arriving at the final destination. Once in St. Petersburg, children from Buryatia have the opportunity to visit museums and to admire the artistic and historical heritage of the northern capital, while once in Buryatia, children from Petersburg join trips and excursions in the natural, spiritual and historical beauties of their “homeland”. The project has raised the level of education of children, it has educated them to patriotism while broadening their horizons and it has instilled in them a tolerant approach towards different cultures in the development of their own identity features.

The tour for our little tourists in St. Petersburg does not begin with the Buddhist temple or any other Buryat monuments, but rather with the visit at the Achmatova’s house at the Fontanka channel, as explained in a recent article appeared in “Бурятия” (‘Buryatia’) on the 19th of June 2012, with the title “Пять дней в Петербурге, которые навсегда останутся в памяти школьников и студентов из Бурятии- Социальный диалог -Балтика-Байкал- состоялся” (‘Five days in Petersburg, which will forever stay in the memories of the school kids and students from Buryatia, the social dialogue-‘Baltic-Baikal’ took place’): *“We begin the journey at the famous river Fontanka by the Fountain House (Sheremetev’s Palace), where in the wing the museum of Anna Akhmatova is located, and the story of the travellers start. Here, close to the garden, the monument to the famous poet was open, made by your countryman, the worldwide famous architect Vyacheslav Buchaev. (...) The visit of the Catherine’s magnificent palace, the famous Amber Room, a walk through the world-famous park among old trees, shrouded gently to dissolve the green, produced an indelible impression not only in children but also in adults accompanying them”*. After the first days of visit at the city monuments and museums, a meeting with the students of the pedagogical college was scheduled, in order to have for children a more “concrete” human exchange with other children.

It seems extraordinarily important to notice that the trip for the young students of Buryatia did not take place in the footsteps of researching traces of their ethnical memories, but rather it developed along the path towards the full recognition of a Russian collective memory, through the visiting of monuments which remind the children about the great Russian art and history. Patriotism and cultural renaissance started from here, from the cultural capital of Russia. It is also very interesting how this aspect of the exchange is fully enhanced by the second coordinator of the Baltic-Baikal project, Lyudmila Erdineva, president of the Agency for families and children of the Republic of Buryatia, in the television interview of the broadcast “точка зрения” (‘Point of View’) on the 29th of May 2012: *“Students, who will be welcomed to our beloved Buryatia, will experience our great multicultural heritage and cultures from other nationalities, like Russian culture, Evenki culture and Eskimo culture. Furthermore, we will show our natural and beautiful heritage, lake Baikal, together with the most important Buddhist monasteries of our region. (...) It is equally important that our students, who went to St. Petersburg, had the chance to meet new people and make new friends. It was the first time they took a plane and the underground. It is extremely important that our children*

had the chance to visit the places and the cultural contexts, where the great geniuses not only of our history but of the whole world lived, like Pushkin and Achmatova. (...) This opportunity is also extremely important for the children's professional future, since once in Petersburg, they could consult important documents, teaching materials and books about whatever topic". It was a program also supported by the Governmental Committee for External Relations and by the House of Nationalities of St. Petersburg, and as the vice-president of Aya-Ganga Zyrendari Sambueva underlines in her interview for "Бурятия7" ('Buryatia7') in the article "За Садовым кольцом Россия не кончается" ('Beyond the Garden Ring, Russia ends') of the 25th of April 2012: "not only entrepreneurs, but the state is beginning to support community organizations in their quest to preserve the cultural, economic, social space. (...) expanding cultural horizons of future teachers through personal experience of intercultural dialogue will promote a culture of interethnic communication".

By continuing our interview with Zyrendar Sambueva, she introduces also later projects, which Aya-Ganga has promoted and keeps promoting within its community: "We participate in different state programs of grants, scholarships, subsidies for the implementation of social programs. We have also strong relations with other Buryat communities in other Russian cities, like Moscow for example. The Moscow community comes here every year to celebrate with us Salangaan, but they also join other moments of fest. We are also planning to go in Moscow for concerts, hosted by them, and vice versa. There are others in Ekaterinburg, Krasnjaskij and we always try to keep contact with them and meet regularly, for example, one opportunity of meeting is the international festival Altargana, which last year took place in Mongolia, and thanks to these opportunities we try to develop relations of exchange with them, each offers what it can. We also organized meetings with other communities in Europe, like in France and Spain. We go there, we stay together by dancing, playing music, eating typical dishes". (Zyrendari Sambueva, vice-president of Aya-Ganga, in the interview with Marinandrea Gamba, on the 11th of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple, Datsan Gunzėchojnėj, in St. Petersburg). Among its constitutive principles, the fond pursues the target of preserving and developing the national culture of Buryats, but it accomplishes its goal with particular attention to children and youth, since, in perfect harmony with Zyrendar Sambueva's words, they represent the future of our community. Aya-Ganga wants to be the bearer of values such as tolerance, multicultural exchange, promotion of culture and education, and all these aims could find a realization in the constitution of the Aya-Ganga ensemble of youth. In this folk collective are seven/eight year old children, who learn dances, music and have the opportunity to perform their first concerts on the occasion of the many initiatives promoted by Aya-Ganga, like the celebration for the Buddhist new Year ('Sagaalga'), or even the many exchanges organized by the association during the year within other European capitals.

For the celebration of Buddhist new year a great fest is prepared by Aya-Ganga, and a consistent part of the Buddhist community of St. Petersburg takes part in it. This year the celebrations have started the 29th of January with a long evening of balls, dances, songs, concerts, games, tastings of typical dishes and the preparation of special corners dedicated to the Tibetan medicine. The fest starts with groups and individual games and riddles about the Buryat culture (which clearly stresses the importance of the role Buryats play in the Buddhist community of Petersburg), and it continues with concerts, where the children of the

Aya-Ganga ensemble and various other young artists from the local academies make beautiful performances with traditional costumes and musical instruments. "Then and now creative children's ensemble is impossible to imagine without Buyantuevoy Natalia, a costume designer. In due time she finished high school of traditional arts of peoples from Trans-Baikal, she worked in the boarding-school N°1 of Ulan-Udė, and now she lives in St. Petersburg, and all the folk group Aya Ganga acts designed and sewn by her in national costumes" (Inna Ryzhkova, "и пошли они до городу Парижу..." - 'And they went to Paris...', article appeared in the newspaper ММБ, on the 13 of February 2008). Costumes are incredibly colorful, and each color is inspired by the Buddhist symbology and refers to a natural element. In the footsteps of the Russian tradition of children parades, every fest or ceremony is an opportunity for the Buryat community to show their costumes and the grace of the movements of their Mongolian dances, during which the costumes are mostly showed.

Students from the St. Petersburg University usually help in the preparation of the children, and their lessons take place within the rooms of the datzan. Also for the exchange of the ensemble abroad, which were already held in Paris, in Peking and in London, the students helped in the preparation of the dances and of the little concert, which children had to perform during the visit in the foreign countries. Kids' performances all around the world have always had great impact on the local communities, for example, the time in France: "In Paris they gave a concert, indeed, with great success. In the Russian House in Faubourg Saint-Geneviève-des-Bois, famous all over Russia, gathered the descendants of Russian immigrants to see the performance of the Buryat children" (Inna Ryzhkova, "и пошли они до городу Парижу..." - 'And they went to Paris...', article appeared in the newspaper ММБ, on the 13 of February 2008).

However, Sagaalga and the concerts of children are not the only events organized by Aya-Ganga, which attract great attention from the public of St. Petersburg. Every summer the Buryat community celebrates the traditional 'Surxarban' in the parks of the Neva river, where Buryats, Kalmyks and Evenks gather together to celebrate the awakening of nature with games, sport competitions, songs, dances and traditional foods (like 'buzy'). The invitation is open to everyone is interested in it, like the Moscow Buryats, who every year arrive from the capital to share this moment, all organizations and associations of St. Petersburg and "in those days in St. Petersburg arrived the famous ensemble of Dagestan and North Caucasian republic government delegations. (...) the decade supports three Russian national republics, as well as Thailand and Mongolia, the consulate of India, by expressing a desire to participate in future decades, is negotiating with other consulates" ("Сияние лотоса на берегах Невы- Декада буддийской культуры в Петербурге", 'Shining Lotus on the banks of the Neva-Decade of Buddhist culture in Petersburg', article from "Бурятия7" on the 23rd of July 2010). It could be said, that this is an event which knows how to collect peoples from distant lands and put them together for celebrating culture and friendship. These celebrations are inserted into the program of the ten-days (Decade) of Buddhist fest, which Aya-Ganga is promoting for years among the people of Petersburg. The association plays a consistent role in the organization of this event and also its ensemble, 'Baikal', performs some concerts and ballets, while all around them specific games and sport competitions for men without any social exclusion are held together with parades of traditional costumes and musical instruments, common to the whole Buddhist world.

Undoubtedly, the ambience of openness and multiculturalism of St. Petersburg allows all these events to be performed with the maximum receptiveness and curiosity of the local administration and of the local people, who feel these celebrations and events are an integral part of their urban cultural heritage. Aya-Ganga enjoys the highest availability of local resources and consensus. *“We usually rely on the House of Nationalities to promote our initiatives together with other ethnic groups. There it is possible to organize festivals all together. While, for promoting sport events we use mostly newspapers and magazines. We also organize exhibitions in the city thanks to various private and public entities, which give us the spaces for preparing everything and for showing later our artistic and social products. Museums and theaters also gave us opportunities to implement our artistic and social projects. In those last years, we also took advantage of the Tolerance Program of St. Petersburg, in which every school became a place of exchange and understanding through our educational performances. Anyway, we always try to encourage people to discover an interest in our culture, and in order to do this, we use media tools like newspapers, TV, radio, etc.”* (Zyren-dar Sambueva, vice-president of Aya-Ganga, in the interview with Marinandrea Gamba, on the 11th of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple, Datsan Gunzėčojnėj, in St. Petersburg).

3.4 The Buryat community at the temple

The Buddhist temple, ‘Datsan Gunzechoyney’ in St. Petersburg, is undoubtedly the most attractive place for Buryats of the city. It is a place where, even non-Buddhist Buryats can gather to spend time together and rediscover their own ethnical identity. In these last ten years the temple has become a promoter of important events, which has had an important reflection on Buryats, since their community is the one which cares more and organizes the life around the temple.

The building is reused for activities aimed at the transmission of the Buryat cultural heritage and for the education of children. A quite clear example is the “воскресная школа” (the ‘Sunday school’), which takes place weekly in the rooms of the temple. Children actively participate in this initiative intensely wanted by a group of Buryat lamas and strongly supported by Aya-Ganga. This school represents a great opportunity for Buryat children in St. Petersburg. *“Folklore is always interesting for children, because, I think, our national culture is very rich, and in particular, the language preserves the soul of a nation and its potential creativity, which shows itself through arts and habits. Folklore means also dances, and children of course are always interested in culture, and here they learn to meet their own culture in their own traditional mother tongue, Buryat language, and in a big metropolis, it is something which is very much in need”* (Arenna, teacher of Folklore at the Buddhist temple of St. Petersburg, in a interview with Ariunzayaa Zjevjejen for ‘Цагаан Сар’, 2012-240. mp4). Together with Arenna, children learn about their traditions and habits through the study of poems and Mongolian literature, which are often coupled to the study of music and dance.

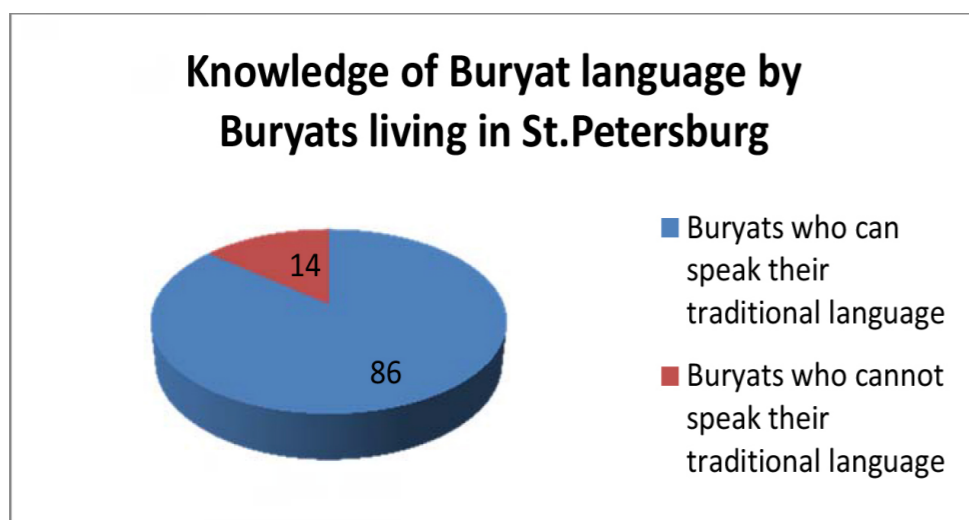
However, the sunday-school is not the only regular appointment at the temple, but also the catechesis with lamas accompanied the path of young and old Buddhists, who together with their own religion wanted to deepen the knowledge of the Buddhist assimilation in their own cultures (like, Tuvian, Kalmyk, Buryat and Mongolian cultures). The temple served as a meeting place. In one of its rooms a bar-cafeteria was set up, where every weekend dozens of people every hour of the day gathered to talk, to discuss the latest news, to prepare for the next event, or only to spend time together drinking coffee or tea with ‘бузы’ (a typical Buryat food). For some of them it is still an opportunity to meet with their fellow “compatriots” and to talk in one’s own language. In the cafeteria it is possible to meet new people, with whom it is very easy to start a conversation about Buryatia and Russia, about how much these two political identities mean for people who live in a diaspora, and it is incredibly surprising, how much Buryats are deeply in love with their own traditions and always ready to engage you in some collective event or fest they organize.

Zyren-Dyjenit Dorzhieva, for example, is a professor of the Faculty of Economics at the St. Petersburg State University, and together with other Buryat friends, she spends her time at the cafeteria every weekend during the White Month (the Buddhist New Year celebrations, which last for thirty days). *“The big difference between the life here in Petersburg and in Buryatia concerns the language we speak, because we live in a space, where many nationalities live together, in the northern capital St. Petersburg, so the parody of actions and communications occurs in Russian language. For me, Russian language ranks second mother tongue, at home we speak mainly in our Buryat. (...) Here in Petersburg we can speak in Buryat only with members of the family or close Buryat friends. (...) Anyway, in Ulan-Udė, for example, many Buryats cannot speak their native language, and they communicate only in Russian. This is a loss. In this way, they lose the capacity of writing in their own language. What happens is a process of assimilation of a nationality, or even better, of all nationalities, which constitute a minority and undergo this process”* (Zyren-Dyjenit Dorzhieva, in an interview-conversation with Marinandrea Gamba at the Buddhist temple, on the 15th of January 2014).

The maintaining of the language (either as first or second language) is felt as the first problem for the preservation of the culture. Buryats of St. Petersburg recognize the importance of the Russian language as medium-language and they recognize it as part of their own cultural heritage, but still, they want their children to know both Russian and Buryat language, not only one of them. Both are part of their identity. Buryat reminds them of their Mongol origin, and Russian reminds them of the fact that they are also Russians, a people, which have followed a different path than the other Mongols of Mongolia, a path rich of cross-cultural spaces. They consider themselves not Mongols, but Buryats.

In a survey, which I personally conducted among Buryats on the 11th -12th of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple of St. Petersburg, I asked whether they could speak Buryat and whether in their families there was someone who could speak it. 86% of the respondents said that they could speak Buryat (as illustrated in graphic N° 1), and 70% of those people, could speak their own “traditional” language, have at least one member in the family who speaks Buryat as well, and in the majority of cases, it is a large part of the family (parents, husband, wife, etc.). This first survey makes us think of Buryat language as cul-

tural subject with an essential valence in the mechanism of reconstruction of identity, above all in dislocations physically distant from the cultural cradle of their identity (Buryatia), in the far-away urban context, where possibilities of identity preservation are more occasional, language transmission becomes the most effective and spontaneous tool for the education to that “point-of-view”, which contains identity’s references. It is more likely for a Buryat family living in St. Petersburg to have all its members to speak Buryat, than a Buryat family living in Ulan-Udé, since cultural incentives in the Buryat capital are more frequent and they can be easily supported by a large slice of Buryat civil society, additionally, the need for cultural preservation is more felt in places considered “dislocated” from the native country where the feeling of being a minority is even more accentuated.



Graphic n°1

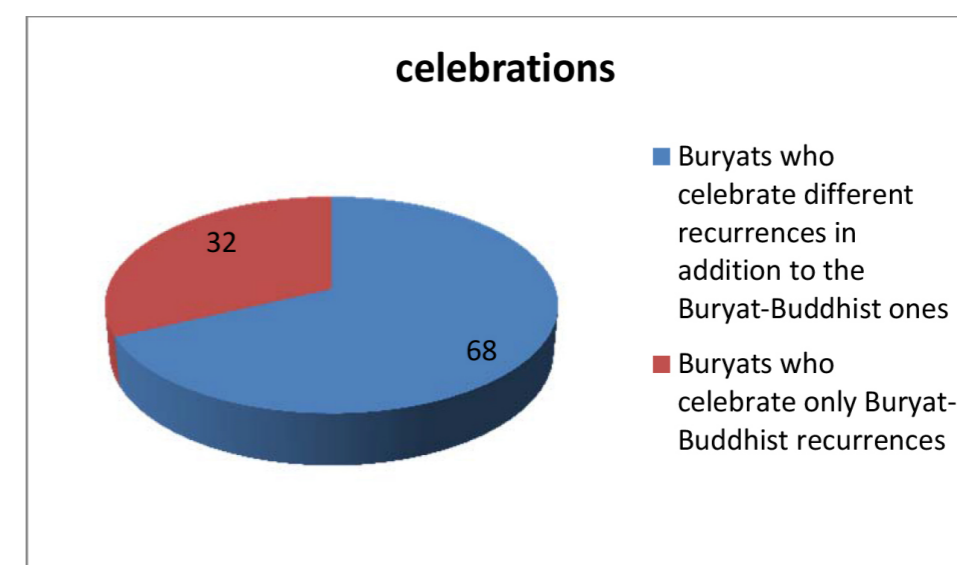
Furthermore, the 46% of those subjected to the survey had at least one family member (in some cases, even more than one), who did not belong to the Buryat ethnicity, and they represented different ethnic groups: Russians, Chinese, Japanese, Ukrainians, Tatars, Germans and other Central Asian minorities. This aspect sounds even more interesting, if we focus on the particular context of St. Petersburg. In fact, as discussed so far in the analysis of the linguistic aspect of Buryat migrants in St. Petersburg, we would expect a trend to the keeping of Buryat traits also in the “choice” of family members, which still exists, but not fully. It seems from this last percentage that Buryats are very well integrated in the social and multi-ethnic stratum of the city, to such an extent that in its most intimate sphere cultural traits are welcomed, which are very different from its “original matrix”. Its identity lives in multi-ethnicity.

From these initial data it could be inferred that, a good part of the respondents live surrounded in their family-daily-life by multi-cultural references and stimuli, despite the fact that, almost all of them do not miss an education on a more “traditional” Buryat base (in many families, Buryat is widely spoken at home). Almost all respondents can speak Buryat together with Russian, and a relevant part of them do not devote much importance to their Buryat ethnical origin, but rather they prefer (or they feel) to define themselves first of all Russian (in the sense of ‘citizen of the Russian Federation’), referring in this way to their

ethnic identity more closely connected with the history of the Russian Empire than to that one of the Mongols (they stress their specificity of “being Buryats” and not only Mongols). Yet it is interesting to notice the reasons given by some respondents on behalf of a major “Buryatness” of their identity, because for them Buryat origin indicates an identity which could contain many other nationalities (in this case, ‘being Buryat’ means recognizing a belonging to a multiplicity of cultural identities).

Nevertheless, a good portion of them continue to refer primarily to their being Buryat, and only then to their being also Russian, thus underlining their link with Buryatia and the more ethnic origins. In this respect, however, some answers sound almost “contradictory”, when asked the question “which community do you feel a part of?” slightly more than a half of those receiving the questionnaire answer and they say that their feelings as community refer to the broader Buddhist world, to “Aya-Ganga”, to the Russian Federation, to the St. Petersburg society, and some of them both to the Russian Federation and to the Buddhist world together (only very few of them look primarily at Buryats as their community of reference).

Respondents show a very open inclination for cultures different from the Buryat one. For example, 68% of them do not celebrate only Buryat or Buddhist fests, but also recurrences of other nationality groups (as illustrated in graphic N° 2) and the 62% thinks that “being Buryat” is something that you can also become if you are interested in the culture and not necessarily to be born as such or a matter of blood. Such an open vision towards different possibilities of being and becoming Buryat represent a further confirmation of Buryats’ multi culturalism, without forgetting that almost all of the respondents supporting the possibility of becoming a Buryat, share also the idea which provides for being Buryat by birth. In their thoughts there is no exclusion to any form or shape Buryat identity could show: it is good to remind ourselves from where we come from, but it is still important that our people have become such thanks to the input of others’ cultural visions and thanks to Buryats’ cross-cultural ethnic origins.



Graphic n°2

I think these last data from the interviewed group are extremely relevant because they underline the importance of traditions related to identity together with the awareness that

preservation of such traditions is impossible without the constant support of new cultural horizons. Interculturalism is essential as much as the maintenance of “handed-down traditions”, participation in different cultural celebrations and events are the proof of their interest and of their attention always pointed outside their mere narrow circles of ethnic values. I think these data demonstrate how flexible their concept of ethnicity is, since, it seems, they conceive ‘ethnicity’, as a broader space open to many cultures, which can bring added value to the shape of Buryat identity.

Concerning the group of respondents, it can be said that almost all of them moved to St. Petersburg for study and then decided to stay permanently for work, so almost all of them have been living here for more than ten years and they can speak of themselves, for all intents and purposes, as residents of St. Petersburg. Only 33% of them dream of coming back to Buryatia (most of them are people who were born in Buryatia and they wish to come back because they already have a strong connection with their native territory), the others prefer to remain living in the northern capital, since they feel already at home. Indeed, the 68% of them feel comfortable with the level of integration Buryat culture enjoys in Russia, and in particular in St. Petersburg, where it is more strongly felt and developed. For the majority of them, St. Petersburg represents a second (and in some cases, the first) home, because they find in the Nordic city the same opportunity of intercultural exchange they enjoy in Buryatia.

The permanence in St. Petersburg by a large community of Buryats has also created a hybrid of Buryat identity among the same people directly emigrated into the northern capital from Buryatia, and this hybrid reflects itself also into the spoken language: *“there are differences among Buryat groups in Russia. For example, in our community in Petersburg there are different dialects, because we come from different regions of Buryatia, where there are different linguistic variations, and when we meet all together in St. Petersburg, each one speaks his/her own dialect, in this way, a kind of -Petersburg language- has been created”* (Zyrendari Sambueva, vice-president of Aya-Ganga, in the interview with Marinandrea Gamba, on the 11th of February 2014 at the Buddhist temple, Datsan Gunzėčojnėj, in St. Petersburg). So that identity seems to remodel new spaces and cultures, by creating uniquenesses among people of the same ethnic group. As a little minority in a huge urban context, they have been able to catalyze all new intercultural suggestions and to propose new ones to the wide St. Petersburg public, and at the same time, to preserve their ethnical identity with new contributions. It emerges from their behavior and their habits that it is important for them to remind themselves from where they come, in order to integrate better with others and to “absorb” with more consciousness new multi-cultural features. They deeply want to be part of a bigger society, with which they share their own identity. Buryats are very multi-cultural people, who, by the way, do not forget to recall their national identity in order to better stay and live together with other cultures, since a good integrational process happens when identity is not cancelled, but enhanced through other cultures.

Conclusion

The history of multicultural arrangements, which the Buryat identity lived through, has deep roots in its multi-ethnic and social formation in the territory of Buryatia. The region all around the Baikal lake has always been a crossroads of peoples and ideas and goods, which have led to the formation in the lake’s surrounding area of a hybrid of Asian cultures with the name of Buryats.

The territory was an important resource for the development of an inter-ethnic character of Buryat people, since it forced them into cohabitation with different cultures and ways of life, which Buryats wisely absorbed, also thanks to their own traditional Shamanist and Mongolian culture. Buryats were people of great displacements, used to establishing relations and confronting different peoples in Asia. Furthermore, the shamanist essence of lake Baikal as a cradle of spirituality, which unified around its shores several different ethnicities, shaped a thought of brotherhood among peoples who looked at it as their natural and spiritual home. For a nomadic and divided people, as the Mongols, the nature of lake Baikal embodied “home” and a Buryat peculiarity, compared with other Mongolian tribes living in other regions of Asia. The lake was a sort of identification element, which united Buryats with other culturally different peoples and divided them from the rest of the Mongolian strain (Buryats are Mongols from Siberia, from the North, from the Baikal region).

With the advent of Buddhism, an even greater “revolution” took place among Buryats. Before its penetration in the Transbaikal region, the Buddhist tradition had been able to absorb many elements and aspects of the cultures and traditions it met and, additionally, it was a religion, which had made these voyages and their inter-cultural contributions its first necessary element of empowerment. The cultural “marriage” between Buddhism and Buryats was one of the best, because the Eastern religion determined the way to combine its own principles with the spiritual tradition of Buryats, and together they gave life to a hybrid combination of Buddo-schamanic shape. However, Buryats, who met Christianity (even if they were a small minority), managed to keep both Christian and Schamanic features alive in the process of cultural integration.

This happened because Buryats had always been able to absorb new elements into their traditional culture by keeping “original” features always open to external contributions. Their nature of “nomads at the crossroads” brought them to welcome multiple choices of identities coming from different traditional spheres. The original formation of the Buryat ethnicity is itself a combination of multiple cultures and ethnicities living on the lake Baikal with the Mongolian stock of Siberia. The Russian yoke renamed them Buryats, in the sense of ‘Russian Mongols’.

The October Revolution would be one of the most crucial cultural and political issues of Buryat identity. Buryats willingly welcomed the arrival of the revolutionary movements

in the wake of social and cultural change, which among Buryats received messianic connotations of spiritual and social change. Buryat support of the revolution resulted in a revaluation of the national heritage as part of the uniqueness of Russian peoples. The Soviet time brought an opportunity for education, which Buryats learned to take advantage of for their national and personal enrichment, by taking advantage of the opportunity of joining the same social background with Russians, first of all, and with the other ethnic groups of the Soviet Union (in particular those living in Russia).

Nowadays, from the ashes of the USSR, the Republic of Buryatia was able to make co-existence among peoples, who cohabited in it, its primary definition and richness. “Friendship and brotherhood between peoples” is the national dictum and the emblem present everywhere (the image is a Russian boy and a Buryat boy holding hands and dancing together). Once again, it is the territory, which shapes the contours of inter-culturality of the Buryat people, since Buryatia is the first Republic of the Russian Federation with the highest degree of multi-culture. Furthermore, the mutual influence which has lasted for decades between Buryats and Russians has left a socio-cultural heritage, which the Russian Mongols have assimilated as their own national connotation and as reason of distinction from other Asian Mongols.

Another important capital of culturalism in Russia was the city of St. Petersburg. The northern capital was the first center of attraction for people of culture, sciences, arts, political ideas and the “collection point” of geographical discoveries and expeditions. It was an attractive place, where one of the most multi-cultural and well educated people of the empire could concretely contribute to the challenging project of a Babel of cultures and ideas. Still nowadays, St. Petersburg knows how to renew its multi-cultural spirit and it is still the cultural capital of Russia. In such a heterogeneous background, Buryats once again played a central role in the social and academic rebirth of the city.

Also in the northern city, the factor which polarized the Buryat attention was the Buddhist temple, and here again Buryats became promoter and creator of this concrete possibility of aggregation, education and social activity, which deeply marked the life of the city. Buryats brought new ideas and interests in a new socio-urban context and they knew how to assimilate with people living there, by making them participate in their traditional events and celebrations. Buryats wanted their cultural heritage to be part of the city heritage (and so, of Russia itself), their cultural and social projects were open to everyone who was interested in them. The city of St. Petersburg largely contributes its open-minded attitude to the development in its heart of different folk- initiatives and it recognizes them as one of its primary resources.

In a world of globalized tendencies and nationalistic pressures, Buryats once again are an example of tolerance and mutual respect. The national and cultural rebirth of the Buryats was conceived within a space of multi-cultural definition, because their revival took place through the awareness that this could only happen where there were also other people who highly valued their own national identity. The Buryat profile was born in a multi-cultural context and only in a same multi-cultural context could its rebirth happen, since their identity culture was a hybrid of Asian and European essences. The research for a union with other ethnic groups is visible also from a careful observation of Buryats’ daily habits and lives, which do not omit the research of multiculturalism between the domestic walls, where Buryats live in multi-ethnic families and are open to any new definition of Buryat identity.

They are people inclined to intercultural dialogue and ready to open new bridges among cultures, since their own path towards national identity is dotted with different languages and socio-political references. Over time they have learned how to deal with numerous historical changes, and they have made migration and cross-cultural communication their own method of national expression.

In the end, among the opening lines of a famous Buryat Buddhist poem was where I thought to spot some of the traditional values of the Buryat people, which have always accompanied their history in the Russian territory and inside Russian culture. The fact that those words are located in the beginning of a national poem confers a special meaning among the Buryat culture. The welcoming of strangers into a Buryat household is disclosed below as part of their daily life:

когда люди зайдут к тебе в дом,
всегда говори, что рад их посещению.
Встречать со словами радости-
это поступок людей мудрых.

Даже случайным посетителям
готовь кушанья и питье
как своим родственникам.
Это-древний добрый обычай нашего края.

Если во время еды зайдет чужой человек
не сморщивай от жадности свое лицо.
Иначе другие с презрением отнесутся к тебе,
как к собаке, оскалившей зубы над пищей.

Хотя тебе жалконеда,
но с радостным видом угощай посетителя.
Может, когда-нибудь
и тебе придет время зайти к нему в дом.
Если у тебя и мало еды, все равно поделись с чужим человеком,
как мать от себя отрывает детям.
Будущем сможешь зайти к нему,
как в свой собственный дом.

(Эрдэни-Хайбзун Галшиев, “Бэлигей Толи Зерзало Мудрости”)

(English translation)

When people drop by your house
Always say that you are glad of their visit.
Make the joy reflect in your words
It is an act of wise people.

Even for casual visitors
Prepare your meals and drinks
As you would for your parents.
It's a good old custom of your land.

If during the meal a stranger will come
Do not affect on your face greed.
Otherwise, the other with contempt will treat you
Like a dog, whose teeth are dirty with food.

Although you mind
Treat the visitor with joy.
Maybe someday
You will have to come to his home
If you have a little food and still share with a stranger,
as a mother tears off for her kids.
In the future you will be able to visit him,
As in your own home.

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Annexes

(notes with the original Russian texts translated by me into English)

2-После распада Монгольской империи этнокультурные процессы начали развиваться автономно. (...) прибайкальские племена в этот период продолжали находиться в довольно тесных отношениях с населением собственно Монголии.

6-Итак, мы имеем народ без языка, без своей культуры и без территории. Мы могли констатировать, что и народа нет, а есть ассимилированная бурятами ветвь соётов. Процесс ассимиляции зашел уже так далеко, что ни о каком возрождении окинских соётов думать не приходится.

18-За долгую историю своей практики в этнической Бурятии тибетская медицина адаптировалась к местным условиям, восприняла лечебно-оздоровительные традиции коренного населения, заменила почти весь свой набор лекарственных средств местными видами и может рассматриваться как компонент традиционной культуры бурят. Такой подход к населению тибетской медицины требует создания светских образовательных учреждений с преподаванием этой медицины на русском языке. Это выводит традиционную медицину из-под монопольного влияния буддийского духовенства, убирает религиозные, национальные и языковые барьеры для обучения и обращения, в целом способствует укреплению атмосферы открытости, взаимопонимания и готовности к культурному диалогу всех живущих здесь народов.

19-можно говорить об “экосистеме” как об гибком взаимодействии трех ее основных частей: окружающей среды, технологической надстройки и нематериальных регуляторов (традиции, верований, обрядов, привычек, стереотипов, норм поведения и т.д.). (...) Большие народы должны понять что однородность человечества - не то, к чему следует стремиться; а малые народы должны знать, что их выживание во многом зависит от сохранности природной и культурной среды, от элементов традиционного образа жизни, который сформировал их духовно-нравственный и культурно-психологический облик.

20-синтеза тибетского буддизма с традиционными верованиями и культурами, обрядами и обычаями монгольских народов Центральной Азии. Буддизм принес этим этносами не только высокий уровень экологического учения мировой религии, но познакомил с экологическими традициями других народов Востока.

21-Таким образом, в целом экологическая культура центрально-азиатского региона формировалась и развивалась под влиянием различных факторов (климатических, географических, хозяйственных, религиозных, этнокультурных, политических и т.д.), определявших своеобразие экологических традиций, которые легли в ее основу.

25-Так, например, кочевники-скотоводы при выпасе животных учитывали взаимосвязь между сезонным циклом и током грунтовых вод. Этот ток менялся в зависимости от времени года, что в свою очередь влияло на качество трав. Поэтому в гористой местности пастухи выпасали стада на разной высоте в течение года, кочуя с ними с тем, чтобы уровень грунтовых вод находился на оптимальной глубине. Для работ на воздухе использовали одежду из материалов животного происхождения (мех, шерсть).

28-Ни религиозно-философские доктрины Востока, пришедшие к бурятам вместе с буддизмом, ни научное обозрение Запада, просачивавшееся сюда через русские школы, не остались без влияния на бурятских культурных деятелей: одни из них выдвинулись в области изучения буддийской философии, монгольской и тибетской литератур и в восточной политики; другие известны своими научными исследованиями по методам европейской науки, путешествиям и общественной деятельностью по распространению у себя, на родине, культурных приобретений Запада.

32-В многонациональном советском обществе большое значение имело положение Ленина о том, что <<интернациональная культура не безнациональная>>. Он утверждал, что каждая культура развивается на своей родной национальной почве, в своих исторически сложившихся национальных формах.(...) Ленин требовал марксистского подхода к каждой национальной культуре, использования свеих ее прогрессивных, демократических элементов в интересах строительства культуры социалистического общества.

34-Среди бурятского и эвенкийского населения продолжали свою деятельность передвижные избы-читальни, Дома бурятки и красные юрты. Массовое распространение получили красные уголки, которые работали в колхозных бригадах и на животноводческих фермах. Эти небольшие очаги культуры имели газеты и журналы, библиотеки массовой литературы, шахматы и шашки.

35-Возникшая литература была определена как литература бурятского просветительства, затем ставшая литературой бурятского буржуазно-демократического просветительства. (...) Эта литература созревала и пестовалась на идеях национально-освободительного движения дооктябрьского периода, а воплотилась с некоторым историческим запозданием, уже в годы Октябрьских потрясений и битв гражданской войны. (...) Под влиянием этой литературы в Прибайкалье и Забайкалье стихийно возникли самодеятельные народно-театральные коллективы, ставившие спектакли по небольшим одноактным и двухактным пьесам <<урусной рукописной драматургии>>.

38-Он - хранит и ретранслирует духовные ценности, выражает менталитет, углубляет у этнофоров ощущение принадлежности к данному этносу. Языку присуща важнейшая функция в формировании национального самоосознания, без которого не может быть самой этносоциальной целостности.

39-В череде важных, лучше всего характеризующих бурятскую национальную интеллигенцию, - любовь к своей земле и народу, доброжелательное отношение к другим этносам, способность в критические периоды, переживаемые нацией, к спокойному, трезвому осмыслению происходящего и принятию взвешенных решений, стремление к знаниям, прогрессу.

50-бурятские женщины всегда больше сохраняли “национальную культуру” (религиозные практики, бурятскую одежду и т.д.). (...) Бурятские женщины, считается сохраняют чистоту крови бурятского народа. Таким образом, через гендерную символику памятника передается смысл бурятского национального возрождения как возрождения истинной бурятскости (заметим, что русификация затронула, в первую очередь, городских бурят) и сохранения самого этноса и его традиционной культуры.

52-Таким образом, российская столица в конце XIX-начале XX века оказалась местом встречи двух различных буддийских традиций: одна распространялась с Запада - из Парижа и Лондона, этих главных теософских и в то же время буддийских центров Европы, и представляла собой преимущественно ранний, хинаянский буддизм Южной Индии, воспринятый и опосредованный европейской интеллектуальной средой; другая - с Востока, от приверженцев средневекового реформированного тибето-монгольского буддизма - российских буряти калмыков.

53-Необходимость такого шага митивировалась желанием народов названных стран приступить к строительству своими силами новой жизни, на революционных началах. Более конкретно речь шла об устройстве общежития-интерната для учащихся только что открытого в Петрограде Института живых восточных языков в двух принадлежащих храму домах, после их ремонта. То, что местом для создания такой базы был выбран именно Петроград, Доржиев объяснял двумя факторами - во первых, тем, что город традиционно является крупнейшим востоковедным центром России, и, во вторых, потому, что << там находится единственный в Западной Европе настоящий буддийский храм>> - << факт, служащий для темного пока бурят-монгольского населения особенно убедительным стимулом для отправки своей молодежи на чужбину для приобретения знаний>>.

54-На восточном отделении учились танну-тувинцы, буряты, монголы, шорцы, уйгуры, казахи, тибетцы, калмыки, якуты и киргизы. Часть из них, - в основном выходцы из буддийских стран - зачислялись на Рабфак по ходатайству Тибетского представительства и затем поселялись в восточном общежитии в Старой Деревне.

56-По возвращении в Санкт-Петербург в 1902 г. исследователь доставил в РГО добытые им в ходе экспедиции более 300 единиц тибетских письменных памятников. Коллекция в том же году была передана Азиатскому музею, так как профиль деятельности РГО не предполагал выполнения научного описания и дальнейшего хранения подобных раритетов. Для Азиатского музея коллекция Цыбикова сделалась ценнейшим приобретением, поскольку в ее составе оказались буддийские философские трактаты - как переведенные на тибетский язык с санскритских (в том числе утраченных) оригиналов, так и созданные тибетскими авторами, а также произведения тибетских историографов, труды по медицине, астрологии и сочинения, повествующие об истории мостастырей и связанных с ними буддийских школ Тибета.

57-В такой атмосфере активных буддологических поисков работал И.П.Минаев, предлагая новые методы исследования буддизма, причем деятельность его в этом качестве была очень многообразна. Он публиковал новые буддийские памятники и их нпереводы, а также занимался теоретическими изысканиями в области буддийской доктрины и отдельных этапов ее развития.

61-Однако одной из лидирующих и доминирующих цивилизационных особенностей буддийской культуры является ее интеграционные возможности в планетарном масштабе. Этноинтегрирующий фактор буддийской культуры четко фиксируется в его антропоцентрической, метаэтнической, универсальной направленности, а также - в духовной гармонии, нравственном самосовершенствовании, милосердии, сострадании и четкой иерархии конфессионального пантеона во главе с основателем буддизма - Буддой.

62-На границе культур создается особое пространство взаимодействия, в рамках которого происходит напряженное взаимовлияние контактирующих культур, находящее выражение и в изменении форм и содержания идентичности.

63-Их политический пафос достаточно быстро потерял актуальность даже для их творцов - представителей элит. Вместе с тем, зерна этнополитической агитации упали на благодатную почву, поскольку, даже в условиях нынешней индифферентности к политике, остается достаточно выраженной ангажированность в сфере этнокультурной идентичности. Проявлением этого в современный период является укрепление и рост интереса к национальной бурятской культуре, в частности, к буддизму.

64-Чем больше даешь, тем больше получаешь. (...) в настоящее время буддизм в значительной мере социализируется в современности посредством участия в светской жизни.

65-Мы как представители одной из мировых религий осуждаем зло, проявление ненависти и злобы, терроризм и экстремизм как средство разрешения конфликтов и разногласий между людьми, народами, нациями. Жизнь дарована нам для совершения благодеяний ради жизни на Земле, ради блага всех живых. Мы живем в эпоху больших перемен, в эпоху глобализации и интеграции всех сфер жизнедеятельности современного человека и общества.

66-В апреле 2009 года в г. Санкт-Петербурге << Совет аспирантов и молодых ученых Бурятии в г. Санкт-Петербурге >> организовал плодотворную работу Всероссийской научно-практической конференции << Социально- экономическое развитие России: региональные проблемы >> при поддержке Комитета по молодежной политике и воспитанию Министерства образования и науки Республики Бурятия и Санкт-Петербургского университета экономики и финансов. Конференция проводилась в рамках российского << Года молодежи >> и реализации целевой программы МОиН РБ << Молодежь Бурятии (2008-2010 гг.) >> по направлению << Молодежная возвратная миграция >>.

67-Творчество молодых актеров вызвало искренний интерес и восхищение соотечественников в Петербурге, а такая оценка очень важна молодым артистам. С тех пор поддержка молодых талантов включена в программу адресной поддержки общества. Налаживание связей с артистами позволило начать концертную деятельность, которую взяли на себя члены общества. Интерес к таким выступлениям был большой, а средств не было даже на аренду залов.

68-Петербург является одним из центров, где национально- культурное движение всколыхнуло тысячи представителей разных национальностей, проживающих в северной столице. Процесс объединения на национально-культурной основе

происходил одновременно с возрождением религиозных общин и передачей им храмов и церквей.

69-Созданное в 1900 г. Ленинградское общество буддистов объединило людей разных национальностей, но в первом совете общества преобладали представители бурятского землячества. Буддийский дацан (...) был возвращен буддийской общине. Это был первый в России прецедент.

70-Созданный в те годы Университет буддийской культуры стал трибуной для известных буддологов, востоковедов. Уникальные выставки по буддизму в музеях города привлекли внимание тысяч петербуржцев. Появились, передачи по радио и телевидению. Стали издаваться журналы и книги по буддизму. Петербург вернул более тысячи культовых предметов из музеев города в буддийские дацаны Бурятии. Все это привело к тому, что буддизм и буддийская культура стали восстанавливать свои прежние позиции в северной столице.

(page 60)-Декада прошла под знаком тибетской медицины, а фундаментом ее являются философские идеи о непостоянстве и изменчивости мира, о единстве духовной и физической природы человека. В Петербурге эти идеи звучат не впервые, имя доктора Бадаева, который в конце XIX-начале XX веков одним из первых практиковал тибетскую медицину в высших кругах общества, известно многим. И сегодня в Петербурге работают известные врачи тибетской медицины, есть три центра, а в 28 государственных больницах с 2005 года в отделении реабилитации под руководством доктора Виктора Базарова, успешно применяют и тибетскую и традиционную медицину.

(page 62-63)-не только предприниматели но и государство начинает поддерживать общественные организации в их стремлении сохранять культурное, экономическое и социальное пространство.

(page 64)-Тогда и сейчас творчество детского ансамбля невозможно себе представить без участия Натальи Буюктуевой, художницы по костюмам. В свое время она закончила лицей традиционных искусств народов Забайкалья, работала в улан-удэской школе-интернате... 1, в теперь живет в Петербурге и весь фольклорный коллектив << Ая-Ганги >> выступает в сконструированных и сшитых ею национальных костюмах.

(page 64)-В Париже дали концерт, и действительно с большим успехом. В Русском доме, в знаменитом на всю Россию предместье Сен-Женевьев-де-Буа посмотреть выступление бурятских детей собрались потомки русских эмигрантов.

(page 64)-В те дни в Петербург приезжал знаменитый ансамбль из Дагестана и делегация правительства северо-кавказской республики.

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