

LUBSAN SAMDAN TSYDENOV,
BIDIA DANDARON
AND
THE ABBOT OF KUMBUM

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ESTONIAN NYINGMA

BURYTIA



Republic of Buryatia, Aga Buryatia (Agin-Buryat Autonomous Okrug) and Ust-Orda Buryatia (Ust-Orda Buryat Autonomo



The Republic of Buryat, though being small in numbers, has given to the world many well-known intellectuals, scientists, cultural activist and Buddhists, who have become famous for their ideas and exploits.

For example, explorer Gonbozav Tsybikov who made the first photos of Lhasa and brought them to Europe, the well-known doctor and peddler of Tibetan medicine Pjotr Badmayev; Agvan Dorjiev, famous teacher of the 13th Dalai Lama; Hambo lama Itegilov, today known as The Living Dead Buddhist Monk;\; philosopher and Hambo lama Choinzon Iroltuev; legendary ascetic Jangchub Tsultim (also Namnane lama), whose foremost students – Agvan Dorjiev and Samdan Tsydenov – shaped the Buddhism of Russia in the 19-20th century;

To these distinguished names we must add Dorjiev` Kalmyk student Geshe Wangyal who brought the lineage of Namnane Lama also to America in the 1950's through his students Jeffrey Hopkins and others.

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HAMBO LAMA IROLTUEV



HAMBO LAMA ITIGELOV



AGVAN DORJIEV



LUBSAN SAMDAN TSYDENOV



BUDDHISM IN BURYATIA

- Late 17th to the end of 19th century - spread of Buddhism
- End of 19th to early 20th century - 'golden age' of Buddhism
- 1920s to late 1980s - destruction and persecution of Buddhism
- Late 1980s to present- restoration of the Sangha



First Buddhist contact was made prior to Buryat joining the Russian Empire.

In the early 17th century, Tibetan Buddhism spread north from Mongolia to Buryat communities of the Baikal region.

In 1712, a group of 150 Mongolian and Tibetan monks fled Mongolia arrived in Buryatia and converted most of the population in the eastern part of the province to Buddhism. At that time prayer yurts of nobles and public nomadic temples began to appear.

In 1727, Buryats became loyal to the Russian Empire, since the “Russian-Chinese agreement on the borders” was signed in Kyakhta.

In 1741, Empress Elizabeth issued a decree that recognized the Lamaistic belief in Buryatia, authorized establishing of 11 monasteries (datsans) with 150 lamas on the staff and decreed these monks exempt from taxation and other obligations.

Selenga Buryats of that time did not consider themselves separate from the Buddhist centers of Mongolia and in fact belonged to the Mongolian Sangha.

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TSUGOLSKI DATSAN, THE FIRST WOODEN TEMPLE



BUILDING MONASTERIES AND PUBLISHING BUDDHIST LITERATURE

In 1753, Tsugolski datsan, the first wooden temple, was established at the initiative of Damba Darzha Zayaev, a young Mongolian nobleman who had studied in Tibet. At the same time, the Gusinozersky Datsan was built at the initiative of Zhimba Akhaldiev, who had studied in Urga, Mongolia. A third centre emerged among the Khorin Buryats

All three centers competed for leading positions. Officially all Buddhists of the Transbaikalian Region were under control of the head lama of the Tsugolsky datsan. But in reality each of the three centers had their own head lamas confirmed by the Russian government.

In 1811, Aginsky datsan was founded (sanctified in 1816); and in 1861 the faculty of philosophy was established.

The printing house of the Aginsky datsan was famous far beyond Buryatia. It kept 47,525 xylographic boards with Tibetan and Mongolian texts as well as wooden plates with drawings. Datsan published books on Buddhist philosophy, logic, medicine, astronomy, astrology and tantra on Tibetan language, also popular didactic literature, dictionaries, etc.

In 1876, a school of Duinkhor Kalachakra was established at Aginsk Datsan.

AGINSKY DATSAN, FOUNDED IN 1811



By 1831, there were listed 4,637 lamas in Buryatia, and by 1846, 34 datsans had been built in Buryatia.

In 1869, monks of Tsugol Datsan started to study Indo-Tibetan medicine under the guidance of Mongolian lama Choi Manramba; and such studies were initiated in several other places.

Buryats managed to import a vast number of the sacred books from Tibet, China, and Mongolia, and adopted many living practices of both the dominant Gelug and other schools.

In 1887, there were already 29 publishing houses, which had produced about 2,000 titles in Tibetan and Mongolian before their destruction in the 1930s by the Communists.

Although the Baikal region Buddhists belonged mainly to the Gelug tradition, the Nyingma tradition also spread widely.

GUSINOOSERSKI DATSAN



BY THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, THERE WERE MORE THAN
40 MONASTERIES
AND 10,000 LAMAS IN BURYATIA



Гусино-озерскій дацанъ. Праздникъ Цамъ.

Guzinoozersky datsan, 1912

‘ GOLDEN AGE ’ OF BUDDHISM IN BURYATIA

The end of 19th century marks the beginning of the ‘golden age’ of Buddhism in Buryatia. By the early 20th century there were more than 40 monasteries and 10,000 lamas in Buryatia. The most eminent Buddhist figures lived at that time, and interesting developments took place.

A legendary figure of Buddhism in Buryatia was Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov, religious leader and national hero, who spread the Tantric Buddhist tradition in Buryatia. He was known as a great ascetic by spending two decades in seclusion in Kudun valley.

Lubsan Samdan Tsydenov was a lama from the Kizhinga (Kudun) Datsan in southern Transbaikalia. While still a child at age 10, he was sent to Kudun monastery. He was famous for his sharp intellect and for success at disputes. At age 35, he received his first degree, Geshe. Tsydenov became famous among the monks for his talents and eagerness to study and practice meditation, and gained respect among lay people as well among orientalist.

LUBSAN SAMDAN TSYDENOV

1841 -1922



There are several stories about his studies at Kudun monastery.

For example, once lama sent Samdan to bring a horse to the monastery. Sandan walked around, passed horse closely, and explained later to the lama that there was no horse. He was so deeply involved in philosophical exercises.

Young Samdan did not like to socialize much with other kids, but once he offered a game himself. - to throw stones at the bush afar. So they throw stones for a while and when the others got bored, Samdan continued throwing stones alone until late evening. Next day there was a small lake, which is called Samdan` lake, or Samdan Key today.

Samdan Tsydenov was not influenced by idle talk. He was independent, proud and decisive. He disliked luxurious lifestyle and empty gossip and preferred privacy and so refrained from society.

Once, Tsydenov was invited by an old man to carry out the ritual of Dorje Legpa.

An old man placed the Dorje Legpa thangka and three tormas on the altar, and decorated everything nicely and carefully. When Tsydenov came in and saw such solemn preparation, he took the tormas from the altar and kneaded these into dough pieces; then picked up the thangka, rolled it up and put it in a bag, saying that this would be enough for an ordinary blacksmith.

TSYDENOV AND THE ABBOTT OF KUMBUM

- In the end of the 19th century, Jayagsy Gegen lama, the 13th throne holder of Kumbum monastery visited Buryatia several times
- The first meeting between Tsydenov and Jayagsy Gegen happened in Kudun monastery, Kizhinga.



In the end of the 19th century, Jayagsy Gegen lama, the 13th Throne holder of Kumbum monastery visited Buriatya.

In Buryatia, he was asked to give Yamantaka blessings, and he promised to give it in Kizhinga.

The first meeting between Tsydenov and Jayagsy Gegen happened in Kudun monastery, Kizhinga.

When all other monks went to pay respect to Jayagsy Gegen at his arrival, Tsydenov stayed in his house. After three days he went to see Jayagsy Gegen, who stood up at his entrance and they bowed to each other as equals.

Separately from others, Jayagsy Gegen gave Yamantaka blessings to Tsydenov, who was his elder.

During the first visit of Jayagsy Gegen, the ideas about the necessity to reform Buddhism arose, and the initiator of these discussions was Tsydenov.

Tsydenov considered that the 20 century would bring changes and the reformed teachings of Tsongkhapa would not be viable under these conditions. He proposed nontraditional principles for practice and rules outside schools to build up Sangha.

TSYDENOV ON BUDDHIST EDUCATION

Tsydenov`s doctrine had two principal objects – to establish a lay Buddhist sangha in Buryatia, outside and independent of the traditional monastic community, and to revive with its help some of the old Tantric practices.

Such a lay sangha, in Tsydenov`s thinking, that would help to preserve Buddhism in the future, and first of all, help to spread Buddhism among new nations, including the West.

To him belongs a famous phrase: *datsan (monastery) is sansara*.

Tsydenov`s printed manifest in Mongolian language contains amazing and courageous predictions about the spread of tantra and future civilization.

When Jayagsy Gegen came to Buryatia in 1910, he gave final Yamantaka blessings to Tsydenov, who had asked for a special blessing of Yamantaka, so that he could talk to the yidam.

When Jayagsy Gegen was the last time in Buriatya, local Buryats carried him 3 times around the monastery and presented him a hadakh, so that he would take his next birth in Buriatya.

Jayagsy Gegen predicted his birth in Buryatia, and said that Tsydenov will be his teacher. He also predicted, that his next incarnation will die in prison.

Jayagsy Gegen died in 1913, on his way to Kumbum.

Shortly after his birth the young Buryat Bidia Dandaron (1913-1974), was recognized as a reincarnation of Jayagsy Gegen, the former Khambo Lama of Kumbum monastery in Tibet. Dandaron was the son of Dorje Gabzhi Badmaev, a disciple Lobsan Sandan Tsedynov.

When a delegation arrived from Tibet to take him back to Kumbum, Tsydenov refused to let him go, saying that Buryat lamas are capable to educate him, and they need their own religious leader. Tibetans then returned to Kumbum and chose a local boy, who as Jayagsy Rinpoche was later the sutra teacher of the 10th Panchen Lama.



TSYDENOV AND CSAR NICOLAS II



One event which became a legend in Buryatia, describes well Tsydenov`s character and views.

In 1896, Pandito Khambo Lama included Tsydenov among the Buryat delegates who went to the enthronement ceremony of Nicolas II. The reason for the inclusion of Tsydenov in the delegation to Moscow and St. Petersburg, was the plan to arrange a debate with the capital's orientalists. Tsydenov was enlisted in the delegation on account of his intellectual abilities and deep knowledge of Buddhist philosophy.

In Petersburg, Tsydenov was present at the audience with Nicolas the Second. When all people bowed deeply in front of Nicolas II, Tsydenov refused to bow to Nicolas as the others did, and stood proudly alone. This incident caused scandal among the palace officials and the Ministry of Domestic Affairs. In reply to the other delegates, who condemned his refusal, Tsydenov said that as a gelong he must not bow to the Czar. He said that his refusal is not a crime, and the fact that the other delegates, especially the Khambo Lama Iroltuev, did bow, was not in accord with the Vinaya and is a shame.

This gesture was striking, and the explanation was majestic and memorable.

Officially it was explained by the excessive patriotic affect that made Tsydenov lose consciousness and caused confusion while seeing the royal person, because he had lived in solitude for a long period. This explanation satisfied the authorities but left Tsydenov himself unsatisfied, since he was not happy that the true motives were not revealed.

After returning to Transbaikalia, Tsydenov left the monastery and started living in seclusion with some of his disciples. In fact, the fame of Tsydenov and his followers went far beyond the valley of Kudun.

By 1906, Tsydenov declared himself a follower of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism and began to accept disciples.



BALAGATS

Then in 1917 the revolution broke out.

In 1917, there were 175 Buddhist temples in our Russia, which collectively housed a population of approximately 20,000 residents. By 1940, all of these had been destroyed by the Communists.

During the Russian Civil War most of the Buryats sided with the forces of Baron Ungern-Sternberg and Ataman Semenov. They formed a sizable portion of Ungern's forces and often received favorable treatment when compared with other ethnic groups in the Baron's army because of Barons Buddhist views.

In 1918, Tsedunov's followers used smartly Bolsheviks policy of land redistribution, and declared him dharmaraja of a Buddhist state comprising 400 farmsteads on the steppe of the KizhinginskiValley. This movement broke off with the official Buddhist church and were commonly referred to as *Balagats*.

This happened when the Buryat People's Duma announced the mobilization of the Buryats into the people's army. It was an very unpopular and Buryats tried to avoid conscription by turning to the lama-ascetic. Tsydenov is said to have addressed his countrymen with the words: *"He who does not want to fight (in the people's tsagda, army), since fighting is against the Buddha's teachings, let him come unto me and be subject of my rule"*.

The Kudun theocracy, however, did not imitate the models of the Buddhist states of Inner Asia by adopting the institute of the Dalai Lama or the Jebdzundamba Khutugtu.

Tsydenov strongly rejected the institute of a reincarnating ruler as a principle of succession.

Tsydenov adopted a constitution which established the Great Suglan, an assembly of people's deputies who were to elect, by secret voting, the president, vice-president and ministers of his theocratic government. Still the supreme political and religious authority was to remain in the hands of the Dharmaraja.

The Balagats focused on meditation; and living in hard conditions and seclusion became a norm for this new community.

Not all Buryat lamas agreed with the tantric, lay approach to Buddhism advocated by Tsydenov and later by Dandaron. Foremost among these was Agvan Dorjiev, who devoted his life to preserving monasticism and the Gelugpa tradition.

Tsydenovs theocratic state included about 13,000 people and with a strong backing of the Buryat believers, lasted a year, until 1920. It was finally crushed by the Red Army in the early 1920s when the Soviet rule was established in Transbaikalia.

Tsydenov was arrested by the Cheka in 1922, put in jail and deported to Novonikolaevsk (today's Novosibirsk). There are several versions of his fate from then on.

One of them says that Tsydenov was exiled to an unknown remote settlement, far from his homeland. Another source says that he died in a Novonikolaevsk hospital on 16 May 1922.

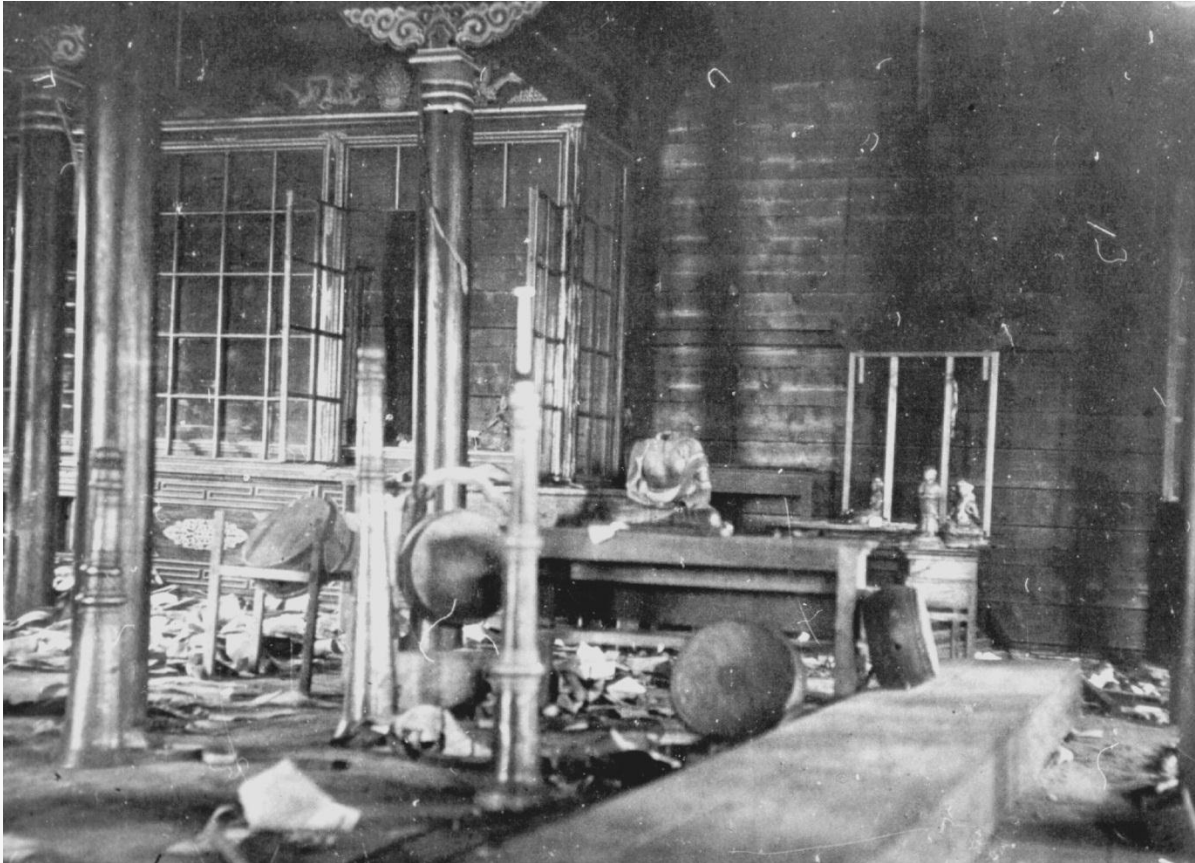
According to Vladimir Montlevich, the disciple of Bidja Dandaron, Tsydenov was last heard of in 1924. A certain Tsygan claimed that he had seen Tsydenov dressed in European clothes boarding a train at the Verkhneudinsk railway station, and according to Tsydenov's own words, "he was going to Italy."

DESTRUCTION OF BUDDHISM



• Khuzhirtayevsky datsan 1934

BY 1976, THERE WERE ONLY 300 BURYAT LAMAS REMAIN
DOWN FROM 16,000 BEFORE THE REVOLUTION



By 1936, 22 of 29 datsans were closed down and lamas were expelled. Similar actions were taking place in Kalmykia and Tuva.

In 1937, the territory of the Buryat Republic was reduced, Mongolian script was banned and replaced with Cyrillic. The mere possession of having a photo of Tsydenov was a reason for imprisonment.

Around five hundred Leningrad orientalists were either imprisoned or executed during the 1930s.

Bidja Dandaron studied in the Aircraft Device Construction Institute in Leningrad, and attended the Eastern Faculty of Leningrad State University as an auditor, studying Tibetan language with Andrey Vostrikov. As religion was suppressed by the Soviets, Dandaron was brought to court three times and spent a significant part of his life in prison camps.

First, he was arrested in 1937 and released in 1943, then arrested again in 1948 but released with political rehabilitation in 1956. He wrote extensively on Tibetan studies and translated religious and historical literature of Tibet into Russian, publishing over 30 articles and other works. His religious works came to public as samizdat.

In 1960 - early 1970s, his main community was in St Petersburg (then Leningrad) where in 1972 he was arrested again. He was sentenced to five years in a labor camp where he continued to teach and practice Buddhism. In 1974, while in the camp in Vydrino, he did not return from the samadhi.

- Bidia Dandaron spent over 20 years of his life in prison and labor camps .
In 1974, in the camp in Vydrino he did not return from samadhi



RESTORATION OF SANGHA

In 1948, a new monastery was built in Ivolga, near Ulan-Ude, the capital of Buryatia, and one of the buildings of Aginsk Datsan near Chita was re-opened.

Buriat lamas who had spent decades in Stalinist prisons and camps, came now to the Ivolga monastery. Two Hambo lamas, Ven Zhimba Erdineev and Ven Munko Tsybikov, the last old generation lamas, made enormous efforts to preserve Buddhism in Buryatia under the strict control by the Soviet authorities.

With the beginning of perestroika, a great number of Buddhist communities were officially registered, and restoration of monasteries started in the Baikal region, Kalmykia, and Tuva, along with building new temples. St. Petersburg Datsan was returned to the Buddhist community and renovated.

In the 90s, a Buddhist Institute was opened at Ivolga Datsan.

IVOLGINSKI DATSAN, FOUNDED IN 1946



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