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Religion, Indigeneity, and Patriotism in Buryatia

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ABSTRACT Focusing on organized Buddhism in the Republic of Buryatia and analyzing the statements of Khambo Lama Damba Aiusheev of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia and the textbooks used for teaching religion in public schools, the article discusses the different aspects of the relations between religion and state as applied to Buddhism in contemporary Russia in general and Buryatia in particular. The imperial politics of diversity management and especially the legacies of confessional governance in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union made the four "traditional religions"—Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism—an important part of "federal" nation-building. Despite the overall desecularization of the Russian state and the long history of relations between the state and organized Buddhism, the predominantly Buryat, centralized organization Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia did not assert its claim to represent all Russian Buddhists. State efforts to establish a system of four "traditional religions," providing *inter alia* a spiritual foundation for Russian patriotism, also did not succeed. Buddhism remained decentralized in both administrative and semantic terms and did not lose its connections to the communities outside Russia. In Buryatia itself, Shamanism and Orthodox Christianity continuously challenged attempts to present Buddhism as the only Buryat "traditional religion."

KEY WORDS Buddhism; Russia; Buryat; tradition; education; nationalism

Introduction

Discussing Russia's imperial repertoire, the article positions official Buddhism in diversity management, as manifested in religious politics and education at public schools. Buddhism is officially recognized as

a "traditional religion" of Russia, together with Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The concept of "traditional religions" was largely a Soviet construct that developed since the 1940s, with the attempt of the Soviet government to control religious practices and to ensure loyalty of religious groups through selective recognition of their leadership. The four organizations (or their successors) that were patronized by the Soviet government, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Council of Muftis of Russia, the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia, and the Congress of Jewish Religious Organizations and Associations of Russia, joined the Presidential Council on Relations with Religious Organizations and recognized each other within the Interreligious Council of Russia in the 1990s. Between 2009 and 2012, the privileged status of the four "traditional religions" was confirmed by their inclusion into public education and the military (Fagan 2013, 4–5, 21, 123). The issue of loyalty to the multinational and multireligious state, which was articulated as patriotism of religious organizations during World War I and then again during World War II, remained important for the post-Soviet Russian authorities, but "traditional religions" started to play a more prominent role in "federal" nation-building. Both religious and secular elites considered the "traditional religions" as a possible substitute for the dismissed Communist ideology in justifying not just loyalty but a sacred allegiance to the Russian state, with Orthodox Christianity fulfilling this role predominantly for the Russian majority, and the other three for the non-Christian minorities.

In Russian official and academic discourse, the "traditional" character of Buddhism is also ascribed to individual indigenous ethnic minorities—the Buryats, the Kalmyks, and the Tuvans—and the three corresponding autonomous republics within the Russian Federation—Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva. Although none of the three ethnic groups is religiously homogeneous and although Buddhism is practiced by people of different

ethnic backgrounds, Marina Mongush went as far as calling all members of the three groups "ethnic Buddhists."[1] Although such a view is challenged by the situation that Darima Amogolonova (2015) described as "confessional competition", in which different Buddhist, Shamanist, and Orthodox Christian organizations compete for followers among all three groups, "traditional religions" other than Orthodox Christianity play an important part in minority nation-building.

The main sources for this article include interviews and public statements of Khambo Lama Damba Aiusheev of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia and other religious leaders published in the Russian-language, predominantly regional media and three textbooks for teaching Buddhism.[2] Two of them—*The Foundations of Buddhist Culture* by Vladimir Chimitdorzhiev (2010), a Buryat *lama* and a member of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha, and *The Foundations of Buddhist Culture* by Baatr Kitinov, a secular Kalmyk scholar, and others (Kitinov, Savchenko, and Iakushkina 2014)—were certified by the federal Ministry of Education, yet presented different takes on what Buddhism was and what place in Russian and global history it had. The third one—*The World of Buddha* by Oleg Zhigzhitov (2010), also a *lama*—was published by the Buddhist Traditional

1 Marina Mongush contrasted "traditional" and "Western" Buddhism and claimed that even though no more than 500,000 people practiced Buddhism in Russia, 900,000 were "ethnic Buddhists" (Mongush 2016, 6). The latter figure apparently included all people who identified as Buryats, Tuvans, and Kalmyks in the 2010 General Census of the Russian Federation—out of 142,856,536 people, 461,389 identified as Buryats, 263,934 as Tuvans, and 183,372 as Kalmyks—and thereby disregarded the religious diversity within the named ethnic groups. Besides, the respective autonomous republics are also ethnically diverse. According to the same census, only 286,839 out of 972,021 people identified as Buryats in Buryatia; 249,299 out of 307,930 as Tuvans in Tuva; and 162,740 out of 289,481 as Kalmyks in Kalmykia ("Vserossiiskaia Perepis' Naseleniia 2010 g.: Naselenie Po Natsional'nosti, Polu i Sub"ektam Rossiiskoi Federatsii" n.d.).

2 In the following, all translations from Russian sources were made by the author.

Sangha and, despite the lack of official approval, was intended for public schools as well.

Claiming to represent one of the "traditional religions," the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia repeatedly attempted to make the secular idea of patriotism, which can also be rendered as Russian "federal" or "imperial" nationalism, part of the religious discourse and, simultaneously, to retain and expand its positions in republican and federal governance, thereby desecularizing the state by introducing religious reasoning into governance. Although in the Presidential Council, Khambo Lama Aiusheev of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (in office and in the council since 1995) is the only representative of Buddhists as of 2017 ("Sovety pri Presidente" n.d.), his interpretation of Buddhism as a centralized "traditional religion" of Russia did not become predominant in politics and education. The Buddhist Traditional Sangha was not officially recognized as representative of all Russian Buddhists, with Kalmyk and Tuvan authorities backing their respective republican Buddhist organizations, which in the case of Kalmykia is also connected to the Tibetan Buddhist community under the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Aiusheev's and his organization's efforts to consolidate the notion of the isolated and self-sufficient Buryat Buddhism also did not succeed. The connections to Tibet (including the Tibetan community in Dharamsala and the global Tibetan diaspora) and the religion's global character remained important for many Buddhists (including those in Buryatia) and made it into the new standard schoolbook, which, like its predecessor, was initially intended to bolster the self-sufficiency of Russia's "traditional religions." The transnational understandings of Buddhism thereby challenged its ethnicized versions, such as "Buryat Buddhism," professed by Aiusheev. Furthermore, Aiusheev's anti-foreign (particularly anti-Tibetan) claims and Moscow's nonadmission of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to Russia since 2004,

predominantly due to its pro-Beijing stance, did not prevent many Buryat Buddhists from travelling to India and elsewhere to meet their spiritual leader and other prominent religious figures (Fagan 2013, 14–15, 130–31, 197; Tsyrempilov 2014b).

The prisms of desecularization (Kormina, Panchenko, and Shtyrkov 2015) and demodernization (Kukulin 2017) proved useful when discussing the broader societal and political changes in Russia in the 1990s and especially in the 2000s and 2010s. Yet the current article takes a more historicized approach to religion, discussing the current policies towards Buddhism as part of Russia's imperial repertoire. The term "empire" is used not only in the historical sense, as pertaining to the pre-1917 Russian Empire and its confessional policies (Werth 2014), but also analytically. The latter use reflects the post-structuralist approach to Russia's past known as the New Imperial History, which discusses it as a history of composite imperial polities and situations in Northern Eurasia (Ilya Gerasimov et al. 2005; Kivelson and Suny 2016). In many respects, including religious policies, contemporary Russia is not much different from the empires studied by Jane Burbank and Frederic Cooper, as it 'self-consciously' maintains the diversity of people which were once incorporated into the polity. The idea of multiethnic national unity, which is part of the most recent Russian Constitution (*Konstitutsiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Priniata Vsenarodnym Golosovaniem 12 Dekabria 1993 G.* 2011), can be described as imperial nationalism (Ilya Gerasimov, Kusber, and Semyonov 2009), while the "imperial politics, imperial practices, and imperial cultures," which acknowledge and utilize difference, remain part of Russia's ethnic and religious governance, both on the federal and regional level (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 2).

The Russian Federation is an asymmetric federation. The recognition of the four religions as "traditional," their inclusion into public education, and

the ascription of a special role in Russian history to Orthodox Christianity ("Federal'nyi Zakon No. 125-FZ, O Svobode Sovesti i o Religioznykh Ob"edineniiakh" 1997) created a partly formalized hierarchy of religions. In a similar way, the existence of national autonomies only for some ethnic groups, the different status of these autonomies and the abolition of some of them in the 2000s, and the recent removal of official minority languages (within autonomies) from mandatory school programs ("Federal'nyi Zakon No. 317-FZ, O Vnesenii Izmenenii v Stat'i 11 i 14 Federal'nogo Zakona Ob Obrazovanii v Rossiiskoi Federatsii" 2018) made the federation hierarchical in an ethnic sense. Similar to other empires, including the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation remains "an assemblage of peoples," at least in the sense of those speaking different native languages and practicing different religions. Like other comparable polities, it also presents a mix of "homogenization and the recognition of difference," in which the attempted centralization of the four "traditional religions" also plays a role (Burbank and Cooper 2010, 12).

Religion is one of the markers of diversity within Russia's heterogeneous society and an instrument for managing this diversity. Articulated situationally through different languages and practices, religion is not a static category (Il'ia Gerasimov, Mogil'ner, and Semenov 2012, 11–12). "Buddhists" and "Buryats" are not holistic entities in the imperial situation, that is, in the "unstable balance in a composite society," in which "social boundaries are conditional, fluid, and situational" (Ilya Gerasimov et al. 2012, 19–20). Just like other societies, the population of the Russian Federation "is differentiated into groups that are distinguished only when (or every time) certain criteria of otherness become relevant in the context of a specific situation" (Ilya Gerasimov et al. 2012, 19–20). The perspective of the New Imperial History hence allows overcoming the secularization/desecularization dichotomy. Russian supraethnic "federal" nationalism—

framed as patriotism—is neither secular nor religious. As voiced by Buddhist officialdom and propagated in the first set of schoolbooks, it is best understood as a new imperial universalism succeeding its predecessors in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union and featuring spiritual connotations.

Religion and Empire

Historically, Buddhism had a strong presence in those regions of the Russian Federation that today constitute the autonomous republics of Kalmykia, Buryatia, and Tuva. Some of the numerous Buddhist organizations were in contact with official agencies of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, with the Buryat Buddhist organizations first recognized in 1741. Since 1764, the Khambo Lama—initially a title within the Gelug Tradition[3] of Tibetan Buddhism—was institutionalized by the state as the leader of Eastern Siberian (predominantly Buryat and Evenki) Buddhists. Even though the violent anti-religious campaign of the 1930s and the early 1940s led to the complete elimination of recognized Buddhist institutions in the Soviet Union, an official organization was reestablished in Buryatia already in 1946, and for most of the Soviet period, the Buryat Central Spiritual Council of Buddhists (in the 1920s and 1930s) and the Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists of the USSR (in 1946–1991) remained in close contact with the authorities (Gerasimova 1964; Tsyrempilov 2013, 2014a; Sinitsyn 2013; Vanchikova and Chimitdorzhin 2006).

3 Gelug is a school of Tibetan Buddhism that, since the late sixteenth century, has been pre-eminent in Tibet and Mongolia, and later in Russia.

The somewhat autonomous governance structure of the Russian Orthodox Church, with the Patriarch at the top, was abolished by Peter the Great between 1700 and 1721 with the establishment of the imperial agency of the Most Holy Synod instead of the Patriarch. Buddhism, which spread among Kalmyk and Buryat communities through Tibet and Mongolia since the seventeenth (or even sixteenth) century, was also soon included in the imperial governance structure. The official recognition of Buddhism in Siberia in 1741 restricted transboundary contacts of Buddhist figures sworn to the empire, while the approval of Damba-Dorzho Zaiaev as the First Khambo Lama in 1764 reaffirmed his status as the Tsarina's subject, firmly making Buddhism a part of the Russian confessional state. Further measures, such as the 1853 Regulations on the Lamaist Clergy in Eastern Siberia, continued the effort to control Buddhism among the Buryats, limiting the number of monasteries, temples, and *lamas* and subordinating them to the imperial administration through the Khambo Lamas, who were officially approved, in contrast to the "discovered" *tulku* (reincarnate) leaders in Mongolia and Tibet. Buddhism became one of the formally recognized "foreign faiths" in the imperial religious hierarchy. Orthodox Christians occupied the top position, while Catholics, Lutherans, Buddhists, Muslims, and Jews (with additional limitations due to official anti-Semitism) were among the second tier of established religions tolerated by the state. Smaller Christian (Orthodox Old Believer, Baptist, Adventist, and other), Shamanist, and other less organized or dissident groups were deemed sectarianists and/or idol worshipers. At the same time, toleration of the established religions did not shield their followers from the state-sponsored Russification and Christianization efforts. Even after the state declared religious freedom during the Revolution of 1905–1907, religious hierarchies and limitations continued to exist (Tsyrempilov 2013; Tsyrenzhapova 2008, 27; Werth 2014).

Official efforts to control Buddhism and limit transboundary contacts between Russian and Qing subjects proved only partly successful. Buryat Buddhists continued to purchase literature, devotional objects, and medical ingredients from Mongolia and Tibet, to travel there for education or on pilgrimage, and to receive religious figures arriving from there (Galdanova et al. 1983). The linguistic and religious entanglements between the Mongolian-speaking Buryats and the population of the Qing Empire, however, was not seen exclusively as a problem. In 1884, Grigorii Potanin (2014, 63–65), a leader of the Siberian Regionalist movement, seeking Russia's decentralization, who participated in expeditions throughout North and Inner Asia, noted the spiritual authority of Mongolia and Tibet over the Buryats but suggested that it could be reversed. According to Potanin, a Buryat intellectual stratum, to be educated in a European way, was supposed to become a facilitator of Russian influence over the Qing Empire. With some Buryats, such as the Baptized practitioner of Tibetan medicine Petr Badmaev and the prominent Buddhist monk Agvan Dorzhiev, cooperating with Saint Petersburg, the sporadic attempts to use the cultural proximity between the Baikal region, Mongolia, and Tibet for expanding the empire's sphere of influence transformed into a coherent policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The transboundary religious connections proved instrumental for Saint Petersburg's efforts to turn parts of Mongolia into its informal dependency in 1912–1915 (Andreev 2006; Sablin 2017).

Apart from the involvement of Buryat Buddhists in imperial foreign policy, the increasing interest in Buddhism and its treatment as a world religion by Western (including Russian) scholars contributed to indigenous claims to both national and religious autonomy (Tolz 2011). These two factors helped Dorzhiev and other Buddhist intellectuals to justify the opening of new temples and monasteries for the Kalmyks and the Buryats

(including one in the empire's capital in 1915) and the continuation of contacts with Mongolia and Tibet. By the time of the empire's collapse in 1917, Buddhism was reaching the summit of its spread in Russia. The number of monasteries and temples in today's Buryatia and Kalmykia combined was well over a hundred, while the protectorate over Tuva (since 1914) and informal control over parts of Mongolia included these Buddhist regions into the broader imperial space (Bakayeva 1994; Galdanova et al. 1983; Mongush 1992).

The imperial hierarchies as such were not necessarily alien to Buddhist intellectuals. When Tsyben Zhamtsarano and other Buddhist intellectuals petitioned the Tsarist government against limitations on Buddhism, they reaffirmed the colonial views of Shamanists, suggesting that the latter's conversion to Buddhism would be "undisputable progress" (Barannikova et al. 2001, 17–18). Besides, many religious leaders remained loyal to the empire despite the religious and ethnic hierarchies in the Russian- and Orthodox Christian-centered empire. During World War I, Khambo Lama Dashi-Dorzho Itigelov organized a mass fundraising campaign among the Buryats for the benefit in the Russian Army (Mikheev 2012).

Seeking to adapt Buddhism to Eurocentric modernity, Dorzhiev, Zhamtsarano, and other Buryat and Kalmyk intellectuals launched a reformist ("Renovationist") movement in Buddhism in the early twentieth century (Gerasimova 1964; Ochirova 2010, 44, 51). After the Revolution of 1917 and the turbulent Russian Civil War (1917–1922), when Buddhists split among different warring parties similar to members of other groups of the former empire, Dorzhiev and many other reformists opted for cooperation with the Bolsheviks. Indeed, after the initial militancy towards religion, which accompanied the 1918 Soviet decree on the separation of church and state and contributed to the plunder of the Buddhist Temple in Petrograd (the name of Saint Petersburg from 1914 to 1924) in 1918, the Bolshevik

leadership proved somewhat tolerant of the “oppressed” religions and, for a brief period, even Orthodox Christianity, where a reformist movement also emerged (Roslof 2002). The toleration of Buddhism throughout most of the 1920s was supposed to facilitate the export of socialist ideas to Asia—primarily Mongolia and Tibet—and contribute to the making of the Bolshevik empire (Sablin 2016).

The moderate approach to secularization came to an end after the world revolution ceased being a priority in 1925–1926 and after Joseph Stalin consolidated his control over the Soviet government in 1928. Between 1928 and 1929, the government increasingly resorted to administrative pressure, and over the 1930s launched a violent anti-religious campaign. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Soviet government put organized Buddhism in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva (formally independent since 1921 but informally under Moscow’s control until its annexation by the USSR in 1944) on the brink of complete eradication. All forty-seven Buryat monasteries and temples were closed and destroyed by 1940. All Buddhist temples were closed in Kalmykia, while the state persecuted the Kalmyks as an ethnic group during the so-called Kalmyk deportations of 1943. By the early 1940s, all monasteries in Tuva were closed and destroyed as well. Thousands of *lamas* and believers, including Dorzhiev and Zhamtsarano, were killed, while others were imprisoned or exiled (Mongush 1992, 119; Ochirova 2010, 49, 54, 55; Sinitsyn 2013).

Despite the tremendous violence of the regime, some *lamas* survived the purges. The re-establishment of organized Buddhism, preceded by the involvement of believers in the World War II effort, was sanctioned already between 1944 and 1946, with the opening of the new Ivolginskii Datsan[4] in Buryatia and the reopening of the Aginskii Datsan in the Aga Buryat District

4 *Datsan* means temple in this case but can also refer to a monastery.

(excluded from the autonomous republic in 1937). The Provisional Central Spiritual Board of Buddhists of the USSR with the seat at the Ivolginskii Datsan was formed and the position of Khambo Lama, as its chair, was re-established. A representative from Tuva also participated in forming the organization, making it non-homogeneous in the ethnic sense, yet no further temples were reopened in the Soviet Union until the 1990s. Hence, the Buryat organization became a *de facto*—and, given its official name, *de jure* the only—official representative of all Soviet Buddhists (Ochirova 2010, 56–57).

The official reestablishment of Buddhism in the Soviet Union owed much to the mobilization efforts during World War II, but also reflected the state's failure in eradicating religion, which continued to be practiced underground. From the 1950s–1980s, the renewed efforts of advertising the Soviet system to post-colonial Asia helped the survival and revival of Buddhism in the USSR. The Soviet government started regular exchanges in Buddhist delegations, the Soviet ones led by the Central Spiritual Board, with a number of Asian states in order to prove the existence of religious freedom under state socialism and to establish contacts to Asian elites. Thanks to the outward respect for Buddhism, Soviet and Mongolian Buddhists succeeded in establishing a Buddhist Institute in Ulaanbaatar in 1970, thereby relaunching organized religious education (albeit in a limited form) and enabling the emergence of a fully Soviet Buddhist generation. For instance, Aiusheev studied at the Ulaanbaatar Institute between 1983 and 1988, becoming part of the official Soviet Buddhist structures. The policy towards Buddhism was, however, far from tolerant and state anti-religious measures persisted, while the organized practice under the Central Spiritual Board was restricted to Buryatia and controlled within the republic (Dandaron 2006).

Following Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, Buddhist communities were registered in Kalmykia (reestablished as an autonomous region in 1957) and Tuva in 1988 and 1990, respectively. Over the 1990s, Buddhism in post-Soviet Russia experienced a broad revival. Some of the old temples and monasteries were rebuilt, but new ones were established as well. Buryatia reconnected to Tibetan communities in India and China, with pilgrims and students traveling there and foreign teachers coming to Russia. Since 1991, the Ivolginskii Datsan hosted the Buddhist Institute turned University (Dashi Choinkhorling), which initially had close ties to Tibetan Buddhists abroad (Mongush 1992, 119–21; Ochirova 2010, 55, 105–6). Despite the survival of the apparatus of the Central Spiritual Board, which was renamed the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia in 1997, Buddhism became decentralized, with the believers across Russia aligning themselves with numerous local, regional, and international religious organizations. After a short period of a decentralized policy towards religions in the early 1990s, Buddhist organizations regained official status in republican (Buryat, Kalmyk, and Tuvan) and federal governance structures. Although the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia under Khambo Lama claimed succession to the Central Spiritual Board and united a large share of Buddhist organizations in Buryatia, a rival organization emerged under the name of the Central Spiritual Board, which contributed, together with numerous independent or transnational Buddhist groups, to Buddhism's organizational heterogeneity in Buryatia as well.

Religion, State, and Indigeneity

The collapse of the Soviet state and Communist ideology stimulated debates on the content of post-Soviet Russian patriotism. By contrast to the last Soviet

Constitution, which offered the "construction of socialism and communism" as a clear basis for unity in the first "state of the new type" ("Konstitutsiia (Osnovnoi Zakon) Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik, Priniata Na Vneocherednoi Sedmoi Sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR Deviatogo Sozyva 7 Oktiabria 1977 G." 1977), the 1993 Constitution included spiritual connotations in its preamble. It claimed that the "multinational people of the Russian Federation" were bound together "by the shared fate [*sud'ba* can also be translated as 'destiny']" and "the memory of the ancestors" whose legacy was the "love and respect to the Fatherland, faith in good and justice" (*Konstitutsiia Rossiiskoi Federatsii, Priniata Vsenarodnym Golosovaniem 12 Dekabria 1993 G.* 2011, 3). Although the Constitution did proclaim a secular state, the increasing participation of religious figures in politics contributed to desecularization.

Although the 1997 Federal Law on the Freedom of Consciousness and Religious Organizations reaffirmed Russia's status as a secular state, it recognized the "special role" of Orthodoxy (Orthodox Christianity) in "the history of Russia" and the "development of its spirituality and culture." The law claimed to respect the various religions which made up the "integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia," but mentioned only four religions explicitly—Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism ("Federal'nyi Zakon No. 125-FZ, O Svobode Sovesti i o Religioznykh Ob"edineniiakh" 1997). Although further Christian organizations acquired a seat on the Presidential Council, the law consolidated the claims of centralized Orthodox Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Buddhist organizations by granting them special status as representatives of Russia's "traditional religions." According to Anna Ozhiganova (2016), "traditional religions" became localized versions of Orthodox Christianity, deeply embedded in the Russian governance structure, yet the attempts to consolidate such

a version of Buddhism under the Buddhist Traditional Sangha proved challenging.

The visit of President Dmitrii Medvedev to the Ivolginskii Datsan in 2009 may be seen as a highlight in desecularization of state life in Buryatia. According to the Russian press, ahead of the visit, on August 24, 2009, two thrones were set up in the monastery, one for Medvedev as an incarnation of the White Tara and one for Aiusheev as the leader of Russian Buddhists, while believers were supposed to prostrate before the living deity—the White Tara. The leaders of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha apparently aspired to revive the alleged tradition of recognizing Russia's rulers as the White Tsars, which was started after Zaiaev and other Buddhist leaders supposedly recognized Catherine II as the White Tara. As Nikolay Tsyrempilov pointed out, however, there is no evidence in written sources that such recognition took place at all, although it surfaced in Buryat folklore songs. According to the press, Aiusheev in fact planned to revive the alleged tradition earlier in 2009, when Medvedev was expected to visit the Saint Petersburg Buddhist Temple (which reopened in the 1990s) but did not come (Berezin 2009; Tsyrempilov 2009, 123). Such a reenactment of confessional policies in the Russian Empire can be seen as an attempt of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha to gain recognition as the official body of all Russian Buddhists and play a more prominent role in the non-secular legitimation of the Russian state. Although there were no journalists at the meeting between Medvedev and Aiusheev in the Ivolginskii Datsan, news outlets reported that the ritual did not take place. Aiusheev nevertheless stated that Medvedev, as the leader of Russia, bore unmatched responsibility and therefore had to be venerated as a deity (Kirilenko 2009).

The August 2009 events in Buryatia became a major news story. The harsh statement of Father Superior Sergii (Iurii Rybko) of the Russian

Orthodox Church, who claimed that "the pagans showed their true essence, sly and hypocritical," (Krug 2009) pointing to the hidden agenda of the Buddhist leaders, circulated in the press. The official reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church, however, was less militant. According to Archpriest Vsevolod Chaplin, the recognition of Medvedev as a deity was a display of the Buddhists' "patriotic feelings" and hence not a problem. Yet he reaffirmed the central role of Orthodoxy in state life, which the Buddhist Traditional Sangha supposedly tried to challenge, stressing that a Christian like Medvedev knew his "way to the God" (Krug 2009). Aiusheev implied in a 2015 interview that Vladimir Putin, who was reelected President after Medvedev's tenure, once again acquired the status of the White Tara, just like the rulers of imperial Russia, but did not explicitly call him the deity's incarnation (Bobrovich 2015).

Despite the seeming failure of Aiusheev to gain an "imperial" status for his organization, the events at the Ivolginskii Datsan in August 2009 were part of the broader pattern of state paternalism towards religion, as Pavel Krug had pointed out. The same month, Medvedev met with the muftis of the North Caucasus in Sochi, while a month before, he chaired a meeting that resolved to establish "spiritual-moral," that is religious, education in public schools and to introduce representatives of the "traditional religions" as chaplains to the military (Fagan 2013, 140; Krug 2009). In March 2010, a representative of the Presidential Administration visited the Ivolginskii Datsan and, according to republican press, ensured annual financial support from the President's foundation for Buddhist education in Buryatia ("President Rossii profinansiruet Buddiiskii universitet" 2010).

The closer relations between the state and religion can be seen as a return to Soviet practices, but also as demodernization of state life—the merger of religious and state discourses, with religious organizations channeling official views (Kukulin 2017, 241–45). Although it is hard to tell which side,

the state or religious organizations, initiated the official conservative discourse of the late 2000s to 2010s, Aiusheev and other leaders of the "traditional religions" signed an open letter, rebuking homosexuality as "non-traditional," as early as 2008 ("Otkrytoe Pis'mo Mezhriligioznogo Soveta Rossii Komissaru Soveta Evropy Po Pravam Cheloveka Tomasu Khammarbergu" 2008). Furthermore, in a 2015 interview, Aiusheev claimed that a woman could never comprehend Buddhist philosophy and therefore become a *lama* (Bobrovich 2015). Although this statement may be seen as an attack on the women's datsan Zungon Darzhaling in Ulan-Ude, the only one of its kind in Russia (Shevtsova 2004), and therefore a claim against the competitors of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha, it fell within the broader social conservatism of the Russian government.

The conservative discourse of state and religious elites is not entirely devoid of modernist connotations. Situating Buddhism in the ethno-national world of the Buryats, Aiusheev and his organization gave it a modern nationalist meaning. At the same time, its understanding as a minority religion within the Russian Federation—similar to that of official Islam or Judaism—contradicts Buddhism's universalism and transboundary character. Buryats historically adhered to a Tibetan version of Buddhism, with the Gelug Tradition being especially prominent, but Aiusheev continuously attempted to present the "traditional religion" of Buddhism as a Buryat phenomenon, thereby supporting the state's anti-foreign views. The visit of Medvedev to the Ivolginskii Datsan in August 2009 preceded the news that the Fourteenth Dalai Lama would not be able to visit Buryatia in September of that year, as many had hoped. In this context, Medvedev declared that the Russian government would support the "traditional religions" of Russia without the need of any assistance from abroad, while Aiusheev stressed on numerous occasions that the Buddhist Traditional Sangha was self-sufficient. Aiusheev in fact avoided any contacts with the Dalai Lama since

his election as Khambo Lama in 1995. Furthermore, when Bogd Gegen—the third figure after the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama in the informal Gelug hierarchy—visited Buryatia in 2005, the members of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha did not formally meet with him (Voronov 2009).

Framing Buddhism as the "traditional religion" of the Buryats (rather than the Russian Federation at large), Aiusheev appealed to both developmental civilizational argumentation and mysticism. Aiusheev claimed in a 2008 interview that "Buryat Buddhism" was self-sufficient for hundreds of years— thereby dismissing the active contacts with Mongolia and Tibet up to the 1930s and then again since the 1950s—and that its development reached "unmatched heights." He then pointed to the imperishable body of Khambo Lama Itigelov, which was recovered in 2002 and since then has been venerated at the Ivolginskii Datsan (for more, see Bernstein 2013) as proof of this self-sufficiency. When asked about the historical connections to Tibet and Mongolia, from where Buddhism came to Buryatia, Aiusheev asserted that the Buryats "received Buddhism from Damba-Dorzhi Zaiaev and he, by turn, received it from Kassapa Buddha during his first birth and from Shakyamuni Buddha during the second one" (Makchachkeev 2008). In this respect, "Buryat Buddhism" can be compared to the primordial nationalist discourses and is, inherently, a modern way of articulating interests of a cultural group (Smith 2013).

Medvedev, however, relied on a different argumentation when formulating the new state policy towards the self-sufficient "traditional religions" of Russia in 2009. According to Krug (2009), Moscow's policy towards Buddhism was not specific and mimicked, in fact, the official policy towards Islam. Fearing the spread of radical Islamic ideas to Russia (primarily the North Caucasus), the state sought to control all transboundary contacts and simply projected the same policy onto Buddhism. The nonadmission of the Dalai Lama was, however, also rooted in foreign policy

rather than driven by fears of imported radicalization of any kind, while its benefits for Aiusheev's project of self-sufficient Buddhism were incidental. Furthermore, Moscow did not explicitly recognize Aiusheev as the head of all Russian Buddhists, despite his claims that Itigelov, as a miracle worker, attracted many people to the Ivolginskii Datsan, implying that it became a genuine center of Buddhism in Russia (Bobrovich 2015). Even though Aiusheev remained the only Buddhist on the Presidential Council after the retirement of Kamykia's former President Kirsan Iliumzhinov, Medvedev mentioned that there were 203 officially registered Buddhist organizations in Russia on his visit to Buryatia in 2009 (Voronov 2009).

The very need for minority religions also did not remain unchallenged in contemporary Russia, with the officially supported notion of a multireligious and multiethnic Russian "imperial" nation as one among several options for the elites. As pointed out by Eduard Ponarin, the possible interpretation of Russia as a Russian (in the ethnic sense) nation state would make a single religion an important marker of belonging to the ethicized Russian nation (Ponarin 2002, 438). As pointed out by Kukulin (2017, 242), the identification with Orthodoxy in contemporary Russia often reflects the desire to be a "true" Russian, rather than holding a religious affiliation as such. If we continue this line of argumentation, the development of a less inclusive or exclusive Russian nationalism would further elevate the status of Orthodox Christianity, making it *inter alia* a countermeasure against ethno-religious mobilization in minority republics.

Such an approach to Russian nation-building was reflected in religious politics within Buryatia. Although Metropolitan of Ulan-Ude and Buryatia, Savvatii (Sergei Antonov) of the Russian Orthodox Church (he headed the newly formed diocese in 2015) recognized Buddhism as another "leading religious system" in the republic. He noted that Orthodoxy was not a religion of the (ethnic) Russians, while Buddhism was not that of the Buryats,

and asserted that Orthodoxy united people of different backgrounds. Furthermore, he implicitly accused Buddhism of excessive tolerance that allegedly empowered "totalitarian sects"—Jehovah's Witnesses, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and other organizations vilified by the Russian Orthodox Church—adding that they in fact included many former Buddhists (Donirova n.d.).

Despite his earlier isolationist statements, Aiusheev attempted to use transnational argumentation in his attempts to spread Buddhism (in the version of his organization) beyond Buryatia. On his visit to the Republic of Altai, Aiusheev openly called for its indigenous population to convert to Buddhism. He explained that there were three civilizations in the world—Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic—and, appealing to indigenous nationalism, claimed that one of them had to be chosen for the sake of preserving a minority nation. Aiusheev was especially critical of Shamanism. Using the argumentation of societal development, he located it in the human past, comparing its adherents to cave dwellers. In this respect, his view of Shamanism mirrored that voiced by Zhamtsarano and other Buddhist intellectuals in the early twentieth century. Yet Aiusheev's proselytism was rebuked by those Altaian indigenous intellectuals who supported the revival of Ak Jang or Burkhanism, a religious and nationalist movement which emerged in the early twentieth century and was rooted in both Shamanism and Buddhism ("Altaitsam Sleduet Priniat' Buddizm" 2015). In 2016, the supporters of Ak Jang even attempted to destroy a Buddhist stupa which was consecrated by Aiusheev on his visit to Altai in 2015 ("Shamany protiv Buddy: v Gornom Altae rzgoraetsia religioznaia voina" 2016).

Interestingly, Savvatii expressed his toleration of Shamanism as "a popular religion which existed for many centuries" (Sitnik 2015). Such a view of Shamanism, a major competitor for Buddhism as the national religion of the Buryats, can be connected to the advances of organized Shamanism

in Buryatia's public space. Bair Tsyrendorzhiev, the Chairman of the Local Religious Organization of Shamans "Tengeri," was especially instrumental in making the organization's version of Shamanism—a centralized, organized religion in the making—comparable to the federally recognized "traditional religions" on the republican level. Claiming its succession to Tengrism, "the traditional religion of the Buryats" ("Tsentr shamanov v Buriatii provodit letnie obriady" 2015), the organization claimed a similar status to that of Ak Jang in the Republic of Altai for itself.

Defining Tengrism as institutionalized, organized Shamanism, Tsyrendorzhiev's organization constructed a Shamanic temple in Ulan-Ude—"the first Shamanic temple in the world," according to Tsyrendorzhiev ("Ulan-Ude stal tsentrom shamanizma" 2013)—which hosted its first celebration of the Lunar New Year (Sagaalgan) in 2018 (Sagan 2018). Furthermore, Tsyrendorzhiev received a seat on the Council for Relations with Religious Associations under the previous Head of Buryatia, Viacheslav Nagovitsyn, which may be seen as partial recognition of Shamanism as an official "traditional religion" (Voronov 2014). Just like in the case of Shamanism in Altai, Aiusheev continuously opposed the spread of Shamanism in Buryatia, its equal treatment with Buddhism, and the inclusion of Shamanist traditions into Buddhism (Gumanova 2011), yet recent media publications did not seem to feature any explicit criticism of Shamanism in Buryatia coming from the Buddhist Traditional Sangha.

The recent change of leadership in Buryatia, however, proved favorable for the status of Buddhism as the national religion of the Buryats. Aleksei Tsydenov, an ethnic Buryat, replaced Nagovitsyn, a native of Udmurtia and representative of the republic's Russian majority ("Glava Buriatii v 2017 godu dosrochno uidet v otstavku" 2017), in 2017 and won popular elections the same year. Although Tsydenov stressed the ethnic and religious diversity of Buryatia, he participated in public events related only

to Buddhism and Orthodoxy. Given that there is no information that the republican Council for Relations with Religious Associations convened under the new Head of Buryatia, this marked a return to the federally recognized list of "traditional religions," which does not include any Shamanic organizations. In September 2017, Tsydenov not only participated in the festivities devoted to the anniversaries of the institution of Khambo Lama and the return of Itigelov's body, but also vocally supported Aiusheev's efforts in preserving Buryat culture. Indeed, the Buddhist Traditional Sangha has continuously supported Buryat publishing, traditional sports, and other cultural practices, reinforcing the connections between "Buryat Buddhism" and minority nationalism in the republic (Ganulenko 2017; "Glava Buriatii Prinimaet Uchastie v Prazdnike, Posviashchennomu Khambo Lame Etigelovu" 2017; Lygdenova 2017; "Pozdravlenie Glavy Buriatii Alekseia Tsydenova s Prazdnikom Belogo Mesiatsa" 2018).

The relative success of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha in the official representation of Buddhism as the national religion of the Buryats, however, did not mean that Aiusheev's organization was unanimously recognized as the leader of all Russian Buddhists in Kalmykia, Tuva, elsewhere in Russia, and even in Buryatia itself. The inclusion of Aiusheev into the Presidential Council as the only Buddhist representative and the multitude of Buddhist organizations in the Russian Federation proved a major challenge to the idea of a centralized Buddhism. The recognition of Kamby Lama Lopsan Chamzy as the leader of Tuvan Buddhists ("Upravlenie Kamby-Lamy Tuvy Prizyvaet Vsekh Buddistov Respubliki Sobliudat' Zapovedi Sviashchennogo Mesiatsa Saka Dava" 2015) and Shadzhin Lama Erdeni Ombadykov as the leader of Kalmyk Buddhists by respective republican authorities challenge Aiusheev's claims to leading all Russian Buddhists. Furthermore, the Dalai Lama recognized Ombadykov as the Twelfth Telo Tulku Rinpoche, a reincarnate, and appointed him his own Honorary Representative in Russia,

Mongolia, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which posed a further challenge to Aiusheev (Tsybikdorzhiev 2017).

Religion in Schoolbooks

The diversity of practices and organizations making up the heterogeneous religious landscape of Buddhism in Russia and beyond proved a major challenge for developing a standardized narrative of Buddhism as a "traditional religion." After the introduction of religious education in parts of the Russian Federation in 2009 and in the whole country in 2012, the semantic heterogeneity proved especially prominent in different textbooks.

The initiative to introduce religion into still formally secular public schools came from the Russian Orthodox Church. The government agreed after about a decade of lobbying, calling the new school subject "the Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics". The new subject included six elective courses, with four based on the "traditional religions": the Foundations of the Orthodox, Islamic, Buddhist, and Jewish Cultures, respectively. The fifth one—the Foundations of World Religious Cultures—practically became a course devoted to all four, while only the Foundations of Secular Ethics proved to be an alternative to the "traditional religions." As noted by Ozhiganova (2016), the introduction of religion in public schooling with the officially declared aim of "spiritual-moral upbringing" of the youth does not fit into the framework of the secular state proclaimed by the Constitution and the Law on Education.

The first officially recommended textbooks on the four "traditional religions," published in 2010 by *Prosveshchenie*, a leading educational publisher in Russia, start with the chapter "Russia is our Motherland" and conclude with the chapter "Love and Respect for the Fatherland." The

opening chapter, which is the same down to the word in all four books, presents patriotism as spiritual universalism. "We live in a great country, the name of which is the Russian Federation, or Russia in short. Say this word out loud and you will feel the light, expanse, vastness, [and] spirituality in its sound…" The chapter then defines the spiritual world, which exists in addition to the material world, as the "knowledge and information which is contained in books, works of art and cinema, the relations between people, and so on." Despite this rather secular approach, the chapter goes on stating that the "spiritual world" reflects in the human's "inner world" which almost all religions of the world define as the soul. The books then explain that there is good and evil in both the outer and inner worlds, while the subject of the Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics is set to answer the main question of how not to destroy one's inner world. The opening chapter defines "traditions" as the paths in the spiritual world previously taken by the ancestors and as the "wealth" of the "multinational country" of Russia. The four schoolbooks give religious cultures and moral-ethical norms a special place among other traditions, claiming that "they all" are based on such "eternal values" as "good, honor, justice, [and] compassion." "If a human follows them, he will not get lost in the complex world, will be able to tell good from bad, will learn how to make one's inner world pure, bright, and joyful." The opening chapter concludes with a celebration of Russia's diversity, stating that the people who often speak different languages and preserve different traditions make up one harmonious "family of Russia's peoples," in which everyone respects individual traditions (Chimitdorzhiev 2010, 4–5; Chlenov, Mindrina, and Glotser 2010, 4–5; Kuraev 2010, 4–5; Latyshina and Murtazin 2010, 4–5).

The textbooks hence foreground diversity, which is defined through language and tradition as the foundation for the "federal" or imperial Russian patriotism. The concluding chapter, which is also identical in each

of the four textbooks, reaffirms the orientation to the past and provides a brief narrative of how the four “traditional religions” and “secular ethics” became part of Russian history.

> In the seventh to tenth century, there was the state of Khazaria in the area from the Volga to the Dnieper, many inhabitants of which practiced Judaism. In the eighth century, the first mosque was built in the city of Derbent (Dagestan), from which the history of Islam began in our country. In 988, Prince Vladimir baptized Rus’—Orthodoxy came to our land. In the seventeenth century, the Buryats and the Kalmyks became part of our state, bringing Buddhism with them. Since the eighteenth century, non-religious culture has begun to spread widely in Russia and a tradition of secular ethics emerged. This is how the spiritual traditions of Russia developed (Chimitdorzhiev 2010, 78; Chlenov, Mindrina, and Glotser 2010, 92; Kuraev 2010, 94; Latyshina and Murtazin 2010, 78).

After this oversimplified historical narrative, the concluding chapter states that the “love to one’s family, to close people, to one’s small and big Motherland, to our Russia” is the main unifying factor for the implied community of Russians and that the Motherland is supposed to be loved only for its mere existence. Love is then interpreted as “service” to manifest itself in deeds for the good of the people and the Motherland. Connecting a private understanding of love to patriotism, the books conclude with a Soviet-like idea of self-sacrificial patriotism. “What does Russia start with? It starts with your love, with that what you are ready to do for it” (Chimitdorzhiev 2010, 79; Chlenov, Mindrina, and Glotser 2010, 93; Kuraev 2010, 95; Latyshina and Murtazin 2010, 79). “Federal” patriotism is, in this respect, composite and multilevel universalism, which starts with

allegiance to family and minority territories (the "small Motherland") and is rooted in love defined as duty.

A single, state-centered view on the history of religions to be taught at schools predated the broader attempt to return to an unequivocal and rather uncritical image of the Russian past, similar to the situation in the late Soviet Union, which was launched by President Putin in 2013. Andrii Portnov (2013, 389), who analyzed the first version of the guidelines for creating a standard official history schoolbook, pointed to the focus on the so-called "military-patriotic upbringing." The school subject of history was to teach patriotism through the examples of historical "labor" and military feats and to nurture pride for Russia.

Although the four *Prosveshchenie* textbooks on "traditional religions" are framed in the same patriotic way, which was probably formulated by the functionaries of the Russian Orthodox Church, *The Foundations of Buddhist Culture* by Chimitdorzhiev (Babu-lama), a graduate of the Ulaanbaatar Buddhist Institute and then the Rector of the Aga Buddhist Academy under the Buddhist Traditional Sangha, provides a history of Buddhism that is different from the concept of "Buryat Buddhism" pushed by Aiusheev. The textbook presents Buddhism as one of the three "world religions," adherents of which live in different countries and belong to different peoples, and then provides a basic introduction to Buddhism, featuring a brief biography of Buddha Shakyamuni and the discussion of the Four Noble Truths and the Tripiṭaka. The textbook introduces the distinction between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism and presents the Gelug Tradition as the most widespread in Russia, but does not stress the differences between different approaches to Buddhism (Chimitdorzhiev 2010, 6–14, 26, 29, 32–33). In this respect, the schoolbook also makes Buddhist universalism prominent.

In one of the chapters and in several instances throughout the rest of the text, Chimitdorzhiev's textbook discusses Buddhism in Russia. Although the book references the official recognition of Buddhism in Russia in 1741, it undermines the story publicly backed by Aiusheev and stresses that Buddhism began its spread in Russia long before that. The textbook discusses Kalmykia, Buryatia, and Tuva as the "traditionally Buddhist" regions of Russia and acknowledges the Burkhan Bakshin Altan Sume (the Golden Abode of the Buddha Shakyamuni), the main temple of Kalmykia in Elista, consecrated by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, as a major Buddhist holy site. Some connotations of "Buryat Buddhism" are nevertheless also present, albeit implicitly. Most images from Russia show monasteries and temples in Buryatia (and the then already abolished Aga Buryat Autonomous District) and works by Buryat artists. Furthermore, the textbook does not mention the Dalai Lama and discusses Itigelov's biography and his imperishable body, the main marker of Buryat Buddhism's self-sufficiency, according to Aiusheev. Although Chimitdorzhiev's schoolbook does not explain the organizational structure of Buddhism in Russia, it refers to Itigelov as Khambo Lama and calls him the head of the Buddhists of Russia, which was not the case in the Russian Empire, in which he was recognized as the head of the Buddhists of Eastern Siberia (Chimitdorzhiev 2010, 15, 19, 25, 35, 38–39, 57–59, 61, 64, 74–75).

Despite the connotations of "Buryat Buddhism" in Chimitdorzhiev's textbook, the Dashi Choinkhorling Buddhist University of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha published its own textbook the same year. Although the book *The World of Buddha* by Zhigzhitov (Pande-lama), a graduate of the Drepung Gomang Monastic University (the prominent Tibetan university in India) and the Vice Rector of the Dashi Choinkhorling Buddhist University, did not bear the seal of approval from the Ministry of Education, it mentioned that its publication was sponsored by a Presidential grant

for the development of civil society.[5] There is no reliable data on the use of the book in public schools, but, according to the Buryat republican government, the 10,000 copies were intended for fourth-graders studying the Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics, evidently in public schools ("V Buriatii Dlia Shkol'nikov Izdan Uchebnik 'Mir Buddy'" 2010).

Unlike the standard textbooks, *The World of Buddha* does not include any chapters on patriotism and immediately starts with the discussion of Buddhism. The book is devoid of the elements of secular religious studies that were present in Chimitdorzhiev's textbook, and discusses Buddha's life and teachings in the first two parts. The textbook includes a section on Je Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelug Tradition, in its third and final part, which, while featuring the biographies of the Buddhist teachers from India and Tibet, pays much attention to Zaiaev's biography, including his studies in Mongolia and Tibet. The textbook claims that Zaiaev was reborn as Itigelov and discusses the latter's biography, including the return of his imperishable body by a group of lamas led by Aiusheev. The textbook concludes with biographies of other prominent Buryat Buddhists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Zhigzhitov 2010, 9–26, 50–54, 56–68). It is unlikely that *The World of Buddha* was circulated outside Buryatia (and, perhaps, Buryat communities elsewhere in Russia), on which it was centered. Even though it makes "Buryat Buddhism" quite prominent, it does not disconnect it from India and Tibet in historical terms, making it a local version of religious universalism. At the same time, the overemphasis on Buryatia and the connection between Itigelov and Aiusheev supports the claim of the Buddhist Traditional Sangha to all-Russian Buddhist leadership.

In 2012, when religious education was introduced federally, a third textbook for the *Foundations of Buddhist Culture* was published. The

5 A copy of the textbook was provided by Jargal Badagarov.

textbook, authored by Kitinov, Kseniia Savchenko, and Marina Iakushkina, and published by *Drofa* (the main competitor of *Prosveshchenie*), was approved by the Ministry of Education and underwent several reissues. With Kitinov of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia as the main author, Abbot of the Burkhan Bakshin Altan Sume Andzha Geliung as one of the two reviewers, and Kalmykia's main temple on its cover, the textbook may be seen as a reaction to the Buryatia-centered narratives. Although there is no reliable information on the use of the new textbook, the circulation of *Drofa* implies that it reached well beyond Kalmykia. Kitinov's textbook also starts with a chapter on the "Motherland" and includes a chapter on defending the Fatherland, at the end of the book, but the patriotic framing is different from that of its *Prosveshchenie* predecessors. Indeed, the opening chapter presents the past as the "Motherland's" foundation, but strongly foregrounds humanity's global character—with the pictures of the Earth and Iurii Gagarin—and does not include the word "tradition" at all. Furthermore, the textbook implies that the "Motherland" clearly has a future to be created by the people (*narod*), and not only its past (Kitinov, Savchenko, and Iakushkina 2014, 4–7). In this respect, this version of patriotism is secular and progressive despite the overall content of the book.

The narrative on Buddhism itself is presented in a much more accessible manner compared to the other two books, with Anand, a fictional Indian boy, and other characters accompanying the readers. The introduction of an Indian character reinforces the overall premise of the book—that Buddhism is a world religion that has spread across numerous countries, including Russia, rather than a "traditional religion" of the latter. The differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism are introduced in the second half of the book, with a separate chapter devoted to Tibetan Buddhism. Tibet itself is featured quite prominently throughout the

narrative, and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is also mentioned and pictured. The chapter on Buddhism in Russia is relatively brief. Mentioning that Buddhism is spread in Buryatia, Kalmykia, Tuva, and Altai, the textbook maintains that the teaching was brought to Russia by the Kalmyks (Oirats) and only later spread in the Baikal region. Furthermore, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama is mentioned as one of the founders of the Petrograd Buddhist Temple alongside Dorzhiev, while Itigelov is not featured in the book at all. These aspects make it part of the counter-narrative to Aiusheev's notion of "Buryat Buddhism." The chapter on defending the Fatherland discusses the relations between Buddhism and patriotism, mentions the military aspects of Buddhist history, and features a photograph of a Buddhist banner used by Kalmyk soldiers in the Russian Empire. Yet even in this chapter, Buddhism is, once again, not presented as a Russian "traditional religion" (Kitinov, Savchenko, and Iakushkina 2014, 19–21, 42, 108–9, 112–24, 125–31, 148–52).

Conclusion

Although in an organizational sense the desecularization of the Russian state bore some fruit, with the introduction of religion to public schools and the direct relations between religious organizations and secular authorities being its most prominent markers, its results were not necessarily beneficial for the authorities. The results of desecularization were a consequence of the imperial situation—although religion became more prominent in the previously secular spheres, no standard view of it prevailed. Religious politics demonstrated that Buddhism in Russia remained decentralized, with the Buddhist Traditional Sangha failing to become a centralized organization on par with the Russian Orthodox Church, whereas the

status of Buddhism as the “traditional religion” of the Buryats remained to be challenged by both organized Shamanism and the Russian Orthodox Church. The two textbooks on Buddhism, which were written by the authors affiliated with the Buddhist Traditional Sangha, demonstrated that there is no unified interpretation of Buddhism even within the organization, despite the position of its leader. Besides, the most recent textbook on Buddhism undermined both the notion of “national Buddhism”—be it “Russian” or “Buryat”—and the religious foundations of patriotism.

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