



Published in the Russian Federation
Oriental Studies (Previous Name: Bulletin of the Kalmyk Institute
for Humanities of the Russian Academy of Sciences)
Has been issued as a journal since 2008
ISSN: 2619-0990; E-ISSN: 2619-1008
Vol. 17, Is. 5, Pp. 1037–1052, 2024
Journal homepage: <https://kigiran.elpub.ru>

UDC / УДК 316.74:2

DOI: 10.22162/2619-0990-2024-75-5-1037-1052



The Role of Buddhism in Everyday Life of Congregants of Kyzyl: Preliminary Research

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Abstract. *Introduction.* The article addresses the issue of ‘ordinary’ religiosity of believers in Kyzyl, namely the role of Buddhism as a religion in their everyday life. The conducted ethnographic research (individual in-depth interviews with the laity and clergy of Tuva’s Buddhist temples) results in a generalized analysis and interpretation of the degree of religiosity of Tuva’s Buddhist population, outlines the role of Buddhism in their daily lives, and attempts a generalized culturological assessment of how that religiosity gets manifested in their day-to-day routine. The study highlights the dynamic interaction between religion and everyday life in Tuva. *Goals.* So, the paper seeks to establish the role of Buddhism in Tuvan believers’ daily life and specify its peculiarities, reveal important factors of ‘ordinary’ religiosity of Buddhist congregants in Kyzyl. *Methods and materials.* The work employs some ethnographic methods and those of qualitative data analysis, the main research method being a qualitative one — that of individual in-depth interviews. The latter make it possible to investigate the field in question as deeply, accurately and thoroughly as possible, to obtain reliable and relevant research material. It is noteworthy that the interviews included the use of the free-list method, which yielded individual data on each respondent’s Buddhist knowledge. *Conclusions.* The preliminary research reveals the formation of a new type of religiosity in Tuva distinguished by certain regional characteristics. This definitely requires a more sophisticated approach to religious studies that should comprise interdisciplinary components. The insufficient competence of older generations in religious matters gives rise to a vacuum that contributes to the emergence of somewhat ‘personal religions’. At the current level of religious development, Tuvans probably need an understandable and convenient religious system, which, in turn, may become an obstacle to deeper interest in Buddhism as a philosophy. Religious studies in the region are still relevant and require further attention.

Keywords: religion, religiosity, Buddhism, the Republic of Tuva, Tuvans, congregants, parishioners, Buddhist monastery, temple, monk, religious situation in Tuva, religious study

Acknowledgements. The reported study was granted by Buddhist Education and Research Foundation, project name ‘Existential Aspects of Buddhism in Everyday Life of Tuva’s People’ (grant agreement no. 17 of 17 June 2024). Authors extend gratitude to Prof. Benjamin G. Purzycki (Aarhus University, Denmark) for his support and assistance in viewing and editing the manuscript.

For citation: Kadyg-ool Kh. K., Mongush D. Sh. The Role of Buddhism in Everyday Life of Congregants of Kyzyl: Preliminary Research. *Oriental Studies*. 2024; 17 (5): 1037–1052. (In Russ.). DOI: 10.22162/2619-0990-2024-75-5-1037-1052

Роль буддизма в повседневной жизни прихожан Кызыла: предварительное исследование

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Аннотация. *Введение.* В статье рассматривается проблема «бытовой» религиозности верующих Кызыла, а именно роль буддизма как религии в их повседневной жизни. Проведенное этнографическое исследование (индивидуальные глубинные интервью с мирянами и священнослужителями буддийских храмов Тувы) дает обобщенный анализ и интерпретацию степени религиозности буддийского населения Тувы, выявляет роль буддизма в их повседневной жизни, а также предпринимается попытка дать обобщенную культурологическую оценку проявления этой религиозности в их повседневной жизни. В исследовании подчеркивается динамическое взаимодействие религии и повседневной жизни в Туве. *Цель исследования.* В статье ставится задача установить роль буддизма в повседневной жизни верующих тувинцев и выделить ее особенности, выявить важные факторы «бытовой» религиозности прихожан буддийских храмов Кызыла. *Методы и материалы.* В работе использованы этнографические методы и методы качественного анализа данных, основным методом исследования является качественный метод — индивидуальные глубинные интервью. Последние позволяют максимально глубоко, точно и всесторонне исследовать изучаемую область, получить достоверный и релевантный исследовательский материал. Примечательно, что в ходе интервью использовался также метод свободного списка, который позволил получить индивидуальные данные о буддийских знаниях каждого респондента. *Выводы.* Предварительное исследование выявило формирование в Туве нового типа религиозности, отличающегося определенными региональными особенностями. Это, безусловно, требует более сложного подхода к религиоведению, включающего междисциплинарные компоненты. Недостаточная компетентность старших поколений в религиозных вопросах порождает вакуум, способствующий появлению в некотором роде «личных религий». На современном уровне религиозного развития тувинцам, вероятно, необходима понятная и удобная религиозная система, что, в свою очередь, может стать препятствием для более глубокого интереса к буддизму как философии. Религиоведение в регионе по-прежнему актуально и требует дальнейшего внимания.

Ключевые слова: религия, религиозность, буддизм, Республика Тыва, тувинцы, прихожане, буддийский монастырь, храм, монах, религиозная ситуация в Туве, религиоведение

Благодарности. Исследование было осуществлено при поддержке Фонда содействия буддийскому образованию и исследованиям, проект «Экзистенциальные аспекты буддизма в повседневности жителей Тувы» (соглашение о предоставлении гранта № 17 от 17 июня 2024 г.). Авторы выражают благодарность профессору Бенджамину Г. Пуржицкому (Университет Орхуса, Дания) за его поддержку и помощь в просмотре и редактировании рукописи.

Для цитирования: Кадыг-оол Х. К., Монгуш Д. Ш. Роль буддизма в повседневной жизни прихожан Кызыла: предварительное исследование // Oriental Studies. 2024. Т. 17. № 5. С. 1037–1052. DOI: 10.22162/2619-0990-2024-75-5-1037-1052



1. Introduction

The religious situation in Tuva is dynamic and progressive [Dashkovskiy et al. 2021: 21]. Thus, studies on present-day religiosity in Tuva, in our opinion, could never be superfluous. Moreover, we estimate the scope and variety of religious research as insufficient, particularly involving in-depth methods. The article aims to uncover several important factors of 'ordinary' religiosity of Buddhist congregants of Kyzyl (Republic of Tuva, Russian Federation). In other words, the research sets a goal of finding out what the impact of Buddhism in day-to-day life of monastery visitors is.

For instance, there is an appreciable variety of studies concerning Buddhism and various aspects of everyday life in different regions of Russia (see [Ulanov 2010; Petrov 2006; Dmitrieva 2021; Bazarov 2012; Tarbastaeva 2019; Garri 2020; Serebryakova, Ayakova 2021; Badmatsyrenov et al. 2020; Erendzhenova 2024] and others).

The religious situation in Tuva in many aspects has been the subject to a large number of studies. The history of Buddhism and other religions' development in Tuva was discovered by O. Khomushku, M. Mongush, U. Bicheldey [Khomushku 1998; Mongush 2001; Bicheldey 2020] and others. Various studies of the present state of religiosity in Tuva and particularly of Tuvan Buddhism are presented in a variety of publications [Lamazhaa 2019; Lamazhaa 2021; Lamazhaa et al. 2020; Dashkovskiy et al. 2021; Tretyakov 2023]. We would like to point out the monograph of O. Khomushku [Khomushku 2024] attempting a uniting and most topical analysis of historical and up-to-date religious situations in Tuva.

The predecessor and most impacting works for our research are the series of studies conducted by Prof. Purzycki [Purzycki 2010; Purzycki 2011; Purzycki, Holland 2019; Purzycki, Bendixen 2020].

2. Study Methods

The study of religion's impact on people's everyday life is a part to sociology of religion, which is a huge field of research, both repre-

sented by classical works (e.g., [Comte 1880; Durkheim 1912; Weber 1992]) and topical ones. Numerous studies articulate that the status of religion in modern society has drastically changed, particularly, the role of Christian church [Luckmann 2001: 389] and other traditional religious systems [Hecht, Biondo 2010].

The methodological core of the research is the concept of the 'invisible' religion [Luckmann 1967]. Another important epistemic guide is to study 'how religion is experienced by living human beings in their actual lives' [Ammerman 2007: VI]. For that reason, we are mostly focused on individuals that are not religious experts, i.e. neither think nor write about religious ideas [Ammerman 2007: 5].

From this point of view, it was evident for us to employ the method of in-depth interviews, so that our respondents could describe their religiosity in their own words [Knott et al. 2022: 1]. The sample size and study design at whole was determined by the financial and temporal boundaries of the grant¹. On the other hand, we decided to limit the number of the interviews when it became evident that the surveyed respond approximately in the same manner [Knott et al. 2022: 2].

The number of respondents is 22, and they are grouped into age classes as follows²:

Table 1. Grouping the samples
[Таблица 1. Распределение образцов (информантов)]

Intervals	Frequency
[18,31)	5
[31,44)	7
[44,57)	6
[57,70)	2
[70,83)	2

The average age of our respondents is 43. Standard deviation³ is 9,5. So, typical respond-

¹ See the description in the 'Acknowledgements' section of the article.

² The number of classes was found by the Sturges formula: $1 + 3,3 \times \lg n$, i.e. $1 + 3,3 \times \lg 22 = 5,42 \approx 5$. The length of every interval: $(80-18) / 5 = 12,4 \approx 13$ (it is recommended to round up this number in any case). So, the first interval is [18, 31) and so on. The last one is [70, 83].

³ Dispersion is 89,6 (found by the following

ents of our survey were aged from 33,5 to 52,5. Minimal age was 18, maximal one — 80. Seventeen respondents are female, and five ones — male [AFD 2024].

The other three respondents are representatives of the Buddhist clergy. The information about them is specified in the following parts of the article.

The questionnaire contained 16 questions for non-experts and 11 — for monks, both were in Russian and Tuvan (translated by the authors as they are both native Tuvan speakers). The interviews with the congregants lasted from 8 to 30 minutes. Those with the lamas took an average of 23 minutes. All those surveyed were given small souvenirs as a token of our appreciation.

It is noteworthy that within our in-depth interviews we also used the free-list method by J. Smith and S. Borgatti [Smith, Borgatti 1997]. It was particularly helpful to find out the most ‘popular’ Buddhist deities according to the respondents’ opinions (see Diagram 1).

3. Materials

The survey was held by the authors on 25–27 August 2024. It would start at about 11 a.m. in three main Buddhist temples of Kyzyl: Thubten Shedrub Ling, Tsechenling and Damba Braibuling. The first one (opened in April 2023) is considered to be the largest Buddhist monastery (by its floor space) in the Russian Federation [Mashukov 2023]. The second one had been the central temple of the Republic of Tuva for quite a long period of time since it was opened in 1999. Damba Braibuling is an interesting example of the temple that was founded by a family of descendants of religious figures which also enjoys great popularity among the local inhabitants (see Fig. 1).

We would like to present some notable observations based on the research. On 25 August (Sunday), there were not many people in Damba Braibuling. It was a time of prayer service. Congregants were often coming out of the temple during the service to make or answer phone calls, some of them departed much earlier be-

fore the end of the ritual. By its end a total of 14 individuals left. Thubten Shedrub Ling was the hardest place to get any interviews. Our assumption is as follows: it is a new place and might still be viewed rather as a museum or art object, and is not fully recognized as religious adobe yet. Our opinion is implicitly acknowledged by the respondents: for spiritual needs one of them (born 1960) visits another monastery; another believer (born 1991) says she visits Tsechenling by force of habit and thinks that even its walls are ‘saturated with the power of sutras and prayers’ [AFD 2024]. On the other hand, the cashier of the monastery museum (in Thubten Shedrub Ling) informed us that there were a number of people (not that many — by her words) who would come to the monastery every day, i.e. they could be considered as the ‘true’ congregants [AFD 2024].

4. Results

4.1. Temple attendance

Initially, we would like to stress several important facts. The letter of the Uryankhai Affairs Commissar V. Grigoryev to Irkutsk Governor General (26 November 1916) said that the number of Tuvans was approximately sixty thousand people, while there were about ten thousand monks [NA RT. Coll. 112. Cat. 1. File 36. Pp. 6–7 back, 29–33 back]. Buddhism had an outstanding impact on traditional Tuvan culture in many social aspects — beside religious and philosophical ones: education, medicine, art and other [Khomushku 2024: 43–44].

These circumstances cardinally changed by the late 1920s and early 1930s. Thus, on 5 June 1928, the Minor Khuraldan passed an act ‘On Separating Religion and State’ [NA RT. Coll. P-92. Cat. 1. File 29. P. 14–14 back]. By this, religious clergymen fell under the jurisdiction of Tuvan Government. In a few years, the status of Buddhism and monks got much tougher. Monasteries and lamas became the subjects of progressive taxes and lost the right of free land-use [NA RT. Coll. P-1. Cat. 1. File 761. P. 4]. In 1931, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of Tuvan Arat Revolution Party decided to seize the property of ‘feudal-theocratic elements’ that were defined as ‘the most vicious enemies’ of workfolk and poor ‘arats’ [NA RT. Coll. P-1. Cat. 1. File 920.

formula: $(\sum(x_i - \bar{x})^2 \cdot n_i) / n$, where x_i is the middle of each interval, $\bar{x}$ is the arithmetic mean, n_i is frequency). Thus, standard deviation is $\sigma = \sqrt{89,6} = 9,47 \approx 9,5$.



Fig. 1. Temple of Damba Braibuling Religious Organization. Kyzyl, 2024. Photo by Kh. Kadyg-ool
[Фото 1. Храм буддийской организации Дамба Брайбулинг. Кызыл, 2024 г. Фото Х. Кадыг-оол]

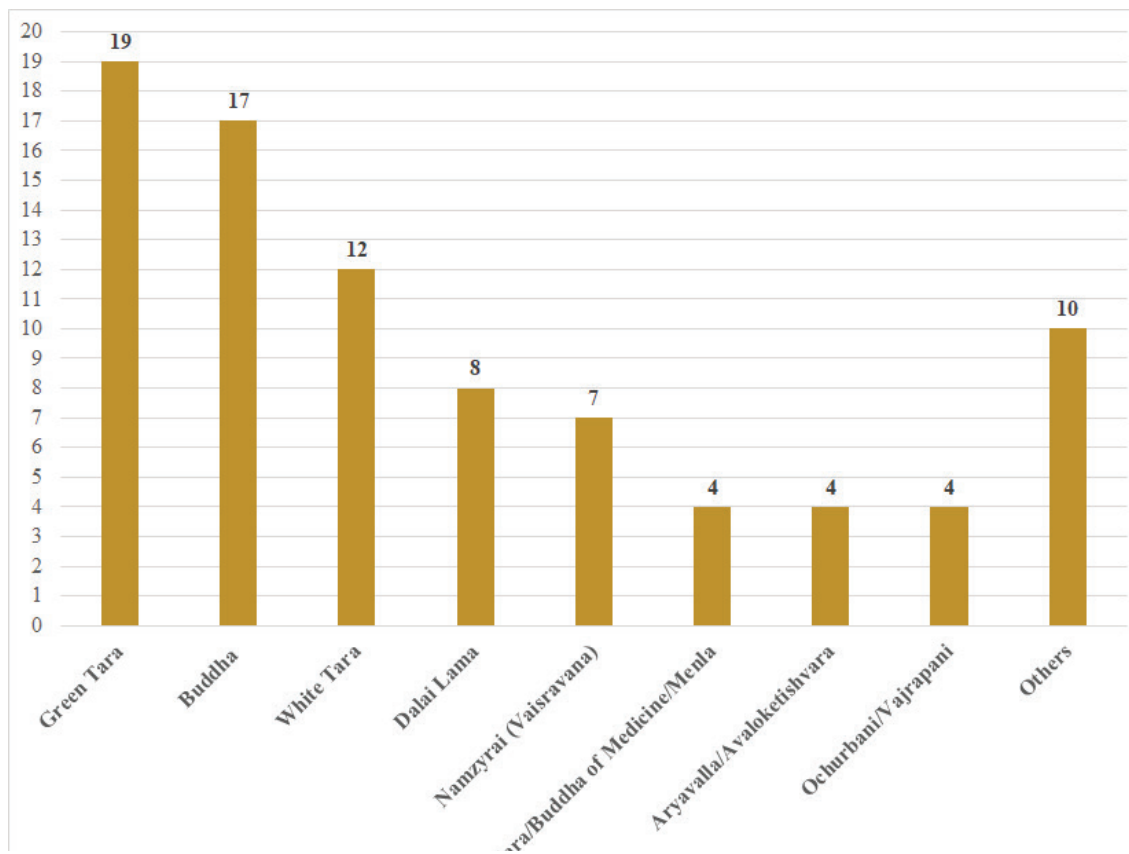


Diagram 1. Most 'popular' Buddhist deities (according to the congregates' opinions)

[Диаграмма 1. Самые «популярные» буддийские божества (по мнению опрошенных прихожан)]

P. 8]. This short period of time was also darkened by the repressions [Khomushku 2024: 73]. For instance, in 1932 there were no lamas left in Upper-Chadaana Monastery, the central temple of Tuva at that time (in comparison to 350 monks of Upper and Lower Chadaana temples in 1929) [NA RT. Coll. P-1. Cat. 1. File 1397. Pp. 22–26].

The Great Patriotic War was followed by some gradual easing for Buddhist monks. In 1949, up to 9 lamas started working in temple-yurts near Chadaana [NA RT. Shyn. 1959, July 18. No. 142]. Some kind of religious renaissance in Tuva started in the late 1980s. On 11 September 1989, a Buddhist religious organization was registered in Kyzyl [NA RT. Coll. P-37. Cat. 1. File 1010. P. 51]. In 1992, the Republican Council of Ministers decided to build a temple in the capital of Tuva [NA RT. Coll. P-784. Cat. 1. File 42. Pp. 14–15]. And the same year Buddhist witnessed a founding congress that elected Kazak Sandak the first Supreme Lama of the contemporary era [NA RT. Shyn. 1992, May 19. No. 94]. In September

1997, the First All-Tuvan Founding Congress was held. The latter's most important results included the revival of Kamby-Lama social institution and the election of new Kamby-Lama — Aganak Khertek [Khomushku 2024: 103]. Thus, in common, the end of the past century was an important period of spiritual and religious uplift.

So, it would be reasonable to suggest that the present-day Tuvans are on the 'next stage' by religious means, and that congregants should be more 'advanced', i. e. having relatively deep understanding and knowledge of the religious and philosophical aspects of Buddhism.

The answers informing when respondents started attending temples were grouped in the following sections.

1. The representatives of senior generations usually mentioned the beginning of the 1990s (some specified the end of the 1990s), the period of the Buddhist restoration in Tuva. One of them (born 1946) called Dalai-Lama's visit in 1992 as the starting point of her religiosity, another one (born 1960) said he just followed

others who had started attending temples. One more respondent (born 1957) mentioned that there was no temple in the villages, so she could not visit any monastery in childhood.

2. The younger interviewees would usually respond like ‘since I was a kid’ or ‘from my childhood’. Mostly, the surveyed ones would tell about their parents who used to bring their children to the temple. One unique situation is as follows: the person (born 1996) lived nearby the Tsechenling, and in her teen years she started volunteering there. Another young respondent (born 1999) had a chance to visit Ustuu-Khuree in Chadaana with parents when she was a child.

3. Other age groups or reasons. Two male respondents (born 1972 and 1993) called marriage as the reason for becoming more religious. Others consider it was due to their moving to Kyzyl from places with no temples. Two respondents (born 1988 and 1990) mentioned the start of their study in Tuvan State University in Kyzyl, the region’s capital town, where most Buddhist monasteries of Tuva are located. And there was one more answer — ‘after becoming a mother’ (born 1979).

The next question was ‘*How often do you visit the temple?*’ The answers led us to a conclusion that our respondents in general are not attending the monasteries systematically. For instance, some of the surveyed ones would tell they ‘come here at any chance’, but when asked to specify the exact cases — they struggled to answer. Least visiting temple respondents were the youngest ones (born 2005 and 2006): once or twice a year. As they explain, it usually happens in the beginning of an academic year and before the national holiday of *Shagaa*¹. Most people mentioned different situations when there was a need to visit a temple. For instance, one of the respondents (born 1979) stated that she is a very rare guest to the monastery, the reason for coming this time: her son graduated from high school and had to leave for Novosibirsk in a few days to start his university studies. Thus, mother wanted to ‘ask for help and luck, attend the prayer service to make his way ‘white’ [AFD 2024]. Those who could formulate the frequency of their monastery visits said

it happens twice a month (born 1957 and 1991), once a month (born 1971). The respondent who does not permanently live in Kyzyl complained that the habitants of her village (Samagaltai — *kozhuun*² center) rarely visit the temple, as a result it often occurs to be closed. One interviewee (born 1988) pointed out that there was a period when she used to visit the temple quite often, it was the time when her parents were seriously ill [AFD 2024].

The next several questions were aimed at attempting to reveal the essence of personal existential religious experience. All the surveyed individuals answered positively to the question if visiting the temple had an effect on their inner strength and pointed out: they usually felt blessed. More specific effects are relaxation, appropriation of inner peace, and tranquility. Some particular answers were as follows: ‘since I’m mother, I ask for my children’ (born 1977); ‘not really, what is more important than just coming to the temple — inner relations with higher powers’ (born 1979) [AFD 2024].

All the congregants agreed that visiting a temple could protect them from future life obstacles. The difference is only in the grade of assurance, still none of them responded negatively.

The last questions of this kind were as follows: ‘Could you, please, tell us, how you pray? Could you, please, share with us, if it is possible, what prayers you say? What you feel during the prayer?’

The respondents demonstrated quite an interesting variety of answers. Most ‘secular’ versions were as follows: ‘I think of my problems that I have today’ (born 1944); ‘I use my own words during the prayer, don’t know any mantras’ (born 2006); ‘Usually my prayers consist of my own words, but my wife knows many mantras’ (born 1972) [AFD 2024].

A little bit more ‘canonical’ respondents told us they use both improvised prayers (as mentioned above persons said: using ‘my own words’) and special mantras. As for the latter, most popular ones quite expectedly include ‘Om Mani Padme Hum’ and ‘Om Tare Tuttare Ture Swaha’, i. e. mantras of Avaloketishvara

¹ *Shagaa* — Tuvan version of Lunar New Year celebrations.

² *Kozhuun* is the administrative territorial unit of the Republic of Tuva. There are 17 *kozhuuns* in total.



Fig. 2. Statue of Green Tara in Thubten Shedrub Ling Temple. Kyzyl, 2024. Photo by Kh. Kadyg-ool
[Фото 2. Статуя Зеленой Тары в храме Тубтен Шедруб Линг. Кызыл, 2024 г. Фото Х. Кадыг-оол]

and Green Tara (see Fig. 2), respectively. One of the interviewees mentioned as mantra the traditional Tuvan prayer — ‘*orshee, Burgan, orshee!*’¹ (born 1999) [AFD 2024].

‘Advanced’ congregants read different deities’ mantras beside the mentioned ones: White Tara; Namzyrai (Tuvan name for Vaisravana, the ‘God’ of material wealth).

Some of the respondents informed that they repeat mantras 108 times a day and wake up early for that or use rosaries.

The respondents also varied in their descriptions of what they feel during the prayers or prayer services. Many of the surveyed ones mentioned that they close their eyes and hold their hands in special mudras². A few people stressed that they used no mudras during the prayers. Several answers include as follows: ‘during the prayer I feel the relation with the highest powers, lumpy throat, sometimes I suddenly get a strong headache’ (born 1957); ‘I feel hope, strength and peace’ (born 1981); ‘If it is a prayer in the temple and I stand in front of the God — in this case I hold my hands in a prayer gesture. I feel flickering and sincere’ (born 1979). There was one answer when the interviewee said that it was very private information (born 2002).

The respondents also pointed out that there could be various reasons for people to visit the temple, but the main motivation is linked with the need for help in overcoming the problems and protection. For instance, several respondents mentioned the current conflict in Ukraine. Three of the respondents were in a more philosophical mood, stating that people come to the sacred place for peace, getting answers to their questions and happiness.

From this point of view, it was interesting to compare the mentioned above answers with the information from lamas. They listed the most frequent questions of parishioners as follows: personal horoscope for the year; advice on where to study; well-being of the family; success in career or business; the health of close people; prosperity and abundance. Monks also specified that many relatives of the

soldiers participating in the Ukraine conflict regularly come to the daily pray services. Our experts also informed us that the most enthusiastic congregants are people aged 50–55 and more [AFD 2024].

4.2. Rituals

Rituals are an important part of the religiosity, particularly in traditional religious beliefs of Tuvans. For this work we use the following definition:

A religious ritual is any repetitive and patterned behavior that is prescribed by or tied to a religious institution, belief, or custom, often with the intention of communicating with a deity or supernatural power [George, Park 2013: 1648].

There is a well-known thesis that the specialty of religious development in Tuva is characterized by syncretism, and it is one of its most important features [Khomushku 2024: 31–35]. Accepting this thesis, we would also like to make an assumption that contemporary religious situation in Tuva should be considered from a more complex point of view. For instance, one of the authors (Kh. Kadyg-ool) in 2014 was a participant of a shamanistic ritual. It was held by a middle-aged shamaness. Noteworthy detail: before the main ritual there was a taromancy session, and what is even more unusual, the mentioned woman described the concept of Tarot cards as ancient, scientific-based knowledge. Another inquisitive ritual took place in 2017. It was also held by a shaman, male, about 35 years old, and was devoted to *Shagaa*. Before the ceremony he lashed out at Buddhism, compared monks to ordinary graduates of secular universities, they (monks) were accused of not having any divine power. Thus, in his opinion, they had no right to hold any sacred rituals³. Despite his criticism the shaman had an image of the Eight Auspicious Signs on the back part of his ritual gown.

The respondents were asked several questions concerning rituals: wedding, funeral and ceremonial attributes at their living places.

³ It should be noted, that this kind of rhetoric is noticeable in Tuvan segment of social network and messengers. For instance, this kind of posts are quite usual for the community “Töögü” (Tuv. History) in “Vkontakte” social network. Community link: https://m.vk.com/toogu_tuva.

¹ ‘Orshee’ means — ‘have mercy on me’, ‘Burgan’ — ‘God’.

² Mudra — a symbolic or ritual gesture or pose in Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism.

Weddings are most remarkable events in the life of traditional nomadic Tuvans. Non-married people were viewed as weird (both males and females) and sometimes even were not allowed to enter the yurt [Subbotin 2016: 162]. Eight respondents acknowledged that newlyweds should visit the temple at the wedding day. Others consider it is not necessary. What is more, the latter are convinced that nowadays visiting a temple on a wedding day has become just an ordinary action and the temple is considered as a vivid photo shooting location.

Respondents shared their opinions on funerals as follows. First of all, close relatives should go to the temple to ask for the sepulture day. Also, they mentioned the ritual of ‘opening’ the last sutra — *aldyn sava* (golden vase or bowl), that should be done in the monastery. Three respondents told that monks must help the souls of the dead reach the other world. Six interviewees used the notion — ‘the last path’. Seven respondents mentioned reincarnation (in different expressions). Five respondents were ‘not sure’ or ‘didn’t know’ [AFD 2024].

We asked respondents to list any deities they can remember. The results are shown in the diagram.

There was another question on deities, intentionally incorrect and provocative one, but interesting for the answers. The respondents admitted Green Tara and Buddha as the most ‘powerful’ (8 and 5 times, respectively) [AFD 2024]. We also need to point that more than half of the surveyed individuals found the question incorrect and inappropriate in terms of discussing the topic of deities. Parishioners’ sympathy for the deities is well-known to the monks, as during the expert interviews they mentioned the same ones: Buddha Shakyamuni and Green Tara [AFD 2024].

Twelve interviewees answered they had no altar in their living places. One of them informed that there was a small statue of Buddha ‘just among other decorations on a shelf in the living room’ [AFD 2024]. Others who did own an altar at their homes described it as consisting of images of Buddha, Green Tara and HH Dalai-Lama on the wall (see Fig. 3). They also mentioned statuettes, sutras and ceremonial items as well. Most unusual answer was that one of the respondents has a *photograph*

(emphasis added) of an altar (not of a concrete deity). The photo was a gift from a Mongolian lama. There is also the image of Maitreya on that picture, and as the respondent informed, the lama from Mongolia revealed the way how to worship that deity. Our conclusion on this notable issue is that this photo-altar as a religious phenomenon could be interpreted in postmodern sense. We consider this fact as one of the most important features of our research.

Three respondents informed that they never invited lama to their living place. One of them added that she used to invite shamans several times (born 1979). The others, who had invited monks into their houses, list the following reasons: *Shagaa*, to ‘clean’ the house and the road, set a protection, read ‘Altan Gerel’ (*Aldyn Kherel* in Tuvan) sutra. This is confirmed by our experts. Also, monks called *dagylga*¹ as one of the most popular rituals where ordinary believers usually invite lamas to.

Eight respondents said they had no Buddhist amulets. Others mentioned special red cords on the wrist. One interviewee said that his red cord decayed and was lost, so she did not get another one, because it was the sign that ‘danger was away’ [AFD 2024]. Others mentioned rosaries (prayer beads) and various types of bracelets. One of the respondents told about the golden figure of the Buddha on his neck (born 1993) and sutra in his truck (for cargo carriage business). He annually brings it to the temple for a special ritual to make it ‘alive’.

Lamas informed us, that there were really few ‘advanced’ Buddhists among the parishioners, i.e. ones able to meditate, know and study sacred texts, have personal gurus, strictly follow vows, go on pilgrimages. There are a number of congregants that regularly help with cleaning and other routine works in temples [AFD 2024].

5. Discussion and conclusions

The significant result of our preliminary research, in our opinion, is an indication of profound process of non-traditional, in some sense ‘next-level’ or even ‘postmodern’ religiosity (or

¹ *Dagylga* is the ritual of offering to the spirits of ancestors and master-spirits of different places. Family groups have sacred places for this ritual: river, *arzhaan* (mineral spring), shaman-tree and others.



Fig. 3. Altar in a private apartment. Kyzyl, 2024. Photo by D. Mongush
[Фото 3. Алтарь в частной квартире. Кызыл, 2024 г. Фото Д. Монгуш]

‘quasi’-religiosity) shaping with regional features. Factors, considered in this article, in our opinion, could represent a call for the formulated above thesis about the need for more complex religious studies in Tuva — it should definitely become an object of interdisciplinary research.

Many respondents’ answers in the previous section could be an argument for another thesis: parishioners lack deep knowledge of Buddhism in common, this fact is also confirmed by the lamas. As we conclude next, this situation (kind of religious ‘vacuum’) could be one of the reasons for the mentioned above non-traditional religiosity processes development in Tuva. We think that it is important to collect unique ‘individual religions’ of separate persons as much as possible. Of course, it does not imply any judgments from some ‘correct’ Buddhist (or any other traditional religions’) point of view.

Another potentially interesting field of research from this point of view is the influence of mass-media and mass-culture at whole on religiosity (or spirituality in common) of the Tuvan youth.

Полевые материалы автора

Настоящее исследование было проведено при финансовой поддержке Фонда содействия буддийскому образованию и исследованиям, проект «Экзистенциальные аспекты буддизма в повседневности жителей Тувы» (соглашение о предоставлении гранта № 17 от 17 июня 2024 г.). Интервью были проведены 25–27 августа 2024 г. в трех главных буддийских храмах Кызыла: Тубтен Шедруб Линг — самый большой буддийский храм в России, Цеченлинг — центральный буддийский храм Кызыла, Дамба Брайбулинг — небольшой храм местной буддийской организации. Респонденты: 22 верующих-мирянина и 3 монаха (интервью последних рассматриваются как экспертные заключения). Все материалы записаны, аудиозаписи и соответствующие стенограммы хранятся на персональных компьютерах авторов.

Источники

НА РТ — Национальный архив Республики Тува.

At the present level of religious development, Tuvan believers are probably in need of convenient and pretty clear religious ‘mechanics’, similar to magical thinking in some sense [Risen 2016]. We suppose this fact is implicitly acknowledged by the ‘popularity’ of Green Tara¹ (see Fig. 2). Several respondents shared their opinions (while answering on provocative question about who was the most powerful Buddhist deity) on divine powers of the mentioned deity as follows: ‘She is my protector’ (born 1971), ‘I know and believe that Green Tara helps instantly’ (born 1981), ‘I know Green Tara grants wishes in a moment’ (born 1999), ‘probably it is Green Tara, I pray more often to Her, because She helps quickly’ (born 1988) [AFD 2024]. If our assumption is mostly correct, this probably could be a serious obstacle for the formation of deeper interest in Buddhism as religion and philosophy among Tuvans. As we stressed in the introductory part to this article, religious studies in our region could never be superfluous, so there is still much to accomplish.

Author’s Field Data

AFD 2024 — The reported study was granted by Buddhist Education and Research Foundation, project name ‘Existential Aspects of Buddhism in Everyday Life of Tuva’s People’ (grant agreement no. 17 of 17 June 2024). Interviews were held on 25–27 August 2024. The work would start at about 11 a.m. in the three main Buddhist temples of Kyzyl: Thubten Shedrub Ling – the biggest Buddhist Temple in Russia, Tsechenling – Central Buddhist Temple in Kyzyl and Damba Braibuling – local Buddhist organization, minor temple. The respondents include a total of 22 believers and 3 monks, the latter’s interviews supposed to contain expert opinions. All the materials were recorded, audio recordings and corresponding transcripts stored on the authors’ personal computers.

Sources

NA RT — National Archive of the Republic of Tuva.

¹ Of course, we only imply people’s attitude to the mentioned deity.

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