

Buddhism and Buddhist Studies in Russia and Buryatia

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"A bibliographer knows by experience how easily materials escape the compiler's attention from his ignorance or carelessness..."

"A bibliography never ends, and is simply a beginning."

Akira YUYAMA¹

Department of Oriental manuscripts and xylographs of the Institute of Mongolian, Tibetan and Buddhist studies of the Siberian Branch of the Russian Academy of sciences (DOMX IMTBS SB RAS) started the elaboration of the project "Buddhism and Buddhist studies in Russia and Buryatia" which is aimed at compiling the electronic version of the bibliography on this subject.

The background of the project

In 1991 the public of Buryatia and Buddhist church marked the 250th anniversary since the recognition of Buddhism as one of the official religions of Russia along with Christianity which was considered to be a state religion. A number of events, both civil and religious, were dedicated to this occasion; several Buddhist monasteries were restored, some religious and cult objects were returned back to Buddhist temples, for example the Sandal Buddha. A scientific conference was held, its proceedings and abstracts were published. This was the time when the compilation of the Bibliography was started. It comprises the period of up to 1991 and is based on the draft typed version completed by the associates of the Buryat national library. Now we are developing its electronic version. The subject of Bibliography is general system of Buddhism.

The analysis of the literature on Buddhism evidences of the fact that it is extremely abundant and diverse, which is accounted for in the first place by a great volume of the buddhist canonical and noncanonic literature, as well as by a great number of mediaeval treatises on history, philosophy, logic and religious practice of Buddhism which had been written in various oriental languages by dozens of thousands of people for many centuries. This legacy, its study by the scholars form up the object of the Bibliography.

The historical and social aspect of the subject of the study, i.e. Buddhism, is also quite sophisticated due to the diverse and complicated nature in which Buddhism displays itself in the social and political life of oriental countries. In many "buddhist" countries the moral aspect of the buddhist doctrine represents one of the most important aspects of philosophical, political, juridical life, but the influence of Buddhism and buddhist communities is not only restricted to the spiritual sphere but it penetrates many other social and political institutions of the countries of the South, South-East and East Asia. The number of publications which analyze or comment on the various aspects of Buddhism and comprise almost all the areas of humanities is quite enormous, nevertheless there are

¹The need for Systematic Bibliographies in Buddhist Sanskrit Philology // Journal of the Institute of Chinese Studies of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1972, vol. 5, no. 2, p. 339.

still many problems to be investigated in future. Moreover the works of historiographical character highlighting the general state of art are also lacking. Unfortunately the present state of science does not stimulate the joint efforts of buddhologists. In fact there is no exchange of information on the researches carried on and the works published.

Outlines of the History of Buddhism

In Europe systematic and large-scale buddhological studies started from the middle of the XIX th century when the main canonical texts of the southern Buddhism were introduced into academic turnover and there emerged their translations in the English language in the series of “Sacred texts of the Buddhists” and “Sacred books of the East”, which served as resources for further broad and diverse studies.

In Russia academic Buddhist studies began from the middle of the XIX th century. Already by the end of the century the Russian buddhological school had won international prestige. With the discovery of the buddhist manuscripts in Central Asia in the beginning of the XX th century a new stage in the study of Buddhism began. The Central Asian, Sak and Uigur buddhist texts with their Chinese and Tibetan translations have been published. The international series “Bibliotheca Buddhica” founded in Russia by S.F. Oldenburg and F.I. Tsherbatsky became the center of buddhist studies which attracted the greatest scholars of the world L. de La Vallee Poussin, Max Walleiser, Sylvan Levi and others. Beginning with 1897 and up to 1937 the most important buddhist texts in Sanskrit, Tibetan and Uigur on buddhist philosophy, logic, etc. were printed in 30 volumes within this series. In 1960 V.N.Toporov published the translation of “Dhammapada”, which became the 31st volume, and A.I.Vostrikov’s book “The Tibetan historical literature” - the 32nd. Many of the works published, particularly on buddhist logic, have been regarded unsurpassed. In the enormous volume of buddhological works the quantitative contribution of the Russian scientists is rather modest, but their qualificative aspect is of high value. In 1985 with the publication of the “Monuments of the Indian texts from Central Asia” by G.M.Bongard-Levin and M.I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya the edition of this series was continued. Later on a few other publications appeared. Among them one can mention the study and the translation from Sanskrit of the 1st part of the “Abhidharmakosa” done by V.I.Rudoï (BB, vol. 35), the translation from the Pali of the “The questions of Milinda” (Milindapanhi) carried out by A.V. Paribok (BB, vol. 36) and also the publication of the work by the Chinese author Huei Tsyao “Biographies of the distinguished monks” (Gao sen chuan) carried out by M.E.Ermakov (vol. 38).

At present Buddhism is studied at the research centers in Moscow, St.-Petersburg and Tartu, as well as in Ulan-Ude, Elista and Kyzyl. The buddhologists in Moscow concentrate their efforts on the role of the Buddhist cult as well as the place and role of Buddhism in social and political life of Asian countries, and its influence on the culture and traditions of oriental peoples.

In St.-Petersburg scholars are mainly engaged in deciphering ancient Indian inscriptions and textological researches in the field of Buddhist art and old Uigur, Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese texts and treatises.

In the buddhological studies which were pursued mainly in the field of sinology and indology notable achievements have been made, whereas in the field of Tibetan and Mongolian studies the scope of research has not been so wide. Nevertheless all the buddhological studies are closely interrelated. A

great many texts in the Tibetan language translated from Sanskrit are accessible now though their original texts in Sanskrit have been lost. Therefore the value of the Tibetan texts becomes all the more significant.

The fact that in Russia there is the living tradition of the Tibetan Buddhism, spread among Buryats, Kalmycks and Tyvanians, greatly contributed to the development of Tibetan and Mongolian studies and within their frame to the buddhological studies. Though one should state quite precisely that implied in this case is the study of a modern European type. In the buddhist monasteries there was their own system of study of Buddhism owing to which we dispose at present of a large layer of the written legacy of the peoples of Central Asia in Tibetan and Mongolian which is the main resource for buddhist studies and is an independent object for study within our other projects.

Buddhism in Buryatia

Buryatia is one of the Buddhist regions of Central Asia and South Siberia, which was the extreme point of the spread of Buddhism northwards. The Buryats were and still are the largest Buddhist population in Russia. The Buryats, Kalmycks and the Tyvanians are the three Buddhist nationalities in Russia historically belonging to the common Mongolian spiritual realm and to the Tibetan and Mongolian cultural and religious tradition of the great Central Asian civilization.

Tibetan religious and cultural influence has been playing up to now an important role in the culture and history of these peoples.

In the second half of the XVII th century Buryats were incorporated into Russia. Beginning from 1727 when the treaty determining the borders between Russia and Manju-Chinese empires was signed the Buryats started the official development within the Russian state².

In the tsarist Russia, where Orthodoxy was the predominant state religion, Buddhists' activities were subjected to certain restrictions. Buddhist monks (lamas) were made dependent on the local police and were subordinated to the chief provincial board. The Regulations for the lamaist clergy, introduced in 1853, made legal the despotic reign of tsarist officials. The latter made the most important assignments concerning even the clerical posts; in official documents the Buddhists were called "the followers of the alien belief" (inoversti) and the religious problems of the buddhist were the concern of a special Department for foreign religions.

Nevertheless Buddhism that began spreading among Buryats in 17th century became an essential and significant element of social, spiritual and material life of most of Buryat ethnic groups, has played a great role in their political and spiritual consolidation.

This process of consolidation was stimulated by the formation of a centralized system of the Buryat buddhist religious administrative structure. With the increase of the number of Buddhist temples their

² Now Buryatia occupies a vast territory in the Trans-Baikal region covering over 350 thousand square km. According to the 1989 Census the Buryat population in the former USSR was about 421 600 people, including people living in neighboring regions. Also, a few groups of the Buryats live in Mongolia and in Chinese People's Republic. The total population of the Buryat Republic is 1.038.252. Among them the Russians - 726.165, the Buryats - 249.525, the Ukrainians - 22.868, the Tatars - 10.496, the Evenks - 1600, etc.

role in social and economic life of the Buryat society was constantly growing. At the beginning Buddhist monasteries were the centers not only of culture and learning, but in fact they became moral and ethical regulators of everyday life of Buryat families. Buddhism stimulated the formation of the nation's intellectual potential. There appeared different monastic educational faculties with many learned monks and scholars. Among them we can mention Agvan Dorjiev (1857-1930), one of the tutors of the 13th Dalai Lama, who was his representative at the Russian court and played a great role in the international political life, establishing various relations between Tibet and Russia. By the beginning of the century Buddhism has become quite strong and this caused the anxiety on the part of the Christian church. In order to adapt the Buddhist teaching and church to the rapidly developing and changing world A. Dorjiev and some prominent Buryat scholars initiated a modernization movement among Buddhist clergy and intellectuals, proclaiming the necessity of combining the Buddhist philosophy with the best achievements of Western culture and civilization. The movement has gained a wide scope in Buryatia. It was due to the fact of mutual interest of both: the Buddhist clergy wanted to preserve somehow the church by means of modification, whereas local intelligentsia regarded Buddhist ideas as a cultural and social basis for the further national development after being freed from pagan elements. Though "modernists" played an important role in national liberation movement of Buryats and promoted national and cultural Autonomy of Buryats within the Russian Federation and establishing of the Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Republic after the revolution, still the movement was doomed to failure because it was unrealistic to expect gaining self-administration for Buryat people by means of religious reforms and revival of national culture neither before the revolution nor after it. The attempt of "modernists" to emphasize similarity of ideas in Marxism and early Buddhism also failed. This movement is all the more noteworthy because no comparable developments took place in Tibetan Buddhism until after the confrontation with Chinese communism in 1949.

By 1935 in Buryatia there were about 45 or 46 Buddhist temples and monasteries.

Antireligious and atheistic policy of the Soviet government was the reason of a complete annihilation of all the Buddhist churches and the clergy. As a result of it nowadays we face the break of cultural and historical links between the generations and the breaking of spiritual and ethic succession of traditions, the loss of the indigenous script. This is vividly testified by the bibliography. During these years buddhological researches in Buryatia gave the foremost attention to atheistic education, critical analyses of social role of lamaist church in the history of Buryat society.

Now we witness the active process of Buddhist restoration and revival, Buddhist temples are being built practically anew. But the process of reviving of spiritual values appears to be more difficult and complicated, because the loss of spiritual and ethic succession of traditions between the generations can't be restored.

Buddhist Studies in Buryatia

1991 was the year when 250 years ago the Russian government has officially recognized the Buryat Buddhist church and gave some privileges to its clergy. Of course, this is a short historical period in the general history of a nation. But it revealed the fact that we don't know much about the early history, the first steps of Buddhist dissemination on the territory of Buryatia. We don't have enough materials and sources for studying this period of history, that the primary sources written in classic Mongolian script have not yet been studied and translated. This was a result of the fact that the

history, development and problems of Buryat Buddhism in the former USSR were of interest only for a relatively small group of professionals.

Buddhological researches in Buryatia have ancient traditions going back to Russian classic oriental studies. They have received a new stimulus with the appearance in 1967 of a special department of Buddhist studies at the former Institute of social sciences, now Institute of Mongolian, Tibetan and Buddhist studies. The scholars of the Department and of the Institute have published a series of monographs and collected works devoted to various aspects of Buryat Buddhism, such as its cult structure and its special features in Buryatia, interrelationship of Buddhism with traditional Central Asian beliefs, the process of Buddhist assimilation of ancient Mongolian, Buryat and Tibetan beliefs, the influence of Buddhism on spiritual culture of these peoples, the role of Buddhist church in different historical periods, Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist art, Buddhist literature, critical study of different Buddhist written sources, their translation and publication, etc. Buddhological researches include not only Buryat Buddhism, but the whole Central and Eastern Asian regions and are carried on the basis of different oriental languages.

Buddhist Bibliography

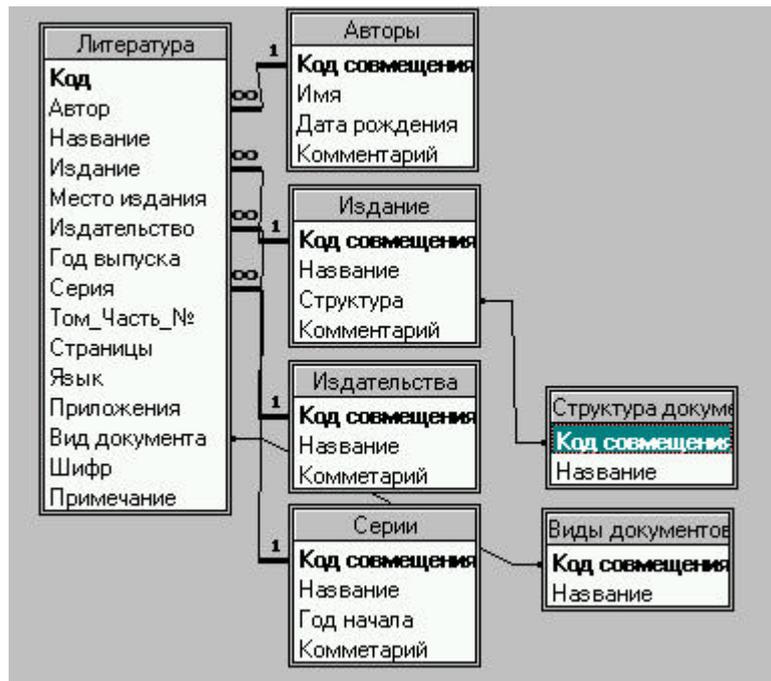
Now we are working out a number of electronic resources that are aimed at upgrading Oriental Studies in Buryatia. These include several projects on cataloging archives, Tibetan and Mongolian collections of the DOMX, subject bibliographies on Buryat ethnography (this one has been presented for the 1998 PNC meeting) and the Bibliography under discussion.

Bibliography on Buddhism and Buddhist Studies in Russia and Buryatia presents the works on Buddhism published during 1737-1991 in Russia. The draft version of the Bibliography includes about 2,500 items. Among them there are monographs, articles and papers printed in different periodicals and collected works. All of them are now being input into computer. Electronic Buddhist Bibliography is supposed to be published on-line during the year 1999. Of course, it will be further developed.

The database provides easy and convenient access to resources it contains. Its structure has been developed for supplying more related information and services than any printed or card catalog can give. For example, there are additional tables that contain extensive information on authors, periodicals, publishing houses, thematic series. It provides also subject systematization.

The relational model of the database is shown on the Fig. 1.

RUSSIAN BUDDHIST BIBLIOGRAPHY RELATIONAL MODEL



The prototype of the database is being developed in MS Access. After completing data input, creating queries it is supposed to move to one of the database server, for example MS SQL Server.

The database will provide following search features:

- subject
- specific publication by the following fields: title, year of publication, language of publication, document type, document code
- author name
- publishing house
- periodical
- series

This Bibliography will be a resource component of the Buryat Regional Orientalist Information Center built on the methodology of EurAsian Orientalist Server of the Institute of Oriental Studies of RAS. The BROIC is a developed version of the project of Buryat PNC Information Center which was delivered at the last PNC meeting. This BROIC project is in the process of formation. It will integrate all our activities in Oriental Studies.