

## **Ivolginsky Datsan**

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Ivolginsky Datsan (Russian: Иволгинский Дацан) is the Buddhist monastery, Buryatia, 23 km from Ulan Ude, near Verkhnyaya Ivolga village.

It is believed that already from the 2nd century BCE, proto-Mongol people (the Xiongnu, Xianbei, and Khitans) living on the territory of nowadays Ivolginsk, were familiar with Buddhism. Namely on the territory of the Ivolginsk Settlement, remains of Buddhist prayer beads were found in a Xiongnu grave (nomadic people who inhabited the eastern Asian Steppe from the 3rd century BC to the late 1st century AD.)

At the end of the 17th to the beginning of the 18th centuries, Buddhism spread throughout the Transbaikal region. The highest development period for Buryatian Buddhism has been considered from the second half of the 19th century until the 1930s.

After communist revolution in 1917, between 1927 and 1938, all 47 datsans that existed in Buryatia and Transbaikalia were closed or destroyed. Highly learned lamas were sent to prison or were simply shot to death without any trial.

Shortly after the world war II, Stalin allowed a host of Buryat lamas, those who survived the purges of the 1930s, to resume the performance of Buddhist rites though on a very limited scale, under the strict control of the state officials and, of course, under constant KGB surveillance.

In 1945, the Ivolginsky Datsan was opened as the only Buddhist Spiritual centre of USSR. Several years later the Aginsky datsan resumed operations. In the course of time Ivolginsky datsan changed into the monastic centre with a residence of Pandido Khambo lama, the leader of all Russian Lamas.

According to the Soviet legislation, it was only in these two places that the Russian Buddhists were allowed to practice their religion, and any religious propaganda was officially forbidden.

The Buddhist Sangha in Buryatia was officially reinstated in May 1946 on the initiative of a group of senior monks and laymen headed by two former members of the Central Spiritual Board,

lamas H. Galsanov and L.N. Darmaev. Like its predecessor, the body found itself in the firm grip of the state, and was used as a convenient tool for Soviet propaganda abroad.

The soviet period of Buddhism in Buriatya and USSR is not much researched until today. Few articles in the English -speaking world have focused on the miracle of Hambo Lama Itigelov ( The Living Dead Buddha) whose body is kept currently in Ivolginsky Datsan but generally all informative sources skip the period from 1945 to 1991, after what powerful Buddhist revival movement started due to the the collapse of the USSR.

The soviet period of the Buryat Buddhism and the life stories of heroic lamas who lived their whole life according to the Buddhist principles, need to be preserved for future generations.

In my presentation I will focus on two decades of the Ivolginsky Datsan (the 70s and 80s). How was given permission to build a Buddhist Datsan and how was selected the place for Datsan; who were these old generation Buryat lamas who had survived from prisons and came to Ivolga and started to build up Buddhist Sangha again.

Because of Soviet control, some Buddhist activities were kept secret, and the general public never heard of such activities because public exposure would have also been bad for the Ivolga monastery. One of such issues was teaching non-Buryat students in Ivolga.

An Estonian Buddhist, Vello Vaartnou, studied from 1976-1987 under the guidance of a number of teachers of Ivolga monastery including a famous doctor-lama Ven Munko Tsybikov and Ven Zhimba Erdineev, and is a rare example of a non-Buryat student at this period.

In my proposed article, I introduce the life stories of two Hambo lamas, Ven Zhimba Erdineev ( Hambo lama from 1982-1989) and Ven Munko Tsybikov (Hambo lama from 1989 -1982)

My interview with Vello Vaartnous cast a brief glance at everyday life and studies in Ivolginsky Datsan, and the old-time events/stories told by the elder lamas to Vaartnou.

Keywords: Ivolginsk, Buddhism, Buryatia, Vaartnou, monastery

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