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Review of the Avtoreferat of N. V. Tsyrempilov's dissertation entitled 'Gosudarstvo I buryatskaya buddiiskaya obshchina Rossiiskoi imperii v XVIII – nach. XX v.' submitted for the academic degree of Doctor of Historical Sciences in the speciality of history of the fatherland 07.00.02.

When Buddhism achieved the status of state religion in Maurya India during the reign of Emperor Ashoka (3rd century BC) this religion came into contact with the state at the imperial level. During the following centuries Buddhist monks served as advisors and official teachers in the court of various Asian monarchs, such as the Tang rulers of China. However, in the case of Russia Buddhism found itself in a situation that was in principle different, with an alien cultural environment, and Buddhist priests had to work hard in order to survive in these conditions. On the other hand, Russia, as a state with an Orthodox formation developed in the context of the contiguity of Christianity with Islam, came across a completely different culture in the XVII century in the Zhungarian steppes and in Trans-Baikalia. Here the Russians had to deal with the different set of values of Mahayana Buddhism and find ways of communicating with the bearers of this other paradigm. The complex academic questions thus arising, concerning the forms of Buddhist adaptation to Russia, as well as the state policy of Russia towards Buddhism, are the themes covered by the research of Nikolai Tsyrempilov. There can be no doubt Tsyrempilov's study of Russia's direct contact on its frontiers with the massive, densely populated, world of Pax Buddhica is a theme relevant to the actualities of the present day.

How does the candidate address these issues? Few scholars have attempted the task up to now – perhaps the most authoritative is the work of K. M. Gerasimova in her monograph 'Lamaizm v Buryatii XVIII – nach. XX v' published in 1982 in Novosibirsk. Researchers, including Western scholars, working on Buddhism in Russia in recent decades have mostly based themselves on this work. To make a contribution beyond this work is not easy, but Tsyrempilov has successfully done so. For a start, his work is based on a wider set of sources. He has analysed materials from all the main Russian archives containing data relevant to the Buddhists of Eastern Siberia (RGADA, RGIA, and others). Besides this, he has made use of the unique documents to be found in the archive of Galsan Gomboev, which is kept in Buryatia. These documents, which relate to the earliest and least studied period of the Buddhism in Russia, have not up to now come under analysis by specialists in the history of Buddhism.

Secondly, Nikolai Tsyrempilov has actively used Buryat historiography, and in doing so he not only sought historical facts that might be useful but also took into account the perspective of the authors as their own system of reading, without trying to evaluate it from the outside or give an 'objective' judgment. For scholars all such

sources are equally valuable, and all opinions and perspectives should be taken into account.

Thirdly, I would like to note that Nikolai Tsyrempilov has used advanced methodology for his research. For example, the research has rejected the regional approach, in which a given ethnic group or religious community is seen as isolated and separate from its ethnic or religious 'metropolis'. In Tsyrempilov's work, the term 'interaction' (*vzaimodeistviya*) is crucial. This word appears throughout the dissertation and expresses its primary approach: to understand the logic of all of the various participants and to understand the history of Buddhist communities in Russia not as a phenomenon but as a process.

The dissertation research of the author concerns various aspects of the life and activities of Buryat Buddhist communities, but an additional topic running through the text is the long and complex history of the judicial status of these communities in the Russian Empire. This is one of the main contributions of the thesis, as before now no one has addressed these questions in such a detailed and fundamental way. Nikolai Tsyrempilov analysed the contents of eight such judicial projects and their historical continuity. The juridical base is an excellent topic for research, since it can show clearly the above-mentioned interaction, so central to the author's methodological approach.

However, the dissertation is not limited to the analysis of judicial systems. Other important aspects of the activities of Buddhism communities are also addressed. For example, the author provides valuable ideas concerning the centralization of the *sangha*, the establishment of the title of the head of the Buddhist organization (Khambo-Lama), the publication of Buddhist texts, religious schooling and the lives of monks. He shows convincingly how the spiritual-administrative leadership of the Buddhists in Russia lost interest in contacts with foreign Buddhists and pushed the Russian administration to take decisive action in this sphere. Another very strong chapter in the dissertation concerns the place of Buddhism in the Russian Orthodox image of the world. The author presents the complex picture of constant quarreling within the Russian administrative apparatus about Lamaism and the many attempts of the Orthodox hierarchy to influence the situation. The author observes that the main reason for the stability of the status of Buddhism in Russia was the foreign policy interests of the Empire in the countries of the Buddhist world.

Nikolai Tsyrempilov's dissertation is a fundamental work of exceptional academic quality, which will contribute immensely to our understanding of the relation between religion and the state. More specifically, Tsyrempilov is at the world forefront of the study of the history of Buddhism in Russia in the imperial period. I consider that he certainly deserves the award of Doctor of Historical Sciences (with the speciality 'fatherland history').



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