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Transbaikalian Buddhism in Christian perspective: cognitive patterns of the Catholic and Protestant observers¹

Development of Tibetan Buddhism in the Transbaikal

Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism of Gelug-pa (*ge-lug-pa*, *dge-lugs-pa* which means “system of virtue” or *nag-pa*, which means “insider”) tradition became an important religious and cultural tradition of the Russian Transbaikal beginning in the eighteenth century. It was brought to Eastern Siberia by the Tibetan and Mongolian lamas-missionaries supported by the last Chinese Qing Dynasty – Gelug-pa Buddhist followers themselves. Rapid spread of the new tradition, called in the past and also described as “Lamaistic Buddhism”, “Lamaism”, “Dalai-Lamaism”, “Yellow Sect” or “Yellow Hats”, caused several concerns for the Russian authorities, both local, East Siberian, and central in St. Petersburg².

Russian authorities consequently had attempted to control organizational structures and development in the Siberian borderland. Tsarina Elizabeth (Elizaveta Petrovna) established an autonomous, separate from Tibetan and Mongolian structure with the Khambo-Lama, supervisor of the Russian Buddhists. Legal regulations of the nineteenth

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Transliteration of Russian names according to *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 16th edition.

² Collective work of G. R. Galdanova, K. M. Gerasimova, D. B. Dashiev, G. Ts. Mitunov, *Lamaizm v Buriatii XVIII-nachala XX veka: struktura i sotsialnaia rol kulturoi sistemy*, V. V. Mantatov (ed.), Novosibirsk, Izd-vo “Nauka” Sibirskoe otd-nie 1983, p. 17-18.

century, starting with Speranskii's Statute of 1822, through *Polozhenie o lamaiskom dukhovenstve Vostochnoi Sibiri* ("Regulation about Lamaist clergy") of 1853, issued by the governor – general of Eastern Siberia Nikolai N. Muravev (from 1858 with a title Amurskii), proved continuity of the state policies: religious tolerance on the one hand, and full state control over religious organizations. It was also a constant reminder of being an internal issue of the Russian Empire, not a subject of international relations.

On April 17, 1905, during the revolution, tsar Nikolai II issued the Tolerance Law³. The Ukase gave more religious freedom to religions and religious organizations throughout the whole Empire, most significantly repealing the law that had made it a criminal offense to renounce membership in the state religion, Orthodox Christianity, and the Russian Orthodox Church. For hundreds of baptized indigenous people in the Transbaikal, mostly Buriat Mongols, it meant a new chance to make a choice between religions. The Ukase of Toleration of 1905 caused a mass exodus of the Buriats from the Russian Orthodox Christianity and a return to Tibetan Buddhism. National revival, even growth of nationalism among Buddhist Buriats, created a new ethno-religious and cultural situation in the region.

During the nineteenth century, the number and importance of Buddhist monasteries of the Transbaikal was constantly growing. From 1807 the shiretujs (supervisors) of Gelug-nor in Mongolian and Gusimoozerskii or Tamchinskii in Russian datsan acted as the Pandito-Khambo-Lamas, the head of the Transbaikal Buddhists. As a central datsan, Gusinozersk became a tourist attraction from the first decades of the nineteenth century. It was famous for its splendid architecture of temples, the main three stored and seventeen smaller one-stored with *sume* (a kind of a chapel consecrated to a special deity), an extensive library with Tibetan and Mongolian religious literature, and was also populated by some hundred lamas both trained and in training⁴.

Numerous descriptions of the datsan, its high-ranking lamas, and especially Khambo-Lama, were published by travelers from European countries and the United States often visiting Gusinozersk. They frequently expressed a great interest in the most famous place in the Transbaikal, their fascination with its weird and wonderful religious architecture, interior decorations, sculptures, and ceremonies. For Western

³ *Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossiiskoi Imperii*, t. XXV, c. 1: 1905. St Peterburg 1908, p. 257-262: no. 26125. Aprela 17, *Imennoi Vysochaishii ukaz, dannyi Senatu, Ob ukreplenii nachal veroterpimosti*, Ukaz was followed by the other. Eg. no. 26480, Iiun 25, 1905, *Ob oblegcheniu uchasti lits, osuzhdennykh za religioznyiia prestuplenia*. Ibidem, t. XXV, c. 2, pp. 559-561.

⁴ A. M. Pozdneev, *Religion and Ritual in Society: Lamaist Buddhism in the late 19th century Mongolia*, J. Krueger (ed.), A. L. Raum (trans.), Bloomington 1978, p. 64-65. Pozdneev describes the architecture: "The Mongols themselves divide their temples into two different kinds: temples of Tibetan type, and temples of Chinese type. The idol-temples of the first type are in most cases square or a bit oblong from west to east; they are almost always of one story". Pozdneev describes *sume* as a prayer temple. See: V. V. Mantatov (ed.), Collective work of G. R. Galdanova, K. M. Gerasimova, D. B. Dashiev, G. Ts. Mitunov, *Lamaizm v Buriatii XVIII-nachala XX veka: struktura i sotsialnaia rol kultovoi sistemy*, op. cit., pp. 55-57.

visitors Gusinoozerskii datsan was a symbolic entrance to the exotic Asian religious culture after passing Christian Russian Siberia.

In 1846 there were 34 datsans and 144 temples with *sume* inside them in the area around Lake Baikal. With constantly growing number of clergy, called lamas, colorful religious festivals, educational centers and hospitals promoting traditional Tibetan medicine, Transbaikalian datsans became a popular destination for Western newcomers, political exiles, explorers, scholars, and travelers, as well as Christian Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant clergy.

In 1891 the Grand Duke Nicholas Alexandrovich, future Emperor Nicholas II, visited the Atsagatskii datsan, one of the Transbaikalian datsans, and was welcomed by a crowd of Buddhist clergy with its shiretui and the future Khambo-Lama Choinzon-Dorzhi Iroltuev. This short, but highly publicized visit increased public interest in the region and its culture. A few years after Grand Duke's visit, several magnificent and luxurious editions that were published in several languages, contained not only documents presenting the itinerary and correspondence of the Grand Duke, but also impressive photographic documentation by Vladimir Mendeleev⁵.

Catholic and Protestant encounters with Tibetan Buddhism: sources of information or evidentiary support

Sources of information considering Catholic and Protestant perception of the Transbaikalian Buddhism are prolific with diverse quantity and quality of information. There are letters, journals, memoirs, travelogues, as well as articles published in the newspapers, and even novels or adventure books for teenagers. Two publications by the American journalist and traveler of the second half of the nineteenth century, Thomas Wallace Knox could illustrate differences in presentation of two literary genres. Knox

⁵ E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Puteshestvie na Vostok Ego Impertatorskago Vysochestva Gosudaria Nasliednika Tsasarevicha 1890-1891*. Avtor-izdatel'. kn. E. E. Ukhtomskii; illiustriroval N. N. Karazin. S. Peterburg, Leiptsig, F. A. Brokgauz, 1893-1897; Esper Esperovich Ukhtomskii, *Travels in the East of his Imperial Majesty Czar Nicholas II of Russia, when cesarewitch 1890-1891*. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company; Edinburgh, T. and A. Constable, 1896-1900 in one volume; E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Travels in the East of Nicholas II, emperor of Russia, when cesarewitch, 1890-1891*. Written by order of His Imperial Majesty and translated from the Russian by R. Goodlet, Sir G. Birdwood (eds.) London, A. Constable & Co., 1896-1900. 2 vol.; see E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Orientreise Seiner kaiserlichen Hoheit des grossfuersten-thronfolgers Nikolaus Alexandrowitsch von Russland, 1890-1891, verfasst von Fürst E. Uchtomskij; aus dem russischen uebersetzt von Dr. Hermann Brunnhofer*, Leipzig, F.A. Brockhaus 1894; E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Voyage En Orient De Son Altesse Impériale Le Césarevitch: Grèce, Égypte, Inde, 1890-1891, Prince E.-E. Oukhtomsky; Traduction De Louis Leger; Préf. De A. Leroy-Beaulieu, Illustré De 178 Compositions De N.-N. Karazine*. Paris, C. Delagrave 1893, one volume; E. E. Ukhtomskii, *Voyage en Orient, 1890-1891: de son altesse imperiale le Cesarevitch*, vo. 2, Paris, Librairie Charles Delagrave 1893-1898. See: D. Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the rising sun: Russian ideologies of empire and the path to war with Japan*. DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press 2001, p. 15-23, 42-60.

in his memoir from travel describing his observations included personal remark, thoughts, and perception⁶. In his second publication, where genre was changed to adventurous travelogue for teenagers, he included rather concise information of encyclopedic character⁷. These narratives were published in several languages, mostly in Russian, English, French, German, and Polish or were translated to these languages.

The authors of reports found themselves in Eastern Siberia in various circumstances. Among Protestants visiting Eastern Siberia from the eighteenth century to the Bolshevik Revolution there were both Russian subjects from the Baltic area, and Westerners employed by the Russian government. They were members of the official exploratory expeditions organized by the Russian government including researchers of various disciplines like geography, cartography, geology, biology, archeology, ethnography, as well as highly qualified professionals like engineers, physicians, army officers etc.

Another large group included tourists, journalists, and writers, who wrote about their impressions and published them. Protestant visitors during usually very brief or occasionally prolonged encounters with the Buddhists noted "typical" events, practices, reactions, or behavior, then made their observations stereotypical images from their own perspective. A group of travelers who came for a very short time was represented by George Kennan who spent just one day in Gusinozerskii Datsan in 1886. Others, like Adolph Erman or Henry Lansdell spent several weeks or days in the Transbaikal. 21-year-old German, Adolf Erman who embarked on a journey from Berlin in the spring of 1827 reached Eastern Siberia and the Transbaikal in 1829 and 1830 and spent several weeks there. Anglican minister Henry Lansdell visited Irkutsk and spent several days in the Transbaikal in 1879 mainly distributing copies of the translation of the Christian Scriptures in Russian, French, German, Polish, and "with certain portions of the Old Testamen for the Buriats in Mongolian"⁸.

⁶ T. W. Knox, *Overland through Asia. Pictures of Siberian, Chinese, and Tartar Life*, Hartford, Chicago, American publishing company, F. S. Gilman & co. 1870; reprint: T. W. Knox, *Overland through Asia*, New York, Arno Press, 1970. See: A. Peck, *Polskie ślady w relacji z podróży po Syberii Thomasa Wallace'a Knoxa. Materiały, "Przegląd Wschodni"*, 1994, t. III, no 2 (10), p. 271-279.

⁷ T. W. Knox, *The boy travellers in the Russian empire: adventures of two youths in a journey in European and Asiatic Russia, with accounts of a tour across Siberia, voyages on the Amoor, Volga, and other rivers, a visit to Central Asia, travels among the exiles, and a historical sketch of the Empire from its foundation to the present time*, New York, Harper & brothers, 1887, pp. 348: "Buddhism is of comparatively recent origin among these people. Two hundred years ago they were Shamans, or worshippers of good and evil spirits, principally the latter, and in this respect differed little from the wild tribes of the Amoor and of Northern Siberia. About the end of the seventeenth century the Bourriats sent a mission to Lassa, the religious capital of Thibet, and a stronghold of Buddhism. The members of this mission were appointed lamas, and brought back the paraphernalia and ritual of the new faith; they announced it to the people, and in an astonishingly short time the whole tribe was converted, and has remained firm ever since".

⁸ A. Erman, *Reise um die Erde durch Nord-Asien und die beiden Oceane in den Jahren 1828, 1829 und 1830 ausgeführt*, Berlin, G. Reimer, 1841; the English edition: A. Erman, *Travels in Siberia: Including Excursions Northwards, Down the Obi, to the Polar Circle, and Southwards to the Chinese Frontier*, Philadelphia 1850; see H. Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, New York, Arno Press 1970, v. 1, p. 7. First three editions were published in London and Boston in 1882.

In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the largest Catholic group in Eastern Siberia was Polish and Lithuanian political exiles, mostly males from impoverished nobility, intelligentsia, and even Catholic clergy. Often after serving their time as prisoners they settled in the Transbaikal, developing business or personal relationships with local people. In a situation of exile they faced problems of psychological adjustment related to culture shock. These exiles perceived Tibetan Buddhism differently than European and American visitors, businessmen, Imperial servicemen, journalists, travelers-adventurers, or tourists of both Catholic and Protestant background, who came to the Transbaikal for a short time, sometimes for just few days.

Construction of the Trans-Siberian railway initiated a new era, making traveling very comfortable, attractive, and faster. Transbaikalian Buddhist monasteries and the exotic culture of Asian religious tradition became an accessible tourist attraction for both Western Europeans and Americans. Guidebooks, such as the meticulously prepared publication *Official Guide to the Great Siberian Railway* encouraged wealthy and middle class travelers and tourists. The Ministry of Transportation published luxurious editions in several languages, not only in Russian, but also in English, French, and German⁹. It especially advertised attractions offered by the Transbaikalian native peoples and the Buddhist culture. Western European and American tourists initiated a new stage of short encounters, resulting in superficial reports, based on information from the guidebooks and purchased postcards with photographs of Khambo-Lama, other high-ranking lamas, and ceremonies at the monasteries.

Another group of sources constitute published materials whose authors were Protestant and Catholic clergy and missionaries. Current-day scholars frequently express their reservations and criticisms toward the quality and validity of these reports, taking issue with the Western and Christian prejudices that critics feel dominate these missionaries' perceptions of the "Other." According to these scholars, Colonial and imperialist ideologies significantly influenced Christian missionaries' activities and understanding of the world¹⁰. While this may be true, ignoring missionaries' perceptions of the Buddhism they encountered is a mistake. Indeed, these missionaries' cultural

⁹ A. I. Dmitriev-Mamonov, A. S. Zdziarski, *Ot Volgi Do Velikago Okeana: Putevoditel Po Velikoi Sibirskoi Zheleznoi Dorogie S Opisaniem Shilko-Amurskago Vodnago Puti i Manchzhurii*, s 3 Fototipiiami, 120 Foto-Tipografiami i Kartoiu Putei Soobshcheniia Rossiiko Imperii (От Волги До Великаго Океана : Путеводитель По Великой Сибирской Железной Дорогѣ С Описаніем Шилко-Амурскаго Воднаго Пути И Манчжуріи, С 3 Фототипіями, 120 Фото-Типографіями И Картою Путей Сообщенія Россійскою Имперію). S.-Peterburg, T-vo khudozh, Pechati 1900; A. I. Dmitriev-Mamonov and A. F. Zdziarski (ed.), *Official Guide to the Great Siberian Railway*. Published by the Ministry of Ways of Communication, John Marshall (trans.), Miss L. Kukol-Yasnopolsky, St. Petersburg, Artistic Printing Society 1900; A. I. Dmitriev-Mamonov, A. F. Zdziarskij, P. Tacchella, *Guide Du Grand Chemin De Fer Trans-Sibérien: Contenant 2 Phototypies, 363 Photo-Typogravures, 4 Cartes De La Sibérie Et 3 Plans De Villes*. Saint-Petersbourg, Société d'impression artistique 1900; A. I. Dmitriev-Mamonov, A. F. Zdziarski, A. Lutschg, *Ministerstvo putei soobshcheniia. Wegweiser Auf Der Grossen Sibirischen Eisenbahnm*. St. Petersburg: Kunstdruckgesellschaft 1901.

¹⁰ C. G. MacKenzie, *Demythologizing the Missionaries: a reassessment of the functions and relationship of Christian missionary education under colonialism*, "Comparative Education", 1993, vol. 29, no. 1, p. 46.

and religious experiences and their influence on the exchange of ideas about the East among their contemporaries should not be discounted or disregarded.

Contemporary scholars examining the interactions between the Christian West and the Buddhist East, including Richard A. Horsley, Richard King, Donald S. Lopez, Philip C. Almond, frequently have discussed Western perceptions and misperceptions of nineteenth-century Buddhism in their work. According to these scholars, the Western and Christian search for an "original" or "classical" Buddhism had a strong colonial context. It led Western intellectuals of the time to create their own interpretations of the Buddhist traditions.

Thus, the concept of a "classical, original" Buddhism came to be juxtaposed with its "corrupted" form, which was manifested in Lamaism or Tibetan Buddhism¹¹. This juxtaposition of an "original" form of the religion with a "corrupt" one parallels similar the nineteenth century juxtapositions of corrupt, overly ritualistic, and hierarchical Catholicism and purified from pagan elements, focused on scriptures and true spirituality as Protestantism, being the closest to the original sources form of Christianity. Anti-Catholic religious bias of Protestant scholars or Western scholars functioning in Protestant cultures influenced pejorative interpretive parallels between Catholicism and Tibetan Buddhism in all areas of presence of last tradition, in Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Transbaikal. On the other hand, Catholic scholars and missionaries tended to perceive these similarities in positive way.

British scholar John Bray, who discusses primarily British Protestant missionaries in Tibet, believes that the missionaries' perceptions of Buddhism were dictated not only by their educational background, or religious beliefs, but also by the "length of time spent in the region, and-above all-personality"¹² Bray's examination of missionaries' perceptions of Tibet and Buddhism makes an interesting point: Despite developing "their own romantic vision of Tibet...missionary writers emphasized the darker aspects of Tibetan culture because these highlighted the country's needs for Christian enlightenment"¹³. The simultaneous idealization of Buddhism and the creation of the myth of a mysterious Tibet were accompanied by a sense of Western civilization's superiority.

¹¹ R. A. Horsley, *Religion and empire: people, power, and the life of the spirit*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press 2003, p. 15-18; R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and the Mystic East*, London, Routledge 1999, p. 149; D. S. Lopez Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 1998, pp. 15-45; P. C. Almond, *The British discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge; New York, Cambridge University Press 1988.

¹² J. Bray, *Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Missionary Images of Tibet*, in: *Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies*, T. Dodin, H. Rather (eds.), Boston, Wisdom Publications 2001, pp. 21-22.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 22.

Catholic and Protestant missionary perspective

Despite valid criticism of perceptual limitations and all concerns over religious and cultural bias, missionary observations and their published reports have had a significant influence on images constructed in Western imagination. In a case of Tibetan Buddhism in the Transbaikal the most important was scholarly research done by the Russian Orthodox missionaries who had exclusive legal right to convert and baptize the native people to Christianity. However, their reports and studies were published in Russian, and in consequence restricted to Russian readers. In contrast, observations reported by the Protestant and Catholic missionaries and clergy were brought to the Western Christian audience of the nineteenth and twentieth century primary through numerous publications in Western Europe and the United States.

Short-lasting Jesuit mission in Eastern Siberia 1812-1820 provided only very brief and superficial encounter with the Buddhists¹⁴. Quality of information in reports, written mostly by Tadeusz Maszewski S.J., could not be weighed against meticulous and comparative analysis of other Catholic missionaries studying Tibetan Buddhism such as Italian Jesuit Ippolito Desideri or French Vincentians (Lazarists) Evariste Régis Huc and Joseph Gabet¹⁵. While Desideri who spent few years in Tibet, from 1716-1721, studying Tibetan language and religious doctrine, and Huc and Gabet obtained their basic knowledge about Tibetan Buddhism mostly in Mongolia, before their brief visit in Lhasa, Jesuits from Połock (Polotsk) sent to Eastern Siberia did not have such knowledge of religion, culture or language of any Buddhist country. In consequence, their observations from the distance led to very superficial conclusions.

A comprehensive report on Tibetan Buddhism written by Huc was published in 1850 and soon became a bestseller translated to several European languages, influencing Western, and especially Catholic perception. However, the eighteenth century writings of Ippolito Desideri remained unknown to the public until 1875, when they were finally rediscovered and published. Both texts became popular and influential readings among Western, both Protestant and Catholic visitors of the Transbaikalian Buddhist monasteries. Especially information obtained from Huc's works became a common

¹⁴ A. Peck, *Between Russian Reality and Chinese Dream: The Jesuit Mission in Siberia 1812-1820*, "The Catholic Historical Review", 2001, vol.87, no. 1, January, pp. 17-33.

¹⁵ Évariste-Régis (E. R.) Huc, *Souvenirs d'un voyage dans la Tartarie, le Thibet, et la Chine pendant les années 1844, 1845, et 1846*, 2 v. Paris 1850; English edition: *Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China 1844-1846*, London 1851; wydanie polskie: E. R. Huc, *Wspomnienia z podróży odbytej po Tartarii, Tybecie i Chinach w latach 1844, 1845 i 1846 odbytej przez księdza Huc, Misjonarza zgromadzenia S-go Łazarza, z francuskiego przełożył Dr. Med. A. Kremer*, nakład i druk Orgelbrand, Warszawa 1858; Ippolito Desideri, *An Account of Tibet. The travels of Ippolito Desideri of Pistoia, S.J. 1712-1727*, Filippo de Filippi (ed.), with an introduction by C. Wessels S.J. Revised edition. London, George Routledge & Sons, LTD) 1937; Ippolito Desideri, *Mission to Tibet. The Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Account of Father Ippolito Desideri, S.J.*, translated by Michael J. Sweet, edited by Leonard Zwilling. Boston, Wisdom Publications 2010.

part of travelers' description, often without referral to its source. Plagiarism was not understood as a transgression against intellectual property yet.

A more convenient situation was provided by the Russian authorities to a group of Protestant missionaries from the London Missionary Society. Congregationalist Scottish families had a quite exceptional situation staying in the Transbaikal from 1818 to 1840, and provided prolific written sources considering their perception of Buddhism in the area¹⁶. Three British families stayed permanently for over twenty years: a family of Englishmen Edward and Sarah Stallybrass nee Robinson with their children, and after Sarah's death in 1833, Edward and his second wife, Charlotte Ellah of Elsinore, who died in 1839 at the age of 31¹⁷, and two Scottish families with their children, William Swan and his wife married in 1831 Hannah Cullen, and Robert and Martha Cowie Yuille.

Similarly to the Jesuit mission they did not have right to baptize potential converts, but they lived in the Transbaikal among the Buriats, learning the language and translating the Christian Scriptures to the Buriat language. The missionaries undertook for many years the strenuous, yet ineffective measures to spread their religion. The mission became a kind of tourist attraction themselves, visited by voyager and adventurers curious about strange Siberian and Asian lands. As early as in 1825, James Holman visited the Transbaikalian mission expressing his great appreciation for the Britons. The author described the mission as difficult, but successfully conquering obstacles, "arising from the ignorance, religious prejudice, poverty, and migratory habits of these people"¹⁸. This account was preceded by memoir of Captain John Dundas Cochrane, and followed reports provided by several other travelers, such as Adolph Erman¹⁹ Polish researcher of the Mongolian and Transbaikalian native cultures and Tibetan Buddhism, Józef Kowalewski (Osip Kovalevskii) maintained friendly personal contacts with British missionaries.

The London Missionary Society issued magazines presenting missionary accounts. Siberian missionaries published their reports, experiences and impressions in several ways. The reports from Siberia were originally in the *Quarterly Chronicle of the Transactions of the London Missionary Society*, the journal published also between 1813 and May 1836 as the *Missionary Chronicle*, and then later from June 1836-1866 as the *Missionary Magazine*

¹⁶ C. R. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas, and Evangelicals: The English Missionaries in Siberia*, London; Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1985; C. R. Bawden, *Buriat Christian Mission (1818-1840)*. In: *The Modern Encyclopedia of Religions in Russia*, edited by Paul D. Steeves. Gulf Breeze, FL, Academic International Press 1991, pp. 236-241.

¹⁷ See <http://www.mundus.ac.uk/cats/4/1303.htm> [16 VI 2016].

¹⁸ J. Holman, *Travels through Russia, Siberia, Poland, Austria, Saxony, Prussia, Hanover, & c. & c.: undertaken during the years 1822, 1823 and 1824, while suffering from total blindness, and comprising an account of the author being conducted a state prisoner from the eastern parts of Siberia*, London, Printed for Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825, v. 2, p. 137

¹⁹ A. Erman, *Reise um die Erde durch Nord-Asien und die beiden Oceane in den Jahren 1828, 1829 und 1830 ausgeführt*, Berlin, G. Reimer, 1841; English translation: A. Erman, *Travels in Siberia: Including Excursions Northwards, Down the Obi, to the Polar Circle, and Southwards to the Chinese Frontier*, Philadelphia 1850.

and *Chronicle*²⁰. Subsequently, the same reports were available in the American missionary journal published in Boston, *The Missionary Herald*. William Swan was the author of the *Letters on Missions*, published in Boston in 1831; Edward Stallybrass published after death of his wife Sarah her letters and her biography²¹.

Missionary impressions were greatly influenced by their own religious beliefs, especially considering both general Protestant and particularly Congregationalist convictions about the “proper form of Christianity.” In confrontation with Tibetan Buddhism they became aware of similarities with issues debated by the Protestants with Catholicism with a strong anti-Catholic bias: organizational hierarchical structure, simplicity or elaborated rituals, Latin or vernacular liturgical language, and understandability of the scriptures. Finally a topic of rationality of celibacy requirement was constantly debated from the time of Reformation through following centuries.

Opinions expressed by the British missionaries residing in the remote Transbaikal constantly reflected European religious debates. Their own religious education and educational experience was gained from a tradition of British Reformation. As Congregationalists they used to confront especially the Church of England and as extension of the debate disagreement with other Christian churches of well organized hierarchical structure. In consequence, the harsh words of strong disagreement and disapproval were addressed to the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church. Their own religious and cultural experience, developed beliefs, biases and prejudice, led directly to formation of cognitive constructs of self-righteousness and condemnation of wrong or mistaken concepts. It significantly influenced interpretation of the Siberian reality and especially their perception of Tibetan Buddhism.

The missionary couples visited the datsans-Buddhist monasteries rather frequently. Female visitors, who were missionaries themselves, were met by the hosts with astonished but warm reception. The first comprehensive description of the visit of Edward and Sarah Stallybrass and William Swan was published in 1823. They spent a few weeks traveling around the area visiting finally the famous Gusinozerski or Tamchinskii datsan, the Buddhist center of the Transbaikal and entire Siberia. The monastery was located in the area of Selenginsk, in short distance from the mission. During years of coexistence Protestant missionaries and Buddhist lamas interacted very frequently.

Perception of the observers: overview

According to the cognitive interpretations, developed by cognitive science and especially by cognitive psychology, the human way of perceiving, processing information

²⁰ See <http://divdl.library.yale.edu/missionperiodicals/viewdetail> [16 VI 2016].

²¹ E. Stallybrass, S. Stallybrass, *Memoir of Mrs. Stallybrass, wife of the Rev. Edward Stallybrass, missionary to Siberia*. With an introduction by J. Fletcher, D. D. London, Fisher, Son, & CO., Newgate-Street 1836.

and finally verbalizing that which has been processed is the result both of individual, even highly subjective opinions based on personality type, individual interest and experiences, and socially or culturally accepted ways of characterizing observed phenomena. Thus, perception is not a passive or objective photograph of the outside world, but rather an active and very subjective construct of reality. People tend to see what they expect to see, or, moreover, what they want to see according to their understanding of the world, their convictions and religious experiences, their pre-conceived notions, their preferences, and their prejudices.

In sum, what we perceive is what we choose to perceive or are able to understand and interpret. We tend to select only part of the available information to engage with and to process; seeing and hearing through our minds as much as through our eyes and ears. Understanding that complex circumstances influences human perception, we can pose the questions: How far does religious background of the observers influence their perception of another, unknown religious tradition? Would it be possible to identify differences in perception of Tibetan Buddhism by observers of two Christian traditions, such as Catholics and Protestants? How would their perception differ? This article addresses these questions by analyzing accounts of Western encounters with Tibetan Buddhism in the Transbaikal.

Cognitive patterns in observers' records: differences in Catholic and Protestant perception

In a complex process of constructing social, cultural, and religious reality of the Russian Transbaikal, and especially in Western perception of Tibetan Buddhism of the native people, important role employed various cognitive techniques. Cognitive scientists examining a phenomenon of motivated cognition put emphasis on variety of factors, such as goals or needs, which influence individual ways of thinking, perceiving, understanding, and explaining the observed reality²². We offer analysis of a perceptual experience in response to a stimulus event as a response of the whole person. In our case, we will examine some religiously shaped differences in perception, understanding, expressing opinions etc., and using three cognitive explanations: the availability heuristic, cognitive dissonance, and confirmation bias.

Availability heuristic is understood as a popular shortcut leading to expression of judgment or opinion based on information which could be easily recalled, which is available in one's memory. Religious background of Western Christian cannot be over generalized. Observers who were raised in the Catholic or Protestant traditions, and who experienced during their formative years a specific denominational education,

²² R. J. Gerrig, P. G. Zimbardo, *Psychology and Life*, Sixteenth edition. Boston, Allyn and Bacon 2002, pp. 280-283, 554-556.

would perceive differently. Their bias and prejudice as well as the way of understanding what is "right" or "wrong" could be a base for their perception in a new situation.

Catholic and Protestant perceptions of Tibetan Buddhist ceremonies, ritualistic arrangement of the altars, decorations of the temples with a myriad of statues and paintings differed significantly. Interpretation based on availability heuristic explains cognitive mechanisms of the observers, and helps to understand the process of development of these differences. Interesting elements of availability heuristic could be found in the recollections of Polish political exiles of the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century living in the Transbaikal area. They were constantly finding in Buddhist prayers and rituals not only similarities with familiar Catholic practices, but also perceived in both Buddhist temples and Catholic churches a mysterious charm, mystery, or spiritual power.

Cognitive dissonance is one of the most popular forms of psychological discomfort rooted in inconsistency of cognition. Christian, not only Catholic, Protestant, but also Russian Orthodox encounters with Tibetan Buddhism were followed by better understanding of this Asian tradition. Finding values and similarities with the Buddhist tradition could lead to development of cognitive dissonance, especially in the situation of the missionaries or true-believers of any of the branches of Christianity. Persistent efforts to convince themselves and the readers of their religious and cultural superiority, present in their written accounts, allow for identifying a situation of cognitive dissonance.

A process of developing cognitive dissonance began usually with an expression of a strong belief of unquestioned Western cultural and Christian religious superiority contrasted with primitive paganism. For example, the British Missionaries observed Buriats' devotion expressed in a form of a financial support for Buddhism, giving an example of "one Buriat, who, out of ten thousand sheep left him by his father, had disposed of seven thousand, and had devoted the produce, with other property, to the building of the temple. Well, may these things provoke Christians to jealousy?"²³ Experiencing difficulties in gaining any converts, British missionaries complained about an incomprehensible paradox: why did good people prefer to follow a delusion instead of the exclusive truth of the gospels?

Major cultural and religious issues in diverse Christian perspective

Diversity of Protestant and Catholic perception included several issues. Additionally, we could find diverse opinions within Protestant observers accordingly to their denomi-

²³ "Missionary Herald", 1823, vol. XIX, no. 5, May, p. 159.

nations, for example Lutherans, Anglicans, Congregationalists. The most commonly discussed topics included Tibetan Buddhists' organizational structure, hierarchy of the clergy, lavish rituals. Rejection or approval of hierarchical structure, celibacy, dogmatic rigidity etc. very accurately reflected observers' background.

Buddhist temples, rituals and ceremonies

The major question considered familiarity and exotic orientalism, closely related to differences in European or Western and Asian esthetics. Descriptions often emphasized differences in understanding of esthetic issues, for example a kind of music performed during religious ceremonies in Buddhist monasteries was perceived as unacceptable for European ear or as cacophony²⁴. However, a cognitive search for meaning and understanding characterized most of the reports. Explanations of importance of colors and a special significance of yellow color could be found in several reports²⁵.

Distinctive differences in perception included Protestant and Catholic perception of interior design of the Buddhist temples. The requirement of simplicity in Protestant churches significantly influenced understanding of the role of religious art. Opulent decorations were noted in a negative way especially by the Lutheran, Congregationalist, and Calvinist observers. British Missionaries' cultural background for example predisposed their perception of elaborate Buddhist symbolism, presence of thousands of statues and figurines of buddhas and bodhisattvas, wealth of colors and ornamentations provoking strong words of disapproval.

A mechanism of availability heuristic influenced Protestant perception. Observers like American Presbyterian George Kennan familiar with simple architecture of the churches as usually monochromatic interiors looked with amazement at Buddhist temples. He noted "a bewildering crowd of deities" in the temple of Gusinoozerskii Datsan, the main monastery of the Transbaikal. Kennan expressed his bewilderment: "I could not ascertain the reason for keeping so great a number of these figures in the lamasery, nor could I ascertain what purpose they served. They presented an almost infinite variety of types and faces; many of them were obviously symbolical, and all seemed to be representative in some way either of canonized mortals or of supernatural spirits, powers, or agencies"²⁶.

Kennan described his impressions addressed primarily to the American Protestant audience, with a characteristic explanation of unfamiliar Transbaikalian Buddhist

²⁴ J. Kobyłecki, *Wiadomość o Syberii*, t. 2, p. 137.

²⁵ "Tygodnik Petersburski", część IX, no. 29, r. 5 (20 kwietnia 1834 roku), Józef Kowalewski's letter dated: Tuesday, April 17/29, 1830, p. 184.

²⁶ G. Kennan, *Siberia and the Exile System*, in 2 volumes. New York 1891, v. 2, p. 88.

culture with a comparison to familiar classical culture of ancient Greece and Catholic religious art. He wrote: "The temple was so crowded with peculiar details that one could not reduce his observations to anything like order, nor remember half of the things that the eye noted; but the general effect of the whole was very striking, even to a person familiar with the interiors of Greek and Roman Catholic cathedrals. The impression made upon my mind by the decorations was that of great richness and beauty, both in color and in form"²⁷.

Analyzing perception of the Catholic observers we can find the same cognitive mechanism. Their religious background, previous personal experience influenced their perception of Buddhist art and symbolism. Terrifying images of Buddhist deities resembled in their mind images of hell and Last Judgment, commonly present in the Catholic churches, and as such looked familiar. Benedykt Dybowski, Polish physician and political exile who spent twelve years in Eastern Siberia, mostly in the Transbaikal, described his impression of the Buddhist temple where he spent a night during his travel through the region. While waking up, he perceived everything around him as "looking very familiar": the altar covered with a white tablecloth, burning candles, sound of bells, prayers and chanting. He concluded that everything that he observed as a Buddhist service resembled a Catholic morning mass²⁸.

Celibacy, sexuality, and morality

The Catholic Church requirement of celibacy for clergy became one of the major issues discussed by Martin Luther and his followers during the time of European Reformation. Debate analyzing all pros and cons continued for centuries. Protestants rejected obligatory celibacy as a condition contradicting the Scriptures, and as a source of moral degradation. Protestant missionaries were advised to have families. In the case of celibacy, both availability heuristic and confirmation bias could apply to an explanation of differences in Catholic and Protestant perception.

Celibacy of the Tibetan Buddhist lamas was seen by the Protestant observers as a particularly unrealistic requirement, as much as it was unrealistic and wrong in the case of the Catholic Church. Protestant Christians of European and American origin perceived lamas' situation as a source of dreadful immorality among Buriats, supposedly disturbing all social standards of decent life through commonly observed sexual misconduct of theoretically celibate clergymen. Protestant visitors in the area listed

²⁷ Ibidem, v. 2, p. 86, 89.

²⁸ B. Dybowski, *Pamiętnik*, Lwów 1930, pp. 429-430: "Z rana zostałem obudzony dzwonkami, leżąc spojrziałem przed siebie i widzę obraz odprawianej mszy katolickiej, nie śpiewanej, lecz czytanej, cichej, wszystko odbywa się w cichości, półszeptem. Pustelnik staruszek, przybrany w rodzaj komży, chłopak, który służy do mszy, również przybrany, coś odpowiada, dzwoni, przynosi księgę z jednej strony na drugą, **wszystko ro robi wrażenie obrzędu katolickiego**".

unspecified cases based on what they heard, what “somebody” told them, and what they could relate to their memories from their formative years. In the next stage of cognitive process the authors of these opinions started to search for evidence confirming their bias. The cases they heard about and probability of their occurrence were rather high; they generalized, discussing wide-spread situations of seductions of women and a large numbers of illegitimate children according to Western standards of “legitimacy”.

Negative perception of celibacy of the lamas was characteristic not only for Congregationalists from the British Missionary Society. In two other travelogues, Adolph Erman and Henry Lansdell expressed similar and even more radical for the nineteenth century remarks and opinions. Adolph Erman, a young German Lutheran in his mid twenties, who reached Eastern Siberia and the Transbaikal in 1829 and 1830, shared all critical views considering celibacy with Scottish missionary Robert Yuille.

Both parties agreed that promiscuity of theoretically celibate lamas caused moral degeneration among good-natured and child-like natives. According to them, accelerated destruction of ethics, understood as sexual morality, resulted directly from the proportionally huge number of lamas, constituting already in the third decade of the nineteenth century one-sixth of the population. Their extramarital and uncommitted sex was generally – in their opinion – practiced by seduction of both young virgins and married women in their own yurts²⁹.

However, the most unspeakable consequence was, according to Erman and Yuille, the practice of homosexuality. They suggested that in fact supposedly holy and dedicated to meditation virtuous Buddhist lamas, called derogatorily the *redcoats*, “convert the temples into places of assignation for this forbidden intercourse”³⁰. Homosexuality, perceived by Erman and Yuille as a perversion, supposedly was an outcome of imposed celibacy and lack of “proper” relationships. Adolph Erman suggested that generally homosexuality resulted from abnormal arrangements of Buddhist as well as Christian monasteries. Similar situations supposedly could be found among celibate Tibetan Buddhist, Catholic and Orthodox clergymen.

Catholic observers usually did not perceive celibacy as strange or unnatural. On the contrary, celibacy of Tibetan Buddhist clergy seemed to be a familiar and fully understandable situation. In Catholic perception it was mentioned as a natural requirement for clergymen, for example, Józef Kobyłecki noted in 1830s that unmarried lamas used to have female servants taking care of their household³¹. Kobyłecki and other

²⁹ A. Erman, *Reise um die Erde durch Nord-Asien und die beiden Oceane in den Jahren 1828, 1829 und 1830 ausgeführt*, Berlin, G. Reimer, 1841; the English edition: A. Erman, *Travels in Siberia: Including Excursions Northwards, Down the Obi, to the Polar Circle, and Southwards to the Chinese Frontier*, Philadelphia 1850, v. 2, p. 216.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 216; C. Bawden, *Shamans, Lamas and Evangelicals*, pp.140-141.

³¹ J. Kobyłecki, *Wiadomość o Syberii i podróże w niej odbyte w latach 1831, 1832, 1833, 1834*. Warszawa 1837, v. 2, p. 126: „wszyscy trudniący się obrzędami religijnymi u Buriatów, to jest tak naczelnicy jak i lamowie nie mają żon; dla porządku jednak w gospodarstwie utrzymują klucznice”.

Catholic authors used a cognitive shortcut, availability heuristic recalling from their memory not only readily available information but also interpretation of the situation.

Expressed opinion suggested that Buddhism does not teach Buriats even basic moral principles. Understanding of "moral principles" referred to the value represented by Protestant missionaries, such as modesty of clothing, especially in a case of women, abstinence from alcoholic beverages and presumed promiscuity. Erman met British missionaries living near Selenginsk, and discussed specific issues of their work among the Buriats. Together they lamented the low level of moral people, specifying and restricting their concerns to two major issues: sexual immorality and abuse of alcohol.

Almost a half of century later Anglican clergyman Henry Lansdell experienced a different situation. He described a dinner at the Transbaikalian frontier when the host offered him brandy. When Lansdell declined this treat he explained that he was a priest, a kind of lama. He commented in his travelogue: "Their lamas were not allowed to drink brandy. It was comforting, therefore, to find that we had at least one good thing in common"³². Lansdell acknowledged a great social respect among the Buriats for their lamas. He mentioned opinions about reality of lamas' celibacy expressed of two other Western travelers, Adolph Erman and Alexander Michie, however he himself did not have any opinion in this matter³³.

Interestingly, several Americans traveling through Eastern Siberia and observing local customs did not make the connection between consumption of alcohol and lack of moral standards deriving from wrong religious beliefs. Perry McDonough Collins working for an America-Russian Commercial Company, Richard James Bush, a member of the Russo-American Telegraph Expedition pointed out similarities between use and abuse of alcohol in the United States, especially in the American West and in the Russian Empire, especially in Siberia and the Transbaikal. They did not perceive it as a vice or immorality like European visitors did³⁴.

A final and definite evidence for Tibetan Buddhist immorality resulted from Christian encounters with religious art. During their visits in the Transbaikalian monasteries they could see Kalachakra images. Statues and thangka paintings portrayed two Tibetan Buddhist deities, male Kalachakra and his female consort Vishvamata in sexual union. Despite symbolism of images where each deity had four heads, many legs and hands, the sexual act was treated literally. The explicitly sexual character of religious images shocked the Puritanical understanding of sexuality and morality of many Westerners and Christians. Sarah Stallybrass, referring to the art of Hinduism,

³² H. Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, third edition. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1882, v. 1, p. 348.

³³ *Ibidem*, v.1, pp. 370-371.

³⁴ P. McDonough Collins, *A Voyage Down the Amoor: with a land journey through Siberia and incidental notices of Manchouria, Kamschatka and Japan*. New York, D. Appleton and Company 1860; R. J. Bush, *Reindeer, Dogs, and Snow-Shoes: A Journal of Siberian Travel and Explorations made in the years 1865, 1866, and 1867*, New York, Harper & Brothers 1871.

delicately mentioned that images of Kalachakra were too obscene to describe them³⁵. Similar feelings and impressions could be found in Catholic perception, cherishing virginity and sexual purity even in marital life.

Requirement of simplicity in Protestant churches significantly influenced understanding of the role of religious art. Missionaries' cultural background again predisposed their perception of elaborate Buddhist symbolism, wealth of colors and ornamentations provoked words of disapproval.

Scriptural language

Argument considering use of the language reflected again debates between Catholics and Protestants from the time of Reformation. Use of Latin in liturgy by the Catholic Church was rejected by the Protestants. It was understood exclusively by the clergy and educated elite, but was inaccessible for majority of society, which could not understand the Scriptures and Christian teaching. Similarly, Tibetan Buddhist teaching, Scriptures, prayers were in Tibetan or to some degree in Mongolian. Both languages were not understood by uneducated Buriats, so their understanding of Buddhism could be compared to European commoners' understanding (or rather lack of understanding or misunderstanding) of Catholic Christianity.

Protestant tradition from the time of Reformation emphasized importance of the use of native tongues in religion. Criticism of the use of Latin, understandable exclusively for a narrow group of educated people, emphasized the necessity of availability of the Scriptures in vernacular languages. Full understanding of the content of religious texts, the prayers, rituals, and teaching created authentic followers-believers. The sensitive issue of the language appeared several times in missionary writings and reports. Their observation related to both Russian Orthodox Christianity as well as Tibetan Buddhism.

The same objection concerned the use of Tibetan language instead of local vernacular languages. According to the missionaries, it was completely incomprehensible not only for the ordinary people, but also often for the lamas.³⁶ Additionally, Sarah Stallybrass drew a parallel between Orthodox Christianity and Tibetan Buddhism. She realized that the language used in Orthodox worship was not a modern Russian language that would be understood by the faithful, but the archaic linguistic form of "old Slavonic". As a result, she noted, the faithful could not be aware of the meaning of prayers and could not become fully informed participants in worship. As a consequence, Orthodox Christianity had little influence on improving morals of the people, such as changes in their inclination to promiscuity and abuse of alcohol.

³⁵ E. Stallybrass, *Sarah Stallybrass*, op. cit., pp. 160, 202, 234, 238.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 155, 163: "wholly unintelligible to the common people, and nearly so to the Lamas themselves".

Protestant observers of the Transbaikalian reality, like British missionaries pointed out the same problem within Tibetan Buddhism, writing: "Their books teach them no morality, for they are in unknown tongue. Their restrains from criminal indulgences are confined to the short time which they spend in their temples; and when they return home, it is to commit all uncleanness with greediness. Their services are unmeaning forms, and they hesitate not to confess them to be irksome and disagreeable, but think the performance of them, on this very account, so much more meritorious"³⁷.

On the other hand, absence or marginal attention to the linguistic issue in Catholic reports could be interpreted as a result of the authors' personal religious experience and religious background. Use of Latin in Catholic liturgy was a part of "normal" religious reality, without questioning and as such use of Tibetan in Buddhist context was not an issue for deliberation.

Hierarchy and organizational structure

Protestant perception of Tibetan Buddhist hierarchy was not homogeneous. Various denominations differed significantly in their understanding and evaluation of the concept of organizational structure. While Congregationalists rejected hierarchy in both Christian and Buddhist religious life, the Anglicans preserved its own hierarchical system and well-organized church structure. From Lutheran, and especially Anglican perspective, development of organizational structure and hierarchy was not only fully acceptable, but also a desirable sign of civilizational superiority.

Henry Lansdell, as an Anglican priest, considered Tibetan Buddhism a highly developed religion because "the Buriats, who are Buddhists, have temples, ritual, and order of priests, and a considerable literature. With a religion so developed, it will not be difficult to account for its overcoming the older Shamanistic creed"³⁸. Similar opinions were expressed by several Polish priests exiled to Eastern Siberia, as well as very few Catholic clergymen reaching Tibet and its capitol Lhasa. Presence of organizational and hierarchical structures was treated by observers with great respect. Despite a strong conviction about unquestionable superiority of Christianity, they treated Tibetan Buddhism with respect as the highest form of Asian traditions. Lansdell, for example, consistently showed a great respect for Buddhism, and viewed Tibetan Buddhism as highly developed and sophisticated.

On the other hand, British missionaries expressed a different opinion, based on their own religious experience. They represented congregationalism, which was known for lack of hierarchy, organizational structures, and supported autonomous, democratically governed communities. Democratic values and equal rights of all Christians seemed

³⁷ "Missionary Herald", 1823, vol. XIX, no. 5, May.

³⁸ H. Lansdell, *Through Siberia*, third edition, v. 1, p. 374.

to contradict the ideas of hierarchy and the special place of the clergy in their religious community. British missionaries carefully observed not only Siberian Buddhism but also structure and functioning of the Russian Orthodox Church. From the perspective of British missionaries, both hierarchical, organized structure of the Orthodox Church, and the structure of Tibetan Buddhism seemed bizarre and corrupt, replacing the authentic spiritual growth by picturesque, but superficial rituals.

The critical opinions of Congregationalist Protestants were expressed by Sarah Stallybrass of London Missionary Society. She noted in her journal on July 12, 1826: "It is surprising, how much these superior lamas assume. Seated on cushions, and surrounded by all appendages of the Lama faith, this proud old man sat like a god, diffusing his blessing to deluded worshipers, who as they entered his presence, bowed three times to the earth, and then received a touch on the head from his book"³⁹. Such an image contradicted the idea of equality rooted in early Christianity, and reminded rather of medieval feudal social structures and feudal customs differentiating mighty and proud lords from their vassals and serf-peasants.

Pointing out this antidemocratic similarly wrong character of religious hierarchy in some Christian churches and Tibetan Buddhism they observed with amazement reverence of the subjects. Great prestige and social respect shown to the lamas constantly surprised the missionaries. Forms of respect from the Buriat tribal leaders to the servants, from both the wealthiest tribal aristocracy and the poor shepherds, seemed to be inappropriate. According to them, the feudal forms of relations between the lamas and the followers, expressed in bowing, prostrations, and humility were interpreted as difficult to accept and understood as slavish submission, a denial of human dignity. William Swan, one of British missionaries concluded: "Buddhist worships were thoughtless and tedious forms of passive participation collected, but not denied their impressive grandeur"⁴⁰.

Unique factor: cultural and political identification of Catholics with "discriminated and persecuted" Buddhist Buriats

Two general cognitive patterns could be identified for Polish and Lithuanian Roman Catholics exiles. First, a very common pattern was based on juxtaposition of Western, European, and Christian superiority with Eastern, Asian, and Buddhist cultural and religious inferiority. Second cognitive pattern, developing especially from the middle of the nineteenth century was based on a sense of common suffering imposed by the Russian oppressors. Polish and Lithuanian Catholic perception in categories of

³⁹ E. Stallybrass, S. Stallybrass, op. cit., pp. 212-213.

⁴⁰ "Missionary Herald", 1823, vol. XIX, no. 5, May, p. 159.

“we” and “others” became quite unique, especially during the period from 1870 to 1905. However, a tendency to search and find similarities was very common.

Identification of the “oppressed” non-Russian peoples of the Empire resulted with characteristic understanding of “others” as Russian authorities and Russian Orthodox Christianity, while “we” were all ethnic groups and religions discriminated against. So, “we” meant “our” cultures and religions were subjected to official policies of Russification and victimized, unexpectedly bonding between Polish and Lithuanian Catholics and Buriat Buddhists, Europeans and Asians. Transition from a deep Euro-centric sense of superiority to feelings of compassion and solidarity caused profound changes in perception of the Transbaikalian Buddhism.

Nostalgic search for familiarity in Eastern Siberia led the exiles to a conclusion that “we have a common oppressor”. In this approach, Transbaikalian Buddhists were perceived as oppressed by the Russian state religion, Orthodox Christianity, exactly like Polish and Lithuanian Catholics were discriminated against and persecuted. In consequence, both religious traditions, Buddhist and Catholics, and both ethnic Buriats and Polish-Lithuanians were equally mistreated.

Interestingly, the same cognitive patterns could be found in opinions expressed by other European Catholics. One of the examples was the opinion of the French traveler, Victor Meignan, who traversed before the railway was built “by sledge over the snow of European Russia and Siberia, and by caravan through Mongolia”⁴¹. Meignan several times expressed the Catholic sense of religious superiority, juxtaposing Catholic righteousness with Eastern Orthodox falsehood. Defending Catholics’ right to religious freedom, he condemned drastic discrimination of Catholics in the Russian Empire, and expressed his sympathy for persecuted and exiled Poles in Siberia. Drawing analogy between the situation of Catholics and Buddhists in the Russian Empire, French author noticed that Buddhists idolaters were also unjustly subjected to discriminatory policies⁴².

Conclusion: Exclusivistic approach and cognitive dissonance

A common denominator for Christian Protestant, Catholic and Russian Orthodox observers who encountered Tibetan Buddhism for longer time than one or two days trip was a problem of cognitive dissonance. Characteristic story was told by James Gilmour, member of London Missionary Society who spent a long time among Mongolian Buddhists. According to Gilmour: “When they see how he [Good Samaritan]

⁴¹ V. Meignan, *De Paris à Pékin par terre: Sibérie-Mongolie. Ouvrage enrichi d'une carte et de quinze gravures dessinées par L. Breton d'après des croquis de l'auteur et des photographies*. Paris 1877; V. Meignan, *From Paris to Peking over Siberian Snow: A Narrative of a Journey by Sledge over the Snow of European Russia and Siberia, by Caravan through Mongolia, across the Gobi Desert and the Great Wall, and by Mule Palanquin through China to Peking*, London: W. S. Sonnenschein 1885.

⁴² V. Meignan, *From Paris to Peking*, op. cit., pp. 420-421.

has bound up the wounded parts, and hear how he conveyed the wounded man to the inn, paid his reckoning, and gave him something to go on with, their enthusiasm rises, because they recognize in the Samaritan ideal of their own religion-self-denying help to the distressed. Though the listeners are frequently lamas, they never fail to express their hearty disapprobation of the red-coated priest who passed by on the other side"⁴³.

Cognitive dissonance of Christian observers was rooted in exclusivistic approach to religions characteristic for Western Abrahamic traditions. Conviction that there is one and exclusive way to search the universal religious truth contradicted Buddhist belief that "The religions are one. The dress is different. The meaning is the same. Exactly alike (...) Even the Christian student of their literature is often struck with points of resemblance, and finds cause to be glad that Mongol Buddhism has such noble teaching"⁴⁴. Close encounters followed by discovering valuable elements in Tibetan Buddhism led faithful followers of both Catholic and Protestant tradition to cognitive dissonance which they presented in their writings.

Anna Peck – TRANSBAIKALIAN BUDDHISM IN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE: COGNITIVE PATTERNS OF THE CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT OBSERVERS

From the eighteenth century, Tibetan Buddhism of Gelug-pa lineage grew rapidly in the Eastern Siberian Transbaikal (Zabaikalie), establishing its organizational structure and gaining followers among the native population. Interactions between Tibetan Buddhists and Catholic and Protestant newcomers: missionaries, exiles, settlers, businessmen, and finally tourists resulted with abundance of written and published sources expressing impressions of the Western authors. The article poses questions considering cognitive patterns in ways of presentation of Tibetan Buddhism concentrating on cognitive concepts of availability heuristics, cognitive dissonance, and confirmation bias. It examines influence of different religious background of Catholic and Protestant authors on their opinions about Tibetan Buddhism.

⁴³ J. Gilmour, *Among the Mongols*. London, Religious Tract Society 1888, pp. 221-222.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.