

Buddhist Religious Education in the Context of Modern Russian Policy of Multicultural Education: A Case of the Republic of Buryatia

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Abstract

The increase of ethnocultural and ethnoconfessional interactions in the context of modern cultural and religious diversity of Russia demands modernization of learning process according to the existing educational policy of multicultural education and defines the relevancy of the article. The purpose of the article is to analyze retrospectively the functioning of Buddhist religious education system in the Republic of Buryatia taking into account the multicultural component. The central methods in this research along with analysis, synthesis, abstraction, induction, deduction, generalization are the analysis of interactive documents and the method of case-study, an active problem-contextual analysis. The article briefly characterizes the main stages of Buddhist education development and the current religious situation in the Republic of Buryatia, reveals the peculiarities of introducing the subjects studying the basics of religious cultures and secular ethics in educational process, defines national and territorial characteristics of Buddhist education implementation in secular schools in the Republic of Buryatia, justifies its preventive educational potential for multicultural society. The study material can be useful for orientalist scholars and also both theorists and practitioners of general pedagogics, Buddhist and multicultural education.

Keywords: *Buddhist education, Buddhist culture, multicultural education, educational policy, the Republic of Buryatia.*

Introduction

Nowadays when complex socio-political processes develop in the context of strengthening of the “Buddhist factor” in the Republic of Buryatia, studying of Buddhist religious education gains particular importance. The present stage of public and academic thought in Buryatia can be defined as a historical retrospective stage, which can be characterized by active studying of spiritual heritage of the Buddhism, attempts to connect the past and the present, to find the binding threads that would add historical importance to the revival of Buddhist tradition.

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The academic reflection and formulation of the contemporary religious and cultural situation, search of its spiritual sources will help to reveal the general and specific regularities of the Buddhism as the system of ideas and theories and to track the stages of its revival in the former Soviet Union. Post-Perestroika and Post-Soviet revival of religious education in Russia is a significant historical event of deep spiritual meaning which demands academic interpretation by the contemporaries.

The research gains special importance due to the educational policy realized in the Russian Federation of multicultural education which was put on paper in such documents of the state level as: “*The Concept of Multicultural Education Development in the Russian Federation*” (2004), and further in “*The Concept of the Federal Target Educational Program for 2016-2020*” (2014) where it is clearly defined that “within the framework of distributing contemporary models of children’s successful socialization throughout the entire territory of the Russian Federation integrated models of the basic and additional education will be widespread throughout all territorial subjects of the Russian Federation. These innovative educational and institutional models will shape the civil identity of students in the conditions of multicultural and polyconfessional society” (The Concept of the Federal Target Educational Program for 2016-2020, 2014).

Thus, the ideas of equality and equivalency of the people, respect of national dignity and religious freedom, need for strengthening and improvement of people’s friendship, systematic cultural and pedagogical work against negative phenomena in this area come to the forefront in modern educational process.

Literature Review

The Russian Buddhist studies appeared not so long ago, a little over a century ago. During these years, scholars have finished to some extent the research of the main Buddhist treatises. It is a truly monumental work taking into account a huge number of philosophical treatises written within the 25 centuries of Buddhism history as the philosophical doctrine. Linnart Mäll, the known buddhologist, has written an article “Dharma as Text and Text-Producing Mechanism” in “Bulletin of the University of Tartu” (Mäll, 1968) on this issue. In the Buddhist studies, the priorities were given to translation and analysis of philosophical treatises, while studying of Buddhist educational systems which actually allowed the Buddhism to become highly intellectual religion stayed in the background.

In the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century prominent Buryat scholars Bazar Baradin, Gombozhab Tsybikov, Tsyben Zhamtsarano, the graduates of the Oriental school of the University of Saint-Petersburg, have laid the basis for studying of the Buddhist monastic universities of Tibet. By order of the Russian Geographical Society, they went on several expeditions to Tibet under the guise of pilgrims and collected unique materials about Buddhist monasteries and Buddhist religious education. All of them in the 1930-s were repressed and, except G. Tsybikov, were shot. In these latter days, their traveling diaries and academic papers are mostly republished. And it is obvious that their contribution to studying of Buddhist education will be seriously researched in the nearest future. Some aspects of Buddhist education are mentioned in works of scholars from the Saint Petersburg oriental school such as Pozdneev (1896), Shcherbatskoy (1988), Pyatigorsky (2004), Mäll (1968), Dandaron (1996) and also in the textbooks published by the staff of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences Ermakova, Ostrovskaya and Rudoy (1999). These authors pay attention mostly to the philosophical content of the Buddhist religious education, which is the main objective of their researches.

A number of foreign researchers study the potential of Buddhist education within a certain country or a specific geographical region. In such a way, J. Li and D. Moore (2014) try to find balance between traditional faith-based education and state education system in one of China prefectures with Theravada Buddhist religious identity. T. Hyland (2013) considers the state-funded education in England and argues against the faith-based education, however, he does not deny opportunities of using the Buddhist traditions in secular approach to educational practice. A number of works of contemporary orientalist are turned to the resource potential of Buddhist theory (Yao, 2006) which can be used both for shaping an adequate view on peacekeeping around the world, economic balance, the uniform rights and freedoms for all especially among migrant population (Murakami, 2012; Tarman & Gürel, 2017), and for personal (Kim & Choi, 2016) and educational reasons (Lafer & Aydin, 2012; Thanissario, 2011; Mamgain, 2010).

Recently one can notice a growing interest of Russian and foreign scholars to the problems of multicultural education (Lonshakova, 2010, Ten, 2007, Saint-Hilaire, 2014, Ngo, 2010, Forrest et al., 2016, Barzanò et al., 2017, Byker & Marquardt, 2016; Kopish, 2016; Yigit, 2017). However, there are almost no researches on the Buddhist education in the Republic of Buryatia in the foreign periodicals. The publication by Petrova (2013) retrospectively considers

underground hindu and buddhist-inspired religious movements in Soviet Russia between the late 1950s and the late 1980s while the article of Holland (2014) presents the comparative analysis of across faith and national groups of religious practice and belief in the Republic of Buryatia. However, they both do not fully reflect the research issues chosen by the authors.

Methodological Framework

This research aims to provide the authors' interpretation of the modern system of Buddhist religious education in the Republic of Buryatia through the prism of multicultural education which is widely propagandized in modern Russia on state and regional levels.

The main tasks of the research are:

- to submit a short retrospective analysis of the development of Buddhist religious education in the Republic of Buryatia;
- to analyse and critically evaluate the existing religious situation in the contemporary Buryatia;
- to reveal the advantages of introducing the courses studying the basics of religious cultures and secular ethics into the school curricula in the Republic of Buryatia;
- to define national and territorial characteristics of Buddhist education implementation at secular school in the Republic of Buryatia and its preventive educational potential for multicultural society.

The following methods were used in order to achieve the objective and the tasks of this theoretical research: analysis, synthesis, abstraction, induction, deduction, generalization. Interdisciplinary methodological synthesis was carried out with the help of sociological method of analysis of interactive documents (Sivovolov, 2007) directly or indirectly connected with the issues of Buddhist education on sociological, analytical, religious and educational web pages; and also with the help of a method of active problem-contextual analysis – case study, which is mainly used in social and economic researches.

Results and Discussion

Economic and geographical characteristics of the Republic of Buryatia

The Republic of Buryatia is the subject of the Russian Federation, which is included into the Siberian Federal District. Ulan-Ude city is the administrative and cultural center of the republic. The Buryat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created on May 30, 1923. In 1937 Aga Buryatia and Ust-Orda Buryatia were detached from the Buryat-Mongolian ASSR and merged with neighboring Chita and Irkutsk Oblasts, respectively. In 1958 the Buryat-

Mongolian ASSR was renamed into the Buryat ASSR. Buryatia is located in the southern part of Eastern Siberia, to the south and to the east of Lake Baikal. The Republic of Buryatia borders with Mongolia in the south, the Republic of Tuva in the southwest, the Irkutsk region in the northwest and Zabaykalsky Krai in the east. On the territory of the republic, there are 21 municipal districts with 2 city districts and 273 urban and rural settlements. The resident population for January 1, 2013 is 971,8 thousand people, an average population density is 3,0 people on 1 km². The ethnic composition of the republic, according to the 2010 Census is as follows: Russians – 66,1%, Buryats – 30%, Ukrainians – 0,6%, other nationalities – 3,3%. Representatives of indigenous ethnic groups – Evenks and Soyots, who live on the territory of the Republic of Buryatia comprise 0,3% and 0,4% respectively out of the total number of the population.

In order to analyze the religious situation in the Republic of Buryatia we have addressed the “Arena” project of the Independent Research Service “Sreda”. “Arena” (The Atlas of Religions and Nationalities) is the first Russian research aiming to give a full picture of religiousness of the population both across Russia in general and in each region in particular.

The data on the Republic of Buryatia received during the sociological survey which was conducted in 2012 among urban and rural population aged from 18 years and more are as follows (Research Service "Sreda", 2012).

Table 1

Religious priorities of inhabitants of the Republic of Buryatia

Religious confession	In Russian Federation, %	In the subject of the Russian Federation, %
I practice Orthodoxy and belong to Russian Orthodox Church	41	27
I believe in God (the highest power), but I do not practice any specific religion	25	25
I do not believe in God	13	13
I practice Islam, but I am neither Sunnite, nor Shiite	5	<1
I practice Christianity, but I consider myself neither Orthodox Christian, nor Catholic, nor Protestant	4	4,2
I practice Sunni Islam	2	0
I practice Orthodoxy, but I do not belong to Russian Orthodox Church and I am not an Old Believer	1,5	<1
I practice traditional religion of the ancestors, I worship gods and forces of nature	1,2	1,8
I practice Buddhism	<1	20
I practice Orthodoxy, I am an Old Believer (starovyery)	<1	<1
I practice Protestantism (Lutheranism, Baptism, Evangelism, Anglicanism)	<1	MORE OFTEN

I practice Shiite Islam	<1	0
I practice Catholicism	0	0
I practice Judaism	0	<1
I practice east religions and spiritual practices	0	0
I practice Pentecostalism	0	0
other	<1	<1

Source: The Atlas of Religions and Nationalities on the website of the Research Service "Sreda" (2012).

The authors of the project note that its purpose is “to create a picture of religions and nationalities taking into account the number of inhabitants, geographical and administrative distribution, abiding by religious practices, worldview and social-demographic characteristics of Russians” (Research Service "Sreda", 2012).

According to sociologists of the Research Service “Sreda”, the Orthodox Christians who identify themselves belonging to the Russian Orthodox Church are the most numerous religious group in Buryatia (27%). Further on go believers who do not practice any specific religion (25%), Buddhists (20%), atheists (13%) and hesitating (6%).

Sergey Basaev, the analyst of “*The New Buryatia*” newspaper expresses some doubts about representativeness of this research. And we, from our part, have to notice that this research does not display the real number of followers of Islam in the republic. Whereas, the web page “Muslims of Russia” (“Muslims of Russia”, 2011), has the section “the Republic of Buryatia” and reports about 20 thousand Muslims in the Republic of Buryatia that makes about 2% of the population. Airat Khazrat Gizatullin, the imam of the Cathedral mosque of Ulan-Ude, speaks in an interview to “The Islamic portal”: “Our mosque can welcome seven hundred people and on Fridays it is filled almost completely. Without women. Therefore, for women we have singled out a separate day which is Sunday” (“Islamic Portal”, 2010). Sergey Basaev pays attention to low percentage of Old Believers and shamanists in the table. “Concerning these two religious groups the research data of the Arena project can also be questioned. It is known that, for example, Old Believers make the majority of population in three districts of Buryatia (Tarbagataisky, Mukhorshibirsky and Bichursky districts) and there are villages with the prevalence of “Semeiskie” in some other districts. Descendants of the Old Believers who moved here in the 18-19th centuries represent a considerable layer of the population of Buryatia estimated by experts from 100 to 200 thousand people (including residents of Ulan-Ude – descendants of the Old Believers), which constitutes 10 to 20% of the population of the republic.

Many of them still keep the subethnic and religious identity, visit Old Belief temples and religious meetings.

Therefore, the data of sociological service “Sreda” about Old Believers (0,4%) obviously do not reflect the real situation. Most likely, the selection of cities and villages for the survey was not made correctly; respondents from those three areas where Old Believers prevail did not participate in the research. Otherwise results on Old Believers would be different.

It is possible to draw the same conclusion about so-called “shamanists”. It is known that from the 1920s the Irkutsk Buryats who are traditionally keeping “religion of ancestors” have begun to move to Ulan-Ude and some other settlements on the territory of Buryatia. Their ancestors were protected by orthodox missionaries from the influence of Buddhist lamas and thus they have preserved in relative purity the traditional religion widespread among Mongols and Buryats even before the adoption of the Buddhism. Even those Irkutsk Buryats who were formally baptized into Orthodoxy (about a half of western Buryats), actually remained shamanists.

In Soviet period the traditions of “Shamanism”, or “Tengrism”, have been destroyed. However, from the 1990s there were founded several religious associations of shamans-boo who actively engaged in restoration of almost lost religious traditions. This process takes place due to the growing popularity of neoshamanism adapted by its adherents to the urban culture. In this situation, many Irkutsk Buryats began to declare again their religious identity and commitment of traditional national religion. In this regard “shamanists” obviously go beyond the statistical error (of 2-3%), and, most probably constitute a steady and rather numerous group” (How many Orthodox Christians, Old Believers and Buddhists are there in Buryatia? 2012).

In the researches of “Arena” there is a special analytical article devoted to the Buddhists of Russia. In the article of the July 6, 2014 with the speaking name “*715 thousand Russian Buddhists: relatively young and convinced that religion is important*”, Kuzmicheva, the researcher of the “Arena” project writes: “In comparison with an average Russian citizen the Buddhists twice more rare agree with the statements “I support traditional family principles when the man is the head of the family”, “I would like to believe in God more, than I believe now” and “I pray every day, with my own words or fixed prayers” (Kuzmicheva, 2014). At the same time, Buddhists speak about the important role of religion in their lives almost twice more often: 27% of Buddhists and 15% of Russians in general agree with this statement. Buddhists

admit that they love Russia rarer than an average (35% of Buddhists and 52% of Russians in general). They also declare they respect and always observe the law less than average (36% of Buddhists and 44% of Russians in general). At the same time Buddhists demonstrate greater tolerance to labor migrants: the alerted attitude towards the people of other nationality who arrived in job searches is inherent to 20% of Russians in general and to only 8% of the Buddhists” (Kuzmicheva, 2014). Two of these statements – “I would like to believe in God more, than I believe now” and “I pray every day, with my own words or fixed prayers” (Kuzmicheva, 2014) are not exactly correct for Buddhists as the Buddhism is the religion which denies the existence of God Creator unlike Judeo-Christian tradition, and Buddhist religion does not practice obligatory daily prayers for laymen. For reading mantras the Buddhist has to undergo special initiations and take vows in front of the Teacher. Nevertheless, the statistics of the “Arena” project is the only one, which can show some conclusions across Russia in general at the moment. Only sociologists of the “Arena” project have counted Buddhists outside the traditional Buddhist republics – Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmykia – about 200 thousand people. This figure speaks about rather large number of Buddhist neophytes and also demonstrates the attractiveness of the Buddhism as a doctrine on the territory of the Russian Federation.

History of Buddhist religious education in the Republic of Buryatia

Pre-revolutionary Buryat-Mongolia contained 46 Buddhist monasteries. Many of them were famous for their philosophical, medical, tantric faculties. During the Soviet period all Buddhist monasteries were destroyed, tens of thousands of Buddhist monks were repressed. After the Great Patriotic War in 1945 Buryats have been allowed to build one datsan for religious needs. For a long time the Ivolginsky datsan remained the only Buddhist temple of the USSR.

Buddhist religious education endures a stage of revival and re-establishment now. Until 1991 the young men from the Buddhist republics who have chosen a Buddhist way had to go to study in Mongolia and India. Many of them experienced difficulties of adaptation to other culture, climate, food, etc. With the establishment of the Buddhist institute “Dashii Choinhorlin” those who couldn't study abroad due to health reasons received the opportunity to continue religious education in the homeland. Considering the level and traditions of Buddhist education in Mongolia and India the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (governing body of the Buddhists) continues to send students to the central Buddhist universities. In 1991, 25 students have been sent to the Buddhist university Drepung Gomang in India. At present 50 students from

Buryatia, 16 from Tuva and 15 students from Kalmykia study at the Buddhist universities of India. In 2007 with the help of donations from Tuva compatriots the hostel for students from Tuva was built at the Buddhist university Drepung Gomang (Zhironkina, 2007), in 2008 – a hostel for students from Kalmykia (Yanchevlov, 2008), in 2013 the three-storied hostel for students from Buryatia was built (The hostel for students from Buryatia is built at the monastic university in India, 2013).

Buddhist institute “Dashi Choinhorlin” was open on February 16, 1991 in Tapkhar village 40 km from Ulan-Ude. In 1993 because of difficulties of Perestroika period the institute had to move to the Ivolginsky datsan. Khambo-lama Choi-Dorzhi Budaev, Dashinima shiretui (abbot of the monastery) of Ivolginsky datsan and lama Zhamyan Shagdarov initiated the creation of the Buddhist institute. Buddhist institute “Dashi Choinhorlin” is the first educational institution in Russia, which trains Buddhist priests for traditional Buddhist regions of Russia (Buryatia, Tuva and Kalmykia). Its creation was caused by the increased need for Buddhist priests for re-opened Buddhist datsans. In June, 1999 the Buddhist institute “Dashi Choinhorlin” obtained the license of the Ministry of the basic and professional education of the Russian Federation. There are four faculties at the institute: philosophical (tsanid), tantric, medical (manba) and iconographic. The faculty Duynhor (Kalachakra Tantra) was opened in 1997 at the institute “Dashi Choinhorlin”. Tibetan geshe Agvan Zhamtso, the specialist in Kalachakra tantra was the head of this faculty from 1997 to 2002. Since 2002, after finishing his studies in India, geshe (the doctor of philosophy), lama Buda Tsydenov became the dean of faculty Duynhor. The iconographic faculty was open in 1999. The students of this faculty study iconography canons, minting, Buddhist sculpture, elements of decoration of Buddhist dugans and temples in the Buryat tradition. Nowadays there are approximately 150 students at the institute, 15% of whom are students from non-Buddhist regions. In 2000 the Buddhist institute “Dashi Choinhorlin” became the university and the first official graduates with state-recognized diplomas have finished their studies. Since April 1998 with the help of its students the Buddhist institute “Dashi Choinhorlin” publishes an almanac “Legshed” which transformed from a six-page newspaper into the color magazine where one can find translations of the main canonical Buddhist texts and practices.

In 1994 the Aga Buddhist Buryat institute which later received the name “Spiritual professional educational institution “Aga Buddhist Academy” was opened at the Aga datsan which is located in 10 km from the settlement of Aginskoye of the Aginsky district in

Zabaykalsky Krai of the Russian Federation. In 1998, it has also obtained the license of the Ministry of the basic and professional education of the Russian Federation. The spiritual professional educational institution “Aga Buddhist Academy” trains in specialty 033400 – Theology (Buddhist sciences). Confessional sample diplomas in specialties: philosopher-theologian, instructor-researcher of Buddhist medicine, master of Buddhist painting are issued, the degree of the bachelor of Buddhist sciences is conferred.

Basics of religious cultures and secular ethics

In 1991-1992, optional courses focused on traditional religions and cultures of the republic were introduced at schools and pre-school educational institutions of the Republic of Buryatia. In the National doctrine of education in the Russian Federation (2000) the strategic objective of education is defined as “laying the groundwork for sustainable socio-economic and spiritual development of Russia, providing life of quality for people and national security”. In 2010-2011 in the framework of implementation of the doctrine the project plan on approbation of complex training course for educational institutions “Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (BRCSE) was developed. This course includes the basics of Orthodox culture, basics of Islamic culture, basics of Buddhist culture, basics of Judaic culture, basics of world religious cultures and basics of secular ethics. In 2011, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation recommended to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia “*The methodical materials for teachers and organizers on introduction of a complex training course “Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”* by E.V. Manakova (2011). In this document of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation beside of very useful methodical instructions for working out the courses of BRCSE, the author recommends to search for additional materials on the web pages of official religious organizations. While the web pages of Russian Orthodox Church, Council of Muftis of Russia, Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia are correct, instead of the web page of nonexistent Association of Buddhists of Russia the document offers the web page of non-traditional missionary school “Russian Association of Diamond Way Buddhists of Karma Kagyu Tradition” under the leadership of the Danish Buddhist Ole Nidahl (Diamond way Buddhism Karma Kagyu lineage, 2011), instead of the official website of Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (2017).

In general, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation has carried out great preparatory work on implementation of BRCSE in regions. According to the report of the

Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia, the total number of 815 teachers have completed professional training of BRCSE course in the Buryat republican institute of educational policy. In 2016-2017 academic year 553 teachers teach BRCSE at schools of the republic. Schools are completely equipped with textbooks on BRCSE. Teacher-parent meetings of third-graders on choice of modules are organized in full measure, however, sometimes the parents are insistently recommended to choose a specific module. On the web page of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia there is a textbook for parents “*Basics of religious cultures and secular ethics*” in free access (The Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia, 2011) in which myths about BRCSE are destroyed and fears of parents about introduction of BRCSE are dispelled. It is interesting to consider the figures reflected in Data on preliminary choice of BRCSE modules for 2016-2017 academic year made by parents (lawful representatives) of pupils of the 3rd grade published by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia.

Table 2

Data on preliminary choice of BRCSE modules for 2016-2017 academic year made by parents (lawful representatives) of pupils of the 3rd grade

District	Number of 3rd grades in 2015-2016 academic year	Total number of pupils of the 3 rd grade	Number of pupils who chose modules					
			Basics of World Religious Cultures	Basics of Secular Ethics	Basics of Orthodox Culture	Basics of Judaic Culture	Basics of Buddhist Culture	Basics of Islamic Culture
Barguzinsky	22	350	16	279	14	-	41	-
Bauntovsky	11	142	29	113	-	-	-	-
Bichursky	21	284	91	25	151	-	17	-
Dzhidinsky	30	309	70	213	5	-	21	-
Yeravninsky	17	224	46	102	41	-	35	-
Zaigrayevsky	39	630	257	336	14	-	23	-
Zakamensky	31	378	95	165	-	-	118	-
Ivolginsky	26	576	158	418	-	-	-	-
Kabansky	38	699	137	488	64	-	10	-
Kizhinginsky	10	216	85	85	2	-	44	-
Kurumkansky	14	195	171	15	-	-	9	-
Kyakhtinsky	31	503	320	141	17	-	25	-
Muysky	8	141	33	108	-	-	-	-
Mukhorshi-birsky	25	301	16	259	-	-	26	-
Okinsky	6	86	70	-	-	-	16	-
Pribaykalsky	24	393	124	241	28	-	-	-

Severo-Baykalsky	10	136	5	122	9	-	-	-
Selenginsky	34	524	106	360	2	-	56	-
Tarbagataysky	15	221	17	181	23	-	-	-
Tunkinsky	23	321	68	200	-	-	53	-
Khorinsky	21	247	49	189	3	-	6	-
Ulan-Ude	296	5804	1486	4269	45	-	4	-
Severobay-kalsk	13	350	-	290	-	-	-	60
Republican Buryat National Boarding Lyceum № 1	2	60	-	-	-	-	60	-
Ust-Alacheyskaya secondary boarding school	1	10	-	10	-	-	-	-
Shimkinskaya secondary boarding school	1	7	-	7	-	-	-	-
Total:	769	13107	3449	8616	418	-	564	60

Source: website of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Buryatia

The table shows that parents generally choose “The Basics of Secular Ethics” module – 8616 out of 13107 people (65.77%), the second place is taken by “The Basics of World Religious Cultures” module – 3449 (26.3%), traditional for the Republic of Buryatia “the Basics of Buddhist Culture” module was chosen by only 564 parents (4.3%), while “The Basics of Orthodox Culture” module even less – 418 people (3.1%). The fact that 60 people have chosen “The Basics of Islamic Culture” module in Severobaykalsk inspires optimism – it demonstrates that there is choice and possibilities for teaching this module, at least in Severobaykalsk.

The possible reason of such choice of modules lies in the so-called “banal religiousness” inherent to people in the Post-Soviet period. “Banal religiousness means lack of contact between religious ethics and secular practice, poor knowledge of dogmatics and the meaning of ceremonies, simplified and pragmatic attitude towards religion, occasional visits to temples... Today it is obvious that for many if not for the majority, banal religiousness acts as religion, it does not contradict to the belief, but also is not equal to it” (Amogolonova, et. al., 2016). Apart from this factor, religious syncretism inherent to the region of Transbaikalia and noticed by many researchers also cannot be disregarded. “Religious and cultural syncretism typical to the religious situation of the contemporary Buryatia can be considered to some extent as the result of interaction of former generations who evinced not only the possibility of appealing to different religions, but also the efficiency of such way of religious confession” (Amogolonova, et. al., 2016). Tatiana Bernyukevich defines the peculiarities of religious syncretism among the people of Transbaikalia: “The Russian people have been closely contacting with the Buddhism for more

than three hundred years in a number of Russian regions of traditional distribution of the Buddhism. Religious syncretism in this case was the result of interaction of cultures when Buddhist culture was perceived if not “their” one, but the close one as it was professed by the people with whom they were in good relations and the representatives of Buddhist priesthood never refused aid to any layman including an Orthodox Christian. Such historically developed positive image of the Buddhism, undoubtedly, encourages Russian population of such regions (most vividly it is shown in Buryatia and Zabaykalsky Krai) to actively visit astrologers, doctors in datsans, attend Buddhist ceremonies and holidays. What is more, the majority of such “dvoeverets” identifies themselves as Christians, more often Orthodox Christians” (Bernyukevich, 2013).

Let us return to the fact that parents of pupils of the 4th grade hardly ever choose the module with a specific religion, even the one they profess. On focus groups at schools of the Republic of Buryatia parents, irrespectively of their own religious views, expressed fears of possible clericalisation of education and showed unwillingness to emphasize the ethnicity and religious affiliation of family. This situation is surprising because the Buryat metropolitanate and the Buddhist traditional sangha of Russia received with big enthusiasm the news about implementation of BRCSE course. For example, M.G. Alisova, the head of the press service of the Ulan-Ude and Buryat diocese developed video-annex considering the local material as the additional source to “The Basics of Orthodox Culture” module for pupils of the 4th grade of the general education organizations. The priest Roman Nikolaevich Khlybov, the head of the department of religious education and a catechesis of the Ulan-Ude and Buryat diocese, took active part in meetings of the Republican expert commission on BRCSE. Excursions to the temples were offered to pupils, representatives of religious faith willingly attend teaching events.

In 2010 year the Buddhist university “Dashi Choinhorlin” of Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia published the book “*Buddha's World*” (2010) within the actions for approbation of BRCSE. In this book, Buddhist lamas in a form, understandable for children, articulates the key moments of Buddha’s (Siddhartha Gautama) biography, basic principles of Buddha’s doctrine and stories from lives of Buddhist teachers. Each paragraph includes tasks for independent work and colorful illustrations of tanka-artists of Ivolginsky datsan. There is a dictionary on “Fundamentals of the Buddhism”, biographies of outstanding Buddhists of Buryatia. Despite all advantages, it is impossible to call this book a textbook on BRCSE, as it is published in A4 size

on heavy chalk overlay paper, the book cannot easily be fixed in the open position because of the hard cover. That is why the book can be recommended to pupils for home reading.

On December 13, 2011 in the Aga medical college the meeting of teachers of high schools from Agin-Buryat Autonomous Area and lamas of the Aga datsan was held. There the discussion of released textbook “*The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics. Basics of Buddhist culture*” (Chimitdorzhiev, 2010) within all-Russian school course “The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” (BRCSE) for 4-5 grades of secondary general education institutions took place. The author of this book is Chimitdorzhiev Babu-lama, the rector of the Aga Buddhist Academy. The textbook is included into completed course line “The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics”. It was developed according to the requirements of the Federal state educational standard of the primary general education and the Concept of spiritual and moral development and character education of the citizen of Russia.

The textbook in a form, understandable for pupils of the 4th grade, acquaints them with the basics of the Buddhist culture: its founder, Buddhist doctrine, moral values, sacred books, rituals, shrines, holidays and art. The topics of the first block are “Spiritual values and moral ideals in lives of human and society” and “Russia – our Homeland”. In the second block acquaintance with Buddhist spiritual tradition begins with such topics as “Buddha and His Doctrine”, “Buddhist Sacred Canon”, “Buddhist Worldview”, “Basic Concepts of Buddhist Ethics”, such as, good and evil, non-violence, love to a person and life value, mercy and compassion, care of nature, family in Buddhist culture and its values. These concepts are fixed by the topic “Buddhist Teachers”. The third block is devoted to rituals and symbolics of the Buddhism, the Buddhist calendar and holidays, architecture of sacral constructions, Buddhist art and sacral objects. The final fourth block of the textbook pays attention to spiritual traditions of the multinational people of Russia. The fourth block assumes presentations of pupils on topics: “How I understand Orthodoxy”, “How I understand Islam”, “How I understand Buddhism”, “How I understand Judaism”, “What is ethics?”, “Value of religion in lives of human and society”, “Monuments of religious culture (in my city / village)”. The culmination of “The Basics of Buddhist culture” course is presentation of creative projects on the topic “Dialogue of Cultures for Civil Peace and Harmony” (folk art, verses, songs, kitchen of the people of Russia, etc). The textbook by V.L. Chimitdorzhiev (2010) “*The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics. Basics of Buddhist culture*” has a workbook. Each section begins with the note “You will learn” where the main

sub-topics of the paragraph are revealed, and is accompanied by illustrations of Buddhist attributes or architecture with commentaries. At the end of each section there are questions and tasks.

The textbook is oriented to motivate a younger teenager to conscious moral behavior based on knowledge and respect of cultural and religious traditions of the Buddhism and to dialogue with representatives of other cultures and world views. For this purposes the value of Buddhist cultural and religious traditions is revealed taking into account educational opportunities of younger teenagers. The textbook creates conditions for upbringing of highly moral, creative, responsible person with respect to spiritual and cultural traditions of the multinational people of Russia, and develops skills to communicate in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment on the basis of mutual respect and dialogue.

Nevertheless, parents of modern children, irrespective of their own religious views, prefer to choose “The Basics of Secular Ethics” module because of fears of possible clericalisation of education and unwillingness to emphasize the ethnicity and religious affiliation of family.

In June 2013 on the basis of the Buryat State University the department of religious studies and theology was opened. On September 1, 2013, the subject “The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics” never taught before at the Soviet school was introduced to the obligatory school program and is studied to the present day. It gives the chance “to minimize risks in the multicultural environment and to help civil society and religion to compromise and respect each other. In this regard, in our opinion, clericalisation of education is impermissible, but children should know more about religion which acts in many respects as the basis for culture” (The department of religious studies and theology at BSU opens against the background of heated discussions about the place of religion in life of society, 2013).

Conclusion

The observed revival of religious education within the promotion of multicultural education in Russia is a significant historical event of deep spiritual meaning which demands further academic interpretation. Over the last couple of decades, the Buddhist university and Buddhist academy with licenses for educational activity from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation have been created in Russia. Buddhist priests received with big enthusiasm the idea of teaching BRCSE course at schools, with the help of Buddhist lamas

the textbook and the book for additional reading within “The Basics of Buddhist Culture” module were prepared.

It is very important that throughout its history Buddhist education instills tolerance – an important human quality for the multicultural and multi-confessional world. Buddha told his pupils that when going to the other countries one should respect foreign gods because if they exist in minds of these people, they really exist. His followers practiced the similar attitude to other religions. In all countries the Buddhism peacefully gets on with other religions, in India – with Hinduism and Islam, in Japan – with Shintoism, in China – Taoism and Confucianism, etc. Moreover, the Buddhist tradition does not insist that people who address Buddhist priests, come to Buddhist temples and even practice the Buddhism, have to be the Buddhists who have taken a Buddhist refuge. The concept of tolerance is one of the main ethical categories of the Buddhist ethics. Tolerance to other people, to a life situation and other beings speaks about open mindedness, general emancipation of a person and readiness for dialogue.

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