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Key Aspects of Buddhism Integration into the Russian Education System

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Abstract

Introduction. The growing interest in Buddhist education is linked to the geopolitical shifts and civilizational transformations currently taking place in the world, which necessitate viewing it through the lens of multipolarity, given the role of Buddhist nations for Russia. The aim of this article is to identify the distinctive features of the integration of Buddhism into the modern Russian education system. The article identifies types of interaction between religion and education and sets out to demonstrate that the integration of Buddhism and secular education represents a new form of contemporary interaction.

Materials and Methods. The methodological foundation is a systems approach, which allows us to view religion and education as social systems that interact with one another. A structural-functional approach is applied to study the integration of religion and education. General scientific methodology is employed in the form of analysis, synthesis, deduction, and abstraction. A post-secular paradigm, pioneered by J. Habermas, is applied to examine the relationship between the religious and the secular.

Results. Modern education is characterized by the active integration of religion, which shapes the spiritual and moral foundations of the individual. Buddhism is no exception; its teachings, by their very nature, constitute a continuous educational process that has historically been carried out in monasteries. At the same time, modern Buddhist education is also concentrated in institutions established at datsans. Several vectors of development in Buddhist education are noted. The first aspect is traditional spiritual Buddhist education; the second is the study of Buddhism as part of secular disciplines; and the third is the integration of Buddhist and secular educational institutions. The study presents an example of the integration of Buddhism and education at the Dorzhi Banzarov Buryat State University, where a bachelor's program in Buddhist philosophy is being implemented for the first time in collaboration with a Buddhist university.

Discussion and Conclusion. At present, there is a consistent government strategy aimed at supporting and promoting the development of Buddhist religious organizations, as well as advancing Buddhist educational discourse. This policy is implemented through a range of measures, including financial support, a legislative framework, and assistance in institutionalizing Buddhist educational programs.

Keywords: society, education, religion, secular education, religious education, Buddhism, Buddhist education

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Интеграция буддизма в систему российского образования: ключевые аспекты

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Аннотация

Введение. Повышение интереса к буддийскому образованию связано с геополитическими изменениями и цивилизационными трансформациями, которые происходят сегодня в мире и детерминируют необходимость рассмотреть его с точки зрения многополярности, учитывая роль буддийских государств для России. Целью статьи является выявление особенностей внедрения буддизма в систему российского современного образования. Выделяются типы взаимодействия религии и образования, поставлена задача доказать, что интеграция буддизма и светского образования – это новый тип современного взаимодействия.

Материалы и методы. Методологической основой является системный подход, позволяющий рассмотреть религию и образование как социальные системы, находящиеся во взаимодействии. Структурно-функциональный подход применяется для изучения интеграции религии и образования. Используется общенаучная методология в виде анализа, синтеза, дедукции, абстрагирования. Применяется постсекулярная парадигма, пионером которой является Ю. Хабермаса, для рассмотрения соотношения религиозного и светского.

Результаты исследования. Современное образование характеризуется активным включением в него религии, которое формирует духовно-нравственные основы личности. Не является исключением и буддизм, учение которого по своему содержанию является постоянным образованием, которое исторически осуществлялось в монастырях. Вместе с тем современное буддийское образование также сконцентрировано в институтах, созданных при дацанах. Отмечается несколько векторов развития буддийского образования. Первый аспект – это традиционное духовное буддийское образование, второй – изучение буддизма как элемента светских дисциплин, третий – интеграция буддийских и светских образовательных учреждений. В исследовании продемонстрирован пример интеграции буддизма и образования в Бурятском госуниверситете им. Доржи Банзарова, где впервые реализуется программа бакалавриата по философии буддизма в сотрудничестве с буддийским университетом.

Обсуждение и заключение. В настоящий момент наблюдается последовательная государственная стратегия, направленная на поддержку и стимулирование развития буддийских религиозных объединений, а также на продвижение буддийского образовательного дискурса. Данная политика реализуется через комплекс мер, включающих финансовую поддержку, законодательную базу, а также содействие в институционализации буддийских образовательных программ.

Ключевые слова: общество, образование, религия, светское образование, религиозно образование, буддизм, буддийское образование

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Introduction. Modern education takes shape within a multi-faith and multicultural environment. In our view, this is a key feature of Russian society, shaping the goals of education, which consist not only in the transmission of knowledge, but also in the formation of the spiritual and moral foundations of the individual. Today religion plays one of the primary roles in this process. At the same time, there is a recognition that the process of teaching scientific knowledge about the surrounding world would be insufficient without paying attention to the diversity of religious cultures that have influenced the development of our country and the world as a whole. It is also an indisputable fact that the influence and role of religion have grown significantly and now concern not only the interests of the individual but also touch upon issues in all spheres of society.

The relationship between religion and education has long been a subject of interest to researchers, but this topic has gained particular relevance relatively recently, with the active integration of religion into the educational system. In the context of modern education, where the religious component plays a special role, it seems necessary to draw some conclusions based on the specific example of integrating Buddhist education into the secular education system. Among the various forms of interaction between religion and education, the experience of incorporating Buddhist education into the secular Russian education system is of particular interest.

Interest in Buddhist education is linked to global trends, as the realities of the modern world present Russian society with the challenge of establishing a dialogue with countries where Buddhism is traditionally practiced and which offer an alternative to Western civilization. The purpose of this article is to identify the key features of the integration of Buddhism and the modern secular education system and to highlight the main trends in this process, drawing on a specific example of the implementation of an educational program.

Materials and Methods. The systems approach was chosen as the primary methodology, as its advantages allow for the study of religion and education as social systems that interact with one another [1, p. 45]. Within this systems framework, religion and education are analyzed as mutually influencing elements of the social structure that perform specific functions and influence one another through their interaction. In addition, a structural-functional approach was used for a more detailed study, making it possible to identify religion and education as structural entities within a single social system and to determine their impact on society as a whole. This methodological choice is driven by the need for a deep understanding of the mechanisms of interaction between religion and education, which allows us to identify the patterns and trends that determine their role in modern society. It should be noted that it was appropriate to use general scientific methods such as analysis, synthesis, deduction, and abstraction, which allowed us to identify connections and relationships between the objects under study. The theoretical foundation of the study was the post-secular paradigm developed in the philosophical works of J. Habermas, which asserts the idea that religion transcends its own boundaries and actively permeates all spheres of public life.

Results. When examining the relationship between religion and education, three main models of interaction can be identified. “First, there is secular education; second, denominational religious education; and third, non-denominational religious education” [2, p. 161]. Within this typology, Buddhist education is represented in the form of Buddhist education in monasteries, as a secular course on Buddhist philosophy in higher education institutions within disciplines such as “History of Philosophy,” “Religious Studies,” and “Philosophy of Religion.” Finally, Buddhism is presented as an ethno-regional component of the school subjects “Fundamentals of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” and “Fundamentals of the Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Peoples of Russia”.

It is important to note that Buddhism historically developed as a distinct educational tradition centered on monastic education, where knowledge was transmitted from teacher to student. At the same time, in Russian regions where Tibetan Gelug Buddhism is traditionally widespread, monastic education has largely been preserved, retaining both its authentic features and having undergone modernization. Essentially, Buddhist education has always been linked to the monastery, where socialization, initiation into Buddhist values, and the acquisition of education take place. “An individual’s entry into a monastery involves passing through several stages of education, which can last up to 20 years or more. Completing these stages and earning academic degrees opened the door to higher positions within the administrative, ritual, and educational systems. The educational hierarchy of Tibetan Buddhism includes up to 40 degrees, depending on specialization, level, and monastic and regional characteristics” [3, p. 64].

Currently, Buddhist spiritual education is offered at two educational institutions: the Buddhist Academy at the Aginsky Datsan and the “Dashi Choinkhorlin Buddhist University of the Damba Darja Zayaev” at the Ivolginsky Datsan. The Aginsky Buddhist Academy has been operating since 1998; in 2022, it received a license for educational activities and established three bachelor’s degree programs in Buddhist studies [4]. In 1999, the “Dashi Choinkhorlin” Buddhist University received a state license to conduct educational activities in the field of religious education; in 2004, it received a state license for educational activities. Students (huwarak) receive a higher education diploma and the title of “Lama-Theologian.” These two higher religious institutions are important for training specialists in Buddhist philosophy, who also serve to reproduce the Buddhist clergy and facilitate its initial socialization [5].

Thus, it is clear that with the onset of a religious revival in Russia’s multi-faith society, a process began to shape a new structure for Buddhist education. We see that the 1990s marked the beginning of the revival of spiritual Buddhist education, when the first Buddhist educational institutions were established; for example, the Aginsky Buddhist Academy began its activities with the opening of a school of Tibetan medicine in the Aginsky Buryat Autonomous Okrug in 1993. Schools of Tibetan medicine continue the two-hundred-year-old educational traditions of the Manba Dugana of the Aginsky Datsan.

Having gone through a complex, multi-stage process of licensing and accreditation in the 2000s, these educational institutions evolved into a system of Buddhist education with a solid pedagogical foundation. It should be noted that this was also facilitated by the modernization of the legislative framework, primarily the Constitution of the Russian Federation, where Article 14 states: “No religion may be established as the state religion or made mandatory,” and “religious associations are separate from the state and equal before the law.” It is also worth noting Federal Law No. 125-FZ of

September 26, 1997 (as amended on December 2, 2019) “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” [6], specifically Article 3: “the right to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.”

These legal documents enabled religious organizations to engage in educational activities, thereby expanding their influence. This was of great significance for Buddhist spiritual education. Especially following the long Soviet period during which religion and religious education were banned, this marked the beginning of a process of convergence between Buddhist education and secular education.

It should be noted that these educational institutions, on the one hand, continue the traditions of Buddhist monastic education, while on the other hand, in keeping with modern requirements, they also exhibit secular characteristics. Thus, the structure of their educational activities is modeled after secular higher education institutions: admission requirements, start of classes, duration of study, types of classes, forms of assessment, and so on. Along with Buddhist disciplines, students study secular subjects such as sociology, English, mathematics, and many others. Thus, it turns out that the Buddhist education received there, despite its secular form, is filled with religious content.

A new phase in the integration of Buddhist education into the broader education system is currently underway. Russian society is actively undergoing a process of incorporating Buddhist religious elements into educational institutions, driven by two factors. The first is the historical experience of intercultural and interfaith interaction that has traditionally developed within Russian society; the second factor is cultural contacts with the Buddhist world. To support Buddhist education, the “Foundation for the Promotion of Buddhist Education and Research” [7] was established; under its auspices, two international conferences on Buddhism were held in Ulan-Ude in 2023 and 2024, with participants from 13 countries.

The Foundation was established with the support of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and research institutes specializing in the study of the East: Institute of Asian and African Studies of Moscow State University and Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences; and the centralized religious organization Association of Buddhist Communities “Arya Sangha.” This demonstrates, on the one hand, state support and, on the other, the interest of Buddhist religious organizations in the development of Buddhist studies and Buddhist education. In this regard, Buddhist organizations act as key players exerting a certain influence on the development of Buddhist education; they are currently actively involved in organizing conferences and meetings, as well as co-authoring scientific research and educational programs.

In 2024, Buryat State University admitted its first class to the bachelor’s program in “Buddhist Philosophy.” A distinctive feature of this program is that students are simultaneously enrolled at the Buddhist university “Dashi Choinkhorlin.” At the same time, it should be noted that the BSU offers the bachelor’s degree program 48.03.01 “Orthodox Theology. State-Religious Relations,» which is provided by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, established in 2013. Here, the emphasis is on Orthodox theology alongside general disciplines. It should be noted that in 2024, the Eastern Institute of BSU established a core department of Buddhist philosophy based at the “Dashi Choinkhorlin” Buddhist University, comprising faculty members from both secular and religious universities [8].

Essentially, obtaining such a degree addresses a very important social issue. A student who has graduated from a Buddhist monastic educational institution can continue their education in monasteries in India or Tibet, or work at a datsan of their choice. However, it should be noted that a monastic education does not always guarantee successful integration into modern society. A situation has arisen in which many graduates of Buddhist spiritual universities are unable to integrate into society without a secular education. Consequently, graduates now possess the qualifications of both a clergyman and a secular specialist.

It is also important to note another key aspect of Buddhist philosophy: the idea of a person-centered approach. Education is a process leading to self-realization, grounded in each individual’s unique characteristics. Buddhist education seeks not to dictate, but to help individuals discover their own potential; moreover, it creates a supportive environment for the individual. All of this demonstrates the potential of Buddhist education to foster sociocultural competencies that meet the challenges of the modern world.

Discussion and Conclusion. So, Buddhist education today is developing in the following directions: the first is traditional monastic education, structured within a secular framework but with a Buddhist focus. This type of religious education has a long history, which has allowed it to preserve the study of ritual practices and specific Buddhist disciplines, while combining them with a modern secular methodological approach. The second direction is the fragmented study of Buddhist culture within the framework of the school subjects “Fundamentals of Religious Culture and Secular Ethics” and “Fundamentals of the Spiritual and Moral Culture of the Peoples of Russia”, the essence of which is based on the axiological aspect of religious content. The third is the study of the origins and philosophy of Buddhism within the framework of secular disciplines in which the religious aspect is not addressed. Finally, a distinct approach is emerging

that involves an in-depth study of Buddhist philosophy as part of philosophy in general, synthesizing secular presentation with religious content. This addresses an important social issue: the integration of the Buddhist clergy into modern society.

Buddhism was originally conceived as an educational doctrine; however, for a long time, there was no need to integrate it into secular education. Nevertheless, today there is a growing need both to expand Buddhist education and to adapt it to modern realities. It should be noted that, of all traditional religions, Buddhism is the least represented in the educational sphere, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

At present, the state's targeted policy to support Buddhist religious organizations is evident. This support is also evident in the development of Buddhist education, which is a crucial aspect of preserving and transmitting the spiritual tradition of Buddhism. Such steps taken by the state include: facilitating the organization of educational programs and creating conditions for the integration of Buddhism into the modern education system.

The development of Buddhist education is largely linked to the nature of contemporary state-religion relations, which are characterized by cooperation between religious organizations and the state. To a large extent, this leads to state support for religious organizations in their efforts to carry out educational activities. It is also dictated by the need to draw upon traditional spiritual and moral values, to preserve national unity, Russian identity, and distinctiveness, the foundations of which, as it turns out, can largely be found in traditional religions.

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