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Kalmyk Prayer Notebooks of the Soviet Era. From the History of the Kalmyks' Buddhist Texts Collections in the 20th Century

Abstract

The article considers written sources that shed light on the history of existence and circulation of Buddhist texts in the Kalmyk environment in the 20th century. The author describes two Soviet notebooks stored in the scientific archive of the Kalmyk Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAN). The article is to describe these written sources, to analyze their composition and content, and to thus introduce them into scientific use. The methods for their studying are basically the same as for studying written sources within the frameworks of auxiliary historical disciplines: analysis of paper, handwriting, language, textology, and

archeography. Judging by the series description and marks in the text, these collections were acquired in the early 1980s, along with the personal library of the famous Buddhist cleric Tougmyud-gavdzhi (O. M. Dordzhieva), which forms the basis of the Center's manuscript collection. Of particular interest is their format: they are pocket prayer books including texts on various subjects in Tibetan with fragmentary inserts in the Oirat writing. The appearance of such prayer collections in such peculiar form, different from traditional Eastern book, was a dictate of time. These two handwritten collections indicate that in the Soviet era, Buddhist teaching was not forgotten, its followers found ways to preserve the doctrinal texts and to use them in personal practice and when performing ritual practices for compatriots. These collections have not yet been described or introduced into scientific use. The publication fills the gap in the history of Buddhism among Kalmyks. Its significance boils down to the fact that, firstly, a new form of a written document has been discovered, a new type of written source has been introduced into scientific use, extending the chronological range of traditional religious literature among Kalmyks to the end of the first half of the 20th century; secondly, the existence of traditional forms of religious texts in the Soviet era has been documented, which is quite unexpected, knowing the history of the Kalmyk people of the 20th century.

Keywords

Written sources, Buddhism, Archive of the Kalmyk Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences, block-book, manuscripts, Tibetan language, 20th century, Ikitsokhurovsky khurul.

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