



**SOLUTIONS AND POSSIBILITIES  
FOR STRENGTHENING  
THERAVADA BUDDHISM IN RUSSIA**

**Daria Sucitta Mikheeva**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
(Buddhist Studies)

Graduate School  
Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University  
C.E. 2018



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The Graduate School of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University has approved this thesis entitled “Solutions and Possibilities for Strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia” as a part of education according to its curriculum of the Master of Arts in Buddhist Studies.

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative research has three objectives, namely: (1) to study the origins of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, (2) to study strong and weak points of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, (3) to study opportunities and threats of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, and (4) to present possible ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in the country. Theravada Buddhism was introduced in Russia about two decades ago and showed a rather little development since the first Theravada monks came from abroad. Although there is an enduring interest for non-traditional religions in Russia, Theravada Buddhists face challenges and limitations in propagating the teaching due to certain factors, internal and external, which were analyzed in the present research based on in-depth interviews and works of contemporary religious scholars. As a result, the research suggested four development strategies, which can be applied by Theravada Buddhists depending on what seems more suitable for their current situation, in order to propagate the Buddha's teaching more efficiently.

Among the four strategies, which were developed based on the method of SWOT-analysis, two can be considered “active” in using strengths and opportunities of external environment, while the other two can be seen as “defensive” and directed at mitigating the adverse events of the environment. The active strategies (A and C) are primarily focused on cooperation: with separate groups of Theravada Buddhists – in order to organize greater projects and event, with communities belonging to various Buddhist schools – to represent the unity of Buddha’s disciples and cover the shortfall of resources, with representatives of Russia’s traditional religions – to represent Theravada Buddhism as a part of Russia’s multi-religious society, and, finally, with organizations of traditional Theravada countries, that could help to fill many shortages in education of Russian Buddhists. The defensive strategies (B and D) comprise dealing with political and cultural trends which may be considered obstructive for dissemination of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Cultural xenophobia, anti-missionary laws, and attempts to represent certain religions as an integral part of ethnical and cultural identity already in the near future may become a challenge that requires careful examination and consideration.

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## List of Abbreviations

AN	:	Āṅguttara Nikāya
DN	:	Dīgha Nikāya
MA		Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakatha
MN	:	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	:	Saṃyutta Nikāya
VinA		Vinaya Piṭaka Aṭṭhakatha (Samantapāsādikā)
Vism		Visuddhimaga
PTS	:	Pali Text Society
e.g.	:	( <i>exempli gratia</i> ) for example
ed.	:	edited
i.e.	:	( <i>id est</i> ) that is
Ibid.	:	( <i>ibidem</i> ) at the same place
no.	:	number
p., pp.	:	page, pages
trans.	:	translated by
vol.	:	volume

All Pāli quotations in this thesis are from the Pāli Text Society (PTS) editions. In quoting the Pāli literature my references are to volume and page. For example: AN.I.134 refers to Āṅguttara Nikāya, volume I, page 134; DN.III.56 refers to Dīgha Nikāya, volume III, page 56.

# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Significance of the Problem

When Russia's religious life comes into discussion, it is a well-known fact that Christianity is professed by the majority of the population. Less is known that Buddhism, being the religion of only 1% of residents, is listed among Russia's traditional religions, which are distinguished for their contribution to the country's history and culture.<sup>1</sup> Tibetan Buddhism spread to Russian Empire in XVI-XVII century from Mongolia through Kalmyk tribes and was officially recognized in 1741.<sup>2</sup> Tibetan Buddhism in Russia has a history of more than three hundred years, while Theravada Buddhism, on the other hand, is a new phenomenon, which only begins to acquire followers among Russians. During the last two decades, a number of Theravada communities and centers were formed in different parts of the country. Members as well as founders of such communities include both Russian nationals and citizens of Buddhist countries. They organize activities ranging from alms offerings to meditation retreats, and offer support to those who wish to study and practice the Buddha's teaching.

As cultural borders become less rigid, further growth of interest to Theravada Buddhism can be expected in Russia. Researchers point out a tendency for religions to lose their binding to areas of original distribution and go beyond traditional, political and geographical borders, thus finding their followers in areas where they never existed

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1 O. Melnichenko, "Traditional Religions of Russia: To the Question of Terms", **Historical, Philosophical, Political and Jural Sciences, Culturology and Art History. Theoretical and Practical Questions**, (Tambov: Gramota, 2012), p. 124.

2 M. Burdo, **Modern Religious Life in Russia. Experience of a Systematic Description**, Vol.3, (Moscow: Logos, 2004), p. 235.

before.<sup>3</sup> While traditional Theravada countries became a popular destination for Russian travelers to fulfill their spiritual searches, the number of Thai, Burmese and Sri Lankan Theravada monks visiting the country increases. Although the amount of Theravada literature available in Russian language remains scarce, canonical and modern texts are translated into Russian on an ongoing basis.

However, no research was ever done to address the state and prospects of Theravada Buddhism in the country. While it is developing in a unique environment, which offers both challenges and advantages, Theravada followers in Russia are facing expectable problems when adapting their religious practices to a cultural environment where these practices remain unfamiliar. Moreover, several factors such as legal restrictions<sup>4</sup> negatively influence the propagation of Theravada Buddhism, which is essential at the current stage of development. Understanding the background and finding ways to overcome challenges require an in-dept study that will consider multiple factors like religious history, cultural tendencies, legal issues, etc.

At present it is not easy to identify distinctive characteristics of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, which could be attributed to its strong or weak sides, since this religious group emerged about two decades ago. However, cases of the existing communities can be described and analyzed in order to gain a picture, understand the problems, and examine their possible solutions. Ideas concerning modern religious tendencies, which became very important since the religious picture was rapidly changing in most of the world's countries during the last decades,<sup>5</sup> can help to evaluate the prospects and possible strategies to develop Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

In this work, the researcher intends to examine Theravada Buddhism in Russia to determine its strengths and weakness, demonstrate the unique cultural, political, and legal environment that it develops in, and present possible ways of development

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3 S. Filatov, "Religious Life in Eurasia: Responses to Globalization", A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (ed.), **Religion and Globalization Across Eurasia**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2009), p. 15.

4 S. Filatov, "Traditional Religions, Russian Civilization, and Sovereign Democracy", A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (ed.), **Religion and Conflict**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2007), p. 31.

5 Ibid, 17.

considering possibilities and threats of external environment. The method of SWOT analysis was chosen in order to gain a comprehensive picture of Theravada Buddhism existing in the cultural environment of Russia, focusing on strong and weak points, opportunities and threats.

This research will include a detailed description and analysis of different spheres related to the existence, development, and propagation of Theravada Buddhism in contemporary Russia. It can benefit non-Russian readers interested in the modern state of Theravada and its propagation in Russia, as well as Russian researchers who study the life of different Buddhist communities in their country.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Research**

The objectives of this research are:

- 1) to study the emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia,
- 2) to study strong and weak points of Theravada Buddhism in Russia,
- 3) to study opportunities and threats of Theravada Buddhism in Russia,
- 4) to suggest development strategies for Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

## **1.3 Statement of the Problems Desired to Know**

The study should provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) How was Theravada Buddhism introduced in Russia?
- 2) What are its strong and weak sides?
- 3) What are the opportunities and threats for Theravada Buddhism in Russia?
- 4) What are the possible ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia?

## **1.4 Scope of Research**

This study will focus on Theravada Buddhism in Russia, namely on Buddhist organizations and religious activities connected with the practice and propagation of Theravada Buddhist teaching within the geographical borders of Russia. This study will analyze the environment in which the religious activities are conducted to identify its special features, which can be seen as advantages or obstacles in the development of Theravada in the country. Religious, cultural, political and legal backgrounds will be considered in terms of how they affect the existence of this school within the Russian borders. Finally, the author will examine possible strategies of development that can be applied by Russian Buddhists.

#### **1.4.1 Scope of Sources of Data**

Theravada in Russia is a new phenomenon, which started to take shape within the last two decades. There are still no in-dept researches that would deal with its existence and development in this area. For this reason, sources of data concerning Theravada Buddhism in particular will include interviews with individuals, who dedicated a significant amount of time trying to propagate the Buddha's teaching in Russia, as well as articles from journals and web-sources. Other sources related to the research will include books and articles on religious history and modern religious trends in Russia, as well as legal acts, social polls, and other social studies connected with the subject. Being a Russian Theravada follower, the researcher also intends to address her own experience in writing this research work.

#### **1.4.2 Scope of Content**

This research focuses on solutions and possibilities of strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia by studying: (1) the history and current trends in the religious life of the country; (2) personal accounts of propagating the Buddha's teaching, organizing respective activities and performing other related kinds of work in Russia. In the process of gathering the information, the researcher will focus on the following aspects: (1) strong and weak points of Theravada Buddhism in Russia; (2) threats and growth possibilities; (3) ways of solving problems and strengthen Theravada Buddhism in the country.

### **1.4.3 Scope of Population**

The present research deals with Theravada Buddhist communities and individuals whose activities are mainly based within the borders of Russian Federation. It is not restricted to a particular area of Russia and not limited to Russian nationals. Citizens of other countries, especially traditional Theravada countries, have made a determining contribution in bringing and developing this sect of Buddhism in Russia. Consequently, it was highly desirable to include data on their activities and contribution in the present research. Seven key informants were interviewed to gather the necessary information on the development and present state of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

## **1.5 Definition of the Terms Used in the Research**

### **1.5.1 Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Theravada (Pali, literally "doctrine of the elders") is the school of Buddhism that is based on the Pali Canon, or Tipitaka, which contains the earliest records of the Buddha's teachings. In Russia, academic interest in studying the Pali Canon emerged in the end of XIX century, although organized groups that focused specifically on the study and practical ways of the Theravada school started to appear within the last 20 years.

### **1.5.2 Russia**

Russian Federation is a country of eastern Europe and northern Asia stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean. It is the largest world's country with Moscow as its capital city and a population over 146 million. Russian is the only official language at the national level, with 35 minority languages spoken across the country. According to various studies, from 47% to 71% of Russians declare themselves Christians. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism are recognized as Russia's traditional religions, marking the country's "historical heritage".

### **1.5.3 Challenge**

Challenge, by one of its main definitions, is a difficult task or problem, something that is hard to accomplish. It requires great determination and effort – mental or physical – in order to be done successfully. Adapting to a Western culture, in this sense, can be a challenge for traditional Buddhism originating from the East. Challenge can also mean a call to confrontation, implicating a conflict between two forces.

### **1.5.4 Prospect**

Prospect is a mental picture of something to come, something that is awaited or expected, or simply an act of looking forward. It also means a probability or chance for future success, especially as based on present work or aptitude. To question about the prospects of Theravada Buddhism in Russia is to question if a favorable picture can be expected in the future.

## **1.6 Review of Related Literature and Research Works**

### **1.6.1 M. Burdo, S.B. Filatov. Modern Religious Life in Russia. Experience of a Systematic Description<sup>6</sup>**

This edition in four volumes provides information on the existing religious organizations in the country, their numbers, confessional educational institutions, media, and activities. It describes foundations of beliefs and approaches to socially significant problems, analyzes ideological trends, conflicts within religious communities, and their mutual relations with authorities and the society. For the future research, this edition is valuable as it provides a comprehensive picture of the religious life in Russia and describes the history and place of Buddhism within Russian culture.

“Buddhism in Russia exists in 2 main forms, namely traditional form of organizing religious life, mainly in Buryatia, Kalmykia, and Tuva, which centers in the monastery, and new for Buddhism form of small communities belonging to different

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<sup>6</sup> M. Burdo, **Modern Religious Life in Russia. Experience of a Systematic Description**, Vol.3, (Moscow: Logos, 2004), p. 235.



schools. Before the end of XIX century, Buddhism in Russia was solely the religion of three [minority] ethnic groups. Russians began to approach Buddhism in the end of XIX century on grounds of scientific interest to the East in general and Buddhism in particular.”

#### **1.6.2 A. Malashenko, S. Filatov. Religion and Globalization Across Eurasia<sup>7</sup>**

This edition is focused on the underexplored subject of how globalization influences religion. The authors go through the problem in application to the world’s religions including Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. The book describes tendencies of how religions can respond to a rapidly changing environment and what are the results of such responses. The era of globalization is a special time in history that places challenges before religions in every country. This study dedicated to modern religiosity will be used in order to understand the prospects of Theravada Buddhism in matching the requirements of a modern Russian society:

“Buddhism in the global era is reconstructed and interpreted based on specific context and interests. Traditional archaic Buddhism does not meet the requirements of globalism (“is not spiritually valuable,” according to new converts), hence a reformatory attitude toward "a return to true teaching" is appearing, which often happened in the Buddhist history of the past century. For example, Buddhism was "purified" from traditional syncretism, extraneous features, and non-Buddhist beliefs and practices (for example, from belief in spirits and astrology in Theravada). This tendency (approximately from the middle of the XIX to the middle of the XX century) led to the formation of some intellectual, rational, and even "scientific" Buddhism, based on such features as reliance on own experience and critical thinking. Although institutionally similar rational Buddhism in its pure form has never been a noticeable phenomenon, this image has had a tremendous impact on the perception of Buddhism in general and the flexibility with which its individual elements have become globalized.”

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<sup>7</sup> A. Malashenko, S. Filatov (ed.), **Religion and Globalization Across Eurasia**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2009), p. 241.

### **1.6.3 A. Malashenko. Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia<sup>8</sup>**

The book, which is based on reports made during the seminars of the Moscow Carnegie Center in 2007-2009, analyzes the processes of religious life in Russia, the stages of religious revival, the relationship between different faiths and the state, and also examines the issues of legislation and its application in relation to activity of religious structures. Among other important issues, the authors point out the importance of new (for Russian society) religious groups in Russia:

“A critical topic today is the problem of new religious movements, which became real evidence of freedom of religion and a vivid example of Russians’ increased interest in religion, as well as of their aspiration to go beyond the scope of standard (for Russian society), “traditional” conceptions of religion. Despite the relatively low number of participants, they are extremely significant, and religious life in Russia today cannot be discussed without mentioning them.”

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

The study will be a qualitative research which combines documentary research, ethnography and auto-ethnography as its methodologies. In-depth interviews with Theravada monks and laypeople involved in religious activities in Russia will be the main method for collecting data on personal histories, experiences, and perspectives on practicing and propagating Theravada Buddhism in Russia. The researcher will implement this part with her direct experience of residing in a Russian Dhamma center in year 2012 and providing a remote support of the same center until the present time. Gathering and analyzing data from textual sources will be used in order to describe the religious, social, political, and legal backgrounds in connection with challenges that Theravada communities are experiencing in regards with their activities. Study of the ideas on modern religiosity will help to evaluate the prospects of developing Theravada Buddhism in the country.

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<sup>8</sup> Malashenko A., Filatov S. (ed.). **Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2009), p. 398.

The research methodology will consist of the following steps:

- 1) Studying documentary data from books, researches and articles to collect information on the contemporary state of religion in Russia.
- 2) Interviewing prominent Russian Theravada Buddhists on matters concerning strong and weak point, possibilities, threats and ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia.
- 3) Studying, analyzing and synthesizing the collected data following the objectives.
- 4) Summarizing data to report the research results.

### **1.8 Advantages Expected to Obtain from the Research**

The following advantages were obtained as a result of the study:

- 1) Understanding the process of introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.
- 2) Gaining insight into strengths and weaknesses of Russian Theravada Buddhism.
- 3) Gaining insight into possibilities and threats of external environment for Theravada Buddhism in Russia.
- 3) Analyzing data to find possible ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

## **Chapter II**

### **Introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

This chapter is aimed to collect the material related to the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Before proceeding to the main objectives, namely the strong and weak points of Theravada Buddhism and possibilities for its development in Russia, it is necessary to gain understanding about its emergence and current state in the country. As the phenomenon was not yet described in other studies at the time of the research, this task is important and at the same time complicated. Additionally, it emerges against the background of an already established religious tradition, which cannot but influence the development of Buddhism in the country. Therefore, a short account of Russia's religious history should be given in the first place. In accordance with this pattern, the chapter has the following framework: 1) History of Religion and Religious Belief in Russia, 2) Emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, 3) Modern State of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, and 4) Concluding Remarks.

#### **2.1 History of Religion and Religious Belief in Russia**

Historians attribute the formation of the Old Russian state to the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The late 10<sup>th</sup> century is one of the most important milestones in Russian history marked by the adoption of Christianity as the state religion. This event deeply influenced the entire subsequent development of the country – national identity, geopolitics, and culture.<sup>1</sup> In pre-Christian times, ancient Slavs had polytheistic beliefs, where each deity was identified with natural phenomena (sun, sky) and concepts of importance (fertility, war, death, etc.).<sup>2</sup> Duke Vladimir, who ascended the throne in 980, was aware of the need to adopt a single state religion. Forced Christianization and

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<sup>1</sup> N. Trofimchuk, **The History of Religions in Russia**, (Moscow: RAGS, 2004), p.85.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

abolishment of the old pagan beliefs was a political act dictated by the prevailing tendencies and demands of a developing society.<sup>3</sup>

However, the imposition of Christianity often encountered resistance from people who stayed devoted to pagan beliefs. Dual faith in which pagan beliefs and rituals were preserved under the outer layer of Christianity became an attribute of Russian folk religion for many centuries. A number of popular pagan beliefs and festivals were adopted by the Church in order to gain wider recognition. Historians and religious scholars generally agree that the conversion of Russian people to Christianity was partial, and the Church failed to cultivate the correct understanding of the faith.<sup>4</sup> However, this was to some extent relevant to other religions in Russia as well. For example, the cult of ancestors, whose vestiges were preserved among the Muslims of the North Caucasus and the combination of shaman rituals with Tibetan Buddhism among Buryats and Tuvinians turned into distinctive features of the religious life of local Islamic and Buddhist communities.<sup>5</sup>

The government facilitated the development of the Church system, generously supported the establishment of monasteries and missionary activities. During the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Orthodox world view, according to some scholars, becomes one of the major aspects of the emerging Russian ethnicity. This period is marked by the most successful missionary activity in the history of the Russian Church, the first waves of which were directed to the north and north-east of the country. During the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, ethnic groups who fell under influence of the young Russian state were converted to Christianity with varying success. Having an important ideological mission to unite the growing territories under the power of a single ruler, Christian hierarchs were gradually strengthening the position of the Church, building up its material well-being and political power. Christianity greatly contributed to the cultural development of the country – architecture, iconography, literature.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> E. Levin, **Dual Faith and Folk Religion in the History of Russia**, (Moscow: Indrik, 2004), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> A. Juravskiy, O. Kazmina, V. Tishkov, **Peoples of Russia: Atlas of Cultures and Religions**, (Moscow: Design. Information. Cartography, 2009), p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> N. Trofimchuk, **The History of Religions in Russia**, (Moscow: RAGS, 2004), p.105.

In the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the "mono-Orthodox" stage was completed; further, as the borders of the Russian state expanded, the foci of the world religions – Islam and Tibetan Buddhism – began to emerge in the country. In the second half of the XVI century, the territories of the Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates, the Nogai horde, and – at the end of the century – the Siberian Khanate were annexed. In the Middle Volga region, Islam appeared even before the christianization of the Old Russian State. The Muslim population of the region was the first significant in size religious minority, which Russia, despite all the efforts, was not able to fully assimilate. In the middle of the XVII century, the first Buddhist ethnos – Kalmyks – settled on the right bank of the Volga after a long migration from Western Mongolia. In 1689, Transbaikalia was annexed to Russia, the indigenous population of which, the eastern Buryats, who maintained close contacts with Mongolia and China, had already adopted Buddhism. The spread of world religions in Russia continued in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tuva area, with Buddhism professed by its population, became the last center of non-Christian religions in Russia. In Tuva, which was annexed to the USSR in 1944, Buddhism began to take root from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. From 1757 to 1911, Tuva was a dependency of China, and since 1914 under the protectorate of Russia.<sup>7</sup>

The imperial stage in the development of the country's religious space is associated with the reforms of Peter I. He placed the Russian Church under state control by abolishing the patriarchate and introducing synodal management in 1721. Peter the Great opened the era of Russia's territorial expansion to the west through the accession of lands, the population which belonged to other branches of Christianity. After the collapse of the USSR, most of these territories happened to be outside modern Russia, but, as a result of forced migrations, a large number of non-Orthodox Christians moved to the country's internal provinces. As a result, several centers of Lutheranism developed within modern Russia. Catholic communities outside of Moscow and St. Petersburg were most quickly revived in the residence regions of the deported Poles and Germans descendants who form the backbone of the Catholic community of Russia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A. Juravskiy, O. Kazmina, V. Tishkov, **Peoples of Russia: Atlas of Cultures and Religions**, (Moscow: Design. Information. Cartography, 2009), p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p. 206.

The geography of Judaism was closely related to the numerous Jewish diaspora which turned out to live within the Russian Empire after the division of Rzeczpospolita in 1772-1775 and the annexion of Belarus and the right-bank Ukraine. Another region of this religion appeared in Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the annexion of southern Dagestan, where part of the population practiced Judaism.<sup>9</sup>

While Peter the Great pursued a policy of secularization of Russian society and limited the power of the Russian Orthodox Church, during the Soviet Union (1918-1991) a much more serious damage was made not only to Christianity, but to various religions throughout the country. Formally, atheism was not proclaimed an element of state ideology, but was actively supported by the party and state structures. In addition to the propaganda of atheism ("the scientific-materialistic worldview"), in the 1920s-1930s, state structures carried out mass arrests and harassment of the clergy and religious preachers. Up until 1939, the policy of eliminating organized religious life was administered by state authorities.<sup>10</sup>

For example, in the late 20s, government authorities began to close and then destroy Buddhist temples, disrobe and arrest the lamas. By the time this campaign was completed in 1939-1940, most of the monasteries and temples of Buryatia and Kalmykia were destroyed. Only few of them remained because the buildings could be used for other purposes. The property of Buddhist temples (books, paintings, and statues) was mostly destroyed, burned, partially sent to museums. By the end of the 30s, Buddhist culture in Buryatia and Kalmykia officially ceased to exist.<sup>11</sup> As for the Orthodox church, in the 30s more than 105,000 people were executed for religious activities and more than 250,000 repressed. By 1939, among 45 provinces, 25 did not have even a single functioning church.<sup>12</sup>

Although later Soviet religious policy was softened and religious life came out of the ban, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is considered to be the beginning of genuine religious freedom and revival. Sergey Filatov, a Russian religious

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 208.

<sup>10</sup> N. Trofimchuk, **The History of Religions in Russia**, (Moscow: RAGS, 2004), p.221.

<sup>11</sup> M. Burdo, **Modern Religious Life in Russia**, Vol.3, (Moscow: Logos, 2005), p. 236.

<sup>12</sup> N. Trofimchuk, Ibid, p. 229.

sociologist, finds this fact astonishing: “Nowadays the revival of historical religions of Russian ethnicities is perceived as is. No one is surprised by it, however, if we return to the real state of culture and religiosity in the late 1980s, this revival was not logically predetermined. That the national revival of almost all Russian peoples occurs under religious banners, and not within the framework of secular ideologies, if we consider that these religions were in a sleeping state until 1988, is an amazing fact.”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, during the Soviet government, all religions except the Russian Orthodox Church completely disappeared from public life, many were eliminated. The anti-religious policy of the Soviet government led not only to the atheization of the vast majority of the population, but also to the highest dominance of the ROC over the last three or four centuries.<sup>14</sup>

The Russian political ideology, emphasizing the unity of the Russian nation and the Russian state, it would seem, should have predetermined religious uniformity too. Therefore, the spontaneous revival of the "traditional religions" was unanticipated. However, the public was able to accept religious pluralism based on ethnic diversity, just as the government recognized the rights of ethnic minorities to profess their traditional faith. On the other hand, the connection between ethnicity and religious affiliation, which is often stressed by political and religious leaders, is becoming less and less rigid in real life.<sup>15</sup> Religious scholars also agree that the spread over the past 30 years of new religious movements that are not associated with any Russian ethnic group is an essential phenomenon in the modern religious space.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, the formation of the Russian state and culture was closely connected with Orthodox Christianity as the state religion, although the religious beliefs of the masses are described as dual faith by researchers due to the strong presence of pagan beliefs. Starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Russia became a multi-religious state, being unable to fully assimilate the peoples from the newly-annexed lands. Although in

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<sup>13</sup> S. Filatov, “Twenty Years of Growth of Religious Diversity in Post-Soviet Russia”, **Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia**, (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2009), p.10.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>16</sup> Lunkin R., “New Religious Movements in Russia”, **Twenty Years of Religious Freedom in Russia**, (Moscow: Carnegie Center, 2009), p.329.



Soviet times religion in general suffered great damage, and the Russian Orthodox Church factually remained the only represented confession, over the past 30 years there has been an unprecedented revival of religious life in all its diversity. In addition to traditional religions, which are nominally assigned to certain ethnic groups, the emergence of new religious movements that never before existed in Russia becomes an important feature of post-Soviet religious history.

## **2.2 Introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

The following section is aimed to answer the question: what are the prerequisites for the emergence of Theravada in Russia? Is the emergence of Theravada in Russia a complete event? What personalities and religious groups made the greatest contribution to the spread of Theravada Buddhism in the country?

### **2.2.1 Prerequisites for the Emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Although areas with population professing Tibetan Buddhism became part of Russia already in the middle of the XVII century, interest in Theravada Buddhism as a separate tradition arose only recently. This phenomenon can be associated with the proclaimed freedom of conscience<sup>17</sup> and the collapse of the USSR in 1991, which preceded the revival of traditional religions and emergence of many new, non-traditional religious associations in the country.

Although the tendency towards religious pluralism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was typical for Western countries, E. Balagushkin is sure that special circumstances played a decisive role in the wide distribution of non-traditional religions in post-Soviet Russia, including various schools of Buddhism. Among the reasons, he emphasized crises, which are always accompanied by an increase in religious pursuits:

Crisis of the Soviet system left the people disappointed in the possibility of achieving the promised earthly happiness, “the bright future of communism”.

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<sup>17</sup> The USSR Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations", adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on 1 October 1990, and effective from the date of its publication on 9 October 1990.

Those who were not able to tolerate the revealed failure of this secular utopia turned to non-traditional religions for consolation.<sup>18</sup>

Apart from the weakness of the Orthodox influence and activities carried on by new religious organizations, the reasons for the spread of non-traditional religions lie in the modern search for identity, meaning and goals of existence, desire for self-realization, change and improvement of moral level. In general, the appeal to non-traditional religions is caused by dissatisfaction with answers and decisions given by the official ideology, secular or religious. The adherents of non-traditional religions hope that the programs of human and social improvement offered by the latter will help to solve the difficulties of modern civilization and above all will help them personally.<sup>19</sup>

In particular, most Buddhist schools have drawn attention by popularizing various mental techniques, which are rightly considered to be an effective means of changing person's mentality, improving one's well-being and corresponding physical indicators. Such practices are seen as an advantage over Russian traditional religions, which exhort their believers to passively wait for mercy from above.

The revival of interest in oriental religious teachings, including different Buddhist traditions, as well as the emergence of first groups of people interested in early Buddhist teachings can be attributed to the abovementioned processes.

It should be noted that scientific interest in Buddhism has been present among Russian scholars since at least 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Russian Oriental School, which included Buddhist studies as its branch, was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Back in those days, Russian Buddhologists translated canonical Buddhist texts and published books where they tried to outline the main principles of the Buddha's teaching. For instance, Ivan P. Minaev, who headed the Sanskrit department of St. Petersburg University, visited Burma in 1886, from where he brought an extensive collection of Pali manuscripts. In his work "Buddhism. Research and materials" (St. Petersburg,

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<sup>18</sup> E. Balagushkin, **Non-Traditional Religions in Modern Russia**, (Moscow: IFRAN, 1999), p.54.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.55.

1887), he examined the Pali canon and drew conclusions on its origins.<sup>20</sup> Together with his colleagues, he educated a number of eminent scientists, whose works and activities became the most significant phenomenon of world oriental studies of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, known as the St. Petersburg Buddhist Studies School.

Russian Buddhology, as part of religious studies, appears in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the context of oriental studies. The need to study Buddhism was realized in Russian science under the influence of historical and cultural aspects of a geopolitical nature. Its disappearance is also associated with political processes in the USSR in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Restoration of the Buddhist studies tradition in the USSR occurs in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Buddhological School of St. Petersburg State University was formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 90s, E. Torchinov, K. Solonin and a number of young scientists continued to conduct studies of the Buddhist tradition. Attempts to revive Buddhist studies in Russia were directly dependent on attempts to revive Buddhism itself. This fact largely characterizes the national Buddhology school. The restoration of Buddhist studies in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflects the revival of interest in Buddhism, as well as revival of religious life in Russia in general.<sup>21</sup> Russian literature on Buddhism will be discussed in more detail in the relevant chapter; for the purpose of this section, it is sufficient to mention that already at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were publications dealing with the Pali Canon, principles of Buddhism, and formation of different Buddhism schools. These works offered the material for academic studies, but also acted as a source of personal interest in the various schools of Buddhism for the readers.

In addition to the crisis of the Soviet system, officially proclaimed religious freedom, and the literary base for the study of Buddhism, globalization and new means of communication, namely the Internet, played a crucial role in the spread of Theravada

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<sup>20</sup> A.M. Alexeev-Apraksin, "Buddhism in the Cultural Life of Saint-Petersburg", **Ph.D. Dissertation**, (Department of Social Sciences: St.-Petersburg State University), 2006, p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> D. Zaharov, "The Problematic Field of Philosophy of Religion in Russian Buddhology", **Ph.D. Dissertation**, (Department of Philosophy of Religion: South Federal University, Rostov-on-Don), 2017, p. 68.

Buddhism in Russia. Internet facilitated access to information, allowing to overcome spatial and time barriers; in a country where distance between the regions can reach thousands of kilometers, and relevant centers for religious education and practice exist only in major cities of Moscow and Saint-Petersburg, the Internet allowed people from all parts of the country to learn about Theravada Buddhism and organize meetings, lectures of visiting teachers, and meditation courses. Religious scholars point out the exclusive role of the Internet in spreading new religious trends:

Internet offers diverse means of representation and communication, which are implemented by certain religious groups. Obviously, non-traditional religions, which by their very nature are more flexible, have used the possibilities of the new network interaction with greater interest and intensity than the "traditional" religions. For them, rapid expansion of the Internet means an increase in the number of network users, among whom they expect to find hypothetical adherents.<sup>22</sup>

### **2.2.2 Criteria for Establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Here we come to the question, what criteria make it possible to speak of Theravada Buddhism in Russia as some kind of phenomenon? Obviously, one cannot consider the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia a completed process, as it will be shown later, but important steps towards this goal have already been taken.

According to the ancient Pali chronicles, the Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa, when Thera Mahinda arrived to Sri Lanka to spread the teaching, he stated that Buddhism would be established only if a sima (consecrated ground for the Acts of the Sangha) were established according to the teachings of the Buddha.<sup>23</sup> The Samantapasadika records a different conversation: "O great king", answers Thera Mahinda, "the Sasana is established, but its roots are not yet gone deep". "When will the roots go deep?" Mahinda Thera's answer is most remarkable: "When a son born in Thambapannidipa (Sri Lanka) of Sinhala parents, becomes a monk in Thambapannidipa, studies the

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<sup>22</sup> A. Rahmanin, **Religious Studies: A Manual for Undergraduate Programme**, (Moscow: Urait, 2017), p. 244.

<sup>23</sup> **Dipavamsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record**, ed. and trans. Hermann Oldenberg, (London: Williams And Norgate, 1879), p. 180.

Vinaya (Code of Discipline) in Thambapannidipa and recites it in Thambapannidipa, then the roots of the Sasana are deep set."<sup>24</sup> According the mentioned passages, although these cannot be taken as canonical, all criteria for the establishment of Theravada Buddhism were already met in Russia.

However, there have not been any publications dealing with this question from a modern standpoint and therefore, the researcher had asked the respondents to express their opinions on emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Summarizing, there are several things that allow to consider Theravada Buddhism in Russia as some kind of phenomenon, according to the received answers. First, most obviously, a number of rightfully ordained monks and laypeople who identify themselves as Theravada Buddhists. Secondly, communities of followers and Dhamma-centers that have been consistently functioning for more than 10 years, attempting to provide systematic knowledge of Theravada Buddhism and organize religious activities in accordance with the tradition. Thirdly, the establishment of data portals which made a significant part of the Pali Canon freely available in Russian language and published translations of Buddhist books and articles. Respondents noted foreign support to transfer the tradition through Sangha representatives of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar as one of the most important factors in the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

Nevertheless, some respondents noted that the emergence of Theravada Buddhism cannot be called a complete process in Russia for the following reasons: lack of unity between different Theravada Buddhist groups and teachers, occasionally turning into public criticism and antagonism, and a lack of a stably existing monastic Sangha consisting of Russian monks. The respondents also noted a rather small number of followers and the lack of official recognition of Theravada Buddhism as a separate Buddhist school in Russia.

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<sup>24</sup> Buddhaghosa, **The Inception of Discipline and the Vinaya Nidana**, trans. and ed. N.A. Jayawickrama, (London: Luzac and Company Ltd., 1962), p. 90.

### 2.2.3 Groups and Personalities that Influenced the Spread of Theravada Buddhism in Russia

During the interviews, among other questions, the respondents were asked to name three or more people who made the most significant contribution to the spread of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. The interviewed Buddhists expressed similar opinions on the persons and groups that had the greatest influence on this process. For individuals, they indicated two foreign monks – Pallekande Ratanasara Mahathero and Phra Chatree Hemapandha, as well as the first Russian monk and an active preacher, Pannyavuddho Bhikkhu, with two translators of the Pali Canon – Dmintry Ivahnenko and Sergey Tyulin. For groups, they indicated the Saint-Petersburg Community of Theravada Buddhists, Moscow Community of Theravada Buddhists, Wat Abhidhamma Buddhavihara (Thai Buddhist Temple in Saint-Petersburg), as well as the increasing importance of Theravada Buddhist Society (Myanmar Buddhist Center in Balashiha, Moscow area).

In order to ordain Russian monks and ensure proper monastic education, introduce traditional forms of religious activity to Russian Buddhists, support and close interaction with representatives of the Buddhist countries was and remains extremely important. From this standpoint, the arrival of a Thai missionary monk, as well as the establishment of the Thai Buddhist center, the official representation of the Thai Sangha in Russia, became a turning point. Phra Chatree Hemapandha (Buddhamkaro Bhikkhu) arrived in Russia in 1997 as a student, completed Russian language courses in St. Petersburg Technical University, graduated from the St. Petersburg State University, Faculty of International Relations (2001, M.A. in regional studies; 2005, Ph.D. in regional studies).<sup>25</sup> He founded a Buddhist center known as Wat Abhidhamma Buddhavihara in St. Petersburg in 2006, which was the first center dedicated to the study and practice of Theravada Buddhism. In addition to regular lectures on Buddhism, conducted in the building of Dazan Gunzechoinei, Buddhavihara has been opening its doors for meditation courses, Thai cultural activities and teachings of renowned

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<sup>25</sup> “Phra Chatree Hemapandha, Biography and service record”, **Buddhavihara Official Website**, Retrieved on 20 January 2019, <http://www.buddhavihara.ru>.

Buddhist masters of different schools on a regular basis. The center provided an opportunity for many people to get acquainted with the Thai tradition thanks to the annual activities held on occasions of Kathina, Songkran, Maghpuja and other major events. Phra Chatree Hemapandha was the one to support the ordination of the first Russian Theravada monks in Thailand.

Notably, he was not the first Theravada monk to stay in the country for a long period of time. Pallekande Ratanasara Mahathero was a student of The Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, also known as RUDN University, from 1974 to 1988. To date, he is an honorary citizen of Russia, the Chief Magistrate of Sri Lanka, the First Secretary of the Sri Lankan Buddhist Council, and the official representative of Amarapura Buddhist sect in Russia.<sup>26</sup> Members of both Moscow and St. Petersburg communities noted his high contribution to the support of Buddhism in Russia. Ven. Ratanasara Mahathero wrote:

As a Buddhist monk of Sri Lanka, I have been doing everything in my power to develop Buddhism in Russia for almost forty years now. Now Russians are beginning to actively practice the Dhamma and I am happy to witness that. However, I would like this development to be led by the citizens of the country. I hope that Russian Buddhists will continue to do everything possible to develop Theravada Buddhism in the country, overcoming external and internal difficulties.<sup>27</sup>

After moving back to Sri Lanka, Ven. Ratanasara continues to regularly visit Russia accompanied by Sri Lankan monks, maintaining interest in Buddhism among the local population. However, the first Russian monks were ordained through Mahanikaya sect of the Thai Sangha, this fact explained by the higher complexity of receiving ordination in Sri Lanka.

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<sup>26</sup> Association of Graduates and Friends, **RUDN**, Retrieved on 28 January 2019, <http://alumni.rudn.ru/graduate/170>.

<sup>27</sup> The message of Ven. Ratanasara on the occasion of anniversary of the Saint-Petersburg Theravada Community, **Theravada.ru**, 2013, Retrieved on 28 January 2019, <http://theravada.ru/blessings2.htm>.

The emergence of Russian monks able to freely expound and explain the teachings of the Buddha in Russian language is one of the important steps towards the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in the country. Oleg Onoprienko (Pannyavuddho Bhikkhu) was the first Russian Theravada monk who received ordination in May 2007 at Wat Bansuan, Phatthalung Province, Thailand, with Phrakhru Kavivaraphon as his preceptor. Originally based in Buddhavihara, in 2009 Pannyavuddho Bhikkhu with a group of supporters founded a new Dhamma center in St. Petersburg, which functions until now and is one of the oldest Theravada Buddhist communities in Russia. Pannyavuddho Bhikkhu is not only the first Russian Theravada monk, but also an active preacher who sought to carry out multidirectional activities for the development of Theravada in Russia.

The Moscow community of Theravada Buddhists was founded in the end of 2008 by a group of people interested in Theravada Buddhism, Pali language and Pali literature. Vladimir Smirnov (Buddhanyano Bhikkhu, ordained in 2010) and Pavel Nazin (Upasaka Khantibalo) were among the founders and leaders of the community. Starting from 2009, the center held weekly classes on the study and practice of the Buddhist teachings in Moscow. These centers not only began to hold regular activities related to the study and practice of Theravada Buddhism for the first time, but also made a great contribution to the translation and publication of Buddhist texts, the dissemination of adequate information on Theravada Buddhism on popular Internet resources, and started information portals that published books, articles, biographies and lectures of prominent Buddhist teachers. This activity was and remains very important for Theravada Buddhism in Russia, where a small number of followers is scattered across a vast territory of the country.<sup>28</sup>

Two translators of the Pali Canon – Dmitry Ivahnenko and Sergei Tyulin – were identified by all respondents as extremely important contributors to the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Oleg Shashkov, a lay Theravada Buddhism follower, finds that:

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Pavel Nazin, leader of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 23, 2019.



Most of the changes are associated with quite specific people. First of all, Sergei, a person who selflessly and completely free of charge, consulting directly with the Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi, over several years translated and published a large part of the Sutta Pitaka on the Internet. For the first time in history, Russian-speaking people all around the world were able to read the Pali suttas, the original teachings of the Buddha, in Russian language.<sup>29</sup>

Even earlier, Dmitriy Ivahnenko began to publish suttas from the Pali Canon in 2001, along with lectures and interviews by contemporary teachers of Theravada tradition. Most Buddhists admit that his website was at the very beginning of their interest in Theravada Buddhism:

Dmitriy was at the very origin of this movement; at that time his website was the only of its kind. His contribution is essential, impossible to ignore.<sup>30</sup>

Certainly, over the past 20 years there have been more people who have contributed to the spread of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

## **2.3 Modern State of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

In this section, the researcher attempts to solve the following problems: (1) to evaluate the state of Theravada in Russia in general, (2) to evaluate the activities of centers and individuals, and (3) to make a conclusion about the state of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

### **2.3.1 Theravada Buddhism in the Religious Space of Russia**

To assess the state of Theravada in Russia for the purposes of this study, it would be appropriate to present official statistical data on its communities and followers. However, in the case it is impossible or does not give a proper idea about the issue. On the one hand, the Constitution of the Russian Federation prohibits to demand the information about religious affiliation of citizens,<sup>31</sup> and the number of followers of

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Oleg Shashkov, Publisher, Tambov, January 26, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Ven. Vladimir Smirnov (Buddhanyano Bhikkhu), founder of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 22, 2019.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Law of September 26, 1997 N 125-FZ "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations".

different denominations is often assessed based on the ethnic principle. On the other hand, sociological polls show that among Russians and representatives of other nations who are not historically associated with the Buddhist tradition, there is a group of people who consider themselves Buddhists, about 1% of those surveyed in major cities (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Samara, etc.).<sup>32</sup> However, their affiliation to certain schools of Buddhism is not specified.

To determine the number of religious groups and organizations through official statistics is also not possible, since many groups do not see the need for going through a complicated registration procedure. In fact, the first and only association that succeeded to register a religious organization was the Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society in 2018. Attempts by other centers (St. Petersburg, Moscow) to obtain the status of a religious organization were unsuccessful, not to mention the fact that many groups never applied for the procedure. The head of the Moscow Community, Pavel Nazin told that:

Our regular meetings are mostly attended by less than 20 people. They don't draw public attention, so until now we didn't have problems with the authorities. At the moment we don't see any pressing need to apply for registration.<sup>33</sup>

According to official statistics in 2018, there are 265 Buddhist organizations in Russia, including 12 centralized organizations and 2 educational institutions.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Theravada Buddhists are a very small group that exists not only against the background of the Orthodox majority, but also appears rather small even against the background of traditional Tibetan Buddhism. Information about the communities and their activities is

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<sup>32</sup> S. Filatov, R. Lunkin, "Religious Statistics in Russia: Magic of Figures vs. Ambiguous Reality", **Social Studies**, No. 6 (2005), p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Pavel Nazin, leader of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 23, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> "The number of religious organizations registered in the Russian Federation at the end of 2017", **Federal State Statistics Service**, 2018, Retrieved on 27 January, 2019, [www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/new\\_site/gosudar/02-11.docx](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/gosudar/02-11.docx).

collected and structured by the efforts of the Buddhists themselves and does not have official confirmation.

### **2.3.2 Groups and Activities**

Today, the largest communities are located (1) in Moscow: Moscow Community of Theravada Buddhists, Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society, Thai Forest Sangha, and (2) in St. Petersburg: The Saint-Petersburg Community of Theravada Buddhists and Wat Abhidhamma Buddhavihara group. People from other cities of Russia or even other countries may associate themselves with the mentioned communities on grounds of collaboration or support of their activities. While the activity of major centers is multilateral, provincial communities may not have the means to hold regular meetings and events, and are limited to inviting teachers occasionally. Current activities of groups and individuals can be divided into following directions:

1. Organizing regular meetings for the purpose of education, practice, and communication

Regular classes to study Buddhism is an important factor to develop a comprehensive and systematic knowledge of the Buddhist teachings among followers. These meetings not only fulfill the educational purpose, but also help people to develop a sense of connection to the community and tradition which is still exotic in most parts of Russia. Meetings are held weekly by large groups in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and include recitation, meditation, lecture, and dana (if a monk is present). Some communities occasionally hold Pali language classes, although this activity is the less popular one.

2. Translation and publication of Buddhist literature

In Russia, publication of the Buddhist books and articles, especially on the Internet resources, plays a huge role in familiarizing the readers with the early Buddhist teachings. People from the provinces mostly do not have access to Buddhist teachers and centers, so literature remains the most important source of information. To date, Sutta and some parts of the Vinaya Pitaka have been translated into Russian language. An outstanding translation of the Abhidhammata-sanghaha, “which set a new standard

of translation of Pali texts in Russia”<sup>35</sup> was published. As a rule, the work is carried out by non-professional translators, which are enthusiastic Buddhists motivated by altruistic motives. In addition to the canonical texts and commentaries, the teachings of modern masters are being published as books on a regular basis: teachings of Ajahn Chah, Pa Auk Sayadaw, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, and others. Oleg Shashkov describes the importance of publishing Buddhist texts as follows:

We live in a difficult time when the lack of information is replaced by its overwhelming excess, and a continuous flow of misinformation. Myths and tales about Buddhism came to the fore, widespread delusions and stereotypical ideas are pushed to the masses by a huge number of sources. Numerous errors are replicated about who the Buddha was and what he taught, what is the very essence of his teachings.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, it is important to serve as a counter process, he states, publishing quality information for people who are interested in the genuine teachings of the Buddha.

### 3. Supporting Buddhist monks living in Russia

At present, there are at least four Russian monks living in Russia, as well as student-monks from Sri Lanka, Thai monks, and Myanmar monks. Groups and individuals join efforts to support the needs of monks who stay in Russia on a regular basis, which includes alms offering, transportation, and financial support. The lack of monastic infrastructure in a non-Buddhist country poses a challenge for monks to keep the Vinaya rules, so it is essential for Theravada Buddhist followers to consolidate efforts in creating suitable conditions for monastics.

### 4. Organizing and supporting events with monks and Buddhist teachers

Teachings given by monks from abroad have been inspiring Buddhists and allowing to gain knowledge about Buddhist culture of different countries. The invitation of monks and nuns from both Western and traditional Buddhist countries has been

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Ven. Alexander Berezin (Dhammavuddho Bhikkhu), representative of Abhidhamma Buddhavihara Buddhist Center, January 21, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Oleg Shashkov, Publisher, Tambov, January 26, 2019.

carried out for many years. The experience of teachers from Western countries, many of which have a longer history in practicing and propagating Theravada Buddhism in a non-Buddhist culture, is valuable for Russian practitioners. Provincial Buddhist groups have been also inviting teachers, both monks and laymen, who live in other Russian cities.

#### 5. Organizing meditation courses

Meditation has gained popularity in Western countries as a means to relieve stress, get away from the routine, and take a fresh look at the world. This wave of popularity has also taken over Russia, where meditation retreats are in high demand. Notably, meditation courses, particularly in Theravada tradition, are attended by people of different denominations or without a clear affiliation to any religious teaching. As a part of researcher's experience, Buddhist meditation courses are often attended by Christians, atheists or even Muslims. In addition to Goenka Vipassana centers, which are located in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Yekaterinburg, as well as Thai Temple in St. Petersburg, retreats are usually conducted by visiting teachers in rented premises, particularly in the countryside.

The Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society deserves special attention, although it is currently focused on the Burmese-speaking population, i.e. Myanmar nationals working and studying in Russia. Pavel Kalachev, deputy chairman of the community, explained: "There are two scholar-monks residing here permanently. They began to learn Russian language, but cannot speak Russian yet." The Myanmar Buddhist Society inspired Buddhists with their larger-scale activities and projects, namely the registration of a religious organization, establishment of a sima, first ordination of monks in Russia, organization of the 1st International Conference on Buddhist Culture & Civilization, etc. Since 2014, every summer a temporary ordination of monks is held at the center: "During the summer of 2014, temporary ordination was received by 70 Myanmar students, three Cambodians and one Russian."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Pavel Kalachev, Deputy Chairman, Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society, Moscow, January 26, 2019.

Currently, the center under the leadership of Ashin Achariya and the patronage of Sitagu Sayadaw (Ashin Nyanissara, the chairperson of the Myanmar Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee) plans to expand and build a full fledged temple with a sima, for the purpose of conducting Sangha acts and meditation courses. The consecration of the land in October 2018 was a landmark event for Buddhists, since it will be the first Theravada temple of this kind in Russia.

Traditional Buddhist republics of Russia – Kalmykia, Buryatia and Tyva – do not have Theravada communities yet, however, this situation is likely to change in the future. A Theravada monk from Elista, Ananda Kalmykiave admits:

Besides me, as far as I know, there are no Theravada bhikkhus or samaneras in Kalmykia at the moment. Some people are interested in Theravada Buddhism, but they have not built an organized community yet. We plan to establish a center in Elista. However, at present I study under the guidance of Bhante Rakvana Nyanasiha, so I live in Sri Lanka part of the time.<sup>38</sup>

Summarizing, today in the major cities of Russia there are centers that conduct regular and multidirectional activities to spread Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Provincial Buddhists, meanwhile, are limited to inviting teachers for lectures and meditation courses. Larger-scale events that were held in the recent years inspire Buddhists and give hope for improvements in the future.

## **2.4 Concluding Remarks**

Russia is a multi-confessional state with Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (in its Tibetan form) as a part of its religious tradition. Over the past 30 years, there was a spread of religious teachings that are not associated with any Russian ethnic group. One of these teachings is Theravada Buddhism, which generated interest due to the efforts of foreign missionaries and Russians willing to spread the original teaching of the Buddha. While there are formal signs of development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, in fact this phenomenon remains very insignificant against the general religious

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Ven. Ananda Kalmykiave, Malvessa Vihara, Sri-Lanka, January 24, 2019.

background of the country. While major cities of Moscow and St. Petersburg are the centers of various Buddhist activities, the provinces do not have any centers that operate in a stable and continuous manner.

# **Chapter III**

## **Strengths and Weaknesses of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

In order to develop a strategy for solving the current problems and strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia, the preliminary information is collected and analyzed by using the SWOT method.

The SWOT method, chosen for the means of analysis, in essence is a method of strategic planning. It identifies the factors of internal and external environment and divides them into four categories: strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). Strong and weak sides are internal factors of the object (what the object is able to influence); opportunities and threats are environmental factors (what can affect the object from the outside and is not controlled by the object). The SWOT method can be applied to any organizations, individuals and countries to build strategies in various areas of activity.<sup>1</sup>

The first task is to identify strengths and weaknesses, which are the elements of the internal environment. In order to analyze the internal factors, they are divided into three parts: (1) literature and translations, (2) education and training, and (3) organization and endowment.

### **3.1 Literature and Translations**

Religious movements by their nature have three pillars, fundamental bases on which the whole tradition rests: the teachers, the doctrine they expound, and the disciples who profess this doctrine. In other words, a living religion is possible only in a group of convinced followers practicing the doctrine preached by the founder.<sup>2</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> A. Zagorodnikov, **Management of Public Relations in Business**, (Moscow: Crocus, 2013), p.55.

<sup>2</sup> E. Rokhlina, "Sacred Books of Religions of the World: Characteristics and Their Features", **Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics**, (Ryazan, 2017).



Buddhism, this idea is expressed in the concept of the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. As for this section, the discussion will deal with the second pillar, the doctrine, or rather its written sources, the scriptures and other texts.

### 3.1.1 The Significance of Literature in Theravada Buddhism

Any religion is based on the doctrine, which is fixed in a set of texts. In this regard, it is reasonable to specify which texts play a crucial role for developing a comprehensive understanding of the Buddha's teaching from the standpoint of Theravada Buddhism.

The Pali Canon, known as Tipitaka, is the standard collection of scriptures in the Theravada Buddhist tradition, as preserved in the Pali language. It is the most complete extant early Buddhist Canon.<sup>3</sup> As the ultimate authoritative reference, the Tipitaka provides the standards or criteria for judging whether a given teaching or way of practice truly belongs to Buddhism. It is, thus, the duty and responsibility of Buddhists to preserve and protect the Tipitaka, which is crucial for the survival of Buddhism, and hence also for the welfare and happiness of the world.

The significance of the Pali Canon is great both in spreading and preserving Buddhism in places where it already has been established. Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto described it as follows:

Religion involves practice, a way of living, or useful application in real life. The way a religion is practiced has to be based on a definitive canon, or fundamental principle accepted as axiomatic, with a clearly stated goal... For this reason, a religious practitioner will direct his attention to the founder's teachings, which are collected, preserved, and handed down in the form of a scripture.<sup>4</sup>

The Pali Canon is a set of scriptures which includes the Buddha's instructions on all aspects important for his follower, ascetics and laypeople alike. Despite the broad meaning of the word "Buddhism", which includes people, organizations and religious

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<sup>3</sup> P. Harvey, **Introduction to Buddhism**, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.3.

<sup>4</sup> P.A. Payutto, **The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know**, trans. Prof. Dr. Somseen Chanawangsa, (Bangkok: Chanpen Publishing House, 2015), p.3.

objects, its essence is the teaching, which is most fully expressed in the Pali Canon. No matter how many teachers and religious objects there are, if the teachings of the Buddha are lost, it will be impossible to claim that Buddhism exists.

Many Buddhists remember the Buddha's instruction recorded in the *Parinibbana-sutta*, as saying: "Ananda, for what I have taught and explained to you as Doctrine and Discipline will, at my passing, be your teacher."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, no matter how many teachers claim to preach the true doctrine, the Pali Canon is necessary to identify what does and does not comply to the actual teachings of the Buddha. For this reason, the translation of the *Sutta Pitaka* and other texts from the Pali Canon into Russian language was an important step for the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

However, the scriptures of ancient religions are difficult to understand for modern readers, as sometimes they seem full of contradictions, understatements, and figurative meanings. This underlines the important role of expositors. Authoritative expositors play an important role in any religion that has a set of canonical scriptures. A commentator must be able to correctly interpret the difficult or controversial places in the text to pass the message undistorted. A person who interprets an ancient religious text should have sufficient knowledge to conduct historical, cultural, contextual, linguistic and ideological analysis.

The meaning of particular places in the Pali Canon, which was recorded over 2,000 years ago, is not easily grasped in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to cultural differences that divide people from different historical periods and geographic locations. The compilation of Commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) and sub-commentaries (*tīkā*) on the Pali Canon suggests that early in the history of Buddhism a need was felt for guidance on how to interpret suttas.<sup>6</sup>

Commentaries play an important role by complementing the Pali Canon: firstly, they demonstrate that the Buddha's teaching is not merely a dusty museum exhibit, but

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<sup>5</sup> DN.II.154.

<sup>6</sup> K.R. Norman, **Pali Literature**, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), p.108.

a living tradition that has been comprehended by Buddhists throughout history. Secondly, they describe many historical events and trends, which gives us an idea about the history of early Buddhism, the formation of different Buddhist sects, and problems faced by the Sangha. For contemporary Buddhists, such information is not just an idle interest, but a way to learn from the history. Third, the commentaries help us make sense of the suttas and give us clues about their context that we might otherwise miss. Finally, the commentaries often contain magnificent stories to illustrate and amplify upon points of Dhamma that are made in the suttas.<sup>7</sup>

For the same reason, the books of contemporary Buddhist teachers are important as a means to expound the teaching in the modern language, considering the cultural context, providing stories and metaphors from the world of the modern reader as illustrations. These three layers of literature seem important for the development of right view (*sammādiṭṭhi*) among people, who is interested in the study and practice of Buddhism.

### 3.1.2 Strong Sides Related to Literature and Translation

Having demonstrated the importance of Buddhist literature of different levels for the development of right understanding of the doctrine, and therefore the success of its propagation in non-Buddhist areas, further it should be determined whether this factor – access to canonical and non-canonical literature – can be attributed to the strengths or weaknesses of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

Most of the Pali Canon, translated into English language by the efforts of various scholars and freely accessible from Internet sources such as Sutta Central, is mostly unavailable for Russian population due to low levels of English proficiency (overall 5,31% of Russians can speak English, according to the 2010 census).<sup>8</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>7</sup> "Beyond the Tipitaka: A Field Guide to Post-canonical Pali Literature", **Access to Insight**, 2013, Retrieved on 3 February 2018, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/noncanon/fieldguide.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "On the results of the 2010 all-Russian population census. Rosstat report", **Demoscope Weekly**, No. 491 (2010), Retrieved on 3 February 2018, <http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2011/0491/perep01.php>.

translation of the Pali Canon into Russian should be considered as one of the most important steps towards the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

The translation of the Pali Canon into Russian, which began in 2001 due to the efforts of Dmitry Ivakhnenko, was succeeded by Sergei Tyulin in 2011. Consulting with Bhikkhu Bodhi, Tyulin completed the translation of the *Sutta Pitaka* in 2016, covering particular texts of the *Vinaya Pitaka* as well. He recounts his experience as follows:

When I came to Buddhism in 2006, there was almost no information about Theravada Buddhism in Russian language. I began with sutta translation in 2011, using the information from John Bullitt's Access to Insight, which mostly used the translations of Thanissaro Bhikkhu. I translated not only the suttas, but generally everything related to Theravada Buddhism which I found useful. In the past there were much fewer books on Theravada Buddhism. Now, of course, a lot of things were translated and published.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of *Abhidhamma Pitaka* translation was to some extent compensated by a Russian version of *Abhidhammattha-sangaha* published in 2017. Since 2018, the Moscow Community of Theravada Buddhists is translating commentary literature, with excerpts from *Atthakatha* being published in free access. Over the course of 20 years, books, articles and lectures of modern Theravada teachers (Bhikkhu Bodhi, Thannisaro Bhikkhu, Mahasi Sayado, Ajahn Chah, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, etc.) have also been translated and published in the public domain.

In Russia, first attempts to study early Buddhism and its place in history were made already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It should be noted that Buddhism in Russia was studied primarily from the Chinese and Tibetan sources,<sup>10</sup> and most works analyzed its history and doctrine from the standpoint of various Mahayana schools. Nevertheless, there were several scholars interested primarily in early Buddhism and Pali literature. In 1872, I. Minayev completed "An Essay on the Phonetics and Morphology of the Pali

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Sergei Tyulin, Translator, Saint-Petersburg Theravada Buddhist Community, January 30, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> E. Torchinov, **Essay on the History of Buddhism Studies in Russia and Abroad**, (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2000), p. 210.

Language”, which became the first systematic description of the Pali language in the country. Minayev translated the *Pratimoksa-sutta* from Sanskrit and published a whole series of articles on Jataka tales, which were neither translated nor published at that time. In 1887, he attempted to analyze the Pali Canon in terms of its antiquity in his main work “Buddhism. Research and materials”.

S. Oldenburg (1861–1934) organized extensive research in the field of Buddhology, in particular, he published a fragment of the Dharmapada, perhaps the oldest surviving Indian manuscript. The works of F. Shcherbatskoi (1866–1942) marked a new stage in the study of Buddhist philosophy and culture. The works of this scholar for the first time revealed the depth and originality of logic and cognitive theory of Buddhism to the Western world.<sup>11</sup> In the 80s, Pali literature was studied by the V. Lysenko and A. Paribok, who translated *Milindapañha* and Jataka tales into Russian.<sup>12</sup> Buddhists mostly find these works still relevant for the means of historical reference, although the earlier ones contained “much bias, inaccuracy, things that seemed completely strange”.<sup>13</sup>

Summarizing, Theravada literature of different layers (canonical, commentary, modern) is available in Russian language, and the number of published translations increases every year. While the translations of canonical literature are mostly limited to *Sutta Pitaka* and the commentaries are represented with a scarce number of texts, scientific literature and the works of modern teachers serve as a means to build a more holistic view on the Buddha’s teachings. This situation might be seen as positive considering the very short period of time passed since Theravada Buddhism was introduced in Russia.

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<sup>11</sup> A. Vigasin, **The History of Russian Oriental Studies from the Middle of the XIX century until 1917**, (Moscow: “Eastern Literature” RAS, 1997), p. 410–411.

<sup>12</sup> E. Torchinov, **Essay on the History of Buddhism Studies in Russia and Abroad**, (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2000), p. 220.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Sergei Tyulin, Translator, Saint-Petersburg Theravada Buddhist Community, January 30, 2019.

### 3.1.3 Weak Sides Related to Literature and Translation

Despite the work carried out over the past 20 years, the translation of a large part of the Pali Canon, namely the *Vinaya and Abhidhamma Pitaka*, has yet to be completed. With the addition of commentaries and sub-commentaries, considering the minuscule number of people able to carry out translation of the Pali literature, the amount of work seems immense. The quality of translations carried out already is also questioned, firstly, since the translators are not professionally qualified (do not have special linguistic degrees), and secondly, because the translations were mostly carried out from English and not from Pali.<sup>14</sup>

However, this hardly poses a problem for people looking towards Buddhism, but not knowing much about its doctrine and practical application. Although only a part of canonical and post-canonical literature has been translated into Russian, such an abundance of “sacred texts” and lack of guidelines on their gradual study can drive people away from attempts to approach the Canon. For comparison, a collection of Christian sacred texts, the Bible, fits in a single printed volume, as well as Quran, the central religious text of Islam.

At the same time, there is a shortage of books that would outline all the basic principles of the Buddha’s teachings in a simple language. There is not a single book written by a native Russian speaker to explain Theravada Buddhism as a separate school and a living tradition. Sergey Tyulin finds that:

As a result, a misconception is formed about Buddhism as a religion and Buddhism as a practice. There are no books about the progressive study and practice of Dhamma, no books about real-life Buddhism. The paradigm of modern Buddhist literature is “meditation”. This is the central topic and everything revolves around it; in my opinion, is not a good thing – although it is demanded and sells well.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Pavel Nazin, leader of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 23, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Sergei Tyulin, Translator, Saint-Petersburg Theravada Buddhist Community, January 30, 2019.

Most respondents mentioned that Theravada literature is seriously outnumbered by canonical and non-canonical works belonging to Mahayana Buddhism. Attempts to promote Theravada Buddhism in the Mahayana countries have always encountered a number of difficulties. Although Russia has never been a Buddhist country, areas of traditional spread of Tibetan Buddhism existed here for about 3 centuries, and interest in Mahayana Buddhism in other parts of Russia has a longer history. Mahayana literature contributes to the perception of Theravada as “Hinayana”, a smaller or inferior vehicle<sup>16</sup>. The problems in the prevalence of such perception, associated with the total quantitative dominance of the Mahayana literature, are difficult to solve, as stated by some respondents. Vladimir Smirnov, a Russian Theravada monk, points that:

Attempts to find knowledge on Buddhism will rather come across a variety of Mahayana books. Many translations were made during the last years, but it is still a drop in the ocean.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, in relation to literature and translation, the weak sides of Theravada Buddhism in Russia include: incomplete translation of the Pali Canon, lack of expert Pali translators, lack of books to describe Theravada Buddhism as a holistic living tradition, and a relatively small amount of literature.

## **3.2 Education and Training**

This section aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the meaning and aim of education and training in Theravada Buddhism? (2) Which characteristics of Theravada Buddhism in Russia can be seen as strong sides of education and training? (3) Which characteristics can be seen as weak sides?

### **3.2.1 Education and Training in Theravada Buddhism**

Buddhism as a holistic system of gradual human development consists of three major stages, which are *pariyatti* (theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained

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<sup>16</sup> Kieko Obuse, “From Hinayana to Theravada: Ven. Alubomulle Sumanasara’s Mission to Japan”, **Journal of International Buddhist Studies**, no.2 (2013): 150-166.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Ven. Vladimir Smirnov (Buddhanyano Bhikkhu), founder of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 22, 2019.

through study), *paṭipatti* (the practice of Dhamma, as opposed to mere theoretical knowledge) and *paṭivedha* (direct, first hand realization of the Dhamma).<sup>18</sup>

While *pariyatti* is the first requisite step of Buddhist education, carried out through the study of the Pali Canon, this theoretical knowledge should not be believed blindly, but applied and proved by oneself.<sup>19</sup> The last stage constitute the ultimate accomplishment of Buddhist Education, namely Enlightenment, or *nibbāna*.<sup>20</sup>

Holistic Buddhist education is meant to guide a person on the path of eliminating all kinds of defilements and ceasing all kinds of suffering from the first stage of theoretical study until the last stage when one becomes an *arahant*. The progress on this development path is carried out through the three-fold training (*tisikkha*), which includes *adhisīla-sikkhā* (training in higher morality), *adhicitta-sikkhā* (training in higher mentality) and *adhipaññā-sikkhā* (training in higher wisdom).<sup>21</sup>

In term of theoretical study, the major divisions of the Pali Canon can be associated with the three-fold training according to their main focus: *Vinaya Pitaka* – with training in morality, *Sutta Pitaka* – with training in mind development, *Abhidhamma Pitaka* – with training in wisdom development.<sup>22</sup> At the level of education through practical application (*paṭipatti*), *tisikkha* functions as the process of learning by applying one's knowledge. The knowledge of discipline is applied to cultivate wholesome behavior, methods and techniques of meditation and mental development are implemented to cultivate samadhi, or the mastery of mind, and the fundamental teaching on the ultimate truth is used as a ground of insight (*vipassanā-bhūmi*) for practicing vipassana, or insight meditation, to cultivate insight wisdom.<sup>23</sup>

Through analyzing the various teachings of the Pali Canon related to education and training, one can come across different aspects of how this process of education and

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<sup>18</sup> VinA.1/317-318T; VinA.2/526T.

<sup>19</sup> DN.II.93; MN.I.37; AN.III.285.

<sup>20</sup> VinA.2/526T.

<sup>21</sup> AN.I.229-239.

<sup>22</sup> P.A. Payutto, **The Pali Canon: What a Buddhist Must Know**, tr. Prof. Dr. Somseen Chanawangsa, (Bangkok: Chanpen Publishing House, 2015), p.11.

<sup>23</sup> Bhaddantacariya Buddhaghosa, **Visuddhimagga: The Path of Purification**, pp.679-784.



training can be represented. Build on base of such analysis, the model of Holistic Buddhist Education<sup>24</sup> demonstrates the 4 major factors of educational process.

(1) *Kalyāṇa-mitta* (a virtuous friend, a teacher) as an external initiating factor.

(2) *Paratoghosa* (external sources of knowledge), which could induce the new learner to possess the internal learning factors, *saddhā* (wise faith) and *yonisomanasikāra* (process of wise attention and reflection).

(3) The integral learning process according to the principle of *tisikkha* is functioning as a way of life. These three steps are progressively repeated until perfect holistic human development is accomplished.

(4) The fully developed human is the ultimate output and as the new *kalyāṇa-mitta* functions as the next external initiating factor in the chain-reaction process of education.

In regards to external factors, the following clarification can be made:

(a) *Paratoghosa*, literally “the sound from outside,” refers to the influence of external factors, or the social environment.<sup>25</sup> In terms of Buddhist education, it includes not only learning the Buddhist teaching by hearing, but also studying by other ways from other sources. All kinds of learning material such as books, visual, and audio media are regarded as external factors of learning. Notably, the best external source of knowledge is not just material, but a person who acts interactively as a good friend or teacher. A good friend can initiate and nurture the internal learning factors of a learner throughout the learning procedure.

The proper external factors are extended to others that are called *sappāya* in Pali. These supporting factors consist of seven aspects:

(1) *senāsana-sappāya*: suitable lodgings,

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<sup>24</sup> Phramaha Pongnarin, An Analytical Study of Process of Learning in Theravada Buddhism, **Master's Degree Thesis**, (Graduate School: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University), 2005, p.58.

<sup>25</sup> Bhikkhu P. A. Payutto. **Good, Evil and Beyond. Kamma in the Buddha's Teaching**, (Bangkok: Buddhadhamma Foundation, 1997), p.74.

- (2) *gocara-sappāya*: suitable resorts and surrounding places,
- (3) *dhammassavana-sappāya*: suitable dialogues and teachings,
- (4) *puggala-sappāya*: suitable companions (good friends or teachers),
- (5) *bhojana-sappāya*: suitable food and other requisites,
- (6) *utu-sappāya*: suitable climate and environment,
- (7) *iriyāpatha-sappāya*: suitable posture, learning activities and meditation.<sup>26</sup>

From the above, it can be summarized that holistic Buddhist education, designed to foster the development of human beings free from mental defilements and suffering, depends on a *kalyāṇa-mitta* (a good friend, a learned person, a teacher) as the first aspect to initiate and support integral learning and training processes in others. It is clear that in the holistic system of Buddhist education, good friends play a special role in preparing all external factors to stipulate internal learning processes and practical application of the Dhamma. A *kalyāṇa-mitta* is the one to prepare suitable sources of information such as literature, lectures, audio and video recordings, as well as ensure material support (housing, food, requisites) and proper organization of educational activities.

### 3.2.2 Strong Sides Related to Education and Training

Among the good friends of Russian Buddhist followers, there are people who gave rise to this movement as mentioned in Chapter II, as well as many others who carries on the work of translating and publishing books, holding lectures, teaching meditation techniques and supporting the centers to function. In essence, the understanding of the need for holistic education, which would contribute to the development of all aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path, leads the centers to conduct multidirectional activities that affect both theoretical learning and practical application of knowledge.

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<sup>26</sup> Vism.127; VinA.II.429; MA.II.9, 11.

Among the strong sides, the respondents highlighted the human factor, particularly enthusiasm and interest in the authentic teachings of Buddhism. Not being a part of the culture allows Theravada Buddhism to be perceived by locals avoiding common misbeliefs and preconceptions: “Buddhism is not a part of our cultural heritage, so it is not buried under the layer of traditional beliefs, rituals and formalism.”<sup>27</sup> However, some are more skeptical about the current situation: “The strong sides [of Theravada Buddhism in Russia] have yet to arise. It could be a special psychological and phenomenological approach, devoid of formalism and ritualism.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite the very limited educational facilities in Russia, it was noted that there are enough opportunities for those wishing to study and practice Dhamma. Vladimir Smirnov expressed this idea thus: “There is Tipitaka to learn from, there are books, courses, meditation centers, many opportunities for those who really wish to study. Factually, the study and practice of Dhamma does not have to rely on organized communities or Dhamma-centers”.<sup>29</sup>

It was already mentioned that Theravada Buddhism has drawn attention by popularizing various mental techniques, which are rightly considered to be an effective means of changing person’s mentality, improving one’s well-being and corresponding physical indicators. Such practices are seen as an advantage over Russian traditional religions, which exhort their believers to passively wait for mercy from above. Meditation as a “key element of global Buddhism” becomes a mass phenomenon, however, it is difficult to explicitly attribute it to the strong or weak sides of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Meditation becomes simplified and non-contextual to such an extent that it could completely break away from its Buddhist root.<sup>30</sup> Aleksandr Berezin

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ven. Vladimir Smirnov (Buddhanyano Bhikkhu), founder of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 22, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Vlad Askinazi, Lecturer, Rime Buddhist Center, January 22, 2019.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Ven. Vladimir Smirnov (Buddhanyano Bhikkhu), founder of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 22, 2019.

<sup>30</sup> A. Agajnan, “Buddhism in the Modern World: A Soft Alternative to Globalism”, **Religion and Globalisation Across Eurasia**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2009), p. 237

shared his experience on conducting meditation retreats at the Thai Buddhist Center in St. Petersburg:

During the weekends around 30 people attend the Vipassana courses, it is the maximum we can accommodate. However, most of these people are not interested in Theravada Buddhism as a holistic way of practice.<sup>31</sup>

Summarizing, during the last decade much work has been done in order to build a basis for education and training within the Theravada tradition. Tipitaka and other literature was translated to serve as a foundation for theoretical study, while Dhamma-centers and information portals help people to find the answers to their questions on early Buddhist teachings. The fact of popularizing Vipassana and other kinds of meditation, as a strong side of Theravada Buddhism, has received mixed assessments by the respondents. Nevertheless, interest in meditation techniques does produce certain interest in Theravada Buddhism as a holistic tradition.

### **3.2.3 Weak Sides Related to Education and Training**

Several weak sides identified by the respondents can be attributed to limitations in education and training. As mentioned earlier, scattered information on different aspects of the teaching does not contribute to the perception of Theravada Buddhism as an integrated system of learning and training in everyday life. Particularly in provinces people mostly do not have the opportunity to study under the guidance or see the teacher regularly. Vlad Askinazi stated that:

Most people who study Theravada Buddhism do not have access to experienced teachers who have transformed themselves through the practice. One of the consequences is a limited understanding of basic aspects such as morality, which is commonly seen as merely following the 5 or 8 precepts, but not from a standpoint of right intention.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ven. Alexander Berezin (Dhammavuddho Bhikkhu), representative of Thai Buddhist Center “Buddhavihara”, January 21, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Vlad Askinazi, Lecturer, Rime Buddhist Center, January 22, 2019.

Respondent expressed the opinion that very few teachers explain how to practice the Noble Eightfold Path in a holistic manner. Thus, a number of people is practicing mind development through the popular meditation techniques without proper theoretical learning or purification of morality, while others focus on the study of the Pali Canon and practice moral behavior without resorting to mind cultivation. Oleg Shashkov was critical in his assessment of popular meditation courses, stating that:

Theravada Buddhism is often served merely as a technique, a magic pill to solve the problems, because meditation was made popular and is in high demand. This technical approach is based on the western, consumer mindset, a fundamentally anti-Buddhist way of thinking, which nurtures the ego, pride, and boasting, without cultivating any respect for the teachers.<sup>33</sup>

A large number of people practicing meditation and awareness techniques do not show much interest to the theoretical and moral aspects, since meditation is often served as self-sufficient:

The point of entry into the teaching is right views, the rejection of past delusions, it is the first aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path for a reason. There is too much emphasis on meditation, not enough focus on learning the suttas. This is what is currently opposed to the development of Theravada in Russia. Unfortunately, almost no one teaches such unfashionable things as reverence for teachers, reverence for monks.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, in terms of education and practice, among the weaknesses of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, we can highlight the presentation of Buddhism as merely meditation practice without proper preliminary training, which includes theoretical learning and purification of morality through wholesome behavior. On the other hand, there is also an opposite process which constitutes in theoretical learning without resorting to sensible practical application. Vlad Askinazi finds there is a fundamental

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Oleg Shashkov, Publisher, Tambov, January 26, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

disagreement among people, who is interested in Theravada Buddhism in Russia. He states that:

There is a conflict between “Buddhist fundamentalism”, which denies the importance and dignity of other religions and Buddhist sects, and indiscriminate practitioners, who resort to various practices without proper consideration.<sup>35</sup>

From the responses received, considering the importance of the human factor mentioned in previous sections, the researcher concluded that there is a lack of educators seen as examples of comprehensively developed personalities who could serve as a real teacher, or *kalyāṇa-mitta*, encouraging the continuous and gradual advancement in the three-fold training, and capable of causing the formation of other external contributing factors.

### **3.3 Organization and Endowment**

According to its definition, the word “organization” may refer to “an organized body of people with a particular purpose, especially a business, society, association, etc.” or “an efficient and orderly approach to tasks”.<sup>36</sup> Endowment refers to an income or form of property given or bequeathed to someone. By another definition, an endowment is any asset donated to and for the perpetual benefit of a non-profit institution. The donation is usually made with the requirement that the principal remain intact and money earned from investing the principal be used for a specific purpose. Thus, this section deals, on the one hand, with the specific features of organized communities created with the aim of spreading Theravada Buddhism and, on the other hand, with the process of organizing related events and their material provision.

#### **3.3.1 The Significance of Organization and Endowment**

While the practice of the Buddha-Dhamma does not require mandatory involvement in organizations or communities, the Buddha has repeatedly stressed the

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Vlad Askinazi, Lecturer, Rime Buddhist Center, January 22, 2019.

<sup>36</sup> J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, **The Oxford English Dictionary**, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

importance of spiritual friendship for monks and laity. In the *Upaddha-sutta*, also known as the Half (of the Holy Life) Discourse, it is said that:

Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions, & comrades, he can be expected to develop & pursue the noble eightfold path.<sup>37</sup>

In the *Dighajhanu-sutta*, there is a special mention of admirable friendship in relation to a layperson:

And what is meant by admirable friendship? There is the case where a lay person, in whatever town or village he may dwell, spends time with householders or householders' sons, young or old, who are advanced in virtue. He talks with them, engages them in discussions. He emulates consummate conviction in those who are consummate in conviction, consummate virtue in those who are consummate in virtue, consummate generosity in those who are consummate in generosity, and consummate discernment in those who are consummate in discernment. This is called admirable friendship.<sup>38</sup>

For cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path, the ability to meet with more experienced practitioners is important for people regardless of their level of knowledge. The Sangha is precious in Buddhism as without those in the community to look up to or share aspirations with, the spiritual life would be very challenging. The presence and positive support of other people is what helps us fulfill our aspirations – and form those aspirations to begin with. This kind of beneficial social influence on one another can be called “positive peer pressure.”

In addition, with the joint efforts of many people, organization of larger-scale events, establishment of new Dhamma-centers and residences for monks in Russia seems to be more likely. Given the small number of followers of Theravada Buddhism, their enhanced cooperation is crucial for maintaining and strengthening Theravada

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<sup>37</sup> SN.V.2.

<sup>38</sup> AN.IV.281.

Buddhism in Russia. Although material support is not a prerequisite for forming a Buddhist community, financial, human, and social resources are intended to improve the efficiency of its activities.

### 3.3.2 The Strong Sides of Organization

Buddhism in general and Theravada Buddhism in particular is a very uncommon, exotic religion in Russia. Attending public lectures and meetings of a local Buddhist community may help the visitors to make sense out of the segmentary knowledge acquired from different sources and build a holistic picture of Buddhism as a way of life. From this point of view, events, meetings, lectures and meditation courses, usually conducted in warm and home-like atmosphere, encourage exchange of experience and developing bounds within community members.

Currently, the communities of large cities not only conduct multidirectional activities for the study and practice of Buddhism, but try to use modern means of communication to compensate for the lack of centers in the provinces. The leader of the Moscow Theravada Community, Pavel Nazin states that:

Every Sunday, our community meetings are broadcasted online. Anyone can see and hear what is happening at the meeting, ask questions and express one's opinion through a video-conference system.<sup>39</sup>

Video recording and online broadcasting is widely used by Buddhist communities and teachers as a means to share knowledge with a wider auditorium, helping people who do not have the opportunity to attend lectures and meetings.

Two Buddhist conferences held in 2018 were a fairly new phenomenon in Russian cultural life. The First Russian National Research and Practice Conference for Translators of Buddhist Texts, "Towards a Russian Language Buddhist Canon", was attended by leading Russian translators, researchers and publishers of Buddhist texts.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Pavel Nazin, leader of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 23, 2019.

<sup>40</sup> Photo report, The First Russian National Research and Practice Conference for Translators of Buddhist Texts, **Center of Tibetan Culture**, Retrieved on 1 February 2019, <http://savetibet.ru/2018/11/10/translation.html>.



The 1st International Conference on Buddhist Culture and Civilization held by the Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society was the first conference organized by Theravada Buddhists in Russia. New events and projects of the group, such as the temporary monk ordination and the construction of a monastery in Moscow, allowed the Buddhists to take a more positive outlook on the prospects of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Apparently, these larger-scale events became possible through foreign financial support.

Thus, the strengths of organization can be seen in the multilateral activities of communities that are trying to use all available means to disseminate the Buddha's teaching and support the growth of the community. The format of the events contributes to the creation of friendly relations between the participants. New types of events and projects organized in recent years should be attributed to the strong sides as well.

### **3.3.3 The Weak Sides of Organization**

All respondents described the lack of coordination between communities and individual Buddhists as an internal negative factor that hinders the development of Theravada in Russia. Oleg Shashkov relates this situation to the mindset of people who usually develop sympathy for Theravada Buddhism thus:

Buddhism as a whole, and especially Theravada Buddhism, is not a mainstream religion in Russia. People who choose this path tend to possess critical, independent thinking. Such people are commonly individualists by nature. They have strong confidence in own views and tend to criticize others for minor mistakes. Hence, there is a lack of unity and cooperation. Now everyone is on their own, it is a community of weakly united people, not capable to create a strong union, a spiritual brotherhood to run volunteer and educational projects.<sup>41</sup>

A similar idea about the shifted accents was expressed by the leader of the Moscow community:

The Buddha stressed the importance of spiritual friendship, but people here prefer to cite the Rhinoceros-sutta and focus on “being islands unto themselves,

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Oleg Shashkov, Publisher, Tambov, January 26, 2019.

refuges unto themselves” rather than search for admirable teachers and companions.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from simply lacking unity, some communities were prone to fundamentalism, showing enmity not only to other religions, but also other schools of Buddhism and communities of their own tradition. It has come to making “official statements” about “not having anything to do” with each other’s groups and activities.<sup>43</sup> Respondents noted that promoting enmity and making conflicts public by Buddhist people are not conducive to develop sympathy and confidence in the Buddhist teaching.

This state of affairs is obviously not conducive to the growth of financial viability of communities that do not cooperate even within their own school. Russian communities do not have the means to rent, much less to purchase accommodation that would meet all their needs, as admitted by one of the respondents. As long as the problem of separation between communities and individuals, in particular between monks, is not resolved, significant improvements in the situation should not be expected, find those surveyed.

### 3.4 Concluding Remarks

During the period of less than 20 years, many efforts were made to introduce Theravada Buddhism in Russia. First, a lot of canonical and non-canonical literature was translated, several Dhamma-centers were established in major cities, and new events were held over the past few years in the capital. Sri Lankan, Thai and Myanmar monks reside in Russia on a regular basis, often directing the activities of Russian Buddhists. The situation represents a considerable improvement, however, during the

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Pavel Nazin, leader of the Moscow Theravada Buddhist Community, January 23, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> “The statement regarding the activities of the religious community "Theravada.ru", 2013, **Buddhavihara**, Retrieved on 1 February 2019, <http://www.buddhavihara.ru/sample-page/statements>.

<sup>44</sup> “Commentary on the statement posted on the official Buddhavihara website”, 2013, **Theravada.ru**, Retrieved on 1 February 2019, <http://www.theravada.ru/Life/Red/Text/03-08-2013.htm>.

survey, weak sides in all areas were more obvious to the respondents than the strong ones. The division between Theravada Buddhists and Buddhists in general, hostility and conflicts on the one hand, and the lack of perception of Buddhism as a holistic system of human development on the other, represents an internal negative aspect that should be considered for the improvement of the situation. Currently, despite all the notable improvements, Theravada Buddhism remains a noticeable phenomenon in the major cities of Russia, while mostly no organized communities are functioning in the provinces.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Opportunities and Threats of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

External factors – opportunities and threats – are events, phenomena and trends that occur in the external environment and are a favorable (convenient) or unfavorable for the studied object. Unlike strong and weak sides, opportunities and threats cannot be directly influenced by the object itself.

History provides many examples of how the fate of Buddhism in particular areas was influenced by various environmental factors. For example, E. Torchinov relates the emergence of Buddhism and a number of other alternative religions in the middle of the first millennium B.C. to the crisis of the ancient Vedic religion, guarded and adhered by brahmins. Further, reliance on royal power led to the almost complete disappearance of Buddhism in India, when the kings gradually ceased to support Buddhism and due to unclear reasons returned to the heart of Brahman orthodoxy, Hinduism.<sup>1</sup> In China, the introduction of Buddhism and the formation of the Chinese Buddhist tradition itself is a vivid example of cultural influence. Chinese Buddhism, which essentially became a product of the synthesis of Chinese and Indian cultures, spread to all countries of the Far East, carrying not only the Chinese writing system, but also those aspects of Chinese culture that had no direct relation to Buddhism.<sup>2</sup>

Undoubtedly, Russia has a number of specific external factors that can influence or are already influencing the spread of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Although these factors appear to be closely related, for the means of analysis, the chapter is divided into three parts: (1) Interreligious Relations, (2) Social and Cultural Background, and (3) Legal and Political Background.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Torchinov, **Introduction to Buddhology. Lecture course.** (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2000), p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

## **4.1. Interreligious Relations**

Russia is a multi-confessional state with different religions having unequal sphere of influence and distribution due to historical reasons. The Orthodox Christianity has an exclusive place in the history and life of modern society, and there is a growing influence of Islam, which is the second most common religion in the country. For the present study, the areas of historical distribution of Tibetan Buddhism, as well as the long-standing interest in Tibetan Buddhism in Russia is of particular interest as well.

### **4.1.1 Theravada Buddhism in the Multireligious Space of Russia**

On the vast territory of Russia, the clash of Christianity with other religions and the theoretical position of the Church towards them during the history took various forms in accordance with the pursued political and military goals: from defense to attack and systematic proselytism and from indifference and tolerance to coexistence and dialogue. In their missionary work, both within the country and in the neighboring states of the Far East, Orthodox Russians met with almost all known religions, including Buddhism, and they studied them, trying to comprehend the essence of their doctrine.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhism bypassed ethnic boundaries and became present in the intellectual landscape of Russia from about the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Orthodox missionary priests – N. Bichurin, P. Kafarov, P. Tugarinov, Guri Karpov and others – were among the first to introduce Russian readers to Buddhism. V. Solovyov was one of the first major Russian philosophers and theologians who addressed the philosophical problems of Buddhism in order to more clearly identify the points of contact and the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Christianity. Many well-known Russian philosophers and thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turned to Buddhism and its doctrine following his example. However, in these works the analysis of Buddhism was carried

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<sup>3</sup> Apart from the missionary notes and general works on the history of the Church, there is no systematic study of this issue. In "Religions of the ancient world in their relation to Christianity" (St. Petersburg, 1878) Bishop Chrysanth, the rector of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, outlines the views of the Fathers of the Church on paganism and develops some theological considerations regarding the non-Christian world.

out on the materials of the British and German Buddhist schools, quite fully represented in the book of V. Kozhevnikov "Buddhism in Comparison with Christianity".<sup>4</sup>

The main principles of Buddhism were seen as: 1) the absence of a soul; 2) negative understanding of spiritual perfection as the destruction of the individual; 3) Nibbana — the goal of spiritual cultivation — is merely extinction, the cessation of the process of being; 4) Buddhism denies the existence of God and, moreover, the idea of supramundane. Despite only Tibetan Buddhism existed in Russia at that time, and such assessment of Tibetan Buddhism was quite erroneous, this point of view became widely accepted in science and public opinion and remained dominant for a long time, despite a significant amount of empirical material introduced by the researchers of Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>5</sup>

There was a certain interest to cultivate this model of Buddhism in public opinion. First, this view was supported by many leaders of the Christian Church and Christian-oriented scholars and writers. Interpretation of Buddhism as a philosophical and ethical (but not religious) system created by man (but not inspired from above) brought Buddhism beyond the spiritual pursuits of people seeking support in the faith and guidance in religion. In addition, in the proposed model of Buddhism, the doctrine of “no harm” (*ahimsa*) was defined as the basis of morality, and the *bodhisattva* ideal (and, accordingly, the doctrine of love and compassion) was considered as introduced into “original” Buddhism later and not intrinsic to it. That created a favorable position for criticism of the moral teachings of Buddhism as indifferent to the sufferings of others.

Although already in 1918 a Russian Buddhologist O. Rosenberg noted that Buddhism is historically represented in the form of various schools and sects, which are sometimes extremely different from each other and rather seem like different religions

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<sup>4</sup> V.A. Kozhevnikov, **Buddhism in Comparison with Christianity**, (Petrograd: Markushev Press, 1916), p.56.

<sup>5</sup> S.P. Nesterkin, “The Main Trends in the Evolution of Buddhism in Sociocultural Space of Russia”, **Newsletter of the Buryat University**, Philosophy Series, No. 6a, (Ulan-Ude: Buryat State University Press, 2009), p.16.

than different sects within the same religion,<sup>6</sup> that Christian criticism usually deals with Buddhism “in general,” and not with certain schools.

Another field of religious influence related to study is the relationship between Theravada Buddhism and various schools of Mahayana Buddhism in Russia. Interest in Mahayana Buddhism developed in Russia already in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, thus, the Mahayana doctrines that influence the perception of Theravada Buddhism became well known in the field of Buddhist studies and among the majority of Buddhists.

These factors of influence, namely, criticism towards Buddhism in general expressed by Christian authors and criticism towards Theravada Buddhism in particular expressed by Mahayana Buddhists in Russia, are the main ones to consider when examining Theravada Buddhism against the background of the religious space. Although Islam is the second most common religion in the country (about 10% of the population, according to some polls), there is no history of close interaction or ideological conflict between these two denominations in Russia.

#### 4.1.2 Threats of Interreligious Relations

The works of Orthodox Christian authors on Buddhism are aimed at demonstrating the superiority of Christianity over non-Christian religions through criticism of Buddhism as an “alien” religion. As mentioned above, the Orthodox authors understood Buddhist ideas by altering their original meaning and transferring Christian meanings on them instead. Buddhist terms were appropriated by orthodox-oriented authors to build a historic foundation, where Orthodoxy plays a vital and comprehensive role in inculturation processes.<sup>7</sup>

There are general tendencies of how Buddhism has been perceived in the Orthodox thought. The basis of Orthodox judgments about Buddhism is the thesis about the incompatibility of these religions, which, as the Orthodox Christians believe, are

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<sup>6</sup> E. Torchinov, **Introduction to Buddhology. Lecture course**. (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Philosophical Society, 2000), p.16.

<sup>7</sup> A. Zhukov, A. Zhukova, K. Vlasova, “Comprehension of Character and Factors of Distribution of Buddhism among non-Buddhist Cultures in Orthodox Religious Studies”, **Zabykal State University Newsletter**, No 1 (92), (Chita: ZabSU, 2013), p.126.

opposed to each other. For those who represent the Orthodox Church, Buddhist ideas are seen solely as an object of criticism. The Buddhist worldview, according to this perception, is a worldview of people with clouded mind, not able to see the truth available to Christian believers. Notably, in the works of the Orthodox thinkers, one can find assertions that “Buddhism does not have reliable criteria of truth, and everything that Buddhism teaches is in fact accepted on faith.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the Orthodox philosopher V. Solovyev coined the term “negative universalism”, by which he understood the stage at which the problems of the individual are resolved by its destruction. According to his understanding, all the meanings of Buddhism were overshadowed by the desire for death as a triumph over life, which opposes the Buddhist and Christian principles. In his opinion, Christianity, which developed to the stage of “positive universalism”, encourages the development of the individual.<sup>9</sup> A. Kuraev believes that Buddhists simply do not know that sin is overcome by penance and acceptance. Other Buddhist categories such as *samsara*, which is understood as a fundamental and beginningless characteristic of existence in Buddhism, in the writings of Christian authors is interpreted as suffering of those who cannot be saved outside the Christian Church.<sup>10</sup> In the teachings on *nibbana* Christian thinkers see the proof nihilism.<sup>11</sup> In the context of Orthodox interpretations, the teaching on personality in Buddhism always looks like a denial of the possibility of soul salvation. Thus, Buddhism in Orthodoxy is perceived as a religion that, for the sake of appearance calls for mercy, but in reality is aimed to eliminate the personality.

Thus, in Orthodox literature, Buddhism always appears as something strange and alien. This picture of Buddhism created by Christianity has the following features: (1) knowledge in Buddhism is based on faith only; (2) the idea of the Hindu (or the pagan) essence of Buddhism, which leads to idolization, image worship; (3) the idea of

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<sup>8</sup> V. Pitanov, “Can Orthodoxy be combined with Buddhism?”, **Livejournal**, Retrieved on 10 February 2019, [http://www.prosvetlenie.ru/2011/09/blog-post\\_7801.htm](http://www.prosvetlenie.ru/2011/09/blog-post_7801.htm)

<sup>9</sup> E.S. Safronova, **Buddhism in Russia**, (Moscow: 1998), p. 137.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kuraev, **Satanism for the Intelligentsia**, (Moscow: Podvorje STLavry, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> N. Lossky, **Christianity and Buddhism: A Collection of Articles** (Moscow: St. Vladimir Brotherhood Press, 1994), p. 64.



individual that has rejected both the “I” (the soul) and the God because of pride; (4) the idea of the deadening spirit of Buddhism, leading to spiritual suicide, the extinction of human self-consciousness in non-existence.

Criticism of the Buddhist doctrine takes place not only in Orthodox literature, but also in the journals and online publications; for instance, there is a series of interviews with former Buddhists who returned to Orthodox faith. These articles may contain descriptions of certain Tibetan beliefs, figures and rituals, which most certainly will appear frightening to a common reader. For instance, in one of the interviews, a man recalled “human sacrifices” in Tibet,<sup>12</sup> as well as the *Chöd*<sup>13</sup> ritual, where the practitioner offers one’s body to be torn apart and eaten by demons.<sup>14</sup>

Active criticism towards Buddhism, however, has been a response to the spread of Buddhist ideas among Russian intellectuals since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Naturally, Orthodox criticism could only limit the spread of interest in a certain extent, but could not stop it completely. Along with this interest Buddhology emerged as a separate branch of Russian Oriental studies. Works dedicated to the study of Buddhism, as well as works of Mahayana Buddhist teachers, both from the west and from the east, began to appear in the press. As a result of this process, many ideas accepted in the Mahayana tradition, particularly those which created a bad image of the Theravada school, have become entrenched in the public opinion. For example, the concept of the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, and the division of teachings into Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana.

Although in the 1950s, during the preliminary stage of the sixth Buddhist Council, an agreement was reached between representatives of various Buddhist

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<sup>12</sup> According to the book of V. Ovchinnikov, when erecting religious buildings, there was a custom to bury a young gifted lama in a state of deep meditation under each of its cornerstones.

<sup>13</sup> *Chöd* is a practice found primarily in the Nyingma and Kagyu schools of Tibetan Buddhism. *Chöd* combines prajñāpāramitā philosophy with specific meditation methods and tantric ritual. The practitioner seeks to tap the power of fear through activities such as rituals set in graveyards, and visualisation of offering their bodies in a tantric feast in order to put their understanding of emptiness to the ultimate test.

<sup>14</sup> Anonymous author, “Why did I left Buddhism?”, **Pravoslavie.fm**, Independent Magazine of Orthodox Public, 2015, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://pravoslavie.fm/articles/pochemu-ya-ushel-iz-buddizma>.

schools that the term Hinayana would not be used for Theravada,<sup>15</sup> in Russian literature among scholars and Mahayana preachers, it is still widely used. Hinayana is most often presented as a “flawed chariot”,<sup>16</sup> an egoistic path, indifferent to the sufferings of living beings, or even a path that can only be taken by monks.<sup>17</sup>

The major accusations against “Hinayana” can be formulated as follows; it became:

- 1) conservative and literal, sticking to the letter, but not the spirit of the teachings, generally resisting change;
- 2) scholastic, giving too much time to analysis and classification of mental states;
- 3) negative in its view on Nibbana and the Path;
- 4) too busy with purely formal aspects of monasticism;
- 5) spiritually individualistic.<sup>18</sup>

Since Mahayana Buddhism is much more common in the religious space of Russia, such attitudes naturally limit interest in Theravada Buddhism, which is factually not represented as a living tradition in the country.

Although in Russia there is no visible confrontation between Muslims and Buddhists, conflicts on religious grounds may arise as it was shown by several events. Thus, in 2017, a large group of Muslims gathered in front of the Myanmar embassy in Moscow to protest against homicide in the Rakhine state.<sup>19</sup> In another event in 2016, a Muslim published a video where he desecrates a Buddha statue in Elista; a group of enraged citizens found him and forced to ask for forgiveness standing on his knees.

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<sup>15</sup> N. Jukovskaya, **Buddhism: Dictionary**, (Moscow: Republic, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> E. Torchinov, **Buddhism: A Pocket Dictionary**, (St. Petersburg: Amphora, 2002), p. 150.

<sup>17</sup> V. Lysenko, **Early Buddhism: Religion and Philosophy**, (Moscow: INFRAN, 2003), c.21.

<sup>18</sup> Sangharakshita, **A Survey of Buddhism, Its Doctrines and Methods Through the Ages. Book II, Hinayana and Mahayana**. (Cambridge: Windhorse Publications, 2001), p.41.

<sup>19</sup> M. Talagaeva, “Who provoked a spontaneous rally of Muslims in front of the Myanmar embassy”, **Moscow's Comсомоlets**, Online Magazine, 2017, Retrieved on 11 January 2019, <https://www.mk.ru/incident/2017/09/03/kto-sprovociroval-stikhiynny-miting-musulman-u-posolstva-myanmy-mneniya-uchastnikov.html>.

Spiritual leaders are struggling to mitigate such conflicts, as they are very dangerous for Russia due to the possibility of causing a massive inter-ethnic confrontation.<sup>20</sup>

Summarizing, Buddhism is generally criticized both by the mainstream religion of Russia, Orthodox Christianity, and, in particular, by representatives of other Buddhist schools, which see Theravada Buddhism as a “smaller vehicle”, not sought for when there are more favorable and more developed ways of practice. At first these external factors might be seen as purely negatively for the spread of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, however, this situation allows a different point of view, as it will be shown further.

#### 4.1.3 Opportunities of Interreligious Relations

Apart from the tendency to criticize Buddhism in general (Christianity) and Theravada Buddhism in particular (non-Theravada Buddhist schools), there is also an opposite tendency to engage in dialogue to promote peaceful coexistence of all religions in the country. The importance of such a dialogue in Russia is due to the state strategy of using religious institutions to resolve inter-ethnic conflicts, since various ethnic groups are nominally associated with their traditional religions.<sup>21</sup>

On the one hand, this is manifested in the statements of religious leaders, who encourage people to show friendliness and respect towards representatives of other faiths. Within the special course on history of Christian thought, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk<sup>22</sup> said that:

Buddhism is a religion represented in our Motherland and practiced by a considerable number of people. Buddhism is a kind religion. It helps to cultivate goodwill, helps to unleash the potential of good – it is no coincidence that many

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<sup>20</sup> “An apology was not enough: Experts believe the arrest of Dagestanis who desecrated the Buddha statue in Kalmykia was excessive”, **Commerzant Magazine**, 2016, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2955938>.

<sup>21</sup> Alicja Curanović, “Weaknesses of the Post-Soviet Religious Model: The Kremlin and “Traditional” Religions in face of Interethnic Tensions in Russia”, **Politics and Religion**, Vol. 7, Issue 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 812.

<sup>22</sup> Chairman of the Synodal Biblical-Theological Commission, Rector of the Church-wide Postgraduate and Doctoral Studies, Professor and Head of the Theology Department of NRNU MEPI.

Buddhists are calm and cheerful. [...] I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that throughout the history of our country, Christians and Buddhists have peacefully coexisted for centuries in different regions and there is no potential for conflicts between them.<sup>23</sup>

While in Russia Buddhist communities are divided and sometimes show hostility towards each other, certain Buddhist leaders are calling for peaceful coexistence of different Buddhist sects. In March 1993, during a meeting of renowned Buddhist teachers with the fourteenth Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India, it was agreed on certain points, including the following statement:

In the West, where many different Buddhist traditions exist side by side, one must be constantly alert because of the danger of sectarianism. Such a wary attitude often arises due to a lack of understanding or an incorrect assessment of everything that is beyond the framework of its own tradition. Therefore, teachers of all schools could bring invaluable help by learning and using the practical experience gained in the teachings of other traditions.<sup>24</sup>

Similar ideas are voiced by other lamas, making the people from traditional Buddhist communities turn to Theravada Buddhism in order to learn more about mind cultivation practices.

In the previous section, it was reported that Buddhism has been thoroughly examined and criticized by Christian authors since the time it became popular in the circles of Russian intellectuals in 19<sup>th</sup> century until today, when it gained a new wave of popularity. Notably, some religious scholars believe that Orthodox criticism has rendered a service to Buddhism by drawing more attention and helping to make the Buddhist ideas more understandable for average Russian people. Orthodox authors paid special attention to discuss the foundations of Buddhism and interpret the doctrine in terms of Christianity, which made it more understandable for an average person.

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<sup>23</sup> “Attitude of the Orthodox Church towards the major world religions”, **Russian Orthodox Church, External Relations Department Website**, 2013, Retrieved on 8 February 2019, <https://mospat.ru/ru/2013/10/24/news93292>.

<sup>24</sup> “Path to Peace”, **Tricycle Magazine**, 1993. <https://tricycle.org/magazine/news-9>.

Ultimately, according to this view, criticism has contributed to the dissemination of Buddhist ideas in the cultural space of the Russian population.<sup>25</sup>

In a similar manner, the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in Russia can be seen as a positive factor for the development of Theravada Buddhism, some respondents find. Like many Theravada Buddhists today, Vlad Askinazi, a lecturer at the Rime Buddhist center, originally developed interest for Tibetan Buddhism after listening to the teachings of the Dalai Lama. He believes that the wide spread of Mahayana Buddhism in Russia is not an obstacle, but a source of followers, who will ultimately favor a different approach to Buddhism. He finds that:

Among Buddhists there will always be people with a skeptical mindset who are not satisfied with the Mahayana approach and feel the need to prove the doctrine, not in terms of logical correctness, but in terms of empirical evidence.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the calls for peaceful coexistence of religions voiced by religious leaders can be seen as a positive external factor that can soothe aggression towards “alien” religions and make Theravada Buddhism more appealing in public opinion. However, it was noted that increased attention, even in the form of criticism, may contribute to the spread of Buddhist ideas among the public.

## 4.2. Social and Cultural Background

By one of its definitions, culture is the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time.<sup>27</sup> The Center for Advance Research on Language Acquisition goes a step further, defining culture as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding

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<sup>25</sup> A. Zhukov, A. Zhukova, K. Vlasova, “Comprehension of Character and Factors of Distribution of Buddhism among non-Buddhist Cultures in Orthodox Religious Studies”, **Zabykal State University Newsletter**, No 1 (92), (Chita: ZabSU, 2013), p.130.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Vlad Askinazi, Lecturer, Rime Buddhist Center, January 22, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/culture>.

that are learned by socialization. Thus, it can be seen as the growth of a group identity fostered by social patterns unique to the group.<sup>28</sup>

Globalization as the process of world economic, political, cultural and religious integration and unification is an important feature of the modern stage of human development, which has an obvious impact on the culture of most countries. This section is dedicated to modern trends in culture that influence the development of Theravada in Russia.

#### **4.2.1 Trends of Social Development in Russia**

The mutual influence of cultures is a process that has been constantly increasing for several centuries. But the last decades have given this process a qualitatively new depth and strength, which led to the emergence of the term “globalization”. Many observers, explaining this new quality of mutual influence of peoples and cultures, the growing unity of humanity, find its cause in the progress of communication technologies, the development of a single global market for goods and services and other material factors. For the means of this study, the phenomena of social, ideological, and religious nature were examined.

With some degree of generalization, it can be said that globalization is Americanization. The American system of values and social structure is more universal, therefore, it is adequate to the universal order. Russian patriotic, mainly Orthodox critics of globalization accuse it for promoting earthliness and destroying religious values. However, if we analyze the real situation, this thesis raises serious doubts, at least because in Russia globalization is associated with the revival of religion, which was almost destroyed during the Soviet era.

Some fundamental features inherent in the American (now becoming universal) religiosity and the system of relations between religious organizations and society are the following:

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<sup>28</sup> “What is Culture?”, CARLA, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <http://carla.umn.edu/culture/definitions.html>

The most important aspect of this American norm is the real equality of religious organizations in the face of the state, the absence of state privileged denominations, the functioning of organized religious life solely on the basis of voluntary self-organization of believers. The state does not provide financial and political support to any religious organizations, but at the same time does not prevent them from carrying out their mission, and public opinion highly appreciates the activities of religious organizations.<sup>29</sup>

There is a general direction in which the perception of religion tends to change. The most obvious features are: (1) reducing the significance of rites and rituals, public worships, asceticism, and the greater importance of social service, charity; (2) cultivating personal responsibility for decisions, the growing role of free choice of believers outside of Church authority, and, on the other hand, tolerance towards other people's religious choices.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps the only feature of modern "global" religiosity, not originally characteristic of American culture, but a natural consequence of globalization, is the deterritorialization of religion. Religion becomes scattered over traditional confessional, political, cultural and civilizational boundaries. Any religion finds its adherents where it has never existed historically, and loses them in regions of traditional distribution.

An individual person is increasingly becoming the subject of choice, regardless of belonging to any religious or ethno-cultural tradition. Pluralism and even eclecticism of religious beliefs extends not only at the level of various societies, but also at the level of the individual consciousness of believers. The eclectic world view is combining logically and genetically unrelated elements drawn from various traditional religions.

The nature of religious life and the position of religion in societies of different countries do not correspond to the standards being established in varying degrees. As they spread and become widely accepted, religious organizations (as well as national

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<sup>29</sup> S. Filatov, "Religious Life in Eurasia: Responses to Globalization", **Religion and Globalization Across Eurasia**, (Moscow: Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2009), p.13.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.14.

societies in general) are forced to respond to this global challenge. Reactions are different, and in every society one can find several types of them. European countries and traditional Christian denominations of Europe are relatively easy to evolve towards the adoption of global standards. But European societies were initially relatively close to the American model. The spread of global values to initially more distant from the American model of society leads to much greater difficulties than in Europe.

In Russia, it is impossible to single out the prevailing response to globalization. According to S. Filatov, the situation is complicated by the paradoxical self-consciousness of modern Russians. Globalization came to the country at the end of the 1980s, essentially into an atheist society, and brought revival of religion along with democracy, political freedoms and human rights. Over the past 30 years, real religiosity has grown, but not dramatically (while adherence to the basic principles of democracy and human rights has become the norm for the overwhelming majority of the population). Based on most indicators (participation in worship, prayer, communion, faith in the basic tenets of Christianity, etc.), according to numerous polls, Russia is one of the most non-religious countries. In the field of morality, the country also does not have a special commitment to traditional Christian values (considering the spread of abortions, divorces, prostitution and tolerance for them, breakdown of the family as an institution).

However, a significant part of the country's population, the clergy of the leading confession, the Russian Orthodox Church, and the political elite simply ignore reality. Russia is aware of itself as a “traditional”, “Orthodox” country, apparently not being such.<sup>31</sup> The ideological position of the political elite and the Russian Church, orientation toward confronting globalization and the destruction of “traditional values” is essential.

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<sup>31</sup> From the speech of Alexy II in the Tambov State University on August 9, 2002: "Today Europe discusses the question of whether Christian values can be considered a heritage that should be the basis of the united European community, or the world has entered the post-Christian period of its development. It's safe to say that for our country, such a question, fortunately, is not urgent, for the new Russian statehood is being built on strong foundations of traditional values and among them, values spiritual and religious", **Journal of Moscow Patriarchy**, No 9 (2002), p. 36.



For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Russia was one of the most isolated countries from external ideological, cultural and religious influences. The lack of boundaries for external religious influence nowadays might still seem unacceptable for conservative-minded people. Hence, ideas about the state's duty to "protect the traditional spiritual values of the nation", etc.

Meanwhile, ideas about a unique Russian culture and the need to defend cultural identity are part of a civilizational approach in history, which is already taught in secondary school and plays a large role in higher education, on the initiative of the Ministry of Education.<sup>32</sup> Erecting impassable barriers between "civilizations" with special inherent "mentalities", this approach gives rise to xenophobia. The civilizational approach sets students on artificial self-isolation from the outside world, which is an utopia in the modern conditions.

In its most popular version, the civilizational approach places religion as the basis for the classification of large cultural communities. Meanwhile, opinion polls indicate the danger of quasi-religiousness, whose growth was observed in the 1990s. It is about people's perception of religion primarily as an identity without corresponding religious values.<sup>33</sup> Such quasi-religiousness is closely related to political radicalism and intolerance.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, two opposite trends can be observed in modern Russia. The first is caused by globalization and related to the adoption of basic principles of democracy and human rights, which also determines the change in how religion is perceived by general population and tolerance for the religious choices of others. The second is caused by conservative sentiments, which are expressed in the need to resist globalization and

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<sup>32</sup> V.A. Shnirelman, "Civilizational Approach, History Books and the New Racism", **Racism in the Language of Social Sciences**, (St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2002), p.242.

<sup>33</sup> A.M. Gracheva, "Psychosemantic comparative analysis of the features of the categories of consciousness of Russian and Jewish high school students in the field of international education", **Value-Normative Orientations of High School Students: Works on the Sociology of Education**. Vol. III. No. IV, (Moscow: CSO RAO, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> A. Perevedentseva, "Religiousness and orientation towards achievement", **Social Inequality of Ethnic Groups: Representations and Reality**, (Moscow, 2002), p. 268-269.

protect Russia's cultural identity, which can manifest itself as intolerance for the spread of other religions or phenomena “alien” to Russian culture.

#### 4.2.2 Threats of Social and Cultural Background

A set of views called culturalism or cultural racism is common among certain conservative Russian groups. In the narrative of culturalism, cultural differences are emphasized and politicized; and since culture is deemed as an important factor of internal and national security, the protection of national culture and identity should be one of the objectives of government policy. Culture is thought to be an objective factor which determines behavior and development of nations. Each individual is said to be born into a concrete culture; as a consequence, identity is not a matter of an individual's choice but is an objective condition which marks the individual for life.<sup>35</sup>

In a country where some people are convinced of the need to protect their culture, which is often seen as based on Orthodox Christian tradition, from “evil” external influences, the fact of propagating such exotic religions as Theravada Buddhism can cause xenophobia. Xenophobia could be defined as “various expressions of intolerance towards groups which are perceived in the public consciousness as strangers”.<sup>36</sup> And strangers in today's Russia do seem disturbing to many.<sup>37</sup> It should be understood that representatives of the same ethnic group may perceive one as alien on the basis of cultural differences. In practical life, this applies primarily to monks of different races, whose “otherness” is conveyed through their appearance.

In an interview published in 2016, a Russian Theravada monk, Pannyavuddho Bhikkhu, spoke on his experience of living in Russia: «The level of xenophobia is disturbing, as well as the increasing level of aggression. [...] It would be desirable that

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<sup>35</sup> V. Schnirelman, **The Threshold of Tolerance: Ideology and Practice of New Racism**, Vol.I, (Moscow: Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye, 2011), p.16-17.

<sup>36</sup> E. Pain, “Xenophobia and Ethnopolitical Extremism in Post-soviet Russia: Dynamics and Growth Factors”, **Nationalities Papers**, Vol. 35, No.5, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 895

<sup>37</sup> “The Other” triggers in Russians concern, uncertainty, even aggression. B. Dubin, **Russia in the Beginning of Millenia. Political culture, historical memory, everyday life**. (Moscow, Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2011), p. 28.

all the religions were treated equally, as stated in the constitution.”<sup>38</sup> In another interview in 2013 he admitted that: “there were cases when it came to a fight. As a rule, these are low-educated people, sometimes with a criminal past, sometimes intoxicated. Fortunately, this happens very rare now.”<sup>39</sup>

Apart from cultural xenophobia caused by conservative sentiments in Russian society, some respondents noted the changed perception of religion as one of the negative factors caused by globalization itself. This refers to personal religious eclecticism, i.e. building one’s religious worldview through a combination of various beliefs taken from different religions, philosophical systems, cults, etc. V. Rozanov (1856 - 1919), a Russian religious philosopher and literary critic, spoke on this phenomenon in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Eclecticism is an external adaptation of things to each other, concepts to each other, philosophical systems to each other. Usually eclectics do not have any own ideas. They do not value, in essence, any idea, not a single belief, but try to "reconcile" them all with each other, coordinate them with one another, cutting off one thing here and one thing there, and stitching everything with a fragile thread of adaptation and convenience.<sup>40</sup>

Oleg Shashkov, a Russian Theravada Buddhist, described his view on religious eclecticism in Russia as follows:

The modern religious world of Russia is similar to a supermarket. People get confused, disoriented in this enormous number of different teachings and systems that became available to them. Nondiscrimination becomes a defense mechanism of the mind, when, in order not to waste time and energy to investigate, a person convinces oneself that all religions are one, they all teach the same thing, and there is no difference what to follow. For some people, the

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<sup>38</sup> Interview by Bair Zuber, March 2016, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucBcOCnGSRo>

<sup>39</sup> Interview for "Personal Opinion", **31 TV Channel**, March 2013, Retrieved on 10 February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsyJKstfw1A>.

<sup>40</sup> V. Rosanov, “Religious eclecticism and syncretism”, **Russian Word**, No.156, 1911.

wider the range of their practices, the better – they hope that ultimately something will help them in their pursuits. Therefore, such people may engage in activities of different religions, [...] meanwhile considering themselves Buddhists, because they sympathize for some particular Buddhist ideas.<sup>41</sup>

This approach, according to respondents, is determined by seeing the truth as relative. Such understanding is dominant, however, “Theravada Buddhism cannot coexist with this point of view. This is what is currently opposing its development in Russia.”<sup>42</sup> The point of entering the doctrine is right view, the first aspect in the Noble Eightfold Path, and the rejection of past delusions, which is not the case for many. Thus, from the point of social and cultural development, threats can be seen in the high level of cultural xenophobia on the one hand and religious eclecticism on the other.

#### **4.2.3 Opportunities of Social and Cultural Background**

The sociocultural space of Russia has historically been shaped as a poly-confessional, polyethnic, and multicultural formation. An important feature of the sociocultural space of Russia is dialogue, which involves not only the peaceful coexistence of various peoples, religions and civilizations, but also the possibility of their dialogical interaction. At the same time, the dialogue of cultures and inter-ethnic contacts in themselves do not yet lead to the establishment of a sociocultural community. Often, they, on the contrary, are accompanied by an increase in ethnic or confessional self-awareness, a striving to consolidate distinctive ethno-cultural features. Therefore, the state has always been the most important integrating principle in the sociocultural space of Russia.<sup>43</sup>

According to the concept of border cultures, specific positive features of border cultures (civilizations) are predisposition to coevolution, the ability to absorb various components of other cultures, peaceful coexistence and mutual enrichment of various ethnic groups and denominations. In addition, border cultures possess such properties

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Oleg Shashkov, Publisher, Tambov, January 26, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> M.S. Ulanov, G.V.Ulanova, “Socio-Cultural Space of Russia and Buddhism”, **Newsletter of Kalmyk University**, No.1 (2012), p.98.

as polymorphism, lability, tolerance, and a predisposition to creative perception of “alien” cultural values.<sup>44</sup>

No matter how Orthodox leaders are stressing the Christian nature of Russian culture, and no matter how they promote the firm connection of “being Orthodox” and “being truly Russian”, social polls on religious affirmation show that “the very Orthodox ideological environment, due to the low level of religious education and the spontaneity of the current religious revival, becomes a breeding ground for ideas that go far beyond not only Orthodoxy but also Christianity in general.”<sup>45</sup>

The worldview reality, hidden behind the declared affiliation to Orthodoxy, can be illustrated by the following answers acquired from a social poll: 38% of the respondents see God as an Individuality and 40% as a “life force”; 45% believe in the afterlife; 20% in the resurrection of the dead; 52% believe in heaven, 46% believe in hell; 49% agreed that "life makes sense because there is a God." Moreover, 30% of the "Christians" believe in the transmigration of the soul and 41% in astrology. Thus, a large part of nominally Orthodox people in Russia have views contrary to Christian teaching in general. In analyzing the results of the poll, an attempt was made to single out a group of more or less "traditional" Orthodox believers. According to D. Furman, there are only 4%. A number of other studies give up to 10%, but no more than that.<sup>46</sup>

Buddhism, along with other traditional religions, contributed to the formation of the sociocultural space of Russia as a Eurasian in nature. The very existence of Buddhism in the sociocultural space of Russia as a kind of third force (along with Christianity and Islam) is an important factor in the unity of the Russian state, since a bipolar state is more dangerous for unity than a polycentric state. This is evidenced by the general theory of conflict, stating that any approach to bipolarity is fraught with the threat of disintegration of unity.

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<sup>44</sup> V. Badmaev, “Transculture as a phenomenon of sociocultural space of Russia”, **Newsletter of the Regional Institute for Innovative Research**, Elista, No.1 (2009), p. 44-45.

<sup>45</sup> Filatov S., Lunkin R., “Religious Statistics in Russia: Magic of Figures vs. Ambiguous Reality”, **Social Studies**, No. 6 (2005), p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> K. Kaariinen, D. Furman, “Old churches, new believers “, **Religiosity in Russia in the 90s**, (Moscow: Letnii Sad, 2001), pp. 16-24.

The possibility of a dialogue can be illustrated with the ongoing construction of the First Buddhist Temple in Moscow, which “will be a home for all Russian Buddhists regardless of their schools, lineages, traditions and nationality.” The Project involves the construction of the First Buddhist Temple Complex with a Stupa in the North-Eastern Administrative District of Moscow, sub-district Otradnoe. The Temple Complex will be located near the existing Orthodox Church with a Chapel, the Muslim Mosques and the Jewish Synagogue, thus, completing a complex representing the temples of traditional religions of Russia.<sup>47</sup>

However, there are prerequisites for strengthening Theravada Buddhism which are not directly related to the country's religious history. There is a trend among atheistic scholars and scientist-oriented public to interpret Buddhism as a philosophical and ethical system. In some works, the features that brought Buddhism closer to science were uncritically absolutized. Buddhism was seen as the most ancient and authoritative spiritual tradition — an ally of the new scientific thought, completely alien to blind faith. Such interpretations of Buddhism are still in demand and supported in the works of modern authors.<sup>48</sup>

Buddhism, like any religious system, has special sources of knowledge different from those accepted in classical science, such as the insight knowledge. However, it uses a methodology and procedure almost identical to that of science to prove its points. The tenets of Buddhism are derived from direct sensory knowledge of an individual with full-fledged senses, and a correct logical procedure. Reference to an authority figure or text cannot be put forward as an argument in a dispute (except in cases where authority is recognized by both sides). Constructive criticism was sanctioned by the Buddha, who urged his followers to critically examine any teaching before accepting it.<sup>49</sup> Apart from methodological aspects, considering particular features of scientific model, the most common are the ideas of determinism and evolution. Both are accepted

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<sup>47</sup> **Official website of the Moscow Buddhist Society**, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <http://moscowbuddhatemple.ru/?lang=en>.

<sup>48</sup> S.Nesterkin, “The Main Trends in the Evolution of Buddhism in Sociocultural Space of Russia”, **Newsletter of the Buryat University**, Philosophy Series, No. 6a, (Ulan-Ude: Buryat State University Press, 2009), p.19.

<sup>49</sup> AN 3.65.

in Buddhism and are expressed in the above-mentioned laws of karma and cultivation. In addition, many concepts of modern science find parallels in Buddhist thought. All this suggests that Buddhism has common ground with the Russian mental culture, which creates certain prerequisites for its organic entry into the cultural environment of Russia.

### 4.3 Legal and Political Background

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a special model emerged in Russia that regulates relations between the state and religion, which can be called the post-Soviet religious model.<sup>50</sup> In terms of legislation, these relations are regulated by the constitution and official state acts that determine the attitude of state and social institutions to religion, as well as its status and position in the society. This model and corresponding religious legislation continues to generate discussion, questions and criticism, as it may seem to hinder religious minorities to carry out their activities.

#### 4.3.1 Legal and Political Trends Concerning Religion

Russia is a secular democratic state in which “no religion can be established as a state or obligatory” and “religious associations are separated from the state”, “everyone is guaranteed freedom of conscience, freedom of religion, including the right to profess ... any religion or none at all.”<sup>51</sup>

On the basis of the Constitution, on September 26, 1997, The State Duma adopted the Federal Law No. 125-FZ “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations”. In its preamble it is reported that the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation adopted this law, in particular, “recognizing the special role of Orthodoxy in the history of Russia, in the formation and development of its spirituality and culture, respecting Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism and other religions that form an integral part of the historical heritage of the peoples of Russia.”

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<sup>50</sup> Alicja Curanović, “Weaknesses of the Post-Soviet Religious Model: The Kremlin and “Traditional” Religions in face of Interethnic Tensions in Russia”, **Politics and Religion**, Vol. 7, Issue 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 788.

<sup>51</sup> Constitution of the Russian Federation, (Moscow: Litera, 2016), p.5.

With this in mind, it can be said that the post-Soviet religious model exhibits three features. The first is the secular character of state guaranteed by the Constitution. The second is the particular category of the so-called “traditional” religions, i.e., religions distinguished by authorities due to their special role in shaping national culture and identity. In case of Russia, these are Orthodox Christianity (represented by the ROC), Islam, Buddhism (the Gelug school), and Judaism. In this context, it is important to note that the practice of distinguishing “traditional” religions already narrows the constitutional principle of secularism. Acknowledging a religious organization as “traditional” is de facto a political decision since no legal definition of this expression has been so far adopted.<sup>52</sup> Obtaining the status of a “traditional” religion is very desirable, as it results in concrete privileges, e.g., state subventions<sup>53</sup> or access to mass-media.<sup>54</sup> However, these privileges (granted by the state) are not without consequences. “Traditional” religions are expected to support the official policy and strengthen the legitimacy of holders of power. If a religious organization loses the trust of the state, it risks weakening its presence in the public sphere.<sup>55</sup>

Since it is not the law but political will which determines the status of religions, it can be said that in the reality of the post-Soviet religious model states grant a sort of “license to preach” which can be limited or in extreme circumstances even taken away. That is, the third feature of the model. This emphasizes the vulnerability of religious organizations to the pressure exerted by the authorities. The character of the regime has an impact on the religious model, as does the fact that Russia is not a properly functioning democracy.

Religious organizations considered “traditional” enjoy certain privileges in comparison to other religious communities. This difference between the “traditional”

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<sup>52</sup> There is no abstract legal definition enumerating criteria differentiating a “traditional” religious community from “non-traditional” ones. Instead, there is a “catalogue” of religions, which a particular state considers “traditional.”

<sup>53</sup> Renovation of the holy sites, for instance.

<sup>54</sup> The ROC can use two Orthodox TV-channels, Spas and Soyuz. Russian muftiates are also trying to establish a channel for Muslims.

<sup>55</sup> This happened for instance to Mufti Talgat Tadzhuddin who called for a jihad against the United States, following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. This and other awkward statements resulted in the loss of the authorities’ favor.



and non-traditional religions is more significant than in many European countries, where the rights of religious minorities are protected by independent courts. In Russia, the judiciary — despite its legally guaranteed independence — can de facto still be influenced by the actual holders of power.<sup>56</sup>

On June 24, 2016, the State Duma adopted amendments to the federal law ‘On Countering Terrorism’ and certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation regarding the establishment of additional measures to counter terrorism and ensure public safety. The adopted law caused bewilderment and fears among believers, especially those belonging to religious minorities. In essence, this regulatory legal act violates the fundamental rights of its citizens and does not comply, according to some specialists, with the current Constitution of the Russian Federation.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the adopted law makes additions to the law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations”, which essentially permit missionary activity only for organizations and not individuals. Missionary activity, in fact, is the "spread of religious beliefs", the right which is guaranteed by article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and article 3 of the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations." The adopted law raised many questions, particularly: who will control and determine whether “missionary activity” was carried out and by whom in a particular case (a citizen or a member of the association)? Were missionary actions performed and which ones? How will such control correspond to the right of citizens to a “religious secret” protected by law and the right to privacy guaranteed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation?

The adopted law creates a problem for foreign citizens, who are now entitled to carry out "missionary activity" only on behalf of a religious group or association registered in the territory of the Russian Federation. The above-mentioned essential shortcomings of the adopted law reveal, in fact, its inconsistency as contradicting the

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<sup>56</sup> Alicja Curanović, “Weaknesses of the Post-Soviet Religious Model: The Kremlin and “Traditional” Religions in face of Interethnic Tensions in Russia”, **Politics and Religion**, Vol. 7, Issue 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 792.

<sup>57</sup> K. Andreev, "Anti-Missionary" law is subject to repeal as anti-constitutional”, **Information and Analytical Center “SOVA”**, 27.06.2016, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://www.sova-center.ru/religion/publications/2016/06/d34892>.

Constitution of the Russian Federation. The vaguely worded laws and the concerns of believers led to the creation of manuals for carrying out religious activities.<sup>58</sup> Experts believe that the mentioned law in fact is a convenient tool that can be applied to suppress any person or religious group.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Threats of Legal and Political Background

As it was shown, the equality of all confessions and freedom of religion in Russia is a rather dubious phenomenon; in this case, religious minorities are most vulnerable and may be easily influenced by authorities. The new amendments in the law raised serious concerns among religious people and human rights activists, who believed that the new norms of the law could be aimed at fighting dissent and heterodoxy. A year after the adoption of the amendments, experts analyzed 218 related court cases: 80% of them were decided against the believers, while, as a rule, religious examination or invitation of religious scholars as experts was not carried out.<sup>60</sup> The trend to attach certain religions to ethnic groups, the strengthening of religious intervention in education and lawmaking, suggests that the secularity of Russian society and the inherent equality of all religions in the future will become even more superficial.

In 2015, even before the amendments to the law were made, Roscomnadzor<sup>61</sup> and Rospotrebnadzor<sup>62</sup> prohibited the publication of a sutta<sup>63</sup> from the Pali Canon, seeing it as a propaganda of suicide. Because of the public resonance, Roscomnadzor and Rospotrebnadzor released a clarification that they have no complaints about the sutta itself. According to the new version, the ban concerned a commentary on this sutta,

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<sup>58</sup> L. Adamia, E. Shestakov, I.Yanshin, **Theory and Practice of Missionary Work**, (Moscow: Publishing Solutions, 2016).

<sup>59</sup> “They will go through the apartments, find them and fine them”, Human rights activist Alexander Verkhovsky on how Russia will regulate missionary activity”, **Meduza Online Magazine**, June 2016, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/06/23/poydut-po-kvartiram-naydut-oshtrafuyut>.

<sup>60</sup> L. Adamia, E. Shestakov, I.Yanshin, **Missionary Work in Russia: Arbitrage Practice**, (Moscow: Publishing Solutions, 2018), p.5.

<sup>61</sup> Roscomnadzor – Russian Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications.

<sup>62</sup> Rospotrebnadzor – Russian Federal Consumer Rights Protection and Human Health Control Service.

<sup>63</sup> Godhika-sutta, SN 4.23.

in which, allegedly, an expertise revealed suicide propaganda. Thus, the ancient commentary of Buddhaghosa, written in the 5th century C.E., was removed from the websites, although it apparently does not contain any propaganda of suicide. However, request to provide a copy of the expertise was not granted. Ultimately, the court supported Rospotrebnadzor, whereby the lawyer Vitaly Cherkasov concluded that in Russia any text can be banned without explanation.<sup>64</sup>

On January 26, 2018, the State Duma Committee on the Development of Civil Society, Issues of Public and Religious Associations held a round table on the topic “Religion and Law: 20 years of the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations”, which discussed the need for cooperation between the church and the state, the spiritual education of the new generation, the inapplicability of the Western democratic religious model in Russia, the need to control the Internet, protect traditional religions from external influences, etc. The participants of the “round table” agreed with the opinion of Metropolitan Sergius of Voronezh and Liskinsky that “the law on freedom of conscience needs to be completely revised, taking into account the new conditions of life and the tasks that the Russian society now faces”.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, individuals and religious groups propagating Theravada Buddhism in Russia in any form may face charges due to the new amendments, which place hard requirements, use vague wording and allow wide interpretation. Considering the concerns of human rights activists, in the future the situation for religious minorities in Russia may worsen.

#### 4.3.3 Possibilities of Legal and Political Background

Despite disappointing forecasts, representatives of religious groups and individual teachers themselves do not see a significant threat in the current religious model and legislation, referring to the fact that “according to the Constitution of the

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<sup>64</sup> “Rospotrebnadzor Got a Minus in Karma: A Buddhist monk told “Commerzant” why Russian officials are wrong”, **Commerzant Magazine**, April 4, 2016, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2955938>

<sup>65</sup> “The State Duma of the Russian Federation called to “tune” the legislation against new religious organizations”, **Religion and Law**, January 2018, Retrieved on 9 February 2019, [http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=490&ELEMENT\\_ID=7755](http://www.sclj.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=490&ELEMENT_ID=7755)

Russian Federation, every citizen is free to profess any religion.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, out of 218 court cases considered in connection with the new amendments to the law, only two cases concerned (Mahayana) Buddhism, while one of the accused was acquitted by the court. According to the available data, the only case related to Theravada Buddhism was examined in 2015, when Roscomnadzor demanded to remove Buddhaghosa’s commentary on *Godhika-sutta* from a Buddhist website. In general, the respondents agreed that Theravada in Russia is not yet a sufficiently noticeable phenomenon to attract the attention of state authorities, therefore, politics and legislation are not serious negative factors that could hinder its development at present. However, increasing legal literacy of Buddhists and bringing all religious activities in line with the current law would be an important step to prevent adverse events in the future.

On the other hand, considering the calls, which are voiced by many, for interfaith dialogue of traditional religions in Russia, Theravada Buddhism “could benefit from cooperation with Tibetan Buddhist organizations”,<sup>67</sup> which enjoy unspoken privileges of traditional religions.

#### **4.4 Concluding Remarks**

The fact of Russia being a secular democratic state needs clarification for those who are willing to explore the activities of religious groups. For most of its history, the Russian state and culture were closely related to Orthodox Christianity, and at present the state follows a model of cooperation with traditional religions, primarily Orthodoxy, to support the legitimacy of authorities and control ethnic tensions. The policy of isolation and opposition to globalization processes, which is primarily supported by the Church, leads to an increase in aggression and cultural xenophobia. Xenophobia is easily triggered by religious expressions, since religion is often thought of as the basis of culture. Religious works of Orthodox writers are aimed at alienating Buddhism in general as an illogical, irrelevant, and negative worldview. At the same time, it is widely

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<sup>66</sup> Interview by Bair Zuber, March 2016, Retrieved on 10 February 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucBcOCnGSRo>

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Vlad Askinazi, Lecturer, Rime Buddhist Center, January 22, 2019.

believed among Buddhists that Theravada (“Hinayana”) is a flawed and selfish teaching as a whole.

It would seem that the situation looks rather unfavorable for the Theravada Buddhism followers who would like to spread the teachings of the Buddha in Russia. However, according to the respondents, the most significant of these negative external factors was the comparative prevalence of Mahayana Buddhism, which contributed to the adoption of the concept that the Buddha’s teachings, and consequently various schools of Buddhism, should be divided according to the degree of their perfection (Hinayana as the lowest, Mahayana as the middle, and Vajrayana as the highest). It is worth noting, however, that many believe that Buddhism, especially Theravada Buddhism, can become popular and harmoniously exist in Russian society, especially because it is often interpreted as a philosophical and ethical system, which can be successfully combined with the scientific worldview and modern understanding of democratic values.

## **Chapter V**

### **Strategies for Development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Religious associations, which are a type of non-profit organization, today operate in an increasingly competitive environment. The demand for their activities is always ahead of the available funds needed to support their causes. Moreover, unstable economic and political situation may pose a threat (or may present an opportunity) to new religious groups. Therefore, in order to effectively carry out activities in light of high competition, scarce funding, and uncertainty, generating possible strategies is an important tool. In this work, the researcher employs the method of SWOT-analysis to suggest strategic steps to strengthen the position of Theravada Buddhism in Russia by conducting an analysis of the internal and external environment, holding on the strong sides of its activity, highlighting shortcomings, taking into account the threats and opportunities of external environment.

#### **5.1 Features of The Conducted Analysis**

Theravada Buddhism in Russia is represented as separate groups, individual teachers and followers scattered across a vast territory of the country. Therefore, when defining its strengths and weaknesses, the researcher considers general situation or characteristics that are unique to certain organizations, but significant against the general background.

The assessment of external and internal aspects was based on two sources: 1) works of modern religious scholars, sociologists, and buddhologists, and 2) opinions, acquired through interviews, of people who can be considered as experts in this field. As a rule, these are people who have been contributing to the development of Buddhism in Russia for at least 10 years. These are both monks and laity, regardless of education and occupation.

The researcher tried to identify specific features that make Theravada Buddhism distinct from other religious communities. For the strategic perspective of this school, the strengths are especially significant, since the whole development strategy should be built on them as a foundation, and competitive advantages will be achieved. At the same time, the strategy should be adapted to the day-to-day realities to neutralize the existing weaknesses.

To determine the strengths and weaknesses, the researcher has followed the algorithm below:

1. Determined a number of parameters underlying the assessment of the activities;
2. For each of these parameters, determined what are the strong and weak sides;
3. Selected the most important strengths and weaknesses and put them into the matrix of the SWOT analysis (Table 1).

To carry out the assessment of strong and weak sides, the following parameters were chosen: 1) literary base, 2) education and training, 3) organization of activities.

An assessment of the external environment is aimed at understanding which threats poses a real danger, as well as which possibilities will help prevent these threats, reduce the impact of weaknesses and increase strengths. The actions in this step are identical to the method of determining strong and weak sides. The following parameters were used as a basis for assessing opportunities and threats: 1) religious space (considering existing religious institutions and their influence), 2) sociocultural conditions (considering traditions, social values, the existing stereotypes of people's behavior towards religion), and 3) political and legal regulation (considering political and legal realities of the country, the likelihood of changes in the legal framework in the field of religion).

The SWOT analysis is not completed with a mere list of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. They have to be matched together, paying attention to the following points:

- 1) What are the strengths which allow to take advantage of opportunities?

- 2) What weaknesses may hinder from using of opportunities?
- 3) What strengths will neutralize existing threats?
- 4) What weaknesses exacerbate the emerging threats?

The matrix of the SWOT analysis is as follows (Table 1):

		Threats	Opportunities
		I.	I.
		II.	II.
		III.	III.
Strong sides	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
Weak sides	1.		
	2.		

For the pairs of "strengths and opportunities", a strategy should be developed to use the strengths of the organization in order to benefit from the external environment. For the pairs of "weaknesses and opportunities", the strategy should be to developed to try to overcome the weaknesses through opportunities of environment. For the pairs of "strengths and threats", the strategy should involve the use of strength to eliminate threats. Finally, for the pairs of "weaknesses and threats", a strategy must be developed to both get rid of weaknesses and try to prevent the threat.<sup>1</sup> Strategies that arise in combining weaknesses and opportunities or weaknesses and threats are usually defensive strategies, which are implemented in the worst scenario. It is important to note that SWOT analysis does not help to choose a strategy, but to generate several strategies, that can be used depending on the changing situation.

A SWOT analysis helps the teachers and leaders of religious groups to answer the following questions:

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<sup>1</sup> V. Zharikov, A. Kolodin, **The Economic Rationale for Technical Solutions: A Manual**, (Tambov: Tambov State University Press, 2011), p.44.



(1) Does our group use its strengths and competitive advantages in its development strategy? What are some of the potential strengths that can be its distinguishing advantages?

(2) Do the weaknesses interfere with competitive struggle and the use of certain favorable circumstances?

(3) What external opportunities give the group a real chance of success?

(4) What steps should be made to protect the group and ensure further development?

## **5.2 Strategies for Development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Four basic strategies were derived from SWOT analysis of Theravada Buddhism in Russia as shown in Table 2. They are:

### **1. Strong sides and opportunities (A) strategy**

Keeping in mind the disunion of groups and individuals, a small number of followers and short history of introducing Theravada Buddhism in Russia, some respondents noted that strong sides are yet to emerge. However, one cannot ignore that despite being small in numbers, the members of this new Russian community were able to translate a significant part of the Pali Canon and introduce the readers to various kinds of Buddhist literature, start information portals, establish Dhamma-centers in major cities with regular educational and practical courses, invite teachers from abroad to organize activities across the country. This demonstrates the high enthusiasm of group members, who are willing to work selflessly for the sake of a common idea, that is spreading knowledge that is “beautiful in the beginning, beautiful at the middle, beautiful in the end”<sup>2</sup>, for the well-being of all beings.

The researcher believes that this movement would be able to achieve a greater success if all the possibilities of external environment would be properly considered. First of all, cooperation with the Tibetan Buddhists of Russia, who represent one of the traditional religions of Russia, as well as participation in interfaith dialog with representatives of major religious groups in the county. Such cooperation allows to

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<sup>2</sup> SN.I.106.

**Table 2: SWOT analysis for Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

<b>Internal / External Factors</b>		<b>Threats</b>	<b>Opportunities</b>	
			I. Criticism from Orthodox and Mahayana Buddhist preachers	I. Calls for interreligious dialog and peaceful coexistence
			II. Rising xenophobia and aggression towards non-traditional religions	II. Using current cultural trends to accent particular features of Buddhist thought
			III. Reinforcement of anti-missionary laws	III. Increasing legal literacy of Buddhists
			IV. Prevalence of religious eclecticism as personal worldview	IV. The possibility of cooperation with traditional Theravada Buddhist countries
<b>Strong sides</b>	1. A vast literally base for study	<b>B</b>	<b>A</b>	
	2. Enthusiasts are using different channels to train and educate the people			
	3. Organizations that conduct multi-sided activities in major cities			
<b>Weak sides</b>	1. Lack of unity and disagreement among groups and individuals	<b>D</b>	<b>C</b>	
	2. No access to teachers in the provinces			
	3. Failure to represent Theravada Buddhism as a holistic way of practice			

reduce tensions in the society and, which is already widely practiced, shared use of spaces, such as buildings and auditoriums, for lectures, meditation courses, etc. Taking part in interfaith conferences and major Buddhist event may represent Theravada Buddhism as a part of the diverse religious space and gain wider acknowledgement as a phenomenon of Russian cultural life. Search for common ground with Orthodoxy can soften the image of Buddhism as an “alien” religion.

More active cooperation with the organizations of the traditional Theravada countries could bring much benefit for Russian Buddhists, primarily in meeting the needs that cannot be satisfied within their own country (obtaining Buddhist education, receiving ordination and monastic training, visiting the holy sites, taking longer meditation courses). Directing efforts to make this cooperation closer and more effective may be one of the directions that Buddhist leaders would benefit from.

Another aspect to direct one’s attention is the demands of society in methods of mind cultivation and improving mental well-being in the light of increasing stress and dissatisfaction, as well as ideological systems that are compatible with modern understanding of human values, scientific knowledge, and a democratic, secular society. Minding the current trends of social and cultural development can bring the adaptation and increasing effectiveness of how the Buddhist knowledge is represented to the public.

## **2. Strong sides and threats (B) strategy**

In today's unstable economic and political situation, it is difficult to predict the direction in which the country will choose to develop in the future. There are legitimate concerns that Russia will continue the policy of increasing isolation, which implies propaganda of cultural superiority, and therefore would generate even more aggression and cultural (including religious) xenophobia in society. In such a situation, it is especially necessary to direct available resources (human and informational), on the one hand, to the search for common ground with traditional religions of Russia and emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence of different religions. On the other hand, it is important to cover the legal aspects of missionary work and recent changes in law among all members who are engaged in disseminating information about Theravada Buddhism and religion in general, and to study the latest court cases, initiated on grounds of religious activity.

Some respondents considered the widespread tendency toward religious eclecticism to be a negative factor that impedes the cultivation of right view in those who develop interest in Theravada Buddhism. Considering that “deep eclecticism cannot be eliminated from the real person’s worldview,”<sup>3</sup> further development and improvement of educational programs will help to learn about various aspects of Buddhist teachings, leaving behind inconsistent, illogical and harmful views common for the cultural space of Russia.

### **3. Weak sides and opportunities (C) strategy**

Interestingly, the problems of internal nature were identified by the respondents as the more significant factors hindering the development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. The lack of unity between communities and individuals, disagreement, turning into public conflicts, was the problem specified by every respondent. The reason for such disagreements, as it seems, is commonly related to fundamentalism of some followers, i.e. failure to accept different forms of practice and preaching, adapted to the specific cultural environment. In other words, rejecting the possibility of compromises, modification and adaptation, or particular ways to do so adopted by certain individuals. For example, interviews have exposed that some respondents strongly criticize the approach of meditation centers, which teach Buddhist meditation techniques outside the context of the Buddhist tradition, making the practice as approachable as possible for an average person. Approaches that ignore the supramundane character of Buddhist goals, trying to represent it as a philosophical and ethical system, were similarly criticized by several respondents.

To overcome the problem of segregation and disunion, Buddhist teachers and activists may adopt a strategy of propagating the importance of cooperation and readiness to allow different approaches to spread the Buddhist teaching in order to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia and organize larger-scale activities and more significant events. On the other hand, closer cooperation with the organizations of traditional Theravada countries would allow solving two problems simultaneously: the lack of teachers, who could be invited to teach across the country, and lack of

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<sup>3</sup> D. Pivovarov, **Religion as a Spiritual Practice: Types of religious organizations**, (St. Petersburg: Aleteya, 2017), p. 187.

understanding Theravada Buddhism as a real-life, holistic tradition, which can be achieved by organizing educational programs in foreign monasteries and meditation centers.

#### **4. Weak sides and threats (D) strategy**

In case if unity and cooperation between different groups and individuals proves to be practically unachievable, and the groups and teachers continue to pursue a strategy of isolated operation, Buddhism will not likely to become a phenomenon at least as significant as it has become in countries like the US, UK, Canada, and Australia. Public conflicts between Buddhists and the lack of larger-scale events is unlikely to contribute to an increase in the number of adherents and prevent Theravada Buddhism from developing in the regions. However, the strategy of isolated operation for groups may become an acceptable defensive strategy in the face of increasing aggression and pressure from the legal system, when greater attention can prove to be more harmful than beneficial, at least until the situation starts to develop in a more favorable direction. Separate groups of Buddhists and standalone activists are undoubtedly able to contribute to the development of different aspects of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, that is the literally base, educational courses, monk support, etc.

As can be seen from above, (A) and (C) strategies are the more active ones and allow to use the capabilities of the external environment in the best way, while (B) and (D) strategies are defensive and allow to adapt to adverse conditions. Although the choice of a certain strategy ultimately lies on the group or individual who evaluates internal and external factors, there are several, sometimes opposite trends that can be found in Theravada Buddhism in Russia today.

First trend is the trend for conservatism and formalism based on a certain view on how Buddhism should be practiced and thought. It can be said that this trend interferes with the use of certain favorable circumstances, e.g. inter-Buddhist and interreligious cooperation. An opposite trend is using certain Buddhist teachings and techniques out of the context, ignoring traditional forms of religious practice. Criticism, hostility, refusal to cooperate between the adherents of different paths do not allow a small number of Russian Theravada Buddhists to unite in order to create more significant events and projects.

From the above, it can be concluded that possibilities for strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia majorly lie in the field of cooperation. Eradication of hostility within the general Theravada community seems to be the closest attainable goal, to which all followers should strive in order to make Theravada Buddhism a more significant and holistic phenomenon in Russia. Cooperation between communities belonging to various schools of Buddhism is one of the ways to demonstrate the unity of the Buddha's disciples and overcome, at least partly, the shortage of spaces suitable for practice and education. Promoting interreligious dialog and peaceful coexistence in the diverse religious space of Russia is an important measure to prevent conflicts arising on grounds of cultural differences. Finally, cooperation with organizations of the traditional Theravada countries may satisfy the needs that at present cannot be satisfied within the country, such as comprehensive Buddhist and monastic education. Cooperation between Buddhist of Russia eventually might be the key for developing a sensible approach to practice and propagate the teachings of the Buddha in a non-Buddhist country with its unique cultural features.

However, ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia are not limited to the field of cooperation. Making more information available for the Russian-speaking followers, developing educational programs, organizing events and traditional activities is a way to increase the presence of Theravada Buddhism in the religious field of Russia. However, it is questionable whether the human and material resources of separate communities will be ever enough to increase this presence or only maintain it at the current level.

For conclusion, it is the tolerance and good-will, which comes from wisdom, loving-kindness and compassion that the students of the Buddha should strive to develop, that is the key to strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia in combining the talents and capabilities of individual followers to create a strong and flourishing community despite the many threats of today's external environment.

# **Chapter VI**

## **Conclusion and Suggestion**

### **6.1 Research Results**

This research work entitled “Solutions and Possibilities for Strengthening Theravada Buddhism in Russia” had 4 objectives, namely:

- 1) to study the emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia,
- 2) to study strong and weak points of Theravada Buddhism in Russia,
- 3) to study opportunities and threats of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, and
- 4) to present possible ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia.

According to the stated objectives, the study provided answers to the following questions:

- 1) How was Theravada Buddhism introduced in Russia?
- 2) What are its strong and weak sides?
- 3) What are the opportunities and threats for Theravada Buddhism in Russia?
- 4) What are the possible ways to strengthen Theravada Buddhism in Russia?

Thus, the main four points of this research are: (1) people and events that influenced the emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, (2) strengths and weaknesses of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, (3) opportunities and threats for Theravada Buddhism in Russia, (4) strategies for development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. The researcher used in-depth interviews and works of contemporary religious scholars to gather information on the topic. SWOT analysis was used in order to analyze the gathered information and suggest strategies for further development. The findings may be summarized as follows:

## **1. People and events that influenced the emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

The researcher was able to identify the following prerequisites for the Emergence of Theravada Buddhism in Russia: 1) collapse of the USSR with the following emergence of many new, non-traditional religious associations as a result of disappointment in the official ideology, 2) longstanding scientific interest in Buddhism, which prepared a literally base for the study of Buddhism; 3) the increasing process of cultural globalization and the spread of modern means of communication. Several key points that marked the establishment of Theravada Buddhism in Russia were identified as follows: 1) foreign influence was represented by Ven. Pallekande Ratanasara Mahathero and Ven. Phra Chatree Hemapandha, who greatly contributed to the introduction of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, 2) the ordination of the first Russian monk who became an active preacher, 3) the establishment of Theravada Buddhists Communities with centers and regular activities in Moscow and St. Petersburg, 4) partial translation of the Tipitaka into Russian language, 5) the establishment of the first *sima*, first (temporary) ordination of monks in Russia, and the construction of first Theravada temple by Myanmar Theravada Buddhist Society. During the last 20 years, many efforts were made in order to introduce and develop Theravada Buddhism in Russia. However, it was concluded that Theravada Buddhism factually has not become well-established due to certain problems of internal and external nature.

## **2. Strengths and weaknesses of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Strong and weak sides are internal factors, which were divided into three parts: (1) literature and translations, (2) education and training, and (3) organization and endowment. Among the strengths of Theravada Buddhism in Russia, the following factors were identified: 1) a vast literally base of canonical and non-canonical literature in Russian language, 2) members of the communities are enthusiastic persons, willing to initiate and support integral learning and training processes in others, as well as support external factors for education and training, 3) the communities conduct multidirectional activities for the study and practice of Buddhism, and are implementing modern means of communication to compensate for the lack of centers in the provinces.



The weaknesses were identified as follows: 1) lack of guidance on how to study the vast amount of Pali literature, 2) failure to represent Theravada Buddhism as a holistic system of human development, 3) lack of unity and disagreement among groups and individual teachers, which leads to inability to organize larger-scale events. The analysis of strong and weak sides pointed out that there are several internal aspects that, despite the continuous efforts, impede Theravada Buddhism from becoming a more notable phenomenon in the field of Russian religious life.

### **3. Opportunities and threats for Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Opportunities and threats are external factors (events, phenomena and trends) that are favorable or unfavorable for the development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. These factors were divided into three groups: (1) interreligious relations, (2) social and cultural background, and (3) legal and political background. The opportunities were identified as follows: 1) establishment of peaceful relations with representatives of traditional religions of Russia; 2) using current cultural trends, such as inclination towards scientific world view and high demand for mental cultivation techniques, to accent particular features of Buddhist thought; 3) increasing legal literacy of Buddhists and bringing all religious activities in line with the current law. The threats of external environment were identified as follows: 1) reinforcement of religious criticism by Orthodox Church and Mahayana Buddhists in Russia, 2) rise of aggression and “cultural racism”, 3) growing religious eclecticism, and 4) reinforcement of anti-missionary laws. Notably, Buddhists mostly do not consider these unfavorable trends as real threats for Theravada Buddhism in the present stage of its development. However, it is evident that religious activities in Russia can be severely oppressed, directly or indirectly, by the government structures, and it is necessary to pay proper attention to the mentioned threats.

### **4. Strategies for development of Theravada Buddhism in Russia**

Four basic strategies were derived from SWOT analysis of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. While two of them may be considered “active” in using strengths and external opportunities, the other two are defensive and directed at mitigating the adverse events of environment. Any of these strategies can be used by a particular group

or individual after evaluation of their current situation in order to make their activities more efficient considering the tendencies of cultural, political and religious life. Among the four strategies, which were developed based on the method of SWOT-analysis, two can be considered “active” in using strengths and opportunities of external environment, while the other two can be seen as “defensive” and directed at mitigating the adverse events of the environment. The active strategies (A and C) are primarily focused on cooperation: with separate groups of Theravada Buddhists – in order to organize greater projects and event, with communities belonging to various Buddhist schools – to represent the unity of Buddha’s disciples and cover the shortfall of resources, with representatives of Russia’s traditional religions – to represent Theravada Buddhism as a part of Russia’s multi-religious society, and, finally, with organizations of traditional Theravada countries, that could help to fill many shortages in education of Russian Buddhists. The defensive strategies (B and D) comprise dealing with political and cultural trends which may be considered obstructive for dissemination of Theravada Buddhism in Russia. Cultural xenophobia, anti-missionary laws, and attempts to represent certain religions as an integral part of ethnical and cultural identity already in the near future may become a challenge that requires careful examination and consideration.

## **6.2 Suggestion for Further Research**

Due to the present research was limited in many aspects, more valuable points may be explored in further studies. Therefore, the researcher would like to suggest some ideas for further studies:

- 1) Certain topics mentioned in this study, such as the influence of political and cultural trends on the development of Buddhism in Russia, can be studied in more detail.
- 2) Cases of specific communities and organizations were not investigated in detail, which can be done in future studies.
- 3) A more detailed SWOT analysis can be carried out with evaluating separate factors of external and internal environment in terms of their significance and accessibility.

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