BUILDING EMPIRE AMONG THE BURYATS: 
CONVERSION ENCOUNTERS IN RUSSIA’S BAIKAL REGION, 1860s - 1917

BY

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues that encounters between Russian Orthodox missionaries and the Buryats with whom they worked in Russia’s Siberian Baikal region between the 1860s and 1917 epistemologically emplaced the Buryats within the empire and caused Orthodoxy to assume the role of bearer of imperial processes of liberalization and modernization. As missionaries and Buryats attempted to negotiate encounters, they deployed arguments about what it meant to be Buryat and what it meant to be Orthodox that drew on languages of individuality and affect, law, citizenship, science, and nationality that emanated from the imperial center. As a result, both Orthodoxy and Buryatness came to be defined through such languages, frequently with Buryatness functioning as either parochial opposition to imperial change or local evidence of imperial change, and Orthodoxy as a proxy for broad imperial processes of modernization. Such definitions gave rise to categories and means of understanding the nature of Buryatness that served to emplace the Buryats within the Russian Empire, but also carried forward after 1917 by informing ethnic and national categories employed by the Soviet Union and Russian Federation and influencing scholarly works on the Buryats. They also connected the imperial and the local to the point of inseparability: the local, embodied by Buryatness, was what gave empire its meaning and material, while the imperial context in which Buryatness became embedded served to define Buryatness.

These conclusions have two major implications for contemporary scholarly explorations of empire. First, they highlight the degree to which empire, when viewed as a concept, and the local were inseparable from and dependent on each other for their
meanings and material. In this case, the local, embodied by Buryatness, provided a foil against which the broad transformative processes perceived to be natural parts of empire could be highlighted and defined. Similarly, the component categories and rich descriptive detail that came to comprise Buryatness rose out of the juxtaposition between conditions on the ground in the Baikal region and the broad patterns of social and cultural change that empire was supposed to bring. Empire and the local were dependent on each other for conceptual generation. Second, “ordinary people” played a key role in generating concepts of empire and the local through their everyday engagements with each other. The low-ranking clergymen who served as missionaries at isolated locations in the Baikal region and the Buryats whom they encountered on a daily basis engaged with the languages of self and community that flowed out from the imperial center and applied them to the specific problem of what Orthodoxy and Buryatness meant. Through such efforts, they defined empire and the local within the region.
To my mother, Audrey, and my grandfather, Orson, who taught me that learning is a lifestyle.
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A striking sculpture stands at the head of Ulan-Ude’s pedestrian mall, jokingly referred to by locals as “our Arbat,” after its better-known and much more glitzy counterpart in Moscow. Two serpents hissing at each other intertwine around a column bearing wings most likely symbolic of a swan, a bird that plays an important role in myths about the origins of the Buryats. Atop the column is perched the state emblem of the Republic of Buryatia, a flame, sun, and moon, an assemblage that is identical to the upper portion of the state emblem of neighboring Mongolia. The snakes, like the horn or cornucopia at the base of the statue, remain a mystery to me when taken in conjunction...
with the rest of the composition. The sculpture is unlabeled, and I never found out what it was formally intended to signify, even though I walked by it several times a week for months. During my early months of research, first in the summer of 2007 and then in the fall of 2008, I asked several of my acquaintances what it meant; they, too, were not entirely sure about its formal intent, but some of them guessed or joked that it represented the relationship between Russians and Buryats, or Russia and Buryatia.

This interpretation was, in large part, indicative of the sentiments of many educated Buryat residents of Ulan-Ude towards the political and social dynamics between Buryats and Russians and between Buryats and the Russian Federation during the time of my research in 2008 and 2009. As part of a massive, federally-driven reorganization of the federation’s governing structures intended to centralize authority, two Buryat autonomous regions, the Ust-Orda Buryat District and the Aga Buryat District, were slated for union with their larger, predominantly Russian neighbors. Ust-Orda was to be absorbed into Irkutsk oblast’, which already surrounded it completely. Critics read this state of affairs as the complete dissolution of Ust-Orda as an entity. Aga was to be merged with neighboring Chita oblast’ to form a new entity, Zabaikal’e krai, whose name referenced the pre-revolutionary administrative unit that had encompassed both Aga and Chita. Both mergers were ostensibly subject to public referenda, and passed with remarkably high rates of approval. In Ust-Orda, 97.9% of voters approved unification, while 94% of voters in Aga did so. Noting the limited and muted expressions of public dissent in the lead-up to the elections and the heavy investment of the administrations of both districts, closely affiliated with Russia’s ruling party, in promoting the merger, some
Buryat commentators argued that such numbers indicated fraud. This interpretation of the results bolstered the sense of hostility between Buryats and Russia that my acquaintances were conveying through their analyses of the statue.

Additionally, the leadership structure of the Republic of Buryatia had abruptly been altered significantly. Between 1991 and 2007, Leonid Potapov, a locally-raised Russian who showed off his casual knowledge of Buryat on television, had held the presidency of the republic by popular election. However, after 2007, the presidency became an appointed position, to be filled by an individual chosen by the President of the Russian Federation, then Vladimir Putin. Putin’s choice fell on Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, a Russian outsider to the region. The Buryat intelligentsia of Ulan-Ude perceived these political maneuvers as a blow to Buryat control over traditionally-Buryat territories and Buryat cultural distinctiveness within the Russian Federation.

The interpretation of the statue as representing natural opposition between Buryats and Russia was also fed by a sense of increasing ethnic conflict. Prior to and during my stay in Ulan-Ude, several young Buryats studying or working in St. Petersburg and Moscow were attacked and beaten by Russian ultranationalist thugs. News of these incidents spread rapidly in Ulan-Ude, where many families had friends or relatives who had moved to Russia’s capitals in pursuit of the economic success that was elusive in

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1 The results may also have been a result of the ambivalence of many Buryats in the two districts towards the propositions. For a detailed discussion of the mechanics of the mergers and the political campaigns and popular sentiments surrounding them, see Kathryn Graber and Joseph Long, “The Dissolution of the Buryat Autonomous Okrugs in Siberia: Notes from the Field,” *Inner Asia* 11 (2009): 147-155.
2 Perhaps indicating the volatility of sentiments over the change in leadership, as of July 2012, Nagovitsyn’s English-language Wikipedia entry had been edited to state that he was “born...to ethnic Buryat parents.” The Russian version lacks such personal biographical information. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vyacheslav_Nagovitsyn, accessed 7/24/2012.
Siberia. Moreover, there were rumors, supported by reports of skinhead activity in Irkutsk, a city with a significant Buryat population, that street violence between gangs of young men in Ulan-Ude was itself becoming ethnically-charged. As many of my acquaintances saw Buryatia as a place where diverse groups of people had historically coexisted peacefully, they interpreted these rumors as a breakdown in older patterns of stability and accepted difference that made the region unique within Russia (the Caucasus was a frequent point of contrast).

In the early stages of my research, this state of confrontation and challenge matched my own findings about my project. My research began as a study of Buryat Orthodox missionaries. I knew that such individuals had existed, and as I set out for my first research trip, I expected that they would be immediately visible in the archive. Having found them and their papers, I believed that I would be able to explore how they understood what it meant to be a non-Russian within the Russian Empire and the Russian Orthodox Church. In retrospect, my confidence in my ability to find those whom I sought seems naïve, as they proved to be understandably elusive in the archive. As a result of this failure, I broadened my search, expanding the project to include Buryat converts, who I knew could be much more easily identified within the archive than Buryat clergy. This, in turn, widened the scope of the records that I was interested in to include documents about interactions between converts and missionaries. It was within this broad pool of potential source material that I finally encountered evidence of discussion over the place of the Buryats within the church and the empire, which turned out to be surprisingly visible within church writings, provided that one was willing to cast a broad
net and stumble upon it in unexpected places such as petitions about marital conflict and obscure linguistics texts.

The topical clusters of documents that I encountered, which provide both archival source material and structure for this dissertation, were full of surprisingly explicit discussion about the Buryats and their relationship to the empire and the church. Now, the documents remind me in many ways of the statue: they offer obvious clues and signposts that convey the possibility and potential parameters of a message, but grasping the sum total of their contents is difficult, requiring the reader to grapple with incongruous elements and subtle motivations underlying the choice of symbolic words and turns of phrase. Early in my research, though, what I saw within these documents was simplistic. I saw a multiplicity of actors treating Buryatness as standing in opposition to and in conflict with Russianness and Russia, an interpretation that paralleled my acquaintances’ comments about the statue. I will admit that the environment in which I lived and worked likely played a significant role in supporting my conclusions. By the late winter and early spring of 2008-2009, though, the situation had begun to shift. I still walked past the statue nearly every day, and given the apparent significance of the relationship between the Buryats and Russia to my project, it provided a point of contemplation. But the feuding snakes no longer had the same utility as a metaphor for my understanding of either the contemporary or historical relationships of the two. My awareness of the nuances and sensitivities of politics in the region had grown, even as my understandings of the content of the documents with which I was working had shifted.

During a visit to Aga in the early spring of 2009, I wandered around the district capital, Aginsk, and took in the physical aftermath of the vote on the merger. In the lead-
up to the referendum, a significant amount of external spending had flowed into the capital to rebut well-founded opposition arguments that the merger would result in a net economic loss for Aga. The main streets of the town sparkled, their sidewalks in repair and clean. Civic buildings, including those that housed the stages on which Buryat theater and dance groups performed, the local museum, which heavily emphasized Buryat history, and the local archive, had been refurbished or rebuilt entirely. The modern, well-heated and well-lit museum highlighted the plight of its counterpart in Ulan-Ude, which suffered from chronic roof leaks that threatened its collections and caused the closure of its reading room while I was working there. Similarly, the local university, a branch of Buryat State University, vastly outshone its parent in Ulan-Ude. Even if Russia’s commitment to funding and supporting the Buryat institutions of Aga was a one-time electoral enticement and a tangential rather than a directly intended benefit, the merger campaign funneled considerable, if temporary, fiscal support to Buryat cultural institutions whose state support had vastly decreased since the end of Soviet period.

Also striking in Aginsk was the ubiquity of advertisements by the regional Buryat leadership stressing Buryats’ belonging within a greater Russian whole. Some of these billboards highlighted the region’s ethnic diversity, showing pictures of Buryats and Old Believers, a hefty percentage of Chita’s Russian population, standing next to each other in traditional costume. Such billboards frequently featured words such as “friendship” [druzhba] and “together” [vmeste]. Ostensibly in preparation for the upcoming seventieth anniversary of the Soviet Union’s entry into World War II, the administration had also crafted a series of billboards featuring Buryat war heroes, detailing the union-wide medals that they had received and highlighting their participation in battles of particular
significance to the contemporary Russian war narrative. These memorials were in
keeping with traditions of war commemoration. However, it seemed to me that in the
political and cultural context of that moment, they also served the purpose of framing
Buryat historical experience as part of Russian historical experience on the level of the
lives of ordinary individuals as well as that of grand narratives. The billboards attempted
to convince viewers that their history and lived experience, as well as those of earlier
generations, were deeply interlinked with Russia.

A painting of a moment of historical fiction prominently displayed in the history
museum had a similar effect. Using a photographic portrait of a Buryat leader from Aga
taken at the time of Tsarevich Nicholas’s visit to the region in 1891 and a painted portrait
of Nicholas commissioned after his 1894 coronation, the artist had created a meeting
between the two. He had painted them standing shoulder-to-shoulder, one in military
uniform and the other in a formal Buryat degel, or robe, shaking hands and gazing
outward at the audience as if they were two world leaders at a diplomatic meeting posing
for press photographers. The painting was intended to represent a meeting between
regional Buryat leaders and the Tsarevich that took place during Nicholas’s one-night
stay on the eastern Buryat steppes in 1891. The reframing of the moment in terms of the
iconography of modern diplomatic encounters added significance that was absent in the
original encounter between the heir to an autocratic throne, a man with a notoriously
complex relationship with the East, and some of his more exotic eastern subjects. The
two were depicted as equals, recognizing each other’s authority and engaging amicably
with each other in terms of that authority, or perhaps because of it. Their outward gaze,
possibly an accidental result of the artist’s reliance on the original portraits, made the painting’s viewers into acknowledged witnesses of this meeting of equals.

The public institutions and visual displays I saw in Aginsk showed that Buryatness could take on a range of relationships to Russia and Russianness that contrasted sharply with the antipathy my acquaintances read into the serpents. What was particularly interesting about the situation in Aginsk, though, was the creative effort to shape what it meant to be Buryat that was embodied in the public institutions and visual displays through which these visions of the relationships between the Buryats and Russia were demonstrated. Public buildings, political campaigns, and art are intended to provoke those who engage with them, even passively, to see themselves or the world around them in a certain light, although the outcome of such efforts depends on audience engagement, perception, and negotiation. The spate of Russia-friendly construction, campaigning, and historical reconstruction was an attempt to create new patterns of being Buryat within Russia that drew on contemporary and historical patterns of the same. Likewise, the perceptions of my acquaintances in Ulan-Ude were not static: the hostility that they saw was not a permanent or natural state, but rather a response with an as-yet undetermined outcome to a series of dramatic shifts in their political and social environment.

What I had begun to see in my archival records during the same period pointed to the existence of a similar creative force in the encounters between missionaries and Buryats that I was analyzing. While the authors of the documents I worked with not infrequently saw conflict between Buryatness and Russianness, the overt conflict masked a much more complex engagement between the two. The social and cultural context in which missionaries and Buryats were encountering each other was in flux, and the
various arguments put forth by all sides were attempts to stake out a secure position in the midst of this change. Ultimately, the encounters and the arguments that they produced served to shape Buryatness and Russianness in tandem upon this shifting ground. Thus, the arguments were creative and reflective of ongoing evolution rather than of any innate conflict between Buryatness and Russianness.

After Aga, the fighting serpents definitively ceased to serve as a metaphor that could encapsulate my understanding of the relationship between the Buryats and Russia, whether the historical relationship that I was investigating in the archives or the contemporary relationship that was unfolding around the issue of the mergers and centralization. Rather than the enmity of the snakes, I became interested in their intertwining, a process that suggests friction and contortion, but also mutual support and the flowing of one into the gaps and spaces created by the other, not to mention change and shifting over time. The metaphor of intertwining serves to explain the various interpretations of the relationship between the Buryats and Russia or Russianness that I encountered during my research year. It encompasses the impassioned reactions to centralization of a group of people who owe much of their intellectual success and worldview to Russian and Soviet academic institutions. It accounts for the results of the votes on union, whether they were the outcome of election rigging by the Buryat administrations of Ust-Orda and Aga or of voter ambivalence that coalesced into reluctant support at the ballot box. It embraces the attempts of the Buryat leadership of Aga to offer a much friendlier interpretation of the relationships between Russia and the Buryats. And it includes the story of the historical production of Buryatness through imperial contact that I trace in this dissertation.
ABBREVIATIONS

National Archive of the Republic of Buryatia………………………………………NARB

Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti…………………………………………………..IEV

Prilozenie k Irkutskim eparkhial’nym vedomostiam…………………………...PIEV

Izvestiia Vostochno-sibirskogo otdela Russkogo Geograficheskogo
Obshchestva………………………………………………………………………IVSOIRGO

Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik…………………………………………………………PB

Pribavlenie k Pravoslavnomu blagovestniku……………………………………PPB
TRANSLITERATION AND TERMINOLOGY

I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system, with a few exceptions. I have dropped the soft sign (´) from the end position except when I am directly representing the original Russian. Where there are commonly-accepted English names for Russian figures, I have used the English (for example, Catherine II rather than Ekaterina II, and Speransky rather than Speranskii). I have also chosen to represent “Buryat” using a “y” rather than the “ia” indicated by the transliteration system. This is because the English sound “y” is more representative of the true pronunciation than “ia,” and because despite the lack of a general convention in English for spelling “Buryat,” a growing group of scholars is choosing to represent the term in this fashion. Where I am directly representing the original Russian, I have used “buriat.” I have also modified my transliterations to account for the script reforms that took place after the 1917 Revolution, in keeping with scholarly practice. Consequently, words are represented in their contemporary, rather than pre-revolutionary, form (russkogo rather than Russkago). All errors are my own.

All dates are given according to the pre-revolutionary calendar.

I have chosen to refer to one of the religions practiced by the Buryats as “lamaism” rather than “Buddhism.” While referring to the religion as Buddhism is factually correct, the vast majority of the sources with which I deal refer to the religion as “lamaism,” a term that had specific connotations not represented by “Buddhism”. To preserve these meanings and better analyze them, I have selected “lamaism”.
INTRODUCTION

Between late 1905 and 1907, the parish rolls of Russian Orthodox missionary churches across the Tunka Valley, below the southern tip of Lake Baikal, emptied. According to the church’s calculations, nearly ten thousand Buryat converts, or “all but a few tens” of the valley’s pre-1905 total, formally renounced their affiliation with Orthodoxy during this period. This mass renunciation occurred immediately after the promulgation of an imperial decree that allowed individuals who had been baptized in the Orthodox Church but maintained belief in their prior non-Christian religion to formally leave Orthodoxy, an act that had previously been forbidden because of Orthodoxy’s privileged position within the state’s laws on religion. The mission never recovered from this blow. As late as 1914, shortly before the Russian Revolution permanently ended the mission, the church was still slowly losing converts, and the missionaries were preoccupied with ruminating about the causes of what they viewed as an apostasy.

The abandonment of the Orthodox Church by Buryat converts can be read as a window into the effects of the mission within the Baikal region in a number of ways. In regional scholarship, this dramatic denouement of the mission’s conversion project has become a teleological endpoint for understandings of Orthodoxy’s impact – or, better, lack thereof – among the Buryats during the nineteenth century. Western scholars have

2 L. L. Abaeva and N. L. Zhukovskaia’s encyclopedic edited academic volume on Buryat history and culture, Buriaty (Moscow: Nauka, 2004), contains no information about Orthodoxy. A variant of this approach is to imply that a very small and select group of Buryats internalized Orthodoxy, going on to become clerical families, while most Buryats simply adopted Orthodoxy because of temporary material gain or state pressure,
used apostasies elsewhere in Russia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an opportunity to investigate evolving attitudes among a range of actors towards the significance of Orthodoxy as a religion and an officially-ascribed confessional status in the context of broad shifts in thinking about the relationship between empire, nationality, and religion in Russia in the late nineteenth century. Examining Russia and locations elsewhere, scholars of religion and conversion have emphasized the active role taken by converts in selecting, interpreting, and adapting what is propagated by missionaries. They argue that such moments of visible conflict reveal that religion was subject to negotiation and interpretation based on the social and cultural contexts of the situation, with a sometimes vast divergence between various understandings of what a given religion meant. Ultimately, though, each of these research approaches restricts the field of effect


4 See, for example, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991); Sergei Kan, Memory Eternal: Tlingit Culture and Russian Orthodox Christianity through Two Centuries (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy, 200-222 and “Big
visible from any given examination of conversion. By assuming that the effects of the conversion project in the area are reflected by statistical measures of confessional identification in the immediate pre-revolutionary period, the research design of the first precludes the missionary presence having any effect. The second explores similar projects within the context of long-standing administrative and conceptual structures of Russian imperial governance, giving these same structures primacy within the outcomes of the studies. And the third assumes that religious practice and belief, albeit deeply intertwined with their cultural and social context, are the chief products of conversion projects. The effects of successive interactions between Russian Orthodox missionaries and Buryats in the Baikal region in the late imperial period were both deeper and broader than any of these approaches would suggest.

1905-1907, rather than the effective end of the Orthodox mission’s unsuccessful efforts in the Baikal region, was the last of a series of encounters between missionaries and Buryats oriented around the idea and act of religious conversion. These encounters took a variety of forms. Some were face-to-face encounters, in which Buryats and missionaries directly interacted with each other with the goal of achieving situation-specific outcomes. Others were of an intellectual nature, and began as one-sided attempts by missionaries to comprehend “the Buryats” as a whole in order to further their religious endeavors. Buryat intellectuals, among others outside missionary circles, eventually engaged with the scholarly products of these encounters, entering into an academic conversation with the missionaries over the question of what it meant to be Buryat. In

both cases, the encounters resulted in the iteration of ideas of what it meant to be Buryat, and what the relationship of Buryatness to Orthodoxy was.

Encounters between Buryats and missionaries reconfigured both the parties participating in the encounter and the meaning of the empire, which provided backdrop, material, and context to the encounters. As Richard White argues in his study of engagement between Algonquians and French in the Great Lakes region from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, such encounters are powerfully, if inadvertently, creative forces. Seeking to secure their desired outcomes,

People try to persuade others who are different from themselves by appealing to what they perceive to be the values and practices of those others. They often misinterpret and distort both the values and practices of those they deal with, but from these misunderstandings arise new meanings and through them new practices…

The result, White finds, was the creation of new ideas of what constituted suitable behavior for all parties involved, but also the creation of “a middle ground,” a space of understanding and encounter in which negotiations could take place on mutually-comprehensible terms.\(^5\) While White implies that what occurred within the Great Lakes region was the creation of a space both distinct from itself before French arrival and dramatically separate from France itself, the results of such interactions were markedly different in the Baikal region. Encounters between missionaries and Buryats led to the multifaceted quality of being Buryat, or Buryatness, being reconstructed in terms of languages for self and community description emanating from central Russia, and in relation to Orthodoxy, which came to stand for the empire itself. The outcome of the encounters was the epistemological emplacement of the Buryats within the Russian

Empire, a process that functioned to incorporate the region and its inhabitants into the empire. As White implies, though, local individuals and local negotiations undertaken without a deliberate agenda of construction were the key agents and means by which this process was carried out.

One of the primary subjects of inquiry for historians examining the Russian Empire has been the related problems of how imperial authorities attempted to construct a unified whole and the degree to which they succeeded or failed. The complex problem of administering a diverse population constantly posed to imperial authorities the question of how the empire was to transform its subject populations into governable imperial subjects, with the result that a wide spectrum of tactics were employed across the empire. However, as Robert Geraci has noted, the “prescriptions for transforming human identities” that underlay seemingly clear-cut administrative propositions were informed by a “cacophony of philosophies and agendas” that undermined the creation or implementation of any transformative policy. In short, efforts to define and apply “Russianness” as a rubric for creating governable imperial subjects undermined and challenged Russianness even as they created it.


7 Geraci, 11. The best case study of the complex fate of imperial assimilationist agendas in governance is a body of literature surrounding russification policies in the mid-nineteenth century in Russia’s western borderlands. See, for example, Darius Staliunas, Making Russians: Meaning and Practice of Russification in Lithuania and Belarus after 1863 (Paris: Rodopi, 2007); and Theodore R. Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996).
laudable effects of proving conclusively that the empire’s power was much less monolithic, absolute, or transformative than decrees and rhetoric might suggest. This instability, however, belies the fact that areas such as the Baikal region were incorporated into the empire in a lasting fashion -- something happened to cause the region and its non-Russian population to become part of Russia even in the face of erratic and inconsistent administrative policies that were severely limited in their application. I argue that the conversion encounters resulted in the creation of ideas of Buryatness that, while maintaining an understanding of Buryat difference from Russianness, oriented Buryatness towards Russia and described Buryatness through terminologies of self and community definition that had originated from Russia. Moreover, locals and their everyday interactions and activities were the sources of such integration.

Although it is well-established that imperial contact with different landscapes and different populations was formative of Russian ideas of Russianness, empire, and the place of non-Russian peoples within empire, the impact of imperial contact on how the empire’s non-Russian subjects saw and defined themselves is less well understood. A frequently-used approach to this question is the genre of the ethnic or national history, which tends to frame contact with empire in terms of oppression and resistance. The theoretical and methodological frameworks of such histories assume that the nationalities or ethnic groups in question – the subjects of oppression and the agents of resistance -

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were not themselves produced through imperial contact. Although this is true to some extent for some of the empire’s subject peoples, such as the Georgians and Armenians, it was not universally so. Scholarship on the late imperial and early Soviet period has demonstrated that both imperial orientologists and Soviet ethnographers and administrative planners, in an effort to make non-Russians into acceptable subjects, created a number of ethnic and national categories that came to be seen as natural, especially in more remote areas such as Siberia. However, as Talal Asad suggests, the solution is not to abandon the genre of the ethnic or national history, but rather to use the process of developing historical narratives about such groups as an opportunity to explore the means by which imperial subjects were constituted. Efforts to do so offer insight into the constructive capacities of imperial governance, but also the local histories of the exercise of power and the construction of categories that are necessarily neglected by

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9 Examples include Ronald G. Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), and Azade-Ayse Roerlich, *The Volga Tatars: A Profile in National Resilience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). No general history of the Buryats under imperial rule has been written since the Stalinist period, when historical scholarship on Soviet nationalities under imperial rule hewed strongly to a model of imperial oppression and nascent national resistance. See, for example, F. A. Kudriavtsev, *Istoriiia Buriat-Mongol’skogo naroda ot XVII do 60-kh godov XIX v.* (Moscow: Izdatel’svo Akademii nauk SSR, 1940), and A. P. Okladnikov, *Istoriiia Buriat-Mongol’skoi ASSR*, vol. 1 (Ulan-Ude: Buriat-Mongol’ske gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1951). Instead, historians have preferred smaller-scale examinations of particular aspects of Buryat society or culture or imperial policy towards the Buryats that treat the concept of what was Buryat and who the Buryats were as concepts independent of imperial rule. A number of examples of such scholarship will be discussed throughout the dissertation. For a more complex analysis of the shortfallings of the genre of ethnic or national scholarship in contributing to knowledge about the Russian Empire, see Geraci, 7-8.


studies that explore category construction as a force moving outward from imperial centers.

The limited amount of research that has been done on how the empire constituted its own subjects suggests that this is a promising line of inquiry. Benjamin Nathans and Robert Crews find that imperial efforts to manage diversity created imperial civic identities that were willingly inhabited and manipulated by specific segments of the empire’s Jewish and Muslim populations, particularly those of education and relatively high social standing. However, their works focus primarily upon formal categories of imperial identity. Another approach to the problem of the effects of empire on the empire’s non-Russian subjects, used in recent histories by Michael Khodarkovsky, Virginia Martin, and Paul Werth, privileges the active role of resistance and interpretation by non-Russians in altering and exploiting imperial administrative structures. In these cases, imperial administrative structures themselves provided forums for resistance, negotiation, and interpretation by non-Russians contesting imperial power or acceding to it on their own terms. The suggestion that the empire itself established the terms on which its authority was contested and exploited has serious implications for the imperial subjecthood of non-Russians, as well as scholarly understandings of the effects of actions of resistance and negotiation on identity construction; however, their results in this regard


remain suggestive, rather than argumentative. The sum total of these two bodies of historiography suggests that the empire itself played a significant role in constituting non-Russian subjects through its attempts to administer them.

As Adeeb Khalid has demonstrated, empire also inadvertently constituted its subjects in ways that had nothing to do with imperial systems for managing diverse populations. Examining “the first generation of modern Central Asian intellectuals, the ‘Jadids’,” Khalid finds that their ways of thinking about themselves, Central Asian society, and their places within Central Asian society grew out of and relied upon technologies, methods of cultural production and social association, and educational philosophies imported into the area by the Russian Empire. As a result, the Jadids and their criticisms of Central Asian society were “as much a result of the profound transformation of Central Asia in the fifty years of imperial Russian rule as a response to it.”14 In many ways, my conclusions parallel Khalid’s. However, Khalid’s work details the rise of a new intellectual elite, a very narrow slice of society, albeit one whose intellectual efforts had a far-reaching impact in terms of the shaping of ideas of tradition and modernity in the Central Asian context. This study suggests that broad swathes of what could be loosely termed “ordinary people” participated in and were shaped by the effects of empire, considered as this simultaneous process of transformation and response.

The epistemological emplacement of the Buryats within the Russian Empire was accomplished through the application of languages of individuality, legality and citizenship, nationality, and science, an awkward list that I will shorthand as “languages

of modernity,” that spread outward to Russia’s imperial holdings from Russia’s center to the problem of the natures of Orthodoxy and Buryatness. It is important to note that these languages were not, in and of themselves, a product of the encounters. Rather, they were already in circulation when participants in conversion encounters drew on them for the purpose of navigating, understanding, and explaining the encounters. Within the encounters, languages of modernity were applied to describe Buryatness and Orthodoxy, a process that connected the languages to imperial governance because of the imperial legitimization of Buryat customary law and confessionalization of lamaism, as well as Orthodoxy’s privileged status within imperial governmental structures. As a result, empire itself came to be reinterpreted locally in the context of ideas of modernity in circulation within Russia’s center. The results ranged from strengthening beliefs that Buryat customary law was a codified, written, and imperially-endorsed body of law to creating ideas of what it meant to be a Buryat convert woman that centered around individual rights and choices to framing Orthodoxy itself as a proxy for processes of liberal and modernizing reform believed to be inherent to the empire. The deployment of languages of modernity within conversion encounters was notable for its ubiquity: opponents of missionaries and conversion to Orthodoxy used them just as missionaries and Buryats who sought to appeal to missionaries did. At the same time, the missionaries saw the spread of ways of imagining the self and community that made use of languages of modernity the missionaries associated with Orthodoxy as a sign of “authentic” conversion or religious progress. Languages of modernity provided the material for the redefinition of Orthodoxy and Buryatness through conversion encounters, served to
define empire itself, and functioned as a key index for analyzing the change that empire was supposed to bring to the Buryats.

The different languages of modernity used in the conversion encounters bridge two important transitions in Russia history. Subsequent to the Great Reforms of the 1860s, languages of individuality, legality and citizenship, science, and nationality were adopted as descriptors of individual and communal identity within Russia proper. Languages of modernity also served as a vocabulary for metropolitan debates about social and political reform, providing new methods for the constitution of individuals and communities that were intimately linked to ideas about what Russia was and what its future should look like. The second great shift of the mid-nineteenth-century was a transition of empire itself from a model of rule and self-imagination focused around a pragmatic, if reluctant, accommodation of diversity towards a nation-based model centered on Russian nationality. In the context of these shifts, languages of imperial

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16 For an overview, see Theodore R. Weeks, “Managing Empire: Tsarist Nationalities Policy,” in *Cambridge History of Russia v. II: Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, ed. Dominic Lieven (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 27-44. For a brief discussion of how this trend manifested in state policies on religion and church attitudes towards mission and conversion, see Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky, “Introduction,” in *Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia*, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 1-9. Several scholarly works have examined particular intersections between these two developments, including examinations of the concept of citizenship within the empire and the use of various modes of scientific understanding to grapple with the relationship of the empire’s subject peoples to the empire. See, for example, Nathaniel Knight, “Constructing the Science of Nationality: Ethnography in Mid-Nineteenth Century Russia” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1995);
identity and description from earlier iterations of the empire gained new life and came to exist, sometimes with considerable tension, alongside languages derived from the newer, more nationalistic, and ostensibly homogenizing empire. These broad shifts were clearly visible in the products of the conversion encounters of the Baikal region, in which they resulted in the coexistence of sometimes-contradictory languages through which arguments over the natures of Orthodoxy and Buryatness and their respective relationships to the empire were conducted. The effect of the spread of languages of modernity was to construct the Baikal region, the Buryats, and Orthodox missionaries as integral parts, subjects, and agents of an empire and a society that were in a state of transition and profound self-questioning.

The ideas of Orthodoxy and Buryatness based on the languages of modernity applied in the conversion encounters proved both lasting and inhabitable. Until the mission was ended by the Russian revolution in 1917, they provided the means by which missionaries understood and described their actions, and the grounds on which Buryats sought to negotiate with the missionaries. Moreover, the use of languages of modernity in conversion encounters occasioned the creation or elaboration of lasting linguistic and religious categories that provided the intellectual underpinnings of the idea that the Buryats constituted a nationality in their own right. All of this supports Talal Asad’s argument that a primary effect of imperial and religious expansion was to spread “forms of language…[which created] new possibilities of action in non-Western societies” and

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allowed subjects “new possibilities for constituting themselves.”\textsuperscript{17} It is notable, though, that the encounter shaped Orthodoxy as much as Buryatness. Broadly speaking, Orthodoxy in European Russia viewed many of the ways of considering self and society implicit in modernity as harmful to both the individual and society, and consequently defined itself against them.\textsuperscript{18} In the Baikal region, the missionaries’ effort to contrast Orthodoxy with Buryatness caused them to positively define Orthodoxy in regards to these same cultural conditions of modernity, which, in the imperial context, it viewed in a positive light. As Asad and Peter van der Veer suggest, this extension of a set of epistemological possibilities has far-reaching effects on the construction of spatial entities and modern states. Respectively, they find that affected areas and populations are brought into historical continuity with the location from which the possibilities originate, and that, by originating and inculcating into parts of the population ideas foundational to the


\textsuperscript{18} In this, Orthodox clergy were part of a widespread tendency in pre-revolutionary Russia to view modernity as a social disease rather than in terms of positivity or progress. On this, see Mark D. Steinberg, \textit{Petersburg, Fin de Siecle} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), especially 114, 205, 211-220, 250-251, 255-256. This is not to say that the church did not engage with manifestations of modernity in ways that affected the organization, theology, and practice of Orthodoxy. The broad reformist trends of the mid-nineteenth-century affected the church and many clergymen, leading to a number of efforts to reform the church as an institution. See Gregory L. Freeze, \textit{The Parish Clergy in Nineteenth-Century Russia: Crisis, Reform, Counter-Reform} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 189-329; and I. S. Belliust, \textit{Description of the Clergy in Rural Russia (1858). The memoir of a nineteenth-century parish priest}, trans. Gregory L. Freeze (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). Moreover, Orthodox religious practice itself was affected by the new means of transportation and production allowed by modernization, although the Orthodox hierarchy was often uncomfortable with the popular manifestations of these changes. See Laura Engelstein, “Holy Russia in Modern Times: An Essay on Orthodoxy and Cultural Change,” \textit{Past and Present} 173, no. 1 (November 2001): 129-156; and Nadieszda Kizenko, \textit{A Prodigal Saint: Father John of Kronstadt and the Russian People} (University Park, P.A.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 151-196.
existence of states as real and imagined entities, such processes contribute to the construction of modern states. Conversion encounters, as the means by which new possibilities for self and community definition were applied and molded into understandings of Orthodoxy and Buryatness, contributed to the process of incorporating both the Buryats and Orthodoxy into an empire that was increasingly characterized and shaped by such languages of modernity and constructing it in its late-nineteenth-century form.

The process of epistemological homogenization to which the conversion encounters contributed implied the replacement or displacement of alternate, non-imperial methods of seeing and defining individuals, communities, and their actions. However, the result of the construction of imperializing epistemic structures in the Baikal region was not an erasure of the local in favor of the imperial, but rather a redefinition of the local, most frequently explored through Buryatness, in terms of the imperial, for which Orthodoxy often stood as a proxy, in the imperial in terms of the local. Indeed, the two were mutually constitutive concepts, each one depending on its relationship to the other for significance and substance. As a result, the conversion encounters led to, in Peter van der Veer’s words, an “interplay between the global and the local through which these very spatial points of reference [were] constituted.” The process of homogenization entailed by the spreading of the languages of modernity was what enabled this interplay to occur – their widespread adoption enabled Orthodoxy,

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20 Asad, “Comments on Conversion,” 264.
Buryatness, and empire to be discussed by all parties using the same set of more-or-less mutually recognized conversational terms. However, it is important to note that the creation of grounds for mutual interaction, recognition ad discussion did not minimize or eliminate conflict. Rather, disputes and even physical violence came to occur and be understood through these new possibilities for imagining self and community.22

Conversion encounters were uniquely productive of imperial identities that incorporated spreading languages of modernity. As the diverse set of languages utilized in the encounters suggests, conversion encounters occurred at the nexus of a number of disparate lines of social concern, imagination, and change in late imperial Russia that have not been analyzed in such close proximity to each other, or being utilized by such a narrow group of actors. However, conversion encounters were not merely unusually reflective of the wide range of possibilities for thinking about society and the individual present in Russia at the time. They involved a substantial amount of creative work, transforming languages of science or individuality and affect into imaginations of Buryatness and Orthodoxy. This was facilitated by the orientation of the encounters around “conversion,” a word that, in Russian as in English, carries implications of transition and change. Consequently, as van der Veer, building on Asad’s suggestion that imperial religious expansion played a powerful role in epistemological homogenization, argues, conversion should be viewed as “an innovative practice that partakes in the transformation of the social without being a mechanical part of it.”23 A number of

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22 This situation is very similar to that identified in White, x.
23 van der Veer, “Introduction,” 7. This argument has been voiced by a number of prominent scholars of conversion including Comaroff and Comaroff; and Gauri Viswanathan, Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
Russian historical peculiarities contributed to the importance of conversion encounters in this regard by casting it as an important moment of transformation, raising the questions of from what and into what an individual was changing. Within imperial law, conversion to Orthodoxy was treated as a moment of passage between different legal systems and, depending on the time and context, different social estates. Additionally, missionaries and some imperial official rhetorically treated Orthodoxy as a means of assimilating non-Russians into the empire, a habit that intensified in the late nineteenth century even as many officials became less willing to directly intervene on behalf of missionaries and increasingly viewed imperial interests as best served by religious non-intervention.

This dissertation explores conversion encounters through the documentary traces of contact between Buryats and missionaries found in the archival records of the missionary churches of the Baikal region, including petitions from Buryats to missionaries and other officials, church administrative decisions, and correspondence between missionaries, mission supervisors, and Buryat administrators. Many of these documents are mediated to consequential degrees and in differing ways, and must be read with sensitivity to issues of authorship, genre, and intent. Nonetheless, they represent a diverse range of voices and perspectives on conversion, including some which, as I argue in the first chapter, should be seen as the voices of “ordinary” Buryats. In addition to archival sources, I incorporate a wide selection of the missionaries’ published works, particularly travelogues, essays about mission affairs, and scientific writings. By and whole, I have worked to maintain a focus on rank-and-file missionaries, rather than ranking church hierarchs. Many senior church officials lived in the Russian city of Irkutsk, and had only limited contact with Buryats. Their published viewpoints have been
included only in instances when they proved particularly influential in shaping the attitudes of missionaries. Where useful, particularly in tracing the utilization of the ideas of Buryatness that resulted from conversion encounters by actors outside of the mission, I employ the works of regional historians, Buryat nationalists, and linguists.

This dissertation explores five different encounters: negotiations over the baptism and marriage of Buryat women, missionary and convert encounters with Buryat community structures, missionary explorations of the Buryat religious landscape, missionaries’ translation efforts, and conversion itself during the events of 1905-1907 and their aftermath. Above all other factors, my selection of encounters was shaped by my archive itself. Both traditional archival sources and missionaries’ published sources placed particular emphasis on these specific issues – there are no other parallel topical clusters. This raises the question of what historical process of selection and culling occurred in regards to archival documents, which provide many of the sources for chapters one, two, and five. While the records of two missionary regions (Ust-Ordinsk and Tunka) provide spectacularly rich collections of documents related to the encounters in question, the records of other missionary regions either suggest that similar collections of documents never accumulated there, or were not preserved. This suggests that missionaries’ individual concerns played an important role in sculpting the collections of documents that I rely on. Their decisions as to whether they were interested in aggressively pursuing a particular type of encounter with Buryats through their mission work, or whether or not they saw a particular set of documents as being worthy of preservation shaped the archival collections available to researchers today. A similar process affected their publications, although selective interest, rather than deliberate
discarding, was the key factor in this case. Consequently, the view that we have of missionary engagement with the Buryats is not representative of the totality of their interactions. Rather, it prioritizes a narrow set of encounters that the missionaries saw as being of particular importance.

Because of the paucity of alternative primary sources from this period, especially when compared to the trove of resources produced by the missionaries, the missionaries’ emphasis on a few selective arenas of encounter has strongly influenced historical investigations into the mission’s history in the region and understandings of Buryat life and culture writ broadly.24 In some instances, this has resulted in a disproportionate treatment of encounter sites such as marriage, missionaries’ exercise of force to recruit converts, and 1905-1907 as entirely representative of the relationship between the mission and the Buryats. In other instances, missionaries’ narrations of encounters have provided and continue to provide a major source base for investigations into Buryat family life and custom, Buryat religion, and Buryat linguistics.25 Researchers rarely acknowledge their heavy reliance on the missionaries’ writings, and scholars have not critically considered how the missionaries’ priorities and their reflections within the source base have shaped contemporary scholarship on the Buryats before the Russian Revolution. As a result, the ideas of Buryatness and its place within the empire that were

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24 The region received little attention from Russian ethnographers until the late nineteenth century. As Buryat self-governmental institutions were granted license by the imperial government to conduct business orally, their records are not comprehensive. While there are Buddhist sources on the region, many of these are written in languages such as Mongolian or Tibetan that often present obstacles to scholars approaching the region from the Russian imperial perspective.

25 For discussions of the missionaries’ heavy representation within the available pool of nineteenth-century ethnographic literature on the Buryats, see chapters one and three.
generated out of conversion encounters have had a formative and unchecked influence on current scholarship about Buryat life and culture in the nineteenth century.

This study includes missionary stations and missionary activities oriented towards Buryats from both sides of Lake Baikal. Consequently, it deemphasizes a number of important divisions. The Buryats did not form a united or homogenous group across this space. Indeed, as I detail in the background section, the label “Buryat”, when applied to the entirety of the group with which this study is concerned, seems to have been popularized largely through Russian administration and labeling of the group rather than autonomous assumption of the term. Additionally, the Baikal region was divided by imperial and religious administrative boundaries. In the early nineteenth century, the region was split into two separate administrative units, Irkutsk guberniia and Zabaikal’e oblast’, with the division between the two running directly south from the southern tip of Lake Baikal and directly through the middle of the Buryat population. Orthodox administrative structures were eventually split between the Irkutsk diocese and the Zabaikal’e diocese, a division that at times resulted in the existence of two separate but cooperating missions to the Buryats. These divisions are paralleled by a cultural divide between “eastern” and “western” Buryats that receives a great deal of emphasis in contemporary discussions about Buryat culture. By examining missionary contacts with the Buryats as a whole, I aim to explore how understandings of the innate heterogeneity of the Buryat population contributed to the construction of the idea that the “Buryats” were a united group possessing a distinct cultural identity and relationship to Russia, but also reified the importance of divisions between eastern and western Buryats.
Background

Readers will find a considerable amount of what can be loosely defined as “background information” distributed throughout the dissertation. I have chosen this organization, rather than the more straightforward path of compiling this information chapter devoted to background, for two reasons. Each of the chapters requires specific information that falls under the general category of “background information” about Russian administrative structures and Buryat culture. Stitched together, these pieces of information would not represent either a holistic portrait of the Buryats in the nineteenth century or a broad overview of the Russian administration in the area, endeavors that would require entire volumes in and of themselves, but rather a piecemeal collection of information that has been included specifically because of its relevance to particular chapters. Consequently, I have chosen to leave this information in the context in which it is most relevant. Additionally, several of the chapters deal with the generation of specific bodies of knowledge about the Buryats, including custom and customary law, the religious categories of “lamaism” and “shamanism”, and the mission’s history in the region. As I suggested earlier in the introduction and argue in more depth at various points in the dissertation, much of our ethnographic knowledge about the Buryats in the nineteenth century is, in fact, dependent on bodies of knowledge generated out of encounters between missionaries and Buryats. As this process of knowledge-generation is, in and of itself, a subject of analysis in the dissertation, I will abstain from treating such knowledge as factually-accurate background information. Consequently, the reader will not find broad scholarly descriptions of Buryat life or culture within this dissertation, although I have, when able, attempted to insert relevant known facts and likelihoods, both
from outside sources and from my own analysis. I will focus in this section on two specific topics that provide background for the dissertation as a whole: the lack of a united Buryat collective identity up to the mid-nineteenth century, and a brief overview of Orthodox missionary activities in the region up to the mid-nineteenth century.

Russians, in the form of Cossacks spearheading the Muscovite advance across Siberia, first encountered the various groups of Mongolic peoples who would collectively become known as the Buryats in the mid-seventeenth century. These groups did share a number of characteristics in common. All were speakers of Mongolic languages, some of which were mutually intelligible, and all had migrated into the Baikal region from steppes of what is now Mongolia, although that process had occurred over centuries. These connections led to parallels of terminology and of cultural practice. However, there were also differences between the groups. The area across which they settled was characterized by sharp shifts in landscape, precipitation, and vegetation, leading to differentiation between those who settled in the forested, mountainous areas near Lake Baikal and on the lake’s western side, and those who settled to the south and east of the lake, a region of dry, grassy, rolling steppes. Moreover, the region already had a varied indigenous population. As immigrants to the region made contact with the region’s various inhabitants, they adopted and assimilated different practices and beliefs. A further differentiating factor was the wide time span across which Mongolic peoples migrated into (and occasionally out of) the region, encompassing well over a thousand years. Religion provides one example of the differentiation caused by departure dates. Early Mongolic peoples to migrate into the area espoused shamanism, which became tinged by encounters with world religions during the period of the Mongol conquests, thus itself
differentiating across time. The latest arrivals left a region that had become a Buddhist monastic and missionary stronghold. They carried with them a package of religious practices that comprised remnants of earlier shamanic practices, traces of shamanic practices from other regions absorbed into Buddhism, and, of course, Tibetan Buddhism, which was itself heavily influenced by Tibetan shamanism.26

The issue of how “the Buryats” came to be in their contemporary form is typically examined within Russian-language scholarship as a matter of “ethnogenesis”, the migratory and assimilatory processes through which the various Mongolic groups present in the Baikal region came to be closely interconnected in one group. This approach has spawned rich bodies of academic literature, particularly focused around archaeology and historical linguistics, that provide overviews of arrival patterns in the region, as well as the diverse cultural landscape occasioned by migration and contact with indigenous and Turkic groups. These literatures suggest that the term “Buryat” emerged at some point in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries as one of three “foundational tribal unions” in the region to which smaller, diverse units were subordinate; as time passed, other such unions also came to exist. As D. D. Nimaev points out in his recent synthetic article on the ethnogenesis of the Buryats, an excellent introduction to the bodies of literature described above, there is as of yet no scholarly consensus or proven hypothesis on the origin or original meaning of the term. However, it does appear that by the seventeenth century, the Yakuts and Uzbeks, other large non-Russian groups resident in Siberia and Central Asia, had begun to use it to broadly refer to Mongolic groups in the Baikal

region. It was likely through such groups that the Muscovites first learned about the area’s population and encountered terminology for describing it.

Driven by the goals of exploration and subordinating Siberian peoples to the *iasak* system, which simultaneously involved the collection of annual taxes in pelts from regional leaders held responsible for those over whom they claimed sovereignty and the subordination of those who paid *iasak* to the Muscovite tsar, the Cossacks rapidly moved across northern Eurasia. As they moved eastward, Cossacks often gathered information about the inhabitants of the areas into which they planned to move from Siberians with whom they already had contacts. As a result of such practices of gathering information in advance, the Buryats appear in Muscovite sources beginning in 1609, twenty years before the Cossacks’ first encounter within them in 1629. The term used to describe them in Muscovite records from 1609 onward is *bratskie liudi*, or “brat people,” likely a Russianized version of the corrupted version of the word “Buryat” used to refer to the Mongolic inhabitants of the Baikal region by other Siberians and Central Asians. From this point onward, variations of the term were used by Russians to refer to the region’s Mongolic inhabitants as a whole. The name appeared in Muscovite records of treaties and maps of the region. It also appeared in toponyms (the first Cossack fort in the region was known as the Bratsk fortress, or *Bratskii ostrog*), and was used by seventeenth-century European authors describing the area through Muscovite information, including

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28 The speed at which they crossed the continent was partly due to the depletion of fur-bearing mammals in the areas that they entered because of the strain on ecosystems caused by the demand for *iasak*.
29 Nimaev, 34.
Nicholas Witsen and Izbrand Ides, the latter of whom travelled through the region as the Muscovite ambassador to China.\footnote{Nimaev, 37.}

All of this suggests that the term “Buryat” began, under the dynamics of Russian intervention into the region, to be applied much more widely than it had been by the region’s Mongolic populations themselves. There has been no examination of how Russian administrative practices affected how the region’s inhabitants, or at least their leaders, referred to themselves; what is clear, though, is that while the term “Buryat” originated among the Mongolic peoples of the Baikal region as an identification for just one sector of a large and diverse population, it began to be applied by outsiders with much greater scope than the term’s native users would have lent it. However, the population to which the term was being applied was entering a period of extreme instability. The first wave of this instability, in the mid-seventeenth century, was caused by the emigration of many of the region’s Mongolic peoples, fleeing conflicts sparked by the Muscovite incursion, into lands held by the Khalkha Mongols. This outflow halted by the 1660s. However, it was soon replaced by the emigration of many groups, including some who had been among the earlier migrants and some who were entering the Baikal region for the first time, northward out of Mongol territory as a result of internal conflict between Mongol groups and the upheaval sparked by the advancing Chinese empire.\footnote{James Forsyth, \textit{A History of the Peoples of Siberia: Russia’s North Asian Colony, 1581-1990} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 97-99. On the westward advance of the Qing empire, see Peter C. Purdue, \textit{China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia} (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); on the absorption of the various Mongol groups into the Qing empire, see Johan Elverskog, \textit{Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China} (Honolulu: University of Hawai`i Press, 2006).}

This unsettled period was ended by the 1727 Treaty of Kiakhta, which delineated the
political border between Russia and China in the region, but also closed the border and
established precisely which parts of the local population were subject to Russia, and
which to China. At this point, the Baikal region’s Mongolic population became a more or
less stable entity, not subject to large-scale in- or out- migration.

No document exists that might lend insight into the perspective of the region’s
Mongolic residents about the issue of their own identity. However, the Russian
administration’s approach to the region’s population suggests that the newfound stability
of the population did not translate to either the existence or perception of strong
commonalities within the population. Instead, it is apparent that the population continued
to be highly differentiated. The common institutional administrative structure among the
many Mongolic groups in the region, all of which the government referred to as Buryat,
was the Russian government. Rather than a united Buryat leadership hierarchy overseeing
the powers of self-administration granted to the Buryats, there were a number of different
leadership groups that represented large-scale tribal units. Each of these administered a
large group of smaller clans. Indeed, the final formulation of this administrative structure,
found in the 1822 Siberian Statute, implied that there were large differences between
each of these groups. The statute ordered the compilation and codification of “Buryat
customary law.” Despite the unity implied by this term, the result was that the
overarching administration of each large-scale tribal unit collected what it argued was the
customary law to which the people it governed were subject; in the end, there were many
different collections of “Buryat customary law.” The Russian approach to the situation
suggests that the Russians themselves believed that such law was best assembled on the
basis of large-scale tribal units rather than the Buryat whole, an approach that
demonstrates awareness of substantial differences within the population. The resulting production of differing representations of what constituted customary law from the Buryat end suggests that difference, rather than unity, was the rule among the region’s population in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

If there was no self-asserted commonality among the Buryats, neither did the Russians attempt to identify one from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century. Indeed, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century writings about the Buryats treated them as a northern extension of the Mongols. When, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Russian Bible Society sought to sponsor the translation of the New Testament into the local language, its translator, Iakov Shmidt, at the time one of Russia’s premier orientalists, believed that all that was necessary was the transliteration of a Kalmyk translation into the classical Mongolian script. Moreover, language specialists and programs located in the regional capital of Irkutsk described themselves as focusing on “Mongolian”. Similarly, Peter Simon Pallas’ late eighteenth century *Collected Historical Observations about the Mongolian Peoples*, the first ethnographic account to include the Buryats, described the Buryats and the Kalmyks as “the Mongols who remain under Russian rule.”

Thus, while the term “Buryat” was well-established by this point as a label for all Mongolic peoples living in the Baikal region, it was, from

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33 Peter Simon Pallas, *Sammlungen historischer nachrichten über die mongolischen völkerschaften, durch P.S. Pallas*, Vol. 1 (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der wissenschaften, 1776), v. See also Vol. 2 (St. Petersburg: Kaiserliche Akademie der wissenschaften, 1801), 97-98, in which Pallas describes his field of ethnographic description as including the Buryats, the Kalmyks, and “the Mongols proper”, a set of labels that used the existence of Mongolia as a region with a distinct political boundary and an eponymous population as the key distinction.
the Russian perspective, void of significant cultural and linguistic distinction. In short, from the Russian perspective, it was largely Russian rule that distinguished the Buryats from the Mongols.

Orthodoxy arrived in the region with the Cossacks. Until the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, most baptisms in the region were carried out by laymen as few priests, as of yet, made the journey eastwards. For them, religion was a key marker of difference, and even of foreignness, as only non-Orthodox individuals could be subjected to iasak. This situation provided a disincentive to large-scale baptisms, as the more Siberian natives were converted to Orthodoxy, the fewer could be relied upon as a steady source of fur. The largest systematic exemption to this was caused by the sharp predominance of men among the new arrivals. This gender imbalance resulted in a considerable degree of sexual contact between Russian men and Siberian native women, a situation that, from the Russian perspective, required the assimilation through baptism of the difference posed by religion. It was this situation itself that compelled the church

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34 There are currently a number of smaller groups labeled as Buryats who live in Chinese Inner Mongolia and in Mongolia. The label was applied to these groups after 1918.  
hierarchy to extend its institutional structure into the Baikal region. In 1681, the metropolitan of Siberia and Tobol’sk, based in the western Siberian city of Tobol’sk, ordered the construction of a monastery on the Selenga River, on the southeastern side of Lake Baikal. The orders given to the two monks who were tasked with starting the construction project accused many of the region’s Russian inhabitants of living in sin with unbaptized women and fathering children out of wedlock. The monks were to see to the spiritual oversight of the region’s Russian and convert inhabitants, ensuring that they hewed to Orthodoxy and maintained Orthodox law.37

The monastery on the Selenga, Holy Trinity, was the first of three built in the region in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The monasteries served as the centers for a growing mission to the Buryats during the eighteenth century. In this period, the scope of baptism efforts widened considerably, in keeping with shifting ideas about the necessity of baptism and the change caused by conversion. With the sharp decline in fur resources due to overhunting, the preservation of a population eligible for iasak no longer promised financial gains for the state. Additionally, shifts in ideas of what constituted foreignness and what foreignness signified to the state brought increased state support of conversion, as baptism came to be seen as a means of transforming non-Russians into Russian subjects.38 New beliefs that conversion required the internalization of Orthodox beliefs and practices, as well as the maintenance of a more Russian lifestyle

seen as natural to Orthodoxy, led to an emphasis on the supervision and oversight of converts, often through harsh means.\textsuperscript{39} The result of these shifts was the construction of large convert settlements around the monasteries. Such communities were facilitated by large monastic land entitlements and legal allowances that allowed Russians, including missionaries and monastic institutions, to take on converts as serfs.\textsuperscript{40} However, the historical conditions that allowed for this system to develop soon disappeared. In 1764, Catherine II confiscated the vast bulk of Orthodox monasteries’ landholdings, with the corollary that most individuals resident on monastery land became state peasants. Any relocated converts who were not reclassified as state peasants at this time came to be listed as such after 1822, when all settled Siberian converts were made into state peasants under the Siberian Statute.\textsuperscript{41}

If the monasteries no longer had the necessary wealth and legal infrastructure to support communities of converts, state policy of the late eighteenth century no longer encouraged the mass baptisms that had characterized the early eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{42} Nonetheless, the monasteries continued to be major centers of missionary activity in the Baikal region, albeit with a new focus. With the arrival of thousands of Old Believers resettled from Russia’s western provinces to the Baikal region by order of Catherine II, the monasteries refocused their missionary efforts from the Buryats to the Old Believers.\textsuperscript{43} Consequently, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{39} Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians,” 126-127. For a brief discussion of the manifestation of such policies in Siberia, see Kan, 177-178.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{40} Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians,” 132. Mikhailova, 31-34.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{41} Kan, “Orthodox Missionaries,” 178; Marc Raeff, \textit{Siberia and the Reforms of 1882} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), 116.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{42} Khodarkovsky, “The Conversion of Non-Christians,” 136-139.}  
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{43} On the Orthodox mission to the Baikal region’s Old Believers, see Guseinova.}
missionary efforts aimed at the Buryats entered a prolonged lull. Although missionary work did continue to be an item of interest, particularly in the Irkutsk seminary, where a Mongolian-language program sporadically operated during the early nineteenth century, there was no consistent missionary agenda, nor were staff or funds consistently allotted for missionary work. This, however, began to shift by the middle of the nineteenth century, when emergent patterns of thinking about the empire as a national entity created a renewed interest in Orthodoxy as an important assimilative tool, particularly in Siberia.44

Structure

This dissertation contains five chapters. The first two, thematically addressing the marriages of Buryat convert women and Buryat authority, focus on “on the ground” encounters between missionaries and Buryats. The second two, on the missionaries’ understandings of lamaism and shamanism and the Buryat language, deal with intellectual encounters, in which the missionaries explored “the Buryats” as a group through scientific and descriptive writing. The fifth, and final, chapter explores the missionaries’ encounter with their own history of engagement with the Buryats and the Russian state in the context of the mass apostasy of 1905-1907. With the exception of the final chapter, which focuses on the period 1905-1917, the chapters run chronologically parallel to each other, following themes from the earliest records in which they appear through to 1905, and in some cases, 1917. Because missionary print and archival sources begin in the 1860s, that decade marks a starting point for three of the chapters, those on

44 On the broad renewal of Orthodox mission during this period see Geraci, and Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy.
marriage, authority, and religion. However, in the case of my investigation of the creation of the Buryat language, published sources have enabled me to begin my analysis in the 1820s. Regarding ideas of what “Buryat” meant, this dissertation begins as the term is starting to gain significance beyond its prior usage as a label for Mongolic peoples living within Russia. It also effectively begins as the mission is reinventing and reinvigorating itself in the 1860s.
CHAPTER 1

MARRIAGE AND CONVERSION

As the public wisdom of the Baikal region in the nineteenth century had it, if a Buryat desired to leave an unwanted marriage or enter into a marriage that flouted Buryat custom, he or she simply went to the local Russian Orthodox church and converted to Orthodoxy. This trope appears in many accounts of life in the Baikal region during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, always supporting the claims that baptism cleanly transferred individuals from one set of legal or cultural strictures to another and that conversion was motivated by the desire to gain indemnity for one’s marriage-related actions. Edward Stallybrass, a British Congregationalist missionary working near Novoselenginsk in the 1820s and 1830s, argued that Buryat women frequently converted in order to gain the upper hand in quarrels with their husbands:

Is she convinced of the truth of Christianity? No; but she has learned that according to the law of the [Russian] empire, no authority can be exercised over a christian by a pagan; and if once baptized, should her husband maltreat her, she may leave him whenever she pleases.¹

Later Russian observers describing the situation attributed it to the exorbitant economic burden placed on would-be bridegrooms in the form of kalym, or bride-price, payments, an obligatory component of marriage “according to shamanist custom.” Once baptized and married, a couple that had avoided such customary strictures could expect to live without fear of persecution thanks to the sheltering authority of Russian law.²

² See, for example, Nikolai Astyrev, Na taezhnykh progalinakh: Ocherki zhizni naseleniia vostochnoi Sibiri (Moscow: Tipografija D.I. Inozemtseva, 1891), 197-198.
to an Orthodox missionary station became a regular plot twist in late nineteenth century
Buryat plays extolling romantic love and criticizing custom as backwards and hostile to
happiness and social progress. Even the Orthodox clergy framed the baptisms they
carried out in such terms. Missionary Ksenofont Popov succinctly wrote, “Ordinarily,
[Buryats] baptize in order to enter into marriage without paying kalym, according to
Orthodox rites.”

The trope of the runaway wife suggests that changing one’s legal status through
conversion was a relatively simple affair, quickly accomplished through a visit to the
nearest Orthodox missionary. In reality, such transitions were anything but clear-cut. The
two legal systems, crucial parts of imperial administrative structure in the region, did not
neatly parallel each other. Rather, they overlapped in some areas and coexisted in an
undefined or tense relationship in others. These legal complexities resulted in the creation
of bureaucratic procedures, largely based within the Orthodox Church, which women
seeking conversion and those associated with their cases were required to negotiate, and
which brought missionaries into intimate contact with Buryats and Buryat understandings
of Orthodoxy. The encounter between Buryats and missionaries over the conversion and
marriage of Buryat women produced new ideas about the nature of Buryatness and
Orthodoxy that were inflected with the complex set of issues linked to the problem of the
runaway wife, including law, custom, the proper state of marital relationships, questions
of social progress and reform, and the status of women. Through this encounter, custom
and customary law came to be upheld as key markers of Buryatness; however, they were

3 Tristra Newyear, “‘Our Primitive Customs’ and ‘Lord Kalym’: The Evolving Buryat
4 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 188, l. 17.
brought into line with Russian ideas about the nature of law as a codified and permanent system. Orthodoxy was also reshaped, becoming positively associated with modernity and the liberation of women and of the individual from authoritarian restraint.

To a certain extent, the discussions that took place within the encounter over conversion and marriage invoked a question that drove fierce arguments in Orthodox missionary circles about the assimilative value of conversion in the context of the Russian Empire. This factor contributed to the orientation of the discussions around the nature and definition of the Orthodox and Buryat communities. Debates about the relationship between Orthodoxy and Buryatness were centered on the question of conversion’s transformative powers. As Robert Geraci has found, theorists of mission during the late nineteenth century were highly conflicted and espoused nuanced and complex views about whether or not conversion transformed non-Russians into Russians. Geraci concludes that these discussions demonstrate both the unstable nature of conceptions of Russianness and the ultimate dependence of Russianness on non-Russians for its constitution. This parallels Gauri Viswanathan’s observation that conversion cannot be easily defined as either an “assimilative or an oppositional gesture” but should rather be understood as an attempt to negotiate, critique, or dispute the boundaries and nature of communities. The discussions provoked by the legal problems surrounding conversion and marriage were, effectively, attempts to define what constituted Orthodox and Buryat behavior and interpersonal relations, as well as the relationships of such to Buryat custom and customary law; these attempts had serious implications for the

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6 Viswanathan, 42.
questions of where the boundaries between Orthodoxy and Buryatness lay, or even whether there were any.

Conversion, as an action, a subject of critique, and a social position served to negotiate the boundaries of belonging in Orthodoxy and Buryatness in a variety of ways. The cynical remarks of missionaries such as Ksenofont Popov notwithstanding, priests and women routinely argued that conversion was (or should be) a transformative shift that transferred individuals from one state of being to the other. Within such arguments, Orthodoxy and Buryatness were mutually exclusive: an Orthodox person behaved and was entitled to be treated in an Orthodox fashion, rather than subjected to physical abuse, the deprivation of free will, and kalym, upheld as markers of Buryatness. For priests, women’s conversions exposed a specific set of concerns about the relationship between converts and communities. Orthodox missionary philosophy of the time argued that women, through their maternal roles, were either the disseminators of primitive, heathen practices or the bearers of Orthodox social change.\textsuperscript{7} In application, though, this called into question whether women automatically assumed such status through conversion, or required outside protection and tutelage to achieve it. Despite their faith in the possibility of achieving social change by converting women, missionaries worried that the confessional law system itself led to conversions being undertaken without conviction, a state of affairs that negated any meaningful distinction between Buryatness and Orthodoxy and made social change impossible. Convert and non-convert men, on the other hand, argued that one could be both Orthodox and Buryat. Depicting Buryatness as a set of contractual conditions and relationships grounded in customary law and custom,

\textsuperscript{7} Geraci, 123.
they argued that conversion neither exempted one from such conditions, nor precluded participation in such relationships. This view implied that women continued to be subject to marital arrangements contracted according to Buryat custom, but also that Orthodox men should not be excluded from Buryat institutions or persecuted by Buryat authorities and that conversion provided them with resources to advocate for their own enfranchisement in these respects.

The empire provided key means through which ideas about the nature of Buryatness and Orthodoxy were formulated. Customary law referred to an operational legal space within imperial law that was occupied by Buryat custom, but also entailed the local upholding of customary law products that were produced by imperial processes. In this respect, imperial ways of imagining and managing difference provided means by which local actors came to interpret self and community. The encounter over conversion and marriage caused some Buryats to proactively adopt and utilize imperially-sponsored ideas of what Buryat customary law was. To assert the parity of customary law with Orthodox law, they upheld a published collection of Buryat customary law based on incomplete and unratified attempts to codify custom as representative of custom. The missionaries supported this process to a limited extent by treating custom as a codified and stable entity even as they asserted Orthodox law’s moral superiority.

The Russian government granted Buryats the right under imperial law to self-administration of certain matters via customary law as early as 1727, when this issue became a part of the negotiations surrounding treaties confirming the location of the Russian/Chinese border in the region and determining which Buryat and Mongol tribes were subject to whose authority. Helen Sharon Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats: Administrative Reform in Nineteenth Century Russia” (Ph. D. diss., University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1984), 92-93.
As Virginia Martin points out in her study of the Kazakh *adat* customary legal system under Russian administration, “custom” is, by its very nature, flexible and subject to “flux and flow” based on context and interpretation. Consequently, the introduction through imperial rule and contact of customary law as a codified, permanent, and inflexible body of law amounted to a major shift in how “custom” was conceived of, orienting it more towards European understandings of law as stable and text-based. This process was a historical accident among the Buryats, driven by the context of encounter and the chance publication of a key legal collection by an uninvolved third party in Warsaw. Consequently, it is impossible to argue, as Robert Crews does in the case of Islam, that the orientation of Buryat custom towards Russian legal standards was the result of a lengthy and deliberate process of negotiation between Buryats and tsarist authorities. Nor did customary law trigger the direct sense of orientation towards imperial authority that Crews argues took root among the empire’s Muslims. Nonetheless, the imperial creation of “customary law” as a legal category did shift Buryat ways of thinking about custom to bring them, at least partially, into line with Russian ideas about the nature of law. This adoption led to an incongruity between Buryat ways of thinking about customary law and Russian ways of thinking about customary law. The style of imperial governance that had produced the customary law collection out of an effort to channel and manage diversity fell into disfavor in the second half of the nineteenth century; it is telling that the published collection of customary law the Buryats drew on was intended to allow scholarly readers a window into the workings of a primitive society rather than serve as an administrative guide. Consequently, Buryats upheld customary

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10 Crews, *For Prophet and Tsar*. 
law as a codified legal system on par with Orthodox law even as Russians increasingly came to reject customary law as backward and out of keeping with the empire’s quintessential Russianness.11

Orthodoxy went through a similar transformation, as the imperial context of the encounter allowed its proponents to positively situate it within the context of discourses of affect, selfhood, and modernity in a way that would have been impossible within discussions of marriage in European Russia. Analyzing the use of ideas of affective marriage in petitions for divorce submitted by women from European Russia’s “middling classes,” Barbara Alpern Engel finds that the notions of individual choice implicit in such arguments were linked to changing ideas about selfhood within patriarchal and autocratic contexts. This “assertion of selfhood against the superordinate authority of others” effectively linked romantic marriage to ideas of modernity. As Engel demonstrates, Russian legal authorities remained hostile towards such arguments, declining to grant women divorce on such grounds, an attitude the Russian Orthodox Church shared.12 As a whole, both women’s petitions and missionaries’ responses typed customary Buryat practice as patriarchal, collective, primitive, and oppressive, while Orthodoxy was implied to be superior, friendly to selfhood, and even romantic. Both women’s petitions and missionaries’ written discussions about them are fraught with language focusing on the importance of affective relations within marriage, particularly the barbarity of forced marriage and the superiority of marriage according to individual choice and inclination. Some Baikal missionaries were friendly towards such arguments, justifying remarrying

11 For a brief discussion of the implications that the rise of Romantic nationalism in Russia had for ideas of how the empire’s minorities were to be governed, see Geraci, 25-27.
12 Engel, Breaking the Ties that Bound, 50, 51, 54.
convert women on the grounds that their customary marriages had been forcible, while their Orthodox marriages would be to partners of their choosing and even resulting from love. However, the description of Orthodoxy in terms of such languages had its limits. Buryat women in Orthodox marriages petitioned to leave their husbands on the same grounds as their non-convert counterparts, describing their husbands as abusive, primitive, un-loving, and un-Orthodox. They found no support within the church, which always responded that divorce was forbidden by canon law. Thus, Orthodox missionaries were only willing (or able) to make Orthodoxy a religion friendly to affect, selfhood, and modernity when dealing with individuals outside of the church.

The encounter that occurred over conversion and marriage was intensely productive of new meanings of Orthodoxy and Buryatness for several reasons. Structurally, conversion and marriage as linked events sat at a unique point of contact and transfer between Orthodox and customary legal systems. Moreover, the written customary law itself treated conversion and marriage as the sole point of such transition which it governed; given this, conversion and marriage created a situation in which both parties had a unique incentive to consider referring to the codified customary law. The terms of the debate thus directly centered on the application, nature, and implications of the two different systems. However, a variety of cultural and social causes combined to make the encounter one of particular significance in terms of community definition for both Russian and Buryat participants.

For Russians, particularly those in contact with non-Russians, the late nineteenth century was a time when marriage bore tremendous value as a symbol of a wide range of social beliefs. Scholarship on other empires has shown that gender played a key role as a
marker of difference in imperial encounters. The social status and sexuality of women, in particular, functioned in the European view as discursive signs of foreignness and relative level of civilization. Such beliefs took root more slowly in Russia than elsewhere.

Tristra Newyear notes that although Russian observers and officials used kalym as a hallmark by which they could classify and group the legal practices of the empire’s non-Russian subjects, their descriptions were largely free of the moral judgment and prurience that marked even the earliest European writings about imperial encounters. However, this shifted across the nineteenth century. From the introduction of Speransky’s 1822 law code for Siberian natives to the rise of ethnography in the second half of the century, imperial rhetoric and administration increasingly presupposed a sharp civilizational differential across the empire’s population. By the late nineteenth century, kalym, which had come to stand for an entire cultural system that dehumanized and crippled its participants, was well-entrenched as a symbol of Oriental inferiority. This spilled over into rhetoric about Orthodox marriage, as church authors began to argue that Christianity

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14 For an overview of how Speransky’s statute was intended to integrate Siberia’s non-Russians into Russia, see Marc Raeff, *Siberia and the Reforms of 1862* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1956), and Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats”.

liberated women from the “slavish conditions they had endured in heathen societies.”

Parallel discussions were held in the context of wide-ranging debates about the place of women in society and the role of the structure of the marital relationships endorsed by Russian civil law and Orthodox religious law in confining women to specific social positions; here, the issues sometimes functioned as a proxy for debates about the degree to which Russia itself was backward and needed reform. The Orthodox Church hewed to a traditionalist argument in these debates, relying on the assertion that family structure was at the “foundation of [the existing] social and political order.” It found itself in a very different position in the Baikal region, where its agents were culturally primed to treat both kalym and Orthodox marriage as symbols of tremendous social significance and objects both central to and symbolic of broader hopes for social change.

Social and cultural shifts affecting Buryats positioned them to also see kalym and Orthodox marriage as of tremendous cultural and social importance. On a practical note, across the nineteenth century, kalym rose sharply to between three hundred and eight hundred rubles, vastly outstripping the earnings of most families. This was accompanied by a transition from payment in livestock to partial payment in rubles. As a result of these shifts, families faced difficulty in gathering the wealth necessary to gain brides for their sons, and were sometimes obliged to take on large debts or place sons in indentured servitude to wealthy men who promised them assistance in finding wives. Brides’ families, not the brides themselves, received kalym, and remaining unmarried had serious

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17 Engel, 3-4, and Wagner, 3.
social consequences for women. Consequently, women had no material incentive to marry for kalym, and the inability of men to muster the necessary financial resources presented them with major difficulties. In light of these developments, conversion marriages presented one possible solution, although they ran the risk of angering the bride’s family over lost kalym. However, such social shifts occurred in the context of broad changes regarding marriage. As Tristra Newyear demonstrates, the late nineteenth century saw considerable discussion rooted in the problem of the cost of kalym about the role of women in Buryat society and whether or not traditional Buryat marriage patterns were primitive and antithetical to progress. Kalym was publicly condemned, and resolutions banning it were issued in certain areas. Public figures advocated for affective marriage and treating women not “as we do our livestock,” but as “bosom friends,” and described Buryat custom as oppositional to such practices. These discursive habits persisted even after kalym virtually vanished as an institution in the early twentieth century. Women’s petitions reflect many of these ideas, typing customary practice as patriarchal, collective, primitive, and oppressive, while describing Orthodoxy as superior, friendly to selfhood, and even romantic.

Speculating about the reasons for the sharp divide between Buryat men’s and women’s arguments is somewhat hazardous, given the paucity of relatively neutral extant

20 Some brides were given a separate dowry [pridanoe] that consisted primarily of household goods and jewelry indicative of their married status; this practice increased in the late nineteenth century. Basaeva, 119-120.
21 Newyear, 10-14.
sources about the period. Marriages were frequently reconfigured, whether formally ended, simply abandoned, or brought into being contradictory to the plans of women’s families. The historical record suggests that women were not infrequently the initiators of such reconfigurations, although the near-complete absence of material dealing with abandoned women may simply suggest that runaway men were more “normal” or less socially disruptive than runaway women. Property and social status seem to have played a major role in determining how much conflict a woman’s departure caused. The petitions I analyze suggest that women’s remedies within the realm of custom for marital conflict, discord, and incompatibility were largely informal, dependent primarily upon the willingness of her family to assist or shelter her, or the social standing of the man she became affiliated with. A woman’s family’s ability to assist her was linked to kalym. Formally ending a marriage or engagement, which may have been desirable from a woman’s perspective, could be difficult from her family’s, as it required recompense to her husband or fiancé for the kalym he had given them. If the family could not, or would not, pay, ending the relationship may have been difficult or impossible. Women thus had a particular practical interest in advancing the argument that conversion meant they

22 The writings of missionaries and pre-revolutionary ethnographers form the bulk of the available sources; missionaries’ works, while detailed, are extremely problematic as descriptive sources. Pre-revolutionary ethnographers were more interested in the rituals surrounding marriage than its pragmatics, and lacked access to or interest in women’s perspectives on the issue. Relevant ethnographies include Matvei Nikolaevich Khangalov, Sobranie sochenenii v trekh tomakh (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo OAO “Respublikanskaia tipografia”, 2004), 1:176-183, 1:208-225, 2: 46-87; M. Krol’, “Brachnye obriady i obychai u zabaikal’skich buriat,” IVSOIRGO 24, no. 1 (1893): 55-79; and M.A. Krol’, Brachnoe pravo inorodtsev selenginskogo okruga (Irkutsk: Tipolitografii P.I. Makushina, 1895). Basaeva’s Sem’ia i brak u buriat is unique in its focus on the pragmatics of marriage, but relies heavily and uncritically on missionaries’ and ethnographers’ writings.
should not be subject to such ties, as it represented the possibility of gaining the protection of an external authority of neither family nor partner could help them.

A similar set of issues incentivized men to engage with the missionaries. The need to marry without having enough money to pay *kalym* and the departure of a wife without the repayment of *kalym* could, in some cases, be resolved by appeal to the church. For men, though, these issues seem to have been closely related to their relationships with the broader community in which they lived. Conflict about marriage sometimes brought men into conflict with community leaders and heads of extended families, a situation that threatened their economic and social status. Consequently, appealing to an outside authority may have provided a means of protecting their positions within the community in the face of considerable pressure, a situation that required the denial of the existence of a sharp boundary between Orthodoxy and Buryatness.

**The Limits of the Evidence**

This study draws on a collection of petitions from the mid 1870s to 1917 from the archival records of the Ust-Ordinsk Orthodox missionary station, located north of Irkutsk. The station was only constructed, as were the region’s other missionary stations, in the late 1860s. Conversion and marriage had been an issue of contention across the region since at least the early nineteenth century. Anecdotal evidence from British missionaries in the region in the early nineteenth century supports this, as does the emphasis in the customary law on how conversion affected, or did not affect marriage – the sheer amount of page space devoted it in the codified customary law suggested that it was an issue of intense concern for the Buryat drafters and Russian officials working on the codification
project. However, for a variety of reasons, the Ust-Ordinsk petitions are the only extant first-person evidence of debate over this issue.

Although runaways and eloping couples had fled to Orthodox churches for decades before the 1860s, they had gone to parish churches that served the region’s Russian inhabitants. When the missionary effort was reinvigorated and redesigned in the 1860s, missionaries specifically tasked with handling Buryat convert affairs were assigned to Buryat districts and stayed more or less stationary within those districts. They were more aware of the legal issues involved with conversion than their village counterparts, and, indeed, were frequently ordered by the hierarchy to investigate and maintain records about cases of conversion for divorce or marriage. Moreover, the fact that the missionaries were stationary rather than moving meant that they could keep extensive records and pursue correspondence in a way that earlier mobile missionaries had not been able to. Thus, pastoral practices that promoted the creation of such an archive only began in the late 1860s.

The Ust-Ordinsk petition collection is unique within the region: a glance over the documents of the Baikal region’s other missionary churches reveals no trace of similar petitions, or even any evidence that they ever existed. A specific set of local coincidences of interest between missionaries and Buryats led to its creation; consequently, the collection should be regarded as reflective of local, rather than regional or imperial, views on Orthodoxy and conversion. A variety of circumstances combined to create the surge of petitions around marriage and divorce in Ust-Orda. The document trail indicates that both the Irkutsk Consistory and local missionaries had an intense interest in marriage. This preoccupation created a self-reinforcing process in which the channeling
of investigations and petitions up the hierarchy encouraged even closer observation and more paperwork. The interest of the missionaries also created an opening for local Buryats: if the missionaries had not been interested in adjudicating marriage-related claims and using them as an avenue to assert the church’s authority, Buryats never would have come to use petitions the church as a method for resolving marital disputes that were far more complex than the trope of the runaway wife would suggest.

There is no question that scribes were heavily involved in the creation of the petitions; literacy rates in the area were low, and many of the petitions are highly formulaic, presenting over and over again the same stories of abused wives, abandoned husbands, and husbands whose wives were stolen from them. However, scribes in the area were integrated into the fabric of local life, and should not be regarded as members of a community separate from that of their clients. Although some anecdotal evidence suggests that Russian exiles living in the region were hired as scribes by Buryat authorities, documents in the church archive indicate that Buryats were also performing such duties. Moreover, as literacy grew among the Buryat population across the nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Buryats likely worked as scribes.23 Some petitions bear obvious signs of having been drafted by someone affiliated with the church; in the more extreme cases, there are even drafts of petitions preserved in the Ust-

Ordinsk church records. Most petitions, though, were written independently of the church, although they may have been crafted due to suggestions or demands made by missionaries. In a few rare cases when the author of the petition is identified in the document, some of those authors were the Buryat neighbors of petitioners. Petitioners and petition-writers thus seem to have co-existed, at least to some extent, within the same communities, and cannot be viewed as belonging to mutually exclusive cultural or social groups. Additionally, the very formulas used in the petitions link the scribes to Buryat communities. During this period, a number of western Buryat playwrights and leaders utilized descriptions of kalym and Buryat custom that were strikingly similar to those employed by Buryat women in petitions to Orthodox priests. This indicates that such discourses were in broad circulation among Buryats in the region, and not solely the creation of a small mixed or Russian group of scribes.

The complex authorship of the material found in the petitions raises the question of how the stories relayed in them should be interpreted. As scholars working with similar documents in other contexts have pointed out, it is reductive to treat the representations of events found in petitions and influenced by motive, discourse, and genre as either “true” or “false.” In her analysis of petitions filed by often-illiterate Russian women seeking separation from their husbands, Barbara Alpern Engel notes that discourses themselves provide windows into broad cultural shifts and “limits of acceptable conduct” in society. Moreover, it is questionable whether there is a clear distinction between representation and reality as regards petitions. Gregory Freeze argues

24 See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, ll. 26-27.
25 Newyear, 10-15. “Western Buryat” is the blanket term used to describe Buryats living on the western side of Lake Baikal, including the Ust-Orda region.
26 Engel, 11.
that petitions themselves served to educate individuals about the proper way to express or understand their desires and experiences using circulating discourses. In this respect, the very act of having a formulaic petition drafted may have educated petitioners about the ideas contained in the petition. Natalie Zemon Davis suggests that fictive elements are a necessary part of any attempt to describe an event: “shaping choices of language, detail, and order are needed to present an account that seems to both writer and reader true, real, meaningful, and/or explanatory.” Consequently, fiction is not necessarily falsehood, but rather a tool for relaying perceived fact, bringing “verisimilitude or moral truth.” In short, petitions performed a recursive function by capturing the experiences of men and women; they encouraged the shaping of experience in certain ways, and reiterated the perceived truthfulness of that experience to petitioner and audience, if the audience was favorably disposed towards the petitioner.

The petitions may have been the result of a number of local conditions, but the locality, locals themselves, and local beliefs about marriage, conversion, and divorce were still very much tied to larger imperial discourses. As was discussed earlier, the very existence of a codified body of customary law was the result of imperial intervention among the Buryats. Moreover, local missionaries were in regular contact with the Orthodox church hierarchy in Irkutsk about marriages and divorces. They passed the hierarchy’s concerns on to their parishioners and petitioners, who were consequently in the position of responding to the comparatively metropolitan concerns of church officials in Irkutsk and being influenced by the way in which those concerns were phrased.

Finally, Buryat discourses critical of *kalym* and customary marriage practices were themselves influenced by imperial ethnographic practices, in which *kalym* became a key marker of the inferiority of its practitioners in comparison to Russians.\(^{29}\) Although the Ust-Ordinsk marriage petitions were the result of local conditions, they are symbolic of a locality influenced by broad imperial ways of imagining (and managing) difference within the empire.

**A Note on Terminology**

I use the term “customary” to describe the range of non-Orthodox forms of marriage and marital practices that were possible for Buryats living in the area, both those explicitly outlined in Samokvasov’s customary law and those not. When petition writers and priests wrote about such marriages, they were usually labeled as customary—“according to shamanist custom” [*po shamanskomu obychaiu*], for example. Such descriptions connoted legally codified and contractually binding practices such as *kalym*, but also invoked more nebulous ideas of spousal treatment and prerogative associated with “custom.” My use of the term “custom” is an attempt to capture my subjects’ views on the idea, but also to acknowledge the coexistence of a codified body of “customary” law and everyday “customary” practice. That the two existed side-by-side and were conflated to the point of sharing terminology does not mean that they were always identical, although at times, they were believed to be identical. “Customary” must thus be read as invoking a multiplicity of concepts: “what Buryats do”, “what everybody knows Buryats do,” and “what the codified customary law says Buryats do.”

\(^{29}\) Newyear, 5-11
The Complexities of Confessional Law in the Baikal Region

The popular imagination of conversion as a relatively simple solution to marital discord and complications reinforces the historiographical argument that the Russian Empire was a heterogeneous entity administered (and united) through the confessionalization of the empire’s diverse religions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Under this program, imperial authorities delegated religious institutions considerable power to regulate the daily affairs of believers, including, depending on the religion, marriage and divorce, debts and contracts, and even certain types of crimes. The religious institutions were charged with overseeing many facets of civil law, and were incorporated into Russian legal structures as legal authorities in their own right. Religious practice and legal subjecthood were thus intimately associated. Consequently, a number of different family law codes coexisted within the empire, with the corollary that religious conversion theoretically meant transferring one’s legal subjecthood in such affairs from one religious authority to another. This is the presumption underlying the public wisdom described above: by converting to Orthodoxy, Buryats neatly stepped through a confessional boundary into a different set of legal practices.

Within the Baikal region, Orthodoxy existed side-by-side with two other religions. At the time of Russian arrival in the area in the mid-seventeenth century, the

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30 Crews’ *For Prophet and Tsar* is the most detailed case study of this process. For an overview of the historical process and context of the confessionalization of Russia’s non-Orthodox religions, see Crews, “Empire and the Confessional State: Islam and Religious Politics in Nineteenth-Century Russia,” *American Historical Review* 108, no. 1 (February 2003), 57-67.
Buryats espoused both shamanism and Buddhism, known locally as lamaism. Shamanism, seen by European observers as lacking a coherent theology and a system of authoritative religious training for clergy, was never deemed a candidate for confessionalization by the Russian government. Buddhism embarked on the road to confessionalization with the creation of the state-sanctioned office of Bandido Khambolama, or head of Russia’s Buddhists, by Catherine II in 1764. However, Russia’s Buddhist institutions never claimed the authority to regulate marriage, likely because Buddhism has never focused significant attention on the regulation of the lives of lay believers.\(^{31}\) Instead, the state placed the regulation of the marriages of both Buddhist and shamanist Buryats within the legal purview of Buryat customary law and made its administration the realm of Buryat officials tasked with interfacing between Buryats and the Russian administration. Customary law was not technically “confessional,” as it did not reflect the specific practices of one religion and was not administered by religious authorities. All the same, it fulfilled the functions performed elsewhere by confessional law, and in areas where some Buryats had converted to Orthodoxy, existed side-by-side with Orthodox confessional law. Complicating the situation still further, customary law governed a much wider set of issues than Orthodox confessional law did. Consequently, even if a convert became subject to Orthodox law regarding some family affairs, he or she remained subject to customary law in some criminal cases, matters of property, and in terms of the local administration.

Determining what exactly constituted “Buryat customary law” in practice is difficult, if not impossible. The *Ustaw ob upravlenii sibirskikh inorodtsev* of 1822

\(^{31}\) On the status of Buryat Buddhism within the Russian empire, see Tsyrempilov, 105-130, and H.S. Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 231-250.
mandated the codification of Buryat customary law, but despite several different attempts, the various compilations were never ratified, and the government abandoned the project after 1841.\footnote{Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats,” 92. Efforts to codify customary law among the Kazakhs also halted in 1841. This may have been due to imperial discomfort with rebellions in the Caucasus; see Martin, 45-46. Practical issues surrounding the implementation of the heavily-modified versions of the law that emerged from the committee process may have also played a part. See A. Nol’de, “K istorii sostavleniia proekta “Svoda stepnykh zakonov kochevnykh inorodtsev vostochnoi Sibiri,” in Sbornik statei, posviashchennykh S.F. Platonovu (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia glavnogo upravleniia udelov, 1911), 502-521. On the codification of Buryat marriage practices as part of processes of imperial governance through categorization, see Newyear, 5-6.} Nonetheless, the statute maintained a legal space for customary law, which was overseen by Buryat self-administration institutions that were responsible to the Russian imperial government, but granted permission to use oral, rather than written, systems of adjudication. The Orthodox Church was thus required to recognize the existence of Buryat customary law, and did so, developing a series of bureaucratic precautions to deal with marriage, the primary arena of customary law with which it came into contact. What functioned within the space designated for customary law is indeterminate. As Virginia Martin points out in her study of the Kazakh adat customary legal system under Russian administration, “custom” is, by its very nature, flexible and subject to “flux and flow.” In the Kazakh case, the idea of customary law as a codified and permanent body of law only existed because of Russian intervention in the legal system.\footnote{Martin, 4.} To a Buryat, “custom” and “customary law” thus included a greater range of meanings and possibilities for action than any codified version of it could reflect. This is not to suggest that the Buryats did not have a written law code before the nineteenth century; indeed, Mongolian written law has a lengthy history stretching back to Chinggis Khan. However, these codes dealt with sharply different subject matter than
Samokvasov’s. For example, one late eighteenth century Buryat example devoted eight articles to gambling and intoxication, while the ninth and final article dealt with abuse of the post system.\textsuperscript{34} In this respect, Russian intervention served to change the scope of practices that were affected by codification.

There are strong indications that the creation of the codified collection, even if it remained formally unratified, affected the constitution of Buryat custom as an applied legal system. Valentin Riasanovsky, whose 1937 \textit{Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law} remains the best guide to the complex and deep historical roots of the genre of written Buryat law, wrote that he was “in possession of exact data” demonstrating that the codified law had been implemented to some extent by Buryat administrators and Russian judges adjudicating Buryat cases. However, he did not publish his data, instead referring parenthetically to the adoption of a Russian statute of limitations in Buryat legal cases.\textsuperscript{35} The subsequent lack of investigation into this question has created a loop in which other scholars refer to Riasanovsky on this issue, but the known historical record includes no proof that this was the case.\textsuperscript{36} As I will demonstrate, despite the lack of formal ratification and the difficulty of encapsulating a category as broad as custom, a codified version of customary law came to be upheld for the purposes of negotiation about conversion and marriage by both Buryats petitioning the church and the church itself.

In 1874, D. Ia. Samokvasov, a legal scholar based at Warsaw University, found a set of documents that he believed to be “a collection of the customary law of the Siberian \textit{inorodtsy}” in the university’s library. In 1876, he published the documents with the

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\item \textsuperscript{34} Valentin Aleksandrovich Riasanovsky, \textit{Fundamental Principles of Mongol Law} (Tientsin, 1937), 68-75.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Riasanovsky, 72-74, 76, 193.
\item \textsuperscript{36} See, for example, Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats,” 92.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
intention of allowing readers a window into the social structures of a primitive society.\textsuperscript{37} The papers were products of the codification projects of the 1820s and 1830s, and had belonged to Senator Gube, a high-ranking official based in St. Petersburg who had encountered the collection as a part of his duties and decided that it was worth preserving for posterity even if it was never ratified. By the point that Gube encountered it, the collection had already advanced along the codification process far enough that the imperial chancellory had translated it into Russian.\textsuperscript{38} Consequently, it had already been extensively modified from its original form. This is immediately evident in the text from the presence of appropriate verses from the Bible explaining the official Orthodox stance on the marriages of women who converted. It may have been altered in other areas as well. In his 1911 study of the aborted codification process, Avgust Nol’dе wrote that the documents that arrived in St. Petersburg went through an extensive process of revision. Excerpts from Chinese and Mongolian legal codes as well as materials from Russian treaties with the Buryats were added where the originals were found wanting. Wording was clarified based on comments from Russian Mongolists and travelers, and organizational divisions were elaborated. Nol’dе suggests that the articles governing marriage, in particular, were subject to this.\textsuperscript{39} Samokvasov offers no information whatsoever as to what stage of the editing process Gube’s documents represent. Consequently, while tampering is evident, it is impossible to determine which, if any,}

\textsuperscript{37} D. Ia. Samokvasov, \textit{Sbornik obychnogo prava sibirskikh inorodtsev} (Warsaw: Tipografiia Ivana Noskovskogo, 1876), i-ix.
\textsuperscript{38} Samokvasov, ix.
\textsuperscript{39} Nol’dе, 506-507, 509-510.
parts of the documents are, in fact, original.\textsuperscript{40} Despite these questions, once the book made its way to Siberia, both Buryats and the missionaries they dealt with began to quote it as “Buryat customary law.”

References to “custom” and “customary law” thus encompassed a range of meanings. On one level, they were deliberate references to a written code of law that was construed to be the Buryat equivalent of Orthodox family law. They also referred to the much more nebulous range of Buryat daily practices and negotiations. This conflation of terminology is visible in the works of contemporary ethnographers. Matvei Nikolaevich Khangalov, an extraordinarily prolific Buryat ethnographer of the region, wrote a short essay entitled “A Few Norms of Customary Law” [“Nekotorye normy obychnogo prava”] in which he detailed a whole range of practices regarding the remarriage of widows that appear nowhere in Samokvasov’s collection.\textsuperscript{41} Finally, in certain discourses, “custom” and “customary law” stood as key markers of the inferiority of Buryatness in comparison with Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{42} The church tended to view “custom” and “customary law” from all three perspectives, as did Buryats seeking the church’s support; Buryats petitioning against the church espoused the first two. Consequently, it is frequently impossible to determine whether or not claimants were basing their arguments on ideas of

\textsuperscript{40} Fifty copies of the law from an unknown point in the revision process were published in 1841 and distributed to officials who were involved with the codification process; these may be what Gube obtained. Raeff, 125. These copies do not seem to have gone into heavy circulation in the Baikal region, as Riasanovsky’s only citation for the products of the codification process directs readers to Samokvasov’s volume. Riasanovsky, 76.
\textsuperscript{41} Khangalov, 1:166-168.
\textsuperscript{42} John Slocum argues that the legal label of inorodets, enshrined by the 1822 statute, was both a legal category and a statement of relative civilizational development; the label was thus simultaneously escapable and inescapable. Slocum, “Who, and When, Were the Inorodtsy? The Evolution of the Category of “Alien” in Imperial Russia,” \textit{Russian Review} 57, no. 2 (April 1998): 173-190.
the law as a codified institution. However, the content of petitions on all sides suggests that claims were situated in a few key areas of conflict, to which the codified version of the law provides a guide.

The regulation of marriage, and in particular the impact of conversion on marriage, was a major focus of the customary law as published by Samokvasov, making the nexus between conversion and marriage a point at which Samokvasov’s collection may have been uniquely useful to Buryats seeking to contest Russian authority. For example, six of the eighteen pages devoted to the customary law of the Verkholensk Buryats focused on rules for non-Orthodox marriages, as well as legal guidelines for when already-married women could be baptized and how conversion would affect their marriages.43 The goal of the customary law regarding marriage and conversion was to prevent the conversion of a married woman from breaking her marriage. To this end, authorities encountering a runaway wife who had gotten baptized were required to determine if she had “unjustly” [nespravedlivo] run from her husband; if so, she was required to return to him, even if he was unbaptized, and live with him “according to the words of the Holy Apostle Paul (first letter to the Corinthians; chapter 7, verses 12, 13, and 14.);”44 this verse was not infrequently quoted by unbaptized Buryats in complaints to priests about the baptism of runaway wives.

43 Samokvasov, 73-78. I will use this subset of the larger customary law as the source material for the rest of my discussion of codified customary law, as the majority of the petitions I examine come from Buryats who lived in the Verkholensk region. 
44 Ibid., 77. My translation of the relevant verses from the Holy Synod’s 1876 Russian-language translation of the Bible reads “12)…if a brother has a nonbelieving wife, and she agrees to live with him, then he should not leave her; 13) and a wife who has a nonbelieving husband, and he agrees to live with her, should not leave him. 14) A nonbelieving husband is sanctified through a believing wife, and a nonbelieving wife is
A further concern was that a runaway wife be prevented from marrying another man in the event that *kalym* had been given for her or an exchange of brides had been made, in which one of the husband’s female relatives married one of the wife’s male relatives in place of *kalym*. Samokvasov’s customary law presumed a close link between the conversion of a runaway wife and her remarriage, which had the potential to “deprive” [*lishit’sia*] her first husband of the value of whatever he had given for her. To prevent such instances, the law charged priests, as well as the convert woman’s godparents, with admonishing the woman against marrying another “without the permission of the first [husband] and without his satisfaction” in terms of repayment of *kalym* or settling any other exchange that had taken place. Priests were also ordered to notify the woman’s husband or the head of her clan upon her baptism and “to investigate the cause of her escape and baptism from the moment of [her] first approach [to the priest]” so that they could take into account her marital status and the state of her relationships when deciding whether or not to baptize her.45

Another purpose of the investigations and notifications was to determine if the woman had “exceptional causes” [*osobye prichiny*] for running away from her husband. Samokvasov’s collection left vague what constituted an “exceptional cause”. Authorities were instructed to evaluate the “justness” or “unjustness” [*spravedlivost’, nespravedlivost*] of her decision to run. The question of what constituted a “just” decision to run was most directly addressed when the law ordered Buryat authorities to evaluate a husband’s guilt “according to the measure of the unpleasantness [inflicted on]

sanctified through a believing husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now- they are blessed.”

45 Samokvasov, 77.
his wife”. That this should be read as physical abuse is supported by the large numbers of petitions from women asking for conversion and remarriage referencing “cruel treatment” [zhestokoe obrashchenie] and frequent communications from their husbands defending against or preempting allegations of the same.46 Another issue left open was the question of whether or not a first marriage marked by extreme cruelty meant that a convert woman was free to remarry an Orthodox man after her conversion.

Although the customary law laid out rules for how the conversion of a married woman was to affect her marriage and how marriage affected the conversion of a married woman, those rules created a variety of spaces for manipulation and action by women seeking to escape marriages and men seeking the return of runaway wives. The customary law declined to state specifically whether Buryat officials or Orthodox priests were to have precedence in deciding the question of whether or not a runaway wife was “just” in her desire to leave her husband; this lack of clarity existed in practice as well, with both authorities regularly involved in adjudicating the same case. This inadvertent system of dual authority meant that the Orthodox Church could function as a court of appeal should a woman be unsuccessful in her attempt to leave her husband by using Buryat governmental structures.47 Additionally, the legal system presumed that priests would enforce or respect the customary law in their interactions with women seeking conversion, namely by investigating the women’s stories. In reality, they did not consistently do so, despite nominal pressure from the church hierarchy. Thus, although some women returned to live with their first husbands after baptism, often after their

46 Samokvasov, 76-77.
47 A similar situation existed among Kazakh women, who appealed to Russian secular authorities as an external legal authority. Martin, 102.
husbands petitioned the missionaries to have their wives returned to them, others married another man, and it only became apparent after the Orthodox marriage was finalized that they had been in a prior marriage. Once an Orthodox marriage had been performed, priests refused to split the couple, regardless of the existence of prior legitimate marriages; priests could be reprimanded, but the marriages remained in effect because of their inviolable and sacramental nature, characteristics that were never attributed to customary marriages.⁴⁸ Finally, the vague definition of what constituted an “exceptional cause” for running away created a space that women petitioning priests to allow them to convert and remarry were able to exploit, but also a space in which their husbands could protest allegations of abuse as unfair.

Customary law created a similar space of ambiguity in regard to the conversion of unmarried women, although in their case it worked in favor of their family members. At the very beginning of its section on marriage and the relationship between conversion and marriage, the law stated that “baptized inorodtsy enter into marriage with baptized women according to Christian custom.” This might seem to make the issue of an unmarried woman converting and marrying a simple one. However, the document continued on to elaborate the conditions under which an engagement or marriage between two unbaptized Buryats should be considered duly constituted. These included a verbal, rather than written, agreement before witnesses, as well as the possibility of affiancing young children and the payment of kalym by the groom’s family to the bride’s family well before the final ceremony that made the couple married rather than affianced.⁴⁹ This created an opportunity for the fathers, mothers, and brothers of newly converted women

⁴⁸ See Wagner, 67; and Engel, 15.
⁴⁹ Samokvasov, 73-75.
to argue to priests that although their daughters or sisters had not been formally married, *kalym* had in fact been exchanged, thus obligating the woman in question to her fiancé and his family.

Like the codified customary law, the Orthodox Church’s regulations for convert marriage seemed incontrovertible, but were in actuality open to negotiation, creating a space for priests and petitioners alike to act. Within this environment, appeals to uphold rules and implicit requests to ignore them both had chances of success. The Irkutsk Consistory issued frequent reiterations of rules requiring inquiries into the backgrounds of convert women, and sent lengthy, harshly worded reprimands to missionaries who violated the rules. In both administrative decisions and orders to priests, it referred to the same verses of First Corinthians laid out in the customary law as an endorsement of the primacy of pre-conversion marriages. However, it does not appear to have fined or demoted missionaries for infractions, *contra* more harshly punitive attitudes towards violations of the rules governing marriage in other parts of Russia. In this respect, the consistory struck a balance between tacitly acknowledging that violations of the rules governing conversion and marriage could be desirable, as they brought the church new converts, but were a violation of both procedure and law. This stance created a space in which missionaries could violate the rules without suffering major repercussions.

The logistics of missionary work in Siberia provided another shelter for missionaries who broke the rules and converts seeking conversion and remarriage. Priests

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50 Although the Orthodox Church’s regulations on marriage required priests to conduct checks to ensure that the couple was not underage or too closely related, these orders contained provisions specific to the region and referencing complaints that the church had received from Buryat officials. See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 8, ll. 16-17.
51 See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, l. 214ob.
had to query Buryat administrators to obtain official records about marital status; poor lines of communication, conflicts between the two parties, and bad record-keeping meant that answers were never guaranteed. In some cases, priests simply could not determine a woman’s marital status unless she told them. But this chaos also provided a convenient excuse for those priests who did not want to deal with the paperwork of background checks, or who preferred to act as their consciences dictated. When confronted with a petition from an angry first husband or admonished by the hierarchy for not performing their duties, such priests often begged ignorance of the truth of the situation or pleaded the impossibility of performing background checks under the conditions of rural Siberia. This fluid situation, dependent on the mood of the priest and his relationship with local authorities and the church hierarchy, meant that petitioning a priest for intervention could obtain positive results for women seeking to remarry as well as husbands requesting the return of runaway wives.

Yet another factor that served to restrict the ability of church rules to govern the actions of missionaries was a destabilization of culturally-dependant concepts underlying rules governing the constitution existence of a legitimate marriage. This destabilization was brought about by the imperial context of the encounter between the missionaries and the Buryats. Within Orthodox theology and state-mandated pastoral practice, key preconditions to a legitimate marriage were the consent of both parties and the absence of coercion. From the theological point of view, marriage needed to be a voluntary act. It is important to note that this was a very narrow and limited concept, not synonymous with

53 See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 51, ll. 86, 89, 108-109, 132, 136, 139.
54 See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, l. 214; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 283, ll. 40-40ob.
either personal freedom or any “doctrine of individual rights”\textsuperscript{55}. Other limits on the meaning of voluntary undertaking of marriage rose from the social context: in contemporary Russian society, arranged marriages were the norm, parental authority was absolute, marriage was viewed as a matter of economic and social necessity, and personal desire was viewed as unnecessary and potentially harmful. In this context, decrying “coercion” and ascertaining “consent” did not equate to asserting the right to individual choice in a spouse\textsuperscript{56}. However, missionary efforts to comprehend and elaborate the differences between Orthodoxy and Buryatness resulted in the argument that customary marriages were defined by the deprivation of free will and complete absence of individual choice. This depiction negated the possibility of a voluntary, consensual marriage and was perceived to be potentially harmful to the developing spirits of convert women. This, coupled with the argument that convert women had undergone a radical transformation that made it impossible for them to exist in the conditions of Buryat marriage, subtly called into question whether or not the missionaries were obligated to treat pre-conversion marriages as legitimate.

A second point of concern that caused missionaries to question the legitimacy of pre-conversion marriages centered on the potential of mixed marriages to undermine the religious belief of the Orthodox partner in the marriage. In the empire’s northwestern borderlands, the Orthodox Church negotiated strenuously with the state to ensure that rules governing religiously-mixed marriages would guarantee that the faith of the Orthodox partner remained sound and that the children of such marriages would be raised Orthodox. Paul Werth points out that this highlights a conflict between the church’s

\textsuperscript{55} Wagner, 64.
\textsuperscript{56} Engel, 49-50.
interest in preserving Orthodoxy, and the state’s interest in minimizing the possible challenge to its authority presented by mixed marriages. In light of the uncomfortable coexistence of these contradictory interests, missionaries felt it legitimate to exploit any room for maneuvering that the law opened to them if they felt that converts’ faith was at stake. Additionally, threat to faith was one of the very few issues outside of witnessed adultery, sexual incapacity, and exile to Siberia that the Holy Synod was willing to entertain as acceptable grounds for a divorce, although it is important to note that it was exceedingly rare for such a case to make it all the way to the Synod, and even rarer that divorce would be approved. Such concerns served to reinforce the belief that customary marriages should not necessarily be regarded as legitimately constituted, giving missionaries a sense that that baptizing and remarrying convert women was in the interests of Orthodoxy.

Women’s Petitions

A large portion of the petitions from women, all from recent or would-be converts, asked priests for permission to leave a marriage, whether a pre-conversion marriage to a nonconvert Buryat or a post-conversion marriage to a convert. Both types of petitions depended on a binary description of the character of interpersonal relationships found in Buryat customary marriages and those expected from Orthodox marriages. Women portrayed customary marriages as characterized by underage marriage against their wills in exchange for kalym, an ensuing life of domestic violence and

58 In one known instance, the Synod granted a divorce on the grounds that the petitioner’s Orthodox faith was threatened by that of her dukhobor husband. Wagner, 68-69.
exploitation for labor, and the hostility of neighbors and family members towards their pleas for help. These aspects of marriage were always linked rhetorically with Buryat or shamanist customs and law. The nature of Orthodox marriage was left to implication rather than directly described, but women’s petitions universally relied on the claim that an Orthodox person could not live in a marriage characterized by the markers of customary marriage. Conversion was presented as the key to escaping such marriages. For women seeking to escape a pre-conversion marriage by changing their status so that they could enter into an Orthodox marriage, conversion promised to remove them from the barbarism of their surroundings. Women seeking to leave an Orthodox marriage presented their husbands as failed converts. Having not made the transition to the behaviors and practices of an Orthodox man, such men subjected their Orthodox wives to the Buryat treatment from which the women claimed conversion exempted them.

Women’s petitions relied on claims that customary marriages were composed of a few foundational elements. They regularly argued that they had been married against their wills to men not of their choosing, had been underage when they were married, were given away for *kalym*, and had been married by their husbands for the purposes of gaining another laborer in the household. In all of these situations, women depicted themselves as having been stripped of the ability to act in their own interests by repressive fathers (or, occasionally, mothers), and/or potential husbands. Women routinely described their subordinate status and the exercise of force against them as parts of custom and customary law. Mariia Angakhaeva asked the Ust-Ordinsk missionary to allow her to separate from her violent first husband in 1888. She established immediately that she had been married to him “against my wishes” and that after their marriage, he
began to treat her cruelly and beat her. Declaring that her life with him was “slavery”, she stated that her only recourse was to “leave my heathen surroundings and accept Christianity” in order to escape “hateful cohabitation with my husband.” She was left no choice, as “under native [inorodets] law and custom,” a woman could be married and then forced to stay in a marriage without her consent and against her will.⁵⁹ Requesting baptism and remarriage, Fekla Fedorova Osodoeva made a similar argument in her 1912 petition to Archbishop Serafim of Irkutsk. Osodoeva, who was requesting baptism and remarriage, wrote that when she was given to her husband in exchange for kalym, “according to custom, [they] did not ask my wish, and I did not know my husband.” Osodoeva stated that she found out only after they were married that he was 54 years old and already had a wife, so that “from the very beginning I became more a servant than a wife.” Unable to stand living with her husband and his first wife, she ran away multiple times, but each time her father returned her to her husband. She concluded, “unable to see an escape from my father or my husband, [I] seek your defense, and sincerely ask [you] to permit me to accept holy baptism.”⁶⁰

Orthodox marriage received a sharply different treatment. By invoking custom and customary law to explain how they had been stripped of freedom of choice and positing conversion as a solution to their problems, Osodoeva and Angakhaeva offered negative definitions of Orthodox marriage: it was what customary marriage was not. Orthodoxy was thus framed as offering freedom of choice of a spouse, liberation from oppressive relationships to husbands and fathers enshrined in customary law, and a

⁵⁹ NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 268, ll. 5-50b, 33-33ob. See also NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 268, ll. 22-22ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 190, ll. 5-5ob, 28.
⁶⁰ NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 291, l. 233.
marriage in which a wife was more than a source of labor. When she completed her plea for baptism with a request for remarriage “with the person chosen by me,” Osodoeva directly stated as much.\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 291, l. 233.}

Convert women in Orthodox marriages petitioning for divorce or separation leveled the same set of criticisms against the behavior of their husbands as women seeking conversion and remarriage did. Continuing to imply that Orthodox marriage should be free of excessive physical abuse and oppression, converts requesting divorce argued that their husbands’ behavior indicated that the men were at best poor Christians, and at worst had never truly converted in the first place. Characteristics of failed conversion were physical and emotional abuse of spouses, failure to fulfill Orthodox obligations such as church attendance or baptism of children, and continued practice of shamanism. All of these practices, often labeled specifically as “Buryat” or “customary,” combined to prevent wives from living the Orthodox lifestyle that they desired to live and to which they argued they were entitled.

In 1889, Pelageia Poliakova ran away from her husband Iakov Poliakov after a particularly severe beating and petitioned for divorce. The two had gotten baptized and married 11 years before, but Poliakov had changed. As Poliakova wrote, “[after] a few years with my husband, I don’t know what happened: he began to fall away from the christian faith, began to practice shamanism.” Poliakova gave birth to five children, all of whom had died; after the death of the last, Poliakov’s violence towards her increased to new levels. She asserted that the deaths of the children were “a consequence of my husband’s bestial treatment of me.” In addition to the physical abuse, she detailed his
many transgressions against Christianity. In his “fall into apostasy from the true God and
under the influence of shamanism,” he had broken and cursed the icons that they had
been given at their wedding. Moreover, every one of the children had been buried
“according to Buryat custom,” rather than with Orthodox rites. Among Poliakov’s other
unchristian acts, she listed “annual spring migrations in a yurt according to Buryat law
but contradictory to the Christian faith,” reflecting a widely-held association between
Christianity and a settled life, but also her vision of Buryat custom and Christian practice
as being mutually exclusive.

Orthodox women petitioning for a divorce on such grounds often highlighted the
negative effects that their husbands’ unchristian behavior had on their own religious
practice. Poliakova highlighted the stakes that continuing to live with her husband had for
her conversion: “being a true Christian, I do not want to fall under the influence of [my]
husband, an apostate from the true God, and, following my husband, be made into a
heathen (sdelat’sia iazychnitsei).”62 Ekaterina Nakeimova followed a similar tactic in her
1914 petition for divorce. She stated that at the time of their baptism and marriage, “he
promised to be an orthodox Christian,” but had since stopped practicing Orthodoxy
altogether and returned to shamanism. In addition to refusing to attend confession
himself, he forbade Nakeimova and her baptized daughter to go, thus preventing them
from carrying out a key obligation of Orthodoxy.63 Aldar Anaeva declared that her
husband, Stepan Anaev, “having entered into marriage with me according to Christian
rites, kept for himself his first wife, a shamaness.” Their abuse, which left her without

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62 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 256, ll. 10-10ob, 12-13ob.
63 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 222, ll. 46-46ob.
food or clothes, placed her in an “unhappy position for an inorodka who has accepted the holy Orthodox faith.”^64

Mariia Angakhaeva’s story contextualizes these arguments about the natures of customary and Orthodox marriage and the authenticity of conversions within the network of legal systems discussed in the introduction to this chapter. Angakhaeva got baptized in order to leave her husband, apparently with the approval of the local missionary. However, once she had done so, her husband also got baptized. She claimed that he had done so solely to prevent her from leaving him, as his having become Orthodox removed one reason that the priest could have used to separate them. His baptism resulted in no meaningful change in his behavior; his Buryat practices were thus carried across the confessional boundary, and served as a fundamental marker of his un-Orthodoxy in Angakhaeva’s petition. Angakhaeva wrote that the priest sided with her, but the steppe duma, the highest level of Buryat administration, favored her husband and forced her to return to live with him.\textsuperscript{65} Petitioning the missionary’s supervisor for further intervention, she declared that conversion had done little to alter her husband’s behavior towards her: as before, he beat her cruelly. The only difference was that he now peppered his beatings with anti-convert slurs. Emphasizing that his conversion had nothing to do with his

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\textsuperscript{64} NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 78, ll. 107-107ob, 287.

\textsuperscript{65} Women regularly claimed that Buryat administrative institutions were hostile or indifferent to their claims of abuse. This was not necessarily always the case; evidence suggests some Buryat administrators supported women’s claims of abuse by gathering statements supporting their claims or taking legal action to allow the women to live separately from their husbands. See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll. 130-136ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, l. 20ob.
beliefs, she declared that “In his home, he has not a single icon; in the yurt are the same old ongons of the heathen faith.”

As the outcome of Angakhaeva’s first appeal to a priest suggests, petitions such as those described here were not guaranteed success. In most cases, it is impossible to determine the outcome. Occasionally, though, the priests did mark the petitions with notations of their administrative decisions. Women who desired to convert and then remarry had a much better chance of a favorable outcome than their counterparts who were already in Orthodox marriages. However, as Angakhaeva’s case indicates, even a favorable decision by a priest did not guarantee the cutting of ties to the first husband. Moreover, getting baptized did not necessarily mean that a woman would be able to remarry. In the case of Sanarkhan Khanbogovorna, who asked to be baptized and then married to Aishei Tumurkhanov, priest Vasilii Larev allowed her to be baptized. He then asked her first husband if he would be interested in getting baptized and marrying Khanbogovorna in the Orthodox Church; he was, and Khanbogovorna’s plans to marry Tumurkhanov came to nothing. Women already in Orthodox marriages had next to no chance of obtaining a divorce. As Evsevii, Bishop of Kirensk, wrote on the petition of Anna Khankhararova, divorce was not allowed for canonical reasons. Thus, the church was marginally, but not always, more open to mistreatment as a justification for remarriage in the case of women whose first marriages had been concluded before their conversions; this openness did not extend to women in Orthodox marriages. This does

\[66\] NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll. 5-5ob, 33-33ob. Ongons are objects representative of local spirits and deities that were often present in the homes and fields of people who practiced shamanism in the region during the period in question.

\[67\] NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 190, ll. 15-15ob, 28.

\[68\] NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, ll. 143-143ob, 196.
not mean, though, that the church was completely unsympathetic to the plight of women in abusive marriages. In the case of Mariia Anaeva, discussed above, the church gave her a small amount of money and promised that more support was on the way.\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 78, ll. 107-107ob, 287.}

**Men’s Petitions**

Given the predominance of requests for conversion and remarriage and pleas for divorce among women’s petitions, it is not surprising that the vast majority of men’s petitions to priests were requests for the return of runaway wives. While women’s petitions universally argued that Orthodoxy and Buryatness were mutually exclusive, men’s petitions paint a much more ambiguous picture of the relationship between the two. Some men accused their convert wives of living a Buryat lifestyle and violating the code of behavior expected of them as Orthodox women, thus subscribing to the idea that conversion should, but did not always, effect a change in a woman’s very way of life. More frequently, though, men argued that their wives, convert or not, were subject to laws on *kalym* and other Buryat customs. On short, conversion did not sever such connections. For themselves, men saw conversion primarily as an act that gave them standing to appeal to the Orthodox Church for assistance, but did not disenfranchise them from other avenues of legal recourse such as the local Buryat administration. In fact, convert men frequently wrote priests to request that they intervene to ensure proper adjudication of marriage-related claims by Buryat authorities whom the petitioners viewed as unreasonably biased against them. In the eyes of most male petitioners, conversion thus did little to change an individual’s subjectivity.
When it came to women, men not infrequently argued that conversion did
necessitate a change in behavior. Male converts often argued that by abandoning their
husbands, convert wives were adhering to Buryat customs in a way they should not
because of their conversions. Tarshinai Tarov, a non-convert, accused his runaway
convert wife of living “without legal Orthodox marriage with the unbaptized
Buryat…Badachaev, according to shamanist-Buryat custom.” A baptized Buryat
petitioned Prelovskii in 1894 for the return of his wife, whom he accused of stealing 350
rubles and running away to live with another man “in the role of wife according to Buryat
custom.” He described these actions as “my wife’s crime against her [Orthodox]
religion.” Ivan Shagnanov, another convert, echoed this sentiment when he wrote to
Prelovskii that his wife, Anna, “a Christian, should not live in the place of wife with
[another] man.” He also accused her of taking their young child and some of his property
when she ran, deeds that he also classified as un-Christian behavior. Shagnanov’s
petition highlights the tactical nature of such claims: a convincing totality of evidence
surrounding the case suggests that the man Shagnanova was living with was her sister’s
husband. At his wife’s behest, he had taken Shagnanova in to protect her from her
husband. Shagnanov no doubt knew this, but felt that describing the relationship as
sexual and antithetical to Orthodoxy was a better tactic for eliciting the priest’s support.
Men thus argued, as women did, that conversion created a fundamentally different set of
cultural expectations for women, separating them from Buryatness.

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70 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 230 ch. 1, ll. 23-23ob.
71 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, ll. 17-17ob.
72 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, ll. 119-119ob, 201-201ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll.
130-136ob.
Using another theme also found in women’s petitions, men portrayed their runaway wives not as independent actors, but as women whose lives were determined by their senior family members, primarily fathers and brothers, but occasionally mothers. While women’s petitions posited conversion as an escape from such subordination, men’s suggested that conversion did little to sever such connections, however antithetical to Orthodoxy they might be. Mikhail Bagazuev, a convert, depicted his wife Mariia Azaeva in such terms in an 1894 plea for her return. Azaeva had gotten baptized to marry Bagazuev after leaving her first husband, a non-convert to whom she had been given for kalym and with whom she did not want to live. Bagazuev argued that Azaeva’s mother, a “shamanist”, had “outraged and seduced her daughter, my wife…to return to her first husband Bardakhanov.” Bagazuev framed this accusation within the context of a larger conflict between Orthodoxy and shamanism, stating that if the church allowed such actions to take place, it was hindering its own growth.73 Ivan Dakhanov depicted a similar situation in a petition to the archbishop about his relationship with his fiancée, Tatiana Asolkhanova, who had gotten baptized with the intention of marrying him. Asolkhanova’s male relatives, who happened to be well-placed in the local leadership, were preventing them from marrying and persecuting them in order to “turn the newly-baptized Tatiana to heathenism [iazychestvo] again.” Dakhanov argued, as Bagazuev did, that allowing incidents such as this to go without punishment “interferes with the spread of the Holy Teachings.”74 Like women’s petitions protesting abuse by convert men,

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73 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, ll. 20-20ob, 23-23ob. See also NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 143, ll. 25a-25aob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 116, l. 30.
74 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 40, ll. 47-47a. Asolkhanova disputed Dakhanov’s version of events, stating that Dakhanov had forced her to get baptized and she did not love him or wish to marry him. NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 40, ll. 39-40ob.
men’s petitions tacitly admitted that although conversion might be held up as a radically transformative event, the reality was less clear.

Men seeking the return of runaway wives often justified their claims in petitions submitted to priests by explaining how much kalym they had paid, regardless of whether or not the marriages, or the people involved, were Orthodox. Contractual relationships associated with Buryatness and custom thus crossed confessional lines: men’s petitions depicted both converts and non-converts as being equally capable of entering into, and equally bound by, customary practices. A 1900 petition from Roman Barkhoev to Ust-Ordinsk priest Khrisanf Nepriakhin highlights this complete lack of distinction between convert and non-convert behavior in regard to kalym. Barkhoev, petitioning Nepriakhin for the return of his baptized wife, Anna Tashamaeva Grafire, reported that he paid her mother two hundred rubles, a horse, and a cow when they were married. Grafire had recently run back to her mother, who was now demanding that Barkhoev pay an additional 250 rubles for her return. Barkhoev thus openly admitted that he had paid kalym for his baptized wife and grounded his request for the priest’s intervention in that payment. Although he apparently perceived no contradiction in his own behavior, he did see one in that of his mother-in-law, whom he accused of acting in an unchristian manner by demanding more money before she would return Grafire to him. 75 The convert Vasilii Innokentiev Zaianuev made a similar argument when he wrote that his “heathen relatives” [rodovichi iazychniki] were obligated to return his wife, Buzinoi Boronova, to him. Zaianuev had recently been baptized and Boronova had been preparing to do so as well, until his relatives told her not to convert and gave her and his son to the head of his

75 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 143, ll25a-25aob.
clan. Zaianuev argued that Boronova had to be returned to him because he had paid 485 rubles and some livestock to Boronova’s brother as *kalym*. If he did not get his wife back, he stated, at the very least he was entitled to get his *kalym* back.76

Complaints made by non-convert men claiming that runaway wives or female relatives had been illegally baptized relied on payment of *kalym* as the key signifier of the existence of a marriage. In 1906, Bidagai Khokhoev asked the Ust-Ordinsk priest to refrain from marrying his runaway daughter, Dalabyr Bidagaeva, to Vasilii Bashkeev. Another man, Burzalka Duksanov, had already partially paid 650 rubles and six head of stock in *kalym* for Bidagaeva, as per an agreement with her mother.77 Others cited Samokvasov’s edition of the customary law to make this point. The husband of one runaway wife, upon learning that she had converted and intended to remarry, wrote the priest a lengthy letter with quotes from the law to the effect that once *kalym* had been exchanged for a woman, priests were required to ask her husband’s consent before baptizing her. He then offered to get baptized and marry her if she had not already been remarried, but concluded that if she was no longer going to live with him, she was required to return the *kalym* that he had paid for her.78

A constant theme running through women’s petitions was that traditional routes of appeal for assistance, such as family members and the Buryat administration, were de

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76 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 125, ll. 33-33ob.
77 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 188, ll. 18-18ob. Khokhoev casually slipped in another reason that the priest should not marry the two, stating that Bashkeev was of the same clan [*rod*] as Bidagaeva. He did not expand on this statement, expecting the reader to know that under Buryat exogamy practices, people of the same *rod* were prohibited from marrying each other. B.E. Petri, *Territorial’noe rodstvo u severnykh buryat* (Irkutsk: Gublit, 1924), 13.
78 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, ll. 121-121ob, 198-198ob. See also NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, ll. 14-14ob, 29.
facto closed to them because custom and customary law disadvantaged them. They presented Orthodoxy and Orthodox family law as offering a separate legal sphere that was the only arena in which they could assert their claims. Male petitioners, on the other hand, maintained that they had been unfairly disenfranchised or mistreated by Buryat legal structures that should have been open to them. While men most often described conflicts with their wives’ well-connected families as the cause, they also, sometimes simultaneously, listed their convert status as the reason for their disenfranchisement. In either case, a request for a runaway wife’s return was effectively a request that the priest intervene on the petitioner’s behalf with the local authorities: priests relied on the local Buryat authorities to find runaways, force them to return home, and collect testimony when necessary. For men, obtaining a priest’s assistance was thus a method of asserting their right to satisfaction in all legal arenas open to them. As with *kalym*, they made no discursive distinction between Buryat or customary legal arenas and Orthodox legal arenas.

Dakhanov, Shagnanov, and Bagazuev, converts all, depicted local authorities as unreasonably biased against them because of family connections. Two ideas are implicit within their claims. First, but for the influence of enemies within the system, they would have either been able to get their wives back through Buryat administrative structures or would have continued their lives without interference. Second, the men implied that the priest had the ability to intervene in the Buryat administrative structure and correct its workings in their favor rather than displace it with a separate legal system. They thus intended to use their ability to appeal to Orthodox authorities to maintain their enfranchisement within Buryat structures. In his petition, Dakhanov accused several
people of abusing their authority to persecute him. In particular, he named Ankha Antaev, the assistant of the local elder and a relative of his fiancée, Asolkhanova: “Antaev is…a rich man and, as one placed in public service, has strong influence.” Also included was an even more senior Buryat official, the taisha, head of the administrative district in which Dakhanov lived. Dakhanov asked the bishop to enforce both “church and civil laws” and punish Antaev and the others.79 Ivan Shagnanov, changing his story about his wife’s disappearance in a 1900 petition, wrote that Anna Shagnanova had been “taken and given” to Obkhon Aterkhanov by her brother, Prokopii Khankharaev. He accused two Buryat officials, the chief clerk and the duty officer (who happened to be Aterkhanov’s brother), of assisting Khankharaev.80 Khrisanf Nepriakhin, the priest at Ust-Ordinsk at the time, interpreted this as a request that he intervene with the Buryat administration on Shagnanov’s behalf; his efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and he blamed the administration’s obstructionism for his failure.81 Mikhail Bagazuev alleged that his wife’s translator, a relative of her first husband Bardakhanov, had manipulated her testimony to the Russian overseer of the Buryat administration, in which she had accused Bagazuev of beating her. Bagazuev then blamed the Buryat administration for granting his wife a permit to reside separately from him on the basis of testimony from another group of Bardakhanov’s relatives.82

The lack of differentiation between Orthodox and Buryat practices and legal spheres exhibited by men in their petitions suggests that they did not imagine conversion as a transformative act that automatically shifted an individual out of a Buryat sphere and

79 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 40, ll. 47-47a.
80 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll. 122-123ob.
81 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll. 122-123ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 283, ll. 75-75ob.
82 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, ll. 20-20ob, 23-23ob.
into an Orthodox one. For men, whether one converted or not, the same ties of financial, familial, and legal bonding remained in effect. As a convert, an individual neither left the system of Buryat self-governance nor ceased to be a subject of customary law. Given that conversion was not described as a major change, it is not surprising that many unbaptized men petitioning priests for the return of baptized wives offered to convert. In doing so, they either attached more importance to maintaining their marriages than they did to conversion, or saw conversion as being a relatively insignificant act.

Men’s petitions did admit a single clear and absolute difference: a convert could only marry another convert, no matter the greater absences of distinction between Orthodox and Buryat legal and cultural systems. However, even as they admitted the existence of this line, they effaced its importance by making conversion appear an insignificant act. Aishei Altaev’s 1887 petition to the archbishop of Irkutsk provides a particularly fine example of this. Altaev complained that Matryona Shalbakova, the wife of his deceased brother, had married Khamarion Khangaev, an unbaptized Buryat, after her husband’s death. Altaev criticized this on two grounds: first, Shalbakova was a convert, and thus could not marry a non-convert; second, he himself wished to marry Shalbakova, a common practice in cases where kalym had been paid by the first brother for the woman concerned, but a marriage that would have fallen within the forbidden degrees of relation in the eyes of the church. This petition expected the archbishop to find such a marriage acceptable in keeping with the lack of distinction between Buryat

83 The primary goal of such marriages was likely to prevent the money paid in kalym from leaving the first husband’s immediate family in the form of the bride remarrying elsewhere. Basaeva, 102. By the end of the nineteenth century, kalym payments, averaging between 300 and 800 rubles, represented a massive outlay of money compared to average local earnings, and many families were forced to go into debt or indentured servitude to afford kalym. Newyear, 9.
and Orthodox practice evident in many men’s petitions. Altaev, pursuing the same tactic that other men did, concluded by informing the archbishop that he would gladly get baptized to marry Shalbakova, and requested that the archbishop inform Khangaev “that he does not have the right to enter into a marriage according to Buryat custom with a baptized [Buryat].” Altaev thus negated the existence of a clear distinction in terms of custom or practice between Buryat and Orthodox marriages, only to reverse himself to a limited extent by agreeing to undertake an act that he did not, apparently, find particularly serious in order to be legally qualified to marry Shalbakova.84

Missionaries’ Views

If male petitioners were ambiguous about the change affected by conversion, the Orthodox Church was ambivalent. Local clergy used kalym and choice in a spouse as discursive elements to differentiate between Buryatness and Orthodoxy, just as women did. Not surprisingly, priests universally argued that Orthodox women should not be subjected to kalym and the deprivation of choice, and some even went so far as to argue that Orthodoxy’s major contribution to the area was reshaping views of women in this regard. Paradoxically, they also reinforced the legitimacy of kalym. Clergy negotiated the return of kalym to the jilted husbands of convert women, and sanctioned marriages originally based on kalym by baptizing the husbands of runaway wives and remarrying

84 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 54, ll. 10-10ob. See also NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, ll. 150-150ob, 193-193ob; NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 125, ll. 33-3ob; NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 230 ch. 1, ll. 23-23ob; NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 295, ll. 160-160ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, ll. 121-121ob, 198-198ob. In NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 24, ll. 14-14ob, 29, a man even volunteered that his sister’s fiancé could “very easily” get baptized in order to marry her, given that he had already paid kalym for her.
them to their erstwhile spouses. Thus, they simultaneously denounced Buryat custom as un-Christian and accepted *kalym* as a binding tie, even for converts. This conflict between theory and the entangled relationships created by religious coexistence in Buryat villages sparked debate among priests about how to best bring the ideals of an Orthodox marriage into being through administrative decisions. They questioned whether conversion liberated converts from all prior ties, if converts could be used as transmitters to carry Orthodox ideas into non-Orthodox populations by remaining in mixed marriages, and if preserving a convert’s Orthodoxy by removing her from a mixed marriage was the most effective way of promoting Orthodoxy. At the root of these debates over administrative decisions was a persistent anxiety over how, and if, conversion changed a convert. This underlying worry speaks to the perceived difficulty of quantifying the sincerity of an individual’s conversion, but also the missionaries’ deep concern that the confessional law system itself had provided a set of incentives for conversion that attracted many who were not sincere.

In 1885, Ioann Sizov, the missionary at Zalozhnyi missionary stan, wrote in his semiannual report,

> Christianity…has already fundamentally changed the view [of the convert] towards woman, and has made [him] regard her as a human, and therefore he enters into marriage with her because of mutual regard, and does not buy her like a thing, as is practiced among the heathens.  

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85 See, for example, NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 286, ll. 3, 6, 6ob; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 272, ll. 1-9ob.

86 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 51, l. 172. In 1865, Hieromonk Meletii, the head of the Zabaikal’e mission, expressed similar sentiments. He, however, argued that this was a change Christianity promised to bring rather than had already brought. Ieromonakh Meletii, “Zapiski zabaikal’eskago missionera ieromonakha Meletiia, za 1864 god (okonchanie),” *PIEV*, 5 June 1865, 369-371.
Sizov’s optimism about Orthodoxy’s impact on Buryat family life was unusual. A 1901 joint letter from missionaries working in the Ust-Orda region to the consistory in Irkutsk complained that conversion had made no change in marital practice: both baptized and unbaptized inorodtsy gave away their daughters only for kalym, “not asking the consent of the girls and even in their absence…girls are a very lucrative object of trade.”\(^{87}\)

Regardless of their assessment of the overall situation, the missionaries all made the same arguments about the differences between Buryat and Christian marriage. Marriages based on kalym were effectively sales, in which money was exchanged for an object. Such marriages allowed women no freedom of choice regarding their spouses. Christianity, at least ideally, was posited as the opposite. For the missionaries, Christianity meant a change in men’s views that allowed women to be humans rather than objects and expected their consent to marriage and affection for their husbands.

While such views come across most eloquently in missionaries’ assessments of their work as a whole, they employed the same concepts when writing about individual women. In 1904, Fedor Korsunskii of Kharbatovskii missionary stan sent his supervisor a series of anecdotes about his work. He described the situation of Khaliun Imeeva, a practitioner of shamanism, who had not liked the man her father had chosen to give her to in exchange for kalym. Imeeva had gotten baptized in order to marry Feodor Stepanov, “the baptized inorodets chosen by her.” Korsunskii then parenthetically referred to a second case he had already informed his supervisor about, in which another inorodka had refused to be married for kalym and told him that she would convert and “get married for

\(^{87}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, l. 11.
love.”88 Kalym was thus linked with stripping a woman of choice and of their right to affective relationships. Priests also frequently labeled it as a form of sale, as Ioann Sizov did when he complained of an attempt by the relatives of the baptized widow Tashan Boitkhonova to “sell [her] for kalym.”89

The missionaries and the consistory agreed that kalym and the lack of freedom of choice for women in customary marriages were emphatically not in accordance with Orthodoxy. As Meletii, the head of the Zabaikal’e mission, wrote in 1865, “Christianity, which grants such a high place to the human self [lichnost’ chelovecheskaia], proposes as a necessary condition of marriage free and mutual consent to spousal cohabitation on the part of groom and bride, rather than buying and selling.”90 The missionaries were less sure about how to eliminate such practices among converts. They advocated monitoring of convert behavior and undertook corrective actions to legitimize sexual relationships in the eyes of the Orthodox Church. However, they also believed that an authentic conversion, not undertaken for the purpose of personal gain, was marked by intellectual or spiritual change that would make such behavior unthinkable or impossible. They were unclear as to exactly what this change entailed. Ksenofont Popov, the priest of Ol’zonskii Petrovlovskii Church, argued in a report advocating better schooling at the mission that

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88 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 97, ll. 172-173ob. Similar language is used in NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 286, ll. 2-2ob and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 188, l. 36. In practice, lack of consent on the part of the women presented grounds on which a priest could refuse to marry a couple. In the case of Aleksei Dakhanov and Tatiana Asolkhanova, Ust-Ordinsk priest Nikolai Pliaskin refused to marry the two after an interview with Asolkhanova, reporting that she did not “love” Dakhanov and had “express[ed] a decisive refusal to marry [him].” NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 40, l. 40ob.

89 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 40, ll. 98-98ob. See also NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 116, l. 30; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 188, ll. 79-79ob.

90 Meletii, “Zapiski…za 1864 god (okonchanie),” 371.
“education and culture” would bring it about. A member of the Consistory wrote in a reprimand to a priest who had improperly remarried a convert woman that contact between convert and non-convert spouses would, through “the attraction of the heart”, trigger a sincere conversion in the non-convert party. Ioann Sizov, who found that Christianity was improving the treatment of women, suggested that Christianity worked “in the mind of the convert” to change his view towards women. When applied in administrative rulings on individual marriages, these questions of conversion and change, and more specifically the role of marriage in reflecting or bringing about this change, highlighted an inherent tension. Were convert women to be viewed as already-changed individuals whose marriages to non-converts could be used to transmit Orthodoxy into non-believing populations? Or did those very relationships, fraught with the power dynamics associated with customary marriages, put their conversions at risk of subversion?

In 1894, Mikhail Kopylev, a missionary at Tal’ianskii stan, baptized and remarried Agazha Shabetova, a runaway wife who had told him that she had been “forcibly” married to her first husband and was “unable to live with him.” He was formally reprimanded by the Consistory for doing so. The Consistory’s representative, Archpriest Vinogradov, did not engage with Kopylev’s description of the state of Shabetova’s first marriage at all, thus dismissing Kopylev’s implicit concern that such a marriage would negatively affect Shabetova’s spiritual well-being. He instead focused his response on Kopylev’s argument that Shabetova’s conversion to Christianity “in and of

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91 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 188, l. 17.
92 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, l. 214ob.
93 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 51, l. 172.
itself destroy[ed] marriage by shamanist custom.” Vinogradov referred to First Corinthians, both the commonly cited verses 7:12-14, which allowed for mixed marriages and argued that such marriages had spiritual benefit for the non-Christian spouse, and the less-frequently utilized fifteenth verse, which read, “if the non-believing spouse wishes to divorce, let him; in such instances, the brother or sister are not joined.” He interpreted this to mean that divorce in the case of conversion was solely the prerogative of the non-convert in the pair, and referenced imperial civil laws, including laws pertaining specifically to Muslims, to argue that divorce was legally permissible only if the non-convert spouse refused to raise the children as Orthodox. Where Kopylev suggested that refusing to remarry women such as Shabetova would slow the pace of conversions, Vinogradov wrote that doing so would encourage more sincere conversions:

…the spouse who has accepted Christianity, remaining in cohabitation with the non-believing spouse [who] through the ties of the heart has agreed to remain in spousal cohabitation with the [one] who has accepted Christianity, can, with [his or her] constant influence, convert to the faith the non-believing spouse.94

The view of the Consistory was thus fairly absolute, at least insofar as Kopylev and Shabetova were concerned.

While it can be inferred that Vinogradov viewed runaway women as eligible for baptism, remarriage was wrong both theologically and in terms of its greater effect on the mission. He made no effort to describe how women were to be persuaded to convert if not with the lure of a possible remarriage or by what means conversion would change their beliefs and behaviors. Nonetheless, he argued that convert women had a special role

94 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, ll. 14-16ob, 237-239ob.
to play as transmitters of Orthodoxy through contact to non-convert populations.\footnote{While Vinogradov used gender-neutral wording in his statement, the transmitter is implicitly female. The only reference to relationships between baptized men and unbaptized women, from the Tunka Valley in 1904, demonstrates that the missionaries saw such relationships as very threatening. Referencing the practice of men having live-in partners but referring to them as household help [striapki], missionaries worried that men refused to formalize their relationships with the women conceal the paternity of the resultant children. They thus avoided the requirement that the children of a baptized parent be baptized and made it impossible to pass Orthodoxy on to the next generation. NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 129, ll. 1-1ob, 7, 8-8ob.}

Perhaps his mental image of the result matched the portrayal of a convert woman found in the 1900 book *Types of Buryat*, a series of essays written by a missionary working in the region and depicting various essentialized Buryat characters. Bartanikha, an elderly convert woman, was described as living in one of four neat and orderly houses in a Buryat village, with the others belonging to her well-raised sons; the houses of the non-converts were less well-tended, in keeping with their lower level of morality and prosperity. She was industrious, generous, loving, self-sacrificing, and exceptionally pious, spreading by example benevolence and morality among her family and the community in which she lived. But ultimately, she was a passive, created object. At one point, the author wrote that she was of a type “less well-developed and weak in spirit, unconsciously and without awareness subordinating themselves to the influence of stronger natures.” The author concluded after describing Bartanikha’s impending death from old age, “How much more good could be done by this woman, only because she is truly, and in the most Christian sense, a woman? And what could be, if only we were able to carve a few more such women out of this wild and unenlightened people?”\footnote{M.I.P., *Tipy Buryat (eskizy)* (Moscow: Pechatnia A.I. Snegirovoi, 1900), 24-29.} She was thus made by someone into the good Christian woman that the author presented, but the
method of transforming the raw material into the finished product remained, as in Vinogradov’s criticism of Kopylev, unclear.

Two months after Vinogradov reprimanded Kopylev for remarrying Shabetova, he issued a radically different opinion on a nearly identical case. Ioann Prelovskii, Kopylev’s immediate superior, wrote the consistory requesting permission to remarry Balkhai Baleokhaeva. Vinogradov’s summary of Prelovskii’s original petition suggests that Prelovskii painted Baleokhaeva as the quintessential abused Buryat woman: she had been married against her will for kalym and her husband related to her “as a slave and not as with a wife,” as a result of which she got baptized. Having declared that she did not want to return to her husband because of his previous treatment of her and the possibility that he would persecute her for her baptism, she asked that Prelovskii marry her to Sergei Shedeev, a baptized inorodets.\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, l. 44. Prelovskii requested the Consistory’s permission to remarry Baleokhaeva because of an occasionally-followed rule promulgated in 1867 to preempt improper marriages in such situations. On the law, see NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 8, ll. 16-17.} Vinogradov not only allowed the remarriage, he wrote an impassioned argument supporting Baleokhaeva’s right to remarry. Citing the Polnoe sobranie zakonov on the general permissibility of mixed marriages, Vinogradov proclaimed that in the opinion of the consistory, “the expression “may stay” [in a mixed marriage] does not mean should stay” [italics mine]. Rather, a marriage should continue “only upon mutual agreement to such cohabitation,” if the non-convert spouse agreed to raise the children as Orthodox, and if the non-convert spouse did not persecute or offend the Orthodox spouse. Having thus emphasized the possibility of leaving a marriage upon conversion, Vinogradov,
...taking into account that the newly-baptized inorodka...[was] given in marriage to the inorodets Baleokhaev against her wishes and agreement for kalyum, that her husband’s treatment of her, as she says, was as with a slave and not a wife, and that, with her acceptance of holy baptism, [he] threatens her with even more cruel treatment, possibly even forcing [her] back to shamanism,

granted Prelovskii permission to marry Baleokhaeva and Shedeev, provided that no other legal obstacles presented themselves.98

Vinogradov’s decision regarding Baleokhaeva exhibited a conception of the relationship between conversion and the individual quite different than that evident in his opinion on the Shabetova case. He operated on the premise that Baleokhaeva’s conversion was actively threatened by her husband. The most pressing threat to her, at least in Vinogradov’s eyes, stemmed from the possibility that Baleokhaev would force her to abandon Orthodoxy and return to shamanism. In this light, the portrayal of Baleokhaeva as the abused victim of a customary marriage shifted from being a dismissable and ubiquitous fact of Buryat life to being evidence of the sway that her husband held over her. Her Orthodoxy remained a delicate and threatened thing requiring the removal of social relationships that endangered it in order to prosper. In this case, a female convert was not so much a transmitter of Orthodoxy into a non-believing population as a single and precarious success in need of defense from the same community that other conversion scenarios saw her as saving.

Kopylev and Vinogradov proposed their divergent views on remarriage after conversion as clear steps on the path to Orthodoxy and living an Orthodox life.

Conversion cleanly cut shamanist ties. Having a convert woman stay married to a non-

98 Vinogradov cited volume 10, part 1, article 80 of the Polnoe sobranie zakonov. NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 93, ll. 44ob, 299.
convert meant that she would spread Orthodoxy among non-converts. Remarrying a convert woman to an Orthodox man meant that the woman’s conversion would be unthreatened. However, women’s petitions about their post-conversion marriages confronted priests with evidence that the reality was much less clear-cut. When Pelageia Poliakova, a convert, requested divorce from her convert husband, she leveled a number of accusations, including physical abuse, against him. Most concerning for the church, though, was her charge that Poliakov had reverted to shamanism, mistreated icons, and was attempting to force her to return to her original faith. The result was an agreement between the two negotiated by the church that she would return to him if he stopped practicing shamanism, ceased abusing her, behaved properly towards icons, and fulfilled his Christian obligations.\footnote{Pelageia Poliakova’s case is discussed in greater detail in the section on women’s petitions. NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 256, ll. 12-13ob, 47-47ob, 51.} The question of what the church could do to help Poliakova if Poliakov failed to change remained unspoken. Other women who made similar allegations, such as Anna Khankharaeva, received the terse response that the church did not grant divorce in such cases for canonical reasons. But if priests were powerless to separate couples in the name of defending one partner’s Orthodoxy, they were equally powerless to keep them together. Despite an order from the consistory, the involvement of the local Buryat administration, and multiple attempts by at least two priests over the course of four years, the church was unable to reconcile Khankharaeva and her husband, Vasilii Shagnanov; indeed, the church was eventually unable to even locate Khankharaeva, a fact that suggests her well-connected family was able to protect her.\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 95, l. 143; and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 147, l. 11. Khankharaeva, also known as Anna Shagnanova, used her maiden name to write her petition. The case of}
Priests and missionaries were regularly confronted by the gaps between their ideals of marriage and conversion, the alternate visions presented by women, and the reality of the church’s inability to enforce its various visions of marriage. Given this, it is unsurprising that their analyses of marriage as a key measure of whether Orthodoxy was taking hold or not grew increasingly pessimistic as the century passed. In 1885, Ioann Sizov wrote his glowing assessment of the impact of Christianity on the treatment of Buryat women. His less-optimistic colleague Nikolai Stukov wrote that he baptized “almost exclusively” runaway brides and grooms who converted solely for the purpose of getting married, and that conversion “did not involve the heart of the individual” but was instead a “means to reaching a well-known goal.” All the same, he still baptized them in order to increase the number of converts on the parish rolls. In 1900, Konstantin Belarov, by this time one of many voicing similar complaints, stated that conversion took place only for material gain or marriage, “and after baptism [they] stay in their lives and religious views the same heathens as they were before, and they raise their children on the same heathen understandings/superstitions...” For both Stukov and Belarov, the implicit blame for the failure lay with the inorodtsy, who, lured by the framework of confessional law, converted under manipulative pretenses. Despite their conviction that this was a very real problem, they voiced no ideas for alternatives by which Orthodoxy could advertise its ideals or determine the nature of a potential convert’s desire to get baptized.

her husband, Vasilii Shagnanov, against her is described in the section on men’s petitions.

101 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 51, l. 54ob.
102 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 140, l. 123.
Efforts by Orthodox missionaries and Buryats to negotiate the conversion encounter that took place over the conversion and marriage of Buryat women resulted in the production of different understandings of what Orthodoxy and Buryatness were, and what the relationship between the two was. Supported by a series of broad discourses that linked the liberation of women from oppressive marital relationships enshrined in custom to positive social change, Buryat women and missionaries framed Orthodoxy and Buryatness as mutually exclusive. For both parties, though, this clean division was not easy to maintain. Orthodox women petitioned for divorces from their convert husbands on the grounds that their husbands treated them in a Buryat manner, attempting to utilize definitions of Orthodoxy crafted on the boundary between Orthodox confessional law and Buryat customary law within Orthodoxy itself. Missionaries’ concerns stemmed from the question of whether or not convert women should be viewed as transmitters of Orthodoxy within Buryat communities or fragile successes whose conversions were in need of protection from Buryatness. They also feared that the confessional law system itself incentivized conversions for superficial reasons, a practice that undermined any distinction between Buryatness and Orthodoxy that they might wish to draw. Men, asserting as valid a newly-available textual version of Buryat customary law, argued for the legal equity of Buryat custom with Orthodox practice, and sought to use the church to ensure the satisfaction of what they argued were their customary rights, in the process arguing for the lack of significant boundaries between Buryatness and Orthodoxy. Through this encounter, Orthodoxy as it was defined locally took on many of the tones of late-nineteenth-century Russian liberal rhetoric surrounding the place of women in society, while Buryat custom came to be treated as a codified legal practice and brought
into line with Russian thinking about law. Whatever the questionable nature of the boundaries between Orthodoxy and Buryatness, both entities emerged changed from the encounter, brought into congruence with broad trends of thought from which they had previously stood apart.
CHAPTER 2

AUTHORITY

*Oppression, violence, theft, exploitation, seizure of others’ property, arbitrariness of authority, shakedowns – all of this has reached terrible measures here! Law does not exist in Tunka.*

-Missionary Iakov Dubrov, 1884

*With his exceptional strength and cruelty, Missionary Berdennikov directed horror straight on the Buryats. His loyal assistant was the taisha Khomakov, who received “for diligence” a row of decorations right up to hereditary nobility.*

-A.I. Termen, 1912

The Baikal missionaries’ published writings return to one topic more than any other. The missionaries repeatedly emphasized the obstacle that Buryat authority and authorities presented to the conversion of the Buryats in the Irkutsk diocesan newsletter, intended to inform clergy and supporters of the church’s activities in the region, and in pamphlets and books published for broader consumption. The above quote from Iakov Dubrov’s published journal excerpts exemplifies such writings. Dubrov, like his colleagues, argued that Buryat administrators ruled in an arbitrary and self-interested fashion that exploited those they governed, preventing both imperial rule of law and Orthodoxy from spreading in the region. Published works by critics of the mission, represented above by a quote from A. I. Termen, an imperial bureaucrat who journeyed through the region, repeated a very different refrain, one that has come to dominate

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1 “Zapiski missionera Shimkovskogo stana za 1879 god. (Prodolzhenie),” *PIEV*, April 3, 1882, 175.
historical writing about the region. Such authors argued that Orthodox missionaries had, in cooperation with corrupt Buryat authorities seeking allies to advance their own status, used cruelty and pressure to force Buryats to convert to Orthodoxy, with the implication that an external authority needed to intervene to protect the hapless Buryats from their leaders as well as the missionaries. As disparate as these two approaches to narrating the same events seem, they in fact have a great deal in common.

The missionaries, whose complaints against Buryat authority developed this pattern well before opposing narratives were published, created this discursive approach to their experiences in the region in order to lobby for the reform of imperial laws mandating Buryat self-administration. Thus, the narrative was intended to prove the necessity of imperial intervention in favor of hastening conversion, but more importantly spreading the universal rule of law and a type of imperial republican citizenship; it was also intended to eliminate an imperial system of governance through diversity in favor of a homogenizing and universal system of rule. The missionaries’ rhetoric stayed consistent between the late 1870s and 1905, a period during which imperial regulations governing Buryat self-administration were reformed in the missionaries’ favor, albeit without the anticipated results and which ended with the abolition of Buryat self-administration in favor of the Russian volost’ system.³ As the mission reconsidered its relationship with the Buryats after the mass apostasy of 1905, it continued to rely on the narrative of abusive Buryat authority, but began to explore the effects that missionary relationships with Buryat leaders had on the mission’s efforts among the Buryats. This turn created much of the historical material which critics of the mission, including Termen and other pre-

³ Forsyth, 172.
revolutionary authors but also Soviet and post-Soviet historians, relied upon as they criticized missionaries’ misuse of authority. Consequently, critics of the mission relied upon the same patterns of understanding Buryat authority that the mission itself did, in some cases because this discourse supported arguments for the necessity of intervention and correction by imperial, and eventually Soviet, authorities.

What, then, was happening on the ground? In the second half of this chapter, I explore archival materials in an effort to complicate several of the presumptions found in such narratives of missionary experience among the Buryats and Buryat experience with the missionaries. Buryats requested assistance from missionaries in conflicts with others in their communities, and in their petitions, they patterned their own stories to fit the missionaries’ vision of Buryat authority. However, they also depicted their experiences in easily visible terms that confounded such simplistic explanations, describing conflicts embedded in complex networks of personal and proprietal relationships that could not be fit into an easy narrative of oppression, or acting in ways that contradicted the missionaries’ interpretations. Nonetheless, missionaries dealing with such petitions showed a marked preference for interpreting what they saw in terms of the narrative described above, even in the face of considerable cause for doubt. Petitions from Buryats who found themselves in conflict with missionaries in scenarios that would later be used to support narratives critical of the missionaries similarly confound those narratives. They reveal that Buryats deployed a complex set of tactics to thwart pressure by missionaries, and cannot be termed helpless or passive victims of coercion from missionaries. They also suggest that missionaries’ authority had legal and practical limits. But the petitions again show how missionaries gained supporting evidence for their understandings of
Buryat authority through such encounters, and how such encounters could be interpreted as violent and unwanted by Buryats.

**The Russian Empire and Buryat Authority**

In many ways, the mission’s origination of understandings that Buryat authorities oppressed converts in order to maintain their own authority – the power, wealth, and privilege associated with their position – were a reaction to the 1822 Statute on Siberian Natives shaped by changes in ways of thinking about the goal of imperial governance after the statute’s promulgation. At the time of its construction, the Statute had built on both older imperial practices of ruling through diversity and newer beliefs in empire’s civilizing mission. It modified extant native administration systems to fit a Russian model on the principle that less-civilized peoples required a government suitable to their level of civilization and were, consequently, not suited for rule by a form of government reflecting a higher level of civilization. However, the Statute also relied on the idea that those it administered would advance under Russian rule, even if it contained no direct mechanisms for bringing about this advancement.4 By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, prevailing patterns of thinking about empire had shifted towards a consideration of the means by which such progress should be brought about, supporting arguments that the empire was obliged to directly intervene in the lives of its subject peoples to elevate them to higher levels of civilization, often directly defined through Russianness.5 In this

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5 On the complexities and range of such arguments, see Geraci, 9-10.
atmosphere, the Statute’s system of governance could be read as entrenching precisely
the sorts of uncivilized practices that imperial rule was supposed to eliminate.

While views on what such changes in the empire’s non-Russian population should
look like and how they should be achieved varied widely, the Irkutsk mission was home
to Archbishop Veniamin, a proponent of the argument that conversion to Orthodoxy
immediately brought about assimilation to cultural Russianness. In correspondence with
N.I. Il’minskii, who argued for a much more gradual form of cultural assimilation that
would itself be driven by the adoption of Orthodoxy rather than concurrent with it,
Veniamin repeatedly asserted that Buryat converts should be described and treated as
Russians, and that they themselves desired to be seen as such. Consequently, any policy
decisions that involved splitting baptized Buryats off from their communities of origin
but maintained them as separate and distinct from Russians were to be avoided.6 As I will
demonstrate in this chapter, the inescapable community structure in which Buryat
converts lived, established by the Siberian Statute, presented a conceptual problem for
proponents of this view. Converts could not leave these communities, nor did Veniamin
want them to. However, Veniamin, as many others in the mission, believed that the
system itself, and in particular the Buryat authorities and practices of authority that it
established and allowed, prevented conversion from taking hold. Individuals found
themselves persecuted and confined to a separate and subordinate social position because
of their conversions; such outcomes discouraged potential converts. Consequently, the
communities themselves had to be reshaped, and the imposition of what the mission

6 For a discussion of Veniamin’s criticisms of Il’minskii’s approach to conversion and
assimilation, see Geraci, 73-74.
argued was a universally-applicable form of civil law was seen as a key method of carrying out this reformation.

After the 1822 statute went into effect, earlier policies of resettling converts into separate convert communities or Russian villages ceased. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, converts were inconsistently resettled around monasteries and the homes of missionary priests or in separate communities. When the statute went into effect, such individuals were labeled as state peasants. This category was believed to reflect their settled status and relative integration into Russian society better than the categories used to classify *inorodtsy*, “nomadic” and “wandering.” The resultant separation of settled converts from other Buryats created a sharp legal division between the two groups. Settled converts became subject to the laws and structures that governed state peasants, while other Buryats were classed as nomadic *inorodtsy*, and became subject to the administrative provisions ostensibly derived from extant Buryat structures of self-rule laid out in the statute. These provisions were not escapable through conversion. After 1822, converts remained, for the most part, subject to the same set of authorities and laws established under the statute that they had been subject to before their conversions.8

The 1822 law established a hierarchy of Buryat institutions of self-administration, which were in charge of overseeing most civil affairs and a range of small criminal affairs that did not involve Russians. The lowest-ranking was the *rodovoe upravlenie*, or

8 As discussed in the first chapter, converts did become subject to Orthodox family law upon their conversions, although they remained subject to Buryat customary law and authorities for other affairs over which Buryats were allowed self-administration.
clan administration, a partially-elected and partially-appointed body that governed the relatively small residential unit known as the *ulus*. This level of government had a range of duties that included resolving small conflicts, collecting minor fines, and regulating the movement of members of the ulus. The head of the clan administration was responsible for carrying out and passing on decrees from the Russian administration, conducting censuses, and representing the ulus in affairs with outsiders. Above the clan administration was the *inorodnaia uprava*, or native administration, which represented a collection of clan administrations and was responsible for collating data, collecting taxes and fines to pass on to higher authorities, and conveying information. This, too was a partially-elected body, consisting of an elected head and two clerks. It was in direct contact, and received orders from, the land police, a Russian institution outside of the Buryat system of self-administration. Above the native administration was the *stepnaia duma*, or steppe duma, an institution that the statute conceived of as parallel to that of a city council within the Russian governmental structure. Responsible for a range of economic affairs, the steppe duma also had judicial oversight over other Buryat institutions and was the primary institution of interface between the Buryat administration and Russian authorities at the local and regional levels. The duma was elected, and intended to be composed of local notables, including Buryat nobility.\(^9\)

While this system was ostensibly modeled after Buryat clan structures and was intended to be in keeping with the development and capabilities of the Buryat population, it was in fact the product of extensive Russian intervention. Buryats had been allowed to administer their own affairs since Muscovite arrival in the area in the seventeenth

\(^9\) Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats,” 34-38; Raeff, 118-122.
century. Self-government had received formal ratification in the process surrounding the drafting and signing of the Treaty of Kiakhta in 1727. However, during the eighteenth century, the Russian government devoted significant attention to rationalizing Buryat self-rule, with the goal of preventing “arbitrariness,” the exercise of authority without regulation or check. Such efforts resulted in the imposition of new administrative institutions, *rodovye kontory*, under Catherine II. Simultaneously, Russian officials began to consider codifying the customary law by which self-government was administered, resulting in a mandate to do so associated with the 1822 statute. The 1822 statute continued such efforts to rationalize the Buryat administration, distinctly separating the government into layers, each accorded specific duties that were frequently related to the record-keeping and tax demands of the imperial government, and creating checks on the power of Buryat officials that often involved the oversight of Russian administrators.

However, the statute was more than an imposition of a new governmental structure. It also continued prior policies of absorbing Buryat leaders into imperial administrative structures, a practice that both changed the social and public role of Buryat leadership and brought new individuals into positions of leadership. Such practices had also been in place since the eighteenth century; for example, the head of a large group of Tungus who moved into the Baikal region from China in the early eighteenth century was accorded the Russian noble title of Prince Gantimurov and granted administrative authority by the crown. Local leaders were also able to negotiate with imperial authorities for increased rank within Russian-imposed administration systems and then parlay that authority into leverage over their local competitors. Consequently, although imperial authorities sought to incorporate Buryat leadership into imperial structures, what emerged
was a Buryat leadership that was itself changed by contact with the Russians, despite the persistence of traditional Buryat titles such as “taisha” that were synonymous with authority within institutions such as the Steppe Duma. Moreover, the delegation of explicit duties mandated by the empire to the various layers of the administration meant that Buryat leaders, whether local men elected as elder of the clan administration or a taisha on the steppe duma, were incorporated into the Russian governmental system, performing specific bureaucratic functions. Indeed, it is telling that in a late nineteenth century photograph of a group of Buryat administrators from the western side of the lake, many wore Russian uniforms, a standard trapping of civil officials and nobility, or other Russian clothing.10

Despite this effective Russianization of the Buryat leadership, Orthodox missionaries working in the region in the second half of the nineteenth century firmly believed that the 1822 statute had trapped the Buryats in a governmental system representative of a low level of development that was not rational and encouraged arbitrary rule. Key to this dismissal was the system’s incorporation of local leaders. Missionaries routinely argued that what the statute had done was to take native Buryat authorities, along with the arbitrary and self-interested form of authority that accompanied their Asian and primitive natures, and give them the imprimatur of imperial authority. This made the system unchangeable: having received an imperial mandate for their rule, such authorities had enough power to prevent social change from occurring, and were not being compelled to do so by imperial officials. The imperial government

was thus sanctioning systems and practices that prevented and obstructed development. The missionaries argued that instead of promoting such administrative particularism at the cost of the development of the Buryats, both state and mission should work to promote *grazhdanstvennost’*, or citizenship.

The missionaries’ simultaneous promotion of *grazhdanstvennost’* and criticism of the self-interested and arbitrary rule of local authorities was part of a broad trend of criticism of local non-Russian elites that developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Dov Yaroshevski has argued that from the 1860s onward, the imperial government promoted *grazhdanstvennost’* within the imperial context as a form of republican citizenship defined as the “joint endeavors of citizens striving for the good of each one and contributing to the good of others, and through this participation aiming at the good of the whole.” Such a common project was to be based on “a community of values shared by associations of citizens,” the elaboration and success of which were often seen to be dependent on the overthrow of local aristocracies labeled as corrupt. As Yaroshevski notes, this concept of imperial citizenship evolved out of earlier visions for the use of paternalistic guidance for the benefit of Siberian natives, including Speransky’s 1822 statute, but was also a product of the intellectual currents of the Great Reform era, during which citizenship was redefined around ideas of public participation in institutions.11 From their references to their goal of creating circumstances that would allow broad community participation under a universal system of law imbued with checks and balances and explicit labeling of such as *grazhdanstvennost’*, it appears that the missionaries, in addition to the bureaucrats and officials discussed by Yaroshevski,

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11 Yaroshevski, 60-65, 67-68.
adhered to such a vision. As Yaroshevski and Joseph Bradley, among others, have pointed out, such concepts of civil society within the Russian context were not necessarily exclusive of autocracy, and indeed, many of them were sponsored directly by the autocracy at one point or another in their histories.\textsuperscript{12} Therefore, there was not necessarily a contradiction in the missionaries’ argument that the imperial autocracy should stand as guarantor and sponsor of the application of universal law and responsive government among the Buryats. Indeed, the missionaries’ proposed solution to this problem relied on paternalistic administrative measures.

To support this argument, missionaries working in the late nineteenth century created a schematic image of Buryat communities in which Buryat authorities deliberately prevented the spread of Christianity by using their authority to violently oppress converts, consigning them to an undesirable and powerless position in society. This image was bolstered by the repetition of anecdotes from the lives of Buryat converts that regularly featured violent beatings and the refusal of authorities to ensure that converts had access to legal proceedings. These anecdotes were often drawn from real-life occurrences related to the missionaries in petitions that reveal their authors did not see the conflicts that initiated the petitions in the same way that the missionaries did. However, the missionaries took the evidence at hand and severely distorted it, remaking it to fit a narrative that supported their arguments about the need for drastic legal intervention into Buryat society. Subsequent users adopted the method of understanding the nature of Buryat authority outlined by the missionaries and supported by such stories.

\textsuperscript{12} See Yaroshevski, 63-70, and Bradley, 1094-1123.
What, then, was the purpose of these formulaic discussions of oppression and violence? Heather Coleman, analyzing stories about violence against converted Baptisms living in Orthodox villages, has argued that the narratives of violence laid out in petitions were often reappropriated by Russian commentators, who used them as a method of commenting on the state of Russian society and the place of the Orthodox Church and religious freedom within society. This marked a vast departure from the intentions of the petitioners, who were attempting to seek outside assistance in maintaining communal boundaries that could be seen as clashing with or transcending religious difference. While the absence of first-person historical records from the perspective of those being accused of committing violence against converts makes exploring the how conflicts were perceived by both parties involved impossible, Coleman’s argument about the usefulness to parties outside of the conflict of retelling stories of violence and recycling the paradigms surrounding them is useful. Such acts of interpretation and description of incidents of violence and the social conditions that brought them about served to outline a justification for what needed to be done to fix the problem of a backward and primitive society. In short, they served as proof of the need for an external authority to intervene to correct and modernize Buryat society to prevent such instances from occurring.

**Buryat Communities as “the Dark Kingdom”**

Pro-missionary published writings displayed remarkable consistency in their imagination of the nature of Buryat authority between the start of the mission in the

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1860s and 1917. Universally, they believed that the exercise of power by Buryat authorities was motivated by the desire of those same authorities to preserve Buryat society in an unchanged state. Key to the missionaries’ imagination of the static nature of Buryat society was the belief that the Buryats lacked a concept of law as a universally applicable system to which all were equally subject, and that Buryats generally practiced an unthinking obeisance to authority figures. The missionaries believed that the introduction of Orthodoxy and imperial legal practices would alter this situation, bringing the rule of law to Buryat communities; consequently, they argued, Buryat authorities worked to undermine both the spread of Orthodoxy and the application of law as a universally-applicable system of governance that restricted the actions of authority figures. However, the perceived efforts of Buryat authorities to prevent the spread of Orthodoxy, which the missionaries believed had successfully restricted converts to a powerless and friendless position at the bottom of Buryat society, posed a problem to the missionaries. If they were not restrained, Orthodoxy would not spread. Consequently, a number of efforts to reform or abolish the administrative structures established under the 1822 Siberian Statute grew out of the missionaries’ depictions of Buryat communities as lawless spaces hostile to converts.

Of all the authors of official missionary publications during this time period, Archbishop Veniamin (Blagonravov, archbishop of Irkutsk from 1873 to 1892) devoted the most attention to the problem of Buryat authority. His views had particular significance in shaping missionary and governmental attitudes towards Buryat authority. Veniamin aggressively used the written word to promote awareness of the mission’s goals and the obstacles that it faced, both within a book on the subject, Vital Questions of
The Orthodox Mission in Siberia, published in 1885, and numerous articles in the church journals *Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti* and *Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik* published throughout his tenure as Archbishop of Irkutsk that were closely related to the material found in the book. As I will demonstrate in the section on how these discourses were connected to daily missionary encounters with Buryats, his works, widely distributed both inside and outside of the mission, shaped the understandings of missionaries working in the field. Moreover, they served as the basis for his partially-successful lobbying campaign to pressure the regional government to reform the laws governing Buryat administrations. His views were not only representative and influential, but synthetic as well. In his articles and books, he relied heavily on published anecdotes about the daily lives of Buryat converts and missionaries as evidence for his propositions. I will focus my discussion here on his *Vital Questions*, with a brief detour to examine how Veniamin’s ideas were represented in and supported by published anecdotes about the lives of Buryat converts.

Veniamin began his account by identifying the problem that led to the title of the book, *Vital Questions of the Orthodox Mission in Siberia*. The mission had attracted followers in regions such as Tunka and Alarsk, dominated by lamaists who were ostensibly more difficult than shamanists to convert. However, it had met with little success in shamanist regions such as Kudinsk, Verkholensk, and Ol’khon, where the population was more inclined to listen to the missionaries. The proposition that lamaists were considerably less open to conversion than shamanists were was widely accepted.

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14 Veniamin, *Zhiznennye voprosy pravoslavnoi missii v Sibiri* (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia A.M. Kotomina, 1885). Veniamin’s published articles on this subject are too numerous to be comfortably listed in a footnote.
among the missionaries. In keeping with this, Veniamin extolled the inclination towards Christianity found among the shamanists, arguing that many of them prayed to icons, attended church services, and regularly told missionaries that “the Russian (Orthodox) faith is the first faith, the faith of all faiths.” The missionaries themselves were not responsible for the lack of conversions: those sent to notoriously difficult regions were among the mission’s most effective, in possession of “strong words” and “moral influence.” Instead, Veniamin argued that the answer lay in the local leadership. In regions where the missionaries had met with success, the leadership was baptized; in those where it had not, the leadership was not.¹⁵ Veniamin thus laid the mission’s failure (and, in some cases, success) squarely at the feet of Buryat authorities, who stood athwart a process of change that would occur if not for them.

Veniamin argued that unbaptized Buryat authorities deliberately refused to allow the general atmosphere of acceptance of Orthodoxy to reach its natural conclusion of large-scale conversion out of base self-interest. Authorities prevented individual conversions and refused to convert themselves out of desire to protect their own interests. Rule by the unbaptized led to range of social ills, most related to extreme differentials of power between ruler and ruled, that were connected to the reasons behind Buryat authorities’ decisions to thwart conversion. The range of these interests can be seen in the descriptive terminology routinely applied to the style and system of Buryat authority in Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti, including “arbitrary rule,” “exploitation,” the rule of a “completely autocratic administration,” “despotism,” and economic domination by “the

¹⁵ Veniamin, Zhiznennye voprosy, 22-23.
established wealthy [bogachi-kulaki].”¹⁶ Such terminologies imply that the missionaries believed Buryat authorities had a range of interests vested in the preservation of the status quo, including their ability to exercise authority when and how they wished, and to preserve their own economic status through their exercise of authority.

The missionaries’ assumption that conversion threatened the status quo rested primarily on the belief that spreading Christianity would radically reconfigure structures and use of authority in Buryat communities. Employing a popular metaphor for the state of Buryat society, Veniamin concluded that as long as the majority of the population remained unconverted, the region would “remain a dark kingdom, in which the clan leaders [rodonachal’niki] possess complete freedom of action” and unfettered authority over those whom they ruled. Unconverted Buryats were prevented by the strictures of customary law from contacting outside authorities except through the same leaders who governed in the name of their own self-interest. Moreover, they were subject to customary law, which Veniamin dismissed as “steppe custom, or simply arbitrary rule [proizvol].”¹⁷ This system enabled Buryat authorities to suppress anyone who threatened their authority, and prevented conversion from starting among ordinary Buryats and changing society from the bottom up. As one article put it, as long as none of the leadership got baptized, “everything among them is sewn up and sealed tight;” no outside force could effectively intervene in Buryat affairs to restructure Buryat society.¹⁸

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¹⁶ See, for example, “Zapiski missionera Shimkovskogo stana,” 3 April 1882, 176; and “Otchet o Zabaikal’sko pravoslavnoi missii za 1876 godu. (Prodolzhenie),” PIEV, 30 July 1877, 396.
¹⁷ Veniamin, Zhiznennye voprosy, 24-26.
Here, Veniamin contrasted Buryat authority with its Christian counterpart, arguing that Buryat authorities were aware of how severely the change to such a system would curtail their own power. Invoking the example of Russian peasant communities, he argued that in Christian societies, leadership could “act only upon prior agreement with the community.” Moreover, members of such communities had access to outside redress, should their leaders fail to act justly. This state of affairs was alternately described as *grazhdanstvennost’*, the rule of a “universal law” [*obshchii zakon*] applicable to all, and “civil civilization” [*grazhdanskaia tsiivilizatsiiia*].\(^{19}\) Conversion to Christianity thus meant conversion to the rule of law and civic practices that entailed the enfranchisement of all members of the community within the political system to some degree. In support of his claim that Buryat officials found these prospects threatening, Veniamin related an anecdote about a *taisha* from Kudarinsk who, when asked if he wanted to get baptized, refused, as doing so would bring him under the rule of law.\(^{20}\)

These arguments that conversion would spark a wholesale change in the nature of authority and the manner of its exercise in Buryat communities offer a window into the mission’s view of itself as a pillar of the empire. The desire of the Orthodox Church to prove itself of service to the empire via mission to the empire’s diverse population has been well-established, and is certainly reflected here. Historians have demonstrated that missionaries attempted to portray their work as relevant to the efforts of imperial administrators to govern and civilize the empire’s non-Russian populations. As Paul Werth has noted, such depictions of the changes that conversion promised to bring

\(^{19}\) See, for example, Veniamin, *Zhiznennye voprosy*, 36-38; “Zabaikal’skaia missiia (pis’mo iz Posol’skogo monastyria),” *PIEV*, 9 March 1863, 141.

included the promotion of ideas of civic imperial life, albeit ones that privileged, or even required, Orthodoxy. However, the Baikal missionaries’ arguments about the reforming potential of Orthodoxy’s introduction into the Buryat body politic suggests that they effectively hoped to create a new type of Buryat civic subject.

The paradigm that Veniamin outlined in *Existential Questions* both resulted in and relied on the framing of convert experience within Buryat communities in terms of oppression, violence, and isolation. The published stories of convert experience connected to discussions of Buryat authority as oppressive of converts fit a basic mold. An ordinary Buryat, driven by conviction in the truthfulness of Orthodoxy, would convert. After his conversion, he would find himself at the mercy of local Buryat authorities who, fearing the social change that he signified, would use their power to physically abuse him or have other Buryats punish him, causing him to regret his decision and discouraging other potential converts. In one such story, Grigori Orlov, a baptized man living in the Buddhist Khori region on the eastern side of the lake, was beaten nearly to death “without any cause” by a local noble, Aiusha Ananduev; Ananduev subsequently flaunted the lack of legal restraint on his behavior by refusing to explain himself to the local elected representative of the converts. In another, Ivan Innokentiev Uedkov and his wife Marfa complained to the Ust-Ordinsk missionary of “persecutions and offenses [priestsnei i obidy]” at the hands of their unbaptized neighbors and the local elder, who beat Marfa, tore the shirt she had received upon baptism, and tore her cross from around her neck. Ivan complained that “it would have

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21 See, for example, Geraci, 73-76 and Werth, 16, 141-145. In this case, proponents of the mission such as Veniamin argued that *grazhdanstvennost’* was a characteristic associated with Russianess.

22 “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi pravoslavnoi missii,” 30 July 1877, 397.
been better if I’d just lived the old way, unbaptized, now I have to endure all sorts of offenses, and solely because I became Russian (Orthodox).”23 Such stories of the brutalities of convert life, explained by the paradigm laid out by Veniamin, posed a dilemma to the missionaries.

The missionaries believed that most Buryat converts, like the Uedkovs, were both socially subordinate and socially isolated because of their conversions. Their position within society meant that the missionaries would not be able to achieve social reform by converting the Buryats from the bottom up – such converts did not have sufficient authority to contradict the power of unbaptized authorities, and their experiences were seen as discouraging potential converts from getting baptized, preventing converts from accumulating strength in numbers.24 Reform would have to come from the top down, whether by converting Buryat leaders or changing the Russian laws governing Buryat administrations so that the system itself became more favorable to converts. Indeed, the 1822 Siberian Statute, which had established the administrative structures that the missionaries blamed for the failure of Orthodoxy to flourish among the Buryats, came under direct criticism by missionaries pushing for legal reform. In Vital Questions, Veniamin criticized the government for acting against its own interests by exempting Siberian natives from Russian legal and cultural norms through the statute.25

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24 For example, the anecdote about the Uedkovs was preceded by the argument that even those who were convinced of the falseness of shamanism and the truth of Orthodoxy refused to convert, deferring out of fear and tradition to Buryat authorities. It was followed by the statement that efforts to unify baptized Buryats into a group capable of advocating for its own interests within Buryat communities had failed. “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti,” 24 April 1882, 213-214, 216.
25 Veniamin, Zhiznennye Voprosy, 3.
missionary lamented that no one had pulled Speransky aside as he wrote the statute and warned him about the dangers of institutionalizing and granting legal privilege to systems of Buryat authority that were, by their nature, autocratic and self-interested: “…a well-wisher surely would have told him, “little father [batiushka]! Look, this is a steppe duma.”

Missionary publications posed three solutions to this problem: the conversion of Buryats already in positions of authority; state enforcement of policies guaranteeing convert representation in the institutions of self-government given authority by the 1822 statute; and the use of land grants to establish separate communities for converts at missionary stations. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, the effectiveness of all three of these solutions was challenged. Failures were publicly explained using the paradigms of Buryat authority the missionaries had established: converts remained subject to malign influence from non-converts in positions of authority. However, alternative descriptions of failures found in archival records and silences in published accounts called into question the very possibility of changing “the dark kingdom”. Missionaries expressed doubts that converts in positions of authority had enough authority to reshape the system, that Buryat officials who converted had experienced a personal change as a result of their conversions, and that new communities were able to separate Buryat converts from their communities of origin.

The mission’s focus on baptizing Buryat leaders already in power relied on the assumption that those under their administration would follow them, both because fear of

26 “Zapiski missionera Shimkovskogo stana,” 3 April 1882, 176.
27 For an outline of these solutions as the resolution to the conundrum, see Veniamin, 
Zhiznennye voprosy, 25-36.
oppression resulting from baptism would have disappeared, and because Buryats were naturally inclined to follow their leaders. One author, describing the baptism of Alsykov, an elder from the Irkutsk region, wrote that “his conversion should act beneficially on simple [prochie] Buryats.”

Published narratives about the conversion of taisha Matkhanov of Alar reveal the anxieties underlying this apparent confidence. Matkhanov, having met Grand Prince Vladimir Aleksandrovich on an 1868 visit to Tomsk, was inspired to return to Alar and build a missionary church. He, his wife, and fifty others were baptized by the bishop upon the consecration of the church. The mass baptism of 388 Buryats subordinate to Matkhanov was part of the festivities surrounding the affair. Most of the 388 had been on a list of persons desiring baptism that Matkhanov had passed on to the bishop and missionaries upon their arrival. Missionaries thus had nothing to do with gathering either the names or the bodies for baptism. The report’s author noted, prefacing bad news with good, that “a few people not included on the list appeared for baptism, but beyond that, a not insignificant number of inorodtsy who had expressed a wish to accept holy baptism remained on the list” without having appeared at the church. The missionaries planned to travel to these individuals and baptize them at home, but were thwarted by bad weather.

The notation of the unexplained failure of this “not insignificant number” to appear subtly questioned Matkhanov’s presumed importance in a variety of ways: did his people not share his desire for baptism? Was he unable to lead his people? Or had he been dishonest in assembling the list? After the mass departure of Buryat converts from the church between 1905 and 1907, such suspicions about the

28 “Kreshchenie rodovogo buriatskogo starosty,” PIEV, 30 April 1877, 245.
29 “Irkutskaia dukhovnaia missiia. Rasprostranenie khristianstva v predelakh Irkutskoi missii v 1869 godu,” PIEV, 3 October 1870, 319-326.
motives and capacities of the missionaries’ allies in the Buryat leadership became open, leading missionaries to argue that alliances with individuals such as Matkhanov had led to many insincere conversions.

The published description of Matkhanov’s departure from power a year later explained his failures in terms of the power structure laid out by Veniamin. Matkhanov had been undermined by his political opponents, who viewed him as their enemy because of his baptism and public support of Orthodoxy. The author argued that Matkhanov’s numerous opponents had filed charges of misrule against him with the Russian government; four investigations had subsequently resulted, coming from as high as the chief administration [glavnoe upravlenie] of eastern Siberia. With Matkhanov absent from Alar as he dealt with the charges in Irkutsk, the mission in Alar had no protective Buryat authority to which it could appeal. When a missionary made the rounds to identify the unbaptized children of convert parents, he was prevented from baptizing any of them by two elders, one of whom declared, “[the missionary] and Matkhanov want to baptize everyone.” The missionaries also reported difficulty gaining access to post horses, government resources to which they had rights but which were locally controlled by the Buryat administration. The actions of Matkhanov’s enemies in the administration were described as an explicit attempt to “destroy everything that [Matkhanov] did: close the church, destroy the mission, stop the education of children in the school.”

Even converting a powerful leader, however questionable his motives and abilities, was not enough to break the patterns of authority and repression implied by “the dark kingdom”

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and guarantee the success of efforts that would promote progress towards citizenship and enlightenment.

At the height of the mission’s political influence in the 1870s and 1880s, Veniamin embarked on an extensive and partially-successful campaign to influence government policy towards the Buryats. One effect of this was the decision of General-Governor Sinel’nikov to narrowly interpret statutes on lamaism as limiting the construction of any and all buildings, including structures as minor as roadside chapels, not simply datsans, resulting in a campaign of destruction.  

However, the publication of Veniamin’s *Vital Questions* in 1885 also coincided with the dusting off and reinvigoration of two old regulations. One was a set of rules guaranteeing converts elected representation within Buryat administrative institutions; the other provided for the distribution of land governed by the Buryat administration to converts settling around missionary stations.  

The government’s justification of its decision to enforce these rules drew directly on the paradigm of relations between converts and non-converts outlined by Veniamin. However, archival documents demonstrate that missionaries working in the field came to doubt the efficacy of both of these efforts. They questioned the degree to which convert representatives were any different than their nonconvert counterparts, and whether it was even possible to create convert communities sufficiently separated from the surrounding Buryat environment.

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32 Laws guaranteeing convert representation within the legal bodies granted authority by the 1822 statute appeared as early as 1837, but were issued in the form that Veniamin wished applied only in 1867. Schorkowitz, *Staat und Nationalitäten*, 72-73.
Elected positions specifically for converts provided another solution the top-down flow of authority in Buryat communities. In 1885, the General-Governor of Irkutsk issued an ukaz that sought to guarantee convert representation within the Buryat administration. The decree was intended to reiterate and strengthen a law that had been originally promulgated in 1867. The priests were to send the governor lists of all persons elected or appointed to positions of responsibility, as well as information about whether or not they were converts. If the senior leader in a particular area was not a convert, elected Christian representation within the government was mandatory. The missionaries were charged with selecting suitable candidates from among the converts. Additionally, they were to explain to the population, both baptized and unbaptized, that the goal of the law was to raise the position of converts living among non-converts by guaranteeing them representation in elected governing bodies and that the law guaranteed the right of Christians to protest actions by unbaptized officials. At the same time, the missionaries were to mention that the Governor cared deeply about the circumstances of baptized Buryats, and that the Tsar wished to see all the Buryats converted. This was a somewhat diminished version of the wholesale abolishment of government sanction for Buryat administrative institutions that Veniamin had argued for in his book, and the missionaries seemed to believe it had promise. Missionaries’ mentions of interactions with convert representatives rose markedly after 1885. This suggests both that they viewed the representatives as potentially helpful, and that there may have been more representatives in office than there had been previously.

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33 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 52, ll. 13-14.  
34 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 191, ll. 23ob.
Archival records from Ust-Orda suggest that the convert representatives proved to be anything but a silver bullet. At times, their failure to defend converts living within their jurisdiction was explained as an outcome of dynamics of authority within Buryat communities. In such cases, convert representatives were described as powerless because of their prior subordinate positions within the community. In the case of Anna Komarova, which will be discussed in the section on alternative interpretations of authority in Buryat communities, missionary Mikhail Makhochkeev described the local convert representative as an “uninfluential individual.” This rendered him unable to assist Komarova, whose opponent, the Buryat official Aleksandrov, inevitably supported the interests of the wealthy.\(^{35}\) In 1900, Vasilii Tarkhov described the situation of Matvei Komarov (no relation to Komarova), the elected convert representative in his area, in a similar manner. Komarov resigned his office of his own free will, but did so because of “persecution” inflicted on him and other converts by “heathens” in the area.\(^{36}\)

At other points, the records demonstrate concern among missionaries and converts alike that the elected convert representatives were little better than their unbaptized counterparts. One missionary harshly accused the convert representative in his region of taking steps beyond the purview of his authority and contradicting the missionary’s intentions in regard to an investigation.\(^{37}\) If the convert representative was not representing the church’s interest, what good was he? Filipp Zorin, another convert representative, was found to have two wives, one of whom he had married in the church and the other “according to shamanist custom.” His very Orthodoxy was consequently in

\(^{35}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 191, l. 23ob.
\(^{36}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 141, ll. 136-137ob, 176-177.
\(^{37}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 256, ll. 5ob, 44.
question. At another point, a convert representative was accused of participating in the very behavior he was supposed to protect converts from: he had been exploitatively collecting “illegal taxes” from those he represented. As the petitioner wrote, “Antaev is a Christian; there is no other clan leader [rodonachal’nik] who is a Christian in my clan; but in view of the defense of their [sic] interests, and also the interests of the Mission, the naming of a Christian clan leader is more than necessary.” In short, Antaev was a Christian, but at the same time, he was not. This called into question his ability to and interest in defending the converts he represented.

A second missionary initiative oriented towards government policy was an attempt to use land redistributions to create communities that would support converts as they changed their lifestyles to match their new religion. Such efforts received the support of the Irkutsk General-Governor’s office in the mid-1880s, concurrent with the efforts to increase convert representation in elected bodies. While published evidence suggests that several attempts at redistribution were made, only one of them, in Ust-Orda, was completed and came to support a small convert community. The state undertook the Ust-Orda redistribution at the behest of Archbishop Veniamin and Innokentii Prelovskii, then the local missionary. In response to an inquiry from Veniamin containing data that must have been supplied by Prelovskii, the governor’s office increased the amount of land allotted to settled Buryats living around the Ust-Ordinsk missionary

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38 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 284, ll. 60-60ob.
39 NARB f. 195, o. 1., 3. 54, l. 5-5ob.
40 Most of these attempts were made on the eastern side of the lake; their failure was attributed to the control of the Buryat leadership over redistribution. See, for example, “Polozhenie khristian v buriatsikh obschestvakh pod nachal’stvo iazychnikov,” PIEV, 2 March 1885, 343-344; and A. Nikol’skii, Zabaikal’skaia dukhovnaia missiiia, 1681-1903: ocherk iz istorii pravoslavnoi missii v Vostochnoi Sibiri (Moscow: Pechatnaia A.I. Snegirovoi, 1904), 59-60.
church. The newly-allotted land technically came from territory belonging to the state treasury. An attached resolution from the Irkutsk General Governor’s Council indicates that the situation was, in fact, much more complex. The land in question had recently been settled by baptized Buryats, but was claimed by the administrations of several still-nomadic local Buryat groups as territory over which they were traditionally sovereign. The Governor’s Council adopted the missionaries’ narrative of the situation, arguing that allowing the nomadic Buryat groups control over the land would increase “hostile relations” between converts and non-converts. By doing so, the council framed the conflict as being essentially about religion rather than a dispute over land use between settled and nomadic Buryats. Moreover, the Council declared that allowing the nomadic groups control of the land would inhibit the mission from spreading Orthodoxy, a conclusion that meshes well with the missionaries’ emphasis on the demoralizing effects of the power imbalance. The Council’s solution was to give the settlement at Ust-Ordinsk a total of 795 desiatins of land, or fifteen desiatins per convert, from the lands previously held by the treasury but assigned to three different nomadic Buryat clans in the area.41

It is difficult to tell what the administrative status of the new convert settlement was. It does not appear to have been removed from Buryat governmental structures, or treated legally as a village. Such a removal was not Veniamin’s goal: he explicitly argued that converts should not be placed under separate administrations, as he believed that Orthodox officials and individuals could have a beneficial influence on non-converts.

41 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 52, ll. 22-22ob. Such a state decision was in keeping with land management policies that encouraged settlement by allowing for redistribution of land taken from that formerly available for migratory herding. See Schorkowitz, Staat und Nationalitäten, 109-156, and Forsyth, 172.
through constant interaction with them. Additionally, the archival records from the missionary station linked to the settlement show no indication of an increase in communications with Russian government officials to suggest that the missionary was corresponding with a different administration about the daily affairs of his settled parishioners. The settlement was thus most likely a plot of land allotted to allow convert Buryats to pursue agriculture and not migrate, but the administrative designation of which kept it under the same jurisdiction it had previously been under.

In the mission’s view, such settlements served two functions. Officially, they were intended to solve the problem of the impoverished status of Buryat converts. By guaranteeing converts access to agricultural land, the mission would liberate them from oppression by wealthy Buryats and associate conversion with gaining economic self-sufficiency. For example, one author characterized the issue of land distribution as one of changing “economic relationships.” However, the communities served a second purpose as a refuge for converts forced to flee their former homes. In Ust-Ordinsk, the missionaries described local settled convert men as a source of shelter and protection for converts, especially women, who were described as having been rejected, abused, or threatened by their families or clans because of their conversion. The missionaries thus seem to have been attempting to construct an alternate Buryat community, one in which established converts provided a similar set of protections to new converts that wealthy and powerful relatives were believed to do within the ulus and clan.

The case of Natalia Andreeva, a runaway wife, illustrates the intentions behind this view of the settlement, but also the missionaries’ sense that they could not, in fact,

42 Veniamin, Zhiznennye voprosy, 42.
43 Nikol’skii, 60.
construct a community that was separate from that from which the converts had originally come. Vasilii Larev, the Ust-Ordinsk missionary at the time, baptized Andreeva after she ran away from her husband in 1914. The missionariews viewed flight from a marriage in order to convert as an act that led to a tremendous amount of familial hostility and violence towards the woman involved. Fearing for Andreeva’s safety, Larev sent her to stay in the settlement surrounding the church with Osip Piatnitskii, a baptized Buryat who was Andreeva’s godfather. Larev reported that a mob of Andreeva’s husband’s relatives, accompanied by the local authorities, came to Piatnitskii’s house. They accused Andreeva of stealing from them, arrested her, and put her in jail. Piatnitskii was helpless to stop them or do more than offer Andreeva moral support during her imprisonment. Stories like Andreeva’s and Piatnitskii’s were regularly repeated elsewhere; that of Mariia Khalagaeva and Vasilii Otodoev, which will be analyzed later in this chapter, is just one such example. In both petitions and published accounts the settlement and the houses of Buryat convert men were permeable places: familial connections and Buryat authorities regularly reached into them to abuse and persecute. Moreover, settled Buryat convert men were never depicted as being able to successfully oppose the authority and power of unbaptized Buryat leaders. As Larev wrote in his report about the Andreeva case, implying that there should be, but was not, some sort of difference between the settlement and its surrounds, “All of this creates an impression as

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44 This case suggests that the male protectors may have been a much more important symbol to the missionaries than to the women ostensibly under their protection; while the published version of events gave Otodoev a prominent role and described the abuse he suffered for defending Khalagaeva, Khalagaeva’s petition described him only as a witness to her abuse. See “Irkutskaia dukhovnaia missiia v 1875 godu. (Prodolzhenie),” PIEV, 23 October 1876, 619-620, and NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 13, ll. 1-9ob.
if this were...something happening not in a Christian society, but in the depths of heathenism."45

Reappropriations of Missionary Narratives about Buryat Authority

The crisis of 1905-1907, during which approximately ten thousand converts formally reinscribed their confessional status as lamaist rather than Orthodox, and the suspicions over the lack of Orthodox convictions among the Buryats that preceded it resulted in a shift in missionary conceptions of the threat posed to conversion by Buryat authority figures. Missionaries continued to argue that Buryat authorities used their power to pressure converts to abandon Orthodoxy, and blamed a considerable amount of their losses on the actions of such authorities. However, they also began to seek alternate explanations for the loss of so many converts in the mission’s own history of relationships with Buryat authorities. The results of such considerations bore much in common with earlier missionary imaginations of Buryat authority. They relied on the idea that Buryat leaders held an undue amount of power over those subordinate to them, and that they had exercised that power to force their subordinates to convert to Orthodoxy in order to reap honors and material rewards from the state and the church for recruiting large numbers of converts. There were two chief differences between such narratives of the mission’s history and earlier conceptions of Buryat authority. Missionaries seeking an explanation for the lack of religious conviction among Buryats and, eventually, the mass apostasy argued that their predecessors had inadvertently supported such actions by encouraging Buryat leaders to support the mission, and that the affiliation between

45 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 22, ll. 44-45.
missionaries and Buryat leaders had resulted in the conversion of large numbers of individuals who had no affinity whatsoever for Orthodoxy. While a number of missionaries made such arguments in reports to their superiors, a report to the Holy Synod written by Archbishop Serafim detailing the mission’s understanding of its own history in this regard had particular influence.

The narratives laid out by missionaries critical of the mission’s local history were directly adopted and adapted by subsequent authors, including Russian travelers and later generations of Soviet historians. Recycled in this manner, the missionaries’ understandings of the nature of Buryat authority came to be used as conclusive proof that missionaries had cooperated with exploitative Buryat leaders to use violence to bring about mass conversions. Pre-revolutionary Russian travelers largely accepted the missionaries’ conclusions that alliances between missionaries and Buryat leaders had resulted in inauthentic conversions, leading to the apostasy of 1905-1907. Travel writers used such descriptions to argue that imperial authorities needed to take strict measures to ensure that the empire’s non-Russian subjects were ruled by authorities interested in their enlightenment rather than their enslavement. Subsequent authors, particularly during the Soviet period used the missionaries’ narratives as a means of demonstrating the collusion between feudal Buryat leaders and religious and imperial authorities in subjugating ordinary Buryats through the use of violence to bring about mass conversion. This outline of the problem again proposed external authority as the means to resolving the problem. Liberating the Buryats from fear and imposed force required the vanquishing of self-interested Buryat leaders, missionaries, and imperial authorities; in other words, it both
explained the necessity and benefits of the Soviet rise to power and the destruction of authorities representing an older stage of history.

As the silences surrounding the failure of taisha Matkhanov to provide the promised numbers of candidates for baptism suggest, the missionaries had long harbored suspicions about the efficacy of relying on Buryat authorities as allies. Such suspicions broke into the open in the wake of 1905-1907. As I cover this phenomenon in greater detail later in the dissertation, I will discuss only one example of such views here, although this is a particularly important example for considerations of how the missionaries’ understandings of Buryat authority were co-opted by later authors. This example, the story of taisha Khomakov, was frequently adopted by subsequent authors to criticize collaborations between Buryat authorities and Orthodox missionaries.

The story of taisha Khomakov was repeatedly recast by the missionaries across the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. In an 1859 account of mass baptisms in the Tunka region, the author referred to Khomakov in glowing terms, depicting his conversion and leadership of those under his authority as a main reason for the mission’s success in baptizing thousands of Buryats in the 1850s and 1860s.\(^{46}\) By the early twentieth century, Khomakov was portrayed in a very different light. As the missionaries sought to understand what had happened between 1905 and 1907, Khomakov’s authority became an explanation for the apostasy. In a 1913 report to the Holy Synod, Archbishop Serafim wrote that Khomakov, among other Buryat leaders from Tunka, had been persuaded to convert by imperial authorities, who had plied them with promises of rewards for their conversions and assistance in converting those under

\(^{46}\) *O kreshchenii mongolo-buriatov Tunkinskogo inorodcheskogo vedomstva, Irkutskogo gubernii* (Moscow, 1859), 1-8.
their authority. Khomakov’s godfather was the Emperor Alexander II, while his godmother was the Empress Maria Aleksandrovna. For recruiting one thousand converts, he was given the Order of St. Vladimir, Fourth Degree. These awards and connections to authority allowed Khomakov to achieve his goal, outstripping the honors and prestige of his local opponent, taisha Porushenov. This meant, however, that the conversions of lower-ranking Buryats brought about by Khomakov were not undertaken out of a sincere conviction in Orthodoxy. Rather, under pressure from imperial authorities and lured by his own desire, Khomakov exerted his considerable power to force his followers to convert. As Serafim wrote, “The power of the taisha over the [Buryats] at this time was very great, his authority among the Buryats was enormous; the masses unquestioningly obeyed him and willingly went after him, no matter where he took them.” The coincidence of imperial interests in bringing about baptism and the personal interests of Buryat authorities led to the simultaneous exercise of Buryat authority and state authority to bring about baptisms. Describing instructions from Archbishop Veniamin to the Tunka missionary Berdennikov, mentioned in one of the quotes with which this chapter began, Serafim argued that missionaries were charged with exercising state authority through the police, and Buryat authority through allies such as Khomakov to bring about baptisms; such actions resulted in the baptism of individuals who did so for base incentives and without conviction, but also the baptism through pressure by individuals who did not wish to be baptized.47

The missionaries’ concern in considering the mission’s past was to identify the causes behind the apparent absence of conviction in Orthodoxy among so many Buryat

converts. Searching for such an explanation, the missionaries fell back on many of their earlier patterns of describing Buryat authority. However, their descriptions of their own failings were adopted by Russians who absorbed the mission’s understanding of events through conversations with missionaries and published them as evidence of the need of a stronger government hand in restraining Russian contacts with the Buryats that threatened to damage both Buryat development and Russian sovereignty and influence in the region.

Two pre-revolutionary Russian travelers to the region. N. M. Astyrev and A.I. Termen, both discussed the problem of the mission’s relationship to Buryat authorities, and drew directly on the mission’s conclusions as an explanation for their chief arguments, in Astyrev’s case, why many Buryats remained poor and undeveloped, and in Termen’s, why russification efforts had failed in the region. Astyrev, who cited as his source a missionary who had subsequently been defrocked, described the cases of Khomakov and Lonson Ozdonov, a Buryat whose forcible baptism was discussed in Serafim’s report. Like the missionaries’ analysis, Astyrev argued that Buryat authorities, out of a desire to gain material rewards, had used their power to pressure their subordinates into conversion, resulting in a number of conversions undertaken for base reasons. Moreover, Astyrev, like Serafim, noted that the state’s interest in promoting baptism had resulted in the application of police authority to bring about conversion at

48 These differences in main argument match the political inclinations of the authors; while N.M. Astyrev was a radical best known for his efforts to improve the condition of Russia’s peasants, A.I. Termen was a colonial administrator known for arguing that the best tool for the russification of non-Russians was enlightened administrative practices oriented towards modernization. On Termen, see Sviatoslav Kaspe, “Imperial Political Culture and Modernization in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 1700-1930, ed. Jane Burbank, Mark von Hagen, and Anatolyi Remnev (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 485-486.
the behest of taishas and missionaries alike. Notably, like Serafim, he did not describe such incidents as violent; rather, they involved the arrest and jailing of reluctant individuals, rather than the inflicting of blows or other physical harm. Termen, who was in attendance at the 1909 missionary conference in Irkutsk whose conclusions Serafim’s report represented, accused Khomakov of rounding up Buryats and locking them in a barn to await the arrival of a priest to baptize them as an example of Khomakov’s willingness to increase numbers of converts by any means. Termen emphasized the mission’s complicity in this, writing that another leader who attempted to free the Buryats from the barn suffered because of his “counter-action against missionary activities,” a position that attracted retaliation from missionaries, imperial authorities, and Buryat leaders cooperating with the mission alike.

Termen’s and Astyrev’s recycling of missionary narratives to support their own arguments in favor of intervention into Buryat society to correct a failure to develop that was located within the exercise of authority to subordinate ordinary Buryats were among the first of several such instances. Each of these contributed to a normalization within Soviet histories of the region of the idea that the missionaries, in cooperation with Buryat authorities and imperial officials, directly utilized physical violence to bring about conversions. Soviet histories relied directly on pre-revolutionary authors such as Termen and Serafim to make this claim. However, they fleshed such accounts out with misreadings of published petitions from Buryats that accused the missionaries of using physical violence to bring about conversions. In doing so, they reduced what appeared in its earlier manifestations as a rather complex structural problem to collusion between

49 Astyrev, 192-194.
50 Termen, 25.
missionaries, imperial authorities, and Buryat leaders to use violent baptisms as a means of oppressing ordinary Buryats.

Serafim’s 1913 report to the Holy Synod stood at the center of Soviet scholarship alleging violent baptisms of Buryats. In 1931, it was published in the historical journal *Red Archive*, with an introduction by I. Shpitsberg. Unsurprisingly, given that one of the journal’s goals was the publication of pre-revolutionary historical materials in order to demonstrate the evils ended with the arrival of the new order, the introduction was harshly critical of the mission’s activities. Shpitsberg argued that Serafim’s report served as decisive proof that the missionaries had, in order to serve the state’s imperialist goals, co-opted Buryat authorities, buying them off with material wealth and the promise of power; one had received a horse and carriage, while another “was made a little tsar” over his subordinates. The end result of this was “baptism by force” [*kreshchenie siloiu*] with the assistance of tsarist officials and Buryat authorities, “forced baptism” [*nasil’stvennoe kreshchenie*], the construction of schools that “forcibly persecuted children,” and the theft of valuable non-Christian religious objects, the construction of schools that “forcibly persecuted children.” Serafim’s report did provide language that could be interpreted to support each of these claims, most explicitly the last. However, Shpitsberg chose to interpret Serafim’s statements as proof of the pervasive use of physical violence to bring about conversions and maintain Buryats as Orthodox, rather than Serafim’s more nuanced original meaning of the church’s accidental connection of itself to leadership structures that ruled through coercion, exercised through a variety of means.

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Shpitsberg’s conviction that the alliance between church, state, and Buryat authorities had resulted in the use violence to bring about baptisms may have been partially inspired by two articles in the journals *Siberian Flames* and *Buryat Life* published in the late 1920s. These articles contained excerpts from petitions written in the 1890s by Buryats alleging that they had been forced to convert through the use of violence, thus providing the Buryat attestation to repression lacking in the missionaries’ narratives. The article in *Siberian Flames* cited Termen as an outside authority to support its claim that such instances were the result of widespread collaboration between missionaries, Buryat authorities, and imperial agents, while the article in *Buryat Life* referred to an 1892 article in the St. Petersburg newspaper *Grazhdanin* that it labeled an investigation of the affair. The published petitions, all apparently from the same series of incidents in the early 1890s, contain graphic descriptions of violence against Buryats who did not wish to convert; as a sample, one author wrote that a Buryat official ordered a Cossack to bind an individual he wished to have baptized hand and foot, while another reported that one group of Buryats who did not want to be baptized were chased down and forced into a cart after they ran. Eventually, this second group arrived at the church, where each had to be dragged to the baptismal font and physically forced in. The petitions blamed the same triad of actors for bringing about forced baptisms that Serafim, Termen, Astyrev, and Shpitsberg had identified: such incidents were the result of a

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52 P. Kudriavtsev, “Stranichka iz istorii nasil’stvennogo kreshcheniia buriat,” *Zhizn’ Buriatii*, no. 6 (1929): 63-66; and A. K-va, “Nasil’stvennoe kreshchenie buriat,” *Sibirskie ogni*, no. 1 (1927): 101-109. These same incidents were described in an issue of the conservative St. Petersburg journal *Grazhdanin*; the journal’s editor, Prince Vladimir Petrovich Meshcherskii, published an excerpt of his diary in the February 12, 1892, issue of the journal in which he described a meeting with a group of Buryats who had journeyed to St. Petersburg to report forced baptisms along the lines of those described in the *Sibirskie ogni* article.
collaboration between missionaries, imperial police, and Buryat officials. Consequently, although I will argue in my discussion of two such instants later in this chapter that to do so is inaccurate, the petitions fit easily into contemporary understandings of the relationship between the mission and authority.

As Yuri Slezkine and Paul Werth, among others, have noted, baptisms of Siberian natives in the eighteenth century were brought about by violence. However, arguing that such practices persisted in the late nineteenth century ignores the sharp changes in church policy and enforcement regarding such acts that took place in the early nineteenth century. By the time that the mission to the Buryats was revitalized in the 1860s, Orthodoxy in Siberia had become thoroughly institutionalized. This meant that the church as an institution had considerably greater ability to monitor, control, and respond to disciplinary infractions committed by clergy. And although the near-complete lack of clergy in many areas had lead to a number of religious responsibilities, including baptism, being assumed by lay believers, responsibilities that had previously assumed by lay believers, such as baptism, had been assumed by an extensive but thin network of church servitors. Moreover, the state itself had come to believe that giving a free hand to Orthodox proselytization, including allowing baptism by any means, was potentially destabilizing of imperial rule and consequently undesirable. Consequently, by the second half of the nineteenth century, those who were performing baptism were responsible to both the church and the state for their actions in a way that their predecessors had not been.

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Moreover, missionaries did not have a free rein to bring about baptism by any means necessary. Paul Werth had enumerated the various restrictions on acceptable tactics for missionaries pursuing baptisms. Mid-nineteenth-century Orthodox theology placed a great premium on the elements of free will and individual desire in adult baptism. In order to preserve the sacramental nature of baptism, the Holy Synod’s rules broadly prohibited the use of “coercion,” which encompassed a variety of actions, including overt violence and activities that were viewed as potentially leading to conversion for reasons not reflective of religious inclination. The Russian civil code contained a similar set of prohibitions, although these were motivated by the goal of maintaining peace and stability among the empire’s non-baptized populations. It is thus extremely unlikely that physical violence would have been consistently exercised as a method of bringing about baptism: not only did this confront important theological tenets of missionary work, it carried the risk of severe condemnation and possible punishment by church authorities and the government. Even if church authorities in the region consistently turned a blind eye to the exercise of violence, the church’s relationship with the government was only infrequently close enough that the government would have done so as well. Only during the mid-1880s and possibly the 1840s does the mission seem to have attracted intense support from high-ranking government officials. Perhaps more importantly, the missionaries always had tense relationships with the mid-level

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54 After 1905, the church hierarchy in Irkutsk became openly critical of the dispensing of material benefits to new converts, arguing that such practices encouraged conversion for material gain; however, in the nineteenth century, clergymen widely believed that material benefits were necessary to attract convert in the first place and did not infringe on freedom of will; see Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 80-81. In the Baikal region, such practices were based on beliefs that Buryats saw Orthodoxy as the religion of impoverished people with low social standing.  
Russian administrators overseeing their districts, who were often labeled uncooperative when the missionaries requested their assistance, as I will discuss later. If such officials were uncooperative regarding inquiries, they were very unlikely to have consistently used the police to carry out large numbers of forced baptisms.

There is an additional reason to approach the contents of petitions such as those republished in the articles as not necessarily true in a literal fashion. These petitions were discursive constructions which, as I argue in the subsequent section, should be treated as embedded within local conflicts. As Paul Werth has pointed out in his analysis of similar petitions from the Volga-Kama region, complaints by converts that they had been baptized as a result of violence perpetuated by missionaries and officials were often tactically informed, shaping events to emphasize arguments for alteration of confessional status believed to be palatable to authorities.\(^{56}\) Thus, accusations that a missionary beat a man in order to force him close to the baptismal font, or that another was stripped and forced into the font by a pair of Cossacks may not be literally true, but rather renditions of events that exaggerated or highlighted particular elements that authorities were believed to see sympathetically. Like the petitions Werth examines, many of the published petitions from Buryats protesting the method of their baptism requested that the petitioner not be listed on official records as Orthodox. However, these petitions to have an individual’s status as a convert revoked frequently detailed the physical violence surrounding the act of baptism within a larger picture of conflicts with local Buryat authorities.\(^{57}\) The petitions may have had the intention of calling in outside officials to

\(^{56}\) Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 166.

\(^{57}\) See, for example, the petitions drawn from the General-Governor’s files contained in A. K-va, 106-109.
intervene in local conflict in addition to obtaining revocation of Orthodox confessional status; indeed, the Buryat official Etagorov seems to have been a particular focus of complaint. It is certainly possible that Etagorov did something to garner such rancor; indeed, Buryat officials may have used registering an individual for baptism as a weapon in local conflicts that had nothing to do with religious affairs at their root. As I will suggest in an analysis of the case of Anna Komarova, a Buryat woman who petitioned for assistance, Buryats found it useful to represent conflicts with complex realities as stemming from narrow causes. While Komarova attempted to maneuver her own story to fit the missionaries’ belief that Buryat authority was oppressive of and violent towards converts, it is entirely possible that Buryats writing to a different set of officials would see representing their own complex conflicts within a narrow narrative of violent baptism.

With the publication of Serafim’s report and Shpitsberg’s analysis in Red Archive, the idea of close missionary collaboration with imperial officials and Buryat authorities and the ubiquity of violent baptism became firmly entrenched within Soviet historiography. In his 1940 survey History of the Buryat-Mongol People from the 17th Century to the 1860s, F.A. Kudriavtsev argued that the missionaries were in collusion with oppressive tsarist authorities and corrupt Buryat leaders, and used violence to bring Buryats to the baptismal font. He gave two examples of such behavior, one drawn from among the Khori Buryats and supported with reference to a folk song collected by a nineteenth-century ethnographer; the other was the history of missionary activities in the Tunka Valley laid out in Serafim’s report and Shpitsberg’s article. Kudriavtsev again recounted the story of Khomakov, stating that Orthodoxy’s spread among the Buryats
“was accompanied by the bribery of noions [taishas], deceit, and violent actions.”

Whether intentionally or not, by citing Shpitsberg as his source for the history he relayed rather than giving a separate reference for Serafim’s report, Kudriavtsev effectively disguised his reliance on the mission itself for his information and viewpoint, an act that also concealed the possibility that the violence he narrated was embedded in the mission’s own views of Buryat society. For subsequent historians, the social fact of the use of violence to compel baptism by Orthodox missionaries, tsarist officials, and Buryat authorities was so well-established that it needed no citations. Respected scholars of the region such as K.M. Gerasimova and L.M. Dameshek, who cited the Grazhdanin article discussed earlier, could make casual references to the “forcible baptism of the Irkutsk Buryats” in chapters on tsarism’s use of Orthodoxy as a tool of assimilation and assume that their readers --knew exactly what they meant. Such narratives are so well-established within thinking about Buryat history that Robert Montgomery, author of the only American monograph to examine nineteenth-century Buryat history, writes, “it was not unknown for clerics to kick in the doors of unbaptized Buryats, drag them to missionary stations, and pressure them to accept baptism,” while citing only sources written after 1916.

That the mission’s questioning of its own relationships with Buryat leaders, fed by its own beliefs about the nature and practice of authority in Buryat communities, had

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58 F. A. Kudriavtsev, 205-206.
60 Montgomery, 111.
been distilled down to a simplistic equation of the combined exercise of violence through conversion upon ordinary Buryats by the combined forces of state, Buryat leaders, and missionaries is evident through a watercolor from the early to mid Soviet period. Preserved in a photograph available in the archives of the M. N. Khangalov Museum of the History of Buriatiya, the painting is best treated as a work of historical fiction rather than a rendering of any particular event. In it, a Russian Orthodox priest performs baptisms from a platform in a river, with a Buryat leader in traditional costume standing directly behind him and looking on. At the rear of the platform stands a tsarist official in uniform. On the shores of the river stands a queue of morose and anxious Buryats waiting their turn. That they are poor is evident from their clothing. They are being herded into line by two Cossacks or policemen wielding whips from horseback. As the new converts exit the water, they are met by two Buryat officials, clad in traditional clothing demonstrative of status, who give them baptismal gifts. The painting depicts a clear constellation of authority between state, mission, and Buryat leadership, exercised at the expense of ordinary Buryats. It also distills the exercise of force down to a violent moment: the herding of Buryats into line to passively wait for baptism through the use of whips and blows.\(^{61}\)

**Narratives of Abuse of Converts by Buryat Authorities, Reexamined**

Petitions to missionaries by converts complaining that they were being mistreated by Buryat authorities because they were Orthodox demonstrate both that there was broad public awareness of the mission’s stated beliefs on the issue, to the point that petitioners

\[\text{ Muzei istorii Buriatii im. M. N. Khangalova, NB 2856183.}\]
seeking assistance from the missionaries can be seen crafting their stories to meet the pattern of experience laid out by the mission. However, the petitions also show that converts’ stories of their experiences with Buryat authorities did not easily match the official narrative. Missionaries selected elements out of petitioners’ narratives that they believed revealed the essential truth of the use of authority to oppress converts. In doing so, they focused on particular aspects of the conflicts that converts described to them. In some cases, this focus concealed the missionaries’ uncertainty about whether or not converts’ stories actually did fit this pattern. In other cases, this became a myopic focus on a single facet of how converts represented the conflicts in which they were embroiled; such narrow interests ignored the broader, multidimensional means by which converts understood such conflicts. Consequently, in such cases missionaries represented convert experience as fitting the narrow mold of the abused convert within Buryat society, even as converts themselves saw conflicts as stemming from multiple causes and rooted in local circumstance and personal history.

The case of Mariia Khalagaeva, which occurred in the late 1870s, is particularly interesting because it left an archival trail, but was also described in missionary publications as an example of the benighted position of Buryat converts. In 1875, Khalagaeva wrote to Filipp Savvin, the missionary at Ust-Ordinsk missionary station, reporting that Taro Gergenov had assaulted her for no reason, all the while declaring that “all converts should be not just beaten, but killed by non-converts.” Gergenov then stole 57 rubles and the silver cross she had received at her baptism. Khalagaeva claimed she had appealed for redress to the steppe duma and the Russian overseer of the Buryat administration, and that both had declined to pursue the case, a statement Savvin
interpreted as an indication that neither were interested in defending a convert. After Savvin wrote to the duma and the overseer, he received responses from both promising investigation. Savvin found neither promise plausible, although there is evidence to suggest that both parties did, in fact, investigate the matter; in the margins of the overseer’s note, he scrawled “As if!”, and on the duma’s response he mocked its promise to look into the matter. To this point, Savvin’s response indicates that he had fit Khalagaeva’s petition into the mold of the victimized convert left without recourse to authority because the authorities were not interested in supporting converts. After the first round of communication, Khalagaeva disappeared. Savvin asked the duma to locate her; when it refused to do so on the grounds that such matters were the purview of lower levels of Buryat authority, Savvin wrote in his notes “And that there is the st. [status] of the Law [sic] now,” suggesting that he attributed the situation to the absence of rule of law in Buryat communities, again in keeping with the prevailing discursive imagining of such incidents. But when Khalagaeva was found several months later, Savvin’s sense that he understood the situation vanished. Khalagaeva, who was illiterate, had a statement written out for her declaring, “if I will or if I won’t pursue a suit I don’t know, but the priest at Ust-Ordinsk missionary church knows.” Savvin did not know. In response to the duma’s request that he clarify the statement, he declared that he had no idea what he was talking about, and expressed confusion about the affair.\(^6\)

Despite Savvin’s encounter with Khalagaeva having ended on a note of considerable uncertainty, Khalagaeva’s story was published in *Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti* as a stark example of the mistreatment of converts within Buryat communities

\(^6\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 13, ll. 4-10.
and at the hands of Buryat leaders. In its published form, the story was attributed to Savvin; it is unclear whether he himself edited it into the form in which it was published, or if he relayed the story to a superior, who revised it for publication. The differences between the two are great, including new characters, dialogue consisting of clichéd representations of anti-convert slurs, a new setting, a death, and the introduction of two named Buryat administrators as villains. Khalagaeva’s story and Savvin’s experience of his encounter with her and his descent from surety to confusion had been completely submerged within a standardized narrative of violence against converts. This narrative provided a clarity and structure to the fictionalized encounter that was lacking in its real-life inspiration.

In the article, the story was introduced as being exemplary of the rejection of converts as “baptized dogs” who should be “[beaten] to death so that there are no baptized dogs;” in other words, it was treated as a clear example of Buryats’ broad rejection of converts and desire to eliminate them. Khalagaeva had been staying in the house of Vasilii Otodoev, a baptized Buryat, out of fear of persecution after her baptism. There, Gergenov had assaulted Khalagaeva, yelling “Take that, baptized dog, take that!” Other unbaptized Buryats present had done nothing to assist Khalagaeva, “as if this is how it should be.” The next day, Otodoev reported the situation to authorities, but received no response; Savvin’s efforts to push the Buryat administration to investigate were also met with silence because the administrators in question were the “most evil
enemies of the mission,” the elders Alsaev and Elboev. Otodoev was subsequently beaten until he coughed blood; he later died from his injuries.63

How should Khalagaeva’s actual experience be understood? Was Gergenov’s attack on her motivated by a desire to push converts out of the community? Or was it a theft motivated by greed, or a personal grudge, or perhaps a combination of these things?

A second set of petitions suggests that the conflicts that led converts to petition for clerical intervention on the grounds that they were disadvantaged and abused within Buryat communities were deeply embedded in local interpersonal relationships, and cannot easily be categorized solely as a result of tension between converts and non-converts. In other words, although converts labeled themselves as such and assumed this as their chief identity when they petitioned missionaries, they existed in their communities as multi-faceted individuals embedded in property disputes, personality conflicts, and family feuds. Converts themselves described how these interconnections created and contributed to the conflicts that drove them to petition to the missionaries for assistance. However, it appears that engaging with the missionaries about conflicts sparked a process of dialogue that encouraged converts to reframe their stories to emphasize the role of religious tension in causing conflict. The missionaries who participated in such processes repeatedly ignored evidence that conflicts were inspired by a number of factors other than religious tension, choosing instead to emphasize only elements within the converts’ stories that matched their belief that converts were abused by Buryat authorities because of their religion.

63 “Irkutskaia dakhovnaia misiia,” 23 October 1876, 619-620. Slurs against “baptized dogs,” often following the exact phrasing found in this article, are repeated over and over again in publications during this time period.
Between 1907 and 1913, Anna Komarova (also known as Dulianova), a Buryat convert, authored a series of petitions to missionaries in the Ust-Orda region requesting their intervention in a property dispute she was embroiled in. Komarova’s conflict stemmed from two separate, but related, issues. Orphaned in childhood, she had been raised by her polygamous father’s first wife, who, after Komarova’s father’s death, had married Innokentii Bulatov, to whom Komarova maintained she owed filial loyalty.64 Bulatov was in a feud with Andrei Aleksandrov, a local Buryat official with jurisdiction over property issues.65 His conflict with Aleksandrov became relevant to Komarova and Mariia Nikolaeva, her stepmother, because of issues related to the disposal of Komarova’s biological father’s property after his death. Komarova’s father and his brother, Baian, had been separated in infancy. As an adult, Komarova’s father had accumulated significant amounts of property, a process to which Baian had not contributed. However, upon Komarova’s biological father’s death, Baian’s son was named as his heir, and took control of the property. Komarova argued that this settlement had left her and Mariia Nikolaeva in destitution, and that she, as her father’s sole descendant, was entitled to a share of his wealth. She had been unable to secure redress through the Buryat administrative system because of Aleksandrov’s grudge against Bulatov; Aleksandrov, who was promoted several times during the period, repeatedly thwarted Komarova and Nikolaeva’s appeals to Buryat authorities.66 Seeking intervention from an outside authority, Komarova used her convert status as grounds for appeal to the missionaries.

64 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 191, l. 125; NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 290a, l. 474.
65 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 290a, ll. 72-72ob.
66 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 191, ll. 125ob-126ob.
Komarova’s petitions show a steady evolution in how she cast the conflict in order to most effectively appeal to the missionaries. In a 1907 petition to Archbishop Tikhon, she argued that she had been unable to gain a favorable decision regarding disposal of her father’s property from Buryat authorities because the authorities favored wealthy Buryats over poor Buryats. Aleksandrov’s control of the local government meant that all the evidence “stood on the wide of the wealthy,” and the process by which he was regularly promoted to different positions from which he could reject her claim meant that she could not get justice through any of the levels of the local Buryat administration. Her plea was completely absent of language casting the conflict as resulting from anti-convert sentiments. In response, Archbishop Tikhon ordered Vasilii Larev, the missionary supervisor in the Ust-Orda region, to gather evidence on the case and let Komarova know that she had the right to appeal to the district court, a separate entity from the Buryat administration.67

Larev delegated the evidence-gathering to one of his subordinates, Mikhail Makhochkeev, who connected Komarova’s lack of legal recourse because of her poverty to the position of converts in Buryat society. Makhochkeev supported Komarova’s claim that the various levels of the Buryat administration were closed to her because of Aleksandrov’s position of authority and his support of the wealthy, and verified her assertion that her father had left a substantial amount of property. Pursuing one of the mission’s key lines of interest in regard to reforming Buryat administrative structures, Makhochkeev noted that the government-mandated convert representative in the Buryat administrative had been present both times that the case had been heard, but that the

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67 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 195, ll. 125ob-126ob.
representative was an “unfluent person” [nevliatel’noe litso] and had been unable to stop Aleksandrov. Makhochkeev thus made a connection that Komarova had not made: he linked her impoverished status, from which she lacked recourse, to her religious status.

The case was not resolved, and in 1913, Komarova authored two more petitions, one to the Irkutsk General-Governor and the other to Tikhon’s successor, Serafim. In her petition to the General-Governor, a civil official, Komarova defined the conflict she faced differently than she did in her petition to Archbishop Serafim, demonstrating that she herself understood that the conflict could be represented in a variety of ways, and that different methods of representing it had different tactical advantages. In her petition to the General-Governor, Komarova emphasized Aleksandrov’s dislike of Bulatov and her own poverty. Her second effort to enlist the church hierarchy also brought up the issue of Aleksandrov’s use of his position to harm her because of her familial connections, and discussed the family history involved in the conflict. This time, however, she argued that Aleksandrov was rejecting her claims because she was a convert. She described how she had “suffered from unjust offenses and persecution, inflicted on me by my neighbors [odnoulsniki], in part for the True Faith of Christ which I confess and in part due to the hatred of my enemy Andrei Aleksandrov for my guardian and stepfather, Innokentii Bulatov…” The increased emphasis on the religious elements of the conflict in Komarova’s second petition to the archbishop was intended to heighten the urgency of her case in the eyes of church readers.

The response of Makhochkeev, who was again ordered to investigate the case, demonstrates that the missionaries focused on the elements of Komarova’s case that

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68 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 290a, ll. 473-477.
69 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 290a, ll. 72-72ob.
matched circulating understandings of the persecution Buryat converts endured because of their religion, directly excluding other potential representations of the conflict. As preparation for his investigations, Makhochkeev was sent a copy of Komarova’s petition to the General-Governor with his orders. He was thus aware that the problem could be described as the result of family history, the persecution of poor Buryats by wealthy Buryats, or oppression of converts. However, he continued to primarily narrate Komarov’s situation in terms of religious oppression, perhaps because such ways of imagining conflict placed the mission’s activities at the center of what the missionaries viewed as broad conflict within Buryat societies. Acknowledging the multiple other factors contributing to the conflict would have placed the mission at a peripheral location in Buryat society, serving as a means of resolving conflicts with which it was not directly involved rather than triggering a social crisis necessitating strong corrective action. In his report to Larev, Makhochkeev again concluded that Aleksandrov’s influence had closed all of Komarova’s avenues of appeal to local Buryat authorities. This was because “Andrei Aleksandrov has, for a long time, stood against Orthodoxy, and therefore will not show favor to the defenseless woman Komarova, who sincerely confesses the Orthodox religion.” By rephrasing her argument, Komarova had led her audience to consider her as an individual persecuted because of her religion.

Komarova’s case is one of the most detailed and extensive in the Ust-Ordinsk church records, although its material reflects the stories found in many other documents. Her multiple petitions demonstrate the variety of ways that Buryats imagined the conflicts they found themselves in: they could be seen as the results of property disputes,

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70 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 290a, ll. 70-71ob.
family histories, the disdain of the wealthy for the poor, or religion. The paper trail of clerical responses surrounding her petitions shows that the missionaries, regardless of the explanation for the conflict they were presented with, tended to connect conflicts to religion. In this light, Komarova’s decision to frame her second petition to the mission in terms of religious oppression was the result of documentary interactions with missionaries that encouraged her to prioritize this way of imagining her conflict with Aleksandrov over other methods of imagining and explaining it. Consequently, missionary representations of conflicts involving converts as inevitably driven by religion encouraged Buryats to frame conflicts that were multidimensional and involved a variety of causes in more narrow fashions.

Narratives of Missionary Violence against Buryats, Reexamined

The presumption that missionaries, Buryat authorities, and imperial officials collaborated to bring about baptisms and used violent means to carry out baptisms obscures the both the multiple ways in which ostensible “collaborations” took place, the multiple types of non-violent force and perceived force that were exercised to bring about baptisms, and the various justifications underlying the use of force to accomplish a baptism. Document trails in the records of the Ust-Orda missionary station suggest that rather than outright collaboration, missionaries, Buryat authorities, and imperial officials worked together – or did not work together – on a case by case basis, using different means to engage and hinder each other depending on the situation. Consequently, such interactions cannot be condensed to a simple paradigm of collaboration. Moreover, force was exercised in a variety of ways that were often indirect, involving legal pressure and
threats rather than physical contact. Indeed, missionaries could exercise force without ever laying eyes on the individuals they were pursuing. When force is recognized as constituting more than physical violence against the weak by an unassailably superior party, the diversity of possibilities for resistance becomes visible. Finally, the missionaries and the Buryats in whom they were interested saw the situation, not surprisingly, in radically different ways. Many, and by the late nineteenth century, perhaps even most, individuals whom the missionaries pressured to get baptized had prior family histories of contact with the church, even if this contact had been initiated because of the various material rewards offered to converts at various times in the mission’s history. However, while the church saw such histories as constituting grounds for keeping a family permanently Orthodox, Buryats believed that some types of family relationships, including marriage and adoption, removed some individuals from the obligation of being Orthodox.

In some, but not all, circumstances, Buryats rejected the idea that family histories of contact obligated descendants to get baptized; while there was at least limited recognition among Buryat officials that this was both Orthodox canon and state law, Buryats exercised various means to extract. However, for the missionaries, baptism for any reason initiated a long-term, even eternal, relationship between the church, the convert, and the convert’s family. Most importantly, a convert’s children were required to

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71 At various times, such incentives included freedom from iasak payments for a limited amount of time, three-ruble pieces, shirts and crosses, and brick tea, a staple in Buryat diets. Many of the petitions complaining about forced baptism published in Soviet journals fall into the category of individuals with family histories of contact with the church.
be baptized and raised in the Orthodox Church.\textsuperscript{72} The church erratically and inconsistently exercised the various means at its disposal to ensure that the children of converts were baptized and received an Orthodox upbringing; it is such actions that are the most plausible site for the consistent exercise of force by missionaries against non-convert Buryats in the late nineteenth century.

In this section, I will explore three instances in which missionaries went to extreme lengths to protect the Orthodoxy of converts’ children, repeatedly intruding into communities and families while only occasionally achieving their goals. In doing so, they acted in a manner that could only be interpreted as hostile, forceful, and harmful by Buryat witnesses, creating an atmosphere of resentment towards the missionaries and sense that they were an oppressive presence. However, rather than simply succumbing to such pressure, Buryats deployed a variety of techniques, ranging from disappearance to legal maneuvering to the application of kinship connections that were foreign to the missionaries. Perhaps because of the value placed on baptizing the children of converts (in the case of the missionaries) or protecting children from a foreign and intrusive force (in the case of the Buryats), documents pertaining to such cases lack the rigid genre requirements and narrative formulas of many other Buryat written engagements with missionaries. Indeed, these documents have a sense of rawness, anger, and pain about them that is often obscured by formalities in communications about other issues. As such, they offer a window into the perceived actuality of the use of force by missionaries against Buryats.

\textsuperscript{72} Such requirements were incorporated into Russian civil law under Peter I, who attempted to establish a legal framework around mixed marriage as a means of promoting closer relationships between Russians and Europeans under Russian rule. See Werth, “Empire, Religious Freedom and…‘Mixed’ Marriages,” 303-304.
The 1896 case of Nikolai Alkhadaev, a young orphaned Orthodox boy who was taken from the family and community that had fostered him after his parents’ death and removed to the missionary station, demonstrates both the extreme emotional stakes for Buryats in conflict with missionaries over children, and the legal options for negotiation open to Buryats. Alkhadaev’s case opens with the plea of his clan elder to the Kudinsk inorodnaia uprava asking that the uprava intervene with higher Russian authorities to achieve Alkhadaev’s return to the clan. Alkhadaev had been taken from the clan that year by Innokentii Prelovskii, at that time the missionary at Ust-Ordinsk station. Prelovskii had abruptly arrived and taken Alkhadaev, in the words of the clan elder, “without either my or the community’s agreement,” apparently on the grounds that there were no other converts in the community and Alkhadaev was not receiving an Orthodox upbringing. The elder’s plea was accompanied by a communal agreement from the clan that stated the history of the case, and declared that Prelovskii’s actions were wrong because the boy was miserable. He spoke no Russian and Prelovskii spoke no Buryat, so the two could not communicate. Moreover, Alkhadaev was lonely in his new Russian, adult surroundings. When members of the clan had visited him at the station, he had cried and begged to go home; the community argued that such misery would eventually harm his health.73

This was not the first time the community had attempted to obtain Alkhadaev’s return. Seeking to find legal grounds for Alkhadaev’s return, the community put forward a set of conditions that it believed might satisfy the law requiring an Orthodox upbringing for convert children. These conditions both indicate that the community was conscious of

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73 NARB f. 195, o.1, d. 89, ll. 2-6.
such requirements, and that they believed there was a space within which they could
interpret the law to gain their ends. They promised to take Alkhadaev to church and to
find a Russian to teach him prayers and Orthodox behavior, “insofar as this is necessary
and possible” given the circumstances in which they lived. The uprava’s response again
suggested that Buryats did maneuver within the law to achieve their ends. The uprava,
noting Prelovskii’s justification for taking Alkhadaev from the community, cited the law
as allowing a non-baptized parent to raise an Orthodox child while leaving the child in
the Orthodox faith if the parent signed an oath to this effect. Extrapolating this clause to
apply to Alkhadaev’s orphan status, the uprava wrote that if Alkhadaev’s relatives signed
such an agreement, the boy might be returned to them. The outcome of the case is not
described in the archive. 74

For the missionaries, identifying and finding the children of converts who needed
to be baptized was a challenging task, given that records were often spotty, individuals
were sometimes listed under multiple names, and determining kinship was challenging.
Many Buryats had been baptized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries;
however, given that missionaries at this time were mobile, the mission did not have its
own set of records identifying who was Orthodox and who was not. When the mission
began to construct its network of missionary stations in the 1860s, missionaries attempted
to develop their own sets of records and pursue the baptisms of children of converts
which had not occurred in the absence of any clerical presence. However, because of the
gaps in their own records, they were forced to rely on local knowledge and the records of
the Buryat administrations, which had been in charge of tracking the confessional status

74 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 89, ll. 3-7ob.
of their subjects for state purposes, to identify such children; this reliance, which opened possibilities for challenge, obfuscation, and resistance on the part of Buryats, makes it clear that the missionaries’ ability to identify those who needed baptism was in no way absolute.

The next two sets of documents that I examine come from Ust-Orda in the mid-1870s, as missionary Filipp Savvin sought to determine which Buryats were the unbaptized children of converts. As he sought evidence, he cultivated a working relationship with Kozma Khramov, a Buryat who had assisted in a smallpox vaccination campaign some twenty years earlier. Khramov told Savvin that on his visits to area households in that capacity, he had observed a number of convert families that had unbaptized children.75 As he attempted to track down the families and children named by Khramov, Savvin encountered what he labeled as bureaucratic hindrance from Buryat administrations that disagreed with his information and outright resistance from the families and communities of the children he sought. As Savvin sought to overcome these obstacles and bring about the baptisms of the children concerned, he acted abrasively, forcefully, disrespectfully, and frequently in blatant disregard of evidence presented to him, leaving an extremely negative impression on a variety of witnesses. Moreover, his activities provoked a variety of responses from those at whom they were aimed, causing Russian and Buryat officials to refuse to participate in his search and families to cloak the children in question in kinship terms that, to the Buryats, made them unbaptizable.

Savvin, as did many Orthodox missionaries, fundamentally misunderstood the complexities of Buryat family structure. Buryat families regularly fostered or adopted the

75 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, l. 19.
children of relatives in cases of parental death or the persistent or temporary poverty of the child’s birth family; sometimes, children were simply given to childless families. On some levels, the new family and the larger community did not distinguish between adopted or fostered children and biological children, although separate terminologies did exist in Buryat for the two categories. This led Orthodox priests to believe that families had more biological children than were listed on the baptismal records or reported to the missionaries by the Buryat administration, or that families had deliberately hidden their children from baptism by sending them to live with other family members. In one instance, Savvin confronted Innokentii Vorob’ev, whom he accused of hiding two children from baptism by passing them on to his uncle and brother. Vorob’ev swore that neither of the children in question were his. In the second case, Savvin attempted to track down two girls he presumed to be sisters and the daughters of Anton Shegloev, a deceased baptized Buryat. Several community members testified that one of the girls Savvin sought actually had been Shegolev’s daughter, but had died fifteen years before. Shegolev had adopted the second, who had subsequently married “according to shamanist custom.” In both cases, family and community distinguished sharply between biological and adopted children. The assumption underlying their public position was that adoptive families did not have the right to alter the religious confession of adopted children. It is impossible to determine whether this was held to be true or was a tactic used to stymie

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76 Basaeva, 39, 56-57; Petri, 16; on terminology, Zhargal Badagarov, personal communication, May 31, 2011.
77 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, ll. 26-27. Complicating this case was the fact that Vorob’ev was also known as Voronev and Murav’ev. It was not unusual for Buryats to be listed in different sets of records under different surnames, challenging priests’ efforts to track converts and their families through the various Buryat administrative units.
78 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, ll. 6-6ob, 9-10.
Savvin, whose categories of understanding for kinship relations failed to account for such a situation and who was intensely disliked by the families and communities involved. Nonetheless, the cases demonstrate that the lines of parentage used by the Orthodox church to determine who needed to be baptized conflicted with Buryat parenting practices.

As he pursued his case against Vorob’ev, Savvin relied on misinterpretations of Khramov’s testimony about Vorob’ev’s relationship to the children in question, forcing Khramov’s evidence to match his conclusion that Vorob’ev was the biological father of the two children. In his original written statement to Savvin, Khramov wrote that twenty years before, he had vaccinated Vorob’ev’s daughter [doch’] Nogol, who had not been baptized because she was the daughter [again, doch’] of Vorob’ev’s uncle, Bidka Borodkino. Khramov thus presented Savvin with a picture of the ambiguous nature of the relationship between Nogol and Vorob’ev. Less ambiguously, Khramov reported that Vorob’ev had given his unbaptized son Mukhor to another Buryat to be raised. Savvin interpreted Khramov’s statements as absolute evidence that Vorob’ev was the biological father of both children, and that he had given them away to other Buryats to prevent their baptisms. In the missionary’s mind, a complex set of relationships that likely arose for a variety of practice and social reasons was thus distilled into a simple equation of a father’s avoidance of his Orthodox responsibility. For his part, Vorob’ev emphatically and repeatedly disavowed having any relationship with either Nogol or Mukhor that would allow him to have them baptized. In an irate reply to Savvin, he referred to the two as “others’ children” [chuzhie deti] and asked why he should be required to present such
for baptism.\(^79\) His definition of “child” in this context seems to have been biological: he emphasized that he and his wife were both Orthodox and were legally married, and that they had only two children, Pavel and Agafia, both of whom were baptized.\(^80\)

Over the course of two years of correspondence with Savvin on the issue, Vorob’ev, Buryat administrators, and even outside Russian investigators mustered extensive proof that Nogol and Mukhor were not Vorob’ev’s biological children. After Savvin requested the Buryat administration’s assistance in procuring Nogol and Mukhor for baptism, the administration replied with its own evidence that only two children, both baptized, were recorded under Vorob’ev’s name in its records, while Nogol and Mukhor were listed under the names of Vorob’ev’s brother and uncle. Savvin contested this point by referring to his own records, which stated that Vorob’ev had four children, including Nogol and Mukhor. In testimony to the administration, Vorob’ev himself disputed Khramov’s evidence, arguing that his children’s lack of vaccination scars meant that Khramov had never visited his house. After his rebuff by the Buryat administration, Savvin appealed to the Russian overseer of the Buryat administration, the zemskii zasedatel’, for outside assistance. In his request, he accused Vorob’ev of lying and bribing the Buryat authorities, and begged the overseer to intervene “for the love of God.” The overseer, dryly stating that Savvin had asked him to verify the veracity of Khramov’s testimony, sent an investigator who interviewed Kirill Ustiugov, a Buryat who had worked with Khramov on the vaccination campaign and whom Khramov had claimed could verify his statements. Ustiugov’s testimony supported Vorob’ev’s claims: Ustiugov said he had vaccinated Mukhor, and Mukhor’s father was Imdei Zaianov;

\(^{79}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, l. 27.

\(^{80}\) NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, l. 26ob.
moreover, he reported that he had vaccinated Nogol in the home of her father, Bidka
Borodkino, and that Borodkino himself was known as a man who would not have had his
children baptized. Additionally, the investigator acquired testimony from nine of
Vorob’ev’s neighbors, all of whom swore that Nogol and Mukhor were not Vorob’ev’s
children.\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, ll. 26-29ob, 31-33ob.}

Savvin demonstrated a similar refusal to consider evidence that called his claims
into question or believe that either the individuals or institutions involved were acting in
good faith as he sought to baptize the children of Anton Shegolev. In Shegolev’s case,
Savvin was dismissed by Buryat administrators just as he had been in Vorob’ev’s, based
on evidence from both record books and testimony from Ustiugov. In response, Savvin
demanded that the Buryat officials who had stated that one of the girls in question was
not Shegolev’s daughter swear “an oath according to shamanist custom” before him and
Khramov. The administration’s response stepped well outside the highly formalized
language typically used for bureaucratic correspondence, showing their irritation:

The clan administration unanimously [illegible – declares?] that if they
gave certification, then it is on the basis of the record books; as far as the
taking of an oath according to Shamanist custom is concerned, they
absolutely do not agree, and in their opinion, this matter cannot be taken
seriously by them, because, according to their shamanist custom, the
taking of such an oath would count as a great sin for them…\footnote{NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 18, ll. 1, 2ob-3.}

By pushing to have the administration give an oath in a form that he construed to be
religiously significant, Savvin trod on the administration’s toes in multiple ways: he
offended their professional dignity by asserting that their claims were untrue, and
appeared disrespectful to and unknowledgeable about their religious beliefs.
Savvin never succeeded in baptizing any of the children that he sought. In 1880, he reported that Nogul and Innokentii Vorob’ev had both died in 1879, the former unbaptized; the lack of any mention of Mukhor suggests that although he may have remained alive, he had not been baptized either.83 Neither of Shegolev’s daughters were baptized; it turned out that one had been dead for fifteen years before Savvin began his inquiry, while the other, married to an unbaptized man in the meantime, would have had to receive her husband’s permission to get baptized.84 In a note detailing the conclusions of the Vorob’ev case, Savvin summed up his explanation for why things had ended in this fashion: “And this is how our missionary affairs go! Not only in the clan administrations, bureaus, and dumas do we not see any cooperation, but even among the land overseers as well.”85 The mission thus found itself isolated and without allies among either the Buryat or imperial administrations.

Overt physical violence was never used in this case. Indeed, there is no sign that any of the parties ever met face to face. However, Savvin managed to repeatedly extend a hand into the communities involved over the course of several years. His activities simultaneously demonstrate the grounds on which Buryats likely perceived the missionaries as an intrusive and unwelcome force affiliated with the state, the very real limits of the missionaries’ power and authority, and the degree to which Buryats were able to mount defenses against missionary intrusions in some cases. From Vorob’ev’s perspective, Savvin’s actions likely seemed a constant harassment that had no rhyme or reason, forced him to spend money on paper, petitions, and documentation, and

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83 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, l. 46.
84 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, ll. 9-90b.
85 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 10, l. 46.
threatened to force him to do something he did not want to do. For whatever reason, Vorob’ev clearly did not want to have Nogol and Mukhor baptized, and his community supported him in this, repeated rebuffing Savvin’s numerous approaches to them by asserting the legitimacy of their own records and kinship practices. Savvin’s investigations may well have seemed supported by the state from the perspective of Vorob’ev and the Buryat authorities. Despite the overseer’s obvious reluctance to engage with and support Savvin, the overseer did mount an investigation of Savvin’s charges that resulted in official visits and inquiries from Russian officials. It is unlikely that either the families concerned or the communities involved were particularly happy about this. As a result, Buryats would have had good reason to view missionaries as unwelcome, powerful intruders, able to call on imperial officials and apparently willing to ignore any amount of evidence to achieve their goals. Moreover, due to their failure to understand relationships that were perfectly transparent to Buryats, the missionaries likely appeared willing to baptize absolutely anyone, even those with no prior connection to the church.

If the cases contributed to the establishment of an image of missionaries as abusers of power among the Buryats, they served to harden missionaries’ belief that Buryat communities were fundamentally unfriendly towards the spread of Orthodoxy. From Vorob’ev’s obstreperous behavior to the refusal of the Buryat authorities to assist Savvin, Savvin believed that the majority of Buryats with whom he engaged sought to hinder his work. While he never attributed a motive to their behavior, such feelings of resentment and frustration likely provided fodder for the construction of overarching missionary discourses about Buryat administrations and leaders as opposing the spread of Christianity for their own base purposes.
By accusing Buryat authorities of using arbitrary rule and their own authority to prevent conversion to Orthodoxy from bringing about a broad shift towards a system in which law was universally applicable to all, the missionaries were participating in a broad trend of thought that denounced local authorities as corrupt and elevated the establishment of a type of republican citizenship as a chief goal of empire. Such patterns of thinking reduced governing structures that were the outcomes of earlier imperial attempts to transform rule through diversity into an imperial civilizing tool into symbols of primitive backwardness that needed to be eliminated through imperial rule. These methods of thinking about Buryat authority lived on after the second half of the nineteenth century, in whose ways of imagining empire the missionaries’ paradigms were embedded. They provided a framework through which the mission came to understand the mass apostasy of 1905-1907 as the unfortunate result of badly-considered collaborations with Buryat and imperial authorities earlier in the mission’s history. From this point, they were adopted by other users, including Russian travelers and Soviet historians, who used the missionaries’ patterns of thinking about authority to narrate the historical experience of the Buryats under Russian rule as justification for their various arguments for the necessity of altering or overthrowing imperial rule in the region. These dominant patterns of thinking about authority in the region have encouraged the acceptance of ways of thinking about Buryat experience that are not necessarily corroborated by the historical record. An examination of documents found within the missionaries’ archives suggests that converts and, in some cases, missionaries, saw the conflicts described in the documents as being much more complex than the missionaries’
paradigm would suggest, although there were significant pressures on both missionaries and converts to portray their stories in a certain way. Moreover, missionaries’ ability to use force against non-converts to compel baptism was dependent on connections to local Buryat and imperial authorities that often failed them, and Buryats had a number of means to contest such attempts.
In 1881, an annual report on missionary activities dramatically referred to the construction of a church along the Russian/Chinese border as a bulwark against the “moral enslavement [of the Buryats] by an outside influence” and “gloom born from neighboring pagan countries.”¹ The church’s concern was the spread of lamaism to Buryats in the Baikal region from neighboring Mongolia, at that time a Chinese territory. At first glance, this statement would seem to suggest that lamaism was a religion from outside Russia’s borders being carried into Russia by foreign means. However, underlying the dramatic language was an understanding of Buryat history and the Buryats’ relationships to the Mongols that implied that lamaism was anything but foreign to the Buryats.

Lamaism came to be treated as a key marker of both foreignness to the empire and Buryatness by means of a series of historical and religious investigations undertaken by the Baikal missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century. Drawing on circulating ideas about the Russian Empire’s space and population, the missionaries used lamaism and shamanism, the former a staple of imperial confessional governance in the region, as categories through which they could explore processes of imperially-sponsored historical development among the Buryats. Identifying evidence of such processes among shamanist Buryats, the missionaries associated shamanism with a Buryat primitivity that was in decline thanks to progress brought to the area by the empire. Lamaist Buryats,

¹ “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Zabaikal’skoi duxhovnoi missii za 1880-i god,” PIEV, 1 August 1881, 354-355.
however, were seen as standing outside of such historical processes; their religion tied them to the Buryats’ primitive Mongolian past, but also prevented the empire from having any beneficial impact on them.\textsuperscript{2} Even as the categories became staples for identifying and describing the nature of Buryatness, they became key methods through which missionaries understood and explained the nature of the Russian Empire. Using lamaism and shamanism, the missionaries elucidated an understanding of empire as a developmental process, linked to but not identical to empire as a territorial construct. This model allowed groups such as lamaist Buryats to be seen as unquestionably resident within the boundaries of the empire’s territory and not be seen as threats to the empire’s political integrity, even as they presented an unacceptable degree of foreignness to other methods of imagining the empire.

\textbf{Missionary Descriptions of Buryat Religion}

In the second half of the nineteenth century, “empire” existed as a geographical space defined by negotiated political borders and populated, at least in its borderlands, by individuals defined as Russian subjects through treaties. Having been confirmed as Russian subjects resident within the empire’s boundaries by the 1727 Treaty of Kiakhta, negotiated between Russia and China, and given the lack of political threat to Russian sovereignty in the region, migrants to the region who espoused lamaism were unquestionably Russian subjects under such a definition. However, by this period, among Russians actively considering the relationship of Russia and Russians to the empire’s

\footnote{In this respect, my findings parallel those of Dittmar Schorkowitz, who argues that developmental concerns informed Russian state policies towards lamaism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Schorkowitz, “The Orthodox Church, Lamaism and Shamanism,” 205-207.}
subject peoples and territories, “empire” also signified an imagined space in which
diverse imperial subjects were united by what Mark Bassin has labeled a “supra-ethnic”
Russian identity.³ For the missionaries, this space did not yet exist: it had to be created by
transforming the Buryats, a process they believed had begun, but was not yet complete.
But the transformative work of empire required that the Buryats be transformable. They
had to be open to cultural change and advancement. Lamaism threatened this
developmental arc. By reinforcing the Buryats’ most primitive social characteristics to
the point of inflexibility, it removed those who espoused it from the transformative
empire, even as they remained within the political empire. Consequently, “the empire” as
the missionaries saw it effectively had two different borders in the Baikal region: one
between Russia and China, and another between shamanist Buryats and lamaist Buryats
that moved westward with the rapid spread of lamaism during the nineteenth century.

As Bassin points out, visions of the empire as united by patterns of common
culture and a certain geographical unity were unstable. The far eastern Amur region was
imagined from Russia’s center as an untouched and pristine extension of Russian
potential in the wake of the region’s incorporation into Russian territory in the 1840s.
Siberian regionalists and Russian settlers undermined this vision by describing the brutal
realities of life in the region for Russian immigrants, instead depicting the region as
belonging to Russia through the historical experience of “being osvoeny, that is occupied
and brought into the realm of civilization and “historical movement” (to use the phrase of

the day) by the Russians.” Similarly, pan-Slavist geographers examining the empire from their base at its center excluded newly-conquered territories in the Far East and Central Asia from the empire as a cultural entity because they were “extraneous historically, ethnographically, and physically.” Instead, they were Russian purely “by virtue of their political subjugation to Russia.” Maintaining the image of the empire as possessing an inherent cultural unity thus required a number of intellectual contortions, in which ideas of historical progress and outright exclusion were particularly powerful tools.

The missionaries, driven by the goal of incorporating the Buryats into the “supra-ethnic” empire, used shamanism and lamaism as categories through which they could explore their successes and the obstacles that they faced. The Buryats had a lengthy history within the empire and had been classed by the 1822 Siberian Statute as a group that had at least partially advanced beyond its primitive roots. The sharp distinction that the missionaries created between civilizable shamanist Buryats and irreconcilably foreign lamaist Buryats suggests that the intellectual processes of imperial construction described by Bassin resulted not only in the exclusion or conceptual instability of territories that were new to the empire, but called into question territories and groups of people who had long been part of the empire. The missionaries coped with the questionable relationship of the Buryats to the Russian Empire through the construction of religious categories that distinguished between Buryats who challenged the missionaries’ vision of the empire and

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6 On the correspondence between perceived state of social sophistication and legal position within the Siberian Statute, see Hundley, “Speransky and the Buriats,” 34-38, and Raeff, 116-117.
those who offered evidence of the inevitable success of their vision. This supports Paul Werth’s assertion that the movement towards a national model of envisioning the empire “required the definition of “alien” elements.” As earlier, more complex bureaucratic terminologies of differences collapsed into the single term of inorodets, simply signifying a not-necessarily-pejorative otherness, “newer epistemologies of difference” gained prominence. These were intimately linked to shifting ideas about the nature of the Russian Empire, as they supported distinctions between non-Russian imperial subjects who were “understood to be different from Russians but amenable to assimilation” and “‘colonial subjects’ (those who were so different and/or uncivilized that they should be administered in a particularistic fashion) and for whom assimilation was not possible.’”

The categories of shamanism and lamaism were iterated through a range of descriptive writings that aimed to explain what the two were, how each related to Buryat history, and how they were reflected in and informed Buryat social and cultural practices. To this end, the missionaries’ works appear representative of a genre that David Chidester has labeled “frontier comparative religion,” a “human science of local control.” Chidester, focusing on southern Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, argues that local representatives of colonial power, including many missionaries, drew on emergent techniques of scientific description to produce “discourse[s] about others that reinforced their colonial containment” by identifying and describing local religion as such. During the nineteenth century, lamaism spread rapidly, both in terms of the growth of new datsans and the growth in the number of Buryats who were listed on state-maintained confessional records as its adherents; the areas in which lamaism was believed to be

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7 Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 124-139.
strongest and most deeply entrenched were the areas that the mission saw as particularly hostile to its activities. In this context, relegating lamaism, the social and cultural practices that were seen as linked to it, and lamaists to the status of exceedingly primitive and fundamentally irredeemable served to exclude a population that was, unquestionably, part of the Russian Empire, from processes of change that the empire was intended to bring about. This division both absolved the empire of its failure to bring transformation and retrenched the idea of imperial transformation as an inevitable process to regions in which such change was a more intellectually tenable possibility. As Chidester points out, such intellectual endeavors produced bodies of knowledge that were “embedded in local colonial situations.”

In this respect, my work provides insight into the debated question of lamaism’s place within the empire. Dittmar Schorkowitz and H.S. Hundley have approached this question through explorations of state attempts to control lamaist structures, and reached very different conclusions. Schorkowitz finds that between the early eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries, the state, informed by missionary reports and lobbying, shifted from viewing lamaism as a sophisticated and potentially civilizing force that should be allowed to proselytize shamanists to treating it as an obstacle to the success of civilizing efforts oriented towards christianization. Providing historical background to this shift, Schorkowitz argues that the period was one of intense social change among the Buryats, in which shamanism, a religion intimately linked to less-complex, communal social structures that were changing as a result of contact with Russians, was in a period of

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rapid decline, a situation of which Russian authorities were aware. Hundley, whose limited base of primary sources is strongly oriented towards missionary publications, finds that the state always saw lamaism as an external force that threatened to undermine its control of the region, and treated it as such in regulations. Analyzing the mission’s concerns, she suggests that missionaries believed that shamanism was less developed, while lamaism was more sophisticated and consequently more threatening to state and church interests. The representations of lamaism as an obstacle and a foreign force and shamanism as a declining religion linked to simplistic social structures that were in a state of change on which Schorkowitz and Hundley rely were the products of attempts to grapple with the challenges the Buryats presented to the construction of empire as a “supra-ethnic” entity. Rather than impartial observations, such beliefs and the observations mustered to support them were intimate parts of the knowledge constructions that Chidester argues were inextricable from the local reproduction of imperial authority. Consequently, they cannot be taken as transparent statements of fact.

Given that Orthodox missionary writings remain a key source for contemporary investigations of pre-revolutionary shamanism and, to a certain extent, lamaism, this calls into question the degree to which contemporary academics can claim any sort of real knowledge about the religious practices and social systems of the Buryats, or, for that matter, other Siberian peoples. Indeed, Caroline Humphrey suggests that it is disputable

9 Schorkowitz, Staat und Nationalitäten, 43-69.
10 Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 231-250.
11 As an example of the heavy representation of missionary descriptive works within the contemporary source base for analysis of nineteenth-century shamanism, approximately twenty percent of the authors discussed in Andrei A. Znamenski’s annotated bibliography of significant ethnographic sources on the subject, Shamanism in Siberia: Russian
whether lamaism and shamanism can reasonably be treated as discrete categories of religious practice among Mongols and Buryats, and a growing body of scholarship points to the idea that the category “shamanism” itself is a western intellectual construct.\textsuperscript{12}

Many assessments of shamanism among the Buryats in the late nineteenth century rely on either state-maintained statistics on religious confession, or descriptive reports such as those of the missionaries.\textsuperscript{13} Government statistics provide an inadequate guide to religious change, simply correlating a drop in reported numbers of shamanists with an increase in reported numbers of lamaists.\textsuperscript{14} This offers no window into the religious practice of ordinary Buryats, instead reflecting both the state’s belief that one individual could not profess multiple confessions and the ascriptive practices of the Buryat officials who maintained such records. As I suggest here, narrative reports are also unreliable indicators of the religious practice of ordinary Buryats, reflecting the anxieties and agendas of their authors as much as what evidence those authors did see; this was as true of Buryat ethnographers attempting to explain their subjects to a Russian audience as it

\textit{Records of Indigenous Spirituality} (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), were Russian Orthodox missionaries.


\textsuperscript{13} For a description-based work, see Mikhailov, “Vliianie,” 127-149, a remarkable attempt, considering the time of its production, to reconstruct how lamaism and Christianity affected Buryat shamanism. Approximately half of Mikhailov’s sources were written by Orthodox missionaries. Statistics-based approaches include Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” and Schorkowitz, \textit{Staat und Nationalitäten}.

\textsuperscript{14} For an overview of government-maintained statistics on religious confession in the Baikal region in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 248-249.
was of missionaries. Using the current Russian-oriented source base, it is extremely
difficult, and possible only in small fragments that are difficult to place in an interpretive
context, to determine what the religious landscape of the Baikal region in the nineteenth
century truly looked like. The simple fact is that we do not know what most Buryats
“truly” believed or what they did away from observers in their homes and fields.

In addition to reflecting fears, anxieties, and hopes about the relationship between
the Buryats and the empire in its various manifestations, the missionaries’ writings can be
read as an extended exploration of the proper place of religion in society. As Anthony
Pagden argues regarding the ethnologies of early Catholic missionaries to the New
World, conceptual scales of development made their explorations of New World societies
into comparative endeavors that were partially intended as meditations on the
missionaries’ society of origin. While this process was not quite as overt among the
Baikal missionaries, the missionaries’ hope of transforming the region in the image of
Russia made their explorations of lamaism and shamanism into considerations of an early
stage of human development and the distinctions between what they perceived among the
Buryats and what they believed the nature of Russian society to be. That the missionaries
believed the Russians stood at the endpoint of the developmental process that the Buryats

15 Alternate sources include works by members of the Buryat intelligentsia, including
Matvei Nikolaevich Khangalov, who was active during the late nineteenth century, and a
large clump of Russian and Buryat nationalist scholars including Tsyben Zhamtsarano,
D.A. Klements, and M. Krol’, who, as Vera Tolz demonstrates in Russia’s Own Orient:
The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet
Periods (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111-134, were themselves pursuing
a research agenda shaped by their ambitions for the Buryats.
16 Anthony Pagden, The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of
Comparative Ethnology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 3-4, 150.
Ronald Hutton makes a similar argument about shamanism specifically, arguing that its
description functioned as a method through which “modern western civilization has
defined itself.” Hutton, viii.
were beginning is evident from their repetitive proffering of Russian history as an example for the benefits that eschewing lamaism could provide to the Buryats. Members of the mission referred to stories about the baptism of Rus’ and the selection of Christianity by Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev as evidence of the potential outcome of the choice between religions faced by the Buryats, imbuing their with the forward momentum of human development. The conversion of Kievan Rus’ was upheld as a triumph of the intellect over “their previous faith” and a great feat of leadership, a careful selection of the best religion from among the rest, and the choice of the most beautiful and sophisticated religion that the world had to offer, with the unspoken implication that lamaism was ugly, uncultured, and the choice of a backwards leadership oriented towards primitivity. By telling the story of Vladimir in the context of the developmental crisis of the Buryats, the archbishops suggested that, faced with a choice between development and stagnation, Russia had chosen correctly, and thus stood as a living example of what the Buryats stood to gain or lose by pursuing or refusing to pursue development. In short: the Buryats had a choice: they could choose to be Russian, or they could choose to be uncivilized.

In light of this deliberate degree of self-reflection in the missionaries’ understandings of what would constitute progress and development among the Buryats, the missionaries’ writings appear as an implicit critique of Buryat society for lacking positive attributes they believed Russian society possessed. In the process of describing

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what they saw as the intertwined relationship between shamanism and lamaism and the respective social and cultural practices of western and eastern Buryats, the missionaries made a number of critiques of shamanism and lamaism that reveal their understandings of the proper place that religion should occupy in society, and the role that it performed in development.18 A chief criticism of both shamanism and lamaism leveled by the missionaries was that the two were all-encompassing, governing every aspect of their believers’ daily lives. This expressed itself particularly in repeated assertions about the misleading and deceptive beliefs characteristic of lamaism and shamanism in regards to health and medicine, but also through criticisms of Buryat herding practices, seen as dictated by lamas and linked to lamaism, as inefficient. The missionaries’ assertion in this regard was that lamas and shamans claimed to possess truths and powers in these matters that modern science had proven that they did not have. In short, they possessed authority that, in a civilized society, was best left to doctors and agriculturalists. Indeed, the missionaries viewed the distribution of medicine and factual information about disease and animal husbandry as some of their best weapons against both shamans and lamas.

In some respects, this reflects the trend among Orthodox missionaries in the second half of the nineteenth century of justifying their work and their requests for state and popular support by proclaiming their role in “larger processes of assimilation and civilizing.” This argument has been understood by historians as an assertion that

18 The missionaries openly argued that they treated religion and way of life as coterminous because the Buryats saw them so; this would seem to support Paul Werth’s contention that the late nineteenth century saw an Orthodox missionary movement towards distinguishing faith or belief from way of life. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 144-145. However, the overall content of their writings suggest that they themselves consistently linked the two, perhaps because they had been unable to find a metric that was not focused on what were labeled as external manifestations of internal belief to determine the authenticity of conversions.
absorption of Christian values would predispose converts to adopt a number of practices that the state wished to disseminate among the empire’s inhabitants.\textsuperscript{19} The missionaries’ critiques of the Buryats’ adherence to “superstition” over science suggest that their imagining of this path of forward development may have been less linear that such interpretations of their words might presuppose. While the missionaries did argue that adherence to Christianity predisposed converts to adopt certain types of law, the same group of authors suggested in their writings about Buryat superstition that an acceptance of scientifically-informed practices was a necessary precursor to the acceptance of Christianity. In short, superstition had to be displaced by science before Orthodoxy could spread among the Buryats. If, as Pagden might suggest, this can be read as a statement of the missionaries’ beliefs about the relationship between the place of religion and secular knowledge in Russian society, it appears that the missionaries envisioned a Russian society in which religion and religious belief existed in a distinctly separate sphere of life from scientific knowledge. The two could be mutually supporting, but were seen as dealing with very different, and mutually exclusive, realms of human experience.

Particularly curious about the missionaries’ descriptions of Buryat religion is the lack of chronological change evident in them. Once the missionaries had grappled with the issue of the Buryats’ internal diversity and its significance to the mission and established a framework within which these problems could be understood, that framework remained remarkably stable. The missionaries continued to interpret lamaism as a threat to the integrity of the transformative empire from within the borders of the political empire even as concern in central Russia about the insecurity of the region in the

\textsuperscript{19} Werth, \textit{At the Margins of Orthodoxy}, 141.
context of the “yellow peril” and the Russo-Japanese War spiked.\footnote{The metropolitan missionary periodical \textit{Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik} republished two 1911 articles from \textit{Novoe vremia} that framed lamaism as a threat to the political borders of the Russian Empire, once arguing that a Japanese count and leader of a “Buddhist sect” had sent a scientific expedition into the Baikal region “with the goal of unifying the Buddhists of Mongolia, China, India, and Japan” as well as the Buryats and Kalmyks, and once declaring that lamaism could become “political” and threatened to unite the Buryats with “foreign [zarubezhnaia] Mongolia.” The fact that the articles were republished in \textit{Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik}, the Moscow-based journal of the Orthodox Missionary Society, indicates that such sentiments had traction with metropolitan church authorities; however, these sentiments found very little reflection in missionary discourses about lamaism’s threat. “Iapontsy u buriat,” \textit{PB}, no. 2 (January 1911): 87-88; “Zabaikal’skoe lamstvo,” \textit{PB}, no. 16 (August 1911): 165.} This was because the depiction of lamaism as a force that reiterated and justified Buryats’ connection to their roots proved an adequate conceptual means of explaining the perceived local manifestation of these events, namely the threat that the Buryats would begin to view themselves as a distinct nationality not bound in cultural union with Russia. Local authorities, whether church or government, never viewed the region as being at risk of secession or overt uprising against Russian governmental authority, and the government did not believe that either the Chinese or Mongolian authorities planned to challenge the border. Buryat nationalism was seen by local authorities who hewed to a vision of the empire as a transformative force as a threat to that vision of the empire, not to the empire’s political integrity.

In this chapter, my argument relies on evidence drawn from published reports about missionary activities intended for consumption by the missionaries and supporters of the mission, including pamphlets, the regional church journal \textit{Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti} and the Moscow-based missionary publication \textit{Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik}, which reprinted articles by regional authors for an empire-wide audience. The
understandings of lamaism and shamanism expressed in these publications are considerably more detailed than those found in the individual notes and communications of missionaries, in which wholesale assessments of the nature of lamaism, shamanism, or the Buryats were rarely included. Consequently, this chapter relies on published, rather than archival, sources.

The Origins of the Buryats

The missionaries had no doubt about the Buryats’ historical relationship to the Mongolic peoples residing outside of Russia’s borders. Most missionary authors who wrote about Buryat history touched on the fact that “the Buryats” had originally been a diverse, if culturally interrelated, set of Mongolic tribes that had migrated across what eventually became the Russian/Chinese border to settle in the Baikal region. Most authors concurred that these migrations had taken place across centuries, with different groups arriving at different times and consequently possessing a different cultural makeup, although many did not bother to trace the migrations in detail back past the time of Russian arrival in the region in the 1640s.

The missionaries believed that the degree of contact that various Buryat groups had with their Mongolian cousins was key to understanding the sharp differences among the Buryats. I. A. PodgORBunskii, a missionary writing in the early twentieth century, argued that up to, as well as under, Russian control, the “composition of the Buryat population…significantly changed.” Within PodgORBunskii’s formulation of the origins of the Buryats, movement in and out of the Baikal region by Mongolic groups began as early as the twelfth century, and was at times accelerated by historical events, such as the
period of Chinggis Khan’s rise to power and the Mongol conquests in Asia and Europe. Eventually, a northern, forest-dwelling Mongolic group began to refer to themselves as *buriaty*, although presumably not in a Russian-inflected plural form. These, in turn, referred to subsequent arrivals by other names, thus delimiting a boundary between the Buryats, who had lived in the region longer, and more recent arrivals such as the Khori. The process of cultural differentiation between dwellers in the Baikal region and what Podgorbunskii described as their “Mongolian relatives [*Mongol’skie soplemenniki]*” took place as a natural result of time, but accelerated under the advent of Russian rule in the seventeenth century. However, differentiation occurred differently for different groups within the Baikal region: the “north Baikal” Buryats, who had lived in the area for longer, were separate from the “south Baikal” Buryats, who continued to be augmented by migration from Mongolia. Podgorbunskii asserted that the latter group only became known as “Buryats” when they were labeled as such by the Russian government; the former group was “Buryat in the true sense.”

Among missionaries who took a historical view of the assemblage as an entity of the Buryats, the southern Buryats, more Mongol than the northern Buryats, were seen as the carriers of lamaism. Their Mongolianness and their ties to lamaism were intimately related. One author argued that the Muscovite government had, in the seventeenth century, required the Mongol Buryats to refer to themselves strictly as Buryats (either

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21 I.A. Podgorbunskii, “Buriaty: Istoricheskii ocherk,” *PB*, no. 18 (September 1902): 87, and no. 19 (October 1902): 121-123. Other authors who took a similarly long view of Buryat coalescence while still emphasizing the essential Mongolianness of the southern Buryats included Nil (Iaroshevich), in *Buddizm: razsmatrivaemyi v otnoshenii k posledovatel’iam ego, obitaushchim v Sibiri* (St. Petersburg: Tipografia Grigoria Trusova, 1853), 5-8; and Meletii, in *Pravoslavie i ustoistvo tserkovnykh del v Daurii (Zabaikal’e), Mongolii i Kitae v XVII i XVIII stoletiiakh* (Riazan: Tipografia Bratstva sv. Vasilyia, 1901).
buriaty or bratskie muzhiki) in order to sever links with the Mongols and prevent the arrival of lamaism from Mongolia. Similarly, Meletii, the one-time head of the mission to the southern Buryats, repeatedly described the Selenga and Khor Buryats, more recent migrants to the area who resided in the south Baikal region, as “Mongols,” and argued that lamaism was endemic among the Mongols. There were dissenters: some missionaries, primarily those writing criticisms of government policy, occasionally described lamaism as something brought across the Russian/Chinese border by foreigners. However, even authors who leveled this charge would make assertions suggesting that lamaism was native to some segments of the Buryats as a result of their cultural and historical ties to Mongolia.

The missionaries believed that just as different waves of migration into the Baikal region had built the Buryats as a naturally diverse group, cross-border contact had continued to connect the Buryats to both Mongolia and lamaism even after the solidification of the border through treaties. One missionary argued that cross-border migration since the 1727 Kiakhta Treaty had altered the composition of the Tunka Buryats: “Emigres from Mongolia have enlarged the population more than a little, and no one has investigated them or asked where they are from and why they have come.” Concerns about the cross-border connections of the Tunka Buryats were particularly

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22 V.V. N-ii, “Bor’ba pravoslavnoi missii v Zabaikal’e s lamaizmom,” PB, no. 1 (January 1903): 33. To the best of my knowledge, such a regulation never existed; this may have been an interpretation of the government’s intent in referring to the southern Buryats in such terms in a treaty.

23 See, for example, Afanasii Vinogradov, “O lamaizm za Baikalom,” PIEV, 30 November 1885, 581.

24 The word “émigré” [vykhodets] typically signified a Mongolian lama who entered Russia, gathered donations, and then left; in this case, the author was referring to laypeople who settled permanently. “Zapiski missionera Shimkovskogo stana” 3 April 1882, 176-178.
prevalent, as the missionaries argued that the region’s mountainous and swampy landscape made access to Mongolia comparatively easier than access to the Irkutsk region, just to the north of the Tunka Valley.\textsuperscript{25} Similarly, they found that in the Aginsk region, the Tsongol Buryats, “living near the border, are in unbroken contact with Mongolian lamas.”\textsuperscript{26}

Tracing the migration patterns that closely linked certain Buryat groups to Mongolia became a means by which the missionaries could explain lamaism’s presence among the Buryats. However, explorations of shamanism also asserted a connection between the Buryats and Mongolia. The missionaries’ attempts to historicize Buryat shamanism used Mongolian written epics and Buryat oral epics as sources or worked to establish philological commonalities between Mongolian and Buryat shamanism. These investigations served several purposes. S. V. Kopylov used the narrative material of epics to attempt to uncover the “pre-lamaist” beliefs of Buryat groups that had converted, and as a method of determining what remnants of shamanism continued to persist even in ostensibly lamaist regions. In this case, the Buryats and Mongols were assumed to have a common past that predated and endured religious change.\textsuperscript{27} I. A. Podgorbunskii, pursuing the philological angle, explored the concept of “tengrii,” which can loosely be defined as “heaven,” within Buryat and Mongol shamanism, treating the two types of shamanism as similar and as an access point through which one could determine the meaning of the

\textsuperscript{25} See, for example, Nikolai Stukov, "Obozrenie preosviashchennym Makariem, nachal'nikom irkutskogo otdela dkhovnoi missii, missionerskhkh stanov v tunkinsome vedomstve i osviashchenie chasovni na skale Sagaugun-Syrdek,” \textit{PIEV}, 11 October 1886, 447.

\textsuperscript{26} “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi Pravoslavnoi missii za 1877 god. (Prodolzhenie),” \textit{PIEV}, 17 June 1878, 272.

\textsuperscript{27} S. V. Kopylov, “Religioznaia verovaniia, semeinye obriady i zhertvoprinosheniiia severobaikal’skikh buriat shamanistov,” \textit{PIEV}, 21 December 1885, 620-621.
This program of study asserted a contemporary commonality between the two types of shamanism, but also gave them a common root in the “ancient Mongols.” Such intellectual efforts served to emphasize the common cultural foundation of Buryats and Mongols, but also supported the idea that a crucial change had occurred among lamaists, Mongols, and Buryats.

“Our Buryats” and Shamanism

There was no question in the mind of the missionaries that shamanist Buryats were more promising as potential converts than lamaist Buryats. One report comparing the percentage of the population that was baptized in the shamanist Kudara region to the percentage baptized in the lamaist Onon region reached the stark figures of 47% and 6%, respectively. The report’s author had a clear explanation for this: “The Kudara missionary works with shamanists, and the other missionaries with lamaists. Between one and the other, there is nothing in common, neither in character nor in religious belief…it was easier to attract the shamanists to the faith of Christ than the lamaists.” The report’s author listed a simple reason for this sharp difference between the two: “the shamanists have neither literacy nor an organizational hierarchy, and the lamaists have both one and the other.” However, the author of the report also attributed the missionaries’ success among the shamanists to the fact that shamanists were, for the most part, “indifferent to

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29 “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi pravoslavnoi missii za 1877”, 17 June 1878, 273-275. H.S. Hundley argues that this view of lamaism as advanced and shamanism as undeveloped and weak was the key factor behind the Russian state’s and Russian Orthodox Church’s fears of lamaism; “Defending the Periphery,” 232.
[their] faith.”30 The missionaries unquestionably found lamaism to be the more intimidating of the two religions. But behind the statement that shamanist Buryats were “indifferent” to their faith rested the idea that through centuries of contact with Russians, shamanist Buryats had developed through a slow process of social change. The missionaries believed that as shamanist Buryats became more developed and their way of life [byt’] evolved, they had outgrown their religion and were on the cusp of embracing a new religion that would match their more Russian way of life: Orthodoxy.

The missionaries’ understanding of the developmental path of the shamanist Buryats depended on the geography of habitation of PodgORBunskii’s “Buryats in the true sense,” the earliest arrivals to the Baikal region. By and large, they lived in the parts of the region most densely populated with Russians: north of the city of Irkutsk, in the Barguzin Valley, and on the river networks on the southeast side of Lake Baikal. The other Buryat groups were more likely to be lamaist and live in areas near the border that were very sparsely populated with Russians. Sustained contact with the Russians over the course of centuries brought extensive changes to the “Buryats in the true sense.”31 Although it is not possible to make a universal statement about the nature of these changes, they included the curtailing or cessation of annual migrations with herds, the adoption of agriculture, shifts in patterns of food consumption, and changes in housing.32

31 For a detailed study of processes of cultural interaction, adoption and adaptation in the Baikal region, including analyses of Russian settlement patterns, see O.V. Buraeva, Etnokul’turnoe vzaimodeistvie narodov baikal’skogo regiona v XVII-nachale XX v. (Ulan-Ude: Izdatel’stvo Buriatskogo nauchnogo tsentra SO RAN, 2005).
32 The Ethnographic Museum in Ulan-Ude has an excellent collection of late nineteenth century “wooden yurts” from the Irkutsk region. These structures were patterned after traditional felt yurts with their one-room, eight-sided design. Unlike the traditional yurt,
The missionaries noted these shifts, and attributed them to the positive effects of intercultural contact sponsored by empire. As Podgorbunskii wrote, the difference between the two types of Buryats was the “degree to which they have given in to Russian influence and move along the path to cultural development.” For the missionaries, these shifts were unequivocally good. They signaled that shamanist Buryats were moving to a higher stage of development, and that the missionaries would eventually meet greater success propagating their more developed religion. The lives of the second group of Buryats did not continue on unchanged – for example, the missionaries made occasional notes about the detrimental effects of vodka consumption, an inevitable result of contact with Russians – but the changes were much less pronounced than among the “Buryats in the true sense.” They also tended to be viewed as negative turns of development.

In the missionaries’ eyes, shamanism was a religion that resulted from a lack of education and mental development. It was unsystematic, which the missionaries took to be a key indicator of its relationship to a primitive society, or it was the intellectual product of a “childlike mind”. But more importantly, the solutions to problems that it provided stood in direct contradiction to civilized science and knowledge. Shamanism succeeded among the Buryats because they had no knowledge to understand or explain the true causes of the things that happened around them, whether natural phenomena or

33 Podgorbunskii, “Buriaty. (Fizicheskii tip i dukhovnaia lichnost’ buriat),” *PB*, no. 9 (May 1903): 27.
life events such as illness. Consequently, they grasped at the solutions provided by shamans, who tailored their answers to meet the developmental level of their clients, suggesting a sacrifice to propitiate whatever was causing the problem.\textsuperscript{36} Because its practitioners and devotees were uneducated and undeveloped people seeking answers that corresponded with their mental capacities, shamanism provided, in the words of Podgorbunskii, “little material for thought [with] so much wasted energy.”\textsuperscript{37} As a consequence of this investment in a religion that sought spiritual solutions for problems that the missionaries viewed as having been solved by civilized science, many Buryats died when they did not have to: missionary reports were not infrequently full of accounts of deaths and suffering as a result of the implementation of shamanist solutions to scientific problems.\textsuperscript{38}

As science was the solution to shamanism, the missionaries saw shamanism beginning to decline as Russian education and medical practices took hold in the region, raising the developmental level of the Buryats. Arguing that the mission should receive credit for this development, Podgorbunskii asserted that the spread of missionary schools since the 1860s had resulted in an increased level of “culture” among the shamanists, making shamanism less appealing.\textsuperscript{39} Dimitrii Gagarin, a missionary working near Irkutsk, found that shamanism was weakening among “the younger, more thinking inorodtsy.”\textsuperscript{40}

The provision of medical services by missionaries was believed to play a key role in the

\textsuperscript{37} Podgorbunskii, “Buriaty,” 24-25.
\textsuperscript{38} See, for example, “Irkutskaiia dukhovnaia missiia v 1876 godu. (Prodolzhenie otcheta),” \textit{PIEV}, 15 October 1877, 531-533.
\textsuperscript{39} Podgorbunskii. “Buriaty,” 25.
\textsuperscript{40} “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii v 1884,” 21 September 1885, 464.
unseating of shamanism through the promotion of science: by serving as medics and explaining the “natural causes” of an illness, missionaries could undercut the authority of lamas and shamans alike using the power of science. As a result of these activities, “The Buryats already do not seek the keys to world processes and explanations of surrounding natural phenomena in shamanism.” However, as one report sadly noted, there continued to be instances in which “all human means are helpless to aid a person”; in the face of such instances of the ineffectiveness of modern medicine, the Buryats inevitably turned to shamanism.

Demonstrating the degree to which broad-scale understandings of the social change caused by contact with Russians could be employed to support the idea that shamanists were evolving in Orthodoxy’s favor, one missionary offered a comparison of lifestyles on the eastern side of the lake to those on the western side of the lake. The missionary argued that the western Buryats “stand comparatively on a higher level of culture than the eastern [Buryats].” Signs of this were that western Buryats lived in uluses that resembled Russian villages and had log winter houses or Russian-style houses, while the eastern Buryats continued to live in felt yurts, typically placed far apart, and to “lead a nomadic form of life, or something very near to that.” Meletii argued that the adoption of settlement was the direct result of the Buryats having “taken the example of [Russians].” The more elevated lifestyle of the western Buryats was linked directly to a greater receptivity to Orthodoxy: shamanists who had adopted Russian living patterns

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recognized the inferiority of shamanism, invoking the formula that “your faith is good and our faith is bad,” even if they continued to cling to shamanism out of tradition.\(^{44}\)

Even as the Buryats’ level of mental development (and Russianness) had shifted to make shamanism less relevant to their lives and weaken its authority, shamanism itself had adapted and become more Orthodox. Missionaries routinely noted that a number of Orthodox practices, including praying to icons and visiting churches, had become popular among professed shamanists, and that Orthodox saints, including Catherine, Paraskeva, and Nicholas, had worked their way into shamanist belief. Even shamanist deities themselves had been reshaped in a fashion that brought shamanist understandings of God and gods into closer proximity to Orthodox understandings. As Konstantin Stukov argued, shamanism had developed a deity who was an “all-mighty creator of this world.” This belief, which he seemed to see as an intermediary step between polytheism and monotheism, had evolved out of contact with Russians.\(^{45}\) Despite these developments, shamanists were still shamanists: Veniamin reported that his argument that saints Catherine and Paraskeva had been baptized and one who believed in them would do well to do the same fell on deaf ears.\(^{46}\) However, as one missionary wrote, a shamanist who

\(^{45}\) To express this deity, Stukov selected the word “Burkhan,” the standard word for deity used by lamaists, shamanists, and the Orthodox Church, in its translations of church materials. He capitalized it according to Western monotheistic tradition. Stukov, “Vzgliad,” 177-178. See also T. Berezin, “Irkutskaiia missia v tsarstvovanie Imperatora Aleksandra II (1855-1881 g.),” *PB*, no. 3 (February 1896): 109.
recognized Orthodox saints and the superiority of Orthodoxy to shamanism was “not far from the kingdom of God,” even if he still refused to get baptized.  

The missionaries were not comfortable with shamanism and shamanist Buryats because they had not evolved; rather, they were comfortable with them precisely because they had. Seeing the world through a lens in which way of life, level of civilizational development, and faith were inextricably intertwined, the missionaries interpreted the dramatic evidence of cultural adoption from Russians among shamanist Buryat groups as an indicator that the Buryats were advancing in both civilization and religion. Although the shamanist Buryats had not yet arrived at this point, the adoption of Orthodoxy was the logical next stage in this process of evolution, and one that did not seem to be far off.

The process of evolution, in which the Buryats were outgrowing their native shamanism, left them in a precarious and vulnerable position. While they were in the slow process of abandoning an old way of life and an old religion, they had not yet completely adopted a new way of life or religion. As lamaism began to spread into the

47 “Kratkii ocherk rasprostraneniia khristianstva v Sibiri,” Piev, 18 December 1882, 664. This was likely not the indicator of slow adoption of Orthodoxy that the missionaries took it to be. A considerable amount of research has demonstrated both shamanism’s tendency to include and reinterpret signs, images, and practices from other religions that are perceived to be powerful, and what Paul Werth has labeled the “appropriation” of Orthodoxy into shamanist religious movements that defined themselves as rejections of Orthodoxy and Russianness. See, for example, Werth, “Big Candles,” 144-172; and Andrei A. Znamenski, Shamanism and Christianity: Native Encounters with Russian Orthodox Missions in Siberia and Alaska, 1820-1917 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 27.

48 Concern over this transitional state was widespread within Orthodox missionary work; indeed, blunting its impact was one of the chief goals of the Il’minskii system, which pursued social and religious change over the course of generations rather immediately. Geraci, 79. Archbishop Veniamin often cited the cautionary example of the mid-nineteenth-century Buryat scholar Dorzhi Banzarov to advocate for pushing converts to immediately adopt both a Russian lifestyle and Russian ways. Banzarov had outgrown his shamanist roots but, living in an environment of Russian liberalism, had failed to
regions of the “Buryats in the true sense,” the missionaries grew concerned that lamas would take advantage of the shamanists’ lack of a structured, intertwined system of lifestyle and belief. One missionary, describing the Verkholensk region north of Irkutsk, wrote that the Verkholensk Buryats were undergoing a “religious rupture, leaving shamanism in search of a new religion, which could turn out to be lamaism.”

Lamaism was attractive not because it offered a more structured or developed form of belief than shamanism, nor did these characteristics make it a more formidable opponent. Lamaism was attractive because it approached the issue of religious change from the angle of way of life, reinforcing the Buryats’ idea that they were a “nationality” [natsional’nost’], with a particular way of life distinctly different from that of Russians and a religion that reflected that way of life.

“Lamaism is Absolutely Not Buddhism”

As they examined lamaism, the missionaries were confident that what they saw was not Buddhism. Rather, they were facing a separate, regional religion that was at best a distorted variant of Buddhism and at worst deceitfully described itself as Buddhism. Orthodox missionary publications of the time defined Buddhism as “the teachings

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 replace them with a new, sound, religious structure, and consequently died an untimely death. See, for example, Veniamin, Zhiznennye voprosy, 37.


50 Very few missionaries made this assertion; the only two examples I have found are Podgorbunskii, “Buriaty,” 25-26; and “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi pravoslavnoi missii za 1877,” 17 June 1878, 273-275.

51 Ponomarev, “Iz zhizni,” 168.
espoused by the founder of Buddhism, the Indian ascetic Shak’ia-Muni (Buddha).” The missionaries believed that lamaism had digressed from these teachings in several ways. First, it had accumulated a large amount of philosophical detritus, such as beliefs about reincarnation, which clouded Buddha’s teachings. Second, lamaism had adopted a number of rituals, including fortune-telling and healing, that the missionaries believed had been absorbed from shamanism as part of a concerted effort to usurp the place of shamans in society and make the religion palatable to Inner Asian converts. Finally, neither lamas nor lay lamaists adhered to the core teachings of Buddhism in practice; therefore they could not be called Buddhists. Consequently, the missionaries believed that they were confronting a regional, Inner Asian religion that reflected the primitive beliefs and development of the Buryats and other Inner Asian peoples.

The missionaries’ belief that lamaism had lost touch with the core tenets of Buddhism through philosophical obfuscation relied on a key referential text, *Buddhism: Examined in relation to its followers, living in Siberia*. Its author, Nil Iaroshevich, had served as Archbishop of Irkutsk in the middle of the nineteenth century. He aimed to give readers a basic understanding of the tenets of Buddhism and explain how Buddhism, in the form of lamaism, was manifesting itself in the Baikal region and interacting with shamanism. Many of his statements are nonsensical and demonstrate a lack of knowledge

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52 Berezin, “Irkutskaia pravoslavnaia missiia,” 107. This is a very narrow and indefensible definition. Buddha lived more than two thousand years before the time of the missionaries, and left no untouched, single-author text outlining his beliefs. Ideas attributed to him were transmitted through oral tradition and eventually written down centuries after his death; they include a considerable amount of the metaphysics that the missionaries denounced as foreign to the religion. Nonetheless, this was a prevalent belief within the community of Orthodox analysts of Buddhism; see, for example, N. Komarov, “Ocherki verovanii inorodtsev, sredi kotorykh deistvuiut nashi missii,” *PB*, no. 20 (October 1894): 160-171.
or perspective; for example, he argued that Buddhism was split between two groups: the
Fo sect in China and lamaism, which encompassed Buddhism in India, Tibet, and
Mongolia. Despite the many easily refutable inaccuracies in his work, missionary authors
continued to draw on Nil’s ideas of the divergence between lamaism and its Buddhist
origins until 1917. Focusing on ideas of cosmology as an example of how lamaism had
strayed from its core, Nil argued that Buddhist cosmology was relatively simple.
However, he argued that subsequent exegetical texts, in particular the Ganjur and Danjur,
two separate collections of texts comprising hundreds of volumes that were key parts of
the library of any datsan of significance, had obfuscated core beliefs and replaced them
with a confused system of astrology and ritual:

“the gloom of the Ganjur-Danjur, its imprecisions and double meanings,
the ordinary stuff of myths, made it so that seekers…lost themselves in
astrology and crafted a system of strange understandings under the
influence of which the Buddhist lives and dies.”

As suggested by his statement that the contents of the Ganjur and Danjur were essentially
little better than myths, Nil believed that the “ritual part of Buddhism,” by which he
meant lamaist practices such as astrology, “brings into play all the wellsprings of ancient
paganism [iazychestvo].” Nil continued on to assert that missionary lamas working
among the Buryats had altered Buddhism to make it compatible with a nomadic lifestyle;
although he did not directly state that these alterations were what had brought
“paganism” into Buddhism, subsequent authors would draw on his work and make this
connection.53

The most well-published person to argue that lamaist rituals were drawn directly
from shamanism was Nil’s successor, Archbishop Veniamin of Irkutsk. In 1863,

53 Nil, Buddizm, 17-19; 250-251.
Veniamin, citing Nil’s work as one of his sources, argued that the *gurum*, a key astrological service provided by lamas to laypeople, was “taken from the black faith, the shamanist orgy.”\(^{54}\) Other authors regularly echoed this proposition. In 1910, one of the leaders of the mission, Hieromonk Gurii, wrote that “lamaism in its current form is not the philosophical doctrine of Buddha-Sak’ia-Muni, but the ordinary type of shamanism (fetishism and anthropomorphism).”\(^{55}\) Hieromonk Meletii, one of Gurii’s predecessors, argued that the *obo*, a type of religious construction that he associated with lamaism, had in fact been absorbed from shamanism.\(^{56}\) This view of the distance between lamaism and Buddhism eventually came to be used (unsuccessfully) by missionaries in their discussions with Buryats; one Father Soldatov reported telling a Buryat that “in Buddhism there are no *gurums* and Buddhism does not have any teachings about medicine, but they (the Buryats) all continue to hold their opinions and say that the lamas would not speak a lie.”\(^{57}\) In some ways, the missionaries were not far from the truth: Tibetan Buddhism had historically been extremely flexible in adopting and adapting shamanist religious elements from regions into which it was spreading, and had indeed done so even in Tibet. However, the missionaries’ assertion that lamaism was essentially

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\(^{54}\) Referring to shamanism as “the black faith [chernaia vera]” was a way in which the author asserted that he was well-read on Buryat shamanism, as it was a reference to the title of the first published account on the subject, Dorzhi Banzarov’s “Chernaia vera, ili shamanstvo u mongolov,” written at Kazan University in the late 1850s.


\(^{56}\) Meletii, “Chto takoe buriatskii *obo* i ot chego neredko byvает zaraza v stepakh i okrestnostiah?” *PIEV*, 4 March 1872, 117-121.

\(^{57}\) “Iz otcheta o deiatel’nosti Zabaikal’skoi missii v 1900 g.” *PPB*, no. 7 (March 1902): 83.
nothing but shamanism was as inaccurate as a statement that Tibetan Buddhism was practiced in the region in an unaltered or original form would have been.\(^{58}\)

The third prong of the assertion that lamaism was not Buddhism was the argument that neither lamas nor lamaists practiced Buddhism. The missionaries sometimes argued that lay believers continued to resort to shamans and shamanist ceremonies even as they proclaimed themselves to be lamaists. For example, one missionary wrote that the Tunka Buryats maintained shamanist hunting ceremonies because lamas were forbidden to kill. To the missionary, this indicated that the Buryats concerned had maintained “their former faith.”\(^{59}\) Another interpretation was that a “new religious superstition” had been created: out of collisions between shamanist Tungus and lamaist Buryats had developed a mix between the two religions that residents of both sides of the lake were now espousing.\(^{60}\) Such views existed side by side with statements that lamaists had “already long ago changed their primordial shamanist faith for the lamaist [faith];”\(^{61}\) sometimes, as Meletii did, the same author would take both positions within paragraphs of each other. At times, missionaries seem to have simply taken loyalty to lamas as a sign that an individual was a lamaist, while in other instances they implied that an individual’s ritual practice was a better indicator of their religious persuasion. In either case, the individual concerned was not truly a Buddhist.

\(^{58}\) Humphrey, 248-249.

\(^{59}\) “Zhilishcha, nravy i obychai Tunkinskikh buryat,” \(PB\), no. 2 (January 1901): 95.

\(^{60}\) T. Berezin, “Zabaikal’skaia Pravoslavnaiia missiia v tsarstvovanie imperatora Aleksandra II (1855-1881),” \(PB\), no. 22 (November 1893): 19-20. See also Gurii, “Pervoe moe znakomstvo s deiatel’nostiu Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii. (Prodolzhenie),” \(PIEV\), 6 December 1880, 621.

Another way of approaching the question of whether or not lamaists and lamas were truly Buddhists based on their practice was to return to the idea that Buddhism had a set of core values, in this case those surrounding asceticism and contact with the world, that neither lamas nor laypeople lived by. Archbishop Veniamin most explicitly elaborated this line of thinking. Veniamin asserted in multiple works that the central value of Buddhism was salvation through the cleansing of the self of “everything sensual and mercy towards all living creatures, [even] to the sacrifice of life.” None of lamaism’s lay adherents in the Baikal region followed this principle; consequently, they were not Buddhists. Veniamin believed the lamas, as well, had too much love of "everything sensual": among their sins, he listed the maintenance of multiple wives and the gathering of extensive wealth. Additionally, they had failed to withdraw from the world, and cultivated extensive contacts with lay believers that they should not have maintained if they were truly seeking withdrawal.62 By portraying lamas and lamaists in this light, Veniamin sought to push the state to reconsider its grant of endorsement and clerical status to a specific number of datsans and the monks who resided in them, which had

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62 Veniamin, “O lamskom idolopoklonicheskom sueverii v vostochnoi Sibiri,” PIEV, 12 June 1882, 313-314; Veniamin, “Zabaikal’skaia missia,” IEV, 27 April 1863, 236-240; Veniamin, “Zabaikal’skaia missia. Piatoe pis’mo iz Posol’skogo monastyrja,” IEV, 15 April 1864, 266. Russian missionaries were not the only Europeans to level the accusation of improper love for “everything sensual” against the lamas; in 1901 the missionary publication Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik published a translation of an article by a French traveler to Tibet who wrote that “the lamas highly value good food, and the vice of avarice is very widespread among them…among them, Buddhism is reduced to only an external façade, and the moral level [naravstvennost’] of the Tibetan lamas is falling.” E. E., “Nekotorye svedenii o predstaviteliakh dukhovnogo sosloviia v Tibete,” PB, no. 4 (February 1901): 189. At least on the charge of the maintenance of concubines, Veniamin was correct. With very high percentages of the adult male population living in monasteries, such practices were common and socially accepted in Mongolia, and likely were in the Baikal region as well. This led to situations, including at least one in the Baikal region, in which monastic titles were passed between fathers and sons. Humphrey, 246-247.
been reiterated in the 1853 decree “On Lamaist Clergy in Eastern Siberia.” He was calling into question whether lamaism was, in fact, the religion that it claimed to be, and whether lamas could be considered clergy. However, his ideas had broader resonance in the missionaries’ discussions of what exactly lamaism was: they served as evidence that lamaism should be regarded not as a proper religion, but as an exploitative force devoid of religious value.63

The missionaries’ belief that lamaism was not Buddhism became a source for criticism of state laws that mandated and supported formal confessional structures for lamaism. The church attacked such laws on the grounds that the state had misunderstood lamaism’s true nature and, not seeing it for the primitive and exploitative force that it was, had granted lamaism a defined legal status that was contrary to the state’s interests in supporting Buryat development. Lamas reaped benefits from their pretense that lamaism was a legitimate religion, using state-sanctioned privileges to pursue an exploitative relationship with the Buryats, as will be detailed below.64 The missionaries argued that this exploitative relationship should be of concern to the state: by sanctioning the undermining of what one critic called the “civic life” [grazhdanskii byt] of the Buryats, the state was contradicting its own mandate to improve the Buryats. This criticism of the state’s failure to promote development by controlling lamaism stemmed from the missionaries’ belief that lamaism had halted the developmental trajectory of Buryat lamaists.65

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63 See, for example, T. Berezin, “Irkutskaiia Pravoslavnaia missiia,” 107-108.
64 See, for example, Veniamin, “O lamskom…sueverii,” 313-314.
65 Veniamin, Zhiznennye voprosy, 19, 51.
**Lamaism as an Outgrowth of Buryatness**

Having accepted the idea that lamaism was not Buddhism, the missionaries moved on to frame it as a regional phenomenon. A key element in this reimagining was the idea that lamaism grew from and capitalized on Buryat structures of authority. In these pyramidal power structures, those at the top kept those beneath them in a state of ignorance and subjugation in order to preserve their own positions of wealth and authority. To this end, the lamas encouraged the Buryats to donate to them and their datsans and purchase religious paraphernalia, all the while perpetuating the mistaken belief that donations and religious materials were spiritually beneficial, and that the lamas were the source of this beneficence. This scheme had international dimensions: the most powerful datsans and lamas within the system were located in Mongolia, with the consequence that much of the Buryats’ wealth flowed outward to Mongolia. While the missionaries noted these connections, they did not express them in terms of national security; instead, they argued that the lamas had such a system in place in Mongolia, but, having exhausted Mongolia’s economic potential, had begun to move outward to exploit the Mongols’ cousins [sorodichi] in the Baikal region. This system of economic exploitation was one that depended on a specific power structure and mode of social organization that the missionaries believed both the Mongols and the Buryats possessed; the difference between the two was that the missionaries believed they were working to reshape social structures in the Baikal region to allow civilization, *grazhdanstvennost’*, and the rule of law to flourish and the Buryats to develop. In the Orthodox view, lamaist economic exploitation threatened to prevent the enlightenment of the Buryats by Russia.
by reinforcing older and more primitive social structures shared by the Mongols and the Buryats.

At the core of this identification of lamaism with hierarchical exploitation lay the assumption that lamaist objects and the services of a lama were both expensive and useless. Lamas, seeing the profitability of their religious endeavors, sought to persuade the Buryats to spend on anything religious at any possible opportunity. Meletii argued that lamas had adopted the shamanist practice of erecting obos solely as an opportunity to gather money, sheep, and other livestock from the Buryats.66 Emphasizing both the expense of purchasing religious services and their pointlessness, Iakov Chistokhin, a missionary in the Tunka region, wrote that visitors to the temple at the Mongolian city of Urga were required to make a gift to the Khutukhtu in the form of a mandala; the first mandala cost two hundred rubles, the second one hundred, the fourth fifty, and the sixth fifteen.67 In return for the first mandala, the Khutukhtu would “strike the worshipper in the mouth with a book and allow him to touch the very edge of his robes.” Meanwhile, a lama had recently arrived in the Tunka region peddling religious objects; one of

66 Meletii, “Chto takoe buriatskii ‘obo’,” 118. Technically speaking, an obo is a housing for a local spirit; obos for spirits that were deemed particularly powerful often became centers of elaborate ceremonies. Meletii seems to have collapsed structure and ceremony into one item. They were used by both shamanists and lamaists, and sanctioned by lamas; such overlaps demonstrate the practical difficulty of distinguishing between shamanism and lamaism. See Mikhailov, 130-135.

67 The Khutukhtu of Urga is the head of Tibetan Buddhism in Mongolia, the region’s most enlightened lama, and the third-highest-ranking member of the Gelugpa ecclesiastical hierarchy, following the Dalai Lama and the Panchen Lama. As such, he attracted large numbers of pilgrims, including Buryats, despite the fact that the Russian state had gone to great effort to insure the autocephalous nature of Buryat lamaism. For an exploration of the complex and theologically-grounded loyalties of ranking Russian lamaists, see Tsyrempilov. Urga, present-day Ulan-baator, was, in the nineteenth century, an immense city composed of many monasteries rather than a secular residential center, as much of the region’s lay population was nomadic.
Chistokhin’s neighbors bought a powder that was supposed to cure coughs, but according to Chistokhin, it was nothing but the powder used for incense sticks. 68

To the missionaries, the practice of charging for services and objects and making them seem necessary and beneficial was a tactic deliberately designed to allow the lamas to reap the benefits of the Buryats’ labor without actually working themselves. One author argued that shamans and lamas alike were “unaccustomed to physical labor,” and hence “try to take the undeveloped Buryat in their hands,” in return for advice, performing services, or providing amulets, both shamans and lamas received money, livestock, and food. He highlighted the practices as deliberately manipulative by noting that “The idol-servitors know well how to exploit the superstition of the Buryat.” 69

Another author from outside the mission declared that “[the lamas] attentively step by step stalk their victim, and so cleverly confuse him in nets of fortunetelling that the stupid Buryat cannot take a step without the help of his tyrant,” available, of course, for a fee. 70

Lamaist activities among the Buryats were regularly described as “enslavement” [poraboshchenie], “extortion” [obiratel’stvo], and “exploitation” [ekspluatatsiia] all implying the manipulative exercise of power by a superior party over a weaker.

Both foreign and Buryat lamas acted in the same exploitative fashion, to the point that stories about them were interchangeable. Porfirii Petrovich, a Buryat lama who had converted to Orthodoxy and was the subject of an essay in the 1900 book Types of Buryats (Sketches) was accused of falsely claiming he had medical knowledge; according

69 Berezin, “Irkutskiaia Pravoslavnaia missia,” 111; see also “Otchet o sostojanii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii v 1881 godu,” PIEV, 17 April 1882, 200.
to the local Buryats, he “healed ‘into the grave’ and was himself a bad person.” He eventually borrowed money with the goal of becoming a peddler, but packed up and left with the goods without paying back the money. The tale of Porfirii Petrovich is virtually indistinguishable from Iakov Chistokhin’s account of the Tibetan lama who arrived in Tunka selling peacock feathers, palm branches, incense, candles, and false cures that were nothing more than common substances. The Tibetan lama could have been exchanged with the Buryat lama, and the two accounts would have maintained their characters and conclusions intact. Missionary accounts routinely stated that both local and foreign lamas were participating in a given nefarious activity, as in a 1904 article that described the activities of “local and non-local lamas,” but also simply referred to them collectively as “lamas.”

The missionaries believed that the success of the lamas’ self-interested labors was intimately related to the nature of power structures in Buryat communities. When describing what they believed to be “traditional” Buryat leadership, the missionaries regularly argued that leaders deliberately kept their subjects in a state of ignorance in order to preserve their own power and maintain the profits that they generated by exploiting those they ruled. Additionally, the missionaries argued that religion was a factor in the leaders’ ability to maintain their authority: shamanism and lamaism, by their very natures, both denoted and reinforced ignorance and resistance to change, and Buryat leaders employed them to maintain an authority that would be unsustainable among a more enlightened populace. It is not surprising, then, that the missionaries directly linked

71 M. I. P., 11-18.
72 “Otchet o...Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii v 1884,” 28 September 1885, 474-475.
73 “Otchet o sostoinii Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1902 god,” PPB, no. 3 (February 1904): 28; see, for example, Veniamin, “O lamskom...sueverii,” 299-315.
the lamas with corrupt Buryat leaders. In some cases, the missionaries alleged that the leadership was “under the influence of the lamas” or that the lamas were “in cabal” with their “cousins [sorodichi] from the administrative side…to rule the soul and body of the Buryat.” Yet another report accused the lamas of cooperating with their “cousins,” the “filthy rich [bogachy],” who exploited ordinary Buryats by charging them astronomical interest rates of fifty or sixty percent. In other cases, though, the leadership itself was seen as leading the spread of lamaism; in 1907, in the midst of a wave of petitions requesting reinscription of religious faith from Orthodoxy to lamaism, one missionary charged that the chief agents of lamaism were “the kulaki-inorodtsy, interested in their own material benefit.” Whatever the agent and the means, though, the end result was that the “simple-spirited Buryat is always the submissive slave of the lamas.”

In the missionaries view, the lamas cultivated an image of their own infallibility, value, and indispensability in order to maintain this position of power and authority, as well as the ability to convince Buryats that they should invest in the lamas’ wares. As one critic wrote,

In order to keep the semi-savage in their power, [the lamas] fill their minds with various fabrications of a religious character and attempt to surround [their] every step with religious rituals. And truly, they have reached the point that not one more or less important moment in the life of the Buryat (birth, marriage, death, migration, etc.) passes without a lama.

This popular belief in the necessity of the lamas and constant participation in ritual provided a steady stream of income for the lamas in the form of donations.\textsuperscript{75} Additionally, the missionaries found that the lamas constantly reiterated their own religious authority, arguing that “The lamas’ teaching is God’s teaching [Bozhie uchenie],” which equated to the idea that “not believing the lamas is the same as not believing God himself or Buddha.”\textsuperscript{76} Further cementing the elevated position of local lamas was the judicious use of foreign connections: as the missionaries believed that Mongolia was a “promised land” for lamaist Buryats, they argued that Buryat lamas strategically affiliated themselves with foreign lamas and Mongolian and Tibetan learning to improve their own standing among the Buryats.\textsuperscript{77} Those who had most successfully created a religious image for themselves from which they could command authority and obtain donations were Mongolian gegen and khubilgans and the Khutukhtu of Urga.\textsuperscript{78} As the Orthodox priests argued that the doctrine of reincarnation itself was a deceit, their description of the latter as “reborns” [pererozhdentsy] and the former as a “living god” [zhivoi bog] were derogatory. However, the missionaries believed that the lamas were aware these positions commanded the greatest respect and

\textsuperscript{75} E. Kuznetsov, “Deiatel’nost’ Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za sorokaletie ee sushchestvovaniia (s 1860 po 1899 gg.),” \textit{PB}, no. 22 (December 1901): 252.

\textsuperscript{76} Berezin, “Irkutskai pravoslavnaia missiia,” 108, and “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi pravoslavnoi missii za 1876 g.,” \textit{PIEV}, 16 July 1877, 376.


\textsuperscript{78} The terms “gegen” and “khubilgan” were titles declaring that the bearer was recognized by monastic authorities as having attained a specific level of enlightenment; reaching such a level was associated with reincarnation. For example, the Khutukhtu of Urga was the highest-ranking gegen in the region.
the most donations among Buryat lamaists; as one observer wrote, Mongolian lamas entering Russia were aware that “their brothers [the Buryats] in Russia lived in luxury” and therefore “[they] take on themselves the form of different holy men and khubilgans.”

In the missionaries’ minds, this entire system, in which the lamas were able to utilize existing power structures within Buryat communities, cast themselves as necessary religious authorities, and economically benefit by selling religious goods and soliciting donations, depended on the Buryats being kept in a state of low development. Again, this parallels the missionaries’ understandings of Buryat community discussed in the previous chapter, as they believed that Buryat authorities maintained ordinary Buryats in an uneducated and primitive state to perpetuate their power and profit. In the case of lamaism, nomadism was key to the maintenance of this primitive state. The missionaries did not directly connect lamaism with nomadism beyond the assertions that lamaism had adapted its rituals and practices to make it compatible with Buryat nomadism, and that nomadism was necessary to maintain the lamas’ profit. However, they did believe that nomadism was representative, in the words of one missionary, of a “primitive Asian condition.” This nomadic state of being represented and perpetuated the absence of intellectual, civilizational, or economic development that would lead the Buryats to reject lamaism in favor of Orthodoxy. The missionaries argued that the lamas acted to inhibit

any sign of development among the Buryats, including agriculture, settlement, or “russification” [obrusenie]. Additionally, upon converting to lamaism, the Buryats immediately abandoned any developmental progress they had made, regressing to what they had been before.

Pavel Shavrov’s discussion of the Aginsk Buryats demonstrates both the changes in lifestyle that the missionaries believed contact with Russians brought to the Buryats, and the devolution caused by the arrival of lamaism. Shavrov began by extolling the many positive qualities of the Aginsk Buryats, which he suggested should have brought them quickly into civilized life. They were “healthy and courageous,” intellectually capable of quickly assimilating art and science and even “surpassing Russians in their mastery and science.” They possessed a number of positive personal characteristics. All of this should have led them “to quickly be made into [sdelat’sia] a civilized people through their own qualities,” but instead, “they are impoverished and poor in their lives. To this day they are located in a savage state and lead a nomadic life.” Shavrov attributed this situation directly to their “steppe customs and religious beliefs.”

Shavrov continued on to argue that the lamas were to blame for cutting the Buryats off from contact with Russians, which he implied would have civilizing benefits, and reinforcing nomadism, to the detriment and suffering of the Buryats and the profit of the lamas:

On one side, the lamas, using all possible means, lies, slander, etc., attempt to divide the Buryats from the Russians, hold them in their wild condition and make them hostile against everything Russian; from the other side, they, in the fullest sense, submerge [obezplivaiut] the Buryats, holding them in their primitive condition...subjugating the Buryat, along with his property and family life, to their vile interests.

Examples of the decline brought about by the lamas included a reversion to nomadism and herding, when they had begun to adopt some forms of settled agriculture. Shavrov explained this by stating that “the lamaist faith does not tolerate agriculture.” Because of this refusal to abandon nomadism, the Aginsk Buryats and their livestock lived through the winter without shelter in houses and barns. As a result of exposure, they themselves suffered tremendous physical discomfort, and their animals died by the thousands. Shavrov held the lamas to blame for providing reassurance to the Buryats that they did not need to plant crops and their stock would survive the winter.  

The key point of interest here is that Shavrov did not view this lifestyle as foreign to the Buryats and imported by the lamas, although he did see it as harmful and wasteful. Instead, nomadism was part and parcel of the Buryats’ origins and their primitive condition; the lamas merely breathed new life into a way of life that would otherwise have become extinct as the Buryats developed, and made it resistant to change. Other writers used nomadism to place the Buryats within a broader Inner Asian cultural and geographical sphere. Nikolai Stukov, quoted above, described nomadism as indicative of a “primitive Asian condition.” Simeon Stukov argued that, in terms of family life, lamaism had left the Khori Buryats “on the same moral level on which they were located at the time of their departure from Mongolia, or even below it.” A report from a missionary working in the Tunka region described nomadism as identical on both sides of

84 Simeon Stukov, “Poraboshchenie buriat lamstvom v Khorinskom vedomstve,” PIEV, 15 June 1885, 289.
the border, and nomadic Buryats as “prototypical Mongols.” \textsuperscript{85} Another report lumped the themes of lamaist greed, nomadism, and Asian origins together into the unwieldy phrase “greedy Asian nomadic lamaists.” \textsuperscript{86} By reinforcing nomadism, lamas were not only subjugating the Buryats, they were returning them to their Inner Asian roots and spoiling the integrative and civilizing work of centuries of contact with the Russians. \textsuperscript{87}

The missionaries understood lamaism to be fundamentally intertwined with Buryat ways of life: it relied on Buryat social structures and primitive nomadism for its perpetuation and profitability. Historically, nomadism in particular linked the Buryats to a broader Inner Asian sphere from which their contact with Russians should have separated them. Within this paradigm, foreign lamaist leaders served a special role: they were the most powerful representatives of the religion, able to call on great numbers of believers (and their wealth), whether by traveling to the believers or through pilgrimage. By creating these human connections, lamaist leaders extended the lamaist space that the Buryats were already on the edge of. By gathering donations, they extended their economic reach beyond Mongolia, a region that the missionaries believed had already been economically devastated by lamaism.

\textsuperscript{86} “Otchet o sostojanii Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1901 god,” \textit{PPB}, no. 4 (February 1903): 41.
\textsuperscript{87} One missionary author, Innokentii Podgornuskii, himself a Buryat, did make the case that the lamas’ success was the result of the failure of Russia to change and improve Buryat life through civilizing contact. Rather, by acting barbarically towards the Buryats, the Russians, including Orthodox missionaries, had forced the Buryats to embrace their Inner Asian roots. He was the only author to make such a case, and his way of imagining the situation did not take hold in other missionaries’ writings. See I. A. Podgornuskii, “Buriaty: Istoricheskii ocherk,” \textit{PB}, no. 23 (November 1902): 291-295.
The missionaries imagined the Buryats’ economic connection with Mongolia in two different ways. First, they argued that thousands of Buryats made the relatively short pilgrimage to see the Khutukhtu of Urga. Once there, the Buryats would make a number of expensive donations and purchases; Iakov Chistokhin’s report on the cost of purchasing mandalas in Urga, quoted earlier, is just one example of such reports. One breathless journal article proclaimed that the Russian consul in Urga had seen twenty thousand Buryats in 1879 alone.\(^88\) The other economic connection was the flow of *khubilgans* and *gegens* from Urga to the Baikal region. The missionaries believed that once such individuals were among the Buryats, their sole mission was to collect donations: in one instance, a *gegen* and his assistants were reported to have gathered as much as two thousand head of stock, one thousand rubles, and an unknown amount of silver.\(^89\) For the missionaries, the economic interest behind attracting the Buryats to Urga on pilgrimage and sending emissaries to them was the impoverished state of Mongolia. One author argued that the Mongolian lamas entering Russia were “driven by need at home…[knowing] how luxuriously their brothers in Russia live,” they had decided to seek donations among the Buryats. Another wrote that Mongolia, and especially those parts of it near the Russian border, were desperately underdeveloped, and suggested that the effects of the underdevelopment were felt even among the Tunka Buryats with whom he worked. He linked this poverty to the influence of the lamas, sarcastically suggesting that this “unchanging nirvana” was the “apogee of [the Mongols’] development” under

\(^{88}\) E. M., “Tibetskie lamy za Baikalom,” *PIEV*, 1 March 1886, 117. This was an exaggeration, as by the mid 1880s, there were only approximately 160,000 individuals who were listed as lamaists in the Baikal region. Hundley, “Defending the Periphery,” 248.

\(^{89}\) Vinogradov, “O lamaizm,” 584.
the lamas. Thus, the economic extraction that the missionaries believed to be the lamas’ chief goal and, indeed, the *raison d’etre* of lamaism, had resulted in the impoverishment of Mongolia; the lamas’ “brothers” in the Baikal region would be next to fall under the lamas’ sway, extending the lamaist economic space.⁹⁰

It is in the context of the belief that foreign lamas, in particular, were an extreme drain on Buryat economic resources that the missionaries argued that foreign lamas directly harmed state interests and undermined the intent of state regulations on lamaism. For a period stretching from the late 1860s to the late 1870s, the missionaries repeatedly described the foreign lamas’ search for donations as attempts at the conversion or “extortion” of “Russian subjects, [russkie poddanye], a phrase that appears nowhere else in the missionaries’ writings. By selecting such words, the missionaries suggested that the foreign lamas were undertaking activities that were illegal, whether as theft or as a violation of the 1853 decree, against individuals who were subject to the laws of the Russian empire and entitled to the empire’s protection.⁹¹ The missionaries also argued that allowing such activities ran contrary to the government’s interests in promoting the “economic well-being of the region.” Thus, the foreign lamas were acting in violation of the law, but also in contradiction to the government’s development goals for Siberia.⁹² This practice of depicting the gathering of donations as a threat to state interests was relatively short-lived. From the late 1870s onward, missionaries resorted to repeatedly

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⁹² “Raznye izvestiia,” 23 April 1877, 241; see also “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za 1869 god. Deistviia missii,” *PIEV*, 7 November 1870, 382.
mentioning that foreign lamas had violated the 1853 decree by crossing into Russia seeking donations with papers from Russian border authorities gained under the pretense that they were merchants. Such statements made an even smaller claim of direct harm to the state than the allegation that the foreign lamas were harming Russian subjects and the state’s developmental interests; however, they continued to be targeted on the state’s chief interest in the regulation of lamaist confessional structures, the control of cross-border contacts and loyalties. This retrenchment may partially be the result of self-censorship; publications such as Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik had close ties to imperial authorities and may have wished to avoid publishing extensive direct criticisms of government policy. It may also indicate that mission leaders had found it more fruitful to lobby regional officials such as the General-Governor of Irkutsk for local policies to restrict lamaism than to campaign for the 1853 decree to be rewritten or enforced more strictly. Dittmar Schorkowitz has noted that such regional advocacy by the mission contributed to General-Governor Sinel’nikov’s effort to destroy a large number of lamaist buildings in the 1880s.93

“The Faith of our Ancestors”

In the wake of the mass departures from Orthodoxy in favor of lamaism that occurred after the issuance of the 1905 Edict on Religious Toleration, missionaries reported hearing over and over again from Buryats who had left the church that they were

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93 Schorkowitz, “The Orthodox Church, Lamaism, and Shamanism,” 206-207.
returning to lamaism, “the faith of our ancestors.” Missionaries took the discovery that thousands of their converts wished to be listed as lamaists as evidence of the creeping spread of a religion that was less a religion than it was a culture: “There is no apostasy on religious grounds; there is such on national, way of life, and economic grounds, but simply not on religious grounds.” The inorodtsy themselves, the author of this statement argued, conflated lamaism and way of life to such a degree that what they called the “Buryat religion [bratskaia religiia]” was actually “an external form of life,” including style of home, clothing, food, and occupation. The missionaries routinely reported that when they asked a given Buryat why he had left Orthodoxy, he would reply that he was returning to lamaism “because it was held by our Buryat ancestors.” As the missionaries themselves conflated religion and way of life, and believed that the Buryats did as well, such statements also indicated a rejection of the cultural adaptations Buryats had drawn from Russians. While before the decree, “the Buryats looked on Christianity as the most elevated religion, the ‘best of all’ religion…and attached to that opinion the cultured way of life of the Russian people,” now they no longer did.

Attempting to maintain their faith in the mission’s ability to succeed in the face of their belief that the Buryats saw their mass conversion to lamaism as a return to the religion and lifestyle of their ancestors, the missionaries asserted that the Buryats had, in the past, been both shamanist and lamaist. As Archbishop Serafim reportedly told one Buryat, “Your ancestors did not and do not hold one and the same faith. In Balagansk and

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94 This edict allowed converts to Orthodoxy could argue that their conversions had been inauthentic to return to their prior religion. During this time, many individuals who had been shamanists before their conversions left Orthodoxy for lamaism.  
95 “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907 godu,” PB, no. 18 (September 1908): 50.  
96 “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907 godu,” PB, no. 17 (September 1908): 10.
Verkholensk uezds, for example, Buryats hold the shamanist faith…it is impossible to say that you hold one and the same faith as all of your cousin-Buryats held and hold.”

I. A. PodgORBunskii’s 1909 “Russian-Mongolian-Buryat Dictionary” performed similar work: he devoted considerable attention to the linguistic differences between shamanist and lamaist Buryats, even within a given region. As a result, under the listing for the Russian word “August” (avgust), he gave both a “lamaist usage” and a “shamanist usage” for the dialect of the Tunka Buryats. This also explained the missionaries’ frequent complaint that Buryats who left the church were not returning to the “faith of their ancestors,” which was shamanism, but to lamaism. On one hand, this was an argument that lamaists were using the 1905 Edict on Toleration to provide cover for missionary work. It was also an assertion that lamaism was poaching Buryats who should have been on the path to the adoption of all things Russian, but now no longer were. Given the missionaries’ association between shamanism and the adoption of Russian ways of life and the potential adoption of Orthodoxy, the constant assertion that shamanism was an important part of the Buryats’ historical heritage and cultural composition maintained a space for the mission to continue to act in the face of the overwhelming success of a religion that it considered to be utterly hostile to both Orthodoxy and Russianness.

Describing the consequences of the spread of lamaism among the Buryats, the missionaries used the terms “Mongolization” [omongolenie] and “to Mongolify”

97 “Poezdka Vysokopreosviashchenneishego Serafima,” 723.
99 “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907 godu,” no. 18, 55.
Elaborating this description of the spread of lamaism as the spread of a Mongolian way of life, one missionary argued that this shift threatened to pull the Buryats away from an orientation towards Russia in favor of an orientation towards their close relatives, the Mongolians:

[On pilgrimage in Urga,] Buryats become closer acquainted with Mongolians [who are] related to them by language, way of life, and religion…Where else, naturally, should the religious and moral sympathies of the Buryats lean? Towards Russia, strange to them in language, faith, and way of life…or Mongolia, of the same tribe and faith [edinoplemennaia i edinovernaia]? 101

This problem of the ties between Buryats and Mongols had multiple dimensions. The two had, at one point in the distant past, been part of a group of Mongolic tribes that had shared a common lifestyle in nomadism and a common religion in shamanism. As a result of migration patterns and the erection of borders, a split had arisen within the group, and Buryats began to differentiate themselves from Mongols. As a result of centuries of contact with Russians, Buryat ways of life and shamanism had begun to evolve in a direction strongly influenced by Russia; Mongolians, on the other hand, had adopted lamaism, a religion that reinforced their commitment to the primitive nomadic lifestyle that the Buryats had left behind. Although the missionaries saw lamaism and shamanism as being very similar, they believed that the two had very different

100 The missionaries occasionally used “Mongolization” [omongolenie] and “to Mongolify” [omongolit’] as descriptors for the cultural effects of the spread of lamaism. For uses of these terms, see Ioann, “Irkutskaia dukhovnaia missiia i glavnyi vrag ee,” PB, no. 15 (August 1910): 110; “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi pravoslavnoi missii za 1876 godu. (Prodolzhenie),” PIEV, 30 July 1877, 399; and “Otchet o Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za 1869 god. Deistviia missii,” PIEV, 7 November 1870, 382.
101 Vinogradov, “O lamaizm za Baikalom,” 585. One missionary author reported that in the wake of 1905, Archbishop Serafim told one Buryat that the only reason he had left Orthodoxy was because “[the lamas] look like you and talk with you in your language…you don’t want to believe us because we aren’t Buryats and don’t talk with you in the Buryat language,” “Poezdka Vysokopreosviashchennieego Serafima,” 726.
implications for the developmental paths of those who followed them. Shamanism would cease to exist as the Buryats pursued a course of development that led them towards Russia and civilization. Lamaism, by constantly referring to and justifying the primitive intellectual development and social patterns that allowed its existence in the first place, strengthened those same patterns and prevented any development from occurring. In this context, the spread of lamaism and ties to the Mongols among the Buryats effectively undid the lengthy process of assimilating the Buryats into the empire. This was not about empire as a territorial construct, as the missionaries had little fear that the Buryats would leave the empire or actively rebel against imperial authority; it was about empire as a transformative process. Lamaism threatened to undo the centuries of transformative work that the missionaries believed they, the government, and Russian settlers, among other parties, had performed on the Buryats.

The missionaries’ examinations of lamaism and shamanism, sparked by their efforts to understand why they experienced comparatively higher conversion rates among western Buryats than among eastern Buryats, created a fundamental instability in their conceptions of the Buryats and their relationship to the empire. The lifestyles of Buryats who practiced shamanism were seen as proof of the empire’s transformative potential: identifying signs of change brought about by centuries of contact with Russians sponsored by empire, the missionaries saw shamanist Buryats as developing in ways that placed them on the edge of acceptance of Orthodoxy and other characteristics of civilization. On the other hand, lamaist Buryats were seen as unreasonably adherent to their primitive ways of life, a resistance to empire-sponsored change that was reinforced and reiterated by their religious persuasion. This apparent resistance to what the
missionaries believed was a natural, inevitable, and positive outcome of empire created a
sense that lamaist Buryats, and lamaism itself, were foreign presences within the empire’s
body, even though they were unquestionably Russian subjects. Seen from this
perspective, the missionaries’ descriptive writings about Buryat shamanism and lamaism
appear as attempts to impose imperial power upon the Buryats through classificatory
practices. The missionaries’ writings also expose much about their own visions of
empire, and of the appropriate relationship between religion and secular knowledge in
society. They adhered to a geographically-informed vision of empire as a transformative
space in which certain historical processes governed the population. They also believed
that religion and science operated in distinct spheres, with each governing a particular
realm of human experience and, by dominating that realm, allowing the other to perform
in accordance with its nature.
The Baikal region’s population, much of which did not speak Russian, posed a crucial problem to missionaries: how were they to communicate with potential converts? This problem would have presented a logistical difficulty to any outsider in the region’s more remote areas. However, it was a particularly acute issue for the two groups of Christian missionaries, representing Russian Orthodoxy and British Congregationalism, who worked there during the nineteenth century. To the Protestant missionaries, whose idea of what constituted an authentic conversion was intimately tied to a personal encounter with the Bible as a text, an individual’s ability to read and consider the Bible was a necessary prerequisite for conversion. Consequently, the Bible itself had to be made legible to the region’s inhabitants. For Russian Orthodox missionaries, the problem of cross-cultural communication was both old and new. Orthodoxy’s lengthy history of holding services in local languages, stretching back to St. Stefan of Perm in the fourteenth century, meant that translation endeavors had historical precedent. Acquiring the local language for the purpose of missionary work gained a new impetus during the nineteenth century, with the development of philosophies of missionary practice that placed emphasis on teaching converts and potential converts about Orthodoxy in their native languages. But the region itself posed a major obstacle to both groups of missionaries: in the nineteenth century, there was no easily identifiable local language or literary tradition. Indeed, “the Buryat language” as such simply did not exist.
Driven by their need, missionaries deployed developing ideas and practices of linguistic science to negotiate their encounter with local linguistic practices. In the process, they constructed a set of distinctions between what was linguistically Buryat and what was not that gradually shifted their conceptualization of what constituted “the Buryat language” away from Mongolia and Buddhist texts and textual traditions and towards the speech practices of the Buryats living on the western side of Lake Baikal. This gradual separation of Buryat from Mongolian and conceptual emplacement of the Buryat language firmly within the boundaries of the Russian Empire was accomplished through changes in linguistic source material, decisions about which script best represented the language, and, towards the end of the century, decisions to divide the language into dialects and publish only in specific dialects. From the inception of the missionaries’ efforts in the early nineteenth century to the mission’s end in 1917, these decisions, although justified on scientific grounds, were driven by the missionaries’ sense of where possibilities for success and threats to their goals lay. Across the period, these anxieties and hopes became ever more closely associated with missionaries’ understandings of what the relationship between the Buryats and the Russian Empire was.

Once the missionaries had created the category of “the Buryat language” for their own purposes, it was adopted and adapted by subsequent generations of users, including Buryat nationalists and, eventually, early Soviet linguists, each of whom used the category as a means of advancing their specific agenda of development for the Buryats. Many of the suppositions that the missionaries asserted as foundational to the category, including the beliefs that the Buryat language was related to, but linguistically distinct
from, multiple forms of Mongolian; should be subdivided into dialects that highlighted key differences between eastern and western Buryats; needed to be distinguished from Buddhist literary traditions to some degree; and could be used to shape the population were passed between generations of users. Consequently, peripheral actors and their scholarly exchanges, as well as local conditions and anxieties, played a significant role in constructing what eventually became one of the empire’s dominant ethnic categories.

Analyzing the Creation of a Language

In some respects, the missionary linguists saw themselves as modern, scientific investigators of language. They subscribed to nineteenth-century modernist views of language as a transparent means of conveying meaning when wielded by a skilled and educated authority. If the internal rules governing the language could be uncovered, the missionaries could explain Christianity, and the Buryats could understand it. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they began to justify their own linguistic expertise based on the academic study of language and the process of scientific observation. In reality, uncovering the language’s internal rules meant transforming the language itself. As a number of theorists have pointed out, any process of language standardization is inherently a creative act.¹ The very act of creating a standardized grammar or translation system for the language required the normalization of some practices and the marginalization of others; in this case, the language came to reflect the dialect of the

Tunka region in which the mission had been most successful; the best converts thus became the native speakers of the standardized Buryat language. The investigative process itself allowed the missionaries’ understandings of the Buryats, and even their hopes, fears, and dislikes, to influence their product.

The missionaries had some awareness of their creative actions in regard to the Buryat language, a fact that suggests they came to view language itself as a means for molding and transforming the Buryats. In the earliest instance of self-aware intervention into the language, translators argued for the necessity of aesthetic modifications to improve the language’s sound to allow it to better serve as a vehicle for the Orthodox liturgy. Subsequent linguists continued this practice. In the most blatant case, the author of the first published comprehensive grammar of the language claimed to have purged from the language a sound offensive to Russian listeners; he then labeled himself a “reformer” of the language, depicting himself as wielding authority over the language to improve and civilize it, even as he asserted that his work was nothing but a representation of information gleaned through his own research and observations. The means by which language was to alter the Buryats shifted over the course of the century: in the case of the translations of the liturgy, the Buryats were intended to benefit as audience to the liturgy,

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2 Ironically, the Tunka dialect is now considered provincial in relation to literary Buryat, although the region has a relatively high density of Buryat-dominant individuals and is the home of many prominent Buryat literary figures. Kathryn Graber, personal communication, 2/11/2011. This process of centering the literary language around one dialect continues today. The literary language is currently based on the Khorii Buryat dialect, and remains difficult to understand for many speakers of other dialects. See L. D. Shagdarov, *Funktsional'no-stilisticheskaia differentsiatsiia buriatskogo literaturnogo iazyka* (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1974), for a classic examination of the contemporary Buryat literary language.

while later translations were intended to allow the Buryats to actively consume both religious and scientific materials and reap the civilizing rewards of belonging within the empire. The missionaries were attempting to comprehend the language in order to convey referential content to the Buryats, but they also came to believe that they could reshape the language so that it, in and of itself, would help shape the Buryats’ future as an Orthodox, and Russian, people.4

In many ways, the missionaries’ shifting conceptions of the Buryat language and the purpose of translating were responses to changing ideas about the nature of the Russian empire and the Buryats’ relationship to the empire. Mark Bassin argues that during the nineteenth century, the empire came to imagine itself as a “national empire” that “both absorbed and superseded mere ethnographic and racial criteria.” For the church, the creation of what Bassin calls a “supra-ethnic” Russian identity meant the inculcation of a set of cultural characteristics and values derived from ideas of Russianness into missionized populations.5 The shaping of the language of translation across the nineteenth century reflected this increasing discomfort with the idea of a diverse empire. Moreover, the translations themselves came to be seen as a method of

4 Such ideas of language and the purpose of linguistic investigation bear strong similarities to language ideologies espoused by early Soviet linguists and state language policies emphasizing language construction [iazykove stroitel’stvo]; see Michael G. Smith, Language and Power in the Creation of the USSR, 1917-1953 (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1998), 3-5. Isabelle Kreindler has remarked on similarities between late imperial missionary philosophies on Russia’s minorities and early Soviet policy in “A Neglected Source of Lenin’s Nationality Policy,” Slavic Review 36, no. 1 (March 1977): 86-100.

5 Mark Bassin, “Geographies of Imperial Identity,” 55-59. The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of intense debate about the nature of Russianness and what was required in terms of cultural change for the empire’s diverse non-Russian population. I oversimplify russification and what it meant to be Russian here in order to better examine changing conceptions of Buryatness. For detailed and critical discussions of the Orthodox Church’s often conflicted positions and relationship with the imperial government on russification, see Geraci and Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy.
pulling the Buryats closer to Russia: acquiring Christianity and the language used in the translations meant acquiring a Buryatness that was oriented towards Russia. In this regard, both the translations and the language of translation reflect Anthony Pym’s theory that translations are “textual responses to the movement of objects across time and space…if nothing moved, there would be no need for translation.”⁶ In the case of the missionaries’ translation efforts, the moving objects were the Russian empire, its changing identity, and the relationship of the Buryats to the Russian empire and the Mongols.

The construction of the language of translation built borders around Buryats and Buryatness in several ways; these borders, and efforts to maintain them, ultimately challenged the conceptual integrity of the missionary linguists’ entire project.⁷ In its final iterations, the Buryat language outlined by the missionaries relied on the related ideas that a significant portion of the Buryat population was simultaneously adopting both Orthodoxy and Russianness, and that Buddhism was foreign to this population. The mass apostasy of 1906-1907, in which nearly ten thousand baptized Buryats from the Tunka region left the church to return to Buddhism, would challenge this. In the wake of what the missionaries viewed as an unprecedented disaster, missionary linguistics turned towards a fractured view of the Buryat language. This was likely an attempt to correct overgeneralizations in response to a wave of reports that the Buryats did not understand the language that the church was using for official translations and proclamations.

⁷ In treating the process of translation as one that necessarily constructs borders, I draw on arguments laid out by Pym in Exploring Translation Theories, 153; and by Bauman and Briggs, who assert in Languages of Modernity that an inevitable and intentional result of the creation of modern, standardized, and scientific languages is the marginalization of those who do not or cannot control the normalized language practices.
However, it was also an attempt to maintain the older image of the Buryats as a non-Buddhist people alongside newer recognitions that Buddhism did, in fact, play a significant role in the Buryat religious landscape. This scholarship provoked criticisms from academic Mongolists who, having been converted to the idea that the Buryat language was a discrete, internally-coherent entity, found the missionaries’ new views to be too fractured.

Given the missionary linguists’ lack of information and constantly evolving conception of the language they were studying, as well as the multiple methodological problems underlying their translations, there is little point in attempting to assess whether or not their translations actually reflected “the Buryat language” or conveyed the intended meaning to their Buryat audience. Anecdotal reports from missionaries who attempted to use the translations in the field, the linguists’ constant efforts to improve their understanding of the language and rectify the errors of earlier translations, and the absence of any documentary evidence that the written language was ever used by lay Buryats indicate that across the nineteenth century the translations failed on both counts. This distinguishes the missionary linguistics project of the Baikal region from similar projects in other locations, where missionary-shaped vernacular languages provided means that actively furthered the goal of conversion, even if the end result was not what the missionaries had anticipated.\(^8\)

\(^8\) Paul Werth has argued that the existence of a body of Orthodox poetry by baptized Tatars written in the vernacular Tatar language used by Orthodox missionaries indicates that the language served as a vehicle for the expression of a baptized Tatar identity. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 230. In the Philippines, the translation efforts of Catholic missionaries introduced misreadings of Catholic texts that furthered conversion efforts, but subverted the meanings endorsed by the missionaries. Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society*
Despite the linguistics project’s failure to further the missionaries’ goals, the category “the Buryat language” was entirely created by the missionaries, and has proven an enduring construct. The canon of missionary translations demonstrates a shift from viewing the language as nearly identical with other Mongolic languages to a discrete linguistic entity in its own right. Responses to the missionaries’ linguistic works from Mongolists working at Russian universities demonstrate that this idea was initially met with hostility, but by the early twentieth century gained widespread acceptance. Once granted legitimacy by the academic community, the Buryat language became part of the platform of national development asserted by Buryat nationalists in the early twentieth century, and a staple of Soviet definitions of the Buryats as a nationality. Each of these subsequent advocates of “the Buryat language” as a meaningful category interpreted the category based on his own understandings and purposes, but all accepted the boundaries and linguistic divisions within the language that the missionaries established. Here, there are parallels to missionary endeavors elsewhere in the world. Examinations of the scientific products of nineteenth-century missionaries working in Africa have demonstrated that missionaries played a key role in using European ideologies of language and race to construct linguistic and ethnic boundaries that informed the scientific understandings of their colleagues at home, as well as our contemporary

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understandings of cultural divisions within Africa. Arguing for the importance of excavating the historical processes through which such categories were constructed, Judith Irvine notes that the present impact of such processes can be seen in the existence of a “regimented standard [dialect], and the potential sense of inferiority imposed on speakers whose usage does not conform.”

The missionaries’ actions were possible and had such a profound impact in large part because of the unique linguistic environment of the region. Classical Mongolian, the only non-Russian written tradition present when the missionary linguists began their translation efforts, was itself the product of Buddhist missionary activity from outside the region. It was not directly representative of the speech practices of Buryats, although it was related to them; a suitable comparison would be between the high literary German used in Protestant church services and spoken Swiss German. Most classical Mongolian texts available in the area in the early nineteenth century were not locally produced, but rather imports from publishing centers in Beijing or Urga, present-day Ulan-Baator.

12 The first Mongolian printing presses in the Baikal region were assembled at datsans in the 1820s. By the late nineteenth century, they were producing significant numbers of texts, primarily instructional materials for learning Mongolian and Buddhist religious texts. Montgomery, 84.
While classical Mongolian, which the missionaries labeled as “literary Mongolian” 
\([knizhnyi\ mongol\ 'skii\ iazyk]\), had gained some traction in the form of a small, literate, 
non-monastic population by the early nineteenth century, it was not in widespread use for 
non-religious purposes. \(^{13}\) The missionaries were not constrained by the existence of 
widespread literacy in a local non-Russian language. In this regard, they faced a radically 
different set of conditions than missionary linguists working with Tatars in the Kazan 
region, where Arabic, Persian, and literary Tatar were all present. However, the situation 
may have parallels to other parts of Siberia such as the Altai region, also the site of a 
major missionary linguistics project in the nineteenth century. \(^{14}\)

The linguistic map of the region also lent itself to flexibility and redefinition. The 
Buryat language is closely related to spoken Mongolian, to the point that the two are

\(^{13}\) Although some Buryat administrations on the eastern side of Lake Baikal occasionally 
used classical Mongolian for administrative purposes, most administrations conducted 
business orally or used Russian. Data on literacy rates in non-Russian languages in the 
Baikal region in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is spotty and difficult to 
verify. Robert Montgomery estimates that by the early twentieth century, 8.4% of the 
male population on the east side of the lake and 5.2% on the west side of the lake were 
literate in classical Mongolian or Tibetan; a spot check of some eastern villages by the 
Russian Geographical Society in the early twentieth century indicated that literacy rates 
in Tibetan or Mongolian among males were as high as fourteen percent in some 
locations. However, lamas and datsans were the primary source of education in Tibetan 
and Mongolian, both as institutions and in terms of the production of educators, and their 
numbers did not begin to escalate sharply until the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, rates in 
the early nineteenth century were likely considerably lower. See Montgomery, 128-129. 
Regardless of literacy levels, the religious knowledge embodied in texts likely spread to 
iliterate portions of the population via verbal practices of knowledge-sharing; Sufi 
religious knowledge originating in texts employing literary languages was widely 
internalized by illiterate Tatar populations; see Agnès Kefeli, “Constructing an Islamic 
Identity: The Case of Elyshevo Village in the Nineteenth Century,” in \textit{Russia’s Orient: 
Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917}, ed. Daniel R. Brower and Edward J. 

\(^{14}\) An Orthodox missionary to the Altai was the first to argue that the “Altaic peoples” 
formed a coherent ethnic category, and the mission to the Altai carried out a similar 
sometimes mutually intelligible depending on situation, speaker, and dialect. Some contemporaneous linguists argue that the two are so similar that, without the existence of a linguistic division based on perception, culture and history, the two would not be considered distinct languages. This close relationship was perpetuated by mass migrations back and forth across the border as late as the nineteenth century and constant cross-border contact and exchange afterwards. Extreme differences in dialects across a wide territory among the Buryats themselves made the situation even less clear. In short, the missionaries were operating in a context in which there were no easy linguistic markers to unify the Buryats, or divide them from Mongolians. Consequently, the missionary linguists faced immense obstacles as they sought to identify commonalities that could make up a language into which they could translate. They were also left relatively free to draw lines as they saw fit. Subsequent linguists did not have this degree of freedom: they were forced to contend with the boundaries established by the missionaries, even if they did not entirely agree with them.

Orthodox missionary translation projects and their relationships to the construction of enduring ethnographic and linguistic categories have received little scholarly attention. The only in-depth analysis of the projects, Robert Geraci’s *Window on the East*, uses them to explore ideas of Russianness informing the missionaries’ work.

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Two scholarly attempts to root the processes of category creation in centrally-developed beliefs about the nature of Russian and Soviet empire that urged the cultivation of certain types of diversity, Vera Tolz’s *Russia’s Own Orient* and Francine Hirsch’s *Empire of Nations*, do not investigate whether the scholars and ethnographers which they examine may have been drawing on categories with much older local histories. This is a particularly notable absence in Tolz’s work, as she deals directly with many of the Buryat intelligentsia who developed the Buryat nationalist linguistic platform. Tolz interconnects her subjects’ views on language with their broader views about the Buryats as a nation and the relationship between East and West, key questions that were a well-established part of local discussions about the language by the late nineteenth century.17

The missionary linguists have also been largely sidelined from discussions of the history of Buryat linguistics or the Buryat language. While a few Soviet linguists acknowledged that subsequent understandings of the language developed from the missionaries’ initial work on dialects, phonetics, and grammar, they downplayed or did not recognize the missionaries’ connections to the church, or, consequently, religious mission’s formative influence on the language as a category. Others simply ignore the missionaries’ works altogether.18 Moreover, contemporary Buryat nationalist scholars

18 The Soviet linguist N.N. Poppe acknowledged the missionaries’ contributions in *Burjat-Mongol’skoe iazykoznanie* (Leningrad: 1933), but excluded them from his later works, such as *Burjat Grammar* (Uralic and Altaic Series, Vol. 2, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960). Later works in the 1970s labeled the missionary publications as having “interesting” or “useful data” and in one case went so far as to recognize the missionaries for having grasped essential dialect divisions within the language, but did not directly list the missionaries’ works as church translations and grammars; see, for example, Ts. B. Tsydendambaev, “Novoe v rabote dialektologov Burjatii,” in *Issledovanie burjatskikh i russkikh govorov* (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskii institut obshchestvennykh nauk, 1977), 3-7; and “*Osnovnye itogi i blizhaishie zadachi izucheniiia*
take a dismissive attitude towards Orthodoxy, largely rejecting the idea that Orthodoxy had any deep impact on the Buryats and preferring instead to emphasize the Buddhist and shamanist roots of contemporary Buryat identity. This attitude influences dismissive treatments of the missionaries’ linguistic efforts in works such as Robert Montgomery’s study of tsarist and early Soviet policies on the Buryat language. The single, and quite notable, exception to this rule is E.N. Grosheva’s well-documented 2008 analysis of the history of book publishing in the Buryat language, in which she identifies the missionaries’ works as early examples of this tradition. Grosheva, a librarian at the National Library of the Buryat Republic, was responsible for the display of selected missionary translations that inspired this chapter. However, she treats “the Buryat language” as a self-evident category, and does not question the role that the missionaries’ efforts played in developing the category, or what influenced them as they did so.

By tracing the development of the idea of “the Buryat language” as a distinct linguistic entity from its origins to its acceptance by the broad academic community, I argue for the significance of peripheral actors in creating the empire’s dominant ethnic categories and, in the process, imagining the empire itself. A considerable amount of

_**buriatskogo iazyka**“ (K izucheniiu buriatskogo iazyka) (Ulan-Ude, 1969), 3–9, 4; and Ts. B. Budaev, *Leksika buriatskikh dialektov v sravnitel’no-istoricheskom osveshchenii* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1978) and *Buriatskie dialekty (opyt diakhronicheskogo issledovaniia)* (Novosibirsk: Nauka, 1992). An example of the complete effacement of the missionaries’ works from the historical record is B. B. Batoev’s *Izuchaem literaturnyi buriatskii iazyk* (Ulan-Ude: Buriatskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 2004), a textbook on the literary language widely used in Buryat schools and universities.

19 Montgomery’s *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Cultural Policy* and L. L. Abaeva and N. L. Zhukovskai’a’s encyclopedic volume *Buriaty* (Moscow: Nauka, 2004) exemplify the dismissal of Orthodoxy as anything other than a foreign, intrusive force from the Buryat historical record.

scholarship on the Russian Empire has explored how Russian academics and intellectuals imagined the empire and its component parts. By and large, these works focus on actors who were based in the central cities of St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kazan, or affiliated with central institutions such as the Russian Geographical Society.\(^{21}\) This focus on prominent individuals and institutions excludes the possibility that scholarly networks and long-term engagement with individuals in peripheral areas were formative of individual views. For example, in his insightful study of Russian orientalism, David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye limits his discussion of “missionary orientology” to the instructors and students of the Orthodox seminary and theological academy in Kazan, and treats the waning of scholarship at those institutions in the mid-nineteenth century as the end of missionary orientology as an intellectually and historically significant field, a conclusion that my results contradict. Moreover, his discussion of the Kazan University Mongolist Osip Kovalevskii, who did his field work in the Baikal region as the missionary translation project was starting and had close academic ties to the project, treats Kovalevskii as a self-contained scholar not influenced by intellectual developments outside of Kazan University.\(^{22}\) As my work demonstrates, individuals who lived

\(^{21}\) Here, I use the term “center” to refer to the dominant centers of cultural and intellectual production within the Russian empire, and “peripheral” to refer to areas, actors, and institutions that both would have identified themselves as insignificant by comparison and have not been labeled by contemporary scholars as dominant contributors to the Russian cultural or intellectual canon. Examples of such scholarly approaches include Bassin, *Imperial Visions*; Hirsch; and Susan Layton, *Russian Literature and Empire: Conquest of the Caucasus from Pushkin to Tolstoy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Geraci’s *Window on the East* occupies a unique place within this body of scholarship, as he deals with actors who were simultaneously employed by some of Russia’s premier intellectual institutions and resident in one of the empire’s many borderlands.

\(^{22}\) David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism: Asia in the Russian Mind from Peter the Great to the Emigration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 111-
comparatively modest and quiet lives on the periphery carried out intellectually
significant research that had a lasting impact on the way that Russia categorized its non-
Russian population, despite their lack of renown. As they did so, they carried on
scholarly (if occasionally rude) dialogue with scholars at more prominent institutions; the
views of both were shaped by the exchange.

Language reforms have long been a magnet for scholars examining the Russian
empire’s assimilationist policies in the mid to late nineteenth century. Most recent
scholarship has used the reforms to complicate understandings of the goals of
policymakers and bureaucrats within the government and the Orthodox Church, and thus
ideas of both what conceptually constituted assimilation and how it was actually applied.
Examinations of language policies in the western borderlands have demonstrated that the
government’s goals were defensive, aimed at curtailing Polish influence, rather than
offensive and aimed at transforming non-Polish minorities into Russians; this situation
was paralleled in the Kazan region, where Orthodox missionaries espoused vernaculars as
a means to combat the foreign influence associated with the region’s non-Russian literary

117, 122-152. Two of Kovalevskii’s most prominent students, the Buryats Dorzhi
Banzarov and Aleksei Bobrovnikov, were connected to the missionary translation project.
Vasilii Florensov, a church historian of the missionary translation project, attributes to
Banzarov an early translation of the Kratkaia sviashchennaia istoriia Vetkhogo i Novogo
Zaveta, dated to 1849, which informed subsequent efforts; another source suggests that
Kovalevskii himself may have assisted in this. Bobrovnikov’s father, a clergyman, was
an early translator of parts of the liturgy, and Aleksei Bobrovnikov himself was the first
student of the missionary linguist Aleksandr Orlov before he moved to Kazan. Vasilii
Florensov, Iz istorii perevodcheskago dela v Irkutskoi eparkhii (Irkutsk: Tipografiia A.A.
Sizykh, 1908), 10-11; “Knigi na mongol’skom iazyke, imeiuschiiasia v biblioteke
Irkutskoi dukhovnoi seminarii, s kratkim oboznacheniem ikh soderzhania, na osnovanii
zametok o podobnykh knigakh izvestnykh mongolistov,” PIEV, 23 April 1883, 227-228;
V. Kopylov, Piatidestiatiletie sluzhby po dukhovno-uchebnomu vedomstvu irkutskogo
protoiereia Aleksandra Matveevicha Orlova, 1838-1888 (Irkutsk: Tipografiia A.A.
Sizykh, 1888), 69.
languages and, in the words of Theodore R. Weeks, “strengthen the Russian element.”

This defensive posture is certainly evident in the missionaries’ attitudes towards the Buryat language. More interesting, though, is the fact that in the case of the Buryats, linguistic research itself served as a means of both defending Russia and shoring up the population’s Russianness, and as a result, the language itself emerged changed from its use as a tool in the assimilatory toolkit. The effect that such intense Russian scholarly focus on vernacular languages had on the languages as categories remains to be studied.

My sources include as many examples of missionary translations and grammars as I was able to assemble from the National Library of the Buryat Republic’s Rare Book Collection and the Rare Book Room of the library of Buryat State University. This is not a complete set, although it is the most complete collection of such materials available anywhere, and includes several items not available anywhere else. I have also included discussions of translations, linguistics, and language use from local church records available in the National Archive of the Buryat Republic and the Irkutsk eparchy’s newsletter, The Irkutsk Diocesan Gazette [Irkutskie eparkhial’nye vedomosti]. For the earliest translations, I have been forced to rely on excerpts of documents found in published histories to provide context for the translations themselves. In one instance, this includes Charles Bawden’s history of the London Missionary Society mission to the Baikal region, the archives of which I was unable to visit because they are in London. In

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the second instance, I use Vasili Florensov’s 1908 history of the Baikal translation project to access documents that were either destroyed or are inaccessible due to the organization of the church’s files in the State Archive of Irkutsk Oblast’.

Translating the Bible (1817-1840)

The earliest translations of Christian texts into the language that eventually became known as Buryat were the result of two separate but interrelated Protestant translation projects carried out in the early nineteenth century under the aegis of the Russian Bible Society and the British and Foreign Bible Society. One, based in St. Petersburg and headed by the linguist Iakov Shmidt, built on translation work Shmidt had carried out for the Moravian mission to the Kalmyks, who spoke a language closely related to Mongolian and wrote using the Oirat clear script, derived from the classical Mongolian script. The second, an effort by British missionaries dispatched by the London Missionary Society to the town of Selenginsk, just south of the present-day capital of the Buryat Republic, developed out of criticisms of Shmidt’s translations. Although the resultant editions of the Old Testament and portions of the New Testament

24 Although Shmidt himself never traveled to the Baikal region and had no immediate familiarity with the Buryat language, he was not mistaken in associating Buryat and Kalmyk. One academic overview of relationships within the Mongolic language family argues that Mongolian, Kalymk and Buryat “are more or less mutually comprehensible,” although the three are currently labeled as distinct languages. See Svantesson, et al., 140-147. For an overview of the various scripts used to represent Mongolic languages, see Kara.

25 For a detailed but uncritical account of the London Missionary Society mission and its relationships with the Moravian mission and the Russian Bible Society, see Bawden. Although many of Bawden’s conclusions about the mission are questionable suppositions hampered by his lack of knowledge of Russia or the Buryats, he provides extensive excerpts and collated details from the records of the Moravian mission, the London Missionary Society, and the British and Foreign Bible Society.
cannot be read as a unified and complete translation of the Bible, they reflect remarkably similar conceptions of what constituted the written version of the language of the Buryats. They drew inspiration for formatting and layout, as well as grammar, from Mongolian Buddhist texts. Moreover, both accepted that a Mongolian script was the natural choice for representing the language. Collectively, these preferences indicate a vision of Buryat culture that was at least inextricably linked to the Mongolians, and perhaps even primarily situated across the Russian/Chinese border.26

Both projects were sparked by the same event. Upon the formation of the Russian Bible Society in 1813, several Buryat notables made large donations, accompanied by expressions of support for translation projects. Shmidt himself triumphantly reported this to the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1814, and two British affiliates of the Moravian mission began pressuring the London Missionary Society to consider sending a mission to the Buryats. As a result, all three organizations concluded that the Buryats were strong candidates for conversion. Not surprisingly, as all three organizations advocated the translation, publication, and distribution of the Bible, they turned to a translation project as the natural starting point. In 1817, as the London Missionary Society finalized preparations to send a mission to Siberia with explicit instructions to

26 This decision may also have been tactical, resulting from a belief that control of a language vested with heavy symbolic value, as classical Mongolian was, granted the controller a method of exercising discursive authority. The missionaries may have believed that transforming classical Mongolian into a language of Christianity rather than Buddhism would allow them to supplant the lamas and wield the cultural authority of the language. J. Jorge Klor de Alva has made such a case in regard to classic Nahuatl, a ritual language employed by central Mexican elites the time of Spanish arrival in the New World that was subsequently co-opted by missionaries and other colonial authorities. Klor de Alva, “Language, Politics, and Translation: Colonial Discourse and Classic Nahuatl in New Spain,” in The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field, ed. Rosanna Warren (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 143-162.
learn Mongolian for the purpose of translation, two educated Buryat emissaries of the Russian Bible Society’s Khori Buryat donors arrived in St. Petersburg. These two were sent because the taisha of the Khori Buryats had received a copy of part of Shmidt’s Kalmyk translation and stated that the local language was distinct enough from Kalmyk to require its own translation. 27 They began to assist Shmidt in rendering his translation of the New Testament from the Oirat clear script into the classical Mongolian script. 28

The resultant works, a translation by Shmidt and the Buryats of the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles and a catechism, and a translation by the London Missionary Society missionaries of the Old Testament, were both cooperative and competitive. By the time Edward Stallybrass and William Swan, the first of the London Missionary Society missionaries, had established themselves in Zabaikal’e, Shmidt’s translations had been published. Copies of the translations were sent to Stallybrass and Swan for use and distribution, but the two expressed considerable concern about their quality. For Stallybrass, the issue was not so much grammar as emphasis. Upon reviewing Shmidt’s catechism, he disputed a passage translated from the Book of Genesis that described the creation of the world in six days on the grounds that it did not sufficiently emphasize the seventh day as the Sabbath; he explained this by stating that “the fraternity of Mr S it is well known pay very little regard to the Sabbath day.” Once the London Missionary Society missionaries completed their independent and methodologically distinct translation of the Old Testament, they began their own translation of the New Testament. However, in order to publish their results, they had no choice but to request that Shmidt, who was both sufficiently well-connected and one of Russia’s few scholars with

27 Florensov, 4.
28 Bawden, 54, 105-110.
knowledge of Mongolian, act as censor. Shmidt used this position to edit the translation for grammar and comment on its relationship to accepted Protestant translations of the Bible.29

![Image from Acts of the Apostles [Deianii sv. Apostolov] (St. Petersburg, late 1820s)](image)

The layout of the translated New Testament books is remarkable, and was deliberately designed to invoke the idea of a holy text for readers familiar with the Tibetan Buddhism practiced by the Buryats and Mongols. Published in individual volumes in St. Petersburg between 1820 and 1827, they were printed in classical Mongolian script with a vertically, rather than horizontally, oriented text. The pages, however, are horizontally, rather than vertically, aligned, and bound at the top rather than on the left. The whole effect is to mimic the overall design and reading pattern used for Tibetan Buddhist holy texts, in which there is no binding, but rather a stack of horizontally-aligned papers with a

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29 Bawden, 280, 283-284.
vertically-aligned text that are flipped over as they are read.\textsuperscript{30} In addition, the text contains a number of markers of Buddhist printing styles, including conch shell designs marking paragraph and page breaks. Moreover, the book was printed using block printing, rather than moveable type (see Figures 2 and 3). This technique was commonly used for Buddhist texts, and was imbued with significant religious meaning. The labor-intensive task of carving the wood blocks was a form of accumulating merit, and the skill was typically restricted to individuals associated with Buddhist monasteries.\textsuperscript{31} These stylistic choices were determined by decisions surrounding Shmidt’s earlier translation of portions of the New Testament into Kalmyk. The first edition of the Gospel of St. Matthew, the initial publication in the series, was printed in a European-style quarto format. However, all subsequent editions of translations done or overseen by Shmidt until his project was shut down in 1827 were published using the Buddhist-influenced format.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30} The Buryats practiced Tibetan Buddhism; Tibetan Buddhist texts in the region were frequently in a Tibetan style, but using a Mongolian script.

\textsuperscript{31} It is unclear where, and how, Shmidt came by the blocks to print his texts.

\textsuperscript{32} Bawden, 280-282.
The London Missionary Society translation hewed considerably closer to European book traditions than Shmidt’s publications. Bound on the left side, the text was intended to appear and be handled as a European volume would have been (see Figure 4). This choice was every bit as conscious as Shmidt’s decision to make his publications reflect Buddhist textual traditions. The London Missionary Society translation was not published until 1840, much later than the New Testament volumes, and Stallybrass and Swan note having come into contact with Shmidt’s publications.³³ Their decision to use a European format for the book reflected the fact that by this time, biblical translation projects were well-established in Britain, creating a precedent for publishing holy texts

³³ Bawden, 284-285.
intended for consumption by persons of other faiths in European book formats. As such translation efforts were new to Russia, Shmidt had less of an established tradition to draw on, and therefore more choice in terms of formatting. However, the London Missionary Society translation still contains markers of Buddhist textual practices, including the use of conch shell designs to indicate paragraph and page breaks. Its compilers thus believed that some of these practices were coterminous with the language itself.

The linguistic choices surrounding the translation projects oriented the language of the Buryats displayed in the translations towards Mongolia. In Shmidt’s case, the translations into Mongolian were initially transcribed versions of his translations into Kalmyk. The two Buryat emissaries to St. Petersburg, Nomtu Uutayin and Badma Morciunayin, were tasked with transcribing the translations from the altered Mongolian script used for Kalmyk into the classical Mongolian script; a translation of the colophon to Acts of the Apostles cited by Bawden and an independent translation by the National Library of the Buryat Republic confirm this. At an unknown point in the process, Morciunayin took on a more active role. The initial focus on transliteration rather than translation indicates that the language of the Buryats was perceived to be so similar in terms of grammar and vocabulary to Kalmyk that the only thing needed was for the translation to be shifted from one script to another. However, Morciunayin’s transition to

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34 Morciunayin occasionally appears in Russian-language historiography and cataloging as Morgunaev, the russified version of his surname.
translation suggests that at some point, the two languages may have been reconceived as being more distinct than originally thought.

The use of Uutayin and Morciunayin as intermediaries of translation privileged the Buddhist educational system, which situated its knowledge in Tibetan and Mongolian writings, as an authoritative source of linguistic knowledge. Both were nobles from the Khori Buryats, among whom a system of Buddhist monasteries that served as schools and supplied lamas as private tutors was well-established by the early nineteenth century.\(^{36}\) Both were obviously educated men, and this was the most likely source of their education. Shmidt was thus relying on informants whose background predisposed them to emphasize Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist texts as sources. Shmidt had no access to sources of linguistic knowledge other than these literate elites because he was based in St. Petersburg. Moreover, as linguistics at the time was largely focused around philology, Shmidt himself was predisposed to viewing texts as superior linguistic sources. Shmidt’s own predilections, and those of his informants, played a key role in orienting the translations towards Mongolia, classical Mongolian, and Buddhism.

The London Missionary Society missionaries’ translation choices performed a similar function. The mission was originally intended to be based in Irkutsk; however, once Stallybrass, the first of the missionaries, arrived there in 1818, he decided to relocate to Selenginsk for linguistic reasons. Justifying his decision, Stallybrass wrote that he found “the Buryats on the western side of Lake Baikal were reputed to be illiterate, and to speak a dialect so corrupt and mixed with Russian that it would be

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impossible to acquire a decent knowledge of the language from them, and inadvisable to try to translate the Scriptures” into it. The other side of the lake, to which Stallybrass relocated the mission, was where Morciunayin and Uutayin had come from. It was the home of Buryats who had migrated from Mongolia more recently than those around Irkutsk. It was also an area that had developed a strong network of Buddhist monasteries, with their accompanying libraries and educational institutions. The missionaries’ preferences for a “pure” language and a literate population combined with preconceptions about the language of the Buryats garnered from Shmidt and other linguists to lead them to groups of Buryats with the strongest cultural links to Mongolia and Buddhism and to reject Buryats with closer ties to Russia.

The already extant orientation of the language of the Buryats towards Mongolia and Buddhist written sources was perpetuated and reinforced by the British missionaries’ method of ensuring the accuracy of their translations. As they embarked on their effort to translate the Old Testament in the 1830s, the missionaries appealed to the British and Foreign Bible Society for funding. In their request, they elaborated their translation methods. The missionaries began the process by making a draft translation; Bawden reports that they were working from a Hebrew text, rather than the Russian or Slavonic text from which Shmidt had started. They then got an educated Buryat, typically a lama whose point of reference would have been Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhist texts, to comment on the draft. After making a second copy, on which the other translators in the team provided commentary, they invited further outside criticism.

37 Bawden, 138.
38 Bawden, 296-297.
The translations were aimed at the small population of literate Buryats, and supposed the book and the written word to be a key method of transferring Christianity to the Buryats. Knowledge of Mongolian was extremely limited among Orthodox priests. The first formal program of language training in Mongolian was not offered in Irkutsk until 1790; that, based at the Irkutsk popular school rather than the seminary, shut down after just four years because of the difficulty of the course of study. The seminary itself did not have full-time instructors devoted to Mongolian until the late 1830s. What evidence does exist indicates that the bibles were distributed directly to high-ranking and literate Buryats. In his history of the Irkutsk eparchy’s translation projects, Vasilii Florensov reports that Shmidt’s New Testament translations were distributed by then-General-Governor of Siberia Mikhail Speransky, a supporter of the Russian Bible Society, to the regional taishas and the Bandido-Khambo-Lama.\(^39\) The London Missionary Society missionaries regularly reported specifically seeking out literate Buryats, including lamas, to give them gospels and tracts. Their counterparts working within Britain regularly distributed pamphlets and Bibles believing that by doing so, they could reach the illiterate many via the literate few. Consequently, the missionaries may have believed that similar patterns of oral transmission within the community would work among the Buryats.\(^40\)

\(^{39}\) Florensov, 4, 8.
\(^{40}\) See, for example, Bawden, 237. In her study of how the publications of Congregationalist missionaries such as Stallybrass and Swan contributed to the creation of an imperial culture in Britain, Susan Thorne discusses how pamphlets were frequently read aloud to circles of family members and friends, a practice that would enable the spread of their contents to the illiterate. Stallybrass and Swan may have believed that distributing publications would work similarly among the Buryats. Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missionaries and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 6.
Translating Service Books (1834-1869)

In the mid 1830s, a series of discussions began in the Orthodox Church’s Irkutsk Eparchy that eventually culminated in the translation of a set of service books into the language that, by the end of this period, was labeled as “mongolo-buriat.” The debates about what constituted an appropriate translation surrounding the project demonstrate a growing belief that the Orthodox Church needed to alter literary Mongolian to create a language for translation that reflected the local spoken language and was better able to convey Christian concepts. This goal of altering the language to meet the needs of Russia’s Buryats was informed by rising sentiments against literary Mongolian’s Buddhist associations. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Orthodox missionaries argued that lamas used literary Mongolian, which was not understood by the local populace, as a tool of deceit. Literary Mongolian and linguistic knowledge derived from lamas became suspect. The result of the discussions leading up to the translation of the service books and the subsequent criticism of them was a steadily strengthening push for a “Buryat” form of Mongolian that reflected local practices and was not burdened by ties to the increasingly problematic literary Mongolian.

The earliest record of an effort to translate church services into Mongolian appears in 1834, when Archbishop Meletii of Irkutsk reported to the Holy Synod that such translations would be useful to the church’s missionary efforts in the area. As a result, Archpriest Aleksandr Bobrovnikov, a Buryat, translated the morning and evening services and a liturgy. By order of the Synod, these were copied and distributed locally to be corrected by verifying if the translations were intelligible to local residents when read
This method of determining the accuracy of a translation by testing its comprehensibility among locals through use gained popularity throughout the 19th century, and is one of the earliest indicators of an increased emphasis on matching the language of translation to the local spoken language. Bobrovnikov’s work, as well as a few other translations by Iakov Aleksandrovich Boldonov, a Buryat teacher at a regional school, does not seem to have had more than limited circulation; however, criticisms of his translations informed the set of translations that were eventually published and widely distributed.

In the early 1850s, Mikhail Teliat’ev, a missionary working among the Khorí Buryats, petitioned the Archbishop to be allowed to perform services partially in Slavonic and partially in Mongolian, drawing on the works of Bobrovnikov and the London Missionary Society missionaries. Nil’s response sharply criticized Teliat’ev’s plan, arguing that to be a fit vehicle for Orthodoxy, any service needed to be whole, rather than composed of snippets in various languages, and overseen by a knowledgeable central

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41 Florensov, 17-18. Bobrovnikov’s family went on to have a long engagement with Orthodox missionary linguistics. His son Aleksei Aleksandrovich was among the first graduates of the Mongolian and Kalmyk language program at the Kazan Theological Academy and authored one of the first definitive grammars of Mongolo-kalmyk; his grandson, Nikolai Alekseevich, was the adopted son, protégé and successor of Nikolai Il’minskii, the mid-nineteenth-century advocate of native-language missionary work. The rise of interest in translations in the Baikal region parallels efforts by Bishop Makarii (Glukharev) in the Altai region; Makarii is credited with starting a renewed push for translations in the Orthodox church. While interest in translating services into the language of the Buryats may be due to news of Makarii’s activities, it may also be an independent development rising from consideration of the translations of the Bible. Whether the former or the latter, the translations took place in the context of increased missionary efforts focused on translations by the Russian Orthodox Church across the Russian Empire. On the Bobrovnikovs’ role at Kazan Theological Academy, see Geraci, 50-51, 75-76.
authority. This concern with central control fits with the church’s fear that unsanctioned materials and religious practices represented or encouraged un-Orthodox forms of belief. The church hierarchy believed that undisciplined parish priests contributed to this problem as much as uninformed lay believers did. Nil’s rebuke of Teliat’ev’s suggestion thus suggests that Nil was concerned with ensuring the doctrinal purity of the translations. Two efforts corresponding to Nil’s criticisms began in the mid-1850s. The first, to be discussed later in this chapter, was a concerted effort to develop a body of linguistic knowledge, including grammars and dictionaries, to be used to train missionaries and translators. The second was the translation and publication of a set of authorized service books for the use of local priests.

Nil sought to shape the new translations around local language use, improved transmission of Christian concepts, and enhanced aesthetic qualities. Nil, himself a scholar of Buddhism and Mongolian, ordered Teliat’ev to begin his own translations, and in the process “1) avoid Mongolian words and phrases that are not found in popular use 2) keep close to the original [and] 3) restrain [from using] grating and repetitive words and forms of speech.” Ultimately, Nil found Teliat’ev’s efforts wanting; in 1853, he wrote, “Teliat’ev’s translation turned out to be completely unsuitable. It presents

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42 Letter from Archbishop Nil to Mikhail Teliat’ev, early 1850s. Quoted in Florensov, 11. This concern with central control fits with the church’s fear that unsanctioned materials and religious practices represented or encouraged un-Orthodox forms of belief. The church hierarchy believed that undisciplined parish priests contributed to this problem as much as uninformed lay believers did.

43 Across the nineteenth century, the church’s hierarchy was preoccupied with maintaining control of expressions of religious belief, including restricting or eliminating the veneration of unauthorized religious figures. In this context, members of the hierarchy likely viewed unauthorized and unverified translations as potential carriers of religious beliefs that violated the boundaries of church dogma and authority. See, for example, Vera Shevzov, Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

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distortions of words and names. Given Teliat’ev’s rank as a missionary, reprimand him for such carelessness towards a holy matter.”

As he was rejecting Teliat’ev’s translations, Nil began collaborating with Nikolai Nilovich Dorzheev, a former lama who had been baptized under Nil’s sponsorship. The published translations that ultimately resulted from this lengthy effort to produce a usable service book were all the work of Nil and Dorzheev. Nil’s scholarly background and his reliance on Dorzheev meant that the source of authority for their translations, as in the case of the translations of the Bible, was based at least partially in the language used in Buddhist texts.

Despite Nil’s reliance on Buddhist texts for linguistic authority, he was intent on refocusing the language of translation from classical Mongolian to the spoken language in order to improve its ability to convey Christian concepts. In a missive to the Synod from the early 1850s in which he criticized Bobrovnikov’s translations of services, Nil expanded on his reasons for making alterations. He argued that Bobrovnikov’s work was flawed because of the Mongolian language itself: classical Mongolian lacked patterns of word composition and particles that would enable the translation of “words and concepts foreign to the Mongolian language and tribes.”

44 Letter from Archbishop Nil’ to unknown, 1853. Quoted in Florensov, 12.
45 Nil, a graduate of the St. Petersburg Ecclesiastical Academy born in Mogilev, arrived in the Baikal region after his nomination as Bishop of Irkutsk, Nerchinsk, and Iakutsk in 1838. Although much of her intellectual biography of Nil is insufficiently critical and problematically-sourced, Anna Peck offers a strong assessment of Nil’s background in Asian languages including Tibetan, Mongolian, and the local language; she also points out that his scholarly works on Buddhism demonstrate the ability to work with primary sources in the relevant languages, as well as strong familiarity with contemporary European scholarship on Buddhism. Anna Peck, “Missionary and Scholar: Russian Orthodox Archbishop Nil Isakovich’s Perception of Tibetan Buddhism in Eastern Siberia,” Sibirica 5, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 62-86.
46 While the source base makes proving a direct intellectual connection impossible, Nil’s argument about the unsuitability of classical Mongolian as a language of translation may
the translator’s skill, were plagued by “obscurities and inaccuracies.” Nil proposed to the Synod that he begin his translation project with a revision of Bobrovnikov’s efforts intended to make the language of translation “more reflective of the language used and understood by the Buryats.”47 By positing these changes as the solution to the problems presented by classical Mongolian, Nil argued that the Buryat version of Mongolian was more flexible and allowed the assemblage of words that could clearly represent Christian concepts. The lack of standardization of the spoken language thus allowed a linguistic creativity and flexibility than the written language could not provide to a translator seeking to represent concepts foreign to the language. Nil’s argument also implied that the Buryat language was accommodating to Christianity in a way that classical Mongolian could never be.

This new emphasis on making the language of translation reflective of the perceived linguistic specificities and capabilities of the Buryats was eventually visible even in the labeling of the translations. While the prefaces of the first two service books described the language of translation as “Mongolian,” the last, published in 1869,

be derived from August Wilhelm von Schlegel’s views on translation, available at the time through Schlegel’s commentaries on translations of Sanskrit and Greek texts. Schlegel argued that a hazard of translation was the violation of the nature of the concept being translated, and that, due to linguistic and cultural traits, some languages were more capable than others of expressing the original intent of the text being translated. See “August Wilhelm von Schlegel,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (plato.stanford.edu/entries/schlegel-aw). Accessed 4/10/2012. Given that Nil was obviously erudite, interested in philology, and had likely received the elite formal education characteristic of most Russian Orthodox bishops during the nineteenth century, it is entirely possible that he was familiar with Schlegel’s ideas. On episcopal education, see Freeze, The Parish Clergy, 25.

47 Letter from Archbishop Nil to the Holy Synod, early 1850s. Quoted in Florensov, 18-19.
described it as “Mongolo-buriat.” Nil himself accepted this conceptual division as early as 1844, when he wrote that “Mongolo-buriat long ago separated from literary Mongolian…thus, the translations of Mr. Shmidt are, for the most part, incomprehensible to the Buryats.” The creation of this divide was partly a recognition of the gap between classical Mongolian and the spoken language of the Buryats. However, it was also intimately related to the idea that the Buryat language, as yet unstandardized, could be shaped and used to reflect Christian concepts and aesthetics in a way that classical Mongolian could not.

Figure 5: Image from Lenten Triodion in the Mongolian Language [Postnaia Triod’ na mongol’skom iazyke] (St. Petersburg: Sinodal’naia tipografiia, 1869).

48 “Кчитателям,” in Sluzhebnik na mongol’skom iazyke (St. Petersburg: Sinodal’naia tipografiia, 1858), Nachatki khristianskogo ucheniia (St. Petersburg: Sinodal’naia tipografiia, 1858), and Nil Iaroslavskii and Nikolai Dorzheev, trans., Postnaia triod na mongol’skom iazyke (St. Petersburg: Sinodal’naia tipografiia, 1869).
49 Report from Archbishop Nil to the Holy Synod, 1844. Quoted in Florensov, 9.
Although it is impossible to parse out any modifications that Nil did make, let alone identify their source, Dorzheev provided Nil with a sense that he had the linguistic authority to incorporate elements from the spoken language. In his scholarly work *Buddhism, Examined in Relation to Its Siberian Followers*, Nil placed great emphasis on Dorzheev’s local roots, writing, “Nilov-Dorzheev [is] a Mongol of the Dzailer-udzonets tribe, which at one time was a part of the Chinggisid monarchy. His father to this day migrates on the steppes adjoining the [river] Onon, between Nerchinsk and the Akshinsk border fortress.”50 This emphasis on Dorzheev’s status as an authentic speaker of the language concerned was reiterated in the last of the translations, the *Lenten Triodion in the Mongolian Language* [*Postnaia Triod na mongol’skom iazyke*]. Unlike the other two, the final page of the *Triodion* bears a statement that it was translated by Nil and Dorzheev. Dorzheev’s clan affiliation is listed, as if to provide a stamp of authenticity for the work.51

Nil and Dorzheev’s translation works, two service books and one book comprised of prayers and rites such as confession, made Russian priests into the primary interlocutors between Christianity and non-Russian-speaking Buryats. Unlike Schmidt’s translation of the New Testament, the format and layout were entirely European. The format, the focus on material restricted to clerical use, and the use of a Slavonic script utilized only by the Orthodox Church all indicate that the books were intended for the use of clergy (see Figure 5). Moreover, they were to be used by Russian clergy who had

50 Nil, *Buddizm*, 343.
51 *Postnaia Triod*. The eparchy itself endorsed Dorzheev’s competence in the spoken language; an 1872 history of the Irkutsk Seminary noted that he taught what in 1872 was termed “the spoken Buryat language” there in the late 1840s and early 1850s. “Istoricheskaia zapiska ob Irkutsk. D. Seminarii,” *PIEV*, 22 January 1872, 48.
limited training in the language. Nil stated in his criticisms of earlier translations that he aimed to create a transliteration system that was pronounceable without long study. The books demonstrate this focus through the use of special accent marks to make the language accessible to speakers with little training, and the inclusion of pronunciation guides that drew on Polish and other European languages in cases when similar sounds could not be found in Russian or Slavonic. This widened the implied primary Buryat audience for the translations to include the vast majority of the population that was illiterate, and removed the requirement that the person accessing a text have a Buddhist education that had been assumed by previous translations.

In the wake of their publication, the translations drew considerable criticism from the local clergy, much of which revolved around a rejection of Buddhism as a source for linguistic information about the Buryats. Nil’s and Dorzheev’s departures from Irkutsk allowed considerable leeway for sharp criticisms. Nil was promoted to Bishop of Iaroslavl in 1853. He continued his work on the translation project after his departure. Although Dorzheev technically remained subordinate to the Irkutsk eparchy, the Synod, at Nil’s behest, repeatedly ordered Dorzheev to travel to Iaroslavl to assist Nil. Dorzheev spent most of the time between 1853 and his brief recall to Irkutsk in 1867 in Iaroslavl and St. Petersburg, where he worked with the Oriental studies faculty at St. Petersburg University. Dorzheev, rather than Nil, was publicly held to blame for flaws in the translation; this was likely partially due to the fact that Nil remained in a position of high

52 Letter from Archbishop Nil to the Holy Synod, early 1850s. Quoted in Florensov, 20. This tactic underlay translations of services into non-Russian languages using Cyrillic scripts in other parts of the empire, and that it resulted in clergy conducting phonetic readings of the services without any awareness of content or proper pronunciation. Geraci, 65-66.
53 Peck, 64.
authority within the church. However, Dorzheev’s pre-conversion life as a lama fueled considerable doubt about the accuracy of his contributions. Most of the criticism revolved around suspicion that Dorzheev had skewed the translations toward classical Mongolian rather than the language spoken by the Buryats. His character also came under attack: he was described as ignorant, devious, unpleasant, and lacking true spiritual conviction, all characteristics that local Orthodox publications began to associate with lamas from the late 1860s onward. The criticism of the service books and Dorzheev himself thus fits into the pattern of increasing rejection of the Buddhist intellectual tradition as a resource for translation projects.

Shortly after the first of Nil and Dorzheev’s translations were published in 1858, Konstantin Stukov, a missionary working among the Khori Buryats on the eastern side of Lake Baikal, unsuccessfully attempted to publish a critique of the translations entitled “An Appeal to the Mongolologists of the Russian Empire.” Stukov, a missionary who spent most of his lengthy career in the field, participated in the translation efforts at several points and studied Buddhism as a hobby.54 His denunciation thus may have had considerable weight among his colleagues. Stukov began by declaring that translations were badly needed because of appallingly low levels of competency in the spoken language among missionaries. Despite this need, he found the service books inadequate. Stukov colorfully decried what he labeled as “Nilov-Dorzheev’s translations” for

54 In the mid-nineteenth century, Stukov compiled a partial Slavonic-Russian-Mongolian dictionary and a set of lessons for students of Mongolian, and translated the Lord’s Prayer. He also served as a member of the Irkutsk Eparchy’s Translation Committee upon its creation in 1863. Upon his death, scholarly works on Buddhist philosophy were found among his papers. Florensov, 11; “O perevode uchebnykh knig na buriatskii iazyk,” IEV, 16 March 1863, 163-164; A. M., “Uchenaia zametka o nekotorykh predmetakh buddizma,” PIEV, 23 March 1874, 141-142.
utilizing the “decrepit ancient Mongolian language with [its] Tibetan idioms.” He declared that this language was as separate from that spoken by those among whom he lived as the language of the *Compendium of Sviatoslav* [Izbornik Sviatoslava], written in 1073, was from that spoken by contemporary Russian peasants. Finally, he accused Dorzheev of having an inadequate knowledge of Mongolian and Old Church Slavonic, as well as Orthodox theology. Stukov wrote that he had backtranslated a portion of the services and instead of “beloved Son,” [vozliublennyi Syn] gotten “external, hollow and fleeting, insignificant Son [vneshnii, suetnyi, nichtozhnyi Syn].”

The classification of literary Mongolian as an ancient or even dead language sharply separate from the living language of the Buryats became a staple for subsequent theories of what constituted the Buryat language. In the introduction to his 1878 *Grammar of the Mongolo-Buriat Spoken Language*, Aleksandr Orlov, the Mongolian instructor at the Irkutsk Seminary, stated that “Although the speech of all Buryats is, in

55 This remark is curious as at this time, the church hierarchy remained deeply ambivalent over the publication of the Bible in Russian rather than Slavonic. Although the Bible was translated into Russian under the aegis of the Russian Bible Society by 1816, it was not published due to church reluctance until 1876; even then, there was no attempt to create a liturgy in the Russian vernacular. Thus, Stukov’s comparison was technically as apt for the relationship of Old Church Slavonic to Russian as it was for the comparison of classical Mongolian to the spoken Buryat language. Although many scholars have noted the paradox between the church’s attitude towards translating services into the languages of the Russian empire and its attitude towards translations into Russian, there has not been an investigation of this apparent contradiction.

56 Konstantin Stukov, “Appelatsiia k mongolologam Rossiiskoi imperii,” quoted in Florensov, 25-26. Stukov did not give a quotation from the translation, so it is impossible to tell whether his interpretation of Dorzheev’s mistranslation is correct. However, Orlov also raised concerns about the accuracy of Dorzheev’s translations; he reported that he had found the Mongolian word for what he delicately referred to as “coitus” in one of the translated hymns. Orlov, *Otvet*, 53. This was an endemic problem for missionary translations into vernacular languages. Paul Werth suggests that mistranslations and the absence of unambiguous terminology to explain theological concepts in vernacular languages created a space for indigenous interpretations of Orthodoxy. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 113-115.
its essence, one and the same as the so-called literary Mongolian language…upon reading the literary Mongolian words according to the rules of grammar, simple Buryats may completely fail to understand them.” This was because literary Mongolian contained a number of grammatical forms and words that were “practically dead, as opposed to living. It is clear that the Mongolian literary language alone cannot be used to enlighten and educate the Buryats.” Like Nil, subsequent linguists accepted an effective divide between the Mongolian written language and the language as used by the Buryats and placed the separation in the distant past; however, like Stukov, most felt that Nil’s and Dorzheev’s translations had not gone far enough towards representing the language of the Buryats.

Criticism of Dorzheev’s linguistic failings was part of a growing wave of disparagement of Buddhist lamas based on the idea that they used language as a form of deceit. While Orlov and Stukov admitted the existence of classical Mongolian as a language in its own right, they and other members of the clergy asserted that their knowledge of the language, gained through academic study, was superior to that possessed by the lamas. One Orthodox author wrote that Orlov, “as one who had received a scholarly education, knew the literary Mongolian language even better than Dorzheev, a

57 Aleksandr Orlov, Grammatika mongolo-buriatskogo razgovornogo iazyka (Kazan: Tipografia i litografia M.A. Gladyshevoi, 1878), v-vi. See also remarks made by Iakov Chistokhin, a translator active in the 1870s and 1880s, quoted in Florensov, 42-43. Missionary linguists would regularly criticize their predecessors for failing to sufficiently recognize the division between literary Mongolian and spoken Buryat; see, for example, I. A. Podgorbunskii’s criticism of Orlov’s grammar on similar grounds in Materialy dla grammatiki razgovornogo buriatskogo iazyka (Publisher and city unknown, early twentieth century), 1. Podgorbunskii’s grammar cannot be dated or identified by publisher because of missing frontmatter and its complete absence from library catalogs. Florensov does not mention it, so it was likely published after Iz istorii perevodcheskogo dela in 1908.
native Buryat and former lama.” More virulent were claims that classical Mongolian and Tibetan were languages completely devoid of meaning, and that the lamas’ use of them in rituals amounted to pretense that the languages possessed meaning to either lamas or audience. According one assessment, the lamas “read their senseless Tibetan pages before their empty idols and before a people uncomprehending [neponimaiushchim] of what is read to a word.” A further pretense was that the lamas “knew”, i.e. understood and could use, the languages. As Archbishop Veniamin wrote, “Mongolian writing [gramota] itself is little known in the datsans [Buddhist temples], as is seen in the Khambo-lama Gelun-lama Dambaev, who was unable to write his name in Mongolian.” For the missionaries, Mongolian, especially in the hands of a lama, was a tool of Buddhism’s deception of the Buryats. In this context, claims that Dorzheev’s translations demonstrated his ignorance associated Dorzheev with negative stereotypes about lamas and Buddhism.

Accounts of Dorzheev’s brief return to the Irkutsk region in 1867 and 1868 demonstrate the intertwined nature of criticisms of Dorzheev’s linguistic work and

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58 For this and other statements questioning Dorzheev’s knowledge, see “Svedeniia ob Irkutskom otdelenii dukhovnoi missii v 1867 godu,” PIEV, 1 June 1868, 129-130; “Missionery Tunkinskogo vedomstva,” PIEV, 3 August 1868, 237-239; “Irkutskaja dukhovnaia missiia v 1868 godu,” PIEV, 6 September 1869, 299-302.

59 Meletii, “Chto takoe buriatskii ‘obo’,” 118. See also “Zabaikal’skaia pravoslavnaia missiia v 1870 godu,” PIEV, 30 October 1871, 765-766.

60 Veniamin, “O lamskom…sueverii,” 324. The khambo-lama was the government-certified head of the region’s Buddhists. These claims had little reflection in reality. Tibetan and classical Mongolian have important symbolic value within the regional variant of Buddhism, so the question of transmission of meaning is irrelevant. The existence of a thriving Buddhist publishing industry indicates the presence of many people who did understand and could operate in the languages. Grosheva, 21. Finally, when Veniamin denounced the khambo-lama, he was likely referring to Dambaev’s inability to produce Mongolian calligraphy, an art form that Dambaev would have had little reason to know.
suspicion of his deceitfulness as a former lama. The accounts, highly exaggerated and all very condemnatory in tone, agree on a rough outline of events during Dorzheev’s visit. When Dorzheev was finally ordered to return to Irkutsk because of a shortage of qualified personnel, he did so resentfully. His short tenure as a language teacher at the seminary in Irkutsk was marked by his mistreatment of students and snubbing of Aleksandr Orlov, the permanent Mongolian instructor at the seminary, who, “as one who had received a scholarly education, knew the literary Mongolian language even better than Dorzheev, a native Buryat and former lama.” He then took over a missionary post in the Tunka Valley; the accounts suggest that opening the post to Dorzheev meant displacing qualified clergy, and that Dorzheev was insufficiently appreciative of the responsibility and honor accorded him. In Tunka, Dorzheev reportedly attempted and failed to perform the complete translated liturgy, something that had not yet been done because of the difficulty of bringing together a priest, deacon, and cantors with sufficient linguistic skills. For the remainder of his time in Tunka, he allegedly did nothing. One account reported that he claimed to have spent his time checking the accuracy of his translations with the local population; the account cast aspersions on this by citing reports from Stukov and other missionaries that the translations were incomprehensible. Another account baldly accused him of grossly neglecting his pastoral duties as he was preoccupied with figuring out a plan for quickly leaving Siberia rather than serving his parishioners. He soon returned to Irkutsk, ostensibly due to illness; from there, he traveled to Iaroslavl’ after a summons from Nil.61

The publication of the first two volumes of Nil and Dorzheev’s translations provoked strong criticisms of their failure to adequately represent local speech and potentially harmful inclination towards literary Mongolian. Ultimately, these criticisms relied on one of the assumptions fundamental to Nil’s theories about the language of translation. Nil approached the project from the beginning by arguing for the existence of fundamental differences between the spoken language and literary Mongolian. Critics of the translations, prompted at least partially by their negative views of Dorzheev, argued that he had not gone far enough. The next stage of the translation project, which began in Irkutsk in the early 1860s, strove to more accurately capture the spoken language of the Buryats. In doing so, it came to emphasize careful linguistic observation of native speech as the source of linguistic authority, and eschewed anything that smacked of ties to Buddhism or Mongolia.

The Irkutsk Translation Committee, 1863-1917

By 1863, the rejection of Buddhist and Mongolian linguistic sources had informed a vision of the language as something used solely north of the Russian/Mongolian border and culturally oriented towards Russia, rather than the Buddhist East. The committee, which included Orlov, Stukov, and, at least nominally, Dorzheev, as well as several Buryat lay teachers affiliated with the Irkutsk eparchy’s various educational institutions, had conflicting ideas about what constituted the language and how it should be written. However, its decisions to classify the Buryat language as one comprising several dialects, focus on the dialect spoken in the Irkutsk region for translation purposes, use the contemporary Russian script to represent the language, and privilege native speakers as
authentic sources all spoke to the increasing conceptual emplacement of the language within Russia. The Committee functioned sporadically and with a rotating membership between its founding in 1863 and lapse in 1917. Translations into Buryat printed during this period by the Orthodox Missionary Society in Kazan and by the Irkutsk Translation Committee in Irkutsk largely operated on the ideas of the language contained in the minutes from the Committee’s founding meeting.

The committee alternately labeled the language “Buriat” and “Mongolo-buriat;” works printed under the committee’s imprimatur often emphasized the language’s reflectivity of native speech by adding the adjective “colloquial” \([\text{razgovornyi}]\).\(^{62}\) The Buryat language was composed of three different dialects spoken by the Buryats of the Irkutsk, Selenga, and Khori regions that “differed very little between each other.”\(^{63}\) As translation efforts and research into Buryat progressed, boundaries between the dialects shifted. Aleksandr Orlov and Innokentii Podgurbunkii, missionary linguists who compiled grammars of the language and cooperated with the Translation Committee, found that there were effectively two dialects to the language. Both argued for the existence of a coherent Selenginsk dialect more closely related to Mongolian than other forms of the Buryat language. Other variations were classed as part of the Balagansk dialect, in Orlov’s case, or as a group of dialects more closely resembling each other than the Selenginsk dialect, in Podgurbunkii’s case; these were also labeled as the “Irkutsk dialect” or “north-Baikal dialect”.\(^{64}\)

\(^{62}\) See, for example, Orlov, \textit{Grammatika}; Pavel Grozin, “Pouchenie k novoprosviashchennym khristianam ob udalenii ot idolosluzhenii,” \textit{PIEV}, 1 November 1869, 487-491.

\(^{63}\) “O perevode uchebnykh knig,” 164.

One of the results of this reconceptualization of the Buryat language was a reliance on those with field experience, rather than scholars based primarily at the Irkutsk Seminary, as translators. Practice and observation leading to knowledge of local specificities, rather than scholarship of texts, became the sources of linguistic authority touted in reports on translation efforts by the Irkutsk and Zabaikal’sk eparchies. For example, in 1877 the diocesan newsletter reported that Iakov Dubrov, a missionary who was compiling notes on Buryat grammar, had gained his knowledge of the language through “constant interaction with Buryats.”

The door was opened to translations from a diverse range of contributors, including Innokentii Livanov, a missionary based in Balagansk, the priest Simeon Stukov, who worked among the Khori Buryats, two convert lamas based at a monastery on the eastern side of Lake Baikal, and N.S. Boldonov, a teacher at the native school [inorodcheskoe uchilishche] in Balagansk. Numerous works, including some in Mongolian script and translated by former lamas, were produced on the eastern side of the lake.

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65 “Irkutskaia dukhovnaia missiia v 1876 godu (prodolzhenie otcheta),” PIEV, 5 November 1877, 569. Archbishop Veniamin of Irkutsk related an anecdote about this conflict between scholarly, book-oriented authority and practice-based authority in an 1870 letter to Nikolai Il’minskii. He wrote that a convert Buryat from the Khorinsk region, Roman Tsyrempilov, had, at Veniamin’s request, compiled a Manchurian grammar based on his own knowledge; Orlov criticized this grammar and compiled his own, drawing on books. Veniamin wrote that, comparing the two, he felt “like a blind man who did not know where to turn,” but that after consulting with Il’minskii, he had decided to prefer Tsyrempilov’s. O khristianskom prosveshchenii inorodtev: Perepiska Arkhiepiskopa Veniamina Irkutskogo s N.I. Il’minskim, ed. K.V. Kharlampovich (Kazan: Typo-Litografiia Imperatorskogo universiteta, 1904), 20.


67 Only one of these, former lama A. M. Berestov’s translation of Skazanie o zhiti prepodobnogo Aleksiia cheloveka Bozhiia (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi
Ultimately, the published products of the Translation Committee had an extremely restrictive effect on the nature of the officially-endorsed Buryat language. At its initial meeting, the Committee decided that the Irkutsk dialect was the most suitable for translation, and did not publish translations in other dialects. Only one Orthodox translation not published in the dialect and script selected by the committee reached the printing press between 1863 and 1917. In 1889, the Imperial Academy of Sciences, based in St. Petersburg, published a translation of the *Tale of the Life of the Saintly Aleksii, Man of God*, by A.M. Berestov, a former lama working for the mission in the eastern Buryat regions. The book used a Tibetan-derived format similar to Shmidt’s translations, as well as a Mongolian script. Notably, St. Petersburg was home to several scholars who argued that Buryat was essentially a dialect of Mongolian. Thus, it is not surprising that the Academy of Sciences proved to be more accommodating than the Translation Committee to ideas that translations into Buryat should be styled in such a manner.

Contributing to the process of narrowing the bounds of the language was the fact that nearly all of the Translation Committee’s publications of religious materials were the work of a single translator, the priest Iakov Chistokhin, a Buryat from the eastern Aginsk region who spent much of his life as a missionary in the western Tunka region. In many respects, Chistokhin’s career path was unusual. He was the son of a convert from Aginsk, an area in which missionaries had extreme difficulty persuading Buryats to get baptized. His family was closely tied to the church; his brother went on to become a cantor at the

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68 “O perevode uchebnykh knig,” 164.
main Aginsk church, albeit one of ill repute. Chistokhin appears to have been placed on a fast track within the clergy from a very young age. In 1873, he was studying with the head of the Irkutsk Mission, possibly assisting with translations, when his father, at the request of the chief missionary in Aginsk, granted him permission to enter the clergy. He subsequently graduated from the seminary, and spent the rest of his career dividing his efforts between a missionary post in the Tunka Valley and his translation work, which took him several times to Kazan to work with linguists at the Theological Academy.

Chistokhin took on different roles during his translation work; these speak to the ways in which conceptions of authentic sources for linguistic knowledge had shifted by the 1870s to privilege both the idea of the existence of an authentic native speaker of a language and the centrality of educated observers in collecting data and mediating linguistic knowledge. In his publications independent of the committee, Chistokhin asserted himself as an educated observer in his own right, collecting and translating ethnographic curiosities and publishing them in the regional journal of the Imperial Geographical Society. However, in his work with the committee and Russian missionary linguists, Chistokhin himself was repeatedly subordinated to the authority of others and sometimes even placed in the role of the authentic native speaker whose language was to be observed and dissected.

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69 In 1895, the regional Steppe Duma accused Avraam Chistokhin of stealing doors off the communal grain storage building and using them to fence in his pigs; the Steppe Duma reported that he subsequently returned the doors without their iron latches. The Duma found this particularly reprehensible, as Chistokhin was a “man of the cloth” who was behaving “outside of the boundaries of decency.” NARB f. 191, o. 1, d. 108, ll. 71-71ob, 93.
70 NARB f. 191, o. 1, d. 23, ll. 48-48ob.
Chistokhin was most blatantly typed as an authentic native speaker by Aleksandr Orlov in his 1878 *Grammar of the Mongolo-buriat Language*. Chistokhin, originally from Aginsk, an eastern Buryat region along the Mongolian border, was a native speaker of a dialect much more similar to Mongolian than that spoken in the Irkutsk region.72 However, all of his published translations are in a version of the Irkutsk dialect written in a Russian script, suggesting that he, as did the committee, felt that this was simply more appropriate and useful; this means, though, that Chistokhin was not a native speaker of the dialect into which he was translating.73 Nevertheless, Orlov argued that Chistokhin’s translations could be taken as examples of the language as used by a native speaker. In a response to criticisms of his grammar by A. M. Pozdneev, a Mongolist based at St. Petersburg University whom Orlov believed was cooperating with Dorzheev in attacking his grammar, Orlov wrote that “my so-called translation is nothing more than a repetition of the words of a native Buryat, from his translation” of *The Sacred Story of the Old and New Testament* [Sviashchennaia istoriia Vetkhogo i Novogo Zaveta]. He later specifically identified Chistokhin as one source of his examples of the “living speech” [zhivaia rech’].74 Orlov thus treated Chistokhin as a primary source, a native speaker whose language was real, authentic, and observable for purposes such as constructions of grammars.

Chistokhin’s translations for the Translation Committee reveal a similar pattern. Every one of Chistokhin’s translations was advertised in the diocesan newsletter as

72 Letters in a Mongolian script dating to the late nineteenth century are present in the Aginsk church’s archived files. See NARB f. 191, o. 1, d. 75, ll. 72-76.
73 Chistokhin’s translations carry dialect markers from the Tunka Valley. I am indebted to Kathryn Graber for this observation.
74 Orlov, *Otvet*, 12, 21. Chistokhin’s translation of the *Sviashchennaia istoriia* was published in Kazan in 1878, the same year Orlov’s grammar was published.
having been done in cooperation with V. V. Mirotvortsev, a professor of Buddhism at the
Kazan Theological Academy. Given Mirotvortsev’s overt focus on Buddhism and
presence in an academic institution that elided the study of the Buryats into the study of
the Mongols, he brought little to the project beyond his title and academic authority.
Mirotvortsev’s name was thus a way of granting the seal of accuracy of a knowledgeable
linguist to the work of a translator whom Russian missionary linguists dismissed as
nothing more than “a native Buryat.”

The works of the Irkutsk Translation Committee reflected a divided understanding
about the purpose of the translations that was split between using the language to convey
referential content, and using the language itself to reshape the Buryats. On one hand, the
translations, as before, continued to be viewed as a method for transmitting Christianity.
The books, bound in paper and cheaply printed in comparison to prior translations, were
intended for wide, low-cost availability (see Figure 6). Their content, primarily saints’
lives and devotional materials for everyday use, also suggests that the books were
intended to physically transport their message into Buryat homes. Missionaries used the
texts as aids in teaching Buryats about the basics of Christianity as they attempted to
spark conversions, and reported some success in doing so.75 On the other hand, this set of
translations was intended to solve a paradox presented by their very existence: the
committee had published books for common consumption that had no common audience.
The translations were intended to create that audience, and the language of translation
reflected the missionaries’ ideas and hopes for what that audience would be. In short, the
language itself would transform the Buryats into pillars of the Russian empire.

75 See, for example, Florensov, 44; “Otchet o sostojanii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi missii v
1880 godu,” PIEV, 9 May 1881, 203; and NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 78, l. 3ob.
Literacy rates remained low in the region into the late nineteenth century, and the Irkutsk Translation Committee’s publications appear to have been the first time that the Russian alphabet was used in print to represent a standardized Buryat language. The use of the publications in mission schools was supposed to create an audience literate in a language that would tie the Buryats even more closely to Russia and Orthodoxy. Selections of script and dialect reflected the missionary linguists’ imaginations of the identity of their audience, as well as their hopes for the path of development that audience would take. The direct role of the texts in supporting this path of formation and development can be seen in the parallels between the manner in which the texts were used or intended to be used, and the Il’minskii system of education for Siberian natives.

Figure 6: Image from The Life of the Prelate Nikolai, Bishop of Myra [Zhite Sviatiitel’ia Nikolaia, Episkopa Murlikiiskogo] (Kazan: Tipografiia i litografii M. A. Gladyshevoi, 1879).
The choices of script and dialect for the translations were freighted with meaning. Indeed, the choice of the contemporary Russian alphabet to represent the Buryat language explains much about why the Translation Committee chose to focus on the Irkutsk dialect. At the committee’s founding meeting, the decision of which script to use was framed as a choice between “Mongolian and Russian;” the inclusion of the former is not surprising, considering that the committee included well-known partisans of the Mongolian script such as Konstatin Stukov. However, the committee ultimately selected Russian. The committee’s justification for its decision reveals that its members believed the alphabet choice would capitalize on already-extant inclinations towards Russia, Russian, and Christianity found amongst the Irkutsk Buryats.

The selection of the Irkutsk dialect and the Russian alphabet relied on an intertwined series of assumptions about the relationship between the Buryats and the Russian empire. Explaining its decision to focus on the Irkutsk dialect, the committee argued that “its speakers represent the tribe more predisposed to the adoption of citizenship [гражданственность] than the others,” as some were already converts and many had ceased to be nomadic. Consequently, they not only had a greater need for information than their fellow Buryats, but were “more capable of adopting and internalizing this information, for which they are already prepared by their position

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76 “О переводе учебниых книг,” 163.
77 Dov Yaroshevski has argued that in the late imperial period, the government embarked on a mission to inculcate граждансвенность as a type of republican citizenship defined as “joint endeavors of citizens striving for the good of each one and contributing to the good of others, and through this participation aiming at the good of the whole” and proclaiming “a community of values shared by associations of citizens.” The church’s Baikal mission viewed itself as promoting this version of imperial subjectionhood. Yaroshevski, 60.
among the Russian population and frequent relations with Russians.”78 Justifying its decision to use the Russian alphabet to reflect the language of the Irkutsk Buryats, the committee concluded that

The Irkutsk Buryats do not have their own Buryat writing system [пісменост’], and those who are literate read and write in Russian. In this fashion, the Russian [русская] alphabet is already somewhat familiar to the Irkutsk Buryats; the Mongolian [script] is unknown to them.79

The Irkutsk Buryats needed the translations more than their fellows and were more receptive to them, in both cases because of their closer ties to Russians and the Orthodox Church. Russian was the more suitable alphabet because the Irkutsk Buryats’ links to Russians, rather than Mongolians, meant that they had more experience with the Russian language. The choice of dialect and script thus reflected a belief that the cultural past and future of the Irkutsk Buryats were inextricably intertwined with Russia, rather than the East. The selection of the word “citizenship” to describe the state towards which the Irkutsk Buryats were moving made the endpoint of this process not only closer cultural affinity with Russia, but contributory belonging within the Russian Empire: the Irkutsk Buryats were further along the path to becoming “good imperial subjects” than their fellows were.80 In regard to these assumptions, the translation project was dependent on ideas circulating at the time about the relationship between conversion to Orthodoxy and

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78 “О переводе учебных книг,” 164.
79 “О переводе учебных книг на бурятский язык (продолжение),” IEV, 23 March 1863, 178.
80 For critical examinations of ideas of the relationships between Orthodox mission, assimilation into the empire and imperial stability, see Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy; Geraci; and Of Religion and Empire: Missions, Conversion, and Tolerance in Tsarist Russia, ed. Robert P. Geraci and Michael Khodarkovsky (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).
conversion to Russianness, but also on its views of the Orthodox mission’s history with the Buryats.

The mission’s own history and perceptions of its progress contributed to the sense that the Buryats of the Irkutsk region were on a faster path to union with Russia than their fellows. In the late 1850s, the mission achieved what it believed to be wild success in the Tunka Valley, on the western side of the lake. Over the course of two years, thousands of Buryats, including much of the regional Buryat leadership, were baptized, most in a series of mass baptisms in the summer of 1857. According to an 1859 account of the events, translation was key to the festivities surrounding the baptisms. On two separate occasions, lengthy sermons were translated for the new Christians, once by Orlov and once by N. S. Boldonov.81 In contrast, missions to other Buryat areas reported fewer successes. Missionaries working north of Irkutsk listed yearly totals of baptisms in the tens and twenties, while missionaries working on the eastern side of the lake were lucky to baptize even a few converts in a year. Until 1905, Tunka was held up as the mission’s greatest success story, and missionary efforts in Tunka received the lion’s share of resources. The committee had many reasons to prefer Chistokhin’s Tunka-derived version of the Irkutsk dialect.

At the time of the baptisms, and after 1905, Tunka was a strongly Buddhist area; however, after the mass conversions, it was folded into a vision of the Irkutsk region as the home of the shamanist “true” Buryats, as opposed to the eastern Buryats, who had either brought in or succumbed to the invasion of Buddhism and the literary Mongolian language. The missionaries believed that shamanist Buryats were being transformed by

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81 O kreshchenii mongolo-buriatov, 5-7, 11-14.
the Russian empire into civilized (and Orthodox) imperial subjects by means of their lengthy historical engagement with Russians. Lamaism, as the local variant of Buddhism was known, disrupted the transformative process of empire by perpetuating Buryats’ primitive Mongolian ways. For the missionaries, the religious divide within the Buryats thus constituted an important paradigm for understanding the Buryats’ relationship to the Russian empire. This division was reflected in the way that missionary linguists of the late nineteenth century imagined the Buryat language to be split between two dialects, one more and one less closely related to Mongolian. As Aleksandr Orlov wrote in his 1878 grammar, the split between the two was effectively a split within the Buryats between “Mongolian in the minority and Buriat in the majority.” The Mongolian Buryats, speakers of the Selenginsk dialect, were descendants of the more-recently-arrived Khalkha Mongols, while speakers of the Balagansk dialect had migrated into the region in an earlier period and hence had developed a distinct linguistic identity. Orlov argued that this linguistic split directly paralleled a religious split: speakers of the Balagansk dialect were shamanist, and residents of the Tunka Valley, converted Buddhists, were counterfactually included within this group; speakers of the Selenginsk dialect, on the other hand, were Buddhist.82

The Irkutsk Translation Committee’s philosophy and translations developed contemporaneously with Nikolai Il’minskii’s system of native-language education for baptized non-Russians, which relied on the idea that translation was key to safely absorbing a diverse population into the empire.83 Il’minskii argued that the best method

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82 Orlov, Grammatika, vi-vii.
83 The primary English-language studies of the Il’minskii system are Wayne Dowler, Classroom and Empire: The Politics of Schooling Russia’s Eastern Nationalities, 1860-
for ensuring that converts internalized Orthodox (and ultimately Russian) ideas and values was to educate them about Orthodoxy in their native languages, using convert teachers. The converts would thus be liberated of the burden of attempting to absorb the religion through the medium of Russian, which they knew poorly or not at all. Over the course of several generations, convert communities could be expected to internalize Orthodoxy, and then move on to adopt other characteristics of Russianness, including the Russian language and deep loyalty to the Russian Empire. The committee’s founding documents and reports of translation activities in the Irkutsk eparchy do not directly refer to Il’minskii or his philosophies, which were still coalescing in the early 1860s. However, the committee had ties to the Kazan Theological Academy, where Il’minskii and many of his supporters were based, through Chistokhin’s work with V. V. Mirotvortsev, a collaborator of Il’minskii’s. The committee’s translations were published in Kazan until the mid-1880s, when the project ceased for a time and then restarted, working with a printer in Irkutsk. A final piece of evidence is that correspondence between Il’minskii and Archbishop Veniamin of Irkutsk about Chistokhin’s 1874 trip to Kazan to work on translations suggests that Il’minskii supported the trip. Given this, the project was either

84 O khristianskom prosveshchenii, 33. Arguing for the existence of views opposing Il’minskii’s within the Orthodox Church, Robert Geraci quotes the same letter from Veniamin to Il’minskii announcing Chistokhin’s impending 1874 arrival in Kazan. In this letter, Veniamin repeatedly emphasized that Chistokhin, as Orthodox, was Russian, not Buryat. Geraci uses this as evidence of Veniamin’s belief that Il’minskii’s emphasis on gradual cultural conversion through use of native-language materials was mistaken. However, Veniamin must have known that Chistokhin was going to Kazan to work on translations, the Irkutsk translation project continued in full force during Veniamin’s tenure, and the eparchy’s publications regularly referred to Chistokhin as a Buryat, not a
directly influenced by Il’minskii’s philosophies or, at the least, a product of the same zeitgeist.

As used by the missionaries, the Irkutsk Translation Committee’s products functioned as stepping-stones in the same way that translations did in the Il’minskii system. Chistokhin’s translations were used as textbooks for students; the head of the Irkutsk mission described them as “important resources for native [inorodcheskie] children studying in missionary schools.”85 Indeed, in the early twentieth century, the committee produced several textbooks, including a Buryat-Russian dictionary accompanied by a textbook in a dual-column format with Russian readings on one side and their Buryat translations on the other, that drew heavily on samples from Chistokhin’s translations.86 The translations themselves could be used to convey Christianity to illiterate or non-Russian-speaking Buryats, and church-supported education was to play a chief role in educating non-Russians in the Russian language as they became capable of acquiring it.87

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85 Meletii, “Otchet o sostoiannii i deiatel’nosti zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii v 1879 godu (okonchanie),” PIEV, 19 April 1880, 199.
86 Kniga dlia chtenia v buriatskikh shkolakh s prilozheniem buriatsko-russkogo i russko-buriatskogo slovaria (Kazan: Typo-litografiia Kliuchnikova, 1903). The missionaries seem to have sought to supplement the books with native-language instruction; for example, Aleksandr Dobromyslov, a missionary working near Kurumkan in the Barguzin Valley, complained vigorously in his annual reports for 1896 and 1897 that he desperately needed a native-language cantor who could teach students at the mission school; he finally found one, and in 1899 wrote that this aided him considerably, as most of the pupils were “Buryat boys who know very little Russian.” NARB f. 220, o. 1, d. 186, l. 85ob; NARB f. 220, o. 1, d. 186, l. 420ob; NARB f. 220, o. 1, d. 199, l. 331.
87 For a discussion of the purposes of native-language and dual-language instruction in the Il’minskii system, see Geraci, 123-125.
In 1878, Aleksandr Orlov published the first comprehensive grammar of the spoken language of the Buryats. The grammar displayed an artificially narrow view of the Buryat language similar to that advanced by the Translation Committee’s publications. As discussed earlier, Orlov posited two principal divides among the Buryats. The first was between the Selenginsk dialect, with its Mongolian ties, and the other dialects, under the umbrella of the Balagansk dialect; this divide was paralleled by a split between Buddhist and shamanist Buryats. However, as much as Orlov’s grammar was intended to reflect the spoken Buryat language, it was also a self-conscious attempt to construct and codify rules for that same language. Orlov himself described the book as an effort towards the “correct demonstration and construction [postroenie] of the Mongolo-buriat speech.” His vision of himself as a builder of Buryat stemmed from his collecting and sampling of a number of sources, including Chistokhin’s translations, translations of the Bible, sayings, and oral tradition, all of them from a variety of different sources and regions. Having assembled all these materials, he mined them for examples illustrating various rules and patterns that he identified. This process of elucidating similarities from such a diverse set of documents effectively imposed unity and uniformity where there was little to start with. In the process of demonstrating the systematic underpinnings of the language, Orlov published excerpts from a wide range of sources, including Chistokhin’s translations, examples sourced from other Buryats working for the mission, and oral epics, without systematically labeling them and enumerating their differences. This gave the reader an impression of unity and uniformity in the source material that elided regional and stylistic differences. In short, Orlov’s grammar imposed an artificial unity on a language that was not unified.
Just as the decisions about script and dialect choices made by the Irkutsk Translation Committee, Orlov’s grammar involved a set of creative hopes for the future, embodied in his effort to make aesthetic revisions to the Buryat language. He wrote that on a visit to the Selenginsk region, he had heard how beautiful the Buryat language could sound, and had consequently softened the sounds of the “harsh” Balagansk dialect.88 Defending this decision, he described the effect that the pronunciation of the word “khuin” had on the audience of a Mongolian language examination at the Irkutsk seminary. Three Russian women in attendance had broken into hysterics when the word was spoken, crying and laughing strangely. Orlov wrote that such words “can cause a most undesirable impression upon Russian or educated people.” His sense that the word was offensive had grounds in his own moral sensibilities; in Russian, “khui” can (and could) be translated as “prick,” a probable cause for a fit of the giggles. The comic nature of the elderly priest’s aversion to offensive false calques aside, his arguments reflect a concern with the Russian audience as well as the Buryats themselves. He was grooming the language to make it suitable to be spoken and heard within the Russian empire. In this regard, Orlov even labeled his own role as that of “reformer” [reformator].89

Unsurprisingly, Orlov’s grammar did not meet applause from academic Mongolists. In a scathing thirty-eight page review, A. M. Pozdneev excoriated not only Orlov’s interventions and heavy reliance on examples from Orthodox translations, but his very assertion that Buryat was a language distinct from Mongolian. Pozdneev, a professor

88 Orlov, Grammatika, vi-ix.
at St. Petersburg University, was Russia’s preeminent Mongolist at the time. His reaction demonstrates that the broader academic community continued to imagine the Buryats as indistinguishable from the Mongols across the Chinese border. By positing what Pozdneev labeled “the Buryat dialects” of Mongolian as a distinct language, rooting the language in speech practices, and expressing it using a Russian script, Orlov and the other missionaries had created a variety of artificial distinctions between Buryat and Mongolian. By restricting his sources to those reflective of the spoken language, Orlov had separated the spoken language from the richness of expression and vocabulary found in classical Mongolian, thus diminishing the language’s expressive capabilities. The Russian alphabet they had selected could not represent the range of sounds required by the language. In Pozdneev’s mind, these errors stemmed from Orlov’s scientific ignorance – he was unfamiliar with the philological rules of Mongolian and the science of philology itself. In an equally irate response, Orlov defended his methodologies as scientific, and argued that Pozdneev’s criticisms were based on the inaccurate assumption that he had been attempting to craft a grammar of the literary Mongolian language, when he had focused specifically on the spoken Buryat language. Somewhat comically, he

90 His works include Mongoliiia i Mongoly: rezul’taty poezdki v Mongoliuu, ispolnennoi v 1892-1893 gg. A. Pozdneeyvym (St. Petersburg: Izd. Imperatorskogo Russkogo Geograficheskogo obshchestva, 1896-1898), Ocherki byta buddiiskikh monastyrei i buddiiskogo dukhovenstva v Mongolii v sviazi s otoshcheniiami sego poslednogo k narodu (St. Petersburg, 1887), and Mongol’skaia khrestomatiia dlia pervonachal’nogo prepodavaniiia (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1900).
assumed that Dorzheev, who had been working in St. Petersburg, had been behind Pozdneev’s negative review, even though he had not been listed as an author.\textsuperscript{92}

Ultimately, Pozdneev’s criticism of Orlov’s grammar prevented the Holy Synod from approving it as an instructional text, with the result that it could not even be used in Orlov’s home institution, the Irkutsk Seminary.\textsuperscript{93} However, within thirty years, the situation would reverse. In part due to shifts in the political climate and increasing concern over Russia’s position in Asia subsequent to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905, the broad academic community accepted the idea that the Buryat language was, in fact, a coherent entity. The nascent Buryat nationalist movement also latched on to the category, interpreting it within the context of pan-Mongolist theories. At the same time, the last of the missionary linguists, working in the context of the mission’s own post-1905 crisis, issued a work that seriously questioned the conceptual unity of the language.

\textbf{Three Epilogues}

In the early years of the twentieth century, the missionaries’ control of the language was challenged in multiple ways. The upheavals surrounding 1905, in which massive numbers of Buryats in the Tunka region formally changed their confessional status from Orthodoxy to Lamaism, created a lingering suspicion among missionaries that their linguistic knowledge was false. However, the mission’s surety in its ability to transform the Buryats had also been challenged by this event. Efforts to reexamine the mission’s linguistic knowledge bore a double burden, simultaneously striving for more detailed knowledge and realistic portrayal, but also highlighting linguistic elements

\textsuperscript{92} Orlov, \textit{Otvet}, 1.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 1.
within the Buryat population that were seen as indicating the possibility that the mission could overcome its setback. This complex mix of self-questioning and attempts to reinforce the mission’s view of itself emerged at the same time that the scholarly community, which had previously rejected the missionaries’ arguments about the language, came to view the language as a coherent and discrete entity. Simultaneously, a new set of actors began to dispute the missionaries’ hegemonic status in regards to the assemblage of the language as a category. Buryat nationalists, espousing a program of national development and renewal that they saw as rooted in education and the development of the Buryat language, began to assert their own visions for the category’s composition and meaning. In doing so, though, they built upon many of the missionaries’ key assumptions.

Russian linguists, whether missionary or otherwise, made no attempt to take on the task of crafting a more accurate grammar until I. A. Podgorbunskii, a Buryat priest, did so in the early twentieth century. Podgorbunskii adhered much more closely to a descriptive agenda than Orlov, portraying himself as a professional linguist and avoiding any overtly transformative agenda. However, like Orlov’s, Podgorbunskii’s linguistic work was profoundly shaped by the historical and religious context in which he operated. Between 1906 and 1907, the position of the Orthodox Church in the Tunka Valley, once its chief success story in the region, radically changed. Before 1905, tsarist law had forbidden conversion from Orthodoxy to other religions. Attempting to mollify agitators as protests over a variety of issues spread across the country, the tsarist government lifted the relevant restrictions. Once this decision was publicized, approximately ten thousand converts in the Tunka region, very nearly the entire Orthodox population, petitioned to
change their confessional status from Orthodoxy to Lamaism.\textsuperscript{94} Moreover, the missionaries themselves came to question the idea that the language as utilized in official church translations was even comprehensible to the Buryats. Podgorbunskii’s grammar and dictionary were both an attempt to correct the linguistic problems exposed by 1905, and conceptually maintain the Buryats as potentially transformable by the church.

Missionaries working in the Tunka Valley abruptly realized in 1905 that their audience did not understand the church’s version of Buryat. One missionary reported reading aloud an official statement by Archbishop Tikhon on the immorality of conversion from Orthodoxy that had been translated into Buryat by the church hierarchy and published in the church center of Irkutsk. For reasons that escaped him, the Buryats said they could not understand the meaning of the text. Another missionary echoed this observation, informing his superior that his reading of the same statement had provoked “angry outbursts” \textit{[gromy]} among the local Buryats, who, “not understanding the translation,” passed their misunderstandings on to their relatives. “The Buryat translation,” he wrote, “was not understood by either Buryats or literate Russians who know Buryat well.”\textsuperscript{95} In short, the missionaries believed that the church’s translation project had failed: the language that the church was using was not the Buryat language as it was actually spoken and understood.

It was in this context that Podgorbunskii crafted the final linguistic works of the project, a grammar that was published some time after 1908 and a dictionary, published

\textsuperscript{94} Most of the approximately ten thousand baptized inhabitants of the region left Orthodoxy by 1907. Serafim, “Doklad irkutskogo arkhiepiskopa Serafima,” 105.

\textsuperscript{95} NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, ll. 23-23ob; f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 10ob. Archbishop Tikhon’s statement, translated by Vasilii Kopylov, can be found at f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 43.
In keeping with the prior emphases of the project, Podgorbunskii stated that he was depicting the “colloquial Buryat language” [razgovornyi buriatskii iazyk], thus implicitly accepting divisions between the literary and spoken languages, and emplacement of the Buryat language on the Russian side of the border. Like Orlov, he posited a split between the Selenginsk dialect and the rest of the Buryat language. However, Podgorbunskii’s vision of the Buryat language was fragmented and diverse, divided among dialects, regions, and religions. He never stated whether or how the aftermath of 1905 had influenced his views on Buryat linguistics. However, his emphasis on the many divisions within the language may have stemmed from a desire to steer missionary linguistics towards recognition of the language’s inherent diversity and resistance to easy standardization. To a certain extent, this implied a failure of the missionaries’ transformative project: the Buryats were not a united group moving smoothly along a trajectory of development towards unity with Russia. However, Podgorbunskii’s emphasis on the linguistic manifestations of Buryat religious diversity in fact maintained a space in which the empire could perform its transformative work.

Podgorbunskii was a Buryat priest working on the western side of the lake who published several formidable linguistic and historical works in the early years of the twentieth century. His relationship to the Irkutsk Translation Committee is unclear. He

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was certainly aware of its works and at least moderately involved in its affairs.\(^\text{98}\)

However, he never affiliated himself with the committee in his publications, and, indeed, did not even acknowledge that he was a priest in either his grammar or his dictionary. His separation of descriptive linguistic work from missionary activities went to such an extreme that when he discussed the existence of a prior corpus of translations using a Russian script as precedent for continuing to do so, he conspicuously neglected to mention that these were the missionary translations.\(^\text{99}\) Moreover, his discussions of his linguistic work in no way linked the project of studying the Buryat language to the effort to convert the Buryats or tie them more closely to the empire. Instead, he grounded his claims about the nature of the Buryat language in observation and obscure notes about phonetics. Podgorbunskii thus appears to have been trying to separate his authority as a linguist from the Orthodox Church and its mission to the Baikal region. In the text, he portrayed himself as a linguist in critical dialogue with the works of linguists outside the church.\(^\text{100}\) This may have been simply a tactic selected to convince readers to take his work seriously; as David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye has pointed out and Pozdneev’s

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\(^{98}\) None of his works bear the imprimatur of the Irkutsk Translation Committee, although the committee’s Irkutsk printer published at least one of them. Florensov does not report that he worked for the committee. However, he is listed as the censor for the committee’s 1903 reader and dictionary for Buryat students.

\(^{99}\) Consequently, most references to Podgorbunskii in literature on Buryat linguistics and its history do not mention his affiliation with the church.

\(^{100}\) Podgorbunskii stated that the first use of the Russian alphabet to represent the Buryat language occurred in 1863, when the head of the Main Administration Council of Eastern Siberia asked a local teacher of the Buryat language to translate a publication for use in village schools in Zabaikal’e oblast’. He did not note that this was the foundational event for the Irkutsk Translation Committee, or that the publication in question was an Orthodox textbook on the creation of the world, “On Cosmogony \([O\ mirozdanii]\).” Podgorbunskii, *Neskol’ko zametok po fonetike buriatskogo iazyke v sviazi s voprosom transkriptsii buriatskikh tekstov* (Irkutsk: Tipografiia Irkutskogo t-va pechatnogo dela, 1910), 20.
criticisms of Orlov highlight, “missionary orientologists faced an uphill battle for intellectual respectability” within secular circles, which viewed the clergy as ignorant and reactionary.\(^{101}\)

Podgorbunskii’s Buryat language was regionally and religiously diverse, and his description of it displayed an attention to pragmatics and context-dependent meaning that was remarkable for lexicographical treatments of the time. In stark contrast to his predecessors, he did not treat the speech of one region and/or one religion as representative of the whole or attempt to impose an artificial unity. In his grammar, he started by describing an internal division between the Selenginsk dialect and the other Buryat dialects, on the grounds that the Selenginsk dialect was more similar to Mongolian than the others. But while Orlov had argued that the entire language could be represented by a single, cohesive lexicon and set of grammatical rules, Podgorbunskii found that the dialects all differed from each other in substantive ways. Both his grammar and dictionary are dotted with notations about the peculiarities of grammar and lexicon between the various dialects. For example, under the dictionary listing for the verb “to address” \([\text{adresovat'}]\), Podgorbunskii listed three different Buryat words, describing them as the Selenga, Tunka, and Alar variants. He also implicitly argued against the idea of a split between a true, shamanist Buryat language and an imposed, Buddhist-influenced language. For words whose meanings he thought dependent on religious context, Podgorbunskii included both religions: in the case of the month of August \([\text{avgust}]\), he

\(^{101}\) Van der Oye, *Russian Orientalism*, 151.
listed a “lamaist usage” [lamskoe nazvanie] and a “shamanist usage” [shamanskoe nazvanie], drawing both from the Tunka dialect.  

The decision to emphasize the linguistic evidence of religious diversity in the Tunka region fits into the mission’s post-1905 pattern of emphasizing the shamanist roots of the Buryats in the face of the rapid growth in numbers of Buryats formally listed as Lamaists. When read in the context of the mission’s belief that shamanism indicated the developmental potential of the Buryats and Lamaism the refutation of that potential, such assertions argued for the continued possibility that the Buryats could be transformed. Both at the time of the church’s mid-nineteenth-century successes and the mass departures of 1906-1907, non-Orthodox Tunka Buryats were identified in local records as Lamaists. However, in the face of assertions by Buryats departing the church that they were returning to “the faith of our ancestors,” missionaries had taken to informing them that their ancestors had been shamanist as well as lamaist. As Archbishop Serafim told one Tunka Buryat, “Your ancestors did not and do not hold one and the same faith. In Balagansk and Verkholensk uezds, for example, Buryats hold the Shamanist faith…it is impossible to say that you hold one and the same faith as all of your cousin-Buryats held and hold.”  

Likewise, Podgorbunskii’s assertion that the Tunka dialect contained linguistic evidence of both shamanism and Lamaism was an argument that Lamaism was not the entirety of the past and future of the Tunka Buryats. The question of whether, or how, Podgorbunskii believed his works would assist the church to convert Buryats remains unanswered. His published works, unlike those of his predecessors, lack any vision of how linguistics or translation efforts would affect the

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103 “Poezdka Vysokopreosviashchennego Serafima,” 723.
cultural trajectory of the Buryats. Indeed, the diversity reflected in Podgorbunskii’s descriptions of Buryat poses a very real question of applicability: what was an aspiring language learner or translator supposed to do with his materials? Podgorbunskii’s dictionary and grammar presented no way for a language learner to learn to speak to “the Buryats” as a whole; similarly, they did not present a language via which the Buryats could move towards a unified future. Somewhat ironically, secular criticisms of Podgorbunskii’s work on this specific point indicate that the idea of “the Buryats” as a coherent linguistic entity had finally gained a following outside of missionary linguistics circles, even as missionary linguists lost that sense.

Gonbozhab Ts. Tsybikov’s 1909 review of Podgorbunskii’s dictionary demonstrates the degree to which the idea of a coherent Buryat language had gained broad acceptance outside of the narrow field of missionary linguistics. Tsybikov, a Mongolist and Buryat nationalist educated at St. Petersburg University and working at a university in Vladivostok, used Podgorbunskii’s description of the language with which he was working as the “living conversational language” throughout the review, but never disputed the phrasing, indicating his acceptance of it. Supporting Podgorbunskii’s use of a Russian alphabet for transcription, he described the separate literary Mongolian language as an arm of Buddhism and the Chinese government. As a carrier of foreign interests, the Mongolian literary language might corrupt Russia’s Buryats:

As is known, that [Mongolian Buddhist] literature, for the most part translated from the Tibetan and Chinese languages, has a strong influence on the change of the living speech of other dialects. In addition, among the Mongols themselves, there is also the language of official business, located under strong Chinese and Manchurian influence.
The idea of a distinct Buryat language, separate from literary Mongolian, was thus fundamental to Tsybikov’s understanding of the Buryat language. Even more interesting, he argued strongly for the coherence of the Buryat language. Tsybikov wrote that Podgorbunskii’s dictionary was not so much a dictionary as a list of Russian words with accompanying and unsystematic translations into several dialects. He found that “Mongol” was an inappropriate label for the dictionary, as there were few Khalkha Mongol words included, but suggested that it should not even be called Buryat because of the absence of words “‘common’ to all Buryats.” Tsybikov thus accepted the idea that there was a linguistic commonality between the Buryats, and concluded that Podgorbunskii’s attempt to reflect the language’s internal diversity had actually harmed its coherence.104 While, as Vera Tolz demonstrates, Tsybikov’s views of the Buryats as a coherent entity were shaped by his intellectual contacts with a group of Orientalists based at St. Petersburg University, his intellectual engagement with Podgorbunskii through the review demonstrates that he was in scholarly conversation with the missionaries’ linguistic works.105

If the stakes for maintaining the image of the Buryats as potentially transformable had grown with the mass apostasy, the stakes for using linguistics to do so had grown

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104 G.Ts. Tsybikov, *Otzyv o knige: I.A. Podgorbunskii. Russko-mongolo-buriatskii slovar’* (Vladivostok: Tipo-litografiia Vostochnogo Instituta, 1909), 1-3, 10. Tsybikov’s concerns about the Mongolian language as a carrier of a foreign power and culture should be backgrounded against the Russian Empire’s loss in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War and Russia’s rapid expansion into Manchuria by means of railway concessions, both of which were widely analyzed by contemporaries within a framework of the “threat from the East.” For a study of discursive constructions of the East informed by questions of empire and national security, see David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, *Toward the Rising Sun: Russian Ideologies of Empire and the Path to War with Japan* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2001).

105 Tolz, 111-134.
with the development of Buryat nationalist organizations advocating a program of linguistic pan-Mongolism. In October 1907, the Irkutsk Committee of the Orthodox Missionary Society issued a panicked memorandum informing the missionaries that several Buryat intelligentsia groups had united around a program of popular Buryat language education using a revised Mongolian script that was intended to bring about “cultural pan-Mongolism” and promote Buddhism. Particularly concerning were reports that the nationalists were focusing their educational program on the Irkutsk region, where Buryats had been hitherto unfamiliar with the Mongolian script, and the non-Orthodox population were shamanists with little knowledge of Buddhism. The Committee believed that the nationalists were initiating a linguistic program that aimed to pull Buryats who had previously been within the cultural sway of Russia and on their way to converting to Orthodoxy towards a Mongolian and Buddhist identity that refuted both.106

Podgorbunskii responded to the mission’s specific concerns on this issue, as he issued a refutation of one of the revised Mongolian alphabets on phonetic grounds in a publication of the east Siberian division of the Russian Geographical Society aimed at a scholarly audience.107 In short, linguistics had become a field in which the identity and future of the Buryats were being contested.

Language was, in many ways, central to the nationalists’ program for the development of a self-aware Buryat nation. In developing their ideas of what constituted the Buryat language and theorizing its cultural importance, the nationalists drew on a variety of currents of thought, including European ideas about the nature of nation and

106 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 78, ll. 1, 12.
107 Podgorbunskii, Neskol’ko zametok.
culture and the links between the two. However, their scholarship also developed in the context of local and regional ideas about the nature of the Buryat language. Given the nationalists’ rejection of Orthodoxy and its self-proclaimed status as a carrier of Russian culture, it is not surprising that they did not reference the scholarship of the missionaries in their writings. Moreover, they likely viewed the ideas of a bounded Buryat language composed of regional dialects visible in the missionaries’ research as further proof of the self-evident nature of these concepts, given the ideas of nation and language current at the time. Despite their dismissal of the church’s linguistic produce, nationalists were very likely familiar with the church’s grammars and translations. In this case, the missionary linguists’ models of the Buryat language would have provided evidence and inspiration for the nationalists, even as the nationalists rejected the cultural baggage surrounding those same models.

In 1910, Nikolai Amagaev, a Buryat schoolteacher, and Elbek-Dorzhi Rinchino, a future Bolshevik activist writing under the pseudonym Alamzhi-Mergen, issued an impassioned plea for the adoption of their modified Mongolian script to represent what they labeled as the “Mongolo-buriat” language. Amagaev and Alamzhi-Mergen placed

108 For examinations of the Buryat nationalist movement circa 1905 that place language activists at the center of political activity, see Montgomery, *Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Nationality and Culture Policy*; Robert Rupen, *Mongols of the Twentieth Century, Part I* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1964); and Tolz, 111-134.

109 Alamzhi-Mergen is a pseudonym referring to the hero of a Buryat epic that Rinchino used for many of his scholarly, artistic and linguistic works. Rinchino had a varied career as a nationalist, scholar, and revolutionary; he went on to become a key figure on the side of the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, a revolutionary in Mongolia, and an influential theorist of pan-Mongolism. He was purged in 1937. For an analysis of this text in the context of the development of Buryat national consciousness and minority language affairs, see Kathryn Graber’s “Public Information: The Shifting Roles of Minority-Language News Media in the Buryat Territories of Russia,” *Language & Communication* 32, no. 2 (April 2012): 124-136.
the language of the Buryats within the larger Mongolian linguistic, cultural, and historical sphere, but viewed the Buryats as a distinct group with their own distinct language within the larger arena. This is evident in their discussion of the cultural need for a common script, peppered with references to the “Buryat people [narod]” and their various groups and dialects. Similar to Tsybikov’s argument that overemphasis on the language’s diversity distracted from its inherent unity and in an implicit engagement with the missionaries, Amagaev and Alamzhi-Mergen argued that efforts to produce written materials reflective of regional specificities written in multiple scripts threatened Buryat cultural unity. They warned that upon encountering such materials, a speaker of another dialect might reject the materials as being in another language, and thus completely foreign. On the other hand, a common script and written language had the potential to further unify the Buryats. Amagaev and Alamzhi-Mergen also drew on the discourse of what they labeled as “ancient” Mongolian as being representative of an older cultural tradition, and thus both unsuitable to contemporary Buryats and a constraint on their ability to develop a modern culture. For the two, the creation and spreading of the revised script “signifies a rejection of traditions that are too old, but as yet unwilling to depart the field of life.”

Finally, like the missionaries, Amagaev and Alamzhi-Mergen described the growth of literacy in the new script as the key to a successful cultural future for the

\[n^\text{110}\] It is important to note that the two disassociated “ancient Mongolian” and Buddhism: they counted lamas among their assistants in spreading the script and argued that the new script would enable the “masses” to have direct access to the positive philosophical and moral teachings of Buddhism, rather than merely absorb its “external, ritual forms.” However, they aimed at an unnamed, presumably clerical, opponent a statement that modernizing the language was in keeping with the Buddhist commandment to teach in a language understandable to the common people; they thus accepted, to a limited extent, the argument that the obscurity of the languages of Buddhism enabled the subjugation of the Buryats.
Buryats. Having adopted the script, the Buryats could begin to create a corpus of literature and engage in a period of growth in which they drew on their national heritage to create their national future. However, the Buryats of the future were to straddle East and West, rather than be oriented solely towards Russia. Secure in their own culture, they would be able to interact with Western culture in a way that benefited rather than harmed them.\footnote{This suggests that the polemic should not be read as separatist, but rather espousing a strong Buryat national culture within the boundaries of the empire. Further evidence for this is the fact that the book was published by the Imperial Academy of Sciences.} But one of the results of the adoption of the new script would be the ultimate creation of a common Mongolic language [obshchemongol’skii iazyk], presumably spreading to other speakers of Mongolian and related languages the beneficial results of the Buryat cultural renaissance. The Mongolian cultural and linguistic sphere would thus be recentered around the Buryats.\footnote{N. Amagaev and Alamzhi-Mergen, Novyi Mongolo-Buriatskii Alfavit (St. Petersburg: Tipografiia Imperatorskoii akademii nauk, 1910), 1-5, 28-42.}

The missionary linguistics project could be judged a failure on many fronts, and would have been by its participants. Buryats did not internalize Christianity to a greater degree because of the existence of the translations; in fact, missionaries continued to complain about converts’ complete lack of understanding of even the most basic tenets of Orthodoxy. The existence of translated texts did not attract the anticipated waves of converts awed by the beauty of Orthodoxy or persuaded by its theology; every mention of a success in this regard is matched by a report that audiences either did not understand what they heard, or simply chose not to listen. And the missionaries’ continued efforts to improve upon their translation systems indicate the presence of a persistent sense that
they had never captured the language of the Buryats. However, they did have
unintentional successes. Their investigations of the language of the Buryats, shaped and
guided by their shifting beliefs about the cultural trajectory of the Buryats towards
Russia, eventually concluded, and reinforced the conclusion, that there was a coherent
Buryat language that differed from that of Mongolia. The political border between the
two groups thus came to be matched by a cultural divide supported by linguistic science.
This conceptualization of the Buryat language was carried on into the twentieth century,
even after the end of the missionary translation project, by a range of other linguists,
ranging from university scholars to nationalists.
“It turned out that the building was built on an unsteady foundation, on sand: a strong wind blew, and nothing of it remained.”

-M. Fiveiskii, 1914

In 1859, an anonymous supporter of the Orthodox mission to the Buryats published a glowing account of a series of mass baptisms of Tunka Buryats. Immediately after several Buryat leaders and their families were baptized with considerable pomp in Irkutsk’s cathedral in May 1857, the archbishop himself led a party of clergy to the Tunka Valley in search of more converts. Although the account does not contain specific numbers and the archival records of the Tunka churches do not allow for such calculations, hundreds of Buryats were baptized. At one location, it took three hours to baptize all the men who were waiting; three priests who struck off from the main party reported that they baptized 194, 159, and 69 individuals apiece. The account emphasized the sincere belief in and desire for Orthodoxy of the newly baptized. In Irkutsk, the converts responded to a sermon translated into Buryat for them by Aleksandr Orlov with the spontaneous declaration, “We will praise and thank God. We will love God. We will love those close to us. We will try to learn the teachings of Christ. We will pray to the Lord God.” One elderly Buryat asked how he could pray when he had no icons in his iurt; the archbishop assured him that God was everywhere, so he could pray without an icon, and that the church would procure icons for the new converts. In Tunka, a shamaness

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1 M. Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii Irkutskoi pravoslavnoi missii (okonchanie),” PB no. 2 (January 1914): 150.
who attempted to disrupt the proceedings approached the priest in charge of baptizing
women at the end of the ceremony and requested that he baptize her; when she emerged
from the font after her third submersion, she cried, “Glory to God that I have been saved
[from the “dark force”]! Now I am better!” Oshur Monkuev, an elder who had previously
expressed reluctance to convert, got baptized, stating “I…have accepted the true faith
with a conviction in its holiness.” In short, the author of the account presumed the
conversions to be a mass, but internal, recognition of the truth and supremacy of God and
Orthodoxy.

By late 1905, the missionaries described the population of the Tunka Valley as
much less friendly, even hostile, to both Orthodoxy and the missionaries themselves. Key
to these descriptions of rejection and threat was the idea that the Buryats were now
choosing to be lamaist rather than Orthodox. Mitrofan Korotkoruchko wrote that Buryats
living around his missionary station had begun behaving “hostilely” towards him because
he was a “preacher of Orthodoxy.” Another missionary reported to his superior that
converts in his area had returned their icons to him, declaring that they no longer wished
to belong to the “Russian faith” [russkaia vera]. Other Buryats had stated that they
would no longer pay for the upkeep of the missionary station on the grounds that they
were now lamaist, not Orthodox. Elsewhere, a group of inorodtsy stormed into a
classroom at a mission school, refused to take their hats off, tried to smoke, returned a
pile of icons and crosses and a handful of used and dirty candle stubs, demanded a

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2 O kreshchenii mongolo-buriatov, 5-7, 15-16, 23, 29, 31-32, 35.
3 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 78, l. 4.
4 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 9.
5 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 19-19ob.
refund, and declared that they no longer wished to be Orthodox.\textsuperscript{6} The same missionary who reported this incident wrote elsewhere that he was afraid to travel alone.\textsuperscript{7}

Between the optimistic paeans to Buryat convert faith written in the 1850s and the fearful descriptions of 1905, the Baikal missionaries crafted a series of complex understandings of Buryatness, Orthodoxy, empire, and the relationship between the three that conceptually supported their endeavor but also reinforced doubts about the ultimate transformability of the Buryats. The seismic shifts of 1905, including the apostasy and the issuance of two edicts that allowed the apostasy to take place, brought many of the doubts contained in such understandings to the forefront of missionary discussions about the Buryats. In this respect, 1905 functioned as a prism through which the missionaries were forced to consider the implications of their intellectual creations for their goal of conversion and their own activities in the past and present. Grappling with the problem of how they should understand Buryat conversion to Orthodoxy in light of the mass abandonment of Orthodoxy in favor of lamaism by so many Buryats, the missionaries sequentially explored conceptions of conversion implied by several of their major understandings of the triangular relationship between Orthodoxy, Buryatness, and the empire. Their conclusions suggest that in the aftermath of 1905, the missionaries saw Buryatness as having succeeded in establishing itself as a monolithic and unchanging force, in keeping with some of the darker implications of their earlier explorations of the topic. However, they found that a shift within the empire itself, towards an acceptance and even a strategic shaping of diversity, was key to Buryatness’s success in this regard. At the same time, they found fault with the earlier, homogenizing empire, blaming the

\textsuperscript{6} NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 26.
\textsuperscript{7} NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 24ob.
apostasy on the mission’s co-option into the state’s homogenizing project which, they argued, had led the mission to wrongly approach conversion and Buryatness.

The missionaries directly attributed the increasing hostility of the valley’s inhabitants towards Orthodoxy to the edict of April 17, 1905, the promulgation of which marked the start of the religious upheaval in the Baikal region. The edict allowed individuals listed in state records as Orthodox, but who had never actively practiced or believed in Orthodoxy, to petition to have their, or their family’s, pre-conversion religion listed as their confession. Between late 1905 and 1907, the vast majority of the convert Buryats of the Tunka Valley would, either as individuals or through a series of community meetings and petitions, file formal requests to have themselves reinscribed in confessional records as lamaists. The sheer numbers involved constituted a crisis for the mission; in 1913, once the dust had cleared, Archbishop Serafim of Irkutsk would estimate that “all but a few tens” of the approximately ten thousand Orthodox Buryats resident in the valley in 1905 left the church during this period.  

Much of the missionaries’ discussions about the problem of Buryat conversion to Orthodoxy posed by the apostasy revolved around the question of whether or not Buryat

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8 Serafim, “Doklad Irkutskogo arkhiepiskopa Serafima,” 105. This contradicts other published estimates of the number of Orthodox converts who officially became Buddhist post-1905, particularly Paul Werth’s estimate, based on documents from the Russian State Historical Archive, that in total, between 1905 and 1909, 3,468 Orthodox within the Russian empire became Buddhists. The spotty nature of preserved documents from the Tunka churches makes an accurate assessment of the numbers of converts pre-1905 or post-edict based on church records impossible. Complicating the matter, the missionaries often did not know which of the converts on church rolls were dead, and individuals not infrequently got baptized more than once; consequently, the church itself was likely able to do little better than guess at convert numbers. Dittmar Schorkowitz estimates that by 1878, there were 8,121 baptized Tunka Buryats; this places Serafim’s estimate of ten thousand by 1905 within the realm of possibility. Schorkowitz, *Staat und Nationalitäten*, 568.
converts had truly converted to Orthodoxy or not. I have chosen to use the concept of authenticity to describe this question. The missionaries unquestionably had an idea of what constituted an “authentic” conversion – such a conversion was an internal recognition and embracing of Orthodoxy and its tenets as superior and true, with an accompanying attempt to apply Orthodox tenets to one’s life. Because authentic conversions were an internal affair – indeed, the missionaries most frequently described inauthentic conversions as being “external” [vneshnyi] – they could not be assessed or judged in and of themselves. Rather, the missionaries’ discussions of the idea of authentic conversion suggest that they believed that internal conversions could only be evaluated by their external manifestations, which included statements, religious practices, and behavior. At this point, though, they encountered one of the fundamental difficulties of assessing and labeling another’s religious practice. The missionaries’ understandings of Buryat converts’ religious practice, as well as their conversions, were based on the missionaries’ own beliefs about what constituted Orthodoxy, and convert Orthodoxy in particular. However, practices and ideas that the missionaries understood to be the external signs of an internal conversion to Orthodoxy could be, and most likely were, seen as having a different meaning by Buryat converts.

The edict of April 17, 1905, created a set of circumstances that brought these two different interpretations of particular practices and statements into conflict with each other and made the gap between meanings apparent. Attempting to assess whether or not the wave of petitions to leave Orthodoxy reflected the true religious state of Buryat converts, the missionaries evaluated the situation based on their understanding of what indicated an authentic conversion. Buryat converts, however, had been given the chance
to declare that their religious practice indicated something different than what the missionaries believed; this happened both at the time that the petitions were initially filed, and during a period of inquiry by the mission afterwards. The documentary record does not allow for an exploration of the converts’ understandings of the nature of their religious practice. However, even allowing for the presence of peer pressure and communal force in bringing about the departures, it is clear that many converts did not agree with the missionaries’ assessment that the label of “Orthodox” represented their religious practice.

The April 17 edict led to a significant shift in the religious balance sheets of the Irkutsk region, with a large number of individuals who had previously been listed as Orthodox being reinscribed as lamaist, and a much smaller number as shamanists. However, it is important to note that this statistical realignment gives little indication of whether there was any corresponding shift in religious practice, or if the reinscription marked a change in how individuals, absent of any external pressure, would have described their own practice. The missionaries reported a sharp drop in attendance at church, and that some former converts had returned physical objects, such as icons, that were representative of Orthodoxy. However, the very real possibility, eventually broached by the missionaries, that such practices and objects had been adopted out of necessity and compulsion calls into question whether or not they were ever incorporated into Buryat religious practice in a meaningful way. Contradicting this, though, is the missionaries’ argument that many converts continued to possess and pray to icons even after they had petitioned to leave Orthodoxy, a piece of evidence that suggests some Buryats may well have adopted items such as icons into their religious practice, even if
they did not consider themselves to be Orthodox. Consequently, the evidence as to whether or not the petitions of 1906-1907 indicated a concurrent shift in religious practice is, at best, inconclusive.

A second radical shift that occurred during the period was a dramatic refiguring of the mission’s attitude towards the state. Church officials elsewhere seem to have been more or less comfortable with the state’s decision to issue the edicts in question, and even the consequences of those edicts. However, the mission to the Baikal region reacted so negatively to the state’s role in bringing about the departures that it began to narrate the mission’s entire history in the Tunka Valley in terms of state co-option of the mission for its own ends. The state became the primary reason that so many Buryat converts had gone through external conversions without any internal change at all. It was also to blame for usurping the church’s authority with the result that it, rather than the church, became the arbiter of whether or not an individual could be considered Orthodox. The missionaries argued that state implementation of liberal attitudes towards law and religion had led to the drafting of the edicts, which the missionaries saw as unwarranted intervention into church affairs rather than a withdrawal of state support and authority from the church.

The Edicts of 1905

The edict itself played a major role in inclining the conversation surrounding its implementation towards a discussion of the meaning of conversion. As Paul Werth has noted, the edict was the product of efforts to solve the problem of Tatar, Uniate, and

Baltic Christian converts to Orthodoxy whose conversion came about because of, in the words of one of the edict’s architects, “those abnormal circumstances in which Orthodoxy has been accepted by non-Orthodox people in Russia.” These circumstances included the state’s conferral of advantages upon converts to Orthodoxy, state encouragement of conversion at specific historical moments, the use of state authority to compel converts who did not actually practice Orthodoxy to baptize their children and marry within the church, and restrictions preventing individuals listed as Orthodox from engaging with non-Orthodox religious institutions; collectively, they had resulted in large numbers of “zealots of other confessions” being listed as Orthodox without feeling any affection for or loyalty towards the church, but simultaneously being legally prevented from gaining the benefits of open association with the religious institutions matching their actual faith. The edict’s supporters argued that practitioners of minority religions, particularly Islam, were loyal to the Russian state, and that the spread of atheism, aided and abetted by the lack of formal religious supervision of “recalcitrants”, was the true threat. Consequently, the edict was built on the position that a number of conversions to Orthodoxy in the empire’s various borderlands were inauthentic conversions that bore no relationship to an individual’s actual religious belief or practice, and that maintaining this misalignment did no good to either the state or the Orthodox Church, which gained nothing from being required to minister to individuals that did not want anything to do with it.¹⁰

To solve this problem, the edict created two pathways to realign individuals’ confessional status to match their faith. Those listed as Orthodox who wished to be

¹⁰ Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 245-248; quotations are from M.E. Iachevskii, acting head of the Department for Religious Affairs of Foreign Faiths, cited on 245-246.
inscribed under another type of Christianity accepted by the state could freely shift their confessional status. For those wishing to leave Orthodoxy for a non-Christian confession, the situation was less clear-cut, requiring judgment on the veracity of an individual’s claim that he or she was, in fact, a practitioner of a different religion. The edict’s drafters believed firmly in the supremacy of Christianity; consequently, the ability to depart Orthodoxy was only granted to those who “in reality confess that non-Christian faith to which they themselves or their ancestors belonged before” their conversion to Orthodoxy.  

As Werth points out, this opened up the question of how investigators were to determine the confession “in reality” of those seeking to leave Orthodoxy. The Ministry of Internal Affairs ruled that this could be done by determining, presumably via church records, whether the individual in question had fulfilled Orthodox religious obligations before the decree was issued; given, though, that fulfilling obligations was compulsory and failure to do so occasionally bore consequences, this means of providing proof favored flagrant lawbreakers or those with indifferent clergy over petitioners who had reluctantly attended church. The issue of ancestral confession was equally problematic, as it treated “religious confession as a hereditary trait.” It created problems when families were divided by confession, especially if the parents practiced Orthodoxy, but the children claimed to espouse Islam.  

Ancestral confession was also a particularly challenging metric to use when the religious landscape itself was changing, as it was in the Baikal region with the rapid spread of lamaism. In either case, implementation of the law relied on a system of petition, investigation, and administrative decision that required authorities to pass judgment on the “reality” of an individual’s religious confession.

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11 Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov III, no. 26126 (17 April 1905), section I, article 3.
12 Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy, 248-249, 253.
The October Manifesto, which contained a vague provision allowing the general population “freedom of conscience,” complicated the legal framework for confessional realignment still further. The manifesto was frequently interpreted by those wishing to leave Orthodoxy for a non-Christian confession as legal grounds for them to do so freely and without constraint, and it was cited as such with some frequency in both central Russia and the Baikal region. However, both local officials and clergy continued to rely on the processes of petition and judgment established under the April edict, with the result that petitioners’ claims to an absolute right to freedom of conscience met with little favor.

The few surviving petitions suggest that as a whole, the grounds on which petitioners requested reinscription were fairly uniform. Indeed, although no examples of such petitions survive, standardized printed blank petitions seem to have been circulating among the Tunka Buryats. Ioann Kosygin, the superintendent of the missionaries, made handwritten copies of two different variants available in the region. In one, the petitioner (where a specific gendered pronoun would have stood, Kosygin inserted “he/she”) declared that her “ancestors” had been of the “lamaist confession” and stated that she had been forced to get baptized but had nonetheless continued to adhere to the “faith of her ancestors.” Citing the “ukaz of April 17, 1905” and the “manifesto of October 17, 1905” as grounds granting her “freedom of conscience” [svoboda sovesti], she requested permission to leave Orthodoxy for the “Buddhist faith.” The second example that

13 Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov III, no. 26803 (17 October 1905).
14 Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy, 252; as concerns the Baikal region, see, for example, NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 70, 85.
15 Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy, 252; “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906 god,” no. 13 (July 1907): 157-158.
Kosygin copied was much shorter; the petitioner declared that he (and again, Kosygin used “he/she”) had gotten baptized due to pressure from local authorities and the missionaries, and wished to return to “his old lamaist confession.” These formulas reflect the public circulation of formulaic petitions to leave Orthodoxy, but also the public circulation of information about the contents of the two laws; the missionaries reported the arrival of thousands of petition blanks and pamphlets containing copies of the edicts in question drawn from Pravitel’stvennyi vestnik ordered from the Irkutsk guberniia printing press.

In the Tunka region, Orthodox missionaries played a key role in administering the process of confessional realignment. Once knowledge about the April edict became widespread in late 1905, communities and individuals began submitting petitions to change their confessional status to regional authorities. These made their way to the office of the Irkutsk General Governor. The Ministry of Internal Affairs had charged the regional governors with determining the “reality” of the petitioners’ confessional status, and in the Irkutsk region, the General Governor, apparently at the behest of the church, delegated this responsibility to the Orthodox mission. The petitions were passed to the Consistory, which ensured they eventually reached the missionary who oversaw the missionary church at which the petitioner was registered. The missionaries were then to approach those who had requested reinscription for individual “questioning and

16 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 70, 85.
17 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l26ob and f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 10. “Otpadenie irkutskikh biryat v lamaizm,” PB no. 23 (December 1906): 301. The situation in Tatar regions of central Russia seems to have unfolded similarly. Werth, At the Margins of Orthodoxy, 250.
exhortation.”18 This process seems to have been somewhat unusual. Records from mission churches in the diocese of Zabaikal’e, on the eastern side of the lake, suggest that the consistory, in correspondence with the government, took a direct hand in overseeing the comparatively small number of petitions there. The consistory, having received the names and home churches of petitioners from the governor’s office, contacted the appropriate missionary with an order to inspect the metrical books to determine whether or not the person petitioning was a communicant of the church and give a brief pastoral admonition to the petitioner.19 An individual’s recorded ritual participation in the church was thus the key metric for judging the authenticity of his or her Orthodoxy.

The church argued that missionaries were the only party capable of accurately judging the “reality” of the petitioners’ statements. The author of the eparchy’s annual report for 1906 implied that this had been a disputed issue, stating that the baptized Buryats were “located in the bosom [lono] of the church” and consequently the petitions were a spiritual matter, a “purely church affair” with which “civil authorities should have no relation.”20 A commentary on the initial order of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the governors declared that the civil authorities could exercise no better judgment than an average “chancellery clerk,” merely checking to see if the individual appeared in the church metrical books or not. Even this was questionable, as the books were in the hands of the clergy. Worse still, the police, as the “most effective means” available to the civil authorities to undertake such investigations, would become the “deciding voice” in the

18 “Otchet o sostojanii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” PB no. 13 (July 1907): 156-158. Missionaries received specific orders to carry out such activities; see NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 46a-46aob.
19 NARB f. 220, o. 1, d. 227, ll. 249-251, and f. 220, o. 1, d. 243, ll. 36-37.
20 “Otchet o sostojanii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 13 (July 1907): 156-158.
matter. The author argued that if the civil authorities were allowed to carry out the investigations, the “fact of the apostasy will certainly be sanctioned.”\(^{21}\) The missionaries were instead instructed to pursue investigations that started from the presumption that the petitions were not “an affair of freedom of conscience,” but rather the result of “criminal agitation and coercive force.”\(^{22}\) Instead, the missionaries were to rely on conversations with each individual petitioner and gathering each petitioner’s signature or mark of assent on the petitions to guarantee his or her personal agreement to the petition.\(^{23}\)

This was no small order. Incomplete records belonging to Ioann Kosygin, the superintendent of missionaries in Tunka, indicate that the missionaries faced massive piles of individual petitions that likely did not include those individuals listed on communal petitions. Between late August and late October 1906 alone, Kosygin received at least 1,426 petitions from the Missionary Society.\(^{24}\) In the context of the sheer volume of petitions, the difficulty of travel in Tunka, and the missionaries’ sense that the population had become hostile to them to the point of physical threat, it is extremely unlikely that they managed to carry out the task of investigating every petition. Nonetheless, the missionaries drew on established concepts of the place of converts within Buryat societies to both explain why the investigations were worth conducting in the first place, and also to explain the fact that the investigations universally failed to return the results that the missionaries desired.

\(^{21}\) Efrem, “Veroispovednoi soblazn v Zabaikal’e,” *PB* no. 5-6 (May-June 1914): 177-179. Although this was published in 1914, the verb tenses in the article indicate that it was written much earlier, likely immediately after receipt of the MVD’s instructions in 1905.

\(^{22}\) “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 13 (July 1907): 157.

\(^{23}\) NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 46a, and f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 61ob-62.

\(^{24}\) NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 47, 48a, 52, 54, 56, 72.
The Proposition of Authentic Conversion

Forced to judge whether or not the reality of converts’ religious practice made them Orthodox, missionaries made a variety of arguments about what demonstrated a convert’s Orthodoxy. These often relied on external or ritual demonstrations of Orthodox affiliation, but presumed that these discernable characteristics signified that converts had internalized an undefined Orthodoxy to a greater or lesser extent. The missionaries openly admitted that the practice of most converts was less than ideal, constituting a mix of Orthodoxy and habits carrying over from their pre-conversion lives. However, they argued that this haphazard blend was an inevitable part of conversion, which took place over individual lifetimes, generations, and even centuries.

The simplest indicator of whether or not a given convert was truly Orthodox was a habit of attending church services and participating in recorded ritual obligations such as confession and communion, acts that missionaries interpreted to as indications that the individual had engaged with the church of his or her own free will. Informing the missionary committee of the results of the missionaries’ inquiries into a batch of 276 petitions from three different Tunka districts, Kosygin stated that all were from individuals who were “baptized by wish and not by force”; as proof of this, he declared that many took communion, although the women did so less frequently than the men and had a lower overall rate of church attendance.25 Another missionary evaluated the petition of a woman and her grandson who argued that they had been “accidentally” [sluchaino] baptized in light of evidence that the woman had been baptized twenty-five years before,

25 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 111.
and her grandson at birth. Consequently, they had attended services and communion many times. Offering a suggestion for why evidence of participation in rituals made a person Orthodox, the missionary argued that over such a long history of engagement with the church, the two would have inevitably learned about Orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{26} Within this formula, attendance at church proved consent to engagement with the church and provided a medium through which the convert in question would have learned enough about the meaning of his or her actions to continue to assent. Furthering the idea that participation constituted assent, a missionary declared his skepticism that waves of eight hundred petitions at a time could represent “freedom of conscience” or “an internal striving of every Buryat,” as many of the petitioners had attended church, fasted, and participated in sacraments, never asking to leave before the edicts.\textsuperscript{27}

Use of items or practices that the church identified with Orthodoxy outside of the church also provided evidence that an individual should be considered Orthodox. Unsurprisingly, since these were common gifts to newly-baptized \textit{inorodtsy}, pectoral crosses and household icons were the examples of such behavior most commonly cited by missionaries. Elaborating concerns that true converts were among those included on petitions, one Tunka missionary wrote that Aleksei Porushenov, an elder who had been baptized forty years earlier, and his family had been forced to give up the icons “with which they had prayed for so many years” by local authorities. Similarly, a woman

\textsuperscript{26} “Otchet o sostoianii Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za 1905 god,” \textit{PPB} no. 3 (February 1907): 41.  
\textsuperscript{27} Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 13 (July 1907): 158, 160.
complained that she had been forced to give up her pectoral cross. In Zabaikal’e, possession of pectoral crosses and proper maintenance and use of household icons served as indications that some petitioners had “become firmly established, living in proximity to God’s church, in the great truths of the Christian faith” [v istinakh very khristianskoj]. This was used to contradict their claim on their petitions that they “secretly practice the lamaist faith.”

The missionaries saw indications of Orthodoxy such as church attendance and personal use of icons and crosses as proof that Buryat converts had internalized a rudimentary form of Christianity that was expressing itself through such outward signs. They stressed that this Christianity was far from perfect or complete, but rather a work in process. To prove that the wave of petitions in the Onon region of Zabaikal’e did not represent the actual religious practice of the petitioners, one missionary wrote that because of his twenty-year service, he knew that the petitioners met their religious obligations, kept icons “in their [proper] places and in clear view,” lit icons before them, wore crosses, and knew basic prayers. However, this was part of a mix of religious practices; supporting this, he quoted from the petition of Anna Bekel’manova, who wrote, “at this time I confess the lamaist faith and fulfill the obligations of the Orthodox religion, that is, I have holy icons in my iurt and pray in the Orthodox style.” For the missionary, this was not a contradiction or an indication that Bekel’manova’s Orthodoxy not real; rather, it proved that

although [the converts] are in simplicity, they believe in the One True God...of course, among the inorodtsy in question there were and are insufficiencies in a religious-moral respect, but who doesn’t have [them]. Russian Orthodox peasants sin in multitudes against the requirements of the Orthodox faith.

He argued that the petitions stood in contrast to the “realities” [deistvit’ nosti] of the situation, as they only had sound legal basis if the petitioner had not “absolutely not practiced the Orthodox faith” before the issue of the April edict.30 Similarly, a missionary reported that petitioners seeking to return to shamanism told him that they would not dispose of their icons, or stop praying to them, as God was one and the same for all people. Nonetheless, they had filed petitions because “sometimes they want to practice shamanism [shamanit’], and a baptized person has to do that secretly.” From this, the missionary concluded that the petitions did not reflect the petitioners’ religious practice, but were instead “artificially created.”31

That the petitioners seem to have freely and openly incorporated Orthodox objects and rituals into their own religious practice while claiming that they were, in reality, lamaist or shamanist points to the problem that likely lead to the mission’s failure to keep many converts who petitioned to leave within the church. By 1905, Orthodoxy had been part of a religious landscape that was in a state of flux and change for approximately 250 years. The region’s two other major religions, lamaism and shamanism, were both highly flexible, adopting and adapting religious practices as they moved into new historical and human contexts.32 With the opening of churches, the performance of services, the

31 Epifanii Kuznetsov, “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907 godu,” PB no. 18 (September 1908): 53.
32 Humphrey, 243, 248-251, and Mikhailov, 127-149.
distribution of icons and crosses, and the sale of candles, Orthodoxy became one more source of material for this process. The missionaries saw these borrowings and adaptations as evidence that Orthodoxy as they knew and understood it was being adopted by the Buryats. The Buryats did not necessarily see the situation in the same way; for some, the use of Orthodox items and rituals may have been simply one more facet of their own religious practice, and one they may not have defined as Orthodoxy. If the statement that “God is one” [Bog odin] can be taken at face value, the converts may have seen Orthodox items and rituals as a valid way of approaching their own religion. For the missionaries, the idea that “God is one” was an indication that the “undeveloped” Buryats were being convinced by someone more sophisticated that there was no difference between the Orthodox God and their own, evidence that the Buryats were coming to recognize the supremacy of the Orthodox God, or proof that the Buryats were indifferent in their confessional affiliation.\(^\text{33}\) In a draft sermon, Kosygin played on this difference, citing the claim that “God is one” and responding with the statement that “the one God will judge you if you leave Orthodoxy;” both “God is one” and “the one God” were expressed with the phrase Bog odin.\(^\text{34}\) The missionaries had no conceptual structure to grasp the syncretism that was likely taking place; consequently, their attempts to define and label the reality of converts’ confessional practice were inadequate to the situation and the converts’ understandings of their own practice.

Having typed the petitioners’ Orthodoxy as flawed but present, the missionaries imagined the petitioners as occupying a place along a familiar developmental path. Using


\(^{34}\) NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 6ob-7.
the language used to describe the religious status and failings of Russian peasants, the missionaries argued that the converts’ position was an inevitable stage in a slow conversion that required vast spans of time to complete. According to a 1906 analysis, the “traces of heathen religions” would coexist with Orthodoxy for a long time, a state of affairs described by the familiar label of “double belief”, or *dvoeverie*. Dvoeverie was a sorrowful fact, of course, but historically and psychologically necessary and unavoidable…A great internal struggle, an internal rupture, is necessary to subjugate it, and the less spiritually and mentally developed a person is, of course, the harder it is for him to accomplish this…If a cultured and enlightened people need centuries and gradual movement for the firm mastery of the Christian faith, then what is to be said of the Buryats?

Buryat converts were thus seen as progressing along the same developmental path taken by the Russians themselves; if anything, their path would be even longer than that of their Russian counterparts, as they were less developed to begin with. Within this paradigm, the converts’ always wanting and occasionally lax practice was “understandable and natural” and simply a part of the conversion process. For the missionaries, to use converts’ “wavering” to assess the reality of their confessional practice was to ignore the process of change that they had embarked upon.36

**Authority and the Subversion of Conversion**

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35 Ensuring the orthodoxy of the beliefs and practices of Russian peasants, frequently suspected of being tainted by perpetuations of paganism, was a major concern for the church in the second half of the nineteenth century. Analyses of the conflict between Russian popular belief and the vision of Orthodoxy propounded by the church hierarchy can be found in Shevzov and Chris J. Chulos, *Converging Worlds: Religion and Community in Peasant Russia*, 1861-1917 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003).

36 “Otpadenie,” 300-301.
As the missionaries believed that an unquantified number of those petitioning for reinscription were, in reality, Orthodox, they were forced to find an explanation for why so many converts sought to formally leave the church. Examining the social and cultural circumstances surrounding the creation of the petitions and the converts themselves, the missionaries found their explanation in the family and community structures that they believed had long suppressed and hindered the spiritual development of converts. These structures created an environment in which converts could be pressured into signing the petitions by those with whom and under whose authority they lived. However, the missionaries also held the Russian government to blame for abetting and participating in this subversion by promulgating the edict and simultaneously elevating lamaism to a position within Russia parallel to that held by Orthodoxy.

Utilizing earlier ideas about the place of individual converts within non-convert families and communities explored in the chapters on marriage and violence in this dissertation, the missionaries interpreted some of the petitions as the result of converts being reassimilated by those amongst whom they lived. The process of petitioning was thus a sort of social homogenization. This process of reabsorption came out of the perils of interpersonal contact and relationships in mixed families and communities. Reports from Zabaikal’è expressed concern about the fate of converts who lived in the uluses, who were perceived to be even more vulnerable than other converts because of the daily pressures of “living and social relations” surrounding them.37 Another author expressed concern that some petitions claimed to represent entire families and were from the “head

of each family.”38 Such statements referenced concerns about the ability of heads of families to threaten, punish, and control junior family members’ religious practices particularly evident in missionaries’ discussions of the fate of convert women. Spousal and parental relationships were of particular worry in this context, as the apostasy of one family member was viewed as something that threatened to erode the Orthodoxy of other family members.39 If communities were unable to reassimilate the converts, they expelled them, leaving the converts without connections or property. In a biannual report on the state of the mission, Kosygin described how an elderly convert and his adopted son, who had also been baptized, were chased out of their ulus and forced to move to a Russian village, abandoning their house and fields. A group of “unbaptized lamaists” had made them leave because they would not “leave Orthodoxy and transfer to Buddhism.” In the wake of the edict, the prevailing sentiment was that “Orthodox should not live together with lamaists.”40

At the same time that the missionaries blamed the situation on forces of conformity and broad family and social pressure, they argued that Buryat leaders played a particularly important role in bringing about the apostasy. By sponsoring the drafting of petitions, placing pressure on individuals to file petitions, and even forging petitions, Buryat leaders sought to bring about a massive religious realignment among the Buryats. This realignment would benefit their interests by creating a common anti-Russian and anti-Orthodox identity for the Buryats and pushing out the missionaries. They were not driven by religious fervor, but rather the goal of preserving and strengthening their own

38 “Otchet o sostoianii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 13 (July 1907): 159.
40 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 90, l. 5ob.
authority. The missionaries believed that ordinary Buryats, threatened by and in awe of the wealth and power held by this select group, had little ability to resist them. This method of explaining the enormous quantity of petitions drew heavily on the missionaries’ understandings of the nature and use of authority in Buryat communities.

Missionaries frequently identified Buryat officials, nobles, or wealthy elite as ringleaders in the apostasy. In the Ust-Ordinsk region, Gennadii Vdovin identified Plenskii, the local chief clerk, as the culprit; in 1908, Plenskii was fired due “in part” to his actions, and the flow of petitions from local residents immediately ceased.41 In the Oka district of the Tunka Valley, Innokentii Romanov accused Badrikhaev, a clan elder, and Verzhekhovskii, the chief clerk, of rounding up attendees for councils in order to obtain mass agreements to leave Orthodoxy.42 Elsewhere in the valley, Nikolai Nikolaev Kuznetsov, the head of the inorodnaia uprava, and Aleksei Nikolaev Khomakov, a hereditary noble, were accused of guiding the process.43 Kosygin himself declared that wealthy Buryats were the “primary directors” of the affair.44 Although the Orthodox missionaries had a lengthy history of difficult relations with Buryat leaders and had a strong discursive framework for understanding the role of leaders in any event not to their advantage, there is outside evidence to suggest their claims may not have been unfounded. Kosygin’s records contain a petition passed on to him by the local Russian administrative overseer from a group of baptized Buryats who complained that the elder of their clan, Egor Budaev, had been carrying out extortion, gathering levies to finance

41 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 246, l. 133.
42 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 5.
43 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, ll. 12ob, 19. Given the paucity of hereditary noblemen in the area, Aleksei Khomakov was likely a descendant of the Khomakov who had been one of the original leaders of the mass conversions.
44 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 50ob.
the costs of producing petitions to leave Orthodoxy. The handwriting is poor, the spelling atrocious, and the word choice eccentric, in all cases much worse than documents produced by either the clergy or paid scribes, suggesting that one of the petitioners himself may have drafted it.45

The missionaries accused the Buryat leaders of using their authority to pressure individuals who did not wish to leave Orthodoxy to sign petitions, creating a hostile environment for them. As Kosygin wrote, “The poor baptized Buryats suffer from the constant demand to transition to lamaism and are restless, not knowing what to do.”46 Innokentii Romanov was particularly concerned about this issue, reporting on it at multiple points and often with particular concern for baptized Buryats who were well-known to him and whose faith he was assured of. He reported that even the Gomboevs, an extended family of iasachnye inorodtsy, had been approached by Buryats asking that they sign a petition; they had refused, but were afraid they would suffer reprisals as a result.47 Romanov’s concern for the Gomboevs was likely motivated by their status as iasachnye, which indicated that they had been baptized well before the mass baptisms of the 1850s and 1860s; iasachnye were widely believed to have assimilated into the Russian population and Orthodoxy to such a great degree that nothing beyond “physiognomy” distinguished them from Russians.48 Separately, he reported that his Buryat church warden [trapeznik] had told him “with tears” that Badrikhaev and Verzhelkovskii had visited his wife and family, who had given their consent to be put on

45 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 36.
46 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 4.
47 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 26ob.
48 For a representative discussion of the lifestyle of iasachnye inorodtsy, see “Otchet o sostoianii Zabaikal’skoi dakhovnoi missii za 1910,” no. 13 (July 1911): 14.
a communal petition “out of fear of the strong.” Badrikhaev and Verzhekhovskii had also put the man’s son Aleksandr on the petition, even though Aleksandr had been away taking an exam at the time of their visit, and had consequently been unable to personally assent.49

The missionaries argued that many of the names on petitions were those of individuals who had been listed regardless of their personal wishes. Kosygin reported that after a clan meeting of those who ostensibly wished to leave Orthodoxy, he received a list on which he found the names of individuals who had personally confirmed to him that they did not wish to leave Orthodoxy.50 Women and children were seen as particularly susceptible to this due to the patriarchal nature of Buryat society; Romanov fretted that Badrikhaev and Verzhekhovskii had included the names of women and children on a communal petition that had supposedly risen from a suglan, or traditional community meeting. The missionary noted that women and children did not, as a rule, attend suglans, so they could not possibly have given their assent.51 The missionaries expressed concern that the use of printed petition forms allowed the ring leaders of the movement to forge large numbers of petitions. Gavriil Sizykh, a deacon serving as a missionary in a particularly isolated part of the Tunka Valley, noted that he had received printed petitions from individuals he knew to be literate and capable of writing their own petitions; he suggested this meant their names had been used without their knowledge.52 The use of blanks by illiterate individuals was also questioned, as “they are in the same template for

49 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 5ob.
50 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 3.
51 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 5ob. Rather than women and children being prevented from attending suglans, they were allowed to attend, but could not speak.
52 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 55ob.
all, and are signed by one individual.” To demonstrate that this called into question the veracity of all the petitions, the author wrote that out of one group of petitions, five petitioners had been unaware that a petition had been submitted in their name, two were from deceased individuals, two from individuals who had never been baptized, four from individuals who had long ago left the church, and six from adults listing quantities of children that did not match the number of children the petitioner actually had. To the missionaries, this suggested that the clan elders and clerks most frequently labeled as the leaders of the effort were engaging in systematic forgery, and the petitions could in no way be trusted to reflect the reality of individual confessional practice.

The missionaries also found evidence of the work of a hidden hand in the spread of information about the contents of the edicts. Noting that petitioners, by and large, held common views of the edicts’ content and how they should be interpreted, the missionaries argued that low literacy rates in the region meant that the petitioners could not have reached such conclusions on their own. Rather, the region’s few literate individuals were conveying interpretations of the edicts’ contents to the illiterate many and enabling them to use the written word to support their petitions. A published report declared that the popular understanding of the April and October edicts was wrong and based on a deliberate misinterpretation of the laws spread “by some person” who could only be a “most evil enemy of the holy church, the Tsar, and the Russian government.”

One of Kosygin’s subordinates reported that he had disputed arguments that the edicts should be interpreted as the tsar having “ordered that [the converts] be lamaists.” In

54 “Otpadenie,” 303.
response, those with whom he was speaking had pulled out a brochure published by the Irkutsk guberniia press containing an explanation of the edict of April 17. They were illiterate, but directed the missionary to the “point about freedom of transfer from Orthodoxy to another religion.” Someone had underlined this point with a blue pencil; the missionary believed this had been done by “different leaders of the Buryat movement” to allow illiterate individuals to use the brochures to combat the missionaries’ arguments.\(^55\)

Russian itinerant traders \textit{[del’tsy]} were also believed to play a role in this, convincing Buryats of the legality of their desire to leave Orthodoxy regardless of the actual content of the law.\(^56\)

For the missionaries, Buryat leaders’ ability to artificially create the apostasy illustrated a long-held belief that socially and economically subordinate Buryats either followed their leaders without question. Consequently, the apostasy could be explained by the same conditions of Buryatness that explained earlier Orthodox failures. Convert or not, lower-ranking Buryats were susceptible to bullying by their superiors, but were also inclined, above all, to blindly follow their leaders. Missionary reports about events on the ground routinely described petitioners as an indistinct and opinionless mob following the wishes of its leaders. Kosygin wrote that rich were the “primary directors of any affair, and the entire ordinary \textit{inorodets} mass follows after them;” another missionary less charitably described converts as a “herd of sheep” following someone else’s lead.\(^57\) This pattern of description invoked the circular relationship between conversion and social

\(^{55}\) NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, ll. 9-9ob.

\(^{56}\) “Otchet o sostojanii i deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi dukhovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 13 (July 1907): 154. This published report was likely drawing on a report to the Missionary Committee filed by Kosygin; see NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 50ob.

\(^{57}\) NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 50ob; NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 55ob.
structure laid out by earlier missionaries: ordinary Buryat converts were easily swayed from Orthodoxy and Orthodox ways of life by their leaders, who had no interest in practicing (if they were converts) or encouraging (if they were not) Orthodoxy because it would challenge their own authority. Given this, it is unsurprising that some missionaries explained the apostasy as a result of the fundamental conflict between Christianity and a way of life that was “alien in the very foundation of its ideas” to Christianity.58

In the missionaries’ view, the edicts provided a method by which Buryat authorities could, to greater effect than before, subvert the conversions of Buryats. The missionaries argued that Buryat authorities were aided and abetted in doing so by a broad movement within various layers of the Russian government and society to elevate lamaism to a position equal to that held by Orthodoxy. This endeavor was seen as undermining a key tenet of what the missionaries argued was the guiding motif of the tsar’s personal views on the matter, that all Russian subjects needed to become Orthodox. The missionaries connected this attempt to enshrine diversity within the empire to a rising local sense that Buryat nationalism was acceptable within the empire. In this sense, support of lamaism, which the missionaries believed to be but one tactic within a broader liberal project to unseat Orthodoxy from its privileged place, was contributing to a hardening of Buryatness against absorption into Russia.

This criticism never went so far as to argue that the tsar himself either wished or endorsed the departure of Buryats from Orthodoxy or the displacement of Orthodoxy from what the church saw as its previously prominent social position. Indeed, the missionaries’ public interpretation of the edicts for Buryat consumption depended on the

58 “Otchet o sostoiании и deiatel’nosti Irkutskoi duchovnoi missii za 1906,” no. 12 (June 1907): 147.
idea that the tsar’ himself did not wish Buryat converts to leave Orthodoxy and espoused a program of unification of all Russian subjects. Archbishop Tikhon wrote a formal refutation of the interpretation that the edicts constituted a statement by the tsar’ that the “tsar’ ordered the Buryats to be lamaists”; it was translated into Buryat and published for wide distribution. Kosygin received 2,500 copies, and other Tunka missionaries reported reading the statement aloud to Buryat audiences. Tikhon argued that the idea that the tsar’ wished the Buryats to leave Orthodoxy for lamaism was a slur on the “Tsar’, the chief confessor [of Orthodoxy]” [Tsar’-Ispovednik]. “The Orthodox Russian Tsar’” [pravoslavnyi russkii tsar’] could not, by definition, be an enemy of the “salvation of the souls of his loyal subjects, the inorodtsy.” The statement thus linked the tsar’s ruling authority with his Orthodoxy. By using the adjective russkii rather than rossiiskii, Tikhon described the tsar’s Russianness in a sense that made it inextricable from Orthodoxy; he also described the tsar’ as the ruler of a homogenous Orthodox land, avoiding the connotations of rule over diversity invoked by the term rossiiskii. Tikhon concluded by declaring that he did not believe the Buryats could “consciously decide” to “distress” the Tsar’ by leaving Orthodoxy.

The missionaries believed that the unifying promise and mission of Orthodoxy were being undermined by the liberal press and government officials, who were

59 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 40-40ob; NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, ll. 23-23ob; NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 10ob. The Buryat translation was not well-received; for a discussion of the document’s place within the history of missionary linguistics endeavors, see the chapter on language. The effort to distribute so many copies is strange, as the missionaries repeatedly claimed that local literacy rates were extremely low; the mission may have been attempting to combat the flood of copies of the edicts into the region and their use by illiterate Buryats as authoritative documents by distributing its own authoritative document.

60 For a dual-column Buryat-Russian translation of the statement, see NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, l. 41.
capitalizing on current events to make lamaism appear to be an imperially-sanctioned religion. Two different lines of current events intersected to create this paranoia. The first was the growing public prominence around 1905 of Buryat nationalists espousing a program of cultural pan-Mongolism. This program, argued that Buddhism was a key element of pan-Mongolian heritage. High-ranking Buryat lamas were, consequently, often guests at public meetings held to develop an agenda for Buryat political development during the upheaval of 1905.

The second line of current events was the complex posturing of the Russian Empire in negotiations with Japan and China over the fate of Mongolia, a situation that grew even more tangled in 1904 and 1905 as the Dalai Lama fled to Mongolia in the wake of the British invasion of Tibet. From 1904 through 1917, the Russian government was confident of its position in regard to Mongolia. It viewed Mongolia as something of a sphere of influence, cultivated Mongolian cultural and governmental inclinations towards Russia, and attempted to use its influence in Mongolia to pressure China, technically Mongolia’s suzerain. When the Dalai Lama, the highest religious authority in Gelugpa Buddhism, the type of Buddhism practiced by the Buryats and Mongols, fled to Urga, he began appealing to Russian authorities for support against the British. The Russian Foreign Ministry, interested in cultivating an alliance with the Dalai Lama as a lever to use against the British in Central Asia, opened dialogue with the Dalai Lama, both through secret diplomatic communiqués and public maneuverings by prominent persons that received press coverage. The ministry, which at one point briefly considered allowing the Dalai Lama to take refuge at the chief Buryat datsan, Gusinoozersk, used Khambo Lama Iroltuev as an emissary in the affair. The Dalai Lama’s chief
representative was the Buryat Agvan Dorzhiev, his ambassador to St. Petersburg, publicly known to be extremely popular with the royal family and the St. Petersburg nobility. The Dalai Lama, attempting to demonstrate his interest in Russia, encouraged large pilgrimages of Buryats to Urga and, according to the report of the Russian consul there, paid special attention to them. The negotiations eventually came to nothing and ended with the Foreign Ministry, seeking to preserve Russia’s status quo with China in the context of the Russo-Japanese War, allowing the Chinese to force the Dalai Lama to leave Urga and begin moving back towards Tibet.61 From the perspective of the Russian government, the negotiations with the Dalai Lama had always been about foreign affairs, and about negotiations with Japan, China, and Britain rather than about Mongolia itself. However, the missionaries read the press coverage of these events as an elevation of lamaism to an unprecedented public position of acceptance, a distinctly local problem. The missionaries’ view of events in this light reveals that one of the chief sources of instability in the area stemming from the geopolitical currents at the time was not a sense of external threat, but rather one of threat to the integrity of the empire as a homogenous entity.

The missionaries accused regional and local government officials of supporting lamaism at Orthodoxy’s expense by granting lamaism an aura of official sanction; press coverage amplified the government’s actions, giving them widespread public

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prominence. A 1906 report from the Zabaikal’e mission demonstrates the missionaries’ views of the intertwined nature of government action and press coverage. The report argued that two circumstances had brought about the “upsurge of religious and national self-consciousness” among lamaist Buryats and Tungus. First, the Dalai Lama visited the Gandan (Gandantegchinlen) Monastery in the Mongolian capital of Urga, and was met by a mass of Buryat pilgrims and a delegation of Russian officials. The missionaries cited circulating rumors, prompted by his visit, that Tibet and Mongolia would accept Russian sovereignty and the Dalai Lama would settle at the Gusinoozero datsan, the seat of the Khambo Lama. They argued that press coverage of the Dalai Lama’s reception of the pilgrims and the delegation had painted him in a very sympathetic light, sparking “religious enthusiasm” among the Buryats. Second, two public meetings between ranking Zabaikal’e lamas and “representatives of the people” [predstavitieli ot naroda] had been held in the cities of Verkhneudinsk (in 1904) and Chita (in 1905). Both meetings had been held with the open permission and approval of the government, and one of the main topics of discussion had been securing increased freedom of movement and publishing privileges for lamas, with the implication that regional officials supported this agenda. The cumulative effect of official participation in these events and their coverage in the press was to support the circulating rumor that the edicts meant that “the government itself does not know which is the true faith, and therefore allowed everyone to believe in his own manner.”

At times, the missionaries argued that official participation in and press coverage of such events were part of a deliberate attempt to unseat the church from its foundational

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62 “Otchet o sostojanii Zabaikal’skoi dukihnvoi missii za 1905,” no. 3 (February 1907): 36-40.
position within the Russian state.⁶³ One article criticized the “completely leftist” Chita press for giving extensive coverage to the election of a new Khambo Lama and his meetings with the head of the Verkhneudinsk city administration and the Governor of Zabaikal’e for treating the whole affair as one of “high state importance.” By doing so, the press had reinforced the idea that “now the lamaist faith is celebrated over the Christian [faith], and wise, well-learned, and educated people already transfer from Christianity to Buddhism.” Worse, they had reported on the construction of Dorzhiev’s datsan in St. Petersburg, supporting a rumor that the tsarevich himself was unbaptized and would become Buddhist. Behind these actions by what the author derogatorily labeled “‘progressive’ society and the ‘progressive’ press” was an effort to subvert the meaning of the edicts in order to “shift state life from its historical foundations” and

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⁶³ Although the Orthodox Church argued that it had an indispensable cultural and historical relationship with the Russian state and Russianness writ broadly and was crucial to the maintenance of both, this was widely disputed by 1905. Although Nicholas II used Orthodoxy as a symbolic language through which he could demonstrate his own authority (on this, see Richard S. Wortman, *Scenarios of Power: Myth and Ceremony in the Russian Monarchy: from Peter the Great to the Abdication of Nicholas II* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 347-360), even conservative elements within the government had begun to develop legal channels around the church’s authority in arenas such as family law, which had previously been unquestionably within the church’s purview; Engel, 4-6. Imperial administrators had long sought to minimize the state’s association with Orthodoxy in borderland regions where religion was seen as a politically-sensitive issue; indeed, the issuance of the April 17 edict stemmed from a belief that forcing Orthodoxy on converts who were not, in fact, Orthodox was not in the state’s interest in areas such as the northwestern provinces and central Russia. Werth, *At the Margins of Orthodoxy*, 245-247. The increasingly large portions of Russian society that identified themselves as liberal were rarely unhesitatingly friendly towards the church. Finally, the mission had long argued that the state had historically not privileged Orthodoxy as much as it should have. As early as the 1880s, Archbishop Veniamin blamed liberalism for granting lamaism legal protections to the cost of the mission. Consequently, although the missionaries’ claim had elements of truth, in that the church was being displaced, the displacement had already been going on for an extended period of time. This claim is thus best viewed as part of the church’s efforts to demonstrate to and remind the government of its current and historical worth at a time when its authority and privileges were waning.
reconstruct it along “extraconfessional and extratribal,” “national” lines. The promotion of lamaism was, in short, a method leftists were using to reshape the Buryats along national lines as part of an attempt to redesign the entire Russian empire.

The missionaries argued that the increased support of government officials for lamaism, as well as positive press coverage of both lamaism and supportive government actions towards lamaism, created an environment that made misinterpretations of the edicts seem more logical. This, in turn, placed baptized Buryats in an uncomfortable position, as they felt themselves to be in “an untruthful position” without an endorsement of the absolute supremacy of Orthodoxy, and became vulnerable to the argument “that it is possible at any time to change [one’s] faith on a whim.” Consequently, liberal attitudes towards lamaism served to encourage those who were already inclined to leave Orthodoxy to do so and making the religion unpalatable to new converts; however, they also subordinated authentic conversions by supporting broad trends of belief about Orthodoxy that made it increasingly difficult for converts to adhere to their convictions in the face of social pressure.

Other concerns about the threat that liberalism posed to the church’s authority and Buryat conversions manifested themselves in criticisms of the edicts themselves. Paul Werth has suggested that, on the part of its architects, the April edict was the result of an effort at political reform in response to “liberal and revolutionary opposition” undertaken before the upheavals of 1905 even began. On the part of the edict’s authors, the edict was a retrenchment of state authority to the enforcement of law rather than spiritual

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64 “Otchet o sostojanii Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za 1910,” no. 13 (July 1911): 4-6, 9.
65 “Otchet o sostojanii Zabaikal’skoi dukhovnoi missii za 1905,” no. 3 (February 1907): 40.
conviction, an effort that Metropolitan Antonii of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, the church’s representative to the Committee of Ministers, supported.\(^6\) For the missionaries, rather than being a reduction of harmful intervention by the state into spiritual affairs, the edict and legal decisions regarding its implementation amounted to the state assuming, under the mantle of drafting law and legal procedure, an authority that by rights belonged to the church. Thus, while in some respects the edicts can be seen as the removal of state authority from some aspects of religious life, for the missionaries, the edicts constituted state intrusion by means of legalism into the church’s area of oversight.

At issue was the state’s establishment of a legal framework by which individuals could be excluded from Orthodoxy. A 1906 denunciation of the procedure from the Irkutsk region declared that the missionaries could not respond to the petitions “formally and only on the basis of the given manifestos, quickly satisfying the request[s] of the baptized Buryats,” regardless of “civil decisions and statutes.” The likely core of the problem was the requirement that those inquiring into the truth of the petitions quickly establish their veracity, which was effectively a judgment as to whether the person should remain within the church or not. The author argued that the filing of a petition requesting reinscription effectively constituted apostasy and constituted grounds on which, according to canon law, the church could excommunicate the petitioner. However, out of fulfillment of the church’s obligation to oversee “the salvation of men from sin, damnation, and death and true to [Christ’s] commandments,” the church could not decide to excommunicate its “lost and confused children” [zabliuzhdaiushchikhsia chad] without

considerably more effort than that mandated by the state. Such a step could not be taken until the church had

expended all the fatherly measures of Christ’s boundless love to reason with [the petitioners] and exhort them, and only then, when every effort to awaken in the hearts of the lost an awareness of the horrible religious crime of their ruinous decisions…turns out to be futile, can and should they be counted as apostates.67

The missionaries thus viewed the civil procedures established to oversee the transition as threatening their ability to see to the spiritual needs of the church’s members.

In Zabaikal’e, missionaries had not been given the limited authority over the administration of the inquiries into the petitions that their colleagues to the west received. Here, criticism of the state’s assumption of the church’s authority was much more direct and alleged a degree of intent in the state’s actions absent in criticisms from Irkutsk. In a document published in 1914 but likely written in 1905 or 1906, Archimandrite Efrem, the head of the Zabaikal’e mission, declared directly that the “rules and their clarifications by civil authorities…contradict the Word of God.” Here, he cited Matthew 18 15:17 and First Corinthians 5 2:6; the former enjoined church members to struggle with the issue of community members’ sins against each other within the community, while the latter asserted that the authority to dispense judgment and salvation belonged to God. Efrem declared that the issuance of the edicts and crafting of the petition process meant that the state had “claimed for itself the power to excommunicate [otluchat’] wavering and fallen sinners from the Church.” By selecting the terminology of excommunication and sin rather than other words such as perechislenie, or reinscription, used elsewhere to describe

67 “Otpadenie,” 300.
the process, Efrem maintained the assertion that the power the state had assumed fundamentally belonged to the church, even when it was in the state’s hands.68

**Narrating Failure**

By 1910, the petitions had slowed to a sporadic trickle. It had become clear to the missionaries that their inquiries to determine whether petitioners in reality met the standards for departure from Orthodoxy laid out by the law, or had signed onto the petitions of their own free will, were largely fruitless. Archbishop Serafim summed up the results of the investigations, writing, “before the eyes of the missionaries, the real state of things was uncovered, when almost all the baptized inorodtsy of the Tunka Valley openly declared that they were not Christians and that they had never been such…”69 While the possibility that there were many authentic converts among the mass of petitioners had initially supported missionary attempts to describe the situation as a result of the subversion of conversion by various authorities, the missionaries’ to turn up the widespread positive results they had initially anticipated through their inquiries undermined this proposition. Forced to find a new explanation for the transition between the mass conversions of the 1850s and 1860s and the events of 1905-1907, the missionaries argued that the state’s exploitation of the mission for its own political goals in the region had led them to cooperate closely with Buryat authorities in bringing about conversion. Explaining the conversions as a result of state pressure and coercion made the disappearance of the converts once state support for the mission vanished an unsurprising occurrence.

69 Serafim, “Doklad irkutskogo arkhiepiskopa Serafima,” 123.
From the very start of the affair, the missionaries had acknowledged, if quietly and never in early published reports, that some petitioners had been baptized in circumstances that prevented them from making a free choice about their religion. These converts had either never practiced Orthodoxy, or had practiced it only out of fear of legal repercussions for failing to fulfill their obligations. Dmitrii Nazemskii, one of the Tunka missionaries, reported to Kosygin in October 1906 that of twenty-six petitions he had looked into, all had been baptized not because of “internal conviction,” but due to unspecified interpersonal influences. They had ceased to practice Orthodoxy partly because they were surrounded by non-converts and were pulled into practicing “heathen rites;” at the same time, they had continued to attend church out of fear of “responsibility before the law.” Similarly, another Tunka missionary wrote in early 1906 that many converts in his region were “forcibly baptized Buryats” whose conversion had only “an external form.” They had seized upon the edicts to leave the church formally, even though they had long ago done so in actuality. The missionary went so far as to describe the overall mood among the Buryats as “optimistic.” As time passed and the totality of the departure of the Tunka Buryats from the church became clear, the mission’s leaders began to publicly use this formula to describe the conversions of all converts who had petitioned to leave the church.

Between 1910 and 1914, the mission settled into a single pattern of describing its history that depended on the idea that the early conversions of the Buryats had been compulsory, and consequentially only “external,” not reflecting personal belief or conviction. The conversions had taken place in such a manner because the state, both

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70 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 67, ll. 73-73ob.
71 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 114, ll. 26-26ob.
acting with and exploiting avaricious and self-promoting Buryat leaders, used conversion as a tool of “russification.” Within this system, the mission had come to see conversion the same way that the state did, as an instantaneous shift in an individual’s identity that was, in and of itself, meaningful. Because the state had been both the source of the initial conversions and the heavy-handed enforcer of church attendance and participation, it was not surprising that once the state removed itself from the missionary project, the converts left the church in droves. This method of explaining the apostasy was used in multiple articles and reports, ostensibly by different authors, that all drew on the same source material and narrated events in an identical fashion, sometimes even by including unattributed excerpts from each other.⁷２ The interlaced nature of these documents and the narrative’s appearance in Pravoslavnyi blagovestnik, the official journal of the Orthodox Missionary Society, as well as a final report on the matter of the apostasy submitted by Archbishop Serafim to the Holy Synod, suggests that this method of explaining what had happened had become the mission’s official line.

All of the reports argued that the regional government had established the system that led to the masses of meaningless baptisms in order to further its own political and security interests in the Tunka Valley, and worked with clerical authorities in a common mission to tie the region to Russia. M. Fiveiskii, using language also found in Serafim’s report, wrote that regional authorities had been intent to use the mission to promote “the russification [russifikatsiia] of the region” with the understanding that “converts would

⁷２ Published annual reports from the Irkutsk mission made brief references to events that match this pattern; I will be focusing on the more detailed histories laid out in Ioann, “Pravoslavnaya missiia sredi buriat, eia osobennosti i nedostatki,” PB no. 16 (August 1910): 172-180; Protoierei M. Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii Irkutskoi pravoslavnoi missii,” PB no. 1 (January 1914): 169-196 and no. 2 (January 1914): 129-158; and Serafim, “Doklad irkutskogo arkhipiskopa Serafima,” 104-126.
integrate with the Russian population, would live out Russian interests, and would
forever forget their connection to their relation, neighboring Mongolia.” The
government’s equation was simple, and posited conversion as an instantaneous change in
an individual’s affiliation: “If [an individual] is baptized into the Russian faith, it means
he is already not a Buryat, but Russian.” The mission thus argued that the government
used conversion as a tool of cultural and political integration.73

The mission came to espouse a similar view, whether willingly or due to
government influence. Fiveiskii and Serafim implied that this result of the church’s
commitment to support the state was undesired by the church: “The diocesan authorities,
going to assist in the work of the civil authorities on the russification of the inorodtsy,
unwillingly came to [the government’s] point of view.”74 Fiveiskii further emphasized the
mission’s subordination to the state, arguing that in its views towards baptism and actions
based on those views, the mission had acted “according to the advice, according to the
encouragement, according to the temptation [soblazn], according to the insistence, and
under the pressure of one or another authority.”75 However, while the two implied that
the mission had been pressured into reaching this conclusion, specific missionaries were
treated as active and willing participants in the policy. Archbishop Veniamin, who
became the prime illustration of mission policy following and supporting state policy in
treating conversion as a tool of russification, was portrayed as an eager advocate of this

73 Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii,” no. 1 (January 1914): 174; Serafim, 108. See also Ioann,
“Pravoslavnaia missiia sredi buriat,” 174.
74 Serafim, “Doklad Irkutskogo arkhiepiskopa Serafima,” 108; Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii,” no. 1
(January 1914): 174.
policy due to his own “conviction” about the significance of conversion.\footnote{Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii,” no. 1 (January 1914): 171.} Iakov Chistokhin, a Buryat missionary active in the Tunka Valley during the 1870s and 1880s, was described as sharing Veniamin’s views and arguing that Buryats should convert because of “the authority of Christianity as a state religion, the religion confessed by the Great Russian Ruler and His highest servants.” Because he spoke from this position, Chistokhin appeared to the Buryats as a “representative of higher Russian authorities” rather than a religious missionary.\footnote{Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii,” no. 2 (January 1914): 144.}

If baptism was an instantaneous change in which a Buryat became a Russian, baptizing the largest possible number of Buryats was in the interests of the state. To carry this out, the government acquired another set of allies: Buryat leaders. Once the government had partnered with the Buryat leaders to bring about conversions, the leaders also became the allies of the missionaries. The histories all fixed on the same series of examples as demonstrations of how the government’s desire for conversions and belief that Buryat authorities could bring them about en masse led the government to reward greedy and self-promoting individuals for their conversions with trappings of secular power and authority. In 1841, the “self-loving and vain” Bordoi Porushenov, taisha of the Tunka steppe duma, was baptized; eight hundred of his subordinates followed him. His godfather was General-Governor Piatnitskii; in 1844, Porushenov was made head of a special administrative division created specifically for baptized Buryats. Fiveiskii argued that Porushenov had converted and procured so many other candidates for baptism in order to secure his own power; Serafim declared that he had done so “solely from
avarice” and in order to secure his advantage over a competitor. Unfortunately for Porushenov, the government went on to persuade Zangei Khomakov, Porushenov’s competitor, to get baptized as well. Khomakov similarly found an elite sponsor, received large material benefits, and brought many followers with him. The church came to treat these leaders as a resource for increasing the numbers of converts just as the state did.

Within this narration, Buryat leaders’ conversions were hollow and undertaken solely for personal gain, but so were those of their followers. Pressure and force from Buryat authorities, but also material desire, were depicted as bringing ordinary Buryats to the baptismal font. Listing the material benefits offered to ordinary converts, the histories noted that in the middle of the nineteenth century, the tsar’ himself allotted two thousand rubles annually for gifts to baptized Tunka Buryats; the funds were distributed by the Buryat leaders. The mission itself similarly provided material incentives; under Archbishop Veniamin, missionaries regularly gave monetary gifts, clothing, or “brick tea,” a staple ingredient for a calorie-rich brew of tea, butter, and salt that was an essential winter food, to new converts; the historians argued that many got baptized simply for the gifts. With such a range of incentives in play, the historians suggested, it was unsurprising that many Buryats got baptized with no intention of abandoning their former religion. They were unwilling to fulfill basic Christian obligations, such as confession or baptizing newborn children. In such cases, though, the mission was able to

81 Ibid., 176.
82 Ibid., 188-189.
turn to its allies in both the civil and Buryat administrations to enforce converts’ adherence to church requirements. In short, the church’s and state’s treatment of conversion had transformed it into a hollow affair, but a hollow affair that was only supported by the exercise of state power against unwilling converts.83

In short, the missionaries, through analysis of their own situation, had come around to the very conclusion reached by the designers of the April edict ten years before: maintaining the status quo was not in the interests of the state, which sought to preserve its own authority, or in the interests of the church, which sought to support authentic conversion, whatever that might be. The readjustment caused by the edicts was thus, as Serafim wrote, a revelation of “the real state of things.” However, as the missionaries’ narrations of the cause of the mass departures of 1906-1907 indicate, the missionaries held the Russian government to blame for creating the situation that led to the departures in the first place.

Reimagining Mission?

As the magnitude of the departure became clear to the missionaries from 1906 onward, they devoted considerable effort to imagining how the mission should be redesigned to compensate for the shortcomings that had been revealed. Missionaries in Tunka held multiple meetings to discuss the state of the mission and make suggestions for its improvement in preparation for a general meeting of the Irkutsk mission in 1910, while the meeting itself sparked subsequent print discussions. Outside of Tunka, some missionaries began to include detailed suggestions for improvement in correspondence

with their superiors ostensibly dedicated to other issues. Their ideas presumed that
previous conversions, as established in the official narrative of the apostasy discussed
above, had been “external,” absent of any meaningful personal engagement with
Orthodoxy. However, their suggestions demonstrate that the upheaval did not, in fact,
cause the missionaries to think differently about their means of reaching out to the
Buryats than they had before.

The missionaries’ proposals for the recovery of the mission revolved around four
separate suggestions. As they had frequently done before, they argued that the mission’s
quality could be improved by attracting better-equipped, more dedicated staff and taking
measures to soften the exigencies of missionary life, such as increasing pay. Such
complaints, though, were standard for Orthodox clergy everywhere in Russia at this point
in time. More specific to the Baikal mission, the missionaries focused on the necessity of
improving knowledge of the Buryat language and the mission’s overall capacity to
communicate, both face to face and in print, a range of knowledge to the Buryats. This
would aid Buryats in the “mastery” [usvoenie] of a range of subjects, including
unspecified knowledge about Orthodoxy, but also practical knowledge about crafts,
agriculture, and housekeeping.84 The missionaries also argued for teaching and practicing
other forms of scientific knowledge that they associated with Russianness, in particular
medicine, which they had previously identified effective means of combating the appeal
of lamaism and shamanism. The context around the missionaries had shifted
dramatically. Nonetheless, they continued to see mission work as a combination of
education about Orthodoxy and attracting converts by means of demonstrating the

84 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 90, l. 36.
superiority of Russian imperial civilization. Ultimately, this suggests that they continued to regard Orthodoxy as a religion associated with what they viewed as a developmentally-advanced lifestyle; with development, the Buryats would inevitably realize the error of their ways.

This method of imagining conversion developed long before the mass apostasy occurred and the missionaries began to see association with the state as having a strongly negative impact on the mission’s ability to bring about authentic conversion. Indeed, the continuity between the missionaries’ views of mission before and after 1905-1907 begs the question of whether changes to the mission’s position vis-à-vis both Buryats and the state had any effect on what they believed they were doing, and how they believed it should be achieved. The magnitude of both events is indisputable. Even if the missionaries had been less than confident in Buryats’ conversions before 1905-1907, both the sheer numbers involved in the apostasy and the missionaries’ belief, at least initially, that the conversions of some of those leaving were authentic and were being destroyed, likely had a profound effect on them. Similarly, although the missionaries had found the state’s support for the mission before 1905 to be lacking, this was a far cry from their subsequent belief that the state had deliberately harmed the mission across the course of the centuries. The missionaries’ efforts to redesign the mission operated on the assumption that in the light of recent events, they needed new approaches to encourage authentic conversions and avoid the overt emphasis on russification that state contact had presumably lent the mission. However, their new approaches were, in fact, profoundly shaped by the mission’s previous patterns of engagement with the Buryats.
Excoriating the lack of linguistic knowledge among missionaries in the Tunka Valley, Kosygin argued that missionaries had been unable to do anything more than evangelize Buryats in a “language that was foreign to them.” Implying that knowledge of the language would have granted missionaries insight into the Buryat religious mindset, he wrote that by using Russian, the missionaries had failed to grapple with the “worldview of the inorodtsy and the peculiarities of their existence.” Instead, evangelization needed to have a “practical character” focused on the day-to-day lives of its subjects. While Kosygin was vague, describing what the missionaries would use their language skills for as “enlightenment,” he argued that Orthodox schools were part of the solution, but also suggested that the schools could do little under the conditions of Buryat life and agriculture. This broader ignorance was the “primary evil” that the mission faced.85

Kosygin believed the mission’s schools needed to be reformed along the lines of the Il’minskii system.86 Elsewhere, other missionaries reported new efforts to translate religious materials and plans to revise existing translations. All of this suggests that religious “enlightenment” continued to play a major role in the missionaries’ vision of the change they wished to enact among the Buryats. The Il’minskii schools primarily taught a course of basic theological education; they included native-language literacy education as a means of granting students first-hand access to translated religious texts, which was believed to be the best means of allowing them to comprehend and internalize the

85 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 90, ll. 33ob-34. Other missionaries placed similar emphasis on the importance of redesigned mission schools to the mission; see NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 62, l. 4ob, and f. 340 o. 1 d. 78 l. 7.
86 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 90, ll. 35ob-36, 42ob.
A similar emphasis on the importance of accessibility and comprehension was evident in Zabaikal’e, where Epifanii Kuznetsov, the head of the mission, announced an effort to modify the existing translation of morning and evening services, as well as the prayer for the Tsar’, into the Khori Buryat dialect. Kuznetsov argued that translating the services into Khori would make them “more conveniently understandable for the inorodtsy;” emphasizing the premium placed on comprehensibility, he said that in areas were Buryat or Tungus, the region’s non-Russian languages, were not understood, services should be carried out in “the Russian language, as [it is] more accessible for comprehension than Slavonic.” In short, the provision of religious knowledge in a comprehensible manner continued to be seen as a key part of combating religious ignorance, and the mission continued to draw on the same set of tactics for solving this problem that had led to the creation of the Irkutsk Translation Committee.

The missionaries also found scientific and popular materials to be appropriate targets of translation activities, indicating the broad ways in which the missionaries defined both “enlightenment” and their role in relation to it. While Kuznetsov wrote that the lives of early saints and excerpts from the biblical story of Solomon would be helpful to the mission, he also argued that translation efforts needed to include “articles and brochures about hygiene, crafts, and agriculture.” A 1915 overview of reform attempts within the mission advocated that missionaries use mission schools as a platform from

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87 Geraci, 119.
88 Epifanii Kuznetsov, “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907 godu,” PB no. 24 (December 1908): 315-316, 322. This marked the beginning of the Zabaikal’e mission’s effort to start a translation project separate from but in communication with the Irkutsk project; however, the endeavor does not appear to have produced publications. See NARB f. 191, o. 1, d. 108, ll. 26-26ob.
89 Kuznetsov, “Zabaikal’skaia missiia v 1907,” no. 24 (December 1908): 326.
which to teach about farming. Feodor Petrov, “Proekt reformy Irkutskoi pravoslavnoi duxhovnoi missii,” PB 3 (March 1915): 239.

Fiveiskii advocated the distribution of information of a “cleanly everyday-practical point of view,” such as pamphlets about housekeeping, gardening, crafts, and herding; Buryats, he suggested, were inclined by their very nature to take such materials seriously. These materials were not just part of the mission’s vision of what constituted enlightenment; they were a crucial method of drawing Buryats to enlightenment in the first place. Serafim argued that providing Buryats with scientific and informational materials was a method of demonstrating that the mission took them seriously and did not look down on them. Scientific literature could demonstrate the mission’s goodwill towards and esteem of the Buryats, attracting them to the mission in the first place. Serafim also recommended the translation of Russian folk epics [byliny] for the Buryats, suggesting that these stories, with their “hero-warriors and harmful evil powers” and their focus on the “children of the steppe,” could draw Buryats into reading the mission’s books and brochures by highlighting cultural commonalities.

Medicine continued to occupy a prime place in the missionaries’ efforts to assert an Orthodox alternative to the healing services provided by lamaism and shamanism. Comparing the relationship between western medicine and Orthodoxy to the medical practices of lamas and shamans, Kosygin asserted that there was a known connection between “health and morality:” the two were linked within a religion, as if they were under the roof of the same house. Consequently, providing medical care was a necessary component of a holistic approach to mission centered on understanding the spiritual

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90 Feodor Petrov, “Proekt reformy Irkutskoi pravoslavnoi duxhovnoi missii,” PB 3 (March 1915): 239.
91 Fiveiskii, “Iz istorii,” no. 2 (January 1914): 149.
92 Serafim, “Doklad Irkutskogo arkhiepiskopa Serafima,” 121.
needs of converts. The missionaries all argued that the missionary himself needed to assume an active role in providing medical care. Kosygin stated that missionaries needed to receive medical training as a part of their preparation for missionary service, while Mikhail Makhochkeev argued that missionaries needed to be properly equipped to provide “first aid” to any who showed up at missionary stations requesting medical attention. This is the only point within the missionaries’ discussions for the post-1905 rehabilitation of the mission at which they made any argument that cooperation with the government could be helpful to the mission; Makhochkeev asserted that the mission needed to persuade the government to place an educated fel’dsher at every missionary station.

While the Baikal missionaries had expressed doubts about the depth of Buryats’ conversions to Orthodoxy for decades, the mass apostasy of 1905-1907 was unanticipated, and cast the mission into a series of successive considerations of the nature of Buryat conversions pre-1905. These considerations drew on earlier understandings of Buryatness, but also involved a set of new calculations about the relationship between the mission, the Russian state, and Buryat authorities. Initially, missionaries in areas both more and less hard-hit by the apostasy asserted that a number of Buryat converts had truly converted to Orthodoxy. Although their practice and understandings of Orthodoxy were flawed, those flaws were to be expected, as conversion was a process that took generations, if not centuries, to complete. As the apostasy progressed and its magnitude became clear to the missionaries, they lost their conviction that the conversions had ever

93 NARB f. 340, o. 1, d. 90, ll. 35-35ob. See also Petrov, “Proekt reformy,” 241.
94 NARB f. 195, o. 1, d. 230, l. 8.
been authentic, describing them as “external” and undertaken out of necessity or material desire rather than conviction. The missionaries’ ruminations about the nature of Buryat conversions were intimately tied to their ideas about the exercise of pressure and authority within Buryat communities. Even as their understandings of Buryat conversion shifted, the missionaries consistently blamed the perpetual problems of social pressure from non-converts and abuse of authority by leaders for creating the situation. When Buryat conversions were believed to be at least partly authentic, living circumstances and Buryat leaders were blamed for suborning authentic conversions. After the missionaries switched to arguing most conversions had initially been false, they argued that the same set of structures had created the problem of false conversions. Ideas of the relationship between state authority and conversion underwent a similar transition. Initially, the missionaries blamed the government for intervening in the church’s spiritual oversight of convert development and argued that the government had appropriated from the church the ability to excommunicate apostates. With the abandonment of the premise of authentic conversion, the mission settled into a pattern of explaining the phenomenon of “external” conversions by arguing that the state had sought to use the mission as a tool for russifying the population, in the process tying the mission to exploitative Buryat leaders.

The missionaries treated the events of 1905-1907 as having exposed the need for a new approach to mission. To this end, they attempted to iterate a revised version of what constituted missionary activity that would bring about authentic conversions. In their efforts to do so, they returned to themes prevalent in earlier discussions about the mission’s role, activities, and intentions among the Buryats. The missionaries argued for
clearer translations of a broader selection of religious texts, coupled with better linguistic knowledge of the Buryats, the better to missionize to them in a manner that allowed them to comprehend Orthodoxy, but also put the missionaries in a position to grapple with the realities of their worldview. Simultaneously, the missionaries continued to argue that the mission should work to spread a common Russian imperial culture based on specific scientific and cultural commonalities. In short, although they described themselves as undertaking a new effort in a new context, their response was shaped and informed by the mission’s earlier experiences among the Buryats.
CONCLUSION

If the missionaries who attended the 1909 conference on missionary affairs in the Irkutsk Diocese had been polled on whether or not they believed their efforts to convert the Buryats were meeting with success, they would have said no. After 1905, many of the missionaries’ earlier fears that the Buryats were not, in fact, meeting various metrics for authenticity of conversion gained reality in the form of a mass departure of Buryats from Orthodoxy to lamaism as a formal confessional status. Drawing on language used by Buryats in petitions and their perceptions of encounters with Buryats, the missionaries viewed the departure as a rejection of Orthodoxy, Russianness, and a homogenizing model of empire in favor of a mass Buryat identity based on a refusal to integrate which grounded itself in a model of empire that both encouraged and constructed separatism. This method of understanding the aftermath of 1905 drew on the intellectual products of the missionaries’ earlier encounters with the Buryats. However, it ignored many of the products of those same encounters, which had served to redraw Buryatness along Russian lines, effectively accomplishing a form of integration, albeit one very different than that which the missionaries sought.

Across the nineteenth century, a series of face-to-face and broad intellectual encounters between missionaries and Buryats conceptually emplaced Buryatness within the Russian Empire by means of the construction of ideas about Buryatness, Orthodoxy, and empire and the relationship of the three to each other. Buryatness gained a specific location in relation to circulating imperial ideas about law, citizenship, the role and rights of women, science, religion and nationality, conceptual emplacements that had specific
implications for Buryat belonging within the empire’s culture and geography, imagined and real. Some of the key means of emplacing Buryatness within the empire have proved lasting, providing materials through which Buryatness was subsequently constructed by Buryat nationalists and Soviet scholars and bureaucrats among others, and through which it continues to be constructed today.

The construction of Buryatness and emplacement of it within the empire were accomplished through explorations of the relationships of Buryatness, Orthodoxy, and empire. Empire and Orthodoxy emerged changed from the encounters, even as Buryatness did. Through the encounters, various conceptions of empire were applied to the human landscape of the Baikal region and interpreted in relation to the region’s population. This process contributed to empire’s existence in the region as a local, rather than abstract or distant, phenomena with a specific presence and effect. Through its constant juxtaposition against and interplay with Buryatness, Orthodoxy assumed a number of characteristics, particularly in relation to modernity, with which it was not associated elsewhere in Russia. These became the primary standards by which the missionaries and some Buryat converts argued that conversion would change the Buryats. The missionaries’ post-1905 pessimism was thus, in notable respects, unwarranted. Not only did the missionaries not realize how their mission itself had developed out of contact with the Buryats, but they did not see the deep changes that their presence in the region had brought about within Buryatness, much less identify how those changes had oriented Buryatness towards Russia.

The significant effect that encounters between missionaries and Buryats had by emplacing the region with the empire highlights the generative power of “ordinary”
human contact in the construction of empire and its epistemological structures. The chief
agents in this process were rank-and-file Orthodox missionaries and low-ranking
members of the Orthodox hierarchy, scribes embedded in Buryat communities, average
Buryats, and mid-level officials working in Buryat self-administration structures. And
while some of the encounters in question were intellectual and not infrequently
undertaken by missionaries based in Irkutsk who had minimal contact with Buryats
outside of the city, others were grounded in hundreds of meetings and negotiations rooted
in ordinary life events such as marital and community conflict. While these encounters
were shaped by a number of factors including imperial administrative policies and
prevailing methods of imagining the empire, the encounters effectively applied,
interpreted, and negotiated the meanings of administrative structures and discourse about
the empire in the context of daily life, building empire on the ground. In the case of the
Buryat language, they also generated what later came to be a staple administrative
category within the successor states to the Russian empire, thus shaping the very
structures that gave frame to the encounters in the first place.

The generative nature of ordinary encounters suggests that in the Baikal region,
the empire’s power to incorporate territory into itself was located not within
administrative or formal political structures, but rather outside of them. By fostering
specific sets of terms on which identity was understood and could be discussed and
allowing for the circumstance of everyday encounters of the type which I have analyzed
here, empire created an environment in which imperial subjects were subtly reshaped in
ways that inclined them towards the empire itself. Administrative and political structures,
as well as overarching discourses about the nature of empire, played a significant role in
establishing the terms in question. In and of themselves, though, such structures did not reshape the empire’s population. Rather, the encounters in which the concepts and terms that spun out of such structures were applied performed this function.

To say that the empire’s population was reshaped by the empire itself does not mean that the result was “assimilation,” “Russification,” or any of the related terms that late nineteenth century Russian theorists of empire would have used to describe empire’s ideal effect on its subjects. What was produced in the Baikal region was effectively a form of imperial difference that, ironically, gained its material from the ideas about homogenization as empire’s natural effect that predominated in the late nineteenth century. Buryatness developed as a quality that was held to be distinct from the multiple dimensions of Russianness out of attempts to explore how and when Buryats could be incorporated into Russianness or Orthodoxy. Through this same process, it came to include characteristics that were interpreted as inflexibility, permanence, and hostility to change. However, this reified Buryatness had been influenced by the empire itself, coming to be shaped around imperially-promoted customary law, authority systems, and religious categories, and in opposition to aspects of Russianness and Orthodoxy that were presumed by the missionaries to be representative of homogenizing imperial cultural. The late nineteenth century empire thus produced a category that directly challenged assimilationist pretenses, but simultaneously emplaced the Buryats and Buryatness within the empire.
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