



УДК 29+9(С)

ББК 86.37+86.39+63.3(2Р5)

Архиепископ Вениамин и модные интеллектуалы: поиск значения «реальный буддизм»

А. Пек

Университет Северной Каролины, США

Развитие востоковедения в конце XIX в. повлекло всплеск интереса к буддийским концептам и обрядам среди русской интеллигенции. Модное увлечение общества буддизмом и псевдонаучными концептами «буддийских загадок» поразило консерваторов христианства. Находясь во главе миссии, распространяющей христианство среди забайкальских буддистов, архиепископ Иркутска и Нерчинска (Благодетель) свидетельствовал о том, что идеализированное восприятие мира в буддизме было всего лишь модным бессмысленным веянием. Он ссылаясь не только на свои собственные знания и опыт, но также приводил доводы, опираясь на научные исследования российских востоковедов. Интеллектуальный оппонент Вениамина, философ Владимир Викторович Лесевич, был сторонником всеобъемлющей и беспристрастной оценки буддизма как неевропейской традиции. В работе приведен также семантический анализ «истинного буддизма» и показан миссионерский опыт в Забайкалье.

Ключевые слова: тибетский буддизм, буддизм в русской философии, теософия, миссионеры православия, востоковеды, архиепископ Вениамин (Богословов), В. В. Лесевич.

ARCHBISHOP VERSUS PHILOSOPHER

At the end of the nineteenth century the conservative supporters of the religious policies of the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod Konstantin Pobedonostsev faced new and unexpected challenges. Scholarly research in Buddhism, its history, philosophy, teaching, and rituals, conducted according to Western standards, triggered a broad intellectual interest in the subject. This knowledge being supplemented by new kinds of fashionable social fascination in spirituality with pseudo-scientific concepts of “Buddhist mysteries”, astonished conservative Christians. Mergen S. Ulanov sees the growth of interest among Russian intellectuals in Buddhism as well as the spread of eccentric notions of theosophy or anthroposophy, as a result of crisis in the Russian Orthodox Church [1]. Intellectual ferment and a search for alternative forms to fulfill the spiritual needs of individuals and societies had been additionally triggered by recent scientific discoveries, technological developments, and social movements challenging traditional structures of social and religious life. Siberian Orthodox Christian missionaries in the Transbaikalia had to confront these new phenomena at the end of the century. One of them was Archbishop Veniamin.

In 1890, during the twilight of his missionary career, the 65-year-old archbishop of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk Veniamin (Blagonravov), the leading figure in missionary efforts to Christianize Transbaikalian Buddhist Buriats, experienced deep distress, expressed in the article he wrote and published in the local ecclesiastical newspaper *Irkutskie Eparkhialnye Vedomosti*. The source of Veniamin's anguish was a text he read in the third issue of *Vostochnoe Obozrenie* edited January 14, 1890, which published the bibliographical note considering works of Vladimir Victorovich Lesevich, a philosopher and recent political exile. Popular journal *Vostochnoe Obozrenie* was edited by Nikolai Mikhailovich Iadrintsev in St. Petersburg and from 1887–1888 in Irkutsk [2]. Both Iadrintsev and Lesevich represented views that were scarcely tolerable to a conservative Archbishop who started a vigorous polemic.

Iadrintsev, a distinguished scholar with considerable knowledge of archeology, ethnography and geography, was the author of the renowned work *Sibir kak kolonia*, first published in 1882. Iadrintsev discussed in this work his views on Siberian regionalism and separatism. He argued that the Siberians developed as a separate and unique type, having a different history as the Russians perceived them as oppressors [3]. These views were rejected by the Archbishop. From Veniamin's point of view, Siberia was indisputably an Asian part of Russia—indeed, it was itself Russia. Despite his animosity and differences of opinion the Archbishop was familiar with the newspaper, not only reading articles from the popular and prestigious *Vostochnoe Obozrenie* but also publishing his own text there [4].

Veniamin addressed his article to Lesevich, the author of a controversial article discussing problems of religious freedom and tolerance within Buddhist tradition, which attracted European readers and created a new breed of Buddhists of European origin. Outraged by what he read Veniamin immediately published in response in the fifth issue of *Irkutskie Eparkhialnye Vedomosti* of 1890 edition a polemical essay entitled *Nastoiashchii Buddizm*. The same text was simultaneously published in the fifth issue of *Vostochnoe Obozrenie* in January 28, 1890. From Veniamin's point of view, Lesevich showed inappropriate enthusiasm for Buddhism, observing that in the recent times Buddhism was attracting much attention from European scholars and European societies in general. Lesevich presumably stated that, in addition to the clearly theoretical interests of Western scholars, described as Orientalists, a new phenomenon of European and Russian fascination with this Asian tradition had begun to develop [5].

Lesevich already published several articles about various aspects of Buddhism, which were not mentioned by Veniamin, but could have even more infuriated the Archbishop. However, Veniamin referred specifically to Lesevich's discussion of religious freedom in the edicts of Emperor Asioka [6], and the comments published by the *Vostochnoe Obozrenie*. Lesevich responded to criticism and even to an accusation of betrayal of his cultural origins in the polemical article entitled: *Gde sleduet iskat' 'nastoiashchii buddizm'?* His response was published almost immediately in 1890 in the journal *Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii* [7]. Their exchange of arguments and occasionally sarcastic remarks made the articles of both authors interesting and intellectually provocative to readers. Why did the

Archbishop decide to respond so violently to Lesevich's rather neutral and balanced observations about the ancient king Asioka and write his polemic? Who was Lesevich and why was he so important in Veniamin's eyes?

Vladimir Viktorovich Lesevich (1837–1905), who caused Veniamin's prompt polemical response, was a well-known positivist philosopher and publicist. He underwent higher education at the St. Petersburg School of Engineering and the Academy of the General Staff. Representing "critical positivism," Lesevich followed Auguste Comte and tried to utilize the principle of critical philosophy. According to Andrzej Walicki, "Lesevich devoted his chief works to critical reflection on the origins and development of "scientific philosophy." He was interested in epistemological questions. He believed "that Comtean positivism represented a turning point in the history of philosophy... Lesevich was convinced that 'scientific philosophy' could be of tremendous social significance: it would help to overcome routine and traditionalism, it makes clear the needs for changes in different fields, and encourages scientists to concentrate their efforts on solving problems in the public interest" [8].

Early in his life Lesevich broke with traditional religion and fell under the influence of positivistic philosophy, opposing theology and any kind of metaphysics. He advocated philosophical empiriocriticism as the only scientific point of view. Lesevich followed Comte's concept of a "religion of humanity" according to which the society went through three phases: theological, metaphysical, and scientific [9]. While maturing, Lesevich turned to psychology and empiricism for establishing the conditions of knowledge, characteristically publishing in the journal *Voprosy filosofii i psihologii*, which published contemporary studies in both disciplines. Pavel K. Mokievski in a paper published in 1890, described Lesevich as one of the major contributors to the Russian journal *Voprosy filosofii i psichologii*. According to Mokievski, Lesevich was influenced by Schopenhauer and his disclosure: "It is easier to point out the mistakes and delusions of a great mind than to give a clear and full account of its qualities" [10]. The author mentioned also the second philosophical work of Lesevich, *Letters on Scientific Philosophy*, wherein discussed the major question "what is scientific philosophy?"

Attracted to the revolutionary movement, Lesevich became involved in Populist activities. Exiled to Siberia in 1879, after his return he lived under police surveillance in Poltava and Tver and was not allowed to return to St. Petersburg until 1888. During this time he developed an intellectual interest in Buddhism, its history and doctrine; this became well known by the end of 1880s. Mokievsky, expressing his great respect for Lesevich's achievements, added this information about his current fascination: "It is to be noted that Monsieur Lesevich is now zealously studying Buddhism" [11]. Mokievsky wrote about an article on "Religious Liberty according to the edicts of King Asoka the Great" with appreciation. He published his article in 1890, the same year when Archbishop Veniamin started his controversy with Russian enthusiasts for Buddhism based on the same text. Archbishop Veniamin had understanding for popular recognition of Lesevich publications when he found or someone called his attention to the article in *Vostochnoe Obozrenie*.

Lesevich's intellectual fascination with Buddhism became well-known not just among Russian intelligentsia. In his famous work on Siberian exile, George Kennan mentioned Lesevich, "who was in exile in Yeniseisk, is one of the best known writers in Russia upon philosophy, morals and the history and influence of Buddhism" [12]. *Abraham Yarmolinsky, the chief of the Slavonic division at the New York Public Library, provided information about letters from Lesevich to Kennan during time of his exile and a photograph of Lesevich, stored in the Kennan collection* [13].

“THOSE LIBERALS”: INTELLECTUALS AND THEOSOPHISTS

Veniamin portrayed Lesevich as a major opponent, presumably blindly propagating Buddhism. However, it would be implausible to characterize this positivist philosopher as a convert acting with a neophyte's zeal. Lesevich perceived religion as a social and psychological phenomenon, which should be discussed in a broad historical and political context. James H. Billington, analyzing the philosophical concepts of the Comtean new religion of humanity, compares it to "Catholicism without Christianity," also pointed testifying to the influence of these ideas on the Russian intelligentsia [14]. Comte's ideas became popular in Russia from the 1860s. Onward Billington describes Lesevich as a liberal "who later courted Buddhism." The development of his interest in Buddhism was associated with his interest in positivism, the idea of the new religion of humanity, and participation in the Russian intellectual ferment of that time [15].

The Ukrainian scholar Iuri Zavgorodnij [16] expressed a similar opinion to Billington's interpretation of Lesevich's approach to religions. Zavgorodnij described Lesevich's interest in Buddhism as scholarly and intellectual. According to him, Lesevich researched Buddhism strictly as a religious and philosophical phenomenon. The eight Lesevich's studies of Buddhism, mostly based on works published in French, German, English, and sometimes Russian, were published between 1886 and 1902 [17]. Following the typical for the end of the nineteenth century Western intellectual perception of Buddhism, Lesevich analyzed differences between the original teachings of Buddha and their evolution in concepts of the "southern" Hinayana and "northern" Mahayana traditions. Fascinated by the teachings of Buddha as presented in Western publications, he paid more attention to the southern stream as supposedly closer to original Buddhism. Perceiving "original Buddhism" according to his own worldview and ideals, the philosopher presented an idealized image of ethical perfection, of Buddhist benevolence, peacefulness, and serenity of mind, of infinite tolerance. Expressing his admiration for the Buddhism he emphasized its moral superiority in all its manifestations [18].

However, Lesevich avoided any simplifications, perceiving contemporary Buddhism as a polymorphic and equivocal phenomenon. On several occasions he expressed a criticism of Buddhist metaphysics. Following a growing social interest in psychological and psychiatric research and novel interpretations of religious phenomena in the context of psychopathology, he questioned some Buddhist modes of reasoning, and some practices, especially practicing the isolation of the monks from the society as abnormality. Scientific methods of treatment developed by modern psychology and psychiatry could exclusively help to overcome mental

problems caused by some religious practices. Unfortunately, according to Lesevich, Buddhism neglected scientific research and acknowledgement of the blessings of Western science which constituted its major weakness [19].

Ulanov, in his study of the role of Buddhism in Russian philosophy, also analyzed Lesevich's position in the context of his skeptical view of traditional religions in general. Ulanov argued that in the essay entitled, "The Buddhist Moral Type," Lesevich presented Buddhist teaching as "abstract" and as failing to address questions of reality; it represented a shallow metaphysics in comparison with the European philosophical tradition. He ascribed to Buddhist indifferentism, mysticism, a form of quietism, pointing out similarities between Christian mystical ideas of annihilation of the self in contemplation and Buddhist meditation. To a positivist philosopher all these terms had pejorative connotations. According to Lesevich, Buddhism was useless and misleading, disconnecting people from reality and society. However, Lesevich appreciated the superiority of Buddhist morality over the European/Christian moral system [20].

Lesevich explicitly stated that Christian missionary efforts could not succeed in their confrontation with Buddhism. Christian missionaries supporting their religious teaching with arguments in form of the technological superiority of European civilization he juxtaposed with the superiority of Buddhist teaching exceeding spiritual and moral values. He optimistically concluded that contacts between Buddhists and Christians could introduce Europeans to the transcendental values present in a non-European tradition. Confrontation of Buddhist and Christian ideas in Asian countries demonstrated that missionaries of all Christian denominations could not effectively gain converts: during the last decades of the nineteenth century "a reverse effect" could be observed. Buddhists started to teach and convert Christians, and it was Buddhism which gained supporters among Westerners, Europeans and Americans [21].

The positivist idea of the creation of a "new religion of humanity", a kind of syncretic synthesis of existing forms of religion constituted another controversial subject. Lesevich, observing the development of new churches and denominations, and theological debates within Christianity, especially within American Protestantism, as well as the constant evolution of emanations of Buddhism, concluded that there were possibilities and even a necessity for construction of a new universal religion of modern-day humankind [22]. According to him, traditional forms of Christianity could not satisfy a modern population at the end of the nineteenth century. The new era required a new form of pan-monotheism, a universal religion of the future, perplexing form of neo-Buddhism. On the other hand, Buddhism as preached to Europeans and propagated in the Western world offered two possible choices: a pure, rational version of the teachings of Buddha and a darker version overfilled with mysticism and fantasy. Lesevich himself expressed his hesitation fully to accept a doctrine of Tibetan Buddhism in its contemporary Euro-American version [23].

Although Lesevich's interpretations appeared well balanced, Archbishop Veniamin singled out his comments several outrageous and infuriating elements. What was absolutely unacceptable to him as a church official and missionary? Veniamin's response to Lesevich's viewpoints presented in the journal *Vostochnoe*

Obzrenie considered three primary matters. First, religious freedom and religious tolerance were perceived by contemporary scholars to be signs of highly developed civilization. For Veniamin, however, debate about religious freedom challenged the rationale of Christian missions and the concept of European/Christian superiority. Secondly, Veniamin could not under any circumstances understand and accept the audacious prediction of Buddhism being a future religion for Europe. The third problem perceived as equally outrageous was a new phenomenon: Buddhists of European origin.

Upon reading Lesevich's views, Veniamin expressed frustration as a clergyman and missionary. He felt that some intellectual debaters of the second half of the nineteenth century, of whom Lesevich was an example, targeted the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian reason d'état. His understanding that the Church could be perceived as a declining institution offering empty rituals, and causing increased social isolation triggered a need for debate. He rejected any suggestion that the era of modernization, industrialization and secularization could make Christianity irrelevant in Russian social and individual lives. Although he could observe increasing disappointment with Orthodoxy, the idea of the necessity of a new religion of humanity, and in particular the idea of Buddhism as a new religion for Europe or, in broader sense, a future religion of the Western world sounded scandalous, blasphemous, and frightening to him.

Vladimir V. Lesevich was the sole adversary named in Veniamin's article, mentioned five times in the first two paragraphs; however, the Archbishop addressed his criticism to a broader intellectual circle. Using strong expressions, Veniamin attacked specifically "those crazy liberals" like one Lesevich and a group of few theosophists searching for a fictional esoteric Buddhism, which existed only in their own imagination [24]. The arguments displayed by Veniamin juxtaposed the missionaries' personal experience of "real Buddhism" with the idealized, bookish knowledge of a new breed of Russian enthusiasts. This argument had its validity. Lesevich, despite the interest in Buddhism he developed during his Siberian exile, never had any personal contact with followers of Tibetan Buddhism. The primary source of his knowledge was extended study of mostly French and German publications, for example *Revue de l'histoire des religions*. His fascination was deeply rooted in the intellectual propensity of that time. Among several his contemporary intellectuals studying Buddhism there was, for example, the well-known Ukrainian poet Ivan Iakovlevich Franko, who explained his interest rather as intellectual fascination than a practical one. In the case of many Russian intellectuals, their interest inhered in a fashionable selection of readings rather than a desire for conversion and to become a Buddhist [25].

The search for mystical experience, spiritualism, and the mysteries of the Orient became a frequent element of fashionable society's life. Not only Western European intellectuals' fascination with Buddhism sparked a kindred interest among members of the Russian intelligentsia. It was also articulated by increasingly popularity of the theosophical movement. Maria Carlson, in her work on the history of this movement in Russia, presents a long list of prominent figures in Russian cultural life associated with theosophy. Among them were the religious

philosopher Vladimir Soloviev, the critic Dmitrii Merezhkovskii and his wife, and the poet Andrei Belyi. Carlson described them as “representatives of the creative and God-seeking intelligentsia» [26].

Theosophy appeared at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of the “frustration and dissatisfaction of a growing number of thinking people who felt intellectually and spiritually cut adrift, unwilling or unable to choose between the sterility of scientific positivism and the impotence of a diminished church” [27]. The Theosophical Society of Madame Blavatsky was an expression of her fascination with Tibetan Buddhism at a time when scholars expressed their preference for the southern Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhism as the “real Buddhism,” which reflected the original teaching of Buddha. Blavatsky developed her admiration for its Tibetan form. She even claimed to be a Tibetan Buddhist, although “Tibet and the Tibetans were, in the Theosophical teaching, purely imaginary objects» [28].

Lesevich several times addressed the New York Theosophical Society and its interest in Tibetan Buddhism. Despite the questionable reputation of Elena Petrovna Blavatsky, née Gan (Hahn von Rottenstein) or Madame Helena Blavatsky, theosophy became popular in Russia in the 1880s. Presentation of the Theosophical Society by journal *Russkaia Mysl* in 1887 included Lesevich’s article “Noveishe dvizhenia v Buddizmie” together with two other text–Russian translations of works of the prominent theosophists, poem written by Sir Edward Arnold and Colonel Henry Steel Olcott’s, cofounder of Theosophical Society, *Buddhist Catechism* [29].

In the final part of his article about theosophy and its Buddhist obsession, Lesevich exhibited confident skepticism. Flourishing European and American interests in Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and mystery he put down as complete nonsense. He perceived their understanding of Buddhism to be based on misconceptions and misunderstandings. He treated rumors spread by the members of the Society about some mysterious and presumably ancient manuscripts supposedly obtained Tibet with even more skepticism. Vague stories about secret “brother-monks” passing on secret teachings considering methods of obtaining control over the powers of the nature and within the human body he treated with disbelief, clandestinely suggesting they were fraud. Their belief in the existence of a personal God was clearly different from Buddhist concepts. The same was true of teachings about humans reflecting divine nature and power [30]. Lesevich characteristically separated himself from theosophists, consequently using the words “them” or “Theosophists”.

The questionable reputation of Blavatsky and the ambivalent reception of the Theosophical movement in Russia changed in 1890, when Vladimir Soloviev published an essay considering the movement. Soloviev, embracing theosophy, clearly stated “that true ‘theosophy’ and ‘Buddhism’ are, in fact, mutually exclusive” [31]. The concept of God, he continued, was taken from Christianity; however, theosophy was “an anti-religious, anti-philosophical, and anti-scientific doctrine” [32]. Anticipating possible criticism of Buddhologists, the theosophists developed their own mythological version of secret teachings from the Himalayas. Soloviev’s article helped Blavatsky establish her movement in Russia in a more prestigious manner. However, it did not clarify understanding of the distinctions between Buddhist

and theosophist doctrines. Theosophists' constant references to Tibetan Buddhism elicited responses not exclusively from scholars and orientalists.

Archbishop Veniamin, representing a strong sense of Christian and Western superiority, could not accept the Russian enthusiasm for Buddhism. He perceived Asian traditions as obviously inferior, inevitably to be subjected to Westernization in the "civilizing process" of Christianization. Buddhism, according to Veniamin, constituted a fine example of primitive superstitions and false beliefs. For lifelong missionaries the information about the growing popularity of Buddhism among Europeans was scandalous, difficult to accept and understand. The only possible reason for it lay in public ignorance about the "real nature" of Buddhism or, specifically, Lamaism. Those who knew the real face of this tradition would recognize the silliness of this new fashion, and Veniamin included scholars and missionaries in the category of knowledgeable and reasonable people who could see through such nonsense.

FASHIONABLE NONSENSE

Contesting the fascination of Russian intellectuals, liberals and theosophists considering Buddhism, Archbishop Veniamin vigorously debated their idealized and therefore favorable manner of portraying Buddhist beliefs. In his eyes their glorification of Buddhism was an artificial construct unconnected with the reality known to Transbaikalian missionaries. He argued that the supposedly sophisticated philosophical system and religious tolerance did not exist in Tibetan Buddhist reality and practice. Veniamin, a brilliant debater and inflexible conservative with a strong sense of self-righteousness, sturdily disliked ideas propagated by intellectuals like Lesevich and the supporters and followers of the Theosophical Society. He spoke of them with the greatest disgust, dismay and incredulity. He could not understand their fascination with what he perceived as simply a primitive Asian cult. From his viewpoint, religions such as Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, or Lamaism, were equally erroneous and misleading examples of the inferior "pagan traditions".

Archbishop Veniamin viewed the Russian intelligentsia's fascination with Buddhism in the last decades of the nineteenth century as "fashionable nonsense. The term "fashionable nonsense" is borrowed here from Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont's discussion of incorrect and incompetent usage of scientific concepts by postmodernists [33]. It accurately reflects the impressions and feelings expressed by Veniamin. In the article published in the *Irkutskie Eparkhalnye Vedomosti*, he used expressions such as "nonsense" or "liberalnoe iurodstvo" (liberal idiocy) [34]. The content of this article and its strong language clearly showed that Veniamin perceived Western and European, therefore Russian obsession with Buddhism to be "fashionable nonsense". Veniamin argued that such enthusiasm was based on misconceptions, misperceptions, and ignorance of the religious and cultural realities of Buddhism, realities he knew and understood.

Veniamin's powerful response to the new intellectual "fashionable nonsense" was not unique in his contemporary world of Western Christian civilization. Tomoko Masuzawa, in her work on the nineteenth century invention of a concept of world religions, presents several Western scholars, such as Max Müller, German orientalist and professor at Oxford University and Frank Field Ellinwood, professor

of comparative religion at the University of the City of New York, who expressed similar concerns and frustrations. Masuzawa discussed their responses to concepts concerning the relationships between Buddhism and Christianity distributed in popular culture through journal articles, books and other publications. These resembled Veniamin's perceptions and arguments. Both Müller and Ellinwood dismissed sensational séances of such groups as the theosophists or esoteric Buddhists as fashionable nonsense.

In 1891 in New York F. F. Ellinwood published lectures expressing his opinion that the development of sensational popular journalism in the United States helped spread pseudo-scientific theories more easily than in England. According to him, these highly questionable ideas "were fuelled largely by individuals with dubious qualifications, self-aggrandizing obscurants and suspected charlatans who maliciously averred, or else mendaciously and stupidly believed, that Buddhism had the primary and originary status over Christianity" [35]. Archbishop Veniamin, like Ellinwood, defended Christian superiority and supremacy thus blamed liberals and the secular press for spreading false statements about Buddhism. Both Siberian Orthodox Archbishop Veniamin and American Professor Ellinwood published almost simultaneously their ripostes to such "fashionable nonsense" using similar arguments.

American scholar Donald Lopez argued that the Theosophical Society "was in many ways a response to Darwin, yet rather than seeking in religion a refuge from science, it attempted to found a scientific religion, one that accepted the new discoveries in geology and embraced an ancient and esoteric system of spiritual evolution more sophisticated than Darwin's" [36]. In response to the intellectual and psychological need of contemporary, nineteenth century society, theosophists searched for mystical mysteries hidden in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Having a profound impact not only on Russian but also on Western interests in and perceptions of Buddhism in general, members of the Theosophical Society offered their own understanding and interpretations, which were questioned by Orientalists and researchers on Buddhism.

Veniamin astutely declared theosophical theories were a fallacy, along with other popular interpretations of Buddhism. For this lifelong missionary, the phenomenon of reversed religious and cultural fascinations expressed in the flourishing interest of Christian Russians in Buddhism was scarcely comprehensible. From Veniamin's point of view Lesevich himself and a few eccentric members of Theosophical Society who preached such novel ideas were merely arrogant and ignorant. The scholarly skeptic criticism made him suspect when conscious of dishonesty and attempts to deceive their readers or audience. He argued that they were not obsessed by "real Buddhism" but by an image of Buddhism artificially created in their minds. Veniamin presented himself as an expert on the subject, believing that his missionary practice in the Transbaikal and decades of discourse with Buddhist lamas had given him a comprehensive understanding of the true realities of Buddhist teachings.

The Archbishop was astonished and angered by expressions used by his adversaries who critically described Western, Eurocentric, and Christian patterns of

thinking and belief in their own superiority as emblematic of “European barbarians” or “savages” [37]. Reversed juxtaposition of the “civilized” and “barbarians” seemed to be very offensive for the Christian missionary. The Archbishop decided to refer to acknowledged authority of the leading Russian orientalists. He wisely chose university professors with established professional positions, such as Vasilii Pavlovich Vasiliev, Ivan Pavlovich Minaev, and Aleksei Matveevich Pozdneev to prove his point. The Archbishop consciously referred to distinguished university professors acknowledged by society to be intellectual authorities. He understood the popular perception that missionary opinions could easily be accused of being biased. Missionaries were under suspicion of portraying adversaries in an erroneous and unfair way. Scholars’ opinions, on the other hand, were seen as objective, scientific, and well balanced [38].

LESEVICH’S RESPONSE TO VENIAMIN

In immediate response to Veniamin’s article Lesevich expressed his great surprise that his scholarly and neutral essay about King Asioka could have had such immense impact on one reader and caused his irritation (*razdrazhenie*) [39]. In a well-structured polemical article Lesevich debated the opinions of his adversary with politeness and irony. The tone differed significantly from the emotional tone used by Veniamin. Lesevich respectfully disagreed with the “anonymous author”—Veniamin signed his text as V.E.K.—pointing out fallacies and weaknesses in his adversary’s patterns of thinking and argumentation. His opponent assumed the right to call a philosopher’s opinions “*liberalnoe iurodstvo*”. Lesevich felt obligated to argue without using comparably insulting expressions. However, sarcasm and sometimes mild irony were present through the entire text, for example in remark that the use of extensive quotations by Veniamin from the works of leading scholars-orientalists did not make these opinions any more valid. It was easy to find supporting quotations in scholarly works; however, it was much more difficult to comprehend their research.

The arguments presented considered three issues discussed by Veniamin: the first was idolatry; the second was moral and sexual corruption, and the third was the historical role of Buddhism. Lesevich rejected the term “idolatry” as a description of Buddhism, and called readers’ attention to the fact that quotations provided by his opponent did not prove the “idolatrous character” of Buddhist worship. He proffered the daring statement that deification of objects and individuals belonged to recognized religious systems. The existence of artistic images and specifically of sacred sculptures was common in the Catholic tradition which could lead to a conclusion that Catholicism was a form of idolatry. Finally, he boldly reminded readers that there was a sculptural representation of Jesus Christ in the Russian Orthodox Church – figure of the Savior in Moscow. However, he concluded, not a soul would suspect the Orthodox Christianity of being idolatrous [40].

Lesevich warned that simplified statements based on superficial observations could lead to entirely false conclusions. Gross oversimplification could be detected in the belief that that Buddhism is solely responsible for the social, economic, and technological underdevelopment of Eastern Asia. Stereotypes and generalizations overlooked the complexity and diversity of the Buddhist world, leading to further

misunderstanding. Generalizations based on individual cases and concerning two major vices, sexual misconduct and drunkenness, were illogical [41]. Finally, Lesevich posed a fundamental question: which Buddhism is the “real” one? Distinctions in theory and practice and in regional and cultural diversity should be treated as secondary to basic belief. “Real” Buddhism is to be found in the law, in Buddhist books, in the scriptures. Whoever limited his knowledge to superficial observations without have studying their scriptures would understand nothing of “real Buddhism,” and should not feel qualified to hold or disregard opinion on the subject [42].

DICHOTOMIES IN PERCEPTION

Two fascinating public debates, a vigorous exchange of intellectual ideas, and of religious and philosophical reflections, proved the multidimensional nature of the understanding and perceptions of Buddhism during the last decades of the nineteenth century. This is not limited to the apparent discrepancy between Christian missionaries’ perceptions, distorted by a sense of religious self-righteousness and contrasted with the objectivity of interpretations offered by modern scholars. Debates rather presented semantically different ways of understanding two different versions of Buddhism: a sterile idealized vision of the “original” historical Buddhism and its contemporary, corrupt Tibetan form, called Lamaism. All participants of debate attempted to juxtapose and evaluate their concepts, accusing adversaries of being prejudiced or obsolete.

Under the same term “Buddhism,” Veniamin discussed Tibetan Buddhism as known through his missionary experience in the Transbaikal, while Lesevich discussed his vision of historical reality. These differing visions or perceptions did not contradict each other. The major misunderstanding on both sides of the debate was rooted in parallel argumentation without any common points of agreement or disagreement. The debate which started after Aleksei Matveevich Pozdnev published his book *Ocherki byta buddiiskikh monastyrei i buddiiskogo dukhovenstva v Mongolii* in 1887 and involved Vasilii Pavlovich Vasiliev’s and Ivan Pavlovich Minaev’s harsh reviews, concentrated on understanding of the nature and religious role of Tibetan Buddhism [43]. Ironically, the arguments used by the leading Russian orientalists Pozdnev, Minaev, and Vasiliev interacted with both ways of thinking and perceiving issues debated by philosopher Lesevich and the Orthodox bishop and missionary Veniamin. Discrepancy in perception could be related to several factors, among them generational differences, personal beliefs, and the personalities of the individuals participating in the debate.

However, in Archbishop Veniamin’s reaction dismissing any idealized understanding of Buddhism as a fashionable and nonsensical chimera, another dichotomy could be found, a dichotomy of a provincial versus a central (or metropolitan) perspective. Veniamin’s viewpoint was based on his observations and personal interactions, as well as religious and cultural biases, as engendered in the Siberian provinces. Veniamin insisted that this perception reflected “the reality,” or at least his perception of Transbaikalian religious and cultural realities. He contrasted his personal experience and understanding with images generated among high society

or the intelligentsia from metropolitan St. Petersburg or Moscow, whose members held more attenuated visions of “real Buddhism”.

1. *Ulanov M. S.* Buddizm v istorii russkoi filosofii XIX – pervoi poloviny XX vv. Elista : Kalmytskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2003. P. 7, 14–15.
2. *Goldfarb S.* Gazeta “Vostochnoe Obozrenie” 1882–1906. Irkutsk : Izdatelstvo Irkutskogo Universiteta 1997. P. 14–17, 29–31, 40–43, 60, 86–87.
3. *Bruce Lincoln W.* The Conquest of a Continent. Siberia and the Russians. Cornell University Press, 2007. P. 225–226.
4. *Goldfarb S.* Op. cit. P. 121. N 183 on the list of correspondents is Vasilii Antonovich Blagonravov. The author did not mention that it was a secular name of Archbishop Veniamin.
5. *Veniamin.* Nastoiashchii Buddizm // Irkutskie Eparkhialnye Vedomosti. 1890. N 5. P. 6.
6. *Lesevich V. V.* Religioznaia svoboda po edictam tsaria Asoki Velikogo (Religious Freedom in edicts of Emperor Asioka the Great) // Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii. 1889. Kn. 1. P. 163–188; Zavgorodnij Iu. Iu., V. V. Lesevich i ego interes k buddizmu // Treti Torchinovskie chteniia: religiovedenie i vostokovedenie : Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii, Sankt-Peterburg 15–18 fevralia 2006 g. / ed. Pakhomov S. V. SPb., 2006. P. 150–156.
7. *Lesevich V. V.* Gde sleduet iskat’ ‘nastoiashchii buddizm’ // Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii. 1890. Kn. 3. S. 121–127. Lesevich published several other papers on Buddhism and its influence in Europe: Buddhiiskii nrvstvennyi tip // Severnyi vestnik. 1886. N 5. P. 41–77; Novye dvizhenia v buddizmie, podderzhivaemye i rasprostraniaemye evropeitsami // Russkaia mysl. 1887. N 8. P. 1–17.
8. *Walicki A.* A history of Russian thought from the enlightenment to Marxism. Translated from the Polish by Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka. Stanford : Stanford University Press, 1979. P. 353–357.
9. *Losskii N. O.* History of Russian philosophy. New York : International Universities Press, 1951. P. 378; Filososkii Entsiklopedicheskii Slovar. 2-nd ed. M. : Sovetskaia Entsiklopedia, 1989. P. 309.
10. *Mokievski P. K.* Philosophy in Russia. Mind, vol. 15, N 57 (Jan. 1890). Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Mind Association P. 156.
11. Ibid. P. 159.
12. *Kennan G.* Siberia and the Exile System. New York : The Century Co., 1891. V. 2. P. 449
13. *Yarmolinsky A.* The Kennan Collection. The New York : Public Library, 1921. P. 3; digitalgallery.nypl.org photograph. N 83.
14. *Billington J. H.* The Intelligentsia and the Religion of Humanity // *American Historical Review.* 1960. Vol. 65, N 4. P. 807–821.
15. Ibid. P. 813.
16. His name is also spelled as Yuri Zavhorodny.
17. *Zavgorodnij Iu. V. V.* Lesevich i ego interes k buddizmu. P. 151–152; Lesevich included in footnotes to his studies works of E. Burnouf, A. P. Sinnet, Rhys Davis, L. Freer, and Oldenburg.
18. Ibid. P. 154.
19. Ibid. P. 155; Beer D. "The Medicalization of Religious Deviance in the Russian Orthodox Church (1880–1905)". *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History.* Vol. 5. N 3. Summer 2004. P. 465–466.
20. *Ulanov M. S.* Op. cit. P. 104–106.
21. *Lesevich V. V.* Novye dvizhenia v buddizmie. P. 3, 10.

22. Ibid. P. 4–5.
23. Ibid. P. 6, 13.
24. *Veniamin*. Op. cit. P. 6–7, 10.
25. Ibid. P. 152–153; Iu. Zavgorodnij, *Buddizm v tvorchestve Ivano Franko // Piervye Torchinovskie chteniia: religiovedenie i vostokovedenie : Materialy nauchnoi konferentsii, Sankt-Peterburg 20–21 fevralia 2004 / ed. S. V. Pakhomov. SPb., 2004. V. 1. P. 24–25.*
26. *Carlson M.* “No Religion Higher Than Truth”. *A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922.* Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1993. P. 8.
27. Ibid. P. 5.
28. *Pedersen P.* *Tibet, Theosophy, and the Psychologization of Buddhism // Imagining Tibet: Perceptions, Projections and Fantasies / ed. T. Dodin and H. Rather. Boston, 2001. P. 156–157.* Also *Bevir M.* *The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition // Journal of the American Academy of Religion. 1994. Vol. 62, No. 3. P. 747–767;* *Deutsch Kornblatt J.* *Reviewed work(s): "No Religion Higher than Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875–1922 by Carlson M. The Slavic and East European Journal. 1994. Vol. 38, No. 1. P. 174–175.*
29. *Lesevich V. V.* *Noveishe dvizhenia v Buddizmie P. 17; Zavgorodnij Iu. V. V. Lesevich i ego interes k buddizmu, P. 152; Carlson M. Op. cit. P. 216.*
30. *Lesevich V. V.* *Noveishe dvizhenia v Buddizmie P. 15–17; Carlson M. Op. cit. P. 46.*
31. *Carlson M. Op. cit. P. 46–47.*
32. Ibid. P. 47.
33. *Sokal A., J. Bricmont, Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science. New York : Picador, 1998.*
34. *Veniamin*. Op. cit. P. 10.
35. *Masuzawa T.* *The invention of world religions, or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2005. P. 142.*
36. *Lopez D.* *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1998. P. 49–50.*
37. *Veniamin*. Op. cit. P. 6–7.
38. Ibid. P. 7–10.
39. *Lesevich V. V.* *Gde sleduet iskat' 'nastoiashchii buddizm'. P. 121–122.*
40. Ibid. P. 123.
41. Ibid. P. 124.
42. Ibid. P. 126–127.
43. *Review by V. P. Vasiliev, Ocherki byta buddiiskikh monastyrei i buddiskogo dukhovenstva v Mongolii v sviazi s otnosheniami sego poslednego k narodu. St Petersburg 1887 // Zapiski Imperatorskago Russkago Geograficheskago Obshchestva po otdeleniu etnografii, t. XVI) // Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshchenia. 1888. V. 259. P. 417–434; Minaev I. P. Apologia lamstva // Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshchenia. 1888. V. 259. P. 434–448; Pozdneev A. M. Otvet na retsenziu prof. I. P. Minaeva na sochinienie: "Ocherki byta buddiiskikh monastyrei i buddiiskago dukhovenstva v Mongolii" // Zhurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveshchenia. 1888. N 260. P. 304–323; Minaev I. P. Zametka na otvet A. M. Pozdneeva // Ibid. P. 323–326.*

Archbishop Veniamin and New-fashioned Intellectuals: Searching for the "Real Buddhism" Meaning

A. Peck

University of North Carolina, USA

Development of oriental studies was followed at the end of the nineteenth century by the growing interest in Buddhist concepts and rituals among Russian intellectuals. Fashionable social fascination in Buddhism and pseudo-scientific concepts of "Buddhist mysteries," astonished conservative Christians. Leading missionary spreading Christianity among the Transbaikalian Buddhists, archbishop of Irkutsk and Nerchinsk Veniamin (Blagonravov) argued that the idealized perception of Buddhism was merely a fashionable nonsense. He referred not only to his own knowledge and experience, but also to the scholarly research conducted by the Russian Orientalists. Veniamin's intellectual adversary, philosopher Vladimir Victorovich Lesevich, supported a comprehensive and impartial evaluation of non-European traditions such as Buddhism. Debate considered also a semantic analysis of "real Buddhism" and practical missionary experience in the Transbaikal.

Key words: Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhism in Russian philosophy, theosophy, Christian Orthodox missionaries, Orientalists, Archbishop Veniamin (Blagonravov), V. V. Lesevich

Anna Peck – Ph D. associated Professor, the University of North Carolina (the USA), specialist in Russian-Polish relations, Confessional History of Siberia in the XIX c., e-mail: annapeck@hotmail.com

Анна Пек – доктор философии, доцент Университета Северной Каролины (США), специалист в области русско-польских отношений, конфессиональной истории Сибири XIX в., e-mail: annapeck@hotmail.com