

Fluttering Robes: Dynamics of Buddhism in Mongolia

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Things Happen

Religion is a dynamic phenomenon within human society that is often considered a cultural universal. In other words, all cultures are believed to have religious aspects. In general a religion is expressed in both belief and action. Both are however far from static and change in the cause of history. Although often, within a religion, claims are made on ancient teachings, the religion itself is in a continuous process of redefining itself. In this case we will look at the dynamics of Buddhism in Mongolia.

What happened?

Buddhism comes from a background of the great variety of religious practices in India generally referred to as Hinduism. From there it was introduced in Tibet by Padmansambhava, or Guru Rimpoche. He was able to connect the local beliefs of the people of Tibet with the teachings on the 'end of suffering' from Buddha Shakyamuni. After several earlier attempts, it was only in the 16th century that Buddhism became the dominant religion among the peoples of Mongolia. As it was being introduced from Tibet, the practices and beliefs of Buddhism again assimilated to the new environment. After a flourishing period, the 20th century becomes a dark period for Buddhism. Overt practice is forbidden and the worship is taken underground.

What is happening?

After 1990 religious freedom has returned to Mongolia. Old monks take up their robes and teach the young boys the chanting they almost forgot. People are searching for their roots and identity and are turning to find both. Monasteries are restored and new temples build. Yet a new phase has begun.

What will happen?

Buddhism finds itself in a crucial period in Mongolia. Some people think it is a collection of old fashioned practices, but others find comfort and hope in the beliefs and practices of Buddhism. In the meantime missionary groups of other religions have come to challenge Buddhism. What will happen next? We look forward to your input!