

The Revival

There are hardly other nations in the world that cherish their religion as deeply as Mongols and Tibetans. They both believe and revere Buddhism, sacrificing everything of value for this religion, wrote Russian scholar Baradain Banzar, who also fell the victim of the purges in 1930s.

Despite the destruction of monasteries and decades long suppression of the religion, Buddhism remains deeply embedded in the cultural life of Mongols and the society.



Buddha Mairdar ceremony at Gandan Monastery, May 2000.

When political changes of early 90s ended the seven decades long rule of Communist party, the religion began to revive with small temples and even ghers popping up in the places where monasteries stood before.

All things here are donated by local people. And even the building was erected with their help, says Purevsurenbold, a 23-year-old priest of the Shankh monastery, the first monastery built in 17th century by Zanabazar, the founder of Lamaism in Mongolia. Among the religious items donated by people are 500-years-old manuscript, other rare items of religious art. People donate them from the bottom of their heart, without asking any money or compensation.



Newly restored temple with 40 meters high statue of Buddha Megjid Janraisag, rebuilt with peoples' donations.

For the past half a century, our elders never failed to held an annual prayer ceremony. And now a local reported to the security service, says proudly a local man who brought with his son 40 liters of yogurt as donation to the monastery.

Namdagsuren, Gombo, Tserenpil, Natsag, Onor... these old men never gave up their faith. Each year, during the first airag in early June they would gather secretly to chant Buddhist prayers for the well being of the locality and its people.

They did this for decades when all the religious ceremonies were banned, risking to be arrested and imprisoned. As soon as the religious freedom was

allowed in 1990 they restored the Shankh Monastery and returned religious artifacts and items they managed to save when young, just before the monastery was demolished with artillery shells.



"Though our famous Titan wrestler Bat Erdene (12 times winner of the Nadaam festival wrestling) began a very good deed, it will be had to restore our monastery in its full splendour and glory known all over the country. "

"Out Baldan Vereevun monastery had 12 large statues of Buddha, 11 datsans and numerous temples, and was famous for its scholars. Maybe one day our monastery will recover,?says 98 year old Tovuu who lives now on the ruins of the datsan from which he obtained a degree in philosophy.



Not the official church but ordinary people donate their money to build anew stupas and temples on the places covered with ash of past monasteries.

A new crop of Buddhist monks continues the disrupted traditions.

Today more than 157 religious temples and shrines in Mongolia have been rebuilt. In some cases, it is only a gher (felt tent) or a small wooden house with mostly elder monks who learned the religion when teenagers.

Even though they do not know the prayers well enough, people still attend the religious ceremonies and prayers seeking hope and trust in the future.

