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The Korean Presbyterian mission in Ulan-Ude and the awakening of ethnic identity in Buryatia, 1995-2007

In this paper explores the reception of Presbyterianism in Buriatiya in the context of the general religious and national awakening that occurred in Russia under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris El'tsin. Rather than provide a final answer to the reasons for the extraordinary successes of the Korean mission, the author has turned my lens to the reception of the Korean kerygma under the particular historical conditions of the 1990s. Under Gorbachev, important legal changes provided greater religious freedom and more cultural autonomy to ethnic communities; the new legal regime transformed the nature of the market of ideas and collective identities. In 1990 a new law that permitted the creation of national-cultural centers allowed the Koreans and other nationalities of the Republic of Buriatiya to develop a secularized collective identity that emphasized their shared historical experience. In the same year, a new law granted unprecedented religious liberty to Soviet and also gave foreign missionaries the opportunity to offer new religious collective identities.

Keywords: Korean Presbyterian missionaries, Republic of Buriatiya, religious communities, Protestantism, doctrines and practices.

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On 1 January 1995, two Korean Presbyterian missionaries, Kim Geun-gon and Li Chang-bae, arrived in the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buriatiya, one of the (then) 89 subjects of the Russian Federation. Reaching out to the small Korean diaspora in the republic, the two men also developed ministries among the Russians and especially the native Buriats. Buriats have traditionally practiced shamanism or Tibetan Buddhism, but today the Presbyterian church of about 200 that Kim and Li founded is one of the few predominantly Buriat Christian congregations in the world (5; 27). Moreover, the church continues to grow, and has established three other registered churches in nearby villages (Soldatskii, Tarbagatai, and Onokhoi), as well as several rural missions (31). Nor, as Iuliia Koval'chuk has noted in her recent candidate dissertation, is their success in the former Soviet Union unique; Korean Protestant missionaries have had an enormous impact on the indigenous peoples of Siberia (19; 20). In fact Kim and Li were only two of the estimated 557 Korean missionaries who had been sent to the former Soviet Union by the end of 1996 (9). For example, in 1995 Korean missionaries from the Cho Yonggi's Full Gospel Church (Sun Bok Eum) planted a now thriving Tyvan-speaking congregation of about 400 among the Tyvans in Kyzyl, despite significant opposition and serious internal conflict (20; 23; 25). In the Altai Republic, Korean missionaries have created three churches, one in Gorno-Altai and two others in the villages of Shebolino and Onguda, and actively adapt the Turkic culture, mindset, and mythology of the indigenous Saian to better preach their message. Perhaps most remarkably, the missionaries in Buriatiya and Tyva have al-

ready left the churches that they started and have given the leadership to local Christians (20).

What accounts for this success? Much of the scholarly literature has focused on the peculiar characteristics of contemporary Korean Protestantism. Koval'chuk argues that over the past century Koreans have adapted the Western Protestant Christianity to Asian conditions. Embracing the Protestant rationalism, work ethic, and conception of worldly vocation, Koreans underwent a difficult period of industrialization after the devastation of Japanese colonization, the Second World War, and the Korean War. To the doctrines and practices of traditional Protestantism, Korean Christian thinkers added their own emphases on divinely given prosperity [translated into Russian as *protsvetanie*], their historical experience of modernization, and their theological understanding of their divinely appointed role to bring salvation to Asia. From her fieldwork in a Korean-American church that sends and support missionaries, cultural geographer Ju Hui Judy Han contends that Korean Christians are no longer an "ethnic enclave," but instead have a "profoundly global sense of place" that empowers them to reproduce their faith—and their hierarchical regimes of power—in many places around the world. Seeing themselves as strategically located in the "10-40 window" (a section of the world, stretching from ten to forty degrees north of the equator and from North Africa to China, where most of the population is not Christian), these Korean Christians have developed multiple effective strategies to propagate their religion (10). Korean missiologists explicitly compare the Korean world-wide diaspora to the Jewish diaspora of the first century; just as St. Paul reached the world by first preaching the gospel in the synagogues of Greece and Asia Minor, so too today can Christian missionaries extend the gospel by working with the Korean "new Israel" (21). Presbyterian missionary Kim Jin-eun, who teaches practical theology in the Canaan Theological Seminary of St. Petersburg, wrote in a recent letter: "As God used Jewish people to save all nations, may he also use the Korean diaspora, so-called 'Korean Jews,' to preach the gospel over the world in the last days" (15).

However powerful and correct these explanations may be, they do not fully account for the reception of Korean forms of Christianity in particular instances, nor do they account for particular failures of Korean missionaries to plant churches in Russia. Even observers who are sympathetic to Korean missions have found much to criticize, from missionaries' poor preparation, limited language skills, cultural arrogance, and ignorance of local customs and traditions (35). A neutral observer of the Ulan-Ude Presbyterian mission in 1995 might very well conclude that it was doomed to fail. Neither of the two Korean missionaries spoke Russian or Buriat well; they relied on translators, and their linguistic and cultural missteps are today lovingly and good-naturedly remembered by their spiritual children (13). Less friendly voices attacked the missionaries as "new crusaders," agents of capitalist imperialism, and dangerous fanatics (7; 16; 33).

In this paper I explore the reception of Presbyterianism in Buriatiya in the context of the general religious and national awakening that occurred in Russia under Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris El'tsin. Rather than provide a final answer to the

reasons for the extraordinary successes of the Korean mission, I have turned my lens to the reception of the Korean kerygma under the particular historical conditions of the 1990s. Under Gorbachev, important legal changes provided greater religious freedom and more cultural autonomy to ethnic communities; the new legal regime transformed the nature of the market of ideas and collective identities. In 1990 a new law that permitted the creation of national-cultural centers allowed the Koreans and other nationalities of the Republic of Buriatiya to develop a secularized collective identity that emphasized their shared historical experience. In the same year, a new law granted unprecedented religious liberty to Soviet and also gave foreign missionaries the opportunity to offer new religious collective identities.

In the wake of these new opportunities, the Koreans of Buriatiya brought into being two new cultural institutions, which offered different kinds of collective identity. The National-Cultural Korean Association, first established under the 1990 law, promotes a secularized Korean identity, with special commemoration of their shared tragedy – Joseph Stalin’s mass deportation of the Soviet Koreans in 1937. The Center seeks to save Korean Russians from a spiritual crisis, but find the solution to this crisis in the preservation of Korean language, customs, and traditions.

By contrast the Christian Presbyterian Church founded in 1995 represents an entirely approach to this spiritual crisis. The missionaries Kim and Li brought a different kind of collective identity, a Christian identity forged in the South Korean furnace. Although they successfully won many in the small Korean diaspora, who still faithfully attend the church, their aim was never the preservation or extension of Korean culture, but the creation of a Christian community, and they and their successors proved to be very flexible during the volatile changes in post-Soviet Russia. While the church retains a distinctly Korean stamp (the current Russian pastor travels to Korea for theological training and time in the *kidowon*, church members sing from Korean-Russian hymnbooks, and the church has daily prayer meetings early each morning), the congregation has creatively adapted to bring its message and its community to the diverse ethnic communities in the Republic of Buriatiya.

Religious Pluralism in the Buryat-Mongol ASSR and Its Repression under Joseph Stalin

The Republic of Buryatia, founded in 1923 as the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, covers 351 344 square kilometers and is located in southeastern Siberia, just north of Mongolia, with which it shares a long border. According to the 2002 census, the Buryats make up approximately 28 percent of the population of the Republic of Buryatia, while ethnic Russians represent a little over two-thirds. The Buryats, who altogether number 445 175 persons in the Russian Federation, are the largest ethnic minority in Siberia; they are largely concentrated in the Buryat Republic and in two nearby ethnic enclaves: the Ust’-Orda Okrug in Irkutsk oblast’ and the Aginskii Okrug in Chita oblast’.

Until the twentieth century, Buryats were predominantly nomads. Their traditional ethnic faith was shamanism, but at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Mongol khans who ruled over promoted Tibetan Buddhism among their subjects (1). A few decades later, in the 1660s, Russian Cossacks and monks established Orthodoxy beyond Lake Baikal. In 1664 Russian monks founded the Nerchinsk Monastery, the first Orthodox monastic community in the area, and two years later Cossacks created the town that became Verkhneudinsk and later (in 1934) Ulan-Ude, the Republic's capital. In 1681, Abbot Fedosii led a group of 12 monks to form the first TransBaikal mission; they founded the Trinity Selenginskii monastery on the Selenga River, and the Posol'skii monastery on the shore of Lake Baikal.

Using a combination of military force and material enticements, such as monetary rewards for baptism, Russian Orthodox missionaries had limited success in converting Buryats to Christianity. By contrast, the Mongolian lamas, who could not turn to state power for support, found more effective ways to win converts, and the numbers of Buddhist monasteries (*datsans*) and temples grew, especially in the region east of Lake Baikal. Rather than struggle directly against their shamanistic rivals, lamas incorporated native rituals and symbols into their religious practice. Lamas also offered a highly developed system of education and medical treatment using Tibetan principles. By 1741 Empress Elizabeth officially recognized the strength of Buddhism by officially appointing the Bandido-Khambo-Lama as head of a Buddhist hierarchy in the empire. Buddhism remained primarily the rural religion of a nomadic people until collectivization.

Under Catherine the Great, in the late eighteenth century, a third important religious tradition entered the TransBaikal region when Old Believers—Orthodox Christians who had rejected the liturgical reforms introduced by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow (r. 1652-58) – were forcibly exiled from northwestern Russia and Poland into Siberia. Known as the *semeiskie* (from *sem'ia* or family), these Old Believers established significant settlements throughout the territory of the present Republic of Buriatiya (4).

After the construction of the Transsiberian Railway opened up the region to European settlement in the 1890s, Protestant—especially Baptist—congregations began to appear in the Transbaikal region. Tsarist efforts to repress the young Russian Baptist movement, which began with the baptism of Nikita Voronin in 1867, led to the Siberian exile of many fervent believers, and, ironically, to the propagation of the Baptist faith (30\$ 34). Baptist missionaries and Protestant immigrants from the central provinces also expanded the numbers of believers in Siberia (8\$ 30). By 1923 Baptists had established five congregations on the territory of the present Republic of Buriatiya (12).

With the Russian Revolution of 1917, the new Bolshevik regime disestablished and actively persecuted the Russian Orthodox Church. During the 1920s, Bolshevik religious policy was relatively more liberal toward non-Orthodox religions. In the Bolsheviks attacked conservative lamas and supported the modernist reformers, led by the noted scholar and lama Agvan Dorjiev, who pursued a mu-

tually beneficial relationship with the atheist rulers. As Aleksandr Andreev's pioneering work in the secret police archives has shown, the early Soviet state hoped to gain diplomatic and intelligence advantages through the reformists' close connections to the court in Lhasa (9). Even after the victory of the atheists in October 1917, remained a thriving multi-confessional region: in 1923, when the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created, there were 44 Buddhist monasteries [*datsans*], 211 Orthodox churches, 81 Old Believer prayer houses, 7 synagogues, 6 mosques, 5 Baptist congregations, and one Catholic church (2).

But this diversity was not to last. The Stalinist Cultural Revolution that began in 1929 sought to eliminate religion completely. During the second five-year plan (1933-1937), the state forcibly closed all religious institutions in the republic (32). Forced collectivization and dekulakization had a devastating impact on the nomadic and semi-nomadic Buryat population, many of whom fled into China or Mongolia (36).

Even as the "godless" Second Five-Year Plan sought to put an end to religion altogether, the Soviet state and the Communist Party also instituted a new policy toward ethnic minorities, especially the Asians living in border regions. Concerned about increasing tensions with Japan and the possibility that Japanese spies might penetrate the Korean and Buryat population in the Far East, Stalin decided to take extreme measures. Accusing the Buryat political and religious elite of Pan-mongolism and of spying for Japan, Soviet authorities dismembered the Buryat-Mongol Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic into three parts: a truncated republic and two autonomous areas (Ust'-Ordynskii autonomous okrug and the Aginskii autonomous okrug) located in neighboring provinces (11). The dismantling of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR was accompanied by the physical execution of many members of the Buryat intelligentsia, including the orientalist Tsyben Zhamtsarano (arrested in Leningrad in 1937 and died three years later), the revolutionary El'bekdorji Rinchino (shot in Moscow in 1937), Bandido-Khambo-Lama Agvan Dorjiev (died in prison in 1938), the scholar Badzar Baradiin (shot in 1937), and the first (Mikhei Nikolaevich Erbanov) and second (A. A. Markizov) secretaries of the Buryat-Mongol Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (both arrested in 1937 and shot) (29).

The large Korean community of over 200 000 people in the USSR also suffered from the Soviet government's growing concern about pan-Mongolism and the Japanese threat. Koreans had been part of the Russian Empire and the USSR for over seventy years. After the 1860 Treaty of Beijing had defined the boundaries between the Russian Empire and China, some Koreans had found themselves on the Russian side of the new line, while others, fleeing famine and poverty, had crossed the narrow eighteen-mile border to found villages in Russia's Maritime Province. This trickle of immigrants became a flood as many Koreans fled Japanese colonial oppression. On 21 August 1937, the Council of People's Commissars, the executive branch of the central Soviet government, and the Central Committee of the Communist Party ordered the mass deportation of all Koreans from

the Maritime province to Central Asia (primarily the republics of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Joseph Stalin personally signed the order. Agents of the secret police descended upon Korean villages, announced the deportation, and gave the inhabitants just three days to prepare for their departure (28). As the victims later testified, the human toll was great:

One day, suddenly, we received a command like thunder to prepare to move in three days. Uproar and wailing echoed through all the villages. People asked where and why, but the questions were not accepted. The police just commanded with rough voices that they must comply and do not have the right to ask questions.

It took more than one month by train to arrive in Central Asia from the Far East. Many people died in epidemic diseases, especially children and the elderly. They buried the dead around the railroad tracks when the trains stopped at the next station (26).

This tactic of mass deportation, which became a staple of Stalinist nationalities policy, was first tried on the Soviet Koreans.

Post-war Religious and National Revival

Joseph Stalin moderated the extreme Soviet antireligious policy in 1941, after the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. In an effort to unite the entire Soviet nation against the enemy, Stalin freed the leaders of major religious confessions from prison and allowed these confessions a legal existence. In 1943 the Russian Orthodox Church was allowed to hold a council and elect a new patriarch; in 1944 Evangelical Christians and Baptist were permitted to create an All-Union Council that became the major legal expression of Protestant Christianity; and in 1946 Buddhists built a new datsan in the village of Ivolga to house the headquarters of the new Central Spiritual Buddhist Directorate.

Stalin's reforms barely allowed for the legal recognition of certain privileged religions, but the state continued to deny freedom of religion to the vast majority of religious believers. Newly created state agencies, the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church [*Sovet po delam Russkoi pravoslavnoi tserkvi*] and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults [*Sovet po delam religioznykh kul'tov*] closely supervised the legalized religious bodies to ensure that they did not go beyond the narrow limits set by socialist law. For example the new Buddhist directorate had only 20 legal lamas, whereas before the revolution, 13,000 lamas served the Buddhist population of the Transbaikal region (2). Likewise, although Baptists were given limited freedom to form a national denomination, Pentecostals (Christians of the Evangelical Faith) were faced with a difficult choice: either join the Baptist Union on terms set by Baptists and the Soviet state, or meet and worship together illegally. Registering new congregations remained a difficult chore, and one that Communist Party workers were anxious to discourage. A 1949 report from the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults indicated that there were only four registered religious congregations in the entire Buryat-Mongol Republic: two Orthodox, one Buddhist, and one Old Believer communities. At the same time, several unregistered groups of various denominations, including Jews and Muslims, vainly sought recognition (12).

Moreover, this new religious freedom was always tenuous. In 1959 Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party, launched another antireligious drive marked by new legislation against religion, arrests of religious activists, campaigns of slander against believers, and closures of churches, temples, and mosques. No Baptist congregation was allowed legal existence in the Buryat republic until 1978 (12). A report submitted by the government representative of the Buryat Council on the Affairs of Religious Cults in 1960 perfectly expresses the atmosphere of the time:

In the course of the period of this report in the Ulan-Ude suburb of Bald Hill, there was discovered a semi-legal group of Evangelical-Christian Baptists which meets regularly (every Sunday) at the home of their leader, Petr Dorofeevich Merkulov, who is 85 years old and deaf, at ul. Lysogorskaia, 78. The group consists of 15 people, who are mainly elderly and housewives. They have excommunicated two of their members (Rosliakov and Shurygin)—one for attempted rape and the other for theft. There are others who cannot attend the meetings because they are sick.

The preacher Merkulov and his helper Matveev were taken in for questioning, and they did not deny the existence of their congregation and its regular meetings. However at the suggestion that congregation cease its activities, since they are illegal, they did not agree, declaring that they did not conduct any political work, and occupied themselves only with preaching. Therefore they requested that their group be registered. Until now, they have been refused registration, and it has been suggested that they dissolve the community. For the future, work aimed at the dissolution of the congregation should be undertaken (12).

But even as Khrushchev was intolerant of religion, he did begin rehabilitating the nations that Stalin had deported. In 1954, a few months after Stalin's death, the sentence of administrative exile imposed upon Koreans ended, and Soviet Koreans once again could more freely move about the USSR. Although most chose to remain in the Central Asian republics, many others sought their fortunes in the capital cities of Moscow and Leningrad, in the Caucasus, or in other areas of the Russian Federation. Fifty years after the deportation, 107 000 Koreans lived in Russia. A few—but only a few—settled in the Republic of Buryatia. In 1970, fresh from completing the medical institute in Blagoveshchensk, the young physician and future head of the Korean National Cultural Association Gennadii Sergeevich Ligai made his home in Ulan-Ude (22). By 1989 he was one of only 309 ethnic Koreans living in (11).

Thus by the beginning of the 1980s, the Soviet Union had institutionalized two kinds of collective identity—national and religious. Under Stalin, the USSR had carved out nations within its borders, recognizing and constructing national identity as one of the constituent elements of the new socialist reality that the Communist Party hoped to create. Unlike religion, nationality was an objective reality with observable components: Stalin had defined nation as «a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a community of culture» and every Soviet citizen had his nationality rec-

orded in his internal passport. Like other diaspora nations in the USSR, Soviet Koreans had paid for their national identity by suffering deportation. This common historical experience united Soviet Koreans, and the collective memory of this shared trial became one of the chief links binding the *koryo saram* – the Koreans of the USSR.

Ironically, late Stalinism also institutionalized religion as the source of collective identity. Marxist theory held that religious identity—unlike the nation—was an illusion, a form of false consciousness, destined to disappear in a just social order. But having failed to destroy religion in the 1930s, the Soviet state institutionalized and legitimated it by creating small, tightly controlled hierarchical denominations. In the late 1980s under Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, these two types of communities—national and religious—were granted unprecedented freedom.

Two Versions of Collective Identity: National or Religious

In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union under the leadership of Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, who served as the General Secretary of the Communist Party from 1985 to 1991, granted greater freedom to both religious and national communities. This reform program was largely designed to improve the economic system by giving groups a greater stake in society and a greater say in political decisions. In April 1990, in an effort to respond to growing national unrest in Central Asia, the Baltics, and the Caucasus, the Soviet parliament granted new liberties to ethnic minorities by issuing a law «On the Free National Development of the Citizens of the USSR, Who Live outside the Boundaries of Their National-State Formations or Do Not Have Such Formations on the Territory of the USSR». The new law permitted the creation of «national cultural centers» that could maintain a special representative in the local parliaments (Soviets of People's Deputies) to suggest and comment on new legislation that could further the development of national culture, language, and tradition. Such centers also had the right to publish works in their national language, conduct mass celebrations of ethnic holidays and festivals, establish ties with international cultural organizations, created ethnographic museums, help preserve historical monuments, and organize language circles.

The small Korean community in quickly took advantage of the new law and formed the National Cultural Association of Koreans of the Republic of in October of 1990. The chief organizers of the association came from the older generation, who had experienced the deportation and wanted to preserve their language and culture:

Forced separation, deportation, compulsory assimilation has led to a significant degradation of Korean culture. The dismemberment of the Korean ethnos and the absence of national-state and socio-cultural institutions as well as a series of other circumstances have set the Korean people on the edge of a spiritual crisis.

The solution to this crisis was also clear—a return to Korean culture, language, and values—the objective elements in the Stalinist definition of nation:

To strengthen ties with one's own national culture, with those traditions that people live by and which are preserved in cultural memory, to acquaint Koreans

with their national culture by widely propagating knowledge about it—this is the basic goal of the Korean national center.

One of the major projects the center undertook was to participate in the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Korean deportation in 1997. A «Train of Memory» departed from Vladivostok and went through Khabarovsk, Ulan-Ude, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk, Almaty, Tashkent, and Moscow, where an international conference on the Korean deportation took place.

Although tiny, the community included several prominent citizens: the deputy minister of culture Boris Anatol'evich Kim, son of North Korean immigrants; Margarita Antonovna Magomedova, special assistant to the president. Sofia Petrovna Ni, owner of the main modeling agency in Ulan-Ude, who has enjoyed great success in the Miss Russia and Miss Asia beauty pageants; the successful farmers Roman Semenovich Pak and Ivan Maksimovich Tsol, and the famed Tae-Kwon-do trainer - Maksim Kim.

For these elite members of Buryat society, the center's primary purpose was the preservation of language and «rituals and holidays which are in particular the means of transmitting traditions». When I asked Gennadii Ligai, the president of the center, about the work of the Korean Presbyterians, he noted that the church was no carrier of Korean tradition. With the departure of the missionaries, the preaching is no longer in Korean. They sing contemporary songs and use guitars, not traditional Korean instruments. Clearly in Ligai's view, the church does not provide an answer to the cultural and spiritual crisis that Korean Russians face.

Religious Freedom and Religious Identity: The Korean Presbyterian Mission, 1995.

Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union also granted unprecedented freedom to religious communities and to foreign missionaries. On 1 October 1990 the new federal Soviet law «On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Organizations», provided a much simpler method of legal registration, opened the door to foreign religious workers, and allowed previously persecuted groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, to emerge from underground. The Russian Federation passed its own version of the law on 25 October, which dramatically deregulated the religious market and allowed for intense competition. The flood of Korean missionaries, which reached 557 by the end of 1996, began with the passage of this legislation.

Religious liberty had a significant impact on. Before the law, there were only a handful of registered religious congregations, but by 1 January 1994, fully 56 religious communities had been registered. A year later that number had increased to 81 congregations representing nine different confessions (6). On that very day, two Korean Presbyterian missionaries, Kim Geun-gon and Li Chang-bae arrived in Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic. They came at a period of intense turmoil in Russia; the USSR had collapsed—largely peacefully—a little over three years earlier. In October 1993, just fifteen months before the arrival of the missionaries, President Boris Nikolaevich El'tsin (1931-2007) had used the Russian armed forces to storm the parliament building and take control of the government. In the wake of

this violent coup, Russian voters adopted a new constitution with a powerful executive. A new parliament had been elected in December of 1993, but within a year, Russian soldiers were again fighting to quell a rebellion in the breakaway republic of Chechnia. Although far from the Caucasus, it had its own troubled history of national relations. From 1990 to 1994 the short-lived Buryat-Mongol People's Party called for a return to the pre-1937 borders of the Buryat-Mongol ASSR. But this nationalist movement had little chance of succeeding in a republic whose population was less than a third Buryat.

In this tense atmosphere, the missionaries faced serious opposition. The Russian Orthodox Church, which had just re-opened the pre-revolutionary diocese of Chita, regarded the Koreans as a sectarian threat, and the church press attacked the foreign missionaries as agents of another state (7). The president Leonid Potapov – the former Communist Party secretary who had been elected to his new position just a few months earlier – also looked at both Protestantism and foreign religious workers with deep suspicion (21). Potapov himself came from a family of Old Believers, the *semeiskie*, but in the new Russia, he provided material and moral support to what he regarded as the four traditional confessions of: shamanism, Buddhism, Russian Orthodoxy, and Old Belief. (Noticeably absent from this list are Islam and Judaism, which current Russian law categorizes as traditional religions of Russia). In contravention of the Russian constitution, which forbids the establishment of religion, Potapov even allocated government funds for specific projects, such as restoring the Russian Orthodox Odigitrievskii church and constructing the Buddhist Rinpoche-Bagsha Center. Protestants, however, enjoyed no such benefits, and were often attacked in the official newspaper, *Tsentral'naia gazeta*, as well as other periodicals, such as and *Informpolis*. Often foreign missionaries were the object of attack:

They arrived in our country as teachers of English, in the framework of cooperation in the sphere of education, and with a program of humanitarian aid. In the guise of free courses of English, they use neurolinguistic programming for brainwashing. Professionals – outstanding psychologists – are at work here. As a result in many cities there are now Russian branches of totalitarian sects, created for purposes other than saving lost souls (17).

Despite the obstacles, Li and Kim each founded a Presbyterian fellowship. Li's church, called «Love», met in the library of the large locomotive repair factory that had been an important component of the local economy since the 1930s. Kim's church, which he called «Antioch», met in a local high school. In accordance with Reformed theology, the two men preached the dual vocation of the Christian, who has both a spiritual calling and a worldly one. Thus they started a vigorous program of both evangelism and social ministries, including helping the homeless and working with invalid children. Within a few months, the two churches had started their own missions in the villages of Tarbagatai (originally founded by Old Believers) and Ivolga (the site of the main Buddhist *datsan*).

The churches' Korean connections were especially important in this early period. Short-term workers from Korea helped the Presbyterians to develop a music ministry, and

they imported hymnbooks printed in both Korean and Russian. Korean professors of theology arrived to conduct seminars. The missionaries also relied on local Koreans from, who translated their sermons into Russian.

The church's long-term survival did not depend just on support from Korea. The missionaries carefully cultivated local leadership, responded creatively to the legal challenges represented by registration, sought cooperation with Republican and municipal officials in the creation of social programs, developed strong ecumenical ties with other Christians.

Cultivation of local leadership was especially key to negotiating the changing legal requirements for registration of religious associations—a necessary requirement for the exercise of legal personhood, such as owning real estate. In 1996 adopted a law officially favoring the Republic's four «traditional» confessions—shamanism, Buddhism, Orthodoxy, and Old Belief—making the process more difficult for the growing numbers of Protestant congregations. By the spring of 1997, the two churches decided to merge into the single Ulan-Ude Christian Presbyterian Church. Legal troubles precipitated the union: with the help of the local Buryat Christian Vladimir Nikiforov, Kim had been able to register his congregation with the Ministry of Justice, but the «Love» Church had no Russian citizens in its leadership, and could not receive official registration. At the same time, the new church broke ground on its new building.

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