УДК 294.3
DOI: 10.30792/2949-5768-2024-8-101-106

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АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ ПО ИСТОРИИ МОНГОЛЬСКОГО БУДДИЗМА: РЕЗУЛЬТАТЫ СОВМЕСТНОГО МОНГОЛО-ЯПОНСКОГО ПРОЕКТА

В 1935 г. известный японский исследователь Эгами Намио раскопал руины Олон Суме в аймаке Улаанцав Внутренней Монголии, что ознаменовало начало японских исследователей, сосредоточенных в области буддийской археологии в Монголии. С 1990 г. были успешно реализованы совместные проекты между двумя странами. Среди них монголо-японский совместный проект «Проект Гурван Гол», «Проект Бичэс», «Проект Эрдэнэ-Зуу», «Проект Хан Хэнтий», «Совместный проект Национального университета Монголии и Университета Отани». Недавние исследования привели к новым открытиям в истории монгольского буддизма. В статье представлены объясния результатов и проблем проектов, в которых участвовал автор публикации, а так же будущее проекта.

Ключевые слова: археология, монгольский буддизм, монгольские тексты, буддийский монастырь.

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON THE HISTORY OF MONGOLIAN BUDDHISM: RESULTS OF THE MONGOLIA-JAPANESE JOINT PROJECT

In 1935, the famous Japanese researcher Egami Namio excavated the ruins of Olon Sume in Ulaantsav aimag of Inner Mongolia, which marked the beginning of Japanese researchers focused on Buddhist archaeology in Mongolia. Since 1990, joint projects between the two countries have been successfully implemented. Among them are the Mongolian-Japanese joint project «Gurvan Gol Project», «Biches Project», «Erdene Zuu Project», «Khan Khentii Project», «National University of Mongolia and Otani University Joint Project». Recent research has led to new discoveries in the history of Mongolian Buddhism. This article provides an explanation of the results and problems of the projects in which the author participated, as well as the future of the project.

Keywords: archeology, mongolian buddhism, mongolian texts, buddhist monastery.

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1. Researches on the History of Mongolian Buddhism

My research has revealed that Buddhist culture has had a profound impact on the history of Mongolia, and that it is worthy of further study.

In addition to researching history, philosophy, and writings, I have paid great attention to the work of re-examining the history of Buddhism in North Asia by conducting research on monastaries such as the Tsogt Ikh Sum (Pavilion of Raising the Yuan 興元閣) built during the Mongol Empire and Yuan dynasty, and the ruins of Munkh Khaan or Shagja Monastery.

However, Mongolian Buddhism, which flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries, experienced a period of decline in the 15th and 16th centuries. This has resulted in uncertainty regarding the transmission of the tradition after the 17th century.

In recent years, as a result of intensive archaeological research in Mongolia, numerous Buddhist monuments, possibly dating from the 15th and 16th centuries, have been discovered. Among these are texts written on birch bark.

Considering this situation, it is very important to carry out archaeological research and dating methods of new Buddhist monuments, collect local traditional oral sources and study them from the perspective of Religious Studies, Anthropology, Museology and Ethnography, in addition to historical sources.

Results of joint research

2.1. BICHEES project

First result.

In 1994, the joint Mongolian-Japanese «BICHEES Project» began to conduct preliminary research, in addition to the comprehensive study of stone inscriptions and Rock inscriptions in the Mongolian highlands, as well as archaeological excavations of ancient cities and ruins related to stone inscriptions, for about 30 years.

In 2010 and 2011, within the framework of the «BICHEES Project», the first archaeological excavations related to Buddhist studies were conducted in the ruins of a Buddhist monastery in Kharbukh balgas, Dashinchilen soum, Bulgan aimag.

The research identified more than 100 texts written on birch bark in Mongolian languages, the majority of which were religious books.

While the original text lacks clear information about its date of composition, it is assumed that they were written in the first half of the 17th century, prior to the spread of Gelug sect or Yellow Sect Buddhism in Mongolia.

The second result.

During the course of archaeological excavations at the Khalzan Shireg ruins in the Sharga soum of Gobi-Altai aimag, the legs and hand parts of a Buddha statue were discovered.

The statue was discovered in August 2016. According to the results of C14 dating research, it was dated to be the first half of the 13th century. It is suposed that the date of the ruins indicates the time when the cities of Chinkhai, the military headquarters of Chinggis Khan, were built in the area.

Consequently, the monument indicates that during the Central Asian campaign of Chinggis Khan, it was a military base on the western side of Mongolia. Furthermore, it provides a new rationale for the hypothesis that Buddhism from Central Asia spread to Mongolia via the upper Silk Road route. However, in order to ascertain the specific flow of Buddhism that entered Mongolia from Central Asia, it is necessary to conduct further detailed research in the future.

The third result.

Let me briefly introduce the excavation research conducted in 2018, 2019, and 2023 in the ruins of Munkh Khaan balgas or Shagja monestery in the Ar Bulag soum of Khuvsgul aimag.

In the 1950s, a stone inscription written in Chinese and Mongolian script was found in this site.

Its content is that in 1257, a nobleman named Bars Tuge of Oirad tribe built a religious monastery called Shagja monastery for the Emperor Munkh Khaan.

Archeological excavations at the main foundation of the monastery revealed a huge wooden structure with 22 stone pillars.

On both sides of the stairs in the front, a large amount of pottery shards was found, including pottery with the Chinese character «fifteen 十五» carved into it.

Also, a wooden fence came out of the foundation on the west and north sides.

In addition to them, a remarkable thing was a 1.4 meter long, 30 cm diameter wooden column buried under the floor in the center of the wooden structure.

According to the results of the chronological C14 analysis of sample, the age of the bone fragment near the front ramp was 1225 calAD – 1280 calAD (95.4%). It is exactly the same as the Munkh Khaan period.

But the animal bones around the buried column were found to be 1163 calAD – 1234 calAD (84.9%) i.e. more than 50 years before that.

The tradition of leaving old pillar wood when expanding temples can be seen in the Gurvan-Zuu of Erdene-Zuu, and similar examples also exist in Japan.

These physical evidences show that the building structure of Shagja Monastery is consistent with the foundation structure of wooden temple buildings in East Asia.

However, the excavated roof tile and pottery have a different design from the ruin of Tsogt ikh sum built in Kharkhorum during the reign of Munkh Khaan, so further comparative research is needed.

2.2. Erdene-Zuu Project

During the six-year period from 2009 to 2014, a project was implemented to study the past, present and future of Erdene-Zuu Monastery, Uvurkhangai aimag.

In 1914, the Polish scholar Kotwicz discovered a fragment of the Sino-Mongolian inscription of the Pavilion of the Raising of the Yuan 興元閣碑 from 1347 on the western wall of Erdene-Zuu. However, this finding was not followed up. In 2009, it was rediscovered by our project and made available for further research.

This discovery made progress in the research of the Pavilion of Raising the Yuan inscription, and consequently, in November 2022, a replica of the whole inscription with base turtle stone and head stone was erected in front of the Kharkhorum Museum.

Also, as a result of a small archaeological excavation inside the Erdene-Zuu Monastery, the existence of cultural layers from the 8th century Uigur period was revealed.

It is interesting to note that this is strangely consistent with the hypothesis of Zava Damdin, eminent Tibetan polymath of Mongolia in 19–20th centuries, that Erdene-Zuu was first established during the Uigur period.

Of course, this is not a historical fact, but it is worth noting that Zava Damdin's theory that Erdene-Zuu was founded during the Uigur period was not based on written sources, but on «fconversations of local elders».

This is a good example of the importance of local oral traditions when historical records are limited.

2.3. Joint project of National Univ. of Mongolia and Otani Univ

Since 2013, based on a joint research agreement with National Univ. of Mongolia and Otani Univ., the project «Archaeological, historical and religious research of Buddhist monasteries during the late spread of Buddhism in Mongolia (13th to 17th centuries)» has been implemented.

As part of the research, 3D mapping and documentation of the octagonal stone structure of Khatant Khairkhan of Khotont Soum, Arkhangai aimag, and C14 dating of samples taken from inside the wall were done, resulting in a corresponding date from the 8th to the 9th century of the Uigur period.

The question of whether this eight-sided structure is a Buddhist stupa or not is related to whether the central structure inside the Khar Balgas was a Buddhist stupa, discussed in recent times.

This may provide new evidence for the spread of Buddhism during the Uigur period.

2.4. Other projects

The Institute of Archeology of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, together with some Japanese researchers, conducted an archaeological study of the site of Higher foudantion of Ikh bulag in Tuvshinshiree soum, Sukhbaatar aimag, and determined that it belongs to the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century.

Also, Japanese archaeologist Prof. Shiraishi and I participated in the «Uv soyoliin Golomt (the Fireplace of Cultural Heritage)» project excavating «Tuulyn Khartuna» or «Türgenii Gol balgas» in 2022 and 2023 as foreign advisers.

3. Future prospects

Researchers have identified three main phases in the history of Mongolian Buddhism. The first is the early expansion period, which covers the time from the Hun to the Uigur and Kidan periods. The second is the medieval expansion period, which encompasses the Mongol Empire and the Great Yuan period. The third is the late expansion period, which includes the Northern Yuan and Manchu Qing periods.

Among these researches, firstly, for the research on the reality of Mongolian Buddhism during the 13th–14th century Mongol Empire and the Great Yuan State, in addition to the study of written sources and stone inscriptions, recently, archaeological excavations (Tsogt ikh sum, Cities of Chinkhai, Ruins of Shagja Monastery, etc.) are gaining new knowledge and information.

In particular, there is a need for a comparative study of the Tsogt ikh sum and the Shagja Monastery, two monuments from the reign of Munkh Khaan.

However, recent archaeological excavations have determined that some of the ruined monasteries can be dated to the 16th–17th centuries. This is evidenced by the findings at several monasteries, including Harbukh, Ikh Bulag's Higher Terrace, Sumiin Terrace, Kherlen Bars Khot I, and Turgen River. It is necessary to further support the study of the Buddhist texts revealed in these sites and to carry out a detailed study.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that Mongolian and Buriad scholars and lamas participate and cooperate in the reading of Buddhist texts in Mongolian and Tibetan language.