

Tibetan Medical Practitioners in Buryatia and Russia

Along with Buddhism, Tibetan medicine spread to Buryatia and Russia via Mongolia. First, Tibetan medicine was introduced to the Mongols in the 13th century during the Yuan Dynasty. Tibetan medicine became the backbone of the health care system in the Mongol areas, forming the unique characteristics of its healing system in the Mongol speaking lands. However, in Russia, Tibetan medicine was little known until the middle of the 19th century. Then within a short period of time, Tibetan medicine practitioners from Buryatia became well known in the Russian Royal court and had great political influence on the Russian Royal government's position regarding Tibet.

The Buryats practiced shamanism and were not particularly interested in Buddhism at first. Only at the beginning of the 18th century did Buddhism slowly started to penetrate the steppes and semi-steppes east of Lake Baikal. In 1712 or 1720, a group of about 150 monks from Tibet and Mongolia came to Buryatia. Among the group was an *emchi* – the Mongolian word for a Tibetan doctor – called Chokyi Nawang Phuntsog. He is said to be among the important founders of Tibetan medicine in Buryatia. From that time, many *datsangs* (monastic colleges) were established in different part of Buryatia. In the year of 1741, Empress Elizaveta legalized the existence of 11 *datsangs* and 150 lamas. This further brought the official recognition of Buddhism in Russia. *Datsangs* also housed medical schools, clinics and pharmacies of Tibetan medicine.

In the summer of 1857, the Russian Governor General of East Siberia, Nikolay Nikolayevich Muravyev, was returning to St. Petersburg. During the long journey from east Siberia to St. Petersburg, his wife fell ill. Russian doctors diagnosed her as incurable. Sultim Badma (1793-1882), a monk Tibetan medical physician from Aga Datsang (1811-1831), succeeded in discovering the sources of her mysterious disease and promptly cured her with remedies of Tibetan medicine. After returning to St. Petersburg, Nikolay N. Muravyev didn't forget his wife's healer, Sultim Badma, and invited him to St. Petersburg. There, Nikolay Muravyev helped to establish a personal residence and a Tibetan medical clinic for Sultim Badma at Poklonnaya Hill, probably the first Tibetan medical clinic in Europe. Soon, the ordinary women as well as poor people gathered in his clinic. With increasing numbers of cured patients, Russian physicians began to ponder the reliability of this new arrival of healing art. Later, Sultim Badma was introduced and appointed to the Tsar Alexander II's court physician and was baptized as Alexander Alexandrovich Badmaev.

In the year 1860, Tsar Alexander II sent a letter to the Military Hospital in St. Petersburg regarding the practice of Tibetan medicine by Alexander A. Badmaev. (Tsar Alexander II (1818-81), Tsar from 1855-81, assassinated.) The letter said

Lama Badmaev is introduced to apply his herbal healing drugs to patients who suffer from all stages of tuberculosis. As well, he shall try his remedies on cancer patients. The treatment shall be conducted under the supervision of hospital physicians. In case he runs out of herbal ingredients, he shall inform the authorities in time, who are instructed to ensure sufficient supply. If he fails in

treating the patients successfully, he shall not receive permission to practice as a doctor in our country.

Afterward, Lama Badmaev was successful in treating patients and received permission to practice as a physician in St. Petersburg and was invited to work at the Medical Surgical Academy.

In 1864, the Tsar Alexander II issued a decree to order the translation of the Tibetan medical treatise The Four Medical Tantras or *rGgyud-bzhi* into Russian.

To assist him in translating the *rGgyud-bzhi*, a younger brother, nine years his junior, was allowed to join him. Around 1870, Alexander A. Badmaev's brother, Zam Saran (1851-1920), a monk from Aga Datsang, arrived in St. Petersburg and was baptized a Christian and chose the name, Pyotr Alexandrovich Badmaev. Political reasons may have played a decisive role in inviting the brother to the capital as talk of a Trans Siberian railway was in the air. Achieving this goal required the goodwill and tolerance of the peoples of Central Asia, especially the Mongols. In this regard, the two lama-physicians were of political value. They were directly descended from Genghis Khan, and it was believed that this fact might be useful during later negotiations.

Pyotr A. Badmaev, along with his brother, administered the Tibetan medical clinic. At the same time, he studied Western medicine at the Medical Surgical Academy, and in 1877 he received his doctorate as a Russian physician of western medical science. Two years later, he was invited to work as an associate or advisor to the Asian department at the Ministry of External Affairs.

Alexander A. Badmaev died in 1882. The year before, a bomb killed Tsar Alexander II, his godfather. And a few months later, Earl Nikolay N. Muravye, who had introduced him to St. Petersburg society, died in Paris. Within a short period of time, the three central figures who had paved the way for Tibetan medicine to reach the west disappeared from stage. All this happened at the same time as Robert Koch, with his "Four Steps to Identify the Tuberculosis Bacillus," opened the era of bacteriology.

Pyotr A. Badmaev, with his exceptional expertise in both Tibetan medicine and western medicine, became one of the most important figure in the expansion of Tibetan medicine in Russia. He was well connected not only with ordinary people but also with ministers and senators. Tsar Alexander III became his Godfather. Later on, Tsar Nicholas II also became greatly interested in the methods on treatment and remedies of Tibetan medicine. And Pyotr A. Badmaev, a frequent visitor to the palace, became Tsar Nicholas II's court physician. In the politics of Russia, he secretly wrote a letter to the Tsar and suggested that Russia should peacefully annex Tibet, Mongolia and the neighboring Chinese region of Manchuria.

The Tsar's heir, Alexey, had been born suffering from a bleeding disease. Although Rasputin was given official credit for curing Prince Alexey's illness, Badmaev had also contributed in curing it with his Tibetan medical remedy.

Pyotr Badmaev lived through the First World War, the Kerensky regime, the October revolution and the time of the civil wars. One day in 1923, he called for his nephew and friends and said good-bye to them. He then sat in the lotus position on a cushion that was placed on the floor, and began to recite with a clear voice--his hand folded to prayer--the text of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. These words are usually read to the dying by a lama to prepare his soul for the coming reincarnation.

During the 1890s, Pyotr A. Badmaev wanted to find a successor. His nephew Jamjan Badma (1884-1961), a monk who was studying Tibetan medicine at Aga Datsang, was called to St. Petersburg. There, he further studied Tibetan medicine with his uncle, and finally he was also baptized as Vladimir N. Badmaev. His godfather was Tsar Nicholas II. After completing high school, he studied western medicine at the Medical Surgical Academy and received a doctorate and returned to his uncle's clinic. At the beginning of the First World War, he was appointed leading physician of a military hospital train on the Russian railways.

After the death of Pyotr A. Badmaev, Vladimir N. Badmaev left Russia and traveled to Poland where he had practiced Tibetan medicine and lived with his wife until his death in 1961. Being the first Tibetan medical practitioner in a Western country to either practice the tradition that he had studied, or to adapt to his Western colleagues, he chose to remain loyal to Tibetan medicine, although he foresaw that it would not be an easy task. His cousin was a Siberian doctor, N.N. Badmaev, who was well known in Leningrad (St. Petersburg) for his Tibetan medical practice and his great success in Tibetan therapy. His patients included prominent people like Alexi Tolstoy and communist leaders such as Bukharin and Rydov. On some occasions he was even summoned to visit Stalin.

In conclusion, the Badmaev lineage of Buryatian physicians not only called their practice "Tibetan Medicine," but also they treated ordinary Russian people in addition to the Russian Royal family members and communist leaders. It is safe to say, the Badmaev physicians are the ones who brought Tibetan medicine practice into the west and made a great contribution to the welfare of Russian society.

References

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