

# THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN CULTURE: A COMPARISON OF ITALIAN AND MONGOLIAN TRADITIONS

**Dr. Marsarjav Gantuya**

In ancient times, Mongolians followed the Mongolian Shaman religion. A peculiar feature of Shamanism is that it is adapted to the Mongolian land, nature, climate and the human environment.

Mongolia's next traditional chief religion was Buddhism, which arrived in Mongolian lands in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Mongolian historians divide the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia into three main periods. In the first and second phases, of Buddhism spread across Mongolia from the emperors' palaces while many Mongolians remained followers of Shamanism. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> and final phase (in the XVII-XX centuries), Buddhism flourished in Mongolian lands. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one third of the male population was Buddhist monks or lamas living in more than 700 temples, and Mongolian Buddhist monastery treasuries controlled over 20% of the national wealth. But in the 1930s more than 17,000 monks were arrested and executed, and all temples except one were closed. In 1990 Mongolia adapted to democratic government and a market economy.

Today older Mongolians generally believe in Buddhism, while the middle-aged population is largely atheist. Younger adults follow many traditional and Western religions, while children tend to adapt to foreign Christian faiths. Nowadays the most important question for Mongolians is how to find a proper combination of traditional and modern spiritual cultures, the essence or heart of which is religious belief. Christianity, for Mongolian people, is a new and modern religion.

For Italians, though, Christianity is the traditional or – one could say – “family religion,” which plays a fundamental role in Italian spiritual culture – a culture that has gone through many complicated religious historical periods, difficulties and hardships to achieve its current value. Culture is not a result; it is a progression or process of historical experiences which cannot be easily re-created. In my paper I would like to briefly illustrate the comparative history of Mongolian and Italian religions as unique cultural experiences.