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SEARCHING FOR “NEW” IDENTITY BASES IN THE FAR EAST IN THE 1990S

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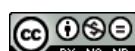
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Abstract

The article deals with the study of the role of religion in political orientations and worldviews of the Far Eastern intelligentsia in the 1990s' crisis. Sociocultural changes in the context of an ideological crisis have generated in the minds of Russians a sense of pessimism, hopelessness, a feeling of fragility of the world around them, and in the minds of the Far East also a sense of “uselessness” to the federal center. The search for the foundations of their identity led the Far Eastern intelligentsia to the search for God. Having no experience of “living in God”, the Far Eastern intelligentsia and students turned to both traditional and various non-traditional religions and pseudo-religious groups, the teachings of which began to actively spread Far East missionaries of neighboring countries in the 1990s. One part of the Far Eastern intelligentsia sought for support in existing religious communities; for another part, religion has become the basis of a certain “national” ideology and identity; the third, disappointed with the Orthodox communities, turned to non-traditional religions. The attitude to these religions after the adoption of the Federal Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations” (1997) changed dramatically, they began to be perceived by the Far Eastern intelligentsia as a threat to national security. A new “turn” of the Far Eastern intelligentsia to Orthodoxy began, which it began to perceive as protection against the expansion of its eastern neighbors, as a sign of a national way of life and belonging to the Orthodox-Slavic civilization.

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1. Introduction

The last decade of the 20th century marked the beginning of profound changes in the ideological orientations and worldviews of Russians. In the 1990s, the attitude towards religion and its place in everyday and public life changed significantly. The revival of religious and church traditions has ceased to be perceived as an unusual, amazing and alarming phenomenon. The religious factor has become so active and influential that ignoring it has become almost impossible.

2. Problem Statement

The process of searching by the Far Eastern intelligentsia for “new” foundations of their own identity is considered in the context of the crisis processes that occurred during the reforms of the 1990s, compounded by a change in the regional policy of the federal center. The focus of the study is the religion-intelligentsia relationship, the Far Eastern intelligentsia's search for the religious foundations of self-identification, and the role of traditional and non-traditional religions in this process. The article summarizes the results of field studies of the process of “religious revival” among the intelligentsia in the first half of the 1990s, the positive and negative consequences of this phenomenon.

3. Research Questions

The relations “religion-intelligentsia” are considered in the context of the search by the intelligentsia of the “new” foundations of self-identification as a certain process of religious search—the search for the religious foundations of their own self-identification:

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this article is an attempt to identify the role of religion in ideological orientations and worldviews of the Far Eastern intelligentsia in the 1990s. To consider the process of searching by the Far Eastern intelligentsia in the post-perestroika years for “new” foundations of their own identity, place and role in this process of the religious factor.

5. Research Methods

The methodology chosen by the authors for this study includes a comparative analysis, which involves the identification of the most significant problems in the religion-intelligentsia relationship; identification of objective and subjective reasons for the growing interest of the Far Eastern intelligentsia in traditional and non-traditional religions in the early 1990s and the decline of this interest after the adoption of the Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations".

6. Findings

The years of “perestroika” were marked by a surge in interest in religion in Russia. According to Furman, in the context of the unfavorable social and spiritual atmosphere of the 1980s, the movement

toward “the church and religion becomes completely natural—just as before the revolution the movement towards atheism was completely natural” (Furman, 1989, p. 10). In the intellectual circles, including in the Far East, the most bizarre forms of religious and philosophical mindsets were spreading. Basically, these teachings were syncretic in nature, eclectically combining elements of different religions and philosophical systems (Epstein, 1994).

By the beginning of the 1990s, Russia, losing the status of a great power, having lost its former role in geopolitics, having lost the national idea, goal and development strategy of a person, society, nation and state, moved from one historical period to another. These sociocultural changes gave rise to a sense of pessimism, hopelessness of life, a psychological feeling of fragility of the surrounding world. All this led to an active search by the Russians for the “foundations” of their individual (rather than collective) existence. The eyes of the Russian intelligentsia turned to religion, including non-traditional religions, denouncing "the hypocritical apologetics of the authorities and the corruption of church institutions" (Balagushkin, 1999, p. 78).

The most problematic search for the religious foundations of their identity took place in the frontier territories, which the Russian Far East traditionally belongs to, which, due to the specifics of its settlement and development, was a historically secular region.

By the beginning of 1990, only 10,611 people, which amounted to approximately 0.17 % of the total population of the region, were believers. In the vast territory there were only 160 religious communities and groups of the Orthodox (27 from Russian Orthodox Church, 6 from Old Believers), the Baptist (41 from All-Soviet Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists; 12 from the Council of Churches of Evangelical Baptist Christians), Adventist (21), Pentecostal (30), Jehovah's Witnesses (7), Jewish (1) Mennonite (1), pagan (14) religions, both officially registered and operating without registration (Dudaryonok, 2015), whose clergy were not ready for the huge interest in religion on the part of students and intellectuals having no experience of "living in God."

The policy pursued by Moscow in the 1990s in relation to the Far East has formed in the minds of the Far East the sense of “uselessness” to the federal center, and set them the task of finding new foundations for their identity. This was felt most acutely by the Far Eastern intelligentsia, whose reaction to the crisis was different. Part of the intelligentsia left the territory of the Far East, having moved to the European part of the country and countries of the Asia-Pacific region (the largest outflow came from the northern regions of the region), the other tried to turn to “national” roots, changing the identity of the “Far East” to nationality in the worldview.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the process of creating cultural-national centers has been actively going on in the Far East, and the local “national” intelligentsia played the main role in this process. Very often the “national” blood in a person was a quarter or even an eighth, but in a crisis, belonging to a “related” social group was decisive. Considering that the basis of “national culture” is religion (Poles should be Catholics, Germans should be Lutherans, Tatars should be Muslims, etc.), the Far Eastern intelligentsia in every way contributed to the revival of the Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, Muslim and other communities. The results of such cultural-national-religious self-identification had negative consequences for the demography of the region: all these organizations, both cultural and religious, did a lot for talented youth and intellectuals to move to their “historical homeland”. In the early

1990s, not only Jews, Poles, Germans, Latvians, Estonians left, but also Russian children—students of Far Eastern universities—to whom the revived Jewish, Catholic and Lutheran communities paid for their studies at leading European universities (Dudaryonok, 2015).

Still others tried to gain faith, find like-minded people and support in existing Orthodox and Protestant communities.

A few Orthodox parishes and their abbots were not ready to receive young and well-educated neophytes: in the early 1990s, Orthodox parishes of the Far East did not have qualified missionaries, and elderly parishioners did not really like young people who “wandered” into the church.

Protestant churches possessed great opportunities in working with young people and the intelligentsia, who received significant material and moral assistance from their co-religionists in the 1990s.

Protestant churches, created with the assistance of foreign missionaries (Omelyanchuk, 2003), became attractive to the Far Eastern intelligentsia in the 1990s, not only because of the satisfaction of their religious needs, but for purely mercantile reasons. They conducted various non-religious activities: they provided financial assistance to their parishioners; Organized free English and Korean language courses, free excursions for parishioners in South Korea; patronized orphanages, nursing homes and hospitals; worked with prisoners; organized seminars and conferences for pastors and those interested in the Bible; provided material assistance to the poor, gifted children and small peoples of the Far East; for several years they distributed bread, organized the distribution of clothes and food; conducted free lunches and provided hairdressing services to low-income residents, etc. (Vysotskaya, 2001).

In a situation of crisis, for many representatives of the older intelligentsia, material assistance provided by missionaries helped to survive, and for students, participation in missionary charity programs was a way of manifesting their civic activity.

In addition to the religions traditional for the Far East, Far Eastern student youth and the intelligentsia in the 1990s began to seek support for their individual existence in various pseudo-religious groups and non-traditional religions, the teachings of which, after the adoption of the Law on Freedom of Religion, began to actively spread in the territory Far East missionaries of neighboring countries.

In the Primorsky and Khabarovsk Territories, the confessional diversity of such new formations was significant and included at least 30–40 items. The largest number of them operated in Primorye: Vladivostok in terms of the religious diversity of non-traditional religions in the 1990s was second only to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

The creeds of most non-traditional religions are quite difficult to understand and require some preparation, therefore, the Far Eastern communities of various non-traditional religions almost one hundred percent consisted of intellectuals and students.

In the early 1990s, the penetration and spread of non-traditional religions in the Russian Far East was perceived positively by the Far Eastern intelligentsia and students. Among those who were interested in newfangled teachings there were many who showed interest in Eastern and Western philosophy, practiced various martial arts, was interested in meditation practices, etc. In personal communication, they often said that they belonged to those religious teachings whose leaders enjoy the sympathy of senior management countries: from President Gorbachev to the regional political elite (Dudaryonok, 2015).

This, oddly enough, was a reality. For example, the pamphlet “Perestroika and new thinking for us and the whole world”, the first and last president of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev has become a popular work among New Agers. The “Guru” Sri Chinmoy, who regularly conducted “peace meditations” at the UN, devoted a whole series of hymns and songs to “Mahatma Gorbachev”. The pompous presentation of the book by Hubbard “Dianetics: the modern science of mental health” took place on March 31, 1993 at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses. The head of the Sahaja Yoga movement, Sri Mataji Nirmala Davy, managed to charm the mayor of Tolyatti and the administration of AvtoVAZ and AvtoVAZbank in the early 1990s, who provided her with a plane, a transportation vehicle, and a stadium for mass “karma cleansing” to move around the country, and despite the fact that in India itself, this movement is little known and is not among the officially recognized religions. There are infinitely many such examples.

The move of the Far Eastern intelligentsia towards non-traditional religions in the early 1990s was largely due to their sociocultural activities. The benevolent attitude towards the Vaishnavas (Society for Krishna Consciousness) and Mormons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), was determined by the fact that, following the Protestant missions, they engaged in educational and charitable activities.

For example, Vladivostok Vaishnavas, whose community in 1990 consisted of 125 students from Vladivostok universities and creative intelligentsia in the first half of 1990, periodically met with students and employees of the DVFU, the scientific community of the Academgorodok FEB RAS, residents of the city of Vladivostok in the Actor’s House and in various clubs. At these meetings, many people came to learn about Vaishnavas, their creeds and cult practices. So, for example, on May 24 and 25, 1990, 1000 people attended meetings at the Sailor’s Club (State Archives of Primorsky Krai – State Archive of Perm Region).

In 1991, at the initiative of the Vaishnavas, a vegetarian cafe “Hare Krishna” was opened in Vladivostok. Since the beginning of 1993, there were daily free dinners for single pensioners. To coordinate charitable activities in 1994, the Vaishnavas of Vladivostok registered the Charity Public Organization Food for Life, which provided assistance to many categories of people in need in the early 1990s and received a positive assessment from the local press (Filonenko, 1994; Kaliberova, 1994; Savina, 1994).

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints began to implement its charity programs in Russia since 1984. This includes the provision of food, clothing, training materials, medical equipment, and consultations in the field of agriculture and medicine. Through various charitable organizations, from January 1, 1984 to May 19, 2003, the Church implemented 657 humanitarian projects in Russia worth millions of US dollars.

The first humanitarian project on the territory of the Far East was carried out by TsIKhSPD in the Primorsky Territory in 1992–993: through the International Humanitarian Service "Care", 35,700 kg of clothes for women and children were transferred to the needy (Humanitarian Aid of Russia, 2003). It can be assumed that, to a certain extent, the interest in the Church among Russians, including the Far East, is the result of the charity of the Church.

The activities of many other non-traditional religions exacerbated the already difficult sociocultural situation. For instance, the missionary landing of the Church of Christ (Boston Movement), consisting of 10 people led by Derick Watt, an American preacher who sent the International Church of

Christ for missionary work in St. Petersburg, from where he arrived in Vladivostok in 1993, performed the "saving mission of the Varangians." The landing party had significant financial resources, for which it rented a cultural center for them to start missionary activity. Dzerzhinsky (Current archive of the department for relations with public and religious organizations of the Primorsky Territory administration doc. no. 21., sheet nos. 8-9). Derik Wett in his sermons made insulting attacks against the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and other Christian Churches, and sometimes spoke unflatteringly about the Russian people as a whole.

Perhaps the neglect of Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian people lies in the reason that for a significant number of "disciples", being in the Vladivostok church of Christ was transitory: more than 3,500 people passed through this church in the 1990s (mainly students of Vladivostok universities), but the number of church members never exceeded 250–300 people (Dudaryonok, 2015).

We do not have the opportunity to consider the influence of all non-traditional religions on the process of searching for the foundations of their own identity by the Far Eastern intelligentsia, we only note that in many of them in the second half of the 1990s the attitude became sharply negative, not only because of the constant violation of Russian law by their representatives, but also a certain danger of loss of national identity by the Far East.

The change in attitude towards non-traditional religions of the Far Eastern intelligentsia and students can be seen in the example of a change in attitude towards the Unification Church (Association of the Holy Spirit for association of world Christianity—Munites).

The first Munites appeared in the Far East in 1992. In their missionary activities, they focused on teachers from local universities and schools, students, journalists, and young entrepreneurs. Probably, the region seemed promising to the emissaries of the UC, since at the end of February 1993 a group of munites arrived in Vladivostok from Moscow headed by the emissary of the Interuniversity Association for the Study of the Principle prof. Kazuoshi Ikeno and the regional director of educational programs at the Munits International Education Foundation headed by Saver from Austria. This group settled in the Pacific medical dispensary, where until July 3, 1993, it held "leadership seminars", which are an account of the foundations of the doctrine of the Unification Church (Vladimirov & Lapin, 2001). A little later in the Arsenyev museum a lecture on the study of the Principle began to be held by American Jank Clifford and Bulgarian Yanko Kirkov. High school teachers showed the greatest interest in the teaching of the Unification Church. The last stage of training took place, most often, at the Tavayza recreation center or at the Pacific medical dispensary, where the newcomers would go all summer.

At the same time, the missionaries of the Unification Church taught the course "My World and Me" at the All-Russian Children's Center "Okean"; the vouchers to the Far Eastern schoolchildren were awarded by the education authorities for good study and active participation in public work, and they also gave their lectures to 10–12-year-olds schoolchildren in Wrangel Bay.

The change in the attitude of the Far Eastern intelligentsia towards the UC is connected with the scandal caused by the receipt in July 1994 of the prosecutor's office of the Leninsky district of Vladivostok by the statement of the mothers of Vladivostok teenagers demanding to protect their children

from “the influence of the Munits illegally conducting their activities in Vladivostok” and demanded to verify the legality of their activities.

The audit showed that missionaries live illegally in Vladivostok, however, they rent apartments and work as teachers in universities. Critical articles about the Unification Church appeared in the mass media of the region, after the appearance of which the directorate of the Museum of Local Lore named after Arsenyev refused to rent the museum premises for seminars and Sunday services at the Vladivostok UC, the visa authorities did not extend visas to church leaders: Japanese Ikena Kazuoishi and Bulgarian Janko Kirkov. Clifford Jank was also expelled from Vladivostok, whose visiting card proudly displayed “Regional Director of Primorsky Krai” (Current archive of the department for relations with public and religious organizations of the Primorsky Territory administration doc. no. 18).

Negative publications in the media about the Unification Church have changed the attitude not only towards it, but also towards many other non-traditional religions. Their activities in the Russian Far East began to be perceived by a significant part of the Far Eastern intelligentsia as expansion threatening national interests (Trofimchuk & Svishev, 2000). For many, it became clear that looking for a basis for self-identification, relying on alien religious traditions, is futile.

7. Conclusion

The realization that the unified cultural space of Russia is largely based on the Orthodox tradition has determined the turn of the Far Eastern God-seekers to Orthodoxy and the loss of interest of the Far Eastern intelligentsia in non-traditional religions.

In the Far East, the percentage of “Orthodox” among non-believers in the 1990s was very high, for example, in the Amur Region it reached 58.5 % (Current archive of the department for interaction with political parties, public and religious associations of the apparatus of the Governor of the Amur Region. Analysis of religious situation in the Amur Region, sheet nos. 1-65); in Khabarovsk Territory 38.6 % of respondents considered themselves “Orthodox”, while 3.3 % considered themselves “believers observing religious rites” (Nikulinov & Svishev, 2001, p. 58), in the Jewish Autonomous Region 44.8 % of respondents identified themselves with Orthodoxy “as a culture of the titular nation of the state”, while for only 21 % of respondents it was important in life (Current archive of the Office of Public Relations and Media of the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. Analytical note on the results of sociological research in the Jewish Autonomous Oblast. sheet nos. 3-7).

Similar data were obtained by researchers in other regions of the Far East. So, in the Magadan Region, among 66.5 % of the respondents who called themselves believers (86.4 % of them identified themselves as Orthodox), only 2.5 % were oriented toward religious values in their daily lives in the 1990s (Bashlakov, 2006).

Summing up our reasoning, we can confidently say that religion was perceived and perceived by the Far East not as a religious system itself, but as a sign of a national way of life, that the Far East began to identify themselves with Orthodoxy in an effort to preserve their cultural and ethnic affiliation, belonging to the Orthodox Slavic civilization.

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