

## SCTCMG 2019

### International Scientific Conference «Social and Cultural Transformations in the Context of Modern Globalism»

#### CONFESSİONAL SITUATION IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION

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#### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the latest history of state-confessional relations in Russia, beginning since the late 1980s. The authors consider regional characteristics of the confessional situation in the Russian Far East in a historical retrospective and prove that the region was initially formed as a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic territory with a low level of population's religiousness. In the course of the study, the authors assess the influence of globalization on the religious life of the region and differentiate the periods based on changes' essence. The period of integration processes lasted from the end of 1980 to 1997. During this period, foreign missionaries, whose activities were aimed both at helping existing religious associations and at spreading new, non-traditional for the region, teachings rush to the Far East. The period of disintegration processes began in 1997 after the adoption of Law of the Russian Federation "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations". Communities that belonged to new religions and were created by foreigners with the attraction of tremendous financial resources but did not have ethnic and cultural grounds in the region, did not stand the test of time and lost their influence on local society. Processes of globalization were limited to the post-Soviet space and the near abroad. Against the background of constant threat from the state, Protestant confessions reduced their activity in the social space of the region. This period is marked with the completed formation of Islamic component in the religious life of the Far East.

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**Keywords:** Russian Far East, religious associations, globalization.



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## 1. Introduction

The transformation of economic, political, cultural and religious life of the country, increasingly focused on world integration and unification processes, was one of the most important consequences of the period of reconstruction ('perestroika') in the USSR.

According to Elbakyan (2013), "globalization is changing the economic, social, cultural and information environment" (p. 156).

The fall of the Iron Curtain significantly expanded cultural contacts among different countries, which led to a change in the religious vision of the world, to the formation of a new confessional space in a number of regions of the Russian Federation as a result of foreign missionaries' activities, and to the emergence of new confessions or long-lost religious traditions. These processes were most active in the Russian Far East.

It can be argued that the process of globalization intensified the interaction of religions and contributed to the formation of a special type of missionary culture. Mass media played a significant role in popularizing knowledge about confessions, including new, non-traditional religions.

In the late 1980s – early 1990s, the process of so-called "religious rebirth" began in Russia. This phenomenon had both common features characteristic of the whole country and those specific for each of its regions. The general features include the increase in the number of religious associations and religiously motivated spirituality among the population. The regional features were somehow associated with globalization processes.

## 2. Problem Statement

Since the late 1980s, not only the confessional range of existing religious associations, but also their influence on the Far Eastern society and the nature of relations with the authorities has changed significantly in the Russian Far East. Changes have also taken place in the organization of confessions' church life.

## 3. Research Questions

The present research is focused on assessing the factor of globalization among the many reasons that contributed to these changes. The authors highlight the stages of changes in the religious situation in the Russian Far East under the influence of globalization and describe them.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

The research purpose consists in identifying the features of confessional situation in the Russian Far East in the context of globalization since the late 1980s.

## 5. Research Methods

The main research methods include the comparative-historical method, the historical-genetic and historical-systemic methods that allowed considering the process of changing confessional landscape of the

Russian Far East in the period under study, determining its features and place of religion in the life of the Far Eastern population.

## 6. Findings

Since its annexation to Russia in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Far East has developed as a multinational and multi-religious region. The settlement and development of the territory was influenced by its remoteness from the Central regions of Russia and the corresponding specific migration policy. Before the revolution, the Far East was also a refuge for religious dissidents, and during the repressions, the population of the region was replenished with former GULAG (the system of Soviet labour camps and prisons) prisoners who remained in the territory after serving their sentences, including for their religious views.

Migration to the Far East of believers who sought to find relative freedom here, hiding from persecution of state authorities at various construction sites, had continued throughout the Soviet period (Chernolutskaya, 2011). Thus, a certain confessional landscape of the Far Eastern region was formed, where along with the religious indifference of most of the population, there were traditional confessions, such as Orthodoxy (Russian Orthodox Church Moscow Patriarchate and Old Believers) and Protestantism (Baptism, Adventism, Pentecostalism). Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Methodism and Catholicism ceased to exist as a result of the repressive policies of the Soviet state of the 1930s (Society and Power in the Russian Far East in 1960-1991, 2016).

During the Reconstruction period, cultural and interfaith contacts between Soviet citizens and foreign co-religionists intensified, which greatly influenced the transformation of religious life in the USSR divided into several stages.

The first stage was the period from the end of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s, characterized by integration processes. "New religions" in the USSR began to appear in the 1970s. These were organizations such as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Children of God, the International Collection of Sanyasins, the Center of Scientology, Ananda-Marga and others. But non-traditional religions were most prevalent in the 1980-1990s, "in the heyday of Reconstruction, when M.S. Gorbachev, R.I. Khasbulatov, A.I. Rutskoy, Yu.M. Luzhkov, O. Lobov strived to settle contacts with Mun, Asahara, Scientologists, Mormons, and witnesses of the new truth" (Trofimchuk & Svishchev, 2000; Grigoryeva, 2002).

Globalization can proceed differently for different regions of the same state. Some become "gates to the global world", while others find themselves outside the globalization space. But the state is always entirely plunged in the integration process.

In the 1990s, the Far East of Russia along with Moscow and St. Petersburg became the favorite place of activity for foreign missionaries. The Khabarovsk Krai suffered to a greater extent, the Chukotka – to a lesser extent, and the border areas (Amur Oblast, Primorsky Krai) which were freed from the border zone regime in the early 1990s (Fedirkо, 2017) became especially attractive. At the same time, their activities were aimed both at helping existing religious associations and at spreading new dogmas, non-traditional for the region.

According to Dudarenok (2004b), the activities of foreign religious missions, which initiated active work in the Far East after the adoption of the Federal Law on Religious Freedom (1990) greatly contributed

to strengthening the position of 55 associations of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Evangelical Christians. Revealing the features of "new" religions in the Far Eastern region, Dudarenok (2004a) notes that adoption of these non-traditional religions was "transit" for many adherents, and the active and dynamic development of non-traditional religious teachings in the Far East in the 1990s is due both to global transformations and to a complex of reasons of a purely domestic nature that gave rise to a sense of life futility, inability to achieve harmony in society and to realize humanistic ideals.

By the mid-1990s, confessional diversity in the Russian Far East reached 60-70 denominations, among which were both registered and unregistered religious communities and groups, as well as those that existed in the status of public organizations.

Thus, in the region in the late 1980s and 1990s, international missionary organizations actively influenced the population through the use of various means (financial and humanitarian aid, the creation of a network of educational institutions, pilgrimage, etc.) and methods (education, NLP, etc.) with the aim of involving citizens in religious groups.

After the events related to the extremist activities of religious groups *Aumsinrike* and *The White Brotherhood*, Russia finally introduced a protective barrier in the form of the Law of 1997 "On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations". The previous law of 1990 deprived the state of control over the activities of religious associations, thus creating the conditions for their rapid inclusion in globalization processes, often of an aggressive nature. The Law of 1997 of the Russian Federation allowed the central and regional authorities for taking part in the regulation of religious life, thereby laying the foundation for disintegration processes (Odintsov, 2018).

The nature of state-confessional relations in the Russian Federation, established after the adoption of new legislation, allows, in our opinion, for singling out their new stage, which began in 1997.

Evaluating the role of religion in the globalizing world, Beyer (2004) points to

*two possibilities: either religion is confined to a private sphere, serving the religious choice of people, or actively intervenes in political and public spheres. In the second case, there are also two possibilities: the ecumenical one, which takes into account the global problems posed by globalization and the differentiation of society, or a political movement that advocates cultural identity of a particular region. Currently, the second option prevails.* (p. 76)

Communities that belonged to new religions and were created by foreigners with the attraction of substantial finances but did not have ethnic and cultural ground in the region, did not stand the test of time and, as a rule, lost their influence on local society.

By 2005-2007, Protestant organizations representing traditional religions of the Russian Far East did not need to invite foreign missionaries to enhance the religious life of local communities, since the latter had become institutionalized and acquired a stable status of partner of the state in the sociocultural space of the Far East and Russia as a whole. These associations never depended on foreign capital, but only used it as additional funds to assist the socially vulnerable population groups. In the period under review, the positions of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) and the traditional confessions of the Far East were strengthened, and since the mid-2000s, Islam also established itself more sustainably.

The expansion of the sphere of influence of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) is connected, first of all, with the public and tacit support provided by the state. As Roussele (2001) notes, "the church ... carries out its mission within the framework of regional integration, ... protecting the territory of its jurisdiction" (p. 185). Meanwhile, the Non-Orthodox confessions, traditional for the Far East (first of all, Protestant churches), followed the path of developing inter-Protestant cooperation.

Despite the rapid politicization of religion until 2016, researchers note the joint character of activities between religious associations and the state, which received the status of "social partnership". At the same time, the state restricted the right of religious associations both to assistance from international religious centers and to inviting missionaries from abroad. However, it was during this period that most of the Far Eastern Protestant confessions launched independent missionary programs in the countries of the Asia-Pacific Region.

High social tensions caused by increased terrorist threat in Europe in 2013-2016 created the prerequisites for adopting a regulatory framework that significantly limited the rights and freedoms of citizens (Zolotnikova, 2016). Russia did not remain aside from these processes, and in 2016 *The Yarovaya law* was adopted. Despite the appeal of public organizations and political parties to the Federation Council for the abolition of these regulatory acts, the anti-terrorism legislation entered into force.

Under the Yarovaya law, unpredictable phenomena began to take place in the religious sphere, in particular, a wary, sometimes aggressive attitude towards Islam and the Muslims (Akaev, 2016). These trends touched upon the Far Eastern region as well. According to Shulzhenko (2009), the land border of Russia with the Islamic world (Georgia - 875.3 km, Azerbaijan - 327.6 km, Kazakhstan - 7452.8 km, China - 4300 km) provides direct contact with "militant Islamic extremism" and puts the Russian Federation first in the classic centuries-old confrontation: North - South, Asia - Europe. Thus, given the direction of migration process, the Far East of Russia in the Europe-Russia-Asia-Pacific system of communications, undoubtedly, occupies an important place.

In our view, special attention should be paid to the ethnic situation of Far Eastern Islam in the same context. The ethnic composition of the Muslims of the Far East "with predominance of the natives of the Caucasus and Central Asia, including as community leaders" (Yarkov, Denisova, & Morozov, 2017, p. 75), the high birth rate and active, often uncontrolled, migration processes, ensure a constant increase in the number of Far Eastern diasporas of Muslim peoples from Central Asia and the Transcaucasia. Against the background of the continuous outflow of representatives of other peoples and confessions from the region, these circumstances give rise to tension in the sphere of interfaith relations caused by the radicalization of the Far Eastern Ummah.

In the Far Eastern Federal District there are several radical Muslim organizations consisting of both migrants and the local Tatar population. They include the Islamic Party of Turkestan (IPT, formerly known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) and Hizbut-Tahrir al-Islam, which are banned on the territory of Russia since some representatives of these organizations were accused of illegal actions. The case of the Islamist gang that operated in Vladivostok in 2008-2011 and was part of the Islamic Party of Turkestan received the greatest response.

The activity of Muslims in the Far East of Russia, the demographic changes in the region fit into the general context of Islam promotion in the Russian Federation, particularly in the Urals and in Siberia.

Despite the geographical distance from conflicts related to the activity of radical Islam, the Far East is not completely isolated from them. Interaction between Islamist groups in Afghanistan, Central Asia, Russia and Chinese Xinjiang is being intensified. An Islamist chain has been formed from the Middle to the Far East. According to official reports, Islamists are recruiting militants throughout its entire length to be sent to the Middle East. Islamist groups consisting of representatives of different ethnic groups are formed everywhere, the main role being played by migrants from Central Asia.

## 7. Conclusion

The processes of religious landscape transformation in the Far East are closely connected both with the religious policy of the Russian Federation and with globalization trends.

Assessing the influence of globalization on the religious life of the Russian Far East, we can distinguish periods that differ from each other in the nature of changes.

The period from the end of the 1980s to the end of the 1990s is characterized by integration, accompanied by the introduction of new religious teachings and significant transformations of traditional ones under external influence.

The period that began after the adoption of the Law of the Russian Federation of 1997 contained disintegration functions. The reduction, and in some cases, the complete cessation of contacts with international religious centers, allowed religious associations for focusing on the inner church life and reach a new level of state-confessional relations. In some cases, the Far Eastern religious organizations started organizing missions in the APR countries independently.

The adoption of anti-terrorism legislation, known as The Yarovaya law, further strengthened the disintegration trends in the sphere of international contacts of Far Eastern confessions. The processes of globalization were limited to the post-Soviet space and the near abroad. Against the background of the constant threat from the state, Protestant confessions reduced their activity in the social space of the region. In turn, the formation of the Islamic component in the religious life of the Far East was completed.

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